

JUNE

TRAVELING THE WILDERNESS

ROUTE TO DESTINY

We have traced the history of God's people, Israel, from their inception, through their early years as a nation, through the years of slavery, to the border of their promised land of Canaan. For the past few months we have meditated on the hindrances that prevented them from taking possession of God's promises, including their words which generated doubt and disobedience; their negative mindset; and the hindrances of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Upon receiving a negative report from ten of the twelve spies who returned from Canaan, Israel spoke against their leadership and God Himself. God would have destroyed them, had it not been for the intercession of Moses (Numbers 14). Because of their negative words which caused doubt and disobedience, Israel rebelled and was turned back from the border of their land to wander in the wilderness for forty long years. During that time, all of the adult population died. They would never return to the Promised Land. It would be the new generation that would rise up and fulfill Israel's destiny.

This month we are going to focus on traveling the wilderness route to divine destiny. When we speak of the wilderness, people often think of Israel's forty years of wandering. They consider the wilderness as a negative place spiritually where one is doomed to die--which it can be if one is there and remains there because of their sin.

A spiritual desert is often compared to the environment of a wilderness in the natural world--a scorching hot and desolate land, uninhabitable, causing discomfort to anyone attempting to travel through its barren wasteland. But the Bible also portrays the desert as a place for developing intimate relationship with God. While the adult generation of Israel died there, the younger generation was being strengthened mentally, physically, and spiritually during the long wilderness trek. They learned to overcome the brutal environment through dependency on God for provision, protection, and guidance. There in the wilderness, they were being prepared for destiny.

Biblical examples of life-changing desert experiences are numerous. Abraham and Sarah were living in the desert when God revealed His plan for their lives. Moses spent forty years in the desert in preparation for delivering Israel out of Egypt. Elijah and Elisha both retreated to the desert to find God's answers for difficulties they faced in ministry. John the Baptist lived his entire life in the desert where God prepared him and then used him in ministry. Jesus spent forty days in the desert in preparation for His public ministry, and the Apostle Paul retreated to the desert after his conversion prior to commencing his work. The Apostle John received the Revelation on a secluded desert island.

On the road to your destiny, you most likely will experience a spiritual desert along the way. Through the devotional readings this month, you will come to view the wilderness, as difficult as it may be, as a place of purpose where you are being prepared for the future.

JUNE

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JUNE 1 A NEW GENERATION

Because of disobedience, the nation of Israel was turned back from the border of their promised land to wander in the desert for forty years:

And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. (Numbers 14:26-32)

The emphasis in this sad account is usually on those who missed their destiny and died in the wilderness--those who had murmured, complained, and rebelled against God. But someone else walked through the wilderness for those forty years, and that was the new generation that was being raised up by God. These young people were being prepared to fulfill destiny.

A desert is any difficult time when you feel alone and abandoned and you aren't quite sure what is going on in your life. You will undoubtedly experience deserts on the pathway to destiny, but they will not always be caused by your sin. The older generation of Israelites experienced the desert because of their sin, but the young people were being prepared for the future.

You do not have to join the generation with negative attitudes, rebellious and sinful ways, those who will die in the desert. You are part of a new generation that is being raised up by God to fulfill divine destiny. On the road to fulfilling your vision, you will experience difficult times--dry places that seem like a wilderness. But you will not die in there. You are being prepared for the future:

This is what the Lord says... "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland...I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise." (Isaiah 43:16, 18-20)

This month, we will focus on desert experiences in the Bible, gleaning truths to apply in our own difficult times in life. Like the new generation of Israelites, a desert experience is vital to your destiny. It is in difficult times that you are being prepared to accomplish great things in the future.

JUNE 2
HE GOES BEFORE YOU

In a trackless desert, there are no road signs. There are no footprints to follow. There is only emptiness and silence. A harsh environment. But where you are right now is essential to where you are going.

The howling wind blows across the hot desert floor, so strongly at times that it can pit vehicle windshields and take the paint right off the body of a car. But do not let the blowing sand get in your eyes spiritually. Ask God to help you clearly see the reasons for your desert experience.

You are never alone in the desert. When Israel left Egypt for their Promised Land, God promised *"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged"* (Deuteronomy 31:8). God fulfilled this promise as they traveled to the border of their destiny the first time, and He continued to be faithful during the subsequent forty years of wilderness wandering.

In the time of your great loss, in the desert of your difficulties--God is with you. In fact, He goes before you showing you the way through the wilderness. He opens the way, and delivers you from the enemy:

He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness . And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left (Psalm 106:9-11)

Despite Israel's subsequent failures down through the years, God remained true to His promises. During the time of the prophets God repeatedly confirmed, *"According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not"* (Haggai 2:5).

Even in times of difficulty caused by disobedience, God remained faithful:

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction...thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it , when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:20-21)

And to believers--going through wilderness experiences--Jesus confirms, *"...I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world"* (Matthew 28:20).

No matter the reason for your desert experience, you are not alone. He goes before you.

JUNE 3
A PLACE OF PURPOSE

God is a God of purpose. He does nothing and allows nothing to happen in your life without divine purpose:

This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back? (Isaiah 14:26-27)

We are called according to God's purpose (Romans 8:28). Every purpose of God is directed towards fulfilling His will (Ephesians 1:11). Jesus was sent to earth for divine purpose: *"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil"* (1 John 3:8).

Wilderness-like spiritual experiences always have divine purpose. In the case of the new generation of Israelites, they were being prepared to embrace their destiny. The years of dealing with difficult circumstances gave them the mental and spiritual mindset necessary to conquer the enemy.

When you are experiencing a spiritual desert, seek the purposes for it. For example, in a desert of affliction, while you are separated from the normal distractions of life, focus on your purpose. What is God saying to you through this experience? What is He wanting to do in your life?

Moses, David, and Paul all had desert experiences in which God was preparing them for their destinies. If you are in the desert right now, know that God is at work in your life. Do not despair. Trust God. There is a purpose for what you are going through.

Job went through a wilderness experience of great loss--family, fortune, and health. Here is how he felt: *"Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him"* (Job 23:8-9). Have you ever felt that way? Do you feel that way right now? Let's read the next portion of Job's comments:

But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. (Job 23:10-12)

Every wilderness is different. Sometimes it is a place of chastisement. At other times you are drawn aside to receive new direction and to grow in intimacy with God and His Word. There is always a purpose and it always relates to your spiritual vision. The wilderness is a place of purpose, a divinely ordained part of your pathway to purpose.

JUNE 4
THE GOD WHO SEES

One of the first references to a profound spiritual experience in the wilderness is recorded in Genesis chapter 16. It happened to a young girl named Hagar who was a handmaiden to Sarai, Abram's wife. Because Abram and Sarai were unable to bear children, they decided for Abram to bear a child by Hagar. This was an acceptable custom of the day, but not acceptable to God.

When Hagar learned she was pregnant, the tension grew between her and Sarai to the point that Hagar fled into the desert. There, the Angel of the Lord found her alone and distraught. The Angel of the Lord told Hagar to return to her mistress and that her seed--the generations from her son--would be greatly multiplied. This was fulfilled through Ishmael, the child she would later bear:

So she called the name of the Lord Who spoke to her, You are a God of seeing, for she said, Have I [not] even here [in the wilderness] looked upon Him Who sees me [and lived]? Or have I here also seen [the future purposes or designs of] Him Who sees me? Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi [A well to the Living one Who sees me]; it is between Kadesh and Bered. (Genesis 16:13-14) AMP)

Hagar declared, "You are the God who sees me!" No matter why you are in the wilderness--for discipline, for preparation, or even if you have retreated to a self-imposed wilderness as Hagar did--God sees you there. You may be in a desert, but it is not a wasteland when God is there!

Hagar had another wilderness experience years later after Isaac was born to Sarah and Abraham. She had to leave her home because God had declared that the child of the flesh (Ishmael) could not remain in the same house with the child of promise (Isaac). The Bible says:

...she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. (Genesis 21:14-19)

Hagar thought she and her child would die in the wilderness--but again, God came to her. He opened her eyes to see a fountain in the wilderness where she could drink and be sustained. God sees you in your wilderness. Ask Him to open your eyes to see the spiritual waters flowing there which will sustain and refresh you.

JUNE 5
A NEW LEVEL OF WORSHIP

In Genesis 22:5, God commanded Abraham to take his only son--Isaac, the child of promise--into the desert and sacrifice him as an act of worship.

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you, (Genesis 22:3-5)

The story records how God supernaturally intervened, revealing that this was a test of Abraham's faith and obedience: *"And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Genesis 22:12)*. All of the promises of God rested in Isaac, yet Abraham was willing to sacrifice him. He knew that the One who gave the vision was greater than the vision itself and, if necessary, He could raise Isaac from the dead to make it come to pass. Abraham referred to this as an act of worship, saying "I and the lad will go yonder and worship." There, on the lonely desert mountain, Abraham rose to a new level of worship. By his willingness to sacrifice his only son, he confirmed that God was more important to him than anything or anyone.

In the desert, you will come to know God in a new way as you worship Him alone in the solitude. There, in the midst of the desert of your difficulties, build an altar of praise to the Lord. Offer upon it everything--every talent, every dream, every vision, all that you treasure.

Abraham said, *"I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you."* Abraham was willing to offer all upon the altar, but he fully expected to return with his son--*"we will come again to you."* Actually, Abraham not only returned with his son but with new promises of multiplication and blessing from God:

And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shores. (Genesis 22:15-17)

On a lonely wilderness mountain, Abraham rose to a new level of worship. Many of David's psalms were written in the wilderness as he rose to a new level of worship while in exile fleeing from King Saul. The Apostle John was worshipping on the barren, deserted Island of Patmos when he received the revelation of the end-times.

You can complain and murmur, or you can worship your way through your wilderness. The choice is yours.

JUNE 6 IN THE PITS

It began in a waterless pit in the wilderness. A young man named Joseph--who was to be a father of the nation of Israel--was cast into the pit by his own brothers because of their jealousy (Genesis 37:22-24). Even though Joseph cried out to them appealing for help, they would not listen (Genesis 42:21). Have you ever been in a wilderness pit like that spiritually? You are crying out, but no one seems to hear or care?

When an Egyptian caravan passed by, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. Then Joseph suffered another great setback when he was falsely accused of immorality and thrown into prison. Talk about a wilderness experience--prison certainly qualifies as one! In prison, Joseph was placed in a position of responsibility and ministered to a butler and baker who were confined with him, both of whom promptly forgot their promises to him (Genesis 39-40).

Little did Joseph realize that every circumstance--every wilderness experience in his life--was bringing him nearer his God-given destiny. This is what God wants to do in your life also. Every wilderness you have endured--every painful experience of your past and present--is being used to shape you for destiny. Eventually, Joseph was supernaturally released from prison, became ruler of Egypt, and saved the then-known world from death through famine.

When Joseph married, the names he gave his two children were symbolic of the experiences he had passed through (Genesis 41:51-52). The first child was named Manasseh, meaning "*God hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house.*" Joseph didn't forget his father's house, but he forgot the pain associated with the events. You may never forget the difficulties of the past, but God wants to heal you of the pain of your wilderness experiences. Joseph's second son was named Ephraim, meaning "*God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.*" Joseph was fruitful in affliction because he let God heal him of the pain of his past.

As a child, Joseph had experienced dreams of being in a place of responsibility and authority. All through the long, difficult years, Joseph never lost that vision of destiny. When at last he stood in the place of his God-appointed destiny, he remembered the dream: "*And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed*" (Genesis 42:9).

You may feel like you are in the "pit in the wilderness" right now, but God has a plan for your life. Do not let the pain of your past or the desolate difficulties of your present wilderness abort your future. It isn't over yet. Do not abandon the vision God has given you.

In Genesis 50, we read the story of Joseph's death. Joseph requested that his body be placed in a coffin so that someday when Israel traveled to their promised land, his bones could be taken with them. Even in death, Joseph looked towards the future. For hundreds of years, through all the dark days of Israel's slavery, that coffin provided hope. It was a silent promise that someday God would move in behalf of His people. They would not remain in the wilderness of slavery forever.

JUNE 7
A PLACE CALLED THERE

He just couldn't take it anymore. Moses saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite and it was literally the last straw. When he witnessed this violent scene, he responded in anger and killed the Egyptian taskmaster. Then, knowing his life was in danger, Moses fled to the backside of the desert.

As you learned in the February devotions, for forty long years Moses lived with the memory of an aborted destiny. He had tried, and failed. Would God ever use him again? Have you been there? Are you there right now? You tried to step out and do what God called you to do, only to fail. Have you, like Moses, retreated to the desert to nurse your wounds?

One day, while watching a flock of sheep in the desert, Moses saw a burning bush which, miraculously, was not consumed (Exodus 3:1-10). When he turned aside to see it, God spoke to him telling him to return to Egypt and deliver Israel from slavery. Note that it was right there where he was--in the desert--that Moses received the commission for his divine destiny.

You are not abandoned in the desert and left to die. God knows right where you are, just as He knew where Moses was. The words you are reading right now are His "burning bush" message to you. There are several things revealed in this story of Moses that will help you move from the backside of the desert to return and embrace your divine destiny. Let's review these:

-Reject excuses for remaining where you are. Moses had a multitude of excuses why he could not fulfill his destiny: Who am I? What authority do I have? What if they don't believe me? What shall I say? There, in the desert, God dealt with every excuse.

-Realize that things always get worse when it is time for a move. When Moses returned to Egypt, things got worse for God's people before they got better. Right before your victory, immediately before reaching your divine destiny--things may get worse.

-Respond to each difficulty on the basis of the covenant promises of God. Moses came to Egypt and stood before Pharaoh with a powerful message of deliverance based on the covenant promises of God.

-Rise up and take action. You must act upon the Word of God or, otherwise, you will stay right where you are spiritually. In God's perfect timing, Moses left the desert to fulfill his destiny.

-Rely on God's power to fulfill your destiny. It was not Moses' miracles when he stood before Pharaoh. It was God's miracles. You will only be able to fulfill your destiny through His miracle-working power.

Your ministry may have been aborted because of circumstances, hurt, or disillusionment. Perhaps you were rejected by those to whom you ministered. Why you are on the backside of the desert is not as important as what you are going to do about it. The bush is burning for you right there in your desert. You can be assured: God isn't finished with you yet.

JUNE 8
A PLACE OF REVELATION

The wilderness is place of revelation. In Exodus chapter 3, Moses drew near a burning bush in the wilderness and received a revelation from God regarding his destiny. The Lord directed him to return to Egypt to deliver God's people from slavery.

God told him, "...put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Moses was told to take off his shoes, not only because of the profound revelation he was receiving, but because God was illustrating that He was going to walk in his shoes, so to speak, until his destiny was fulfilled. God's presence would go with him and would remain with him until his destiny was fulfilled.

In the spiritual wilderness you are in, God wants to reveal Himself to you in a new way. It is a holy place--this desert in which you wander right now. This is where you will receive a new revelation of God's plan. Do not fear, because God is going to literally "walk in your shoes" to take you to your divine destiny.

In Exodus chapter 19, Moses and Israel were directed to the base of Mt. Sinai.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord. (Exodus 19:9)

The people gathered at the base of the mountain and what followed was the revelation of the law of the Lord to Moses.

In Exodus 34, when God's presence was revealed in the tabernacle, Moses and Joshua went up to experience it first-hand. The remainder of the Israelites stood in the door of their tents and watched them.

God wants to reveal Himself to you in the midst of your wilderness. Will you enter into that revelation or simply worship from afar? The greatest revelation God wants to give you is of Himself. Coming to know Him more intimately is a major purpose of the wilderness experience.

That I may know him , and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. (Philippians 3:10)

Paul went into the Arabian desert for years and John was exiled to a deserted island as a prisoner. What great revelations came from both of their experiences!

The question is, what great revelations does God want to birth in your wilderness?

JUNE 9
SNAKES AND SCORPIONS

Moses warned the children of Israel not to forget... *"the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions"* (Deuteronomy 8:14-15).

There are several analogies that can be drawn from snakes and scorpions and applied spiritually.

Snakes. The venom released by poisonous snakes when they attack affects your nerves, your blood, and your heart. Satan also attacks in these three areas. He attacks your nerve--your courage to live for God and fulfill your divine mandate. He attacks the work of the cross, trying to sabotage every benefit of Christ's blood in your life. He also targets your heart, trying to get you to focus your affections on things of the world.

A snake captures its food in four different ways: Through a swift strike; by throwing around its prey to overcome it; by holding the target in its fangs until the poison venom paralyzes it; and through constriction where it wraps itself around the victim and slowly squeezes out its life. Do you see how these methods parallel those used by Satan in spiritual attacks?

Scorpions. A scorpion seizes its prey, crushes it, and then injects deadly poison from its stinger. If you are stung by a scorpion, you will experience pain, restlessness, weakness, and numbness. The spiritual analogies of this are evident. Scorpions live in dark places and die when exposed to the heat generated by the light. The scorpion-like tactics of the enemy are defeated by the light of God's Word.

You will encounter spiritual snakes and scorpions in the wilderness, but Psalm 91:13 declares that you will trample the enemy underfoot because your feet are set securely on the path following Almighty God. Remain there, and you need not fear spiritual serpents, scorpions, or anything else along the pathway to your destiny.

Jesus also promises, *"I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you"* (Luke 10:19).

When you are surrounded by spiritual snakes and scorpions, remember that you have power over all the power of the enemy. You will not become their victim and die in the wilderness.

Like Paul--when he was bitten by an actual snake--just shake off these attacks and continue on your way to destiny (Acts 28:5).

JUNE 10
WILDERNESS PROVISIONS

It was in the barren wilderness that Israel learned to trust God for supernatural provision. Whether it was the initial wilderness journey preparing them to enter the promised land, or the forty-year trek experienced as chastisement for their rebellion--God provided for them.

The Word records that their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet outgrow their shoes during all those years (Deuteronomy 8:4). God prepared a table for them in the wilderness (Psalm 78:19), providing both water and manna for food (Exodus 16:32).

Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness : the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness , so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not.
(Nehemiah 9:19-21)

While they were in the wilderness, God provided all they needed--not the demands of their fleshly lusts, but what they needed. The same is true in your spiritual wilderness. God will provide spiritual food and water. In the wilderness, you will learn the difference between what you need and what you want. God promises provision of your needs, not every lustful want (Philippians 4:19).

In the New Testament record, we also find Jesus with a multitude of hungry people in the wilderness:

And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.
(Matthew 15:33-38)

In the wilderness, you recognize just how needy you are spiritually. Your resources--your loaves and fish--are not enough. This kind of need is good, for as He did in the natural world, the Lord will do likewise in the spiritual desert of your life. He will meet your needs, It is good to be a needy person spiritually because Jesus said: "*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled*" (Matthew 5:6).

JUNE 11
SPRING UP OH WELL

Water. This is the greatest need in the wilderness. Barren, dry, hot--and without water, you will perish.

The same is true in the spiritual deserts of life. While navigating through times of difficulty, we often think we will die of spiritual thirst. But the psalmist declared: *"He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings"* (Psalm 107:33-35).

It was at a well in the desert area of Samaria that Jesus met the women whose story is recorded in John 4. She had come to draw water to quench her physical thirst, but Jesus saw her greater need for spiritual water. He declared: *"...Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"* (John 4:13-14).

Jesus also declared: *"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water"* (John 7:37-38). Of what water was Christ speaking? The next verse explains: *"But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified"* (John 7:39).

This is the kind of spiritual water God wants to give you. It is the living water of salvation through Jesus Christ that will spring up into everlasting life. It is the outpouring of His Holy Spirit in your life that will guide, teach, and sustain you through the wilderness of this world.

The Psalmist cried out, *"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary"* (Psalm 63:1-2).

If this is your cry from your wilderness today, then receive the Word of God through the Prophet Isaiah: *"For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground..."* (Isaiah 44:3).

At one location in the wilderness, God directed Moses to...*"Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it..."* (Numbers 21:16-17). As the people began to sing and praise God, the water gushed forth!

Right now--right there in the dry place you are in--begin to sing to the source of Living Water within you: "Spring up oh well!" Get ready to receive. Come thirsty.

JUNE 12
PERILS IN THE WILDERNESS

In the natural world, as you travel through a desert, there are many perils to avoid. The same is true of wilderness experiences in the spiritual world. When you do not understand what is going on in your life--when you feel alone and confused about which direction to go--there are many perils to which you may fall victim. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. From the example of Israel and their wilderness wanderings, we can learn the attitudes to avoid.

Murmuring and complaining. When the nation of Israel faced bitter waters they could not drink, they murmured against Moses (Exodus 15:24). This is a common response when we face difficult experiences. We complain about our circumstances. We blame others and murmur against them, but actually all murmuring is against God. We must realize that He is taking all the circumstances of our lives, both bad and good, and using them to accomplish His purposes (Romans 8:28-29). When we murmur against this process, we murmur against Him.

Questioning. Why? This is the question we usually ask when faced with difficulties and tragedies in life. It is also a question asked frequently during a wilderness experience. Repeatedly, the children of Israel asked *"And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?"* (Numbers 20:4) Honest questioning is not wrong. Jesus knew the purpose for which He had come into the world was to die for the sins of all mankind, yet in His hour of suffering He cried out, *"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* It is what follows the questioning that is important. His next words were, *"Into thy hands I commit my spirit."*

A hardened heart. Exodus chapters 7-8 records how Pharaoh hardened his heart against God's people. Then in Exodus chapter 9 it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. When God hardens a heart, it is because a person has continued to rebel against Him. The person first hardens his own heart, then God steps in and hardens it to accomplish His purposes despite this rebellion. In the book of Joshua, God hardened the hearts of an already hardened people to come against Israel so that Joshua could execute judgment upon them as he had been commanded. A hardened heart is a serious matter: *"Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest"* (Hebrews 3:8-11).

Lust. Lust for the things of the flesh was a major problem during Israel's wilderness trek. The Bible records that *"...they soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul"* (Psalm 106:14-15).

Rebellion. Wilderness experiences can lead to outright rebellion. You don't like where you are at and how things are being done, so you rebel against God and spiritual leadership. Read the story of Korah in Numbers chapter 16 and learn from it!

JUNE 13
PURPOSES FOR THE PATH

We learn from Proverbs 6:16 that God hates pride. Perhaps this is because pride is the root of all other sins. It was the sin that brought down Lucifer. It was the appeal Lucifer used to Eve "You shall be as gods..." that resulted in sin. Pride is a quality or state of being proud, inordinate self-esteem, conceit.

One of the reasons for Israel's wilderness experience was to eliminate their pride:

And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live. (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

In another passage, additional insights regarding the purposes of Israel's wilderness experiences are given:

Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. (Deuteronomy 8:16-18)

These verses provide God's statement of purpose regarding Israel's wilderness trek. These purposes are His purposes for you also in your wilderness experiences:

- To humble you.
- To prove you.
- To know what is in your heart.
- To see if you keep His commandments.
- To make you rely upon God and His Word.
- To do you good in the end.
- To make you realize it is the Lord that gives you the power to succeed.
- To prepare you to receive His covenant blessings.

These were the God-ordained purposes for the path Israel took through the wilderness. God is working similar purposes in your wilderness of negative circumstances and difficulties. Be assured: The pathway you are traveling has divine purpose.

JUNE 14
GOD'S GUIDANCE SYSTEM

Israel had no map to guide them in the desert. They had no GPS system. They were wandering in a trackless wilderness where there were no highways or trail markers.

In this barren land, God gave them supernatural guidance:

And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. (Exodus 13:20-22)

The cloud gave them a covering by day, and the fire gave light in the night (Psalm 105:39) He also sent His angel before them (Exodus 23:20).

Nehemiah recalls God's faithfulness even after Israel had rebelled, refused to obey, ignored God's miracles, and made a molten calf to worship as their god:

Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. (Nehemiah 9:19)

In every wilderness experience of life--even one due to your own sins--God provides guidance.

The cloud in scripture is symbolic of God's presence. The Lord descended in a cloud to talk with Moses and Jesus ascended in a cloud. The fire is symbolic of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:3-4). One of the purposes of the Holy Spirit is guidance (John 16:13). God Himself is called a "consuming fire".

You are not wandering aimlessly in the desert. God is guiding you through it. Even if you are in the desert because of your own rebellion, God has not abandoned you. He will lead you through to your divine destination.

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction...thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:20-21)

JUNE 15
A TIME OF REFRESHMENT

Could it be that the desert is actually a time of spiritual refreshment? The psalmist declared:

Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing. (Psalm 65:9-13)

Right there in the wilderness, there are pastures being watered by the river of God and softened by the showers of His blessing. The barren places become productive, and a shout of joy arises from the weary travelers. Joy for the journey. Joy despite the journey. Joy to strengthen you for the journey. Joy to complete the journey.

Jesus often withdrew to the desert for rest, and He admonished His disciples to do so also:

And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. (Mark 6:31-32)

It was in the wilderness that the prophet Elijah, tired and discouraged, received supernatural refreshment:

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers. And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. (1 Kings 19:4-7)

After this time of spiritual and physical refreshment, Elijah heard the voice of God and received a new mandate for his ministry.

What a joy to a weary traveler in the wilderness to see an oasis--green trees, soft grass, and pools of fresh water. Among the joys of a spiritual wilderness is refreshment in the Lord. If you are tired and discouraged, come apart and get alone with Him. Allow God to minister to you in a time of spiritual retreat. Be refreshed in your desert oasis.

JUNE 16
A HIGHWAY TO GOD

There is a special highway winding through your wilderness. All you must do is follow it to reach your destiny:

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. (Isaiah 35:1-8)

The highway in your wilderness is called "the way of holiness." It leads away from the things of the world and towards the things of God.

It is not an easy road, because as you travel along this desert highway, God is perfecting and preparing you for what lies ahead. God is more concerned about your character than He is your comfort.

According to this passage, along this highway of holiness you will experience:

- Joy and gladness.
- The glory of the Lord.
- The excellency of God.
- New strength.
- Salvation and deliverance.
- Elimination of fear.
- Supernatural miracles.
- Refreshment in dry places.
- Restoration of the barren areas in your life where spiritual enemies have dwelt.

You won't encounter any fools along this desert highway--those who have rejected God (Psalm 14:1). This path is one of separation from the things of the world designed for those who want to walk in holiness. It is a highway that leads to God.

JUNE 17
DRY BONES LIVE AGAIN

Years ago, as early pioneers traveled from the populated east to the western frontier of the United States, they did not go very far in the desert before encountering sad scenes of bleached bones--people who had passed that way before them and had died in the wilderness.

The prophet Ezekiel had a spiritual vision of sun-bleached bones described in chapter 37 of the book bearing his name:

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. (Ezekiel 37:1-10)

While this passage refers prophetically to Israel, it can also be applied spiritually to believers. There are many of God's people who have fallen in the wilderness, so to speak. We see their dry bones littering the pathway as we pass by. As people of God, we should reach out to those who are dead or dying spiritually in the wilderness with the good news that dry bones can live again!

These people, like the nation of Israel, feel that all hope is lost. God's message to them is: ...*"Oh my people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land...."* (Ezekiel 37:12-14).

The dead and dying in the spiritual wilderness need the new life of God to flow through their dry bones. As you travel through the trackless desert, you can revive them with a Word from the Lord: Dry bones can live again!

JUNE 18
RAISING DRY BONES

In our meditation yesterday, we talked about those who are facing spiritual death or who have died spiritually during their wilderness experience.

Ezekiel was instructed by God to prophecy new life into dry bones. As you travel the desert road of life, you can bring new life to fellow travelers. But to do so:

You must go where they are. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Ezekiel and took him to where the need was. In order to bring life, you must go to the desolate wildernesses of the world--the prisons, to the drug addict, the alcoholic, etc.

You must not listen to the voice of man. People may tell you that it can't be done--that a person cannot be restored or a dead ministry cannot be revived. Wonder what they said to Ezekiel about talking to a bunch of bones?

You must recognize the seriousness of their condition. They are dead or dying spiritually. They do not need rehabilitation, they need regeneration through the new life of the Gospel.

You must be endued with supernatural power. A lifeless, powerless believer cannot infuse new life into someone else. You must have the life of God within you and flowing through you in order to transmit it to others.

You must know the objective. The objective is not to cleanse a dead body, embalm it with spices, or cover it with fine linen to prepare for burial. These are all improvements, in that you can no longer see or smell the effects of death. But you still have a dead body. Your objective is not to teach morality, self-improvement, cover sin, or change society. Your objective is to transmit new spiritual life. Settle for nothing less than life!

As you travel through desert experiences, do not focus only on yourself. Look around. Other believers are traveling right there with you. Some of them are weak and need strengthening. Some are hungry and thirsty and struggling spiritually. Others have fallen by the wayside and will die there in the wilderness unless they receive help.

Like Ezekiel, could this be one of purpose for which you were taken into the wilderness? Is this the reason you stand at the edge of the valley of dry bones? Are you, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be instrumental in raising the dead and dying to new life?

JUNE 19
A DOOR OF HOPE

God spoke to the Prophet Hosea regarding His people, Israel, saying:

Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor (trouble) a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali. For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name. (Hosea 2:14-17)

Do you see what God is doing in these verses? As a result of Israel's sinfulness, God was going to entice, persuade, and lure them--to where? Into the desert! It was right there, in the wilderness, that God would speak tenderly to them and restore their spoiled vineyards and their fruitfulness.

In order for God to speak to you and restore your spiritual productivity during the dry times of life, you need to be planting seeds in your life right now. The "seed" is the Word of God which enables you to know God's voice:

But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (Matthew 13:23)

Plant the promises of the Word into the fertile soil of your heart and mind consistently and then when the difficult times come the Word will bring forth fruit in your life. He will bring His promises to mind and confirm them as He speaks tenderly to you.

The Valley of Achor--meaning the Valley of Trouble--is where Achan buried forbidden treasure from Jericho in his tent. Achan's disobedience was the cause of Israel's defeat in the first battle at Ai (Joshua 7). Achan took the spoil that was reserved for God and kept it for himself. In order to be blessed again, these idolatrous objects had to be purged from their midst.

During your desert trek, you must make a dedicated search for idols--anything in your life that God has ordered you to destroy. It may be the idol of materialism or entertainment. It may be anger, bitterness, or hatred. It may be immoral relationships or addictions. Perhaps you are sacrificing to your career and amassing wealth, putting this ahead of the things of God.

In this passage God also promised to turn the Valley of Achor--the Valley of Trouble--into a valley of hope. So we learn from this that trouble can lead to restoration of lost hope. In the desert valley, you can learn to dream again. You can be restored to usefulness for God. You can receive a fresh revelation of your divine destiny. Your valley of Achor becomes a passageway of hope.

JUNE 20 THE IMPORTANCE OF HOPE

You learned in yesterday's devotional reading that God wants to turn your valleys of trouble into renewed hope. You may have lost hope because of:

- A broken relationship.
- Your financial condition.
- Your inability to find a job.
- A chronic illness.
- Delayed fulfillment of promises from God.

You may think things will never improve and that there is nothing to look forward to in the future. You are not having a faith crisis, but a hope crisis.

The Bible says *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1)*. The Amplified Version translates this as: *"Now faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]"*.

Faith is generated by hope. Its substance is things hoped for and that is why it is so important. Hope is defined as confident expectation and happy anticipation, If you do not feel this way spiritually, then you may be experiencing a hope crisis. Faith reveals things you do not see with the natural senses.

When you lose hope, your faith is affected because you no longer feed substance to your faith. Your vision of spiritual destiny is ultimately affected, because hope feeds the faith that gives you the assurance of the things you do not see. When you lose hope, you are tempted to turn away from God and walk in your own ways (Jeremiah 8:12). Hope is the anchor of the soul that prevents you from drifting spiritually (Hebrews 6:18-19).

Many great people in the Bible had just cause to lose hope. Abraham had no hope in the natural of birthing a son. Joseph was betrayed and abandoned. Moses was exiled on the backside of the desert. Job lost everything. Esther's people were condemned to die. Jairus' daughter was already dead and Mary and Martha lost their brother before Jesus arrived. Even the Apostle Paul despaired of life at one point.

And then there were the disciples on the way to Emmaus who, when asked why they were so sad, replied: *"But we were hoping that it was He Who would redeem and set Israel free" (Luke 24:21, AMP)*. All of these people lost hope, but had their hopes rekindled and went on to fulfill their destinies. And to you, God says to you today the words of Jeremiah 29:11: *"I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out--plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for" (The Message Bible)*. *"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (The Living Bible)*.

JUNE 21
RESTORING LOST HOPE

You cannot look to the world to restore your lost hope in the difficult times of life. The world has enough problems of its own. Your hope is not in the philosophies of the world, your bank account, or your job. Your hope is your Divine Source--God Almighty--and the promises of His Word.

Are you going through a hard time? Declare Romans 5:3-4: "*...but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope...*"

Are you lacking in joy and peace? Claim the hope of Romans 15:13: "*Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*"

Feeling hopeless about your children? Claim Jeremiah 31:17: "*And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border.*"

Feeling abandoned in the wilderness? Read Psalm 22:9-10: "*But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.*"

Are you spiritually weak, your courage failing? Claim the Psalm 31:24: "*Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.*"

Have you lost a loved one? Place your hope in the promises of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: "*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*"

Lost your direction in ministry? Settle your divine destiny with Luke 4:18: "*The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon Me, because He has anointed Me [the Anointed one, the Messiah] to preach the good news (the Gospel) to the poor; He has sent Me to announce release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to send forth as delivered those who are oppressed [who are downtrodden, bruised, crushed, and broken down by calamity].*"

There, in the wilderness of your life, God is restoring your hope so that you can be a minister of hope to a hopeless world.

JUNE 22
PREPARING THE WAY

One of the questions we often ask when we are going through a desert experience spiritually is "Why am I here?" As we have learned, for the first generation of Israelites their desert was a result of their own rebellion. But a desert can also be God-directed, as when Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. It can also be self-imposed, as when the Apostle Paul retreated to the desert to be prepared for his ministry.

Why you are in a spiritual wilderness is not as important as what you do while you are there. The Prophet Isaiah gives some insight regarding this:

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (Isaiah 40:3-5)

These prophecies are similar to the words spoken about John the Baptist, who prepared the way for our Lord's earthly ministry (Matthew 3:1; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1:6-7).

Living in the desert-lands of Judea, John the Baptist spent his entire life preparing the way for Jesus Christ. One day he looked out over the barren land and proclaimed:

...Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water...And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. (John 1:29-34)

One of the purposes of the desert experience is preparation--preparing the way for a new manifestation of the Son of God in your life. Expect to meet God in the desert, for if you seek Him you will find Him. Moses told Israel that even if they were scattered among the nations because of their disobedience, "...if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the Lord thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them" (Deuteronomy 4:29-31).

You make straight paths for God when--in your wilderness experiences--you remove all the distractions of life. Eliminate the useless clutter from your life, suspend meaningless activities, and focus on God. Prepare the way, and He will come.

JUNE 23
LED INTO THE WILDERNESS

One of the first things Jesus experienced after His baptism by John was a barren wilderness. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. The purpose? It is clearly stated: To be tempted by the devil. Read Matthew 4:1-11 before proceeding with today's devotion.

Jesus had been in the wilderness fasting for forty days when the enemy came to tempt Him. Isolated and hungry, the desert is a strategic time for attacks by the enemy. In the first temptation, the enemy suggested that Jesus make bread from stones. What would be wrong with that? After all, He was hungry and He had the power to do it. But Jesus responded with the Word of God declaring that *"Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* If you read Deuteronomy chapter 8 from where Christ's response was drawn, you will see that the subject of the passage is Israel's hunger in the wilderness. The point of the chapter is that if Israel obeyed God, their needs would be provided. In His quotation, Jesus was drawing upon the whole context of the passage to illustrate that obedience is more important than fulfilling personal needs.

The second temptation by the enemy was for Jesus to throw Himself down from the temple mount. This time, Satan even used Scripture to support his appeal. After all, aren't angels supposed to bear you up (Psalm 91:11-12)? Christ's response was again drawn from Scripture, noting that we are not to test God. In essence He was saying, "I do not need a sign or to have a miraculous intervention to prove who God is or who I am in Him."

The third temptation was an appeal for Christ to worship the devil. In essence, Satan was saying "Why go through all the suffering that lies ahead. Just worship me, and I'll give you the kingdoms of the world right now!" Again, Jesus responded with the scriptures saying *"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."* This quote in Matthew 4:10 is drawn from Deuteronomy 6:13. Jesus already owned the kingdoms of the world and would receive His everlasting Kingdom in the perfect timing of God.

The first temptation had to do with knowing *priorities* in life--the priority of obeying the Word of God. The second temptation had to do with knowing your *position* in God. The third temptation had to do with fulfilling God's *plan* in His timing and His way--no shortcuts or alternate plans. These are issues you must settle in your own life, and very often they are settled as you are drawn by the Holy Spirit into the seclusion of a spiritual desert.

Throughout the remainder of His ministry, Jesus retreated often to the desert to rest (Luke 4:42). He also invited His disciples to come apart and rest in the desert (Mark 6:31). The place of testing became a place of resting. God is able to take your most difficult wilderness experiences and transform them into places that will provide spiritual rest and restoration to your soul.

JUNE 24
LIFTED UP IN THE WILDERNESS

Israel had just completed a great military victory through the power of the Lord (Numbers 21:8). What followed next was inexcusable. As they journeyed through the wilderness, they became discouraged because of the difficult way--a barren path without food and water (Numbers 21:4). It is easy to forget the wonderful things God has done when you are traversing the desert trails of life. And that is exactly what Israel did:

And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. (Numbers 21:5)

At this point, God had enough of their complaints. The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and many people died from their lethal bites. The people came to Moses saying,

We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived. (Numbers 21:7-9)

Jesus spoke of this Old Testament event declaring:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:14-16)

There are spiritual parallels between Israel's experience and ours:

- We, too, are in a wilderness.
- The serpent--Satan--would have us perish there through our sin.
- We have an intercessor on our behalf. As Israel had Moses, we have Jesus Christ who is at the right hand of God making intercession for us.
- It was God that designed Israel's deliverance, as He did ours.
- That which they looked to for a cure bore the likeness of that which afflicted them. Because of the flesh, they sinned. Jesus Christ was made flesh to bear our sin, yet He was without sin.
- As the image was lifted up in the wilderness, so Jesus is lifted up on the cross above the wilderness of our world.
- To be healed, Israel had to look to the symbol. We must look to the reality--Jesus--who was lifted up for our sin.

In the wilderness of sin--in the deserts of this world--provisions for your salvation, healing, and deliverance have already been made. Look to Christ and live.

JUNE 25
STRAYING INTO THE WILDERNESS

In previous devotions this month you have learned many reasons for desert experiences in your spiritual life, noting that they are always for divine purpose. Sometimes, however, you may enter a desert experience because you are not walking in God's way. This, too, is for divine purpose. To bring you back to the right path.

The Bible compares us to sheep, saying *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6).

Jesus is compared to a good shepherd:

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:14-15)

Jesus Christ is the Shepherd of your soul. He leaves the flock to search for one lost lamb that has strayed:

For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish. (Matthew 18:11-14)

If you have strayed into the wilderness because of your sin, it is not God's will for you to remain there. The Shepherd of your soul comes seeking you today. Cry out to Him and He will tenderly rescue you from the barren land into which you have strayed. You will not die there. He is not willing that you should perish.

Follow the paths of the good Shepherd, and your every need will be met. As the psalmist declared:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. (Psalm 23:1-6)

JUNE 26
ALONG A DESERT ROAD

"Philip, are you sure? This just doesn't make sense!" That is what Philip's friends might have said to him when he said he was leaving the great revival in Samaria to go into the desert. Right in the middle of a great spiritual outpouring, "...the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert" (Acts 8:26).

At the Word of the Lord, Philip obeyed, leaving a flourishing revival to go into the desert. For what, he did not yet know. Sometimes, God will call you from a busy productive ministry to one that seems less promising. Sometimes--as in Philip's case--God will not explain the reasons or details as to why you are to move on. But at the Word of the Lord, you must go because there are spiritually hungry people waiting for you in the desert:

And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. (Acts 8:27-29)

The same God who guides you into the desert will show you what to do when you get there:

And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. (Acts 8:30-38)

Philip left a city-wide revival to go into the desert to reach one man with the Gospel. Never be too busy with ministering to the masses that you neglect ministry to an individual. The man to whom Philip ministered became a vital link for the gospel to spread to Ethiopia and from there throughout all of modern-day Africa.

What amazing encounter does God have planned for you along your desert road? Go there at His direction, respond in His timing, and you will be amazed at the miraculous results.

JUNE 27
LEFT ALONE

When God draws you aside into a desert place, do not leave your wilderness retreat until you hear from God. When Paul went into the Arabian desert, he did not confer with man, but he did confer with God. Paul wrote of his experiences saying:

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. (Galatians 1:15-18)

Three years in the desert conferring with God followed by fifteen days conferring with man. We often get the process reversed. When we have questions or encounter difficulties, we spend months and sometimes years going to counseling and seeking input from friends or family. There is a place for godly leadership and wise Christian counsel of course, but that place does not replace conferring with God Himself. And to do that, you must get alone with Him.

Abraham was called alone (Isaiah 51:2). Jacob was alone when his life was finally transformed (Genesis 32:24). Moses was alone in the desert when he experienced the voice of God from the burning bush (Exodus 3). The Prophet Jeremiah records that he sat alone because of the hand of God upon him (Jeremiah 15:17). Daniel was left alone when he saw his great vision of future kingdoms (Daniel 10:7). The psalmist felt like a pelican in the wilderness and a sparrow sitting alone on the house top (Psalm 102:6-7). Elijah thought he was the only prophet left when he nursed his wounds in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:10). And then there was John, alone on Patmos, when he received the amazing revelation of the end-times.

Do not fear the isolation of the wilderness. It is there that God will confer with you. And in reality, you are not alone because Jesus promised "...I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

Alone in the wilderness, hiding from the evil King Saul, the psalmist wrote:

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:7-10)

Whether it be Heaven, Hell, the depths of the sea, or the middle of a wilderness--you are not alone.

JUNE 28
RAIN IN DUE SEASON

One of the hottest places on earth is Death Valley, California. Furnace Creek Wash temperatures climb to 120 daily and have been recorded as high as 134 degrees. Miles of lifeless wilderness stretch out in all directions.

Despite the harsh temperatures, Death Valley is famous for its spectacular spring wildflowers--a sea of gold, purple, pink and white flowers stretching across the desert floor. Although there are years where blossoms are few, they are never totally absent.

Most of the showy desert wildflowers are annuals, also referred to as *ephemerals* because they are short-lived. Their limited lifespan assures their survival in these harsh conditions. Rather than struggle to stay alive during the desert's extreme conditions, these annual wildflowers lie dormant as seeds. When enough rain finally falls, the seeds quickly sprout, grow, bloom, and then go back to seed again before the heat returns.

This spectacular display of spring wildflowers does not occur by chance. Water is necessary either by rainfall or from the aquifer upon which the valley sits. Down below the desert floor lies soil saturated with water. The water moves down through many channels under rock formations. Whenever the water hits a vertical place on a rock, it gurgles to the surface as an artesian spring.

In the deserts of your life, things often look dead. Nothing is flourishing. There seems to be no growth. But if you have planted the seed of the Word in your life, those seeds will bloom in God's perfect timing. God has promised:

...I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain , that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you. (Deuteronomy 11:14-17)

If you remain faithful to God in the barren times of life, refreshing spiritual rains will return again in due season. The artesian well of God will rise up within you. You will once again be fruitful. You will be productive again spiritually. The beauty of God will once again rest upon you.

And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. (Psalm 90:17)

JUNE 29 NEW THINGS

Throughout the pages of scripture, new things were frequently revealed in the wilderness.

- In the pit in the wilderness, Joseph began a journey that would take him to his destiny.
- Moses received a new opportunity to fulfill destiny as he stood by a burning bush in the wilderness.
- Tired and discouraged, the Prophet Elijah retreated to the wilderness wanting to die. Instead, he received strength and encouragement and a new mandate of ministry.
- John the Baptist grew up in the wilderness, being prepared to make the way for one greater than he--the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.
- Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness before beginning His earthly ministry.
- The Apostle Paul withdrew to the desert to prepare for a new ministry--he would reach the Gentile nations of the world.
- Exiled on lonely Patmos, John received a new revelation of the end-times unparalleled before or since.

Through the Prophet Isaiah, God promised:

Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:18)

Right there in the midst of your difficulties--in the neediness of your desert experience, God wants to do new things in your life. He will make a way for you, and it won't be a dry, desolate path. It will be a path that will stretch beside "rivers in the desert."

A new destiny, a new refreshment, a new revelation. What new thing does God want to do in your desert?

Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them. (Isaiah 42:9)

JUNE 30
COMING OUT OF THE WILDERNESS

We have traveled many miles spiritually during this month, learning many things about the purposes of the deserts of life.

You will eventually come out of the wilderness--no matter if it was self-imposed, caused by chastisement, or for purposes preparation. Regarding Israel, the Word declares: *"He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years "* (Acts 7:36).

God brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt and out of the wilderness of wandering after His divine purposes were accomplished in their lives. When the new generation of Israelites came to the border of their promised land the second time, they were ready to possess it. Their wilderness experiences had prepared them to seize their God-given inheritance.

You will not emerge from your wilderness weak and despondent. The Bible says that after His wilderness experience *"...Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about"* (Luke 4:14). The wilderness experience launched Jesus into a Spirit-empowered ministry. He went immediately into the synagogues to teach and to boldly declared His purpose:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. (Luke 4:18-21)

You, too, will emerge from your wilderness with a new sense of purpose. You will make your spiritual come-back in the power of the Holy Spirit.

You will walk out of the desert as did the maiden in the Song of Solomon--representative of the Bride of Christ. She came out of the wilderness leaning upon her beloved (Song of Solomon 8:5). The word "leaning" denotes total dependence.

As the bride emerged from the wilderness, her friends and family questioned, "Who is this?" The wilderness experience had so changed her, that even friends and family did not recognize her. The same will be true in your life. You will never again be the same.

How do you make it through a desert? One step at a time. And when you come through the desert experience you will know for certain that...*"The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert...Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything"* (Deuteronomy 2:7).