

LIFE GROUP LESSON

Bigger on the Inside - Week of September 21

Introduction

What is it like to live in the desert? The more we read Scripture and the more we live *life*, the more we see, it is often in the desert where God finds us. Sometimes God leads us into the desert, for it is often there where God refines us. None of us are exempt from seasons in the wilderness.

God called Abram to the desert. He called him to leave the fertile crescent and move to Canaan, a land replete with desolation. God sought Isaac and Jacob while they sojourned in desert places. God found Moses in the desert, deep in the wilderness of Sinai ... and then appointed him to lead descendants of Jacob back into the wilderness to worship him. David learned to worship God in the desert. We think of Elijah from Tishbe, Amos from Tekoa, Isaiah son of Amoz, Jeremiah son of Hilkiah from Anathoth, Jonah son of Amittai, and Daniel in exile. All acquainted with the literal and spiritual desert places.

Think about it:

- Could it be the desolate experiences all began with the first man and woman? Created in the *Imago Dei*, they enjoyed a perfect relationship with God, but then found themselves in the desert place once sin entered their heart (Genesis 3:8-13, 17-19, 23-24). How is fear, unbelief, and shame tied to the desert place we find ourselves in?
- Where did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus after his baptism in the Jordan River? (see Matthew 4:1-2).
- What does the 'desert place' look like for you (your family, or your church family)?

Background

Many things can bring on desert experiences. It may be the poor choice of someone that in turn, triggered a poor response from you. It may be the sudden loss of a loved one, or an unwelcome diagnosis requiring a period of prolonged treatment. It may be your marriage is dissolving around you... or that sarcasm and disrespect has left you feeling degraded. You see no way to *fix* your desert. It may be the result of your own sin that keeps you repeating the same pattern of unhealthy behavior.

It's one thing to try to manage ourselves, it's quite another when we add other people into the mix. Desired outcomes go from complicated to complex when we factor in the range of the 'free will' of everyone involved. We must know, the first step in a 12-step recovery program is that "We admitted we were powerless over our addiction – that our lives had become unmanageable." We need a higher power. And his name is Jesus Christ!

Jesus has to go through the desert on his way from Judea to Galilee. He and his disciples find themselves in the Samaritan village of Sychar near Shechem of the Old Testament. As the disciples go into town to buy food, Jesus remains behind and sits wearily beside Jacob's well. Soon a woman approaches to draw water from the well. She has endured five failed marriages and is now living in sin with a man who isn't decent enough to marry her. She comes to draw water midday – hot, thirsty, feeling like used property. Can you imagine her dry soul, the angry, indifference, and resentment? Perhaps you resonate with how she feels beaten down. Rejected by men, not loved by God. Suddenly, this man (Jesus) asks her for a drink. Could she be thinking: "Well, that's a line I haven't heard"...

Read John 4:4-18

- After Jesus says, "... those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again...", the woman's initial request is "Please sir, give me this water!" Why do you think Jesus responds with, "Go and get your husband"?
- Why is it important to own our *stuff* and be honest before the Lord Jesus?

Continue reading John 4:19-30

The woman perceives this man (Jesus) is a prophet and so, shifts the conversation to a controversial subject stemming back to the days when the Assyrians deported people of northern Israel, replacing them with foreigners - pagans who intermarried and intermingled the worship of God with practices from the east (see 2 Kings 17). The Samaritan woman then asks: Why do you Jews insist you have a corner on 'where' to worship...

Jesus responds with a two-part answer. The time is coming, he says, when it will not matter where you worship. The Samaritans' worship of the LORD God of Israel had drifted from the time God first revealed himself to Abram, Isaac, and Jacob. But now, the over-arching point is that God is seeking true worshipers who will worship *in spirit and in truth*. The true place of worship is a place of repentance, a broken and contrite heart willing to be healed.

- How does true worship enable us to be bigger on the inside?

- Once Jesus revealed who he was to the woman, she immediately left her jar beside the well and ran back to the village proclaiming: “Come and see a man who told be everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah!”
- How can inviting others to know Jesus make us bigger on the inside?

In Closing

Every follower of Christ must learn to worship God in the desert. Thankfully, the Lord never stops pursuing us and never leaves us. He also never stops pursuing the people around us. We must remember that and resolve to worship him in the desert. Continue inviting others to know him, even the difficult people in your life. Close by reading how the apostle Paul boldly called believers in the province of Galatia back to repentance.

Read Galatians 1:6-17

Paul went away to the desert of Arabia in preparation for the preaching ministry before him.

Some of us may feel very small on the inside. We must avoid two temptations – (1) thinking we are better than others *and* (2) thinking we are a nobody. Both are rooted in pride and rotten to the core. We can never ‘will’ ourselves into right relationship with God. No amount of works righteousness will ever earn us salvation. We are saved only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Further, we must remember Jesus suffered in the wilderness; we will as well. This is where worship becomes sweetest, and faith becomes truest.

One Year Bible Reading For This Week:

September 21: Isaiah 37:1-38:22, Galatians 6:1-18, Psalm 65:1-13, Proverbs 23:24
 September 22: Isaiah 39:1-41:16, Ephesians 1:1-23, Psalm 66:1-20, Proverbs 23:25-28
 September 23: Isaiah 41:17-43:13, Ephesians 2:1-22, Psalm 67:1-7, Proverbs 23:29-35
 September 24: Isaiah 43:14-45:10, Ephesians 3:1-21, Psalm 68:1-18, Proverbs 24:1-2
 September 25: Isaiah 45:11-48:11, Ephesians 4:1-16, Psalm 68:19-35, Proverbs 24:3-4
 September 26: Isaiah 48:12-50:11, Ephesians 4:17-32, Psalm 69:1-18, Proverbs 24:5-6
 September 27: Isaiah 51:1-53:12, Ephesians 5:1-33, Psalm 69:19-36, Proverbs 24:7

BIGGER on the INSIDE

Text: Galatians 1:6-10, John 4:17b-26, Exodus 7:16

PLAIN TRUTH

True faith is _____ God in the
 desert which _____ us to
 _____ others to _____ water.

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