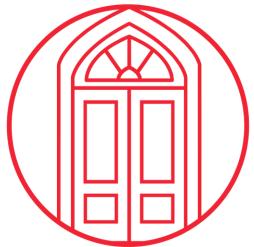


21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL INTRODUCTION

Welcome to 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting! This year's theme is Wild Faith – a look at how wilderness seasons shape our faith, and can often prepare us for the miraculous.

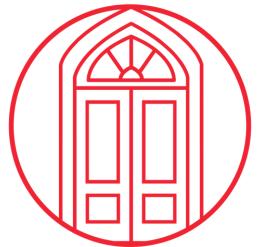
2026

Over the next 21 days, we'll raise the spiritual temperature in our lives both individually and in community. Lean in to both the deep, soul-transforming lessons of the wilderness in the daily devotionals, and we'll pray bold prayers to see God move in the daily Prayer Room. The following 21 devotionals each highlight a different person in the Bible who experienced some sort of wilderness – a literal wilderness, a waiting period, an unanswered prayer, etc. Seeing God in their story can strengthen your faith in your own wilderness, either a current wilderness or one to come. Each devotional was written by someone in our community at City Church OTR.

On the flipside, each day in the Prayer Room, we'll look at some of the biggest breakthrough moments of God in the Bible. These stories will spark our faith and expectancy for God to move in a big way for the things we're praying for now.

As you go through each day, may you hear God's voice through His word and from others in our community. May God tend to the deepest parts of your heart, bringing healing, freedom, and peace. And may your faith increase to expect Him to move in your life, even in the most seemingly impossible ways. May you be emboldened to pray the big, scary prayers in the midst of your community. And throughout the 21 days, may you sit in the presence of the God who loves you, wants to reveal himself to you, and draw you closer to Him.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY #1

BY KRISTEN FULCHER

THE STORY OF HANNAH

1 SAMUEL 1:1-28

THE WILDERNESS OF GRIEF

“I am a woman deeply troubled.” I so deeply resonate with Hannah’s words. Feeling forgotten. Having so much to be grateful for, and yet there is this one thing I’ve asked the Lord for year after year that often feels like a giant hole in my life. Similar to Hannah, I have longed for the day to have a family and children of my own. And yet, the reality of that dream seems further away than ever. These years have been my own wilderness of waiting. I have learned to carry a consistent grief over not seeing the life I thought I’d have by now. Some days it’s just a lingering reminder of a desire that feels like it’s slipping away, other days it’s overwhelming like I’m being provoked to only see what’s missing in my life instead of all that I have. As much as I try to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus in the waiting, it’s so easy to believe that God is holding out on me, or there is something so broken in me that makes me unworthy of being the wife and mom I once thought I was made to be.

I see a similar grief in Hannah – year after year asking for the Lord’s favor while being provoked until her soul was broken down to the point she wouldn’t even eat. But it didn’t make her run from God, it made her run toward Him. Even in the midst of her despair and anguish, Hannah had faith that God would still come through for her. She poured her soul out to Him in prayer asking God to remember her. When the bible talks about God “remembering,” it’s not that He actually forgot about Hannah. It means He acts on His promise and mercy. And that’s what He does for Hannah. Her son, Samuel, became one of the greatest influential prophets in the Old Testament and honored God his entire life, just as Hannah prayed.

I don't know why God closed Hannah's womb and had her walk through this wilderness, just like I don't know the specifics of why I'm in mine. But I do know that He is faithful through it, He wants us to be close to Him in the midst of it, and we have no idea what greater purposes He might be working through it. The outcome isn't actually the part of the story that I think is the most meaningful – God cares about our hearts in the process. There was a significant shift that happened in Hannah in that time of prayer. She entered in anguish, and left no longer downcast. In my own waiting, I have learned to fight to hold onto joy along with the grief. It only comes from being with the Lord, laying my soul fully before Him, and surrendering to His will. It takes faith to surrender. It takes trust. And yet, that is also where joy is found. It doesn't mean the grief goes away. It just means I'm not overwhelmed by it.

My story isn't over. While there are days it only feels like a tiny mustard seed, I have faith God is still working something out for me. He hasn't forgotten me. As I've leaned more and more into prayer and surrender, I'm starting to feel a shift in my spirit. It's a familiar one of hope and joy springing up yet again, and faith that God will remember me too. Where is God inviting you to lay your soul before Him? May we, like Hannah, have faith to run to the Father in our own wilderness.

PRAY:

Father, thank you for seeing me in the waiting, for being with me in it. I pray for faith like Hannah. To lay my entire soul before you, to surrender to you. And while my story is still being written, I pray to find joy in the surrender. As I continue to pray, increase my faith for the impossible. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY #2

BY KRISTIN SCOTT

THE STORY OF JACOB

GENESIS 29:13-30

WORKING IN THE WILDERNESS

Jacob was a man with a plan. To him it seemed like a fool-proof one, until of course, it wasn't. Can you imagine the level of fury and disappointment Jacob would have felt? To have your plans and desires ruined with such a cruel plot twist? Dashed hopes and expectations to this magnitude certainly would have sent him into a personal wilderness while he was forced to work for an additional seven years to earn the bride he was seeking.

Like Jacob, I'm a planner. After working as a stay-at-home mom for seven years I had a grand plan to return to my teaching career and insert a deeper sense of purpose back into my life. I was starting conversations with my husband about this desire when he suddenly lost his job. My return to work quickly became the immediate plan, not the pace I was expecting it to be. Yet, after months of interviews, the job I ended up being offered was a long-term sub position. This was not the plan I had in mind or, quite frankly, felt like I had deserved after working diligently for so many years at home. I struggled in that wilderness season to show up to work with the right attitude and perspective. I couldn't understand why my plan had failed, nor was I able to reconcile that I had been given second best. A song that I discovered during that year of wilderness laboring provided words that I clung to: "Even when I don't understand, I will choose to trust you, God." These words kept my soul from floundering and getting lost in the disappointment of unmet expectations. I had to learn to trust God even when things didn't make sense or go my way.

After one week Jacob got Rachel, and after one year I officially got the job. However, three years later I voluntarily walked away from teaching to pursue ministry, which I discovered held the true sense of purpose I had been longing for. The pathway and plan that I thought would lead to my deepest desires ended up being something unexpected, and nothing I could have planned. God is working in the details of our stories, and even uses what seem like mishaps to bring his “unexpected” plans about.

When we work through disappointing wilderness seasons, trusting more in God’s purposes and focusing less on our own disillusionment, we may discover that God is up to something even greater than our own plans. Where in your story is God inviting you to deeper trust?

PRAY:

God, even when I don’t understand your plan, I choose to trust you. Help my heart to not lose sight of your everlasting love and faithfulness within my story. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY #3

BY JOE TRAMMELL

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM & SARAH

GENESIS 15:4-6, 21:1-7

In my house group last year, I described faith in God's faithfulness as the variable that makes the math work in an equation that otherwise doesn't make sense. We've been contending for a number of ongoing things with physical and mental healing, jobs, and relationships. There have been times where it seemed like despair would win out, where faith once was, as people continued to wait on an unfulfilled prayer.

Abraham and Sarah's faith started strong. In Genesis 12, God essentially tells them, "Leave what you know and I'll tell you when to stop," and they went. When God tells them that they will conceive an heir and father a great nation, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (James 2:23) James considers this a pivotal moment of faith for Abraham.

But this faith wavered after waiting years for the promise to be fulfilled. Abraham and Sarah tried to force the issue ten years later by having Ishmael through Hagar, and thirteen years after that they laughed at God when He said it was time.

But Abraham and Sarah were undeniably confronted with God's faithfulness again when Isaac came. Seeing God fulfill the promise when they'd wavered in faith seems to break something in them. They call Isaac that name because it means "laughter," a constant reminder of their lack of faith and God still moving anyway. In a demonstration of how much his faith had grown, some thirty years later, Abraham is commanded to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham remembered that God's promise was that through Isaac a nation would be built, and Isaac had no children.

THE WILDERNESS OF WAITING

Abraham's only way to reconcile what seemingly was God breaking His promise was to assume that God would just raise Isaac from the dead ([Hebrews 11:17-19](#)). Resurrection was not a thing up to this point. Abraham would sooner believe something unprecedented would happen than believe God would break a promise. After being confronted with God's faithfulness, their faith corrected back to believing God, even when God's command seemed to be counter to the promise. When the equation didn't add up, their faith was the variable that made the math work.

Our House Group has seen a back healed, a good report on chronic ear issues, a more enjoyable job, a more stable job, keeping a job when layoffs occurred, and renewed relationships with siblings and friends that were months or years of prayer. And there are still a number of situations that have seemed to have little movement—ongoing pain, difficult parent relationships, depression, and desire for marriage. But in the waiting, we hold onto the faithfulness of God, and let it increase our faith in believing what He says. Where despair would seem to be the answer, we're leaning into faith.

What are some of the ways you've seen God's faithfulness in your life? Where are you waiting for Him to show up now? What would it look like for you to choose faith and believing God over despair in this season?

PRAY:

God, thank you for being faithful, even when my faith wavers. Help me to remember your faithfulness in my life as I wait for your promises to come to pass. Give me courage to take steps of faith in response to what you ask me to do, and help me to trust that you will be faithful to your word, even when it doesn't make sense. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 4

BY MANDY OWLIAIE

THE STORY OF THE WIDOW

2 KINGS 4:1-7

During a time of great sorrow, this widow is facing the threat of losing even more than she's already lost. Life without a husband left her vulnerable, and she had no idea what to do. She went to Elisha for help. He asked her, "What do you want me to do for you? What do you have?" She thought she had nothing, just a small jar of olive oil. At first, Elisha's instructions seem strange: why would her last jar of oil be the key to saving her children? Why ask her neighbors for empty jars to fill? It doesn't make sense, yet in her obedience God multiplied what little she had, turning her last offering into more than enough. Sometimes God's ways are surprising, and provision comes through what seems insignificant or even impossible.

There are often times when I think I have nothing left to give, and the Holy Spirit gently reminds me of a "small jar" that I can offer the Lord. I love this story because it is 100% God's provision, yet it required the widow to act. Too often, I get stuck waiting for God to move, when he has already invited me to take the next step. I love that the Lord's desire is to partner with us.

I remember a wilderness season of back-to-back traumas when I felt frustrated with God and had nothing left to give Him. Even spending time with Him felt impossible. I was afraid more would be taken away from me and honestly, I wanted to be in control. My heart was hardened but my head knew I had nowhere better to go than the Lord. My spiritual director encouraged me to simply place my hand on the window each morning and say, "Good morning, Lord." This is such a small, insignificant jar to offer the Lord that I thought it wouldn't change anything. It wouldn't be enough.

OBEDIENCE IN THE WILDERNESS

And if a neighbor ever saw me, they would think I was crazy for flinging open my curtains and putting my hand on the window, but I had nothing left to lose. Slowly, He took that tiny act and grew it into a deeper desire to be with Him. He was drawing me closer to Him. That simple act of obedience changed the trajectory of my relationship with the Lord.

As I slowly emerged from that wilderness season, the Lord began building a new foundation for our relationship. I started to understand that I don't need to earn His favor or perform for Him. He simply wants to be with me. Looking back, I remember how painfully hard that season felt, and I am so grateful for God's kindness. He never gave up on me and he used that time to grow our relationship so that it wasn't based on my performance.

I am convinced that I will never fully understand the Lord's ways on this side of heaven. But I do know that the Lord is good and kind, and that He desires good things for us. He responds to our obedience to him, even if it doesn't come in the timing or way we expect. What do you want the Lord to do for you? How are you going to obey what He says? Do you trust He'll use your "jar," even if it seems too small?

PRAY:

Lord, thank you that you are good. Thank you for responding to our obedience. When things feel impossible, would you help us to recognize the "small jars" we have to offer you and would we give you everything. Help us to be a people quick to obedience.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 5

BY MICHAEL BADE

THE STORY OF DANIEL

DANIEL 5:1-17

PREPARATION IN THE WILDERNESS

Anticipation can be exciting, exhilarating, euphoric. It can also stir anxiety, confusion, and staleness in faith. Doubts and questions perpetually arise within: “Can I trust you, God?” or “Are you even there anymore?” Trusting in God’s timing is really challenging – His immeasurable will is incomparable to the finiteness of human experience. The wilderness can often feel like we are wandering alone, absent from the Father’s presence. How do we steward those times when our circumstances feel like a wilderness, and we’re not sure how or when God could move?

In Daniel 5, King Belshazzar is writhing in fear after a crazy supernatural encounter – fingers writing on a wall. His color changes as his “knees knocked together” (v6). In many of our own experiences with the supernatural, whether it’s a dream, vision, or word from God, our first instinct can often be fear. Last February, the Lord revealed a new professional path to end my current role, and take a chance on going to law school. This meant leaving my job and studying for the law school admissions test. As I entered into this season of trusting and waiting, I had no guarantees that it would work out. I prayed the Lord would prepare my heart and sustain me in this time. I was anxious that this risk would not reap a harvest, questioned the soundness of His calling, and even doubted what I heard from Him. When has God asked you to take a risk you had no idea how it would play out?

Daniel lived in a wilderness of exile in Babylon. He didn’t know what would be next for him under foreign rule.

Yet he remained faithful to the Lord. As I endured my own season of waiting, I began to spend more time with Christ by structuring prayer, scripture, and worship as pillars of my day. This created metamorphosis in my life from the inside out. I started to notice spiritual nudges to share the heart of Jesus to those around me, through acts of kindness at the grocery store, praying for friends and family, and setting His commission as my own priority.

Daniel was called to interpret what the King saw on the wall, and he was unaware that the Lord had been moving behind the scenes. If he could interpret what was written, he'd be promoted to be third in command (v16). While he did not know God's direction for his life in exile, Daniel chose faithfulness and obedience, which ultimately prepared him for what was next.

What if instead of anxiety in the unknown, God is fostering preparation for what is next in your life? Where is He asking you to deepen your relationship with Him? How could this season actually shape you now, for what might come next? I was just accepted into law school, and now I know how to witness to others once there because of what I learned in this preparation season. God's purpose for me is not just to have a new career, but to make disciples in this field.

PRAY:

Lord Jesus, we thank you for Your faithfulness. As we wait, we pray for strength to rise. Search our hearts, O God. Reveal to us how we can know you deeper. Grow our trust in you. As we seek to foster our relationship together, transform our lives to be about YOU. You are the King, and we trust in your mighty hand. Your will be done, even when we are anxiously doubting. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY #6

BY KENNY FROST

THE STORY OF DAVID

I SAMUEL 23:13-29

Stories about David are so exciting, especially the period when he was running from his father-in-law, Saul. David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel to be king of Israel, the successor to Saul. Through a series of convoluted events, Saul had decided that killing David was the best course of action to keep his dynasty intact. Rather than confront Saul outright, David decided that keeping his distance was the wiser option to avoid bloodshed and a political coup.

At this point, David was on the run with approximately 600 elite soldiers. Saul's pursuing force consisted of roughly 3,000 elite soldiers. While traversing the arid wilderness of Israel (think rocky northeastern Utah) to evade Saul's forces, God told David that he should liberate the city of Keilah from the Philistines, savage fighters and Israel's enemies. After David liberated the city, its residents betrayed him by giving his position to Saul. Awesome, right?

A wilderness of mine was a medical emergency that required six hours of surgery. My wife was pregnant with our first son, and my survival wasn't guaranteed. Good decision-making felt nearly impossible in that wilderness. We were tired, resource-depleted, and in constant crisis, which clouds judgment and can shift decisions toward self-preservation.

KEEPING YOUR
BEARING IN
THE WILDERNESS

David faced the same challenges while being pursued by a tactically superior force. He could have engaged in warfare and potentially decimated Saul's forces. He didn't, because he knew God's commands: he was "not to touch my anointed ones" ([1Chron. 16:22](#)). As king of Israel, that meant Saul. David was one of Saul's tier-one operators and had served as his second in command before everything went sideways. David chose to ignore everything he knew about warfare—at the risk of his own life and his men—to keep God's commands.

David's obedience and steadfastness in the wilderness brings us to some important questions. How much do we actually believe or act on what we claim about our faith? Will we fold when adversity hits? Are we willing to risk our own existence to act in faith and do what God asks of us?

PRAY:

Father, give us clarity as we walk through the wilderness. Remind us, as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, that you are with us and you love us, so we should fear no evil. Give us the fortitude to make the hard calls as your sons and daughters

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY #7

BY JUSTIN DISABATINO

THE STORY OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST

MATTHEW 3:1-11

THE
WILDERNESS
AS
REPENTANCE

This entry has had many false starts. I knew what I wanted to say but each thought only went on for a little bit before losing its way. Everything I wrote felt too rigid, too structured, and I never seemed to end up where I wanted to go. As I sat with the Lord and mulled over today's Scripture yet again, he made it clear to me that my walk with him has been similar to this process.

Much like writing these words, I've had many false starts in my faith. Despite being exposed to God from a young age, there was no life to what I believed. I saw God as a manager of rules and laws, balancing out sins to see if I was "good enough" to make it into heaven. I was embedded in the church and heard the Gospel, yet I spent decades struggling with sexual sin. I was consumed by pornography and eventually committed adultery. I was tearing my life apart, destroying everything I held dear, all while wearing the mask of a "good Christian."

I was like the Pharisees in Matthew 3. I was in the wilderness, but only to watch other people repent and walk in freedom. I was determined to maintain control, and never truly engage in surrender to the Lord. I was too afraid of what other people might think; I was too afraid of what I might lose. In the wilderness, we have a choice: to idly watch, or to embrace the opportunity to strip away our misconceptions, our false identities, our worldly burdens and come to the Lord in all of our brokenness. It is our chance to repent and turn away from wherever we are headed and turn back to Him.

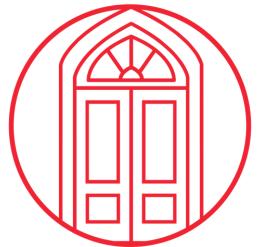
It is such a gift that our Lord is so patient. After years of watching, self-protecting, making excuses, the weight of my sin became too much to bear. In my darkest, loneliest moments, I finally called out in surrender to the Lord. And He answered. The resulting wilderness was a period of repentance that was so, so hard, but unspeakably fruitful. Everything that I had considered beyond redemption, He washed clean and rebuilt better than before. In every place I thought I had needed to protect myself, He became my defender. I had been afraid of what I would lose, and in all transparency, I lost a lot – my job, many friendships, and for a season, the trust of my wife. But as I learned to genuinely repent, I experienced what John promised in our story in Matthew – the Kingdom of God comes near. It's on that foundation He built a life more beautiful than I ever dreamt possible.

Is there an area in your life where you are resisting freedom that can come in the wilderness? What might be keeping you from moving forward in surrender and repentance? You are never so far from the Lord that he will not come after you. There is no sin you can repent of that He will not forgive and redeem.

PRAY:

God, thank you for never giving up on me, for the opportunities you give me to enter into the wilderness to be renewed. Bless me with a heart that is quick to repent. Let me never forget that true healing can only come through surrender. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY #8

BY MICHELLE SANTORA

THE STORY OF HAGAR

GENESIS 16:1-16

Hagar, Abram, and Sarai. These three could rival the drama and chaos of most reality tv shows today. Control grabs, blame shifting, surrogate moms, horrible bosses.... It's a wild ride. Although she's not blameless in the mess, in many ways Hagar is a victim of Sarai's and Abram's actions. And in Genesis 16, Hagar gets tired of it and runs.

Hagar ended up in an actual physical wilderness, but ironically, she was also running FROM her wilderness – the impossible and trying circumstances she was living in under Sarai and Abram's authority. As Hagar runs, she is met by an angel of the LORD who speaks to her and he tells Hagar to return to her masters, along with a prophetic message about her unborn son. And something significant happens in this interaction.

Hagar is moved by the personal nature of the message she is given and she does something surprisingly intimate and incredible. Hagar calls God by a new name: El Roi. "She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me.'" (Genesis 16:13) It's the first time in the Bible that we see someone give God a name. This woman – a servant girl, broken, alone, and running – declares who God is. And in faith that this God knows her and is worth listening to, Hagar obeys and returns to the wilderness that's awaiting her.

I can't tell you how many times in my life I've wanted to run away from problems or hard situations like Hagar tries to do. And honestly some days I do run. It looks different for me than it did for Hagar.

**GOD SEES
YOU IN THE
WILDERNESS**

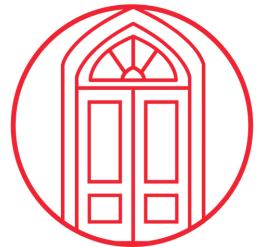
It might be sleeping, watching tv, or doom scrolling for the best memes. Those are often my ways of running from the problem in front of me, when the wilderness feels too much to face...again. I want to bury my head under my pillow until it's over. Oftentimes navigating the wilderness means finding the way through it with the Lord, even when our flesh is screaming at us to run from it.

Our God is unchanging - He is still El Roi, the God who sees you. The same God who sought out Hagar as she ran in the wilderness sees you, your pain, your wrestling, and He loves you deeply. Sometimes wild faith is simply taking a step of obedience to stay present in the wilderness and ask the LORD to meet you there. And I know from experience that's easier said than done. But El Roi is not absent or unaware. He is with you in the wilderness and He wants to walk with you. What wilderness are you trying to run from? Where is God asking you to stay and walk through the wilderness with Him?

PRAY:

God, thank you for being the God who sees me, who knows me fully, and who loves me deeply. Help me see you in my wilderness today. Help me see how you have shown up for me and walked with me in the past so that I can remember who you are. I need you. Please show me how to walk this path and what you are growing in me through this experience. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY #9

BY BRANDON MCCUALEY

THE STORY OF MOSES

EXODUS 3:1-4:17

HEARING
GOD'S VOICE
IN THE
WILDERNESS

Moses was living an entirely different life than what he once expected. He had grown up in the home of Pharaoh, and eventually the consequences of his sin drove him into the wilderness. Mercifully, he was able to develop a life there. He became a shepherd for his father-in-law for forty years. I have to imagine he had no intention of his life changing at this point. He certainly wouldn't have planned on going back to Egypt, where he had once fled for his life. When the voice of God shows up in a miraculous way, He asks Moses to begin the journey of leading the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt. Moses responds with a very "human" amount of grumbling and bargaining with I AM.

I remember feeling like 2020 was going to be "my year" – what a wild ride that year was for us. Six months into it I found myself in a wilderness. I had no close-by community, was not involved in a local church, and had no sense of purpose in a job that drained my soul. Yet, that summer was the single most impactful time of my relationship with Jesus. I had daily coffee with Jesus, journaling the depths of my heart, and prayer walks around my neighborhood. Never in my life had I experienced a more sweet expression of God's presence and the living representation of Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." And yet, I still grumbled with God.

As I was led to City Church that fall, I still held a grumbling in my spirit that needed to be healed. Then, I felt God speak an instruction to me, this 24-year-old, single man with no experience, "If you want to be like Jesus, you'll be with the children." Like Moses, I felt disqualified for what God was asking, yet, I said "yes."

That began my healing journey of my disappointment with God, and his Church, and became a job that fills me with purpose and delight. Because of the intimacy and clarity in the wilderness, my invitation was clear – as was Moses'. The unexpected call on his life was cultivated solely through hearing God's voice in the wilderness, and his (somewhat reluctant) "yes" that followed.

Our wilderness experiences cultivate something in us that prepare us for something greater than we can imagine while we're in them. AND, the grace of I AM can sustain our grumbling because of a love that is deep, personal, and knows pain and grief Himself. Being honest with Him about our present state develops that intimacy and clarity that can help us give a simple "yes" to His call when it comes.

How is God using your wilderness to become more acquainted with His voice? How can this season produce intimacy with Him that leads to clarity in what He says?

PRAY:

Father, thank you for being near to the broken-hearted, and those crushed in spirit. May I see you more clearly now than I ever have before. May I trust you enough to humbly lay down my grumblings before you, and say yes to that which you have called me. Help me to see you and hear your voice today. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 10

BY DAVE MCMURRAY

THE STORY OF ELIJAH

1 KINGS 19:1-18

GOD'S
WHISPER
IN THE
WILDERNESS

Elijah's story in 1 Kings 19 is a picture of a soul in the wilderness. After a season of pressure, fear, and exhaustion, Elijah flees from Jezebel and eventually collapses under a broom bush and prays, "I have had enough, Lord." The wilderness here isn't just a physical place; it is spiritual, emotional, and deeply personal. Elijah finds himself in a season where his strength has run out, where the answers feel distant, and where loneliness and doubt begin to overwhelm him. Yet in that wilderness, God does not scold him. He feeds him, lets him rest, and speaks gently, reminding Elijah that he is not alone. What's striking is that Elijah never asks God to show up. He asks for it all to be over and then he falls asleep. And still, God comes. First with quiet provision through angels, and later with His own voice, not in wind or fire, but in a whisper.

As I was reading the story of Elijah, I immediately recognized a similar wilderness in my own life. My dad had early onset dementia and experienced a sudden decline in 2020. This decline led him to move in with our family, eventually needing us to provide round the clock care for the next three years. Through this season, our family found ourselves in a wilderness that was similar to Elijah's. Just like him, we hadn't chosen this wilderness, but we found ourselves in it all the same. It was physically exhausting, emotionally draining, and spiritually challenging. Fear and grief settled in, and there were moments when we cried out to God much like Elijah did, definitely ready for it all to be over, longing simply to sleep and escape the weight of it all.

And yet, this is exactly where God met us. Not loudly or dramatically, but faithfully. He came in small, sustaining ways. In brief moments of clarity and laughter, unexpected strength to keep going, unity within our family, renewed vision, and the quiet faithfulness of our community. No earthquake or fire, but just a patient God, whispering grace that was sufficient for each day. Looking back, our family all agrees that this wilderness became one of our seasons of greatest growth and joy.

Wilderness seasons can convince us that we are alone or that nothing meaningful is happening. But Elijah's story reminds us that the wilderness is often where God does His most tender work. He nourishes. He restores. He redirects. And He whispers truth into places where louder answers might overwhelm us.

Many of us have some sort of wilderness season right now. Maybe it's grief, uncertainty, waiting, caregiving, or just plain exhaustion. TAKE HEART. God meets us in our wildernesses. Not necessarily with big, quick fixes, but with presence, sustenance, and hope. We just have to pay attention and listen. Where do you feel most weary or overwhelmed right now? Take a moment to notice God's gentle provision in that place. Maybe there is a small way He's already sustaining you – through rest, your community, a word, or a moment of grace? Think about it, write them down, and thank God for these small moments of his tenderness and provision in your wilderness.

PRAY:

Father, in the wilderness of our lives, meet us with your provision and presence. Let us hear the gentle whisper of your voice. Help us recognize your presence in the small, sustaining graces of each day. Lead us through this season with renewed faith and a deeper awareness that we are cared for and never alone. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 11

BY KATHERINE MARLIN

THE STORY OF ANNA

LUKE 2:36 - 38

DEVOTED
THROUGH
THE
WILDERNESS

“She was very old” – what a way to be described; not just “old,” but “very old.” However, Anna being “very old” has a lot to do with the story of her waiting. It tells us that her waiting has gone on for a LONG time. Scripture says “she never left the temple, but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer.” What was she waiting for? Or more like, who was she waiting for? The Messiah. The One who would “rescue Jerusalem.”

We read that Anna’s husband died after just seven years of marriage. I’m glad Luke includes this context because I think it gives us a window into who this woman was, and the character that would be developed in someone who lost their husband that young. We also read that she remained a widow until 84. Doing some simple math and using a culturally normal age for her marriage, she probably spent three-fourths of her life as a widow. Three-fourths of her life, or 60+ years, never leaving the Temple, worshiping God, fasting, praying, being totally devoted. Wow.

I wonder if this prophet Anna would have been all-in, devoted to worshiping God in the Temple, had her husband not died. I obviously can’t know the answer to that question, and yet, it does make me wonder, “what do seasons of wilderness cultivate in us?” For Anna, she used this time of grieving and mourning to draw her close to where God “lived,” the Temple. She could have gone about her days mourning and I’d imagine folks wouldn’t question her. Yet, she didn’t. She used the pain to draw her in. She sought the Lord and now used this “empty” time and space to fill it with Him. She possibly knew, being a prophetess, that He was going to be coming soon, like actually soon, and she wasn’t going to miss it.

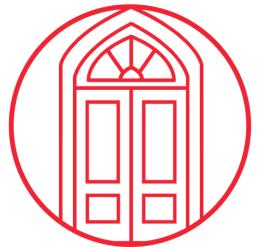
In my own life, I'm certain that my devotion to seeking God would not be so strong had I not had a long period of wilderness while waiting for children. Five years of infertility feels very small compared to 60 years of waiting, but in the middle, it felt long and often without hope. During that time I was so desperate for God to move, in a way that honestly hasn't been matched since. My sweetest times of connection and hearing from Him came during that wilderness season. There were so many opportunities for God to "be close to the brokenhearted" (Ps 34:18), and He was as I honestly poured out my heart to Him.

God rewarded Anna's devotion and worship by allowing her to behold the infant Messiah. What an absolute honor. For us, although not a tangible sense, we get to behold our Messiah in worship and prayer through the power of the Holy Spirit. He fills us and meets us in our questions and wilderness. How is your current wilderness cultivating devotion to God in you? If you mercifully aren't in any "wilderness," how might you still choose devotion to God today?

PRAY:

Father, meet me in my wilderness of _____. Show me how to cry out to you; to worship you, like Anna, even in the midst of pain. May my honest crying out be worship unto you. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 12

BY ABBY DENOMA

THE STORY OF NOAH

GENESIS 7:1-24

THE WILDERNESS OF TRANSITION

Transitions are hard. I moved to Chicago the winter after college graduation. I lived alone and was starting my job as an ICU nurse, which was exhausting in every possible sense. In fact, I didn't really want the job when I applied for it. I prayed they'd say, "You're not what we're looking for, but thanks." Instead they said (verbatim), "You're exactly what we're looking for, when can you start?" In talking with God, I knew this was the place I was supposed to be, and I watched God provide for me as I prepared to move. Winter is not the season you want to move to Chicago. Words like: wilderness, loneliness, and "Chiberia" come to mind. That wilderness season taught me to tune my ears to God's voice and to trust I was nestled in God's mercy and will. I reminded myself of the ways He provided for me at every turn, and how near He really was, even when I questioned His presence. The transition slowly revealed itself as a transformation of my soul.

Noah is on the cusp of a transition with his ears tuned to God's voice, as he builds an ark, collects his family, and a zoo full of animals. In a generation when God was so grieved by mankind's corruption He chose to destroy them, Noah was seen as righteous and blameless. God demonstrated his mercy to Noah with instruction and provision. And, Noah listened and "did all that God commanded him." There is nothing quite like a transition as an opportunity to tune your ear to God's voice and actually do what He says.

But there is also nothing like a transition to bring up questions. I, myself, have some questions about Noah's endeavor. When Noah boarded the boat with his family, do you think they knew how long this was going to be?

Was Noah given a tranquilizer kit in case there was a major gorilla/lion brawl? Was God present and near, or did He feel distant? How did Noah answer his wife/children the 8,391st time they asked “So what exactly did God say we were doing?” Did Noah question God’s plans, starting over at 601 years old?

Despite the questions he might have had, Noah chose to believe, obey, and hope in the midst of a hopeless situation. He trusted God’s words, timing, and provision. Nestled in the will and mercy of God, he and his family were protected from everything God was doing outside the ark. And when it was over, Noah’s first move was sacrifice and praise.

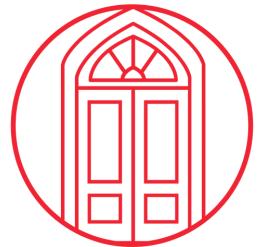
Where are you in the process of transition – preparing, in the middle, or recalibrating? Does preparation look like tuning your ears to hear God’s voice and obeying His commands? Are you listening for His answers to your questions in the midst of transition? Does God feel near or distant? And once you’ve made it to the other side, will you turn your eyes, mind, and heart to sacrifice and praise?

Being protected in the middle of God’s will and mercy doesn’t make transitions easier, but it does make them worth it. And if we let them, transitions can lead to some of the greatest moments of transformation in our faith.

PRAY:

God, in your infinite kindness, please tune my ears to your voice today. You are merciful and faithful in your promises. Extend to me the olive branch of peace and hope that I need to see today. In my questions, please show me more of who you are & what you have for me in this season. Make me sensitive to the things of you & bend my heart to obey your commands. I praise you, for I am yours. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 13

BY BRAD BRUESEWITZ

THE STORY OF THE ISRAELITES

EXODUS 15:22 - 16:36

PROVISION IN THE WILDERNESS

Life is often a mixed bag of incredible moments mixed with difficult ones, to put it lightly. The “highs” often seem fleeting, and the “lows” seem to last forever. The brand-new nation of Israel experienced God’s rescue from slavery, toting silver and gold from their former captors amid their departure. They experienced God splitting a body of water in half. They wandered without water for three days and again, God provided, miraculously quenching their thirst and leading them to an oasis. Now, they face starvation.

They begin complaining, wishing they were back in Egypt where at least they would have died with a full belly. It is easy to see their doubt creep in, filtering their past through a cynical lens created by their current predicament. Was it really God who led us this far? What if we are actually on our own out here? Note: they blame Moses. The Israelites begin to reimagine their experiences not as God’s provision, but as the works of an incompetent leader bumbling forward without a plan, who must have just gotten lucky thus far.

I tell people often that I am a “highly logical person,” my way of admitting I can be cynical. This outlook makes it easy for me to downplay God’s role in my life. The issue with cynicism is that it tricks me into thinking I see things more clearly, when in fact, I’m missing out on the bigger picture, much like the Israelites. The miraculous can easily be filtered out to appear mundane or coincidental. I begin to doubt I’ve even had any highs. When I minimize or dismiss the ways I have seen God move in the past, I begin to seriously doubt that He will provide in my present and future.

And yet, God is patient with me (as He was with the Israelites), and He mercifully provides yet again. I am coming out of a season of cynicism and indignation towards God. I have seen God meet me when I humble myself and surrender to Him, despite how I feel. I began shattering the cynical lens I was holding onto by reminding myself of who God is and how He has worked in the past through difficult seasons. I trust more in God than in what I see in front of me. In what ways do you need to do the same? What “lens” is making you see His provision less clearly?

When Moses cries out to the Lord, the Israelites are given manna and quail, satisfying their legitimate need for food. This provides for them now, but more importantly Moses reminds them that through this “you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt.” It was God who brought you here, and it is He who will lead you onward.

PRAY:

Lord, thank you for your patience, mercy, and provision – even in my seasons of doubt, when I dismiss your goodness and love. I take time now to reflect on the ways I am refiltering my past or present incorrectly. Guide me to remember in hard seasons that you have never left me. Help me to lay down my pride and surrender even when I don’t want to, so that I can see your goodness more clearly. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 14

BY LEXI BRUESEWITZ

THE STORY OF JONAH

JONAH 1 & 2

GOD'S MERCY
IN THE
WILDERNESS

Does God truly know better than I do? Is God really good? Does He see and understand me? Our disobedience points to what we believe - about God, ourselves, and others. In Jonah's story, he runs from God's call to preach in Nineveh because of his own thoughts about the people there. He doesn't want God to have compassion on them, so he refuses God and heads the opposite direction. He prefers his own plan to God's. It feels important that Jonah acknowledges this. He actually tells the men on the boat that he is running away from the Lord. Months ago, I had felt that I too was running from God. I confessed to a friend that I was not praying about a situation because I wasn't sure I would be obedient if I heard from Him. I wanted God to change my situation, and I had fear that He would rather change my heart instead. Like Jonah, I had decided to plug my ears and hope for my own plan to come to pass.

This disobedience, or lack of submission, can bring us into a wilderness of our own. This can come by God's hand or simply the natural consequences of our sin. Either way, God uses our situation to draw us nearer to Himself. In Jonah's case, God brought the storm and three days alone in the belly of a fish. While he sat in the fish, in his solitude and honesty with the Lord, Jonah's heart began to change. No longer running away, he says, "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, and your holy temple." He then declares that he will do what God asks. It was God's mercy for Jonah to have time for his belief to change. My wilderness looked like a state of unnecessary anxiety and uncertainty and, when I finally began talking to God about it, my prayer was a cry for help, to help my unbelief.

When we acknowledge the state of our heart and confess the things we're withholding from Him, even if we aren't ready to surrender, He mercifully uses it. As I confessed my lack of trust and submission to God, I felt Him changing my heart. Even though it's not what I wanted at first, He has given me contentment right where I am. The stress and anxiety have faded because I have opened my hand to God's plan instead of fighting for my own.

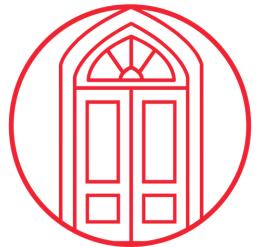
In our conversations with God, He reminds us of who He truly is. He is loving. We can be honest because He can handle our disobedience. He is patient as we are learning to trust Him. We might find ourselves in the wilderness, but He will never leave us on our own. He is a God who is worthy of being followed.

Take time today to be brutally honest. What is your true view of God? Is there anything you're withholding from Him?

PRAY:

Merciful Father, forgive me for withholding from you, for not always trusting you fully. Open my eyes to your goodness. Open my ears to your voice. Help me trust that you see and hear me too. Give me the courage and humility to choose your way above my own. Help me see that even when I run from you, you are there. Let me remember the reality and depth of your goodness, past, present, and future. May I find that the more I trust, the more I find you always faithful. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 15

BY REAGAN WILDONER

THE STORY OF ADAM & EVE

GENESIS 3:6 - 13

SHAME IN THE WILDERNESS

“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food... a delight to the eyes, and desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.” Have you ever judged something to be good that God called evil, and had to wrestle through the kind of submission that makes no sense? Or, in the wrestling, have you failed miserably and simply rebelled against God? If you’re anything like me, you’ve had times of victory and defeat. When I’ve fallen short, whether in rebelling against God or making an idol of something He created, I always end up in the same place. I find myself in the wilderness of shame.

In this passage, we see the garden become a wilderness simply because of the decisions of those who live in it. How often is the same true of us? I know for me, there are times where I have the ability to live in a garden and I am choosing to stay in the wilderness, because shame feels safer than confession. During the times when my journey out of sin has been messy and non-linear, I coped by letting pride and shame lie to me as I spent weeks listening to satan instead of the scriptures. I have meditated on my sin instead of the cross, and like Adam and Eve, I hide myself from the presence of the God who has only ever loved me.

Yet, I see faith in this story as well. Adam and Eve don’t stay silent. They tell the Lord where they are at, and confess what they have done. It takes faith to confess our sin to the Lord and believe that we will be received by Him in love. That faith leads them out of the wilderness of shame, back into the arms of God.

If we have the same faith to come out of hiding and uncover the parts of us that feel too vulnerable to share, we will be met by a loving Father, Friend, and Savior. In the times that I have been bold enough to have faith that my sin was truly paid for, I have been rescued from that wilderness and delivered back into a garden.

Every morning brings new mercies. When I look at my life and pay more attention to my sin than the God who handled it, I spiral into shame and hide from the Lord. When I recognize the reality of my sin, but choose to dwell on what God says about me and his finished work on the cross, I am filled with a hope that drives back the darkness. When we, like Adam and Eve, find ourselves marinating in an internal wilderness of shame, may we remember that the hope of God will bring us back to the garden.

PRAY:

Jesus, help me to believe in what you have said and who you are. Help me not to rely on my own understanding of what I can see, but to submit to your perfect knowledge of how and who you created me to be. Thank you that where my sins are many, your mercy is more. As I continue a flawed walk with you, fill me with hope that the work of Jesus on the cross truly is enough to set me free of shame. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 16

BY LIA FISCHER

THE STORY OF JOSEPH

GENESIS 37, 45

HOLDING ON TO
GOD'S PROMISE
IN THE
WILDERNESS

“Close every door to me, keep those I love from me, darken my daytime, and shut out my night. Just give me a number, instead of my name, forget all about me and let me decay. For I know I shall find my own peace of mind, for we have been promised a land of our own.”

These words were belted as loudly as humanly possible all throughout my house growing up. If you weren't raised in a musical-theater-loving home like I was, those lyrics were famously sung in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Coat*. Joseph sang as he was in prison after everything he ever had was taken from him. My brother and I would see who could sing these lyrics higher than the other. Yet, I had no idea how important those lyrics would become for me in a season of waiting on God's promise to be fulfilled.

God began to speak to Joseph through prophetic dreams, where he saw himself ruling over his parents and siblings. When he shared his dreams with his brothers, they were horrified that Joseph believed he would one day lead them, so they beat him and sold him into slavery. Joseph was wronged many times over years of waiting on God's promise, yet, that's exactly what God used for His plan to unfold.

If Joseph hadn't been sold into slavery exactly when he had, he wouldn't have been purchased by Potiphar. If he hadn't been purchased by Potiphar, he wouldn't have met Potiphar's wife. If he hadn't met Potiphar's wife, he wouldn't have been thrown in prison at that exact time.

If he hadn't been thrown in jail at that exact time, he wouldn't have been able to interpret the dream of another man who had been put in that prison. If the cupbearer hadn't forgotten about Joseph's dream for two years, Pharaoh could have met and then dismissed Joseph prematurely. At the right time, decades of prophetic words came into fulfillment, breakthrough came, and nations were saved.

Even in the worst situations, Joseph lived with integrity and faith. He trusted that God would be with him. Yet, his problems weren't fixed instantly. Maybe, like me, you've noticed that doing the godly thing doesn't always change things right away. I often have to remind myself what Joseph knew – the point of serving the Lord isn't the outcome we hope for. He is deserving of our obedience no matter what.

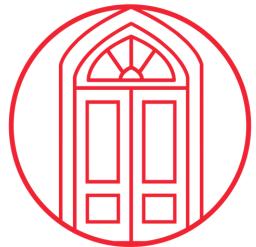
Where are you waiting on a promise of God? A few hard weeks? A handful of awfully long months? Years that seem to drag on for eternity while simultaneously seeming to pass quickly in a cruel way that makes one stop and say, "Another year has already passed, and I still haven't seen breakthrough?"

No matter where you are in your waiting, this story reminds us that God is in control, has His hand on us and on the timing of our story, and is always doing something much greater than we can see in the moment.

PRAY:

God, will you renew my hope today? Remind me that God is up to something good in my life. That my waiting is not in vain. I pray that you use this season for my good and for the good of many others. I trust you – that your ways are not like mine, and your ultimate purpose will come to pass ([Is. 55:8-11](#)). Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 17

BY ANNIE FRANCIS

THE STORY OF ZECHARIAH

LUKE 1:5 - 25, 57 - 80

THE WILDERNESS OF SILENCE

Elizabeth and Zechariah were described as righteous and faithful, people who obeyed God wholeheartedly. And yet, they lived with a long-standing grief: they had no children, and they were well beyond the years when hope felt reasonable. Their wilderness was not loud or dramatic—it was quiet and prolonged. It was the ache of unanswered prayer. They trusted God, but they also carried disappointment, waiting for something that never seemed to come.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the temple, announcing that Elizabeth would bear a son who would prepare the way for the Lord, it should have been a moment of pure joy. Instead, Zechariah doubted. Standing in the presence of an angel, he still asked, “How can I be sure?” His disbelief didn’t cancel God’s promise, but it did shape the journey. Zechariah was made unable to speak—a season of forced silence while God fulfilled His word anyway. That silence wasn’t only a consequence. It was formation. In the quiet, Zechariah was invited to watch God work without trying to explain, control, or question the process.

I resonate deeply with that tension—believing God can move, while struggling to believe He will. There are seasons when faith feels fragile, when prayers feel repetitive, and hope feels risky. I’ve experienced moments where doubt didn’t push me away from God, but it did quiet me. Times when I had no eloquent prayers left, only waiting. Looking back, I can see how God used those quiet seasons to deepen my trust. What I questioned with my words, He answered with His faithfulness.

What felt like a delay was actually preparation. Zechariah's disbelief didn't cancel God's promise, but it did push him into a season of silence, reflection and discernment.

Elizabeth's pregnancy became living proof that God had not forgotten them. Their child's purpose was to prepare the way for the Savior, so if he had come any earlier, the timing would not have been perfect. What an example of God's timing being better than our own, right? When John was born, Zechariah finally spoke again. The silence produced something richer than certainty—it produced worship. God did exactly what He promised, even while His servant wrestled with doubt. That's the hope of this story: God's faithfulness is not dependent on the strength of our belief. He is steady even when we are not.

Where might God be meeting you in a season of silence or waiting? Is there a place where doubt hasn't disqualified you, but has invited you into deeper trust? Perhaps God is using the quiet not to shame you, but to shape you, preparing your heart for fuller joy and deeper praise.

PRAY:

Father, thank you for being faithful even when my faith feels small and I doubt your goodness. Meet me in the waiting and the silence. Silence mine or any other voice, so that I can hear yours clearly. Speak louder than any of my doubts. Help me trust your promises when I don't yet see the outcome. Use this season to form my heart, deepen my faith, and lead me into praise. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 18

BY IZZY KESTERSON

THE STORY OF PAUL

GALATIANS 1:11 - 24

GRACE IN THE WILDERNESS

Admittedly, I never understood Paul in my younger years, but after a season of ignoring God and my faith, Paul's conversion was inspiring. In this passage, Paul effectively summarizes the before and after of his encounter with Jesus in a way that reminds me what happens when we take a minute to zoom out and look at the whole picture. In a moment where most people would have despaired over the hardship they endured, Paul's reaction is to run immediately to God.

The end of 2023 was my hardest wilderness yet. Freshly recommitted to my faith, loss connected to my struggles with sexual sin turned my life upside down in a manner of minutes. Much like Paul when he was struck with blindness, I was brought to my (emotional) knees. I was confronted head on with a decision in my suffering – turn from the Gospel, or cling to the gift of grace and mercy that was offered.

The following year I spent so much time in solitude, lamenting to the Lord and digging into the Word. It was there in the depths of my emotion, in the processing of grief and hardship, that God revealed himself to me. I surrounded myself with a faithful community, who helped shift my theology and cultivate an intimate relationship with the Lord. It wasn't easy, but it was so worth it. In the quiet moments, I slowly discovered a passion and calling that could not have been recognized without this experience. God used what I learned through this season of suffering and has given me the opportunity to further the Kingdom.

In his writings, Paul doesn't curse God for putting him through trials, or carry shame of his life before Jesus. He celebrates the gift of grace that was so freely given to him. Paul chose to chase after God first in his suffering, submitting to God's will and creating space for God to move. I won't pretend to know what Paul was doing in Arabia, or Damascus, or what getting "acquainted with Cephas" entailed, but I do know that community who pours the Father's love into you is vital in times of hardship, and without those believers Paul probably wouldn't have been the great teacher he's known to be.

Do not bury your wilderness. Paul did not try to hide his past of further persecution, but used it as an opportunity to celebrate how great our God is. Even in the midst of suffering, where do you see God? Is there a new opportunity, understanding, or relationship that has come from it? The more I've been able to zoom out and identify God working in the wilderness, the more capacity I've found for the difficult things in life. The Lord didn't forsake me, and He hasn't forsaken you. Like Paul, we all have the opportunity to look back and identify where He has been working.

PRAY:

Lord, thank you that the wilderness is not the end. I pray that through suffering, purpose will be revealed to me. Hold me close to you, fill my life with others who will point me back to you. I pray that your blessings in my life will pour out onto the others around me, and my life will be a testament to your goodness. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY #19

BY CASSIE VANDERWOODE

THE STORY OF NAOMI

RUTH 1

Growing up, I was a dancer. From the ages of 3-16, my Tuesday nights consisted of dance lessons in the basement of a Catholic church on the west side of Cincinnati. As I grew older, life became busier, and I ultimately had to decide to stop dancing to make room for the responsibilities that life had ahead of me. I was devastated that I couldn't have both, and a seed of bitterness began to take root in my heart. Since then, I've developed a deep, personal relationship with the Lord, and there have been many sweet moments in which he has met me, dancing with me. Those are the times when I feel His presence the closest. Because of that, I decided that I wanted to start dancing again. Except the first time I tried, I badly hurt my knee, requiring physical therapy. Though this setback was temporary, I felt the seed of bitterness grow again.

Bitterness arises when we hold onto the hurt of unmet expectations. I see an abundance of unmet expectations in the story of Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law. Between the famine that causes her to leave her home, the death of her husband, sons, and supposedly her family line, Naomi is left with a life she never expected. When she returns to Judah with Ruth, she says, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty." (Ruth 1:20-21). Naomi feels completely hopeless, to the point that her heart has come to believe all these unmet expectations are a sort of judgment from God. I can see how the enemy had a hold on her heart, convincing her that the Lord was against her.

BITTERNESS IN THE WILDERNESS

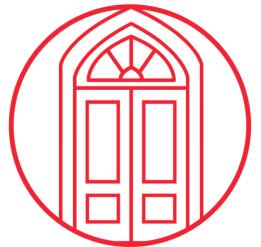
I can understand in a small way where she is coming from. I have found myself questioning the Lord, asking, “Have I done something wrong? Why would you take away something that brings me so much joy and allows me to connect with you?”

Despite the desperate situation Naomi was left in, the Lord blessed her with a grandson, Obed, who became the grandfather of King David, which ultimately led to Jesus! I am in awe of how the Lord still moved within and despite Naomi’s bitterness towards him. He takes the expectations for her life that she had and creates something even more beautiful than she could have ever imagined: the family line for a Savior. Do you see yourself in Naomi’s story as I do? Is there a situation, small or large, that you’ve deemed hopeless that God might be trying to move in? What bitterness does he want to uproot? How might he exceed all your expectations? While I’m still unable to dance right now, I’m seeing the Lord change my heart from one of bitterness to one of hope. I know that he is a healer, a provider, and a Father who loves me deeply. He will take my unmet expectations and create something even more beautiful than I could ever imagine. And we will dance together again.

PRAY:

Father, thank you for your faithfulness in every situation. In your kindness and mercy, would you begin to uproot any bitterness in my heart today and replace it with your hope. Would you increase my faith so that I expectantly turn to you in moments where my expectations are unmet. Would you meet me there and help me find hope in the good story that you have created for me. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 20

BY JASON SCOTT

THE STORY OF PETER JOHN 18:15 - 27, 21:15 - 19

“Oh, Peter,” and as soon as I type those words, the next thought that comes to mind is “Oh, Jason.” I relate to Peter, and not for the good stuff he did, more-so the trouble he got himself into while operating out of his own strength. You know, the big promises he makes and the so-called “bold moves” he takes (off with your ear!). Recall what Peter so vehemently declared to Jesus back in Matthew 26:35, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” A few hours later, Peter denies Jesus three times. Well, that was quick!

I attended a healing talk a few years ago, and I remember being deeply moved by the teaching and testimonies. I responded like any good “Peter” would, “Father, from this moment forward, I will pray for every sick person I ever see!” A few days later...we found ourselves at a city-wide yard sale. No joke, out of the hundreds of people we passed by that day, 1 out of every 4 were on crutches, in a wheelchair, on an oxygen machine, or suffering in some way. I was so overwhelmed by the needs that I crumbled inside, too scared to pray for any one of them.

When Peter, you, or I fall short, do you notice that Jesus never casts us out? He doesn’t send us off into the wilderness to figure it out on our own. Nope, we do that! Peter went back to his fishing boat and I went back to shame and condemnation, punishing myself for falling short.

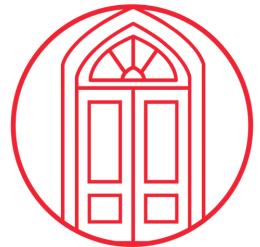
THE SELF- IMPOSED WILDERNESS

Jesus responds to our self-imposed wilderness or “time-outs” by coming right after us. There Jesus is, sitting on the shore cooking up breakfast for Peter, waiting to reinstate him into the ministry. Jesus does the same with us. We anticipate being corrected or punished. Yet, He desires to sit with us and talk about what’s next. Where do you tend to run off to when you slip or fall short in faith? Where might Jesus be waiting to speak life and love into you?

PRAY:

Father, help us be faithful sons and daughters who walk by faith and trust in you, not in our own strength. May we be those who run to you when we fall short and sit with you when we are lost. Thank you Lord, that even when we find ourselves in the wilderness, you are with us. Amen.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER & FASTING



DEVOTIONAL

DAY # 21

BY CHRIS MARLIN

THE STORY OF JESUS

LUKE 4:1-15

THE SPIRIT IN THE WILDERNESS

“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14).

Jesus’ ministry was done “in the power of the Spirit.” Yes, He was the Son of God. But He also took on flesh and subjected himself to human weakness and limitation (Phil 2:6-8). He acted “in the power of the Spirit.” We often attribute Jesus’ miracles and wisdom to His divinity, but this tells us that His human body was filled with the Spirit – the same Spirit that can fill us.

Jesus returned with that power. Where did He return from? The wilderness. Everyone wants Luke 4:14. Very few would choose verses 1 through 13 though. It was in the wilderness that Jesus was tempted, ridiculed, questioned, and physically exhausted. It was from there that He returned in the power of the Spirit. How? Because He partnered with God in the midst of the wilderness.

The wilderness carries a two-part blessing: 1) That the Spirit of comfort empowers you in the wilderness (Rom. 8:26), and 2) That we can be filled with more of the Spirit when we return from the wilderness (Rom. 5:3-5). The wilderness is hard. No one would choose it. Yet it chooses all of us at various times and seasons. The one choice we do have is how we partner with God in the wilderness. My friend Rich says hard things can either make us “bitter or better.” It really is our choice.

When I was in college, my crush chose another guy over me. I know, hard to believe. My heart was crushed. And I responded poorly. I made under-handed comments about him to her, talked badly about her to others, and generally became cynical everywhere else. I came out of that wilderness looking less like Jesus and with no more of the Spirit than I started.

Contrast that to a big part of my adult story: our journey through infertility, a much bigger wilderness than some college relationship. The stakes were higher and it lasted much longer. Sixty painful months of being let down, and our hopes feeling more and more hopeless.

And yet...

As hard as it was, I wouldn't take that part out of my story. I know Jesus more because of that wilderness. And I carry more of His Spirit because I partnered with Him in that time. Two wildernesses and two very different results.

Take a moment to reflect on your wilderness season. Are you partnering with God in it, or are you doing anything you can to get out of it quickly? Do you want to leave with more of Him, or stay the same?

We all have had a wilderness, and we all will have another. The unconditional promise in it is that He's with us. What is conditional is how we return from it. With more of Him or not. Bitter or better?

PRAY:

Lord, we thank you for the wilderness. For the opportunities to be empowered by you and know you more. Selfishly, we ask for protection and avoidance from the wilderness. But we also ask for those seasons to not be wasted. Let us partner with you in them and return with more of you from them. Amen.