

Face to Face
Trapped in the Wilderness • Message 5
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Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Ask God to strengthen your faith in every season of doubt.
- Pray for a Godly community to help you uphold your faith.
- Pray that Brookwood is a light of hope and encouragement in our community.

Scripture Reading:

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (NIV)

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.

Deuteronomy 8:10-11 (NIV)

A. Introduction

Often, we talk about the highs and lows of life... but what we don't often talk about are the in-between times.

Author Adam Grant said this about the in-between times...

It wasn't burnout- we still had energy. It wasn't depression- we didn't feel hopeless. We felt joyless and aimless. It turns out there is a name for that: languishing. Languishing is a sense of feeling stagnation and emptiness. It feels like you're just grinding out your days, looking at life through a foggy windshield. And it might be the dominant emotion.

- Adam Grant

Think about it like this... look at this scale.

High	Low
Flourishing/thriving	Sadness/depression

Think about this... for a lot of people, you would say, *I'm probably in the middle*...you can't escape the feeling that there is more. You want this other season, but you're stuck here... stuck in this stagnant or dry season, and you aren't certain you will change...

If you feel like this, let me encourage you: you aren't alone. God's chosen people, the Israelites, felt this.

Think about it...

Promise Land	Egypt
(Flourishing)	(Slavery)

But you know where they spent 40 years of their life? Right in the middle. And you know what that season is called?

The wilderness.

Promise land	Wilderness	Egypt
(Flourishing)	(Languishing)	
(slavery/sin)		

Truth is, I have spent a lot of my life in this middle section.

And the danger for me is that you can spend your whole life in the wilderness season. For some of us, we've spent years living right here... honestly, I'm afraid to look at the whole of my life, to see how long I've spent in this season...

And I don't want to sugarcoat it... almost all Israelites never got to the Promised Land. They got out of Egypt, but they stayed in these wildernesses, this languishing season.

This could be one of the most important sermons I can give if you find yourself in this middle space.

So how do you get out?

Moses didn't do it perfectly, and at the end of his life, he made a big mistake. But spiritually speaking, I think Moses lived in the Promised Land. Remember this whole series is called *Face to Face*, because he walked with God and talked to him face to face...

So, for those stuck in the wilderness season... There are two things that Moses understood that you must understand if you're going to get out of this season...

B. Trapped in the Wilderness

1. Understand, you don't have a faith problem; you have a FOCUS problem.

(Exodus 15:23-24. C/R: Exodus 16:3; Exodus 17:1b-4)

This will be really freeing to some of you... because for years I thought there was something wrong with my faith... like I wanted to return my faith and be like... *God, I need something new... I think my faith button is broken.*

And look at the Israelites... let me show you what happens in wilderness seasons.

Exodus 15 – Doubt (escape through the Red Sea 3 days earlier)

When they came to the oasis of Marah, the water was too bitter to drink. So they called the place Marah (which means "bitter"). Then the people complained and turned against Moses. "What are we going to drink?" they demanded.

Exodus 15:23-24 (NLT)

Don't you love that they demanded... I can just see my mom going, *You better watch that tone with me, young man...*

God tells Moses to throw a piece of wood in the middle of the water, and it purifies it... sound familiar?...

Jesus took the bitterness of our sin by being nailed to a cross so that we can be made right with God!

God had just rescued them 3 days earlier... he had split a sea... now they are doubting His provision...

In the wilderness season, we often doubt God's provision. Will he really provide for me? Can I really trust him?

There is healthy doubt; we all have some of that, but there is toxic doubt where you forget or doubt God.

Exodus 15- Doubt

Exodus 16- Comparison

"If only the LORD had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death."

Exodus 16:3 (NLT)

Literally, God had split a sea, miraculously provided water for 2 million people, rescued them from slavery, and now they are comparing themselves to other people... do you know what they call this nowadays? Social media!

I have never heard anyone say to me, *I'm feeling so refreshed and flourishing in my soul after just spending two hours scrolling through social media.*

How do you know if you're really comparing yourself to other people? You get an inferior or superior spirit. You start looking around, and you gauge your life's success by how you're doing compared to others.

In the wilderness season, you know what we often do?... Why did they get the promotion? Why don't I have what they have? Why do their kids behave that way? Why isn't my spouse like that? Why don't I make as much as they do?

Why can't I get this, God?

Exodus 15- Doubt

Exodus 16- Comparison

Exodus 17- Complaining

Do you know the average person will complain every 32 minutes... so today I'm going to do something I don't normally do, I'm going to preach for 31 minutes... no, but let me say this, I feel like at this point everyone who's been around knows we aren't getting done at 12, right?... listen, what I'm passionate about, I'm going to talk about... I can talk all day about my kids,

about the Dallas Cowboys, and about the Bible... so 12:15 it is, amen?... (passive aggressive with the alarms)

Eventually they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink. So once more the people complained against Moses. "Give us water to drink!" they demanded. "Quiet!" Moses replied. "Why are you complaining against me? And why are you testing the LORD?" But tormented by thirst, they continued to argue with Moses. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?"

Exodus 17:1b-4 (NLT)

It means rest... stop... it's dried up...

Notice, they are demanding again... *you better do this...* and can we be honest? being a bit dramatic... *Did you bring us all the way out here to kill us...* 9 times. 9 times God's people are complaining... One time in Joshua, Psalm 59, the book of Exodus, and Numbers has the other 6... most of the complaining comes from the people of God... and here's the thing... as Moses talks to God... God tells him to strike the rock because the people complained, and he will cause water to rush out. Remember this for later...

You know the other thing the wilderness season is defined by? Complaining. What's funny is the day I was writing this sermon, I was with the family, and there was a lady who was going slow, so we went around her, and both her and her husband stuck out their middle fingers... and I loved it, one of the girls started talking about it and said she needs a cupcake...

It's defined by seasons of complaining... it might seem innocent, but trace your words... joy and complaining can't co-exist... it's really a heart issue...

If you find yourselves like the Israelites... complaining, comparing, and doubting... I have good news and bad news for you...

The bad news is that if you stay in this season... it will kill your faith... it will keep you in the languishing and wilderness...

But, the good news is... I want to say this, it's not a faith issue... it's a focus issue...

I want to do something... hold one finger up, and if you choose the middle one, you've already failed. Now, try to block me out... everyone, do it... okay, you got it. Squint a bit... Question: Have you blocked me out? Okay, keep up your finger... Question: Am I bigger than your finger? So, how are you blocking me out? Because it zoomed out.

The question is, is God bigger than your doubt, than your problems, than your comparison? Yes....

So why can't you see him in this season... because you're zoomed in on the wrong things.

You're focused too much on work, money, children, health, problems, trials... and you made something small seem way bigger than it is... when you focus on God, guess what happens - your faith flourishes.

G. Campbell Morgan had already enjoyed some success as a preacher by the time he was 19 years old. But then he was attacked by doubts about the Bible. The writings of various scientists and agnostics disturbed him (e.g., Charles Darwin, John Tyndall, Thomas Huxley, and Herbert Spencer). What did he do? He canceled all preaching engagements, put all the books in a cupboard and locked the door, and went to the bookstore to buy a new Bible. He said to himself, *I am no longer sure that this is what my father claims it to be--the Word of God. But of this, I am sure. If it is the Word of God, and if I come to it with a 'we will see'... The result? That Bible found me!* said Morgan. The new assurance in 1883 gave him the motivation for his preaching and teaching ministry. He devoted himself to the study and preaching of God's Word. He started focusing on the right thing...

Do something, look back- if all you do is look back, you're going to feel guilt and shame.

Look around this room- if you look around, you will have a comparison problem.

Look down- complain.

Look up- your faith begins to flourish.

Peter didn't sink because of a faith problem; it was a focus problem. The Israelites didn't stay in the wilderness for 40 years because of a faith problem; it was a focus problem. You have to get your eyes on God's word daily... you have to be rooted in Spirit.

And if you spend your life focusing on the wrong things...

2. Understand, God can't be your resource; He must be your SOURCE.

(Exodus 17:4, 11-13. C/R: John 6:31, 35; John 7:37-38)

I love what Gene says in our Care Ministry... people are a resource, but God is the source.

What's interesting is... every time the people begin to complain, doubt, or compare, you know what Moses does...

He goes straight to God first because he understands that God is the source.

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What should I do with these people? They are ready to stone me!"

Exodus 17:4 (NLT)

(and he's not talking about a CBD gummy)

Notice where Moses takes his problems first. Straight to God...

In the wilderness, you can end up making other things your source... your job, your friends, even your family can end up being the thing you try and get your identity and strength from... but those things aren't a strong enough source.

- In Exodus 16, they have so much manna, they are making manna cotti, eggs manadict, peanut butter and mana sandwiches, sorry dad joke there... but here's what I find interesting... the manna goes bad after that day... why? Because they are trying to stockpile things, and God doesn't want them to trust the resource, He wants them to trust the source.
- If you depend on money, you can become greedy and materialistic.
- If you depend on marriage or family as your primary source, you become possessive or codependent.
- If you depend on your looks or body as your source, you become obsessive with products and diet, and you get jealous of others' looks.
- If you depend on your job, you become prideful or insecure.

And what's interesting is when they depend on the manna, it begins to rot, and your soul begins to rot.

Listen, let me be clear: you need people. For those of you who love God but don't have a godly community, this is a dangerous place to be.

Later on, in Chapter 17... Joshua goes to fight the Amalekites, who are wicked and evil people... and Moses goes to a hill and holds his hands up...

As long as Moses held up the staff in his hand, the Israelites had the advantage. But whenever he dropped his hand, the Amalekites gained the advantage. Moses' arms soon became so tired he could no longer hold them up. So Aaron and Hur found a stone for him to sit on. Then they stood on each side of Moses, holding up his hands. So his hands held steady until sunset. As a result, Joshua overwhelmed the army of Amalek in battle.

Exodus 17:11-13 (NLT)

Notice he got tired.. you need Godly people as a resource. That's why we say *Growing Stronger Together*... You need Godly people to hold your hands up when you're exhausted. You need Godly people who don't let you give up...

You need Godly people that push you to get out of the wilderness season...

Do you have those Godly people? If not, find them... don't try to find the perfect one... just gather a group today and commit to holding each other's arms up.

But let me be clear, the battle isn't a physical battle; it's a spiritual battle. And physical resources aren't a strong enough source to give you the spiritual strength and power you need...you know who is... God.. Jesus is...

As we close, let me point out something... all these things in the Old Testament are pointing to one thing...

You know who it is? Jesus....

Looking back...

Trapped--- > Doubt (Exodus 15) ---→ Comparison (Exodus 16) --→ Complaining (Exodus 17)

Maybe you are trapped by those things...

Here's what God does when you make him the source, when you make him the center!

Trapped--- > Doubt (Exodus 15) ---→ Comparison (Exodus 16) --→ Complaining (Exodus 17)

I

Cleanses us

The wood that was thrown into the bitter water... is a picture of Jesus who took the bitterness of our sin to make grace sweet to us...

Moses commanded them to take a tree and cast it into the waters, and they became sweet. So, the Spirit of God, finding our natures bitter, takes the tree of Calvary, casts it into the stream, and everything is made pure.

At some point, we have to realize that our hearts are polluted, and we need God to come and make us clean... he is the source that can do that...

But also, he fills us... he satisfies us, not just cleans us... in Exodus 16, the manna... was a picture of what?... Jesus.

Trapped--- > Doubt (Exodus 15) ---→ Comparison (Exodus 16) --→ Complaining (Exodus 17)

I

I

Cleanses us

Fills us

After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, 'Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 6:31,35 (NLT)

Jesus cleanses us and fulfills the deepest longings of our souls because He is the source; no resource can do this.

For those stuck in the wilderness, languishing... I'm telling you... for all of you who are unhappy, for all of you who feel unsettled and incomplete, for those who hunger and thirst... what you're looking for is Jesus.

He's the bread and water of life that your soul craves.

Finally... he was the rock that was struck for our sins...

In Exodus 17, God told Moses to strike the rock instead of striking the people, and when he did, water flowed out that saved the people.

Trapped--- > Doubt (Exodus 15) ---→ Comparison (Exodus 16) --→ Complaining (Exodus 17)

I

I

I

Cleanses us

Fills us

Delights us

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

John 7:37-38 (ESV)

Jesus is the sacrifice that cleanses you, the bread that feeds you, and the water that sustains you. And he could do all of that because he was struck in your place, because he passed every test that we failed. That's why we call him Savior.