

The wilderness—a place of scarcity and danger—is a major theme in Scripture. People end up in the wilderness for different reasons: their own foolishness (like Moses after killing the Egyptian – *Exodus 2:11–15*), the hurtful actions of others (like Hagar – *Genesis 16:6–13*), or because **God leads them there**, as He did with Israel after the Exodus (*Exodus 13:17–18*).

God rescues Israel from bondage with great power, bringing them out of Egypt, but they still think and respond like slaves. They have been shaped by Egyptian culture and the worship of false gods for generations, which is where ideas like the golden calf originated. Although freed, they are not yet ready to trust God with their lives or live as His unique people. Their formation in slavery needs to be deconstructed and rebuilt—their identity, understanding of God, and hearts must be reshaped before entering the land.

Two key things happen in the wilderness:

- **God tests their hearts** – stripping away false security and exposing what they truly trust (*Deuteronomy 8:2; Exodus 14:10–12*).
- **They encounter God** – He shows mercy, rescues them, reveals His character, and wins their hearts (*Exodus 14:13–31; Hosea 2:14–15*).

The wilderness is about **formation** – God’s training ground where old ways and false gods are removed so His people learn to trust and love Him as His redeemed family (*Deuteronomy 8:2–5*). The story of Israel points forward to Jesus and the church. Just as Israel journeyed toward its inheritance, believers today walk through wilderness experiences where God shapes us more deeply (*1 Corinthians 10:1–13*).

For many, the Christmas season highlights this reality. While we sing of peace on earth, nations are still at war. A season meant for celebrating the warmth of family can sharpen the ache of the loss of a loved one or strained family relationships. Generosity and celebration often collide with financial pressure, stress and overwork. The world we live in is still marked by scarcity, danger, and struggle. We are in the wilderness.

Our Wilderness experiences are about Formation - Discipleship

Just as Israel needed old identities, attachments, fears, and loves stripped away, the same is true for us. This world has shaped how we see success, security, identity, relationships, and even God Himself. And it is in the wilderness where God meets us and reshapes us.

Maybe today you find yourself in a season that feels barren, confusing, exhausting, or frightening. You may not understand why—but know this: the wilderness is not a sign that God has abandoned you. It is often the place where He is meeting with you and working most deeply in your heart and life.

Instead of complaining, instead of taking matters into your own hands... , ask the Lord...

- What is it, Lord, that you are revealing about my Heart?
- What is it, Lord, that you are revealing about yourself and your love for me?

Here in the wilderness, God’s goal is to shape our hearts—to win more of our allegiance—so that we might love and honor Him in ways we never have before and live as His unique people.