

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: John 6:32-40

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship.)

Meditate on John 6:32-40 as a group.

Icebreaker

What is your favorite time of the day and what do you like to do at that time?

Text for Discussion: Exodus 16:2-4, 11-16a, 35; Deuteronomy 8:1-5, 10-18

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

The years God's people spent in the wilderness are an excellent metaphor for our lives today as followers of Christ. We exist between a past we've been delivered from and the promised land we have not yet reached. It's tough being in this "in-between". Although we try to avoid such truths, the wilderness exposes us for who we really are as well as the multitude of problems we have living into our new identity as God's beloved children. We also fear change and the unknown future that the wilderness is preparing us for.

God's children are ungrateful, inconsistent, entitled grumblers. When we see this is true of our own hearts, the less disappointed we will be when others act this way.

Within days of their miraculous deliverance from pharaoh, the Israelites are complaining. They've had a life-changing encounter with the redemptive grace of God, yet in no time they are grumbling. Even if they have a legitimate reason for concern, something sinister lurks beneath. They do not trust God to meet their daily needs. The same is true of us. The real problem lies within. Think how differently we would navigate relational conflicts if we began from a posture of, "*I tend to be entitled, proud and self-righteous. I do not see myself well, while I clearly see the faults of others.*" We are deeply loved images of God... and we also happen to be ungrateful, forgetful, entitled complainers. When we know this is true of our own hearts, we can stop being so surprised when we see it in others. We become realists with a healthy sense of human frailty. And in giving others the opportunity to be human beings, we are actually giving ourselves permission to be deeply-flawed children of God.

The Wilderness is a humbling place of training and testing. Because we yearn for control and to lean on our own understanding, learning to trust God is a daily endeavor.

The Christian faith must be lived to be learned. It is the long, slow path of learning to trust God's provision. To experience the comfort of God, we must be weaned of our attempts to secure our own comfort. It may have taken days for God to get the Israelites out of Egypt, but it took years to get the life they had known there out of their hearts. The same is true of us. We are so fickle. We need for God to train us! This isn't a punishment. Our faith is a daily, difficult choice. Real circumstances conspire against our trusting that God is benevolent toward us. But God responds to our faithlessness with Jesus, whose presence strengthens our faith. We need Jesus every day, so God trains us to keep bringing ourselves back to Him.

It's not the things we expect that will wreck our lives.

We fear the great and terrifying wilderness – adversity, tragedy, tears, heartbreak. But these dangers aren't what destroys a life. Our successes trip us up far more often than our failures. And nothing comes more naturally than looking to something other than God for our happiness, significance and security. Our apathy, restlessness and grumbling show we aren't at rest with who we are in Christ. And so God leads us through the wilderness to humble and train us to rely on Him. Because God's ways lead to life. That is the promised land.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

Discuss how wilderness experiences are often those of prosperity and tedium with more apathy than tragedy.

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- What and who are the people complaining against as they are about to enter the wilderness?
 - What did they think should be the solution to the problem?
 - Could this story be about you? Can you name a time when you forgot the Lord and His ways?
- Discuss the details of God's response to their grumbling and complaining. What did He provide for them?
 - What is God doing by giving them something that would only last a single day?
 - Think back to school, does a test benefit the tester or the learner?
 - What did the people learn from God's "test"? What do you learn?
- How does the New Testament link Jesus to manna in the wilderness? Read John 6:32-35.
 - How does Jesus compare Himself to the manna in the wilderness?
 - What or who are you feeding on every day?
- Discuss how wilderness experiences are often those of prosperity and tedium with more apathy than tragedy.
 - What are the warnings in the Deuteronomy passage about this?
 - Discuss how wilderness "tests" are not punishment but rather a recipe for contentment and rest.
 - Are we ever left alone and to our own devices in the wilderness? Explain.
- We are to approach the Bible as humble learners expecting to hear from God, letting the Bible read us, sitting under it rather than over it. What do you understand this to mean? What do you feel that God is speaking to you personally in these texts?

Prayer

Spend time praying through a passage of scripture. Read any passage that comes to mind or Psalm 23. Start your prayer time by praising God for the attributes seen in the passage, then listen to one another pray through the scripture. Pray in this way to pray rather than tell prayer requests in your CG time.

Experiment of the Month

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

Renewing your mind with truth on a daily basis is essential, especially in difficult times. Additionally, we can receive strength from being in community with others, hearing their faith stories and watching them grow in their walk with Jesus. The experiment of the month is to spend some CG time each week sharing with others how you see God at work in their lives. Bless a couple members of the group each week. The leader can tell who the members will be the week prior to allow for prayer and prep time. Continue your Bible reading plan.