



Lesson 1: Wilderness

I. **LOVING (10 Min)** ~ *What wilderness experiences have you had?*

- A. Being lost in the woods without a GPS
- B. Waiting for test results on a hospital bed
- C. Trying to navigate conflict with a loved one
- D. Being confused by a difficult decision
- E. Being overcome with the results of bad choices
- F. Being in the midst of spiritual battle

Share with one to two persons and then share with whole group:

- 1. What image comes to mind when you think about being in the wilderness?
- 2. What does it feel like to be lost?

II. **LEARNING** ~

- A. **In the Know (15 Min)** ~ Read aloud, if more than 7, break into groups of 4 to discuss.

What is the wilderness? Wilderness represents times in our lives when we begin to face, head on, our own brokenness. We admit we have fallen and can't get up on our own. We admit we have lost our way. We admit we are facing trials and temptations. We admit we have come face to face with evil. We admit that we can no longer manage on our own. We need help. We need a Savior.

For some, being in the wilderness is temporary. For others, it is the status quo of their entire lives. But whether our wilderness is temporary or seems to be permanent, we experience it the same. Being in the wilderness is a time of testing.

The wilderness is where the wild things are. There is no ready supply of food or fresh water. The wilderness is desolate. It is a place of desperation. But wilderness also speaks to periods of life or states of mind: lost, unsettled, wandering, discerning, tempted by Satan, tested by God. The wilderness is a time of trial. It is a probationary period.

Heading into the wilderness, whether it's imposed upon us or we voluntarily go, is only the first step in the rehab journey toward reconciliation, healing, and wholeness. But it is a step we must take to start the process of recovery.



Share your thoughts about wilderness.

1. What is the difference between planning to go into the wilderness versus finding yourself in the wilderness without preparation? (Survivor vs. Lost)
2. How does going into the wilderness lead to transformation and hope?

B. Reflection on the Scriptures (20 Min) ~ One person read the following passages and another read the background.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news' (Mark 1:9-15).

Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Background:

Our image of repentance can often be of a one-time decision made at an altar rail or revival service while the congregation sings "Just as I Am." However, the biblical image of repentance is much broader. This is displayed in the Old Testament: God makes a covenant with Israel; Israel promises faithfulness; Israel slides into unfaithfulness; prophets warn the people; punishment eventually comes; Israel repents and returns to God. With repentance, there is both a turning away from sin and unfaithful habits and a turning toward God. Repentance results in reconciliation and in new behaviors (obedience, faithfulness) that demonstrate new commitments.

Repentance is at the heart of the gospel announcement. This is demonstrated in Jesus' preaching and teaching (Mark 1:15) and with the first Christians (Acts 2:38). Repentance is an ongoing, continuous action with the life of the growing disciple. As we grow closer to God, the more we see that we need to repent from. As we grow closer to God's love, the more we see our need for transformation.

Questions for Discussion ~ If more than 7, break into groups of 4 to discuss.

1. Why do people go through times of testing?
2. Why is the call to repentance linked to making changes in our lives?
3. What lesson do we learn about how Jesus went from the joy of his baptism immediately into the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil?



III. LEADING ~ Making it Personal (10 Min)

- A. How do you think you would handle an intense period of temptation similar to what Jesus faced for forty consecutive days? What would it reveal about you? (Not fit enough spiritual? Spiritually broken?)
- B. How is beginning rehab or physical therapy similar to a wilderness experience? (Certain luxuries are not accessible; habits will have to change; often there is a radical departure from previous practices; there may be feelings of disorientation; often a long duration of time.)

Close in Prayer (5 Min)