

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. - James 1:2-4 NIV

When trials happen, it would be easy to give up and give in, but James encourages us to allow those tough times to produce perseverance and maturity.

Jesus was able to endure severe testing because He knew His identity was confirmed by His Father and that He was loved. Share some of the ways God has confirmed His love and acceptance of you. Are you in a season of testing and persevering or are you in a time to reflect on God's work in maturing you in the faith? Pick one or two partners to pray with to either encourage those persevering in challenges or praising God together for the way He has shaped your life thus far.

13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. Mark 1:13 NIV

When His trial was ended God sent angels to minister to Jesus and supply His needs. He had declined to produce food for Himself as Satan suggested. But God was watching over Jesus just as He is watching over us. Even in the wilderness, He provides for us at the end of our trials. And through them we will be refined, matured, shaped and strengthened.

WRAP-UP

Jesus went straight from baptism to shaping and preparation. He wasn't baptized and his identity wasn't affirmed, to model and describe the end of the discipleship journey. Rather it is from the posture of baptism and affirmation of His identity that He is launched into the process of preparation and shaping for the ministry ahead. It's not the ending but a beginning point. What you should expect following baptism is not an easy life but a formed and a shaped life.

MEMORY VERSE

14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. - Romans 8:14 NIV

Challenge-

As you celebrate Thanksgiving this week, remember the times of trial and testing that God has seen you through and include those times among the things you are thankful for.

Into the Wilderness **The Gospel of Mark - Week 4**

INTRODUCTION

Our study this week begins immediately after Jesus is baptized. Mark's account is succinct and unembellished. What he covers in two sentences is described by Matthew in eleven verses and by Luke in thirteen verses. This scene is in stark contrast to Jesus' baptism, where John announced the Messiah's identity to the crowds, and the Holy Spirit appeared like a dove as God tore open the heavens to declare His approval of His Son. But now the Holy Spirit compels Jesus to go to a wild and lonely place to endure temptation. He was alone in the wilderness, one on one with His enemy as God used this time to shape Him and prepare Him for the journey that lay ahead.

Ice Breaker

What is your favorite style of camping- tent camping, rent a rustic cabin, drive an RV, stay in the Ahwahnee Lodge at Yosemite, home in my own back yard?

Key Passage

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

- Mark 1:12-13 NIV

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Sent by the Spirit

*12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness- Mark 1:12 NIV
1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. - Matthew 4:1 NIV
1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, - Luke 4:1 NIV*

In all three of the Gospel accounts of this passage, it is clear that it was the Spirit that sent Jesus into the wilderness. Jesus had been obedient to

the Father through baptism, and now He submitted to the direction of the Spirit as He faced a time of trying and testing.

Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness was a period of testing with a purpose.

2 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness
- Malachi 3:2-3 NIV

In describing the effect of God's presence, Malachi 3:2-3 compares it to a fire. What is the purpose of that fire? When we think of following the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we might not expect it to involve hardship or pain. But have you been through a time of "refining" that was painful to endure but which God used to remove or change things in your life that needed to be changed? How did it help prepare you for the future?

In the NIV translation the words "sent" and "led" describe how the Spirit moved Jesus to the wilderness. The Greek word for Spirit is pneuma and can also be translated breath or wind. That word evokes images of life and power. And it was the power of the Spirit that sent Jesus forth to the wilderness where His purpose, identity and His destiny would be confirmed proving His pure and sinless nature, like gold refined by fire.

Have you spent time in a place that was crucial in preparing you for your next step. Perhaps in a location or a job or in a family that lasted only for a season before God moved you on? Did you recognize God's purpose during that time, after it, or is it not yet clear?

Many of us are anxious to move on to our next step in life's journey. We may long for a spouse, a child, a home, a job, or retirement that we believe lies ahead. Consider that God might be using this time of waiting to shape and prepare you for your future. Let it be a time of trusting and growth that readies you for whatever God has prepared for you.

2. Tempted in the Wilderness

Mark simply tells us that Jesus was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. Matthew and Luke give us some insight into the nature of Jesus' temptation.

The wilderness surrounding the Jordan was a desolate, dessert wasteland. Jesus didn't carry a backpack with supplies, He fasted as He sought God's direction. After 40 days He was physically depleted.

2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."
- Luke 4:2-3 NIV

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"
- Genesis 3:1 NIV

Even though Jesus was God the Son, He also lived, as we do, in a mortal body which requires food. And so, when we are told after 40 days He was hungry, He was actually starving. In this weakened condition the devil began tempting Jesus.

The first attack in Satan's temptation was against Jesus' identity. What had Satan invited Jesus to do to prove His identity? In what ways is this the same temptation we see in Genesis 3?

Rather than responding to Satan's challenge to do a miracle, Jesus replied with the truth of God's word (Deut 8:13), "*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" There was no question that He was the Son of God, no miracle was needed to prove that. Remember what God has spoken in Mark 1:11. Instead, Jesus trusted the Father's love and relied on the truth found in His word to sustain Him.

3. Shaped and Prepared for the Journey

Jesus' time in the wilderness reminds us of story in Exodus where God used the wilderness experience to prepare His people, and to strengthen their faith and trust before moving them on. We too may experience this process of shaping and preparation. Our enemy will attack our thoughts, sow seeds of doubts and exploit our weakness. But we know God has a purpose in whatever hardships He takes us through.