

**Surviving  
your**  
**WILDERNESS**

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with Bob Gladstone  
**Surviving Your Wilderness**  
English

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# Surviving Your Wilderness

## Introduction

“If you’re going through hell, keep going!” So said Winston Churchill during one of the worst crises in world history. And these words of wisdom still apply to anyone passing through a trial today. Adversity does not have to become our destination. It can be a pathway to something greater.

Maybe you are passing through a difficult season in your life. Perhaps you feel spiritually dry and alone. You might feel as though your prayers are not being heard and you wonder if God even knows where you are. You are not alone. Millions of believers have passed through these troubled waters and experienced the same emotions. King David sang about the “deep sunless valley of the shadow of death.” John of the Cross wrote of the “dark night of the soul.” Even Jesus went through times of suffering when He had to offer “prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death” (Heb. 5:7 NASB). People often refer to such seasons as, *The Wilderness*.

The wilderness is a hard place. But it's as crucial for our lives as it is painful. While a desert season feels terribly wrong, and loneliness and despair may seem to reign, God is with you and He desires to use the wilderness for your eternal good. To reap its benefits, however, you must understand its nature and purpose. That's the reason for this book. It will look to the Bible as a spiritual "Survival Guide" for the desert – *the* supreme source of wisdom both for enduring the wilderness, as well as navigating safely through it to God's promised destination.

But first things first. If you have not been born again into the family of God, then the wisdom that follows cannot apply to you. Before a person receives the mercy of God through faith in Jesus Christ, he or she is lost in a perpetual wilderness that stretches beyond this world and into the next. And there's no way out – except one: *repent and believe the gospel*. Entering God's Kingdom by making Jesus your Lord and Savior makes you a child of the most loving, powerful, and wonderful Father. He knows how to guide and take care of you as you traverse life's journey, even when it leads you into a wilderness. His wisdom for the wilderness is what I want to explore in this book.

To do that I will adopt six tips survival experts give for those stranded in the wilderness. As you will

see, the secrets for surviving a physical wilderness bear striking parallel to those for surviving a spiritual one.



## Survival Tip #1

# Don't Panic

Surviving a physical wilderness takes more than the skills to build a shelter, start a fire, and purify water. It requires a certain psychology, a mind-set, a *will to live* that overcomes the fear and stress associated with crisis. In fact, some people who possessed the skill still died when stranded in a physical wilderness because they lacked the will. And others who lacked the skill but had the will, found a way to survive.

Upon entering a spiritual wilderness, our tendency is often to let our imagination run wild. “Will I ever make it out?” “Why is this happening to me?” “I don’t feel ready for this.” “Does God not realize what I’m going through?” “Is He angry with me?” “Is He judging me?” “Is He even real?” Though it’s natural to ask questions like these, obsessing over them depletes our resolve to believe God. And since these questions

relate to the very nature of God, their responses must be biblically sound. That's why our study begins here. In the wilderness, perspective is everything.

So if you find yourself in a wilderness: don't panic. Take a deep breath. Take a moment to remind yourself who God is, who you are in Christ, and what the Bible says about His faithfulness during troubled times. Fear makes you susceptible to lies from the enemy. He will lie about God's faithfulness and love for you. He'll even lie about God's existence, or about how valuable you are to Him. Such lies are meant to sap you of spiritual stamina. But that's just when the "will to live" must rise – the will to live *in the Spirit* while you pass through desert regions.

For God's children in the wilderness, the "will to live" does not merely refer to a desire to survive. It refers rather to *an earnest determination to believe God*. During spiritual drought, you must determine – sometimes against all circumstances, emotions, and even the advice of friends – that God is *real*. He is good. He is faithful, and you *will* make it through to the other side with Him. Don't let the enemy or circumstances define who God is for you. Refuse to allow yourself to believe anything but God's Word. Resolve as David did during a spiritual desert: "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast!" (Psa. 57:7).

One of the most important things you can understand is that even when it seems like everything around you is spinning out of control, if you are a child of God, there is nothing that touches your life that is not ultimately under God's supervision. Everything in your life is somehow "Father-filtered." He loves you dearly and deeply. He is watching over you, and won't allow anything to separate you from Him.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39 NIV).

Allow God's invincible love to cast out all of your fear.

"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:3-5 NIV).



## Survival Tip #2

# Assess Your Situation

Those stranded in the wilderness must constantly evaluate their situation. They need to take stock of their resources and understand their surroundings. That way they can move forward with a level head and a good idea of what's necessary to get through.

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### What Are Your Resources?

If we were lost in the wilderness, our odds of survival would drastically improve if we possessed a few basic supplies like food, water, a knife, or matches. Never are these provisions more important than when our survival is at stake. This is also true for the spiritual wilderness. The resources God has given us for spiritual life are always precious, but in the wilderness we must rediscover them and cling to them like never before.

These resources are the Word of God, the fellowship of saints, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

### *The Word of God*

14 God's Word is an oasis of truth in any spiritual desert. No matter how barren the season, it is an ever-present source of renewal and strength. It does not depend on outward circumstances to be effective. Let Christ's Word "dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16) because "the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (Rom. 10:8). When outward conditions contradict the truth, the truth must determine our *inward* condition. "You desire truth in the innermost being" (Psa. 51:6 NASB). This allows us to live and speak from our heart – the hidden chamber that stores God's Word – and not from our circumstances. "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psa. 119:11).

This is especially important when the enemy takes advantage of our wilderness by flooding us with lies and temptations. Our only weapon against him is the truth of God's Word. *That* is our wisdom for the wilderness. Jesus exemplified this in His own wilderness when He responded to the devil's temptations *by quoting Scripture* (Matt. 4:1-11). He reached into His internal arsenal, found just the right texts, and fired truth back

at his enemy. God's written Word has incredible power when we believe. It is our greatest resource during dry seasons.

Not only does it protect us from lies, but God's Word also reminds us of His purpose for the wilderness itself. The wilderness can knock us off kilter and make us feel like something is terribly wrong. But the truth of God's Word provides wisdom to put everything in perspective.

The two disciples walking the road to Emmaus were suffering the pain of a sudden spiritual desert. They were totally disoriented, darkened with the despondence of dashed hopes and a chilling sense of prevailing evil. Their hero had died. Jesus of Nazareth, the mighty prophet whom they thought would redeem Israel, seemed to perish in shame like a false Messiah. Religious leaders mocked and murdered Him. Now their aspirations of freedom and glory lay buried with Him. How could this have happened? How could such hope be turned so suddenly into a wasteland?

Jesus comes along incognito. He walks beside them and interviews them. He learns what they are discussing and why they are so sad. Then He completely transforms their perspective *by explaining the Scriptures to them* (Luke 24:27). "Did not the Christ have to

suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (Luke 24:26 NIV). Notice that Jesus does not first reveal Himself to them in person, showing them that He is alive and well and walking right next to them. Rather, His identity remains hidden while He *explains from the written Word* that their circumstances are not dismal after all. They are necessary to God’s plan of salvation. Jesus does not change their circumstances; *He changes their perspective through the wisdom of the Scriptures*. Now they will understand, not just that Jesus came back from the dead, but that the whole “tragedy” was actually God’s plan from the beginning. There was no other way to forgive their sins and exalt the King. Truth from the Scriptures transformed their viewpoint, not their situation.

That is the power of God’s Word. It is a most wonderful treasure when you find yourself in the desert. As you assess your resources, rediscover the Word – because in the wilderness, perspective is everything.

### *The Fellowship of the Saints*

The wilderness does not have to be a lonely place for a child of God. It’s an expedition God means for us to travel in partnership with one another. Israel experienced Egypt, the Red Sea, and the Sinai deserts *together* as a very large family. “For I do not want you

to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were *all* under the cloud and that they *all* passed through the sea...[into] the wilderness” (1 Cor. 10:1,5 TNIV). It’s the same for us today.

God did not intend that the members of Christ’s body suffer hardship alone. We belong to one another, and must feel one another’s joys and pains. That is the nature of a body. “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). So during seasons of adversity, when pressure is unusually thick, emotions thin, and relief scarce, we need the strength of our spiritual family to help carry the weight of the burden. “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2 NASB).

During his congregation’s spiritual wilderness, the author of Hebrews said, “Encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called Today, so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13 NASB). Once isolated in a spiritual desert, we become especially vulnerable to discouragement and deception.

Have you ever watched a wildlife documentary where lions are hunting, on the Serengeti for instance? You will often see how a lion waits for one of the poor

creatures on the fringes to separate itself from the herd. The lion will single out the one who strays away from the group because the lion knows that there is safety in numbers – and the devil knows this too. The Bible says that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Those who isolate themselves become an easy meal for Satan. In times of pain and hardship, without the support of the body, he knows that we can easily fall prey to his temptations and traps.

One day as I was reading about the “armor of God” in Ephesians 6, I had a revelation. The passage tells us that God has provided armor for the head, the feet, the chest, and the waist; and He has also given us a shield and a sword. But then I saw something I had never noticed before – all the protection is facing forward – *there is no armor protecting the back!* At first I found this very peculiar and then suddenly verse 18 *KJV* jumped out at me, “*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance for all saints.*” This verse, which is mentioned in the context of the armor of God, says that we are supposed to be looking out for one another and defending each other in the battle. There is no back armor because *we* are supposed to have each others’ backs. If God equipped us in such a way that we need others to watch our backs, then it is clear that He never

intended that we go into battle alone. God created us to need one another. This is why if you are going through a trial, a battle, or a barren season, you need to surround yourself with brothers and sisters who will pray for you and watch out for you with purpose and perseverance.

So when evaluating your resources, consider your spiritual family. Take stock of your closest comrades and harness the power of their presence and voice. Even the experts of physical survival emphasize this point. They encourage an appraisal of your team's gifts so everyone can contribute effectively to everyone else's survival. When we find ourselves in spiritual survival mode, we must do the same.

### *The Comfort of the Holy Spirit*

Who is a more faithful comrade in the wilderness than the Holy Spirit? Whose friendship is more valuable during troubled times than the most wonderful, kind, loyal, and awesome confidante in the universe? When taking stock of your resources, remember this most precious, personal gift of His presence and fellowship. The living God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, is going before you, walking beside you, guarding behind you, resting upon you, and dwelling within you. What more do you need?