

When The Storms Of Life Are Raging

Psalm 63

Fifty-nine-year-old Victoria Grover loves being outdoors and knows a thing or two about the wilderness. She was hiking a trail called Sand Creek off Hell's Backbone Road near Cedar City, Utah, just last week (April 2012), when it began to get dark. She was on her way back to her car when she jumped off a ledge and broke her leg.

She had water, so she was not concerned about that. But she worried about hypothermia, knowing that she was stuck and could not get out by herself. The lodge where she was staying realized she had not returned for two days and contacted the sheriff's department. For nearly a week she was lost in the wilderness, until searchers spotted her from a helicopter.

You may never have been lost or stranded in the wilderness, but circumstances of your life may have left you feeling that way. Your leg may not be broken, but your heart is, and your spirit feels totally drained. Today I have a word of encouragement for you, and some very practical things to do while you wait. We take our cues from David, who once found himself in both a literal and spiritual wasteland—*at the same time*.

David's life had never been easy. Looking after his father's sheep in the wilderness had at times been dangerous, as wild, hungry beasts tried to feast on the animals in his charge. He and his brothers didn't always get along. Once, when he attempted to help in a serious situation, one of his brothers accused him of wicked motives. Then, through a turn of events orchestrated by the Lord God, David found himself in the court of Saul, the first king of Israel.

Even there, life had its problems.

David had killed the giant Goliath, and as the people sang the praises of this young shepherd boy more and more, King Saul found himself being choked by jealousy. Twice Saul had unsuccessfully attempted to pin David to the wall with his spear. The second time, David escaped from the palace, eventually making his way to the wilderness.

But God vindicated David, and eventually the former shepherd boy became king over all Israel! But even being king did not stop trouble from finding its way into David's life. Because of a lapse in his relationship with God, David woke up one

day to realize that he was guilty of two very serious sins: he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and, when she reported that she was with child, the king had arranged for the murder of her husband, Uriah. When David repented, God lovingly, compassionately forgave him.

But the consequences of David's sin were not wiped away. Trouble began to pour down on David's household in torrents. The child born to Bathsheba died suddenly after a brief illness. Amnon, one of David's own sons raped his sister Tamar, and then "*hated her with intense hatred.*" Another son, Absalom, quietly waited for two years before he killed Amnon in revenge for what he had done, then fled into exile. It was five years before King David allowed Absalom to even come into his presence.

A divided family, to say the least. But it got worse—much worse.

Absalom conspired to wrench the kingdom away from his father, and through shrewd plotting, eventually gained strength for his scheme. King David suddenly found himself fleeing into the desert with his household and officials and a few friends, fearful for his very life.

That is what had probably just happened when David wrote Psalm 63. Out in the wilderness David had a lot of time to think about what had developed. He probably looked back over his lifetime and recalled that he had experienced much sorrow. He looked around at the sights in the wilderness and compared what he saw there to his relationship with God.

For instance, David felt the thirst of the wilderness, and compared that to a thirst of an entirely different kind. He wrote to God, "*My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water*" (v. 1b).

Whenever his stomach would growl with hunger, David remembered a richer, more satisfying food, and he exclaimed, "*My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods*" (v. 5a). Perhaps he observed fragile little eaglets peering out from under their mother's wings, so he sang to God, "*Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings*" (v. 7). Maybe he watched as desert jackals scavenged the remains of a dead animal, and compared that to what would happen to his enemies (v. 10). He was definitely in the wilderness.

But from that wilderness experience, in the midst of a tragic crisis in his family and his kingdom, David learned some things about trusting God. The storms of life were raging for him, and in the storm he turned to God.

Ernest Tubbs apparently had been in a wilderness of a different kind when he wrote the spiritual, *“Stand By Me.”* That song of faith opens with the words, *“When the storms of life are raging, stand by me. When the storms of life are raging, stand by me. When the world is tossing me, like a ship upon the sea, Thou who rulest wind and water, stand by me.”*

Tubbs continued, *“In the midst of tribulation, stand by me. In the midst of tribulation, stand by me. When the hosts of hell assail, and my strength begins to fail, Thou who never lost a battle, stand by me.”* The third stanza goes like this: *“In the midst of faults and failures, stand by me. In the midst of faults and failures, stand by me. When I do the best I can, and my friends misunderstand, Thou who knowest all about me, stand by me.”*

You may not have ever been chased into a literal wilderness for fear of your life. It is more likely that the wildernesses you and I experience are those of the soul and the heart. The circumstances may be rooted in serious illness, family problems, personal sin, temptations, depression, pressures at work or school, or misunderstandings between friends. You may have been in your own personal wilderness for so long that you wonder if even God knows where you are. In fact, you may feel a cold, hard distance between you and God, so that even your prayers seem to bounce off the sky back at you with a sneer.

A wilderness like that can be a very scary, very lonely place.

You may be in that wilderness because of personal sin and rebellion. Fleeing from the Egyptians, the newly-freed Hebrews could have entered a land flowing with milk and honey in only a few days. But because of their refusal to follow where God was leading, they were condemned to spend the rest of their natural lives in the desert, literally wandering around in circles for forty years.

Only when all the adults except Caleb and Joshua had died, did God allow them to cross the Jordan River into Canaan. Perhaps you have found yourself wandering around in spiritual confusion and aimlessness because of your disobedience. God may be trying to get your attention in your desert experience.

Or you may have suddenly found yourself cast into the wilderness because of the mistreatment of others. Take Hagar, for example. Her mistress, Sarah, had grown jealous because of Hagar's ability to bear Abraham a son, while Sarah herself had remained barren for years. When the situation heated up too much, Hagar took the child and ran away into the desert.

God sent her back, promising to take care of her and the boy. But when Sarah herself had a child, Abraham was the one who placed the food and skin of water on Hagar's shoulders, and pointed the way to the desert. Once again, God kept His eye on Hagar, and promised His protection for her and the child. Perhaps as I speak you are wandering around in a desert because someone else treated you shamefully or unfairly. You are the one having to suffer for it.

But it is even possible that you are in a spiritual wilderness right now because that is exactly where God wants you to be. Believe it or not, your desert may have nothing at all to do with your personal sin or the mistreatment of others. Sometimes that is just what life hands to you; there are no explanations or reasons. Look at Moses. He had enjoyed many pleasures and privileges in the court of the Pharaoh in Egypt. But God was getting ready to set His people free, and He wanted to use Moses to get the job done.

It is very likely that Moses would not have heard God speaking to him if he had still been surrounded by the finery and luxury of Egypt. So God got him off in the wilderness, and there, while Moses was tending sheep for his father-in-law Jethro, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush. We might not think of watching over a flock of smelly sheep out away from the rest of the world as being a very spiritual experience, but God knew just exactly what it would take to get Moses' attention.

He also knows what it will take to get your attention, and perhaps your Heavenly Father has made all the arrangements for your personal desert just so you will hear Him, as you may never have heard Him before in your life. As it has in my own life from time to time, it may take the raging of a personal storm in order for you to hear the voice of God in a fresh way.

Whatever the reason for your stay in this wilderness, Psalm 63 gives us insight into what you can do while you are there. Quickly, look at what David did while he was in the wilderness, to find out what we can do when the storms of life are raging:

1 We should seek God, v. 1

That may be exactly why you're in the desert to start with. Even if it isn't, God still has something to say to you. David sang in verse one, "*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*" Understand the depth of what David was experiencing here. The word "thirsts" is literally translated "parched." Really feel that parching thirst for God that originates down in your soul, a thirst which causes you to yearn for Him, to crave His fellowship with you in your life.

Continuing to seek the face of God, to know His presence with you in that wasteland, may be the best thing you can do right now. Nothing else makes any sense. Your world is in turmoil, and every day brings new changes and instability. That's why you need to seek God, to experience once again His unchanging dependability and strength.

2 We should worship God, v. 2-5

Use this wilderness time to learn to worship God again. Take advantage of that "aloneness" you feel in your spirit to know Him once more, in a way unencumbered by what others expect of you. David sang in verse two, "*I have seen you in the sanctuary, and beheld your power and your glory,*" as he remembered those times back in Jerusalem. But he realized that he could worship God even here in the desert, so he continued in verses three through five: "*Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*"

The word "satisfied" in verse five literally means "to be gorged." In your desert experience, gorge yourself with the worship of God. Don't even bother to look for fulfillment and satisfaction anywhere else. Worshipping Him is really the only way to know satisfaction deep in your soul.

3 We should remember God, v. 6

Sometimes we focus so much on the heat and dryness of our wilderness that we fail to worship God in spite of the circumstances. Getting alone with Him like that will enable us to remember all those things for which we can praise Him. If the desert seems to be a big place in the daytime, it must be endless in the night hours. If that is true in a literal sense, it is also true of our spiritual deserts.

And it may be that you are not really aware of your wilderness until you try to sleep at night. Insomnia strikes. Look at how David handled his sleeplessness: “*On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.*” In those long hours of the night—or day, for that matter—meditate on the goodness of God, on how He has watched over you and protected you through your life, perhaps even in ways of which you were unaware. Remember God’s goodness to you, that even though there may have been rough and uncertain times, He has sustained you, and kept you alive and strong through them all.

4 We should cling to God, vv. 7-8

David’s experience was this: “*Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I stay close to you; your right hand upholds me.*” I like the way the King James Version puts it: “*my soul followeth hard after thee.*” Actually, the word means “to be glued together.” Especially in our wilderness times do we need to stay close to God, clinging to Him as we would to a plank floating by should we be shipwrecked in the ocean. Cling to Him as a baby bird clings to its mother because it knows she will protect and care for it. Weld yourself to Him as if you had nothing else to which to cling, nowhere else to turn. When we strip away everything else, God is really all we have.

Paul Johnson paraphrased Psalm 63 for a youth musical in the early seventies. He wrote,

*O God, You are my Father;
Each morning I seek Your face.
My soul cries out for Your mercy;
I long for a touch of Your grace.*

*Though it seems I’m often surrounded
By a dry and desolate land,
I behold Your power and glory,
And I know that I’m safe in Your hand.*

*Your love is better than life,
And my heart longs to offer You praise.
So I’ll lift up my hands and I’ll worship You.
And be satisfied all of my days.*

*When I make my bed in the darkness,
I will sing with joy a new song,*

*And recall all the times that You've rescued me,
And I'll worship You all my life long.*

Are you in a wilderness right now? Do you feel as if you're lost on a trail off Hell's Backbone Road? If not, you will be at sometime in your life! The God who created the universe is the God who is just as much sovereign out there in the desert as He is in the church building. For whatever reason you have found yourself there in that spiritual wasteland, follow the principles David discovered and cataloged for us in Psalm 63:

**Seek God
Worship God
Remember God
Cling to God**