

How to Embrace the Wonders of Trials

I recently picked up one of my old journals that I call my wilderness journal. It covers the late 1990s up to about 2001 and is filled with prayers, Scriptures, conversations with God, revelations, confessions of sin and declarations of faith. During that season of life, I had lots of promises from God and hardly any fulfillment in hand.

But the visions and dreams were strong. As I reread this journal, I recalled the long process I went through to reach the time of fulfillment, and God showed me some exciting things.

No one really likes to talk about process. It isn't a very popular topic. We live in an age of instant gratification, when microwaves and drive-thru windows give us what we want as soon as we want it. But you can't read about the great people of faith in the Bible without noticing that God spent years on them before bringing them into the place of promise. There was a process, and it was rarely an easy one. Many of them lifted up lots of prayers and cried plenty of tears before stepping into the fulfillment of God's calling. Process is part of God's plan.

Psalms 84 talks about those who pass through the Valley of Baca, which literally means the "Valley of Tears." There is absolutely no condemnation in these verses for those who go through that valley; experiencing trouble in this world doesn't mean you've done something wrong. I used to think it did. I assumed God was punishing me for something if I was experiencing trials.

God may discipline us if we are stubbornly going off in a direction contrary to His will. But that's to bring us back,

not to punish us. God is for us.

More often, our hardships have absolutely nothing to do with God's discipline. Jesus assured His disciples that there would be trouble in this world. It's a given. But He also assured them He had overcome the world (John 16:33). The Valley of Tears is a common experience, and overcoming it is meant to be a common experience too.

Unique Opportunities in the Valley

As I go back and read my journals, I realize what a precious time the wilderness provided. God allowed me to really get to know Him. If you're going through a season when you have yet to see the fulfillment of promises God has given you, count on the fact that He has a plan, and it isn't just for you to endure pain. It's for you to turn the place of weeping into a place of springs. That is His plan for you, at least for now.

Turning the place of weeping into a place of springs is very simple, but it isn't always easy. You'll be tempted to slip into discouragement and despair at times. That's normal, and there is no condemnation from God for that. Temptation does not define you. But with every temptation, God provides a way of escape. He points you to a spring where you can go and drink deeply from the river of His presence. He has joy for you in that place, a peace that passes understanding.

The wilderness is part of the pilgrimage, but we are created for joy, even in the midst of that season. When you meet people who say, "I'm going through a wilderness," and you can tell they are in a place of misery, it isn't very encouraging, is it? You don't really want to be around them very much. That's because God didn't call anyone to simply survive. He called us to thrive.

With His help, you can lay hold of supernatural strength and rejoice in all circumstances. And in the midst of your journey through the valleys, you can see incredible, glorious

manifestations of God because that's where you find Him.

That's why I hesitate to talk of wilderness and wonders as two different seasons of life. There are wonders in the wilderness too. They may be different kinds of wonders than the ones you're dreaming about, but they are just as miraculous and meaningful.

If you can see something in the Spirit that is part of God's plan for you, you can have it. If you're going through a wilderness season, you must develop God's perspective. You must fix your eyes on something greater than what you're going through because if you can see only your circumstances, life is going to feel pretty bleak. What you focus on is what you move toward. Abraham kept his eyes on the promise. So did all the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11. They had their sights set on a city they hadn't yet seen (Heb. 11:13-16). They knew the power of vision.

A New Perspective

If you were driving and suddenly saw that the bridge over a giant chasm was out, would you just turn around and go another way? Or would you stop the car, forget everything you had scheduled and try to warn people of the danger ahead?

It's easy to get so caught up in your own dreams and in getting through the wilderness that you forget the reality of what a believer's ministry really is. We are all called to love God and love people. An inward focus makes us lose sight of the big picture—that without God, people are headed for grave danger and have no hope unless someone warns them and leads them to the Savior.

In reading my old journals, I see how focused I was on my own ministry aspirations. Fear makes us selfish, and selfish ambition is a symptom of not trusting in God's ability to fulfill His purposes. In turning my focus to Him in that wilderness season, I began to get an eternal perspective. As

much as we have done it to the least of these, God says, we have done it to Him (Matt. 25:40). If we lose sight of the Father's heart for the lost, we lose our way and miss out on the joy of bringing to God what blesses Him most: children reconciled to Him. Loving people really connects us with the heartbeat of God. He wants us to be able to see things from His perspective.

God gives you a fresh perspective in your places of pain. You learn to focus on what's important. God draws you out of yourself and into Him, that place of true freedom. When God shows you that His ways are better than yours, give up on your own schemes. Don't go kicking and screaming. Just let go.

We learn things in the wilderness that we can't learn any other time, and we develop a hope that cannot be shaken and a joy that can never be taken away. And that joy—our delight in the Lord Himself—prepares us to bear the glory of the wonders that are coming.

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For more study...

In her book, *From Wilderness to Wonders: Embracing the Power of Process* (Charisma House), Katherine Ruonala reveals the process of maturing. Using examples of godly men in the Bible, Ruonala shows how trials are part of God's plan. You can find this book on , [christianbook .com](http://christianbook.com) or wherever Christian books are sold.