

Why So Many Precocious Prima Donnas Charade as Contemporary Preachers

We need to plunge into the darkness to see the light. This is a counterintuitive reflection based upon my own experience and the reading of Scripture.

To start, last week I encountered this passage in Isaiah 40:3-5, which says in the English Standard Version:

A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

We see in this portion of Scripture that it is in the wilderness (a metaphor for going through tests and trials in life, as was illustrated with the children of Israel in the desert for 40 years in the book of Exodus) where a highway for our God develops, where the crooked path is made straight, where valleys will be lifted up, with the result being that the glory of the Lord will be revealed.

This comports to my own experience, since it is in the wilderness, in times of severe testing and trials, that we often are desperate enough to admit our failures, turn away from faulty thinking, embrace a new paradigm and hear more clearly the voice of the Lord for the next steps in life.

Truly, it is in the wilderness where we make the crooked paths straight and where eventually every valley is lifted up;

hence, we often need to go to the valley (emotional lows and times of testing, confusion and even ignorance of God's perfect will) before we are lifted up and can see clearly.

Truly, I believe God actually allows us to plunge into the darkness in order to face our true self as well as reality before we can see the light! I have learned to embrace the fact that every crisis is truly an opportunity to go to another level in life and ministry.

Biblically, it is no accident that in Genesis 1:5, the first day actually begins with evening—not morning—or, that darkness precedes the light. Of course, in most parts of the world, 12 a.m., when the day begins, is as dark as the evening. Hence, what God calls the day includes thick darkness, without the radiance of the sun! (Even though in most minds, the day connotes the light of the sun).

Psalms 18:9-11 (NASB) also shows that God surrounds Himself with thick darkness under His feet, as well as making darkness His hiding place and His canopy around Him. Consequently, getting to know God deeply sometimes means having to plunge into the darkness, into the mystery of knowing God's ways, His path and His truth.

Walking with God and knowing His will is not always pain-free, simple and as easy to discern as seeing the difference between the colors black and white or darkness and light. Some of the saints of old actually spoke about going through "the dark night of the soul" as a necessary process that teaches full dependence upon God, brokenness, humility and Christlike character. One of the most profound things about the Scriptures is in regard to the honesty it shares with us related to illustrating how our complex humanity intersects with God, which includes how the Bible has exemplars of people exhibiting the full range of human emotion while learning how to discern the will of God and rest in hope in spite of emotional lows, depression and patient endurance as they await

the fulfillment of His word and promises.

The Psalms are a great example of this, as the book is replete with the musings of saints who battle depression, fear and their inner longings as they learn to wait upon God for total deliverance. (Pour over Psalms 10, 22, 28, 35, 38, 40, 51, 69 to name a few.) Truly, God's eyes search the ends of the earth and test the children of men—both the righteous and the wicked (see 2 Chron. 16:9, Ps. 11:4,5) to see whose heart truly desires Him. Biblically, we see illustrations of this in the Old Testament, when God was able to reveal Himself to a meek man named Moses, who lived 40 years in the wilderness tending sheep. What is telling about this example is that Moses was once an over-confident, ruling prince in the land of Egypt who took matters into his own hands instead of waiting upon God's will and timing (see Ex. 2:11- 3:16). Moses could not fulfill his assignment until he experienced the wilderness and became humble. Also, the powerful prophet Elijah fell into a deep depression after a great victory because he had an unrealistic expectation that the whole nation of Israel would repent because of his ministry. It was during this dark point in his emotions that God revealed His will related to the transition of his mantle to Elisha and the next phase of his significant prophetic ministration. (See 1 Kings 18-19).

The book of Job is perhaps the most poignant Old Testament example of God putting one of His servants through a time of severe testing and the predictable response of his close (self-righteous, undiscerning) friends who evidently only knew the God of the light but not the God who clothes Himself in thick darkness and mystery. In the New Testament, the Gospels open up with the ministry of John the Baptist, whom our opening Isaiah passage in this article refers to. All four Gospels agree that John arose out of the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. Luke even implies how God bypassed influential political and religious leaders to manifest His voice through John in the wilderness (see Luke 3:1,2). No

wonder Jesus proclaimed that of all the people ever born of women, John was the greatest! (See Matt. 11:11.) How did he get to be so great? I don't think it was an accident that John lived in the wilderness—a place without creature comforts, many people or social settings for affirmation and accolades—a place where he had to learn utter dependence upon God to survive and thrive. What amazes me the most about John is this: He prepared 30 years in the wilderness for a brief season of ministry, possibly only one year! (See John 5:33-35.) Most people want to prepare merely one year for every 30 years of their ministry, which is why we have so many unbroken, precocious, prima donnas, prima *uomos* and puffed-up peeps who charade as contemporary preachers!

Finally, Paul the apostle recounts the fact that he was so desperate to get delivered from his thorn in the flesh (which was a messenger of Satan sent to harass him, as he recounts in 2 Cor. 11:17-34) that he begged the Lord to deliver him from them; however, God told him that his weakness enabled His grace to operate even stronger through him (see 2 Cor. 12:1-12). For this reason, when under duress, stress and tests, Paul depended upon His Lord even more, which opened the door for God to do extraordinary things through this weakened vessel (see the account in Acts 16:22-30).

According to his own letter to the Corinthians, Paul taught that he needed these tests and trials to keep him from being lifted up with pride, which means God allows His servants to suffer tests and trials commensurate to the calling and assignment they have in life, and according to their propensity to be puffed up with pride. Consequently, the higher the calling, the more the tests—and the more illumination of the Father, the more humility and brokenness is needed so that we don't use our knowledge to build our own empires and dishonor God in the process. {eoa}

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