

MORNING DEVOTIONS

Walking in the Wilderness

There's nothing worse than being on your own out in the wilderness. Fortunately, I've never been caught like that, but I have read stories of those who have. Maybe a bush walker gets lost or loses contact with a group – and suddenly he or she realises, "I'm lost".

Hundreds of people go hiking in the bush, and sadly a few are never heard of again. Back in 2014 Shannon Leah Fraser from Queensland was at a swimming hole south of Cairns with her fiancé and some friends. She had an argument and stormed off into the nearby bush. She was lost and volunteers spent a total of 800 hours searching for her.

Seventeen days later she found her way back to the swimming hole. She was severely sunburned and had lost 16kg of weight. A farmer found her and rushed Leah to Innisfail hospital. She had got lost in the mountains and lost all sense of direction. But she survived to tell of her frightening wilderness experience.

When I read the New Testament I see that on one occasion Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness, eating nothing, but I assume he had water. He was alone in a very dangerous wilderness area in the Judean desert – cold nights and blistering hot days, wild animals, probably dangerous snakes. It's difficult to imagine what it was like.

Out there all alone, the only person to help Him was the Holy Spirit who strengthened and sustained Him. The devil did all he could to destroy Him with fierce temptations and doubts because Jesus was just starting out on His three-year ministry journey after being baptised in the Jordan river.

Have you been through a wilderness journey? I don't mean being out in the bush – but maybe a personal experience you'd rather forget. A sickness or unexpected illness, some bad news. Life went from bad to worse, and you felt no one really understood how you felt. I think it's amazing how the bad times can sharpen our focus.

While we would not want these bad times to come, often something good comes out of them – if we are patient enough to wait. We may not like them, but we become aware of ourselves in a new way. Our mind is better focused - Christianity offers you hope because God Himself can help you take stock of important matters.

What is my life purpose? What is God trying to say to me? Do I need to change my attitude from negativity to positivity?

Don't let yourself get sidetracked, even if life seems a mess at the moment. **God is the God of the possible** – He can do all things for you. There is no limit to His faithfulness, goodness, and power. We go about building our own plans and sometimes forget about the Master Builder who knows the future. He says to cast all your worries and concerns on Him. **The wilderness days do have a purpose.**

Focus your attention on Him and embrace the difficulties as best you can. You can't sugar-coat life really – and for each of us there will be moments of hardness and pain. I know that for myself with cancer in 2019. It came as a huge shock, but I had to journey through it as many thousands have.

The Old Testament tells us the story of the children of Israel who literally wandered in the wilderness for 40 years – homeless and without hope. About 250 miles from Israel – but they were in a mess in the Sinai desert. But it took them that long to be re-educated. I know – a long time. A whole generation had to wait until the entry into the promised land Israel.

But God never left them. He protected and led them, ungrateful as they were. They were led by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. God never left this group even though they had rejected Him. Today, the same God who encircled this large group of people, watches over you and me. If you're stuck in a wilderness experience, He is still there caring and watching out for you.

The Bible is not blind to the sufferings of people. The apostle Paul told the Corinthian church, "We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the death sentence" (2 Cor 1:8-9).

Christian author Paul Miller wrote an excellent book called *A Loving Life* and in it he admits, 'As I prayed, God re-shaped my soul'. And that can happen to you as well. Spending time with God in prayer gives you a new way of looking at life. The wilderness is not a nice place – but it can be the place of restoration and new plans. When you do finally leave the wilderness, you won't be the same person.

Someone said, "The work God does in you then is preparing for what's on the other side". You may feel confused, vulnerable, and unprotected – but join the Psalmist who declared to God, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). Let God take you into new circumstances, because the strange twists and turns of life will make sense one day, even if not in your life time.

Do you believe God has a plan for your life? He won't take you into the wilderness without a reason. Take to heart the promise of Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear; for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand".