

LESSONS LEARNED IN THE WILDERNESS

Lesson 1: God's Power in Parting the Waters (Exodus 13-14)

Background (Exodus 12-13)

“Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place ... And when the Lord brings you into the land ... which he swore to your fathers to give you ...” (Ex. 13:3, 5)

- First, there is a call to remember who God is and what he's done.
- Second, what they're specifically called to remember God's power and provision for them “by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place” (13:3, 9, 14, 16).¹
- Third, there is a future promise they should trust that God will bring them into the land of Canaan (3:5, 11).

In Exodus 13-14, rather than living by faith and practicing these three things, they give in to fear and forget each of them.

1. God Leads Us (13:17-22)²

God leads us with purpose and love.

- God never leads us into dangers or trials that he won't walk with us and carry us through (Is. 43:1).
- God is our good shepherd directing our path (Ps. 23:2-3) to do us good in the end (Deut. 8:16).
- God not only has purpose in where he's leading us, but he knows the best path to get us there (Ex. 13:17).

“You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.” (Ex. 15:13)

“So He takes us the long way. And that's not the wrong way. Because there's a funny thing that happens on the long way—you actually do *become* something rather than just end up somewhere. In fact, you might say it like this: the most formative parts of your lives—the ones that fashion real character, dependence, faith, and perseverance - are often the most difficult. When you feel like you are wandering around in circles, when you don't seem to be making any progress, and when you might even feel trapped—those are the forging times.”³

Remember: The long and winding way is worth it. God's path is full of purpose even when it's full of twists and turns.

The wilderness isn't a waste when it leads to a deeper faith in God and bigger view of God.

- The wilderness is a classroom where God teaches us who he is and who we are in him (Ex. 15:1-21; Deut. 8:2-3).
- The wilderness removes distractions and reveals our dependence so God can prove to us who he is, what he can do for us, and his love and faithfulness (Ex. 14:31; Hos. 2:14).

“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (Is. 43:19)

Remember: We don't know why God takes us the way he does or why he brings us into the wilderness where and when he does, but we can know for sure he is with us, he loves us, he will help us, and he will use this for our good.

¹ **God's Arm:** Jer. 21:5; 32:17; Ps. 44:3; 77:15; 89:10, 13; 98:1; 118:16; 136:12-13; Exod. 6:6; 15:16; Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 11:2; 26:8; 30:27; Is. 40:10; 48:13; 52:10; 63:12. **God's Hand:** Ex. 3:19; 6:1; 13:3; 15:6; Deut. 4:34; 7:8; Josh. 4:24; Job 12:9; 2 Chron. 30:12; Ps. 10:12; 44:3; 98:1; 136:12-13; Eccl. 2:24; Is. 41:10; 59:1; Jer. 21:5; Ezek. 20:34; Dan. 9:15; 1 Peter 5:6; Rev. 2:1.

² Consider reading or singing a Christian song as an encouragement to your heart. Examples include, “God Will Make A Way” by Don Moen; “Waymaker” by Michael W. Smith; “Chainbreaker” by Zach Williams; “God Moves in a Mysterious Way” by William Cowper; “He Leadeth Me” by Candi Pearson-Shelton; “Oceans” by Hillsong; “Trust in You” by Lauren Daigle; “Be Thou My Vision” by Mary Elizabeth Byrne.

³ Michael Kelley, “The Long Way is not the Wrong Way,” <https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/the-long-way-is-not-the-wrong-way>.

2. God Fights for Us (14:1-31)

We fight fear by looking to the God who fights for us.

“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (Ex. 14:13-14).

- Rather than only *seeing* the scary circumstances on the horizon, look up to *see* God and his salvation (Ex. 14:13; Dt. 1:29-30). When looking around causes fear, look up in faith.
- The way we fight fear is to redirect our eyes onto who God is so that he becomes big, which causes fear of the circumstances to shrink (Is. 35:13-14).

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.”⁴

Remember: The call to “fear not” is a call to consider who our God is, and to be so awed by him that it causes our fears to slowly wither. For every look to the news or every thought causing fear or anxiety, turn your eyes upon Jesus, the one who is ruling and reigning over our lives with good purposes.

We fight fear by trusting in God.

- We trust God because he promises to fight our battles and handle our business (Ex. 14:14; 15:3).⁵
- Trust requires giving up control and entrusting things to God (Ps. 37:5; 1 Peter 5:6-7). Stand back and be still.

Remember: Trust is the antidote to fear. There is no better place for us or the things we’re worried about to be than entrusted into God’s loving hands.

We fight fear by walking with God.

- God not only fights for us but he is also with us (Is 41:10-13; 43). He goes before us but he also walks next to us.⁶
- God doesn’t promise the wilderness will be easy, but he does promise to be with us (Joshua 1:9; Ps. 23:4). His presence can be stronger than our fear, and his presence last beyond our time in the wilderness.
- Fear can be an opportunity that forces us to run to God and find refuge in him (Ps. 46:1-3).⁷

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” (Is. 43:1-2)

Remember: Let fear cause you to run God and not from him. He will be your refuge, safe-place, and storm-shelter.⁸ If he leads us into the fires then he will carry us through, and if, he leads us through the waters he walks with us.

⁴ Helen Lemmel, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus,” https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Turn_Your_Eyes_upon_Jesus/

⁵ God as Warrior: Deut. 3:22; Zeph. 3:17; Is. 42:13; Jer. 10:16; 31:35.

⁶ God’s Presence: Is. 43:1-5; Joshua 1:9; Mark 6:50; Ps. 46:7; Ps. 118:6-7; 139:7, 18; Deut. 31:8; Heb. 13:5-6.

⁷ God as Refuge: Ps. 31:20; 46:1-11; 34:8; 91:1-2; Prov. 14:26; 18:10; Is. 25:4; Jer. 16:19.

⁸ There are many good Christian hymns or songs to sing about fear, including “I Will Fear No More” by The Afters; “Whom Shall I Fear” by Chris Tomlin; “Fear Not” by Ellie Holcomb; “Trust in You” by Lauren Daigle; “Fear is a Liar” by Zach Williams; “The Breakup Song” by Francesca Battistelli; “No Longer Slaves” by Jonathan David Helser, Brian Johnson, Joel Case.

3. New Testament Connections to Exodus 13-14

- 1) Jesus calms the storm when the disciples feared (Mark 4:35-41; Matt. 8:18-27; Luke 8:22-25).
- 2) Jesus comes to his disciples in the middle of the night while they're alone (Matt. 14:22-33).
- 3) Jesus' statement "[I am the true light](#)" (Jn. 8:12) likely refers to the pillar of fire being a light to Israel in the darkness through the wilderness.
- 4) Jesus faces fear and the great enemy—pictured as a river in many traditions and stories—at the Garden of Gethsemane and the cross of Golgotha.
- 5) Our baptism, picturing union with Jesus, draws on the image of us walking through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1-2).

Ways to Respond

- 1) List of 5-10 things you are or have been fearful about. Find a truth or promise that speaks to each of those fears.
- 2) Start a journal, a note on a device, fill a jar with little scraps of paper, write on post-it notes you put up somewhere, or find some other way to record God's goodness, faithfulness, provision, protection, and mercy in your life. Where has God delivered you in the past, provided for your needs, been kind to you, given mercy to you, strengthened or sustained you, changed you, or answered prayer? Where have you seen God at work or experienced deliverance?
- 3) Pick one thing talked about today and do a deeper study of it. See "Additional Resources."
- 4) When fear or worry attack, fight with God's Word. Look up in fear and look away from your fears. Pick one truth, verse, promise, or attribute of God to recite whenever you feel fearful. When you're tempted to scan the internet, check the news, or scroll on your phone, first recite this truth and pray to God. Ask a friend to be praying for you in this or to provide encouragement and accountability so you don't let fear linger without trying to resist.

Charles Spurgeon Quote on God's Good Purposes in Suffering

"We are always prone to put a high estimate upon what we are, or may be, or can feel, or do. It is clear, then, that self must stand out of the way, that there may be room for God to be exalted; and this is the reason, the true secret, why God often brings his people into straits and difficulties, that, being brought to their wits' end, and made conscious of their own folly and weakness, they may be fitted to behold the majesty of God when he comes forth to work their deliverance. A man whose life shall be one even and smooth path, will see but little of the glory of God, for he has few occasions of self-emptying, and hence, but little fitness for being filled with the revelation of God. They who navigate little streams and shallow creeks, know but little of the God of tempests; but they who "go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep." Among the huge Atlantic waves of bereavement, poverty, temptation, and reproach, we learn the power of Jehovah, because we feel the littleness of man. Self-esteem is that speck in the eye which most effectually mars human vision; the Great Surgeon of souls removes this from us chiefly by sanctified afflictions. At the mouth of the furnace the Great Purifier sits as a Refiner to purify the sons of Levi, and when this work has been achieved, and they have become pure in heart, the divine purpose is accomplished, God's glory is manifested, for the pure in heart shall see the Lord, Thank God, then, dear brother, if you have been led by a rough road: it is this which has given you your experience of God's lovingkindness. Your troubles have enriched you with a wealth of knowledge to be gained by no other means; your trials have been the cleft of the rock in which God has set you as he did his servant Moses, that you might behold his glory as it passed by. Praise your God, O sons of sorrow, ye have not been left to the darkness and ignorance which continued prosperity might have involved. Bless him that you have been capacitated to show forth his glory by being permitted and honored to endure a great fight of affliction. Our one aim in life is, I trust, to glorify our God, and if so, are not those afflictions precious which enable us to honor him? We will call them friends, if they help us to praise God. We will wear them as jewels, and rejoice in them as a bride rejoices in her ornaments, if they aid us in glorifying our blessed Lord. In this spirit, we may almost envy the children of Israel as we see them entangled in the wilderness and overtaken by their foes, for now shall they see the mighty arm of God made bare."⁹

⁹ Charles Spurgeon, "Direction in Dilemma," <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/direction-in-dilemma#flipbook/>

Summary of Main Ideas

- In the wilderness, God grows our faith and shrinks our fears by proving his power and giving us his presence.
- Fight fear with faith in God. When danger and potential threats cause fear, trust in the God who is with you, for you, and fighting on your behalf.
- Though none of us want to face fear, it can be a friend if it helps us turn to and trust in God. The wilderness of fear isn't only a place to endure or escape, but it can first be a place to experience God's power, provision, and presence. The wilderness isn't a waste when it leads to a deeper faith in God and a bigger view of God.
- In difficult wilderness seasons, know that God has not left you and you are not lost. God leads us down every path with purpose, wisdom, and love.
- When fearful, we're tempted to take God's place and seize control, seek to feel like we have power, and attempt to figure everything out. But we are not God, and so we must depend on and trust in God as creatures and children. He alone is sovereign, all-powerful, and all-knowing. He is a loving Father whose ways, timing, and plans are perfect and always have our good in mind.

Additional Resources

- **References to Red Sea Crossing:** Dt. 5:15; 11:2-4; Josh. 2:10; 4:23; 24:7; Neh. 9:9; Ps. 44:3; 77:16-20; 106:7-12; 114:3; 136:12-13; Is. 43:16-17; 50:2; 51:10; 63:11-14; Dan. 9:15; Acts 7:36; 1 Cor. 10:1-4; Heb. 11:29.
- **Fear not:** Ex. 14:13; Dt. 1:29-31; 3:22; Joshua 1:9; Ps. 46; 56:4, 11; 91:5; Is. 35:4; 41:10, 13-14; 43:1-5; Mark 5:36; 6:50; Heb. 13:6; Rev. 1:17. **Courage:** Deut. 31:6; Joshua 1:9; 1 Chron. 28:20; Is. 35:4; Mark 6:50; 1 Cor. 16:13.
- **Stand firm:** Ps. 31:24; 57:7; Eph. 6:11-13; Phil. 1:27; 4:1; 1 Cor. 15:58; 16:13; 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Peter 5:8-9.
- **God's Arm:** Jer. 21:5; 32:17; Ps. 44:3; 77:15; 89:10, 13; 98:1; 118:16; 136:12-13; Exod. 6:6; 15:16; Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 11:2; 26:8; 30:27; Is. 40:10; 48:13; 52:10; 63:12.
- **God's Hand:** Ex. 3:19; 6:1; 13:3; 15:6; Deut. 4:34; 7:8; Josh. 4:24; Job 12:9; 2 Chron. 30:12; Ps. 10:12; 44:3; 98:1; 136:12-13; Eccl. 2:24; Is. 41:10; 59:1; Jer. 21:5; Ezek. 20:34; Dan. 9:15; 1 Peter 5:6; Rev. 2:1.
- **God's Power:** Is. 41:10; Mark 4:39-40; 2 Chron. 20:6; Job 26:7-14; Ps. 71:18; 147:4-5; Jer. 10:12-13; 32:17.
- "[His Way was Through the Sea](#)" by Garrett Kell at thegospelcoalition.org Garret Kell
- "[The Long Way is Not the Wrong Way](#)" by Michael Kelley at ftc.co
- "[Four Reasons the Wilderness is Not a Waste](#)" by Dustin Crowe at ftc.co
- "[God Comes Close](#)" by Ed Welch at ccef.org
- Read one of Spurgeon's sermons on this passage or on fear: "[Direction in Dilemma](#)," "[Forward! Forward! Forward!](#)"; "[Fear Not](#);" and "[Away with Fear](#)."
- [Overcoming Fear, Worry, and Anxiety](#) by Elyse Fitzpatrick; [A Small Book for the Anxious Heart](#) by Ed Welch; [Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest](#) by Ed Welch; [Fear and Faith](#) by Trillia Newbell.

Additional Resources for Parents & Kids

- Listen to the songs "Fear Not," "Do Not Worry," and "Red Sea Road" by Ellie Holcomb at ellieholcomb.com.
- Here's a [playlist of upbeat songs for quarantined kids](#) by Betsy Childs Howard.
- Read pages 92-99 from *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones
- Watch the Bible project [video on Exodus 1-18](#) at bibleproject.com.
- Find ways to re-enact the Red Sea crossing as a fun way to experience God's deliverance. You can read about [ideas at sermons4kids.com](#).
- Use The Gospel Project to teach on the Red Sea crossing. [Here's](#) a lesson for kids and here's their [preschool video](#).
- Watch a movie about the Exodus or Moses, or watch one the scenes of the Red Sea crossing from one of these movies. Here are [a few of those scenes](#).