

LESSONS LEARNED IN THE WILDERNESS

Lesson 1: God's Power in Parting the Waters

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.

GOD LEADS US THROUGH THE WILDERNESS & THE WATERS

Background (Exodus 12-13)

After 400 years of slavery in Egypt, God sets loose a series of plagues to prove his power over Egypt's false gods. After striking down every firstborn in the land, Pharaoh finally tells them to leave (Ex. 12:31). Israel leaves Egypt in a great exodus (Ex. 12:33-42) and begins a journey to the promised land of Canaan.

Slaves to the most powerful empire at the time are freed by God's mighty and merciful hand. Their stories are rewritten. They see firsthand God's faithfulness to his promises, his unstoppable power, and his active presence and work among them. Moses tells them to remember all these things.

"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.

The themes of remembrance and forgetfulness will echo throughout Israel's experience. They are to live by faith in God today by remembering all God has done for them in the past. When fear strikes them or opposition seems too great, all they need to do is look back and see God's mighty hand against Egypt that led them out into freedom (Dt. 5:15). In the following verses, they are called to practically remember through the feast of unleavened bread (13:2-10) and through circumcision (13:12-16).

Second, what they're specifically called to remember is that "by a strong hand the Lord brought you out from this place" (13:3, 9, 14, 16). The hand of the Lord or God's arm refers to his power and what he accomplishes. Just like how when we see a guy with huge arms we automatically think of strength, God uses these terms to refer to his might and strength. But the hand of the Lord also suggests his provision and goodness in what he gives as well as his care and guidance of us.¹ They have no need to fear any foe since God fights their battles.

¹ Look up these verses about the arm or hand of the Lord for encouragement about God's power, provision, and care for us.

And **third**, there is a future promise that God will bring them into the land of Canaan (3:5, 11). The past and future are connected as the power of God they have seen is the power of God they must trust to lead them into this promised future. This will be important because Israel will have many things threaten them on their journey, but if God has promised they will make it to this land, then they should bank on his promises.

But as we'll see in Exodus 14, where they get into trouble is they forget what he's done and they forget his Word and promises. When Egypt attacks, they don't stand by faith in God's promise to bring them to Canaan, but they falter in fear because of the danger they see threatening them.

God Leads Them (13:17-22)

After God delivers his people, he also guides them. Rescue and redemption isn't the end of the journey; it's the beginning. Through a pillar of cloud at day and a pillar of fire at night, God guides them in the way they should go (13:21-22). He does not leave them or depart from them, but guides their every step. God is with them.

God also knows where and how to lead them. We're told he doesn't lead them in a direct route through the land of the Philistines but takes them through the wilderness. He knows they will fear the Philistines too much and turn back, so he graciously leads them along a path they can handle. He knows our limits, weaknesses, and needs, and he leads us on a personal route. That does not mean the wilderness route isn't hard, because it is, but if he takes us down this path he has good reasons to do it and knows we can make it.

Because Israel's faith in God and knowledge of God is still small, they aren't yet ready for battle. God takes them through the wilderness to provide a training ground or boot camp on the power, provision, goodness, and faithfulness of God. This is an important aspect of the wilderness experiences from Exodus to Joshua. The wilderness might feel like a trial—and it is—but it's more than a trial to endure. It's the classroom where God wants to teach us specific lessons about who he is and who we are in him to increase our faith.

The lessons God takes us into the wilderness to learn are designed to help us in the future, when bigger trials and temptations arise. This should change our perspective about wilderness periods away from a place we want to get out of as quickly as possible to a place we want to learn from and move on from with those lessons in hand. **The wilderness isn't a waste when it leads to a deeper faith in God and bigger view of God.**

Though God certainly could wipe out the Philistines or the Canaanites like he did the Egyptians and take Israel on a fast-pass route to the destination, he wants to move them along in their faith by helping them trust God more. Part of what the wilderness period does is train them in faith by proving to them—often in challenging circumstances—God's power over nations and nature, his ability and desire to provide, his faithfulness to keep his Word and promises, and his amazing patience and steadfast love. They will need to learn these lessons as they enter their new land and live with God as king. Michael Kelley writes:

“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

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.

circles, when you don't seem to be making any progress, and when you might even feel trapped – those are the forging times.”²

God leads us with purpose and love. He has not led you to where you are, even if it feels like a dead-end or into danger, to abandon you. God led you to where you are today, and he has done so with good plans and purposes.

You are not here by accident but by God's sovereignty and wisdom.

You are not here facing a fearful situation because God is unkind or unfaithful, but it might be the very opportunity for you to taste and see his kindness and faithfulness.

You are not alone; God is with you.

You are not here so God can punish you, but so he can prove his power, faithfulness, and love to you.

In the wilderness, or in seasons and circumstances we'd rather not be in, we have to trust that God is leading us. He is our good shepherd directing our path (Ps. 23:2-3). God is leading us through the wilderness to do you good in the end (Dt. 8:16). Just as Israel learned to trust God's leading, and judge their path by his good character and not their perceptions, so we must learn to trust where God has and is leading us.

If you're looking around wondering why God took you the long way or led you down a winding path, or when you look around you feel stuck or threatened, look to God with the eyes of faith. Trust his leading. Seek his nearness. Stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord.

The wilderness is a place where God teaches us who he is, what he's capable of, and his trustworthiness. It requires, at times, getting us alone and getting our attention through wilderness experiences. **The long way and the windy way is worth it. God's path for our life is full of purpose even when it's full of twists and turns.** God's ways are not our ways and his plans are not our plans, and that's not only okay, it's good because he's all-knowing and we're not. He knows what's best for us and how, when, and where to teach us, shape us, and bless us in the ways that will be for our growth, the good of those around us, and God's glory.

This season of social-distancing and the Coronavirus feels like a wilderness experience. We're being pulled out of society and even away from family, friends, and our church community. There are stressors and threats because of the economic situation, jobs lost and hours reduced, health scares and sickness, a sense of loneliness, and the loss of our normal rhythms and some everyday blessings we took for granted. And while we might rightly want this season to pass quickly (and I do want that), what might God want to do in us and then through us through this wilderness experience. As we're isolated, how might God want to draw near to us and reveal better who he is? What does he want you to learn in this season and how might he be shaping you for the future? Don't see this season as a waste or simply something to get through. See it as a wilderness classroom to graduate from having spent time learning about who God is, who you are in him, and how he wants us to follow him and reflect him.

Crossing the Red Sea (14:1-14)

As Exodus 14 begins, God tells them to camp near the waters of the [Red] sea (Ex. 14:1-2). As a general rule, being backed up against a large body of water isn't a great military tactic. But despite how things seem on the outside, God has a plan and is at work. But Israel doesn't yet understand this. Pharaoh regrets his decision to let the people go, so he takes his army of chariots to pursue Israel (14:5-9). A well-ordered army on horseback

² Michael Kelley, "The Long Way is not the Wrong Way," 9/21/17, <https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/the-long-way-is-not-the-wrong-way>.

would quickly catch up to a nomadic group of men, women, children, and all their animals and belongings. As Pharaoh's army becomes visible in the distance, the sight of them caused great fear and panic among the people (14:10). They cry out to God. They complain to Moses. They say it would have been better to serve the Egyptians than die in the wilderness (14:12).

You can imagine the great fear and palpable sense of panic as they see this army fast-approaching, eager to slay them or enslave them, and they have nowhere to go since they're backed up against a wall. Hope seems dim. It looks like it's over for them. Defeat seems imminent. Remember, they have no boats to get across. No military to fight back. No other place to escape. They have no way out, and they're struck by fear. Imagine how you would have felt in that situation. The outcome looked pretty certain from their vantage.

Fear Not by Looking to God

It's at this point their leader, Moses, stands up and calls them see their circumstances with the vantage of faith. He declares: "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).

Moses calls on the people to "fear not." He doesn't answer all of the questions they have or defend God's actions or his actions as their leader. He addresses what's raging in their heart in these hard circumstances: fear.

It might seem to us today unfair or unrealistic to simply say "fear not" or do not fear. How do you decide to no fear? If you're afraid or anxious, hearing don't fear or don't worry might feel like telling someone you not to be hungry. You might think, if I could stop it, I would. We might even wonder if we have control over it. It's like a gut-response.

But Moses tells them to fear not, and the reason they're not to fear isn't because he's going to ignore the scary circumstances in front of them, he's not going to paint a positive picture, he doesn't have confidence in their ability to defeat Egypt, and he doesn't want them to just mentally will themselves out of the emotion. The reason they're told not to fear is because he wants them to shift their eyes upward. Rather than only seeing the scary and circumstances on the horizon, they must look up and see the God at work for them. When looking around causes fear, we look up in faith.

The call to "fear not" is a call to consider who our God is, to be so fearful or awed by him that it causes our fear of circumstances to wither. It's changing our perspective. Fear takes place when we get focused on the situation and practically ignore God, so the thing we fear becomes big and God becomes small. 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. It's not that it goes away entirely or that there's no element of concern in our heart, but it changes our perspective to factor in an all-powerful, ever-present God.

Moses calls them to fear not because he wants them to consider and trust their God. Though it might seem like hope is lost, they made the wrong choice in following him and coming out to the wilderness, and that their future is doomed, God is bigger than what they can see in front of them. He's the one who delivered them with a mighty hand from Egypt and he's the one who led them to this very spot. God has good purposes for us, he's faithful to protect and provide for us, he's working for us and on our behalf, and he cares for us and loves us. He is trustworthy. Trust is the antidote to fear. Trust declares with a loud voice this is who my God is, and that voice silences the fearful thoughts and whispers in our mind.

Fear Not by Remembering God Fights for You

Rather than running around in a fearful panic, Moses tells them to stand firm, to stay put, to be silent, and to watch. Don't try to figure out your own solution and plan. Stand firm by trusting, believing, and courageously banking what's about to happen on God's promises. Don't look to the right or the left. Don't shrink back. Don't let fear get the best of you. Instead, trust God, and let faith in God produce courage and strength. In verse 14, it tells them they won't even have to fight. They just have to be silent, and let God do the work.

Being silent before God is a picture of trust and faith. It's choosing to let him work. It's giving up control and letting him be in control. That's one of the hardest things to do when you're fearful or anxious. When things feel out of control to us, we try to take over for God and seek to be in control. But we're not all-knowing and all-powerful so we can never actually get the control we seek, nor would we know what to do if we had it. We aren't God, but we are God's creatures and children.

Faith requires learning to give up control and trusting God to be in control. That's easier said than done, but that's what we seek to do as we step back, stand firm, and are silent before God as we allow him to fight our battles and handle our business. It's a humble act that recognizes we are dependent on and desperate for God. We can't change this, fix this, or overcome this, but our God can.

Fear not. Stand firm. Because the Lord will fight for you. Our God is fighting our battles. He is a father who protects his children, a king who defends his city, and a warrior who fights for his people. Moses calls them to see the salvation the Lord will work for them today. Notice that while *seeing* the approaching army of Egypt causes their fear and panic, they will *see* instead the salvation of the Lord. They are to *look* for how God is or might work and not just *look* at what's causing their fear.

If they stand firm and watch, they will see what God had planned all along. The winding path and being led into the wilderness wasn't pointless. God brought them here to display his power before them and lead them with his mighty hand through the sea. God is working even when we don't see it. God is working even when it looks like the train has slid off the tracks. God is working even in trials and hardship; he has a plan for us and is working for us and has our good in mind. His plans are not our plans. His ways are not our ways. His timing is not our timing. But his plans, his ways, and his timing are good and loving. Fear not. Stand firm. See the salvation of the Lord.

Fear Not Because God is With You

God not only fights for us but he is also with us (Is 41; 43). He goes before us but he also walks next to us. If he leads us into the fire he carries us, and if he leads us through the water he walks with us. We can let go of fear centered on hard circumstances by clinging to faith in a God who is for us, with us, and over us in everything.

"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; cf. 41:10-11, 13)

The biblical admonition to "fear not" is rooted in God's character, his promises, and his presence. We cling to the hope he will never leave us nor forsake us, he will work all things together for our good, and that he has good plans for us. Fear might cause us to want to hide, so hide in God as our refuge and strength. Cling to him until

the storm comes and goes. Let him be your refuge, safe-place, and storm-shelter. When you're afraid, remember his promise he is with you and his promises to carry and help you. Then take him at his Word and trust him.³

Egypt Defeated and Israel Delivered (14:15-31)

Moses lifts his staff and God parts the waters so they can walk across dry land. The enemy is relentless and pursues them, but God confuses them with the pillar and then crushes them by crash waves on them. God delivers his people and defeats their enemy. They see the salvation of the Lord. The fear that seemed so daunting and overwhelming is now behind them, placidly lying on the seashore. It's almost like a boxing match. Fear lies flat on the canvas for the 10-count, but God still stands. The victory is his. Verse 31 says they saw the salvation of the Lord and their fear of Egypt was replaced by fear of God. Egypt now looks small and God looks big. God showed off his power. Their fear gave way to faith. And Chapter 15 is a song of worship and thanksgiving.

This is one lesson they learn in the wilderness, that God wants to grow our faith and shrink our fears by proving his power and giving us his presence.

New Testament Connections

1) Jesus calms the storm when the disciples feared (Mark 4:35-41; Matt. 8:18-27; Luke 8:22-25).

This account has several similarities to and twists of the Exodus account. Jesus and his disciples seek to cross the waters on a boat. A heavy storm hits them and threatens their safety. [Think *Deadliest Catch*.] They can't move forward or cross the water on their own and Jesus is asleep below deck. They begin to fear for their lives and even ask Jesus if he cares they're going to perish (Mark 4:38). Jesus rises and then calms the sea—saying “Peace. Be still”—so they can safely cross to the other side (4:39). He asks them why they are afraid (if he is with them). They then marvel at his power and the fact that the winds and sea obey him.

This scene provides a NT re-enactment of the Red Sea Crossing. Here again we see that despite our fears and worries, Jesus is with us, and so we have nothing to fear. He will not let the storm overwhelm us and will carry us safe to shore. He grows our faith, not by leading us away from trials and hardship, but by helping us feel our dependence and turning to him through trials. It's in the storm that he proves his power, sovereignty, love, and faithfulness. The winds and waves obey him, as do all things in our own life that cause us fear. Even if our boats are being rocked and the storm threatens us, we can rest knowing Jesus is with us, Jesus has good plans for us, and Jesus has power over the very things causing our fear and worry.

2) Jesus comes to his disciples in the middle of the night while they're alone (Matt. 14:22-33).

With power over the water and creation, Jesus crosses the water and walks to them (John 6:16-21). They fear what they see, but Jesus comforts them with the assuring words that he is with them. Jesus tells Peter to look at him when he walks across the water rather than looking down. When his eyes are looking to Jesus, his faith remains firm and he can continue walking. But when his eyes look away from Jesus and focus on the dangerous or scary circumstances, his faith becomes shaky and he stumbles. As Peter starts to sink into the abyss, no doubt full of fear at this point, Jesus grabs onto him and saves him. Even after we falter, Jesus is faithful where we are faithless (2 Tim. 2:13).

³ 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) Jesus' statement "I am the true light," likely refers (at least in part) to the pillar of fire being a light to Israel in the darkness.

Each "[I am](#)" statement from John's Gospel shows how Jesus is who Israel looked for in the OT.⁴ He fulfills all the shadows and promises from the OT in his person and work. Jesus is the way to God and our source of salvation, deliverance, and victory that we would not have on our own. We are still and he does the work; we simply take the path he puts down for us and receive salvation by grace. He is the light that leads us and saves us. He is the light that guides us in the darkness.

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.

He knows what it's like to encounter fear and worry. He knows suffering. But Jesus entrusts himself to the will of the Father, even to the point of death, because even death itself is not ultimate. God's good plans and purposes aren't thwarted by Jesus' betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, they're moved forward and fulfilled through it (Acts 2:23).

When Jesus is led to the cross it's not because the Father led him astray. This is where he needed to go. The place that by all appearances seems like a dead-end, a lost cause, and the end of hope is the very place God wanted him so he could resurrect him, bring new life, and bring his good purposes to pass. The cross is not the end of the story; the cross leads to the resurrection (and ascension).

The resurrection is the place where Jesus comes out of his own Red Sea crossing in death and proves God's deliverance, the enemy's defeat, and he finds victory for his people. Easter is the new Exodus. It's a reminder that for those united to Christ—for us as his followers—will not only be delivered from death and brought safely onto the other side of eternity, but even now we are being led by our good Shepherd into freedom, life, and victory.

5) Our baptism, picturing our union with Jesus, draws on the image of us walking through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1-2).

We go in and out of the water with Jesus and because of Jesus. Through union with Jesus Christ, we are delivered from sin, death, and the enemy which held us slavery and nip at our heals. By going in and out of the water, we come out on the other side as those saved and given a new life. We make it safely through the waters of judgment because God is for us and not against us. God proves his saving power most clearly in our own salvation, pictured in our own going in and out of the waters of baptism. We don't fear judgment or death—or any trial by fire in this life—because through Jesus we already have the victory as those who have passed from death to life.

LESSONS TO LEARN & APPLY

1) **Fight fear with faith.**

By faith, I mean turn your eyes away from circumstances and onto God so he becomes bigger than our fear. Our faith might not be bigger than our fear, but our faithful God is bigger than what we fear. Direct the mental attention we give our fear and anxiety to seeking the knowledge of God.

Dig into the Bible, or a good book full of the Bible, to see God's attributes, promises, and acts. Saturate your mind with the glory, goodness, and the grace of God. Dwell intently on the person and work of Jesus, and how

⁴ See "The 7 'I Am' Statements of Jesus: OT Background & NT Meaning" by Dustin Crowe at indycrowe.com, <https://indycrowe.com/2019/02/13/the-7-i-am-statements-of-jesus-ot-background-nt-meaning/>

the gospel means that God is now for us. Look to Jesus your faithful, merciful, and sympathetic high priest. Do a further study this week on one of the things I've mentioned and listed in the "additional study" section.

We sing this reality in the old hymn, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus."

"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."⁵

In this season, where sickness, suffering, and stress can cause us to fear, my encouragement is to look to Jesus. For every look to the news and every reason to be nervous or anxious, turn your eyes upon Jesus, the one who is ruling and reigning over our lives with good purposes.

Find specific ways to do this that work with your rhythms and that address your fears. Maybe it's having one truth, promise, or attribute of God to recite when you feel fearful. It could be memorizing a verse or verses during this season, writing a key verse or truth somewhere visible, reading a God-centered book or listening to God-centered music that directs your gaze upward, studying one promise or attribute of God today or this week, or spending time journaling to reflect on ways God has been faithful to you. Grow your view of God and shrink your fears by increasing your knowledge of God and intimacy with God.

2) Trust God will continue to lead you.

God has not only led you here for a purpose, but God will lead you forward. Even if it seems like there's an insurmountable wall, God will remove it if he wants you to move forward. Even if a deep sea stands in front of you, God will part the waters. He's a way-maker.⁶

God causes them to walk through the Red Sea. He makes a way where their seemed to be no way. He walks before them to guide their steps. He walks with them to accompany them. And he goes behind them to defeat any enemies on their hills.

"Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?" (Is. 51:10)

Later passages in the Bible draw on this story as an example of how God leads his people like a shepherd leads his flock. Though sheep get spooked and don't always know why they're going the way they do, and though sometimes God must use his rod or staff to redirect a straying sheep, God leads us with care, gentleness, and purpose. He knows the place he's taking us and he knows the best route to get us there.

"Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? ... So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name." (Is. 63:11-14)

This becomes a defining feature of God for his people. As Isaiah 43:6 says, the Lord is the one "makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters."

⁵ Helen Lemmel, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus," https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Turn_Your_Eyes_upon_Jesus/

⁶ There are lot of good Christian hymns and contemporary songs about God making a way for us. Consider reading or singing one of them as an encouragement to your heart. Some 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) **Live by faith, not feelings.**

Relate to the Lord by trusting in his truth, not being shaken by what you sense. It's not that feelings don't matter, because they do, but they can't be trusted. They're not ultimate. In fact, they're often wrong, especially when we fear or are anxious. When I'm fearful, I can convince myself something is true that's not, or that an outcome is certain that's not. Fear is a liar, and it's not to be trusted, even if it feels powerful and persuasive.

Israel felt fear and panic because what they sensed was they were dead-meat with no place to go. And it seemed that way, but God had other plans. Our senses and feelings often deceive us, lie to us, and lead us astray because they only factor in what we see with our eyes and reason in our head. We fail to consider who God is and what he might be doing. God calls his people, throughout the Bible, to live by faith in him.

Faith is hard, and we sometimes forget that. It's hard because it requires trust and belief, that at times, might seem counterintuitive to what we see, feel, or think. But God is bigger than what we see, feel, and think. Even when we don't see it, feel it, or know it, God is working. God has plans and can do things beyond what we sense. That's why we trust him and have faith, even when it's hard and even when we're fearful. We lean into trusting God not because we feel like things are going to go well or we see the answer, but because our hope and faith are ultimately in an unseen God working in unseen ways.

William Cowper reminds us,

“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense
But trust Him for His grace
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face

His purposes will ripen fast
Unfolding every hour
The bud may have a bitter taste
But sweet will be the flower

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain
God is His own interpreter
And He will make it plain.”⁷

4) **Go forward by looking back in remembrance.**

We'll see this in more detail in other lessons throughout the wilderness, but one of the weapons of our war against fear is our spiritual memory-bank. God has been powerful, faithful, and merciful not only in our shared history of the Bible or even church history, but he has been so in our own life. How do we draw on times in the past where we saw God work in power, to remind us God will be the same today? Israel forget the God who delivered them, and by forgetting, they grew fearful of circumstances in front of them. But we remember, and by recalling and rehearsing who God has been in the past we find strength knowing who God will be today and tomorrow. Look back in faith to look forward without fear.

⁷ William Cowper, “God Moves In A Mysterious Way,”
https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/God_Moves_in_a_Mysterious_Way/

HOMEWORK

- 1) Make a list of things you're fearful about from the past or today. These don't have to be the same level of fear, but they're things you have or could be fearful about. It can be something simple, or more personal like fearing for my family's safety, or something more internal, like fearing failing or that people see me as a failure. Write down 5-10 personal fears. Then 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?

When we're in the wilderness and things get hard, or in seasons where God's presence seems distant and our hearts grow weak, we're called to remember what God has done for us in the past.

- 3) When you feel fearful or struggle with worry, fight with God's Word. Look up in faith and look away from your fears. Pick one truth, verse, promise, or attribute of God to recite when fearful. Ask a friend to pray for you 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 bringeth his people oftentimes 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 rejoiceth 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."⁸

⁸ Charles Spurgeon, "Direction in Dilemma," <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/direction-in-dilemma#flipbook/>

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; 41:10, 13; 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; Rom. 1:20.
- "[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
- Mark Vroegop sermon, "[Fear Not, Stand Firm & See the Salvation of the Lord](#)," at yourchurch.com.
- 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 lessons from The Gospel Project to teach more about 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](#).