



The wilds are unexpected places where the best things begin. Hope is often born in the wilds. Frequently in the Bible, the wilderness is where God transforms us, raises us as leaders, and prepares us to live passionately and with purpose.

*It's where God wrestles with Jacob and gives him a new name.
It's where Moses is called to rise as a leader even though he feels inadequate.
It's where Hagar is reminded that God sees her.
It's where the nation of Israel was brought to prepare for the Promised Land.
It's where David penned the Psalms.
It's where God protects, provides for and prepares Elijah.
It's where John the Baptist took on the moniker of "a voice calling the wilderness."
It's a testing-ground where Jesus faces off with temptation before his ministry began.*

Audacious, unbridled purpose and possibility are found when we are willing to go through some discomfort to follow God to a new place. This is the message that came to God's people who were exiled in Babylon. They were living in constant disappointment, corruption, division, and exhaustion, yet Isaiah's words invite them to get passionate about their future. Babylon is not an end but a beginning. God was doing something new, but it was going to look different than they thought it would.

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.

God's people had a reputation for settling for just getting by. When God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness, providing manna from heaven, the people complained and wanted to return to what they considered the "good old days." They wanted to go back to Egypt, where they were enslaved in horrific conditions, but at least they had stability and shelter and knew what to expect. They were stuck longing for a former situation that while it was miserable, it was known.

A new season needs a new strategy. New seasons call for a new level of trust in God. This is why God reminds us not to dwell on the past. We can own and learn from it but don't need to get stuck there. We can't expect past victories to sustain us (Judges 6:13). We also shouldn't let past failures paralyze us. All of our experiences so far are breadcrumbs leading us to what's ahead.

Do you not perceive it?

No matter how hopeless a situation seems, God specializes in the impossible. This is a tremendous source of hope. Starting in Genesis 18:14, God asks Abraham, who is having a hard time believing that he and his wife would have a baby after waiting for so many decades, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" Throughout the Bible we are reminded of this same fact – nothing is too difficult for God.

— *Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?*

JEREMIAH 32:27

— *Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.*

JEREMIAH 32:17

— *But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

MATTHEW 19:26

do you not perceive it?

Do you not perceive it? Have you forgotten what God is capable of? God is continually doing surprisingly good things for His people, but sometimes we need to get curious about what is holding us back from perceiving the new things God wants to do in our lives.

Ian Simkins, Lead Pastor of Teaching and Vision at The Bridge in Nashville, TN, says:

It's hard to hear God's voice if we've already decided what He should say.

It's hard to expect God to lead us if we've already decided where we should go.

It's hard to expect God to be our identity if other people's opinions are our mirror.

It's hard to expect God to nourish us if the news is what's feeding us.

It's hard to believe God can do something new if we've bought into hopelessness.

Here are Some Ways God Makes Things New:

GOD RENAMES: Names carry a lot of significance in Scripture, but what is even more significant is the renaming of people. When God gives someone a new name, it is always a sign of renewed purpose.

God changed Abram's name to Abraham in conjunction with a monumental promise (Genesis 17:5). Jacob became Israel. Simon became Peter, and Saul became Paul when they became Jesus' disciples (Matthew 4:18; Acts 13:9). God gave new names to mark new beginnings, hopes, and blessings. While we may not literally receive new names when we become Christ-followers, we do receive new identities. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV). This year, MomCo takes on a new name, and we don't take lightly that this renaming from God comes with fresh purpose, promises, and responsibility. May it be a year where we honor the new creation God has made us individually and collectively.



GOD MAKES A WAY IN THE WILDERNESS:

Often, we find ourselves in places where we can't see a way forward. We want to do it all, but also feel guilty that we aren't doing everything perfectly. We're bombarded by so much information and so many opinions that we feel overwhelmed and uncertain which path to choose. What school should we send our kids to? Should we take on more work to help with finances? Do we let our baby cry it out, or will that mean they never form healthy attachment for the rest of their lives (so dramatic)? It ALL feels high stakes! Often, it's lonely and scary in the wilds and so we start to think everything is up to us – like we must save ourselves and figure out the path forward because if we don't, no one else will.

Here's the good news – God is a way-maker. He parts seas and overcomes enemies. He provides pillars of cloud by day and fire by night. He quiets the storms inside and outside of us. He reveals paths that we didn't realize were there. He has good plans for us that are better than anything we might figure out on our own.

There is another truth about the wilderness that we sometimes don't want to talk about, is often is the place where we battle darkness. Jesus models this when in the wilderness he is faces three common human temptations:

- The desire to be relevant, “*...command these stones to become loaves of bread*” (Matthew 4:3).
- The desire to be impressive, “*... throw yourself down ...*” (Matthew 4:6).
- The desire to be powerful, “*all these I will give you ...*” (Matthew 4:9).

Jesus confronts the same struggles that we face and affirms that our identity is found not in our own power to make things happen, but God's.

Lastly, in the wilderness God promises to remove all obstacles in coming to Him (Romans 8:31-39). Whatever may hold us back – mistakes, shame, regret – Jesus has already made a way. “*Jesus, said to him ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life ...’*” (John 14:6).

God Provides Streams in the Desert

Have you ever been in an isolated place, unprepared for the experiences you were navigating? Maybe like David, you can't escape your problems. Or, like Abraham, you're hoping for something that feels impossible. Maybe, like Moses, you feel overwhelmed by the needs of the people around you. Or, like Elijah, you are burnt out. Like your body or soul is parched.

The Hebrew word for the desert is MIDBAR. Because there are no vowels in Hebrew, the letters that spell it out are M-D-B-R. Coincidentally, this is also how you spell another Hebrew word, MEDABER – to speak.* When we are in the desert thirsting for hope, this is where God speaks to us.

This is where the words of the Psalmist become our words, *"As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God"* (Psalm 42:1). And, *"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water"* (Psalm 63:1).

God provides water from a rock, nourishment under the shade of a tree, God sends angels to provide a snack – no joke. When we experience the wilds of the desert, this is where God provides for our most desperate longings, both practically and spiritually. The desert is where we learn that just because something is difficult, doesn't mean we are doing it wrong. It's where we learn to dance upon disappointments, and where we see that God literally provides for our needs.

God is about to do something new, do you sense it? A new season of hope is rising and it's starting right here, with the kid-raisers, the dust-shakers, and the rule-breakers who are willing to do to the impossible in the name of Jesus. May our homes and the world be changed because we choose to live with Wild Hope.

GOD IS MAKING ALL THINGS NEW, "And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'" REVELATION 21:5, ESV

*Source: <https://firmisrael.org/learn/wilderness-meaning-bible-importance-desert-seasons/>
All translations are English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.