

Week #:	81	Series:	Walking with God in the Desert	Title:	Session 1: It's Hot Here and There's No Way Out
Text:	Psalms 121:1-5; Exodus 15:22-27; Exodus 16:1-5; Exodus 16:9-15; Exodus 17:6; Deuteronomy 8:1-5; Deuteronomy 11:1-15				
Songs:	God Will Make A Way – Don Moen				
	Another In the Fire - Hillsong				
	In Your Presence – Paul Wilbur				
Video:	Walking with God in the Desert: It's How Here and there's No Way Out (Ray Vander Laan)				

For God's ancient people, the desert regions of Israel and the Sinai were a vast expanse of rocky, mountainous terrain and deep, treacherous wadis. There was no escaping the harsh reality of life in these barren lands where even the necessities of water and food were scarce. God's people experienced scorching daytime heat, venomous snakes and scorpions, and cold nighttime temperatures. But even as His people experienced the hardships of desert life, God was there. When they were overwhelmed by needs they were powerless to meet, He met them in the desert and provided food, water, and protection.

God often used the challenging and painful circumstances of desert life to teach His ancient people to listen to His voice and to trust Him – and only Him – to provide everything they needed. Through His faithful provision in the midst of their desert experiences, God formed a people who knew Him intimately, trusted Him fully, and lived in dependence on His every word. In fact, the Jewish sages have noted that the beautiful image of love portrayed in the Song of Songs, "Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" also described Israel, God's people, as they came out of the desert.

So it is not by chance that many notable servants of God mentioned in the Bible = Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul – all spent significant time in the desert before rising up to fulfill their roles in God's plan of redemption. It is not by chance that before the Israelites entered the Promised Land they too spent time in the desert.

There, through God's faithfulness, they learned to rely on His love and provision as they faced the challenges and uncertainties of fulfilling their intended purpose.

And it is not by chance that God's people today, although we may never set foot in a physical desert, go through "desert" experiences – intense times of struggle and pain, uncertainty and lack of control that push us to the end of our resources and abilities, God has not changed His ways when it comes to forming His people. He still uses deserts – difficult as they are – to lead us to the place where we choose to depend on Him and His provision rather than trusting in ourselves. And when we make that choice, He meets us in our deserts just as He met His ancient people in their deserts.

So let's take a closer look at the deserts of our lives. Let's see what God provides when difficulties threaten to overwhelm us, when the temperature soars and we are powerless to deliver ourselves. Let's choose to discover the God who meets us where so that we may grow into a deeper, more intimate relationship of trust with His. May we too come out of our deserts leaning on our Beloved.

Psalms 121:1-5

I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not

slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you – the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

When life goes well, it is easy for us to feel confident and in control. It is easy to believe that our own decisions and actions will provide what we need and produce the outcomes we desire. At other times, life doesn't go as well as we would like. We may face times of struggle and pain – times of "desert" in our lives – when we are not sure how things will turn out and our confidence in successfully facing what lays ahead falters.

What impact do you think a person's relationship with God has on how he or she handles the deserts in life? _____

What impact have you seen desert times have on your own relationship with God and your expectations of how He will respond to your needs? _____

****WATCH VIDEO ****

This study was filmed in Wadi Nasb in the Sinai Peninsula. An ancient caravan route passed through this wadi that connected the coastal road along the Gulf of Aqaba to the interior desert regions of the Sinai Peninsula. In what ways did the view of the desert wilderness presented in the video help you to better understand what the writers of the Biblical text may have envisioned when they described living in relationship with God as walking by faith, not by sight?

Hardships and Dangers in the Desert:

Because most of us may be unfamiliar with Middle Eastern geography, it's easy to underestimate the difficulties that Moses, the Israelites, and others experienced in the deserts of the Sinai and the Trans Jordan region. We may picture the Israelites' exodus from Egypt as a journey across flat, sandy plains covered with sparse vegetation. But in these desert regions, steep, rocky mountain ranges surround and crisscross the flatter valleys and plains, making travel much more difficult. Just imagine how difficult it would have been for the Hebrews to pass through the granite and sandstone mountains of the southern Sinai?

In addition to the difficulties of traveling through unforgiving terrain, the deserts of the Bible receive little rainfall. The Negev receives about ten inches annually; the Wilderness of Paran and Judea Wilderness receive less than two inches. Yet the sparse rainfall is deceiving. Nearly all of the rainfall in the mountains to the north and west of these deserts falls during the six-month rainy season. The hard stone and meager topsoil of the mountains cannot absorb all of the rain, so it runs west toward the Mediterranean and east

and south into the deserts. Rain in the desert often falls heavily for short periods of time, adding to the streams that rush quickly down the mountains and carve the deep flood canyons that open into the valleys below.

A desert flood canyon, called by its Arabic name, *wadi* (*nahal* in Hebrew, often translated *brook* or *stream* in English), is normally dry and may be used as a road. The road from Jericho to Jerusalem, for example, passed through the Judea Wilderness alongside a deep wadi. In Wadi Nasb, where this study was filmed, an ancient caravan road led from the interior deserts of the Sinai Peninsula to the coastal road along the Gulf of Aqaba. The route is still used today.

However, wadis can flood suddenly, even when there isn't a cloud in the sky. From some trails in these narrow riverbeds it is impossible to see more than a few hundred feet ahead or behind, so travel through a wadi can be dangerous. In fact, even today, as was true centuries ago, the greatest cause of death in the Middle Eastern desert is not heat or thirst, but floods in the wadis. So traveling into the unknown desert territory was difficult for the Hebrews. They had to trust God and His servant, Moses, to protect and provide for them no matter what danger or hardship might be ahead. Passing through the "desert of life" is not easy. It has always been difficult for God's people – and it still is.

What kinds of desert experiences in life push us to the edge of our self-sufficiency? _____

When you face trouble in one of life's deserts, what does it mean to you when God steps in and meets you at a point of great need and demonstrates His loving care for you? _____

What impact does His presence during these times of trouble have on your relationship with Him? _____

When you feel overwhelmed in one of life's deserts, what kind of *shade* do you expect God to provide for you? _____

In what ways might your image of shade differ from the reality of the shade provided by a broom tree in the desert? _____

To what extent does God's provision of *just enough* shade for the day satisfy your desire for relief from the hardships of life in the desert? _____

God Wants His People to Rely on Him:

God knew that His chosen people would be driven by the desire to provide for themselves and pursue their own ways if they did not learn to completely depend on Him for guidance and direction, provision

and protection. So He forced them to leave the lush, fertile lands of Goshen where they had irrigated their crops with the waters of the Nile River and enjoyed abundant harvests. He led them into the unknown, barren deserts of the Sinai where they would have to depend on Him and trust in Him in order to survive.

Exodus records a number of desert situations in which the Hebrews revealed what they really believed about God and Moses, His chosen leader. As you read about three of these situations, notice how God used each one to teach His people that they could depend on Him to meet their needs.

Text	What hardship or crisis did they face?	What was their "solution"?	How did God show Himself to be a trustworthy provider?
Exodus 15:22-27			
Exodus 16:1-5; Exodus 16:9-15			
Exodus 17:6			

In these instances in the desert, with its limited source of food and water, was exactly the place into which God had led His people. Why do you think He led His people into a strange, unknown place that would be difficult, dangerous, and frightening? _____

What do you think His purpose might have been in not revealing ahead of time what to expect or how He would provide? _____

What do you think God might want us to experience and learn when we face unknown, unpredictable, and frightening deserts in our lives? _____

Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, Moses spoke to them about all that they had experienced during the desert journey so that they would remember it when they lived in the good land God had provided for them. Deuteronomy 8:1-5 and 11:2-15 give us insight into Gods intended purpose for the hardships of the Israelites’ desert experience. As we read these portions of the text, note the contrast between our human drive for self-sufficiency and how God wants us to depend on Him.

Deuteronomy 8:1-5

¹ “Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. ² And

you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. ³ So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. ⁴ Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. ⁵ You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you.

Deuteronomy 11:1-15

¹ “Therefore you shall love the Lord your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always. ² Know today that I do not speak with your children, who have not known and who have not seen the chastening of the Lord your God, His greatness and His mighty hand and His outstretched arm— ³ His signs and His acts which He did in the midst of Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to all his land; ⁴ what He did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and their chariots: how He made the waters of the Red Sea overflow them as they pursued you, and how the Lord has destroyed them to this day; ⁵ what He did for you in the wilderness until you came to this place; ⁶ and what He did to Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben: how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, their households, their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel— ⁷ but your eyes have seen every great act of the Lord which He did.

⁸ “Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess, ⁹ and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord swore to give your fathers, to them and their descendants, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’

¹⁰ For the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden; ¹¹ but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, ¹² a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.

¹³ ‘And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹⁴ then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. ¹⁵ And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.’

What do people really want in life, and how did God intend for His people to receive it? (See Deuteronomy 8:1) _____

What process did God use to expose the self-sufficiency of His people and to provide for their needs, and in what ways is it similar to what He does through our desert experiences today? (Deuteronomy 8:2-5) _____

How had God taught His people that He was sufficient – that He was their provider? (See Deuteronomy 11:2-7) _____

What impact did God expect His provision in the desert to have on His people, and what would their faithful trust in His produce for them? (See Deuteronomy 11:1, 8-9) _____

What direct contrast related to self-sufficiency did God draw between the land of Egypt and the Promised Land? (See Deuteronomy 11:10-15) _____

To what extent do you think the desert experiences in our lives help to expose our inclination toward self-sufficiency? _____

Generations after the Israelites entered the Promised Land, what did God, through His prophet Jeremiah, lament about the hearts of His people? (See Jeremiah 2:13) _____

What impact does our stubborn inclination to pursue our own ways and place confidence in our own self-sufficiency rather than in God’s provision have on our relationship with Him; and on our future well-being? _____

What are the “cisterns” we dig for ourselves today? _____

Many of us who live in economically prosperous cultures consider God’s blessings to be the things that make our lives easier, more pleasurable, and predictable. We put a great deal of effort into avoiding situations or conditions that would make life harder, less pleasurable, and less predictable. We have ten-year plans, insurance for every possible peril, and retirement accounts because we want the security of having in hand everything we could possibly need or want for tomorrow. And then, when our plans and resources fail to protect us from hardship, we may view the situation as God’s judgment on us.

In contrast, God often leads His people into harsh and painful deserts where life is not predictable, where we cannot store away everything we may want or need for the future. Deserts expose the fallacy (and sinfulness) of our self-sufficiency and force us to face the unknown. At that point of powerlessness, we make a crucial decision: will we learn to depend on God for each day’s protection and provision, or will we choose our own way?

In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus told a parable about a person who was unable to see around the next bend of life yet trusted in his resources and ability to provide for himself.

How does this parable help you put your self-sufficiency into perspective? _____

In what ways have deserts – perhaps the loss of your job, home, retirement income, health, significant relationship, or your failure to achieve to desired goal – destroyed your comfortable self-reliance and forced you to reconsider your perspective on what you control and where you place your trust? _____

In what way(s) has your experience in the desert changed how you trust and rely on God? _____

In what way(s) might God be leading you (or someone you know) into the unknown – into the desert? _

How does what you have discovered during difficulties lie ahead as opportunities to meet God, learn His ways, and experience Him more intimately? _____

Pray, asking God to reveal to you areas of your life in which you trust in yourself and pursue your own ways rather than trusting in Him and His faithfulness.