

Week #:	85	Series:	Walking with God in the Desert	Title:	Session 5: They Were Not Wandering
Text:	Deuteronomy 8:2; Matthew 4:19; Nehemiah 9:12; Psalms 1:6; Psalms 16:11; Psalms 18:30-36; Proverbs 2:6-22; Proverbs 4:10-22; Proverbs 4:26-27; Proverbs 14:12; Proverbs 15:6; Proverbs 28:18; Deuteronomy 30:15-19; Psalms 119:30-35; Psalms 119:101-105; Psalms 119:127-128; Isaiah 2:1-3; Psalms 119:97-105;				
Songs:	More Than Enough – Gary Oliver (5:18)				
	Trust In You – Lauren Daigle (3:30)				
Video:	Walking with God in the Desert: They Were Not Wandering (Ray Vander Laan) (26:09)				

What an amazing year the Hebrews experienced while camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. It was one of the most momentous years in the history of God’s people. Every morning, manna covered the ground. In a waterless land, water gushed out of solid rock. Then the Lord, Creator of the universe, descended onto the mountain in thunder and lightning, smoke and earthquake. From there He spoke the “Ten Words” [Ten Commandments] – the vows that united the Creator and His chosen people like a husband and his bride. In unity, obedience, gratitude, and love, God’s people gave the best of what they had to build the tabernacle as the place for God’s presence to reside among them.

Then it was time to move on. The pillar of cloud lifted from the tabernacle and moved ahead of the people, leading them on the unknown (to them) path to the Promised Land. Because of their stubborn resistance and outright rebellion, however, the journey through the Wilderness of Paran stretched to forty years. Most of God’s people who began the journey died on the way. But those who were young when they left Mount Sinai and the children who were born in the wilderness emerged from their journey as a community of god’s people who were ready to take the next step in His redemptive plan.

We often refer to this period on Israel’s history as “wandering” through the wilderness. In one sense, this is true: “The Lord’s anger burned against Israel and He made them wander in the desert” (Numbers 32:13). But the Israelites were never lost during this time; their movements were not without purpose or direction. The Bible emphasizes that during this time God led His people as a shepherd leads a flock. The people moved when and where God desired. Moses summarized the Israelites’ experience by saying, “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years” (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Life for God’s people is always like this. We know our eternal destination, but as we walk through our daily lives we rarely know exactly where we are going, how to get there, or when we will arrive. We must seek the right path and follow it faithfully, trusting God to lead us to the destination He has promised as He molds us into the people He desires us to be.

When Jesus called His disciples, saying, “Come, follow me” (Matthew 4:19), they trusted that He would lead them to the place He had prepared for them. But their journey was a walk of faith that led into the unknown. How often were they confused or uncertain about the path they walked as they fulfilled their mission of being God’s witnesses to the world? We know that Paul desired to go to Rome and that God prevented it until the apostle went in chains! Perhaps he wandered about the path too, but he trusted that God was leading him and continued walking.

It must be the same for us. In a world shaped by fear, uncertainty, and insecurity, we must seek God’s path and follow Him obediently into the unknown. Although we may travel through difficult and painful deserts, God guides our every step without necessarily revealing the next. We sometimes may feel that we wander

aimlessly, but God is watching and guiding our way. Like God’s people who have gone before us, we are not wandering, we are led!

Nehemiah 9:12

By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take.

When we talk about life, we often speak of it as a path. We may say, “I decided to _____, but I didn’t know where that path would lead,” or, “When _____ happened, I realized I was on the wrong path.”

When have you thought that you lost your way on the path of life, and how did you know something was wrong? _____

What are the signs you look for to know that you are following the right path? _____

[WATCH DVD]

The Israelites walked on many different paths as they made their way to the Promised Land. The different paths you have seen in this video series are much like the paths they walked. [The path filmed for this study is in the southern Sinai Peninsula near Jebel Katarina and Jebel Musa, thought of traditionally as the possible sit of Mount Sinai.]

Consider the topography of the different regions through which they passed. Some paths may have followed the shores of the Red Sea. Some may have twisted through the sandy wadis, others over rocky mountain passes. On some paths their destination may have been in view; on others they may have thought they were wandering into the unknown.

1. What did you imagine these paths looked like before you saw the video? _____

2. To what extent did the difficulty of the paths through the desert surprise you? _____

3. What do you think it might have been like to follow god and learn from Him as you walked on these paths? _____

4. Although we may say Israel *wandered* through the desert, the truth is God *led* them every step of the way. In what ways does wandering on the path of life differ from being led by God? Does it look different? Feel different? Lead to a different place? _____

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5. When you consider the varied paths that people walk through life, does it seem to you that most people walk as wanderers or as people who are being led? Why? _____

 6. To what extent do you think people today would notice the way Jesus walked His path (lived His life) as John the Baptist noticed it, and what would they recognize as being different? _____

 7. What do you think people today notice about the way you walk the path of life? Would they recognize that you walk with God? Why or why not? _____

 8. How would you describe the path on which God desires His people to walk? What is it like? What must one do to discover it? What is required to stay on it? Where does it lead? _____

 9. When you have encountered painful obstacles on a rough, steep, dangerous path, have you found the honey in the rock and tasted the goodness of God? If so, how did that sweet moment encourage you, and how can it encourage others? _____

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WALK THE RIGHT PATH

Many times the Bible mentions ordinary paths – the routes a person walked in order to travel from one place to another – as a metaphor to describe human experience and God’s intentions for His people. To walk on a path, both literally and figuratively, involves choosing it and remaining on it until the individual arrives at the intended destination. So the paths on which we choose to “walk” (or “live”, in our English usage) reveal our focus and portray the character of our lives. We either walk on God’s path and choose to obey and trust Him faithfully, or we take another path and make different choices. Let’s explore the two main paths emphasized in the Bible – God’s path (the way of righteousness) and the path (way) of the sinner.

The Bible is full of instruction for walking life’s path. It tells us how to find God’s path and describes the benefits of walking on it. It also warns us against the dangers of walking the path of wickedness or evil. The following passages provide a very brief overview of the Bible’s teaching. Read each one and see what you learn about following God’s path and walking in His ways as opposed to following the path of sin. Write down your observations about the paths one may choose in life so that you build a picture a profile of each.

Psalms 1:6

⁶ For Adonai watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is doomed.

Psalms 16:11

¹¹ You make me know the path of life; in your presence is unbounded joy, in your right hand eternal delight.

Psalms 18:30-36

³⁰ With you I can run through a whole troop of men, with my God I can leap a wall. ³¹ “As for God, his way is perfect, the word of Adonai has been tested by fire; he shields all who take refuge in him. ³² “For who is God but Adonai? Who is a Rock but our God? ³³ “It is God who girds me with strength; he makes my way go straight. ³⁴ He makes me swift, sure-footed as a deer, and enables me to stand on my high places. ³⁵ He trains my hands for war until my arms can bend a bow of bronze; ³⁶ “You give me your shield, which is salvation, your right hand holds me up, your humility makes me great.

Proverbs 2:6-22

⁶ For Adonai gives wisdom; from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding. ⁷ He stores up common sense for the upright, is a shield to those whose conduct is blameless, ⁸ in order to guard the courses of justice and preserve the way of those faithful to him. ⁹ Then you will understand righteousness, justice, fairness and every good path. ¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart, knowledge will be enjoyable for you, ¹¹ discretion will watch over you, and discernment will guard you. ¹² They will save you from the way of evil and from those who speak deceitfully, ¹³ who leave the paths of honesty to walk the ways of darkness, ¹⁴ who delight in doing evil and take joy in being stubbornly deceitful, ¹⁵ from those whose tracks are twisted and whose paths are perverse. ¹⁶ They will save you from a woman who is a stranger, from a loose woman with smooth talk, ¹⁷ who abandons the ruler she had in her youth and forgets the covenant of her God. ¹⁸ Her house is sinking toward death, her paths lead to the dead. ¹⁹ None who go to her return; they never regain the path to life. ²⁰ Thus you will walk on the way of good people and keep to the paths of the righteous. ²¹ For the upright will live in the land, the pure-hearted will remain there; ²² but the wicked will be cut off from the land, the unfaithful rooted out of it.

Proverbs 4:10-22

¹⁰ Listen, my son, receive what I say, and the years of your life will be many. ¹¹ I’m directing you on the way of wisdom, guiding you in paths of uprightness; ¹² when you walk, your step won’t be hindered; and if you run, you won’t stumble. ¹³ Hold fast to discipline, don’t let it go; guard it, for it is your life. ¹⁴ Don’t follow the path of the wicked or walk on the way of evildoers. ¹⁵ Avoid it, don’t go on it, turn away from it, and pass on. ¹⁶ For they can’t sleep if they haven’t done evil, they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone fall. ¹⁷ For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. ¹⁸ But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, shining ever brighter until full daylight. ¹⁹ The way of the wicked is like darkness; they don’t even know what makes them stumble. ²⁰ My son, pay attention to what I am saying; incline your ear to my words. ²¹ Don’t let them out of your sight, keep them deep in your heart; ²² for they are life to those who find them and health to their whole being.

Proverbs 4:26-27

²⁶ Level the path for your feet, let all your ways be properly prepared; ²⁷ then deviate neither right nor left; and keep your foot far from evil.

Proverbs 14:12

¹² There can be a way which seems right to a person, but at its end are the ways of death.

Proverbs 15:9

⁹ Adonai detests the way of the wicked but loves anyone who pursues righteousness.

Proverbs 28:18

¹⁸ Whoever lives blamelessly will be saved, but he whose ways are crooked will fall in one [of those ways].

	God's Path	The Other Path
Who walks on each path?		
Which is each path like and what happens on it?		
What are the benefits or dangers of each path?		
How does God view those who walk on each path?		
What does god do for those who walk on each path?		
What is the destiny of each path and the people who choose to walk on it?		

10. What did you learn about God's path or the path of wickedness that you did not realize before?

11. When the Israelites were at least ready to enter the Promised Land, they were well trained in walking God's path. Yet Moses was still concerned about the path they might choose in the future. In his final plea for them to keep walking on God's path, how did He describe the difference between the two paths? (See Deuteronomy 30:15-19) _____

12. Are his pleas and warnings effective enough to convince you? Why or why not? _____

13. What was the psalmist’s attitude toward each path? (See Psalms 119:30-35; Psalms 119:101-105; Psalms 119:127-128.) _____

14. What delight and joy did walking God’s path bring into the psalmist’s life? _____

15. How eagerly did he seek to know God’s path and follow it wherever it might lead? _____

16. What would you say if you were asked to describe what walking God’s path means to you? _____

In the modern world, we can travel from place to place on roads that are mapped, designed, and constructed using the latest technology and equipment. We can know where a road will lead and how fast we can travel on it before it is even built. The Biblical understanding of a path is not a constructed road, however. The Hebrew word translated “path” is derived from the word translated “cart” and refers to the ruts left when carts pass over an area multiple times. So a path is a furrow(s) that is cut into the ground during a long period of time as animals and people pass over it.

God’s path is not the product of abstract, two-dimensional maps. His path is the route He intends His people to walk as they live in obedience to His every word. It is the path that God himself walked when Jesus became one of us. To walk God’s path is, in a sense, like placing our feet in the ruts worn by the faithful, Godly people who have gone before us.

For forty years, the ancient Hebrews – as we often say and they may have thought – “wandered” through the desert. Although they may not have known where they were going or how to get there, they never truly wandered because God led them. Whenever the pillar of cloud and fire moved, God’s people followed. We do not have the visual symbol of a pillar to follow, but through His Word God continues to instruct people in how to walk His path (Isaiah 2:1-3). His Word is our “pillar,” leading us every step of the way.

17. How would you describe the two main “paths” of life – the way of the righteous (God’s path) and the way of sinners, and one which path do you want to walk? _____

18. Do you sometimes walk on one of these paths, then switch to the other? If so, how might you correct your course and stay on the path you truly desire? If not, what keeps you walking in the path you desire? _____

19. For people who desire to walk God’s path today, the crucial questions are: “How well do you know God’s Word?” and “How committed are you to learning God’s ways from His Word?” _____

20. Do you know it well enough to be led by it when you are uncertain as to what will happen around the next bend? _____

21. Do you know it well enough to be led by it when you feel that you are wandering or have lost your way? _____

22. Do you know it well enough to trust its leading even when your feelings or the counsel of others seem to suggest another path? _____

23. What do these responses indicate you might need to change about your relationship to God's Word? _____

In Psalms 119:97-105, the psalmist expresses his love for God's law (which is another way of saying God's Word) and how obedience to it keeps him on the right path.

24. If you have ever sensed that God is leading you, what encouragement did you receive to continue on despite the difficulties and obstacles on the path, and to what extent did His leading cause you to more eagerly study and know His Word? _____

25. When in your life has God's Word been a light that guided you on His path? What might have happened if you had not had that light, and to what extent has that experience led you to eagerly seek God's light for every step you take? _____

Psalms 119:101-105

¹⁰¹ I keep my feet from every evil way, in order to observe your word. ¹⁰² I don't turn away from your rulings, because you have instructed me. ¹⁰³ How sweet to my tongue is your promise, truly sweeter than honey in my mouth! ¹⁰⁴ From your precepts I gain understanding; this is why I hate every false way. ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp for my foot and light on my path.

Pray, asking God to help you choose His path daily. Commit to Him your passionate desire to know and obey His Word. Ask Him to guide your feet moment by moment and day by day so that you do not depart from the right path.