

Week #:	88	Series:	Walking with God in the Desert	Title:	Session 7: There's Hope in the Desert
Text:	Revelation 7:16-17; John 7:37-38; Genesis 2:8; Jeremiah 2:13; Revelation 22:1-2; John 4:10-14; Jeremiah 17:13; John 7:37-39; Isaiah 32:2; John 7:10, 14; John 7:37; John 7:37-38; Isaiah 32:2; John 7:38; John 4:14				
Songs:	Trust In You – Lauren Daigle (3:30)				
	Blessed Be Your Name – Chris Tomlin (3:49)				
	Medley: I Sing Praises, I Just Want to Praise You, We Exalt Thee – Reggie Royal & Judah (10:24)				
Video:	Walking with God in the Desert: There's Hope in the Desert (Ray Vander Laan)				

Water was precious in ancient Israel (as it is to this day). Rain typically fell during five months of the year, and the Jordan River was Israel's only major river. For people living in these lands, thirst was more than a temporary discomfort; it was a frightening, life-threatening reality.

People survived much of the year by using water that had been channeled into cisterns during the rainy season and stored. The most prized sources of water, however, were springs that mysteriously flowed out of the rock and provided what the Israelites called "living water" – fresh, flowing water. They considered these constant streams of water to be water that the Lord Himself provided. Although they are very rare, springs in the desert were even more significant. When God's people were in the desert, these springs often made the difference between life and death.

Since 70% of the Promised Land is desert and some of the most significant events in Israel's history took place in desert regions, it is not surprising that Biblical writers often included references to water, thirst, and cisterns. They also created powerful metaphors of desert and "living water" to describe the experiences of God's people and their relationship with their God. Thus the harsh realities of desert life often represent the difficult and painful times when God's people struggle to Survive. In these deserts" life is hard, so the presence of God portrayed as "living water" is not just a beautiful image, but it satisfies our desperate thirst and gives us life. People cannot thrive in the deserts of life without God's "living water."

Interestingly, the restoration of shalom – Gods perfect peace, harmony – in the coming messianic age is distinguished by the absence of thirst. Consistent with the rest of scripture, the prophetic vision God gave John is built on the reality that God alone satisfies the thirst that overwhelms His people in their deserts.

Revelation 7:16-17

¹⁶ "They will never again be hungry, they will never again be thirsty, the sun will not beat down on them, nor will any burning heat. ¹⁷ "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will shepherd them, will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

Just as in ancient times when God provided precious water by rain, snow, and springs or by literally bringing water out of the rock when His people were in desperate need, He alone is the source of "living water" today. When His thirsty people call on Him, He provides life-giving water. Whatever thirst we may experience in our deserts – physical, emotional, relational, or even spiritual – God promises to provide according to His will. Whenever we, like panting deer or the thirsty desert traveler, cry out to Him, He meets us in our deserts. He comes to us like a spring of "living water" and sustains us as we walk the desert path. Eventually our journey through earthly deserts will lead to heaven, the eternal Promised Land, where there will be no more deserts and no more thirst.

John 7:37-38

³⁷ Now on the last day of the festival, Hoshana Rabbah, Yeshua stood and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him keep coming to me and drinking! ³⁸ Whoever puts his trust in me, as the Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow from his inmost being!"

Most of us have a vision of what we would like our life to be. Whether or not our present life matches our hope, we long to experience and feel certain things. In our relationship with God, for example, we long for true intimacy – to trust Him, know Him, walk with Him, and enjoy the abundant and gracious provision He promises.

1. When you find yourself walking a desert path of suffering, hardship, or sorrow, what happens to your hope?

2. To what extent do the hardships of your path define your hope, perhaps even causing it to vanish like a drop of water on desert sand? _____

3. To what extent does your hope flow into your desert experience and shape your walk on the path? _____

(Watch DVD)

4. En Gedi, set against the backdrop of an extremely dry and rugged desert, is an amazing sight. How does the image of En Gedi being a sanctuary in the Judean Wilderness help you to picture God being a sanctuary in your deserts?
5. Does God’s presence with you in your deserts make as great a difference as the springs of En Gedi do in the desert wilderness? Should it? Why or why not?
6. What are your thoughts about asking God to give us the right kind of feet to travel the paths He has chosen for us rather than asking Him to make our paths easier?
7. Imagine choosing cistern water (remember the stagnant pools left after floods in the wadi?) over the fresh, clear, flowing waters of En Gedi! In what ways do we sometimes do this when we ignore God and the springs of living water He provides?
8. How has this video helped you to see what we are really choosing when we make such a choice?
9. What have you discovered through this series of desert lessons that stands out in your mind as a picture of how God is with you and will express His love to you during your own desert experiences?

When God’s ancient people experienced life’s painful, difficult deserts they needed the hope of His presence and provision. During those times, as expressed in the figurative language of the Bible, God became their rock, shade, shelter, shepherd, bread, and water. The water of God is living water, fresh, flowing, invigorating water that He causes to flow out of even the hardest rock in the scorching desert. By drinking in His healing presence, symbolized by living water, His thirsty people find the strength to continue walking the path He has chosen for them. It is no different for us. We also experience painful, difficult deserts for which we need the healing presence of God’s living water.

10. What is associated with God’s presence in each of the following passages and what does it provide for people in the desert? [Genesis 2:8; Jeremiah 2:13; Revelation 22:1-2] _____

11. Since water is essential for sustaining physical life in the desert, what might be the consequences of turning away from the presence of God when we face desert experiences? _____

12. Which images did Isaiah use to describe the overflowing abundance of God’s presence in the desert, and what would result from it? _____

John 4:10-14

¹⁰ Yeshua [Jesus] answered her, “If you knew God’s gift, that is, who it is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink of water,’ then you would have asked him; and he would have given you living water.”

¹¹ She said to him, “Sir, you don’t have a bucket, and the well is deep; so where do you get this ‘living water’? ¹² You aren’t greater than our father Ya’akov [Jacob], are you? He gave us this well and drank from it, and so did his sons and his cattle.” ¹³ Yeshua [Jesus] answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty again! On the contrary, the water I give him will become a spring of water inside him, welling up into eternal life!”

13. When Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, what did He say about the thirst we experience in this broken world, and how does it differ from the living water He offers? _____

14. As you think about your relationship with Jesus, how would you define the water that He offers, and how does a person “drink” it in? _____

Jeremiah 17:13

¹³ Hope of Isra’el, Adonai! All who abandon you will be ashamed, those who leave you will be inscribed in the dust, because they have abandoned Adonai, the source of living water.

John 7:37-39

³⁷ Now on the last day of the festival, Hoshana Rabbah, Yeshua stood and cried out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him keep coming to me and drinking! ³⁸ Whoever puts his trust in me, as the Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow from his inmost being!” ³⁹ (Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who trusted in him were to receive later — the Spirit had not yet been given, because Yeshua had not yet been glorified.)

15. During the Feast of Sukkot, during the time the prayers for water were offered, who did Jesus invite to come to Him and why? _____

16. What amazing claim did He make in light of the prophet Jeremiah’s words? _____

Isaiah 32:2

² A man will be like a refuge from the wind, like protection from a storm, like streams of water on arid ground, like a rock cliff shading a weary land.

17. When we experience great thirst in life's deserts and come to Jesus to drink in His living water – His words, His love, and His presence – what do we become in relationship to other people? _____

THE FEAST OF SUKKOT

After the fall harvest, the Israelites celebrated the Feast of Sukkot (also called the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths). It was a time to be especially thankful for God's blessings. Following God's command, His people came to Jerusalem and built booths of olive, palm, and myrtle branches (Nehemiah 8:15) that provided shade. They were to leave enough space between the branches that they could see the sky and be reminded of their years in the desert.

These booths (sukkot – plural of sukkah) gave the feast its name. For seven days, the people lived, ate, and slept in these booths and rejoiced before God, praising Him for His gifts of freedom, land, and bountiful harvests.

Sukkot took place at the end of the dry season, and rain was needed immediately to ensure a bountiful harvest the following year. So the celebration of God's harvest was coupled with fervent prayers for next year's rain. During a special ceremony that included prayers for rain, priests marched from the Temple to the Pool of Siloam, which was fed by the "living water" flowing from the Spring of Gihon. A priest filled a golden pitcher with water, and the procession returned to the Temple. Then the priest solemnly poured this water into one of two silver funnels leading into the stone altar used for daily drink offerings. At this time, the people – accompanied by the Levitical choir – began a chant that means, "O Lord, save us by sending rain as well." Imagine the joyful noise!

During Sukkot, four huge menorahs (more than seventy-five feet tall) were erected in the women's court of the Temple. These commemorated the small amount of sacred oil that burned miraculously for eight days in the menorah in the Holy of Holies after Judah Maccabee defeated the Greek army of Antiochus and reclaimed Jerusalem. Light from these could be seen from every house in Jerusalem.

In the context of Sukkot, the water ceremony, and the menorahs blazing with light, Jesus presented the message of His kingdom to great crowds thronging the Temple in Jerusalem (John 7:10, 14). On the "last and greatest day of the Feast" (John 7:37), against the backdrop of the water ceremony, Jesus proclaimed: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37-38). His words must have had a stunning impact.

Jesus knew well the thirst that overwhelms people in the desert. He came to live among us and offer us the living water that satisfies our thirst. He also willingly became thirsty on our behalf. In a poignant declaration of His own desert, He suffered on the cross, He said, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28; Psalms 69:21).

Jesus is now reunited with the Father, but Matthew 25:31-46 suggests that He continues to identify with our deserts of hunger, thirst, nakedness, loneliness, and illness: "Whatever you did for one of the least... you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). In response to these deserts, He wants those who follow Him – those of us who have been filled to overflowing with His living water – to partner with Him in bringing His shalom (peace, harmony) to our broken

world. He wants us to live up to His promise (Isaiah 32:2; John 7:38) and be living water for people around us who suffer in the desert.

18. When your deserts overwhelm you, where do you turn for help, and how deeply do you drink the living water of Jesus' words, love, and presence? _____

19. If you are drinking it, in what ways does it satisfy your thirst? If you are not drinking it, what keeps you from doing so? _____

20. How encouraging it is to you that Jesus also experienced the thirst of desert times, so that He knows both the struggle and pain of your physical needs and your spiritual thirst? _____

21. When have you been refreshed by living water from a person who walked closely with Jesus and was filled to overflowing with it? In what ways did God use that person to refresh and restore you? _____

22. How great a priority is it for you to be living water for other people, and in what ways do you do this? _____

23. It is nearly impossible to imagine the spiritual desert, as evidenced by His thirst, that Jesus experienced when He was separated from God the Father because of the sins He bore on the cross for us. In what ways is a broken relationship with God a vast and dreadful desert? _____

24. What does it mean to you that Jesus was willing to go into the desert in order to be living water for you? _____

25. When have you, or someone close to you, experienced a dreadful spiritual desert, and what difference did the living water of God make at the time? _____

26. How might you encourage people around you to drink the living water of Jesus so that they will never again experience the thirst of separation from God? _____

John 4:14

¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty again! On the contrary, the water I give him will become a spring of water inside him, welling up into eternal life!"