



underthefigtree

WILD PLACES IN OR OUT

A Discussion Guide for Individuals and Groups

IN OR OUT

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It is a familiar plot; a ravaging storm forces the crippled plane down into a raging sea. The survivors miraculously wash up on a deserted island. At first the island is rescue, a paradise! Soon it's clear - this is no utopia. With the passage of time what appeared initially as rescue and reprieve is now looking increasingly risky; poisonous snakes, lack of food, and hostile natives.

"We must leave and I have a plan!" declares the leader. Their lives at risk, desperate for home, tired of the oppressive island, and fearful of its inhabitants the idea at first sounds good and hopes begins to grow. Then reality settles in; how can they possibly leave? True, on the island death is imminent, but how can they possibly survive the vast, unpredictable ocean? Their death is certain. Each survivor struggles with their reality; being trapped between a rock and a hard place and their answer to the pressing question: Are you in – or – out?

This is much like the situation our Hebrew ancestors faced as Moses came with his message of deliverance. Egypt may mean brutal slavery, the death of infant sons, and the scorn of Pharaoh but at least they are alive... for the time being. Moses' alternative gets everyone out of Egypt but leads into the wilderness – how can that possibly save us? In Egypt there is food and water – in the wilderness there is certain death. Moses, are you sure God wants to save by going into the wilderness?



“SEE WITH YOUR EYES, HEAR WITH YOUR EARS, AND SET YOUR HEARTS ON EVERYTHING I AM GOING TO SHOW YOU, FOR THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE. THEN TELL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL EVERYTHING YOU SEE.” EZEKIEL 40:4



THE TEXT

Before you watch this session read the following passages:

Job 23:8-12

Psalms 77:10-20

Psalms 23

Hebrews 11:13-16 & 11:23-12:3

THE TEACHING

Watch the video “In or Out”. If time allows, we recommend that you or your group review the following background information below before continuing with the talking points.



THE BACKGROUND

Egypt was an incomparable economic powerhouse whose influence was far reaching. It is not possible to overstate Egypt's power, wealth, and influence. To this day, remnants of Egypt's economic strength and fertility are impossible to overlook. Temples, statues, tombs, storehouses, and of course the pyramids were built to show the world just how powerful and wealthy they truly were.

The source of their power was the ability to produce food. The extensive reach of the Nile bathed Egypt in fertility. The floodplains of the Nile created a natural irrigation system giving Egypt the ability to produce and trade massive quantities of food. In the right hands Egypt was impervious to famine; indeed, Egypt during periods of famine was the breadbasket of the ancient world. This abundance of food brought Jacob and his sons to Egypt. When the seven lean years passed the Hebrews understandably remained in Egypt and there gained in strength and number. They grew so much so that in time Egypt's leaders became unsettled. In a land where more means: MORE and bigger means: BETTER, the fact that Hebrews were beginning to become "more" and outnumber Egyptians was no small thing. Something must be done.

What was first rescue, this land of fertility and affluence, was now becoming a threat to the very existence of the people of Israel. Enslaved, oppressed, and embittered the Hebrew people endured among Egyptians. One more background fact, the Egyptians were deeply spiritual and proudly claimed their pantheon of gods, almost 1,400 in all, as the source of their protection and provision. Interestingly, with all the deities none noticed their hardship nor heard the cries of the Hebrew people. But there was one who did hear - the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... the I AM. "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering" Exodus 3:7. God's concern would be experienced by His deliverance, but His deliverance would be into and through the wildest of places – the wilderness.

Are you in... or... out?



THE TALKING POINTS



- 1 George reflects on Job and his God-initiated “wild place”. Review Job’s story by scanning Job 1- 2:10; how wild of a place was Job in and how did he get there? Like Job, God tends to build our faith in unexpected places and work in unpredictable ways. What has been an unexpected “place” where God has shaped you? How have you been able to look back and see how you “came forth as gold”?
- 2 Hebrew, like English, has a word for “trust” and a word for “faith”. What is the difference between “trust” and “faith”? Some scholars view God’s use of the ten plagues to achieve a number of objectives, not the least of which to build the trust of the Hebrews to follow the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Out of this trust God grows faith. Comment on the following; “There seem to be many Christians who claim to have faith in God, but have a difficult time trusting Him; if they did trust wouldn’t you think they’d be more eager to follow?” Hebrews 11 states “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1) As people of faith, should it be so difficult to trust God and follow him? In what ways would a wilderness or wild place cause us to be sure of what we hope for?
- 3 George describes the wilderness as being the place “where all is stripped away and there is nothing except you & God”. It is there that some of the most honest conversations with God can take place. There are those who have endured the wilderness of disease, unemployment, etc. and now reflecting back say, “I wouldn’t trade it for the world.” How can we walk alongside people during their wilderness while not robbing them of this time with God? How would you like us to walk with you through your wilderness?
- 4 The contrast could not have been greater -- the lushness and fertility of Egypt and the bleakness of the harsh wilderness. Are you in – or are you out? This is a question every Christ follower has had to answer. Read Luke 12:8-9, how important is it that one decides? Would you be willing to share when, where, and the circumstances of your decision for Christ? Was “wilderness” involved?
- 5 Read 1 Peter 1:6-9. What strikes you most about this passage and your discussions so far? What is your favorite part of this passage and why? What are the most challenging parts of Peter’s words of encouragement?

THE TASK

Here are some challenges for you as you reflect and apply this lesson:

- * Memorize Job 23:8-10. Make it a goal within your group that the next time you meet, you can say the words of this passage together.
- * Re-read Talking Points 2 and 3 and write out your answers in a journal. Use your journal to talk honestly with God about your wilderness experiences and how he has shaped you and may continue to shape you.
- * Write a prayer list of people you know who may be going through a wilderness experience. Ask God how you can best serve them without robbing them of their wilderness. Perhaps write a note of encouragement or provide a listening ear.
- * “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” We strive to be people of faith. Take time to reflect on what God is doing in your life to build trust and grow faith. Reflect on those situations and circumstances where God is calling you to risk so that you might trust Him more.

