

Practice Guide for March 10th 2024

Into the Wilderness, pt. 3—Grow in the Dark

Suggested Ice Breaker (10 minutes)

Spotlight

Have the group gather in a circle with the lights dimmed or turned off completely.

- The person in the middle points a flashlight beam (from a flashlight or phone) at a chosen random person. Whoever is in the Spotlight, must dance, sign, tell a joke, or perform in some other way.

Possible Variations:

- The person with the flashlight can draw from a basket with suggestions for performance.
- The first person spotlighted starts a story and each person must add a sentence to it until it comes full circle.

Opening (5 minutes)

Before beginning, open the meeting time with 2 minutes of silence to help you focus on interaction with God and one another. At the end, ask someone to open the gathering time with prayer asking for openness to God's guiding light even in our darkest times.

Question for the group: Growing up were you afraid of the dark? What are some memories of when you were scared (of the dark or otherwise) you that you look upon now and laugh about?

Reflecting On Scripture (20 minutes)

Read 1 Samuel 22:1-2 and 24:1-6, silently or out loud, and reflect on the following questions.

Questions for discussion:

1. What do you think were some of the emotions and thoughts that David was wrestling with during his time in the wilderness caves?
2. How do you relate to the feeling of being in a “wilderness” or “dark night of the soul”?
3. In what ways can our dark seasons strip us down to our true selves and our dependence on God?
4. David had the opportunity to eliminate his enemy but chose restraint. Have you ever had a moment where you had to choose between an easy path and the right path? How did you make your decision?

Community Practice (20 minutes)

Take 5-7 minutes on your own to prayerfully journal your response to the following questions:

- Reflect on a time when you felt like you were in a wilderness or dark season. Describe the situation briefly. What were the main challenges or feelings you encountered?

- What did this wilderness season teach you about trust, patience, and surrender to God's timing? Are there specific instances where you saw God's hand at work, even if it wasn't immediately apparent?
- Reflect on the ways this season of wilderness has contributed to your spiritual growth. How has it shaped or is shaping your character to be more Christ-like?
- David found physical refuge in caves and spiritual refuge in his faith. Where do you find refuge during your wilderness seasons? How does your place (or persons) of refuge help you to cope and grow?

Share and explain your answers in groups of 2 or 3.

Gather back together as a group and have someone read the following quote out loud:

"It is only in the heat of pain and suffering, both mental and physical, that real human character is forged. One does not develop courage without facing danger, patience without trials, wisdom without heart- and brain-racking puzzles, endurance without suffering, or temperance and honesty without temptations. These are the very things we treasure most about people. Ask yourself if you would be willing to be devoid of all these virtues. If your answer is no, then don't scorn the means of obtaining them. The gold of human character is dug from torturous mines, but its dung and dirt are quite easily come by. And it should come as no surprise to us that in our time—the time of the great flight from pain—such virtues as these are conspicuous only by their absence." —Dallas Willard

Group Discussion:

- As a community, how can we support each other in our cave seasons?
- Reflect on the idea that "our primary calling is to the character of Christ." How does this perspective change the way we view our wilderness seasons?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Have one person close in prayer, and/or slowly read aloud this prayer from the Puritan "Valley of Vision":

*Let me learn by paradox
that the way down is the way up,
that to be low is to be high,
that the broken heart is the healed heart,
that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,
that to have nothing is to possess all,
that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
that to give is to receive,
that the valley is the place of vision.
Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from the deepest wells,
and the deeper the wells the brighter the stars shine;
Let me find thy light in my darkness,
thy life in my death,
thy joy in my sorrow,
thy grace in my sin,
thy riches in my poverty,
thy glory in my valley. Amen.*