

Why the Desert?

I remember a grade-school teacher asking, "how can you remember the difference between "desert" (the sandy place with no water) and "dessert" (like delicious chocolates)? To which she replied, "desert" (the sandy kind) only has ONE letter 's' and "dessert" (the yummy, sweet kind) has TWO of the letter 's', and we all like desserts more than we like the desert."

While this has been a helpful reminder of how to differentiate 'desert' from 'dessert', it also illustrates a great point: we despise the desert seasons of our lives. If we could, we would all choose one tasty dessert after another. But these dry and weary, often unbearable, times are worth more than we realize.

In fact, throughout Scripture we find numerous people being taken to the desert on their journey with God. Not always a literal desert, although sometimes it is. So why the desert?

Here are some possible reasons for the desert, and some related Scriptures to consider:

1. Sometimes the desert is literally a PLACE OF REFUGE.
A time away from current, painful surroundings and circumstances.
 - Hagar and Ishmael found refuge from Sarah in the Desert of Paran (Genesis 21.1-21)
 - David often fled for safety in the refuge of the valleys and caves (see 1 Samuel 20-21)
2. The desert is often a SEASON OF INITIATION AND PREPARATION.
 - Moses met with God at the burning bush in "the far side of the desert" (Exodus 3)
("out in the desert" is a common meeting place between Moses and God)
 - The Israelites endured a season of testing in preparation for The Promised Land (see Exodus 16 and Hebrews 3.8).
 - Even Jesus, after he was baptized, was "led by the Spirit to be 'tested and tried' by the devil" (Matthew 4.1).
 - Paul went to Arabia (a place of desertion) for three years prior to his public ministry (Galatians 1.17-24).
3. These times of trial are meant to further DEVELOP OUR CHARACTER
 - Sometimes we endure hardship to help us grow up and gain the capacity to hear from and gain wisdom from God (James 1.2-5).
4. Sometimes God takes us to the desert to strip us of everything we hold onto, so we can FALL IN LOVE WITH GOD all over again.
 - Psalm 107 is a beautiful picture of this.

Some thoughts and questions:

If God is in the desert, why do I despise these times so much?

When other people are going through a desert experience, maybe God doesn't want me to "fix them" or get them out. Maybe I should just walk with them while they learn to meet with God. How should this affect what we offer others?

Maybe we grow more by asking questions than we do by trying to answer all the questions.

Are you in need of some 'time away'? Do you need to leave everything behind and just go spend time with God for an hour today, or a weekend this month?

What is God doing in your life right now?

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