

Getting the Nod

Video Clip: **Carriers**

Well, we sure find ourselves in a sober moment. These are uncertain times around the world and fears are rising. People who have never felt anxious before are suddenly weighed down with worry and are not sure what to do next.

Do YOU need encouragement right about now? Are you feeling anxious and uncertain? Do you find yourself in a season of isolation as our events cancel, schools shift online, and churches close their doors to large gatherings?

When I need to stay calm, I have to turn to this Scripture: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7, NIV).

Are you anxious? Then set your affections on things above!!! Set your heart on the God who not only delivers us in times like this... but also loves us unconditionally. Right now... be intentional with your affections toward the One who extends grace... even though we don't deserve it!

Illustration of Impulsive Affection: I read about a young man who was determined to win the affection of a lady who refused to talk to him anymore. **He decided that the way to win her heart was through the mail, so he began writing her love letters.** He wrote **a letter every day** to this lady. **Six days a week the postal service delivered a letter to this lady.** Still not responding, he increased his romantic deliveries to **three notes every 24 hours.** In all, **he wrote more than 700 love letters, and what did she do? She married the mailman!!!**

That, my friends, is an example of unintentional affection. The mailman benefited from someone else's pursuits.

No one accidentally bumps into God's love. He isn't pursuing someone else and you happen to see it. He is pursuing you and me. Everyone is an object of God's love and none of us are on the “B” team of God's affections.

He loves us... flaws and all. He's not looking for something better (even though He helps us become better), He penetrated earth's atmosphere because He loves you; He created you; He desires you; and He proved it to us... through grace! That my friend is the most valuable reality you will ever hear.

Transitional Statement: And how does grace help in these uncertain times? In other words, with stress all around us... what does God tell us in scripture to do in times like these? Well, maybe knowing that Jesus also handled stress can teach us personal lessons at this moment in history!

Making It Fit

Yes, you heard me right... Jesus had stress! We know that Jesus was both God AND man! So, His humanity was tested by stress...

- **He had stress in the Garden of Gethsemane!** He was about to experience betrayal, punishment, ridicule, and literally prayed so hard that His sweat drops were mixed with blood.
- **He had stress during His trial and abuse!** Mocked and physically punished, dragged from palace to palace, bearing the weight of sin... He had to have suffered stress.
- **And another time of stress was in the wilderness.**

Transitional Statement: In Luke 4 we the details of this story...

God's Take

The background of this story:

- Jesus has just been **baptized in the Jordan River** by John the Baptist.
- **The Holy Spirit leads** Jesus into the wilderness where for 40 days He ate nothing and was hungry... as well as tempted by the Devil.
- **In three different temptations, the devil tries to confound Jesus.**
 - The first temptation extended is to turn stones into bread.
 - the second was to take Jesus up on a high mountain and offer Him the world if He would just worship the tempter.
 - The third was to test the promises of God by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and see if the angels catch Him.
- **After Jesus responded to all three temptations with Biblical rebuttals...** He rebuked Satan and then **God the Father ended the stress by sending angels** to care for Jesus.
- **The connection to us is this... this wilderness experience was a test of faith and trust. Right now, we are in the wilderness of testing and are we going to trust the outcome with our faith?**

What is the wilderness? How does Jesus' wilderness speak to us?

1. It is the battleground of our spiritual journey.

- **When trusting God becomes the challenge... that's spiritual wilderness.** Trusting God with provisions; trusting God with keeping His promises; and trusting God with the entire outcome of the economy and the potential of this virus.
- **Abraham had to trust God** with his future and destiny.
- **Noah** had to trust God with his calling.
- **Joseph** had to trust the Lord with his uncertain future.
- David trusted / the three Hebrew young men in the fiery furnace trusted / Daniel trusted. **Are we going to trust God? The resume to trust is pretty impressive!**

2. It is the place where the Holy Spirit leads us.

- **Jesus didn't just wander into the wilderness and bump into the devil...** He was led into it by God the Holy Spirit. **Why?** To prepare Him for the next three years of ministry.
- **When David fought the lion and the bear in the fields...** he was being prepared for Goliath.
- **When the disciples faced storms on the Sea of Galilee...** they were being prepared for the storms that would come as they were building the Church.

- **Even though this is a time of difficulty...** the Holy Spirit is leading us... THE CHURCH. This is a time when the church is being tested to see if we are who we say we are. **This time is a time of preparation for us...** Are we going to rise to the occasion and be the church?
- **Jesus was stronger in His 3 years of ministry because He had already defeated the enemy in the wilderness. I believe this is our opportunity to see the church touch the world in a real way!!! Let's trust the lead of the Holy Spirit.**

3. It is where we learn to depend upon God.

- **Jesus responded to every test with the dependence on God and His Word!!**
- **Joshua depended on God** to lead the nation of Israel.
- **Moses lacked people skills...** but depended on the One He met at the burning bush.
- **Elijah depended on God...** when he stood alone against the Baal Prophets. **Let's Depend on heaven... not the human!**

4. It is where priorities are made accurate.

- **When in the wilderness,** priorities simplify. When Jesus was tempted by bread... He chose to trust His Father with providing it.
- **When Jesus had a chance to take a short cut around the cross...** He chose to depend upon God.
- **When Jesus was tempted to test God's protection...** He chose trust over test.
- **Let's not clutter our lives with fear and anxiety... let us simply set our affections above.**

Transitional Statement: But, where do we find grace in the wilderness? Where are we to go in order to see God at work around us? I feel that Psalm 91 can show us the way here...

Now What?

NLT - Psalm 91:1-6 1 Those who live in the shelter of the Most-High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 This I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. 3 For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. 4 He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection. 5 Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day. 6 Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness...

Where do we find overcoming grace in the wilderness?

1. **In the shadow of God's presence.** (This is a description of prayer and proximity. "Shelter" is an intimacy and a military reference. We will find God's undeserving favor and rest as we get intimate with Him! And He will then defend us when under the attacks of the enemy!!!)
2. **Under the cover of His wings.** (This is a description of protection and perception. The word for cover in the Hebrew text literally means to "Hedge in" and to "block the approach of something". By living in close proximity with God, He is going to build a hedge of protection around us and stop that which threatens us.)
3. **In knowing how this wilderness journey ends.** (This is describing prophecy and promise. We will survive the wilderness because we know the end of the story)

(NLT) Psalm 91:9-11 - 9 If you make the LORD your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, 10 no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home. 11 For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go.

Transitional Statement: Let me share a final story that relates to Grace in the Wilderness...

Draw the Net

Illustration of a Father's Protection: A FATHER'S PROTECTION

In certain Native American tribes there's a rite of passage for their teenage boys into adulthood. At age 13 a boy would be blindfolded and led to a certain spot in the woods. He would be forced to sit down while the men of the tribe returned to their camp. The boy would be required to sit all night with his blindfold in place. He was forced to listen to the frightening sounds of the night. Once he felt the warmth of the sun as it rose in the east, he was allowed to remove his blindfold.

The first thing he saw when he removed it was his father sitting across from him. The boy's father would sit with him all night, protecting him from the animals of the wilderness, yet he was not seen by his son.

You may not see God right now... or sense His presence... but he is with you in all this uncertainty!

Get in close proximity with Him,

Let our faith perceive His protection,

And never forget that He will never leave you or forsake you... even now.