

The background of the cover is an aerial photograph of a vast, cracked, and dry lake bed. The ground is a mix of dark and light brown tones, with a complex network of white and light-colored cracks forming irregular, polygonal shapes across the entire surface. The horizon line is straight and divides the image roughly in half. Above the horizon, the sky is filled with soft, white and light blue clouds, with a darker blue area at the very top, possibly representing a mountain range or a different part of the sky.

WALKING
IN THE
WILDERNESS

A 7-DAY DEVOTIONAL

by Kristel Acevedo

WALKING IN THE WILDERNESS

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever found yourself in the wilderness? What does that mean exactly?

I often refer to the years 2011-2017 as my wilderness years. Six years in which I felt confused, frustrated, and lost. I remembered those years with disdain. In fact, for a while I didn't like remembering those years at all. I wanted to put them out of my mind and forget. If you've ever walked through a difficult season, I bet you've had similar feelings.

But then I read a verse that changed my entire perspective. It was Luke 1:80, "The child grew up and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel." This verse is about John the Baptist. We'll talk more about him on Day 5 of this devotional, but this is the verse that helped me see the wilderness was not just an inconvenient detour on my journey in life, the wilderness is a place where I could become strong in spirit if I let it.

I became curious about other people in Scripture who walked through the wilderness. Turns out, there's a lot! We can learn from their stories and see how God works powerfully in the wilderness.

I pray that this devotional will bring some comfort to you. I know the pain of wilderness seasons. I've walked through periods of darkness and doubt. It's not easy, but there is comfort in God's Word and there is comfort in walking with others. You don't have to do it alone, let's do it together.

Each day we will start with a Scripture reading introducing us to someone's wilderness story. Then we'll think through what we learn about God and ourselves through this reading. At the end, I encourage you to pray and journal. This is a powerful way to allow God the space to speak directly to our hearts. My prayer is that by the end of this week you will have renewed strength and energy — that you will remember God has a plan and a purpose.

In Him,

Kristel Acevedo

DAY 1: ADAM AND EVE IN THE WILDERNESS

Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:4-24, Genesis 3:1-24

God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden. Do you ever wonder what the Garden was like? I'm a plant lady. I love having plants all around my home. The different shades of green are beautiful to me. I also like sitting outside in nature with the sun gleaming on my face. I imagine the Garden of Eden was beautiful beyond our imagination — colorful and vivacious.

Then I think about the wilderness. Going from the Garden to the wilderness must have been a shock for Adam and Eve. No more trees filled with fruit. No more sweet-smelling flowers.

Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden because of their own sin. It wasn't that God didn't love them anymore. In fact, He loved them so much that He provided coverings for their nakedness and gave them a hopeful promise — that one day their offspring would crush the serpent.

Still, sin comes with consequences. For Adam and Eve, they had to go into the wilderness. Have you ever encountered a difficult season as a result of your sin? It's painful. You may be overwhelmed with guilt and the question of, "what if?" You may question your standing with God and even your own salvation. When I was a young Christian I prayed the "sinner's prayer" almost every week. I thought that if I was really saved I wouldn't be choosing sin over and over again. Shouldn't I know better?

But sanctification is a process. When we say yes to Jesus, we must practice spiritual habits that help us to grow in our holiness. We will stumble along the way, but that doesn't mean God has turned His back on us. It's not what we do or don't do that saves us, it's what Jesus has done. Take comfort in that.

I also realized that God's discipline is love in action. Psalm 94:12 says, "LORD, how happy is anyone you discipline and teach from your law." In verse 14, the psalmist continues, "the LORD will not leave his people or abandon his heritage, for the administration of justice will again be righteous and all the upright in heart will follow it."

As difficult as the Lord's discipline can be, it actually is good and can redirect us so that we do not continue on the path of unrighteousness. God loves us too much for that. He wants to free us from sin, death, and evil so that we can be freed to live happy and whole lives.

If you're experiencing a wilderness season as a result of sin, what is your next step? Have you repented? Have you asked God what He wants you to learn in this season? Have you redirected your steps? Take time to pray and journal before ending your time today.

DAY 2: HAGAR IN THE WILDERNESS

Scripture Reading: Genesis 16:1-13; Genesis 21:8-21

The story of Hagar fills me with tension. Upon first reading I feel angry on her behalf. She has done nothing wrong except exist. She was taken advantage of and discarded into the wilderness. The people who were supposed to care for her, didn't. They failed. I feel compassion for her situation. But there's more to her story.

I read a book from Karen Gonzalez called *The God Who Sees*. In it she says, "Hagar becomes the first person in the Bible to receive an annunciation—an appearance, or special message, from God—and the first to give God a name." The name is El-Roi and it means "God sees me."

I found this revelation to be powerful. I don't know about you, but I have struggled with "feeling seen" for most of my life. I have a quiet disposition and wondered if anyone could actually hear or see me. I thought I was alone in feeling this way, but over the years I've learned that I'm not the only one who feels unseen. You've probably felt that way too.

Hagar's mistress treated her unfairly and it caused her to run away. Have you found yourself in a similar position? Walking through a wilderness not of your own doing, but because you were mistreated or disrespected, overlooked or underestimated. Walking through a wilderness questioning your own thoughts and actions. Asking yourself what you did wrong or what you could have done differently.

Sometimes we walk through the wilderness feeling utterly alone after experiencing pain from people who were supposed to be there for us. If that's you, I mourn with you because it's not supposed to be that way.

When Hagar ran away into the wilderness in Genesis 16, she was met by the angel of the Lord. He tells her that God has heard her cry. She realizes that even if no one else sees, God sees. He sees and He cares. It's the same for you and me. He sees us. He cares for our affliction. He empowers us to go back and face whatever hardship stands before us.

Later in Genesis 21 Hagar finds herself in the wilderness again, this time with her son, Ishmael. She doesn't want to be there. I wouldn't want to be there either. But God has not forgotten her. He sees her; and this time, He opens her eyes as well. "Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. So she went and filled the waterskin and gave the boy a drink." (Gen. 21:19 CSB) He provided for her in a sweet and simple way. He helped her to see that she is not alone, even in the wilderness.

What can you glean from Hagar's story? Who has wronged you and how can you see God's presence even in the pain? Have you opened your eyes to whatever God has for you in this wilderness season? Take time to pray and journal before ending your time today.

DAY 3: THE ISRAELITES IN THE WILDERNESS

Scripture Reading: Numbers 11:1-15; Number 21:4-9

God freed the Israelites after hundreds of years in slavery. They walked out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and camped out in front of Mt. Sinai ready to set out again. God has come through for them in miraculous ways. And yet, they grumble. They forget who God is and what He's done. From Numbers 11-21, we read about seven times Israel rebels against God.

Have you ever been there? Perhaps you've seen God show up for you in amazing ways. You have sung His praises and marveled at His works. But then time goes by and you start to forget. Another hardship comes along and you doubt that God can do it again. You start to worry or even get angry wondering, "why me?" You might even start to rebel.

Often when I read about the Israelites in the Bible, I'm dumbfounded by their rebellion. How could someone witness the Red Sea parting and still doubt? And yet, we read over and over about their grumbling against Moses and God. If I'm honest, however, that could be me. In fact, it has been me on many occasions and it could be me again in the future. I'll encounter a challenge and wonder how I'm supposed to get through it. I'll feel sorry for myself and grumble against God. I'll ask myself, "well, how in the world is this supposed to bring glory to God and good for me?!"

We're human and prone to forget. We get comfortable in our circumstances or distracted by the world. We start feeling superior only to be slapped in the face with another difficulty. It's in these moments that we must fight to remember who God is and what He has done for us. The more I think about it, the more I realize how much harder it must have been for the Israelites to remember. They had to look ahead and wonder how God would fulfill His covenant promise to Abraham to give Him a family from all nations and who the Messiah would be. We, however, get to look back at the cross and empty tomb. We know what Jesus did and how He fulfilled the Law. We have blessed assurance as we see what Christ has done and how He has saved us.

God is truly faithful — and His faithfulness is not dependent on us. When we're walking through our own wilderness, we can be led to a new and deeper level of trust in Him.

Do you struggle with trusting God when you're wandering the wilderness? How have you seen God's hand guiding you even when you felt lost? When have you seen God come through for you in the past? How can you deepen your trust in Him as you journey through your own wilderness? Take time to pray and journal before ending your time today.

DAY 4: ELIJAH IN THE WILDERNESS

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 19:3-18

Elijah was a prophet of Israel. Prophets were not fortune tellers, they were more like truth-tellers. As we read through the book of 1 Kings we see that the kings of Israel had not lived up to what they were supposed to do. They were not faithful to God. And so we are introduced to the prophets. Their role was to remind Israel of their purpose: to be a light to the nations and to worship Yahweh only.

Elijah was one of these prophets. He was very vocal against King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. He called Ahab out on his idolatry and injustice. He told him that soon his house would fall. In 1 Kings 18 they have a showdown between Ahab's god, Baal, and the one true God who Elijah served, Yahweh. Elijah prayed for God to show Himself and He did, by raining down fire on the altar Elijah built. It's a powerful story that you should take the time to read!

When Jezebel hears about what has happened, she is angry and promises to have Elijah killed. He becomes fearful and immediately runs for his life. He ends up going into the wilderness.

When I first learned of Elijah's experience in the wilderness, I felt in awe with the practical ways God cared for him. Elijah wanted to give up and die, but God wasn't having it.

Have you ever been there before? Overwhelmed with the struggles of life. Disheartened by the sin of this world. Ready for Jesus to come back. I know I have. Around the middle of 2021, we had been dealing with the pandemic for over a year. I had done my best to stay strong and keep going. I didn't want to admit to myself how difficult this all was. After all, there's no way I had it as bad as others who had gotten sick or lost their jobs or said good-bye to loved ones. I didn't want to complain. But I found myself listless. I was weary and tired all the time. I felt no joy, only dread and overwhelm.

It took me a while, but I finally admitted to myself and my husband that I was depressed. I needed to be cared for in the most basic of ways. I needed rest. I needed permission to feel and talk about what I feel. I needed a hot cup of coffee in the morning.

"Get up and eat." That's what the angel of the Lord told Elijah in the wilderness. "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you." Elijah got up, ate, and drank. He was strengthened and walked 40 days to Horeb, the mountain of God. There, he meets with God.

Reading these verses reminded me that God has us on a journey. We have been given a purpose and a mission. Not only that, He will strengthen us for the journey. He doesn't leave us on our own. He doesn't push us to get our stuff together. He doesn't tell us to quit complaining. He gently cares for us and provides our most basic needs.

When Elijah finally has his encounter with the LORD, we see how He can show up in unexpected ways. The Almighty God can show up in a soft whisper and commission you to continue on the journey.

What is God whispering to you? How does He want to strengthen you? Will you let Him? How will you let Him provide for you in the wilderness? Take time to pray and journal before ending your time today.

DAY 5: JOHN THE BAPTIST IN THE WILDERNESS

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:57-66; Luke 1:80; Luke 3:15-16

I've been waiting to be able to talk about John the Baptist. I love everyone's story that I'm sharing in these pages, but it was that one verse about John the Baptist that shattered my erroneous perspective of the wilderness.

"The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance."
(Luke 1:80)

When we see John the Baptist later in life, we see that he understood the assignment. Many people were following him and started to wonder if he could be the messiah. Rather than take any glory for himself and misleading the people, he told them, "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I am is coming." He knew his role in life was to simply point to Jesus.

I also think about Zechariah's prophecy. Zechariah was the father of John. After John was born, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave a prophecy. One of the things he said was, "And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins." (Luke 1:76-77)

I imagine that as John grew, his mother and father reminded him of his miraculous birth and the purpose of his life. I imagine they taught him the scriptures and told him of his relative, Jesus.

It was in the wilderness that John became spiritually strong. There was something about the wilderness that eliminated distractions and helped him to focus on his mission. It was there that he heard a word from God and began his ministry of baptizing in the Jordan River. He proclaimed that the Messiah was near.

When I think about my own wilderness experience, I realize how much God worked in me. In those years, He stripped away distractions until I could only focus on Him. I thought I knew what I wanted and I was mad when I didn't get it. But now I realize how my affections for God were waning as I pursued other loves. It was in the wilderness that my trust in God increased and my zeal for Him heightened. I got some perspective and realigned my purpose for my life with God's purpose for my life.

What is God calling you to? How have you veered off the path? How can your wilderness season make you spiritually strong? What can you learn from John the Baptist's story? Take time to pray and journal before ending your time today.

DAY 6: JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

Today's scripture reading starts off by telling us that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Whoa. That sounds terrifying to me. While in the wilderness, Jesus fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. This is when the tempter shows up.

Jesus and the devil go back and forth in the wilderness. The devil tries to tempt Him to give up His Kingdom, but Jesus responds with scripture until eventually, the devil leaves Him and Jesus is ministered by angels.

I can imagine that Jesus was tired, hungry, and weak after 40 days of fasting. After all, He was fully human. He experienced all of the same limitations we experience, but He walked in the Spirit always. He depended on the Spirit to strengthen Him. This is the same Spirit that we have access to today. The Counselor. The Helper. He lives in us and through us. We can learn to walk by the Spirit as Jesus did.

Jesus also used scripture to counter the devil's points. Even when Satan tried to misuse scripture in his favor, Jesus was not swayed. He knew the scriptures well and applied them accordingly. How well do we know the scriptures?

The Bible is vast and can feel intimidating. I get it. There are still portions of scripture that I come to with a big question mark on my face. That's okay. We can approach the Bible with curiosity, humility, and faith that God can reveal to us what we need to know when we need to know it. Reading the Bible is not about acquiring knowledge. It's not information that we're after, it's transformation.

The more we soak in the scriptures, the more we will be transformed. His Words will come to us as we sleep and as we wake and as we walk through our days. When the tempter comes to sway us away, we can remind him of what God's Word says.

The sweetest part of this story for me, is when the angels come to Jesus and begin to serve Him. God knows that facing temptation and saying no is hard, and I believe that He will minister to us in our obedience. He is good and kind.

What is your relationship with the scriptures? Do you spend time daily reading His Word? How can you begin to make Bible reading a priority? Who can you invite to read the Bible with you? Take time to pray and journal before ending your time today.

DAY 7: YOU IN THE WILDERNESS

Scripture Reading: Psalm 63

Over the last week we have seen various Biblical characters in their wilderness journeys. Today, I want to talk about you. How are you doing? What has God revealed to you about your journey? How has your perspective of the wilderness changed?

Psalm 63 is one of David's psalms from when he wandered the wilderness of Judah. David was not in a good place when this psalm was written. He was running for his life and found himself hiding out in the wilderness, alone and scared. And yet, he says, "my lips will glorify you because your faithful love is better than life." (Psalm 63:3)

As you read these verses today, stop and worship the Lord. That's it. Nothing else. Because whether we're walking in the wilderness or sitting in the sanctuary, He is good. He is faithful. He is worthy. Let's give Him all honor and praise.

Take time to write your own version of Psalm 63 in your journal today. Pray those words back to God.

Thank you for journeying with me over the last seven days. I pray that this devotional has been refreshing and eye-opening. And I'm praying for you on your wilderness journey. Remember, God is with you and He is shaping you into His likeness. Amen.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristel Acevedo is a wife, mom, and writer. She serves at Transformation Church in South Carolina where she gets to create resources and disciple others.

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Twitter & Instagram @KristelAce

www.kristelacevedo.com