

You are not alone!

Have you ever been in a “wilderness experience”? Odds are that you have. Maybe you are going through one right now, or will be in one in the near future. “Wilderness” is part of life. Songs, poems, books, and movies have tried to communicate the battles won and lost during these difficult seasons.

What if the main purpose of these “wilderness experiences” is not to take something out of us but to put something within? What if the most loving thing God can do at times is to allow difficulties into our lives? What if the love, grace, and acceptance that we all long for were best revealed to us in our own personal “wilderness experience”?

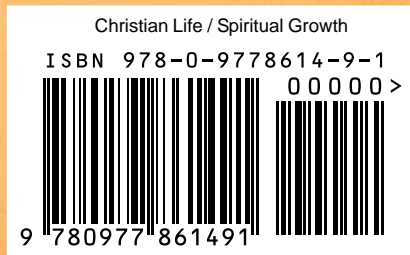
In this book, let us explore together the lessons and the love that God longs to pour into us as we journey “Through the Wilderness.”



James Krechnyak Jr. graduated from Elim Bible Institute in 1995. From there his life took several twists and turns with a mixture of working at home with youth and in a local coffee bar, training and staffing with YWAM (Youth With A Mission), and doing missions in places like Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Hungary, Jamaica, and Mexico. In 1999 he met Rachel, the woman of his dreams. They married in her homeland of Ireland and have remained there since working as missionaries with LGOM (Life Giving Outreach Ministries). In 2004, they church planted Portlaoise Family Worship Centre, and continue in that work to this day with their three children, Caleb, Benjamin, and Brianna.



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THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

JAMES KRECHNYAK JR.

In the difficulties of life,
God longs to reveal His love and grace

Through the Wilderness

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by James Krechnyak Jr.



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Through the Wilderness

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“And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the four most influential people in my life. They are my wife Rachel, my two sons, Caleb and Benjamin, and daughter, Brianna. There are so many others who have impacted me and who have imparted the message of this book, but these are the daily reminders to me of God's love and grace, as they teach me to rely on Christ in deeper and deeper ways.

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I would like to thank Keith Dowling for the personal photograph used on the back cover of the book.

Last but not least, I am so thankful to God, and the daily relationship that I have with Him. Through Him I have hope, and life has become worth living. Without Him I would have no message to write.

Contents

Section I: The Process in the Wilderness	9
Chapter One: The Start of God’s Process	10
Chapter Two: The Process Can Bring Pain	18
Chapter Three: Failure as Part of the Process	22
Chapter Four: The Beginning of the End	27
Section II: Lessons in the Wilderness	31
Chapter Five: Springs in the Wilderness	32
Chapter Six: Wilderness Breeds Fire	36
Chapter Seven: “I Need Rain, Not Storms”	41
Chapter Eight: “Don’t Stop, We’re Not There Yet”	45
Chapter Nine: Wilderness Brings Death	52
Chapter Ten: Wilderness Is Not Forever	62
Section III: Into the Promised Land	67
Chapter Eleven: Healing for the Soul	68
Chapter Twelve: From Rejection to Acceptance	74
Chapter Thirteen: All We Need Is Love	78
Chapter Fourteen: Greater Grace	86
Chapter Fifteen: Just Receive	92
Chapter Sixteen: Finding Purpose	98

Introduction

Jesus told stories. He used objects and situations of everyday life to create parables that communicated deep spiritual truths. For those who had an open heart to receive His words, they released something of eternity. Those words were as springs in the desert places. Those words still have the same impact two thousand years later for people who are willing to risk believing.

The Bible is very similar in its nature. It is a giant collection of stories, imagery, poetry, prophetic utterances, and historical facts, all designed to lead us in our journey into understanding what God is like and how we can know Him. One of the concepts brought forth in its pages is that of the *wilderness experience*. Some of those references are literal stories of those who wandered in these difficult terrains, and others are figurative examples of a process God wants to take us through in our lives.

For over a decade, my initial journey in knowing God seemed to be surrounded by wilderness-type experiences. While I had known the goodness of God at times in my life, I felt a long way from the life of abundance that the Bible spoke of. It seemed to taunt and elude me. Freedom was more of an idea and concept than a way of life. I felt like I was a prisoner in some sort of cage.

Over the years I have come to learn that I was not alone. Many have or have had the same story. The glories of eternity seem to be far from a present life full of struggle and disappointment. So much so, that some even consider why they became Christians. Was it just to live a life of misery trying to serve and lay one's life down for this God who demands righteousness and holiness?

God's message for us is that there is another way. There is life beyond the iron bars that hold us. There is hope.

To me, the wilderness has been a place of great difficulty and struggle, but also a place from which true life flows. In 1996, my perspective of what it means to be a Christian drastically changed. I was able to walk past the prison doors that surrounded my heart and I began to experience the abundant life I had always heard about.

To this day, I continue to feast on those revelations and what I learned in those difficult and sometimes despairing places of wilderness. There are times when I need to remind myself of those truths because I forget. There are seasons when God brings greater revelation than I already have, and so I let Him teach me. The adventure of knowing God never ends.

This book is my continuing journey into understanding what it means to *live by the life of Another* (see *Galatians 2:20*), and my path in knowing Him more. For it is in Him that we move out of the shadow world, that place where we have all come from, and to which none of us wants to return. The place that we all too often live, when true reality for those of us who know God should be outside the iron cage.

I pray that this book will encourage you in your adventure of knowing Christ, and the life that He has made available for you.



Section I

The Process in the Wilderness

Chapter One

The Start of God's Process

My Story...Beginnings

I was around the age of five when I became a Christian. I don't remember coming to an altar in a Church or saying a special "Salvation Prayer." I am sure that there must have been some *beginning* point, but in my memory, I only remember Jesus always being there.

This is the heritage that I was given from my parents. The Bible tells us that to be "Born Again" is a decision that each individual makes, and that it cannot be passed on from generation to generation. Neither can it be obtained through some intricate form of osmosis by growing up attending church. That's not the heritage that I am speaking about. My heritage is that my parents trusted in Jesus with their lives and committed themselves to raising us kids in an environment that illuminated the character and nature of God. That provided us at a very young age the chance to know God.

My parents did not have this same opportunity growing up. Their stories are a bit different. The scars from abusive homes are now the balm that God uses to bring healing to others. Abuse comes in many forms, but I believe one of the most deadly is that of "un-graceful" parents. That in short is what my parents experienced. The out-workings of "un-grace" manifest itself in many forms. Arms that never hug. Acceptance that is never spoken. Tears that are never collected. Words that tear down. Fear that is put in. Anger. Hate. Violence.

Many know this familiar road of rejection. Rejection builds walls around the heart, and the wounds of "un-graceful" parents

go deep. Where my parent's lives started in that place, I thank God that they did not end there.

The beginning of my story really starts with the beginning of my parents. The Bible tells us that when we are "Born Again," the old becomes new and that while we were dead in transgression and sin, in Jesus we become alive. So it was when I was just a little guy that my parent's life really began. It was then that they became alive.

It was the mid 1970's. My parents had grown up in Catholic homes, but that was the extent of their religion. There was no real sincerity. No personal relationship with Jesus. My mother's parents had been attending a Catholic Church that was experiencing the "Charismatic Movement," where many were being filled with the Holy Spirit and experiencing things similar to that in the book of Acts of the Bible. In time, my grandparents became the first in our family to come into a personal relationship with Jesus. In their zeal, they tried to get my parents to come to the Church and check it out, but they just ridiculed the idea.

On a weekend when my grandparents went out of town on vacation, my parent's curiosity got the best of them, and they went to the Church. The impact of it was so powerful that when my grandparents returned from vacation, my parents continued to go. It was the testimonies of changed lives that got my parents the most. Those who were in bondage to alcohol, drugs, depression, and rejection, were now free and enjoying a life of newness in Christ. Those people were not perfect, but my parents recognized the difference between those lives and their own. It was only a matter of time until they made their own decision to follow Jesus. I was soon to follow.

So what kind of relationship does a five year old have with Jesus? I didn't have the theology all worked out, or necessarily right, but Jesus said, "*Let the little children come unto Me.*" Even

in the times of Jesus, the disciples, those suppose to be nearest to Jesus, thought that children were just too young to understand the mysteries of God. And yet, Jesus tells us that unless we come unto Him as little children, there is no place for us in the Kingdom of heaven. Children can have the most simple and trusting sort of faith, that we many times lack as adults. And so was I simple in my faith. I heard, and just believed.

I remember being up at 5:30 in the morning as a young boy. I would climb into my dad's lap. He would be sitting in the large black leather chair that sat in the corner of our living room in front of the window. It was there that I would spend the next hour. My dad would have his Bible in hand, and I would have my 'Picture Bible'. I would read my way through that red hardcover book morning after morning, as it told me in its comic strip format, about the people of the Bible. Abel's offering that was accepted by the Lord. Noah's obedience to build the ark. David the shepherd boy. Paul and his journeys.

Life was simple but would soon be interrupted by a great change. School. When I started first grade my sister was already in fifth. We went to the same school. It was a Christian school run by the church we were going to. In the mornings we had chapel. It was in these chapel times I started to learn about hearing God. The microphone would be opened to any of us students who felt God was speaking something to share with the rest of the student body. I would go up at different times and share. Some weeks both my dad and I would get similar words that we felt were from God, and unknowing to each other, he would share them at the midweek prayer meeting and I would share them at school. It was not until people, who were at both meetings, told my parents that we learned this was going on. This relationship with God was pretty exciting!

I did well in school. I was a bit of a perfectionist, but we will get into some of that later. At the end of every school year, there was a big awards night, where students from grades first through

twelfth received academic awards for their accomplishments during the school year. My second grade year I received the highest award possible. I had the highest grade point average in all my combined subjects for the whole school! When I went up to receive my award, the principal announced that I had finished the year with a 97%. My struggle to hold back the tears erupted in an explosion of cries going back to my seat, because I thought I had done better and should have had a 98%!

These are some of the snapshots from my early childhood memories. They serve as mental photographs to help remind me of what God did in those early years. They also display events that paved the way for the pages of my life not yet filled. Life is a journey, and we must always remember that. God has a way of allowing it to make twists and turns in order to help us face truth. Revealing truth is what God does, and whether or not we live in that truth is our decision.

My first response to truth was to become a follower of Christ. And so, the journey begins.

It Starts with a Dream

In Genesis 37:5 it tells us, “*Joseph had a dream.*” In Genesis 37:9 it reads, “*Then he had another dream.*” The story continues with Joseph informing his family about the dreams, and that a day would come when they would all bow down to him. Not only did his dreams come across as arrogant, but they were a big claim coming from one of the youngest in the family. Little did Joseph know where those dreams would take him before he would see them come to fulfillment.

Most of us are similar to Joseph. God gives us some direction and we suddenly become the expert and go around letting everyone else know it. Something we at least tend to do when we are young.

God did speak to Joseph. The dreams would come to pass. But in his zeal, Joseph needed the wisdom to hold back the contents of those dreams. Zeal is good, but it will not get us to where we need to be. It can get us started, but it will take something more to get us beyond what lies ahead.

After Jesus finished His journey as a man on this earth, He left His disciples to carry the movement for spiritual awakening to the nations. The Jewish priests were jealous and wanted it stopped. They had seen the Truth in living reality, but refused to live by it. They even tried to destroy the Truth by killing it, but even that failed when Jesus rose from the dead.

On one occasion after beating the disciples and wanting to put them to death, a wise one stood among them and said that if what these disciples were saying was lies, the movement would eventually disintegrate. He knew zeal only had so much momentum. Only truth can sustain. And if what these men were about was truth, then they were in big trouble for fighting against it because *truth is God*.

There is another danger with zeal if it is disconnected from wisdom. It can take us away from the truth if we allow it. How many cults started with some *piece* of the truth that a group was passionate about emphasizing? Suddenly they were the only ones who knew anything.

God has ways of keeping us on target while revealing His truth to us. One way is through the obstacle of “time.” Things just don’t happen overnight. Delay to zeal can be like a bucket of water on a day when it is below zero. It begins to freeze.

Paul tells to young Timothy in ministry to hold fast to the words of prophecies spoken over him. Why? It was probably because it was going to get harder before easier. So when things get rough, and are not happening fast enough, just remember “how” and “why” you started in the first place.

The funny thing about truth is that deep inside we desire it, but many times we do everything we can possibly do to fight against it. So God pulls out stop number one: *delay*.

It has been said, “The larger the vision, the longer the process needed to build the character to sustain it.” To by-pass the process is to bring about certain ruin. “Time” will always be a very important ingredient in the mixture of our lives.

Joseph wasn’t the only one. Exodus 2:11-15 tells how Moses saw a Hebrew, one of his own people, being beaten by an Egyptian. In order to free the man from his suffering, Moses killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. The next day, Moses saw two Hebrews fighting and asked, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?”

In response, the Hebrew said, “Who made you ruler over us? Will you kill us as you killed the Egyptian?” By the tone of the Hebrew’s response to Moses, we can speculate that Moses had some indication that he was called to be the Hebrew deliverer or one of the deliverers, and was trying to act the part. The problem was that Moses had too much of Egypt (which represents the world’s system to us today) in him that still needed to be removed.

The pages of the Bible are full of stories of God’s process and preparation. They say to every story there are two sides. So instead of ending this Chapter with the heavy reality that God is developing character in lives, sometimes through some very difficult circumstances, let’s look at the “process of maturity” from a slightly different angle.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, *so that your*

youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103:1-5, italics added are mine).

I don't know if you have ever had the chance to view an eagle in flight as I have, but they are quite amazing birds. Eagles do something no other bird does. They soar. I have watched on a windy day the crows trying to push themselves into the wind, flapping their wings, almost in a panic to get anywhere (many times the same way we are when we are in any type of difficult circumstance). Even in a storm, the eagle has the ability to tilt its wings as the rudder of an airplane, and up they go, high above the storm. From there, they gain perspective and can soar with ease. God's heart for us is that our youth would be renewed like the eagle—free from striving and struggling with inconsistency.

An eagle, as do we all, goes through a "process of maturity" to get to that vantage point. It begins when they are young eaglets, and mother has them snuggled in her nest in the cliff of a mountain. All of the eaglet's needs are provided for by its mother. Then one day, she returns to the nest, but with no food. Soon she is doing something very illogical to an eaglet. She begins to tear the nest apart! And just when things couldn't get any worse, she pushes the eaglet to the cliff's edge!

Have you ever felt like that or been there before? Where is God when there is pain? Why do we have to go through what we do? If that eaglet does not learn how to fly, it will die. Eaglet doesn't know that, but loving mother does. So she pushes baby off the side of the mountain. But she doesn't leave eaglet to fend for itself. We read in Isaiah 40:31:

"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

As that eaglet falls, trying to flap its wings for the first time with little success, mother swoops down under little eaglet and

catches him or her on her wings and brings them back to the mountains edge. Then the process begins again, until at some stage, the eaglet learns to fly.

Our Father God is loving and kind, and allows things that bring pain to come in our path, only because He sees our end is death if we don't go through them. It is that perspective that can cause us to not only make it, but say as David in the midst of the storm, *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not His benefits!"*

There are two types of wilderness experiences. The first is because of some sin in our lives. The second comes just because we live in a fallen world. No matter the reason, God's desire is always the same. It is to bring about godly character and deeper intimacy with Him. Your God loves you passionately, and if you can see it, that revelation will sustain you through any wilderness.