



Into the Word:

Many people think that “getting God” would mean things would go blissfully well and that the Christian life was one of continual growth toward spiritual wholeness, with no setbacks or messes along the way. The hard truth is that God is not just about fixing people. God often comes to us most fully in our brokenness.

As Jeremy shared with us, Gideon and his people were in a state of brokenness. They were beaten down, conquered, and scared.

Think about the times when you have grown spiritually: What conditions led to the spiritual growth? Were they all uplifting and positive? Or have you grown best when your life was being challenged by painful circumstances? What were those circumstances? How did God use them to deepen your faith?

Read Exodus 17:1–7

When the Israelites entered the wilderness after their liberation from Egypt, they complained about lack of water. They wondered why God had rescued them from Pharaoh for this! They’d have rather returned to slavery than endure the dry and dreadful desert. But God had not abandoned the Israelites; in fact, he made provision for them, making water gush from a rock that came to be called Meribah, meaning quarrel, since they had quarreled with Moses over their living conditions.

Things seemed to be impossible for the Israelites. Ironically, their wilderness experience came to be a high point for their community. That’s when God entered into a covenant relationship with them and gave them the law that provided order and cohesion to their community.

We’ll do anything to avoid pain and seek pleasure. Spiritually, this means we’d like to live on a continuous mountaintop of blissful presence with Jesus. But in reality, we usually live in a kind of wilderness—a time of temptation and trials, a dry place. A place where things seem impossible and our faith seems to grow weak.

But as the Bible and many writers remind us, that is not all bad.

What recently has troubled you? Did you stop to think that whatever it was that made you irritable may actually have been an occasion for God to break into your life?

Read 1 Kings 19:1–12

Talk about an impossible situation. Elijah was in a struggle for his life: Jezebel was out to kill him, so Elijah fled. First God led him into a wilderness (his journey is reminiscent of the Israelites’ wilderness trek, it took 40 days and 40 nights, which is also the length of Jesus’ later temptations in the wilderness). There Elijah was touched by an angel—twice—who brought him food and drink, and then urged him to continue on to the mountain. After he entered a cave, every imaginable natural disaster hit: wind, earthquake, and fire. But God was in none of those.

And then there was “a sound of sheer silence” (that’s in the NRSV; the NIV says it was a “gentle whisper”). Can you imagine what that was like? Can you “hear” it? God, apparently, was in the silence.

God allows us to enter wilderness (or an impossible situation) because sometimes it is the only place where we will stop and listen for what He is trying to say to us or do through us.

How do you take time to listen to God’s sheer silence? What do you hear when God is most silent? What do you learn about yourself? About God? About your situation?

How does God break through to you most effectively?

Apply the Word

Avoiding pain and suffering is not Christian. Other religions, like Christian Science or Buddhism, are into either denying the reality of suffering or trying to live above it. The Cross of Jesus Christ stands in stark judgment of such approaches. For it is through suffering and pain that God brings about redemption. God took on the pain and suffering of the world in order to save it. And that is why Jesus’ followers are “burden bearers” (see Gal. 6:2).

Consider this statement: “The church should be a place where people don’t have to pretend they’re okay when they’re not.”

Should the church be a place where you can simply say, “I’m in bad shape”, or “Things seem impossibkle for me” and someone will say, “Tell me about it”?

Does that characterize your church and/or your group?

How could your church or group become that kind of place or continue to be that type of place?

Prayer Time

You might want to conclude your time together with prayers for burdens that people in your group or church are carrying and prayers for their healing. If sharing in a group, give freedom to people to be as general or specific as they choose in sharing their concerns with the group. You might even want to gather around individuals in special need, laying hands on them as you pray.