

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO HARD TIMES?

In his book *The Land Between* the author Jeff Manion uses the story of the Israelites' journey through the Sinai Desert as a metaphor for being in an undesired transitional space – a time of testing, a trial. After generations of slavery in Egypt, the Israelites travel through the wilderness (the land between) toward the Promised Land. They crave the food of their former home and despise their present environment. They are unable to go back and incapable of moving forward. They did a lot of complaining. Yet their forty years in the desert were intended to transform them from people of slavery to people of God.

We too go through wilderness experiences, every time we have a time of prolonged waiting, confusion, illness or emotional problems.

- Are you going through a wilderness experience right now? Do you want to tell us about it?

Manion says that “many seasoned spiritual advisers propose that this is the only space in which radical, transformational growth occurs. God intends for us to emerge from this land radically reshaped. But the process of transformational growth will not occur automatically. Our response to God while in the Land Between is what will determine whether our journey through this desert will result in deep, positive growth or spiritual decline.”

We can't choose what happens to us, but we can choose how we will respond to the situation and to God. Do we complain, ignoring how God has been there for us in the past?...Or will we cry out to God, knowing he's there, knowing he's concerned?

Too often we become a victim to our disease and don't trust God to help us take action. Too often we allow life to happen TO us and don't take steps to do anything. We allow life to control us, instead of placing it in God's hands. If we trust God, He will help us make the best of a situation. And, quite possibly, our faith will grow in the process.

- Can you think of a past wilderness experience that transformed you? How did your response to it help?

Numbers 11:10-17 tells us how Moses responded in frustration over the complaints of the Israelites. The whole chapter is worth reading, but I'll copy a small part of what he said to God. It is a prayer that is more like a rant. Have you ever felt like this? Did you tell God how you felt?

¹⁰ Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. ¹¹ He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? ¹² Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? ¹³ Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' ¹⁴ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵ If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."

¹⁶ The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you. ¹⁷ I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone."

Are you going through a hard time right now? Have you voiced the way you felt about it to God? You can talk to God the way Moses did.

- Write a prayer to God telling Him exactly what you are experiencing.

We can have hope for the future if we can remember how God has been faithful to us in the past.

- Write five examples of how God has provided for you in the past.

When you're passing through a wilderness experience, more than anything, God wants you to trust Him.

- Perhaps the most powerful prayer you can pray is, "I trust you." Take some time to quietly tell God this. You might even hear Him respond to you. What is He saying?