

Lessons in the desert

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."
Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

Matthew 3:17-4:1

Under normal circumstances a person can survive only a very short time in the desert. You may hang on to life for awhile providing that you have a supply of water along with you, but ultimately that water supply will come to an end. And the law of the desert is that the end of the water signals the end of life.

I have never had the experience of wandering in a desert the way God led the nation of Israel in the desert for 40 long years. I would prefer to not have that kind of experience! But I have wandered in other kinds of deserts, 'spiritual deserts', which may have been just as lifeless, hopeless, uncomfortable, and meaningless as what the nation of Israel experienced. You may have also have taken a few laps around a 'spiritual desert' in your own life. Perhaps you are wandering out there right now!

Amazingly, God has chosen the classroom setting of the desert as a place to teach some very important lessons to his people! This is definitely not the kind of class environment that a person would normally seek out, but it is in this kind of setting that God brings his people to in order to teach, strengthen and shape them into his likeness. Depending on how we respond to this training may well determine how long we need to stay in the classroom of the desert.

We do not need to fear the spiritual desert. Yes, it may well be a very uncomfortable place. But God never promised to give us a comfortable life. He did promise to always be with us which includes those times when we feel so alone and lost in those spiritually dry and lifeless seasons.

Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire community, 'Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.'"

While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked towards the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. Exodus 16:9-10

Why is it that when we are experiencing spiritual dryness and lifelessness, the first thing we do is to complain against the very One who is our only source and hope of survival? Instead of being thankful for the daily 'manna' and the Living Water (God's Word) that God has provided for our desert survival, we complain that it is too tasteless, boring, and unentertaining. We stop focusing on and partaking of the very thing that will keep us spiritually alive, God's presence. The desert indeed offers very little that will tantalize and stimulate our passion for 'good feelings'. Therefore we need to reach for something beyond a 'feel good' solution.

We need your help!

...on the next *Bible Courier Trip*

Hong Kong & Beijing, China



You won't want to miss this exciting mission opportunity to help China's house-church Christians get the Bibles they are praying and waiting for.

Fly direct to Beijing with our first load of Bibles. Four days later travel by train to Hong Kong to continue daily Bible courier trips into China.

SIGN UP NOW! There's limited space for only 12 people on this trip.

The cost for this two week trip is only \$1880.00!

This price includes your airfare, accommodations, visas, and daily courier travel expenses in and out of China.

Not included in this price are food and sightseeing costs of \$300.00.

HOW TO SIGN UP: Please contact us as soon as possible and no later than September 1. Send a \$300.00 (tax-deductible) down payment to 'Go Forth Ministry'. The balance of \$1580.00 will be due one month before our departure. Please mail it to: P O Box 17, Apple Creek, OH 44606.

PASSPORT: Make sure that your passport has 4 or 5 blank pages for the many stamps you'll be getting on your frequent trips through Hong Kong and China immigrations. If you don't have a passport or if it expires on or before the date of our arrival back to the USA, please make sure that you receive a new passport before the sign-up deadline (it usually takes from 2-4 weeks to process).

The whole point of the 'desert' is that God is bringing us to a place where there is nothing to distract us from giving Him our full and undivided attention. Thus the things that are going on around us are so uncomfortable that (the idea is) we would be driven into the comfort of the sanctuary of God's presence.

God used the desert to focus full attention of the nation of Israel on Him. In the desert He alone is Provider. He alone is Direction. He alone is Protection. He alone is Hope. He alone is Purpose. He alone is God!

Like Peter and his brief walk on the water we must choose what we are going to focus on when we are in life's crisis. We can choose to keep our focus on God and the promises of his word and experience God's wonderful sustaining power. Or we can, in a panic of natural reaction, turn our attention towards the hopelessness of our situation and indeed experience the very thing we fear the most like Peter experienced as the waves swallowed up all but his last hope.

The desert is a place that God will deliberately take us to! I can't think of a more shocking thing than to be led by the Holy Spirit into a place of dryness, death, isolation, and barrenness. Yet that is exactly what happened to Jesus shortly after he had been baptized. One moment Jesus is the center of attention. Crowds of people watch in awe as he is identified as the long awaited Messiah. Jesus' moment of opportunity is perfect. He was full of the Holy Spirit. God had confirmed to Jesus the assurance of His love, identity and authority - in an audible voice! But then instead of being launched into the ministry that certainly was burning in Jesus' heart, in love the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert! This certainly doesn't sound like 'love' to me. Yet this is the place where God so often reveals Himself - and so much more.

How often we have been given examples in the Bible of God's special work in His people taking place in the desert. Here are just a few examples:

- ✂ Hagar and Ishmael met an angel in the desert. Genesis 21:14-21; God gives hope to those who are dying in the desert.
- ✂ God called Moses from a burning bush on the 'far side of the desert'. Exodus 3:1; Moses finally found his purpose in a desert place.
- ✂ God delivered Israel from Egypt so that they could worship Him in the desert! Exodus 3:18, Ex. 7:16; God calls and leads His people to the desert. He receives worship in a desert place.
- ✂ God provided food, water, and clothing for 40 years for about 3 million people in the desert, "...to humble and test them in order that in the end it might go well with them"! Deuteronomy 8
- ✂ God punished His people for their disobedience by leading them to a life of wandering in the desert for 40 years. Numbers 14 & Deuteronomy 2:7; God continues to bless and provide for His people during their time of punishment - in the desert!
- ✂ David found safety in the desert. 1 Samuel 23:24-25; David spent much of his young life hiding in the desert from Saul.
- ✂ The prophets frequently refer to the desert as an example of people who are spiritual empty and dry. Jeremiah 2:31
- ✂ John the Baptist preached in the desert and the Messiah was revealed to the nation - in the desert. Matthew 3
- ✂ Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to meet and overcome his enemy. Matthew 4:1-11

I have always been intrigued by the way the Holy Spirit leads people. We have so many wonderful examples in the book of Acts. From reading Acts we can see that our self-centered concerns for low risk and high comfort are not a great concern of the Holy Spirit and the places He wants to lead us. His concern is to lead us to the place where God is and God does not always reside in our 'comfort

zone'! So many of God's people are really searching for the leading of the Holy Spirit but have been fearful of allowing their search take them to those uncomfortable places.

I cannot give a cut and dried answer to people who want to know how God leads their own life. But I do know this, it is absolutely vital for successful Christian living to be able to day-by-day live under the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit. And it is very clear from God's Word that the Holy Spirit doesn't necessarily do things the way we like or expect Him to do.

Is your personal life like a 'spiritual desert' these days? Are you comparing your church experience to a 'spiritual desert'? Maybe you feel that your family or our nation has become a 'spiritual desert'. If so, then you will need to make some choices about how to respond to this life threatening predicament. Some options are:

- Panic! ...analyze the situation until you become convinced of the hopelessness of your dilemma.
- Quit! ...go back to the illusionary comforts of Egypt - and its bondage.
- Repent! ...if apathy, pride, trust in 'self, disobedience, or sin has caused you to wander in a desert of religious lifelessness.
- Worship! ...understanding that while in an environment of hopelessness, chaos, isolation, or bleakness - whatever the case or cause, regardless, God is with you! He "inhabits our praises". And it is in His presence that we can find fullness of joy, along with provision, safety, hope, purpose, and His abundance of life - even in a desert!

Jesus went into the desert willingly. He went there because the Holy Spirit led him. He didn't ask why. He didn't make any special preparations except to have a heart of obedience. Yes, He suffered terribly there for at least 40 days. But at the end of that time Jesus came out of the desert classroom "*in the power of the Spirit and news about him spread throughout the whole countryside*"; Luke 4:14.

The bottom line is this; worship God! Are you spiritually dry and lifeless? Worship God! Are you in a financial desert? Worship God! Have you found your relationships to others disappointing and lifeless? Worship God! Has your health brought you to a point of desperation? Worship God! Do you feel void of anything worthy to contribute to God's Kingdom? Worship God!

The Apostle Paul expressed it well, "*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*" Philipians 4:12

There is never a reason to give in to hopelessness. And there is never a reason to not obey God. Wonderful things can happen in the desert! Will you allow God to reveal Himself to you in your desert? Instead of worrying and grumbling - worship Him there. You will survive if you stay in His presence! And in that place He offers a daily provision of 'manna', God's Word which is our spiritual Bread of Life. It's there for each of us every day. We simply need to eat it - and live.



"Harmless as Doves!"

Summer Bible Courier trip Report



We may not look like much, but my hat is off to this dedicated team of Bible couriers! Along with the experience and help of the long-term workers stationed in Hong Kong, plus another team of college kids from the States who helped for two days, what was accomplished in just two weeks is simply amazing. With a heart to work hard despite the heat and humidity, 3.8 tons of literature was hauled across the border successfully. And by the time we were getting on the airplane to head home, eight shipments of literature were heading out in different directions across China to meet the specific requests of the Christians. Here is a breakdown of what was carried in and shipped out:

3,720 regular Bibles

3,159 Study Bibles

1,320 Children's Bibles

Total: 8,199

We arrived in Hong Kong on June 8 and went straight to work. A few days later our team of 12 flew over to Vietnam for five days. I had never taken a team of this size to Vietnam and was a bit apprehensive about it. But it turned out to be a wonderful time of experiencing the Vietnamese culture first-hand, meeting some of the underground Church leaders and their families, and allowing the Holy Spirit to place within each of us His heart for the people of this worn out nation.

Contrary to man's methods, God has chosen to use what the world considers worthless. He does this in order that His strength may be seen and His name glorified. So in reality, the very things that make us look insignificant and feel weak and vulnerable are ...our greatest strength!

"That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Cor. 12:10

How many times I've heard people tell me, "I feel God has called me to go on a Bible Courier trip, but I just don't have the money". My answer to them is that God almost always asks us to go beyond our natural abilities in serving him. *"Without faith it is impossible to please God."*; Heb. 11:6. If you have heard the call God has put on your life, then money (or whatever you're weakness is) is not the real issue. Faith in God at the point of

our weakness is actually the place where God will demonstrate His power and glory. So we start going forward by faith in obedience as much as we can and see what God will do. Have you heard a call of God?

When God sees that we are serious about bringing glory to His name (not making ourselves look successful or religious), then He gets serious about demonstrating His strength in our weaknesses. Things can get exciting then as we see God fulfilling His purposes through us as we simply make ourselves available by active faith.

"Meeting God at the China border"

by Janis Steigauf ...a Bible Courier's experience

The whole team made our first crossing all together right after we arrived into Hong Kong after our long, long journey from the States. We crossed the border into China at 2:30 in the morning! The border was basically empty at that hour. We were incredibly loaded down with personal luggage plus large suitcases of Bibles which our Hong Kong ministry host had just provided for each of us. To say the least, we were all extremely tired and numb from the trip. None of us really knew what to expect and of course were quite nervous.

We made it through the China immigrations and Wendell proceeded to lead us 'past' the luggage scanners. But we were promptly stopped by the customs officials and told that we were to put all our luggage 'through' the scanners. I really thought we were going to be busted.

At that precise moment though, a bus full of kids pulled up to the border. What they were doing there at that hour, I certainly don't know! All these loud and hyped up kids piled out and raced through customs and threw all their luggage on the scanners. In the middle of this chaos Wendell said "ok, do it now!" We merely blended in with this group, putting our personal luggage on the scanners (but not the suitcases with Bibles) and walked right on through with our huge load of Bibles in tow. Suddenly we forgot how sleepy we were! Despite our bloodshot eyes, we were seeing God at work right in front of our noses! To me it seemed like a close call, but with God, 'close calls' do not exist. He was and always is in total control of chaos and can even use it for His purposes!

I made many trips through customs and past the scanners successfully every time, but each and every time I got very nervous. I saw so many little miracles along the way and I realize how detail oriented God is - how He cares so much about the little things when we simply walk by faith each little step of the way, whether we are taking Bibles into China or living day to day in our daily routines.

I did get stopped one time at the scanner. I was already past the scanner when the Customs official called to me. I tried to ignore her, but she got louder and louder in an effort to get my attention, calling me and told me to turn around and put my luggage on the scanner. So with no other choice, I went back to the scanner with my suitcase of Bibles and a bag of personal items thinking that there was no way to get out of this.

But at that precise moment a boy with an overly huge box of some sort put his things on the scanner. Simultaneously I felt the Holy Spirit tell me exactly what to do, which was to take my bag of personal items and put it right up against this boys huge luggage, which I did. I suppose the officials, who weren't paying much attention, thought his luggage was my other big bag (which was full of Bibles) but which I had not put on the scanner. Then I merely took my personal luggage from the scanner and proceeded to walk out, again, with every one of my Bibles.



In the Power of the Holy Spirit!

For years Brother P., a quiet and very reserved man, was a loyal member of the official church in Vietnam. Everything in the church was formal, routine and set in years of tradition. He was faithful in religiously adhering to those forms and traditions, but that is about all his Christian life consisted of. Then a few years ago something happened that radically changed his life. He received the very thing he had been taught to resist ...the baptism of the Holy Spirit!

Brother P.'s life took an immediate and dramatic turn. Suddenly empowered with great boldness, he answered the call of God on his life and began traveling throughout the mountainous countryside preaching the gospel wherever the Lord opened the way.

It wasn't long until money became a crucial factor and threat to the ministry Brother P. had established. With the help of your gifts, Go Forth Ministry has been able to provide some financial assistance to him for the past 3 years.

Brother P.'s first ministry was to a village of lepers (which I've written about in the past). Nearly the entire village of about 300 has come to the Lord through Brother P.'s ministry. Leaders have now been established there and Brother P.'s has moved on to establish other churches elsewhere.

I recently received a very nice letter from Brother P. who expressed his deep gratitude to those who have been a financial help to him. As a direct result of your financial support Brother P. has now established 30 house churches that he oversees. These are comprised of over 1000 people that have come to the Lord as a result of his ministry! From these churches, 60 people have now dedicated their lives to full time service to the Lord and have attend or are currently attending Bible training and discipleship classes.

Brother P. then closed his letter, requesting from us that we pray for these 60 volunteers that the Lord would help them overcome the practical obstacles they face so that their vision could become reality.

I immediately began calculating what it would cost to provide a minimum of \$50.00 for each of these volunteers. Wow! That's a lot of money each month! And I guess I'm a bit like Moses because I immediately began complaining to God, "Why me? How am I supposed to feed all these people plus the 15 others we already are helping?"

To make short work of a very big miracle, within two weeks of reading Brother P.'s letter, God, the One who provides even in the driest desert, opened the way for all 60 of these volunteers to receive the financial support they need for an entire year!

Now please pray that much can be accomplished for God's Kingdom as this little army is now enabled to 'Go' forward in Jesus' name!

Evangelism and ministry outreach in China

Thank you so much for your prayers and support for the Summer China evangelism and ministry team of 14 people. The team included Daisy and our youngest son, Jonnie, who first stayed on in Hong Kong for several weeks to be with family after the rest of the Bible Courier team returned to the States.

Daisy and Jonnie then joined up with the ministry team, made up mostly of mainland Chinese, and traveled by train to a norther city in China. They spent two weeks in that area where they shared the Gospel through 'friendship evangelism' and encouraged local house church leaders. I finally received my 'better half' and son back home on July 28. Needless to say, this has been a long summer with nearly 6 weeks apart.

One of the highlights for Daisy was leading a young lady who was a college graduate and a young boy to the Lord on the train. I just happened to call Daisy on the cell phone that she was carrying at the precise moment that the three were holding hands in prayer to receive the Lord! I guess God knew how I was feeling being left out back in Apple Creek, Ohio, so I was able to join in with them at this wonderful moment!

The \$300.00 miracle! ...the rest of the story

I received many comments about the \$300.00 miracle which I wrote about in our last newsletter. In fact, I was a bit surprised at how much interest this story of 'multiplying money' generated compared to other reports about the great vision, sacrifices and needs of our Brothers and Sisters in China and Vietnam.

During our summer trip to Vietnam we received many expressions of gratitude for the support we are able to provide the house church leaders through your gifts. I was also given a photo of 4 bicycles that \$200.00 of the miracle money purchased. This makes it possible for much more effective ministry for four church leaders who previously had to walk great distances to each of the house churches they had established.



Please pray as efforts are being renewed in China to acquire an official ISBN number from the government which would allow Go Forth Ministry to legally print and distribute "The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ" in public bookstores across China.

Over the past 14 years about 200,000 copies of this book have been printed and distributed through a wide variety of methods, primarily in China as well as Hong Kong and Chinese communities around the world.

The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ

First printed in China around 1914, only one copy of *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ* is known to have survived the following years of political and spiritual turmoil. This rare book is a combination of the four gospels, scriptures written in the everyday language of the people and containing over 200 intricate illustrations portraying Jesus Christ as a Chinese in the Chinese culture.



"A picture is worth a thousand words."

In the past many Chinese have considered foreign ideologies and religion inferior to their own. The art in this book, which is indigenous to China, is very helpful in removing the stigma that Christianity is a foreigners religion. At the same time it reinforces the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is truly for the Chinese people.

Of the estimated 90 million house church Christians in China, 80% of them are semi-literate and live in rural areas. After years of restoration work, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ* is now back in print and helping these less educated Chinese people understand the love of Jesus in a way that communicates to their own culture.



Why did God preserve this one old copy of *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*? Because it is 'harvest time' in China and the Lord is using this book as a tool to reap this great harvest of souls! And in what other country on earth are there more souls than in China!

You can tell the Chinese of Jesus' love!
Help Go Forth Ministry to continue to print and distribute *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ* to the Chinese at **only \$0.80 per book.**

There's not much space left here, so we say this as emphatically as possible, "Thank you so much"! Thank you for being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in being a part of what He is doing in Asia and for entrusting us with your sacrifice.

Thank you for prayers, finances, for 'going' and for parents, spouses and kids who waited patiently while loved ones were overseas. God bless you all!

In His service,

Wendell & Daisy Martin