

IN THE MIDST OF THE WILDERNESS

THE EVENT | Session Three

Have you ever put together a tent? And/or put together Ikea furniture? It's not the easiest thing to do if you've never done it before.

There are several pieces that go together in seemingly impossible ways, and they have to go together in a certain order. And when you get it done, just when you think you've got it figured out, you realize you have a few leftover pieces and you're left thinking "where could those possibly go?!"

As you journey through the wilderness, you'll encounter all sorts of things you haven't had to navigate before.

You'll hit a dead end.

You'll feel discouraged

It'll rain. Or snow.
Or be hot and buggy.

Something out of your control will cause problems.

You may have to go off the path.

You may need to try a way you hadn't considered before.

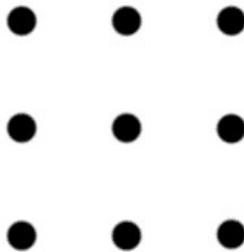
You'll have to leap over a pit of quicksand.

You'll have to avoid getting sucked into the drama.

You'll have to learn to do some things for yourself.

You'll have to do some things you've never done before.

Try this: using only 3 straight lines, and without lifting your pencil, can you connect all the dots?



*Hint:
think outside
the box.*

Sometimes, in the wilderness, and in our lives, we need to look beyond what we know and consider what could be. We can approach an old problem with a new mindset. We can find new people to journey with. We can seek the wise counsel of someone who is a little older and a little wiser to guide us through the messy middle.

God is faithful through the wilderness

...even when everything seems a mess. In the middle of the story, Joshua has to lead the Israelites through years of battles. Because the Promised Land was also known as Canaan, there were already some people living there – the Canaanites. Joshua and the Israelites spend years fighting for this place that God had promised them.

SCRIPTURE

There are two major battles in Joshua 6-8. The first is in the city of Jericho, that has a huge wall surrounding it. God gives Joshua and the Israelites very specific plans for how they can conquer the city:

Then the Lord said to Joshua, “March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.”
-JOSHUA 6:3-5

And it works! Joshua and the Israelites trust God and they are victorious.

The next story of the Battle at Ai makes the opposite point. An Israelite named Achan steals some things from Jericho that were to belong to God alone, and then he lies about it. So Israel goes into battle with the city of Ai and they are totally defeated. And it’s only after humble repentance and severely dealing with Achan’s sin that Israel gains victory.

These two stories are put together, right up front, to make an important point: **If Israel is going to inherit the land, they have to be obedient and trust in God’s commands.**

The messy middle for Joshua required his dependence on God for victory. Joshua encountered unexpected challenges, had to try new things, had to see things differently, had to confront some of his own failures as a leader, but he grew and was changed for the better by the experiences. He became a better leader, and he grew in his understanding of God. Joshua learned, as we are learning, in the wilderness, God is faithful.

It’s important to note that the purpose of these battle stories was never to tell the reader to go commit violence in God’s name. Rather, they show God bringing his justice on human evil - the morally corrupt Canaanites - at a very unique moment in history. And how he delivered Israel from being annihilated by the Canaanites.

ACTIVITY

Supplies:

- A square piece of paper

When we are in the midst of the wilderness, it’s hard to see the end result. It’s even harder to appreciate the transformation taking place. What starts as one thing, goes through a process or a challenge, and becomes something better, more beautiful.

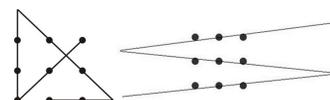
-Origami: Using a square piece of paper, follow the steps on the next page to make an origami butterfly. It may challenge you, the instructions might be hard to follow, they may even test you- but what starts as simply a piece of paper, gets bent and folded and tried, and becomes something new and something beautiful.

PS: here is how to solve the dot challenge:

Source: The Bible Project Video “Overview Joshua - Read Scripture”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=\[qOq\]IFF eU&feature=emb_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=[qOq]IFF eU&feature=emb_logo)

Source for 9 dots activity: <https://www.artofplay.com/blogs/articles/history-of-the-nine-dot-problem>



ALL ABOUT THAT GRACE: SANCTIFYING GRACE

You've learned about:

Prevenient Grace- God has set the route before you.

Justifying Grace- God has set the route before you and you choose follow the map

and now **Sanctifying Grace-** God has set the route before you, you choose follow the map, and you have "arrived" at your destination

Salvation (saying "Yes" to God) is not a static, one-time event in our lives. It is the on going experience of God's gracious presence transforming us into whom God intends us to be. John Wesley described this dimension of God's grace as sanctification, or holiness.

Through God's sanctifying grace, we grow and mature in our ability to live as Jesus lived. As we pray, study the Scriptures, fast, worship, and share in fellowship with other Christians, we deepen our knowledge of and love for God. As we respond with compassion to human need and work for justice in our communities, we strengthen our capacity to love neighbor. Our inner thoughts and motives, as well as our outer actions and behavior, are aligned with God's will and testify to our union with God.

Sanctifying grace draws us toward Christian perfection, which Wesley described as a heart "habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor."

To be *sanctified* is to be *made holy*. Your church has a *sanctuary*, a *holy space*. Sanctifying grace makes you holy.

In a sunrise or sunset that takes your breath away. In the beauty of the sky reflected in a lake. In the unique snowflakes falling sweetly in the slow of winter. In the first signs of spring after a winter thaw. We see God's glory unfold in these holy moments in nature as seasons change. We see these holy moments in our lives as we journey through the wilderness. When we see God's faithfulness through challenge. When we see that we have partnered with God to take a step in faith. When we remember to trust God with our burdens and our joys. When we are changed by an experience, a prayer, a song, a service experience, an exchange with a mentor, pastor, or friend. We have a glimpse at the holiness of God in everyday moments.

RETURNING FROM THE WILDERNESS

THE EVENT | Session Four

Every adventure comes to an end.

Eventually, you run out of snacks. Or time. Or gas. Or money. Or clean clothes. The tent gets a hole in it. Your sleeping bag starts to smell. You're sick of your playlists.

And you face the inevitable return home. (And home might not be a place, but a schedule, a set of people, an everyday rhythm of 'normal'.)

"In the hero's journey, a character has to want something and Overcome obstacles to get it." (Donald Miller, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*)

You are the hero. And you have been in the wilderness.

You have faced challenges and obstacles - internal and external.

You have explored an unknown space, or maybe seen a familiar space with a new understanding.

You have taken a step of faith. Faced the challenge head on.

And you have changed because of it.

SCRIPTURE

JOSHUA 23:1-3, 10

After a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, summoned all Israel – their elders, leaders, judges and officials – and said to them: "I am very old. You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done... the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the Lord your God."

Joshua reminds the Israelites what they have been through, and all the ways God has been faithful. And reminds them, plain and clear, to Love God.