



Finding Your Way in the

WILDERNESS

by Debbie Cox Schwalbe

***God in His boundless wisdom
has drawn me into beginning
a self-study on the book of Psalms.***

***Now, I know why He led me
to this challenge.***

Before this very recent (and divine) revelation, I was already intrigued by David's struggles, his strength, and God's complete and perfect mercy. I know why the Holy Spirit led me to these beautiful examples of personal and spiritual struggles, and it's because I'm "smack dab" right in the middle of my own "wilderness."

Psalms 142 fairly accurately describes where I am on this wilderness journey. I cry out to the Lord and pour out my complaints to Him. Like the Israelites, I am wandering around in my own personal no-man's land searching for God's will for me in my life. As I tell my beloved clients that struggles (and discomfort/pain/the desire not to repeat self-defeating behaviors) are not only the greatest motivators for change, but these are also "tools" God uses to help us grow in Him.

Not only can God strengthen one's faith and facilitate interpersonal growth in our times of struggle and turmoil, He assures us He is always with us and will never leave our side.

As a result of a few choices, some good and some not-so-good, I find myself facing some really tough challenges that have the potential for life-changing outcomes. I haven't lost my ability to still find beauty in God's creation, or to have forgotten the many blessings He has given me, but I do question at times, if He hears me in my struggles. It's easy for us to imagine God is punishing us for those

"not-so good choices." We tell ourselves that if we hadn't made those choices, then we wouldn't be facing the various issues going on in our lives.

I sometimes question if what I'm going through is God doing His work in me, or is it the enemy who wants to see one of God's own suffer from doubt and un-forgiveness. Or, is it a combination of both? I have a question for you, dear readers, "Are you, or have you ever been in your own personal or spiritual wilderness?" If so, what have you learned while enduring this journey? After all, we do learn through our experiences.

To be honest, one of the things I have learned already is taking my own advice is a very difficult thing to do! As a part of my work with my clients, I often suggest they make a "God Box" so they can surrender their issues and turn them over to God.

With this "God Box", we write a personal or spiritual burden down on a piece of paper and place it a specific container. This simple act helps us visualize and internalize our letting that burden go, and letting God to take care of it.

If you've ever done this, you know it can be a very difficult thing to do. It's much easier for us to continue worrying about our burdens. It's as if we have this need to continually reach back into our "God Box" and remove our burden so we can re-traumatize ourselves all over again.

One tool for growth I find helpful is using is the cognitive behavioral principle of changing my thoughts into more positive, less punitive ones. It's amazing how this simple exercise can make one feel better in a very short time.

For example, instead of actually believing God is not hearing your cries, change that negative thought into the

positive one based on what you already know. God is not leaving us hanging out to dry; many passages in the Bible tell us otherwise. Look for them and highlight them so you can easily turn to them when the need arises. Remind yourself the Bible is God's written contract to us, His children, that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

While those in the world often break their word to us, God does not. He never has, and He never will. As I journey through this wilderness phase in my life, my Father continues to show me proof through His word by reminding me the cold, stark winter I find myself in, will someday turn into a renewed sense of peace that comes only through Him.

Psalm 12:1 tells us we are never alone and to seek out other faithful for strength and support. When we are the most vulnerable in our wilderness journey, we are tempted to believe the enemy-based lies that are ever present in our ears. We can "cognitive behaviorally" intervene using this thought stopping technique and then reminding ourselves of the real truth in God's Word.

When the lies begin, learn to intervene by either imagining a stop sign, a light switch, or a radio on/off knob. Stop that thought and reframe it by replacing it with the evidenced-based Truth.

If you have difficulty coming to terms with this Truth, I suggest reading Psalm 18:16-19. This part of God's promise to us is His assurance of your deliverance from the pain and suffering of emotions and spirit. This, my dear readers, is in God's contract to us. I wish you peace beyond any human measure of our own understanding.

God Bless you while on your life-journey whether you are in your own wilderness, or on a peaceful oasis.

Debbie Cox Schwalbe is a Christian counselor in private practice in Decatur. She provides treatment, from a Christian perspective, for depression, anxiety, grief, trauma, and other issues that cause distress. She can be reached by calling (217) 422-6908.



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