

A Wilderness Experience with Jesus Christ



Taking special time with Jesus Christ.

By
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A Discipleship Ministries



Publication

Cover Page

Stephen Miller, a graphic designer from Confluence, Pennsylvania, created the cover. The author took the photos when he visited Israel with his wife (Susan) for the first time in March 1998. The photo in the background of the cover is a picture of the desert South of Jerusalem. The photo imposed over the Jerusalem desert views the Sea of Galilee. The desert contrasted against the beauty of the lush wilderness surrounding the Sea of Galilee represents the different types of experiences one can have with Jesus Christ. The white letters reflect the purity of Jesus and the purple surrounding the photos represents the royalty of Jesus Christ. Take some time to be with the King in the "Wilderness" while you read this book.

First Printing 2002

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FORWARD

"A Wilderness Experience With Jesus Christ" was written to renew and refresh the hearts of those that read this small book. I pray that those who find themselves living in a world of chaos, because of schedules or their routines, will find the peace and the full joy of Jesus everyday in their lives by adding the process of this reading to their lifestyles. I pray that the grieving will find peace and purpose of life once again from the process given in this writing. My prayer extends to all those that are living their lives mechanically with no real joy or peace of mind, because they can not find any time for themselves. My heart breaks for the lonely, the physically ill, the depressed, and the abused. I hope that this writing will begin or restore peace, joy and purpose of life to the readers.

I believe that our Creator gives each person the capability to live everyday in the peace and full joy of Jesus Christ no matter what calamity, hardship or burden is placed upon them by the world. I believe the process to maximize this capability is spelled out for us in the Holy Bible and that a study of this book will enhance your journey toward living this type of life.

I want to thank my wife, Susan, for her love, for her awesome amount of patience with me, and for her constant encouragement which helped me write this book. I would also like to thank a very good friend of mine, Sherry Shockey, for taking the time to encourage and to edit this book. She also encouraged me to expand my mind in a way in which I have not been led before to put this publication together. I have learned so much as a result of the editing process.

May God bless each reader as he has blessed the writer of this book.

"A WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE WITH JESUS CHRIST"

INTRODUCTION

I love to take my family on vacations. At one time in my life, taking a vacation meant a time of rest from work and the normal day-to-day routine. However, since my wife and I have been gifted with three children, I have learned to rule out rest on these trips. Our current vacations have evolved into times to teach, to encourage, and to just plain have fun with each other on the camping adventures we have taken the last few years.

Reflecting on family vacations, one is reminded of those times everyone would rather forget; the times which tear out a parent's heart. One such time for us was losing our four-year-old on Chincoteague Island, Maryland, where people were packed together on the beach like sardines. We thanked God when we found Michael, our middle child, within a half-hour of his disappearance. He told us he wasn't lost, just looking for the new friend he had made.

Then there are the various emergency rooms with which we have become familiar. One June vacation, Michael ran into a parked van with his 5-speed bike, while going as fast as he could. The accident put him in the emergency room as a result of some serious bruising. We thanked God once again that he was not hurt more seriously. We are now acquainted with the emergency rooms in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; Farmington, Maine; Grove City, Pennsylvania and Ocean City, Maryland.

Another adventure occurred the time I forgot I was no longer twenty years old, and decided to swim out to a sandbar to catch the big waves. Not only did I find myself frightened and humiliated as I lost all my strength, but I also realized that I was drowning! A young lady and her boyfriend, who were surfing off the sandbar, came to my rescue. They helped me get to the sandbar to catch my breath, regain some dignity, and then escorted me back to the beach. *My only comment at this point is there is nothing like vacation time.*

You are probably wondering what vacations have to do with this writing. I would like to describe another time away from home that has some similarities to a vacation. I call it "**A Wilderness Experience with Jesus Christ**". "A Wilderness

Experience" is sacred time with our Lord. Not unlike a vacation, this experience affords a time to rest, a time to get closer to your family, a time to learn, and a time to have fun. It is a time to get away from the normal routine of life and spend some very private time with ourselves, our families, and most importantly, in the presence of Jesus Christ. For the fruitful Christian, the "Wilderness Experience" also means getting away from his/her active ministries so that the Christian does not reach a point of "burn out".

My first "Wilderness Experience" occurred approximately eighteen years ago without any planning on my part. My wife, Susan, wanted to attend a Conference of the Holy Spirit taking place at the Oakland United Methodist Church in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Susan asked me if I would take her and some friends to the opening worship session on Sunday evening, ostensibly so that she would know the driving directions to get there the rest of the week. Susan knew I would not attend this type of conference on my own.

I did not feel I needed this conference for various reasons. First of all, I did not have the time. Does this sound familiar? At the time, I

*owned my own business and my paper work was backed up to the point that I needed to spend the week on it just to catch up. In addition, I had never attended this kind of conference, and frankly, I wasn't too comfortable with the idea. I heard many stories about such events and I did not want to place myself in an uncomfortable theological position. To attend such a Conference would be what I call a "**Christian Risk**".*

A "Christian Risk" takes place each time you step out in a Godly direction which is new to you. These "Christian Risks" occur each time you open up in prayer; praising, worshipping, trusting the Lord, and then allowing Christ to lead you according to His Word, even though you are uncomfortable with the situation, or Godly direction you are being led.

The arrangement I finally made with Susan was to take her for one evening, so that she could travel with her friends the rest of the week. I added one condition to this first trip. We had to sit in the back pew, so that I could exit fast if anything occurred (like speaking in tongues, etc.) with which I was uncomfortable.

That evening was life-changing for me. My heart was opened to the Lord in the very intimate worship time that took place. Rev. Joseph Garlington, the keynote speaker, taught on the Holy Spirit of God, and the way he taught penetrated my heart and soul. I learned there was so much more the Lord wanted me to know about Him. It was as though for the first time in my life, I was introduced to The Third Person of the Lord. I was filled with His peace, His joy, His excitement for life, and His presence. I came home from that service and lifted a prayer up to the Lord that went something like this: "Lord, if you wake me up early enough to get my detail work done, I will attend every teaching service and worship service of this conference". I remember waking up at 4 A.M. without any alarm clock that next morning, getting my work done, and attending the Conference that entire week.

I can't explain the newness I felt as a result of this special time with the Lord. A new closeness was developed between my wife and I, and we made a new commitment to our Lord.

As a result of our time together that week in faith, my wife and I took on a ministry that was

impossible for us to do on our own. We decided to put together a weekend retreat that would renew fellow Christians, as well as, proclaim the Gospel to unbelievers. We decided that a campground would be a great place for this retreat. The obstacles ahead of us included persuading our small rural church to endorse our vision. Nothing like this had ever been attempted in our area. The second obstacle would be obtaining a secular campground permitting the spiritual weekend retreat to take place.

*The Chalk Hill United Methodist Church accepted the proposal and Benner's Meadow Run Family Campground not only permitted this spiritual retreat to take place, but did not charge any of our church members for the overnight camping. This retreat has grown and is now going into its eighteenth year. The weekend is known as "**Fire On the Mountain**". There have been many people converted, baptized, and renewed in Jesus during this retreat. All of this was the result of Susan's and my first "Wilderness Experience" with our Lord Jesus Christ.*

SPECIAL TIME

It is important to remember that I did not want to attend "The Conference of the Holy Spirit" about which I have written. First, because I did not think I had the time, and second, because this conference presented a "Christian Risk" for me.

In point of fact, the result of this "Christ Experience" was my introduction to the Holy Spirit. I found myself in God's presence during the entire time I spent there. In addition, a new ministry was born as a result of this experience. I believe this is what is meant when Jesus said: ***"I am the vine, you are the branches, he who abides in me and I in Him, bears much fruit."*** (John 15:5) *Christians need to take specific time to be with Jesus.*

I also believe something like this will happen to you each time you take this kind of time to be with the Lord. Remember that this experience is stepping out of your normal schedules to open up your heart and mind to God in perfect trust and obedience.

An important caution is needed here. You might think that God would never use you like this, therefore, you do not have to add something else to your already busy schedules. If you do not take this

specific time to be with Christ, you will miss what God really intends for you, and the busyness of the world will rob you of your blessings.

You will end up living your life like most people; mechanically, likely under the stress and weight of all that you think is important.

1

THE WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE

I have learned through experience that without taking this special time away from everything we do, simply to be with God, we will find ourselves empty, lost and without His peace. Our lives will begin to feel hollow, full of chaos, and stressed to the maximum. There is just too much to deal with today, too much to do to maintain an even balance of existence. Christian disciples need to take time to spiritually recharge their batteries and to maintain an ongoing personal relationship with Christ.

Dr. Bruce Wilkinson's book, Secrets of the Vine, talks about this important relationship. The entire book describes the life sustaining process taken from the Biblical passage found in John 15:1-8. In that passage, Jesus gives an illustration of a relationship with Him, using the grapevine as a model. He describes the vine as the place where strength is found, and nourishment is received, in order that growth may take place. His disciples (believers) are the branches where the fruit is produced. This fruit represents the witness and ministry that is presented through the Christian lifestyle. The Father is the

vinedresser. He will discipline the believer, or prune him/her, so that the Christian will produce an abundance of fruit. The result of this Godly process is living a joyful lifestyle, while having the truth revealed through the Holy Spirit. When we find ourselves abiding in Christ's love and keeping His commandments, His joy will remain in us. Our joy will be full. The apostle John says it this way:

***"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, these things I have spoken to you that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full."** (John 15:10,11)*

This process sounds so easy, but just the opposite is the truth. Without the earnest discipline of taking time to worship our Lord through **repentance, prayer, praise, worship, and reading the Scriptures**, we will find ourselves frustrated, as well as, **depressed**. The joys of this world cannot give you constant peace and joy. This world is ruled by Satan himself. His total goal is to corrupt you and then take your life. The following is an example of normal everyday life.

During the year 2000, I remember pulling into a new Sheetz gas station in Uniontown, Pennsylvania. It is one of those stations that are self-serve and has about ten separate

islands so that a quantity of people can be handled and gas provided at the lowest price per gallon possible. Because of the grand opening, this particular station had cut their price of gas per gallon low enough that every pump was filled, and there was a line behind each vehicle filling up. Once you went into pay for your fuel there were promotionals going on, which cost you another five or ten minutes before you got back to your vehicle.

When I pulled in, I knew that I would be there for some time. I had joy in my heart and I was prepared mentally for the delay in schedule. I just wanted to fill up and save some money.

When I finally got back to my pick-up truck, there was a very disturbed young woman in line behind me. She reminded me, very sternly, that I could have pulled my truck up so that she could have filled up while I was waiting to pay. I immediately felt guilty, because I never gave it a thought. I apologized, and said that I would do that the next time I got gas. As I started to get into my vehicle, I noticed that there was no place to have pulled up and parked. It was so crowded that you had to leave your vehicle at the pumps. With this new

knowledge, I hesitated, looked back at the glaring young lady, and just as sternly said, "By the way, just where would you have liked me to put my truck?" I wanted to say more, but I felt that my reply was sufficient. Boy! Did that feel good! I certainly had put her in place. I had met her anger for anger. The joy that I had was replaced with the satisfaction of knowing that I had the last word and that the young woman did not know how to reply.

This is the way of the world, isn't it? Get them before they have a chance to get you. I praise the Lord for my connection to the Creator, who is the vinedresser, the one who prunes the fruit. Upon pulling out of the gas station, I was immediately pruned by the Father and knew that I also had done wrong. I did not show love for this woman, and therefore, no fruit was produced. I repented immediately, and the joy of the Lord came rushing back. This is the process that comes from abiding with our Lord Jesus Christ daily.

The point of this simple testimony is that the world's way will "still" your peace. Remember that your peace was paid with the price of Jesus' blood. Taking special time with Christ will keep you in His

presence, so that when this relationship is broken as a result of sin, you immediately long to be re-connected to the vine (Jesus). The repentance process restores you instantly with Christ. Combined with repentance are prayer, praise, worship, and reading and meditating on the Scriptures. This is the essence of the "Wilderness Experience" process.

If simple worldly conflicts "still" your joy, how will we react when we face major conflicts without time with Christ? We will live in chaos, experiencing loss, depression and frustration. It is the result of this worldly lifestyle that causes divorce, juvenile delinquency, and the extremes of road rage, physical abuse, and suicide.

I found myself facing one of these major conflicts on September 11, 2001. I was getting ready to leave Moscow, Russia, with four other men who made up a mission delegation to the Republic of Komi. We were to fly home to Pennsylvania the next morning. This was my sixth time visiting this beautiful, historically rich, but economically depressed, country.

As a group, we had traveled into the Ural Mountains with the "Komi Ministry of Physical Education and Tourism". We were the first

Americans ever to travel with the Komi officials into this mountain to fish their rivers. The purpose of this visit was to partner with this Ministry to help them learn the tourism industry, as well as to utilize our catch of fish to feed some of the orphans with which we work in the Republic. This delegation represented "The United Methodist Conference of Western Pennsylvania", and "Discipleship Ministries of Western Pennsylvania."

We were packing our suitcases during the evening of the eleventh when we saw on our TV's the awful terroristic action which took place in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. As a result of this evil aggressive action on America, we were part of many thousands stranded in a foreign country unable to get home.

As a father and a husband, I yearned to be home with my family; but as a man seeking God's peace and joy, I knew I was to continue to produce Godly fruit in this unwanted situation. I was able to utilize the extra time spent in Moscow to prepare a series of messages I have been sharing since I have returned. These messages have been used by

God to create a spark of revival in the local churches I serve. The time in Moscow became "Wilderness Time With Jesus Christ" for me, rather than a time of stress.

These are the types of situations that can "still" one's peace and joy, or bring one closer to the Lord. When the unexpected happens, the stress of the ordeal can leave you totally messed up mentally. However, with Christ, there is nothing this world can do to you that will steal the joy or peace of Christ, which is available to each of us.

Consider these findings by John S. Lyons, a professor at Northwestern Medical School. Professor Lyons has pointed out that since November of 1994, interest fell 25%, welfare rolls fell 25%, and the stock market doubled. The nation has experienced the lowest unemployment rates in twenty-four years, and we have the highest family income in America's history.⁽¹⁾ Wealth and material assets are growing by leaps and bounds in America, but Lyons further points out that Americans are being treated today for depression more frequently than for all other diseases combined. I believe this illustrates that money cannot buy happiness. I further believe that we need time with the Lord to be whole and thereby avoid these worldly pitfalls.

Wholeness is a result of maintaining peace within oneself physically, mentally, and spiritually. Professor Lyons' research shows that the people in our society are clearly not whole. I would like to illustrate this brokenness with the following example.

A few years ago a woman in her 30's came with a friend to one of the churches I pastor. Her physical appearance was attractive, but her countenance was very hard. She continued to come back week after week. She would even come to service when her friend would miss. On her way out of the service, she would never open up for any conversation outside a simple greeting. I got the feeling that she did not want to communicate with me.

After a few months of this, she handed me a letter explaining everything. She told me her father sexually molested her at the age of three. This continued until she became seventeen and left home. She trusted no one, especially men. She had no belief in God, because she could not see how a good God could let something like this happen to an innocent child. She ended her letter by thanking me for allowing her to have a little bit of her childhood back through our services.

She stated that she found herself receiving peace while attending the services.

*It was shortly after this letter that we began to talk to each other. I told her that I believed she could receive perfect peace from God, and be restored wholly, if she could find openness to God's ways. We discussed obedience to Christ, which is to love God with our entire heart, body, mind, and soul, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We discussed repentance and the willingness to forgive those who hurt and offend us. This young woman was finding a new desire within her heart. She wanted this peace, but did not think that God would show her any special favor. I invited this deeply hurt individual to a special healing service (Wilderness Time), and asked her to open up to the Lord and claim John 15:7-8: **"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit."***

This wounded woman came to the service and made that long walk up to the altar to seek God's healing touch. She looked like a frightened bird ready to fly away at any time.

I remember praying that she would not flee from the service. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she asked Christ to come into her life and to renew her. She asked Jesus to have mercy on her and to forgive her sins, and then she asked to be healed of all the hurt, physically, mentally and spiritually, which she had endured in her lifetime. This was being done while the elders were laying their hands upon her and anointing her with oil as they prayed. (James 5:13-14.)

She left without saying a word to me or anyone else in the service. The next week, at Sunday's worship service, my friend was back. She stood before the whole congregation and shared that God had restored her, and she had never experienced this kind of peace in her entire life. It is over a year since that special service took place, and this beautiful person is healed wholly as a result of her "Wilderness Experience with Jesus Christ."

I believe that God wants all of His disciples to be whole. The only way I believe this will happen is to take this special time with our Lord several times a year on a regular basis.

Kerby Anderson discusses the "baby boomer generation" on his web site.⁽²⁾ He writes that this generation finds themselves spiritually hungry for meaning, even though they have dined on America's "smorgasbord of religions". These menu selections include EST, Gestalt, meditation, Scientology, Bioenergetics, and the New Age Philosophies, to name a few. Many others seek out twelve-step programs for alcoholism, workaholism, and even chocoholism. Ninety-six percent of the present generation has some knowledge of religion. Many have left the church as a result of the process of secularization in modern society, and of the process of pluralization in their world. It would be safe to say that because of our wealth and comfortable living styles, we may think we are healthy and have no needs, especially spiritual needs. However, when we take time to reflect on life's meaning, we find that we actually need a great deal. We need the Lord Jesus Christ.

I was the Evangelist preaching and teaching a series of services at Volant United Methodist Church during the month of May, 2001. This "Wilderness Experience" was scheduled for a period of five evening services and three daily teachings. The first night, I noticed a dignified

gentleman coming into the church. I had been to this church six times prior to this series of services, and as a result, knew most of the congregation. This man was a stranger to me, therefore I felt that he had been invited by a friend. My first impression was that he was quite wealthy. I subsequently found out that he was a very influential attorney.

The first night of the service, he shared with the people that he lost two family members in a plane accident in New York, including his 11½ year old son. He stated that he did not have a relationship with Jesus Christ prior to this traumatic accident, but faced with the pain of death, through his grief he had found our Lord.

I knew that he was not freed emotionally of this grief as yet, but at least, he seemed to have found a purpose for living again. By the end of the week's services, this gentleman shared with a small prayer group that he had a religious experience that changed his life. He stated that he was finally healed of the grief of losing his loved ones. He could smile and enjoy people once again. He had the peace of our Lord restored completely in his life.

You see this grieving man was empty inside because of his grief. He had just about everything materially this world could offer, but he did not have peace of mind. Without the very private time he had taken to be with Christ that week, he would not have found Christ's healing way. I praise God, and know this is what "Wilderness Time with Christ" will do for His people. We need this very special time with our Lord. I urge you not to wait until this world forces you to your knees looking for answers. Come aside, and open up your hearts to Christ. Make this experience a normal and devoted part of your lives.

2 THE PLACE

The New Webster's Dictionary defines a wilderness as "a wild region". Jesus defines a wilderness as a deserted place to get some rest. In the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 6:7-13, we see that Christ sent His apostles out two-by-two to preach to the people a message of repentance. He equipped them with heavenly powers to do this work, including the ability to recognize and cast out unclean spirits, and to heal diverse illnesses. In verse 30, we see the Apostles gathering back to Jesus exhausted, hungry, and excited to give testimonies of their experiences in the mission field. Jesus' very own words to them in verse 31 are: ***"Come aside by yourself to a deserted place (a wilderness) and rest awhile."*** (Mark 6:31) This is the experience we all need; a time to be renewed with, and by, Jesus Christ. We must know Him and spend time with Him. God Himself, in the garden at creation, instituted this special time I am suggesting. ***"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day."*** (Genesis 3:8) We need this personal relationship with our Creator.

Reflect on the way God led an entire nation, the Hebrews, out of bondage from the Egyptians and into the wilderness. God declared the Israelites to be His people. He took them to the foot of Mt. Sinai to teach them His ways. He established a personal relationship with them and then made a covenant with His people. The account is found in Exodus, Chapter 19.

Our Lord instituted this "Wilderness Experience" with His people. He had them prepare themselves for two days before He would reveal Himself to them on the third day. He used the prophet Moses as His mediator. The people accepted as fact that God was to be first in their lives. They were to obey and keep His commandments. If they would honor this, He would make them a special treasure above all other nations. (Exodus 19:5) They were to take this time of preparation to be purified and to rid themselves of sin. They were to wash their clothes and be clean. This preparation included not having any relations with their spouses. This was to be a personal time with God, and they were to be pure and ready when God presented himself to these people.

God gave His people a process, and I believe that this process is the same today, with Jesus Christ as our mediator. During this time, we are to prepare

ourselves for the presence of God. Christians must seek forgiveness from sin, which establishes purity, as we seek this awesome blessing. This much needed wilderness time is the time to prepare for God's renewal, and a time to become clean again in body, mind, and soul. Notice that repentance is a must in order to be renewed, ***"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** (Romans 3:23) I believe it imperative to have this time separate from your normal routine. The time one sets aside for this could be a revival held within a house of worship. It could be at a retreat center, or any other place where you can have that isolated time with Jesus; any place away from phones and messages. This time is to be private time with Jesus Christ, and with others who seek this experience.

3

BARRIERS

On June 21, 1963, the East German Defense Minister issued a decree setting up a 30 to 100 meter border zone around West Berlin. East German propaganda claimed that the wall's intention was to avoid aggression from the West, but the true nature of this wall was to prevent people from getting out of East Germany. This zone was placed under strict surveillance, and anyone entering the zone required a special authorization or face heavy penalties. There were also automatic firing systems put into place to stop people from trying to escape. This was truly a dividing wall erected to isolate the east from the west. After October, 1964, the wall was gradually strengthened, doubled up, and transformed into a modern border, which took on its final appearance around 1979-1980. This wall cut through 192 streets, thirty-two railway lines, eight s-bahns and four underground lines, three autobahns and several rivers and lakes. On the waterways, the wall consisted of submerged railings under constant patrol boat

surveillance.⁽³⁾ There are many tragic stories of people who lost their lives trying to cross this barrier. This wall separated, through the process of deception, the people from their freedom.

I would like to speak about another wall just as mortal as the Berlin Wall. This wall is built as a result of deception very similar to the Berlin Wall. I call it "**The Dividing Wall of Sin**". The construction of this wall started in a garden at the beginning of mankind. God created the human race and commanded them to trust and obey. *"The Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. The Lord God commanded man saying; of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die."* (Genesis 2:16,17) At this point in mankind's history there was no wall, or division, between God and His created human beings. This division did not exist until we accepted the lie of Satan. Eve and Adam chose to disobey the Lord, resulting in a separation from God. Mankind was cast out of the Garden never to enter again. Human relationship with God changed as a result of sin.

The propaganda and deception stated by the East Germans promised that the Berlin Wall was to stop aggression, but the real reason was to force the people to accept an ideology by force. The wall's creation forced this to take place. Mankind was similarly deceived by the demonic powers and persuasion of Satan. This demonic form told the first woman, Eve, that she would not die as the Lord said if she ate the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, but would rather be like God. (Genesis 3:1-5)

Not only was the first woman deceived, but the first man also accepted the lie of Satan and ate the fruit. Immediately, a "Spiritual Wall of Sin" was erected between God and man for this disobedience, causing a division of man from his creator. ***"Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him 'Where are you?' Adam said, 'I heard your voice in the garden, and I hid myself.'"*** (Genesis 3:9,10)

As a result of sin, Adam was separated from His Creator, cut from the vine; a perfect life turned to death. Sin is the instrument Satan used to separate us from eternal life. The "Spiritual Wall of Sin" will take one's life. ***"If anyone does not abide (remain constantly connected) in me (Jesus) he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they are burned."*** (John 15:6)

The "Spiritual Wall of Sin" separates us from God, and the only thing left at this point is chaos: ***"The Lord God sent Him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken."*** (Genesis 3:23) Is there a wall between you and the Lord? Has the world of everyday needs and desires stolen your peace and joy? Do you find yourself living a life of chaos? Take some very needed time with Jesus Christ to tear down "The Spiritual Wall of Sin" and be re-connected to Christ.

In May, 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev made his first official visit to West Germany. He informed Chancellor Kohl that the Breznev doctrine had been abandoned and that Moscow was no longer willing to use force to prevent democratic transformation of its satellite state of East Germany.

The result of Gorbachev's statements was one of the catalysts for the Berlin wall coming down. On May second of that year, Hungary decided to push down the iron curtain, and on September eleventh her borders with Austria were opened. These measures encouraged German's to pour out of East Germany. Within six months, over 220,000 East Germans had passed over to the West. The wall was down. ⁽⁴⁾

Satan deceives the same way East Germany did when they erected the "Wall". False perceptions are given, temptations placed before one and accepted, the "Wall of Sin" is erected and the heart of the deceived person becomes separated from God. Once this has occurred there is no Godly peace or joy until repentance takes place, thus tearing down the separating wall. Remember, forgiveness can only be obtained through the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, ***"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."*** (*John 10:10*) Restoration, for the individual, means replacing spiritual death with spiritual life.⁽⁵⁾ During this process you will seek God's purification process by asking for forgiveness of your sins.

4

THE PROCESS

The Word of God says to: *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."* (Acts 3:19) It is this refreshing renewal of your body, your mind, and your soul that takes place each time you participate in "A Wilderness Experience with Christ".

In order to be renewed, made well, refreshed, your focus needs to be checked. There are essential questions to be asked: Are my priorities right? Am I meditating on Jesus day and night and loving His way of life? Answering these questions in the affirmative is the only way that blessings come in abundance. To be able to live this way, one must incorporate time regularly for prayer, praise, worship, reflection on the Scriptures and repentance.

It is not the intention of this writing to relate the theological doctrine of this process, but to relate to you the process necessary to maintain the quality of life that only Christ will give His Christians.

Repentance

Repentance must take place in every "Wilderness Experience With Christ". The essence of repentance is a decision that results in a change of mind. This change of mind is a change of purpose and action, which further results in the maintenance of the quality of life as the Bible promises: This is the full joy of Christ. We must include this process as part of our normal life routine so that we do not find ourselves open to the deceptive ways of the world. Repentance is a key element to the "Wilderness Experience". Peter, speaking to Jews in Acts 3:19, urges a return to God for cleansing from sins: ***"Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."*** I pray that this verse speaks to you. The first part of any "Wilderness Experience with Christ" is to break down the "Spiritual Wall of Sin" by repenting in prayer to Christ and seeking forgiveness of our trespasses. In a moment, it is done and there is no division between you and Christ. You are in the presence of Jesus himself, and refreshing starts. The believer

will not want this time to end. It is sweet! It is good! It is life sustaining! You will feel Christ strengthening and sustaining you. As you repent, His awesome healing power overflows into you and you are blessed.

Prayer

I like to define *Prayer* as simply communicating with God. This can be done on one's knees, sitting or standing, or even lying prostrate on the floor. This process comes from the heart of the believer to the heart of the Lord. It is simply speaking openly to the Creator of all in the name of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit that lives within each Christian. This is where the believer gives thanks to Christ for His sacrifice on the cross and for the forgiveness of sin. Prayer is where the disciple seeks guidance and direction for their lives as well as a time to intercede for those that are loved by the disciple. This is the process used to praise and to worship our Lord. This is done in secret, privately, or corporately in a group of two or more. Prayer is the link that will keep the "Separating Wall of Sin" from blocking a personal relationship with the Father. Prayer is

the way and means to be in a relationship with the Lord constantly. It is an activity that should be developed until we find ourselves praying day and night. When we pray we are incorporating praise, worship and repentance. During any "Wilderness Experiences" this is one of the primary mechanics of becoming refreshed in the Lord.

Praise

Praise is the action that is performed by an individual, or a group of people, that reflects joy directed toward a person, or a group of people, that are loved, honored and respected for certain attributes which they possess. Praise, according to the Old Testament, is a sudden outburst of noise which is often associated with gestures or bodily actions of joy. Many times praise occurs through singing, playing musical instruments, or just plain shouting.

In our daily lives we see praise given on many different occasions, both secular and religious, and in many different ways. One type of praise displayed very openly is at football games and other sporting events. The fans

display their joy, or praise, when they stand in the bleachers shouting cheers at the top of their lungs as they encourage their team on to victory. They also display their frustration very openly when their team or hero is losing.

There is a difference when one compares worldly praise to Godly praise. How many times have you seen certain male individuals paint their faces and chests in a way that catches the attention of the fans, the players and the media at football games? They stand up in the cold, during the games that take place in late fall and winter, taking off their coats and shirts, and then bare chested, praise their football team by making all kinds of joyous boisterous antics in the crowd. They shout at the top of their lungs, dancing in the bleachers as they strive to cheer their team on to victory. What a sight! This is very secular. Should it be any different when it comes to praising our God? Yes! There are boundaries we use when we praise God. These boundaries were established by God and given to us in the Holy Bible. We praise according to the way we were taught by God to praise Him, but our openness should be no less than in secular displays of praise.

In the Scriptures, we learn of David dancing before the Lord with all of his might, dressed in a linen ephod. David praised His name, and he thanked God for allowing the Israelites to return the sacred Ark of the Covenant to the city Jerusalem. After sixty years of being exiled in Babylon, known today as Iraq, the Hebrew nation praised and worshiped our Lord by singing, playing instruments, and shouting with ear-piercing noises. They were thanking God for allowing them to be released from captivity and to return to Jerusalem to begin the process of rebuilding their Holy Temple that had been destroyed.

Praising God is displaying a joyous action in song, music, dance, prayer and/or making a joyful noise as we show our love, respect, honor and reverence for the one and only God. This Praise is the action we take to thank Jesus for paying the price for the forgiveness of the sins of mankind. Praise is the mark of a Christian who lifts the Lord up because He is God and He is worthy of praise. Without praise there can be no "Wilderness Experience".

Worship

Worship is the process of taking our praise and making it a very personal and intimate relationship. It is displaying very reverent, holy, service to a person or deity that one loves. Worship is humbling oneself before the person, or deity, which is being lifted up. Worship consists of adoration, and referential giving of oneself totally for the purpose of glorifying another.

In a "Wilderness Experience With Christ", Jesus is the object of our worship. This is the time when we must literally bow down before Christ in recognition of all He has done for us. In worship we may lay prostrate before our Lord, recognizing that He is God and the reason for living. Worship is the process of placing Jesus above our very own lives. Worship is loving God to the fullest. Worship is displayed in the same way we praise our Lord, but in worship, instead of reflecting about God, we become intimate with the Lord. Worship comes from the heart and glorifies God.

Reading the Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures are the Words of God revealed to mankind. These Words allow us to know God intimately because the Scripture or Holy Bible reveal His nature. When we read the Scriptures, the Words come alive and speak to us. This is Christ's way. In the Book of John, we are told that those who obey the command of Jesus are His friends. ***"You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."*** (John 15:14,15) This verse instructs us that Christ wants to be intimate with us. If we obey Him, we are his friends. The only way to obey is to know the Scriptures. To live in the full joy of Christ, we must know His will, and the only way to know His will, is to know and love to read His Word, the Holy Bible, daily. Reflecting upon the Word of God is a priority to every "Wilderness Experience".

5

THE BENEFITS OF WILDERNESS TIME

I know that God is calling everyone to produce more fruit. The Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 28:19, instructs those who believe in Christ to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching nations to observe all things that Jesus has commanded. This means everyone who claims to be a Christian is commanded by Jesus to do His work. Jesus Christ's way is to use His believers to proclaim His Word to the world. This does not mean that we all have to start ministries like the one I mentioned previously, or preach sermons, or go to other countries to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. It does mean that each believer has a full time job for the Lord. We are to use the talents with which we were born, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to each believer to do this very special and privileged work. We must remember that this is in addition to all the other things we find ourselves doing with our lives, but this "Jesus work" is to take priority over everything else we do. Without taking "Wilderness Time with the Lord", we will become complacent and find ourselves doing nothing for God.

Doing this "Jesus Work" is difficult, because the disciple must raise his/her family and maintain their normal schedule of responsibilities. Life alone will leave the Christian exhausted, just as it exhausted the apostles. However, the believer can count on the same Godly power being available to them, just as it was given to the Apostles to do Christ's work.

If you take this "Wilderness Time" you will find yourself living in the peace of God with His joy and His excitement: ***"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."*** (Colossians 3:15) It is vital that you, believers in Jesus Christ, take times of refreshing, just as Jesus and His Apostles did.

In 1995, I became part of a United Methodist Ministry that sent me, with a small delegation, to the Republic of Komi in Russia to help the people adjust to their new government. This ministry resulted from the collapse of Communism in Russia during the period known as "Peristroikia" and is known as the "Russian Initiative". I have been traveling to this country at least once a year ever since. I lead different teams, along with the Rev. John Flower, to this Republic and generally stay for

a period of ten to twenty-one days. This area is in the Arctic zone of the Gulag and the weather makes this trip very difficult. We do a lot of our work there in the winter months, because the traveling fares are low. I have already felt the sting of minus 50 degrees F. Our schedules are such that it is next to impossible to stay healthy for any length of time, especially since we work approximately sixteen to eighteen hours each day.

These days consist of meeting after meeting with their government officials, as well as, with the directors of orphanages and various schools. We travel all over the Republic, which is geographically as large as the state of Pennsylvania, making sure that our programs are in order. We have initiated a variety of partnerships with their government to help the people of Komi adjust to their new democratic process. Besides the practical mission work getting done, we are constantly looking for opportunities to share the Gospel of Jesus.

This is some of the most rewarding work in which I have ever been involved, but I could not keep up this kind of schedule and then simply jump right back into my everyday

ministry and responsibilities as a husband, father and preacher when I get home. To do so would simply burn me out. I need some private time, "Wilderness Time with the Lord", to rest and be renewed before I can continue with my life.

While your life may not involve an extreme experience like a mission trip to Komi, everyone's life is filled with extreme circumstances. We all need time to maintain our wholeness.

After each trip to Komi, the private time I take includes being alone with the Lord at least one day, preferably three days and evenings. It is a time for seeking the presence of Almighty God. I take this time to repent, to praise and worship the Lord, while I reflect on the ministry that is past. I reflect in praise, worship, and prayer on any new direction in which God is moving me. This kind of time truly refreshes me and prepares me once again for the work ahead in ministry and at home.

Think of your own lives. Without taking the proper time out with God, how can you maintain your wholeness? There just isn't enough time in the day to get everything done which needs to be done. Granted, we live in a very high technology world

today, but in most families it still takes both husband and wife working to make ends meet. On top of this responsibility, there is parenting and being the spouse we want to be. The retired generation, although living in the "golden years", find themselves filled with physical pain as a result of their aging bodies. The results are schedules filled with doctor appointments, and prescriptions that are supposed to help maintain health and quality of life. Our life is so fast paced we can't, or don't, take time to even have meals together anymore. You have probably forgotten the fragrance of those roses you're supposed to stop and smell, but please do not give up. Look to Christ for the answer to this problem. Take the time and remember this is Jesus' way.

6 CONCLUSION

While earning my undergraduate education at Youngstown State University in Ohio, I worked at U.S. Steel so that I could pay the necessary tuition for school. I was always amazed by the people that had enough seniority in that company to receive a thirteen-week vacation. U.S. Steel recognized that vacation time was necessary to keep an employee happy, and as workers gained seniority, they gained additional vacation time. U.S. Steel recognized an important truth; people need to get away from their normal routines to be productive

Christ recognized this need 2000 years ago. He would take His disciples into the wilderness to rest, to be taught, and to be healed. They would enjoy each other's company, be strengthened by our Lord Jesus, and then return spiritually renewed to begin their work once again. The "Wilderness Experience" does all these things, and in addition, offers a time to leave the comfort zone of your world and spend some very private time seeking the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A "Wilderness Experience" must take place in a deserted place. This should be a place away from the happenings of the secular world. It can be a retreat, a sabbatical, or a private place where you seek to be renewed by our Lord. This experience can be in your home, but preferably takes place away from your normal routine. This is to be an experience with the Lord that would fine-tune the gifts the Spirit of God has already given you. It is a time to be healed from the battles of life, a time to get excited about life once again.

A "Wilderness Experience with Jesus Christ" gives one an opportunity to renew the covenant that was made between you and the Lord, which is to love God totally and to love your neighbors as yourselves. It is a special time of repentance, of reflection on the life of Christ, and of the price that he paid for the new life that we live; no longer just a physical life, but an eternal life.

In the Old Testament, God had the Israelites prepare for a period of three days before He appeared, and they were still frightened at His awesome presence. When He appeared, Moses became their intercessor. Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days to prepare for His ministry. When He left the wilderness He was refreshed, as

well as empowered by God, to do the Fathers work. This same Godly process is offered to us. Each of our experiences will be different, but each time we will leave this experience refreshed, empowered by our Lord Jesus Christ and filled with His joy, to continue our lives. With each experience we will find a closer relationship with Christ. Surely, you will be called a friend of Jesus.

CONTACT INFORMATION

I encourage you to initiate this experience into your lives periodically each year and find yourselves living in the peace of almighty God. I am the executive director of Discipleship Ministries and would love to be part of this experience with you.

If you would like more information on conducting "**A Wilderness Experience With Christ**" in a small group, or would like more information about our ministry, please call, write or e-mail. Our address is;

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Live in God's peace

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President/Executive Director of "Discipleship Ministries of Western Pennsylvania"

FOOTNOTES

1. Web Page, freedom.house.gov./library/values/recover2.oap; Article, *A Moral Emphasis*
2. Web Page, "associate.com/ministry"; Article, *Boomerangs*
3. Web Page, "Berlin Wall" mur-tex10.html, Article, *The Wall System, Subtitle, To Prevent Getting Out*
4. Web Page "Berlin Wall", chutetex10.html, Article *The Fall, Subtitle The Role of the USSR*
5. Spirit filled Life Bible, NKJ version, Thomas Nelson Publishers, *Footnote page 2016 Article What Restoration Means to the Individual*



Rev. Terry W. Collins
Evangelist/Pastor/Teacher/Author

Rev. Terry Collins is an Evangelist preaching over twenty years. He pastors three rural churches in the Laurel Mountains of Western Pennsylvania and is the founder and

President/Executive Director of "Discipleship Ministries of Western Pennsylvania."

He has taken several delegations to the Republic of Komi, Russia, representing "The Russian Initiative of Western Pennsylvania," which he co-chairs with Rev. John Flower of New Brighton, Pennsylvania. He is active in organizing the feeding of over 400 orphans in this Republic and has taught "Ethics" and "Christianity" in the Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages several times while visiting Syktyvkar, Russia.

The Author and his wife, Susan, are the co-founders of a weekend retreat called "Fire On the Mountain," now in its eighteenth year.

In 1988 Rev. Collins was honored as a recipient of the Evangelical "Denman Award". Terry lives with his wife Susan and their three children in Farmington, Pennsylvania and is currently engaged in writing his second book entitled "**A 911 State of Emergency**".

