

Desert

The Narrow Road—part 6

February 9, 2025

DAY 1: The desert

Narrow Road review:

Matthew 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

- Narrow Road: "Follow Me"
- Beach: We are a new creation
- Forest: A purposeful adventure
- Mountains: Climbing the mountain of relationships and responsibilities; with headwinds.

Desert – metaphor

In the bible, the desert is a metaphor for several “adventures” as we walk the Narrow Road. When we find ourselves in a desert, it is very disconcerting. It can test us like nothing else. Thankfully, God uses our desert experiences redemptively! We’ll look at three “deserts.”

(1) **Spiritual warfare** with Satan. Satan taking Jesus to the desert for 40 days of temptation.

(2) **Spiritual refining**. When everything we think we need to really live is removed. Where my real hopes for satisfaction are stripped from me. The place where lesser needs die. The Hebrews traveling through the desert for forty years on their way to the Promised Land.

(3) **Spiritual deepening, enlivening**. We find a deeper thirst for God. Where my deeper desires for satisfaction lead me more deeply to God. Real life is found in God.

Psalm 84:5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

⁶ As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.

⁷ They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

1. The Valley of Baka was a place of drought. Very little water was found. The people were desperate.

2. How did the people respond to the drought as they passed through the Valley of Baka?

3. How did God respond to His people?

4. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 2: The desert of temptation

1. This episode of temptation occurred at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. As you read this passage underline what strikes you.

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

2. "If you are the Son of God..." What preceded this story was Jesus' baptism. God audibly declared, This is My beloved Son." Satan attacks there. 'Are you sure God loves you? Maybe you need more proof.' What happens to you when you lose the assurance of God's full acceptance of you, of an unconditional Fatherly love?

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

3. Satan implies God is good, so good that if Jesus just jumped, God would save him. The trap is to create a crack of doubt, through which a wedge can be inserted, then a brick, then a split!

4. Satan's attacks us the same way to raise doubts to our standing as Christians. God Himself took our sins, paid for our salvation, took our punishment because He loves and wants us. That's the anchor of our significance, security, love, hope, importance and value. Cut this anchor and you're adrift. Cripple the rudder and you're sunk.

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

4. How would you describe this last temptation? Is there more than one temptation in verse 9?

5. How did Jesus respond to Satan's temptations?

6. How do you respond when Satan's tempts you?

7. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: The desert of battle

1. The bible tells us that when Satan attacks we are not defenseless. God provides spiritual “armor” to fend off Satan’s attacks.

*Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ **Put on the full armor of God**, so that you can **take your stand** against the devil’s schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore **put on the full armor of God**, so that when the day of evil comes, **you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.** ¹⁴ **Stand firm then...***

2. How does the apostle Paul describe Satan and his cohorts?

3. What goal does Paul give after we have put on the armor and done the fighting against Satan?

Ephesians 6:14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

- Belt of truth – We are to live based on God’s truths about everything and turn away from Satan’s lies.
- Breastplate of righteousness – How we live matters. The breastplate turns away Satan’s accusations when we fail
- Feet shod with the gospel of peace – This part of our armor turns our attention to lost people. Though we are under Satan’s attack we remain at peace.
- Shield of faith – The shield reminds us that God is good and uses everything redemptively.
- Helmet of salvation – This is the assurance we have of our salvation (1 John 5:11-13)
- Sword of the Spirit – The bible is our offensive weapon against Satan
- “All...prayers” – Paul ends this list of armor with the weapon of prayer

4. Which piece(s) of armor do you use when Satan hurls his fiery darts (thoughts, lies, accusations, etc.) at you?

5. Which piece of armor do you need to use more often?

6. “Desert” life is a matter of “Soldier on!”

DAY 4: The desert that creates godly thirst

1. *Matthew 22:37-40* tells us we are to primarily love God and love people. These are the highest two commandments. Instead, we love other things more.

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in Him. For all that is in the world the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father but of the world.

2. We love the world because we assume it will satisfy us like nothing else. We can't imagine that the world would leave us empty, lonely, anxious, depressed, separated, etc.

3. God brings us to the desert. In the desert, everything we really depend on to satisfy us is shown to be empty and fruitless. He strips us what our real "gods" are.

4. When this happens, an amazing thing arises—we discover a deeper thirst for God that triumphs over every other human thirst!

5. Here is how David described this...

Psalm 63:1 Oh, God, my God, how I search for you; how I thirst for you as in a dry and parched land where there is no water. How I long to find You. ² I How I wish I could go into your sanctuary to see your strength and your glory. ³ For your love and kindness is better than life itself, how I praise you. ⁴ I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. ⁵ At last I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; I will praise you with great joy.

6. At first, we complain that God has abandoned us, our prayers are going nowhere, and it seems like God has abandoned us. In reality, God had been merely a vending machine providing us the things, people, and experiences we believed we needed. But when the vending machine is empty we begin to see the vending machine is far more than a vending machine. He is what are souls crave more than anything else. He is life indeed!

7. He is creating a thirst for Himself that touches the deepest parts of who we are.

Psalm 42:1 As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?

8. Have you had a desert experience, wondering where God was, if He listened to your prayers, feeling spiritually dry and dead? How do you see that desert experience, now?

9. What do you now see God was trying to do in your life?

10. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 5: Hosea 2, on a national level

1. “Why am I so spiritually dry? Why do I have so little motivation to read my bible, pray, go to church, minister to anyone? Where is God? He seems so distant. It feels like my prayers just bounce off the ceiling.”
2. God not only takes people to the desert, but He takes a nation to the desert! During the prophet Hosea’s ministry, Israel had been in rebellion against God. Hosea warned the people about their sin and God’s judgment. They didn’t listen. So, God took the whole nation to the desert!
3. Hosea 1 contains the story of the prophet Hosea who is told to marry Gomer, a prostitute. Gomer has three children, but Hosea is not the father of any of them. Gomer leaves Hosea to go out on her own. Her “lovers” later abandon her, leaving her penniless. Unbeknownst to her, Hosea is secretly providing for her.
4. This Hosea-Gomer story provides a visualization to the nation of what the nation (Gomer) has done to God (Hosea). God is the “husband,” the nation is the “wife.” Through this chapter God will run parallel stories to enlighten the nation!

Hosea 2:2 “Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts.

*³ Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and **slay her with thirst.***

5. Thirst is what is uncovered in the desert, not just a thirst for water, but a deeper human thirst for that “something” everyone thirsts for. People do not recognize a thirst for God.

⁴ I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery. ⁵ Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my olive oil and my drink.’

6. The nation chased “lovers” of foreign gods. The nation doubles down believing that it is her “lovers” who have what she needs. God intervenes. Notice how God responds and notice how the nation responds.

⁶ Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. ⁷ She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.’

⁸ She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold—which they used for Baal.

7. God exposes the bankrupt nature of how they are trying to live! He removes their “trusts.”

⁹ “Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her naked body. ¹⁰ So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. ¹¹ I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days—all her appointed festivals. ¹² I will ruin her vines and her fig trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them.

8. God then goes to the crux of the matter.

¹³ I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; **she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot,**” declares the Lord.

What is the remedy?

¹⁴ “Therefore, **I am now going to allure her;** I will lead her into the **wilderness** (desert) and **speak tenderly to her.**

9. God responds to bring back His rebellious nation. Notice two things: First, notice the nature of the relationship He is re-establishing with Gomer, the rebellious and unfaithful nation. Second, notice the way His goodness will be displayed.

¹⁵ There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will respond^o as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

¹⁶ “In that day,” declares the Lord, “you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master.’” ¹⁷ I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. ¹⁸ In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.

¹⁹ I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. ²⁰ I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.

²¹ “In that day I will respond,” declares the Lord— “I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth;

²² and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. ²³ I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’

I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”

10. God takes us to the desert to deepen our trust, commitment, and to grow a deeper heart for God as our first love.

11. What strikes you from today’s devotional?