

I. Introduction

A. John: extreme, hippie, etc.

1. Lifestyle

- a. Camel hair: similar to what the prophets, in particular Elijah, wore; fitting with the austerity (stern/serious) and asceticism (unindulgence) of his message.
 - b. Food: common food in the Middle East desert; clean and good to eat
2. Getting past these surface things, if we find John's life extreme, it is probably because we do not yet understand the revelation of God he had. John's life does not primarily expose our lack of discipline; It confronts our lack of revelation and our lack of desire.

B. Last week we were at the Temple. This week we head into the wilderness.

1. John spent his life in the wilderness. The first 30 years were development and preparation for less than a year of "ministry."
2. If you and I are satisfied with influence, popularity, comfort, and success, we can avoid the wilderness. If, on the other hand, you want the knowledge of and intimacy with God, He calls you out into the wilderness.
3. The wilderness removes everything superficial and confronts us with who we really are and what we can produce in our own strength. When we come to the end of our own strength, the stage is set for God's glory. But we have to choose that vulnerability. Are you willing to deny your own thinking and your own perception to believe what God has said, or will you deny God and instead put confidence in what you see, think, and feel? This is the core of what it means to "deny yourself" and follow Jesus. When this conflict comes, you will feel you are on the edge of insanity, because no one wants to submit to a wisdom they do not fully agree with.

II. The wilderness (Luke 3:1-22)

A. The message (vs 2-9)

1. "A baptism of repentance"

- a. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. (Matthew 3:1-2)
"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,
"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."
- b. The crowd: all kinds of people, from tax collectors to soldiers to religious leaders in the Temple system

2. Brood of vipers

- a. Vipers birth live babies, not lay eggs. Common belief was that eggs hatched inside the mother and the babies ate their way out of the mother's stomach, killing her in the process.
- b. John is basically accusing the religious leaders, those responsible for guiding Israel to God, of destroying the very thing that gives them life!

3. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

- a. Repentance is beyond mere sorry, it has visible evidence of its sincerity. It extends beyond salvation; it is a lifestyle.
 - b. Many of us in the church are eager to “correct” and “confront” but having right information—even if it's biblical—is not enough to give a messenger the right to publicly confront God's people. You have to live bare before God and let Him transform you.
 - c. True repentance will cut off our competing affections and set our primary focus on being like and obeying Jesus.
 - d. *For every person born, this age has only two real purposes—one is to reveal God to us, and the second is that we would become like Jesus. We have reduced becoming like Jesus to learning His moral code, so we think, if we can resist stealing and pornography we have become like Jesus.
- B. The response (vs 10-14)
- 1. “What then shall we do?”
 - a. When you hear the Word or a message, what is your response? Often, we respond with, “I’ve got a lot to think about” or tuck it away as additional knowledge that I now have.
 - b. If our exposure to the Word (including sermons and messages) gives us something to think about but never provoke the question, “What must I do?” Then something is very wrong - either with the messenger or with me.
 - 2. Specifics
 - a. Generosity and care of others (v 11)
 - b. Manipulation and abuse of others (v 13)
 - c. Contentment and kindness (v 14)
 - d. *Fore-sermon of the Sermon on the Mount (see Beatitudes)
 - 3. If we are not a demonstration of the words we speak, our words will not carry the kind of power John's words carried. God is not looking for you to discover a “new” message. He is inviting you to become the message He has already given.
 - a. We may argue passionately for certain aspects of morality, but do we have the same passion with the of words of Scripture that confront our own lifestyles?
 - b. The messenger is the message. Our culture tends to celebrate information, but God values expression over information. Social media reflects the true state of our existence. We value posting far more than we value our friends. Any messenger who communicates or demonstrates human strength communicates falsehoods about the Gospel (see Moses).
- C. The focus (vs 15-20; John 1&3)
- 1. The fullness of John’s being was focused on preparing the way for Jesus.
 - a. Behold the Lamb of God (John 1:29-34)

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of Whom I said, 'After me comes a man Who ranks before me, because He was before me.’ I myself did not know Him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed to Israel.” And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from Heaven

like a dove, and it remained on Him. I myself did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on Whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

- 1) Decades of faithfulness prepared John to, without hesitation, point toward Jesus.
 - 2) If you choose the wilderness, it will slowly close in on you and lead you to make a conscious choice to pursue communion with God first, reject self-promotion, and delight in the exultation of Jesus.
 - 3) *Am I really willing to draw the kind of attention to Jesus that He actually wants?
- b. I must decrease

Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He Who was with you across the Jordan, to Whom you bore witness—look, He is baptizing, and all are going to Him." John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given im from Heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:25-30)

- 1) John did not have a Temple mindset of power and authority, but a wilderness mindset of humility and faithfulness.
- 2) If the loss of influence or perceived impact is more important to you than the invitation for greater intimacy with God, your life is out of alignment.
- 3) *Am I really willing to decrease if it means Jesus will increase?

2. And then ... prison

III. Our wilderness

A. God's work in the wilderness

1. Presence: In the wilderness, God asks, "Am I enough for you?"
We have an opportunity to develop a deep and abiding intimacy with Jesus.
2. Provision: In the wilderness, God asks, "Do you trust me?"
Our confidence in our own ability is an expression of pride, and it limits our ability to experience the power of God. We have an opportunity to develop a deep and abiding trust in God's ability over our own.
3. Preparation: In the wilderness, God asks, "Am I God?"
We tend to focus on our activity and accomplishments, but God is focused on us as a people. As a result, God enjoys our formation, even though we often despise it.
4. *The wilderness exposes the deepest desire of our hearts and our character. Why?
Because it offers only one thing: the possibility of deep communion with the uncreated God.

B. Will you prepare the way for Jesus?

1. In the future, when we lose the comforts we currently enjoy and the diversions that presently take our time, it will give us a chance to focus our gaze on Jesus.

2. Trouble will come, but we do not know when that disruption will come, and we do not have to wait for it.
 3. We have an invitation right now to turn aside, take the Word of God seriously, and ask the Holy Spirit to align our affections with His.
 4. If we respond, we can begin to live wholeheartedly as a wilderness people even though we live in a comfortable, prosperous, and distracting place.
- C. God's primary context to shaping our lives for His purpose and glory happens in the wilderness. If you and I want to be the priests who participate in preparing the nations (even your community) for the return of Jesus, then we must seek God in the wilderness.



PREPARE THE WAY: THE WILDERNESS

LUKE 3:1-22

APRIL 3, 2022 | PASTOR MATT WHITEFORD



FOLLOW UP FROM LAST WEEK'S LIVE IT OUT QUESTIONS

If your group met last week, was there anything you committed to doing after reflecting on Scripture during your group? Did you follow through with that commitment, what steps did you take (or not take), and is there any way we can help?

GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER (USE JUST ONE OR ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS TO CONNECT AS YOU START YOUR CONVERSATION)

1 John the Baptist had an interesting diet in the wilderness. Have you ever eaten a bug? What was that experience like?

QUICK REVIEW (OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO SHARE WHAT MOST STOOD OUT FROM SUNDAY'S MESSAGE)

Looking back at your notes from this week's message, was there anything you heard that caught your attention, encouraged, challenged, or confused you?

DIG DEEPER (OBSERVATIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURE OR COMPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURES FROM SUNDAY'S MESSAGE)

1 Someone read **LUKE 3:1-9** in their Bible.

What message did John preach? What is the purpose of repentance? How would you explain your experience of repentance to an unbeliever?

Why do Christians, though saved, need to live a lifestyle of ongoing repentance?

Repentance means turning from sin and turning to God. Repentance expresses a sincere, inner reorientation of life away from sin and toward God. Spiritual transformation within a person becomes evident in that individual's lifestyle and behavior. Once you have repented and been forgiven of sins, you become sensitive to areas of your life that are not in accordance with God's will.

What do we miss if we fail to turn toward God in repentance and only turn away from sin?

2 Someone read **LUKE 3:10-18** in their Bible.

The response of the crowds to John's message of repentance is "What then shall we do?" How often do you respond to what you see in Scripture and ask, "If this is true, what needs to change in my life?" Why does this response need to be a common one and followed through as we follow Jesus?

According to vs. 15-18, how was John different from Jesus?

Put John's warning in v. 17 into your own words. Why was this important to note in a conversation about repentance and the coming Messiah?

3 Someone read **LUKE 3:19-22** in their Bible.

Eighteen years had passed since Jesus, at the age of 12, went to the temple and listened to the religious teachers. Why do you think He chose to go to a river to announce the start of His ministry, rather than back to the temple? Who did He identify Himself with through this action?

Why was Jesus baptized, even though He didn't need to repent of His sins?

Luke continues to emphasize Jesus' connection with humble people and he sets the stage for Jesus' work on behalf of sinful humanity. Jesus was not baptized for the forgiveness of sins, as were all the other people whom John baptized. Rather, Jesus was baptized to identify Himself and His ministry with the ministry and message of His forerunner. By being at the river that day, He associated with repentant sinners.

LIVE IT OUT (DISCUSS HOW YOU CAN LIVE OUT THE TRUTHS YOU JUST OBSERVED IN SCRIPTURE)

1 Matt talked about "our wilderness" on Sunday. Why does the wilderness expose the deepest desires of our hearts and character?

2 To be in the wilderness means we need to be willing and available to be who God calls us to be and go where He assigns us to go. If you are finding it difficult to pursue God in the wilderness, what might be keeping you from doing that?

3 If what we looked at tonight in God's Word is true, what needs to change in your life?

CLOSING PRAYER

If you have not already done so, take some time to share needs and praises to your group so that you can pray for one another, both during your group and throughout the week.

NEXT WEEK: Prepare the Way pt. 3

Take some time before Sunday to pray that God would use next Sunday's message and worship service on to transform the minds and lives of those who participate in it. Remember to take good notes during the message so you are ready to add to the discussion your home group will have!

PRAISE/PRAYER REQUESTS (TRY TO HAVE ONE OR A FEW PEOPLE PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME)

Use this space or the back of this paper to write the requests and find a way to share those with the group so you can be praying for each other during the week.

TIPS ON GROUP PRAYER

PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME: Anyone in the group is free to introduce a prayer request or praise during the prayer time. Once a topic is introduced, the group focuses on that request alone. Once it's covered, the group moves on to the next request or praise.

PRAY MORE THAN ONCE: If your group is focusing on one topic at a time, each person is encouraged to pray several times during the prayer time for those topics they feel most led to pray about. No one should be required to pray.

KEEP PRAYERS SHORT AND SIMPLE: Group prayer goes better when members keep their prayers short and to the point. When someone prays for a long time, it's hard for the other members to stay focused and long prayers tend to intimidate those who are just learning to pray out loud in a group.

How to Use this Discussion Guide

This guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create a healthy environment for Gospel community, growing in friendship, and becoming like Jesus together. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, please review the guide before your group meets to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel the need to ask every question during your group discussion. This guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help your group grow in Gospel community. In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead. We are praying for you too!

Visit cpmodesto.org/groupleaders to download the sermon discussion guide every week. Not in a Home Group, but want to be in one? Visit cpmodesto.org/homegroups and use the Home Group Finder!

COMMENTARY

LUKE 3:1-22

1 John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by calling people to repentance and faith. In so doing John helped prepare people for Jesus' public ministry. God's word apparently came to John much as it did to the Old Testament prophets. God used John as a mouthpiece or spokesman at this crucial time in history. God commissioned John as a prophet and equipped him for the task.

2 With the phrase "son of Zechariah," Luke identified John as the one born to prepare the way for the Lord (1:13-17). Obviously the desert played a significant role in John's life. Luke also mentioned John's life in the desert in Luke 1:80. The reference to the desert not only indicated John's location; it also helped identify John as the prophetic voice promised in Isaiah 40:3. Desert places held significance for others mentioned in the Bible, including Moses and Jesus.

3-6 John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He performed this ministry in preparation for Jesus. John associated baptism with repentance. The Greek word translated "for" in the phrase "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" also could be translated "with reference to" or "as the result of." God's forgiveness was the result of the people's repentance and was symbolized in baptism. Submitting to John's baptism demonstrated evidence of repentance and willingness to participate in the coming Kingdom of Christ. John preached a baptism that followed repentance and was a sign of that repentance. Repentance literally means "a change of mind" toward something. John called for a change of mind toward sin. He called people to confess and turn away from their sins and to turn to God. Baptism, then, was intended to symbolize publicly that repentance already had occurred in a person's life.

7-9 Verses 7-9 record the clear warning John sounded. Luke noted that John preached to the crowds. Matthew mentioned that John preached to the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 3:7). John's message from God was for everyone. All people need repentance. The harsh words of these verses indicate John's awareness of the insincerity of some who presented themselves for baptism. How did John know that members of his audience had not repented? He saw that they had produced no fruit in keeping with repentance. John saw no evidence of changed lives. Many Jews considered themselves in right standing with God simply because they descended from Abraham. John reminded them of their individual accountability to God. They could rely neither on an outward ceremony of baptism nor on a physical descent from Abraham to save them from God's wrath against sin. Instead they must individually turn to God in repentance and demonstrate that repentance by changed lifestyles.

10-11 True spirituality impacts real life. When confronted with John's challenge, even the masses understood their lives had to change. The question "What then should we do?" indicates awareness that action was demanded to demonstrate repentance. John's response regarding giving clothing or food to someone who has none was not definitive but illustrative. Repentance of sin means that those who have abused or ignored the poor should show a change of heart by meeting others' needs. However, to limit the expression of repentance to these specific acts would be to miss John's point here.

12-13 Luke noted several examples of specific types of people who came to be baptized. Tax collectors, who were vilified for their fraudulent practices against other Jews, asked what they should do. Their question revealed a desire to live differently. The most common wrongdoing of tax collectors was collecting and keeping huge differences over what the government authorized, John again did not limit their repentance to a single aspect of their lives but used the most glaring sin as an example.

14 Some soldiers also approached John, wanting to know how repentance should affect their lives. John's response was appropriate to their situations and their sins. The term "soldiers" could apply to an occupying army, to temple guards, or to mercenaries hired by the Jewish rulers, perhaps to aid the tax collectors. John applied the principles of repentance to the typical wrongs of such people. They should not coerce money and they should be content with their wages. In each example here repentance and a change of lifestyle are inseparably linked. We cannot merely say we are sorry and be forgiven. Our lives will exhibit true repentance as we turn from sin and to Christ.

15-20 John illustrated his inferiority to the Messiah in verse 16. The Coming One would be more powerful than John. True humility surfaced as John expressed his unworthiness to untie the sandal thongs of the coming Christ. Only the most menial of slaves was required to untie the sandals of his master. John did not view himself as worthy to perform the duty of the lowliest slave for the Messiah. John the Baptist

demonstrated genuine humility. As the forerunner of the Messiah, John demonstrated an appropriate attitude. He focused on Jesus instead of drawing attention to himself.

3:21-22 Jesus was not baptized for the forgiveness of sins, as were all the other people whom John baptized. Rather, Jesus was baptized to identify Himself and His ministry with the ministry and message of His forerunner. Prayer, especially Jesus' praying, is a strong emphasis of Luke's Gospel. This is a relatively rare scriptural passage in which all three persons of the Godhead are mentioned: (1) the Father Who said, You are My beloved Son, (2) Jesus the Divine Son, Who was being baptized, and (3) the Holy Spirit, Who was in physical appearance like a dove. The words "You are My beloved Son" echo Psalm 2:7, while "I take delight in You" looks back to a key prophecy of the messianic Servant in Isaiah 42:1.