

Israel's time in the wilderness is of great importance to Christians because of the way Christ fulfilled so many of the themes and promises throughout the narrative. God's chosen people, the Israelites have been set free from their slavery but are now in the wilderness and in the process of learning what it means to be God's people before His plans come to completion. Does that sound a little familiar? For us, it's often representative of the fact that we were all born as slaves to sin but because of Jesus' great love and sacrifice we are free. We, too, are in our own wilderness as we have access to freedom but await the completion of God's promises and plans.

New to daily devotionals? Here are a few tips for this series:

- The Old Testament can sometimes feel distant and confusing. Remember that if we wish to truly understand the message of the New Testament, we must know the message of the Old Testament—this rings especially true for the Israelites' time in the wilderness! When we read the Old Testament, we're crossing into different cultures, worldviews and time periods—that's a lot of differences and yet God is the same! Take each part little by little and ask God, "How would you have me know you more deeply because of this Scripture?"

Monday, February 25th

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Repeat the Shema out loud several times, paying attention to the ways it expresses devotion to God. Remember that "shema" in Hebrew is more specifically translated to 'listen' - to pay attention or respond to what you hear. How are you listening to God and acting on what you hear? Are there things you have heard but have not obeyed?

Read Psalm 27:7

"Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me."

"Hear" is translated to shema—listen and respond when I call. When do you ask God to shema/listen to you? Do you respond the same to Him? Why or why not? What keeps you from not just listening but acting on what you have heard?

Tuesday, February 26th

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Repeat the Shema out loud several times—focusing on the word love. The word love here translates more closely to love in action.

Think of Deuteronomy 10:12-13

"¹² And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to observe the LORD's command and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? "

Love in action here is to fear, to walk, to serve and to observe/keep the Lord's commands. In what ways do you love God—fear, walk, serve and keep? Where might you need to grow? What steps can you take to pursue that growth?

Wednesday, February 27th

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5

*⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

The Hebrew understanding of heart would have been all thoughts, emotions, and choices. The heart was the center of your being—not just your feelings.

Consider Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

The idea here was that you needed to guard your heart because it was the center of all existence. How have you loved God with your thoughts, emotions and choices?

When have you considered your heart's desires as unimportant? How might God change your hearts' desires to be more closely aligned with His? What might you need to do to experience that change?

Thursday, February 28th

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5

*⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your **soul** and with all your strength.*

We usually think of the word soul as a non-material essence—but the meaning of soul would have referred to the whole person.

Read Psalm 42:1-2.

*As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?*

Here, the soul pants and thirsts for God—the whole physical person aches for God. How have you found your whole self aching for God? How can you offer your whole physical being to God—your abilities, limitations and actions? What things in your life might you need to add, stop, or continue?

Friday, March 1st

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5

*⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your **strength**.*

The word strength here is more closely translated to “very” - really, it’s an adverb that intensifies the meaning of other words. To love God with all your strength more literally means, to love God with all your ‘muchness’.

Think of Genesis 1:31, where God creates people:

³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

The word “very” is the same word as “strength” in the shema—God created humans and it wasn’t just good, it was very good. The word has so many variations that it means our opportunities to love God are limitless!

How can you love God with everything you have? What might spur you on to do so? How can you encourage your friends and family to do the same?



Wilderness

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