

Surviving The Wilderness Study Series
Let's Negotiate – Lesson 3 (STUDENT COPY)
Third Baptist Church
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Purpose of Study: To help navigate the challenges and pitfalls that lie in the wilderness moments of life.

Scriptural Focus: *“When the people saw how long it was taking Moses to come back down the mountain, they gathered around Aaron. Come on, they said, make us some gods who can lead us. We don't know what happened to this fellow Moses, who brought us here from the land of Egypt (Exodus 32:1, NIV)*

The sovereignty of God in the lives of believers will at times lead us into barren and inconvenient places. These moments of spiritual unrest, if not handled properly, will minimize the true purpose of being in the wilderness. A **“wilderness experience”** is usually thought of as a tough time in which a believer endures discomfort and trials. The pleasant things of life are unable to be enjoyed, or they may be absent altogether, and one feels a lack of encouragement. A **“wilderness experience”** is often a time of intensified temptation and spiritual attack.

Chapter 33 Contextually:

- A) Provides a look into the “next steps” of Israel as fragile and somewhat tentative. This frailty hinges on the continuation of Israel being “a people” that was formed out of “no people”.
- B) This chapter is the most thorough and sustained struggle with the problem of presence in the entire OT.
- C) As a result of the calf episode in the previous chapter, the relationship between God (Yahweh) and the people has lost whatever innocence it may have had.
- D) Their betrayal has created an irreversible reality that will play out through the entirety of their relationship.

What Are The Non-Negotiables In The Wilderness:

- A) **Repentance** (vs.1-6) – The fact that God spoke is intriguing itself because the sin of the people didn't abort God's plan. God still intends a future for his people and still expects to be obeyed. By speaking, God is revealing to us that His power and authority are still operative, even in the face of their disobedience. **However, God refuses to “go with” the people as they pursue God's plans for them due to the resistance and stubbornness of the people.** The idea of God not going caused the people to repent and disconnect themselves from those things that seduce and distort. This episode highlights the fact that sin leaves us in serious jeopardy with God.
- B) **Assurance** (vs.12-16) – By saying **“if your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here”**, Moses is revealing the need of God's presence to be with them. This is a glimpse into the crisis of presence that is now plaguing Israel's future. Moses is seeking a more intense and immediate presence outside of the “angel” (vs. 2) or the “cloud” (vs.9) to be with them as they continue through the wilderness. Moses is seeking assurance of God's presence because without evidence of God's presence, the people will appear to be on its own. God's presence marks the distinctiveness of Israel's identity and we see that Moses is always desiring more of God's presence.

- C) **Prayer** (vs. 17-23) – Moses was insistent in his prayers to God! Moses refuses to let God determine the limits of asking. He asks to “know God’s ways”, to “see His face (presence)” and to “see God’s glory”. His prayer highlights the viability and necessity of God being actively involved in the affairs of God’s people. Moses could have focused on other irrelevant things but the wilderness experience demanded the presence of God because presence was, and is, a crucial issue for God’s people. ***Moses presents for us a model of prayer because he takes into account God’s sovereignty and his own considerable freedom in prayer.***

Takeaways:

- 1) The primary purpose of this chapter is to highlight the fact that survival depends on presence. Survival means the durability of a cultural system that can provide a “home” for individuals. Survival means the holy source of covenantal life in our very midst.
- 2) The temptation for any community is to imagine that its uniqueness/specialness is tied to its peculiar property.
- 3) The God who responds to Moses is genuinely self-giving.
- 4) There is a limit on our accessibility and intimacy with God.