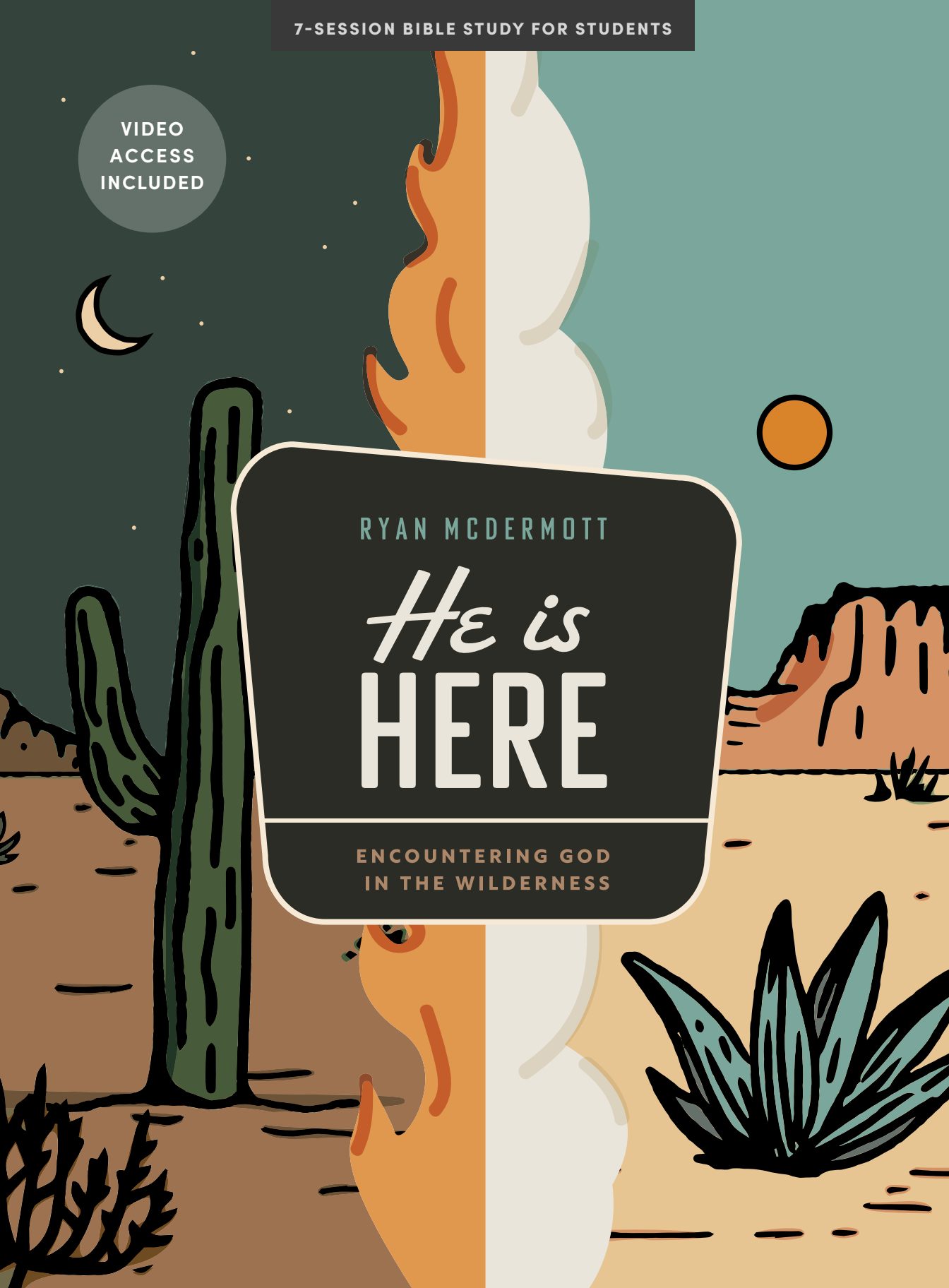


VIDEO  
ACCESS  
INCLUDED

RYAN MCDERMOTT

*He is*  
**HERE**

ENCOUNTERING GOD  
IN THE WILDERNESS



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*He is*  
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**ENCOUNTERING GOD  
IN THE WILDERNESS**

Lifeway Press • Brentwood, Tennessee

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# INTRODUCTION

Life can sometimes feel like a journey through the wilderness—uncertain, challenging, and even lonely. Whether it's dealing with the pressures of school, navigating relationships, or facing unexpected challenges, we all experience moments where we feel lost and unsure of the way forward. But what if those wilderness moments were not just times of struggle but opportunities to encounter God in deeper, more meaningful ways?

In the Bible, the wilderness is often a place of testing and trial, but it is also a place where God reveals Himself to His people in powerful and life-changing ways. The exodus story is one of the most profound examples of this. As the Israelites journeyed from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land, they faced countless challenges in the wilderness—including hunger, thirst, fear, and doubt. Yet, it was in these very moments of hardship that they experienced God's presence, provision, and guidance in ways they never had before.

*He Is Here: Encountering God in the Wilderness* is designed to help you navigate your own wilderness moments by exploring the story of the exodus. Through a deep dive into the experiences of the Israelites, you will discover that God is not distant in your struggles—He is present and active, guiding you every step of the way. By studying the Scriptures, you'll learn to trust Him in the uncertainty, rely on His provision, and find hope in the midst of your trials. You will walk away with a renewed sense of God's presence in your life and an understanding that the wilderness is not something to avoid, but something to embrace.

No matter where you are in your journey, know this: He is here. So, let's dive into the story of Exodus and discover the God who never leaves us, even in the challenges of the wilderness.



## *Ryan McDermott*

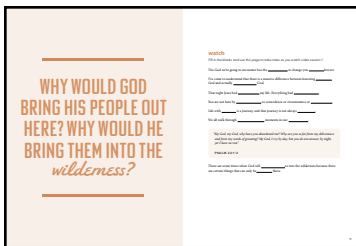
Ryan McDermott has served the local church as a full-time Youth Pastor since the age of nineteen. His life's mission is to love his wife, be his kids' hero, lead students to Jesus, and help those students be brave enough to believe they can change the world. He holds an undergraduate degree in Christian Leadership and Youth Ministry from Palm Beach Atlantic University and a master's degree in Ministerial Leadership from Southeastern University. He is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Missiology, also from Southeastern University. Ryan currently serves as a teaching pastor and the Senior Executive Director of Family Ministry at Christ Fellowship Church, where he has been on staff since May of 2010. He and his wife Christine live in south Florida with their two wonderful kids, Declan and Kinley.

# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible study provides a guided process to help individuals and small groups engage with God's Word. Seven weeks of study give a biblical framework and practical guidance to help guide students when they walk through wilderness times. Through the study, students will learn foundational principles and practical tools to help them grow in their relationship with Christ.

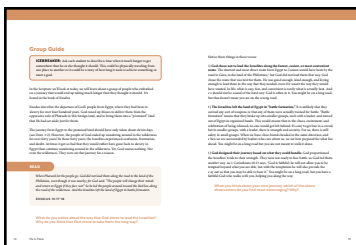
## Group Study

Regardless of what day of the week the group meets, each session of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among students and with God's Word.



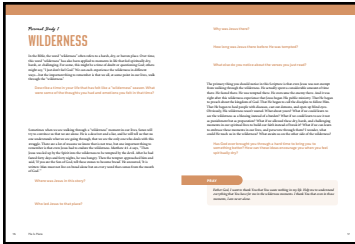
## Watch

This page provides space to take notes on the video teaching. Codes to access the videos are included with your purchase of this book and can be found on the insert located at the back of this book.



## Group Guide

This section is the main component of the group session. The icebreakers, commentary, and questions provided are designed to facilitate group discussion on the session's topic. The goal is to help students better understand God's Word and apply the biblical teaching to their lives.



## Personal Study

The group and personal studies are paired together to help students grow in their understanding of the topic for each session. Three days of personal study are provided after each group session (except for session seven) to help students apply God's Word to their lives.







*Session 1*

# THE LONG ROAD

---

WHY WOULD GOD  
BRING HIS PEOPLE OUT  
HERE? WHY WOULD HE  
BRING THEM INTO THE  
*wilderness?*

---

## watch

Fill in the blanks and use this page to take notes as you watch video session 1.

The God we're going to encounter has the \_\_\_\_\_ to change your \_\_\_\_\_ forever.

There is a massive difference between knowing \_\_\_\_\_ God and actually \_\_\_\_\_ God.

That night Jesus had \_\_\_\_\_ my life. Everything had \_\_\_\_\_.

You are not here by \_\_\_\_\_ or coincidence or circumstance or \_\_\_\_\_.

Life with \_\_\_\_\_ is a journey, and that journey is not always \_\_\_\_\_.

We all walk through \_\_\_\_\_ moments in our \_\_\_\_\_.

*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far from my deliverance and from my words of groaning? My God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, by night, yet I have no rest.*

**PSALM 22:1-2**

There are some times when God will \_\_\_\_\_ us into the wilderness because there are certain things that can only be \_\_\_\_\_ there.

## Group Guide

**ICEBREAKER:** Ask each student to describe a time when it took much longer to get somewhere than he or she thought it should. This could be physically traveling from one place to another or it could be a story of how long it took to achieve something or meet a goal.

In the Scripture we'll look at today, we will learn about a group of people who embarked on a journey that would end up taking much longer than they thought it should. This story is found in the book of Exodus.

Exodus describes the departure of God's people from Egypt, where they had been in slavery for over four hundred years. God raised up Moses to deliver them from the oppressive rule of Pharaoh in this foreign land, and to bring them into a "promised" land that He had set aside just for them.

The journey from Egypt to the Promised Land should have only taken about eleven days (see Deut. 1:2). However, the people of God ended up wandering around in the wilderness for over forty years! In those forty years, the Israelites experienced confusion, frustration, and doubt. At times it got so bad that they would rather have gone back to slavery in Egypt than continue wandering around in the wilderness. Yet, God wastes nothing. Not even the wilderness. They were on that journey for a reason.

### READ

*When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them along the road to the land of the Philistines, even though it was nearby; for God said, "The people will change their minds and return to Egypt if they face war." So he led the people around toward the Red Sea along the road of the wilderness. And the Israelites left the land of Egypt in battle formation.*

**EXODUS 13:17-18**

**What do you notice about the way that God chose to lead the Israelites?  
Why do you think that God chose to take them the long way?**

Notice three things in these verses:

**1) God chose not to lead the Israelites along the fastest, easiest, or most convenient route.** The shortest and most direct route from Egypt to Canaan would have been by the road to Gaza, in the land of the Philistines,<sup>1</sup> but God did not lead them that way. God chose the route that was best for them. He was good enough, kind enough, and loving enough to lead them in the way that they needed, even if it wasn't the way they would have wanted. In life, what is easy, fast, and convenient is rarely what is actually best. And we should not be scared of the hard way: God is often in it. You might be on a long road, but that doesn't mean you are on the wrong road.

**2) The Israelites left the land of Egypt in “battle formation.”** It is unlikely that they carried any sort of weapons or that any of them were actually trained for battle. “Battle formation” means that they broke up into smaller groups, each with a leader, and moved out of Egypt in organized bands. This would ensure that in the chaos, excitement, and celebration of being released, no one would get left behind. It's easy to get lost in a crowd, but in smaller groups, with a leader, there is strength and security. For us, there is still safety in small groups. When we have close friends headed in the same direction, and when we are surrounded by leaders who care about us, we are best prepared for what lies ahead. You might be on a long road but you are not meant to walk it alone.

**3) God designed their journey based on what they could handle.** God proportioned the Israelites' trials to their strength. They were not ready to face battle, so God led them another way. As 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.” You might be on a long road, but you have a faithful God who walks with you, helping you along the way.

**When you think about your own journey, which of the above observations do you find most encouraging? Why?**

## READ

*Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, because Joseph had made the Israelites swear a solemn oath, saying, “God will certainly come to your aid; then you must take my bones with you from this place.” They set out from Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. The LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to lead them on their way during the day and in a pillar of fire to give them light at night, so that they could travel day or night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left its place in front of the people.*

EXODUS 13:19-22

You might remember Joseph from the book of Genesis. He lived a long and remarkable life. Even though he was an Israelite, he spent a number of years as a ruler in Egypt. Even there, he always remembered God’s promise. He knew that one day, God’s people would get to enjoy this “promised” land. So in the last chapter of Genesis, on his death bed at 110 years old, Joseph asked his brothers to make sure that when God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, Joseph’s bones would be buried in the Promised Land (see Gen. 50:24-25). Four hundred years later, Joseph’s bones were still in Egypt waiting for the day when God would fulfill His promise to His people. How cool is it that Moses made sure to bring Joseph’s bones on the journey? How cool is it that they would later bury Joseph in the Promised Land (see Josh. 24:32)? Joseph’s bones are a reminder that we can always trust in the promises of God. He is a promise maker and a promise keeper. He is a faithful God. Even when the promise seems slow in coming, we can trust that His promises will always prevail.

**How did God lead the people by day?**

**What would this provide them by day?**

**How did God lead the people by night?**

**What would this provide them by night?**

The pillars of cloud and fire represented the presence of God to His people. In tough, dry, barren environments, there is never a good time to travel. If you move during the day, it can be too hot and physically exhausting—extremely dangerous. If you move during the night, it can be too cold and too dark; you risk running into predatory animals and people with bad intentions—also extremely dangerous. So what did God give His people? He gave them a cloud to follow by day. The cloud would lead the way and give them direction, but it would also provide much needed shade to protect them from heat and exhaustion.

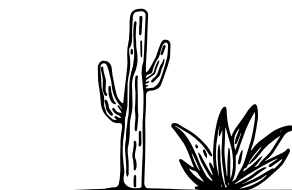
He also gave them a pillar of fire to follow at night. Why? Because they needed light to see where they were going, identify threats, and be protected, and to provide warmth in the cool of the night. God gave them exactly what they needed when they needed it, always going before them.

**Describe a time when God gave you what you needed when you needed it. Or describe a time when you knew that God was going before you. How did you know?**

Many of us can become discouraged when we have to go through “wilderness” moments. It can often become something that draws people away from God. But God actually wants to use those moments in our lives to draw us closer to Him. Our “wilderness” moments do not have to be wasted. Remember: God’s presence is always with us. He will never leave us or forsake us. He gives us what we need, when we need it. Follow His lead. If you cling to His promise and His presence, the journey will always be worth it.

**REMEMBER, GOD USES THE WILDERNESS TO DRAW US CLOSER TO HIM.**

**CLOSE IN PRAYER.**





## *Personal Study 1*

# WILDERNESS

In the Bible, the word “wilderness” often refers to a harsh, dry, or barren place. Over time, this word “wilderness” has also been applied to moments in life that feel spiritually dry, harsh, or challenging. For some, this might be a time of doubt or questioning God; others might say, “I just don’t feel God.” We can each experience the wilderness in different ways—but the important thing to remember is that we all, at some point in our lives, walk through the “wilderness.”

**Describe a time in your life that has felt like a “wilderness” season. What were some of the thoughts you had and emotions you felt in that time?**

Often when we’re walking through a “wilderness” moment in our lives, Satan will try to convince us that we are alone. He is a deceiver and a liar, and he will tell us that no one understands what we are going through, that we are the only one who deals with this struggle. There are a lot of reasons we know that is not true, but one important thing to remember is that even Jesus had to endure the wilderness. Matthew 4:1-4 says, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. Then the tempter approached him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ He answered, ‘It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

**Where was Jesus in this story?**

**Who led Jesus to that place?**

**Why was Jesus there?**

**How long was Jesus there before He was tempted?**

**What else do you notice about the verses you just read?**

The primary thing you should notice in this Scripture is that even Jesus was not exempt from walking through the wilderness. He actually spent a considerable amount of time there. He fasted there. He was tempted there. He overcame the enemy there. And it was right after this wilderness experience that Jesus began His public ministry. That He began to preach about the kingdom of God. That He began to call the disciples to follow Him. That He began to heal people with diseases, cast out demons, and open up the eyes of the blind. Obviously, His wilderness wasn't wasted. What about yours? What if we could learn to see the wilderness as a blessing instead of a burden? What if we could learn to see it not as punishment but as preparation? What if we allowed these dry, harsh, and challenging moments in our spiritual lives to build our faith instead of break it? What if we can learn to embrace these moments in our lives and persevere through them? I wonder, what could He teach us in the wilderness? What awaits us on the other side of the wilderness?

**Has God ever brought you through a hard time to bring you to something better? How can these ideas encourage you when you feel spiritually dry?**

## **PRAY**

*Father God, I want to thank You that You waste nothing in my life. Help me to understand everything that You have for me in the wilderness moments. I thank You that even in those moments, I am never alone.*

## Personal Study 2

# HANGRY

READ: MATTHEW 4:1-4.

As we take another look at these verses from Matthew 4, let's focus our attention on two things: 1) how Satan tempts Jesus and 2) how Jesus responds to this temptation. The Bible tells us that Jesus had been fasting from food for forty days and forty nights. I don't know about you, but it barely feels like I can go forty minutes without food sometimes. If I have to skip a meal, I get hangry. (That's a real word by the way: it means irritable or angry because of hunger.)

So what did Satan do? He first tempted Jesus in the area where He was the most weak and vulnerable at that moment. "If you really are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matt. 4:3). Satan was essentially saying, "I know You're hungry, Jesus. But You can eat right now! Snap Your fingers, say the word, and You will have all the food You can possibly dream of." It's not a sin to eat when we're hungry, but it would have been for Jesus in this moment—the point of His fast was to depend entirely on God for everything. Satan will often attack us in the areas where we are the weakest and the most vulnerable.

**In what area of your life do you feel like Satan tempts you first?**

**What are some things that cause you to let your spiritual guard down?**

In His response to this first temptation, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. Look at these verses to see the context of what Jesus is quoting:

*"Carefully follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase, and may enter and take possession of the land the LORD swore to your ancestors. Remember that the LORD your God led you on the entire journey these forty years in the wilderness, so that he might humble you and test you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your ancestors had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." — Deuteronomy 8:1-3*

## What are some words from Deuteronomy 8:1-3 that stand out to you?

How cool is it that Jesus, in His own wilderness experience, actually quoted the words that God spoke to the Israelite people while they were in the wilderness? Jesus recognized where He was, He understood what was happening, and He remembered: “I am not the first one to walk in the wilderness.” God had led the Israelites on their journey, just as He led Jesus into this moment. Why? So that they could learn to trust God as their Sustainer and Provider. So that they could realize that God is interested in more than just meeting our physical needs. So that they could recognize that He had given them something better: His Word.

In Matthew 4:4, where it says “every word that comes from the mouth of God,” the phrase “comes from” is actually a Greek word, *ekporeuoma*.<sup>2</sup> One definition of that word is to “flow forth as from a river.” Consider where Jesus was standing when He uttered those words. Consider the context of the verses from Deuteronomy that He was quoting. Remember that the “wilderness” often refers to a harsh, dry, or barren place. Picture it: The Word of God is the only stream of life that pours forth for His people in an otherwise dry and barren desert. What a beautiful picture of the Word of God! When the land around us has nothing to offer, the Word of God is a stream of life reaching into even the driest corners of our lives. No matter what you are experiencing today, remember that you can find life in the Word of God.

### PRAY

*Lord Jesus, protect me today from the attacks of the enemy. Help me to remain strong in the face of temptation. Help me to know what a gift I have in Your Word. May I always turn to Your Word as my source of life.*

## Personal Study 3

# THE WORD

READ: MATTHEW 4:1-11.

One of Satan's primary objectives in our lives is to get us to question the Word of God. Several times in these verses, the enemy says to Jesus, "If you really are the Son of God." What is he doing? He's attacking God's Word. He wants Jesus to betray who He is and what God has said about Him.

Right before this moment in Matthew 3:16-17, the Scriptures tell us, "When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.'" Just three verses later, the enemy says to Jesus "If you really are the son of God . . ." He attacks the identity that God has just spoken over His Son!

Satan's tactics have not changed. All the way back in the events of Genesis 3:1, he used the same tactic on Eve when he asked her "Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden?'" What was he doing? He was attacking the very Word of God by getting her to question what God had spoken. Just as he did with Eve and with Jesus, Satan will try to do everything he can to get us to question the very Word of God.

**What word that God has spoken does Satan try to get you to question?**

Not only did Satan cast doubt on God's Word, but he actually took Scripture and twisted it to try and use it to his advantage. When Satan attacked Jesus the second time, he used the phrase "It is written" (Matt. 4:6). Satan was actually quoting Scripture from the Old Testament to Jesus to try and get Him to do what he wanted Him to do. How did Jesus respond? Jesus told him, "It is also written . . ." (Matt. 4:7). Don't miss this: What did Satan use to try and tempt Jesus? Scripture. And what did Jesus use to stand firm in this attack from the enemy? Scripture.

Jesus's greatest line of defense against the attack of the enemy was knowing God's Word and rightly applying it. Jesus knew both the Word of God and the heart of God, so He was not sucked into Satan's trap. Here is the sobering question we must ask: *Does Satan know the Word of God better than I do?* If so, I am in trouble. I need to arm myself with God's Word if I hope to stand strong against the attacks of the enemy.

If the enemy's offensive strategies have not changed, why should our defensive strategies be any different from Jesus's? What do we fight Satan with? Scripture. The Word is our weapon. Just like a soldier has to become intimately acquainted with his or her weapon before ever marching into battle, we need to be intimately acquainted with God's Word. We need to know it inside and out. We need to know what to do and how to respond when something goes wrong. We need to have confidence in our weapon to stand firm against the attack of the enemy. Imagine what life would be like if you were so intimately acquainted with God's Word that whenever Satan attacked you, you immediately knew the truth to counter the lies that he was telling. Imagine if you were so intimately familiar with God's Word that whenever something came up, or something went wrong, or someone had a question, you knew exactly where to go, exactly what to do, and exactly what to say. Don't march into battle without your weapon.

**What steps will you take to be more familiar with God's Word?**

## PRAY

*Lord Jesus, give me a greater desire to know Your Word inside and out. When the enemy attacks, help me to stand strong using the weapon of Your Word.*



# Get the most from your study.

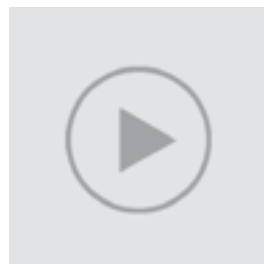
Customize your Bible study time with a guided experience.



## What do you do when you don't feel God?

As Christians, sometimes we have mountaintop experiences where God feels close and fellowship with Him is easy. Then there are times when we feel like we are wandering around in the desert and God is nowhere to be found. If you've ever felt like that, or feel that way now, you're in good company. For forty years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness and many times they wondered, "Where is God?" This Bible study is designed to help you know what to do when—not if—you find yourself in the wilderness. Even if you don't feel God, even if you seem to be in the wilderness, even if you're confused, scared, and feel alone, He is here.

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RYAN MCDERMOTT



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# WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL GOD?

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