

So where do people meet today? On the internet? A chat room? A bar? A wedding reception? At work? In a world that is increasingly private and disconnected, many complain it is more difficult than ever to find that special someone.

Unfortunately, many have found out that things are not always what they seem to be and sometimes there is a price to pay for looking in love in the wrong place. Often we are so used to the wilderness we fear reentering life!

Matthew says that Jesus was "*led by the spirit into the wilderness ... to be tempted!*" Why would God want him to "*seek temptation?*" It sounds like the last thing a Messiah should willingly do! This sounds like the wrong place to get close to the love of God! Think about our approach as we train our kids to stay out of difficult situations and seek to avoid what they can't resist. Why look for trouble?"

Why did Jesus do this? Why seek temptation – isn't that going at in in the wrong way and wrong place?

His temptation was a *dry run* for ministry – he struggled with the decisions and temptations that alone could derail his mission. He went out in the desert to do battle with the same daily, demonic, blood-sweat-and-tears struggle we must face! This was the first Lenten walk.

Conventional wisdom would have kept Jesus away from the desert, the devil, and even the cross! And yet if Jesus had let conventional wisdom be his guide, we would be left with no hope and no life! Conventional wisdom says to us that if WE try hard, and live good life, nothing bad should happen! *So much for conventional wisdom!*

Genesis proclaims that *paradise was lost once for all*, and there is nothing we can do to bring it back. So, by default, we relive eating forbidden fruit daily. Too often we ignore God, hide from God, or complain when God doesn't do what we demand or think we deserve. In a real sense, this was the first record of climate change as a perfect garden of love and peace became a wilderness of selfishness, sin, and death.

To be human is to live with sin, and the assumption that I am more important than God ... or at least more important than those around me.

Jesus went into the desert, from the beginning of his ministry, to make sure everyone understands what the Gospel is. He began in a *garden-become-wilderness* (the aftermath of Eden's failing.) His temptations were real, as he endured hunger, loneliness, and the tantalizing taunts of Satan, just as we encounter every day.

We all have different weak spots, places of vulnerability, and that is where we most often fail. Jesus began ministry by addressing the real tests that could make his rescue mission to earth fail.

He was tempted to avoid suffering and a cross by taking the easy way out. He was tempted to avoid sacrifice and suffering and accept the riches he truly deserved. He was tempted to force

God's hand, and control his journey, but instead he lived by faith, and gave himself completely into the care and keeping of his heavenly Father.

I was reminded this week of an old country hit called "Looking for love in all the wrong places." Isn't that exactly how we live? We look for love, for affirmation, for success, for security in all the wrong places. We look for what we think we need where we would place it, rather than looking for what God has already given, where He has placed it!

Jesus' journey into the desert would have been seen as seeking love in the wrong place, just as his journey to the cross was likewise dismissed as the wrong way to become a Messiah. And yet, it is in the wrong places, the broken places, the desert places that God's power is most desperately needed and useful. And once we understand Jesus' victory over even death, we are free to live in a faithfully new way.

We understand how our Lenten journey is to remember that of Jesus. On the other hand, it is so much easier to get ready for Christmas than Easter – sacrifices, humility, loving service, and meditative prayer are not where the world goes for love ... and yet that is the way of the cross. And the way of the cross leads to an empty tomb!

Why not adjust your preparations for Easter, so that you are as ready for Easter as you are for Christmas. Our Lenten journey is our opportunity to find love in the right place. Let's think about it another way; would you run marathon or take final exam without preparation? *Why then would we ever seek to live through our own wisdom, power, and strength alone?*

Faith doesn't look FOR temptation but looks AT it in a new and powerful way. Lent reminds that at weakest most tempting moment when we are closest to God.

In that song I mentioned there is line that says, "I was looking for love in all wrong places ... was alone then, no love in sight."<sup>1</sup> And in those wrong places is where Jesus began, so that no matter what we face or endure, his love is always in sight!

So, maybe the wilderness (of all places) IS the place where true love begins!

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