



“Out of the Wilderness and Into New Life”

Lenten Devotionals 2025

Week TWO: March 11 - 17, 2025



Written to the glory of God by the people of Huntsville First United Methodist Church

DAY 7 - March 11, 2025

There are times in life when we hit a surprisingly sharp curve. In 2017 an ominous mammogram led to an immediate ultrasound. Although both tests had been conducted at the end of what had been a normal Tuesday, I was told the doctor would be in touch with me very soon.

The immediacy of the situation heightened my anxiety. The following morning, I was told a biopsy was scheduled for me the next day. The news hit hard and fast. The curve had taken me “off road” and I was landing in the wilderness.

Fear was like a wild stalking beast ready to consume me. This multi-headed monster was growling all the possibilities of horrific treatments and death. Could I walk the talk of my faith in the face of this beast?

I prayed honestly about my anxiety, groaning, and trepidation. How could I get through this? The Spirit led me to Psalm 34. These verses stood out. “I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me, freeing me from all my fears. Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy... (Ps 34: 4-5 NLT).

I had one of my answers. I felt a relief and an assurance that God would be with me. I could walk the days ahead fearlessly and joyfully.

The biopsy confirmed I had triple-negative breast cancer. And God was with me. He gave me consolation through my loving husband, Woody, family, friends, and an excellent medical team. These were my angels. I was surrounded by steadfast love and being upheld by the Spirit.

I may not have been fearless and joyful all the time, but the promise of answered prayers, and the support of those who loved me, sustained me, and gave me the strength to overcome my fears, face down the beast, and walk in faith toward recovery and wholeness.

I was out of the wilderness and ready for the road ahead.

- Myra Sanderson



Prayer: Healing God, be with us in the waiting, anxiety, diagnoses, procedures, and in the healing. Be with our families and friends as they work to be the angels attending us in our times of need. Give us the words, the emotions, and the maturity to tackle our anxieties head-on and in faith that you are with us always. Strengthen our resolve for all the things we must face and stay beside us every step of the way. Amen.

DAY 8 - March 12, 2025

But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will be strong like eagles soaring upward on wings; they will walk and run without getting tired. - Isaiah 40: 31 (CEV)

One way to encounter wilderness is to find one's self in a confusing, isolating, unexpected scenario for which you have few resources or methods of navigation. That is a perfect description of my Lenten season back in 2014.

My aging grandmother had fallen and broken every bone on one side of her body, leaving her non-weight-bearing for months. She was not quite herself after multiple surgeries and would forget that she was not able to just get up and move around as usual, so our family made a rotation of who would sit with her throughout the day and night to keep her safe. We were completely clueless as to how to help her, if she would heal, what would be required of us, how to deal with insurance or red tape, and how to navigate a situation we had never experienced before. To top it all off, she was in excruciating pain, which made us all feel even more helpless.

During one of the weekends of that Lenten season, I took a break to attend Huntsville High Theater's Spring musical performance of *Godspell*. It was such a joy and a blessing to experience, especially in the lead-up to Easter that year, with so much hanging over our heads and hearts. So often, the circumstances of my grandmother's recovery left us coming up short with ideas on how to help her and Jesus's story, as written in this unusual musical, was strangely comforting.

I felt such peace that afternoon, for the first time in weeks. I cannot even define why, but a sense of ease washed over me during that show and prompted me to go home that evening and write a note of thanks to the cast, crew, and director for blessing me so in a moment where I felt so lost and far from God. I now know, with a little time and distance to better analyze the experience, that God was wrapping me in his care through the gifts and talents of others.

That night, I decided – instead of giving something up for Lent, I would add something. I spent the next few weeks sitting in my grandmother's room at Redstone Village writing 40 notes in the moments she didn't need me. I wrote to friends, pastors, classmates, and other people I admired – all just to thank them for making a difference in my life and wishing them well. It was a bit threatening to be so exposed, but it was freeing in a way, too.

In this season of wilderness, I was ministered to by talented high school students, their director, and the people who helped make that production take place. Little did they know that their spring musical would result in soothing my soul and a sense of perspective that was desperately needed. And, through that comfort, I was able to better serve my grandmother and to share my love with 40 others.



Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for unconventional experiences that fill our hearts right when we think we are empty. Thank you that we can hit what we think is rock bottom and still find something deep down inside to pour out of us to magnify your glory. Amen.

- Sarah Lauren Kattos

DAY 9 - March 13, 2025

We all face wilderness seasons. Times of dryness, hardship, and uncertainty where the path ahead seems obscured by a thick fog. It might be a period of grief, a struggle with illness, a career setback, or simply a time of feeling lost and disconnected.

Like the Israelites wandering in the desert, we can feel adrift, wondering if we'll ever reach the promised land of hope and fulfillment.

For me, February 5th was always my wilderness. It's the day I lost my biological mother and started down an unpredictable future path. It was always a day of sorrow and sadness. A day of what I was living without instead of focusing on what I was living with and for.

However, in God's perfect timing, he would later bring me my second-born, my first son on the same day.

Today, let's reflect on the nature of these wilderness experiences and how we can emerge stronger, wiser, and closer to God.

Scripture Reflection: Isaiah 43:2-3: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

Father God, thanks for promising to stick with us no matter what, even when things get tough. Honestly, these rough patches can feel like way too much. We feel totally lost, confused, and like you've abandoned us. But your word says you're always with us, and you'll never leave us hanging.

We're bringing all our struggles to you right now. We don't always get why we must go through these things, but we trust that you know what you're doing, even when we can't see the point.

Help us, God, to notice you even when things are hard. Talk to us when things are quiet when we can shut out all the noise. Show us what we need to learn, where we need to grow, and how to lean on you instead of trying to do everything ourselves.

Give us the grit to hang in there, the strength to keep going, and the faith to know you've got this. Remind us how you've helped us out before, how you've gotten us through tough times, and how you'll do it again.

While we're going through this stuff, help us to see it not as some kind of punishment, but to make us better. Burn away all the junk in our lives, the stuff that keeps us from following you completely.

Shape us and mold us into the people you want us to be. And when we come out of this, God, we pray we'll be stronger, wiser, and closer to you. We hope we'll grow and blossom, doing things that make you proud. Thanks for your love, your kindness, and for always being there for us. Amen.

Thanks,
James Sweeney



DAY 10 - March 14, 2025

In the wilderness Jesus likely felt tired, lonely, hungry, and beaten down. In His most vulnerable state, Satan tried to take advantage and tempt Jesus to use his power to seek relief. But Jesus had a choice and decided to resist fleeting satisfaction for a higher purpose. After dismissing Satan, Angels showed up to minister to him.

Carolyn and I are empty nesters and we no longer have constant focus on meeting the needs of our kids, going to their events, etc. Parenting is helpful in keeping perspective and directing focus. Now that they are gone, where do we find meaning and satisfaction? My wilderness tends to be the same wilderness I have struggled with my whole life. Being as comfortable and happy as possible. My temptations, especially now that there is not a constant focus on parenting, have become on making my life as satisfying as possible, and it is very tempting to seek instant gratification through the gateway to the world- my smartphone! It's as if Satan is saying, "You have the world at the touch of a button, isn't this interesting? That would be a satisfying Amazon purchase. One more for free shipping! Check social media or you'll miss something. Check it again five minutes later!" ... and down the rabbit hole I go. Because the emotional part of our brains can't tell the difference between true urgency and a strong urge, it's a hard path to navigate. Especially in my most vulnerable states, it *feels like* I should follow this instant gratification path even though it distracts me from God, relationships, responsibility, or even peaceful silence.

The good news is that Jesus taught us how to manage this. Jesus was tempted with instant gratification and control just as we are tempted by so many easy-access distractions and the control we believe they will bring. He could have given in to the temptation but he did nothing. That's right, he did nothing! Ultimately Jesus was satisfied with his relationship and trust in God and his acts of love, even to those who were seen as unloveable. This probably wasn't always easy for Him, but angels ministered to him afterward, providing sustaining comfort. In my own wilderness of constantly growing instant gratification, I know that God has set our bodies and brains up for this to be a very difficult process driven by dopamine, the motivation chemical. I am a counselor and I deal with this kind of dopamine-driven behavior on a daily basis. I also understand that God has created a recovery process that is also chemical, and it is amazing. If I resist and do nothing, just wait it out, the dopamine-driven urge fades and my calmer brain understands that the temptation was just a trick. I will be more satisfied with directing my energy toward my relationship with God, loving others, and yes, sometimes sitting in silence.

We are all in this wilderness, and chances are that temptations are going to get more and more easily accessible. I pray we can all face the wilderness like Jesus did and just wait it out, let that temporary feeling pass, and receive the supportive angelic ministers who say, “Nice job. That was a tough one. Aren’t you glad you didn’t give in to that?” In a “gotta be right now” world, let’s remind ourselves that the wait is tough, but well worth it.

- Paul Bakke



Prayer: Holy Lord, help us to use this time of Lent to put away distractions and draw closer to you. In our urges for instant gratification, help us to see that sometimes waiting in the stillness can be much more satisfying in the long run. Make us able to take a deep breath, steel our hearts, and lay our worries at your feet. You are almighty but, more than that, you are good. Thank you for loving us. Amen.

DAY 11 - March 15, 2025

My Story of Trusting God's Plan – by Matthew Stegherr

After graduating from college, I realized that the path I had spent years preparing for wasn't the one God had in mind for me. Despite earning my degree, I quickly understood that my future was not in the field I had studied. So, I returned to the food and beverage industry, which had supported me through college. During this time, I was not attending church or living the faithful life I knew I should. Yet, I found myself constantly asking God to bless my life according to *my* plan and timing. I wanted God to give me a high-paying job in Atlanta, introduce me to the perfect spouse, and make everything happen as quickly as possible.

This went on for years, until one day, an old high school friend reached out to me out of the blue. He was a man of deep faith, with a strong family and a career in government contracting in Huntsville. I explained how tough the job market in Georgia was and how I was searching for a career I could truly be passionate about. He offered to set up some meetings to explore the job market in Huntsville, which I reluctantly agreed to—though in the back of my mind, I told myself, *I will never move to Alabama.*

A couple of weeks later, I traveled to Huntsville to meet with the contacts he had set up. The final meeting was with his boss at the time, and just a few hours after I left for home, my friend called to tell me that the meeting had gone well, and they were going to post an entry-level position. He encouraged me to apply and strongly suggested I consider moving to Huntsville.

At that point, I was still holding on to the hope that God would provide for me in Georgia. But, with some hesitation, I applied for the position. The next day, they called me for an interview. A few days later, I drove the four-hour journey to meet with the company, and as I was driving home, they called to offer me the job.

I asked for some time to think about it and promised I would call them back later that afternoon. As I prayed, I asked God if this was His plan for me, or if He was simply going to let me follow the path I wanted. The thoughts running through my mind were overwhelming: *I would have to move to a place where I only knew one person, I would be making significantly less money than before, I would be leaving my family and my support system.*

At that moment, God was asking me to take a leap of faith and trust that He would provide, even if it didn't fit into my own plans. As I prayed, I felt a sudden sense of calm and peace that I couldn't explain. It was as though God was reassuring me, "Trust Me. I have a plan for you." In that moment, my relationship with God changed. I stopped asking Him to bless my plan and began to trust in His greater plan for my life.

I took the job. Over time, I found my church home, met my wife, had three beautiful children, and am now living my life according to God's will. Looking back, I can see that God led me down a path I never could have imagined for myself, but I am so grateful for the blessings He has given me along the way.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the unexpected paths that lead us right to where we should be. Kicking and screaming, we hold tight to what we know or envision for ourselves, but you have such great things in store for us if we just trust you. Ease our hearts to lean into your word and your love, Lord. And may all we do be pleasing to you today and every day. Amen.



DAY 12 - March 16, 2025 (2nd Sunday in Lent)

Today is our 12th day of Lent and our second Sunday. The sermons in our services today center around God's blessings and making good choices with where we set our sights.

In **Genesis 15:1-12**, the Lord comforts Abram, who is concerned that his lineage is dying out. It's just he and his wife, Sarai, with only a household servant to receive his estate. God reveals that He will give Abram a future family as plentiful as the stars in the sky. **God is generous.**

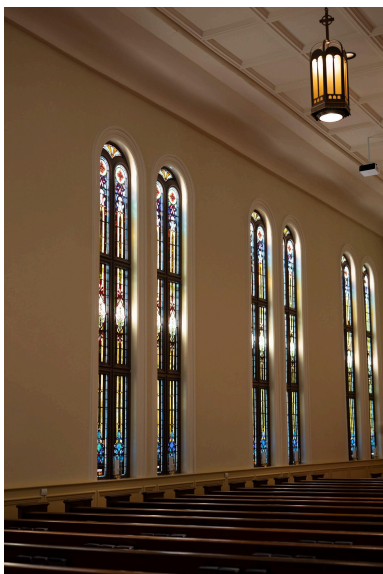
Today's New Testament scripture involves Paul's letter to the people of Philippi. When we dove into the summary of this verse, we saw a few sermon titles. They ranged from:

- Stand firm, Citizen of Heaven
- Pattern of Heavenly Citizens
- Standing Fast in the Lord
- Should Someone Imitate Your Life?
- Two Ways to Live
- Glory in Shame
- Faithful or Fraud- Why Your Appetites Matter
- The Kind of Person You Should Imitate

Philippians 3:17-4:1, finds Paul reminding the Philippians to focus on those who live as the Disciples lived, not as an "enemy of the cross of Christ." He says, "their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame."

What (or who) is the God of **your** life? If someone was to look at your life - your REAL life - would it be something you would hope others would emulate?

Paul tells us our citizenship is in heaven. "And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."



Prayer: Oh God, you are such a generous provider. Just when we think we are at the end of our possibilities, like Abram felt, you name a future for us that we never could have imagined ourselves! You grant us a future that makes the impossible possible. For that, help us be grateful. Help us to take the gifts you provide and use them in such a way that our lives are pleasing in your sight. Amen.

DAY 13 - March 17, 2025 - St. Patrick's Day

It is said that hymns often say in a song what mere words cannot convey. And how the songs came to be often tell a story of wilderness-inspiring art. One of those stories is the story of “Be Thou My Vision”.

According to Dr. C. Michael Hawn of Perkins School of Theology, writing for *UMC Discipleship*, the original wording was from a “poem, found in two Irish manuscripts in the library of the Royal Irish Academy, may be dated as early as the 8th century.”

The poem, blended with a traditional Irish tune called *Slane*, made its way from Ireland into several British hymnals where it gained the attention of hymnal editors after World War II.

But that’s hardly the most meaningful part of the story. That has to do with Saint Patrick.

It is well known that St. Patrick was kidnapped at the age of 16 and held in captivity for over 6 years. During that time, he grew strong in his faith and came to influence many believers in Ireland, which was a pagan country at that time. His faith would lead him to many brave actions in the name of Jesus, but the most important happened on Slane Hill, for which the Irish tune of *Be Thou My Vision* was known.

On Easter Eve 433 CE on Slane Hill, Saint Patrick defied the High King Logaire of Tara by lighting a fire on the hilltop to celebrate Christ. The King had wanted to signify the beginning of a pagan festival with his own fires, but Patrick wanted to signify the King of Kings’ instead. Hawn writes that “King Logaire was so impressed by Patrick's devotion and purported miracles in he name of Jesus that, despite his defiance, he was permitted to continue his work as Ireland's first Christian missionary.” It is said that Slane Hill was where Saint Patrick used the common Irish shamrock to explain the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Saint Patrick went against the most powerful person in that community to pay Easter homage to Jesus. So, when we sing the lyrics exalting our Lord and Savior, remember Saint Patrick whose example, despite many wilderness experiences, changed the heart of Ireland.

Be Thou My Vision

English version by Eleanor Hull (1912)

- 1. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; Naught be all else to me save that thou art.
Thou my best thought by day and by night; Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.*
- 2. Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true Word; I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord.
Thou my great Father, I thy dear child; Thou in me dwelling, with thee reconciled.*
- 3. Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight; Be thou my dignity, thou my delight.
Thou my soul's shelter, thou my high tow'r; Raise thou me Heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.*

*4. Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise; Thou mine inheritance, now and always.
Thou and thou only, first in my heart, High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*5. High King of Heaven, my victory won, May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heav'ns Sun!
Heart of my heart, whatever befall, Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.*

*Prayer - High King of Heaven, we recognize you above any ruler in our lives. You made the
Heavens and the Earth. You created each one of us in Your image. You hold us in the palm of
your hand. May we set lights on high hilltops to praise you and to make your light shine far and
wide. Be thou our vision, oh ruler of all. Amen.*





Thank you for reading these devotionals each day! We hope you will continue and find ways to get involved in all the opportunities of the church during this special season of faith and that you will continue our daily Lenten devotionals as we approach Easter.

If you have any questions about the church, want to reach our pastors, follow us on social media, have questions about small groups or volunteer opportunities, need service times, or more, please see <https://huntsvillefirst.org/new/> and reach out!

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