



THE
WILDERNESS
GENERATION



A FIELD
JOURNAL

ORIENTING TO THE WILDERNESS

The truth is, we are all on a journey. Depending on when the question gets asked will determine where you are at in your journey. It's never static. Had you asked me six months ago I would have probably told you everything was just fine. We typically characterize these various changes in our lives as "seasons."



"I wish we could just go back to..."

The nostalgia surrounding that place, those people, the simpler times. In our heads life tasted sweeter, even if it wasn't so sweet, it at least felt less complicated and we just didn't know what we didn't know, and that ignorance was bliss.

"That was rough!"

Ever said that one? I have. More than once. We carry the scars from those seasons, and while we'd never want to go back, they made us into something. The battle wounds. The wisdom. The intimacy.

"We have finally arrived."

It may not be the destination you originally intended at the beginning of the journey, but the arrival and having the impossible behind you, there is a thankfulness for the rest, the deep breaths.



When King Solomon said that there is nothing new under the sun, that life is "hevel," (הבל) a mere vapor or a breath that's already been spent, we are reminded that generations before us have walked these ancient roads.

Old Testament scholar and theologian, Walter Brueggeman, in his book, "The Spirituality of the Psalms" has profound wisdom about our seasons of life. He depicts that we find in the the Psalms three experiences we find ourselves in; seasons of:

Orientation
Disorientation
Reorientation



ORIENTATION

Psalms of Orientation express a season when all is right in the world. Our posture is facing toward God and there is a delight in His Presence, in His creation.

Think of Psalm 8, for example.

"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"



DISORIENTATION

A person is walking away from the camera on a path through a misty forest. The trees are tall and thin, and the ground is covered in fallen leaves. The overall atmosphere is quiet and somewhat somber.

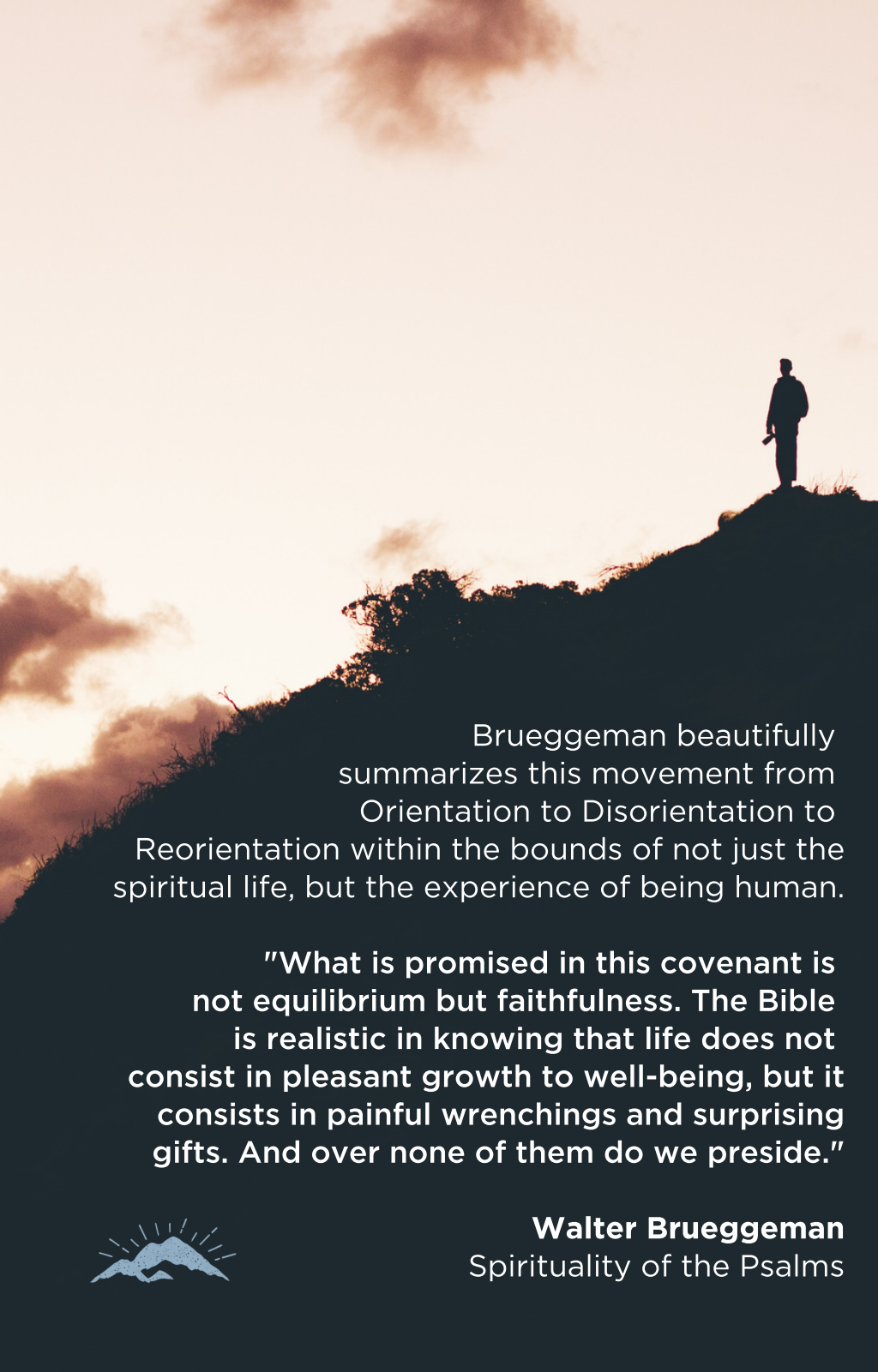
And then, at times without warning, it feels as though the rug has been pulled out from underneath us. The delight of being with God feels more like abandonment. Disorientation is the grasping in the darkness and searching for God, feeling like He is either evasive or cannot be found. In these seasons, we are not alone. Psalm 13 describes well this season in this lament.

**"How long, Lord?
Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide
your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with
my thoughts and day after day
have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy
triumph over me?"**

REORIENTATION

When we are stuck in that time of lament, it feels like forever. If only there was that light at the end of the tunnel we could crawl through and manage joy in some form once again. There is an emerging that takes place in Reorientation, a Divine rescue of sorts and the forlorn find hope and restoration, like Psalm 73.

"When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you."

A silhouette of a person standing on the peak of a hill, looking out over a vast landscape. The sky is a mix of warm orange and soft white, with scattered, wispy clouds. The foreground shows the dark silhouette of the hillside and some sparse vegetation.

Brueggeman beautifully summarizes this movement from Orientation to Disorientation to Reorientation within the bounds of not just the spiritual life, but the experience of being human.

"What is promised in this covenant is not equilibrium but faithfulness. The Bible is realistic in knowing that life does not consist in pleasant growth to well-being, but it consists in painful wrenchings and surprising gifts. And over none of them do we preside."

Walter Brueggeman
Spirituality of the Psalms



I've spent my journey trying to capture the movement of God within the human experience. My own "painful wrenchings and surprising gifts" are far more universal than unique to me. I have spent a lot of my life in the land of Disorientation. Author Paul Young calls it, "The Great Sadness." I know it as "The Wilderness."

The narrative that has spoken to me and captured my heart lies in the destiny of the Israelites. They were a people enslaved in Egypt for 400 years and delivered by a Mighty God. God did not redeem them to the Promised Land, but to the Wilderness.

We wish our experiences went straight from Egypt to the Promised Land. The space between, the dreaded Wilderness, is unavoidable. The life between Egypt and the Promised Land leaves us yearning for one or the other. Even if it means going back to Egypt. While these three movements are a picture of these seasons of life, God speaks to us most intimately in the Wilderness.

The Wilderness shapes us still today.



I believe we are "The Wilderness Generation" and have much to learn from those who have walked these steps before. For God, He was never in a hurry to get His people into the Promised Land. He desired closeness as He led His people through a land of desolation.

I have walked with my own feet and seen with my own eyes these physical places: Egypt, the Wilderness, and the Promised Land.

I can sit here now and vividly picture all of them and have tried to put myself into the sandals of the Israelites.

Whatever season you find yourself in, I hope that this story deeply intersects with your story, and together we see our place in a greater story that is being told, full of redemption, restoration, and a Promised Land to come.





THE
WILDERNESS
GENERATION