

MOSES A MAN OF SELFLESS DEDICATION

STUDY FIVE

The Desert: School of Self-Discovery

Exodus 3:1; Deuteronomy 8:2; 32:10, 12

There's nothing like the desert to strip away all the trappings, peel off all the masks, and help you discover the real you.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

DRIVING across a desert is a test of endurance. Blistering winds whip up dusty cyclones. The scorching heat cracks the landscape. Thermal waves rise from the ribbon of highway that seems to stretch to infinity, and you wonder whether you'll ever make it through this dreadful place. Your only hope of escape is to keep driving.

Then a thought shudders your soul: *What if the car breaks down and I'm stranded?*

For many, the feeling of being stranded in a desert is a daily reality—stranded not in a literal desert but in circumstances that seem like a desert. In his book, *Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes what may be your wilderness:

Your wilderness experience might involve caring for an ailing family member or an elderly parent over an extended time, with no help at hand and no relief in sight. Your sojourn in the dry lands might be a stubborn physical condition that keeps you confined. It could be that deep soul-ache that comes with an unfaithful spouse, or a rebellious teenager. It may be moving from an area where you had numerous friends and deep family ties to a place that seems strange and alien, where you don't know anyone at all. You feel displaced . . . shelved. It may be a failure at school, an estrangement from an old friend, a boring, thankless job. . . . The desert wears many faces.¹

Will God leave you stranded? Will He abandon you? No, He will not. He is with you in ways you can't imagine. In fact, it's likely that He led you into your desert for a purpose. He brought Moses to Midian to teach him valuable lessons, and He can teach us the same lessons, if we calm our fears, be still, and watch for God in the wasteland.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus sojourned in the dry land, too, and He knows what deserts are like. Pray in His name and ask the Father to encourage you through your time in His Word during this study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

For this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we move beyond Exodus to look at a passage written by Moses near the end of his life, forty years after the Hebrews left Egypt. On a windswept plateau overlooking the promised land, Moses penned Deuteronomy as an instruction manual on God's law to prepare God's people to enter their new home. In Deuteronomy 32, Moses looked back over his life in the desert and proclaimed the faithfulness of God in a song. Here is a portion that exclaimed God's care for His people in harsh times:

*For the people of Israel belong to the LORD;
Jacob is his special possession.
He found them in a desert land,
in an empty, howling wasteland.
He surrounded them and watched over them;
he guarded them as he would guard his own eyes. (Deuteronomy 32:9–10)*

Let's dig into this passage and discover God's care for us in our "empty, howling wasteland."



Observation: Enrolling in God's School of the Desert

Observe the details in Scripture by reading them multiple times.² First, read the verses above again, and with a pencil or perhaps a mental marker, circle the words that describe what God does for His people in the desert.

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God's Use of the Desert—Deuteronomy 32:9–12

Now read *Deuteronomy 32:9–10* once more in the New American Standard Bible, and note the word variations. Write down all the key words you find.

Read the next verses in Moses' song, *32:11–12*. How else does God relate to us in the desert?

Yes, God is with us! The desert forces us to lean on God because He is all we have. Only when God is all we *have* do we recognize God is all we *need*. We realize, perhaps for the first time, that He is enough.

Summarize what God does for you in your desert. Make *32:9–12* personal by using first-person pronouns. For example, "He finds *me*. He surrounds *me*."

God does four things when you are in the desert. He encircles you. He cares for you. He guards you. He guides you. He hasn't left you; rather, more than ever before, He is closer to you. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Moses' Life in the Desert—Exodus 2:21–22; 3:1

Now, let's turn back time and return to Moses' life in Midian forty years earlier. This was the training ground for Moses to learn the survival skills and spiritual fortitude he would need to lead the Israelites through their wilderness to the promised land.

What was it like for Moses in Midian? A technique in *Searching the Scriptures* is to put yourself in the biblical scene. Let's imagine what Moses experienced during this season of his life, examining his location, vocation, and education.

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First, picture Moses' *location*. Find Midian on your Bible maps, or look at the online map, "[Exodus from Egypt](#)" at [insight.org](#). Midian is on the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba, but it could also include parts of the Sinai. Where did Moses lead his flock in [Exodus 3:1](#)?

There's no one else to guide you when you're in the desert. There are no places to find shade or relief. You are naked before God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

View photos of this [wilderness](#) at [bibleplaces.com](#) and write down what it must have been like for Moses to live in such a lonely, barren place.

The desert is the place where God speaks. He communicates a message to us. We could not otherwise hear what He has to say if it were not for the desert. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Second, consider Moses' *vocation*. Moses went from a prince dressed in regal robes to a shepherd covered in barnyard grime. Imagine one of Moses' old friends from Egypt visiting him in Midian. What contrasts would Moses' friend see in him now compared to his former life?

Third, ponder Moses' *education*. God enrolled Moses in "courses" in this school of the desert. Let's take a closer look at God's curriculum for Moses in the next phase of this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study.

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Interpretation: Training in God's School of the Desert

Interpretation builds on our observations and unlocks the passage's meaning, as we focus on what God taught Moses by using *obscurity*, *time*, *solitude*, and *discomfort*.

Obscurity

As a prince in Egypt, Moses lived a glamorous life. If there were paparazzi in his day, cameras would be clicking whenever Moses hopped in his flashy chariot for a night on the town or escaped for the weekend in his yacht on the Nile. How did the *obscurity* of Midian and his humble role as shepherd shape Moses' character?

Time

Moses was forty years old when he enrolled in God's school of the desert, and he didn't graduate until age eighty, and then he spent another forty years in the wilderness, leading the Israelites. What spiritual virtues did *time* in Midian teach Moses?

In the desert, you learn to do things you never dreamed you'd have to do. You learn to live with things patiently that you never thought you'd have to accept. That's all part of the training. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Solitude

View a few more photos of the [wilderness](http://bibleplaces.com) at bibleplaces.com. The Sinai desert ranks among the loneliest places on earth. Arid and remote, this hostile land of jutting boulders and sun-beaten sand barely sustains life. Moses' only companions were sheep . . . and God. What vital lessons in walking with God could Moses only learn through *solitude*?

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Discomfort

Moses suffered the harshness of desert living. Leathery skin. Blistered feet. Parched lips. Bone-chilling cold at night. Seering heat in daytime. It was a rough life. What did God teach Moses through *discomfort*?

The desert strips from you all the things you hang onto for comfort, all the things you felt you needed through life but you didn't need because they were the things that kept you from hearing God speak. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Purpose of God's School in the Desert

Correlation takes us to passages on a similar theme to sharpen our understanding. What purpose does the desert serve in our relationship with God, according to *Deuteronomy 8:1–5*?

Your desert will not be someone else's desert. God is finding the desert you need to build into your life the qualities of character you would not otherwise gain. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Our Response to the Desert

In which of the four “courses” are you enrolled now? Obscurity, time, solitude, or discomfort? Maybe more than one? What are your desert circumstances?

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The severe conditions of the desert push us to the brink and test our faith. Will we abandon God's path for our own way? Or will we stay true and persevere? Our time in the desert becomes a journey of self-discovery as God reveals the quality of our character, exposes our fears and flaws, and explores our deepest longings.

What have you discovered about yourself through your personal desert?

Have you sensed God encircling you, caring for you, guarding you, and guiding you? If so, in what ways?

If you're trudging through a personal dry land—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual—be honest about your feelings. You may feel tired of it because it's lasting too long, and you don't see relief on the horizon. Express your feelings to the Lord in the space below.

Your instinct is to speed through this wasteland as fast as possible. No matter how fast you go, however, the time of your passage is up to God. You can't change the situation, so lean into it. Use the experience as an opportunity for self-discovery and God-discovery. Allow God to reveal aspects about yourself and Himself that you would otherwise never see. And, in the stillness of the desert, listen for His voice in His Word. It will be the sweetest sound, just what you need to hear.

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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I admit that I sometimes begrudge Your will. If there were an escape route, I would take it. And yet, I want to be with you and where You would have me, and if that's in the desert, then I choose to walk with you through the desert. I don't always understand, but I don't need to. I trust You with my life, and that's all I can do. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication* (Nashville: Word, 1999), 74.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2024–2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1975, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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