

Series -

Date/s -

26 July 2015

Topic - Going Through Life's Deserts

Speaker/s -

Pastor Tak Bhana

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like "Desert Song", "Give Thanks" or "Stronger".

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, cell members will:

1. Understand that God can give us treasures even in the midst of darkness or difficulties.
2. Walk through a desert experience and enter into God's promises.

Word [45 min]

Pastor Tak Bhana started by sharing that the greatest challenge many Christians go through is in experiencing the "deserts" of life. Psalm 63:1 describes King David's longing for God when he was in the desert of Judah and found no water. As Christians, we are not immune to the difficulties in life. Understanding the deserts of life and how to go through them will give us strength. The key in facing the difficulties posed by the deserts of life is to go through them and not to stop there permanently. Again, we can draw encouragement from the words in Psalm 23:4 when going through life's "darkest valleys." It is helpful to see life's "deserts" as tunnels and not caves. God has assured us a way out to a place of light, i.e., a place of blessings. In going through a desert, we must remember God works all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28) and that joy will come in the morning (Psalm 30:5)!

Ps Tak Bhana added that every believer has a date with the "desert." This also applies to every business and to the church. There are many examples in the Bible that between the promises of God and the fulfilment of these promises, there is a desert. In fact, there is always a desert somewhere in our lives. Even in the midst of blessings in many areas of our lives, there can be a desert at the same time. As Christians, we should expect this and not be stumbled. Learning from the example of King David in Psalm 63, we must continue to sing in the desert. God has promised blessings at the end of the desert.

It is however easy to misinterpret the desert. Oftentimes, Christians would ask "what is it that I have done wrong?" and risk getting sidetracked by guilt or depression. Ps Tak Bhana said that we can be going through a desert even when we are or are doing things in God's will. As illustration, Luke 4:1 shows that Jesus was led to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit in order for God's glory to be shown. Some fruits will only grow in winter, just as some things (e.g. character) can only be developed in the desert. At such moments, we must remember that the Devil is not running our lives, God is. Isaiah 50:10 exhorts us to trust and rely on the Lord. Isaiah 45:3 goes further by saying that treasures are hidden in the darkness. Ps Tak Bhana encouraged us to make sure that we pick up the treasures - the secret riches - that can only be discovered in darkness either through or in a desert experience. Deserts can be places of growth. In James 1:2-4, we are encouraged to persevere so that our endurance can be fully developed and we will be perfect and complete in Christ. When our faith is tested, we

must therefore push through the perseverance barrier and not run away from the problems. We must hang in there and grow our spiritual muscles and stamina!

Ps Tak Bhana encouraged us to look at life's desert as a place of promise. God wants to move us out of our comfort zone so that we can gain strength - spiritual strength - which can only come through a period of difficulties and trial. King David's losses and trials at Ziklag, where he and his men not only lost their possessions, their women, children and everyone else were taken captive (see 1 Samuel 30), happened just days away from David being crowned the King of Israel. Similarly, Joseph became powerful only after his "desert" experience in the prison. A desert is difficult to traverse. We can only go through a desert by God's grace and mercy. Ps Tak Bhana drew an analogy about sheep being caught in the wilderness. They do not do well in the wilderness. They panic and make wrong decisions. They are also easily taken by the enemies. Christians going through a desert should similarly realise that we are not smart and that we need God. Ps Tak Bhana encouraged us to get Godly counsel and guard our hearts (Hebrews 3:7-14) during these times.

In Samuel 1:10-11, God met Hannah in her "desert" when she was going through the deep trials of barrenness and of mocking by others. The "desert" can be a place of consecration and surrender to God. God's plan for the Israel nation through the birth of Samuel was therefore accomplished through Hannah's trials and surrender to God. The working of God can take time. We are called to be patient and expectant. God must work in us to get the "desert" out of us. We give thanks for the wonderful treasures that can be found when going through life's deserts!

Discussion Questions

1. **Ps Bhana mentioned the ways God uses "desert" experiences in a believer's life to accomplish His purposes. What are these ways and identify one such way God has used to fulfil His purpose.** [15 min]

Leader's Notes: This is a recap and relate question to lead people into the discussion proper. Ps Tak Bhana shared on the following ways God used "desert" experiences in a believer's life:

- a. Trust in God that there is always a way out. See Romans 8:28, Psalm 23:4 and Psalm 30:5.
- b. Continue to sing in the desert and believe that there are always blessings at the end of the desert. See Psalm 63.
- c. Be mindful not to misinterpret the desert so that we do not end up with blame, guilt or depression. God may use the wilderness experience to bring glory - see Luke 4:1. Some things can only be developed in the desert.
- d. Know that the desert can be a place of promise. Spiritual strength comes through difficult times and through experiencing the goodness of God during those times.
- e. Get Godly counsel and guard our hearts when traversing the desert. See Hebrews 3:7-14.
- f. Expect growth to come in the desert and persevere - see James 1:2-4.
- g. Knowing that the desert is a place of consecration and surrender to God - see 1 Samuel 1:10-11.

2. **Read Isaiah 45:3 and from the sharing in Question 1, what have you (a) gained as a treasure and (b) developed or learnt through the "desert" experience?** [10 min]

Leader's Notes: This is a reflect question. Ps Tak Bhana mentioned what we can gain through a "desert" experience and shared his own journey when his father developed a terminal medical condition. Ps Tak Bhana shared that through coming alongside his father and leading him to Jesus Christ, he developed a passion for the lost. He also realised that no one is beyond the reach of Jesus Christ. Ps Tak Bhana also developed the spiritual discipline of fasting and praying. Encourage members to reflect and share from their own personal journey with God.

3. **At this moment, what is an area in your faith journey that is dry/barren or where you are faced with difficulties? Having heard Ps Bhana's message, how can you better bear or handle these difficulties?** [15 min]

Leader's Notes: *This is a response question. Ps Bhana shared that it is possible that we can be doing everything in God's will, and still find ourselves going through a 'desert' period. God can work in our lives through such times. Consider what God may be saying to you so that He can bring you into alignment with His plan for a larger purpose. See Hannah's case (1 Samuel 1:10-11) where she was in a place of 'barrenness' so that God would do the impossible, fulfilled her destiny and in years ahead, Samuel grew in stature & favour and was mightily used by God in the history of Israel (1 Samuel 2:26; 3:19-21; 7:13-15).*

Share in practical ways how the 'desert' in our lives can be turned into a place of consecration and surrender to God (Isaiah 50:10, James 1:2-4, 1:5-6, 1:12).

Works [10 min]

Let's pray:

1. Every Riverlifer will choose to face the difficulties posed by the deserts of life and to go through them holding on to His promises and abiding presence.

Announcements

1. BAPTISM SERVICE

Sun, 2 Aug | 2.30pm-5pm | Victory Chapel
Come join us and show them our support!

2. Fri, 7 Aug | 7am to 11am | SIA Sports Club

Recruiting team players for inter-generational activities: Soccer Tournament & Telematch
If you would like to participate, please email your interest to fookloy@cfyouth.org.sg.

3. CELEBRATING

SINGAPORE'S JUBILEE & RIVERLIFE'S 24TH ANNIVERSARY

3.30-5.30pm: Carnival
5.30-8pm: National Day Parade 'Live' Screening
Venue: Riverlife Church

4 FAITH AT HOME

FAMILY LIFE SEMINAR WITH REV MARK HOLMAN

Sat, 19 Sep | 10am-6pm | Grace Chapel
For more information, please contact Christine Tan at 6511 4145, or email her at christinetan@riverlife.org.sg.