

How to Bloom in the Desert 4

The instructions were simple, but I was struggling to actually believe them. “Make sure you transplant the cactus and succulents with dry soil.” Really?

These directions confused me because, before I came to work at the nursery, I was an avid grower of African Violets. African Violets are a rainforest plant and I had been growing them in a desert city, Tucson. Early on, I learned when transplanting African Violets to always work with wet soil, and water immediately after transplanting.

Now here at the cactus nursery, they wanted us to transplant with dry soil. When we were transplanting a cactus, we never used wet soil. Not only that, but after we had transplanted them, we didn’t water the cactus for a week. This was true whether we were putting them into a new pot or transplanting them into the landscape somewhere. The reason we did this was because cactus and succulents are more susceptible to rot when their roots have been damaged. The stored moisture within a succulent will easily sustain the plant for more than a week. The truth is the roots of a succulent need to heal before it can take in moisture.

Just like the cacti, I have noticed that God often uses my deserts so he can heal me. When I have been wounded or my roots have been disturbed, maybe a quiet dryness is exactly what I need to heal. God is very intentional in what he is allowing into our lives. One of the major reasons we find ourselves in what feels like a dry land is God’s desire to heal us.

Before we move on, let’s review for a moment. You will remember that in past lessons we learned that Isaiah 35 is a passage of Hebrew poetry and prophecy about the restoration of a kept garden. Within this chapter, we will also discover how God uses spiritual deserts. Today we want to focus on the next verse in the chapter, Isaiah 35:3.

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ESV

Isaiah is speaking poetically about two parts of our bodies, weak hands and feeble knees. The way he words this, by choosing phrasing like strengthen and make firm, he implies they need healing. One of the principles we learn about our desert experience is if you want to bloom in the desert, you must see the desert is a place of healing.

Another passage that speaks of the healing God performs in the desert is Hosea 2:14.

Therefore I am going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. NIV

God speaks tenderly while we are hurting and he blesses us in circumstances which were of his choosing, not ours. These circumstances initially may feel dry and lifeless.

One of the key purposes, then, of us coming to the desert is healing, but there is an amazing spiritual paradox which comes on desert dwellers. Once we have been healed out of our newfound spiritual health, others will come to peace. We will talk more about this in future lessons, but I wanted to mention it now because there is a profound spiritual mystery at play here. We can't love others if we are constantly unkind to ourselves. Our healing comes first and then we learn to love others as ourselves.

It is not selfish to recognize you are wounded and need healing. It is a wise attitude to adopt, so you can seek healing from God. Look at Hebrews 12:12-13. This is a good companion passage to Isaiah 35:3.

Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. ESV

Notice that the writer to the Hebrews uses similar imagery to Isaiah 35, drooping hands and weak knees, which need to be cured. He goes on to explain that we need to be healed, so we will not become disabled.

Many times when we have a small physical injury like a twisted knee or a sprained wrist, it does not feel very serious and it is common to try to ignore it. What happens if we don't pay attention to this small problem? It can lead to a much worse ailment, even causing a disability or surgery.

The writer to the Hebrews is pleading with us to get help while we only need to be strengthened and before our injury leads to a disability. It is almost like he is saying, "You need to get physical therapy, because if you are not careful, you are going to need a major surgery." One of the main purposes of a desert experience then is to seek God's healing. We know we can't do anything to bring about our own healing, but we need to understand God values our willingness to be healed. We need to realize our time in the desert will expose our wounds to us.

Dry experiences do not cause our hurts, but they illuminate them so we can learn to be kind to ourselves. God meets us in a quiet dry place to show us what we really are afraid of. When we have been able to identify our fears, we know where we have not trusted God, where we have been unable to see him as bigger than our problems. We have to be able to identify our real fears before we can believe God and trust him. Self-discovery is an important part of this holy adventure with God leading the charge to teach us about our real needs.

Each time we are wounded it is an opportunity to trust God in a new way. Discovering our fears will always be the first step. The cause of our hurts will be numerous, but the first temptation will always be the same. When we are hurt, we will find it more difficult to trust God. God takes us to a dry place to sort out these emotions. He speaks tenderly to us there. In difficult circumstances, he woos us and is always asking, "Can you trust me with this?" Do you hear his voice?

Take a moment to apply these principles.

- 1) In today's lesson, we learned that a time of dryness might actually protect us when our roots have been damaged. When we can't drink in refreshing liquids, we need to be safe from the danger of root rot. Has an emotional dryness ever exposed to you a hurt? Explain.

- 2) How can you practice being more kind to yourself today?

If in your reading God is illuminating a specific wound which is festering, please don't feel you are being selfish by recognizing you have a need. We must first learn to practice genuine self-love. Maybe it is time for you to talk with a professional counselor.

Whenever we experience a drought, we need the assurance that blooming is God's idea. God is on our side and he equates blooming with gladness and joy. God wants to heal us.

As we continue our study of Isaiah 35, keep reading the chapter. These ten verses are a deep well of sweet water worth the exertion it takes for us to haul up the bucket.