***Not Tame***

A Discussion Guide for Groups or Individuals

Children love the zoo; it’s an exciting and safe place to experience creatures from around the world. Parents delight in their children’s amazement, while their thoughts wander to a longing to see these animals in the wild, untamed, natural habitats. The great Bengal tiger slumps down and lazily yawns in its cage as innumerable crowds of gawkers file by; the scene betrays a certain reality - were it not for the cage, the crowd would be food to this wild animal.

In C.S. Lewis’ The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, Aslan the Lion-ruler of Narnia first appears much like that Bengal tiger; a tame domesticated lion, roaming among civilization. But the children are warned: Aslan is not tame! Yes, Aslan is good, but he is not tame lion! Neither is our God after which Lewis patterened the character of Aslan. Always good and loving, yet an unpredictable sovereign is our God. Good, yes - but not tame.

**THE TEXT**

Isaiah 40:3-5

Exodus 3:7-10

Luke 1: 26-38

**The Video**

Watch the video, “Not Tame.” We suggest a review of the vocabulary words and background details below before continuing with the talking points.

**Vocabulary**

Tza-Akah: Hebrew -- to cry out, a cry of distress, wailing; cry of distress especially heard by God.

Tame: (according to Webster’s)– made docile and submissive, lacking spirit, zest, interest or the capacity to excite.

**The Background**

By the time of Moses the Hebrews had been in Egypt for over 400 years. Consider the significance of that; no North American country is near that old! Consider also how many in both Canada and United States are 3or 4 generations after their immigrant ancestors and have become “Americanized”. For 400 years the Hebrews had been immersed in Egyptian culture and beliefs. As George states, “Egypt mastered them” so much so that they had become blinded to seeing Egypt as a wild place.

Understand, it was not as if Egypt was a wild place in that they had no spirituality or sense of order; quite the contrary! The ancient Egyptians were deeply spiritual people having more temples per square mile, and more deities than any culture at the time. Herodotus, the renowned ancient Greek historian, wrote “the Egyptians are more religious than any other people.” Without question that after over 400 years immersed in Egypt the people of Israel were affected.

A significant part Egyptian spirituality that Israel would have been familiar with was the ongoing cosmic conflict between the primary gods Osiris and Set. Egyptians believed that the fertile black land of the Nile ( which the ancient Egyptians referred to as: Kemet) was ruled by the god Osiris while his brother, the god Set, ruled over the “red” land of the wilderness. These two deities were locked in an eternal ongoing conflict for dominance pictured in the yearly floods of the Nile. Set ruled the wild place, and the wilderness was deeply feared by Egypt and all their inhabitants. For the ancient Egyptians, Set was as close as one might get to the embodiment of evil that a god could get.

Into this scene Moses enters having been commissioned by God. The picture would have been dramatic – 40 years in wilderness, the land of Set Moses comes with a message of deliverance. From the land of Set -- the land of danger, excruciating heat, and bone crushing thirst. This is where God wants to bring his people. The God of the Hebrews is indeed good, he has heard their cry – but clearly, he is not tame; where others perish is the place God leads his people to live; no, he is not tame.

**TALKING POINTS**

1. The video begins by discussing Egypt’s fertility, wealth and luxury as being a “wild place” and how the Hebrews had been mastered by it all. Mastered to the degree that when their enslavement required that their baby boys to be thrown into the Nile to be drowned none are recorded as trying to escape. Why do you think their eyes blind to seeing Egypt as a “wild place”? Why was it so difficult to leave? Reflecting back was there a time or circumstance in your life when you found it difficult to leave a similar “wild place” like ancient Egypt was to the Hebrews?

2. Read James 1:2-4. Not all “wild places,” however, are entered into because of being blind to unrighteousness. God’s people may find themselves in wild places because of God’s leading and sovereignty – whether it be disease, severe loss, economic instability, or other circumstances. How do you respond to some common belief that wilderness circumstances are always as a result of sin? How can you use the story of God leading Israel to the wilderness as a story of hope rather than God’s disdain? Re-read James 1:2-4. How can we diminish “health & wealth gospel” messages, and encourage truth in the biblical narrative – that sometimes it is God who leads into the wilderness?

3. Moses brings a wild message: redemption comes by following him into the wilderness with a God who is not tame. George describes “not tame” as not predictable, and uses the exceedingly “wild” and unpredictable example of God using a humble, virgin birth to bring forth the Saviour of the world. What other “wild” stories in the Bible does God show he far from predictable and is not tame? Read Hebrews 11:17-40. How do some of these heroes of faith and their stories show even more fully how God is not tame?

4. Can you think of several examples of how Jesus’ ministry was unpredictable and untamed? Read Isaiah 55:8-9. How does that passage help in thinking of God as “not tame”? What are some of Jesus’ actions and messages that point out that he, like his Father, is not tame?

5. When George speaks of the exodus out of Egypt into the wilderness, he states, “What looks like death is life, what looks like life is death.” Discuss the significance of this throughout the entire biblical story. What are other examples of death looking like life and vice-versa? How is Jesus the perfect manifestation of this statement?

**THE TASK**

Here are some challenges for you as you take this lesson with you into the days and weeks ahead:

• Re-read Isaiah 55:8-9. Journal or reflect on the times in your life that God took you through a wilderness, and perhaps your thoughts and God’s thoughts may not have aligned. Was there a time you had wondered, “God, what are you thinking? What are you doing?” With hindsight vision, how can you see now how God was working?

• As you go about your week, listen to the well-known contemporary Christian song by Matt Redman, “Blessed Be Your Name.” Reflect on how these words relate to our discussions about “wilderness” and God not being tame.

• In personal time of reflection, read through the genealogy of Jesus found in Matthew 1:1-16, taking note of some of the familiar characters and their biblical stories. Jesus’ lineage also shows that God works in unpredictable ways. How does God reveal even before Jesus is born through his lineage that He is not tame?

• Pray for the North American church and its fallacious portrayal that the Christian journey is an easy one, and only the sinful enter times of wilderness. Pray for your own eyes to be opened to the ways God may be asking you to accept how he is an unpredictable and untamed God, who may ask you to step out in faith when you would rather stay comfortable.