



underthefigtree

WILD PLACES NOT TAME

A Discussion Guide for Individuals and Groups

NOT TAME

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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 patterned the character of Aslan. Always good and loving, yet an unpredictable sovereign is our God. Good, yes - but not tame.

“SEE WITH YOUR EYES, HEAR WITH YOUR EARS, AND SET YOUR HEARTS ON EVERYTHING I AM GOING TO SHOW YOU, FOR THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE. THEN TELL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL EVERYTHING YOU SEE.” EZEKIEL 40:4



THE TEXT

Before you watch this session read the following passages:

Isaiah 40:3-5

Exodus 3:7-10

Luke 1: 26-38

THE TEACHING

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

THE 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

Egypt was an incomparable economic powerhouse whose influence was far reaching. It is not possible to overstate Egypt's power, wealth, and influence. To this day, remnants of Egypt's economic strength and fertility are impossible to overlook. Temples, statues, tombs, storehouses, and of course the pyramids were built to show the world just how powerful and wealthy they truly were.

The source of their power was the ability to produce food. The extensive reach of the Nile bathed Egypt in fertility. The floodplains of the Nile created a natural irrigation system giving Egypt the ability to produce and trade massive quantities of food. In the right hands Egypt was impervious to famine; indeed, Egypt during periods of famine was the breadbasket of the ancient world. This abundance of food brought Jacob and his sons to Egypt. When the seven lean years passed the Hebrews understandably remained in Egypt and there gained in strength and number. They grew so much so that in time Egypt's leaders became unsettled. In a land where more means: MORE and bigger means: BETTER, the fact that Hebrews were beginning to become "more" and outnumber Egyptians was no small thing. Something must be done.

What was first rescue, this land of fertility and affluence, was now becoming a threat to the very existence of the people of Israel. Enslaved, oppressed, and embittered the Hebrew people endured among Egyptians. One more background fact, the Egyptians were deeply spiritual and proudly claimed their pantheon of gods, almost 1,400 in all, as the source of their protection and provision. Interestingly, with all the deities none noticed their hardship nor heard the cries of the Hebrew people. But there was one who did hear - the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... the I AM. "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering" Exodus 3:7. God's concern would be experienced by His deliverance, but His deliverance would be into and through the wildest of places – the wilderness.

Are you in... or... out?



THE 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.