

Pastor Chris Carr: CAMP REACP 2026 → Into The Wilderness – September 6th, 2026

But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.” Luke 5:16 (NASB)

- What drew Jesus into the Wilderness? **THE FATHER (to abide).**
 - o Consider how the verse ends: “...and pray.” Jesus went to the wild to connect with the Father. He didn’t “slip away” to isolate himself, but to commune.
 - o John 5:19 says that Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing. **Wilderness = VISION!**

Here’s The Aim: Be with Jesus → Become like Jesus → Do as Jesus would do.¹

- *But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places (also translated wilderness) and prayed.* Luke 5:16 (NIV)
- *Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did.* 1 John 2:6 (**Live IN HIM → Live LIKE HIM**)
- **GET YOUR EYES ON JESUS:** This is where it all starts! Discipleship begins with *beholding*.²

TRUTH: the Bible presents “the Wilderness” as something to run *towards*, not *away from*.

- **WHY?** Because Jesus is still out there. It’s where we meet with Him.
 - o **MANY people have a fear of being alone...** scared of what they might encounter within their hearts. Silence, waiting, & the unknown are scary... YET it’s a gift to be sought out.
- **David wrote, *You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.*** Psalms 63:1 (NIV)
 - o *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?* Ps. 42:1-2 (NIV)
- *“I have so much to do that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer!”* Martin Luther
 - o Getting alone with God when life gets busy becomes even more important, **not less!**

The wilderness isn’t something to “*get through*”... but a place to **GET TO** (our aim)

- The wilderness isn’t just a place; it’s **A PACE**. Many people are simply doing **TOO MUCH**.
 - o It’s where Jesus invites us to **slow down & wait**. Wait with Him and on Him.
 - o **BIG QUESTION: Will You Choose The Wilderness?**³

A Voice Crying Out ~ After Malachi (last book in OT), God was “silent” for roughly **400 years!**

- This was a **wilderness time** for the people of Israel, waiting for God to appear.
 - o **AFTER 400 YEARS:** *The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send MY MESSENGER ahead of you, who will prepare YOUR way” — ³ “a voice of one calling IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”* Mark 1:1-3 (NIV)

Q: PREPARE FOR WHAT? More accurately, prepare for **WHOM?**

- During this time, Israel was desperately waiting for a **SAVIOUR**.
 - o A **DELIVERER**. Someone to **RESCUE THEM** from Rome. AKA, “**THE MESSIAH**”.
- **SO... WHO IS “THE MESSENGER”?** We know they aren’t the Messiah, but someone else. Why? Because the messenger’s job was to prepare the way for Him... for none other than **THE LORD!**
 - o **And Where Will “The Messenger” Do This Preparation Work??** You guessed it...
 - o **IN THE WILDERNESS!**

¹ Borrowed and adapted from John Mark Comer, “Ruthless Elimination of Hurry”.

² Phrase borrowed from Samuel Whitefield’s book, “Discipleship Begins With Beholding”.

³ Phrase borrowed from Samuel Whitefield’s book, “Will You Choose The Wilderness?”. His book was a huge inspiration for this camp theme and I am grateful for his contributions and insights!

⁴ And so **JOHN THE BAPTIST appeared IN THE WILDERNESS**, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ **The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out TO HIM.** Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ **And this was his message:** "**AFTER ME** comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Mark 1:4-8 (NIV)

- John the Baptist was "**A VOICE CRYING OUT** in the Wilderness."

BIG TRUTH: John **PREPARED THE WAY** for Jesus' first coming. The Church is called to prepare the way for His 2nd coming. God desires a CHURCH that, like John, **APPEARS IN THE WILDERNESS**, crying out...

"prepare the way for the Lord." **THIS IS OUR MARANATHA CRY!**

- **IN SHORT:** Jesus & John both *chose* the wilderness. Will YOU?

WHO WAS JOHN?

- John was Jesus' cousin.
- John was a promised child whose birth was miraculous & foretold.
- John was a prophet. Well... according to Jesus, "**MORE** than a prophet." Matt 11:9
 - o He was certainly "**cut from the same cloth...**". Pay attention to **his clothes**.
 - o "*John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt...*" Mark 1:6 (NIV)
 - **HE WAS LIKE ELIJAH!**
 - o Elijah "*...had a garment of hair and had a leather belt around his waist.*" 2 Kings 1:8
- John was... **a health nut?** **Grasshoppers & honey!** Lean & clean insect protein!!
 - o Again, we breeze over details like this in Scripture. John lived a **SET APART** life. He ate food that was both available within His calling & permitted by Scripture (Lev. 11:22).

#10 | John Leapt For Joy When He First Met Jesus (...in the womb!)

- ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby **leaped in her womb**, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In **a LOUD VOICE she exclaimed:** "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, **the baby in my womb leaped for joy.** Luke 1:41-44 (NIV)
 - o John recognized Jesus the Messiah **IN THE WOMB**. That's remarkable, especially considering the esteemed "religious leaders" failed to do this...
 - o **John LEAPT for joy!** Jesus was His joy & His mother's joy too! That continued in his life.
 - o Notice his mom **EXCLAIMED** in a loud voice, "**BLESSED ARE YOU.**" Before John had a voice to cry out, his mother cried out for him!!

#9 | John Slipped Away Into The Wilderness (...again, even in the womb!)

- *Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained **in seclusion**.* Luke 1:24 (NIV)
 - o **INTERESTING!** We don't know where exactly Elizabeth went, but she withdrew. I doubt that a pregnant women went to a literal wilderness, but in the spirit of "slipping away" from the public eye, Elizabeth (and John within her womb) **went into seclusion**.
 - o This was another **prophetic foreshadowing** of what John's life would become!

#8 | John Grew Up In The Wilderness (...he chose it)

- *And the child (i.e. John) **grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived IN THE WILDERNESS until he appeared publicly to Israel.*** Luke 1:80 (NIV)

- We don't know exactly when he retreated into the wilderness, but it was likely early in his life that he began to "serve the Lord" as a priest, **much like Samuel the prophet.**
- He was strong in spirit & chose to wait in the wilderness – **why??** – for preparation!

#7 | John Baptized JESUS

- ⁹ *Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was **baptized by John** in the Jordan. Mark 1:9-11*
 - o **Note:** JESUS was baptized. Wow. November is coming, & so are baptisms!!
 - o **Matthew tells us that John objected to baptizing Jesus...** *"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"* **Matt. 3:14.** But Jesus was adamant, and John "consented".
 - o John was **HUMBLE** – didn't assume he was worthy BUT didn't argue either. He obeyed!

#6 | John Was A Friend Of The Bridegroom

- ²⁸ *You yourselves can testify that I said, '**I am not the Messiah** but am sent ahead of him.'* ²⁹ ***The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. John 3:28-29***
 - o **According to ancient Jewish wedding customs:** the bride would be accompanied (aka watched over, protected) by a friend of the groom. The friend would care for her needs and be a go-between for the groom & the bride. **This was John!!**
- Notice John was NOT the center of attention (rather, the coming groom & waiting bride were), yet this was a JOYFUL task for him! John was **LOYAL** & **FAITHFUL**! He heard the voice of the **bridegroom** & **readied the bride** (God's people Israel & The Church) for His soon arrival!

#5 | John Had Disciples (...actively lived in community, not isolation!)

- Many people assume John was a hermit, likely from his wild appearances... a grasshopper eating wild bush man... *"He's gotta be a loner... **a bachelor, at least!**"* Yet, John had **Disciples!**
- ¹⁴ *Then **John's disciples** came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"* **Matt 9:14 ~ We also know he *disciplined them to FAST!***
 - o John was misunderstood... disliked by some, but **respected**. The crowd revered John as a Godly man, and he had close followers. This means John actively lived in community!
 - o **The wilderness is not permission to do life alone:** *"Let him who cannot be alone beware of community... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone... Each by itself has profound perils and pitfalls."* Dietrich Bonehoeffer

#4 | John **HAD** Disciples (...that all left to follow Jesus! He saw this as success!!)

- ²⁶ *They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and **everyone is going to him.**"...* ²⁹ ***The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now COMPLETE.*** ³⁰ ***He must become greater; I must become less.*** **John 3:26-30 (NIV)**
 - o John possessed a **RARE quality:** He was selfless, understanding the mission was not to gain a following or to be liked, praised, or admired. **JESUS MUST BECOME GREATER.**
 - o John prepared the way for the Lord THEN got out of the way.
 - **Sign of a GREAT, Godly leader:** sets OTHERS up to succeed in their mission.

#3 | John Fearlessly Confronted the Crowd & King (...and went to jail)

- ⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “**You brood of vipers!** Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?” ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. Luke 3:7-8
- Boldness to the crowds is one thing, but John even exemplified courage & conviction when addressing the powerful elite of his day. ¹⁹ But when John rebuked **Herod the tetrarch** because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done, ²⁰ Herod added this to them all: **He locked John up in prison.** Luke 3:19-20 (NIV)
- **Wilderness → JAIL HOUSE!** “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.” Matt. 11:6
 - o “Preachers make pulpits famous; prophets make prisons famous.” L. Ravenhill
 - o Remember that when it comes to faithfulness in one’s calling, hardship is not necessarily a sign you’re doing something wrong. In fact, likely means you’re doing something right.

#2 | John Gave God His Heart & Herod Took His Head

- John knew **WHOSE he was**, so he knew **WHO he was** and **WHAT he was called to do**. There is no question that John gave God his heart. **He lived a FULLY SURRENDERED life!**
 - o He was prepared for the cost of discipleship. Are you?
- John leaves an unsettling example to follow: **FEAR GOD**, not man. **OBEY GOD** at all costs.
- ¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, “John, **whom I beheaded**, has been raised from the dead!” ¹⁷ For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, whom he had married. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” ¹⁹ So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰ because **Herod feared John** and **protected him**, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, **he was greatly puzzled**; yet **he liked to listen to him.** Mark 6:16-20
- Notice that when John was in the wilderness, people came to HIM to listen. He stayed planted where God called him. And even in a PRISON CELL, people (Herod) still came to HIM! John was **unshakeable** and **consistent**. He brought God’s kingdom to bear in any circumstance & place.
 - o John preached a short, simple message **and let God take care of the rest.**
 - o **In Fact, his message wasn’t even NEW.** It can be summarized in one word: **REPENT!**

#1 | JESUS CALLED JOHN THE GREATEST

- Jesus loved John... deeply.
 - o Jesus admired John’s life & loyalty to the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - Jesus sympathized with John when he was arrested for the righteousness sake.
 - Jesus mourned for John when he was executed.
- And In Matt. 11, Jesus Gave John A Most Prestigious Title: **“The Greatest”** ...
- ⁷...Jesus began to speak to the crowd **about John**: **“What did you go out INTO THE WILDERNESS to see?** A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. ⁹ Then what did you go out to see? **A PROPHET? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.** ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written: “‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ ¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist...” Matthew 11:7-11 (NIV)

“John had often borne witness to Jesus; now Jesus bears witness to John.”

Expositor's Bible Commentary

JOHN WAS A PROPHET. Yes! A spokesperson for God like Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc. This hadn't been seen in Israel for hundreds of years!! **But MORE than that...?** John was also the **fulfillment OF prophecy. A promise from God! John had a message, but more than that, HE WAS THE MESSAGE!**

- He was **"The Elijah To Come..."** as Jesus goes on to say. **THE GREATEST born of men.**
- **"...yet whoever is LEAST in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."** Matthew 11:11 (NIV) – That is written... **TO US.** And it's very **humbling.**
- **TRUTH: John wasn't the "end of an era", he was a prototype of what was to come.** He has been called a forerunner of a NEW GENERATION. In other words... you and I have access to the same Spirit and are called into ACTION. In fact, we have a more complete picture than John did.
 - o **John was a MAN in the wilderness crying out. TODAY God is looking for a CHURCH in the wilderness, CRYING OUT – prepare the way for the Lord!!**

BIG Question 1: How do you define success? What is GREATNESS?

- **Consider John:** *"Only had a visible ministry for 6-18 months. Was in jail longer than he was a public figure. Was never invited to serve, travel, or minister with Jesus. Lived in a small, isolated place. Did not lead any kind of large movement. Did not do any miracles. Did not speak about visionary encounters with God. Did not give any new prophecies."* Samuel Whitefield

BIG Question 2: Who (or what) are you living for? For Jesus? yourself? or _____?

- Some in this room care too much about what others think about you and not enough what God thinks about you. Some of you may be living for the wrong thing and aren't prepared to stand before a Holy God. Our lives are not our own.

BIG Question 3: John was ready for Jesus' 1st coming. Will the church be ready for His return?

- **Are YOU ready for Jesus to come back?**
- **Are you doing your part to prepare yourself & others for His return?**

CONCLUSION: Jesus & John both chose the wilderness. Will YOU?

- **John was a voice CRYING OUT.** He both **embraced** & **refused** silence. He chose the Wilderness (*a place of seclusion*) to live & do ministry. But He also made the Wilderness into "his pulpit".
 - o **John offered his body as a living sacrifice to God, and because of that – HE HAD A MISSION & MESSAGE for the world.**
 - o **He is A VOICE CRYING OUT. We are called to join Him.**