

JESUS ZONE: WILDERNESS TRAINING

“Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.”

Luke 4:1

After enduring an eight to twelve week training cycle and competing in a powerlifting meet, many lifters take a few days off from the gym before resuming their training. The purpose of this “downtime” is to recover mentally, emotionally, and physically before beginning a new cycle.

Some lifters train with a specific “off season” in which they utilize lighter weights to allow their bodies and minds to recover and prepare for their “competitive season.” In both cases, time away from the gym is designed to help us prepare for our next attack in the weight room.



All-Time record holder Kris Clark understands the importance of taking time

Similarly, the role of “wilderness training” in the preparation of a leader cannot be overemphasized. Throughout Scripture we read how God utilized wilderness experiences to train leaders like Moses, David, John the Baptist, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and how it prepared them to be “fishers of men.”

Moses spent 40 years living in the desert of Midian before being called by God to the burning bush. The time spent in the desert

served to prepare him to stand up to Pharaoh and lead the Hebrew nation out of slavery. David spent years tending his father’s sheep in the fields. In fact, when David volunteered to battle Goliath, King Saul questioned his ability. David responded confidently, stating, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and

struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.” John the Baptist lived in the wilderness and spent much time with God. Once his ministry began, John gathered many followers. His mission of being God’s messenger, however, was so engrained in him that when he saw Jesus he stated: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days before His ministry began. For the next three years, He transformed the world with God’s Word. In short, God chooses to refine a leader’s character in obscurity where He can instill His vision in the mind and heart of the leader while teaching the leader the value of hard work and the importance of trusting in God.

In today’s world, leaders rarely get the opportunity to experience wilderness training. Businesses host retreats for their leaders and “all hands” gatherings for employees, however, true wilderness training to prepare leaders is not considered

necessary. Those that have experienced wilderness training, however, are considered by many Americans to be the standard in values-based leadership. Mother Teresa left home at the age of eighteen to join the Sisters of Loreto; her life was devoted to God and helping the poor. In his autobiography, Rev. Billy Graham wrote that he often paddled a small canoe on the Hillsborough River to a small island where he would preach to “the birds, alligators, and cypress stumps.”

As Christian lifters, it is imperative that we take time off to spend with God and solidify our mission both on and off the competitive platform. I was very fortunate to have survived my time in Afghanistan, and am thankful that God used the time I spent in the desert to refine my dependence on Him and to understand how He could use me in our great sport. R.A.W. United was originally conceived in Afghanistan, and it has now grown into Strong Life Christian Ministries as a result of the wilderness training experienced in the desert.



Teenage sensation Nate McCool and rising youth star Sadie Forman

Of course, we certainly don’t need to leave home or go to war to experience God’s presence in our lives and to discover His mission for us. We simply need to take time without the distraction of cell phones, I-Pads,

computers, etc. and spend quality time with our Creator. As Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”