



## **Into the Desert** **Finding Purpose Amid the Pain**

by Jeromy Deibler

A friend once told me that experience without reflection is pointless. So today I'm sitting in a big leather chair at my favorite bakery with my feet up on the coffee table thinking about the past. I started with just the past weekend, now I've ventured back over the past few years.

After ten straight years of touring with our worship band, FFH—some of those years traveling over two hundred days a year—my wife, Jennifer, and I and put the brakes on our music careers in 2006 and moved to South Africa along with our 3-year-old son. We spent six wonderfully quiet months there and then moved back home expecting to begin our “next life.” But for the next year, the Lord was silent. We waited for direction and wandered the desert of silence, walking in circles of discontent.

During the wait, after several years of unexplainable physical symptoms, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. And during that time, Jennifer lost both of her only grandparents to illness. What we expected to be a time of great motion and new beginnings turned into a time of involuntary silence and heartache. Still, we kept asking, “What’s next Father? Where do we go from here?” Our hearts were still addicted to motion, but the Lord was inviting us to slow down and detox.

At some point during the process we got tired of asking about the future. We stopped looking for the next big sign. I don't know whether it was wisdom or just spiritual fatigue that led us to give up, but at some point we just surrendered. We stopped living in the things to come and just accepted where the Lord had us at the time. The decision came during a conversation in our kitchen, where most of our important talks happen, and it began the process of enjoying the desert. It was a turning point.

God's silence—or the desert, or winter, or whatever you chose to call it—is *not* the absence of His presence. I've found that it's actually the opposite. Some of my sweetest times with Jennifer or friends have come when we are just

*with*

each other. No words are needed. That's how the desert is with Yahweh if you settle down and let it happen.

It took me a year to let it happen, but it was worth it. And it would have never happened without the hard stuff that brought me here. I say "here" because I'm still wandering in many ways. I still have lots of questions, and I still have MS. But I also have a new hope and a new understanding of God that I didn't have before.

I have new plans, but I know that God can thwart them at any time, and I'm okay with that. If He chooses to work against me, it will be for my good, as painful as that may be. I have to work against my kids when they get ahead of themselves, and I know that Yahweh may have to do that for me. And I know that it may make me mad and cause me to question, but I know He can handle my questions and my anger. I also know He can make me grateful for my illness because without it I wouldn't have slowed down. And I know He can heal me if and when He chooses. But if He doesn't, it's because the painful things are sometimes best for me.

I've learned some things in the desert. Some are things that can *only* be learned in the desert. Even when you are lonely, lost, and frustrated, what you need still falls from the sky.

*"But then I will win her back once again. I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her there" (Hosea 2:14).*