

In the Wilderness Journal

Journaling can be a powerful spiritual practice, allowing campers to process the concepts being presented at camp and to hear what God is saying to them directly about their unique concerns and situations.

The following pages offer some reflection questions, particularly for older campers. For younger campers, you might ask more general questions that are the same each day, such as

- What was your favorite part of the day today?
- What did you learn about God today?
- Did you hear or do anything today that made you think of something God might want you to start or stop doing?

Emphasize that each camper's journal is sacred and should be left alone by other campers. If you think journals would be safer if the counselor gathered them and put them in a safe place, have counselors do so.

Whether or not you use any of the suggested questions, consider setting aside time for journaling. Tell campers that their journals are just for them. If they would rather draw than write words, that's fine. Journals are tools for getting in touch with ourselves and with God.

In the Wilderness Journal

Day 1: Wilderness Is

Psalm 139: 7-14

Read: Psalm 139: 11-12

*If I said, "The darkness will definitely hide me;
the light will become night around me,"*

*even then the darkness isn't too dark for you!
Nighttime would shine bright as day,
because darkness is the same as light to you!*

Reflect:

- What are the differences between dark and light?
- What times of day do you most often think about God?
- How does it feel to know that God is with you at all times and in all places?

Respond:

Can you draw a picture of a place you would like to explore? Can you add yourself to the picture? Can you include something to remind you that God is with you?

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Day 2: Wilderness Awes

Job 12: 7-10 (NRSVUE)

Read: Job 12:7-10

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you,
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

Reflect:

- What question would you like to ask an animal?
- What do you think the animals or plants might want us to know?
- How do you think animals and plants might worship God?

Respond:

Can you draw a picture of an animal or plant you think would be a good teacher? Can you include yourself in the picture as one learning? Where might God be in the picture?

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Day 3: Wilderness Leads

Exodus 13:17-22

Read Exodus 13:17-22

When Pharaoh let the people go, God didn't lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, even though that was the shorter route. God thought, If the people have to fight and face war, they will run back to Egypt. So, God led the people by the roundabout way of the Red Sea desert. The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt ready for battle. Moses took with him Joseph's bones just as Joseph had made Israel's sons promise when he said to them, "When God takes care of you, you must carry my bones out of here with you." They set out from Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. The Lord went in front of them during the day in a column of cloud to guide them and at night in a column of lightning to give them light. This way, they could travel during the day and at night. The column of cloud during the day and the column of lightning at night never left its place in front of the people.

Reflect:

- How good are you at finding your way home or to school?
- Who do you trust to guide you to new places?
- How do you think God might give directions?

Respond:

Can you draw a picture of someone following a path to a new place? Can you place yourself in the picture? Where might God be in the picture?

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Day 4: Wilderness Frightens

Matthew 14:22-30

Read Matthew 14:22-30

Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowds. When he sent them away, he went up onto a mountain by himself to pray. Evening came, and he was alone. Meanwhile, the boat, fighting a strong headwind, was being battered by the waves and was already far away from land. Very early in the morning, he came to his disciples, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified and said, "It's a ghost!" They were so frightened they screamed.

Just then, Jesus spoke to them, "Be encouraged! It's me. Don't be afraid."

Peter replied, "Lord, if it's you, order me to come to you on the water."

And Jesus said, "Come."

Then Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when Peter saw the strong wind, he became frightened. As he began to sink, he shouted, "Lord, rescue me!"

Reflect:

- What are you afraid of?
- What helps you feel brave?
- How might God help us feel brave?

Respond:

Can you draw a picture of you being brave with something that scares you? Where might God be in your picture?

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Day 5: Wilderness Unites

Esther 4:12-17

Read Esther 4:12-17

When they told Mordecai Esther's words, he had them respond to Esther: "Don't think for one minute that, unlike all the other Jews, you'll come out of this alive simply because you are in the palace. In fact, if you don't speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows? Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family."

Esther sent back this word to Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews who are in Susa and tell them to give up eating to help me be brave. They aren't to eat or drink anything for three whole days, and I myself will do the same, along with my female servants. Then, even though it's against the law, I will go to the king; and if I am to die, then die I will." So Mordecai left where he was and did exactly what Esther had ordered him.

Reflect:

- What groups or communities are you part of?
- How do you help the people in your communities?
- How does God help us care for each other?

Respond:

Can you draw a picture of a group or community that is important to you? Can you include yourself in the picture? Where might God be in your picture?

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Day 6: Wilderness Reveals

Luke 10: 25-37

Read Luke 10:30-37

Jesus replied, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took two full days' worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, "Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs."

What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?"

Then the legal expert said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Reflect:

- When has someone you didn't know helped you?
- Why is it important to take care of other people?
- What makes it hard to help other people?

Respond:

Can you draw a picture of you helping someone in need? Who else might help you help them? Where might God be in your picture?

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Day 7: Wilderness Awaits

Jeremiah 29:11-14

Read Jeremiah 29:11-14

I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope. When you call me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. When you search for me, yes, search for me with all your heart, you will find me. I will be present for you, declares the Lord, and I will end your captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have scattered you, and I will bring you home after your long exile, declares the Lord.

Reflect:

- What will you do first when you get home?
- Who will you tell about your adventure at camp?
- What was your favorite Bible story this week, and what does it teach us about God's love?

Respond:

Can you draw a picture of yourself at camp? Who else might you add to your picture? I wonder what God might be in your picture?