Desert Living for Modern Day Ministers: Embracing the Life and Practice of Desert Living in Ministry Today

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Abstract
Ministers spend most of their time assisting others through trouble and hardship, yet they are often unable to cope with their own personal struggles. In doing so, they neglect their own spiritual lives for the sake of others. This dissertation will explore the desert experiences of the past to determine if the desert metaphor holds value for ministers today as a place of healing and spiritual transformation. In biblical times, the desert was a literal place where people sought God and explored their life and faith. The Desert Fathers and Mother followed this example. Desert living is available for us today, yet many ministers are unwilling to engage the desert as a spiritual place when faced with unexpected hardships or life's difficulties. We need the desert and we must learn to value the desert as a place of healing and spiritual transformation.

Chapter One provides an introduction to our need for the desert and why we might arrive there. This is accomplished through personal experience and evaluation of ministers in need of the desert. This chapter will introduce the proposed solution, which incorporates ways to use the desert for personal and spiritual benefit. This comes through the understanding of a daily practice of desert living regardless of one's vocation or where one lives.

Chapter Two defines the desert as a place and a state of being. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a foundational understanding of the desert as a spiritual place for those of the past as well as for our future. We will look to the models of the Old and New Testament desert experiences as explored in the lives of Moses, the Israelites, Elijah, and Jesus. This chapter concludes with an understanding of desert experiences today.

Chapters Three and Four will introduce two of the three gifts of the desert: silence/solitude and awareness. We will consider these gifts and learn how they hold value in our life and ministry today. These chapters will begin with a conceptual thesis which then results in a renewed appreciation for the desert.

Chapter Five explains desert living as valued in the life of the Mystics. We will explore Christian history to examine how the desert led to a value of discernment. In doing so, we will examine the historical use of discernment as a valuable aspect of Christian practice. This chapter will conclude with the results of discernment for ministers engaging in desert living.

Chapter Six, our final chapter, will provide a conclusion for our research, as well as propose a solution. This solution is intended to encourage ministers to engage with the desert as a vital part of their life and ministry in a retreat model. The intent is to provide a valuable resource to encourage ministers to engage in desert living in their daily life.

Recommended Citation
He lived in the desert, took the Nazarite vows and lived his days with specific purpose. His clothing and diet were simple; he wasn't loaded down with the cares and desires of this world. Though his life may seem extreme and most of us may not easily relate to a diet of locusts and honey, the heart of it is this: He chose obedience to God’s call. He said “yes” to God’s mission. Even when it probably was not easy. Deep humility and obedience characterized his life and ministry. “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry.”