

If you were to find yourself outdoors in the wild, away from civilization, what would you do to survive? The challenges of physical survival are several. Shelter is the first thing to seek or build, as it provides protection from the elements, and some degree of security from potential threats. Risks in the wild include exposure, which may be in the form of hypothermia if you get too cold, or heat exhaustion and heat stroke (hyperthermia) if you are too hot. Of course one must also identify sources of food and water.

General rules of thumb for an average human being are these. In adverse weather conditions, you may not be able to survive more than three hours. You cannot survive more than three days without water. You cannot survive more than 3 weeks without food. In the wild, one is also at risk of disease and injury, without ideal medical care, if any. One also risks encounters with wildlife, the worst possibly being mosquitoes, ticks, and chiggers. But of course one would also like to avoid such things as a bear attack or a venomous snake bite.

So if you were to find yourself having to live outdoors in the wild, you would have to prioritize the order of steps to take, beginning with shelter. One should not expect to stumble upon a cave. If there is one, and it is occupied by a bear or a cougar, that could be a problem. But if the weather is extreme, a cave might be the expedient choice. It is most likely that you must build a shelter, beginning with a part to block the wind, and then expanding it to be a full shelter. After all, one can't count on the wind to always blow from the same direction. Even if you have a tent, a more permanent shelter is in order. After shelter, how will you obtain water, and after that, what will you find to eat? If you have no weapons, what can you find or fashion to serve that purpose?

In the civilized world, it is so easy to survive physically that we hardly think of daily life in terms of survival. Yet that is what we do every day. We live and work in buildings that protect us, and regulate the temperature. We have food and water in our homes. Yet no matter how comfortable one might be physically, it is important to realize that we are all in a survival situation spiritually. Billions have suffered from this adverse spiritual environment and its many dangers. They fall victim to the temptations and deceptions of God's adversary, Satan the devil, and his rebels (fallen angels). Without the right knowledge, relationship with God, and effort, anyone can suffer spiritually.

The most important thing one needs to survive physically is knowledge of how to survive. One might have lots of survival tools and supplies, but without the knowledge of how and when to use them, they will not be as useful. And in fact physical survival is not just about supplies and how to use them. It requires additional knowledge about how one should interact with the environment, and how to take advantage of what it has to offer. Likewise, spiritual survival also requires knowledge of the dangers in the spiritual environment, and the sources of protection and nourishment.

During the pioneer days of early America, there were cases when a traveling party was caught by winter weather and could not travel further due to conditions. Such parties, not finding larger game for food, were able to trap or shoot small game like rabbits and squirrels to eat. Being winter, there were no apparent edible plants at hand. But while their bellies were full of small game meat, they became weak and some died. This phenomenon has been termed "rabbit starvation." This is because small game animals are of almost no nutritional value. One can die from malnutrition.

Had early settlers and explorers possessed better survival knowledge, they would have known that the sapwood of a number of species of trees would have been a nourishing edible for their diet. These include pine, spruce, fir, birch, aspen, basswood, maple, cottonwood, slippery elm, sassafras, and willow. The sapwood is the layer just under the bark. It can be dried, roasted, fried, ground into flour, or boiled to make a soup.

The emerging branch tips of conifers are also edible. And tea made from chopped green pine needles contains more vitamin C than the same amount of orange juice, plus vitamin A. While knowledge of specific vitamins was not yet known, Native Americans taught some explorers how to make pine needle tea to fix the weakness they were experiencing, that owing to scurvy - a serious vitamin C deficiency. This was the same cause of death for so many of the pilgrims of Plymouth Rock notoriety.

So survival knowledge tells us that one can survive in the dead of winter in most forests. There is nourishing food available, even after all the nuts and berries have been eaten by wildlife, and there are no beneficial game animals around as a food source. Of course one must be able to identify tree species, and must have a knife or other tool to cut off bark, then cut out thin strips of sapwood. One must also have a means to make a fire, and a cup or bowl that can be heated to make pine needle tea (or spruce or fir tea). And obviously, proper clothing and shelter from the elements are also necessary.

In other seasons, it is essential to know which wild plants are edible and which are toxic. It is helpful to have a guide on this subject. As a matter of interest, general characteristics of plants to be avoided, due to their toxicity, include the following. (There are exceptions in some of these categories.)

Milky or discolored sap; plants whose seeds are within pods; bitter or soapy taste; spines, fine hairs, or thorns; parsleylike foliage; almond scent; grain heads with pink, purple, or black spurs; three-leaved growth pattern; shiny leaves; white or yellow berries (half of plants with red berries are also toxic and only a few blue colored berries are toxic); plants with umbrella shaped flowers, plants springing from bulbs; and plants that are irritants to the skin.

There is useful survival knowledge, and there is not so great survival knowledge. For example, many survival books show how to build an A-frame type of lean-to shelter, but that is not a good design when there is a strong wind or a large predator investigating your very humble abode. It's not that hard to destroy something that is only leaning.

It is better to lash the branches that form the walls of your shelter to trees, which are anchored to the ground by their roots. Find four trees spaced about the size that you want to make the shelter (or that will allow you to enclose your tent if you have one). And lash branches for the roof to the walls. Such a shelter is not easily knocked down by a predator or blown down by the wind. A sloping roof is recommended, and a door panel must be fashioned. (A tree saw and binder twine are very useful for building the shelter just described.)

There are many survival books that have been written. And some are of limited value. For example, there are guides on how to tie 1,000 and even 10,000 different types of knots. No one need learn more than a half dozen knots, and who would want the weight of a book about 10,000 knots in their backpack? There are also endless books on religious topics. But all one needs is one spiritual survival book, and that is the Bible. It contains the knowledge of how to survive in the spiritual wilderness of this world.

One needs spiritual shelter, spiritual water and food, spiritual defense from attack, and a spiritual weapon. And this is for every day in the present, not simply for some more difficult future time that one might anticipate. Satan is crafty. He mixes in some error with the truth, and tempts folks to sin. He puts forth a menu of wrong choices, and hopes that each person will choose their favorite. Satan just doesn't want anyone to make the right choice about life, or be close to God. Satan wants folks to be distracted and misdirected from a Christian life.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. - 2 Cor 4:4

And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. - 2 Cor 11:14-15

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience... - Eph 2:1-2

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. - Eph 6:12

God knows that we live in a world of good and evil, with Satan and his rebels acting according to their irrational hatred. God gives free choice to all. And God is there to help anyone seeking the path to salvation. One can decide between good and evil - what they love and what they hate.

"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one." 1 - John 17:15

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. - Rom 12:2

*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.
- 2 Pet 2:20*

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" - Matt 16:26

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. - 1 John 2:15-17

God makes available needed spiritual survival knowledge and is always there to call upon for help. One can survive spiritually if they live in relationship with God, instead of just a relationship with a corrupted world. God can lead one away from temptation, and save one from evil.

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." - John 15:16

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world... - Phil 2:14-15

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. - Titus 2:11-14

What is our source of strong spiritual shelter?

The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe. - Prov 18:10

For You are my rock and my fortress; Therefore, for Your name's sake, lead me and guide me. - Psalm 31:3

And while God provides spiritual shelter for the saved, God is also using the saved as building blocks of a spiritual temple.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. - Eph 2:19-22

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. - 1 Cor 3:9

What spiritual defenses and weapons are available to Christians? Note that in the next scripture, all the items mentioned are defensive, except the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God... - Eph 6:13-17

God can provide our physical food, as well as being our source of spiritual food.

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." - John 6:35

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." - Matt 6:31-33

We learn from the experience of living in this world. It's been said that life is a school, not a vacation. So like school, there are tests and pop quizzes. If God only babied folks, and bailed them out at the first moment of adversity, they would not develop any character. They would remain weak. But God has provided folks with a brain and the Bible, both of which are powerful tools, in addition to prayer. And even when one is out of cell tower range, they can always call on God 24/7 for assistance.

A prudent man foresees the difficulties ahead and prepares for them; the simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.

- Prov 22:3 (The Living Bible)

When traveling through or living in the wild, it is a well known principle that one is much safer if they are accompanied by at least one other person. This is often referred to as the "buddy system." If one is hurt, the other can assist. Likewise, two can fend off an attacker better than one. Otherwise, mutual support results in less effort per person to accomplish necessary survival tasks than if one person handled all of them.

Yet, if one is in a relationship with God, and is alone, they are not really alone. They are in contact with God. And there may be angels present who are watching over their welfare, or who may be dispatched to assist as needed.

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. - 1 Cor 10:13

In the wilderness, we must identify edible items correctly. In the spiritual wilderness, we must also identify what to take into our minds. Take the case of mushrooms. While some mushrooms have medicinal value, they contribute almost nothing nutritionally. Because some poisonous mushrooms mimic the appearance of edible types, it is best not to waste time gathering or filling one's stomach with mushrooms. Eating certain poisonous mushrooms can result in a excruciating death. The spiritual equivalent to un nourishing mushrooms might include listening to picky doctrinal disputes and endless conspiracy theories, not to mention time ingesting questionable media content.

If we venture into the wild, we might or might not encounter a wild animal that is a serious threat. Still, in the wild, we must know how to deal with the possibility of wild animals. However, we are always in the spiritual wild in which Satan is the spiritual creature threat, and who has many rebellious demons serving him.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. - 1 Pet 5:8-9

To greatly reduce the chance of a bear attack or snake bite when traveling through the wild, one should make noise. One way to do this is clapping two flat blocks of wood together, which is louder than clapping hands. Some folks suggest using bells. Noise will generally result in bears, snakes, and many other types of wildlife keeping their distance. The key to spiritual defense from Satan is to keep close to God.

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you... - James 4:7-8

Essential tools to survive in the wild might include the following. Many would best be kept together in a backpack.

Matches, compass, bandages, watch, map, mirror, magnifying glass, knife, multi-tool, knife sharpening stone, rifle, slingshot, sleeping bag, tarp, flashlight, extra batteries, whistle, binoculars, insect repellent, fishing line and hooks, water purification tablets or filter, cooking kit, canteen, rope, soap, scissors, tape, tweezers, pliers, wire, safety pins, needle and thread, medicine kit, extra clothing - especially socks, survival manual, and tree identification guide.

Many of these are not items one uses every day. And one must know how and when to utilize them. For example, if you have rope, but don't know a few of the most useful types of knots to tie, the rope will lose some of its value. So one must be up on knot tying, and other survival knowledge. One should refresh on physical survival knowledge to really be ready to use it. And as we are living in a spiritual wilderness, we should refresh on spiritual knowledge frequently, as we are in that wilderness every day.

In terms of spiritual tools, if one is up on their Bible knowledge, there are many tools available that can come to mind and can be utilized in response to the challenges of living in this age of good and evil. For example, the book of Proverbs tells what the wise response should be in various situations. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7 paints a broad picture of how one should approach life, and 1 Cor Chapter 13 explains the characteristics and expressions of love. But note that simply reading or even memorizing particular scriptures does not imbue you with the personal qualities described. One must practice what they read. One can only be considered wise if they act upon the proverbs, or loving if they sincerely behave in a loving manner.

In the Boy Scouts, there is a special honor called The Order of the Arrow. Scoutmasters select which scouts will have opportunity to qualify for the honor. There are tests of character to endure. Typically, during a week long scout camp attended by multiple scout troops, an Order of the Arrow ceremony is held after dark. Scouts stand in a large circle around a bonfire. Each scoutmaster stands behind his troop. One or more groups of two scouts run behind the circle of scouts.

When a scoutmaster points toward the back of a selected scout, that scout is "tapped" three times by palms striking his shoulders with nearly enough force to bring the scout to his knees. The scout has no advance warning of the taps. Then each runner grabs a wrist of the scout and runs him off into the forest.

The scout is informed of what he must achieve over the next few days to qualify, beginning with sleeping in the woods that night with just the clothes on his back. He is given an object that he must keep hidden so well that no one can find it. Then for the next few days, he must complete assigned physical labor tasks without speaking a word, even when mocked or goaded to speak. These tests are called "The Ordeal."

It is not a stretch at all to analogize God's calling us to a Christian life to the tap out just described, and the ordeal that follows. We don't choose it. God decides who to call. And the Christian life is about building character and having their character tested. The hope is that we will come to love what God loves, and hate what God hates.

Hopefully, we will be fully loyal to God, loving God with all our mind, heart, soul, and strength. We will love all other human beings, but we will not love all that they do. We will believe God. We will not be faithless. We will develop a lifelong relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ through daily candid prayer. We will pray for and help those in need, including our enemies. And the time will come that the ordeal of living in this age will end, and we will live forever in a kingdom and family of peace.

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another." - John 15:16-17

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. - Rom 8:28-29

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. - 1 Cor 1:26-29

No one is chosen by God for the ordeal of Christianity because they are exceptionally capable. Instead, God is glorified if the weak become spiritually strong. And if the weak can be saved, they can serve as examples to those who are strong that anyone can be saved. It is not true that "life is a bowl of cherries." While there may be many enjoyable days, there will surely be some that are otherwise. One can have joy, which is the anticipation of assured future happiness. But don't expect pure happiness every day while living in this present age.

The thing that is attainable with devotion to God is to achieve satisfaction each day - satisfaction from doing the right thing, putting forth effort in one's responsibilities, and caring for family and folks who are in physical and/or spiritual need. And in that regard, there is this true expression, "service is its own reward."

*Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.
- James 4:17*

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'" - Matt 25:34-36

*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.
- Gal 6:9-10*

Of course no one is perfect, and everyone sins to one degree or another. But one's sins may be forgiven every day, thanks to Christ paying the penalty for them. Of course the precondition for forgiveness is that one must first forgive others (Matt 6:14-15). When one stumbles, spiritual survival requires getting back on one's feet with God's help.

Eventually, one who is saved will leave this present spiritual wilderness, and live permanently in the Kingdom of God. Finally, the City of God, the New Jerusalem, arrives on the new earth as a dwelling for God's saved family. There is then no concern about survival when one has an eternal body that cannot die. Instead, eternity is about relationships and all of the projects and activities of those in the Kingdom of God.

"They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." - Rev 7:16-17

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." - Rev 21:1-4

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