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## Desert Love

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## DESERT LOVE

BY MARK LOVE

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des' -ert, n, a dry arid land incapable of supporting life.

I am always amazed at the picture of God presented in Hosea 2. There he is a lover, hoping to woo back unfaithful Israel. What romantic getaway does God plan for these two to rekindle their love? The desert. "I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her." What a romantic. "Hey, honey, I've got a sitter. What's say you and I run out to Godforsaken, rent a dusty room at the Happy Trails Inn and take in the view?" The wilderness has such charm.

Wilderness, desert, arid, lifeless, parched, empty, void, ache. We've all known wilderness, visited desert places in life. The desert is where you feel swallowed up by the harsh realities of life. The desert is where you don't know where your next meal is coming from. The desert is where life ups the ante and you don't have the chips to call. The desert is what's left over when the pot's boiled dry. The desert is where the road never rises up to greet you, but where the horizon is a monotonous changeless infinity. "I will now allure her, bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her."

Eden is lush and verdant, brimming with the mercies of God. The nectar of flowing fruit constantly on a moist tongue. Eden is a walk in the park with so much that is good for food and pleasing to the eye. Here there are gorged grapes and sonorous figs. Here you could grow to be a giant. And who is to say what a giant can or cannot do? "Psst. You can have it all. Bloat yourself on life. Know good from evil." Who needs mercies when you own the land flowing with milk and honey?

Yet, Eden is no place for God to woo Israel. Israel learned in the wilderness what Adam and Eve lost in the garden—that life, true life, down at the bottom of the barrel life—comes only from heaven. No one manages manna. There are no self-made men or fascinating women in the wilderness. Only, daily, undeniably, mercy.

We think of wilderness as a place without God. We feel the void in our life and wonder what has happened to God? How have I lost God? How has he lost me? Yet, it could be that wilderness is the place where God is most steadfastly present, whispering sweet nothings into the ears of those he loves. The ache of wilderness may be the stage where God plans to woo you again. The good news is that God never intends to leave us in the wilderness. There is always a promised land full of vineyards we do not deserve. Yet, it is the woings of the wilderness that teach us how to stay in the promised land, faithful to our lover God.

des' -ert, n, a place where God speaks tender words of life to his loved ones.