



**Mentoring support
for those involved
in word, image
or performance arts**

<http://thegroup.artsmentoring.co/>

February 2016 – The Wilderness and the Desert of the Real

Five years ago this month, 'The Wilderness and the Desert of the Real' was launched at Cafe Kino in Bristol. You can still find it here as a PDF.

<http://upptacka.com/publications> (All quotes are from the Kindle Edition). Maybe it was a sign of the times, but we were banned from using the Café again, because of our 'religious' commitments! Go figure, even equality has a preferred style of shoe; some more comfortable than others.

The next four entries on the blog will cover each book in the series '*Spiritual Direction in a Postmodern Landscape*'. In many ways it will mirror some of the questions raised in the "Simple Questions of Artists" series. Here goes,

This is a quote from my favourite filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky.

"I believe that it is always through spiritual crisis that healing occurs. A spiritual crisis is an attempt to find oneself, to acquire new faith. It is the apportioned lot of everyone whose objectives are on the spiritual plane. And how could it be otherwise when the soul yearns for harmony, and life is full of discordance. This dichotomy is the stimulus for movement, the source at once of our pain and of our hope; confirmation of our spiritual depths and potential."

Hall, Geoff; Lorensen, Chris; Hall, Mark (2011-01-26). *The Wilderness and the Desert of the Real (Spiritual Direction in a Postmodern Landscape)* (Kindle Locations 82-84). Upptäcka Press. Kindle Edition.

It seems to be that kind of season whereby we think of the Wilderness. Maybe it's that winter stirs within us thoughts of attrition and scarcity. If you're going through a season of Wilderness living at the moment, then now is the time to pay attention. The wilderness has a sign written above the entrance. "This is not an Exit".

This arid season is not a sign of rejection, nor of punishment, but it does make us feel challenged and tested. It's the Way of the Spirit to draw us into such seasons; a Lenten purge if you will.

“The Wilderness experience will teach us...who we are and what we are here for – our calling.”

Hall, Geoff; Lorensen, Chris; Hall, Mark (2011-01-26). *The Wilderness and the Desert of the Real (Spiritual Direction in a Postmodern Landscape)* (Kindle Location 130). Upptäcka Press. Kindle Edition.

This knowledge of our calling reminds me of something Mark Twain said, “The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.” Without this, our work will remain incoherent, a cacophony of competing voices and therefore competing styles. How many of us are instructed, aided by our weekly institutional commitments to take the time not to affirm, but to reflect on who we are? Knowledge stems from love, or ‘epistemology of love’ as Tom Wright called it. If we know we are loved, then the journey of discovery can begin.

“But the Wilderness, in all its harsh reality, teaches us the gift of love.”

Hall, Geoff; Lorensen, Chris; Hall, Mark (2011-01-26). *The Wilderness and the Desert of the Real (Spiritual Direction in a Postmodern Landscape)* (Kindle Location 133). Upptäcka Press. Kindle Edition.

For we are woven together by and for love. This is our starting point and not rejection, nor a depressive mood, nor a black dog day. It is the Wilderness and not the marketplace that is our testing ground. The marketplace is for product, the wilderness for the heart. If we focus on the marketplace to tell us who we are, it may only confirm our anonymity.

5 years ago I shared these thoughts about the marketplace.

“The artist wants to get to the marketplace to participate in the conversation. The theologian wants to control the conversation. The artist wants a free-forming discourse on the plastic horizon. The theologian wants to measure the distance to the horizon and make sure nobody goes beyond it.”

Hall, Geoff; Lorensen, Chris; Hall, Mark (2011-01-26). *The Wilderness and the Desert of the Real (Spiritual Direction in a Postmodern Landscape)* (Kindle Locations 209-211). Upptäcka Press. Kindle Edition.

The marketplace is, culturally speaking, where we should as artists be situated; not in a car boot sale for the art of a sub-cultural domain.



Mount Kilimanjaro's Shadow, Copyright Mark Hall

Like Jesus, before we experience our sojourn in the wilderness, we should know who we are.

Jesus was given a glaring affirmation of his identity with a voice from heaven (God) telling him and the crowd that he was God's beloved son. Then he is 'driven' by the Spirit into the wilderness. Whether it was in a 2CV or Volkswagen Beetle I'm not sure, but what a massive polar swing. However, it is not the swing between being loved and being rejected. Jesus in the Wilderness is still God's beloved son.

Is that what we carry with us into the desert terrain?

The first question in our series 'Simple Questions for Artists' was 'Who are You? One thing we experience in the Wilderness is the silence; so different from the noise of a crowded marketplace which is full of things that wrestle for our attention.

It was the Desert Fathers who in the 4th Century began to record their practice of 'stillness' in this terrain. One short instruction stands out for me, from St. John of Karpathos, and it is this,

"at all times cultivate intense stillness" [saying #9]

"The Philokalia", Vol 1. p300. Palmer, Sherrard and Ware. Published by Faber & Faber, 1983.

For it is in this stillness, that the voices of despair and depression, anxiety and stress are quietened. We reconnect with our heart and we know the Love of the One and Only. It doesn't matter if sales are down, or the agent is not helping us, for that doesn't define us. We need first and foremost to understand that we are loved.

This is the point of departure for knowing our identity, which then helps us understand what we are here for, but that is for the next time, when we consider 'The Cultural Way of Being'.

"Everything that happens has a small beginning, and grows the more it is nourished."

St Mark the Ascetic. [The Philokalia, saying #171]

Peace,

Geoffx