



## Journeying in the Wilderness: Forming Faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

by Terri Martinson Elton

As Terri Elton writes *Journeying in the Wilderness*, the wilderness she digs into is the wilderness of faith formation and how it needs to change. Dr. Elton did not know that by the time the book was released in February of 2020 we would be in the middle of an additional disruptive wilderness—the wilderness and isolation of Covid-19.

The additional layers of wilderness make her book an important prophetic voice to navigate our way amid the disruptive forces. Covid-19 and racial injustice can be added to the complexities of consumerism, digital revolution, information age, globalization, individualization and religious pluralism that Terri Elton highlights. How do we form faith in such a time as this? This book provides hope, scripture, practical activities as well as a framework to guide our journey.

The book is written to read alone or with a leadership group in a congregation. Each chapter ends with activities to do alone or with others. The SE MN synod faith formation network decided to read the book together a chapter or two at a time. We knew we needed time to do some balcony (big picture) thinking in the midst of our “covid chaos” so we gathered every other week on Zoom. The chapters about wilderness gave us time to grieve our current covid losses and reflect together on what God’s Spirit is up to. As Terri Elton writes: “Wilderness periods shape us in significant ways and prepare us for what lies ahead.”

My favorite chapter is #LivingAbundant. Terri Elton suggests a new operating system. Courageously try new things and regard failure as learning. These five “playgrounds of possibility” are going to guide my ministry in the coming year/s.

1. Reclaim relational existence. We are created to be relational beings. Our identity is communal—not individual.
2. Cultivate community. Community is not correlated to geography or physical presence but rather to a sense of social support.
3. Celebrate Diversity. How can we envision a world where all people thrive? How can we strengthen cultural intelligence?
4. Contribute to the common good. God’s Spirit is at work as much in the world as in the church.
5. Being one among many. Being Christian means learning to love diverse religions and neighbors—learning to work together.

When Terri Elton teaches, she encourages people to find a “nugget” to take home and use. Here are some of the top nuggets found by SE MN synod leaders in this book. Read it yourself to find your own.

- Wilderness as opportunity. Prepares and shapes us for what lies ahead.
- "Nudged by the Holy Spirit experimenting is where holy disruption meets playgrounds of possibility." page 181
- Reflecting on what's needed for this journey. What do we need to let go or lay down as we continue to journey in the wilderness?
- The need to see and name the activity of God in the world.
- "Placed in the world and on the move, we are invited to join God in co-creating the future" page 120
- Listening to each other as spiritual practice.
- Brutal truth. We cannot love our neighbors if we do not know them.
- How church can move away from top down thinking and forming faith without the pillars of privilege.
- The importance of participating in and remembering Sabbath...it is hard to do at times!
- Dwelling in the Word is both faithful and disruptive.... it challenges assumptions and pushes us out of our comfort zone! So, we take risks for the sake of the Gospel
- Loving our neighbor is not an add-on; it is integrated into everyday living...

Review written by Carole Joyce