



## **Into the Wild**

by Darin Hufford

When I left the institutional church, I wasn't bitter or hurt. We had our share of letdowns and painful events while there, but our leaving had nothing to do with that. I had merely come to a point in my life where I was so sick and tired of that particular system, I never wanted to go back.

After being away for about six months, I started to see how deeply it had affected me. I felt like a tiger born in captivity, growing up in a zoo and one day someone left the cage door open. I walked through it innocently and unknowingly. Once I was out of the cage and into the wild, I began to discover that, for my entire life, I hadn't been a tiger. I was just a stuffed animal on the shelf. It wasn't until I was in the wild that I found the true meaning of "Tiger." In my freedom, I learned that the very essence of who I was created to be had been stolen from me by the institution.

I think we spend a lot of time trying to make "church" better and more tolerable. Every year there are more and more conferences around the world presenting new and improved ways to "do Church." It reminds me of zoo-keepers who decorate the tiger's cage to look as much like the tigers' natural habitat as possible. Thick trees, a pond, grass and a cave for privacy, are all lovingly placed around the pit so the tiger won't know the difference. The one ingredient, however, that cannot be given to the tiger is freedom. Sadly, this is what makes him a tiger. You can't cage something that was intended to be wild. When you do, the

TIGER inside the tiger dies and all you have is a lazy stuffed animal with matted fur and a hollow, far-away look in its eyes.

In the wild, a herd of zebras may stop to drink at a watering hole. If you're on an African safari and witness that, it's an amazing sight. That doesn't mean that by catching ten zebras, putting them in a chain-linked pen and placing a bucket of water in front of them, we can rightfully say to a group of tourists riding on a tram, "Oh look - a herd of zebras has stopped to drink from a watering hole." That's a lie!

This is exactly what we do with what we call "church." We capture a group of Christians, put them in a pen and say, "Oh look - a bunch of Christians gathering for fellowship." It's a lie! What's sad is that we justify it by telling ourselves that we're not to forsake the gathering at the water hole. The very thing that would have happened naturally becomes scheduled, formulated, mapped-out and dictated.

Christians who have the living love of God in their hearts will naturally connect with people and have relationship. They don't need to be monitored and dictated by a hierarchy. Things that happen naturally don't need any help or assistance from an outside source in order to make sure they continue in their natural course. Any form of assistance on the part of humans will inevitably kill the essence of a natural thing.

It's that "NATURAL" part that I want to get at. When I talk about living in the wild as a Christian, some people immediately associate that with some sort of vicious, drooling beast that lives alone in a cave and lashes out at everything crossing its path. Wild does not mean rabid. It's simply means free. Free to be what you will. Even a flower can be wild. I cannot stress the importance of this in the life of a Christian. Institutionalism has done everything to insure that this freedom is never realized in the heart of one single Christian.

For religion to work and sustain itself, that wild essence must be strangled because the heart in which it dwells will naturally demand freedom. Know this: Until a Christian is free from organized and planned religion, he or she will never really know what it means to be a Christian. They'll just sit in their pews week after week, like stuffed humans with matted fur and a hollow, far-away look in their eyes. Many will not even know that they're missing anything. They'll drink when they're told and they'll eat and fellowship upon command without having the slightest idea what true Christianity is all about. This caging of the natural is perhaps the most heartbreaking thing of all.

Sometimes I feel like the tiger who escaped captivity and tasted freedom for the first time. Now I'm back at the zoo trying to convince the other tigers to leave with me. The problem is that the tiger in them is comatose, so they neither have the will nor the desire to experience the wild. They're not even sure I'm telling the truth and everything within them suspects that I'm not. They are slothfully satisfied in their captivity. The thought of having to hunt for their own food sounds too much like work. They wouldn't even know where to begin. The zoo has made life easy for them. Why leave? The zoo has convinced them that their cage IS the wild.

It reminds me of the slave days. Certainly there were loving slave owners who treated their slaves well. They didn't beat them or over-work them. They provided them with comfortable living quarters, clothing and good food to eat. They may have even treated their slaves with respect and dignity and allowed them to live with their families and have a day or two off each week. The problem, however, is due to the set-up itself. Irrespective of how these men and women were being treated, they were still slaves. They may have been loved and cared for, but they were not free.

No amount of care and favorable treatment could wash away the fact that thousands of people with thousands of dreams were forced to pick cotton for someone else. When the slaves gained their freedom, many of them stayed right where they were. In their minds, they had a good thing going. They liked their "master" and they had grown accustomed to life as a slave. Sadly, their hearts were convinced that they were born to pick cotton. The institution of slavery attacked their essence.

Not until you gain your freedom, will you recognize what you really want to do in your life. There are many Christians who have settled for picking cotton when they were created for something much more beautiful and fulfilling. Captivity steals your essence. It separates you from it, and over time, you forget it was ever a part of you. The only way to survive as a slave is to shut down your inner dreams and desires and go with the flow of what's happening on the outside. Over time, you begin to believe that your captivity IS your calling. All of your hopes and dreams conform to the confines of the cage. Your eyes no longer see past the bars in the windows. Once that happens, you can pretty much kiss your wild essence goodbye.

Being released into the wild after a lifetime of captivity is both exciting and terrifying. I have many people come to me, petrified by the road before them, after walking through the open doors of religion's cage. They fear that they don't know enough to survive in the wild. They want to learn as much as they can about living in the wild so they won't fall flat on their face. More than anything, I find that people don't trust their hearts to carry and lead them. They want a teaching, a map, or a list of directions because they've never listened to their

own heart and followed their dreams. When trouble or loneliness comes, they are tempted to run back to the cage and mindlessly follow the instructions of the institutional system. I understand this feeling and everything in me wants to reach out and help people in this phase of life.

There is nothing to learn about living in the wild. It's not a matter of learning, but of unlearning. When a wild animal has been raised in captivity and is being prepped to be reintroduced into the wild, that animal is not being taught; he's being un-taught. Sometimes the only way to un-teach an animal that has learned to rely on captivity is to give them nothing at all. So many free believers run the risk of becoming like the bears at Yellowstone Park used to be. They're free and wild, but they feed themselves by going to the visitor's center and eating scraps from tourists. That is not wild living. There's a point in every Christian's life when they have to just trust that they are a Christian.

I hear sincere-hearted people nervously talking about how they can best "walk out" the Freedom in Christ message and a part of me wants to grab them and shake them. Bears don't "walk out" being a bear. Tigers don't "walk out" being a tiger. They just are. It's not a question of what to do! It's a question of who you are. Settling in and trusting what you are is what it's all about. This is the first step to discovering the voice of your heart and being in tune to your spirit's cry and purpose.

So many believers begin to doubt themselves and they lose confidence in their ability to really, truly know what exists within. I can't tell you how many times I've heard this. Some people have even become panic-stricken because they don't feel like they have a clue where to start in their effort to reclaim their heart's desires.

This has been voiced to me so many times that I am beginning to recognize an epidemic. The old way of thinking inside of me is begging to write a sermon series on how to do this. Unfortunately that would only perpetuate the problem and lengthen the healing process in people's lives. The problem is that the system of slavery we were raised in has caused us to be terrified of doing nothing. We've been led to believe that we must always be growing and moving forward in our lives. Even a hint of idleness is evidence that we're on the wrong path or not getting something. I would like to put that lie to rest. Nothing could be further from the truth.

When a tiger that has been raised in captivity is released, there is one important skill to learn. He has to first learn to do NOTHING, and do it well. For most Christians, this sounds like heresy. It feels totally wrong because all we've ever been told is to produce, produce, produce. The moment we stop producing, we begin to feel guilty and condemned. We start

getting a feeling that we're missing something and perhaps getting left behind the pack. You have to put that out of your mind and allow yourself to be comfortable doing absolutely nothing. I believe that until a believer can accept this, they will never get in touch with themselves. In other words, don't sit around thinking about how you can grow. That's silly. Don't sit around pondering what you need to do in order to be a better Christian. Stop trying to be spiritually busy. Just do nothing. I promise that the rest will come on its own. I guarantee it.

We've been brain washed in so many ways, it amazes me at how many of us sit around worrying about things that happen totally on their own. Some of us are like a zebra that tries to have more stripes or a cheetah trying to add spots to her fur. Believe it or not, as a Christian, you don't have to worry about your purpose. Sadly, we've grown up in an institution that constantly produces books, sermons and study guides on how to find our purpose and live in it. Think about that for a moment. That's got to be the stupidest thing ever. If you have a purpose, it's because the One who created you, created you with a purpose. "Finding it" is NOT your job. It shouldn't even be a concern in your heart. Your purpose IS your stripes and your spots. It's just a silly thing to concern yourself with. Stop looking for it and worrying about it!

This generation of Christians worries about some of the most ridiculous things in the world. This is clear evidence of the amount of devastation that has been caused by organized religion. What generation before us ever had to worry about knowing themselves? Where in the Bible did anyone ever have to find themselves and know their own hearts? For that matter, when did anyone in Scripture search for their purpose? It didn't happen. Unfortunately, we've been deceived into believing that the very things that happen naturally on their own, must somehow be discovered and controlled by us. Poppycock!!!

Do you ever worry that you won't know if you're hungry or not? Do you sit around and worry whether or not you'll know your hand is being burned if you accidentally hold it over the stove? Do you fret about knowing if you're tired or not? Do you stress about whether or not you'll sneeze if something gets in your nose? This is how ridiculous we Christians sound when we start distressing over whether or not we'll know our purpose, or hear what our heart is telling us.

We do this because the slave master of religion has forcefully hijacked the natural things in our lives and has taken control. The answer is not to "Learn them back" but to do NOTHING. When you're hungry, you'll know it. When you're tired, you'll be in tune to it. If you're uncomfortable, you'll know to switch to a different position. If something's funny, you'll laugh. If you have an itch, you'll know to scratch it. Don't waste time fretting about these things, because they happen naturally.

When the Spirit of the Lord lives inside of you, you don't have to remind yourself to do the things that naturally occur in a Spirit-filled life.

Darin Hufford

**See Also:**

**1) "As The Church Burns"**

**2) "Why Going To Church Is UNbiblical"**

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