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## Wilderness Vision

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# Wilderness Vision

## **Abstract**

"The joy this morning, in the wake of two decidedly different mission stories, is that He comes to us in his own ways, in his own time."

Posting about the path to Christian belief from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/wilderness-vision/>

## **Keywords**

In All Things, lectionary, wilderness, vision, missions

## **Disciplines**

Christianity | History

## **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

# Wilderness Vision

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 [inallthings.org /wilderness-vision/](https://allthings.org/wilderness-vision/)

James Calvin Schaap

## Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 95](#)

[Exodus 17:1-7](#)

[John 4:5-42](#)

[Romans 5:1-11](#)

In 1837 a caravan of covered wagons left Indiana for Iowa, which wasn't Iowa at all back then, but still referred to as the Wisconsin Territory. Call it what you will, but what lay across the Mississippi in the 1830s was wilderness. This trek was led by John Maulsby, a fearless pioneer who, according to his daughter's memoir, loved the wilderness fiercely.

One of the wagons held the Westgates, although Mary Ann Maulsby claims she's making up that name, not wanting to lay shadows over the path of his life. Westgate was a schoolteacher who had a vision, a great spiritual vision.

On that score, he wasn't alone. Throughout the land, ordinary people had visions that grew out of what historians call the Second Great Awakening, a revival that brought forth a gaggle of new religious brews.

Professor Westgate believed the Lord had sent him to the wilderness, to the heathen, to preach the gospel of Christ. He was vision-bound to bring the Sauk, the Fox, the Kickapoo to the Lord.

It was a pact he'd made months back while praying over his sickly wife. He believed the good Lord had promised her recovery—she would become the woman he'd married again—if only he would go out west and preach Jesus to the wilderness savages. That was the deal.

Sadly enough, Mrs. Westgate didn't make it. Along the way, her condition slumped greatly. "Her face and limbs were so emaciated there was no flesh left on them," Mary Ann Maulsby wrote, "and her eyes were glassy and held a strange expression."

Mrs. Westgate died, and when she did, so too did her husband's vision. Apparently, the deal was off. "They yoked their oxen to their wagons" in the morning, and "soon disappeared from our sight."

I read that story just an hour or more before reading the wonderful old story of the Samaritan woman, a story most of us know well. What I hadn't remembered of that mission saga was what happened *after* the she returned to her people to tell them what happened at the well. You can imagine her, wide-eyed, saying that this very strange Jewish man knew every secret there was to know about her life. "Could this be the Messiah?" she asks them (vs. 29). She can't quite believe it herself.

No matter, at that point her people went wide-eyed too, I'm sure, and traveled back forthwith to hear the words of this odd Jewish prophet.

Now, the denouement of the story is something I'd forgotten completely:

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves,"

and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.

I rather like the fact that the Samaritans needed some convincing.

Damascus-road experiences get all the ink. Paul become Saul in a blinding moment of divine insight. Many Christian believers mark the day on the calendar when they were saved. Praise Jesus.

But today I say, praise the Lord for the Samaritans. It wasn't just a wink and flash, some wide-eyed epiphany. "Because of his words," the apostle John says, "many more became believers."

They heard it for themselves. They listened. They believed.

Did the Lord come to Professor Westgate in a vision?

Maybe he did.

But the joy this morning, in the wake of two decidedly different mission stories, is that He comes to us in his own ways, in his own time. Some believe in an instant, but some trek into a wilderness before he brings them on home.

He's got his ways. He's God. We aren't.

Praise his holy name.