

# AN OVERVIEW OF WILDERNESS SURVIVAL

## —From an End-Time Christian Perspective—

Wise people foresee trouble coming and avoid it  
But foolish people keep going and suffer. (Prov 22:3)

### Why an End-Time Christian Perspective on Wilderness Skills

From the Bible's prophecies we understand that we *are* living just before the final end-times. These prophecies also tell us that during the final part of these end-times God's people will need to 'flee to the wilderness,' Therefore, if we believe these prophecies, and choose to stay loyal to God, we must conclude that we will soon be heading into the wilderness. Are we going to be wise and prepare? Or are we going to go into the wilderness unprepared?

If we believe the divine warning in these prophecies and are planning to stay true to God, then learning about bushcraft and wilderness survival is not just something interesting to do, or something that *might* be good to know in case we *happen* to get stuck in the woods someday. It is something we *will* soon be doing.

### Avoiding First Trip Mistakes

Over the years we have taken a lot of people on their first overnight wilderness trip. On these first trips, people typically bring a lot of things they really don't need. And the unfortunate thing is, they also *don't bring* many of the things they really *do* need! This article grew out of a presentation that was developed to help people realize what they actually *do* need in order to make life work in the wilderness —without having to spend a potentially awkward and uncomfortable overnight trip in order to find out what they should, and shouldn't, have brought along.

### Looking at Nature Differently

It is also hoped that as a result of studying and practicing the things we discuss in this article, you will come to look at nature differently. Although many people nowadays see the wilderness as a place of beauty, they also consider it foreign and uncomfortable, even scary —especially if they have to spend the night. But it shouldn't be this way. In the beginning, God placed Adam and Eve out in nature —in the Garden of Eden. Outside the Garden was just a vast world, full of more nature —wilderness. And for thousands of years since then, many native peoples have wandered through this wilderness, living off the land. To them, it was home. And more than that, it was also where they got everything they needed. For them, going into nature was like going to the mall, and grocery store, and hardware store, all rolled into one. So, instead of just seeing trees and grass, and rocks and streams, we hope you will learn to recognize the resources, which, together with a few simple inexpensive tools that can easily be carried in your pack, would enable you to survive indefinitely in the wilderness.



“I’ll never look at a bunch of pine needles laying on the ground the same way again!” —Brian Polm

We also hope that as you experience nature, you will find it less foreign and scary, and learn that you can be relatively comfortable in it.

### **‘Flipping Switches,’ and ‘Setting Things Out On the Craft Table’**

A big part of the problem is that in our modern world, many of life’s necessities can literally be had ‘at the flip of a switch.’ If it is too hot or too cold —just move the thermostat up or down. If we are hungry —just take some food out of the freezer, put it in the microwave, and push a few buttons. If we need a drink of water, or need to get washed up —just turn the faucet knob. Since this has been the case for a couple generations now, many people, especially children, have no idea where our necessities actually come from. Neither do they realize all the preparation work that has gone into being able to have what we need ‘at the flip of a switch.’ The worst part is that many of us no longer even think about, or plan to have our needs met because everything has always ‘just been there.’

Similarly, many youth organization and schools have some sort of ‘crafts’ as a part of their program. Typically, all the materials are set out on the table before the children even show up. So when it’s time to do ‘crafts,’ the kids just come sit down at the table and do the craft —with no thought of all the preparation that was necessary for them to be able to do the activity.

On the other hand, in the wilderness there are no ‘switches’ or ‘buttons,’ neither is there any ‘craft table’ that has already been set up with all the materials to do survival ‘activities.’ For example: On a recent hike, a group of boys were given the task of starting the fire. They were all intently huddled around the fire-pit. One of them was adding the last twig he had gathered to the flickering flame. The others just sat there and watched as the flame burned through the few sticks they had placed on it —and then went out. Because these boys were not used to ‘setting things out on the craft table’ for themselves, they had failed to gather enough kindling to build up the fire.

So, what do we need to ‘set out on the craft table’ so that we can survive in the wilderness? That is the topic of this article.

### **Let’s Go On an Imaginary ‘Hike’**

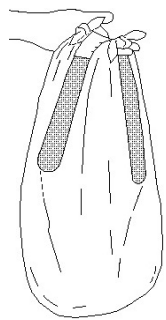
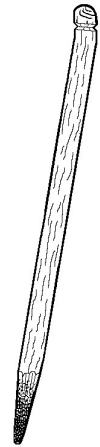
The presentation this article grew out of consists of a ‘hike.’ But this ‘hike’ isn’t just walking to some destination and back. Our goal here is to show, through a series of hands-on activities and demonstrations, all that we would need to do to be able to survive for 24-plus hours in the wilderness. In the course of these demonstrations, the equipment that we would need in order to do these activities also becomes apparent. This, in turn shows what we would need to ‘set out on our craft table,’ or in this case, bring with us in our packs.

Although we always did as many activities on these ‘hikes’ as we had time for, we were never able to do *everything* we would have liked to do. So a booklet was

developed as a way to share that additional information, as well as being a reminder of what we had done. If you would like a copy of this booklet, contact me at <jabuller7@juno.com>

Because it will probably not be possible for you to go on one of these 'hikes' with us in person, let's picture an 'imaginary' overnight wilderness hike here. Since we are wanting to develop our wilderness skills, we will put ourselves in 'survival mode' from the very beginning of the hike. We will also assume that we are all wearing **adequate clothing** for this type of excursion. To make it easier to go back and summarize, the key equipment items that we would want to carry in our packs appear in bold print the first time they are mentioned.

As we walk along, we notice the many different plants growing in the area. Some of these plants have edible bulbs. So we decide to dig up some of these bulbs to eat with our lunch. What would we need in order to be able to collect these bulbs? —Some digging sticks. However, we don't have any digging sticks with us. So we decide to stop and make a few, as they will also be useful for many other wilderness living tasks. In a nearby tree we find a suitable branch. What would we need in order to cut the branch and make the digging stick? —We could do it all with a **knife**, but a collapsible **saw** to cut the branch, and a **machete or hatchet** to chop off the branchlets and make a point on one end would be nice. We'll use the knife to peel off the bark and smooth and refine the overall shape. All these tools will come in handy for many other wilderness tasks as well. So we stop for a bit to make some digging sticks for our group, and then we dig up some of the edible bulbs.



Since we have just started hiking, and it is not yet time for lunch, we want to bring the bulbs along with us. But what can we use to carry them? —We could take the time to weave a basket. But if we had a bandanna or scarf, we could simply tie the bulbs up in the **scarf** and put them in our **packs**. Or we could tie the adjacent corners together to make a bag with handles to carry them in.

After we have hiked on a ways, we come to a creek crossing. By this time we have gotten thirsty. There is plenty of water in the creek, but it probably is not safe to drink straight from the stream. So what do we need in order to boil and purify some water? —A cook pot, and a fire.

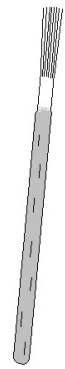
But what do we need in order to make the fire? —Some dry sticks, which we can easily gather nearby, and some type of **fire-starter**. We should be sure to carry some sustainable method of fire-starting, such as the historic 'flint & steel.' Otherwise, what would we do after we've used our last match, or the lighter runs out? So we build a small fire, take our **cook pots** out of our packs, fill them with water from the creek, and use the digging stick to put the pots full of water on to boil. After the fire brings the water to a boil, we take the pots out of the fire and let the water cool so we can drink it.



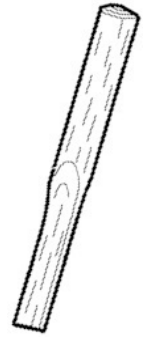
In order to take some water with us as we continued hiking, what would we need? —We could carry it in the cook pots, but some simple **water bottles** would work much better.

While we are waiting for the water to boil and then cool, we realize it is about time for lunch anyway. So since we already have a fire going, we decide to cook the edible bulbs we gathered. We untie the scarf and use it as a 'table cloth' to provide a clean work area for food preparation. What are we going to need to cook these bulbs? —Again, the cook pot and the fire. So we get a pot of the edible bulbs cooking.

What else would we need to cook and eat our food? —Some sort of 'utensil.' We could easily make some chop-sticks, or simply flatten a stick to make a sort of spatula. But what would we need in order to make these simple utensils? —Again, the saw to cut the sticks, and a knife to refine the shape.



After we have eaten our lunch, we wash our 'dishes,' and then peel and smash one end of a willow twig against a rock with our digging stick to make toothbrush to brush our teeth. Then, we continue hiking, interacting with nature along the way and gathering more wild edibles that we find.



Later that afternoon, we find a nice place and decide to make our camp. We could make shelters entirely from natural materials, but it would take a lot of materials to shelter our group. So what could we have easily brought with us to make a shelter with? —A **tarp** and some **twine**. But we'll also need some poles to make a frame for the tarps. What would we need to cut and clean, some standing dead poles? —Again the collapsible saw

and a machete or small axe. So we gather some poles, and set up some tarp shelters for our group. We also gather debris, (pine needles, leaves, moss, grass, etc.), to make debris beds inside the shelters. But what else would we need in order to comfortably spend the night? —Some type of **bedding**, like blankets or sleeping bags. So after we get our shelters and bedding all set up, we make another fire, and cook some supper. After spending a pleasant evening around the campfire, we bed down for the night.



In the morning we wash up in the creek, build the fire back up, and make some breakfast. After washing our 'dishes' and brushing our teeth, we take down our camp, re-scatter the debris, and head down the trail for another day.

So, what were all the equipment items that we would have needed to bring with us in order to do all of the things we needed to do during this 'imaginary' 24 hours in the wilderness? Please note here that if we are equipped to spend '24 hours' in the wilderness, we will also have what we would need to be able to stay longer. We would just have to replenish our supplies of water, firewood, food, and certain hygiene items from nature.

## Basic Wilderness Living Equipment

- Adequate Clothing
- Bandana / Scarf
- Bedding
- Tarp
- Water Bottle
- Fire-Starter
- Cook Pot
- Knife (this would also include the small axe or hatchet, the bush knife or machete, and the folding saw, as well as sharpening stones and/or files to keep them sharp)
- Cordage (Twine)
- Pack (to carry it all in)

Studying wilderness survival teaches you how few items really are essential, and how essential those few items really are.

## SURVIVAL PRIORITIES

The Survival Priorities are the things that we need, (not counting Air), in order to stay alive, wherever we might be. All the items we used in the 'hike' mentioned earlier are based on these priorities. I would definitely be worth memorizing this list.

### **Survival Priorities**

- 1. Shelter**
- 2. Water**
- 3. Health Concerns**
- 4. Fire**
- 5. Food**

**Shelter** is first, because within a few hours we will most likely need shelter from something. **Water** is second, because under most conditions we could make it into the next day without water. **Food** is last, because we could survive a couple weeks without food—we may not feel very good about it, but we'll live. **Health Concerns** represents things like safety, sanitation and hygiene, and getting adequate rest. It is in the middle because we always want to stay safe and healthy. Even under 'normal' circumstances, if we were to get sick or injured it would make our situation worse, and we definitely wouldn't want something like that to happen in a survival situation. **Fire** is also in the middle, as it may be needed in connection with our Shelter for warmth and light, to purify Water by boiling it, and for cooking Food.

The order of these priorities is especially important at the *beginning* of a survival situation. There is simply so much that needs to be done, and usually there is a limited amount of daylight to do things. So we simply must do first things first, and not waste time on non-essentials.

### Survival Priority Equipment

Based on the Survival Priorities, there is an expanded list of actual equipment item categories which we need in order to provide ourselves with these priorities. We will call this expanded list ‘Survival Priority Equipment.’ ‘Tools’ have also been included here, because although they are not a direct need, they enable us to get the things we do need more easily and efficiently. In a short term survival situation you could get by without many of these. But in a long term situation, you *will* need *all* of them.

Unfortunately, there seems to be a general reluctance to carry any equipment—especially things that are bulky. This probably stems from our desire to have everything already set out for us on the ‘craft table.’ There is also a common conception that if you bring any gear then it is not really ‘survival.’ But we are talking about actually living in the wilderness here, so we can’t leave things out to make things ‘easier,’ or worry about living up to someone else’s ideas. Neither can we go back to civilization at the end of the day. So don’t be misled.



### “One Way or the Other, You Have to Do the Work”

On a survival trip awhile back, our friend Brian noted that,

One way or the other, *you have to do the work.*

Because in a long-term situation we *will* need all of these things, we will either have to ‘work’ to carry in the things we need, *or* we will have to ‘work’ to gather the materials, and ‘work’ to craft or build what we need once we get to our wilderness

camp. Some things are fairly easy to get from nature. Other things are easier to pack in. To sort this out would take a bit of experience, and one of our goals here is to share our experience in this to hopefully save you a lot of time.

### **Most Valuable Possessions**

Within the list of Survival Priority Equipment there are also items that could easily be brought from 'civilization' that would simply be superior to what we could make in the wilderness. For example, a steel knife which we could easily bring with us, as compared to the stone knife we could make in the wilderness. In general, these are the things that are made out of metal, cloth, and plastic. In the wilderness, these would be our 'most valuable possessions,' as they could not be replaced from nature. We should be sure to include them in our survival kits.



### **Caretaker Attitude**

We can cause a lot of damage to nature when either practicing survival or actually surviving. However by having a 'caretaker attitude,' and thinking about how our activities will impact nature, it is possible to get everything we need and actually leave nature better off than we found it.

Remember, in the beginning God gave Adam and Eve the job of taking care of the garden, (Genesis 2:15). And by extension, we, as their children, have the same job. Unfortunately, for the most part the human race hasn't followed God's plan, and we've pretty much trashed the planet. As part of a declaration that will be made in heaven just before Jesus comes, it will be stated that the time has come to "destroy those who destroy the earth." (See Revelation 11:16-18.) God still cares about His creation.

So for example, if we need to cut a live stick, rather than taking that 'perfectly' shaped little sapling growing off by itself, let's look for something that has already been damaged, or for a place where some pruning or thinning are needed.

### **Cherokee Law of Seven**

As a part of their 'Caretaker Attitude,' the Cherokee, a Native American tribe, had the 'Law of Sevens,' which is a good example for us to follow as well. Before they would harvest a plant, or take an animal, they would be sure they had seen seven others. This was to be sure the species would not become extinct, even within a particular area.

### **Learning Wilderness Survival**

In a way, learning to survive in the wilderness is like learning how to play a musical instrument. You will need:

- Identification Knowledge
- Equipment
- Skill

For example: You may be able to learn how to read music without a violin. But 'you cannot learn to play a violin unless you have a violin to play' —much less become skilled. Similarly, you may be able to gain a lot of wilderness knowledge without any equipment. But you *will need* to have the equipment to actually be able to develop any

skill and proficiency. So in preparation for 'fleeing to the wilderness,' we will need to not only know which plants are edible, and where to find a good campsite, etc., we will also need to have all of the basic wilderness living equipment items, and be familiar with how to use them.

It is recommended that you start by collecting the necessary **equipment**, so you can use your equipment to start practicing and developing your **skills**. And work at picking up wilderness **knowledge** all along the way.