

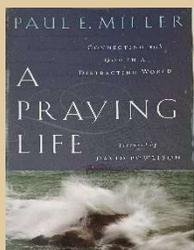
Desert Level

March 2026

A desert can be many things. A “land desert” is defined as an area receiving less than 10 inches of precipitation per year; land deserts cover about 1/3 of the earth’s land surface. A desert can be hot and dry like the Sahara or a coastal desert like Atacama or a cold, polar desert like Antarctica. The main issue linking all of these is **dryness**.

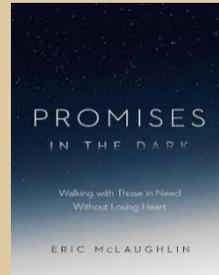
A “food desert” usually describes low-income neighborhoods, mostly rural or urban, lacking access to affordable, nutritious and fresh food within convenient traveling distance. Residents rely on convenience stores or fast food, leading to obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Similarly, a “medical desert” describes an area with limited or no access to necessary health care services due to a severe shortage of doctors or facilities. An “educational desert” describes a geographical area with limited or no access to affordable public education. The qualities of these three deserts include **limitations** and **emptiness**.

In Biblical terms, there is something that could be termed a “soul desert.” God placed people in various desert situations throughout the Old and New Testaments. Moses took the people of Israel through 40 years of desert wandering. Jesus spent 40 days early in his ministry being tested and tempted. Philip was led down the desert road to Gaza to meet the Ethiopian eunuch. Significant spiritual formation can take place in a desert.



In his very personal book, **A Praying Life**, Paul Miller describes yet another type of soul desert. It is the space or area between our hopes and our reality, often characterized by suffering, sadness, struggling—a place of dryness, limitations and even emptiness. It is a place where other believers are called to bring consolation, comfort, help, strength, prayer and encouragement. It is holy ground. “This desert is where those who suffer live. If I am called to comfort them, then I am called to join them in that desert.”

In **Promises in the Dark**, Dr. Eric McLaughlin has written movingly of his questions and struggles in bringing healing and comfort to those in need in Burundi, the poorest country in the world. “I resist, saying I cannot keep opening my heart each time something goes wrong. There are more tragedies in the world than there are tears to cry for them. But



ultimately, we cannot live with hearts that are more bunker than hearth, hearts of stone rather than hearts of flesh.” He admits, and we would agree, this comfort we give does not come easily, without sacrifice. The ministry of consolation may threaten to exhaust our own stores of comfort and leave us dry. Dr. McLaughlin does not leave us there, but continues to ask the right questions to help find a hopeful way to “walk with those in need without losing heart.”

The Bible speaks to the emotional aspect of our involvements. In Isaiah 55 it is written “you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and hills will burst into songs before you.” (For those of us in our war-weary region, it is more like the mountains will burst forth in drones and rockets!) Psalm 30:5 says “weeping endures for a night but joy comes in the morning.” And Psalm 36:5 declares “those who sow in tears will reap in joy.” In our ministry experience, sometimes weeping turns into joy, sometimes joy turns into weeping. And you cannot seem to determine the outcome ahead of time!

We so appreciate it when people ask how to pray for us. As we walk through physical and spiritual deserts with people in need, we are imperfect, with feet of clay. But with those feet, we also need hearts of flesh, minds of wisdom, peace in the dark nights, hope in the mornings! Pray that we remain fresh, faithful, fruitful, patient and kind. We cherish our family and friends who refresh us, our pleasant book-filled apartment, and those churches and supporters who have helped to provide the blessing and privilege of our years of serving in Jordan with all the heartaches, disappointments, joys and delights!

Bob and Suzanne
Sharing Christ’s Love with Urban Arabs