

# A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER

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## Chapter 1: 'Crossing over - Courage to trust' Based on Joshua 3:1-18; 4:1-8

This month's content is written by Lyndall Bywater, a writer and speaker on prayer and part of the UKI Territory's Prayer Network team.

### INSPIRE

God shows up in lockdowns. That's what happened to the first disciples. They were locked away in fear and confusion in that Upper Room when the Holy Spirit poured in, giving them courage to step into the completely new thing God was starting. Could that be us? Might this Pentecost be our moment, here in COVID-19 lockdown, to meet God in a new way and step into a future we never imagined?

Join us for Chapter One of our 'Into the Wild' story - a year of encounter and adventure. This month we meet Joshua as he leads the people of Israel across the Jordan to a new land.

Read about the Joshua story alone or with a friend, reflect on the discussion questions over the phone with someone or using online small group/Bible study, try the prayer activities... and see what happens when you take courage to cross over into a new place.

If you'd like to receive regular updates throughout the 'Into the Wild' journey over the coming year, including invitations to our regular Zoom prayer gatherings, [sign up here](#).



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## EXPLORE

### Introduction

Once I'd stepped backwards off the edge of the 50-foot cliff, abseiling was a whole lot of fun. The trouble was, it took me ages to find the courage. Every fibre of my being was telling me not to do it. Apparently that proves I'm normal. We're not meant to want to step off cliffs backwards (or forwards for that matter). Yet the only way to experience the thrill of abseiling down that rock face was to defy my body and brain and step over the edge.

### Context

The people of Israel had been in the desert for 40 years. You might imagine a desert wouldn't be a particularly pleasant place to live, and it certainly wasn't where God had intended his people to settle, but after 40 years that desert had become home. Those who remembered Egypt had all but died out. The generation we meet in Joshua 3 had never known anything other than a nomadic existence in the wilderness. They were at home there. They were known and respected there. They knew how things worked and they were prosperous there.

And then God told Joshua, their leader, that it was time to cross over. For us, the promise of the Promised Land is just a matter of a few chapters before. The desert bit feels like an unfortunate hiccup along the way. But for most of Joshua's generation, the Promised Land was a bedtime story, a legend of long ago. Now, suddenly, Joshua was inviting them to walk into that legend and make it come true. It meant leaving everything they'd ever known, and it must have felt like a backwards step off a cliff.

Over the coming months, we'll be exploring stories of encounters with God. As followers of Jesus, the things we've experienced in the past - even the best and most exciting things - are never the end of the story. There's always more to come. The only way to keep our faith alive and vibrant is to keep meeting with Jesus, its author and perfecter - to keep encountering God.

### Deepen

I rather like the fact that Joshua is our starting place for this journey into the wild. In truth, we know very little about what this encounter with God was like. Later we read of him seeing the angel of the Lord, but all we get here in chapters 3 and 4 are some snatches of a conversation, and then Joshua's absolute conviction that God has called him to something.



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The Old Testament is full of stories of dramatic God-encounters - supernatural phenomena, angels, fires, strange sounds... even donkeys - and our prayer is that as we walk this journey together, you will encounter God's presence in surprising, even dramatic new ways. But if you've never had an experience like that, take heart from the fact that one of the most important 'crossings over' in Israel's history happened simply because a human being had a rock-solid belief that God had called him to action.

If you feel a strong conviction to do something, then there's every chance you've had an encounter with God. How do you know for sure? Well, God never interacts with us without leaving fingerprints of love and encouragement on our hearts. We may feel daunted by the task ahead, but we know somehow that God has it - and us - in hand. For Joshua, those fingerprints were about **courage** and **company**: the encouragement to be strong and courageous, and the promise that God would be with him wherever he went.

## *Courage*

If God has given you a conviction, deep inside you, that there's something you need to do, the chances are it will involve being courageous. Not all courage looks the same:

- Sometimes courage is starting something new, and sometimes it's letting go of something old.
- Sometimes courage is changing direction, and sometimes it's going in the same direction but with more determination than ever before.
- Sometimes courage is looking outwards, and sometimes it's looking inwards.

Whatever it is, it's worth doing. God only ever calls us forward to lead us into fuller, more abundant life. The Israelites were doing fine in the desert, but all the while they stayed there they were missing out on a beautiful land.

## *Company*

With the courage comes the promise of company. God had Joshua station the Ark of the Covenant, that sumptuous, gold-covered symbol of divine presence, right in the middle of the river. Every Israelite who crossed over would see it and know that God was right there, invisible but more real than the rocks beneath their feet.



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Moments of encounter with God do matter, but they're not the be all and end all. We need a deep awareness of God's company, God's continual presence with us. That's what gives us the reassurance we need when being courageous gets difficult or frightening.

## Conclusion

I did make it over that cliff edge, but only because the abseiling instructor kept talking to me, and I was so busy listening to him and following his instructions that I was horizontal and on my way down the rock face before I realised what had happened.

Whatever happens when you take courage and cross over, you can trust God to always be with you.

## *A truth to hold on to*

We may need to be brave but we're never alone. Your challenge, should you choose to accept it:

- Try something new every week this month: a new food, a new hobby, a new walking route or even a new prayer rhythm.

## WATCH

This month Colonel Deborah Graves, Territorial Secretary for Leader Development, tells the story of a time when God called her to do something that took a lot of courage.

[Watch the video.](#)



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## DISCUSS

- Have you ever been absolutely certain that God was asking you to do something brave?
- Have you ever had to leave a familiar place and go somewhere new, strange or even frightening?
- Has there been a time in your life when you've been more aware than usual of the presence of God with you?
- Is there a 'crossing over' you know God is asking you to make?
- What will you need to leave behind?
- What will you take with you - a good thing from the 'now' which you know you are to carry into the next season?

## PRAY

### 1. A Cairn of Thankfulness

After they'd crossed the Jordan, Joshua had the people bring stones from the riverbed and set them up in the new land as a reminder of God's faithfulness in their crossing over. In the years ahead, how often did they take courage from looking at those stones and remembering?

- Find about 12 stones and pile them up into a little cairn, either in your house or garden. As you lay each stone in the pile, give thanks for one moment in your life when you experienced the faithfulness of God. Next time you need to be courageous, spend time looking at your cairn and remembering.

### 2. Think as you Walk

Have you ever noticed how walking works? You put a foot out in front of you and transfer your weight on to it, and you move forward. In the moment of transitioning your weight, you are temporarily off balance; but if you never transfer your weight, you can never move forward.

- As you walk around, think about God's call to step forward into something new. Pray for the courage to trust that, as you temporarily allow that loss of balance, you will find yourself in a new place.



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## 3. A Heavenly Risk Assessment

Risk assessments are a familiar aspect of starting new things these days. You think about what you want to do and what the dangers might be, then you work out what you're going to do to make the activity as safe as possible.

Is God inviting you to step into something new? Then why not do a risk assessment - not a normal one but a prayerful one:

- Write out what God is calling you to.
- Fill the page with all the things that worry you, frighten you or make you want to ignore the call.
- Read them through out loud to God; the honesty will help.
- Search your Bible and make a list of verses where God promises something like 'I will be with you'.
- Read your list of fears again but, after each one, read one of the verses on your list.

## 4. A Letter to the Future

At the start of this 'Into the Wild' journey, why not write yourself a letter. Write about your hopes and dreams for the coming year. Why are you drawn to this adventure of encounter? What do you hope it will mean for your faith and your walk with God? And what do you think God is saying to you about it?

Once you've written your letter, put it in an envelope and put it away somewhere safe. We'll remind you to open it this time next year.

