

Courageous Obedience



Genesis chapters 6 to 8



This month we begin a series exploring the covenants God made throughout Scripture and what they reveal about his character and his relationship with his people. In this first session we explore the beginning of God's covenant with Noah. The world of Genesis 6 was marked by violence, corruption and deep sadness, yet God chose to remain involved rather than walking away. Noah's life stands out because of his faithful response to God's call, even when the task appeared impossible and the future was unclear. Through this story we discover that courageous obedience grows from trust in God's character and in the promises he makes. The rainbow becomes a sign of hope after the storm and a reminder that God's covenant faithfulness continues for all generations.

You will need:

- Flipchart paper and pens
- Rainbowtastic PowerPoint presentation
- 'Courage to Obey' handout

**Say:**

The rainbow has come to mean many different things to many different people. It is often used as a symbol for the LGBTQ+ community; it is used by families to remember babies who have sadly died; and during the Covid pandemic the rainbow became a reminder of the hard work of NHS staff and other key workers keeping people safe.

Ask:

Can you think of any other contexts where the rainbow image has been used?

Leader's notes:

For this activity you will need the 'Rainbowtastic' presentation. The first question on the presentation is: How many of you have seen a rainbow? It's very unlikely there's anyone in the group that hasn't seen a rainbow, but the following 15 slides show a range of rare and unusual rainbows. Show and discuss each one. At the end of the presentation, ask the group which kind of rainbow they would most like to see in real life.

Say:

Rainbows carry lots of meanings today. In the Bible, God uses the rainbow as a sign of covenant. Today we are going to explore why that matters.

 **Bridge****Ask:**

With so many different meanings attached to the rainbow today, what do you think makes it such a powerful symbol across different cultures and situations?

 **Amplify****Say:**

Today we begin exploring the first major covenant in the Bible. A covenant is not a contract. It is a committed relationship that God initiates with his people. In Genesis 6 we discover the state of the world and begin to understand the reason why God made his covenant with Noah.

Read:

5 The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. 6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. 7 So the Lord said, 'I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created - and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground - for I regret that I have made them.'

– (Genesis 6:5-7)

Say:

These verses make it clear that God is not distant from what is happening in the world. The language of regret and grief shows how deeply God feels the brokenness of creation. The problem is not just behaviour, but the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The world has

reached a point where violence and corruption shape everyday life. This is the backdrop to the covenant that follows.

Ask:

- What is the world like at the time of Noah, both spiritually and emotionally?
- Why do you think the writer emphasises not only human actions but the thoughts of the heart?
- How does the description of God showing regret and being ‘deeply troubled’ impact your understanding of his character?

Say:

This is where we meet Noah. In a culture shaped by violence and self-interest, Noah chooses a different way. His life stands out because of his relationship with God.

Read:

⁸ But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord.

⁹ This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. ¹⁰ Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

– (Genesis 6:8-10)

Ask:

- How is Noah described, and how was this seen in the way he lived?
- What might it mean to ‘walk with God’ in any generation where people are choosing other paths?

Say:

Before Noah builds anything, God speaks a promise. This is the first time the word ‘covenant’ appears in Scripture. God takes the initiative. He sets out his plan to save Noah and his family and to preserve life. This covenant is a sign of God’s commitment long before Noah’s obedience is seen.

Read:

¹⁸ But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark – you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you. ¹⁹ You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰ Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. ²¹ You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.’

– (Genesis 6:18-21)

Ask:

- What do you notice about the way God speaks to Noah here?

- Why might it matter that God establishes the covenant before Noah acts?
- What does this show about God's character?

Say:

This moment opens up the whole idea of covenant. God is taking the initiative, setting the direction and committing himself to Noah long before any action is taken. To understand why that matters, it helps to step back and see how covenants work across the Bible and why they are so important for understanding God's relationship with his people.

Watch:

What is a Covenant and How Does It Relate to Interpreting Scripture? (2:05)

https://youtu.be/pQL7kVFOfOA?si=-7DiY2_qHcsl-YKb

Ask:

- How does understanding covenant change the way you see God's involvement in human history?
- What difference does it make to know that God commits himself to us even when humanity fails?

Say:

Noah's story becomes much clearer when we see it through the lens of covenant. God is not only responding to human brokenness. He is also choosing to remain involved, to guide, to rescue and to renew. The covenant God makes with Noah is the beginning of a pattern we will see again and again throughout Scripture. Each covenant shows us more of who God is and what it means to walk with him.

 **Bridge****Ask:**

If God had already committed himself to Noah through this covenant, what difference could that have made to the way Noah responded?

 **Sound Check****Say:**

We have looked at the world Noah lived in and the covenant God promised. Now we are going to look at what Noah was actually asked to do. This part of the story shows us the scale of the task and the depth of Noah's obedience.

Leader's notes:

Divide the group into smaller teams.

Say:

In your teams, read Genesis 6:11 to 7:5 together. As you read, pay attention to three things:

1. What God asks Noah to do
2. The detail and length of time needed to complete the task
3. How Noah responds to God each time he speaks

Give the groups a few minutes to read the passage.

Once the teams have finished reading, give them the 'Courage to Obey' handout.

Say:

Now that you have read what Noah was asked to do, we are going to explore the kind of courage his obedience required. Use the four boxes on your handout to guide your discussion.

Leader's notes:

The 'Courage to Obey' handout has the following content. The information shown on the handout is in bold, and there is also additional information to help prompt discussion.

Courage to Obey Handout

Box 1: What Noah could see

List the practical, visible things in the story.

Examples:

- Clear instructions
- The size of the ark
- Gathering animals
- Preparing food
- A long-term project

Box 2: What Noah could not see

List the unknowns and uncertainties.

Examples:

- When the flood would come
- How people might react
- Whether he would be able to complete the ark
- Whether he would be alone in this
- Exactly how long it would take

Box 3: How Noah responded**Look for repeated words or actions.****Examples:**

- Noah did all that God commanded
- Noah built and prepared
- Noah acted on God's warning
- Noah followed God's instructions exactly

Box 4: What this teaches us about courage

Teams reflect on:

- Courage as steady obedience
- Acting without having a full picture of what might happen
- Trusting God in uncertainty

Leader's notes:

Give the teams time to complete the handout and then share their ideas together.

Say:

Noah's courage shows us steady obedience. He keeps going even when nothing around him makes sense. Noah chooses to trust God before he sees the outcome. That is courageous obedience.

 **Bridge****Say:**

In the New Testament book of Hebrews, we hear the stories of the heroes of faith found throughout the Bible. Noah makes the list!

Read:

⁷ By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

– (Hebrews 11:7)

Ask:

- What is the significance of the phrase 'things not yet seen' in Noah's story of courageous obedience?
- Thinking about your own life, are there 'things not yet seen' where trust feels important? How might Noah's story shape the way you approach those situations?

 **Selah****Say:**

We have explored the world Noah lived in, the covenant God promised and the courage Noah showed in responding. Selah gives us space to be still, to listen and to pray. We are going to look briefly at the covenant God made after the flood and then use that as a starting point for prayer.

Read:

12 And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.’

– (Genesis 9:12-13)

Say:

This is the moment God completes the covenant he first spoke to Noah before the ark was even built. It is a promise of protection, renewal and hope. The rainbow becomes a sign that God keeps his word even after the storm.

Leader's notes:

Ask the group to close their eyes for a moment and imagine the rainbow God placed in the sky after the flood, a sign that his promise still stands. Invite them to think of one word they need God to strengthen in them today, such as courage, trust, hope, patience, faith or peace. Encourage them to picture placing that word into the rainbow, trusting that God holds it with them. Allow around 15 to 20 seconds of quiet. Then ask the group to offer that word to God in a simple silent prayer.

 **Coda****Say:**

In a piece of music, the coda brings the different aspects of the melody, harmonies and bassline to a conclusion. It pulls together the different themes and often, but not always, brings resolution to a piece of music.

Ask:

As you reflect on everything you have learned today, what is your coda?

What is the one thing you will take away from this session about the importance of courageous obedience?

Leader's notes:

Give the young people a moment to think about your question and briefly share their coda with the group before the session comes to an end.

Courage to Obey

What Noah could see

List the practical, visible things in the story.

What Noah could not see

List the unknowns and uncertainties.

How Noah responded

Look for repeated words or actions.

What this teaches us about courage