

A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER



Chapter 4: 'Poor me! - When we can't, God can' Based on Judges 6:1-32; Judges 7; John 21:15-18

This month's content is written by Captain Cor van der Woude, prayer leader, intercessor and officer of The Salvation Army, based in Chester-le-Street.

INSPIRE

Can God really use little me? Feeling small and inadequate seems to be a perennial problem for many of us. We'd love to do great things for God and his Kingdom, but we're all too aware of everything about us that isn't quite right and doesn't quite fit.

In Chapter Four of 'Into the Wild' - a year of encounter and adventure - we rewind to the beginning of Gideon's story. The triumphant jar-smashing, trumpet-blowing battle is a long way off, and the least important person in the least important clan of one of the smallest tribes of Israel is doing some undercover threshing in a wine press. A 'mighty warrior' he is not - well, not yet anyway - but he does discover that his failures and shortcomings are no obstacle for God.

If you're feeling small and inadequate today, stop a while with Gideon and take a moment to listen to what God has to say about you. You might be surprised...

Read alone or with a friend, reflect on the discussion questions over the phone with someone or in an online small group / Bible study, try the prayer activities... and see what happens when you let God work through you.

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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A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER



EXPLORE

Introduction

God called me to be an officer when I was 14, but for me there were many reasons why I couldn't do it. By the time I finally became convinced that I should answer God's call and wanted to go for it, I thought it would be impossible because of decisions I had made over the years. But God had other plans. He showed his power, grace and guidance; he confirmed again that nobody is a lost cause.

The people of Israel were not so different from you and me. It is so easy to judge them from our comfortable seats in church or at home, but how many times do we try to do things our way, to try to stay in control?

In this chapter, we return to Gideon. Last month, we looked at the story of the little army of 300 and the battle they fought. This month we're stepping back to the start of Gideon's story. So far, our encounters have been about events - decisions that were 'out there', so to speak (crossing the Jordan, circling Jericho, fighting the Midianites). But this story is about those personal encounters when nobody is around - just you and God.

Context

The people of Israel had experienced 40 years of peace under the leadership of Deborah, the previous judge. Then they went their own way again and the Midianites oppressed them for seven years. The oppression was so bad that people made hiding places for themselves in caves, and that's where we meet Gideon. Gideon is very quietly threshing wheat in a wine press, to keep the wheat hidden from the Midianites. He is trying hard not to be noticed, and it's in this place of desolation and stress that God meets with him. At first Gideon is suspicious and disrespectful. He doesn't think too highly of God. 'If he is with us, then why has all this misfortune come on us?' (Judges 6:13 *The Voice*)

That's a sentence I've heard a lot over the last few months. 'If there is a God, why Covid-19? Why have so many people had to die?' Maybe it's a question you've asked when life was hurting; maybe it's a question you are screaming out right now. We want answers, we want an explanation. But is God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, accountable to me and you?

God doesn't respond by striking Gideon down with a lightning bolt from Heaven. He simply gives him his task, and the story continues in a rather familiar vein (to me at least), with Gideon presenting his excuses, starting with 'I can't do this.'

God's answer to Gideon is simply to promise God's presence. Gideon will be able to do what God asks of him because God will be with him (Judges 6:12,16). At that point, Gideon decides to make a meal. Is he stalling for time to get his head



A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER



around things; to find better excuses; to make sure this is really God meeting with him? When the meal is burnt up by fire that seems to come from nowhere, the penny drops. That fire is the sign that God, the Eternal One, is present, right there with him.

Deepen

I realise again how often I don't take God's answers seriously enough. God does not send somebody else. He himself, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Trinity, for whom nothing is impossible, will go with me. Wow! I often make the mistake of looking at my own abilities and the circumstances around me. I weigh up my options according to earthly conditions and personal limitations, instead of realising that this promise cannot be weighed or measured because it is not of this earth.

The next thing Gideon does is to build an altar. As we saw in Chapter One (Joshua leading the Israelites across the Jordan), altars are there to create a memory point; a place to return to and remember God's presence with us in times of trouble and distress. Do I mark those significant moments when I have sensed God's presence and power?

Gideon is then given the first part of his task, to take down the Baal altar and the Asherah image, but he does it at night. Perhaps he does it then because he thinks nobody will notice. But when God is with us, his grace and strength shining through us, people notice. Have you ever tried to do something quietly but found that people have noticed because they've seen God at work through you?

Conclusion

When God goes with you and you do things in his strength instead of your own, miracles happen, and ways which seem blocked, open up. But you have to trust.

When I answered God's call to officership and said to him, 'I have no excuses any more,' he made the impossible possible. Going into the Salvation Army Training College looked impossible because we had a debt of around €25,000. But God vaporised that in a year. Looking back, we saw how he had prepared the way. He was with us and we had to trust him to open the way for us.

When you look in the mirror and think you are no good, that you're a lost cause, think again. God loves you and God is with you. There is no better place to be than that. Keep loving him; keep trusting him; then see what he will do through you.



A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER



A truth to hold on to

God is always with you and nothing is impossible for him.

Challenge

- Does it feel like there's an obstacle in your path stopping you from moving forward? Ask God to do a miracle.

WATCH

This month we bring you two inspiring stories of people who have clearly heard God's call to do new things - new things they feel completely inadequate for, but which they're stepping into anyway, because they know God is with them. Meet Mary Wolfe in Neath (South Wales) and Sam and Jenny Tomlin in Liverpool, all starting out on initiatives which will change lives in their local communities.

[Watch their stories here](#) - and please pray for them.

DISCUSS

- How might it change your day if you kept remembering that God is right with you, wherever you are and with whatever you're doing?
- Is there a call or challenge which God has put on your path but which you have put aside?
- Have you ever been surprised by the nearness of God?
- Have you ever had to tear down any idols - yours or someone else's?
- Do you mark the moments when God answers your prayers? If so, how?
- Do you truly know that God loves you? How does that impact you?



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A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER



PRAY

1. Carry a reminder

If you tend to forget that God is always right there with you, find something you can carry, something you will notice, like a stone in your pocket or a band around your wrist, to remind you that he is there. Each time you notice it, turn your thoughts towards him and thank him for being your constant companion through life.

2. Made in God's image

Read Genesis 1:27 out loud a couple of times. Now stand in front of a mirror, look at yourself and say aloud, 'I am beautiful because God lives in me.' If this is too difficult, write the sentence on a piece of paper and stick it to the mirror you look in most often throughout the day. Every time you see it, ask God to give you the courage to accept that you are beautiful; he is crazy about you.

3. Seeing yourself through God's eyes

Make a list of five things about yourself that you are happy with. Then make a list of two or three things you know you need to change and that you know you need God's help with. Start each day of this month by thanking God for the things you are happy with, then pray for the things you need to change, asking for opportunities to put those changes into practice. God will answer this prayer.

4. Journal

If you have never journaled before, why not start this month? Simply take a notebook and write in it each day, noting the key words, thoughts, feelings and pictures you've had during your quiet time. Put the date next to it.

This is a beautiful and powerful support for those days when you cannot write, when your quiet time proves extremely hard. You can flip through your journal and read your entries to encourage and remind yourself that God is with you. Take time to sit down, to look back and find the moments when God has used you in a way you never expected, when God has worked through you, when you were able to do things in his power you never expected you could do.



A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER



5. Altars of answered prayer

Make a prayer book where you can write down the situations and people you've talked with God about. Make sure you put the date next to each one. Then leave space to write the date when the prayer is answered. Go over this regularly, asking for faith to persevere when prayers are not answered. Keep an open heart so that God can give you wisdom and help you discern if he wants you to stop praying any of those prayers.

When prayers are answered, thank God wholeheartedly and mark these moments as 'altars' in your life.

WEBSITE AND CONTACT EMAIL

For resources and sign up: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/resources/into-the-wild

Email Prayer Network: saprayernetwork@salvationarmy.org.uk



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