

# A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER

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## Chapter 2: 'A tale of two circles - fear versus faith' Based on Deuteronomy 1:21-35; Joshua 5:13 to 6:7

This month's content is written by Captain Xander Coleman, a worship leader and church planter based in Buckingham.

### INSPIRE

Do you ever stop to think about what drives you? In Chapter Two of 'Into the Wild' - a year of encounter and adventure, we're talking about the difference between trudging in fear and walking in faith.

The Israelites did a lot of circling. In the wilderness they circled in fear, unable to receive God's invitation to enter the land. It led to generational decline, dryness and deferred promise. At Jericho they circled the city, following the Ark of God's presence, but this time it wasn't about a fear response. This time it was a faith response. They trusted God, and in turn he led them to inherit the promise and enter the land.

How did they swap fear for faith? It happened because they encountered God - once on the wilderness side of the Jordan (which we explored in Chapter One) and once on the Jericho side.

Join us for Chapter Two of our 'Into the Wild' series - a year of encounter and adventure. This month we accompany Joshua to his meeting with God.

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 exchange fear for faith.

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

I find getting lost and that feeling of going around in circles terrifying. My anxiety spikes, I get short-tempered and I'm horrible to be around for anyone who is with me.

I've been thinking recently about the People of Israel going round and round in circles - circles in the wilderness before they crossed the River Jordan, and then circles round Jericho once they'd arrived in the Promised Land. There's a striking contrast between those two circles. One circle was marked by fear, the other by faith.

What can we learn today about our own fear-responses to God's whispered call to us to journey with him into the wild?

### Context

Sometimes I lack sympathy for the people of God, wandering through the wilderness for 40 years. They had everything they could want for a rich spiritual life - an actual pillar of cloud and fire going before them, a tabernacle in which to worship, a robust set of moral, ceremonial and civil laws to regulate community behaviour, daily bread from Heaven, water from rocks, and a charismatic leader whose face literally shone with God's glory. Yet they missed what God was doing and their faith was found wanting.

Shortly after they escaped from Egypt, when they had been in the desert only a few months, they arrived at the border of the Promised Land. Twelve spies were sent to scout the land; ten came back saying that Canaan's warriors couldn't be beaten, but the other two (Joshua and Caleb) disagreed. God, who had been with them these past months, would surely give them victory.

Despite obvious evidence of God in their midst, the people responded to these reports with fear - 'We won't, we can't enter the land, even if it is promised to us!'

As a result of that posture of fear, they wandered the desert in circles for 40 years, until the whole generation of adults who made that collective decision had died, all except Joshua and Caleb. The promise of God hung over them, but instead of surrendering themselves to God in faith, the people surrendered themselves to fear of defeat and failure, to fear of the new.



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Forty years later, they found themselves at that border again, right in front of a fortified city - maybe the same fortified city that had caused those ten spies to doubt God's promise all those years ago.

## Picture the scene

The Israelites are encamped on the plains of Jericho, the city gates locked ready for siege. Joshua goes for a closer look. Raising his head, he sees a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. A warrior. Not unduly intimidated, Joshua approaches.

'Are you for us, or for our enemies?' His adrenaline surges. He unconsciously places a hand on the hilt of his sword. He's guarded but not hostile as he looks into the man's face. Fires blaze in his eyes.

'Neither,' replies the man, his voice like rushing waters, 'but as the commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come.'

Joshua's bravado abandons him, and he tingles with the glory of God around him. Before he knows what's happening, he's face down in worship, prostrate in reverent submission before this appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ - for who else could it be?

'What message does my Lord have for his servant,' Joshua forces out, desperate to know God's strategy for winning the impossible battle he is facing.

The reply comes, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.'

## Deepen

Something about encountering the manifest presence of God shifts things in our hearts and minds. Yes, God is omnipresent - everywhere at all times - but there are times when he seems especially close, as if you can almost feel him. Those liminal times, when God seems closer than usual, can be catalysts to transform us, our churches and corps, and the world. It's in those moments that we realise again that God is bigger than our fear. It's those moments that kindle in us the faith to follow God's plans, purposes and strategies, but only if we, like Joshua, are willing to 'take off our shoes' and surrender to him.

Bowing barefoot before the commander of the army of the Lord, Joshua receives divine strategy. They are to walk in circles of faith around the city, once a day for six days, then seven times on the seventh day. Then they are to raise a shout of faith, and the walls will come down.



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## Conclusion

If we are to walk in circles, may they be circles of faith, not circles of fear. I have given up trying to plan for the future. There is too much I cannot know. Instead, I am trying to lean into this posture of faith-filled obedience, inclining my heart to the voice of the Commander of the Army of the Lord, taking off my shoes and surrendering to his plans.

At every moment, we have the choice to respond to the wildness of our world, and the wildness of our God, with fear or with faith. God will not up and leave us if we are afraid. He's loving and kind, compassionate and tender. But he longs for us to raise our faith to meet our fear, to step out in surrendered obedience, to follow wherever he leads.

## *A truth to hold on to*

When we get close to God in surrender, he gives us faith to obey.

## Challenge

- Have you done the last thing God told you to do?

## WATCH AND LISTEN

This month we hear the story of Diamond, a man who raised his voice and stepped out in faith to help bring down a huge injustice.

We also have a video montage from the Salvation Army Prayer Strategy Team on our top tips for praying out loud.

[Watch and listen here](#)



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## DISCUSS

- Have you ever done something that frightened you? What was it like?
- When was the last time (if ever) you felt God come close - perhaps in worship, prayer, during a meeting or by yourself?
- Have you ever responded to God in a public way in a meeting - for instance by raising a hand in response to an appeal, going forward for prayer or kneeling at the Mercy Seat? Was it scary?
- What might God be calling you to do, say or be, that you find intimidating or frightening?
- When was the last time you made a prayer of surrender to God?
- What are the Jerichos in your life or your church or corps - those things which seem unconquerable and in the way of inheriting the promises of God?
- Are there times when fear seems to have the victory in you or your church or corps? What would God's victory cry sound like over that situation? Where do you find yourself surrendering to fear or failure?

## PRAY

### 1. Circling Prayer (*Caim*)

Celtic Christians had a style of prayer that invoked the presence of God in a circle around a person or community.

- Meditate on God encircling you, breaking down the walls in you that prevent him having full access. Take your time, and use repetition to help you connect with God through this prayer.
- You may like to use the following prayer for yourself, from *Celtic Daily Prayer*:  
Circle me, Lord. Keep protection near and danger afar.  
Circle me, Lord. Keep light near and darkness afar.  
Circle me, Lord. Keep peace within; keep evil out.
- The prayer below, also from *Celtic Daily Prayer*, can be used to intercede for others, by putting their names and situations in the relevant places:  
Circle (name), Lord. Keep (name the good you want revealed) near and (name the evil you want removed) afar.  
Circle (name), Lord. Keep comfort near and discouragement afar.  
Keep peace within and turmoil out.  
Circle (name), Lord. Keep hope within and despair without.
- Try writing your own circling prayer for yourself or someone on your prayer list



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## 2. Prayer Walk

Similar to the *Caim* prayers above, prayer walking can be a helpful way to focus your prayers for a particular geography. Joshua 1:3 promised, 'I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses', and in Christ we appropriate that promise for ourselves as we walk around our communities, towns and cities. There's a reality that Christians carry the manifest presence of God wherever they go, and as we pray we invite God's Kingdom to be established everywhere our feet touch.

- Walk your community, alone or with someone else. You can plan a route, but be open to Spirit-led impulses to go in different or unexpected directions.
- Keep your eyes open and watch for those things that stand out for you. Allow these things to spark prayers for your community. For example, seeing a rainbow image in the window of someone's house might spark a prayer asking God to honour all his promises over your community.
- Pray out loud if you can, especially if you're praying with others. Allow the prayers to be natural, and don't worry if there are long periods of silence. During these moments you might like to pray in tongues or use a repetition prayer of blessing such as, 'Jesus, fill this place with your love', or 'Come, Holy Spirit'.
- At the end of your walk, spend some time debriefing with someone else. What did you sense going on in the spiritual realms of your community? Did you notice anything you could continue to pray into? What was God speaking to you about your community?
- You may wish to conclude your debrief by praying a circling prayer of protection over yourself, each other and/or the places you walked.

## 3. Postures of Surrender

Our bodies, souls and spirits are inherently interconnected, and what we do with our bodies when we pray can affect the nature and quality of our prayers. Some postures of prayer, such as standing or raising hands, communicate in our bodies our confidence in and awe of God. Others, such as kneeling or even lying prostrate before the Lord, may help us to come into a place of submission, surrender and consecration.

- If you can, try kneeling in prayer, or lying prostrate before the Lord. Surrender yourself, your plans, your everything to God.
- Reflect on how your physical posture affects your attitudes, your prayers and the way you feel.



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## 4. Shouting

On the final lap around Jericho, each Israelite warrior had to find his voice and shout in victory. In the UK, we often feel that church in general, and prayer in particular, should be quiet activities. Perhaps we can recognise this as a cultural quirk, since shouting has always been a feature of prayer and worship throughout the history of God's people. In fact, Commissioner Samuel Logan Brengle, The Salvation Army's prophet of holiness, had a whole chapter on shouting in his seminal book *Helps to Holiness*.

Shouting in prayer isn't easy, especially when you first do it, and it's worth thinking about where and when you might try it. Find somewhere where you won't disturb anyone and where no one will disturb you (the car can be a good option if you have one). The best things to shout are declarations about who God is and what he can do; so as you pray for a situation, think of a word or phrase which sums up what you want God to do, and then shout it out. You might also find it helpful to play some loud worship music and sing along as loud as you can.

Counterintuitively, shouting is sometimes easier with another person if they are shouting too.

Some find this discipline particularly spiritually cathartic. Though shouting doesn't make our prayers more powerful, the Holy Spirit sometimes uses it to bring a breakthrough in situations we're praying for. Shouting can feel like a very exposed way to pray, but it's worth experimenting with if you are able.

## WEBSITE AND CONTACT EMAIL

For resources and sign up: [www.salvationarmy.org.uk/resources/into-the-wild](http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/resources/into-the-wild)

Email Prayer Network: [saprayernetwork@salvationarmy.org.uk](mailto:saprayernetwork@salvationarmy.org.uk)



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