

A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER



Chapter 12:

The wildest gift - dare we go where the Spirit wants to take us?

Based on Acts 1: 1-11; Acts 2: 1-13

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INSPIRE

We are coming to the end of our 'Into the Wild' adventure, and what a year it has been! When our journey started, we were in the middle of the first UK lockdown. Over the past 12 months our hopes and expectations have been raised so many times: by news of people leaving hospital; by a drop in the infection rate; by the development of not one but several vaccines - and then dashed again by news of lives lost and lockdown renewed.

We are again hoping and waiting for that day when restrictions will be eased, when we can meet loved ones again and when our society and economy can recover.

In Chapter 12 of our 'Into the Wild' journey let's look at the events of the first Pentecost, to witness again how the lives of Peter and a group of frightened, confused disciples were transformed for ever by the power of the wildest gift ever given. Let's wonder what the future might look like if we dare to go where the Spirit is leading us.

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 the Holy Spirit live within 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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EXPLORE

Introduction

What does the word 'wild' conjure up for you? Is it rugged landscapes; powerful rolling waves crashing against the seashore; a ferocious animal defending its territory - or something totally different? The *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines wild as 'uncontrolled, violent and extreme'. Young people will often describe a party as being 'wild', and people who do extreme sports talk about the buzz that makes you feel like you could overcome anything. Whatever 'wild' is, it's always a moment of intensity which takes your breath away.

'Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.' (Acts 2:2-3)

Pentecost was wild. Imagine for a moment you are one of the disciples. You've travelled with Jesus for three years, witnessed the miracles he performed and listened to his teaching. Then you have stood and watched him being crucified and die, your thoughts and feelings in turmoil, as you begin to doubt yourself.

Then, three days later, you hear rumours that he is alive. Throughout the next 40 days he appears then disappears many times, until one day he ascends to Heaven, right in front of your eyes. And the only thing he has told you to do is to stay together in Jerusalem and wait for 'the gift' (Acts 1:4).

Context

Waiting isn't easy, even when we know we're waiting for a gift. It must have been particularly difficult for a group who were used to being busy, and that's true for us too. Leave us waiting too long and we get fidgety, pacing the floor, looking out of the window, our anxiety levels rising as the anticipation turns to frustration.

What is this gift we're waiting for anyway? How will it affect us? Jesus had tried to explain the gift (John 15:26; 16:12-14), and John the Baptist had talked about it too when he talked about the Holy Spirit baptism they'd receive from Jesus (Matthew 3:11). Yet still they didn't fully understand what this gift would mean for them personally, and for future generations.

Prior to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had already been active in the world, touching people's lives and empowering them to do remarkable things. We've thought about many of them throughout this 'Into the Wild' journey. But at Pentecost there was a change in the way the Holy Spirit worked. Warren Wiersbe writes:



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‘However, now there would be two changes: the Spirit would dwell in people and not just come on them, and his presence would be permanent, not temporary.’

Acts 2 tells us that the believers were all together, waiting, praying and probably going over everything they had witnessed. Perhaps some were keen to return to something normal. But out of nowhere they heard the sound of a violent, rushing wind, and all of a sudden it seemed that tongues of fire were landing on their heads. Then, to round it all off, they began speaking in other languages, and people from all the surrounding tribes and nations were able to understand what they were saying.

It was Peter who got up to preach - Peter, who had denied Jesus and cut off the ear of a servant of the High Priest. He was utterly transformed by that wildest of gifts. This one-time fisherman, now full of the Holy Spirit, spoke with wisdom and discernment, confidence and boldness, no longer afraid to challenge the Law, to speak out against the authorities or to debunk tradition. God’s Spirit moved mightily among the people who were seeking something more. They wanted freedom from the Roman Empire, but 3,000 of them found an even more incredible freedom in the Kingdom of God that day

Deepen

Many years ago, Generals John Gowans and John Larsson wrote the musical *Spirit*, which includes the song, ‘What does the Spirit say to the churches?’

*‘What does the Spirit say to the churches?
What does the Spirit say to you?
If you have ears then hear from the Spirit,
Do what the Spirit tells you to!’*

It’s now an old song but so relevant for these times. Many people are talking about what the future of worship might look like and what it might mean to be Church in the years to come. There is much talk about reimagining and what a ‘new normal’ might be, and it is a great opportunity to ask some important questions:

- Should we just carry on doing things because we’ve done them for years?
- What are people really looking for when it comes to Church, and what is God really looking for?
- How do we maximise the potential of online worship while making sure we don’t leave out those who can’t access things online?
- How do we care for everyone - those who are delighted to return to in-person meetings and those who feel anxious about it?
- How do we begin to dream about the kind of Church that looks nothing like we’ve ever seen before?



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Conclusion

We can learn much from Peter and the early Christians. They didn't try to go out in their own strength but sought the Spirit's guidance. And they prayed because they knew prayer was vital. We need to be people of prayer filled with his Spirit.

God invites us to keep receiving the wildest of his gifts. The same Holy Spirit who empowered those first believers to go out and bear witness to the name of Jesus is still available to us today. Just as the Holy Spirit was with those first believers in the upper room as they waited ... I believe he has been with us as we have waited these last 12 months.

Just as those early Christian believers gathered together and prayed, we need to pray: pray for the Spirit to fill us his people, and give us renewed energy and passion to serve the present age and to discern his mission for our post-COVID world.

A truth to hold on to

God never makes us wait in vain.

Challenge

- Ask yourself the hard question: as we move out from here, what needs to change?

WATCH

As our 'Into the Wild' year draws to a close, we've asked three people to share their testimonies. Angie Carney, Mary Wolfe and Tim Swansbury have journeyed with us throughout the year and this month they tell us their stories of meeting God in the wild.

[Watch the videos here](#)



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DISCUSS

- When you think of the wildness of Pentecost, how does it make you feel? Would you like to have been there?
- What has the Spirit been doing in you over these past 12 months? What's the biggest change in you since the beginning of our 'Into the Wild' journey?
- Thinking about your corps/church, what's the most difficult question you're having to ask yourself at the moment?
- Is there something you desperately don't want to go back to, when life returns to a more familiar shape? What is it and why don't you want it back?
- What has the Spirit done in your corps/church over this past year? How might you keep hold of those good things as we move forward through 2021?
- Sometimes it's as though the Holy Spirit is drawing our attention to something - tugging on our sleeve to get us to go in a particular direction. Is that true for you at the moment? Who does the Spirit want you to go out and share Jesus with?

PRAY

1. Book of Acts

Why not set yourself the task of reading prayerfully through the book of Acts over the next few weeks, paying attention to one particular character ... the Holy Spirit. There's lots in there about people, but notice particularly what the Holy Spirit does in each of the stories you read.

2. A gift you need

The Bible talks about the Holy Spirit - this wildest of God's gifts - bringing all sorts of gifts into our lives. Is there a particular gift you know you're going to need over the coming months? Take time to ask for it in prayer. Your loving Father delights to give you good gifts.

3. God's Kingdom

Read Revelation 21: 1-4. By the power of the Spirit, the Apostle John is seeing a world that's entirely different from the persecution-ridden one he lives in. Write your own version, using phrases like 'I see ...', 'I hear ...', 'There is no more ...', 'There is only ...'.



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Imagine your local community as it would be if the Kingdom of God was fully visible there. Let your imaginings stir faith in you, then take your piece of writing out on a prayer walk. Pray your words over the houses, businesses, streets and people of the place where you live.

4. A letter from the past

At the start of this 'Into the Wild' journey we invited you to write yourself a letter about your hopes and dreams for the coming year, then to put it in an envelope and put it away somewhere safe.

The time has come to open that letter and to read it through. Take time to reflect on the journey you've taken, to grieve what you've lost and to give thanks for what God has done.

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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