**JOURNEYING TOGETHER:** FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Session 3 of 4

# Crossing the river

### MEETING AIM

To reflect on the obstacles between us and what God has promised us, and to work with God to overcome those.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Joshua 3-4

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your situation.

Joshua and the people of God stand on the brink of the promised land. But the Jordan River stands between them and entering into it. They have to trust that God will help them overcome this final hurdle. This session will encourage the young people to think about what God has promised them, and what stands between them and God’s promises. Help the group to reflect on those promises (or to seek God for what he has in store) and how they can rely on him to bring those promises about.

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

Welcome the young people and spend some time chatting about their week. Share out any refreshments you have brought with you; celebrate in their triumphs and share in their disasters. Perhaps share a little of your week too. Ask what memories of water they have. It could be a beach holiday or swimming in a lake. It might be a hot shower after a long muddy walk or a cold drink after a particularly hot summer game of football.

### INTRO ACTIVITY – 10 mins

**You will need:** two pint-glasses; two jugs of water; Jenga blocks

Ask two volunteers to sit opposite each other. Give each a pint-glass of water, a jug of water and an equal pile of Jenga blocks. The aim is to drink all the water in the glass, but you are only allowed to drink while your Jenga tower is fully built. If you have a full Jenga tower, you are allowed to knock over your opponent’s to stop them from drinking and to fill up the other person’s glass from the jug.

After a set time limit or if one player succeeds in draining their glass, ask for other volunteers to play. Chat about the difficulties of achieving the goal in keeping their tower fully built. What obstacles did they have to overcome to achieve their goal?

### BIBLE EXPLORATION – 10 mins

Before the session, practise telling the story below yourself, or ask someone else in the group to prepare it. Alternatively, you could film yourself or someone else telling the story in an appropriate location and costume!

Gather the group together and explain that the people of God – the Israelites – have to cross the river Jordan to reach the land God promised them. They stand on the banks looking at that promised land. Invite them to listen to the story of Joshua getting ready to cross the river.

I wait uncomfortably before an ocean of expectant, tired faces. I wipe my palms across the back of my legs to hide the sweatiness. Nervousness in my stomach has churned and risen into my throat. I’m aware of panic flickering inside; I swallow hard and begin again my opening statement in my mind, desperate for my voice not to give way to a tell-tale quiver.

Forty-five years. Forty-five! Time flies. No, actually it drags when you’re just going round and round in circles, always hoping for a change – something better, which never comes. I hate that feeling, being let down so often by people you’ve been working hard for, for years. And now, at this age it’s as if my life is just beginning. I dreamt of this when I was a boy, back in the bad old days. I could hardly imagine then what we have now. All this seemed like an absolute fantasy to me then. Ridiculous. A campfire tale without any basis in the real world. I mean, I dreamt of freedom, of living without fear, a life with purpose and hope...But I didn’t expect this!

I remember feeling like this once before. When was it? A long time ago. I have this image in my mind, it’s always been there. It’s just a simple view looking down at my own bare feet. The ground was sticky like it was drying quickly and I could see mud between my toes as I wiggled them. And then – and this is the weird bit of this memory, dream, whatever it is – a dead fish, lying next to my foot. Not a smelly, decomposed dead fish, just a fish…dead. I mean, I live in the desert, I’ve only ever seen fish once or twice! What a strange picture to have in my mind as I’m about to address all these people! Me! Just like Moses was on the day I first met him. He stood in front of everyone just like this – so inspiring, so important looking, so... well, big! But then I was five, so everyone was big to me! Come on, Josh.

I open my mouth. The acoustics are good, my voice soars over the plain, louder than I anticipated. The rickety platform sways a little as I remind the people of God’s promises. I recite the Torah and honour the memory of my great and noble mentor, leader and friend, Moses. Excitement grows as I speak of a new way of life. I tell them of new opportunities and great challenges and how we will overcome in the power of God. Finally, I turn away from them, step down to the sparkling shallows and raise my arms. The waters ripple around my feet. Cold. Oh, please let something happen. It’ll be so embarrassing if you do nothing, God! A breeze touches me and again a picture of him comes to mind – the man I admired, loved. I see him on the clifftop in a position not dissimilar to this. I remember him teaching me. I remember the greatness of God, seeing the miraculous happening around me.

The breeze picks up and strong wind pushes into me. I lean into it to keep from stepping back. Suddenly the rushing waters slow, fading around my feet, melting into a trickle. The mighty river is backing up to my left and the riverbed is drying up before my very eyes. As I look down to my grubby, sandalled feet, I notice a fish, flapping its last few breaths in the damp riverbed dirt, just like once before, a long, long time ago. But now, now it is time to cross the Jordan and take the promised land.

*This story is produced using some material previously published in Grove Books booklet Y37* Mentoring and Young People *by Joel Toombs.*

Once the story is over, ask the young people to give their first impressions on what they have heard.

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Ask someone, or a couple of people, to sum up the story. Use the following questions to start discussion:

* Where is Joshua’s image of the muddy dead fish from? Why is this significant? (It refers to when Moses parted the Red Sea for the Israelites to escape Egypt into the desert 40 years earlier.)
* Why was the promised land so important to the Israelites?
* What does this story tell you about God? Both for the Israelites then – but also for us today?
* What impact on the Israelite people would parting the Jordan River like this have? Would it help their attack on the peoples who already lived there?
* Is there a ‘promised land’ for us as Christians? Do you have one as a church or an individual? Not geographical land, but a spiritual accomplishment, community or vision God has placed in your hearts?
* What obstacles are there in the way?
* What ‘weapons’ or strengths and opportunities do we have along the way?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE – 10 mins

**You will need:** a slip ’n’ slide waterslide, long tarpaulin or tent ground sheet; water

Lay out your slip ’n’ slide waterslide, long tarpaulin or tent ground sheet. Do this outside if possible, if it’s not too cold. (If you do this inside, you’ll need to limit the amount of water you use, or use a long piece of blue fabric to symbolise the river.)

Gather everyone on the near side of it and ask them to take their shoes and socks off. Pour some water on the slide, just enough for the group to get their feet wet and create a little splash, but not enough to make it slippery. Say that this represents the river Jordan. Stand the other side of the Jordan from the young people, and encourage them to visualise this as a river blocking them from the promised land. What was the promised land for the Israelites? What is it for Christians? What is their promised land personally? What is it they want to move into: a season of life, a career, a calling or other things God might have put in their heart?

Ask the young people to close their eyes and visualise the obstacles in the way and the things that stop them or slow them down from getting there. You may wish to have a time young people can chat one-to-one about these obstacles and what they can do to overcome them.

### PRAYER – 5 mins

**You will need:** your Jordan River from ‘Creative response’

While people are still standing on the river’s edge, pray and ask God’s Spirit to rest on the young people, to speak into their hearts, to embolden them again about taking that ‘land’. Ask for God’s supernatural intervention and action in their lives – his provision spiritually and materially, everything they need to get across.

Tell them that when they feel ready, they can walk slowly across the river as a symbol of embracing God’s proactive leadership in their lives, but also the fact that they personally have to get up and get on with it themselves!

Afterwards, ask for people to say how they felt and share what it meant for them. Ask them to pray for each other in pairs about moving into their respective ‘promised lands’ and around the obstacles they face.

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