**FIRST STEPS TOGETHER:** FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

Session 3 of 4

# Crossing the river

### MEETING AIM

To think about how it’s important to reflect and thank God for his faithfulness.

### 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 particular situation.

This passage marks the crossing of the boundary into the promised land, and parallels the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14-15). God reminds the Israelites of his promises and faithfulness. He renews their faith and strengthens them before the next challenge. The focus in this session is on their remembering God’s faithfulness and helping the children to reflect and do the same in their lives.

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

Welcome each child by name and encourage them to share stories from their week. Celebrate any birthdays, or special events. Ask the children: “What do you do to help you remember things?” Thank God that he’s with you and ask him to help you learn more about him today.

### PLAY – 10 mins

**You will need:** paper; felt-tip pens or crayons; collage materials

Ask the children what they are thankful for today. You might need to give them examples: the people who look after them, food, friends at playgroup or nursery, your church group. Can they think of a really special memory? Maybe it was a time when they knew God was with them? Invite the children to think of a memory and make a collage picture to help them remember it and thank God.

### BIBLE STORY – 10 mins

**You will need:** twelve stones made from scrunched-up paper; a washing-up bowl (or other big container) of water; an empty bowl of the same size; towels

Before the session, hide the twelve stones around the room. Gather the children together and tell this story:

Joshua was the leader of the Israelites – God’s people. Joshua and the Israelites were almost in the land that God had promised them, but first they needed to cross the Jordan River. The river was between them and the land.

Joshua got his people ready to cross the river. They camped next to the river for three days like God had told them to. *All lie down and pretend to be asleep.*

The river was so full of water that it was flooded. The water was so deep that they wouldn’t have been able to walk across the river. *Mime walking through water.*

God told Joshua to tell the people that the priests were going to carry the ark of the covenant (a wooden chest covered in gold where they kept the ten commandments) and lead the people through the water.

He told the priests to step into the flowing water and that if they did, the water would stop flowing. *Invite the children in turn to take their shoes off and step into the bowl of water. You could also use a jug and pour water in on top of their feet.*

When they did, the water stopped and the Israelites walked through to the other side. *Invite the children to dry their feet and then step into the empty bowl. How do the two bowls feel?*

The priests stayed standing in the empty river while everyone else crossed over. God told Joshua to get twelve men to collect stones from the ground where the priests were stood. *Challenge the children to find your hidden ‘stones’.*

When the priests carried on walking the river carried on. *Pour water into your empty container to represent the flowing water.*

They brought the stones to their camp and built a memorial so they could remember what God had done and remember to tell people for years to come. *Invite them to place the stones on top of one another.*

This story is a lot like when God stopped the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape from the Egyptians. God was reminding his people of how he had been with them before, was still with them now, and would be with them as they went into the land he had promised them.

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Ask the children these questions, ensuring everyone has the chance to contribute:

* What was your favourite part of the story?
* How do you think the Israelites felt when the river was flowing too fast to cross?
* What do you think it would have felt like to see the water stop flowing?
* What did the Israelites do to help them remember how God had been with them?
* What do you do to remember that God is with you? (Share an example from your own life.)

### CREATIVE TIME – 10 mins

**You will need:** jelly; long plate or piece of guttering; spoons

Before the session, create a jelly river by filling a long plate or length of (new, clean) guttering.

Divide the group into two teams or do this activity all together, depending on how many children you have. Invite the children sit around the jelly river. Ask them questions about today’s session and story. Every time someone gets an answer right, they can all eat a spoonful of jelly until it’s clear to cross! Chat about how exciting it is to be able to cross over. How did the people of God feel about crossing the river?

If you have children with allergies or want to do this without food, you could use water to have a sip or scoop out each time.

### PRAYER – 5 mins

**You will need:** stones or building blocks

Remind the group that the people of God created a memorial out of stones so they could remember how God had looked after them. Invite the children to build their own group memorial by each placing a stone or block in a central pile. Invite them to say thank you to God for something he’s done as they place their stone. Finish by saying: “Thank you, God, that you are with us, that you have been with us in the past and will be with us in the future.”

**ANNIE WILLMOT**

is a children’s worker and mum to two boys. She loves nothing more than an honest conversation and a good cup of tea.