

'Trees of Life' Lent Course: Week 2 - Thursday 29th February 2024

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Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] So, we're doing this Trees of Life course for five weeks in total. It's building on previous weeks as we go through. So, if you miss a week or you want to go back and check something out, all the sessions are recorded and they're on our YouTube channel.

But I thought tonight, and we'll probably do this each week, really, be good just to recap on where we got to last week. If you recall, for example, we saw that trees and bushes and wood and fruit, all things tree-related are found all the way through the Bible, pretty much on every page, all sorts of trees and wood.

We identified on our flip chart there. In fact, I think we said there's over a thousand mentions of tree-related stuff in the Bible. And we saw how in the Hebrew language that the Old Testament's written in, there's not much differentiation in Hebrew between living trees and dead wood, or between bushes and trees and vines.

It can all be summarized with a Hebrew word, which we learned last week. Any ideas? Can you remember what that Hebrew word was that we looked at? Three letters. Yes.

Spelled ets, pronounced ets, I think. Yep. Nice one. That can mean wood. It can mean timber. It can mean trees. It can mean vines. It's a kind of catch-all term for all things woody.

[1 : 26] So, what else, though, did we see last week? Well, we saw that humans and trees are deeply connected, such as the way in a creation story in Genesis, where both humans and trees are described as being created from where?

Where are humans and trees? Yes. From the ground, indeed. Yes. And out of the ground, both humans and trees, it seems, are called to bear what?

To bear fruit. Excellent. You're informed. So, yeah, to bear fruit. And when is that fruit to be born, to be bared? In, oh, this is spot on. Come on.

Yes, in season. And we looked at that, didn't we, thinking, yeah, we're often likened to trees being root and planted to blossom and fruit and so on, but not in a pressurized way, but in season, according to God's good plans, you know, all in good time, all in God's time, shall we say.

We saw as well, though, that not only are humans like trees, but God is like a tree, the one who sustains life, giving us the breath and the food we need. And we looked a little bit at that creation story of Adam and Eve.

[2 : 34] We saw that in them, they're given a choice represented by two trees. This first one was the idea of being able to feed on God, represented by the tree of...

Excellent. And then the other one, which was the opposite of that, was called the... Well done.

Yeah, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And why are these two trees? Well, the tree of life is all about feeding on God, doing things God way. And the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents that choice that we have, perhaps, where we might want to do things our way and rely on our own wisdom and decision-making rather than God's.

And then last week, we finally, we left it last week, underlining how this choice between these two trees, between following God's wisdom or our own ways, well, that's a theme, which as we'll see tonight and in future weeks, which crops up time and again throughout the stories of the Bible.

But it's interesting, as we'll see, that the stories depicting this choice between our way and God's way, they're also invariably connected to trees and wood as well.

[3 : 49] So, that was last week. If you were here, great. If you caught up online, great. If you just want to have that quick recap in your mind, great. Can you just share, perhaps, with those around you, one thing, one thing that maybe stuck with you from last week or has stayed with you, something that struck you that has maybe helped your thinking as you go through this week?

Very quickly, just 30 seconds. Say one thing that stayed with you from any of those themes last week. All right. So, we won't get feedback on that, but I'll let you keep those to yourselves around your table.

But we will have a chance to do a fair bit more sharing and discussion and feedback a little bit later on with some other questions that we'll look at tonight. But there's this theme, then, of trees and wood connected with times of choice that people are presented with.

But before we continue exploring that theme, I just want to take us back to the Garden of Eden because there's one other little detail that I think will be worth us keeping in mind as we go through.

So, have a look at this from the second creation story in Genesis. This is from Genesis chapter 2. It says this. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[5 : 05] A river watering the garden flowed from Eden. From there, it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon.

It winds through the entire land of Havilah. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It winds through the entire land of Kush. The name of the third river is the Tigris.

It runs along the east side of Asher. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. Now, reading that through, it's not particularly perhaps something that we often focus on in the story of creation and Adam and Eve and so on.

But, again, do you want to just turn to those next to you? And what is it that maybe sticks out from there? Anything in particular that you notice from that description of the garden of Eden?

Just share that with your neighbour and we'll maybe get some ideas in a minute or two. All right, so there's no wrong answers with this because this is just what maybe strikes us from this little passage here.

[6 : 10] But anything anyone wants to share of something that strikes them from reading these few verses here from Genesis chapter 2, what is it that jumps out at you when you read this?

Ellen at the back. Excellent. We notice that the fourth river doesn't actually say where it runs from or to, whereas the other ones are mentioned.

Dave, you had another thought as well, didn't you? You know, I've often said, I must learn to keep my big mouth shut over all the years I've been at St John's. I was very interested.

I picked that up, yes, about the Euphrates. We decided that there are four headwaters that all join into one. That was one thing that we thought about. It's the third and the fourth river that we know of today, the Tigris and the Euphrates.

And just to shatter your dreams, I think in the last sort of 10,000 years or so, the River Severn has moved hundreds of times and it never flowed through the direction that it flows through now.

[7 : 13] And neither does the River Thames. So they can change directions too. Thank you, Dave, trying to find the location of the Garden of Eden, maybe a bit of a fool's errand, if you think along those lines. But yeah, thank you, Ellen.

Thank you, Dave. Any other things that stick out for us on reading this passage, Neil? This is actually Hannah's, which she didn't want to say. I had to put my hand up instead.

That it all, or the water and the water of life is flowing from the Garden of Eden and out into the world. Excellent, Hannah. Thank you, Neil. Nice one. Yeah, the water of life.

These rivers are flowing out of Eden into the world. Any other little thoughts anyone's got? Or are you happy with those observations for now? Go on, Dave. Am I right in thinking that these rivers are flowing before we ever had any rain?

Because rain came in Noah's time, didn't it? And are we talking about Iraq? And again, it all depends whether you take its location literally or if it's figurative and pictorial of something.

[8 : 14] Thanks, Dave. Yeah, I mean, whatever our views on the literalness or otherwise of this story, I guess in some ways, yes, it's picture language.

I mean, these four rivers, we know about the Tigris and the Euphrates. These are massive rivers, but historically they haven't got the same source, shall we say. But I think Hannah's on to something with what she said.

Because in order to flow and water the garden and also to become these much bigger rivers, where would these rivers normally have to begin?

Exactly, yeah. From higher ground, we might say. A high place. And so if the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil are in the centre of this garden, the picture that's painted seems to be that they're growing near or even on the peak of a high place.

You know, the trees are located on a high place. So we think of the Garden of Eden perhaps as a hill or even a mountain kind of garden from which rivers flow down.

[9 : 25] So that seems from the word go, the Bible is telling a story about trees, which represent God, and the choice we have in life.

That's located on a high place. On a high place, all right. As we go through the Bible, this theme of trees and wood and high places, it's one which appears time and time again.

So for example, if we think about the story of the flood and Noah's ark, Noah has his choice. He chooses to obey God's commands to build a big boat, the ark.

What was the ark made out of? Wood, yeah. Go for wood. Or etz, etz in Hebrew as well. And where did the ark come to rest as the floodwaters receded?

Yeah, very good. Yeah, on top of Mount Ararat, a high place. And Ararat means the curse reversed, you know, perhaps representing God's rescuing of Noah and his family from the waters of chaos below.

[10 : 31] Now, if we think about the Noah's ark story for a moment, Noah's ark and the flood, it's a pretty brutal story of destruction, you know, of mass killing. And probably the worst story to make cuddly children's toys out of, really, sort of thing.

So you want to think twice about that one. So I think it's a story we need to approach with a bit of caution, perhaps, as we try and make sense of where God might be found in it. But at the very least, for our purposes tonight, it's a story that connects choice and obedience with wood and a high place.

Or again, a little later in Genesis, we think about Abraham, when he believes God asks him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. So we're told this, that then God said to Abraham, take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the region of Moriah.

Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain, I will show you. And we're told, Abraham and Isaac, well, they carry the wood, again, the word is eits, up this mount, Moriah, Moriah, meaning the land of God, for the fire that they think they'll need to make.

Now again, on the surface, at least, this story of Abraham and Isaac and so on, is pretty horrific. It's a pretty horrific story which needs careful unpacking. And in some ways, I'd suggest it is an illustration of exactly what God's not like, you know, as someone who couldn't possibly follow through with a demand for child sacrifice because God calls out and stops Abraham killing his son.

[12 : 10] But again, at the very least, it's a story that connects obedience with wood on a high place. So we've got Adam and Eve, you've got Noah, you've got Abraham, all presented with choices, all found on high places, whether it's Eden or Ararat or Moriah, all connected to wood and trees.

And so with that in mind, let's take a look at another story, this time not from Genesis, but from Exodus. Exodus chapters 3 and 4. This time a story about Moses and an encounter that he has with God that presents him with a choice.

Now Moses was sending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

There, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up. When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, Moses, Moses, Moses.

And Moses said, Here I am. Do not come any closer, God said. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.

[14 : 02] then he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

At this, Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt.

I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So now go.

I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

Moses said to God, Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you. And they ask me, What is his name?

[15 : 15] Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites.

I am has sent me to you. Moses answered, What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, The Lord did not appear to you? Then the Lord said to him, What is that in your hand?

A staff, he replied. The Lord said, Throw it on the ground. Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake.

And he ran from it. Then the Lord said to him, Reach out your hand and take it by the tail. So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and he turned back into a staff in his hand.

This, said the Lord, is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has appeared to you.

[16 : 39] Moses said to the Lord, Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.

But Moses said, Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else. Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said, What about your brother, Aaron, the Levite?

I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you and he will be glad to see you. He will speak to the people for you and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him.

Now, there's a lot in that story. Not least, perhaps, this pretty weird staff turns to a snake thing.

You know, probably a snake because snakes were symbols in ancient Egypt of royal authority. So I guess if Moses is going to lead the people out of Egypt, having a sort of recognizable symbol of a snake perhaps gives him some extra authority in their eyes.

[17 : 57] Let's leave snakes to one side, though, for another snake handling session perhaps another time. But instead, though, if we think about this idea of wood and high places and of meeting of God and being given a choice, what did you notice about this story?

For example, for a start, where does this story take place? Can you remember? Where does this story take place? And a mountain.

Yep, on a mountain. It's actually the mountain that's named Horeb. So we're told Moses came to Horeb, the mountain of God. Now, interesting, Horeb means dry or heat.

Pretty apt name for somewhere with a burning bush, perhaps. But more importantly, this place of encounter, it's a mountain. It's a high place. It's a high place carrying on this theme perhaps.

But any ideas of what Mount Horeb also comes to be known as instead of Horeb? Some of you know it. What we got? Mount Sinai.

[19 : 00] Yes, they changed the name to Mount Sinai. And Sinai is found here where the red dot is on what's still called the Sinai Peninsula, the wilderness part of Egypt, that kind of triangle area.

That's where the Exodus happened. That's where the Moses and the Israelites wandered around for 40-odd years following their escape from Pharaoh. But the fact that Mount Horeb becomes better known in the Bible as Mount Sinai, that could be significant.

You see, here's what we read, for example, in Exodus 3, verse 2, says this, Now, the Hebrew term here that we translate as bush is the Hebrew word is the Hebrew word Sene, Sene, word which scholars reckon could be why the mountain, even the whole peninsula to this day, is called Sinai, Sene, Sinai, Sinai, same root letters in Hebrew.

So the mountain, the whole mountain, even the range of mountains is seemingly named after this bush, this eighth, this tree.

And why? Because this little episode that we've been seeing seems to be pretty significant because God is present and represented by the wood, the tree, which is found on that high place and where Moses is offered this choice by God.

[20 : 34] Now, it's a story that I think is a bit too good to pass by. So I just want to unpack it a little bit and then we'll have a chance to share some sort of lengthier reflections perhaps with each other.

So we've got this burning bush but with a fire that doesn't consume the bush. And it's an intriguing enough phenomenon for Moses to think, I will go over and see this strange sight, why the bush doesn't burn up.

And we're told that when the Lord saw that he had gone over to take a look, God called to him from within the bush, Moses, Moses. And it's fascinating, I think, to think what would have happened if Moses hadn't been bothered, if he hadn't been intrigued because God, it seems, only speaks to him once he'd come over to take a look.

You know, curiosity, inquisitiveness, asking questions, seem to be all important ways in which we're opened up perhaps to meeting with God in unexpected ways.

What else? We're having gone to take a look. Moses is told not to come any closer. In fact, take your sandals off, Moses, because not only is there a fire there representing God's presence, but the ground you're standing on, we're told, is holy ground.

[21 : 54] Again, ground. We've had that come up before already. Now, had this ground where Moses is, where his sandals need to come off, had this ground suddenly become holy?

Or was it more likely that it had always been holy even before Moses turned to look at this burning bush? And if so, we could say, again, it's the act of meeting with God that opens his eyes to the holiness which has actually been under his feet all along.

And again, I think there's something in that. The ground from which Adam was created, the ground from which the tree of life springs, the ground from which the burning bush grows, is holy ground.

We could say this, is holy ground. Burnt wood, that word wood again. You could say burnt wood is holy ground.

Why? Because God is here through his spirit. And I wonder what a difference that would make to us and our world if we could grasp the significance that every step we take in this life is on God's holy ground.

[23 : 07] But then having got Moses' attention, God then gives Moses a job offer. Indeed, the Lord, we're told, says, I have seen indeed the misery of my people in Egypt.

I've heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I'm concerned about their suffering. So now go. Walk out the door, just turn around now, because now go.

I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. But Moses, well, he basically says no, coming up with a series of doubts and questions and reasons not to send him.

He says this, for example, he says, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? I mean, how would you summarise that? What kind of reaction is that? In a word, what's he displaying here, would you say?

Why me? Yeah, that kind of thing. Yeah. Low self-esteem, yeah, inadequacy, that kind of thing. He feels inferior, perhaps. Perhaps he's got imposter syndrome. You know, who am I?

[24 : 13] God, you've got the right person here, I don't think so. Fear, yeah, all that. And this is going to give his responses, I think. So you've got the next one, he says, suppose I go to the Israelites and say, God has sent me, and they ask me, what is his name?

Then, what should I tell them? Again, how would you summarise his response here? What kind of words spring to mind with this response? Okay, coming up with excuses kind of thing, yeah, maybe, maybe.

And it's interesting, he says the word God, I guess, if he's coming from Egypt, where there's multiple gods, he wants to know which particular God is it who sent me here? I want your name, please, but he feels uninformed, perhaps.

Another excuse he has, what if they do not believe me, or listen to me? Again, how would you summarise that kind of response? What words spring to mind there? Yeah, yeah.

Again, I guess we could say he's afraid, maybe there's a sense of shame, that he's going to be embarrassed about this as well. He's playing hard to get, isn't he?

[25 : 19] Yeah, yeah, yeah. And he carries on as well, pardon your servant, Lord, getting a bit more bashful about this, but this is honesty. I've never been eloquent. Yeah, I'm slow of speech and tongue.

Again, he's going back to this idea of feeling very self-conscious, very embarrassed. Maybe he's got a stutter or some kind of speech impediment. Maybe he's afraid, as most of us are, including me, of public speaking, that kind of thing.

I think it's the most fearful thing that people have often, getting up in front of people and speaking. And then Moses ends up eventually saying this, you're summing it all up, pardon your servant, can you send someone else, please?

I'm doing this. Anyone else? Anyone else? And I don't know about you and all of these kind of excuses. You can really identify with Moses, I think, even feel a bit sorry for him.

He's put on the spot here by God. He's understandably scared and nervous, lacking in confidence, desperate for someone else to do the job instead of him. And yet God on the whole gets a bit frustrated at the end, but on the whole, he patiently responds to his concerns one at a time.

[26 : 28] So Moses then, by God, is given all sorts of assurances from God, from him being told God's name, which is I am who I am, to being reassured that God would be with him.

Even his run-of-the-mill stick, his staff, becomes a miraculous stick that turns into a snake. And he's even told, if you don't want to do it, Moses, I'm sending your big brother, Aaron, to you.

He can do the speaking for you if you just tell him the script. How about that as a compromise, says God. And so we could argue that God in this is the great encourager.

He gives courage to Moses, so much so that Moses eventually says yes to this pretty special calling on his life to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses could have said no.

Again, we've got this choice going on. But his encounter with God at this burning bush, this wood, this tree, on a high place, is an example of the choices that God presents to people.

[27 : 28] Are you going to trust me, do things my way, or are you going to do things your own way and eat the fruit, if you like, of your own knowledge rather than eat from my tree of life?

So that's a little thing of the Moses and the burning bush story. With all that in mind though, and particularly perhaps with the courage that it sometimes takes to choose God's ways above our own.

Here's some questions for us to consider. And we've got a good few minutes on these. This is the bulk of our time talking amongst ourselves tonight. Just go through these very quickly and then over to you. First up, and you can share in as much or as little detail as you want around your tables.

But what kind of places do you seem to encounter God most clearly and why do you think this is? How important is curiosity that turning aside to look at a burning bush?

How important is curiosity to our experience of faith? What are the situations in life when you feel least equipped to deal with what's asked of you? And then in what ways have you had to show courage in your life or your faith?

[28 : 34] And perhaps most importantly, what have you learned from those times of courage? Thinking of this word courage. How have you known God's encouragement of you?

And then lastly, how might we inspire courage? How might we encourage one another? So, we've got a good 20 minutes on these.

If you want to have a ponder with those, grab a drink, chew the fat, and then we'll have some feedback on these if you're keen to afterwards. If you want a feedback, it's always nice to be encouraged by one another's insights.

So, perhaps two or three for each of these questions, perhaps you want to share. So, in what kinds of places do you seem to encounter God most clearly and why do you think this is?

Any hands up on this one? Where do you encounter God most clearly? John? Are you far away? Home.

[29 : 34] Home. Interesting. Now, why is home the place you encounter God most clearly? Well, here as well, obviously. Two places, yeah. But home because it's really peaceful and it's very loving and quiet.

Good stuff. So, Haven. Haven. Yeah, yeah. In the quiet. Yeah, yeah. Good stuff. Good stuff. Lovely. God's love at home. Excellent. Excellent. Other people, where do you find Mike?

I have to agree with, I don't know who just said it, at home and here and the first thing, I start with God in the morning, I listen to the daily bread on the iPad and that sets me up for the day and after that, the day is just a normal day.

That's the start of the day for me. Yeah, your foundation of the day, intentional time, getting your mind on God. Yeah, great. Thanks, Mike. Where else?

What kinds of places do you think we encounter God most clearly? Hang on, Mary. By the sea. By the sea. Why do you think it is? I don't know. No, it's just, I think the sea is just the power of the sea and just looking at it and I always feel closer to God then.

[30 : 52] Yeah. Interesting. Interesting. And it's interesting as well in Jesus' life, he seemed like spending time by the seashore, didn't he as well? He had some affinity there with the, whether it's the tides or the waves or the ripples, whatever it is.

Very Jesus-like, Mary. As always, well done, well done. Mark, Mark. We said on our table that we encountered God here in church, in the quietness, sometimes on the front row and sometimes in the altar because it's like sitting on his lap if you go in the altar, so it's more personal.

Marie said in the garden, kneeling at the altar as well. Hazel said on the beach, watching the sea. Ruth was more walking and swimming for her time to encounter God.

So it was a very positive chat. Yeah, great, great, good variety there, which I guess in itself says something in terms of not one place, but lots of places, lots of ways. Yeah.

Interesting. Thank you. Okay. How important is curiosity, would you say, to our experience of faith, wonder and inquisitiveness and being interested in finding things out?

[32 : 04] On our table, we did talk about having to unlearn what we might have learned as young Christians in other places where perhaps the doctrines that we were led to believe, we've seen since had to challenge because they just weren't right.

You know, we were told things, particularly Anne, perhaps within the faith and the church that she was a part of, she was told things that are just wrong.

And we've learned and being part of this church, we've learned things that, you know, the truth of what's gone on. And if you don't, if you don't have the curiosity, you don't challenge things that you've been told, which when you're a child, you just believe everything that you're told, particularly by somebody in authority and the church as an authority figure.

Thanks, Trish. Thanks, Anne. Yeah. It's interesting that Jesus is renowned for asking questions, isn't he, all the time. I think there's something like in the Gospels, it's something like 350 times Jesus asks a question and he only tends to answer questions three or four times directly.

He's much more about the questions. Even Jesus has this curiosity about human life and experience, it seems, Dave. And I'm sure you've thought this one through already, but seek and you shall find.

[33 : 32] Knock and the door will be opened unto you. Thanks. Thanks. Yeah. Ask, seek, knock. And I think the words are sort of a current, ongoing one. Ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking.

Thanks, Dave. Any thoughts on curiosity? I appreciate no cats would want to talk about this one, but. I always think that if you never step out of your comfort zone, sometimes you can never meet with God in the way he wants you to.

So you need to kind of take that first step first. Yeah. Great stuff. Thanks, Joe. That's a Moses experience in it, turning aside and being inquisitive about the bush. Yeah. All right. Bit more vulnerable, perhaps, this one.

I wonder if you'd be brave enough. What are the situations in life when you feel least equipped to deal with what's asked of you? What are the situations where you feel least equipped or have felt least equipped over the years?

Any brave hands? Nice one, Jane. I'm coming over. Well, I suppose, really, for me, it's been sort of standing there, leading worship at times.

[34 : 43] And it's something that, in my own strength, that I couldn't do. And it's only through God's strength and relying on his Holy Spirit to help me through it.

Because I've often said the words, you know, why me? I can't possibly do this. And what am I doing here? But God uses me, or has used me.

And it's only in his strength. Thanks, Jane. Thank you. Don? This is one that's just come to mind. It's not one that the group have discussed. It's when you know you should stop and count to ten.

And at ten, say, practice. Thank you, God. Thanks, Don. Thank you. Thank you. All right. Dave and Anena. I was saying in our group, the problem often starts when you do feel equipped to do something.

And certainly in public life, we see lots of people who think they're the answer to everything. And they're not equipped at all. And perhaps it's good that we don't feel equipped.

[35 : 47] And Linda was saying about Moses that actually he was the best equipped. God had chosen him because of all. Who else knew Egypt back to front like he did? And if you like, this was the last bit of the formula.

But if he'd said, OK, God, that's fine. Of course, I know why you've chosen me. I'm brilliant on everything. Actually, that would be the worst possible answer. Because he's then totally depending on God and is the people who think they are equipped that actually wreak havoc in our society.

And we'd do well to learn from Moses' approach, really. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, I guess it's that importance of humility within courage.

It's not something our culture is very good at, I don't think. If you think about all the sort of where it's X Factor, Britain's Got Talent, you know, to sort of psych yourself up to do it because you can do it. You're going to be a star, you know. And actually, the example of Moses is there's real humility there and he's almost backwards and coming forwards with doing it.

But that's what God seems to use. Ellen. Mine was similar to Jane. When I first started out doing a bit of worship leading, didn't feel equipped.

[36 : 57] It's something that I've really had to battle with and really wrestle with God with because I thought, I can't, I don't play a musical instrument and I thought, I can't, I'm not equipped enough to do it. But over the years, I think God has, God's really shown me, like, obviously, yes, you don't have to play an instrument to lead worship but there are other ways of leading worship without an instrument.

You know, you get up the front, you can lead a song but it's also listening to him, being in, you know, listening to what he has to say that ministers to people.

So it's not, it's not all just about, you know, the musicianship of, you don't have to play an instrument to lead worship but I really struggled with that and then you do get stronger as in you get a bit more confident but every, I don't know, ten, well, nine positive things that get said and one negative, you're going to remember that one over the negatives.

but I think when you feel least equipped you rely on God more to get you through that and I think there are times when you've walked away and you think, I don't remember that and you know it was all through God's strength as Jane was saying but he equips you just like he equipped Moses and, you know, other people in the Bible so, you're not on your own.

Yeah. I appreciate the next question is kind of combined with these and the ways we've had to show courage in our life and faith and what we've learned from those because we've been talking about things we're not equipped for but then sharing about the ways in which courage has been displayed in those so you can combine these two if you wish.

[38 : 38] Thank you. I've got a couple of examples for that and when you learn to scuba dive you go in the pool to start with and you do some you do some sessions in the pool but then you go to the sea and you have to sit at the bottom of the sea and it just happens to be the Red Sea and you sit on the bottom the sea base and you have to breathe through your regulator and I sat on the sand and I couldn't because I've had a knee replacement I couldn't kneel like everybody else so I had to sit on my bottom with my fins up in front of me and I was panicking I was seriously panicking feeling very claustrophobic and I looked at my fins and the brand name of them was Frog and I looked and I thought fully rely on God and then after that no problems whatsoever but the one time I had to really screw up my courage was when I was in Oz we'd taken some school children there was camps all through the year and one year we took it was always year sevens and one year we went and they were going come on Rev Kim come down the zip line and I am absolutely petrified of heights and I said no no no

I'm not doing it not doing it so anyway they caught me in a weak moment and they made me promise that next year when I bought year sevens there that I would do the zip line and so they told all the year sixes who would then be year sevens Rev Kim's got to do the zip line she's promised and I didn't sleep the night before and I was absolutely petrified getting on that platform and there was a little girl there who just did not want to do it and I went come on come with me it'll be fine we'll do it together it'll be fine and I thought this is Moses and Aaron and we zip line down past the kangaroos and it was amazing it was one of the best things I've ever done in my life but I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't have screwed up my courage but also relied on God for it brilliant thank you thank you good job you saw that frog on your flippers and read it wasn't it so there we go excellent excellent thanks Kim and again I appreciate there's some blurring between these perhaps how have you known

God's encouragement of you and how might we inspire courage in one another a bit like Kim's done with a little girl on a zip wire perhaps we do it together how have you known God's encouragement or how might we share that same encouragement by being here I think when we came in 2004 the growth in me as a Christian and the work that I've wanted to be involved in in this church to being church warden and PCC secretary has been such a blessing and a growth not only for me as a person but to grow in faith too and there are lots of people in this church in this room who have given me encouragement and I remember Jane saying to me once he doesn't give you anything that you can't cope with or that you can't handle you don't see it at the time but when you look back you think oh my goodness yes he is there and he does encourage me and he does wrap his arms around and you do feel that

I didn't realise what a fabulous relationship you can have with Jesus Christ until I came here and the teaching of Matt and Ruth and Jane and all those that get up there it's mind blowing really and it's it just cements that relationship that we can have with a friend and I'm grateful so thank you thank you thank you grateful for you as well thank you Marg Ruth I was actually going to reflect on the fact that one of the people I find who it encourages is Marg because there are some of the meetings that we go to which are unbelievably you feel like God has walked out of the room and I won't mention which ones but but Marg always turns around and she says something which just reminds you why we're here and where God is and helps you look at people with more generosity and I am very very grateful for that thanks Ruth thanks Mark good stuff Sean hang on there you go the only other the only thing that I've learnt through life is give it a go and my lovely husband

Simon he used to say because I would always say oh I can't do that I can't do that I can't do that and he said well just give it a go just give it a go and see how you get on and I would say 100% of the time I'd give it a go and think that wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be actually so I would say Simon's one of my big encouragements in God yeah yeah Margaret a lot of you will know that my life has changed hugely in the last year or so and I spend a lot of time on my own at home and it's amazing because some days I feel so down but God always pulls me up again I don't have to tell him that I'm struggling he just knows that I'm really struggling that particular day and he's there with me and he's listening even when I talk to the dog he's listening and

[44 : 19] I know he loves me lovely thanks Margaret thank you alright that's a good one to to close thanks very much everyone for that yeah since you've seen what Sharma said about I find the things I regret in life the things I haven't done not the things I have done usually there's something in that I think thank you yeah okay one little final bit then just concerning Moses for tonight before we close because having eventually successfully leads the Israelites out of Egypt and he and the people arrive on their wanderings once again at Mount Sinai and there God gives instructions to Moses to build what becomes known as the tabernacle tent of meeting with God a tent in which the Ark of the Covenant you know the Indiana Jones gold-covered box in which the tablets of stone in which the Ten Commandments were written was to be kept and overall this tabernacle this tent it's a kind of mobile temple really which the Israelites will carry around with them as they make their winding way to the Promised Land where they'll eventually settle this tabernacle therefore becomes it seems the same as the holy ground on which

Moses stood by the burning bush you know the kind of movable visible place in which God's glorious presence if you like the fire of his presence the cloud of his presence dwells a holy place of encounter and I'm just going to watch a brief little clip from Exodus outlining the construction of this tabernacle Moses assembled the whole Israelite community and said to them these are the things the Lord has commanded you to do all who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded the tabernacle with its tent and its covering clasps frames crossbars posts and bases the ark with its poles and the atonement cover and the curtain that shields it the table with its poles and all its articles and the bread of the presence the lampstand that is for light with its accessories lamps and oil for the light the altar of incense with its poles the anointing oil and the fragrant incense the curtain for the doorway at the entrance to the tabernacle the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating its poles and all its utensils the bronze basin with its stand the Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses

Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded so Moses blessed them then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle it's interesting I'd like to ask Moses if his feelings at the burning bush were the same as when he encountered the tabernacle or God's presence in the tabernacle there as well I suspect the feelings were very similar and so once again though what is this tabernacle and the ark of the covenant and the framework of this sanctuary made out of well as we can see it's made out of wood made out of acacia wood we're told to be specific it's a wooden themed arena if you like in which God's presence for the Israelites dwells where encounter in particular can happen and where the people are encouraged day by day to put their trust in God now hold this idea of the tabernacle in mind because we're going to pick up the significance of the tabernacle and the temple that it will become next week as we think about encountering God and choices and wood and high places and so on