



COURSE 2 • 6 WEEKS

Promise to Promised Land

Stewarding a word from God across the long middle of the journey

"Wage the good warfare — by the prophecies previously made about you."

— 1 TIMOTHY 1:18

Contents

-
- 01** **Wage the Good Warfare** 1 TIMOTHY 1:18-19
1 Timothy 1:18 as the frame for your whole journey
-
- 02** **The Cave** 1 SAMUEL 22:1-2
David, hiddenness, and what God forms when nothing visible is happening
-
- 03** **The Prison** GENESIS 39:20-23
Joseph, injustice, and holding the promise when circumstance contradicts it
-
- 04** **When the Odds Don't Matter** ROMANS 4:19-21
Abraham, Caleb, and faith past age, circumstance, and logic
-
- 05** **Holding Joy Through the Fire** 1 PETER 1:6-9
Endurance and the strange joy that survives the hardest seasons
-
- 06** **The Promised Land** HEBREWS 11:13-16, 39-40
Fulfilment, partnership, and legacy — promise is not the end
-

COURSE OVERVIEW

Why this course exists

God speaks. That part, many of us know.

The harder part is what happens afterwards. The long years between hearing a word and seeing it come. The cave seasons where the promise goes quiet. The prison seasons where circumstance seems to contradict it. The slow work of maturing a promise into a fulfilment.

Paul's letter to Timothy gives us a single line that reframes the whole of this middle:

Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience, by the prophecies previously made about you (1 Timothy 1:18–19).

Prophecies are not the trophy at the end of the fight. They are the weapons Paul tells Timothy to fight *with*. This course is about that fight — the stewardship of a word across the long middle.

What the group walks through

Over six weeks, a small group walks together through the territory between promise and fulfilment:

- 1 Wage the Good Warfare** — 1 Timothy 1:18–19 as the frame for the whole journey.
- 2 The Cave** — David, hiddenness, formation. What God forms in the cave that He cannot form on the throne.
- 3 The Prison** — Joseph, injustice, delay. Holding vision when circumstance contradicts the word.
- 4 When the Odds Don't Matter** — Abraham and Caleb. Faith past age, past logic, past circumstance.
- 5 Holding Joy Through the Fire** — Endurance and the strange joy that holds.
- 6 The Promised Land** — Fulfilment, partnership, and legacy. Faithfulness is the shape of the end.

This course is for the middle. For those carrying something God has spoken and who want to steward it well across the years it takes to come to pass.

Who this is for

Small groups that have been walking together and want to go deeper. Leaders in transition. Believers carrying a long-held promise. Mentor-mentee pairs working through a long season together.

This course assumes you have received something from God. If *Hearing His Voice* is about sharpening how we hear, this course is about stewarding what we have already heard.

How the course is structured

Participant reading (15 minutes before each session): everyone reads the week's material.

Group session (90 minutes): welcome, pre-read discussion, Scripture anchor, short teaching, practice, close.

Between sessions: a weekly practice of returning to old words, declaring them aloud, writing them down again.

The facilitator edition contains everything in the participant guide plus teaching notes, Scripture deep-dives, discussion prompts, practice scripts, and prayer prompts.

A word about caves and prisons

Scripture is full of caves. David's. Obadiah's. Elijah's. The cave at Adullam where four hundred men gathered around the king-in-waiting. And Scripture is full of prisons. Joseph's. Jeremiah's. John the Baptist's. Paul's. If God's servants spent that much time in caves and prisons, these seasons are not detours from the story. They are part of how God forms His people for the promises He has spoken over them.

How to use this guide

Pastors and facilitators: download the full facilitator edition. Read it through before week one.

Small group leaders: share the weekly link with participants as pre-read. Gather weekly. Declare old words in the room.

Participants: read the week's material, bring the old journals, come with the words spoken over you.

Wage the good warfare.

● WEEK 1 OF 6



SESSION 1

Wage the Good Warfare

1 Timothy 1:18 as the frame for your whole journey

SCRIPTURE

1 Timothy 1:18–19

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

Bring one old prophecy or word you have received. Declare it aloud in the group.

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Then go home and find one word from God you received in your past — anything from the last week to the last thirty years. Write it down. Bring it to the session. It does not have to be dramatic. It has to be real.

One strange verse that changes everything

Paul writes to his young apprentice Timothy. Timothy is tired. The church in Ephesus is a mess. He is young, criticised, physically unwell, and running a congregation with problems. And Paul, writing to him, says something we almost never stop on:

"This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience." (1 Timothy 1:18-19)

Read that again. Slowly.

Paul is not giving Timothy a pep talk. He is giving him a *combat strategy*. Wage the good warfare. *By them*. By the prophecies previously made about you.

The prophecies are the weapons.

Not the trophy. Not the souvenir. Not the thing framed on the wall for the memory of a better season. The words spoken over Timothy are what Paul tells him to *fight with*.

This one verse reframes the entire prophetic journey.

The problem Paul is actually solving

Most of us treat prophecies as something to be *carried* rather than *fought with*. We receive a word, feel encouraged, maybe write it down, and then — if we're honest — we mostly wait for it to come true.

That is not the posture the New Testament teaches.

The posture the New Testament teaches is *active engagement*. Prophecies are not promises that arrive by gravity. They are the terms of a fight that God has invited you into. You are expected to take them into battle.

Timothy did not need encouragement in Ephesus. He needed weapons. Paul — Timothy's mentor, the one who helped receive these prophecies in the first place — is saying: *remember the words that were spoken over you. Say them aloud. Hold them. Stand on them. Fight.*

That same instruction is now, two thousand years later, for you.

What waging good warfare looks like

There are a handful of practical movements that this verse implies. Look at them carefully, because they are the whole of course two in miniature.

1. You had to have heard something. You cannot fight with prophecies previously made about you if you never received any. If you have not heard from God, or received an encouragement from His people, that is the starting point. (That is what course one — *Hearing His Voice* — is built for.) This course assumes you have heard something. If you have not, start there.

2. You had to have kept it. *Previously made* implies memory. Timothy remembered what had been said over him. If Timothy had forgotten, he would have had nothing to fight with. Most believers' first problem with warfare-by-prophecy is that they can no longer remember what God said. The prophecy is still real; they just can't find it.

3. You have to be currently fighting. The verb is *wage*. Present tense. Ongoing. This is not a one-off skirmish. This is a posture. Paul is not saying *once, when the battle arises, you may recall these words*. He is saying *this is the ongoing terms of your Christian life*. You are always, in some sense, in warfare. You are always, in some sense, meant to be holding your words.

4. You have to be holding faith and a good conscience. The prophecies alone do not save you from drift. Paul adds two companions in verse 19: *faith* (trust in God) and *a good conscience* (integrity before Him). Without these two, the warfare goes wrong. People have shipwrecked their faith while technically holding prophetic words, because they stopped holding them with faith and integrity.

Why this matters now

Most of you came to this course because you are somewhere in the middle of something.

You received a word years ago, and the promise seems further away than when you heard it. You felt called to something, and your life now looks like the opposite. You heard from God about your marriage, your vocation, your healing — and nothing visible has moved. You said yes to something, and you are now somewhere you didn't expect to be.

This is the terrain of 1 Timothy 1:18. This verse is written for exactly this moment.

The pressure of the middle is that you begin to doubt you heard at all. *"Maybe I imagined it. Maybe it was never real. Maybe I outgrew it. Maybe God changed His mind."* That is the lie that disarms Timothy. And Paul's response is not *"try to believe harder."* Paul's response is: *go back to what was actually spoken. Declare it. Fight with it. It is still your sword.*

The ancient practice of declaration

In the Old Testament, the writers of the psalms have a strange habit. In the middle of complaint, despair, even accusation against God, they suddenly pivot. "*But You...*" or "*Yet I will...*" or "*I remember the days of old, I meditate on all Your works...*" (Psalm 143:5).

Declaration in the middle of darkness. Reminder spoken aloud when everything contradicts.

The practice of *waging good warfare* with a prophetic word is usually this: *speaking out loud what God said, when the evidence seems to say otherwise*. Not denial of the circumstances. Not pretending. Just bringing the word back into the room and letting it occupy space alongside the struggle.

Your own voice is a weapon. You already know this in the wrong direction — the way anxious self-talk shapes your day. Reverse it. Let your voice speak what God has spoken over you.

The first session

Tonight, as a group, we will do something simple and strange. We are going to take our old words — prophecies from years ago, convictions that keep returning, specific Scriptures that came alive — and we are going to speak them aloud. Over ourselves. And over each other.

Some of the words you bring will be decades old. Some will be from last week. Some will feel true. Some will feel stranded. That is all fine. The point is not whether the word is currently *feeling* true. The point is whether you will *stand on it*.

This is what Paul told Timothy to do.

The practice for this week

Before the session, find at least one word — written down if possible, spoken if still remembered — and bring it to the group. It can be:

A prophecy another believer spoke over you.

A Scripture that came alive in a particular season.

A conviction you keep returning to.

A sense of calling you received.

Something from your own listening time years ago that you have not fully acted on.

If you cannot find anything, look for the oldest testimony of God's faithfulness in your life. Something He did. That is your stake in the ground.

Before you come to the session

Come with one word, written down.

Come willing to read it aloud.

Come expecting to fight for it, not merely to remember it.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person will have stood up and declared aloud one word God has spoken over them, been prayed over by the group, and left with 1 Timothy 1:18 as the frame for the six weeks that follow. This is the opening session. Set the tone.

Before you arrive

Read 1 Timothy 1:18–19 five times. Study the verbs — *wage, holding, by them*.

Find your own old word. Bring it. Lead from it.

Check in with the group by email ahead of time: remind everyone to bring one word. The session does not work if people come empty-handed.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and framing (10 min)

Open with prayer. Then tell the group what they are about to spend six weeks doing: walking together through the long middle of the prophetic journey — the territory between receiving a word and seeing it come, where stewardship matters most.

Name tonight's move clearly: *We are going to take our old words and start using them as weapons.*

2. Pre-read discussion (20 min) Three questions.

What word did you bring? You don't have to read it out yet. But hold it up.

How long has it been since you heard that word?

What does the space between receiving it and now look like?

Let the answers be honest. Some will say "*nothing has happened.*" Some will say "*I nearly gave up on it.*" Some will cry. Hold the space.

3. Scripture anchor — 1 Timothy 1:18–19 (15 min)

Read the passage aloud. Then read it aloud again, slowly, verb by verb:

Wage — what does it assume? (Present, active warfare.)

Good warfare — the fight is good, even when it is hard.

By them — with them, through them, on the strength of them.

Holding faith and a good conscience — the two companions. Without them, the warfare goes bad.

Make the point: prophecies are not souvenirs. They are weapons. Paul is telling Timothy — tired, young, ill Timothy — *remember what was said, and fight with it.*

4. Micro-teaching (10 min)

Three short points.

Prophecies require use, not merely keeping. Most of us have kept them. Few of us have fought with them.

The middle is where they are needed most. The gap between receiving and fulfilment is where they are sword-weight. That is the whole territory of this course.

Your voice is a weapon. Declaration is a biblical practice. Psalm after psalm pivots in the middle of darkness to *but You...* Reclaim this posture.

5. Practice: declaration (30 min)

This is the heart of the session.

Have each person, in turn, stand (or sit where they are — keep it informal), and do the following:

- 1 Read aloud the word they brought. Plain. No commentary. Just the word.
- 2 If it was spoken by someone, name them. *"My pastor's wife said to me in 2014..." "A man prayed over me at a conference when I was nineteen..."* Honour the messengers.
- 3 If helpful, say one sentence about what is happening now. *"I am in month eighteen of unemployment." "My marriage is hard." "The calling feels further away than when I heard it."*
- 4 Then say simply: *"I am choosing to stand on this word."*

After each person, the group prays over them. Simple prayers. Agreement with the word. *"Lord, we agree with the word You spoke over Sarah. We agree that You said..." "Father, we stand with Jonathan on this."*

Do not rush. If the group is large, this will take the full thirty minutes. That is fine. This is the session.

6. Closing (10 min)

Recap: tonight we did what Paul told Timothy to do. We took old words and fought with them — by declaring them, by agreeing with them, by standing on them.

Between-sessions practice: every day this week, read your word aloud. Morning and evening if possible. Let your own voice become familiar with declaring what God said.

Next week is the cave. Start looking at your current season honestly. Is there a cave-quality to it? What is God forming while you wait?

Close in prayer. Bless every word declared tonight.

What to watch for

The one who came empty-handed. Despite your reminders, one or two will arrive without anything to declare. Have a short list of Scriptures ready — *"the one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion"* (Philippians 1:6) — and ask them to declare a Scripture instead. A Scripture is a word. God's word over them.

The one whose word hurts. Some people will bring a word that has been *partially* fulfilled in a way that felt like loss. Others will bring a word they have suspected might

not have been God at all. Do not rule on accuracy tonight. Just let them declare it. Testing belongs to other weeks. Tonight is about reclaiming the practice of declaration.

The one who cannot read it aloud. Some will be overcome. Let them. Read it aloud on their behalf. Let the group pray over them.

The scepticism in the room. Some people will have grown cynical about prophecy — particularly if life has been hard. Do not try to remove the cynicism tonight. Let Paul do the work. The words, declared aloud by others, will do what your arguments cannot.

Prayer prompts for the group

That the words declared tonight would rise in the spirit realm as they did in the room.

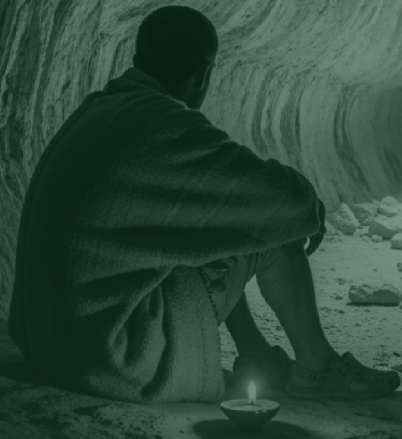
That each person would recover their capacity to fight, not just remember.

That the six weeks ahead would take these words from the shelf into the hands of those who carry them.

Looking ahead

Next week is *The Cave*. David. Hiddenness. Formation. Ask participants to come having thought honestly about whether they are currently in a cave — and what God may be forming there.

● WEEK 2 OF 6



SESSION 2

The Cave

David, hiddenness, and what God forms when nothing visible is happening

SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 22:1-2

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

Name your cave. What is God forming there that could not be formed on the throne?

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Come with an honest answer: are you currently in a cave? What does it look like? How long have you been there?

A prophet and a song

A teenager is tending his father's sheep in the hills of Judah. His name is David. An old prophet named Samuel shows up at the house, one day, unannounced, and pours a horn of oil over David's head in front of his brothers. *This is the future king.*

That is a big prophecy.

And then, for the next fifteen or so years of his life, David does not become king.

He plays the harp for a king who grows to hate him. He defeats a giant and watches the national praise he earned turn into royal jealousy. He marries the king's daughter and has to flee his own wedding bed with a spear thrown at his head. He runs. He hides. He lies to a priest. He feigns madness in front of a Philistine ruler. He ends up, in 1 Samuel 22, in a cave.

David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. (1 Samuel 22:1)

And look at who joins him there:

And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men. (1 Samuel 22:1-2)

This is who God trains kings with. The distressed, indebted, bitter-of-soul. Four hundred men who would become, years later, his mighty ones. A future king being formed in a cave with a ragtag band of nobodies.

Now read this again: David had been *anointed*. He had *heard from Samuel*. He was *a prophetic promise walking*. And he was *in a cave*.

The word most of us want to hear

Most of us, when we receive a word from God, secretly expect a trajectory that goes like this:

Hear the word. → Feel inspired. → Move quickly toward fulfilment. → See the word happen. → Give God thanks on the other side.

The actual biblical trajectory almost always looks more like this:

Hear the word. → Feel inspired. → Begin to move. → Everything slows down. → Circumstances contradict the word. → Cave. → Prison. → Years pass. → Something forms in you that could not have formed any other way. → Fulfilment arrives, later and different than expected, and mostly in a way that makes God famous rather than you.

The cave is not a detour. It is the curriculum.

Why caves form kings

There are a few things that can only be formed in caves. These are the things God does in you while nothing visible is happening:

Character that can handle power. The David who walks out of the cave is different from the David who walked in. He has learned to wait. He has learned to spare Saul when Saul is in his hand. He has learned that God, not his own striking, is the one who puts kings on thrones.

Loyalty to God when nothing is on the line. In the cave, worship is private. There is no crowd. No platform. No return. You either love God when no one is watching or you don't. The cave reveals this, and over time, deepens it.

The capacity to lead the broken. David does not gather the competent and the connected in the cave. He gathers the distressed, the indebted, the bitter. These are the ones who become his mighty men. A king who was formed only on the throne could not lead these people. A king who was formed in a cave can — because he understands them.

Songs. Most of the Psalms were written from cave-shaped seasons. If David had not been hidden, we would not have the psalter. Some of what God does in you in the cave is not for your sake. It is for the generations that will read what you wrote from the cave, for the rest of time.

The cave is not punishment

This is the part most of us get wrong.

We enter a hard season and immediately go scanning: *what did I do wrong? What sin opened this? What am I being punished for?* Sometimes there is a real answer. Often there is not.

Sometimes the cave is not discipline. It is formation.

God forms people in caves He could have kept them out of. Job was blameless. Joseph was righteous. David was anointed. Paul was on mission. Every one of them ended up in some kind of cave or prison for seasons God could have prevented and chose not to.

This does not mean the cave is pleasant. Read the Psalms. David complains, weeps, accuses, rails, despairs. He is honest in the cave. God does not ask him to pretend.

But the cave is not God withdrawing. The cave is God *at work in a way that is not visible yet*.

What usually happens to us in a cave

There are predictable temptations.

Cynicism about the word. *"Maybe I made it up." "Maybe it wasn't as specific as I remember." "Maybe God changed His mind."* The longer the cave, the stronger this gets.

Quiet bargaining. *"If I do this for God, He'll release me from the cave."* God is not a vending machine. The cave ends when it ends.

Trying to exit early. David had two chances to kill Saul in the cave and become king immediately. Both times he refused. Early exits from caves usually end badly.

Losing the word altogether. This is why course one was about *recording*. If you lose the word in the cave, you have nothing to hold. Paul told Timothy to fight with the prophecies previously made. Not the vague sense that maybe God once said something.

Isolation. The cave is lonely. Believers are tempted to drift from church, friends, accountability. David had four hundred men with him in the cave. You need a handful of people who know where you are.

What to do in the cave

This is the practical part. When you find yourself in one:

- 1. Bring the word with you.** Read it aloud. Weekly at minimum. Declare it the way we practiced last week.
- 2. Keep writing the Psalms.** Not literally. But the practice: honest prayer, complaint, hope, declaration — all in the same breath. Write it down. You will need it later.
- 3. Stay in the body.** Do not run from your people. David's loneliness was not total. He had the four hundred. Have your handful.
- 4. Watch for the formation.** What is God forming in you that could not form on the throne? You will not see it all clearly while it is happening. But some of it you will notice.
- 5. Do not try to end the cave.** You cannot shorten formation. Every attempt to exit early lengthens the cave.
- 6. Worship.** Even poorly. Especially poorly. The worship of the cave is more valuable to God than the worship of the throne. No one is watching.

A final honest word

Some of you are in a cave right now. You did not come to this session to hear that your cave is beautiful and good and full of hidden meaning. You came because you are tired. Some of you have been in this cave for years.

Hear this plainly: God has not forgotten. The word has not expired. What is forming is real, even though you cannot see it. And the cave does end.

David spent years in Adullam. He did become king. And his story begins, in 1 Chronicles 11, by listing the names of the mighty men — *these were the men who came to him at the cave of Adullam*. The cave was not an interruption of his story. It was the origin of his army.

Your cave may be the origin of things you cannot yet see.

Before you come to the session

Name your cave. One honest sentence.

Answer: what is God forming in me that could not be formed on the throne?

Bring the word from last week. We will speak it again.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person in the room will have named their cave honestly, identified one specific thing God may be forming in them, and had the group pray over both the cave and the word they are holding in it. This session often surfaces weariness. Be ready for it.

Before you arrive

Re-read 1 Samuel 22:1–2 and 1 Samuel 23:1 in context. Read a few of David's cave psalms — 57, 142.

Think about your own caves. Have you been in one? Are you in one now? Lead from honesty, not from pretend resolution.

Prepare to hold heavy stories. Tonight is often where people admit things they have not been saying out loud.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and recap (10 min)

Check in on last week's declaration practice. Did anyone declare their word aloud this week? What happened?

2. Pre-read discussion (20 min) Three questions.

Are you currently in a cave? Describe it in one sentence.

How long have you been there?

What do you think God might be forming that could not be formed on the throne?

Let the silences be long. This is not small talk. The third question in particular is worth sitting with. Some will have no answer. That is fine. The question does the work over time.

3. Scripture anchor — 1 Samuel 22:1-2 (15 min)

Read the passage aloud. Then ask:

What condition are the people who gather to David in? (Distressed, indebted, bitter of soul.)

What does this tell us about what kind of king God was forming?

What is the meaning of verse one — David being forced into a cave by the king he should be replacing?

Make the point: the cave is not a pause in David's formation. It is David's formation. The mighty men who become his army gather to him here. The songs of the psalter are written here. If you remove the cave from David's life, you remove the shape of him.

4. Micro-teaching (10 min)

Three points.

The cave is not punishment. God forms people He could have kept from the cave. This is formation, not discipline.

What forms in caves cannot form on thrones. Character, honest worship, the capacity to lead the broken. Read this off. Let people sit with it.

You cannot shorten formation by escaping the cave. Every early exit lengthens it. Stay until He releases you.

5. Practice: name the cave and hold the word (25 min)

Part one (10 min, silent). Have each person write down:

A one-sentence description of their current cave (or their most recent cave, if not currently in one).

One thing they sense God is forming in the cave.

The word they are holding through it.

Part two (15 min, around the circle). Each person shares:

- 1 Their cave in one sentence.
- 2 The word they are holding.

After each person, the group prays over them. Short prayers. *"Father, for what You are forming in Sarah in this cave, we agree. For the word You spoke over her, we agree. We ask You to sustain her in the hidden place."*

No advice. No *"have you tried..."* No *"I was in a cave once and..."* Just agreement and prayer. Resist the urge to fix.

6. Closing (10 min)

Read aloud one of David's cave psalms — Psalm 142 is a good choice. *"I cry to the Lord with my voice; to the Lord I plead my cause. I pour out before Him my complaint; before Him I tell my trouble..."*

Name that honest prayer is part of the cave. Complaint is not unbelief. Lament is not failure. David wrote Psalm 142 in a cave and it is Scripture.

Between-sessions practice: every day this week, read your word aloud, and then read one verse of a cave psalm — 57 or 142 works well. Let the two sit together. Let the honest lament and the declared word occupy the same breath.

Close in prayer. Bless the caves. Bless the formation. Bless the ones who are weary.

What to watch for

The one who has been in the cave for a long time. Some people have been hidden, forgotten, passed over, or waiting for many years. Tonight is often the first time they have said it plainly. Do not rush them through. Hold the weight.

The one who is bitter. Paul tells us that a root of bitterness can defile many (Hebrews 12:15). Sometimes the cave has turned bitter. Gently pray for that, but do not confront it publicly. Often the honest naming of the cave begins to loosen the bitterness.

The one who has exited their cave early. Occasionally you will hear someone describe a pattern of short-circuiting the hard season — trying to manufacture a way out, forcing doors open, disobeying. Do not confront. Plant a gentle question: *"Was there a cave you left before you were released from it?"* Let the Holy Spirit do what He does.

The one with no sense of current cave. Some will say *"I'm not in a cave right now."* That is fine. Have them speak into someone else's. They will be in one later. This is preparation.

Prayer prompts for the group

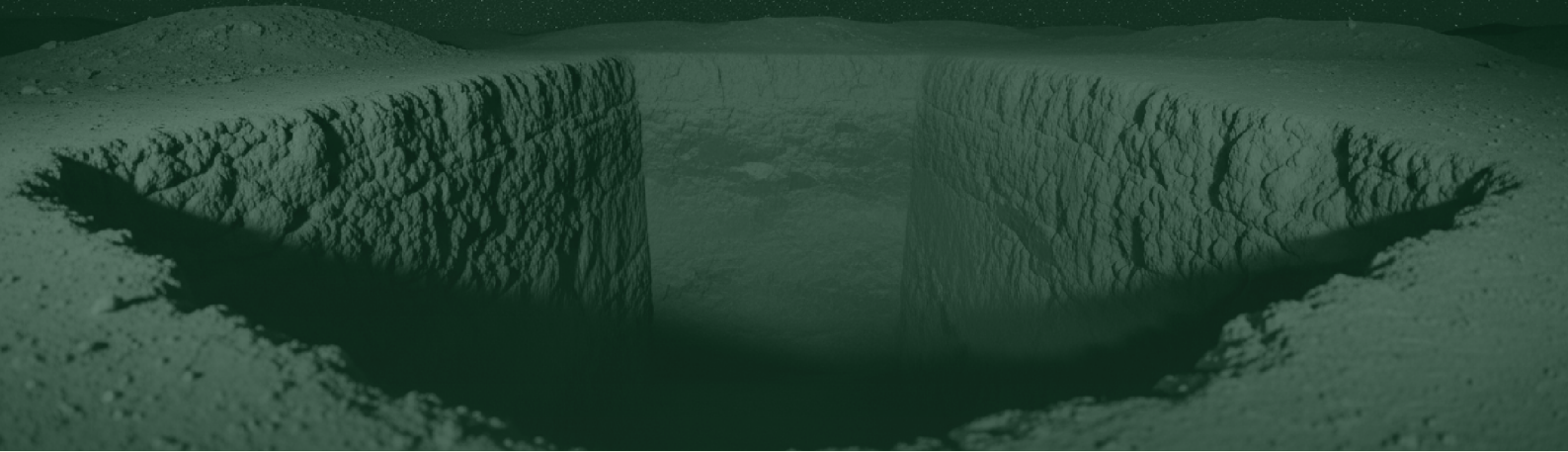
That the cave would not be wasted.

That the word would remain alive in every person's hand through the hidden season.

That the formation God is doing would not be interrupted by impatience.

Looking ahead

Next week is *The Prison*. Joseph. Injustice. Delay. Where the cave is about hiddenness, the prison is about contradiction — being punished for the right thing, the promise seeming to move further away rather than closer. Ask participants to come having considered whether their cave has elements of prison too.



SESSION 3

The Prison

Joseph, injustice, and holding the promise when circumstance contradicts it

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 39:20–23

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

Identify where the promise seems contradicted. Re-receive the word in the face of the contradiction.

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Come with one specific way that your current circumstance seems to contradict what God spoke to you. Be specific. *"I was called to marriage and I'm still single at thirty-nine."* *"I was told I would have children and I've had three miscarriages."* *"I was called to ministry and I've been out of work for eighteen months."*

A seventeen-year-old dreams

Joseph is seventeen. He has two dreams. In the first, his brothers' sheaves bow down to his. In the second, the sun, moon, and eleven stars bow down to him. God gives him, unmistakably, a future.

Two chapters later, he is in a pit because his brothers hate him. One chapter after that, he is sold to slave traders. One chapter after that, he is a household servant in Egypt. Six verses after that, he is in prison on a false accusation.

From dream to prison, it takes about four chapters.

Read that carefully. The dream was real. The prison was also real. The gap between them is not an illusion. And between the dream at seventeen and the fulfilment of the dream at thirty, Joseph spends about thirteen years in a slow downward trajectory — every external evidence pointing *away* from what God had shown him.

This is where most people lose the word.

The difference between cave and prison

Last week we looked at the cave. Hiddenness. Formation. Slow work in a quiet place.

The prison is something else.

The cave is where God hides you. The prison is where the world contradicts the promise *and keeps you there*. In the cave, you are forming. In the prison, you are waiting, and the waiting is being *made harder by someone else's sin*.

Joseph does not end up in prison because of his own failure. He ends up there because he did the right thing. Potiphar's wife propositioned him; he refused; she accused him; he went to prison. The prison is the direct result of his obedience.

This is the prison most believers dread. Not the consequence of sin. The consequence of faithfulness.

What the prison does to the word

A prison season does specific damage to a promise.

It makes the word feel like a lie. When Joseph is in prison on a false accusation, every external signal says the dream was wrong. He is not rising. He is descending. The gap between what God said and what is happening is growing wider, not narrower.

It exposes your hope's foundation. In the cave, you can still believe the word because the season is simply *quiet*. In the prison, you have to believe the word while the season is actively contradicting it. This is a different muscle.

It invites interpretation of circumstance as verdict. Many believers quietly conclude, in the prison, that God has changed His mind, or that they misheard, or that they disqualified themselves. The prison is designed, by the accuser, to make you read the circumstances as the verdict.

It tempts you to manufacture an exit. Joseph could have slept with Potiphar's wife. He could have forged documents. He could have compromised with the cupbearer or the baker to try to buy his way out. He did not. He waited.

Paul's instruction to Timothy — *wage the good warfare... holding faith and a good conscience* — is precisely the prison posture. You hold the word. You hold faith. You hold a good conscience. You do not try to cut corners out of the prison. You wait.

What God does in the prison

Two things become visible in Joseph's prison that were not visible in the cave.

The prison produces administrative gift. In the prison, Joseph is put in charge of the other prisoners. He becomes, essentially, the prison manager. *The Lord was with Joseph, and He showed him steadfast love and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison* (Genesis 39:21). The skills he will use, years later, to manage an empire through famine — are being forged in prison administration. This is not coincidence. Prison is the management training.

The prison positions you for unlikely meetings. In the prison, Joseph meets Pharaoh's cupbearer. This meeting does nothing for Joseph for two more years. And then it does everything. When Pharaoh has a dream no one can interpret, it is the cupbearer — and only the cupbearer — who can say *"I know a man in prison who interprets dreams."*

If Joseph had never been in prison, he would never have met the cupbearer. If he had never met the cupbearer, he would never have been called to Pharaoh. If he had never been called to Pharaoh, he would never have been positioned to save Egypt, Israel, and his own brothers' families.

The prison is the unlikely hallway to the throne.

Holding the word through contradiction

The test in the prison is whether you can hold a word *when your life contradicts it*.

This is not the same as the test in the cave. In the cave, you are holding the word when nothing is happening. In the prison, you are holding the word when the *opposite* of the word is happening.

There are a few honest practices that help.

Re-receive the word. Go back to it. Read it aloud. Say, "*God, I received this. I believe You said it. And my life is pointing the other way. I do not understand. And I still stand on it.*" Not because you feel it. Because you are choosing it.

Reinterpret circumstance cautiously. Circumstance is not always the verdict. Joseph's fall–backwards trajectory was, the whole time, moving him toward Pharaoh. You cannot read the story from inside chapter 39. You can only read it from chapter 50 — and by then, it looks entirely different.

Refuse early exits. If a way out of the prison involves violating the conscience, it is not God's way out. God does not deliver by asking you to compromise the person He has been forming you into. Joseph refused Potiphar's wife; that obedience was what *kept him in prison*. The same obedience that *keeps* you in the prison is what *positions* you for the throne.

Make friends in the prison. Joseph did not become bitter. He served the other prisoners. He interpreted their dreams. He did his work well. This is not resignation. This is the shape of a person whose promise is intact.

The contradictions you are holding

Some of you are in prisons tonight. Not all caves. Not all delays. Some of you are living the direct contradiction of a promise.

You were told you would be a father and the infertility continues. You were called to lead and you have been overlooked again. You were told you were healed and you are still sick. You were promised restoration in a relationship that remains broken. You heard God about a financial provision and the bills are stacking up.

The prison asks you: *will you hold the word when the world tells you it is a lie?*

Timothy held. Joseph held. Every one of God's long–promise leaders held through a prison season. The way you hold is by declaring the word in the room where the contradiction is loudest.

This is not denial. You are not pretending the contradiction is not real. You are simply insisting that the contradiction is not the verdict.

The practice for this week

Two honest moves.

- 1 Name the contradiction clearly.** One sentence. Where does your life currently contradict what God said?
- 2 Re-receive the word in the face of it.** Write it out. Read it aloud. Say, *"I am choosing to hold this word even as I see this contradiction."* Do it daily for a week.

Before you come to the session

Come with the contradiction named honestly.

Come with the word from last week still in hand.

Come expecting to be prayed over by people who can see the future even when you cannot.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person will have named one specific way their life currently contradicts what God said, re-received the word in the face of the contradiction, and been prayed over by the group. The prison session is often the hardest of the six. Do not shrink it.

Before you arrive

Read Genesis 37, 39, and 40 in one sitting. Notice how long the descent takes. Notice how long Joseph is in prison before anything changes.

If you have been in a prison season yourself, think about what you would have needed someone to say to you in it. Lead from that.

Hold space for heavier stories than week two. The prison is where people admit that circumstances seem to contradict what God clearly spoke. Be ready.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and recap (10 min)

Check in briefly on last week. Anyone still in the cave they named? Anyone out? Any updates?

2. Pre-read discussion (20 min) Three questions.

Where does your life currently contradict the word? (Be specific. Help people move from "things are hard" to "this specific promise looks like it is reversing.")

What is the temptation in your prison? (Bitterness? Manufactured exits? Interpreting circumstance as verdict?)

What would an early exit cost you?

3. Scripture anchor — Genesis 39:20–23 (15 min)

Read the passage aloud. Note the strange phrase in verse 21: *"But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love."* Read that twice. *The Lord was with Joseph — in prison.*

Ask:

How can the Lord be "with" someone in prison? What does "with" actually mean here?

What is God doing in Joseph while he is imprisoned?

Verse 23 says the keeper paid no attention to anything in Joseph's charge because the Lord was with him. What gets built in Joseph in prison that will matter later? (Administration. Favour. Serving the unlikely people who will become doors.)

Make the point: the prison is not the absence of God. It is often where God is most visibly with His people, producing the specific capacities they will need on the throne.

4. Micro-teaching (10 min)

Three points.

The prison is contradiction, not absence. The cave is quiet. The prison is loud — circumstance is shouting that the promise is a lie.

The prison is forged by faithfulness, not failure. Joseph went to prison *because* he obeyed. This is the hardest kind of prison to accept.

Holding the word in the prison is choice, not feeling. You do not feel it to be true. You say it is true anyway. Declaration in contradiction.

5. Practice: re-receive the word in the contradiction (25 min)

Part one (10 min, silent). Have each person write:

One sentence naming the specific contradiction. *"I was called to ___ and ___ is happening."*

Their current word or promise, written out in full.

One sentence of re-receiving: *"I choose to hold this word even as I see ___."*

Part two (15 min, around the circle). One person at a time:

- 1 Reads their contradiction aloud.
- 2 Reads their word aloud.
- 3 Reads their re-receiving sentence aloud.

After each, the group prays briefly. *"Father, we agree with the word You spoke over [name]. We do not deny the contradiction. We hold both. We stand with [name] in the prison."*

No reassurance. No fixing. No *"don't worry, I'm sure it will happen."* Just agreement.

6. Closing (10 min)

Read aloud Genesis 50:20, from the other end of Joseph's story. *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."* Let it sit.

Name that we cannot read our story from inside chapter 39. We can only read it from chapter 50. And from chapter 50, the prison was the hallway.

Between-sessions practice: every day this week, speak both — the contradiction, honestly, *and* the word, in the same breath. Let them occupy the same prayer.

Close in prayer. Bless the prisons.

What to watch for

The one in a long-held prison. Some people have been in the same prison for many years. Their honest naming tonight may be the first time in a long time. Do not try to comfort too quickly. Let the naming land before you move to prayer.

The one who has exited their prison through compromise. Occasionally someone will realise, in the middle of this session, that they cut corners out of a prison years ago and are still paying for it. Do not confront. Gently pray for restoration. The God of Joseph is also the God of the prodigal.

The one asking hard questions. *"Why would God allow this?"* is a real question. You do not need to answer it tonight. Sit with them in it. Point to Joseph. Point to Christ in Gethsemane.

The bitter prisoner. Hebrews 12:15 again — the root of bitterness. If the prison has turned bitter, pray against the bitterness specifically. It is often the block that keeps God's work in the prison from being visible.

Prayer prompts for the group

That the prisons would not be mis-read as verdicts.

That each person would develop the muscle of holding a word in contradiction.

That what God is building in the prison would become visible on His timeline, not ours.

Looking ahead

Next week is *When the Odds Don't Matter*. Abraham and Caleb. Faith past logic, past age, past circumstance. After the weight of the cave and the prison, week four opens a window. Ask participants to come with a promise where the odds now seem impossible — and be ready to look at them with new eyes.



SESSION 4

When the Odds Don't Matter

Abraham, Caleb, and faith past age, circumstance, and logic

SCRIPTURE

Romans 4:19-21

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

Name the odds against your word. Then declare the word louder than the odds.

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Come with one promise you still hold, and a clear-eyed account of the odds now against it. We will bring them both into the same room.

An old man takes a hill

Caleb is eighty-five years old and asking for a mountain.

In Joshua 14, forty-five years after Moses promised him the hill country of Hebron, Caleb stands in front of Joshua and says:

"So now, behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming. So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said." (Joshua 14:10-12)

Read that again. *Great fortified cities. The Anakim* — the giants whose mere presence forty years earlier had convinced ten of the twelve spies that the promised land could not be taken.

And Caleb, at eighty-five, is asking for them.

Not the easy land. Not the suburbs. *The hill country with the giants.*

The look of faith past age

Abraham is also old. A hundred years old. His wife Sarah is ninety. They have been holding the promise of a son for decades. In Romans 4, Paul gives us this line about Abraham:

"He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised." (Romans 4:19-21)

Look at the phrase: *when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead*. This is not denial. Abraham is not pretending the odds are in his favour. He is looking honestly at the odds — *his body was as good as dead* — and still trusting the word.

This is faith past logic. Not faith *without* logic. Not faith *against* logic. Faith that has looked at the logic, acknowledged it, and still chosen to trust God's word above it.

Abraham is a hundred years old and trusting for a son. Caleb is eighty-five and asking for giants. These are the odds-defiers of the Bible. Both of them have been holding a word from God for decades.

The odds in your life

You are probably somewhere between Joseph's prison and Caleb's hill. Which means you have a promise that now looks unreasonable.

You have waited too long for the promise to still be plausible.

You are too old for the thing you felt called to.

You have too much against you for the word to still make sense.

The circumstances have hardened beyond what you can see God moving.

This is normal. This is where most long promises end up. The question is not whether the odds are against the word. The question is whether the odds are God's concern or yours.

What Abraham actually did

Paul says Abraham *grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God*. That phrasing is worth sitting with.

Abraham did not *grit his teeth*. He did not *positive-think* the son into existence. He did not *manifest*. He gave glory to God.

Giving glory to God in the face of impossible odds is a specific practice. It looks like:

Talking to God about what He can do, not about what you cannot.

Declaring who He is, not rehearsing the problem.

Remembering what He has done before, and saying it out loud.

Refusing to let the conversation about His promise become mostly a conversation about the obstacles.

When you *give glory* to God, your faith grows. Not because of positive thinking. Because you are turning your attention toward the One whose character is the actual foundation of the word.

Paul puts it in three moves at the end of the passage: *fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised*.

Able — capacity.

To do — action.

Three things to hold. God has the capacity. God acts. And what He said, He will do.

Caleb's phrase

Go back to Caleb. Read that last line of his speech again, slowly:

"It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said." (Joshua 14:12)

It may be.

This is not a man who is cocky. This is a man who is honest. He does not know, exactly, how this will work. He just knows that the word was spoken forty-five years ago, and he has been waiting, and he is still as strong as he was then, and he wants the hill with the giants.

The phrase *"it may be"* is one of the holiest phrases in the Bible. It is faith without arrogance. It is hope without presumption. It is the posture of a believer who does not presume on God and does not give up on Him either.

It may be that the Lord will be with me. And if He is, the giants come down.

This is the posture of the long-promise carrier.

What the odds actually are

Here is the honest theological note.

The odds are real. Abraham's body was as good as dead. The giants at Hebron were genuinely large. Sarah was genuinely barren. The circumstances are not imaginary obstacles that faith can wish away.

And yet.

The odds are not the final word. God is the final word. And He does what He promised, even when the odds have stacked against it for decades.

This is why the weight of the promise does not rest on your strength. You are not expected to believe the odds away. You are expected to hold the word, give glory to God, and let Him do what He said He would do.

Hebrews 11:11 has a line that carries this well: *"By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised."*

Sarah did not consider her age. Or rather, Sarah considered her age, and then *considered Him faithful who had promised*. Both things are there. The honest assessment of the odds, and the deeper assessment of His character.

What this week is about

Somewhere in your hand is a word that now looks unreasonable. You are older. More tired. The window you thought the word would come through has closed. The circumstances have hardened.

This week you are going to practice Caleb's *it may be*.

Not *I refuse to acknowledge the odds*. Not *the odds don't bother me*. But *the odds are real, and He is more real, and I am still asking for the hill with the giants*.

The practice for this week

Two moves.

- 1 Write down the odds.** Name them honestly. *"I am forty-three, I have no partner, the promise was marriage and children."* *"I have been unemployed for eighteen months. The promise was fruitful work."* *"The relationship has been broken for a decade. The promise was restoration."*
- 2 Write down the word louder than the odds.** Under the odds, write the word. *"And He said _____. He is able to do what He promised. It may be that He will be with me, and I shall see it just as He said."*

Read both aloud every day this week. Odds. Word. Declaration.

Before you come to the session

Come with the odds named honestly.

Come with the word louder than the odds.

Come willing to ask, in front of the group, for the hill with the giants.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person in the room will have named the odds against their promise honestly, declared the word louder than the odds, and asked the group to stand with them in their *"it may be."* After three weeks of caves, prisons, and contradiction, this session opens the window. Make it count.

Before you arrive

Read Joshua 14:6–15 (Caleb) and Romans 4:13–25 (Abraham) in full.

Think of people you have seen God do late-in-life things through. Have one or two stories ready if helpful.

Prepare the room to feel different tonight. If weeks two and three felt weighty, this one should feel a little brighter without being falsely upbeat.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and recap (10 min)

Check in on last week's prison work. Any updates? Has anyone felt their circumstances shift, even slightly? More often, has anyone gained a new capacity to hold the word as the circumstances stayed the same?

2. Pre-read discussion (15 min) Three questions.

What odds are currently against your word? Name them.

What does your logic tell you about the likelihood the word will be fulfilled?

What do you make of Caleb's phrase "it may be"? Is that faith or is that fence-sitting?

The third question is important. Some will feel that "it may be" is a lack of faith. Use this to teach: it is actually the opposite — hope without presumption, trust without arrogance.

3. Scripture anchor — Romans 4:19–21 and Joshua 14:10–12 (15 min)

Read both passages aloud, back to back. Then ask:

Paul says Abraham "did not weaken in faith when he considered his body, which was as good as dead." What is the phrase "when he considered" doing in that sentence? (It is there. Abraham did look. Faith is not avoidance.)

What does "grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God" mean practically? How does that work?

Caleb wants the hill country with the giants. At eighty-five. Why that land specifically? (Because that was the specific promise.)

Make the point: faith is not pretending the odds are smaller. Faith is looking at the odds and then looking at God and concluding that He is bigger.

4. Micro-teaching (10 min)

Three points.

Faith is not anti-logic. It is pro-God. Abraham considered his body. Sarah considered her age. They did not pretend. They acknowledged and then trusted.

"Giving glory to God" is a specific practice. Talking about Him, not about the obstacles. Declaring His character, not the problem. Remembering what He has done, not what you cannot do.

"It may be" is the posture of long-promise carriers. Honest. Humble. Expectant. Not presumptuous. Not despairing. The sweet centre of faith.

5. Practice: odds and the word louder than the odds (25 min)

Part one (10 min, silent). Have each person write two things in clear view on their paper:

The odds. Name them. Specifically. Age. Years waited. Resources. Circumstances. Opposition. Be honest.

The word, louder than the odds. Under the odds, write the promise in bigger letters.
Add: *"He is able to do what He promised. It may be that He will be with me, and I shall see it just as He said."*

Part two (15 min, around the circle). Each person shares:

- 1 One odd against their word.
- 2 The word.
- 3 Their *"it may be."* Said out loud. Asking the group to agree.

After each person, the group prays with them — short, simple, in agreement with both the honest odds and the louder word. *"Father, we agree with Anna. The odds are real. You are more real. It may be that You will be with her, and she shall see it just as You said."*

6. Closing (15 min)

Read Hebrews 11:11 aloud. *"By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised."*

Point out: she *considered*. Not ignored. Considered her age. Then considered Him faithful. Both.

Between-sessions practice: every morning this week, read your odds, then read your word louder than the odds, then say *"He is faithful who has promised."* Three movements. Every day.

Close in prayer. Bless the hill country. Bless the giants' defeat. Bless the late-in-life yeses of God.

What to watch for

The one whose odds feel truly final. Some things have timed out — a natural window has closed. Do not contradict their reality. But remind them gently that God has a history of operating past windows. (Sarah. Elizabeth. The blind from birth.)

The one who is afraid to hope. Some people have been disappointed so many times they are afraid of hope itself. Hope hurts when it has been crushed before. Do not demand they hope. Let the Scriptures do the work. *"Against hope, in hope Abraham believed"* (Romans 4:18).

The one who jumps too fast to presumption. Occasionally someone will move from *"I have a word"* to *"God has guaranteed me this specific outcome by this specific date."* Gently redirect to Caleb's *"it may be."* Presumption is not faith. It is a different thing that ends in disappointment.

The logic-heavy person. Some in the room will find this language difficult. They process through logic and evidence. Meet them there. Abraham looked at the evidence too. He just also looked at God. You can be a rigorous thinker *and* a person of faith. These are not in tension.

Prayer prompts for the group

For the capacity to look at the odds clearly *and* look at God clearly in the same moment.

For the promise to be re-spoken louder than the obstacles.

For the quiet certainty of Caleb — asking for the hill with the giants at eighty-five.

Looking ahead

Next week is *Holding Joy Through the Fire*. After the weight and the honesty of the first four weeks, week five is about what endures — and the strange joy that survives the hardest seasons. Ask participants to come with one moment in the middle of a hard season where joy surprised them.

● WEEK 5 OF 6



SESSION 5

Holding Joy Through the Fire

*Endurance and the strange joy that survives the
hardest seasons*

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 1:6-9

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

Name one moment joy has surprised you in a hard season. Share it.

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Come with one moment — specific, recent if possible — when joy showed up in a season you did not expect it to. A laugh in the middle of grief. A peace in the middle of the fight. A gladness you could not explain. Bring it.

An inexplicable word from Peter

Peter is writing to believers who are scattered, persecuted, and facing increasing pressure for their faith. Real suffering. Not theoretical hardship. Ordinary Christians losing jobs, houses, reputations, sometimes lives.

And what does he write to them?

"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexplicable and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:6-9)

Read that sentence again. *Joy that is inexplicable and filled with glory.*

Inexplicable joy. Joy that should not make sense given the circumstances. Joy that coexists with genuine grief. Joy that is not a denial of hardship but somehow runs beside it.

This is the joy Peter is teaching. Not the absence of pain. A joy that survives the fire and is proved real by it.

What joy is not

Before we go further, let us be honest about what this joy is not.

It is not denial. Peter names the grief plainly. *"You have been grieved by various trials."* He does not pretend the trials are not grievous. The grief is real. So is the joy. Both at once.

It is not a feeling you can manufacture. You cannot produce inexplicable joy by trying harder. If you could, it would be *explicable* — the product of your effort. It is called inexplicable because it does not come from you.

It is not constant. Even Jesus grieved. Even Jesus wept at a grave. Joy does not require that you are always smiling, always content, always stable. It coexists with sorrow. It is a different thing than happiness.

It is not a reward for staying strong. You do not earn joy by passing the fire test. Joy is given, not earned. Often it shows up in the exact moment you think you cannot go on.

What joy actually is, in Scripture

The joy of Scripture is strange.

Paul sings in a prison at midnight after being beaten (Acts 16:25). Habakkuk declares he will rejoice in God even if the fig tree does not blossom (Habakkuk 3:17-18). Jesus, *"for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross"* (Hebrews 12:2). James tells believers to *"count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds"* (James 1:2).

These writers are not naïve. They have seen the worst. They know what trial is. And they speak, repeatedly, of a joy that holds in the fire.

What is it?

The best phrase in the New Testament is Paul's: *"sorrowful, yet always rejoicing"* (2 Corinthians 6:10). Both at once. Not an oscillation. A simultaneity.

Joy, biblically, is the settled sense that God is still good, that His word is still holding, that you are still known and loved by Him, and that the story is still going somewhere. It survives the fire because it is not built on the fire going out.

Why fire matters for the word

Peter says your faith is being *tested by fire* — and that what comes out of the fire is *more precious than gold*.

Fire does two things to faith.

It burns off what was false. Most of our faith carries a lot of additions that will not survive a fire. Spiritual ambition. Social performance. Cultural Christianity. Romanticised expectations of how God should act. The fire burns these off. What is left is what was actually true.

It refines what was real. What remains becomes denser, brighter, heavier. The same way gold is refined in a crucible — the metal does not lose its goldness in the fire. It *becomes more itself*.

The same thing happens to a promise held through the fire.

If your word was mostly your own ambition dressed in Scripture, the fire will burn it off. But if your word was actually from God — if what was spoken was real — the fire will not destroy it. It will refine it. What comes out the other side will be denser, brighter, truer than what went in.

This is why some of the most prophetically precise believers are the ones who have been through the most fire. They have been refined. What they speak has weight because it has been tested.

Joy is the evidence

Peter makes a strange move in verse 8. He names the joy that results from holding faith through the fire, and calls it *"inexplicable and filled with glory."*

The joy is the evidence.

Not the circumstances changing. Not the prayer being answered. Not the word being fulfilled yet. The joy itself, surviving the fire — that is the proof that something is real.

If you are in a long hard season and a quiet joy still visits you — at unexpected moments, in the middle of weeping, over small things — that joy is testimony. Not that the season is about to end. That God is still with you in it, and your faith is still holding, and what you have is real.

This is a different kind of assurance than most of us look for. We want the outcome as proof. God gives the joy as proof.

The difference between joy and resignation

A careful distinction.

Joy through the fire is not the same as giving up. It is not saying *"I have accepted that nothing will change."* It is not lowered expectations dressed as maturity.

Resignation says, *"I have stopped hoping."* Joy says, *"I have stopped demanding the outcome and started trusting the One."*

These look similar from a distance. They are entirely different up close. The resigned person has let the word go. The joyful-in-fire person is still holding the word — they are just also holding joy, because their confidence has moved from *the word arriving* to *the One who spoke it*.

Joy makes you more able to wait, not less. It does not replace the word. It accompanies it.

What this week asks of you

After four weeks of caves, prisons, contradictions, and odds, this week gently asks: *what has survived?*

What is still here after the fire?

If you answer that honestly, some of you will find the answer is *the joy*. A small, quiet, strange joy that has not left — even when the word has not arrived, even when the circumstances have not shifted.

This is evidence.

Count it. Name it. It is not accidental. It is God's testimony to Himself in the middle of your fire.

The practice for this week

Three honest moves.

- 1 Name a moment.** When has joy surprised you in this season? Be specific. A particular morning. A song in the car. Laughter at something small. A peace while praying that you did not expect.
- 2 Ask what has survived.** After the fire so far, what of your faith is still here? What has not burned off? Name that clearly. It is your gold.
- 3 Let joy testify.** Every day this week, look for one small joy. Receive it as evidence. Not evidence that the word is about to be fulfilled — evidence that the One who spoke it is still with you.

Before you come to the session

Come with one moment joy surprised you in this season.

Come with an honest note on what has survived the fire so far.

Come expecting, if you are in the fire tonight, to be visited by a joy you did not manufacture.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person in the room will have named one moment joy has surprised them in the current season, counted what has survived the fire so far, and blessed the joy of others in the room. This is the second-to-last session — let it breathe.

Before you arrive

Read 1 Peter 1:3–9 slowly. Notice the bracket: the living hope in verse 3 and the joy in verse 8.

Think of your own moments. Have one or two honest examples of joy visiting you in a hard season, ready to share if the room needs a starter.

Consider playing worship music softly under the practice tonight — this session often benefits from music in the room.

Session outline (90 min)

- 1. Welcome and recap (10 min)**

Check in briefly on last week's odds-and-word practice. Did anyone find their "it may be" getting stronger? Did anyone find it hard to hold?

2. Pre-read discussion (15 min) Three questions.

When has joy visited you in the middle of a hard season? Can you name a specific moment?

What has survived in your faith through the fire so far?

Do you find Peter's phrase "joy inexplicable and filled with glory" believable? Why or why not?

3. Scripture anchor — 1 Peter 1:6–9 (15 min)

Read the passage aloud. Slowly. Twice.

Then walk through the logic:

Verse 6 — "in this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved." What does "in this" refer to? (The living hope, the inheritance, the salvation of verses 3-5.)

Verse 7 — "the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold... tested by fire." What is the fire doing? (Testing, proving, refining — not destroying.)

Verse 8 — "rejoice with joy that is inexplicable and filled with glory." What does "inexplicable" mean? (Cannot be explained by the circumstances.)

Make the point: Peter is not telling them to feel joy *about* the trials. He is describing a joy that *survives* the trials and is evidence of something real. The joy is the proof.

4. Micro-teaching (10 min)

Three points.

Joy is not the absence of grief. Sorrowful yet always rejoicing. Simultaneity, not oscillation.

Joy is the evidence, not the outcome. Not that the word is about to arrive. That the One who spoke it is with you.

Fire refines what is real and burns off what is false. If what comes out of the fire is still there, it was real.

5. Practice: count what has survived (30 min)

Part one (10 min, silent). Have each person write three things:

One specific moment of joy in this season. Name it with detail.

What has survived the fire in their faith. One or two sentences.

One thing they suspect has been burned off — an expectation, a false certainty, a dependency on something that was not God. This is delicate; do not demand a dramatic answer.

Part two (20 min, around the circle). Each person shares:

1 One moment of joy from this season.

2 One thing their faith has kept through the fire.

After each person, the group blesses them and speaks a simple truth over them. Not fixing. Not advising. Just honouring what has survived. *"Simon, that joy in you is real. The God who gave it is still giving. Thank You, Father, for what You are preserving in him."*

Do not force anyone to share the "burned off" answer. Some will offer it. Others will keep it private. Both are fine.

6. Closing (10 min)

Read Habakkuk 3:17-18 aloud. *"Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation."*

Point out: Habakkuk names the losses without minimising them. Then he pivots. *Yet*. That small word is the hinge of faith.

Between-sessions practice: every day this week, find one small joy. Write it down. Treat it as evidence. Treat the joy as a message from God to you about Himself.

Close in prayer. Bless the joy. Bless what has survived. Bless the fire's refinement of what remains.

What to watch for

The one who cannot find joy. Some in the room will honestly report that they cannot remember the last time joy visited them. Do not challenge this. Sit with it. Ask them to look for the smallest thing — a moment in the day, a taste, a breath. Often joy is being missed, not absent.

The one who is afraid joy means the fire is over. Some fear that admitting joy in the fire is naive. Gently remind them: joy is not a verdict on the season. It is a visitor in the season.

The sceptic of inexplicable joy. Some will find Peter's language too much. Do not argue. Let the practice do the work. Practicing noticing joy changes people over weeks, not in one evening.

The breaker moment. Occasionally someone will, in this session, find themselves weeping over the realisation that they *have* been carried. This is tender. Let it happen. Don't rush them.

Prayer prompts for the group

That joy would become a practiced noticing, not a waiting-on-feelings.

That what the fire has burned off would not be mourned.

That what remains would be recognised as more precious than gold.

Looking ahead

Next week is the last session. *The Promised Land*. Fulfilment, partnership, and legacy. Ask participants to come having considered: what promise has God already fulfilled in my life that I may have forgotten to celebrate? And: what am I still holding?

● WEEK 6 OF 6



SESSION 6

The Promised Land

Fulfilment, partnership, and legacy — promise is not the end

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 11:13–16, 39–40

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

Name one promise already fulfilled you have forgotten to celebrate. Name what you are still holding.

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Come with two lists. First: promises God has already fulfilled in your life — however small, however partial — that you may have forgotten to name. Second: what you are still holding. We will close the course with both.

A strange ending to a chapter of heroes

Hebrews 11 is the great chapter on faith. It names Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, David — giants of long-promise-carrying. And then it says something strange at the end.

"And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."
(Hebrews 11:39-40)

Read that again.

These heroes of faith. These long-promise-holders. *Did not receive what was promised.*

At least not in the way they expected, and not in their lifetimes.

Abraham died holding the promise of a nation he could not yet see. Moses died on a mountain looking at the land he was not allowed to enter. David died with the temple he longed to build left to his son. Joseph's bones travelled in a coffin for four hundred years before arriving in the land of promise.

And the Bible calls these people heroes of faith.

This reframes everything.

Promise is not the same as fulfilment

Most of us, when we think about the prophetic journey, imagine arriving. The word spoken over us at twenty comes true at forty and we sit in the sunshine on the other side.

Hebrews 11 quietly tells us this is not always how it goes.

Some promises are fulfilled in your lifetime. Many more are fulfilled *through* your lifetime — in the life of your children, your spiritual descendants, your community, your nation. Abraham did

not see a nation of stars. He saw one son. Isaac saw two sons. Jacob saw twelve. By the time you get to David, you have an actual nation. The promise was fulfilled — just not in Abraham's personal timeline.

This is the honest theology of promise.

You are not the last chapter of your own story. You are a chapter in something larger. What God spoke over you at twenty-two may not fully arrive in your lifetime. Some of it will. Some of it will arrive through the people who come after you.

This is not failure. It is faithfulness. It is Hebrews 11.

But some promises do land

And some of them already have.

This is the move most of us skip. We are so focused on what has not yet happened that we forget to count what already has. The fulfilments that arrived quietly. The words that came true in ways we did not notice because we were looking for something else. The partial fulfilments that are real but not yet complete.

Go back through your life and ask:

Where has God already been faithful to a word He spoke?

Where has He done something I prayed for so long I stopped noticing when it arrived?

What small fulfilments have I failed to celebrate?

The practice of remembering what He has already done is half the practice of holding what He has not yet done. If you do not celebrate what has arrived, you will not recognise fulfilment when it comes.

Fulfilment usually looks different

Another honest note.

When fulfilment arrives, it almost always looks different from what we were waiting for.

Abraham was looking for a son. He got a son, yes. But the real promise was a nation, a land, a blessing to the ends of the earth, and ultimately a Messiah. The fulfilment of the promise of Abraham was, in its fullness, Jesus Christ — born of his line two thousand years later.

Could Abraham have imagined that at his campfire in Genesis 12? No. But that does not mean the promise failed. It means the promise was bigger than Abraham's imagination.

Your promise is probably bigger than your imagination too.

When what arrives does not look like what you were expecting, do not conclude that the word failed. Sometimes the shape of fulfilment is larger, stranger, and slower than what you thought

you were promised. Sometimes it arrives through means you did not anticipate. Sometimes it takes a form your twenty-two-year-old self could not have named.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

Far more abundantly — which means also, sometimes, *very differently*.

Partnership matters

Hebrews 11:40 has a curious line: *"since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."*

Read that carefully. The heroes of Hebrews 11 — Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David, all of them — *are not made perfect apart from us*.

Their story is not complete without ours. We are part of their fulfilment, and the believers who come after us will be part of ours.

Which means the prophetic journey is not an individual sport. You are in partnership with generations. The word God spoke to you may be completed by someone you will never meet, two or three generations from now, because you held faithful through your cave, your prison, your contradiction, your fire.

You are building something that your children, biological or spiritual, will finish. And they are building something that will finish in ways only God can see.

This is why the course is not a solo project. Why it is in small groups. Why we are building a culture of remembering. Because the promise is never just yours.

Faithfulness is the shape of the end

If fulfilment is not always what we think, and if some promises are completed in generations we will not see, what is actually the *point* of the prophetic journey?

The point is faithfulness.

Not: did you see the outcome. But: did you keep holding, through the cave, through the prison, through the odds, through the fire, the word that was spoken over you.

This is what Paul tells Timothy at the very end of his own life, in his second letter: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"* (2 Timothy 4:7).

Not *I have seen it all happen*. Not *every prophecy came true in the way I expected*. *I have kept the faith*.

Faithfulness is the shape of the end. The fruit is not the same as the fulfilment. The fruit is the person you have become while holding the word through everything that tried to knock it out of your hand.

What this session celebrates

Tonight, together, we are going to do two things.

First, we are going to remember what God has already done. Every person will name at least one promise that has already been fulfilled — however small — and we will celebrate it.

Second, we are going to name what we are still holding. Every person will say what word they are taking out of this course and into the rest of their life.

Then we will bless each other. And we will send each other out — not to some dramatic new stage, but back into the ordinary hours of your lives, where the real waging of good warfare happens.

The practice for the rest of your life

Three things.

- 1 Keep a record of fulfilments.** Start a simple list. Every time God answers something, add it. Add the date, the context, the original promise. Return to it in hard seasons. It will become your own Hebrews 11.
- 2 Keep holding what has not yet arrived.** Continue the declaration practice. Wage the good warfare. 1 Timothy 1:18 is not just for the weeks of a course. It is the posture of a lifetime.
- 3 Hand it forward.** Speak the words God has spoken over you to the generations after you. Record them. Teach your children and spiritual children to look for the fulfilments. Build the culture of remembering beyond this small group.

Before you come to the last session

Come with a list — short or long — of promises already fulfilled.

Come with the word you are still holding.

Come ready to bless and be blessed.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person in the room will have named at least one already-fulfilled promise they had forgotten to celebrate, named the word they are still holding, and been blessed by the group in their sending. Close the course well.

Before you arrive

Read Hebrews 11 in one sitting. Let the weight of it land. Let the last four verses — especially 39–40 — sit.

Prepare to close this well. Bring something shared — bread, wine or juice, a simple meal. This session deserves communion.

Think of each person in the group. Prepare a short, specific blessing for each. You will speak it over them tonight.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and gratitude (10 min)

Open with a prayer of thanks. Name what the six weeks have been together. Ask people to say one sentence of gratitude — for the group, for a particular moment, for what they have seen.

2. Pre-read discussion (15 min) Three questions.

What is one promise God has already fulfilled in your life that you may have forgotten to celebrate?

When fulfilment has arrived, how has it been different from what you expected?

What does Hebrews 11:15 do to your theology? — "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar."

3. Scripture anchor — Hebrews 11:13–16, 39–40 (15 min)

Read verses 13–16 aloud first. Then verses 39–40. Let people sit with the gravity of *"did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."*

Ask:

What does it mean that these heroes did not receive in their lifetime, and yet are called heroes of faith?

What does "apart from us they should not be made perfect" mean?

If faithfulness to the word is the shape of the end, rather than seeing the outcome, what does that change?

Make the point: the prophetic journey is not won by seeing. It is won by holding. Hebrews 11 is the great chapter on those who held.

4. Practice — celebrate and name (35 min)

Part one (10 min, silent). Every person writes two lists:

Already fulfilled. Even small ones. The friend who came. The healing that was partial but real. The job that came through. The relationship that mended. The child given late. The provision that arrived quietly. Name them.

Still holding. The one word — or the one strongest word — they are carrying out of this course.

Part two (25 min, around the circle). Each person shares:

1 At least one already-fulfilled promise. *"God fulfilled His word in ____."* The group celebrates briefly — one line of thanksgiving. *"Father, thank You."*

2 The word still held. *"I am still holding ____."*

3 The facilitator (and any others who feel led) speaks a specific blessing over the person. Something you have watched God do in them over six weeks. *"Mark, I have seen you move from hiding your cave to naming it. I bless you to take that honesty into the rest of your journey. I stand with you on the word over your work."* The rest of the group agrees.

Do not rush this. It is the climax of six weeks. Let every person receive.

5. Communion and thanksgiving (15 min)

If appropriate to your tradition, take communion together — or share a simple meal of bread and cup as thanksgiving.

Read aloud 1 Timothy 1:18–19 one last time, together. *"This charge I entrust to you... that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience."*

6. Final commissioning (10 min)

Stand together. Pray something like this:

"Father, we thank You for every word You have spoken over every person in this room. Thank You for the ones already fulfilled. Thank You for the ones still held. Thank You for caves and prisons and fires and strange joys. Thank You for the generations who held before us, and the generations who will hold after us. Let us leave this room people who wage the good warfare with what You have said. Let us hold faith and a good conscience. Let us not be the ones who let go in the middle. And when our time is done, let us be among the ones Hebrews 11 remembers. In the name of the One who holds every promise together, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen."

Send them out.

What to watch for

The one who struggles to name a fulfillment. Everyone has had something. If someone is stuck, offer them simply: *"that you are in this room, alive, still believing — that is already evidence of God's faithfulness."*

The one who is still deep in their cave or prison. Some will not be out of the hard season by week six. Do not pretend they are. Bless them where they are. Affirm that the journey continues. The course is ending; the process is not.

Emotion. This session surfaces tears almost always. Tissues. Space. Do not rush.

The goodbye. Some groups find themselves unsure of what to do next. Have a suggestion ready: a monthly follow-up, an agreed-on check-in pattern, an invitation to run the course again with new people.

Prayer prompts for the group

For every promise already fulfilled to be remembered and celebrated.

For every word still held to be held well, until it arrives.

For the group to scatter, but not disperse — to remain in partnership even beyond the six weeks.

Looking back and forward

Look back over the six weeks. What has changed in each person? In the room? Note it honestly. Celebrate it. Give God glory.

Then ask God: *who are the next people You want to walk through this?* Some from this group may be ready to facilitate the next cohort. Others may simply be living their own newly-reframed journey. Both are fruit.

A closing word for the facilitator

You have led a group of people through something that, if held, will shape the rest of their lives — and the lives of everyone they touch. Sit with that. Give thanks.

Then go and hold your own word, too. The facilitator is always also a participant.

*"Wage the good warfare, holding
faith and a good conscience."*

1 TIMOTHY 1:18-19

