



CALLING OUT COURAGE: A JOURNEY BEYOND COVID

AN INVITATION TO A JOURNEY

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought the strangest & starkest disruptions known for generations.

What if... there is goodness still to be drawn from the experience?

Learnings to be gained?

& hopeful new possibilities to be discovered by slowing & listening?



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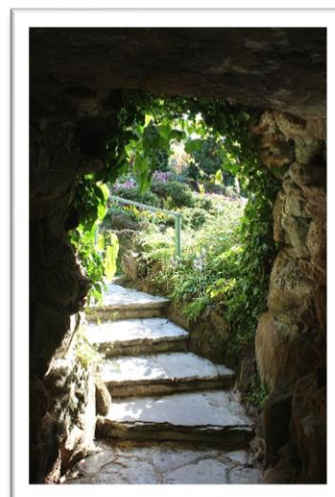
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INTRODUCTION

Occasionally in life big disruptions or traumatic events come our way which we'd never choose. We'd do anything to not have to go through them. And yet, with time, if we put in the work, they can unexpectedly, against the odds, bring positive transformation in ways which are hard to imagine. You may have your own examples. Martine Wright's story of losing her legs in the 7/7 tube bombings in 2005 is a deeply humbling one. Amongst other things she went on to become a Paralympic sitting volleyball athlete. None of what has happened since makes the experience OK on any level, but the unbelievable trauma and horror it caused unlocked something remarkable in her.

Ten years later she reflected some of that confusing topsy turvy reality saying, "In some ways it was the best thing that ever happened to me. No, I can't say 'best' thing, that's not quite right. It was the most life-changing thing that has had such profound and positive effects. It may sound absolutely mad to say that but I truly, truly believe that good can come out of bad".¹ For Martine good came out of bad as a result of the long arduous journey of facing what had happened head on and making courageous proactive choices.



What's the connection? The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was perhaps the biggest global disruption to have hit the world in the last hundred years. We would never have chosen it and its impact has been devastating on so many levels. We adapted, because we had to, but if someone had told you in 2019 some of the practices and realities which became 'normal' to us as 2020 unfolded, you wouldn't have believed them.

I wonder what it has all meant for you? And I wonder what has drawn you to this resource?

'Calling out Courage: a journey through COVID' is born out of a strong sense that the huge dislocation we all experienced invites each one of us to slow down, to process, to assess. Having done that, the next invitation is to work out what that means for each one of us and what we might choose to do with what we have learnt. That invitation is for each of us individually; that we can explore what it means to process and assimilate what we have learnt, in order to personally thrive as we move forward within the new normal. It is also an invitation on behalf of our tired old world – both the human bit and the natural bit (with the realisation that maybe those two aren't so different?).

We are naïve if we think this invitation will unlock change by accident – it won't. We need to proactively find ways to attend to what has happened and to honour it. It is only as time opens up between the events of 2020/21 and the rest of the decade that we can find the perspective to do that properly. It is a work which will stretch well into the next few years if we are to do it well. The first edition of this resource was published in July 2020. I grappled with whether there was value in it all these months on. Others persuaded me that there absolutely was, for two reasons. Firstly, I was encouraged that there's still deep untapped potential to be found in the material – it's needed. Secondly, I wonder if now is actually better timing. First time round so many of us were in shock, trauma and overwhelm. We were

¹ You can read Martine's remarkable story [here](#)

just trying to get through. Perhaps it is only now that we have the thinking space to process at this level, before we lose what potential there could be to, in Martine's words, see "good come out of bad".

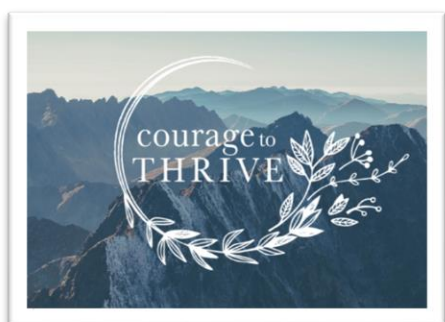
If our world could speak, I wonder what you think it might have been saying to you during this time? What would it love you to listen deeply to, to face, and to use as fuel going forward? How can we learn lessons from this time to be individuals and communities who move forward humbled, challenged and changed for the better by what we have experienced? What might that look like? This resource offers you a means of exploring those questions in your own context. It is offered as a gift to you and to our profoundly beautiful, and extremely weary world.

Journeys are, by definition, active things! This journey is no different. The resource in front of you is laid out in the form of a guidebook to the terrain you are invited to explore. Have a flick through and see what's here. I recommend that you begin with the first section '*Setting up your Travel Kit*' as that explains the resource's ethos and invites you to set up the 'itinerary' for your journey in the way that will work best for you. It will need an hour or two of your time, which I suggest you schedule when you can give it your full attention. From working through that section, you will quickly discover that this is a journey which will take time and needs good travelling companions. You will also discover that beyond slowing down and travelling with others there aren't any rules! It is a resource for you to bend, to play with, to adapt, to work with in whatever order you choose, in whatever way feeds you. It closes with a final section which mirrors the first: '*Keeping your Travel Kit Stocked: How to Equip for the Long Haul*'. I hope you enjoy the adventure, and enjoy discovering your own style.



One final point. As you begin to take a look into the following pages you may decide that this isn't the right time for you to take this journey just now, or at all. Perhaps you can't realistically spare the time, or it's not what you expected it to be. Perhaps there are other reasons why you're not in the right frame of mind to benefit from it. That's really fine! You are in charge, so give yourself total permission to leave it here, to step out at any time, or to go for it wholeheartedly. Be freed to do what works for you and let go of what doesn't!

So, whatever your reason for downloading this resource, for wondering about taking this journey, you are very welcome! Thank you for risking slowing down. May you, those around you, and your little patch of the world, be surprisingly blessed because you risked taking the time to slow, to see, to feel and to make positive choices. Enjoy!



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SETTING UP YOUR TRAVEL KIT

Before you set out on a journey, you need to know:

- where you're trying to get to and why
- how you plan to get there
- who you are travelling with
- what you need to take with you

This section helps you work that all out – to set up your 'Travel Kit'! It will be a self-guided journey, so it also invites you to think about how you will look after yourself along the way; to be mindful of tending to yourself as you travel. The material provided acts like a guide book. It is

not the journey itself – that's up to you! The quality of time and attention you choose to invest will be reflected in what you get back - how creative and impactful this journey could be. In order to set out you will need:



1. **An understanding of the approach** (ethos, underpinnings and choices available to you)
2. **A level of self-understanding** (why are you undertaking the journey, what's your focus and aims, how you learn best, your readiness for change)
3. **Time to commit to the journey** (how and when)
4. **Travelling companions** (who will accompany you along the way)

And so this section is the introductory chapter to the travel guide. It invites you to reflect on how you want to undertake the journey and how you will tailor it to work well for you. In order to begin **you are invited to schedule an hour or two to work through this section**. By the end of that time, you will have the tools to personalise your journey, to make it the most effective it can be for you. At the end of each heading section there is a text box with an invitation to respond to what you have read. Read through each section and then use the questions in the text box to personalise your journey.

Find an hour or two in a time and place you won't be interrupted (schedule in your diary?), with pen and paper. You may want to set aside a notebook or journal for the work you will be doing on this journey. At the start of this time, begin by grounding yourself however you choose to in order to be fully present and open to the possibilities of this journey. Once you have 'arrived', gradually work through the sections below. Enjoy!

1. GAINING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE APPROACH (ethos, underpinnings and choices available to you): This journey invites you to engage with your whole being – not just your professional or intellectual self. That includes:

- The intellectual, rational, thinking, theorising, working out part of you;
- The creative, imaginative, playful, childlike, limitless, dreaming, wondering part of you;

- The spiritual part of you – that which seeks meaning and purpose and is open to noticing something beyond yourself, those surprising nudges we may otherwise disregard²;
- The emotional part of you – making space to notice and name feelings – both positive and negative, comfortable and uncomfortable – to experience letting yourself feel them and see what they may be telling you;
- Your physical body – moving beyond just your head and heart – through movement & engagement with the world around you.

This is a journey towards *contemplative action*. To have the courage to slow down in order to notice, reflect and feel in order to decide if and where you want to bring change as a result. To not be so busy that you miss the opportunities for radical change being presented to each one of us in every/any area of life as a result of the disruption we have experienced in recent times. The journey follows six stages:



1. Beginning the Journey
2. Seeing & Listening: What have I seen that I can't now unsee?
3. Thawing out the Feelings: Harnessing Grief, Anger & Joy
4. Letting Go & Walking Away
5. Standing Tall, Exploring my Power.
6. Choices & Action: What will this Change? What is Emerging?

The journey closes with a final section similar to this: *'Keeping your Travel Kit Stocked – Keeping Going for the Long Haul'*. Each stage of the journey needs you to give it adequate attention (this is addressed further in the section below on pacing yourself and giving adequate time). You may choose to travel the journey in a different order which makes more sense to you. That's up to you.

Each stage of the journey includes the following elements:

- An introduction to the stage of the journey – setting the scene, provoking thought and questions;
- Links to external resources to stimulate your own responses (poetry, music, story, theory);
- Exercises, questions and reflection tools to help you to dig into that leg of the journey and apply it to yourself. To find ways to carry those questions with you in daily life to see what emerges.

You can read more background to the influences and inspiration behind these ways of working on the [Courage to Thrive website](#). Courage to Thrive CIC is a social enterprise (a business for social purpose) based in Poole, Dorset which seeks to unlock thriving with individuals, teams and communities. This resource is written in the spirit of inviting good people to step up so that little by little, family by family, neighbourhood by neighbourhood and region by region, we craft the kind of lives and communities that allow a deeper thriving for all to be possible. Developing it has been a labour of love (and tears!), born

²A note about spirituality: the invitation is to be open to something beyond yourself – to be willing to be surprised. The spirituality of this journey draws on the actions, life and teachings of Jesus. For some, that feels fine; for others it may feel alien or uncomfortable. Take a moment to notice any reactions in yourself to that. Be reassured - you tailor each part of the journey to work for you - using what resonates, leaving what doesn't, adapting to make it work for you. You choose. You do not need to hold to any particular belief system for you to be nourished, stretched or challenged by what is offered. Neither is there any expectation for you to adopt it as your practice or belief, simply to be open to what it may bring you.

since the beginning of the first COVID-19 lockdown in early 2020. It's continued to evolve. It's offered in humility and imperfection, in service of who you may be becoming, and in the possibilities of what our world could be. Putting a price to this resource felt increasingly uncomfortable, so it is offered as a gift, with an invitation for you to respond to the gift in whatever way you choose³. My greatest hope is that it helps you, and those around you, to unlock courage and thriving. To live more in line with your values and so to bring positive change to you and those around you. I hope you enjoy the gift.

What do you feel/think about what you have read in this section? How easy will you find this way of working? What will you need to be mindful of and how will you do that? What do you feel curious about or unsure of? What is new to you? What do you notice in yourself having read this section?

What is your response to the invitation around money? How will you *'give this resource the attention and value you would if you had paid a couple of hundred pounds for it'*? Might you write a diary note to yourself around the time you expect to complete the journey to decide how to respond to the gift?

2. SELF-UNDERSTANDING: This section is both philosophical (*why* do you want to undertake this journey?) and practical (*how* do you learn, *how* will you reflect).

To begin with the **philosophical**:

- What has brought you to this journey and what do you hope to get from it?
- How do you feel about the invitation to transformation? Notice any stirrings.
- What is disquieting you?
- What do you long for?

Each person's journey is unique, and this material is designed for you to tailor for your own context and needs. To help you plot that journey use the wheel on the next page to mark out which areas you want to prioritise on this journey – for each area, assign a value between 0-10 where 10 is really important, and 0 is not important at all. Join the 'spokes' to see where your priorities lie:

³ Courage to Thrive CIC has all the usual business overheads and is my only form of income. In some areas of my business, where possible, I'm experimenting with a radically different theory of money which disconnects one's ability to pay (our personal 'wealth') from our right to access services or products. To be reliant instead on generosity and vision, in the context of individual circumstances. One challenge of that is that we have come to equate financial cost with value (ie if it's free it's obviously not valuable!). I'm inviting you to question that assumption, and give this resource the attention and value you would if you had paid a couple of hundred pounds for it! In the closing section, once you know how helpful this journey has been for you, you will be given the opportunity to respond to the gift. That could be in the form of a donation to Courage to Thrive to support the community work we do (including developing a Poverty Truth Commission locally and delivering 'Step out of the Traffic' community workshops), or 'paying it forward' in another setting in whatever way you feel is a joyful, appropriate response. For now, the only action needed is to find a way to value the gift 😊



You may choose to use this resource to help you make an audit of the whole of life. Or you may have a specific area of life/work that you want to focus on – either on your own or with a team. Perhaps recent times have challenged your organisation’s assumptions or models of working and you want an opportunity to give that attention. Perhaps it’s a much more personal journey. What is right for you just now?



Getting practical: what do you know about your preferred *learning style* – how do you most enjoy learning and taking in information? Do you prefer to listen, to read, to talk things over with someone else, to see something expressed visually, to experience it for yourself, to reflect for a long time, or just get on with it? Part of tailoring your journey is to be true to the way you like to learn – what will this mean for you?

At each point in the journey you will be invited to find *ways to reflect* on questions arising – to give yourself time, space and creative ways to listen more deeply. Some of us find that really challenging, we just want to get on with it. But there is richness to be found in ‘chewing the cud’ as any cow will tell you! The ways you choose to do this depend on your character, your learning style and your preferences. Here are some examples:

- Journalling – you may already have this practice, or it may be new to you. It can take on many forms (writing, doodling, creative journalling) – it may be worth doing a web search for inspiration. You may want to buy or make yourself a journal, notebook or sketchbook and give it a go – either as a regular rhythm, or specifically in response to questions arising here?
- Morning Pages: A practice (developed by Julia Cameron in *The Artist’s Way*) of writing for half an



hour each morning without editing what you write, to see what is emerging for you. It's different from journaling in that it's less reflective, and more spontaneous. A simple A4 notebook will do – amazing what you notice emerging. Good exploration of benefits of this practice from a sceptic's perspective [here](#)!

- Walk of awareness: A mindful walk to take space to reflect and ponder, whilst seeing what you notice in nature and the world around you. To carry any questions as you walk and listen to what arises. You could travel in one direction with a question, and explore answers or different perspectives as you return, like a form of labyrinth. What might work for you?



- Mood board/collage: Gather a few magazines/newspapers, a large piece of paper or card, some glue and scissors and a question or a theme and see what you find: words (found, or made from cutting out letters), images, pictures, colours. Some reflective music may help you play. Don't over-think, and see what emerges. A great way of listening to inspiration and tapping into thoughts and feelings which may be deeper than words or conscious thoughts.



- Anything creative - drawing, baking, singing, painting, movement, making music, gardening, clay work, stitching, feltmaking. What do you enjoy? What could you create whilst holding a question – to let your subconscious surface fresh thinking, to allow something to emerge whilst not looking at it head on?

The invitation is for you to find practices which work for you, either using the ideas above, or your own. Some of these will be tools or practices you use solely on this journey, some may be ones you choose to embed more widely in daily life. A mixture of different approaches to pick and choose from may be really fruitful.

Finally, a powerful way of journeying can be to work with metaphors and stories which resonate for you. There are various metaphors which pop up in this material, for example:

- Organic gardening metaphors around seeds, germination, nurture and growth, composting;
- Planning and undertaking a journey;
- Pregnancy, labour and birth and the gift of experienced midwives.

Take some time to notice what metaphors work for you. Are there others which you find yourself drawn to in daily life?

Take some time to answer the questions at the start of this section & notice what arises in you.

Use 'the wheel' to explore which areas of life/work/being you want to focus on in this journey (these may change as you set out on your journey; it's not set in stone.)

What are your preferred learning styles – how do you want this to shape your journey?

Self-reflection tools and practices: From the examples given, and other ideas sparked for you draw up a 'library' of your preferred ways to reflect that you can draw on at different stages.

Notice which metaphors work for you and reflect on how you might choose to work with those.

3. TIME TO COMMIT TO THE JOURNEY: A downside of the incredible volume of resource we have within our grasp via the web is that we lose depth. We struggle to stay with something for any length of time. We revel in quantity over quality. We are poorer as a result. And so this isn't another



downloadable resource to be flown through at break-neck speed. To begin on this journey you'll want to set aside time, space and energy for it, to engage at a deep level, the opposite of what our culture usually invites. It is designed to be a contemplative journey which will unlock wise, courageous action. What is provided for you is simply a jumping off point – bits will resonate, other bits won't – that's fine. You need space to see where it will take you.

It also needs to work realistically within the context of the rest of your life and time commitments. That will be different for each of us. For some, this may not be the right time to undertake such a journey. Perhaps there are circumstances which mean now isn't the best time for you. Listen to yourself and trust that – it's OK to choose not to proceed if that's what you feel! Some things are too important to do fast, and different things emerge as we allow time to explore things from other angles. Are you up for that adventure, is now the right time?

The invitation is to listen at a level that allows your inner voice to be heard – if that takes you in a completely different direction – great! The focus isn't the material, it's the journey you undertake as a result. Each of the stages needs a good few hours, with a gap before the next stage, allowing your subconscious to surface things you may not immediately be aware of. The stages are presented as a linear journey, but you may find you want to go back and forward or tackle different sections in different orders. How will you navigate that and keep remembering it's your choice?

How do you want to craft this journey to work for you? How much time would you like to give to each stage of the journey? Here are some examples:

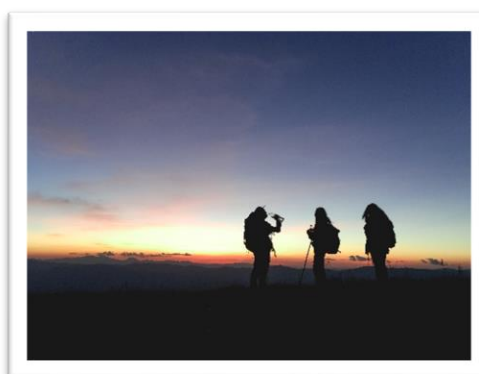
- Over 6-12 weeks: One section per week or fortnight, with an hour set aside to engage with what's presented and one or two other times through each week set aside to undertake exercises and the reflection process;
- Over 6-12 months: One section per month (perhaps using a second month to reflect and go deeper), setting up monthly rhythms marked up in your diary to engage in a way which will best work for you;
- Set aside a series of afternoons, whole days or a block of days – much like a retreat or quiet day – to work through the different exercises and reflection exercises.

When do you aim to complete the journey? What will you do to arrive at the time in a focused, centred state? What will you use to centre yourself? How will you make the physical space you are working in conducive to creative thinking? How will you care for yourself through this journey?

Spend some time writing your responses to these questions; once you've established your approach, find your diary and mark these sections of your week so it actually happens!

4. TRAVELLING COMPANIONS: This is a journey which is designed to be undertaken in community, not in isolation! There are two potential categories of travelling companions suggested here:

- Fellow travelling companions who are choosing to undertake their own version of this journey, to act as 'walking partners';
- Companions who will act as guides, who sit outside your journey and are willing to help you along the way.



In the first category, are there others who you think might benefit from such a journey? To whom you would like to open the invitation to become mutual travelling companions, to find ways to listen deeply to each other on your respective journeys?⁴ Once you've found these companions, how and when might you sit down to compare maps, warm yourselves by the fire, rub tired feet, share stories of the road together and feed and water yourselves? To find ways to listen deeply to each other. To hear what has moved, nourished, disturbed or challenged each one and listen to where the path is taking each of you and how you will be inspired to travel that joyfully. Perhaps you're already part of a group or a team who might benefit from travelling this journey together, or perhaps you'd like to invite a few people together specifically for this? An approach used by one group of travellers was to meet together weekly, setting

⁴ You are invited to share this resource with those people, and anyone else you think might benefit – it's here to be used! I would ask that you share it in its entirety, so people have the whole journey available to them. If you want to use any of these resources in any other way, please get back in touch with me to discuss.

aside one week to work through the material and the next week to process, discuss and support each other's learnings on the journey. What might work for you?

Secondly, who outside of your journey might act as wise guides? This could be a trusted friend or colleague who takes on the role of a thinking partner, or a trained coach or spiritual accompanier⁵. An important responsibility you carry on this journey is to ensure you host yourself well and keep yourself safe. To pay attention to your own mental health and provide yourself what you need in the way of nurture and self-care. Whilst that responsibility rests with you, your travelling companions can also help you notice what that means and ask helpful questions.

Are there others who you think would want to undertake a similar journey for themselves who could become your 'walking party'? What actions do you need to take to make that happen?

Who, outside of your journey, might act as a listening partner for you?

Spend some time writing your response to these questions. Pick up the phone and make the ask, share this resource – or schedule when and how you will do that!

How will you look after yourself on this journey? Who might help you do that?

Well done – you've worked hard! Having worked through the material to this point, you now have:

1. An understanding of ethos & underpinnings of how this journey works (what)
2. A level of self-understanding (why & how)
3. A plan of how to pace yourself (when)
4. Assigned travelling companions (who)

So you are ready to go! Thank you for having the courage to step forward into the unknown – our tired, weary and yet extremely beautiful and joyful world needs you – I hope you enjoy the adventure!



⁵ This resource is specifically designed to enable you to tap into your own community of support and therefore build informal locally resilient networks. If, however, through the course of your journey you decide you'd like to invest in more formal paid support (coaching, spiritual accompaniment, support in setting up a coaching circle with others or facilitated Zoom conversations to explore this journey with others in a professional or personal capacity), please do get in touch. You can learn more about Courage to Thrive coaching [here](#), and more about Courage to Thrive Coaching Circles [here](#).

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

The onset of the pandemic brought with it the strangest collective experience in living memory. We're now experimenting with what it means to live with COVID and hoping the worst is behind us, but only time will tell. Talk of what our 'new normal' is or should look like feels a bit exhausting. There's been much talk of a 'reset', a 'rethink'; of 'building back better' or 'building back fairer'. I wonder what it will amount to in time – only time will tell. You will be privy to information I don't have at the time of writing. What will not change is the enormity of what we have experienced – on a global, national, local and individual level. I will never be the same again as a result of living through this pandemic.

You will never be the same again. Society will never be the same again. That leaves me with various questions:

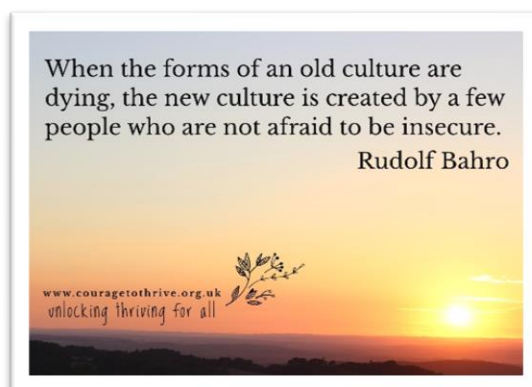
- How does our crazy-paced, action-oriented world afford us the time, space, tools and resources to draw out the learnings and any potential goodness from what we have experienced?
- Do I want to choose to let the experience change me, and therefore my little bit of the world, for the better? To build resilience, vision, my sense of purpose and direction.
- Am I going to leave those changes to chance or do I want to take an active part in what those changes could be?

My concern, and the impetus for the creation of this resource, this gift, is that our normal ways of operating will not allow us to do the work that is needed. To see, to name, to grieve, to celebrate, to learn, to be changed and thus to be equipped to move forward with wisdom and humility towards better living and wiser action. Add to that our levels of exhaustion with the whole thing which, as time rolls on, can push us to turn our back on it all, close the door and leave it well behind. To almost pretend it never happened!



The metaphor of composting comes to mind. I always find the process mysteriously magical! It's one of life's impossibilities. I begin with a random, unpleasant combination of the detritus rejected from our organic kitchen waste. To that unpromising mixture, I add a few grass clippings, weeds and thinnings from the garden. It's a smelly, uninviting mess. And yet, with a combination of the right ingredients (space, worms, moisture, heat and time) it transforms into a rich, crumbly, sweet-smelling powerful context for new life to thrive. It doesn't happen by mistake though. It needs careful curating.

The changes we so desperately need will not happen by mistake either. The invitation of this journey is to set up an environment to 'compost the goodness' from the unpromising, smelly, uninviting mess. The



potential goodness and transformation available from what has been a deeply painful, challenging and baffling time. Whilst we have all shared in a global event, there are as many varied experiences of it as there are people on the planet. Your experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has been unique to you. We have each been affected in different ways and to differing depths. If your journey has been deeply painful, I am profoundly sorry, and I hope your pain will be honoured in this journey. Each of our stories are unique and each needs to be honoured. This resource is designed to draw out your learnings whatever your experience.

The *'Setting up your Travel Kit'* section has introduced you to the direction of travel – the six stages we will pass through, and the methods – the 'kit' – you have available to you. It is a journey designed for people who care. Who are, or want to be, changemakers. Those who want to leave their little bit of the world changed for the better. If that is you, you are a 'leader' within in your own sphere of influence – whether you see yourself as a leader or not. Leadership includes personal leadership – taking control of your choices. And it includes leadership within your family, your neighbourhood, your city or your organisation. To risk being changed and living differently as a result. Speaking up and harnessing your power to make a difference.

You will be invited to listen to what may be just below the surface of things. To risk your own importance. To risk that there may be more. To risk not having easy answers. To be d-i-s-illusioned. To be out of control. To live more openly. To be changed. And to see what that means for you. To choose to take this journey at this time is a courageous one. The temptation is to take the easy path. To run, to move on. But what goodness could be missed if that's what we all choose to do?

There are various recurring themes which may be relevant to you. For example our:

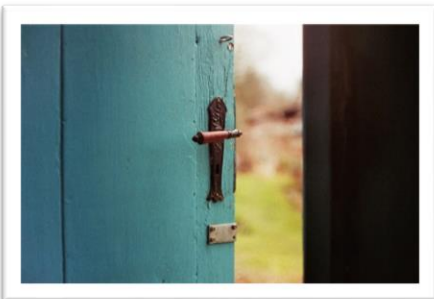
- illusion of human control which was quickly shattered with the arrival of a tiny particle, finding ourselves faced with our frailty and limitations;
- unearthing of gaping inequalities and how we choose to put value on a human life; a gasping earth and the damage of an unfettered greed system;
- power and powerlessness: power of the institution, the corporation, money, the state, the digital devices in our hands, the consumerist project predicated on the need for me to believe that I'm not good enough and need more in order to be complete;
- relationship with our own egos, our work, our sense of purpose, our power;
- pace of life, our drivenness; our loss of gratitude and wonder;
- questioning of what and who really matters to us.

The list goes on, and yours may be completely different. The amazing thing is that all of that was within plain sight before, but somehow it was easy to ignore. We were running at such a pace that many of us failed to notice or we refused to see. Cynicism provided a useful mask for some, or we numbed ourselves. Seeing seemed futile. The events which have unfolded since early 2020 have made things visible. Practically overnight, that world changed beyond recognition. The cruelty of a tiny invisible particle brought us to our knees. Things we all thought were 'impossible' suddenly became possible. The veneer of our sortedness vanished in an instant. We pivoted towards clapping those who are not valued in terms of their salary and towards whom we may previously have given little attention. Power, control, value, certainty, order – all thrown up in the air. It's been frightening, confusing, desperate, heart-wrenching, unbelievable.

It also opened us up as a society. As the dust hopefully begins to settle, this is an invitation to let *yourself* be opened up. To risk a journey of listening – to your deepest self, to the world, to others, to what’s going on around you, and if you would like to – to God – or whatever you see beyond yourself. To not rush on, to slow, to get whatever goodness may be possible from this strangest of situations. We had no choice whether we wanted to go through this time or not. We *do* have a choice how it will change us; whether we emerge bolder and freer and in turn more able to love ourselves and therefore to love and serve our neighbour. To be the change our society so desperately needs.



It’s as if a door towards possible change, in so many areas of life, has unexpectedly blown wide open. It will, and in many ways is already very quickly banging shut. This is an invitation to put your foot in the



door! To choose what *you* want to take forward from this strangest of times. It is a journey of slowing, of noticing, of choosing to be changed, of calling out courage. That we will walk on from here different - freer, lighter and with a freshness in our step. That the world around us may in turn be changed for the better. Rather than relying on changes It’s not a ‘they must change’, it’s a choice to say ‘I will be changed’.

OVER TO YOU...

Remember you are creating space for deeper listening – to others, to your inner wisdom, to God/something beyond yourself. The goal is one of personal discovery and transformation, engaging the whole of you, not purely intellectual stimulation. Notice where these ideas and questions intersect with your own story, your own thinking, what you bring to the table. Where images or past experience seem relevant, where your mind wanders to make other connections – that is fertile ground. With that, and all your strategies, tools and learnings from ‘*Setting up your Travel Kit*’, here are some jumping off points for you to use for self-reflection on this stage of the journey. Don’t feel you need to work through all of it – see what draws you, be open to being surprised:



What might it mean for you to risk a journey of listening and “let yourself be opened up”?

What do you want to choose to do to “put your foot in the door” to prevent it from slamming shut?

“It’s not a ‘they must change’, it’s a choice to say ‘I will be changed’”. How do you feel about that statement – what might it mean for you?

As you engage, where do you notice bubblings of joy, curiosity, challenge or hope? How might you find ways to stay with those and let them grow?

TOOLS & RESOURCES:

1. Listen to [Every Little Bit of It, Carrie Newcomer](#)
What might you notice 'just below the surface of things'?
How do you want to give that space?
2. In the children's story 'We're going on a Bear Hunt', the repeated refrain is '*we can't go over it, we can't go under it, oh no, we've got to go through it!*' The pandemic has felt a bit like that. There was no opt out clause! Given that you've had to go through it, what would you like to learn as a result?
3. '*When the forms of an old culture are dying, the new culture is created by a few people who are not afraid to be insecure*' Rudolf Bahro
What does this quote mean to you – what would you say is dying?
What might be being created in its place - what would you long for?
Honestly reflect on your willingness to be insecure – how does it feel, what might it mean?
4. Read the poem [Fully Alive](#) by Dawna Markova.
What do you notice? What phrases inspire you? What phrases challenge you or make you uncomfortable?
What resonates?
What would you like to do with those ideas?
5. There is a story common to both Christians and Jews of [Jacob wrestling with an angel](#) (Genesis 32:22-31)
On many levels this is a peculiar and curious account, which leaves more questions than answers! What I notice is that Jacob refused to leave the situation until he received a blessing. He limped for the rest of his life as a result of this encounter.
What is the blessing you long to receive from the challenging time we have experienced?
In what ways might you wrestle and not let go until you have received it?
Are you prepared to be permanently changed as a result?
6. If you have found a question to travel with, use the 'Travelling with a question' exercise on the next page. Edward de Bono's thinking hats (information provided) may prove a helpful way of examining your question from different angles.

TRAVELLING WITH A QUESTION EXERCISE:

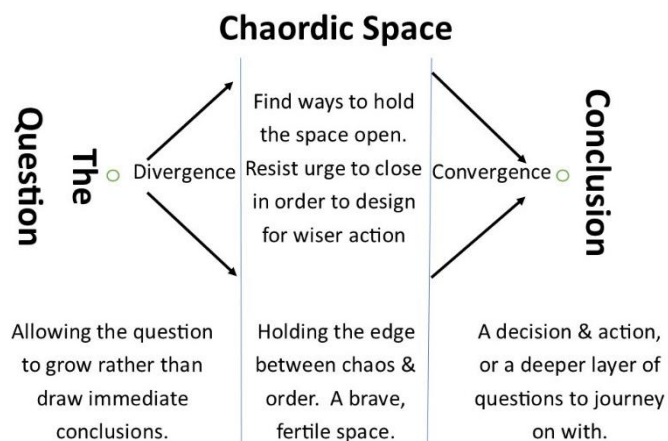
Purpose: During the course of your reflections you may unearth a question. This exercise provides some creative ways to stay with the question rather than jumping to conclusions, to give it space to inform wise action.

Time needed: You define the timescale. It could be a few days, a week or a month. Within that timeframe, make space for the reflection exercises you choose (see below).

Background: As human beings we yearn for closure. Everything in us kicks against holding open uncertainty. We would often rather draw a wrong conclusion and act on it than stay with the not knowing. Think of our yearning for a story to reach a satisfying ending, for a piece of music to resolve or for the wonderful relief of getting 'unstuck' and finding a way forward with a problem.

You have found a question. The temptation is to jump to a solution or a response. Sometimes you've been travelling with it subconsciously for a while, so that when it surfaces, the solution seems obvious and you instantly know how you want to act. If, however, the question itself is a new discovery, the wise action may be to carry it with you for a while. To journey with it, to ponder, to be curious, to allow it to develop and grow, and possibly open up more questions! The quality of your subsequent action may depend on the quality of the time spent exploring the question.

So our instinct, once we've found a question, is to find a solution and act on it. Here we explore something different, slower, and possibly wiser. Some design theory borrowed from 'Art of Hosting' is helpful here, applied to invite an individual to hold open space in order to journey with a question:



Instructions: Once you've unearthed a question you are invited to carry it with you in ways which work for you, your character type and your learning style (see '*Setting up your travel kit*'). You may want to literally carry it in your back pocket and pull it out to ponder from time to time (like when you boil the kettle).

EDWARD DE BONO'S 6 THINKING HATS:

You may be familiar with Edward de Bono's six thinking hats. This can be a helpful way to explore a question or issue from different angles, or through different lenses. The different 'hats' are summarised below. You may want to find ways to 'try on' each hat as you travel with your questions, and notice what it tells you. Involving one of your travelling companions in this process may be helpful.

EDWARD DE BONO'S 6 THINKING HATS



Neutral, facts & figures, data,
What's missing? Information.
No emotion.



Creative, crazy ideas, lateral thinking,
What are the alternatives? Playful.
No judgement.



Positive, sunny, optimistic, constructive,
What are the benefits? 'Can do'.
No criticism.



Negative, cautious, careful,
What are the weaknesses & risks?
[Careful not to overuse!]



Strong emotions, feelings, hunches,
What does your gut say? Intuition?
No logic or explanation



The chair – brings it all together.
Monitoring, summarising, balance,
[Conclusions: the role of the coach...]

Source: Edward de Bono, Six Thinking Hats

SEEING & LISTENING

WHAT HAVE I SEEN THAT I CAN'T NOW UNSEE?

Seeing is super courageous. It is an act of resistance. An artist will tell you that the start of their creative journey begins by really seeing. Not what they assume is there, but what is actually there.

If we don't see we don't need to take responsibility. Ignorance is bliss. But to slow down and choose to see the discomfort, the mess, the pain, the injustice – within and without – that's brave. To empty ourselves of our answers and solutions and stop still for long enough to really listen. To listen to someone's story, to what's actually going on inside me, to what I see in the world around me or to my own deepest unmet yearnings – that takes real courage. Are you willing to do

that? To trust that although it may 'undo' you and you can't guarantee the destination or outcome, you still choose to see and to hear. To stay in the place of discomfort and see what might emerge?

That seeing and listening is both an inward journey and an outward journey. A listening to other, to self and to something beyond us all. In the opening stage of our journey we noticed the phrase 'to be d-i-s-illusioned'. The term 'disillusioned' usually occurs in a negative context, but when we look at it more closely we discover it has at its heart a crucial gift – the gift of removing an illusion of which we were previously unaware. That cannot happen unless we risk slowing down to really see what is being presented to us.

I wonder what became visible to you out there in the world and within yourself during the extra-ordinary arrival of the first COVID-19, lockdown and all that has happened since? As a species we are incredibly resourceful, and so we quickly normalise what ought to still seem ridiculous. This is an invitation to risk de-normalising it for a while. To take yourself back to early Spring 2020, and ask what did you notice? What have you noticed since? A few lines of thought:

- Inequalities & injustices which were there all along have come to the fore. The truth is that the system wasn't working that well for a lot of people before, but we kept going. Close on the tail of COVID-19 injustices, the Black Lives Matters campaign was tragically but crucially thrust into the limelight by yet another murder. No doubt other events have unfolded since. What did the arriving crisis push out into the light that could previously be ignored?
- Things we were previously told were impossible became possible overnight. The frame shifted and we realised 'impossible' had a lot of assumptions behind it. It was often tilted in favour of big business, profit, economic growth and the protection of the 'haves' over the 'have nots'. What happened (both within and without) which you never would have believed could be possible at the start of 2020?



- With the first lockdown nature seemed to breathe a sigh of relief. The sound of traffic abated, skies cleared, many breathed more easily. In 2020 many of us noticed spring burst forth in a way that had passed us by in previous years. The earth seemed to rejoice in its temporary freedom from the over-stretch of modern life that had gradually taken hold. We had talked about a 'climate crisis' – the actions of early 2020 showed us how people actually respond when we really believe it to be a crisis.
- What happened in your own community, street or neighbourhood? What did you notice in the way people treated each other? Where was the vulnerability? Where was the pain? Where was the generosity and joy? What formal or informal social infrastructures grew up which surprised you?
- We suddenly noticed those we previously took for granted or ignored. Care workers, cleaners, delivery drivers, supermarket workers and others were given the wonderful new title of 'key worker'. Their value is certainly not reflected in their pay, and yet the situation showed us how desperately important they are and how valued they should be.
- What have you noticed about your own assumptions, the way you were living, your working practices? Our pace of life, the unquenchable demands of the institutions we work for or our own drivenness have a way of creeping up on us. Like frogs in gradually boiling water, it happens stealthily. Where might there be gift in what you can now see?

This list is designed to whet your appetite. Your own may take you in a totally different direction. Take courage and time and develop your own inventory of what you have noticed. Within your own organisations, teams or personal relationships – what has come to light? Where have you noticed leaders who have inspired and impressed you – what qualities and actions have stood out for you?

And what have you noticed within yourself? Parker Palmer talks about our soul, that inner core of



ourselves, as being shy – like a wild creature. What would she/he have to tell you if you sat gently enough for her/him to emerge and be seen? A video which did the rounds on social media about what we might learn as a result of the pandemic included the phrase *"we dusted off our instincts"*. A beautiful image of uncovering what we already know deep down inside ourselves if only we have the courage to slow down and notice.

What surprised you? How did your ego cope? What stirrings do you notice if you wait and listen well enough? What happened to your sense of agency? What brought you joy which has surprised you? What did you struggle with which you least expected?

And what about the 'Other' beyond ourselves and society? For some we name that as God, for others it may be a sense of the universe, the environment, our natural context. If that had a voice, what might it be saying to you at this time?

The invitation here is to travel with these questions and notice what you observe. To be curious, to notice, to capture, to wonder, to have the courage to stand without answers – not to jump to action. We

continue the task of slowing down that we began on the first leg of our journey. The spectrum of discoveries will be different for each of us. Take your time. Some things are too important to do fast.

OVER TO YOU...

Remember you are creating space for deeper listening – to others, to your inner wisdom, to God/something beyond yourself. The goal is one of personal discovery and transformation, engaging the whole of you, not purely intellectual stimulation. Notice where these ideas and questions intersect with your own story, your own thinking, what you bring to the table. Where images or past experience seem relevant, where your mind wanders to make other connections – that is fertile ground. With that, and all your strategies, tools and learnings from *‘Setting up your Travel Kit’*, here are some jumping off points for you to use for self-reflection on this stage of the journey. Don’t feel you need to work through all of it – see what draws you, leave what doesn’t and be open to being surprised:



“Seeing is super courageous. It is an act of resistance ...if we don’t see we don’t need to take responsibility”. How do you respond to the idea of having the courage to see?

How do you feel about the invitation to “empty yourself of answers or solutions” as you see and listen, to “stay in a place of discomfort” and risk being “dis-illusioned”? Where will you find this particularly hard? Find ways to stay with what arises for you.

What might emerge if you ‘dusted off your instincts’? Find ways to play with that idea.

There are plenty of other questions in the text above. Slow down and choose two or three which strike you, finding ways to explore them for yourself.

TOOLS & RESOURCES:

1. Spend some time drawing together ‘data’, analysis and opinion from the last couple of years – articles, podcasts, insights from thought-leaders or people you know who you respect. Use this database of information to build a picture of what has been unearthed in whatever way works for you. [Build back Fairer: the COVID-19 Marmot Review](#) on health inequalities may be a good starting point. Notice what themes emerge for you. What do you see? What do you hear?
2. Watch this video of the children’s story [The Emperor’s New Clothes](#). What are some of the lies we find ourselves colluding with because we are too afraid to challenge received wisdom? Place yourself in the part of the young child – what are the things you can see from this time which you haven’t been willing or able to see until now. Reflect on what that might mean for you.
3. Find a comfortable quiet place to listen to Martyn Joseph sing [‘Let Yourself’](#). As you listen, enjoy the words as a gift to yourself. You may want to listen a second time and have a pen ready to scribble down any phrases which leap out at you. What would it mean for you to *‘let yourself be quietly drawn by the stronger call of what you really love’*?

What do you notice that stirs in you as you listen to these lyrics. Stay with anything that arises – what might it be telling you?

4. Slow down to read or listen to RS Thomas reading his poem [The Bright Field](#).
Use your chosen reflection tools to notice how you respond to it.
How does it connect with your story – what might your 'small field' be?
How will you 'turn aside' to notice? What would you like to do with that?
5. Use the Finding Values & Direction Exercise on the next page to dig into what really matters to you and how you want to be remembered.
6. Jesus tells a story of a son who is fed up with life at home and so asks his father for his inheritance [Luke 15:11-32](#). The father gives it to him and he goes off and lives the high life, spending all his money. With time, the money runs out and he finds himself far from home and realises what he sought turned out to be a painful disappointment. At this point the story says he 'came to his senses'. He used that waking up to inform the super-courageous action he then took. Choosing to see and hear is literally enabling ourselves to 'come to our senses'. Engage with the story in whatever way is helpful to you (you may want to imagine yourself into the story?). Reflect on what the outcome of 'coming to your senses' might mean for you.

FINDING VALUES & DIRECTION EXERCISE:

Purpose: To help you discover your values and what really matters to you. Noticing how you want to be remembered provides insight into the values which matter most to you and who you want to be. In turn that helps you find courage to make proactive decisions in life.

Time needed: 30-60 mins plus reflection time. Turn your phone off, make yourself a hot drink, find a comfortable place where you won't be interrupted. Breathe...!

Other resources needed: Pen and paper

Background: The invitation in this exercise is to picture your own funeral somewhere many years from now. If that takes you to a bleak place, then by all means build a picture of a party being held for you in 5, 10 or 15 years time. Choose whichever scenario will be the most life-giving and illuminating for you. Make sure you take responsibility for keeping yourself positive and safe in that decision.

Instructions: Funerals are a wonderful place to hear a person's life celebrated – it always feels like a shame that the person being celebrated doesn't get to hear the things said about them! In your mind's eye, picture a day in the future when your loved ones have gathered to celebrate your life. Spend a few minutes picturing who is in the room – friends, family, people you have worked with, people in your local community. Notice the love and appreciation expressed in them - realise they have all gathered because they love and value you – notice how that feels. Enjoy feeling appreciated!

In turn a close friend, a family member and then a colleague are invited to stand and give an epitaph. A celebration of who you were, what you meant to those around you and what you achieved in your life – through your relationships, the way you acted and the decisions you took. What would you love them to say about you – what really matters to you?*

Take some space to note down what you would most like to hear ...what qualities they have seen in you ...what achievements would you want to be remembered for ...what you mean to them ...what they really appreciate and love about you ...what they have seen of your character and who you really are.

When you have finished, slow down and look through what you have written. Is there anything which surprises you about how you would like to be remembered? Reflect on what that might tell you about how you use your time, what you want to prioritise and how you relate to others. If it helps, make some notes about your reflections. Take your learnings into the next phase of your journey.

*This isn't boasting & isn't what you think of yourself now! It's what you really *want* people to see in you as you grow into the future. The focus is on positives only. Enjoy exploring who you want to be & what really matters to you!

THAWING OUT THE FEELINGS HARNESSING GRIEF, ANGER & JOY⁶

Throughout our lives we each develop and operate with a set of defences designed to keep us safe. They are an important mechanism and are to be respected. It's helpful to be aware of them, in order to notice when they begin to trap us instead of contributing to the thriving of ourselves and others. The pandemic and all it brought with it challenged our defences in completely new ways. Many of us experienced confusion, fear, anxiety or loss

as our expected norms were challenged. As we witnessed what unfolded in wider society, we may also have been moved in surprising and unexpected ways. I wonder what the prevailing feelings were for you during that early period, and what you're now feeling?



Feeling the feelings leaves us vulnerable. In our work contexts, in particular, we may have been well trained to compartmentalise to ensure we leave emotions out of our professional life at all costs. Allowing ourselves to notice and give space to our feelings may lead us to the murky world of feeling out of control. The enormity or complexity of the situation, our helplessness to make a difference or the level of pain being felt by those around us can each mean our brains choose to shut that down. Do 'the stuff', but don't feel the feelings! And yet our emotions are an important part of who we are. Allowing ourselves to access this part of us, in a safe and controlled way, is an important part of unlocking the motivation and 'oomph' we will need to bring about the change we choose.

Fear, grief, sadness, anger, loss and hopelessness. Uncomfortable frightening out of control feelings. Joy, delight, love, excitement, creativity and celebration. Feelings which are wonderful and welcomed but sometimes looked down upon or written off as childish. I wonder what your relationship is with the whole range of emotions? Some of us are naturally thinkers, whilst others of us are naturally feelers (a bit like being left or right-handed). Whichever our preference, being in touch with our feelings remains an important part of being human.

As you have asked yourself what you have seen which you now can't unsee, I wonder what feelings may have arisen for you? For some of us we may have been moved deeply. We may have become aware of issues and injustices which we judge to be plain wrong. If you're old enough (!), you may remember the spinach-eating American cartoon character Popeye, who would be provoked by something to the point of

⁶Remember to check what it means to look after yourself as you explore this and each section of this journey. Connect with your travelling companions, seek support, tend to yourself. If these themes aren't helpful for you at the moment, listen to that – you can leave it or come back to it. Do whatever is most helpful for you.

bursting. At that point he would announce *'that's all I can stands and I can't stands no more'* before gulping a can of spinach which would power him to acts of enormous courage and strength. Methinks the spinach is a bit of a red herring here! The relevant question is what are the *'all I can stands and I can't stands no more'* themes for you which may have been thrown into focus by the pandemic?



Many of the social revolutions of the past sprang from people having the courage to ask that question and act on what they discovered. Martin Luther King Jr found his in the context of the horrendous racial oppression he was living through in the 1950s and '60s. It led him to a life characterised by nonviolence, freedom and justice; the impact, challenges and after-echoes of which still reverberate around the world today over fifty years after his brutal murder.

For many of us it will be on a much smaller scale. When we moved to a new neighbourhood some years ago, I became aware of how run down the local play park had become. It served residents of the social housing estate next to it, many of whom had no outside space of their own. It was really no longer fit for purpose. Meanwhile the Local Authority had poured plenty of money into the local parks which served the more affluent and touristy parts of the town. It seemed blatantly wrong and a number of us refused to accept that it was OK. We gathered others who felt the same, petitioned the council to act and oversaw a £120, 000 refurbishment. Our seeing led to an *'all I can stands and I can't stands no more'* moment which unlocked action which has brought life and joy to a whole community.

What are the facts, statistics and stories which most sadden you, or make you most angry? The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately struck down the most vulnerable, unearthing deep structural fissures in our society, with subsequent race brutalities and the Black Lives Matter campaign following fast on its tail. A quick internet search will reveal shocking statistics on all sorts of injustices from the impact of the climate crisis, national and international inequality, gender-based violence and the effects of greed and human brutality. Closer to home, what strikes you? On whatever level is most relevant to you – what breaks your heart? What makes you really angry?

Perhaps you've become aware of working practices or unrealistic/unhelpful assumptions within yourself, your organisation or your field of work. Perhaps there are over-stretches which everyone was living with and just not naming. Perhaps it's previously unspoken truths which have come to light within a community you're part of. There can be a real sadness involved in letting yourself see that and owning the pain it brings. It's a courageous thing.

I wonder what you think of when you think of the word *'courage'*? At its root is the Latin word for heart – *cor* (French: *coeur*). The earliest definitions of the word courage meant *'to speak one's mind by telling one's heart'*. I love that. If we haven't had the courage to slow down and really listen to our hearts – to bring our honest feelings to the fore – we will struggle to act from a place of heart-wrenching courage.



I recently heard a climate change activist speak passionately about the concept of 'frozen grief'. He spoke of his own journey of letting himself really feel the feelings around the implications of the climate crisis. His call to each one of us was to find ways to thaw out those feelings. The challenge was that until we do that, we are unlikely to find the 'courage' to bring about the action so desperately needed. Human history and human nature suggests that if it doesn't hurt

enough, we will do everything we can to keep numbing or distracting ourselves.

This is tough stuff which can get overwhelming. Don't try doing it on your own! Which of your travelling companions might explore these things with you? And remember - the negative is the catalyst which, over time, has potential to unlock the joyful alternatives of what could be. Each are alternatives marked by joy, hope and fullness of life. The '*What if...*' questions that we need to dream into being with our travelling companions. The vital flipside of engaging with the difficult feelings is spending time exploring what brings us joy and life, and cultivating gratitude.

Grateful people are a joy to be around and are often the ones most motivated to bring about change. The Benedictine monk, David Steindl-Rast is often quoted as saying '*it is not joy that makes us grateful, it is gratitude which makes us joyful*'. I wonder how you might develop a practice of gratefulness? The other part of not getting overwhelmed is to know what we feel compelled to focus on. We can't feel deeply about everything, and the responsibility for action is shared between every single one of us. The question to each us is to notice which of the injustices or illogical ways of being and doing touch us most. Which is calling us to spend ourselves on their behalf? What can I just not stand? We will move onto the realms of action (with others – not on our own!) further on in this journey, but it has to begin with letting ourselves feel the feelings.



OVER TO YOU...

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What has come to light over this time which makes you really angry or sad, or which needs to be called out - your *'that's all I can stand and I can't stand no more'*? How can you stay with that feeling?

What breaks your heart? How might you go about staying with those difficult feelings in a way which is constructive, safe and honest?

What feelings might you still need to allow to 'thaw' if you're going to be motivated enough to act? How might you go about making safe space to do that?

What feelings of hope and joy have you noticed since the start of the pandemic – what have you seen that has brought you delight? What would you love to see more of? How will you feed that?

TOOLS & RESOURCES:

1. If you haven't seen it before (or maybe even if you have!), set aside some time (about 20 mins) to watch Brene Brown's TED Talk ['The Power of Vulnerability'](#). Have a pen and paper ready and note down any words, phrases or concepts which stand out for you. Spend some time reflecting on what resonates for you and what you'd like to do with that.
2. Where do you notice yourself numbed or hardened to the challenges of life? Where has that been a helpful choice and where has it just happened without you noticing? Listen to Martyn Joseph's [Turn me Tender](#). Notice any phrases which resonate and use them to reflect on where you might want to choose vulnerability.
3. I have noticed a curious paradox. The most deeply joyful people are often those who have known the most profound loss and suffering. Perhaps that's what the Psalmist, writing thousands of years ago, knew when he wrote *'Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him'*. The implication being that joy has not come in spite of the suffering, but as a direct 'crop' of choosing to engage with the pain. That is part of the invitation of Courage to Thrive and the hope behind our logo – there is plenty in life which we would not choose, but there can be surprising depths of joy and life which can emerge from honestly naming and owning our pain. Spend some time engaging with whatever part of that speaks to you. If it's helpful listen to [Weep with Me \(Reprise\)](#) a very short song from Rend Collective picking up on Jesus' words *'blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted'*, or listen to this curious poem about the power of a crying man by Thomas Kenelly [An absolutely Ordinary Rainbow](#).
4. Read Ursula Le Guin's short story ['The ones who walk away from Omelas'](#), a curious tale of what we choose to do with what becomes visible to us. Let the themes of the story echo round in you for a while. Does anything resonate with what you are learning on this journey? What would you like to do with that?

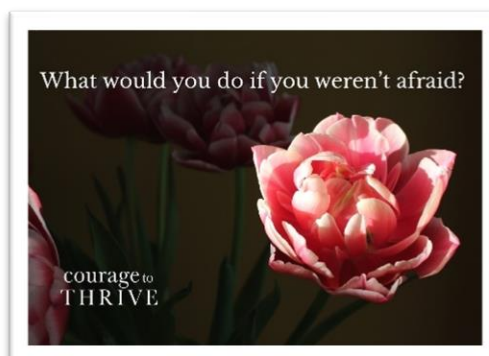


5. What brings you joy? What brings you life? How can you engage with that alongside the challenging aspects of life? You may want to watch this [starling murmuration video](#) or this video of [community joy and dancing](#). Enjoy! How can you bring more of what brings you joy into your life?
6. *'It is not joy that makes us grateful, it is gratitude which makes us joyful'*. What is the place of gratitude in your life? How could you develop a regular practice of gratitude? There are lots of ideas online – perhaps you want to have a search and come up with what might work for you. A practice introduced to me which I find helpful is to close each day by asking myself three questions:
 - a) What three things am I grateful for from today?
 - b) What two things did I do well today?
 - c) What one thing would I choose to do differently?

What would you like to do to cultivate gratitude as a regular habit in your life?

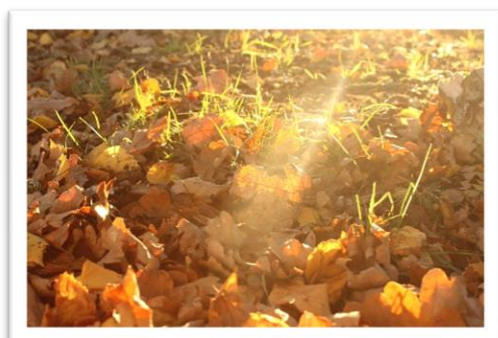
LETTING GO & WALKING AWAY

Many years ago I was looking after a pair of toddlers for a few hours. Their favourite toy in the room was the Fisher Price Garage. Sharing wasn't a skill either of them had yet learnt or planned to practice. It was hard work. Eventually the little girl worked out the best strategy – she would gather all the cars available and hold them tightly to her chest. I watched with intrigue. On one level she had won. She had all the cars, and the little boy didn't have any. In reality they had both lost as she was so busy clutching them as tightly as possible to her body that she didn't have a hand free to actually play with them, and so neither of them benefitted.



I have returned to that image repeatedly over the last 20 years. How often do we hold so much in our hands that we can't actually enjoy or actively, healthily use any of it well? If our hands are already full we can't pick up new things. Sometimes we've been holding onto those things for so long we've stopped noticing what we're holding. What kind of things do we hold - habits, hopes, dreams, false beliefs, ways of doing things, pride, title, positions? Like that little girl, sometimes we can't pick up new things until we risk putting down the old. That's hard. To risk laying stuff down before we know what might come in its place. The gift of being out of control. Of not knowing if something will come in its place.

As is often the case, we find wisdom reflected in the natural world. Some plants are annuals – they are designed to grow, flower, seed and die back within a year. The seeds provide the new growth for the next year, but first there needs to be a death, and a letting go. I wonder if you've ever taken time to contemplate the appearance of seeds. They are the most unlikely candidates for new life. They look as finished as anything on earth. And yet within each of them is the most unbelievable capsule of unique potential life imaginable! Jesus used this metaphor when he said 'unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds'. What a curious picture, which I fight with all my might, given the choice.



Similarly, I have been known to shout at the trees on a damp November day as they appear to meekly give up their leaves for another year (it's true!). Where is their sticking power, their determination, their fight? And yet they 'know' a truth I fail to grasp year after year, that unless they let go and face the fallow, apparent deadness of winter, that incredible luscious fresh green growth of spring is not possible.

And then there's plants like roses which grow on over many years. If, however, they are to be at their best they need pruning. I hate pruning. It scares me and is so counter-intuitive I generally avoid it. The result – leggy, hungry, poorly flowering plants. My husband, meanwhile, is braver at this (he's braver at thinning out annuals too come to think about it – a whole other metaphor!). The result, when applied to

the right plants at the right time, is transformative. That struggling rose, which looked like it was on its way out, appears to magically burst into life – clusters of healthy vibrant flowers on strong fresh growth surprise me every time. And yet, each year when I see the poor truncated branches of the pruned plant, I struggle with amnesia. Will I ever learn?

So what does all this mean for you and for the strange times we have experienced? Early in the pandemic, some of us experienced forced pruning or dying to self through personal loss, through loneliness, through the government furlough scheme/job loss or because our previous ways of life or working practices were incompatible with lockdown and social distancing. Maybe we had space and time to review and notice some of the elements of our working life which perhaps were supposed to be 'annuals'. Looking at those areas now perhaps we can see that we've 'limped them along' way beyond their productive life. Or maybe the changes left you so busy there was almost no time to process any of this, and it's only now you can really come up for air.

Perhaps we've been confronted with the absurdity of how cluttered and busy our lives or working practices had become and we need to say 'enough'. Perhaps through this journey, we are becoming aware of new things wanting to emerge, but we cannot take hold of them without setting other things down or pruning. Perhaps some things surprised us by flourishing beyond our expectations in these unusual times, and our question is 'what next?'. Perhaps it all highlighted how far we have strayed from who we really are, what really matters to us, our original vision. We are finite beings, and we are supposed to share the load with our fellow travelling companions.

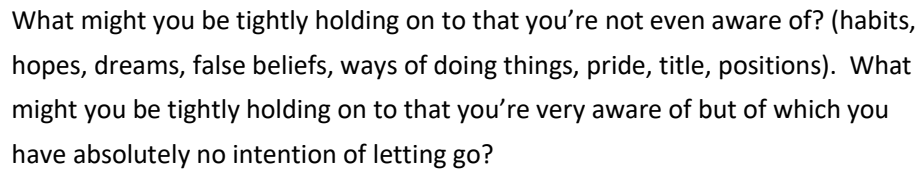


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Pruning, letting go, walking away, letting things which we cherish die takes enormous courage. Enormous courage. I wonder what it all might mean for you?

OVER TO YOU...

Remember you are creating space for deeper listening – to others, to your inner wisdom, to God/something beyond yourself. The goal is one of personal discovery and transformation, engaging the whole of you, not purely intellectual stimulation. Notice where these ideas and questions intersect with your own story, your own thinking, what you bring to the table. Where images or past experience seem relevant, where your mind wanders to make other connections – that is fertile ground. With that, and all your strategies, tools and learnings from *'Setting up your Travel Kit'*, here are some jumping off points for you to use for self-reflection on this stage of the journey. Don't feel you need to work through all of it – see what draws you, be open to being surprised:



Re-read the organic plant images. Where in your life might there be ‘annuals’ which you’ve limped along? Where do seeds need to fall to the ground and die, or leaves fall to give way to new life? Where might pruning be needed? Notice where anything resonates – what would you like to do with that?

1. *'The best time to plant a tree is a hundred years ago. The next best time is now.'* It's too easy to lose ourselves in what we might do if we could re-do events past. A pointless occupation! Listen to Damien Rice ['Trusty and True'](#) noticing the lyrics and what stirs you. Where do you want to choose to 'come'? Where are there past regrets that you cannot change but you want to choose to lay down? Where are you 'so carefully closed'? Where might you want to 'let yourself be wrong'?

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- Calling out Courage: a journey beyond COVID 30

now, what you need for the next stage of life and what you choose to leave, take or pick up for the next leg of the journey.

5. Read the story of a wealthy leader's encounter with Jesus in [Luke 18:18-30](#). Imagine yourself into the story (Who are you? Where are you? What do you see?). Notice what the man is holding onto tightly and his reaction when Jesus puts a spotlight on his lack, despite apparently having so much. Notice the man's response. Spend some time exploring what it is you hold that tightly and what might change if you risked opening up your hands.
 6. Read Mary Oliver's poem '[The Journey](#)'. Notice how you respond. If you 'finally knew what you had to do', what might that be? How would it be to leave the voices of others behind, and notice a new voice which you slowly recognise your own? Enjoy some reflection time.
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RIVER RAPIDS CHANGE EXERCISE

Purpose: To see the recent disruption as an opportunity for change by reviewing what has been and making decisions about what you want to change, leave, and take with you going forward.

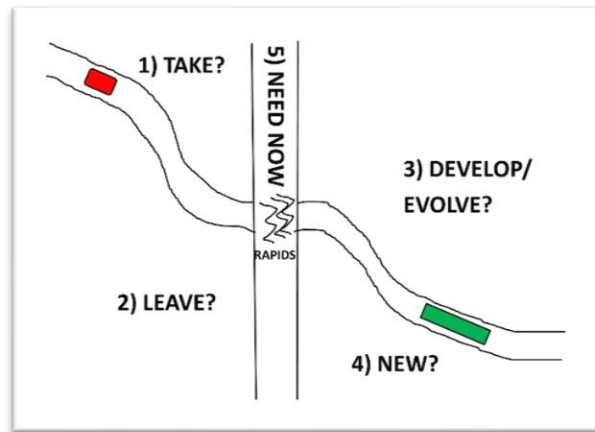
Time needed: 1-4 hours; this exercise is best used over a few days or a week – to let it mull and return to it, adding things as you think of them.

Other resources needed: Large piece of paper, coloured pens.

Instructions: Firstly, decide what area of life you are focusing on (eg. whole of life, specific area, professional or home setting?). Whatever you have chosen as your context/focus – imagine that as a boat sailing down a river (the red boat) – you knew the context, it didn't take too much thought. All of a sudden the smooth river hits rapids – the recent disruption you/we have all experienced. Your boat isn't made for rapids and is too heavy to carry across. Fortunately there is another boat (the green boat) waiting for you on the other side of the rapids which is better suited to the changed nature of the next phase of the river. Your task is to decide:

1. What you want to choose to retrieve from the original boat to take with you into the next phase of your journey;
2. What you want to choose to leave behind;
3. What you want to take with you in a new format – developed or evolved from the form it had before;
4. What new things (behaviours, companions, ways of working, beliefs, vision, direction, goals) you want on the next phase of the journey;
5. What action/equipping/investment may be needed now to make that transition possible.

Draw your own version of the sketch on the next page onto a large sheet of paper leaving enough room in each area to populate with your responses/ideas. Be as creative as you like – you could draw or write your ideas, depending how you feel and what works for you. Feel free to adapt to better suit your situation.



If you've noticed ideas sparking, stop reading here and go play – enjoy! Don't over-edit, just go with what you notice. When ideas begin to dry up you may want to use the prompts below to explore different areas you haven't already covered:

- theories, resources, vision, beliefs, ingredients, approaches, support networks, skills, vocation/calling, assumptions, habits, rhythms, attitude to/use of money, mindsets, ways of working, work-life balance, spiritual practices, ways you honour your character/personality, attitude to time, use of technology, community connections.

Over the course of a week or so, notice any other thoughts/feelings which come up. Add them to your diagram or use the exercise to spark ideas to journal or work with in other ways.

STANDING TALL, EXPLORING MY POWER



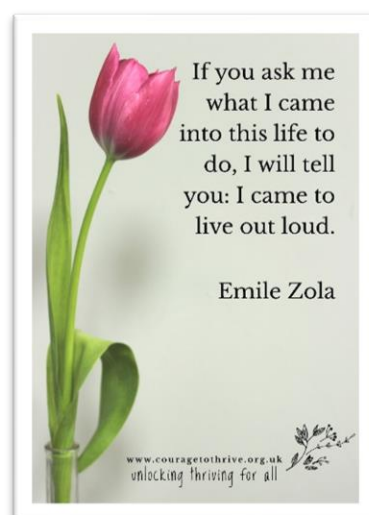
In the 2016 Olympics the British women's hockey team were not the favourites. They progressed to beat The Netherlands (the former champions) to win the gold medal on penalties. For some reason I followed with fascination (having never watched hockey before)! The British goalkeeper, Maddie Hinch, played remarkably. A camera shot of her water bottle stayed with me. She had used it to write herself reminders and encouragements. Alongside various tactical reminders about her opponents she had written 'Stay Big'!

I wonder what it could look like if those of us who long for justice and change found ways to 'stay big'? I wonder what

your relationship is with your own personal power? How does it feel to be invited to step into your power to use it well? How do you feel to be told you are a leader? What is the relationship between your power and your ego? How might you find ways to retain your appropriate smallness whilst embracing your bigness so that the world around you can benefit from the power locked up within you? Your fellow citizens need you!

Many of us can feel pretty impotent to make a difference faced with the enormity of the challenges around us. On a societal level, we have the feeling that we are a tiny part of a huge system which we may not like, but over which we have no control. On a personal level, perhaps we have learned to put up with entrenched behaviours and habits for so long that we don't believe change is possible, and so what is the point. It's that feeling of helplessness and frustration which, I would suggest, may most threaten the viability of the journey you are on.

Too many good people working in tough public sector settings, for example, are leaving their professions in their droves because the system seems so broken that they do not see a way to operate within it whilst remaining true to their values. Desperate! For some, finding alternative ways of bringing about change may be necessary, both because the change they seek may be best brought about from outside of the system, but also to preserve their own wellbeing. Meanwhile I fear for those the 'system' is designed to serve. I don't have an answer. Why risk seeing the pain, listening to the injustice, feeling the feelings if we can't do anything about it? Which takes us to the question of personal power. What is possible through my agency? What could change if I risked believing that I might have more power than I realise and stepped into that power?

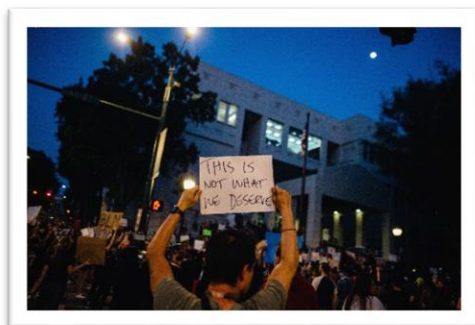


I've developed a conundrum which I've nicknamed 'The Donald Trump Syndrome'. I am so weary of the brash boldness of people who don't appear to be 'in it' for the common good. Who appear to have the

gumption (some would say arrogance) to step into their personal power in phenomenal, and often questionable ways. Meanwhile I have long lists in my head of amazing people I know – chances are you’d be on that list – who, if they had one tenth of the self-belief Donald Trump has, would be bringing about incredible change within their sphere of influence. Part of the intrinsic dilemma is that part of your beauty is your lack of arrogance, your humility and propensity for self-questioning. Those are some of the gifts that set these people apart as extra-ordinary. It is not about dispensing of those in favour of brash selfish action, but instead is about finding ways to call out that courage. WB Yeats was perhaps naming a similar challenge when he wrote: *“The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity”*! Humility is crucial – but never stepping into the possibility of who you could be, the change you could make possible is a ‘sin’ – in the best sense of the word!

Two hundred and fifty years ago Edmund Burke said “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good [people] to do nothing”. That’s been proved again and again in terrible regimes which have been allowed to grow up around good people who were either too frightened or numbed or who simply couldn’t work out how to stand against the tyrants. I wonder what judgements future societies will make of us as they look back with incredulity. I also wonder what your responsibilities and mine could be in bringing about change?

We get super squeamish about power. Many of us don’t believe we have any, hence the feelings of impotence. The author of ‘The Color Purple’, Alice Walker, said *‘The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.’* Challenging stuff! I wonder where you have more power than you realise? Where your circle of influence is, and how that could grow? Others of us feel uncomfortable about the power which we could have because we haven’t earned it – it has come to us through privilege. Factors way outside of our control may have put us in that place of privilege – perhaps



our gender, ethnicity, sexuality, levels of wealth or education and where in the world we happen to have been born. And then there are those of us who feel deeply uncomfortable or ambiguous about stepping into our power either because we fear ourselves, or we see power as a dangerous or self-serving thing. And it can be. *‘Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely’* wrote Shakespeare almost 500 years ago.

All important cautionary tales. And yet, and yet, if people who care, who dream of a different way of being in the world will not grow their spheres of influence and step into their power *for the sake of those who have missed out on their privilege* – we are all bereft. The world will continue to be led by ever more self-serving, power-hungry ‘leaders’. You are a leader! Nye Bevan, who led the establishment of the NHS summed it up when he said *‘the purpose of getting power is to be able to give it away’*. Our world needs you to come to terms with your own personal power! To understand it, to make peace with it and then to work out what your little bit is in bringing about the change our tired old world so desperately needs, on whatever scale and in whatever sphere you have expertise and passion.

A beautiful image of unexpected power came in the form of a group of women who harnessed their anger about the impact of fracking on their local area of Lancashire. They look like an unlikely force for

change, and yet their non-violent protest movement, The Anti-Fracking Nanas, succeeded in bringing an end to fracking in their region! Their strength? They looked at who they were and what they had going for them, rather than to what they didn't have, and majored on tea and kindness! 'We're cute, we're a bit broken, we're easily damaged – if the cops mishandle us, they're going to look awful for it' said one of their founders, Tina Rothery. Not everyone's style of action, but a fabulous example of standing tall in the power available to them!



The poet Mary Oliver, who died last year, wrote *'having chosen to claim my life, I have made for myself, out of work and love, a handsome life... I did not give to anyone the responsibility for my life. It is mine. I made it. And can do what I want to with it. Live it. Give it back, someday, without bitterness, to the wild and weedy dunes.'* What a beautiful testimony to a woman who chose to stand tall and claim her power.

OVER TO YOU...

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Where does all this leave you? What images or phrases stay with you and why?

What is your relationship with your own power? How do you feel about exerting more power? What power do you feel you currently have, in what spheres?

Where does what you have read interact with your own story?

TOOLS & RESOURCES:

1. Listen to Emeli Sande's [Read All About it, Pt III](#) and Keala Settle talking about and rehearsing [This is Me](#) from 'The Greatest Showman'. You may want to do this in two separate sittings! For each song, note down any words or phrases you notice and what stirs you about them. Where do you find yourself *'biting your tongue'*? Where would you like to learn to *'make no apology'* for being fully you? You are invited to make what you have written your own. What would you like to do with that?
2. We live in a stunningly beautiful world, alongside human beings who demonstrate immense acts of kindness, courage, transformation and generosity. A modern paraphrase of Jesus'

words from the Sermon on the Mount says *'Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth ...You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world'*! In what areas of your life might you bring out the very best flavour and colour in the world around you? What would that take?

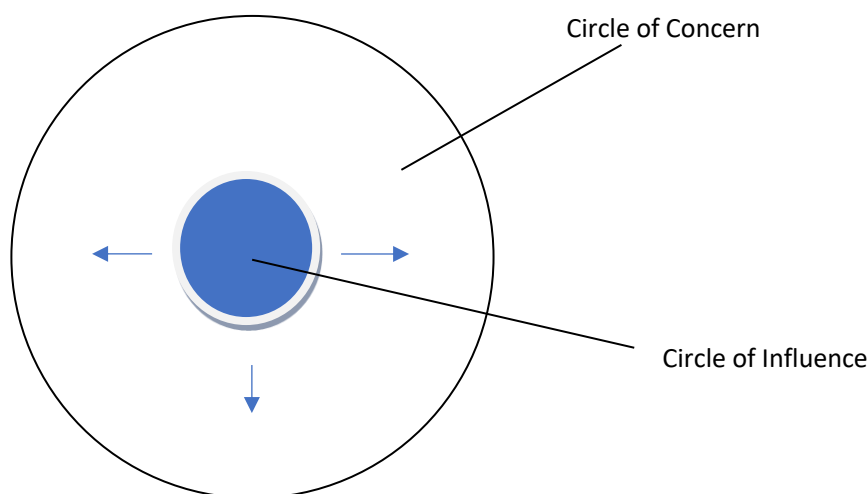
3. I came across this poignant metaphor in a local park. The tree had outgrown its original expected size. Someone else had wrongly predicted how much space it would need and it had literally cracked through the concrete surrounding it! Where might you or others have built inaccurate and unhelpful limits around your own growth and power? What do you choose to do with that? Who can help you? You may want to read the story of the ['Anti-Fracking Nanas'](#) to challenge your assumptions of who holds power!



4. Understanding and applying Stephen Covey's *'Circles of Influence and Concern'* is a helpful step towards unlocking and increasing our personal power. Take a look at the model laid out on the next page. Once you have understood it, take time to apply it to yourself. Draw out the circles and explore across different aspects of your life where your own circles of influence are and how you can choose to spend more time there.
5. Watch this clip from ['Finding Nemo'](#). In what areas of life does swimming against the enormity of the system seem impossible? In an area that you care deeply about or in your field of work, where could standing together with others bring about change and harness community power? Spend time reflecting on this in whatever way you find helpful.
6. Read Mary Oliver's poem ['When Death Comes'](#). Spend time reflecting on what resonates.

CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE & CONCERN:

A model developed by Stephen Covey in 'The 7 habits of Highly Effective People'ⁱ.



Our circle of concern includes all the things which concern, affect or worry us - our thoughts and feelings about our health, our families, our work, our relationships, world politics, the environment, our futures etc. Some of these things we have control over (and are therefore also within our circle of influence) and some are beyond our control and outside our circle of influence. For example I have influence over areas of my children's health and well-being (their diet, exercise, safety on the roads etc), whilst there are other areas I cannot influence (their genetic heritage, illnesses and diseases which are not lifestyle related, natural disasters etc). Spending time and energy in the area of my circle of concern outside my circle of influence is pointless, yet very tempting. Meanwhile our circle of influence includes every area of life where we hold influence to bring about change.

These two circles can be placed in various ways to overlap with each other, depending how much power we exert, how proactive/reactive we are, and where we choose to put our time and energies. Proactive people focus their efforts within their circle of influence – they work on things they can do something about, thus causing their circle of influence to grow. Reactive people focus their efforts in their circle of concern – focusing on the weakness of other people, the problems in their environment and circumstances over which they have no control. The outcome is often a feeling of victimisation, helplessness, blaming and accusing language, anxiety and negativity, leading to a shrinking circle of influence.

Choosing to focus within our circle of influence – the things we can change in ourselves – is a courageous and powerful decision. It leads to wholehearted living, to showing up and being counted, and being the solution to our challenges. It's a really effective tool to use in relation to anxiety levels, boundaries, relationships, perceived responsibilities, personal power and choices – wherever one notices a lot of time and energy being used in areas where we cannot have any influence.

CHOICES & ACTION

WHAT WILL THIS CHANGE? WHAT IS EMERGING?

It takes immense courage to be on the side of action rather than on the side of the complainers or critics. It is so much easier to point out why it's all a shambles, why those in power are disastrous, to shout on social media, to remain an armchair critic. There is little or no cost to that. I can enjoy my sense of moral or intellectual superiority, without having to engage in the complexities of the actual situation. It may be an important place to begin – to allow my feeling of *'that's all I can stand and I can't stand no more'* to build – but if we want to make a difference it is a cowardly place to remain.



In 1910 Theodore Roosevelt gave an address at the Sorbonne in Paris in which he said:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the person⁷ who points out how the strong one stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the one who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends herself in a worthy cause;

who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if she fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so her place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

For me personally, everything in me runs from this challenge. All moral courage disappears. Why would I choose to experience the pain and labour of such a struggle, to look into the mirror that is held up to my shortcomings and risk failure. I have felt it as keenly as ever in developing the resource you're currently working through. My inner-perfectionist and her partner in crime my inner-protector have shouted loudly at me throughout the process! Meanwhile my late father's words whisper gently to me from many years back *'perfect is the enemy of the good'*. And so I daily try to choose to *'dare greatly'* despite the feelings. What about you? It is no surprise that few of us choose such a path, when I can instead critique from a distance or switch off and pursue my own happiness. And that remains the dilemma for each one of us. We are nearing the close of this six stage journey. As you have travelled it, you have had the courage to peer from a number of perspectives at the desperate need for such daring for the sake of our world. To listen to your own inner stirrings and to ask where that takes you to a place of saying *'enough! I must act'*. That has taken real courage, and is an act of resistance in itself.

⁷ 'man' in the original (throughout) – I've adapted. Please adapt as appropriate to you.

We are not called to take on the whole world. It is not all your responsibility and that would lead to a place of total burn out. There is, however, a tiny patch of this beautiful planet where you long to make a

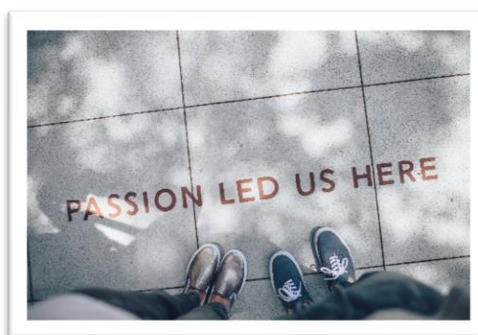


difference, where you can make your mark, with joy, with courage, with others. It begins within our smallest networks – how we love ourselves; our relationships, how we treat those we live with, those around us. How we remain grateful and mindfully present to the beauty around us, investing in what we long to see more of. It grows to our places of work or wider communities – what it is we deeply care about, what gifts we have (if we risk offering them) which can make a little bit of difference in

our own imperfect way. And perhaps it extends to bigger societal/environmental causes which we feel that deep burning passion to see change. It always chooses to operate from within our circle of influence, and in so doing to see that grow.

We live in an increasingly disenfranchised society. One of the unintended consequences of our amazing welfare state and other institutions designed to serve society has been an erosion of agency, of relationship, of personal responsibility⁸. Globalisation makes me feel like an even tinier cog in a giant wheel with dubious controllers. It has all become very big and inhuman. We have seen community ties and relationships gnawed away at as we expect the state or institution to pick up the pieces. We need to learn the art of prophetic imagination! We need poets, artists, hopeful creatives and thinkers to help us reimagine what we cannot see – like the boy in the emperor's new clothes who we visited at the start of this journey. Will you have the courage to stand on the side of hope, imagination and creativity?⁹

I said at the start that these resources, questions and exercises would simply act as a jumping off point. There is so much unsaid. This has not been a 'how to...' journey. It has been a journey inviting you to slow down and listen. It has been a journey into 'why' and an unearthing some of your 'what'. The 'how' is a question unanswered – that is the next part of your story – the next part of the adventure. We love adventures when retold as a gripping story once everything has culminated in success and the outcome is known and celebrated. We forget that along the way the adventure felt anything but guaranteed or exciting (otherwise it would not have been an adventure). When we are in the middle of it, an adventure can feel precarious, uncertain and lonely. We may long for it to end. We most need others with us – more of that in 'Keeping your travel kit stocked for the long haul'.



⁸ For the best exploration I know on this see Hilary Cottam's *'Radical Help'*, 2018 (or watch her TED talk [here](#))

⁹ If you need your eyes lifted to be inspired I recommend [Rob Hopkins'](#) *'From What is to What if: Unleashing the Power of Imagination to Create the Future we Want'*, 2019 and [Kate Raworth's](#) *Doughnut Economics* – inspirational theory and practice inviting us to meet the needs of all within the means of the planet.

What is stirring in you now? What has been bubbling up in you as you've worked through this material? What do you long for? What happens if you let your imagination run riot – removing all the limitations and dream? What do those dreams tell you? Where do you have leverage? What do you most care about? What do you want your life to stand for? What would you do if you weren't afraid – if you shook off your assumptions and took the plunge? None of us can do it all, but if we all do our little bit we can bring about the change we so long for. What is your little bit?

OVER TO YOU...

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Re-read the Roosevelt quote – what moves you? What does it mean for you? Where does it connect with the whole range of what you've been exploring on this journey?

Look back at the questions posed at the end of the piece above. Which ones are you drawn to? Find ways to spend time with those.

What is your little bit? What, after all the exploring of this journey, do you most feel called to take action on? What do you choose to do with that? What then will this change, and what needs to happen next to turn that into a reality?

TOOLS & RESOURCES:

1. Use the *'Writing a Personal Mission Statement'* exercise below as a way of stating who you are and how you want to choose to live.
2. Frederick Buechner said *'Your vocation in life is where your greatest joy meets the world's greatest need'*. You may be familiar with the Japanese concept of [Ikigai](#) meaning 'reason for being'. It provides a model to explore the point where your passion, your talent, what the world needs and what you can be paid for intersect. Does this model shed light on your 'what next?' question? Use it to shed light on some of what you've discovered on this journey.

3. Something in the words of this [audition scene](#) from La La Land moves me. Are you willing to be 'a fool who dreams' and acts on those dreams? What might that mean for you? Who do you want to dream with? If you'll risk being a dreamer, what do you want to do next?
4. Where do you need real courage to step out into something that is emerging in you? You may want to use the story of Peter walking on the water in [Matthew 14:22-36](#) to explore some of those themes for yourself. Jesus says to those in the boat 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid'. Peter responds by saying 'Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water', and Jesus replies 'Come'. And Peter takes the ridiculous action of stepping out of the boat and finds himself walking on the water (until he realises the impossibility of the situation and panics!). You may want to imagine yourself into the story – who would you be? What is your 'water'? What are your fears? What are your hopes? Who is with you? Record what you discover.
5. Making courageous decisions to do things differently has a cost. It's often tough and we can easily become intimidated and overwhelmed. It can seem too hard. If that might be you, listen to Carrie Newcomer's '[You can do this Hard Thing](#)' and let the affirmation settle on you. Listen too to Frank Turner's '[Journey of the Magi](#)'. Spend time reflecting on any lyrics which touch you and what arises for you. Who and what will you need to step forward with courage?
6. As you come to the end of this journey (and the beginning of the next!) how will you summarise your discoveries and set an action plan of how you want to choose to 'say yes to hope'? Who else do you want to involve? What will you do next? What rhythms do you need? How will you stay joyful? How can you celebrate and mark the journey you have been on and what will come next? (The final section of this journey may help you with practicalities on how to equip yourself for the long haul).



WRITING A PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENT EXERCISE:

Purpose: To work out what matters most to you and how you want to live. Create a personal manifesto to which you can refer back to help you make decisions in all areas of life – to give you the information to know if a certain course of action is in keeping with who you really are.

Time needed: Set aside a minimum of one hour for steps 1-5. Step 6 will be completed a week or so later and needs 30-60 mins. During the week you want to be able to carry it with you and reflect (add scribbled notes/doodles) in the course of daily life

Resources needed: Pen and paper

Instructions: Work through Steps 1-5, writing down your answers at each stage. Don't read them through first, just read each question as it is written and *respond without over-thinking* – record the first things which come into your head at each point.

Step 1: Warming up (max 10 mins)

Writing the first thing that comes into your head - take one minute to answer each of the following questions in a sentence (don't dwell on them or analyse what you write):

- What am I doing with my life right now, does it make me happy, do I feel fulfilled?
- What fills me with life? What saps life from me?
- Do I have a sense of calling/vocation, in which case how would I describe that?
- What do I keep gravitating towards? Is it different from what I am currently doing?
- What most excites me?
- What did I enjoy doing as a child? Do I still enjoy doing those things, am I doing any of those things?
- What do I do well, what are my unique gifts and strengths?

Step 2: Brainstorm ideas (10 mins)

Spend 2-3 minutes answering each of the following questions – again, don't dwell on them – just write what comes – don't edit, if you get stuck just write any words or phrases which come:

- Identify a person who has had a positive influence on your life – what are the qualities you most admire in them? What qualities have you gained from them?
- Define who you want to become – imagine it's 20 years in the future and you have achieved all you hoped to achieve – what have you accomplished? Who have you become? What have you done?
- What are the 10 things that are most rewarding to you today – what do you live for and love in life?

Step 3: Take a breather (5 mins)

Take a deep breath and put your pen down. Relax – take a few minutes away (make yourself a cup of tea or look out of the window).

Step 4: Gather your thoughts (5 mins)

Review what you've written – circle any ideas and thoughts which stand out to you, or any words or phrases that make your heart sing. Do you want to include these in your personal mission statement?

Step 5: Write a rough draft of your personal mission statement (30 mins)

There is no right or wrong approach – it could be a sentence or two, a page, a poem, bullet points – it will reflect your character and personality. Don't over-think – this is a first draft which can be changed! Let it sing – let it be you 😊

Step 6: Complete your personal mission statement (a week later)

Carry a copy of your draft mission statement with you through the next week. Have a look at it each day and edit it as you choose – add things in, take things out, play with it. If you want to redraft it each time, do, or just scribble round it. Don't let your inner critic comment – but let your soul emerge. Keep remembering this is for your benefit, not for anyone else's scrutiny.

At the end of the week write up your personal mission statement. It will still be a work in progress, and you can return to it to edit in future. Don't aim for perfection, but rather aim for something which starts to capture who you are – to be a compass against which you can test your decisions and behaviour.

Step 7: Periodically review and evaluate:

Regularly set aside time (every month? Every term?) to ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this mission statement represent the best within me?
- Do I feel direction, purpose, challenge and motivation when I review it?
- Am I living my life according to the ideals and purposes outlined in it? What do I want to change? You may want to journal your responses.

*Adapted from Stephen Covey:
'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' 1999 edition, p 81-86
& 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People Personal Workbook', p42-49*

KEEPING YOUR TRAVEL KIT STOCKED HOW TO EQUIP FOR THE LONG HAUL?

This journey has been bookended with an invitation to set up your 'Travel Kit', and then work out what's needed to keep it stocked. To equip yourself with what you need to travel well. To make time, to find travelling companions, to find rhythms which work and practices which allow you to stay envisioned and travel hopefully and joyfully. You are equipping yourself for a marathon, not a sprint. What do you need for the long haul? Let's imagine a few different elements. At the end of each section is a text

box with an invitation to pause and set action points. You are invited to use whatever tools or approaches have worked for you over this journey to wrestle with these questions. 'The Blossoming Seed Exercise', offered at the end of this document, may provide another way of digging into these questions.



TRAVELLING COMPANIONS: There is an African proverb which says '*if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together*'. We need each other! What have you learned about travelling companions on this journey? Who are those people for you, both formally and informally? Who else would you like to involve and how? Who will walk with you? Who will act as your tour guide? Where will you go to tend tired feet, to check your equipment is in good working order and who will help you to get up again when you fall or lose your way?

STOP! Take time to answer these questions on travelling companions and set action points.

What do you need to do now to make that happen?



RHYTHMS, WISDOM & PRACTICES: What rhythms, wisdom and practices will you rely on to help you pace yourself, to remind you who you are and why you set out on this journey? Are there practices you have discovered or rediscovered during this journey which you'd like to embed into daily life – how will you do that? To ensure you take adequate rest when needed and fill up with water and nourishment along the way? How will you remain joyful when the way is tough? How will you find laughter and remain grateful? What maps will you use – what is the truth that you hold on to and the wisdom you will come back to? How will you keep reminding yourself of the deepest values you hold which emboldened you to

undertake this crazy journey? How will you keep yourself stoked emotionally, mentally, spiritually and physically?

STOP! Take time to answer these questions on rhythms, wisdom and practices and set action points.

What do you need to do now to make that happen?

YOU ARE ENOUGH: How will you hold onto your sense of self on the journey ahead? There is a brilliant T-shirt I saw recently which said *‘Be yourself – everyone else is already taken’* (An Oscar Wilde quote apparently). I long to live in a world where each of us learns to fully inhabit our true selves. *‘How*



do I become the most Emily-ish Emily possible?’ I am sometimes tempted to try to be the most Jane-ish Emily I can be, because I am so impressed by Jane, that I find myself emulating her. In so doing I miss the point.

I have also learned that one of my lifetime’s tasks is *‘learning to lived loved’*. To know that I am enough. The invitation of the Christian worldview (whether that is yours or not) is to begin with the belief that you are loved. You are made in the image of God, and so you are (more than)

OK and you are beloved. To travel healthily on from here it makes a huge difference if you know yourself to be enough, to be loved, and to be OK! Knowing that means that your actions spring, not from a need to prove yourself, but from a deeply grounded place. What a relief!

STOP! Take time to answer these questions on holding onto your sense of self/learning to live loved and set action points. What do you need to do now to make that happen?

RESPONDING TO THE GIFT: If these resources have fed you and you’d like to give something back to Courage to Thrive to support what we do (including developing a Poverty Truth Commission locally and delivering ‘Step out of the Traffic’ community workshops), that would be great. To give you some ideas – if you had bought this as a book that may have cost £10. If you’d booked a block of three coaching sessions that would have been around £150. Or perhaps you’d like to donate on a monthly basis over the next year or two, or get in touch to discuss other ideas? Alternatively, you are welcome to find your own ways to value this gift by paying it forward joyfully and generously elsewhere. How do you want to choose to value it? If you choose to give to Courage to Thrive, details are given below¹⁰.

¹⁰ You can make a one-off BACS transfer, or set up a monthly Standing Order with the reference *‘journey gift + your initials’* to the following account: Courage to Thrive CIC, a/c: 65799288, sort code: 08 92 99.

If you know of someone else who could benefit from this journey, you are very welcome to pass on the material (in its entirety please – get in touch if you have other ideas). If you'd like to share back to me something of what this journey has meant for you, please do drop me an email – I'd love to hear!

One of my personal learnings through following this journey for myself over the past few months has been to reiterate my deepest passion and calling: to find ways to support people like you to be the best they can be! We often set out on our adult lives and careers with great aspirations, which gradually get eroded as we engage with the reality of the institutions we deal with and the painfully stubborn challenges and realities we discover along the way. To catalyse and maintain the kind of courage and action needed at that point is a profound challenge. If you'd like to find out if our Courage to Thrive team can help you do that in a paid capacity through [coaching](#) or setting up [coaching circles](#) or catalysing wiser action amongst [your team](#) through training, reflective spaces or facilitated conversations, please get in touch!

STOP! Take time to think about these invitations around how you would like to respond to this gift and set action points.

What do you need to do now to make that happen?

This is a courageous journey and few take it. Perhaps that is what Jesus meant when he invited us to go through the narrow gate '*which leads to life*' (Matthew 7:13,14). Later in the Bible, its readers are invited to '*take hold of the life that is truly life*' (1 Timothy 6:19). I wonder what taking hold of the life which is truly life might mean for you? It is my hope that this journey has taken you one step closer to that. Thank you for having the courage to risk embarking on this adventure. Go well and enjoy!¹¹



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¹¹ There is one final exercise for you on the next pages: 'From Seed to Blossoming – An Exercise'. Enjoy!

FROM SEED TO BLOSSOMING - AN EXERCISE:

Purpose: Using the image of a seed and growing plant, to reflect on what I need to allow me to blossom and thrive.


Time needed: 20-60 mins, plus reflection time as required.

Other resources needed: Piece of paper and pens; if you want to get more creative go for it! If you have any seeds to hand and flowers to reflect on – bring them along!

Instructions: If you had never seen a seed before and hadn't been told what it was, you wouldn't believe it to be possible. That small dead looking speck or lump is like an impossible capsule of bursting life! We




are like that seed. Each designed to thrive and grow into our own unique flower, tree or fruit. In order for that seed to thrive, it needs various elements – if it's kept in a box in the dark it remains only a seed. Using that image, you are invited to reflect on what you need to enable you to flourish. Draw the following out onto a piece of paper and doodle/write what it brings to mind. There are some prompts/thoughts below if you need them:



What would I like to change to allow me to blossom...

Sunlight: what brings me joy? how do I want to prioritise this?	Support: who supports me? where do I want to seek more support?
Space: how & where do I need more space?	Soil & Water: what feeds me? where am I thirsty? what do I want to change?
Pest Protection: what are the 'pests' for me? what do I want to do to protect myself?	

www.couragetothrive.org.uk
from surviving to thriving 

Sunlight: Sunlight is essential for all life on earth. What is it I grow towards – what underpins my vision? How do I starve myself of light? How can I unblock the windows and let more sunlight in? How can I wonder & notice? Be playful & creative – this isn't self-indulgent, it's the source of life.

Soil & Water: What do I sink my roots into? How many nutrients are there in that soil, and how do I keep it topped up. Soil becomes spent and poor if it isn't replenished. This isn't an optional extra, it's how we need to live. Water is similar on a daily basis. What rhythms and nurturing feed you?

Space: Without space a plant is crowded out and can't reach its best. There are things in life which crowd in which we cannot change, but there are also 'space stealers' which build up without us noticing – what might these be for you and how can you reclaim space to allow you to thrive?

Support: runner beans take off once they find the cane to trail up – without it they flounder. We are designed to work in community – again this is not an optional extra, it is not selfish, it's human!

Pest Protection: pests can come in the guise of unhelpful habits, beliefs, patterns, time wasters – not always easy to tackle, but if we can name them we can be on our guard against them.
