

Lesson 4

Encountering God

The Journey to the Cross



You are now to the point in your journey with Christ where you are ready to encounter God in a very special way. You have made a decision to follow Him, you have learned what Jesus did on the cross, you have taken the important step of being water-baptized, and you have learned about deliverance. Now it's time to prepare yourself for a life-changing experience called the Encounter Retreat.

What is an Encounter?

An Encounter is a divine appointment with God. It is a specific time in your life when God “shows up” on your behalf. It is marked by His presence, His power, and His deliverance. When you encounter God, you are forever changed by the experience.

The Scriptures abound with many instances of individuals who had their own special encounters with God. Consider Jacob, who after wrestling with the angel at Peniel said, “I have seen God face to face” (Gen. 32:30 KJV). After that experience, Jacob’s name was changed, noting the transforming power of his encounter, and always thereafter he walked with a limp as a reminder of the night he wrestled with the angel of the Lord. In the New Testament, person after person was radically changed as each came into contact with Jesus. Because of encountering Him, sick bodies were healed, tormented minds were set free, blind eyes were opened, and even the dead were raised to life. There is truly no end to what can happen when a person encounters God.

Although God is the one who initiates the encounter, deciding the when, where, and how of it, you have an important part to play in the process. Your role is to make yourself available to God and to be willing to cooperate with Him in whatever He wishes to do in your life. Your attitude must be one of surrender, acknowledging Him as the potter who has the right to do with you whatever He chooses. If you will entrust yourself to Him, take the step of going on an Encounter, and maintain an open heart, you will have your own uniquely special experience with God. And just like all the people in the Bible, you will never be the same!

What practical preparations should you make to get ready for your Encounter Retreat weekend?

In the days preceding your Encounter, you will, of course, take care of those ordinary things that we all have to deal with. You will want to make sure that you leave your family on the right note. Leave your home in order, with all details taken care of. It is important that family members understand where you are going and why and are prepared to take care of themselves in your absence.

Ladies, see that your children will have proper supervision while you are gone. Clean the house and do the laundry. Make sure your husband and children have something to eat. You want to do whatever you can to make it easy for them while you are gone. Husbands, if you are the one going on the Encounter, leave your home in order, too. Fill the car with gas, mow the grass, and tend to those little things that you've been meaning to get around to. The main idea is to leave home on a good note, with no room for the devil to plant a seed of resentment in your loved ones because you did not provide for them before leaving.

Most importantly, do not leave home angry with a family member. Resolve any problems before going on your Encounter so that you will be free to concentrate on what the Lord wants to do in you. You want to do everything within your power to make sure that you arrive at the retreat center free of worry, anxiety, or unresolved issues concerning your family.

Another point to make here deals with your employment. Make all arrangements at work sufficiently in advance. If you need to leave early, get permission. Be honest and upfront with your employer about where you are going and why. Most people are happy to work with you. If you have a difficult employer, don't yield to the temptation to use deceit or manipulation to get what you want. Trust God to make a way for you at the right time in the right way as you conduct yourself in the right manner.

How do you prepare yourself spiritually for the Encounter?

Even more important than the physical preparations you make are the spiritual ones necessary to ensure that you have a good Encounter. The most important thing you can do to get yourself ready is to consciously develop an attitude of openness and transparency before the Lord. In the days leading up to the Encounter, make a deliberate step of surrender to the Lord and whatever He wants to do. Ask the Holy Spirit to remove preconceived ideas from your mind and to enable you to go as an empty vessel waiting to be filled. Allow the Lord to stir up an expectancy in you that you will indeed encounter Him on your weekend.

Many things will pull at you and try to distract you from your purpose, but decide ahead of time that nothing will stop you from having your encounter with God. Listed below are a few of the things that you might need to deal with to prepare yourself spiritually for the Encounter:

- **Personal relationships**—Sometimes those we love most, such as our families and friends, are our greatest hindrance in following God. You must determine to follow your Savior, no matter what (Matt. 16:24–25). You must give Him free rein to change you and mold you into His image without worrying about what others will think of you. You must put Him first, before all others (Mark 3:31–35; 10:29–30). When you go on your Encounter, therefore, lay aside all thoughts of those you are leaving at home. If you bring the problems of home or relationships with you into your Encounter, you will be distracted from what God wants to do in you.

- **Personal plans and ambition**—Are you going on this Encounter with an agenda of your own? Do you want God to work in your life, but only in certain areas and ways? Are you trying to dictate to God what to do and how to do it? To truly encounter the Lord, you must lay aside preconceived ideas of what God may or may not do. You have to die to yourself (John 12:24) and be open and transparent before Him. If you will do this, God will move in powerfully and accomplish the work He wants to do.
- **Personal possessions**—The things you own can mean too much to you. Every good thing you have was given to you by God (James 1:17), and He is more than able to take care of your things while you are away on an Encounter. The Word of God is clear. If you seek Him and His kingdom, He will take care of you and provide for your needs (Matt. 6:33). Nothing is so valuable as to be of more worth than encountering the living God.

What will you experience on the Encounter?

The effects of an Encounter are many and varied, depending on what God specifically does in your heart. You may experience a freedom that you've never known before, a new confidence in God's love for you, a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit, and boundless joy in the goodness of God. But whatever happens, we find that, in particular, many people experience the following changes:

- **Repentance (Ps. 51:3–4)**—At the Encounter, most people will come face to face with their own sinfulness and need for forgiveness. All of us have sinned and need to periodically examine our hearts for any areas that are not pleasing to God. The Encounter provides the perfect time and place to get right with God in any way you need to. The repentance will be characterized by a change in life and attitude, not just by sorrow or emotional feelings of regret.
- **New direction (Matt. 4:18–20)**—When Peter and Andrew, ordinary fishermen, encountered Jesus, their lives took a drastic new direction. They left behind all the old and familiar and launched out into

the deep waters of following the Lord. It can be the same for you. The Encounter is an opportunity for you to start on a new course, no matter what your past has been like.

- **Transformed character (Gen. 32:1–8, 27–28)**—When Jacob had an encounter with the Lord, his relationship with his brother Esau changed. Even his very name changed. You will be forever changed in your innermost being if you will allow the Lord to have His way with you at the Encounter.
- **Renewed love (John 21:14–19)**—In the New Testament, Peter boldly declared that he was willing to follow the Lord, even to death, but as the story unfolds, we read how He denied the Lord three times. Then after Jesus’ resurrection, Peter was restored and given a place of authority. He was given a second chance to prove Himself, and prove Himself he did as mightily evidenced in the book of Acts. God will give you a second chance, too. If you let Him have His way with you on the Encounter, you will find yourself falling in love with Him all over again, and you will be able to walk with the fire of your “first love” into the new path He has for you.

Your Encounter weekend is a weekend like no other. It is a landmark event in your Christian journey. As you grow in God, you will look back on that event as a turning point in your life. At the Encounter, you will come face to face with Christ at the cross. At the cross, you will find forgiveness, joy, and a new reason for living. Let’s embark on this journey together, and let’s get ready to encounter God!

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it so important for everyone to go on an Encounter?
2. Name someone from the Bible who encountered God, and describe his experience.

3. What change do you hope to experience on your Encounter?
4. What steps will you take to get ready for your Encounter?