

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Exploring Spirituality: Ways to Encounter God

Meeting with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Version 1.0 - 11/4/10



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

Curriculum Development: The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry**. **General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntihuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout:** Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

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Ways to Encounter God

This presentation is designed for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus.

Learning Objectives

1. Review common obstacles to encountering God
2. Understand how people have seen God as “dwelling in” various places
3. Find where the Bible says God dwells now
4. Discover some specific practices which bring you closer to God
5. Learn some questions to ask yourself about your ability to encounter God

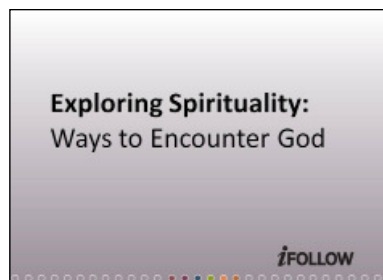
Content Outline

1. Obstacles to encountering God; experiences, definitions, expectations
2. Toward an incarnational theology
3. How can I encounter God?
4. Some questions to ask yourself
5. Putting it all together

Background Material for the Presenter

John Dunne wrote about some early Spanish sailors who reached the continent of South America after an arduous voyage. The fleet sailed into the headwaters of the Amazon, an expanse of water so wide the sailors thought they were still at sea. It never occurred to them to drink the water, since they expected it to be salt water, and as a result some of these sailors died of thirst.

That scene of men dying of thirst even as their ships floated on the world’s largest source of fresh water is in many ways a metaphor for our age. Is it possible that many people starve to death spiritually while all around them is life-giving nourishment? Is it possible that all around us are the footprints of God and rumors of transcendence in places we never thought of looking? And that if we lived with more awareness of the divine, the

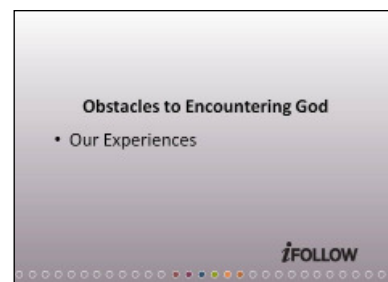


eyes of our hearts open to those mysteries and wonders, we might experience God in meaningful and life transforming ways?

Before we explore how it might be possible to encounter God more often in our lives, it would be helpful to acknowledge the various obstacles that exist to that experience.

Obstacles to Encountering God

Our Experiences: It is hard to be open to the idea of an encounter with God if our experience with God or with those who believe in God has been negative. Let's face it, people who call themselves religious have perpetrated terrible things in the name of God. The list is a veritable smorgasbord of atrocities: killing abortion doctors, calling for the execution of homosexuals, genocide in the name of religion, the Inquisition, name calling and labeling, slavery, environmental plunder, and on and on.

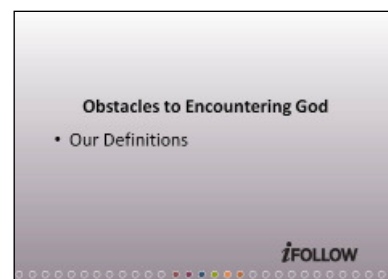


The reality is, many people simply don't have a desire to believe in the God of people who perpetuate such crimes against humanity, the environment and social justice. If what these believers stand for is what God stands for, then forget it, say many people.

It is also possible that our own experiences with God are obstacles to meaningful encounters with God. If we feel we have been disappointed by God or let down by God or ignored by God or God hasn't measured up to our expectations of how God should act on our or other's behalf, then it becomes increasingly difficult to allow ourselves the possibility of awareness and enlightenment about God's transforming presence in our lives. Any footprints we might see of God seem more like boot marks on our backside where we feel run over by God.

Disappointment with God or with God's believers are huge obstacles that often prevent people from being open to even acknowledging the existence of God much less a meaningful encounter with God.

Our Definitions: What we conceive God to be, how we define God, also affects our experience of God. Is God personal? Is God one with whom you can have a real and intimate relationship, a two-way conversation? Is God simply the universal energy and spirit that acts as the force behind all cosmic life? Is God nothing more than the best aspirations of humanity, the love and compassion manifested by people, that which is most true in the deepest core of the human spirit? How you define



God will determine whether you seek a meaningful encounter with God.

Our Expectations: How you define God also shapes the expectations you have of God.

If God is a personal God who wants a loving relationship with you, then your expectation of God for being loving and personal is high. And then if your experience doesn't match that expectation, you're tempted to lose trust or hope or confidence.

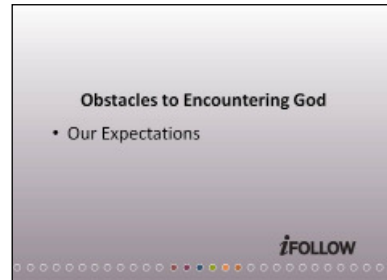
Or, many people have the paradigm that God only shows up in certain places or certain ways or to certain people. Their expectations for God are very specific and limited and localized. For example, people in the Old Testament localized God's presence primarily in the temple in Jerusalem or in the ark of the covenant that resided in the temple. So that if the ark was removed and taken somewhere, God's presence went with it. God was primarily confined to a building or piece of furniture or mediated only through priests.

The difficulty with that paradigm was that their expectations limited their acceptance of God's presence elsewhere. So, for example, when Jesus came on the scene and claimed to be from God (John described Jesus as the human incarnation of God), the religious leaders ultimately rejected Him. John put it this way: "But although the world was made through him, the world didn't recognize him when he came. Even in his own land and among his own people, he was not accepted." (John 1:10-11, NLT)

Our expectations have a profound effect on our openness and willingness to experience God. Expectations can be big obstacles to encountering God. One of the great spiritual writers of our time, Philip Yancey, wrote a book titled *Finding God in Unexpected Places*. He talks about the tendency for religious people under the duress of contemporary crises to withdraw from the world, "to pull up the drawbridge and retreat behind a protective moat. The 'castle' into which Christians retreat is the church. That makes me sad because God does not limit himself to the four walls of a sanctuary." (p. ix)

He goes on in his book to describe glimpses of the divine in surprising ways and places. "As a Christian journalist, I have learned to look for traces of God. I have found those traces in unexpected places: among the chief propagandists of a formerly atheistic nation, in a leprosarium in India and an Atlanta slum and even a Chicago health club, at a meeting of Amnesty International, on the Phil Donahue show, at a weekend retreat with twenty Jews and Muslims, in the prisons of Peru and Chile, and even in the plays of Shakespeare." (p. xi)

His point is well made. God is not confined or limited to the four walls of religious institutions or sacred places. God shows up in the most unexpected places and ways. The issue is, do you see it when it happens? Do your expectations and views of God allow for it?



Toward an Incarnational Theology

The door to encountering God (wherever God chooses to show up) is being able to accept the possibility that God will show up anywhere God wants to show up. Central to this theological paradigm is the incarnation, God's choice to show up on earth in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth.

Here's the way the gospel writer John (a disciple of Jesus) put it: "So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father." (John 1:14, NLT)

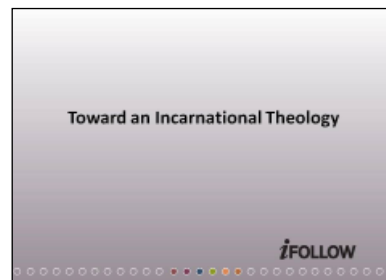
The phrase "lived here on earth" literally means "pitched his tent" in the original language. This is a direct allusion to the Old Testament story of how God gave directions for the people of Israel to build a portable temple, a large tent or "tabernacle" to house the presence of God. The design of that tabernacle (including compartments, furniture, lay out) was later incorporated into a permanent structure in Jerusalem built of stone by King Solomon which became one of the great wonders of the ancient world.

It's important to note that even at this early stage, some people were able to recognize that God did not and could not dwell in an earthly structure. Take a look at the words Solomon himself prayed, at the dedication of that temple: "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built." (1 Kings 8:27, NIV)

Still, to most Jews, this tabernacle or temple was considered the most sacred place on earth because God's presence was there. If you wanted to encounter God, you went to the temple in Jerusalem or you stood outside the tabernacle in the wilderness wherever the tabernacle was set up as the people wandered from their slavery in Egypt to the promised land of freedom in Canaan. The point is, the presence of God was localized in a structure, first the mobile tabernacle and later the permanent temple.

So, as John the disciple wrote, when Jesus came, He (the new tabernacle of God) brought the presence of God into human flesh and took that presence with Him wherever He went. No longer was God only in the temple. God was now in a person. And the stories of Jesus in the Gospels describe what happened when people encountered God through Jesus.

But then the theology became even more transformational. According to the New Testament, after Jesus left earth and returned to God, (whom Jesus had the nerve to call "Father," claiming a shocking intimacy of relationship) the believers became the body of Christ. Jesus now lived on through the life of the new spiritual community established in His name. God's presence was made manifest through the wider body. "Now all of you



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together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27, NLT)

God was choosing to incarnate Himself, not just with Jesus anymore, but with His followers. Notice the language of temple and tabernacle in this text: "We are God's house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also joined together as part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit." (Ephesians 2:20-22, NLT)

This radical paradigm suggested that God chose to bring His presence into not just one location in the desert or at Jerusalem, and not in just one person in the form of Jesus, but now in many people in many places all over the globe. God's presence is made manifest through His people.

That's why John the disciple, when he wrote some letters to believers in the Middle East, expanded this paradigm by suggesting a powerful and profound implication: "Let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love." (1 John 4:7-8, NLT)

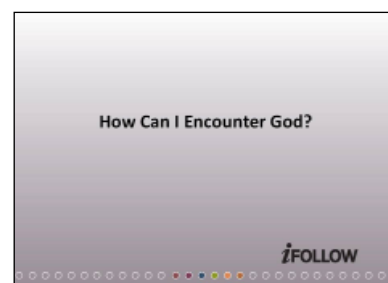
God exists where love exists. God's presence is experienced and encountered when love is experienced and encountered. In fact, the text suggests that even people who may not know Jesus or God personally but who manifest genuine love and compassion are providing an encounter with God.

So now the incarnational theology extends full length: God is in the tabernacle moving around in the desert; God is localized in the temple in Jerusalem; God is in the person Jesus all over Palestine and Judea; God is manifested through the global community of believers; and God is even encountered through people who genuinely love and care even though they may not know God or Jesus personally. Wherever love is, God is, because God is love.

How Can I Encounter God?

So what are ways that God chooses to reveal Himself to us? How might we encounter God? Now that we know God lives beyond the four walls of the church or synagogue or temple and reveals Himself beyond even the life of Jesus, how might we encounter God?

Perhaps the most important issue here is the ability to develop a heightened awareness (eyes to see) of the divine all around us. The famous poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning penned the words, "Earth is



crammed with heaven, And every bush aflame with God, But only those who see take off their shoes.” Here are some questions to ask that might increase your vision:

When is the last time you truly noticed an act of love and compassion manifested by someone? Describe the unselfish love you saw in that situation. How was God revealed there?

Jesus often told contemporary stories about people to illustrate the what He called the Kingdom of God, God’s presence in the world. These include the story of the good Samaritan who boldly intervened to save a beaten and bruised traveler; a father who welcomed home his profligate and prodigal son by throwing a big party, and then imploring the resentful older brother to join them at the party; a shepherd who risked personal danger in order to find the lost sheep and then invited his friends to an ecstatic celebration of his find.

“Jesus himself looked for God not among the pious at the synagogue, but in a widow who had two pennies left to her name and in a tax collector who knew no formal prayers; he found his spiritual lessons in sparrows sold at a market, and in wheat fields and wedding banquets, and yes, even in the observations of a half-breed foreigner with five failed marriages. Jesus was a master at finding God in unexpected places.” (Yancey, pp. ix-x)

Where have you noticed deep, intense desire recently, a longing or passion? What was the desire for? Who was involved? How did the person go about trying to fill that longing? Where was God encountered there?

Journalist G.K Chesterton used to say that a man who knocks on the door of a brothel is knocking for God. It is an intriguing concept. Actually, Jesus affirmed that idea in His conversation with a woman whom He met one day at a well. Hers was a life of relational brokenness. She had already had five husbands and was living with yet another man.

Jesus recognized her deep desire and longing for love, for meaningful intimacy and deep connection and belonging that continued to drive her search with men. He acknowledged and affirmed that thirst for love in her. And then, in a powerful paradigm shift for her, redirected her thirst to Living Water, an encounter with God, an experience with God, who refuses to condemn or withdraw from failure but who chooses instead to engage with love and acceptance. This “outcast” woman was the first person to whom Jesus openly revealed himself as the Messiah, the Sent of God. Jesus modeled this Living Water perfectly with this broken, isolated woman, so effectively that she ended up bringing her entire village (with whom she endured a mutual resentment and isolation) out to meet Jesus.

When is the last time you were out in nature and felt a sense of mystery and awe that caused you to feel you were in the midst of something bigger than yourself? Where does that feeling of mystery, awe and wonder come from? What would cause you to feel a part of something bigger than you? Where is God in that experience?

Novelist Walker Percy has observed, “There may be signs of [God’s] existence, but they point both ways and are therefore ambiguous and so prove nothing ... The wonders of the universe do not convince those most conversant with the wonders, the scientists themselves.”

Although there are certainly many scientists who in fact do see God in the wonders of the universe, Percy is right: nature gives off mixed signals. Like humanity, the rest of the created world presents a strange mixture of beauty and horror, of splendid cooperation and savage competition. Even the New Testament makes the statement: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22) In so many respects it is true: nature is our fallen sister, not our mother.

C.S. Lewis, the noted author and scholar, used to say that the believer doesn’t go to nature to learn the truth about God—the message is too garbled—but rather to fill theological words with meaning. “Nature never taught me that there exists a God of glory and of infinite majesty. I had to learn that in other ways. But nature gave the word ‘glory’ a meaning for me. I still do not know where else I could have found one.”

In other words, nature **can** be a place where we encounter God as we already believe God to be, where we can experience personal and intimate episodes of awe, wonder and mystery, where we can witness something in that context that stirs within us a sense that there is something bigger and more powerful than ourselves. Nature helps us recognize that we are not the center of the universe, there are other sources of power and life beyond us, that we are but inhabitants in a universe of magnificent and mysterious complexity. An appreciation for God as the Source can be enhanced in these contexts.

The poet and song writer in the biblical book of Psalms put it this way:

“God’s glory is on tour in the skies,
God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.
Madame Day holds classes every morning,
Professor Night lectures each evening.

Their words aren’t heard,
their voices aren’t recorded,
But their silence fills the earth:
unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.

God makes a huge dome
for the sun—a superdome!
The morning sun's a new husband
leaping from his honeymoon bed,
The day breaking sun an athlete
racing to the tape.

That's how God's Word vaults across the skies
from sunrise to sunset,
Melting ice, scorching deserts,
warming hearts to faith.”
(Psalm 19:1-6, The Message)

When is the last time you used Sacred Scripture to encounter God? How you can read in a way that facilitates an experience of divine revelation in what you read? Have you asked yourself as you read, what does this say to me about God? Better yet, what is God trying to say to me in these verses?

So often Scripture is used by people to prove some theological point in order to win an argument. The Bible becomes a weapon or a tool to shore up our rightness or another's wrongness. Or Scripture is used as a resource for sacred information, a knowledge base, the ultimate treasury of theology, so if we can simply learn enough from it we can further ourselves along the path to holiness.

Like many of the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They prided themselves for how much they knew of Sacred Scriptures in comparison to the uninformed public. Many could recite by memory lengthy passages, even entire biblical books (they were required to learn this in their schools). Consequently, they felt superior to other people.

But Jesus had some strong words for this limited approach to spirituality. Simply reciting and knowing Scripture wasn't nearly enough. Here's how he put it: "You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren't willing to receive from me the life you say you want." (John 5:39-40, The Message)

The primary point of Sacred Scriptures is to facilitate a living, meaningful encounter with

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the God of Scripture. It's not just about knowing information, it's about encounter, experience, relationship. Scripture is to be approached as a divine communication opportunity, to hear the voice of God speak to your deepest soul, to listen to the words of God in a way that lets them tug at your heart.

Like the two men who, after witnessing the death of Jesus, walked the dusty road home completely disillusioned and discouraged. Jesus joined them, though they didn't recognize him, and engaged in conversation about the recent events in Jerusalem. Taking the opportunity, Jesus spent the rest of the journey explaining to them the Scriptures about who the Messiah was and what was to happen to the Messiah and why; how the events fit into the over-arching purpose of God.

Later that night, after Jesus left them and they realized who He was, they commented to each other, "Didn't our hearts feel strangely warm as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32, NLT) And within the hour, they hurried back to Jerusalem with a new sense of faith in God and passion for community with the other followers of Jesus.

That's the point of Scripture, to give us an encounter with the living God that renews and builds our faith and confidence in God and God's purpose for our lives, to empower us with a passion to live lives of love and compassion for others like Jesus did. So that as others connect with us, they can encounter the God of love living in and through us.

Putting It All Together

Philip Yancey wrote the memoirs of Dr. Brand, a surgeon and leprosy specialist who lived a third of his life in India. Accompanying Dr. Brand (who was 80 years old at the time) back to India, Yancey was able to meet scores of people who had been loved and helped by this famous and beloved physician. Among others, he met a man

named Sadan, one of Dr. Brand's leprosy patients. Sadan looked like a miniature version of Gandhi: skinny, balding, perched cross-legged on the edge of a bed. In a high-pitched, singsong voice he told Yancey wrenching stories of past rejection: the classmates who made fun of him in school, the driver who kicked him—literally, with his shoe—off a public bus, the many employers who refused to hire him despite his training and talent, the hospitals that turned him away.

"When I got to Vellore, I spent the night on the Brands' verandah, because I had nowhere else to go," Sadan said. "That was unheard of for a person with leprosy back then. I can still remember when Dr. Brand took my infected, ulcerated feet in his hands. I had been to many doctors. A few had examined my hands and feet from a distance, but Dr. Brand and his wife were the first medical workers who dared to touch me. I had nearly forgotten what human touch felt like."



Sadan then recounted the elaborate sequence of medical procedures—tendon transfers, nerve strippings, toe amputations, and cataract removal—performed by Dr. Brand and his ophthalmologist wife. He spoke for half an hour. His past life was a catalogue of human suffering. But as he and Yancey sipped their last cup of tea in Sadan’s home, just before leaving to catch a plane to England, Sadan made this astonishing statement: “Still, I must say that I am now happy that I had this disease!”

“Happy?” Yancey asked incredulous.

“Yes,” replied Sadan. “Apart from leprosy, I would have been a normal man with a normal family, chasing wealth and a higher position in society. I would never have known such wonderful people as Dr. Paul and Dr. Margaret, and I would never have known the God who lives in them!”

Handout in this Package

1. Participant’s Notes



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Additional Resources

Armstrong, Karen (1994) *A History of God: The 4,000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Random House Publishing Group.

Chesterton, G. K. (2004). *Orthodoxy*. Dover Publications.

Hall, Thelma (1988). *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*. Paulist Press.

Kovacs, Debonnaire (2001). *Gardens of the Soul: Cultivating a Devotional Life with God*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Tolstoy, Leo (2005) *The Kingdom of God is Within You: Christianity Not as a Mystic Religion but as a New Theory of Life*. Barnes & Noble.

Tozer, A. W. (2008). *The Pursuit of God: Finding the Divine in the Everyday*. Wilder Publications.

Yancey, Philip (1995). *Finding God in Unexpected Places*. New York, NY: Moorings.

Websites

The Houwen Society continues the legacy of Henri Nouwen, one of the most widely respected writers on spiritual topics from recent decades. Its purpose is “to foster the spirituality of solitude, community and compassion that was embodied in the life and teaching of Nouwen.” The organization operates a web site the lists the more than 40 books he wrote and provides many other resources, including audio files of Houwen speaking. His materials provide many ways to encounter and experience God. Accessible at: www.HenriNouwen.org

The Lectio Divina is the ancient practice of praying and reading the Bible to encounter God. This web site explains the simple process: www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html

Discussion Questions

1. When is the last time you truly noticed an act of love and compassion manifested by someone? Describe the unselfish love you saw in that situation. How was God revealed there?
2. Where have you noticed deep, intense desire recently, a longing or passion? What was the desire for? Who was involved? How did the person go about trying to fill that longing? Where was God encountered there?
3. Journalist G.K Chesterton used to say that a man who knocks on the door of a brothel is knocking for God. What do you think he meant?
4. When is the last time you were out in nature and felt a sense of mystery and awe that caused you to feel you were in the midst of something bigger than yourself? Where does that feeling of mystery, awe and wonder come from? What would cause you to feel a part of something bigger than you? Where is God in that experience?
5. What method might you begin immediately to come closer to an encounter with God?

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Group Activities

Purpose: To practice one of the ways to encounter God described in the presentation: finding God in the Bible.

Preparation: Post the instructions below on a board or flipchart. Place chairs in small circles of three or four. Be sure there are enough Bibles for each participant to have one. Prayerfully choose a short passage of a Psalm, a biblical prayer, part of Isaiah or Jeremiah; something contemplative and loving that you feel God is leading you to choose for this particular group of people. Choose only a half dozen verses or so.

Assignment: Say: “Here is one of the sets of questions offered in the presentation, as a way to encounter God: ‘When is the last time you used Sacred Scripture to encounter God? How can you read in a way that facilitates an experience of divine revelation in what you read? Have you asked yourself as you read, what does this say to me about God? Better yet, what is God trying to say to me in these verses?’ Take a few minutes to allow some discussion of whether those in the room have tried this or not. Gauge their willingness to give it a try, with a simple passage and some help from the instructions posted. Have them get into the small circles and find the passage you have chosen in a Bible. If the versions differ, so much the better. Let them follow the instructions with as little guidance from you as possible.

Debrief: In the total group, share what emotions and reactions come up as a result of this exercise. Did people feel they encountered God? Did it feel contrived, or pretended? Encourage all to share the real truth about how they felt, and to react respectfully to each other.

Time: Allow five minutes for the preliminary discussion of the questions from the presentation. Allow at least 15 work minutes in the circles, and at least 20 minutes more for debriefing.

Instructions

1. **What does the passage say?** Each one read the passage aloud. Then be silent for a minute. Take a minute to discuss briefly the basics of what the passage says, on the face of it.
2. Read it again, silently, asking, **What does God want to say to me through this passage?** Be silent for a minute, asking God to give you ideas and insights. Take a minute to share if you wish to.
3. Read the passage a third time, silently, asking, **What do I want to say to God about**

this passage? Be silent for a minute, saying inwardly what you wish to say to God. Share if you wish.

4. Read the passage through again, this time asking inwardly, **How will my life change today because of this time with God?** In silence, plan one specific action or attitude change you plan to put in place because of this time. Share if you wish.

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Handout

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Participant Notes

1. Obstacles to Encountering God

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

Philip Yancey wrote *Finding God in Unexpected Places*. He writes of the tendency for religious people under the duress of contemporary crises to withdraw from the world, “to pull up the drawbridge and retreat behind a protective moat. The ‘castle’ into which Christians retreat is the church. That makes me sad because God does not limit himself to the four walls of a sanctuary.” He goes on in his book to describe glimpses of the divine in surprising ways and places. “As a Christian journalist, I have learned to look for traces of God. I have found those traces in unexpected places: among the chief propagandists of a formerly atheistic nation, in a leprosarium in India and an Atlanta slum and even a Chicago health club, at a meeting of Amnesty International, on the Phil Donahue show, at a weekend retreat with twenty Jews and Muslims, in the prisons of Peru and Chile, and even in the plays of Shakespeare.”

2. Incarnational Theology

“So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.” (John 1:14, NLT)

“lived here on earth” = _____

Progression of Locations for God’s Presence in Biblical History

- A. Tabernacle (desert, wilderness, Canaan)
- B. Temple (Jerusalem)

C. Jesus

“So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.” (John 1:14, NLT)

D. Body of Christ (the community of believers)

“We are God’s house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also joined together as part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:20-22, NLT)

E. Where true love is (regardless of belief)

“Let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 John 4:7-8, NLT)

3. Questions to Ask to Increase Our Vision to See God

When is the last time you truly noticed an act of love and compassion manifested by someone? Describe the unselfish love you saw in that situation? How was God revealed there?

“Jesus himself looked for God not among the pious at the synagogue, but in a widow who had two pennies left to her name and in a tax collector who knew no formal prayers; he found his spiritual lessons in sparrows sold at a market, and in wheat fields and wedding banquets, and yes, even in the observations of a half-breed foreigner with five failed marriages. Jesus was a master at finding God in unexpected places.” (Yancey)

Where have you noticed deep, intense desire recently – longing, passion? What was the desire for? Who was involved? How did the person go about trying to fill that longing? Where was God encountered there?

“A man who knocks on the door of a brothel is knocking for God.” (G.K Chesterton)

When is the last time you were out in nature and felt a sense of mystery and awe that caused you to feel you were in the midst of something bigger than yourself? Where does that feeling of mystery, awe and wonder come from? What would cause you to feel a part of something bigger than you? Where is God in that experience?

“There may be signs of [God’s] existence, but they point both ways and are therefore ambiguous and so prove nothing ... The wonders of the universe do not convince those most conversant with the wonders, the scientists themselves.” (Walker Percy, novelist)

“Nature never taught me that there exists a God of glory and of infinite majesty. I had to learn that in other ways. But nature gave the word ‘glory’ a meaning for me. I still do not know where else I could have found one.” (C.S. Lewis)

“God’s glory is on tour in the skies,
God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.
Madame Day holds classes every morning,
Professor Night lectures each evening.

Their words aren’t heard,
their voices aren’t recorded,
But their silence fills the earth:
unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.

God makes a huge dome
for the sun—a superdome!
The morning sun’s a new husband
leaping from his honeymoon bed,
The daybreaking sun an athlete
racing to the tape.

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Jesus

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**Exploring
Spirituality:**
Ways to
Encounter
God

That's how God's Word vaults across the skies

from sunrise to sunset,

Melting ice, scorching deserts,

warming hearts to faith."

(Psalm 19:1-6, The Message)

When is the last time you used Sacred Scripture to encounter God? How you can read in a way that facilitates an experience of divine revelation in what you read? Have you asked yourself as you read, what does this say to me about God? Better yet, what is God trying to say to me in these verses?

"You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren't willing to receive from me the life you say you want." (John 5:39-40, The Message)

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