



encounter

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encounter

When we encounter Jesus, our life is changed forever.

Throughout the Gospels, people encounter Jesus and their lives are profoundly changed. People whose lives are filled with pain and tragedy are transformed. People from different backgrounds, experiences, cultures and socio-economic circumstances—lives filled with pride, pain, fear and failure—encounter Jesus. They are filled with new joy, new purpose and new meaning. When we encounter Jesus, our life is changed forever.

This is the great purpose of God. He enters our world to rescue and redeem us. The Bible's great narrative is that despite our rejection of God, and the pain it causes, He pursues us. He enters our world, in the person of Jesus Christ, and changes our lives. We are all destined for death without the sacrificial and redeeming act of God to win us back. When we encounter Jesus, we are transformed.

Our community is filled with people who need an encounter with Jesus. They come from different backgrounds, live with different struggles and have different needs. They strive for purpose and meaning, and struggle under the demands of everyday pressures in their own

strength. They have not encountered the grace, forgiveness and redemption that can be found in Jesus.

No matter the circumstances, failure, success, or pain, Jesus has the power to transform every person's life. We are all invited to look to Jesus and find our joy in an encounter with Him, our Saviour. When we do, our life is changed forever. And when our life has been radically changed—we truly have a story to tell the world!

You can use this booklet in your life group or in your own personal reflection. We will explore six people from the Bible who had their lives transformed through an encounter with Jesus. **These were real people with real challenges in their lives, similar to many of the challenges we face.**

Each week we will discuss:

- **Former life:** before Jesus
- **Encounter:** with Jesus
- **Transformation:** life after Jesus.

Each week also includes a **family conversation** you can have with your children.

The seeker

“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

READ JOHN 3:1–15

Nicodemus was a good person. In fact, he was a very good person. So good he was part of the religious elite. Jews across Israel would have looked at Nicodemus as a model of ‘being good’. But being good is not good enough, and Nicodemus knew it. There was something different about Jesus that made Nicodemus want more.

FORMER LIFE

1. Do you relate to Nicodemus’ story? In what way?
2. Nicodemus was a good man, revered by the people and wealthy. Why is it difficult for people like this to come to Jesus?
3. What are some things that make us realise our need for an encounter with Jesus?

READ JOHN 3:16–21

Jesus responds to Nicodemus by saying true life comes from being born again—not of the flesh, striving and the law—but of the Spirit. Forgiveness and eternal life come through God’s loving act of entering our story and offering His only Son, Jesus, for the sins of the world. This was radical news for Nicodemus; it changed his life. He was set free from fear found in religion and invited into a new life of freedom and courage found in the Spirit.

ENCOUNTER

4. What stands out to you about Jesus in His interaction with Nicodemus?
5. How did Nicodemus respond to his encounter with Jesus?
6. As a very religious man, what may Nicodemus have been feeling or thinking at this time?

We often think that as long as we are good, we will go to heaven. We tend to have our own internal measuring stick by which we validate our own goodness. There are people at the top of the moral scale and others that are at the bottom. But being 'good' is not good enough in God's sight. We are all sinful and fall short against God's holiness. Ultimately, we need an encounter with Jesus. When our stories encounter Jesus, we become alive. We are born again. We are filled with His Spirit and given a new story.

TRANSFORMATION

Read John 7:45–52 and John 19:38–40

7. How did the encounter with Jesus transform Nicodemus' life?
8. What are some of the truths we encounter in scripture that speak to who Jesus says we are?

PRAYER

Pray for the people you live, work and laugh with who don't yet recognise their need for Jesus to transform their lives. Pray for each other that you would grasp more deeply your true identity in Christ.

FAMILY CONVERSATION

Read the story of Nicodemus and discuss the following questions: Who do you admire and why? Why do they need Jesus? No matter how amazing we are in any area of our life, we still need Jesus.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Do you have people in your life who you have witnessed to who don't recognise their need for change? Read these scriptures and identify the hope the Spirit of God brings to accomplish His purposes:

- Revelation 22:17
- 1 Thessalonians 1:4–5
- 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17

The sinner

"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

READ JOHN 8:1-11

To everyone looking on, this woman caught in adultery was the lowest of the low. She was a sinner who deserved to be ridiculed and rejected. Her life had come crashing down. Whatever hopes and dreams she had for the future were now in tatters. And, according to the law, she deserved death. But, when all looked hopeless and lost, she had an encounter with Jesus, and everything changed.

FORMER LIFE:

1. How do you relate to the people in this story? (The woman caught in sin, the Pharisees) Who do you most identify with and why?
2. Many people suffer from the judgement and condemnation of others, or the guilt and shame of our own sinful mistakes. How do these separate us from God's forgiveness and love?

Jesus stood before her accusers and defended her life and her dignity. We don't know what Jesus wrote in the sand in that moment, but what we do know is He revealed a truth and a grace that saved her life and gave her a new hope. She had a new story to tell.

ENCOUNTER

1. What stands out to you about Jesus in his interaction with the woman and the Pharisees?
2. How did the encounter with Jesus impact this woman's life?
3. The Pharisees sought justice, yet Jesus offered mercy. Reflect on a time when you have encountered this mercy in your life.

There are many, both inside and outside the church, living with the soul-destroying burden of guilt and condemnation. Nothing this world offers can remove it. No good work. No experience. Nothing. The good news is Jesus knows and sees your life, and in the face of accusation He stands in your place and takes the force of the law. He did so by dying on a cross for every sin, every act of selfishness and rebellion. Our life no longer needs to be marked by fear of condemnation but by freedom found in walking with Jesus.

TRANSFORMATION

1. As we become aware of our sin and need for God's mercy and grace, we experience God's forgiveness. How does this transform us? What are we freed from?
2. What can you learn about the way to treat the people you live, work and laugh with from Jesus response to the woman?

PRAYER

Is there sin in your life that is burdening your heart with guilt and shame? Read 1 John 1:8–10. Confess your sin to God and ask for forgiveness.

FAMILY CONVERSATION

It is easy to judge others for doing wrong. But the story in John 8:1–11 compels us to show grace instead. When we feel like judging, what are some things we can think and say instead to show grace?

The sceptic

"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

READ JOHN 20:24–29

Thomas was a guy who didn't just follow the crowd and believe everything he heard. He needed evidence—hard evidence. Thomas was a sceptic. He needed proof. He needed to see the physical evidence. He needed to see Jesus.

FORMER LIFE

1. How do you relate to Thomas? How does this impact your faith?
2. Thomas was a sceptic who needed hard evidence. Think about those you know similar to Thomas. What are some strategies we could use when sharing our faith with those who are sceptical?

Despite Thomas' lack of faith, Jesus revealed himself. Jesus stepped into Thomas' story of doubt by revealing his presence, his nail marks and scars. Thomas's life was changed forever. He went to be a great missionary to Asia and India, preaching the good news of the risen Christ.

ENCOUNTER

3. How did Jesus respond to Thomas and how can we use this example in our interactions?
4. Share an experience or conversation you've had with someone who had similar struggles to Thomas. What was it that eventually connected them to faith in God?

We live in an age of rational scepticism. In the past generation, a growing number of people have abandoned faith and turned to atheism. But just like Thomas, we see both rational and experiential reasons why it is reasonable

to place our faith in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. You can see His presence in the transformation of people's lives in our community and around the world.

TRANSFORMATION

5. How did Thomas' encounter with Christ change him?
6. What compelling evidence do you have that your faith is real? How has Jesus' presence transformed your story?
7. Read Hebrews 11:1 and John 20:29. How do we balance the importance of faith and evidence?
8. In today's society, many are sceptics who abandon faith and turn to atheism. Why are faith and evidence both important in sharing our story?

PRAYER

Do you know a sceptic? Pray for them by name. Jesus is alive and He wants everyone to come into a relationship with Him.

FAMILY CONVERSATION

Discuss what a sceptic is. Read the story in John 20:24–29.

We often face scepticism about our faith from non-believers. And sometimes we have our own questions as well. God loves it when we want to find out the truth, and asking questions is a great way to do this. Sometimes we can have big questions about the Bible itself. Watch this video about the Bible and list the reasons we can believe what the Bible says.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPaeo19sQXw>

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Lee Strobel message, "The Case for Christ"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67uj2qvQi_k

BOOKS

- The case for Christ by Lee Strobel (also a movie)
- Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis
- The Reason for God by Timothy Keller
- A Ready Defense -byJosh McDowell

The sick

"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

READ LUKE 8:40–56

Two people confronted Jesus who rightly feel desperate and hopeless. Jairus, the synagogue leader, is desperate. His daughter is on the brink of death, so he turns to the person many of his colleagues' fear and hate. Then there is the unnamed woman who has suffered bleeding for years, enduring the pain, embarrassment and cultural isolation that came with her condition. In her desperation she confronted her own fears and cultural taboos and reached out to the one who could heal her.

FORMER LIFE

1. In what way do you relate to the people in this story?
2. What did each person in this story seem to believe about Jesus? (Jairus, the suffering woman, the mourners)
3. How do you respond to the needs of people who are desperate and hopeless in our community?

Rather than rejecting the religious and the outcast, Jesus embraces both—getting his hands dirty with the problems and the pain of people's lives. Jesus encounters their suffering and brings hope and healing. Their lives and stories are changed forever.

ENCOUNTER

4. What is Jesus' response to those who are suffering? What stands out to you about Jesus in these interactions?
5. In what way does suffering impact your faith? How can we encounter Jesus in times of suffering?
6. How can we point people who are suffering to Jesus?

There are many who carry around pain—both physical and emotional, private and public. Many carry the question: Why would God allow this suffering to happen? While at times this is a difficult question to answer,

God is not aloof and far away. He cares so much He came down to earth. Jesus came and got his hands dirty and, ultimately, suffered for us so we can be saved.

TRANSFORMATION

7. How did the encounter with Jesus transform the lives of the people in this story?
8. What stories of healing in body, mind or spirit have you experienced or heard about?
9. What could you do to be more available to those around you who need healing?

Jesus has the power to heal us spiritually, emotionally and physically. In our desperation, we can encounter his grace, mercy, peace and power. When we encounter his presence, we are changed forever. He reaches out to us. Are you willing to reach out to him?

PRAY

Pray for healing for one another— in body, mind and spirit.

FAMILY CONVERSATION

Sometimes we face hard and even desperate situations. Read Luke 8:40–56 together. Discuss what makes you feel better when you are going through hard situations. What have you done to help others when they have gone through hard situations? What does Jesus feel about us going through hard things? What does He do for us?

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Where is God when it Hurts by Philip Yancey
- Walking with God through Pain and Suffering by Timothy Keller
- You'll get Through This by Max Lucado
- Hope in the Dark by Craig Groeschel

The blind

*"For judgement I have come into this world,
so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."*

READ JOHN 9

It is hard to imagine what life would have been like in first-century Palestine if you were blind. This blind man would have had no hope of marriage, family, education or work. His life would have been confined to begging in the side streets. What's more, because of his condition, he was labelled a sinner who is under judgement.

FORMER LIFE

1. How do you relate to the people in this story? (The blind man, the Pharisees)
2. Jesus rescued the blind man from a life of poverty and condemnation. What do we need to be rescued from?
3. What are the things in our culture that blind us to our spiritual need?

Jesus intervened in this man's story and rescued him. He rescued him from his physical condition, and ultimately saved him from his spiritual one. While the religious elite missed the point, and were left in utter spiritual darkness, the healed blind man came to truly understand what it meant to see! His life was changed eternally.

ENCOUNTER

4. What stands out to you about Jesus in His interaction with the blind man?
5. Why were the religious leaders so intent on discrediting the blind man's story? What can cause us to miss what God is doing?

Our community is filled with many who are in physical and spiritual need. Jesus has the power to meet both needs, but sadly so many are blind to his grace and love. Our consumerist culture keeps people distracted at best and blind at worst to their own spiritual state. It leads to a poverty of our hearts and souls, and deep lack of vision of the eternal. Our story becomes inward, self-centred and small. But when our eyes are opened to God's grace and mercy, we can see with new joy and purpose. We have something much greater to live for. And that changes our story for eternity!

TRANSFORMATION

6. How did the encounter with Jesus transform the blind man's life? How are our lives transformed when we encounter Jesus? Be specific.
7. Read John 9:39. How can we guard against spiritual blindness?
8. What are some things we are able to see for the first time when our spiritual eyes are opened?

PRAY

Read Ephesians 1:18–21. Pray it as a blessing over one another.

FAMILY CONVERSATION

Read John 9 together. The Pharisees in the story in John 9 were considered the religious elite of their day and had every physical need met. They had so much pride they didn't see their spiritual need for Jesus. The blind man had very little physically, but when his sight was healed, Jesus also healed him spiritually. He knew he needed Jesus. Discuss what distractions we have in our lives that keep us from seeking Jesus. How does Jesus give us purpose and joy in our lives?

The broken

When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

READ LUKE 8:26–39

Jesus encountered a highly disturbed, demon-possessed man who had been banished from his family and community. His world in every way was chaos, disruption and disorder. When Jesus asked for his name—he could only give the name of the curse inside him. He had lost his name, identity, community and future. Everything seemed lost.

FORMER LIFE

1. What was this man's life like? What words would you use to describe his life?
2. What are the things that bring chaos, brokenness and bondage to our lives?

Then, in this provocative encounter, Jesus speaks to the demonic disruption, commanding the demons out. The contrast could not be more dramatic. Where there was once chaos there is now peace. Where there was once disorder there is now order. Where there was once isolation and disconnection, there is now connection and coherence. This man's story is radically changed forever. He now has a story to tell!

ENCOUNTER

3. How do you see the different people in the story responding to Jesus? (the man living in the tombs, those tending the pigs, and the people of the region). Which person do you most relate to?
4. What stands out to you about Jesus in His interaction with the man?
5. How can we respond to the chaos and brokenness in our lives and in the lives of the people we live, work and laugh with?

The things that happen in our lives define us in deep and profound ways. We wear our past experiences as scars like permanent badges on our soul. They become so much part of us that we give ourselves labels and names: failure, disappointment, rejection, loner. They determine how we see ourselves, how we interact with the world and how we see our future.

But in this place of chaos, Jesus promises peace for today and hope for tomorrow. He stepped down to take all of the pain and chaos in this world on himself at the cross. This message is what a desperate and broken world needs to hear. And when we have an encounter with Him, we cannot help but let the whole world know. What is stopping you from telling your story?

TRANSFORMATION

6. How did the encounter with Jesus transform this man's life?
7. How does Jesus direct him to use his new freedom to fulfil an eternal purpose?
8. If you were completely free from whatever has you stuck, how would you use your freedom to fulfil an eternal purpose? What difference do you believe Jesus is calling you to make in your community?

PRAY

Identify the things the enemy has taken from you. Identify past sins and hurts that still define you today. Claim your freedom back in the powerful name of Jesus. Claim the promises of God for one another in prayer.

FAMILY CONVERSATION

We live in a very busy world. There is so much chaos, busyness and distraction in our lives. The story in Luke 8:26–39 demonstrates our need for peace and how Jesus can provide peace for us. As a family, go for a walk or drive to a bush area and sit quietly. Take in the peace and talk silently to God. Notice how peaceful creation is. Pray together and thank God for His peace that He gives us through creation.

notes

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A series of horizontal dashed lines spanning the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice.

gateway
BAPTIST CHURCH