

ENCOUNTER

SPD^{YM}



Encounter

Big Idea of the Series: This series can be preached as a pre-camp or pre-retreat series for youth. It helps students see that God readily and faithfully encounters his people when they seek him. The series is meant to fuel faith-filled expectation in students as they prepare for a dedicated time in prayer, Scripture, and worship.

Week 1

Text: Psalm 63:1–3; 27:4; Luke 1:20

Topics: Expectation, Seeking God

Big Idea of the Message: God readily and faithfully encounters his people when they seek him.

Application Point: God's people can expect to encounter God.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. "He resolves to seek God, and his favour and grace: *Thou art my God, and therefore I will seek thee; for should not a people seek unto their God?* Isa. 8:19. We must seek him; we must covet his favour as our chief good and consult his glory as our highest end; we must seek acquaintance with him by his word and seek mercy from him by prayer. We must seek him, Early, with the utmost care, as those that are afraid of missing him; we must begin our days with him, begin every day with him: *Early will I seek thee*. Earnestly: '*My soul thirsteth for thee and my flesh longeth for thee* (that is, my whole man is affected with this pursuit) *here in a dry and thirsty land.*' ... He longs to enjoy God. What is it that he does so passionately wish for? What is his petition and what is his request? It is this (v. 2), *To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary*" (Matthew Henry, commentary on Psalm 63, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Psa/Psa_063.cfm).

2. "With what a gracious earnestness he prays for a constant communion with God in holy ordinances, v. 4. It greatly encouraged his confidence in God that he was conscious to himself of an entire affection to God and to his ordinances, and that he was in his element when in the way of his duty and in the way of increasing his acquaintance with him. ... In the courts of God's house the priests had their lodgings, and David wished he had been one of them. Disdainfully as some look upon God's ministers, one of the greatest and best of kings that ever was would gladly have taken his lot, have taken his lodging, among them. Or, rather, he desires that he might duly and constantly attend on the public service of God, with other faithful Israelites, according as the duty of every day required" (Matthew Henry, commentary on Psalm 27, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Psa/Psa_027.cfm).
3. Zechariah entered the Holy of Holies just as any priest normally did during his time. He entered expecting to meet with God. It seems, though, that he did not expect to hear what he heard. We can approach God and expect to meet with him. Some see Zechariah's inability to speak after meeting with God as a punishment for disbelief. Perhaps we can see the situation another way. "In our prayer lives, too, God often speaks most clearly to us in moments when we can quiet our own minds and voices. Words can sometimes be more reflective of my own anxieties and concerns than of God's action. While prayerful words can be a beautiful mode of communication, they can also be distractions from fully placing myself in God's hands. Sometimes our words, like Zechariah's, manifest our own limits. Silence makes room for the fullness of God's dynamic and healing power" (Marina Berzins McCoy, "Zechariah and Holy Silence," *Ignatian Spirituality*, accessed April 6, 2025, <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/zechariah-and-holy-silence/>).
4. When we desire and expect to meet with God, we can trust that he will show up. God wants to spend time with us; we need only acknowledge he is there.
5. Not all meetings are productive. "There are 25 million meetings per day in the U.S., adding up to more than \$37 billion per year wasted on unproductive meetings; middle managers spend 35% of their time in meetings, while upper managers spend 50%; executives believe a whopping 67% of meetings are failures" (Andrea Williams, "Meetings Gone Wildly Wrong," *Full Focus*, accessed April 6, 2025, <https://fullfocus.co/meetings-gone-wrong/>).
6. When companies call for a meeting of employees, they likely create an agenda. "A meeting agenda helps you and your colleagues prepare for a meeting and guide yourselves through the items you need to discuss. Time spent in planning an agenda will likely save time for all meeting participants by providing a clear set of topics, objectives, and time frames. Some meetings may require more planning time than others" ("How and Why to Use a Meeting Agenda," *Human Resources*, MIT, accessed April 6, 2025, <https://hr.mit.edu/learning-topics/meetings/articles/agendas>). Could we treat our time spent with God like a well-planned meeting of high-level executives?
7. Provide journal pages for the students to use to document questions they have for God or topics they would like to discuss with him. The journal pages could include sentence starters such as, "The top three things I want to discuss with

God are...,” or “God, I need to talk to you about...” Offer to hold onto the journal pages for the students. Each week leading up to the camp or retreat, the students can add to their journal pages. Bring them to the event so the students can use them as a guide during prayer times while they are there.

Week 2

Text: Psalm 24:3–6; Exodus 3:1–18

Topics: Preparation, Clean Hands, Burning Bush

Big Idea of the Message: God wants our undivided attention.

Application Point: God’s people should eliminate distractions to giving God their full attention.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. “The properties of God’s peculiar people, who shall have communion with him in grace and glory. They are such as keep themselves from all the gross acts of sin. They have *clean hands*; not spotted with the pollutions of the world and the flesh. None that were ceremonially unclean might enter into the mountain of the temple, which signified that cleanness of conversation which is required in all those that have fellowship with God. ... They are such as make conscience of being really (that is, of being inwardly) as good as they seem to be outwardly. They have *pure hearts*. We make nothing of our religion if we do not make heart-work of it. It is not enough that our hands be clean before men, but we must also wash our hearts from wickedness, and not allow ourselves in any secret heart-impurities, which are open before the eye of God. ... They are such as do not set their affections upon the things of this world, do not *lift up their souls unto vanity*, whose hearts are not carried out inordinately towards the wealth of this world, the praise of men, or the delights of sense, who do not choose these things for their portion, nor reach forth after them, because they believe them to be vanity, uncertain and unsatisfying. ... They are a praying people” (Matthew Henry, commentary on Psalm 24, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Psa/Psa_024.cfm).
2. “God gave [Moses] a gracious call, to which he returned a ready answer, v. 4. When God saw that he took notice of the burning bush, and turned aside to see it, and left his business to attend it, then God called to him. If he had carelessly neglected it as an *ignis fatuus*—a *deceiving meteor*, a thing not worth taking notice of, it is probable that God would have departed, and said nothing to him; but, when he turned aside, God called to him. ... Those that seek God diligently shall find him, and find him their bountiful rewarder. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you*. God called him by name, *Moses, Moses*. This which he heard could not but surprise him much more than what he saw. The word of the Lord always went along with the glory of the Lord, for every divine vision was designed for divine revelation. ... He must express his reverence, and his readiness to obey: *Put off thy shoes from off thy feet*, as a servant. Putting off the shoe was then what putting off the hat is now, a token of respect and submission. ‘The

ground, for the present, is *holy ground*, made so by this special manifestation of the divine presence, during the continuance of which it must retain this character; therefore tread not on that ground with soiled shoes” (Matthew Henry, commentary on Exodus 3,

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Exd/Exd_003.cfm).

3. “And the captain of the Lord’s host said unto Joshua, ‘Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is hallowed ground.’ And Joshua did so (It was a custom for a person to remove their shoes as a mark of respect when approaching a Nazarene, or a place where a Nazarene lived or was buried. The practice primarily related to hygiene rules)” (Robert George Crosbie, *The Book of Man: From the Beginning to the Ending of Days, Volumes I–VII* [Four Elements Publications Ltd, 2008], 216, e-book).
4. Preparation for a retreat or camp is done by limiting distractions and moving our heart to a space of humility. God asks his people to keep their focus on him, to set aside time to turn everything else off, and to consider their time with him holy.
5. “‘Studies have shown that most shoes have millions of bacteria on them,’ Dr. Sullivan says. ‘The germs you track into your house can live on your floor for days or longer. Then, if you touch the floor and touch your face, the germs can get inside your body.’ More gross news: Doing a quick sole check isn’t enough to avoid these tiny invaders. Even if you don’t knowingly step in something icky, germs are *everywhere*. Any public place, from a grocery store to a shopping mall or public restroom (yuck), is home to a colony of microbes ready to stick to your sandals, sneakers, heels and boots. And some of them can bring illnesses. When scientists have examined the soles of shoes, they’ve found hundreds of different germs, including: Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), a superbug that’s resistant to common antibiotics and can cause life-threatening infections, *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), bacteria that live in your colon and can cause diarrhea and other infections, *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. diff*), a bacterium that can cause severe, life-threatening diarrhea and colitis” (“Wearing Shoes in the House: ‘OK’ or ‘No Way’?,” Cleveland Clinic, February 14, 2024, <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/wearing-shoes-in-the-house-is-a-bad-idea>).
6. Horses wear blinkers (or blinders) to help them maintain focus during tasks. Whether pulling carriages, doing farm work, or racing, horses often face many distractions that could pull their focus from the task or cause injury to them, other horses nearby, or the humans involved in the task. You can read more about how blinkers limit distractions for horses [here](#).
7. This would be a great week for the Shoe ID game, explained here: <https://www.icebreakerspot.com/activities/shoe-id#>. (Given the information above, however, you’ll want to wash your hands afterward!)

Week 3

Text: John 20:19–29; Hebrews 13:5–6

Topics: Embrace, Needs, Provision

Big Idea of the Message: God embraces his people.

Application Point: God's people can expect a loving, steady embrace when they seek him with authenticity.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. "That Christ came in among them, and *stood in the midst*, and they all knew him, for he showed himself now, just as he had shown himself before (v. 19), still the same, and no changeling. See the condescension of our Lord Jesus. The gates of heaven were ready to be opened to him, and there he might have been in the midst of the adorations of a world of angels; yet, for the benefit of his church, he lingered on earth, and visited the little private meetings of his poor disciples, and is in the midst of them. ... Christ's gracious condescension to Thomas, v. 27. He singled him out from the rest, and applied himself particularly to him: '*Reach hither thy finger*, and, since thou wilt have it so, *behold my hands*, and satisfy thy curiosity to the utmost about the *print of the nails*; *reach hither thy hand*, and, if nothing less will convince thee, *thrust it into my side*.' ... Thomas's believing consent to Jesus Christ. He is now ashamed of his incredulity, and cries out, *My Lord and my God*, v. 28. We are not told whether he did put his finger into the print of the nails; it should seem, he did not, for Christ says (v. 29), *Thou hast seen, and believed*; seeing sufficed. ... Christ owns Thomas a believer. Sound and sincere believers, though they be slow and weak, shall be graciously accepted of the Lord Jesus. Those who have long stood it out, if at last they yield, shall find him ready to forgive. No sooner did Thomas consent to Christ than Christ gives him the comfort of it, and lets him know that he believes" (Matthew Henry, commentary on John 20, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Jhn/Jhn_020.cfm).
2. Thomas encountered Jesus in a moment when his faith was struggling. Jesus offered Thomas exactly what he needed to increase his faith. Whether Thomas and Jesus physically embraced or not remains unimportant; Thomas fully embraced his faith after Jesus fully embraced his needs.
3. "*God hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*, v. 5, 6. This was said to Joshua (ch. 1:5), but belongs to all the faithful servants of God. Old-Testament promises may be applied to New-Testament saints. This promise contains the sum and substance of all the promises. *I will never, no, never leave thee, nor ever forsake thee*. Here are no fewer than five negatives heaped together, to confirm the promise; the true believer shall have the gracious presence of God with him in life, at death, and for ever. From this comprehensive promise they may assure themselves of help from God: *So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do unto me*, v. 6. Men can do nothing against God, and God can make all that men do against his people to turn to their good" (Matthew Henry, commentary on Hebrews 13, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Hbr/Hbr_013.cfm).
4. As God's people, we can expect him to fully embrace us when we seek him with authenticity. We don't need to fear rejection. As we prepare to encounter and embrace Jesus during a special time, let us remember that Jesus is already waiting there, preparing to meet our greatest need: time with him.

5. Some species of animals abandon one or more of their offspring for a variety of reasons, but most likely because food is limited. Some of us have felt the pain of abandonment, which causes us to fear that God may abandon us too. However, God does not abandon his people (Joshua 1:5).
6. “What does Jesus expect of his Church during this time of crisis? You do not need to have all the answers, but you should embrace the questions. Honest questions are the keys to unlocking the ‘safe-spaces’ we are all longing for. Boldly let Jesus enter the space of your anger, grief, fear, and loneliness, and experience a side of him you have may have never known before. Find the safety and comfort you have been searching for in being known fully and still accepted by Jesus. Then, use that knowledge to authentically reflect him to the world” (Rebecca Bowling, “Do You Feel Safe with Jesus?,” *N. T. Wright Online*, April 20, 2020, <https://www.ntwrightonline.org/do-you-feel-safe-with-jesus/>).
7. Some among us have never experienced these quiet moments with God during a retreat or camp. Spend some time helping everyone picture what the moment will be like. Use the five senses as a guide to imagine the details. Will there be music? Candles burning? Will people be available to talk to or pray with? Is movement allowed? Is participation required? Can quiet times be outside? Will there be incense burning? Am I supposed to be very still and quiet? The more we can help people understand unfamiliar scenarios, the more they are able to enjoy and interact.

Week 4

Text: Matthew 17:1–9; Psalm 27:4; 34:8

Topics: Encounter, Transfiguration

Big Idea of the Message: Encountering God now allows us to taste and see what eternity will be like.

Application Point: God’s people will encounter God, now and forever.

Sermon Ideas and Talking Points:

1. At the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter met with Jesus and the others. He wanted to keep this moment forever. “The desire they had of the continuance of it; *Let us make here three tabernacles*. There was in this, as in many other of Peter’s sayings, a mixture of weakness and of goodwill, more zeal than discretion. ... Peter thought this mountain was a fine spot of ground to build upon, and he was for making tabernacles there; as Moses in the wilderness made a tabernacle for the Shechinah, or divine glory. ... Yet in this zeal he betrayed a great deal of weakness and ignorance. What need had Moses and Elias of tabernacles? They belonged to that blessed world, *where they hunger no more, nor doth the sun light upon them*” (Matthew Henry, commentary on Matthew 17, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Mat/Mat_017.cfm).
2. “The tone of the song suddenly changes from celebration to contemplation. The experience of the goodness and greatness of God made David think about how wonderful it is to seek Him and to experience His presence. ... David wished he

could live in the tabernacle itself, surrounded every day by the presence and beauty of God. ... David knew there was beauty in the nature and presence of God, beauty that could be perceived by the seeking eye of faith. He could think of no greater occupation than to fill his mind and heart with the goodness and greatness of God. ... In God's presence, David wished to go from contemplation to inquiry. He wanted to know more of God and more of His ways" (David Guzik, study guide for Psalm 27,

https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/psalm/psalm-27.cfm).

3. "The goodness of God includes both the beauty and amiableness of his being and the bounty and beneficence of his providence and grace; and accordingly, (1.) We must taste that he is a bountiful benefactor, relish the goodness of God in all his gifts to us, and reckon that the savour and sweetness of them. Let God's goodness be rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel. (2.) We must see that he is a beautiful being, and delight in the contemplation of his infinite perfections. By taste and sight we both make discoveries and take complacency. Taste and see God's goodness, that is, take notice of it and take the comfort of it, 1 Pt. 2:3. he is good, for he makes all those that trust in him truly blessed; let us therefore be so convinced of his goodness as thereby to be encouraged in the worst of times to trust in him" (Matthew Henry, commentary on Psalm 34, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Psa/Psa_034.cfm).
4. "I am annoyed, of course, because the retreat is over. This idyllic situation, unlike any other in this world, is disappearing before my eyes and there is nothing I can do about it. I hear retreatants packing their bags, making travel plans, and beginning to say goodbye to each other. Trying to appear stoic, I simply smile, thank everyone for coming, and say goodbye to each person, while interiorly my heart feels barren and alone. I have what I like to call, PRD, Post-Retreat Depression. ... During each retreat, I tell everyone that this is a special time of grace. God often 'lifts the veil' and allows us to encounter him in a way that is different from our ordinary daily life experience. No matter how blessed a time the retreat was, most of us are not called to live on the mountain alone with God. We have families, jobs, and communities that, whether we like it or not, are waiting for us. The key, I emphasize, is to integrate our experience on retreat into our daily lives" (Jeremiah Shryock, "Post-Retreat Depression," *SpiritualDirection.com*, January 5, 2022, <https://spiritualdirection.com/2022/01/05/post-retreat-depression>).
5. God intends to meet with us in special places. As we meet him there, we taste and see what continual communion with him will be like. What a gift it is to encounter God while still here on earth!
6. Preparation for a retreat or camp event includes preparing the students for what happens after the retreat. In addition to prepping them for the post-retreat letdown, consider preparing something to await them at home. A quick note, a summary of the points taught, a small memento, or something similar would be a welcome gesture upon arrival home.
7. "Mount Tabor, rising like a dome-like mountain from the Plain of Jezreel, is the place where Christian tradition places the transfiguration of Jesus. ... Mount

Tabor stands some 1,500 ft. (457 m.) above the Jezreel Valley plain in Lower Galilee. It held a strategic position at the junction of several trade routes. For this reason, many battles have been fought around it” (“Mt. Tabor: Transfiguration of Christ,” *Holy Land Site*, accessed April 6, 2025, <https://www.holylandsite.com/mount-tabor>).

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