

What Is an Encounter?

[Reflection Questions & Prep Information]

*Welcome to the preparation for the **Encounter God Weekend!** Thank you for taking the time and making the effort, to put this into your personal schedule. We think you will be really glad you did! Congratulations on your decision to want to know the Lord more deeply and meet with Him!*

An **Encounter Weekend** is an experience that can completely change the course of our lives. All of us have already experienced many important milestones, or encounters, in our lives: maybe falling in love, getting married, being accepted into a university, obtaining a job, starting a business, etc. But of all the encounters we could have, the most important one is us having an encounter with the Living God!

The Bible gives us many examples of people who did just that, and were totally transformed by their **personal encounters** with the Lord Jesus. Remember the stories of the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-29), Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10), the Gadarene demoniac (Matt 8:28-34), and all the disciples of Christ? After these people had an **encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ**, they were never the same again. Consequently, we can be assured that when we, too, have an **encounter with Him**, we will never be the same.

It is our desire and prayer that every person who participates in this weekend will seize the opportunity to experience God. The results and God's goal for us is a transformed life – a life that is saved, forgiven of sin, set free, healed by the power of the living God, baptized with His Holy Spirit and entirely sanctified to His will for your life. God knows the plans He has for each of us (**Jeremiah 29:11**).

Each group of four people at our Encounter Week-End will have a volunteer guide who cares about you and has been praying for you. We believe that YOU have been hand-picked by Jesus to participate in this wonderful week-end of spiritual renewal. It is our high honor and great privilege to serve our Lord Jesus by serving you!

Many times we need to be reminded of just how special God thinks we are! (Isaiah 43:4) He loves us and has a great destiny, a mission that He has chosen for us to live and to enjoy! (Isaiah 48:15; 1 Timothy 6:17) Through this week-end, we hope you begin to get a small glimpse of the bright future the Lord has in store for you as you follow Him and let Him lead you. You are loved! (Isaiah 54:10)

4 Questions to Reflect On About Your Salvation Experience...

1. How did God see your life before your decision to receive Christ?
2. What was the main thing that caused you to see your need for Christ?
3. How has your life begun to change since receiving Christ?
4. If you died right now, do you know for sure you would go to heaven? Why? (if you have questions or doubts, read **1 John 5:10, 13** outloud)

Encounter Preparation - Sanctification

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION AND THE BAPTISM OF JESUS – (THE BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT)

In all four gospels, the message of John the Baptist was very clear. He taught the people about two baptisms – the baptism with water and the baptism with the Holy Spirit. John said again and again, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and [spiritual] fire.” (Matt 3:11, Mark 1:7-8, John 1:32-33). We encourage each person to carefully read the Scripture references throughout this lesson that talk about this second baptism which leads into a deeper encounter with God. Feel free to ask questions with any of the people within your group.

What is the baptism that Jesus came to bring His followers?

John the Baptist taught everyone: “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Matthew 3:11)

7 “And this was John the Baptist’s message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:7-8)

32 “Then John [the Baptist] gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ (John 1:32-33)

What is entire sanctification?

Entire sanctification is another name for the baptism that Jesus came to bring to His followers. **I Thessalonians 5:23-24** tells us about this life-changing encounter with God. **“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The One who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”**

Entire sanctification is an act of God, which usually happens in a Christian’s life after they have begun to follow Jesus, just like His disciples. When we fully devote our lives to God like the disciples did before Pentecost, our hearts are cleansed by faith of all desire to sin. **Acts 15:8-9: “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.”**

When we fully consecrate (give over to God) everything that we are and have to God, He baptizes us with His Holy Spirit, cleanses our hearts of our sinful nature and causes His Holy Spirit to take over every aspect of our lives. He empowers our spiritual gifts, equips us with the Spirit’s power for life, obedience, gives us power over temptation and empowers us to be faithful and fruitful in our service to Him.

This deeper life with God enables us to *really grow every day* to become more and more Christlike—this is the life of holiness. This should be the passion of every Christian—to live **baptized with the Holy Spirit** so we become **just like Jesus!**

This experience is also known by various other terms representing its different phases, such as, “Christian perfection” (used by John Wesley and his followers), “perfect love”, “heart purity”, “the baptism with the Holy Spirit”, “the fullness of the blessing”, “Christian holiness”, “the deeper walk”, “being baptized in the Holy Spirit” to name a few synonyms. Because there are many Christians today who teach different things about the Holy Spirit, we have put here answers to some commonly asked questions.

What is the baptism with the Holy Spirit?

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a baptism with power! It is the fulfillment of Jesus’ words concerning the “promise of the Father” (Luke 24:49 KJV). Jesus is the one who baptizes you with the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will manifest the kingdom of God in power, through the way you practically live your life. The Holy Spirit will give you the power to witness, the power to resist sin, the power to overcome the evil one and all of his “oppression,” and the power to be all that God intended you to be in His kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the One who will purify you and empower you so you truly **grow in Christlikeness...becoming like Jesus!**

The phrase *baptism with the Holy Spirit* means to be immersed in a relationship with the Holy Spirit. It is a distinct and separate act of God from being baptized into Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 12:13), which refers to your “born again” experience into the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit baptizes you into Christ when you are born again, but **Jesus is the One who baptizes you with the Holy Spirit**. When this happens, you are filled and immersed with God!

What happens when I am baptized with the Holy Spirit & entirely sanctified?

God totally fills us with His Spirit. God purifies our hearts. God empowers us with the power of the Holy Spirit. God energizes and ignites our spiritual gifts. God gives us new joy and boldness in witnessing. God begins to create in us the very personality of Jesus (The Fruit of the Spirit). God gives us a new sensitivity to sin and uncleanness. God gives us a greater desire to be holy and pure and to become like Him. God gives us a new ability to say “NO” to temptation. God may give us new gifts that we have never had before. God gives us a new, deep abiding peace in our hearts. God will witness in our spirits that we have surrendered everything over to Him.

Will I speak in tongues when I am baptized with the Holy Spirit and entirely sanctified?

Speaking in tongues or the gift of languages is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This gift is the ability to speak in a language that you have never learned. God decides who gets this gift and who receives other gifts. This happened to the apostles and others on the day of Pentecost. It may happen to you. It may not. God does not give everyone the same gifts. God’s Word clearly says that not everybody will speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:30) and that we should not forbid it in private (1 Corinthians 14:39).

Jesus never spoke in tongues. Billy Graham, Jerry Porter, Simone Twibell and many other Christian leaders have never spoken in tongues. I have never spoken in tongues ...although I am REALLY praying for the gift of Spanish! Nowhere in Scripture is it stated that speaking in tongues is the evidence of being filled or baptized with the Holy Spirit, even though this is taught by some of our Pentecostal brothers and sisters. We love them and we can have rich fellowship with them because we have much in common...but we politely disagree that any *one* gift is the evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit. The true biblical evidence that we have been filled with the Holy Spirit is the **FRUIT** of the Spirit, that is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The goal God has for our lives is NOT our gifts...the goal God has for us...is **Christlikeness!**

Here are some things to remember:

- If you are saved, you *already* have the person of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16, Romans 8:9). In the experience of entire sanctification, God gets **ALL of you!**
- The gift of the Holy Spirit is a promise for all who ask (Luke 11:11–13).
- Any believer may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28–29).
- The Holy Spirit gives power to witness (Acts 1:8).
- The Holy Spirit helps us to pray (Rom. 8:26).
- A person may be water baptized and saved but not yet be baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–16).
- The word *baptize* means “to put under,” or “to immerse.” When a person is baptized in or with the Holy Spirit, he is totally immersed in the Spirit of God.

After we are baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit we can ask God to fill us and renew us daily with His Spirit. We need this frequently. Just as you need to “fill up” at the gas station frequently...we will need a fresh touch of God’s Spirit all the time. God’s Word tells us to, **“Keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18)**

Receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit

The experience of being baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit is certainly a life-changing experience. You may want to ask the Lord now to begin preparing you to encounter God in a fresh, new way in your spiritual life. At the Encounter Week-End, we will explore more in depth about how to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Open your spirit to the Holy Spirit and begin to seek Him with all of your heart. Receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and living filled with the Holy Spirit, is the life Jesus desires for every Christian!

A great opportunity:

Prepare your heart for the Encounter Weekend Retreat... we will have a special time at the retreat when we will pray specifically for anyone who wants to live baptized with the baptism that the Bible teaches Jesus came to bring...the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Questions to Reflect On

1. Have you received the baptism with the Holy Spirit since becoming a Christian?
2. Can you give an example of someone who you know, who you believe is living filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit?
3. How has their life and testimony helped you to build your faith?
4. Do you have had any doubts or questions about the possibility of someone being baptized with the Holy Spirit? Feel free to talk and discuss these openly with your group this week-end.

Encounter Preparation – Practical Suggestions

You are now to the point in your life in Christ where you are ready to encounter God in a very special way. You have made a decision to follow Jesus, committed your life to Him, and you are

learning about the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Here are some practical suggestions about how to practically prepare yourself for the Encounter Retreat.

“An Encounter” - Defined

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, His personal touch. 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. Reminding him of the transforming power of his encounter, he forever walked with a limp so he would never forget 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 Jesus, people were healed, tormented minds were cleared, blind eyes were opened, and the spiritually bound were set free. There is truly no end to what can happen when a person encounters God.

What are some barriers that might prevent me from having an Encounter with God?

When you go on an Encounter, you must **prepare your heart** so that you will be in the right frame of mind to receive everything God has for you. Many things will pull at you and **the evil one will try to distract you** away from having a spiritual purpose, but decide ahead of time that nothing will stop you from opening your heart to an encounter with God.

What are the effects of an 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 with the Holy Spirit, and/or a new joy in the goodness of God. But whatever happens, we find that, in particular, many people experience the following changes:

- **Repentance (Psalm 51:3–4)**—At the Encounter, many 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 emotional feelings of regret.
- **New direction (Matthew 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 (Genesis 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 if you 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, He denies the Lord three times. Then, after Jesus’ resurrection, Peter is restored and given a place of responsibility. He is given a second chance to prove himself. 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.

What practical preparations should I make to get ready for my Encounter Retreat weekend?

In the days preceding your Encounter, 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 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.

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.

What things should I and should I not bring to the Encounter?

You will want to bring your Bible, pen and paper, dress in casual clothes and comfortable shoes. Even more important than what you bring is **what not to bring**. It is best to leave at home such things as I-Pads, **your cell phone turned off** – anything else that might distract you from the purpose of the Encounter. Remember: You are not there for the purpose of communicating with others. You are seeking to have a **divine appointment with God**, so don't let anything distract you from that purpose.

How do I prepare myself 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 spiritually ready is:

1. Consciously develop an attitude of openness and transparency before the Lord
2. Make a deliberate step of surrender to the Lord and seek whatever He wants to do in you, in the days leading up to the Encounter.
3. Ask the Holy Spirit to remove preconceived ideas from your mind and enable you to go as an empty vessel waiting to be filled.
4. Allow the Lord to stir up expectancy in you that you will indeed encounter Him.

What is being “set free,” and will I experience this at the Encounter?

When we use the words “*being set free*,” we are referring to action undertaken by God on our behalf to set us free from something. There are many examples in the New Testament where Jesus set people free, healing them from the oppression of the evil one (Acts 10:38). Whatever the situation or condition, a person who had been bound by some difficulty, habit, attitude or spiritual blockage was totally “set free” when he encountered the truth of God's Word. Jesus taught, “you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:32, 36). God wants us to experience a life of being totally set free to love and serve Him.

When you participate in your Encounter, you probably will experience being set free in some area of your thinking or your life. Everyone has areas of their life that need a freeing touch from the Lord. For most people, it is a quiet, internal thing, but some people do have a more observable external response. If you keep your heart fixed on Jesus and His purpose for you, you will find great fulfillment as He works both in your life and in the lives of those around you.

As the Encounter weekend unfolds, we will examine the reasons why people become spiritually bound and spiritually blocked. We will explore how forgiveness leads to spiritual freedom and many other things. You choose whether or not you wish to share something with members of your group. **We allow everyone to go through the Encounter, choosing their own level of participation.**

If you wish, the people in your group can pray with and for you. You may choose you pray simply on your own. Or as you go through the Encounter and experience it, the Lord may bring someone to your mind that you sure wish were here, experiencing it with you! At any time, you can respond by praying for someone else. Whether it is for yourself or someone else, you can experience the freeing touch of the Lord in and through your life in these days just ahead. So, get ready! **We are expecting every one of us to have an *encounter with God!***

Questions to Reflect On...

1. Why do you think it is so important for everyone to experience an Encounter?
2. Name someone from the Bible you know who encountered God – describe what it is about their experience that has encouraged you.
3. What change do you hope to experience on your Encounter?
4. In your own words, what do you think “being set free” is? Why is it necessary?
5. What else do you think you should do to prepare yourself for your Encounter weekend?

We are SO MUCH looking forward to having you join us on this FIRST Encounter God Week-End on the Chicago Central District. If you have any questions, feel free to call or e-mail me. Let's come expecting Jesus to meet with us in a very special way. You are loved.

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