

Personal And Life Changing Nature Of Encounters Series

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Scripture: Genesis 32:24-29, Acts 9:3-19, Acts 22:6-16, Acts 26:12-18, Acts 22:17-21, Acts 23:11, Acts 26:19-20

Denomination: Evangelical/Non-Denominational

Summary: Two aspects stand out when we study encounters with God. One is that it is always a personal one-to-one experience. The second is that it results in significant changes in our lives.

Encounter With God Part 2

Personal Encounter: A life Changing Experience

For a video version of this message, please visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xCZ-xRH3Yg>

Last week we started on a series on Encounter with God. Last week we explored the Biblical Perspectives of God Encounters. We looked at four perspectives

1. If we are not watchful, we might miss the encounter altogether
2. Having an encounter with God is entirely up to us (Because He is always there and present)
3. God encounters are for everyone
4. God encounters are to be experienced everyday.

This week onwards we are going to look at the encounter itself, and how it is a life changing experience. From a leadership perspective, it could mean changes to your Vision, Character and Relationships. Every encounter with God is a deeply personal experience.

Last week while studying the first biblical perspective we looked at the first encounter that Jacob had with God. That is where we looked into his reaction, Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it (Gen 28:16, NKJV). This morning we are going to continue to walk with Jacob and see his other encounters with God and see what we can learn from them.

Overall, the Bible records five encounters with God for Jacob. This further proves our last week's perspective that we saw, that God encounters are not a one-time experience. It repeats and we are invited to have that every day. We will quickly look at the five encounters of Jacob.

Jacob's second encounter is recorded in Genesis Chapter 31. Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you." (Gen 31:3, NKJV). The author does not give us any more details about the second encounter as he did for the first one. No dramatic settings. Just a direct communication from God. It is through Jacob's narration to his wives that we know about the fact that this was part of a dream. (Gen 31:10-13).

His third encounter is recorded in Genesis 32: 24-29. This is probably the most famous, and the most dramatic of his encounters. This is where there is direct contact between Jacob and God. This is where he wrestles with God all night, and lets Him go only after He blessed Jacob. This is also where Jacob

ends up getting his hip bone broken and gets his permanent limp.

The fourth encounter is recorded in Genesis Ch 35, where the Lord asks Jacob to go back to Bethel, where he had his first encounter. Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother." (Gen 35:1 NKJV). This is again most probably a dream and the author does not give us any more details.

The last recorded encounter is found a little later in Ch 35. Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him (Gen 35:9, NKJV). We do not know the circumstances of this encounter either.

Going to the New Testament and looking at the life of Paul, we can see that he has had at least three direct encounters with Christ. The first one is the most famous one and we all remember that one. The one on the road to Damascus, first recorded in Acts 9:3-19 and retold in Acts 22:6-16 (where Paul was addressing the Jerusalem mob who wanted his head, and nothing short) and again Acts 26:12-18 (Where Paul is defending and witnessing to King Agrippa)

Paul's second encounter is recorded in Acts 22:17-21, as told by Paul himself. This is again when he is addressing the Jerusalem mob. This encounter happens more than 3 years after the first one. In this Jesus comes to Paul when he is in a trance and commands him to leave Jerusalem to go and be a witness to the gentiles. This is despite Paul making a good case for being a witness in Jerusalem among the Jews.

Paul's third encounter is recorded in Acts 23:11, where the author records that But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome" (Acts 23:11, NKJV). This is immediately after the Jerusalem mob fury and his address to the Sanhedrin that left the Sanhedrin divided. He was in prison and that is when Jesus appears to him and encourages him, with the promise that no harm will come to him because he has to witness in Rome just as he did in Jerusalem.

As we saw last week, the encounter with God is never a one-time affair and it continues. This is very evident in the cases of Jacob and Paul. We are going to examine two themes from these encounters.

The first theme that stands out is that each encounter is a very personal one. It is not a secondary one. When we do research on any topic for any academic degree, we can do it either through primary research, or through secondary research. The encounters are do not have an option like that. While we can all learn from someone's encounter with God, ultimately we need to have a personal encounter with God for us to be convinced about God's relationship with us. This is so very evident in all the encounters we have listed here. Every time Jacob encounters God is it one-to-one. This is true for Paul's encounters too. The encounters are very personal. I gave a you the start of my conversion story last week, let me give you the remaining part of the story today. You know that I started attending the post service fellowship at Leslie's church more for the samosa and tea than for anything else. But something good came out of that association. As I started socialising with people in her church, I came to see something different in their behaviour. Not all of them though. But some of them. There was even an incident that I very clearly remember. A couple lost their teen-age son in a road accident. The boy was knocked down by a DTC bus while he was riding his bicycle and died instantly. The way the couple handled the trauma, the way they went to meet the bus driver in police custody and told him that they have forgiven him,

the way they stayed firm in their faith, really touched me. It was not just that major incident, but several other small incidents that gave me an impression that there is something different in the way some of these people dealt with life itself. That is what led me to ultimately start sitting through the service. When I started sitting through the service, I wanted to check for myself the veracity of the sermons by the pastors. That is when I got hold of the Bible and started reading the Bible. Again, not for any spiritual reason but more to see if I can prove them wrong in some way. My encounters with God started with this constant engagement with the word of God. It was very personal. God spoke to me through the pages of the Bible in a very personal way. God revealed the extent of His love for me through those pages. God told me that I am precious in His eyes, and He will do anything to get me back. The Bible told me that He has loved me with an everlasting love. The bible encountered me with the truth that He sent His only begotten son to die on the cross, so that I could be saved. Me, the same person who started going to church for the samosa and tea. Jesus spoke to me from the cross and told me that He loves me so much. It is those personal encounters that ultimately led me, after 8 long years, to accept the Lord Jesus as my personal Saviour. In short it was a series of personal encounters that I experienced through the Bible that ultimately made me accept Him and surrender to Him.

(You can read more about my testimony at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvpxU6D-asM>)

Yes, the encounters with God are personal in nature. It does not matter, if you are in a mega church filled with thousands of people, or a small church with just a few people, when you have an encounter with God, the number of people around you do not matter. It is just you and Him. That could be scary at times, but it is where Jesus makes the difference. Jesus makes it possible for us to call the awesome father Abba Father, daddy, papa and come to Him as a child knowing that He will lift you up and put you in His lap, and comfort you.

The second aspect of the encounters that we saw from Jacob and Paul is that the encounters with God are life changing experiences. Let us take Paul first. Immediately after his first encounter, Paul's life takes a 180 degree turn. From being a persecutor, he becomes a witness, instantly. He himself admits to his immediate conversion when he discusses the encounter with King Agrippa. "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance (Acts 26:19-20, NKJV). This is a dramatic change, in line with the dramatic nature of the encounter. Paul's life turns around. But we see that his subsequent encounters also result in some very significant changes to his life and ministry. His second encounter we saw in Acts 22:17-21, had a lifechanging impact in his ministry. He was hoping that he will do ministry among the Jews, where he fitted well, but he was asked to take an entirely different course altogether. I am sure happy that Paul had his second encounter with Jesus. We, the gentiles, have the gospel thanks to that encounter. Paul's third encounter sends him directly to the power center, Rome, where the difficulty is multifold and the impact even more so. So we see that the three encounters of Paul were life changing experiences for him.

It is a slightly different story for our Old Testament friend Jacob. Let us see his reaction after the first encounter. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, 21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. 22 And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You" (Gen 28:20-22, NKJV). The good

part of the vow is that Jacob finally agrees to accept Yahweh as his Lord, and agrees to give tithe for whatever he gets. But let us look at the immature side of this vow. Look at the conditional tone of the vow, look how many times he uses I and me in the vow. He is not saying that he will accept the Lord's promises and worship Him, but he lays down several conditions for that. Keep me in this way, give me bread to eat, clothing to put on, I come back to my fathers house in peace. His acceptance of the Lord is conditional to these good things being done to him. Remember during the encounter, the Lord has promised him everything. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. 14 Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you" (Gen 28:13-15, NKJV). God has already promised him everything and much more than what he is asking, but it seems that Jacob is not fully convinced about the promise keeping nature of God. He lays down his own conditions before agreeing to worship the Lord. Even the tithe is conditional to God meeting all the conditions he has laid out. It is certainly not the type of 180 degree turn that we see in Paul's case. We see a very subtle and an immature change in Jacob.

It is very easy for me to understand Jacob, and identify with him because my life changes after my first few encounters were just like Jacob's. I wouldn't be surprised at all if my reaction after the first encounter with God was like "God as long as you keep serving samosa and tea after the service, I will come to Church". I knew the promises God has made. I knew the sacrifice He made on the cross, yet I wasn't willing to give in so easily. I kept on saying "yes.. but...." That is why my conversion took 8 years.

How about you? If and when you have had an encounter with God, has it resulted in any change in you? Was the change like that of Jacob or like that of Paul? Reflect on it for a moment.

Fortunately for us, God is persistent. He does not give up on us easily. He did not give up on Jacob. He did not give up on me. He continued His encounters with Jacob and as we study the next encounters of Jacob, we realise that Jacob was becoming more mature with each encounter. At the second encounter, he is more certain that the Lord has been with him, and the Lord has taken away Laban's livestock and given it to him (Gen 31: 5,9). He obeys, but is still not too confident, because he runs away quietly without the knowledge of Laban. It is during the third encounter that we see Jacob's determination to be blessed by the Lord peaking (Gen 32:26), and he perseveres till he gets what he wanted, even at the cost of getting wounded and getting a limp. The fourth encounter sees him become a lot bolder, ordering his household to put away all the foreign gods and purify themselves before they set out to Bethel for the third time (Gen 35:2-3). During the final encounter, we see God reaffirming His promises He made during His first encounter with Jacob (Gen 35:9-12), but this time we see complete obedience from Jacob. He does not question, he does not set conditions, but simply worships the Lord with drink offering and pouring of oil.

We will analyse these changes further in the next few Sundays, and we will realise that the changes happen at three levels. There is a change in Vision, there is a change in Character and there is a change in Relationships. These three are the what I call as the three imperatives in my 3-7-10 model that I have explained in my book Not-So-With-You (<https://www.menorahleadership.com/not-so-with->

you_book/). This book, though it addresses leaders in specific, is a useful "How-to" manual on leading like Jesus. The three imperatives are what I call as the Leadership imperatives in this book.

This morning before we close, let us compare our experiences of encounters with God and find out the changes that has happened in our lives due to those encounters. It might be dramatic changes like that of Paul or gradual changes like that of Jacob. Let us identify the changes and thank God for them. If we are unable to see any change, let us seek a fresh encounter with God this morning.

Let us pray.