



ENCOUNTERING GOD

1. IDENTIFY YOUR PATHWAY

ICEBREAKER

If this is a new group or there are new people, please take a moment to **introduce yourselves**.



To start off your small group, briefly share your response to the following questions:

Are you the type who gets easily lost or can you get around anywhere without a map?

Share with your group.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Let's get a big picture of what we'll be learning today...

God wants us to cultivate a close, consistent relationship with Him. Though one can desire this intimate walk with Jesus, many feel that their relationship with God is inconsistent. They are ashamed of their prayer life and time spent connecting with God. We want to grow spiritually, but busyness and distractions often sidetrack us from having a close, consistent relationship with Him. We are all unique in the ways we connect with Him. In this series, we will help you identify the unique ways God has created you to connect with Him. We want to help you identify the spiritual pathways, or to say it another way, the environments and activities that help you encounter Him so you can enjoy a close, daily, consistent relationship with Him. Discover the spiritual pathways God wants you to walk on...with Him. Find the right path or combination of paths for you! The first step is discovering your unique pathway to spiritual growth.



TIPS TO A SUCCESSFUL SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Tip: BE COMFORTABLE WITH SILENCE. Uncomfortable silences are bound to happen. It's okay! A long pause during a group discussion can be powerful. A *pause* gives space for quieter people to break into the conversation; silence allows people to figure out exactly what they would like to say.

Tip: CONFIDENTIALITY IS IMPORTANT. Confidentiality is the key to building trust in relationships. Here are a few mottos to remember to be confidential: "*What is said in small group, stays in small group.*" Nothing, nobody, never...Share nothing, to nobody, never" outside of the group.

ONLINE Tip: HYBRID GATHERING (ZOOM &/OR IN PERSON). If you're meeting together on Zoom, familiarize yourself with the Zoom features on your electronic device. It is helpful for everyone to know where the mute button is located. Ask the attendees to self-mute to avoid environmental noise when someone else is talking & sharing. Doing this will help with the flow of your SG discussion time. If your group decides to meet in person, please practice safe social distancing by following the guidelines of being 6 feet apart and wearing a mask.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.) We can all agree that time with God is important. Like any relationship, communication is essential for a healthy connection. With God, a close relationship isn't possible without daily, regular communication through prayer, Bible reading, and devotion. Jesus said this:

I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in Me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:5 (NLT)

Some of these things come naturally to others...but for the rest of us, praying, bible reading and devotion can be inconsistent and frustrating. Or perhaps we start to find these efforts monotonous and less helpful. At some point, we might even feel guilty for not doing enough devotional time or not doing it the right way.

It could be that we're approaching our relationship with God in incomplete ways. What if there were spiritual environments and activities that felt like a custom fit for our lives? Well, there is. We call these environments and activities "Spiritual Pathways."

What are some ways your walk with God has changed from the time you first started following Him?

PAUSE & TAKE ASSESSMENT: Right now, turn to page 50 of your booklet and take some time to do the Spiritual Pathway Assessment together.

2.) Throughout this series, we will be looking at seven different, distinct, and effective spiritual pathways. These are ways that we best connect with God. No one pathway is better than another. They all offer both positive qualities and potential issues. But when you discover your own unique pathways, you're on your way to deepening your walk with God.

Let's briefly look at each one.

"The Relational Pathway"

People on this pathway discover spiritual growth when they are in the company of others.

"The Intellectual Pathway"

These people love to draw close to God when they are thinking.

"The Serving Pathway"

When they roll up their sleeves and get to work, they feel closest to God.

"The Contemplative Pathway"

Individuals who characteristically love uninterrupted time alone feel great on this pathway.

"The Activist Pathway"

Finding new ways to share their faith is what gets them going.

"The Creation Pathway"

People who find the creation pathway as a great way of growing closer to God respond deeply through their experience in nature.

"The Worship Pathway"

Having a deep love of corporate worship and celebration fuels their soul.

At the end of this book, you'll find an assessment to see which pathway(s) is right for you.

After taking the Spiritual Pathway Assessment, which of these seven pathways do you identify with most? Share with your group.

3.) Each week we're going to unpack specific spiritual pathways. We will look at one to two pathways more in-depth. Let's take a closer look at the first pathway today: **"The Relational Pathway."** If you find this pathway as a great way to encounter God, then you probably love studying the Bible and praying in a group. Solitude may make you restless, but large crowds get you excited!

But the truth is, we all need each other. This one particular pathway may not be your favorite, but it's still vital. That's why small groups are so important. You know that, and that's why you are here right now!

In critical times of spiritual growth, God will use people in small group communities to speak in and through each other's lives. You can see that all over scripture! Take a look:

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 (NLT)

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts

Acts 2:46 (NIV)

What are some ways that your small group has helped you grow spiritually in the past? Share a specific story if you have one!

4.) So, which pathway is the best? The good news is that there's no wrong answer to that! The best pathway is the one that helps you connect to God the easiest and most natural. You may find that two or three pathways work great for you. And the pathway your spouse or best friend uses may not click with you. That's okay. Because that's the way God made you.

"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart."

Jeremiah 1:5 (NLT)

Before you were born, God knew all about you. He is the one who shaped you physically, emotionally, and spiritually. His design is like a stamp that He's placed on you. And the way you are shaped will determine how best you connect to Him.

Have you ever tried something that just wasn't right for you? What was your response? (Example, enrolling in school and not enjoying it or taking a job that was a bad fit)

WHAT WILL YOU DO?



This week, we will begin a journey to discover our own spiritual pathway. This discovery is the first step in spiritual growth, in finding new ways to serve the Lord, and making the most of every day as we walk with Him. Here is where we start this journey...

- Commit to stay engaged through the process,
- Be open to discovering new things about yourself, and
- We encourage you to do the Daily Devotions starting on page 14.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Take a few minutes to close your time together with prayer and to pray for each other's prayer requests. Below is a sample prayer to read if you choose to. You can also choose to write down each other's prayer requests to remember throughout the week.



Sample Prayer:

"Father God, You truly made each of us so unique and yet we have something beautiful in common--You made us in Your image. We have Your DNA. And because of that, we each connect with You in our own special ways. Throughout this new message series, help us to commit to stay engaged through the process and be open to discover new things about ourselves. May this series help us have a better understanding of who You made each of us to be. Thank You for making each of us so wonderful. We desire to know You more. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!"

Group Prayer Requests:

Name

Request

DURING THE WEEK

Find Time To Read God's Word



The Power of Feeding on God's Word Daily

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

Matthew 4:4 (NIV)

As we read God's word, we begin to see how God responds to things. Doing daily devotions re-patterns the way we think and transforms the spirit of the mind. Then, when we face similar situations as Jesus did, we begin to respond in the same way.

Doing devotions is an excellent way to record, process, and share what God is speaking to you. It's also a useful tool to use at a later time to reflect on and review some of the "gems" that you have received. Without writing these down, you may forget God's promises and some very important life lessons! While doing devotions is a very personal time with the Lord, you may want to share some of your daily devotions with your family, friends, co-workers, or small group. Through discussion, you may be able to look deeper into what God is speaking to you, gain new insights, and even encourage others.

Sample Devotion

SCRIPTURE

"If you do not carry your own cross and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple."
(Luke 14:27)

OBSERVATION

Self-sacrifice is a prerequisite for discipleship. Self-centeredness has no place in the life of a Jesus follower.

APPLICATION

It can be hard to focus less on self and more on Jesus, but when we do we are living out the very commands of Jesus.

PRAYER

God, help me to live a selfless life by always focusing on what You want instead of what makes me happy, comfortable, and content. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SCRIPTURE...

Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105 (NLT)

OBSERVATION...

APPLICATION...

PRAYER...

SCRIPTURE...

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

Isaiah 43:2 (ESV)

OBSERVATION...

APPLICATION...

PRAYER...

SCRIPTURE...

Who can live in Your tent, Lord? Who can dwell on Your holy mountain? The person who lives free of blame, does what is right, and speaks the truth sincerely;

Psalm 15:1-2 (CEB)

OBSERVATION...

APPLICATION...

PRAYER...

SCRIPTURE...

In His grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well.

Romans 12:6 (NLT)

OBSERVATION...

APPLICATION...

PRAYER...

SCRIPTURE...

Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in Your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

Psalm 139:14-16 (NLT)

OBSERVATION...

APPLICATION...

PRAYER...
