

WC ENCOUNTER GROUPS CURRICULUM
WEEK TWO: PRESENCE
A MORE EXCELLENT WAY



A More Excellent Way: Presence

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we give thanks for your eternal presence. We know that we are never alone, for you are always with us no matter how far we may stray. Help us to be fully present with you and one another as we grow together in your Word. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

ENCOUNTERING GOD:

How have you seen God at work this week?

.....

.....

WEEKLY SCRIPTURE READING:

Read Acts 28:11-15

“Three months later we set sail on a ship that had wintered at the island, an Alexandrian ship with the Twin Brothers as its figurehead. We put in at Syracuse and stayed there for three days; then we weighed anchor and came to Rhegium. After one day there a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found believers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. The believers from there, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.”

REFLECTION:

Why do we go to the movies, see a college or professional sporting event, or enjoy a music concert? If we are willing to wait, in just a few months the movie will be released. We can stream it from our smart devices or pick it up from Redbox. We can watch a sporting event from the comfort of our homes, without the need to wait in long lines or pay excessive prices for concessions. We can find the music videos for our favorite songs online. So why do we bother to be present for these events when in most cases, it is more convenient to experience them at home? We show up because there is something powerful that happens in the atmosphere and we feel connected as we participate in a shared experience. We are reminded that we are not alone. We show up wearing our team's colors or singing our band's song together. At the movie theater, we share the fear, laughs, anticipation, and resolution as we journey with the protagonist through the twists and turns of the plot. However, none of that is worth it without feeling welcomed. In fact, if we don't feel welcomed, we will often choose not to go to the same stadium, movie theater, or concert venue. Instead, we may choose to go somewhere else or just stay home.

Paul is a prisoner of Rome, he and his co-travelers have survived a shipwreck. They wash ashore on the island Melita (Malta). The natives, who happen to be non-believers, show them hospitality by building a warm fire for the survivors. The natives have no idea who Paul is. Then Paul is bitten by a poisonous snake, which he shrugs off. This powerful act demonstrates to people that God is present with Paul. After that, Paul heals many of the sick people on the island. Paul used his presence on the island to heal those who were sick. Paul left the island better than he found it. His presence made a difference. After three months, they set sail on an Alexandrian ship, under the pagan figurehead Castor and Pollux, “the sons of Zeus.” Castor and Pollux were venerated as saviors from the stormy seas by the Roman pagans. However, Paul knew that it was God who made it possible for him to reach Rome to fulfill his mission. One of the attributes of God is that God is omnipresent, meaning that there is no place that God is not present. God does not conform to time or space. God is the master of both. God’s omnipresence flows from what John Wesley called God’s reigning attribute which is love. Therefore, God was present with Paul during the storm; God was with him when he washed ashore; God was present and at work in the lives of the natives, who showed hospitality to Paul and the other survivors. Paul saw the presence of God in the show of hospitality that he received from the believers in Rome. People came from the Forum of Appius, which is 40 miles from Rome, and the Three Taverns, which is 30 miles from Rome. In their day, 30 and 40-mile journeys were not easy to make. They couldn’t just jump in the Tesla or Chevy and get there 30 minutes later. It could take them days. This required a sacrifice on their part. They made the time to be present with Paul when he needed them most, after the trauma of the shipwreck and the ongoing condition of imprisonment. Lastly, Paul was allowed the freedom to meet with believers throughout the city, although he was under the watch of a guard. The presence of God was at work in the life of Paul; it was even evident to the Romans. What do others see in us?

GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Encounter The Head:

What does omnipresence mean? How can the omnipresence of God help us in our time of need?

.....

.....

Why should we be present in worship and in small groups? What are the benefits? What are the barriers?

.....

.....

What was the most impactful thing that you learned from the podcast, sermon, sermon discussion guide, or from the scripture?

.....

.....

Encounter The Heart:

Share a time when you were present, in the right the place at the right time, to receive a blessing, a prize, a gift, or somethings else of personal value.

.....

.....

Do people thank God that we're around? Is our presence a blessing to others?

.....

.....

.....

GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Encounter The Hands:

Write down the barriers to making ourselves fully present to our family and to God.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Share and discuss ways that you can remove some of those barriers as a group.

Encounter The Home:

Please do your daily reflection questions and check out the Family Encounter that follows.



PRAISE AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Please go around the group and have each person share a praise for this week and a prayer request/concern.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

CLOSING PRAYER

Have a volunteer lead closing prayer: asking for prayer concerns and lifting up the needs of the group.

.....

.....

DAILY REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

We encourage everyone to do a daily reflection. This can be done alone, as a couple, or with your family. This spiritual practice will help answer the questions you have and it will improve your ability to see where God is at work in your life, and in the lives of those around you. Please answer the following questions during your personal devotional time at the end of the day.

Where have you seen God today? For the children, we say, “what made you happy today?”

.....

.....

What broke your heart or made you sad today?

.....

.....

What good thing did you do for someone else today?

.....

.....

What are you thankful for today?

.....

.....

WEEK FOUR

Supplies:

- Bible
- Sacred Candle & Matches/Lighter
- Your walking shoes

WELCOMING GOD:

Gather together, and welcome God into this time and space through the lighting of a candle. Take this moment to pause briefly and sit quietly in this light for a few moments allowing time for everyone to relax their body, mind, and spirit for this time. In these moments, the invitation is to become aware of God's presence with and amongst you as a family.

SHARING WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER:

Say: "If anything is on our minds that makes it difficult for us to focus, let's share it now and then let it go."

- Whoever leads this portion might share what is on his or her mind to model this. Give time for each person to respond. When everyone has responded that would like to, invite everyone to place their hands out and lift them up as we give these distractions to God.

OR you can invite the family to pray together as one person leads, saying the following:

"Dear Loving God, The One who knows our hearts, celebrates our victories, grieves with us during our losses, and gives us the strength to overcome our challenges. Please help us to let go of the distractions we name now, so that we can openly share with our family and may encounter you in a special way today. Our distractions are... (let there be silence here, so everyone has an opportunity to name aloud what is distracting them).

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen."

ENCOUNTERING GOD:

Read aloud: Acts 28:11-15.

- Take turns reading the Scripture or have a different family member read the Scripture each week.

"Three months later we set sail on a ship that had wintered at the island, an Alexandrian ship with the Twin Brothers as its figurehead. We put in at Syracuse and stayed there for three days; then we weighed anchor and came to Rhegium. After one day there a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found believers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. The believers

from there, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.”

ENCOUNTERING EACH OTHER:

Say: This story in Acts is about a journey—a hard journey—to Rome. And when Paul arrived, the Romans came to meet him. Some of the Romans came from up to 50 miles away (no cars!) to meet Paul and to welcome him. And, after a long, hard journey, Paul saw them, thanked God and took courage. The presence of others who loved and welcomed him helped Paul as he came to Rome. But, to do any of this, one thing had to happen for the people in Rome and Paul: they had to NOTICE one another, and noticing only happens when we pay attention. And to do that, we practice!

Activity:

Go on a “noticing” walk together. (Blow out your candle before you go!)

So much of this scripture from Acts details Paul’s journey to Rome. While you are on your walk together, set aside one minute (60 seconds) to be silent and do the following:

- look around
- take a deep breath (or a few)
- listen closely to the sounds around you
- feel the grass or tree leaves or the ground below you

Take the time to really notice things you might not have noticed before (does your neighborhood have an owl you never saw before now? Is someone mowing the lawn? Did you hear any crickets?).

Discussion Questions:

No questions this week. Just this: when your minute of silence is up, talk about what each family member heard, saw, smelled, felt, etc. What did you notice?

ENCOUNTERING GOD TOGETHER:

Say: “May we pray together as a family...

Let us share our prayers for the world: for our country and leaders, for other countries and their leaders...

Let us share our prayers for the church, ministers, and spiritual leaders...

Let us share our prayers for our teachers, first responders, friends, and others in the community...

Let us share our prayers for our family and our own specific needs...”

If you would like to record the people for whom you pray, use the next few lines to do so:

ENCOUNTERING TRANSFORMATION TOGETHER:

Pray aloud together:

God, we welcomed you here and read Your Word,
we prayed and we spent time with you,
we rested in your love for us,
and we did this all together.

Now, we promise to love one another and others as you love us.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

BLESSING ONE ANOTHER FOR OUR ENCOUNTERS WITH THE WORLD:

Invite family members to bless one another using any of the examples below or their own blessings.

Examples:

- “I love you. God loves you. I pray God blesses you.”
- “God loves you exactly like you are—and so do I.”
- “I love the gifts God has given you and how you bless the world with them.”