

Family Encounter

Our days and weeks fill up quickly! There's another meeting, another practice, another round of homework, another volunteer opportunity—and they all combine and contribute to our daily and weekly grind. Amid that grind, we can become ships that meet in the night within our homes, passing one another along the way and missing moments of connection and faith sharing.

Family Encounter is a time for members of Encounter Groups to hit pause on that grind of daily schedules and set aside a few minutes for family—a time to encounter God and one another. Our prayer for this time is that you will grow together as a family and that each of you will experience, know and be constantly reminded of God's never-ending love for you.

A word about Family Encounters

Sometimes, as we read scripture together, we want to ensure that those gathered, especially our children, have a “correct” or “right” interpretation of the Bible. As you come together, we invite you to do so with God's promise to be with us in mind. In Matthew (18:20), we are told that wherever two or three are, so too is God. Remember that God is with you in this time and through this time together. And God is working to transform your lives. Family Encounters are a time to share sacred moments with your family—we want to liberate you from thinking about teaching your children the “right answers” and invite you allow them—and you—to be transformed by God's work in and through this time.

This time is about learning to be with God.

Trust that God will care for the rest.

And, have fun! Yes, this is the creation of sacred time, but it's also a time to be real with one another. Not every activity will work for each member of the family (that's okay! Don't force it!), and not every question will be understood (that's okay, too! Allow children to answer honestly from their own understanding, and you do the same!). As you join together in this time and listen non-judgmentally to one another, share in activities together, and learn with and from each other, God will move. There will be times of seriousness and concern, times of joy and celebration, times of silliness and fun. In all these times, let God move in and through you.

Family Encounters are designed for use by families with children of all ages, and it's completely adjustable. Feel free to use this format in a way that best meets your family's needs. This may mean skipping part, or it may mean lingering over another part. The goal is for your family to encounter God and one another in meaningful ways.



Family Encounter Format

Every weekly Family Encounter will follow a similar pattern and is based on the sermon from the previous week. The basic structure is as follows:

Theme: The theme for each week is selected from the scripture passage and give us a focal point.

Supplies: Each week, you will need a Bible, a candle, and matches or a lighter. You might also need other objects or supplies. Supplies will be listed each week.

Welcoming God: Each week, we will invite you to welcome God into this time and space through the lighting of a candle. We will also invite you to pause briefly and sit quietly in this light for a few moments until everyone has settled in, relaxed, and is ready to focus on this time together with God. In this way, we invite you to become aware of God's presence with and amongst you as a family.

Sharing with God and One Another: All family members are invited to share a word or two about anything that is making it difficult to slow down in these moments. This may be a big meeting at work, the need to cook dinner, a favorite show that's about to come on t.v., the desire to play outside, etc. This is a moment to share together those things that distract us. We need not comment on them. Simply respond to each offering with "thank you for sharing." When everyone has shared, you will be invited to lift those distractions up to God and release them.

Encountering God: This is when we will re-read the scripture passage for the week together. We encourage you to make this a family affair. Have each member of the family take a turn, or switch readers each week. If you have a family Bible that has been passed down, it could even be powerful to use it.

Encountering Each Other: Each week, we will suggest a new way to encounter the scripture and theme for the week. This may be an activity or a practice. We will also ask a few questions (don't worry: there's no right answer!) to guide your exploration of the Scripture together. This is a moment for family members to express themselves and to create listening space. If a longer conversation begins to occur here, great! Roll with it! This is a time for us to encounter one another.

Encountering God Together: This is a time of prayer together. During this time, your family will pray for the world, the church, the community, your friends, your family, and any specific needs you have. If you want to begin a family prayer journal where you list these requests, you can record them in that and see, over time, how God moves.

Encountering Transformation Together: This is a time of prayer that remains the same each week. It is said in unison and is meant to offer yourselves to God. The first few times you engage this practice, you might need to say the prayer line by line with one person leading and everyone else repeating. Soon, you will all know it and be able to recite it by heart.

Blessing One Another for our Encounters with the World: Families and communities have blessed one another throughout history. The practice of blessing is both ancient and biblical. In blessing, we invite the kingdom of God to be active in the life of the one we bless, and we acknowledge the ways that God acts already in that life. During this time, we invite you take the hands of another person, look them in the eye and bless them using one of the blessings provided.*

*A sidebar about blessings: we can do this as a spiritual practice with people every day of our lives. There is no wrong way to bless someone. Blessings can be as specific as sharing with someone that you know they are struggling and pray God's wisdom, joy, strength, protection, etc. for them or they can be as simple as sharing "May the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you."