

ENCOUNTER: People of Presence

Text: Exodus 33:1-17

Theme: We are not just called to live for God, but with God—distinguished by His Presence in our lives.

Thesis

We often settle for God's gifts without God Himself. But Moses shows us that the true mark of God's people is not prosperity, success, or comfort—but His Presence. The Gospel makes possible what Moses longed for: permanent access to the presence of God through Jesus and the Spirit. To live apart from His Presence is to miss the very purpose we were created and saved for.

Introduction

It's possible to gain everything the world offers—peace, success, comfort, even blessings that appear to come from God—and still miss the one thing that matters most: God Himself. In Exodus 33, God tells Israel they can have the land, protection, and victory, but not His Presence. Moses refuses: 'If Your Presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.' This cry reveals the heart of a disciple who knows that without God's nearness, nothing else matters.

The tragedy of modern discipleship is that many settle for form without fire, blessing without Presence, religion without relationship. But Jesus came not just to forgive sin, but to restore us into God's Presence—giving us His Spirit as the very indwelling Presence of God.

Correlating Scripture

John 14:16-18 — 'I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth... You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.'

Group Discussion Questions

Would You Settle Without God?

Israel is offered victory, land, and provision—but not God Himself. Why was this a 'disastrous word' to them (v.4)? What would your life look like if God's presence were removed? Would you notice?

Created for His Presence

Why do you think Moses refuses to go without God's presence (v.15)? What does this reveal about what humans are ultimately created for? How does this challenge the way we often

approach faith—as getting things from God rather than being with God?

Distinguished by Presence, Not Performance

In verse 16, Moses says God's presence is what distinguishes His people from the world. What do people usually use to distinguish Christians today? How would your workplace, school, or family change if what stood out most about you was the presence of God?

From Form to Fire

The sermon warned of 'form without fire'—living as Christians in name and practice but without power. What does 'form without fire' look like in today's church culture? How can we cultivate daily awareness of God's presence so that our faith is more than intellectual belief but lived experience?

Practicing the Presence of God

Dallas Willard said: 'The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds... If God is the great longing of our souls, He will become the pole star of our inward being.' What are some daily rhythms, disciplines, or 'presence practices' that help you keep God before your mind? What would it look like for your group to help one another live in God's presence during the week, not just on Sundays?

Application Questions

- What is one area of your life where you've been living as if God were absent? How will you invite His presence there this week?
- What is one way you can trade religious form for Spirit-filled fire?
- Who in your life needs to see the distinguishing presence of God through you, and how will you carry that to them?

Prayer Guide

- Praise God for sending Jesus so we might dwell in His Presence forever.
- Confess areas where you have been content with blessing without Presence.
- Thank Him for the Spirit who makes His Presence real, daily, and personal.
- Ask for deeper awareness of His Presence in your work, relationships, and struggles.
- Pray that your group would be marked by God's Presence in a way the world cannot ignore.

Discipling Reflection

- How would your life look if you truly lived every day as one who carries the presence of God?
- What would change in your family, friendships, or workplace if you woke each morning saying, 'I'm not going anywhere today without You, Lord'?

"Ransomed men need no longer pause in fear to enter the Holy of Holies. God wills that we should push on into His Presence and live our whole life there." — A.W. Tozer