



Discussion Guide  
Encounters – Part 1  
LEADER GUIDE

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*In Encounters, we'll look at ordinary people in Scripture whose lives were changed by a direct encounter with the presence of God. As we lean into the vision of Coram Deo—living before the face of God—we'll discover that God's presence is not meant to be an occasional experience, but the defining reality that shapes every part of our lives.*

NEED A RESOURCE, HAVE A QUESTION, OR WANT TO HAVE A CONVERSATION?  
Let us know how we can help! Contact your groups director or [discipleship@rockbridge.cc](mailto:discipleship@rockbridge.cc)

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**"We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito."**

[C.S. Lewis]

LEADER RESOURCES || **Leader Note** We do our best to equip, empower, and encourage you to shepherd your group well. Access a resource by clicking on the underlined title and share them with your group!

- **Passage Summary**
  - Jacob's journey to find a wife and escape Esau includes a God-initiated encounter at Luz/Bethel. God uses a dream that includes a ladder/ramp and angels to give Jacob a word of promise. God's sovereignty, integrity, grace, and purposes are all highlighted and force Jacob to make a decision that accounts for (or disregards) God's presence in his life.

ENGAGE & CONNECT || **Leader Note** The goal for the icebreaker is to prepare your group for the conversation ahead by connecting with one another's hearts and building joy together.

Do you remember your dreams? Do you dream in color or black and white?

BEGIN WITH PRAYER || **Leader Note** Begin your time together thanking God for his presence and praying His word back to Him. Ask a few people to pray, taking a posture of humility and dependence!

Lord, You said You draw near to those who draw near to You. We know You are present everywhere, but we want more of You. We want to be close. Help us walk closer to You this week.

MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE || **Leader Note** Help your group memorize this verse together by having each person read it aloud. The goal is to enjoy hiding God's word in our hearts together.

*"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."*

[Joshua 1:9]

BIG IDEA || **Leader Note** Read this aloud so your group knows the theme of today's reading and discussion.

When we are awakened by the reality of God's presence, it becomes—in increasing measure—a factor in how we live our lives.

**PASSAGE & DISCUSSION || Leader Note** Have people read aloud the passage as instructed. Your role is to FACILITATE, so keep your group moving along, encourage people to share, and look for opportunities to point out the grace and glory of God! Here are two reminders: 1) Every question does not have to be answered ... go where the Spirit leads! 2) Answers do not have to be read aloud ... they're for guidance!

Have someone read aloud Genesis 28:10-22 in the ESV.

1. What does it look like to live in the presence of God all the time? *Answers will vary here. Some may be of the opinion that God's presence is an inescapable reality (omnipresent), so of course we're in His presence all the time. Others may have more experience with realizing that presence (manifest presence), with Him speaking directly or giving dreams and visions. Understanding what we mean by the terms will help the group come to a better understanding together.*
2. Imagine you're walking with God along a path in the woods. The path gets narrow at times, and there are trees overhead and boulders around your feet. Where are you in relation to Him? How close is He? *Answers will vary. It can be interesting to learn how we picture and imagine our walk with Christ. There isn't a right or wrong way to answer this; it's more of a way to reveal how we perceive something we don't necessarily see. If someone feels that they perceive Jesus as far from them, or them in front of Him, it might be worth asking a follow-up question of "Why is that?"*
3. How have you experienced God so far? *Just because we haven't heard from Him directly, had Him show up miraculously, or registered His direct action in our lives—doesn't mean He won't in the future, so encourage those who might not have had a direct experience of Him yet. Experiencing God through the Spirit bringing His word to life, receiving a specific guidance, or having Him answer a prayer are all things common to many believers. Let's hear the testimonies of what God has done so far!*
4. How can you change the structure of your week to make time to be aware of the nearness of God? *Listening takes intentional time with quiet enough for us to hear. Watching takes intentional time of visual quiet enough for us to see. Many of us have one barrier to experiencing more of God, and that is simply attention. We listen to other voices and sources, and we watch for everything but Him.*
5. God makes a covenant with Jacob here. What are the conditions of it? *God makes only one condition of this: His own nature. I am the LORD. I will do this. It is not for Jacob to do, merely for God to be with him.*
6. What is the ladder dream about? *This vision has one major interpretation, and that is this: The ladder is Christ. He is the connection between heaven and Earth. He is the promise to Jacob, to Israel. Whether the image is best translated as ladder, ramp, or flight of stairs, the idea is the same. The way to heaven is open, and there is only one Way, set up on Earth and ascending to heaven.*
7. How does Jacob respond or adjust to the reality of the presence of God in this space? *He marks it with a way to remember—a monument. He makes a vow, a promise on his end. His life direction and attention is different from here on out, because God made a covenant with him.*
8. On a scale of "coma" to "wide awake and caffeinated" how awake are you to the presence of God? *Let people describe where they are, then ask if there's a next step they feel God is asking them*

*for becoming more awake to His presence.*

**STEP OF OBEDIENCE** || **Leader Note** *This is an opportunity for people to put into practice what the Spirit is inviting them to do and live in obedience to God for the sake of love! You can encourage your group to be accountable to one another and use these to follow up with one another throughout the week.*

We can never outrun God **nor outdo His goodness.**

*As you consider your next step, reflect on:* 1) How has God covenanted with you? 2) What do you need to commit to God?

*Give your group a few moments to reflect on their answers to the questions above. Then have your group answer the question aloud. Feel free to separate into smaller groups of 2 or 3 for this question, so each person has others praying with them for the needs they're taking before the throne. The possible next steps of faith below are not for discussion, but simply a resource for your group members.*

**PRAYER FOCUS** || **Leader Note** *Be intentional about saving at least 5 minutes to pray together. Try the prayer activity below or pray for one another's personal requests!*

*"Awaken our hearts to Your presence. Call us deeper and closer. Guide us along the treacherous steps of life so that we learn to discern Your voice and accept Your hand. Amen."*