



Discussion Guide
Encounters — Part 4
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

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"God has shown us that he can use any instrument. Balaam's (donkey), you remember, preached a very effective sermon in the midst of his hee-haws."

[C.S. Lewis]

LEADER RESOURCES || **Leader Note** *We do our best to equip, empower, and encourage you to shepherd your group well.*

- **Passage Summary**
 - God is always working for us and on us. Balaam is a man associated with God—not aligned with Him, but honoring God, though His presence is not decisive in his life. He has settled into normalcy at the expense of Coram Deo (being before the face of God); therefore, God's presence brings crisis through a donkey. The narrator seems to want us to see what Balaam cannot see and laugh at his folly—what's normal for Balaam is hilarious folly.

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.*

If your pet could talk, what would they be sure to tell you?

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, help us to laugh together, to learn together, and to receive Your word as spoken by the humblest of Your servants. Thank You that You do miracles and that You are full of mercy.

MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE || **Leader Note** *Help your group memorize this verse together by having each person read it aloud. See if someone will take a chance and try quoting it from memory. 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.*

The overriding, overcoming, humbling presence of God stands in sharp contrast to “normal” Christianity and faith.

PASSAGE & DISCUSSION || Leader Note Have people read Numbers 22 in the ESV. 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!

1. What is a goal you have for this week? Something you want to accomplish or see happen?
Answers will vary. This is a setup question for the next one.
2. Imagine God showing up and literally blocking you from achieving that goal. How would that go? What would you do? *Again, answers will vary here. The story of Balaam is that he did not see that it was God who was blocking him. All he saw was a circumstance—a stubbornness that suddenly showed up in a normally compliant animal. His response was to beat the obstacle, to try to control and make it do what he wanted it to do. That is not how faith moves.*
3. Have you encountered spiritual or religious manipulation? What happened? *People see the power of God and want to use it to further their own power, control, glory, and influence. Sometimes this is fairly obvious: “used a scripture to make me submit, but wouldn’t obey the verse before it” or “said ‘God told me’ so we wouldn’t question it.” Sometimes it’s more subtle. Pray for discernment with this question, and that people’s eyes would be open to the truth. If possible, find scriptures to demonstrate the truth of the matter.*
4. What is God’s position throughout this story? *God doesn’t really budge on His decision here. This band of freed slaves known as Israel is blessed. He will only allow blessing upon His children at this time. Balaam can be swayed by the promise of more money and the favor of people with power, but God is not at all interested in any of these things.*
5. It seems like God changes His mind between the night (go with them, but do only what I tell you) and the morning (his anger was kindled). Why does this change in how Balaam experienced God matter? *This is a complex one, and the text does not offer us an easy answer. First, pray that God teaches us who He is through this story. It’s clear that Balaam isn’t exactly devoted to God and His will here. Experiencing instruction was one thing, but experiencing opposition was entirely another, and he was able to better see the God who could end him... but instead chose to counsel him. The God who could have cursed Israel just fine on His own, but chose to bless. There is probably plenty more to this issue, and it’s important to dive into difficult passage instead of shying away from their troublesome elements.*
6. Are there places where you’ve added some compromise with God, like Balaam was trying to do here? *We both-and so much in our culture, but God does not deal in compromise. We do not get to clean up for church and live for a paycheck the rest of the week. We do not get to “oh, it’s not hurting anybody” our way out of living consecrated, set apart lives. We do not get to spend hours checked out every day, our minds wandering in escapism, and only spend seconds in prayer.*
7. What are some other stories of the lowly, humble, or unexpected being elevated by God as He reveals Himself? *Some of the people in your group may also be that person. Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, and Simeon were all people involved in just the Christmas story alone. This is an excellent rabbit hole for so much of the Bible, because it shows that God’s nature and character (even though an action like Him choosing to oppose Balaam shows change from our perspective) are consistent. He loves to include the ones everyone else would leave out. Glory to His name.*

8. Is there a decision you're facing that you need to factor in God's presence and His word?
Everything from a promotion to a conflict to a need you're not sure is going to be met, all of it is available and open for God to direct, but we must be watching and waiting through prayer.
9. What can we pray about together as a group and seek God's will and position about?
Answers may vary, but be sure to take each thing to the Lord individually. You could assign the person to the right of whoever makes the request, or you could have one individual take notes and pray for each thing.

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 need to base every inclination, decision, and direction on **the wisdom and authority of God's word and the reality of His presence.**

As you consider your next step, reflect on: 1) What decision do you need to hold open before the Lord and let Him speak His will? 2) What compromise or dual motive do you need to purify?

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!*

"Lord, show us who You are. As we read Your word, seek Your face, listen for Your voice, and open ourselves to Your guidance, please let our eyes see, our ears hear, and our hearts receive what You have for us. Amen."