

Encounter God

Retreat & Instructor's Guide



Jim Egli

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Introduction

How to use this Guide

Dear Encounter Instructor,

Welcome to the Encounter God adventure! This guide (which now includes both the *Instructor's Guide* and *Retreat Guide*) was written to make your role as the weekend facilitator easier and your ministry more effective. Each teaching guide in this *Instructor's Guide* has three sections — Ready, Aim and Fire. The “Ready” portion tells you what to do to prepare for each session. “Aim” communicates what your objectives should be. The “Fire” section explains timing and other considerations to keep in mind as you move through each teaching. Simply put, the guides will help you get ready, take aim and fire.

The main body of each teaching page has two columns. The one on the left shows the Encounter God PowerPoint® slides. This presentation can be downloaded from the TOUCH website. (The username and password for the powerpoints may be found on the copyright page within this guide.) In the right column are the teaching suggestions that go with each slide. The slides can be displayed using a computer and a video projector or, if you are doing a small retreat, a large screen television. The slides can also be printed two to a page on transparencies and displayed using a simple overhead projector. You do not have to use the PowerPoint® presentations to teach the weekend. The slides are helpful, especially when you first teach the material, but they are not necessary. In fact, I do not usually use them now myself. Instead, I simply teach through the material letting people follow along in their manuals.

The teaching at an Encounter God Retreat should be powerful and direct. Stick to the Bible and the practicalities of each topic. Illustrate your points, but be careful not to get sidetracked. Keep the teaching on target to allow ample time for the most important part of the weekend — prayer and ministry.

All of the teaching for the Encounter Retreat is also available on video. The videos will be particularly valuable to those of you who are leading a retreat for the first time or two. You can use them to present the teaching itself or you can use them to preview the content and flow of each session before teaching the material yourself. God's Word declares, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16, NIV). My wife Vicki and I have seen this powerful reality over and over again. Our own lives were transformed thirteen years ago in a retreat similar to *Encounter God*, and we have seen many lives touched and transformed in retreats since then.

As you plan for your next retreat, I encourage you to prepare both your notes and your heart. Gather your team in the weeks before the retreat to lift up yourselves and those who will come to the retreat to the Lord. As you open your hearts to God and one another, you will experience His healing and restoring power in a wonderful way.

I thank God for Anne White who taught me the basics of spiritual warfare, for Dr. Timothy Warner who helped me understand the importance of worldview, for Jim and Barbara Lassiter who helped lead and shape the initial Encounters, and for my wife Vicki who has been a fantastic partner in ministry and material development. I am indebted to God for the ways that each one contributed to my life and this life-changing ministry!

Sincerely in Christ,
Jim Egli

Encounter God

Retreat Guide



Section 1: The History of the Encounter God Retreat

A young lady sitting near the front shook with frenzy while I was teaching. Her body went rigid and the manifestations were clearly demonic. I was a young missionary halfway across the world ministering among the Xhosa people in Umtata, South Africa. I did not know what to do and neither did the African Christians present at the session. Satan wanted to disrupt the training, and he succeeded! This was my first face-to-face encounter with the demonic.

Four years later, instead of being a young, inexperienced missionary, I was a young, inexperienced pastor serving a small, rural church in the Midwest. Late one evening, my wife and I were counseling a young couple from our church across our kitchen table. Their marriage was struggling, and the small fortune they had spent on professional counseling had done little good. When we stopped to pray with them, the wife said, "I see something evil. There is a dark presence that I can see in my mind trying to crush me." Again, I did not know what to do, but a novel thought occurred to me, "Pray!" As we sought God, the Holy Spirit brought step-by-step direction. There was victory, and the young wife then experienced the presence of God's Spirit in a new and wonderful way.

These two situations revealed to me that demons are just as real in little country churches in America as they are in Africa. In Africa they work overtly. Here they operate covertly. But their intent is the same: to destroy lives, marriages, and churches.

Nothing in my Bible college or seminary training had prepared me for these face-to-face dealings with the demonic. Even though I came to Christ through the influence of the Charismatic renewal movement and had spent much time studying spiritual gifts, I still knew essentially nothing about spiritual warfare.

To learn how to bring freedom and healing to others, my wife and I attended four intensive one-week training sessions taught by Anne White of *Victorious Ministry Through Christ*. When I got to the first seminar, I discovered that the first step in learning to minister spiritual freedom to others began with me. In about four hours, several prayer ministers led me to take a long, hard look at my past and bring every area of my life and history into submission to Christ. In this loving atmosphere, I brought to God areas from my past that I had never examined before. As I shared about key relationships before these caring servants, I confessed sin and released resentments.

Even though this was no mountaintop experience for me, I noticed profound changes in my life in the weeks that followed. First, I experienced a freedom in my

thought life that I did not know was possible. For men, sexual thoughts are often a constant temptation. After my personal prayer ministry, sexual thoughts might be tempting, but they were no longer controlling as they had been before. Why? Because lurid images from films and magazines that I had experienced had now been specifically brought to the Lord. These images were removed from my mind and subconscious, and their power had been broken.

I also saw significant changes in my memories of childhood. I grew up in a solid Christian home, but like everyone my childhood years were not perfect. Before this healing experience, when I recalled my childhood I would often remember hurt and disappointment. If I tried I could also remember many good things. After receiving ministry, it was just the opposite. The good things came to mind first. It took effort to remember the bad things.

I had gone to the first training event to learn how to minister spiritual freedom. But I came away with more than know-how; I was now free to serve! There was a new level of victory in my life, a fresh sensitivity to the Spirit and a growing use of spiritual gifts in my ministry to others.

In the years that followed, my wife and I were involved in ministering freedom to dozens of people. I was also privileged to study other materials and models from around the world. Although we saw wonderful miracles in people's lives, there was one major frustration. Because the ministry was intensive and requires well-trained and experienced guides, it seemed like so few people could be provided with such in-depth ministry. But several years later my perspective changed.

What's the Secret?

In late 1996, I learned from Dr. Ralph Neighbour, Jr. of the phenomenal growth of the International Charismatic Mission, a cell church in Bogota, Colombia. Intrigued to discover why this church was the fastest growing church in the world, leaders like Dr. Neighbour, Larry Stockstill and Joel Comiskey journeyed to this church to examine it more carefully. As I studied this church, I learned that although this church has thousands of cell groups, the secret to their growth is not the format of their cell groups. In fact, their cells are remarkably similar to the cells in other churches around the world.

Studying the church revealed that its spectacular growth is due to its incredible ability to multiply leadership. So then the question became, "How can this church multiply leadership so quickly?" Or put differently, "Why is this church able to rapidly take

individuals from immaturity to maturity to leadership?” I don’t have space to completely explain all the answers here, but one of the reasons the ICM multiplies leaders so rapidly is because new Christians are taken as soon as possible on “Encuentro” (Encounter) retreats. At these retreats, they are led to bring every area of their life to Christ and encounter His presence in a deep way. When I understood this, I immediately saw its genius.

In our own freedom ministry, we often waited until someone’s life was in crisis. When someone came to Christ we saw an initial surge of growth. Then, hopefully, the person would get connected to the church and vitally involved in a cell or home group. Spiritual growth after this was often gradual or stilted. Perhaps ten or fifteen years later the person would experience a crisis. For example, maybe the person’s marriage would be in deep trouble. At the point of crisis, we would speak into his or her life saying something like, “George, the reason that your marriage is a mess is because your life is filled with anger. We can help you bring that to Christ. If you will take a few hours with several of us, we will walk you through a time of ministry that will bring healing and release.” When people received this ministry, God worked powerfully, and we saw people set free. Sadly, this person should have received the ministry years before.

By taking people on this cleansing retreat early in their Christian life, ICM harnesses their initial zeal and experience of Christ’s love. They experience freedom from the things that tie them down and hold them back so they do not have to ever enter that crisis point. This allows very young Christians to enter into leadership quickly.

Whereas we had helped people one at a time, I saw that ICM utilizes a retreat format that allows them to help many people at once.

Launching and Learning Encounter God

From 1997 through 1999, I studied the Encuentro model and similar retreats that were being offered in churches in the United States, Canada and England. I personally participated in several of these retreats, and I examined others by studying their materials and interviewing leaders and participants. My initial goal was to develop an “Encounter God” retreat for my own church. As we saw God powerfully touch people, we realized that churches across the country and around the world needed a model that was biblical, effective and reproducible. So we began to develop a new Encounter retreat model by testing it in a diversity of churches across the United States — churches from Hawaii to Virginia. After several cycles of prayer, experimentation, evaluation and modification, we knew that we had a model that was not only helpful to us, but would also be effective for many others.

When I first started leading Encounter God retreats, I was afraid that the results would be inferior to the intensive counseling sessions that we had offered before. In those sessions, a small team of experienced and

trained people ministered for hours with one individual. This type of ministry is good, has its definite advantages and is sometimes still needed. However, as I have led the Encounter God retreats, I have been repeatedly surprised at the advantages of the retreat format, not its disadvantages.

In a retreat, you can convey more teaching than in one-on-one ministry. Also being away from home for a two to three day retreat lends itself to spiritual breakthroughs. The retreats have people confessing sins “to one another” in ministry pairs instead of to highly trained counselors. Perhaps at times the ministry is not as deep, but it does a better job of equipping people to take responsibility for their own spiritual victory. We have also found that working in ministry pairs equips people to step forward in ministry to others.

More than any other ministry I have experienced, the Encounters are events where I stand in awe as I watch God work. So often I feel like a bystander. As people take the simple biblical teaching and apply it to their lives, God’s Spirit brings wonderful breakthroughs and deep healing.

When people begin an Encounter God Retreat, there is a wonderful truth waiting to be realized. Jesus has paid the full price for their total freedom! There is no further price that they or anyone else has to pay! Healing, release, and life abundant await them. They only need to take what Christ has already done for them and apply it to each area of their life!

The history of the Encounter God Retreats has only just begun!

Section 2: How the Encounter God Retreat Works

The Goal of Encounter God Retreats

The goal of the Encounter God Retreat is for people to experience Christ's healing in every area of their lives. Because the retreat focuses on surrendering to Christ's lordship and receiving His wholeness, the theme verse is James 5:16 which says: "...confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

The Encounter Retreat also emphasizes John 10:10 where Jesus says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Satan has sought to destroy people's lives and place them in bondage. At the retreat, people are led to identify areas where Satan has brought destruction and bondage. As they bring these areas to the Lord and receive prayer, God brings freedom and life abundant.

Spiritual warfare is a part of the retreat, but they are not primarily deliverance events. Encounters are healing events. They are an opportunity for people to examine their lives in the light of God's Word and surrender themselves more fully to Him. As people do this in an atmosphere of compassion and expectancy, God works powerfully to set captives free, releasing His healing and the life of the Spirit.

The Venue of the Retreat

The venue for an Encounter Retreat is crucial. We have held Encounters in local church buildings, hotels, retreat centers and church camps. Based on your experience and that of other churches, Encounters get the best results when you hold them outside your hometown. They also are much more effective when they are not held in your church building. The reasons for this are apparent. When someone is close to home, it is difficult to disengage from daily concerns. It is too easy to be distracted. People will make a "short" phone call related to their business or run home "quickly" to check on the children. Churches that have done Encounters in their own building and allowed people to stay at home discover that it is easy for people to miss the first session on Saturday.

On a positive note, going to a hotel or retreat center away from home also builds anticipation for the event. People see it for what it is — a getaway to experience more of God. If you do it in your own building or hometown, it is merely perceived as a seminar.

Once you get out of town, the setting doesn't make a

lot of difference. I have led Encounters in nice hotels, in primitive camps and beautiful retreat centers. Some churches have even used summer cabins for small Encounters. God has worked powerfully in each setting. It doesn't seem to matter if you are crammed into a low-budget camp or a cushy hotel. Don't worry about going to a place with lots of amenities or recreational options. The participants will have little free time to take advantage of them.

Christian camps or retreats centers are often the most hospitable and affordable option. I recommend that you check into them first. In many towns, hotels have cheaper rates on the weekends. We found that the ideal hotels are often the newer, less expensive chains that do not have restaurants and include a free breakfast bar in the lobby. Breakfast is free because there is no restaurant. Also, since they do not have their own restaurant, they do not mind if you bring snacks, drinks and catered food, such as submarine sandwiches, pizza or chicken, for the lunch and dinner.

Men or Women or Both

There are two options for organizing the participants. You can include both men and women, or you can hold gender-specific retreats. The first option is great when you are beginning your Encounter ministry and have not developed two teams to lead gender-specific groups.

Yet the experience has revealed that the second option is much more effective. When we began doing gender-specific retreats, we immediately saw that ministry went deeper. It is too easy to be distracted at a mixed retreat. Spouses tend to listen for their husband or wife instead of themselves. They think, "I sure hope my husband is taking this talk to heart, he really needs to hear this!" Or it was easy for them to be distracted, "Why are they taking so long to minister to my wife in this ministry time?" When you have just men or just women at a retreat, people have greater freedom to deal with their own issues and build deeper friendships.

Attendance also increases when you do gender-specific Encounters. People get excited about going to men and women only events. Couples with children did not have to worry about arranging childcare. Singles also more readily join in because they are not going to events dominated by couples.

When you do separate Encounters, it does not matter which event — men’s or women’s — you do first. We do the men’s first and the women’s a month later. In this way, we do not separate married couples from one another for back-to-back weekends. Couples also find the events more affordable if both do not fall in the same month.

Ministry Pairs

After each of the six healing sessions, people minister to each other in ministry pairs. (At a retreat with both women and men present, this is always done men with men and women with women.) Pairs are the ideal way to do the healing ministry. If you put people in small groups of three or four, you will find that people get confused and the ministry takes too long.

The leadership of the retreat should assign the partners. We have tested assigning partners and random selection. It is much better to assign them deliberately and prayerfully. When I am the retreat leader, I arrive at the retreat location early with one or two others on the team. After praying over the retreat, we take the most current registration list and determine the ministry pairs. People are put with individuals who are about the same age. When possible, we pair people together who are in the same cell or small group. This helps facilitate follow-up encouragement and accountability. God is consistently faithful to guide you in your ministry pair assignments. Participants will tell you repeatedly that they had just the partner that they needed.

The ministry pair assignments are announced at the end of the second session on Friday night. Point out that you have tried to make the assignments prayerfully, but if someone feels uncomfortable for some reason with their assignment, they can say so and things can easily be rearranged.

You will find, perhaps to your surprise, that the ministry pairs can handle most of the ministry as the weekend progresses. As the Encounter God Instructor’s Guide emphasizes, repeatedly communicate the availability of the retreat leaders to either model ministry for ministry pairs or to step in and minister to an individual. Sometimes a person has a ministry need that they do not want to share with their partner. Also, make it clear that if someone ever feels overwhelmed by something that their partner shares or confesses, they should immediately come to one of the retreat leaders for help and one of them will assume ministry at that point.

I have found that new Christians are able to minister effectively even when two of them are paired together. When two new Christians are paired together, you may want one of the retreat leaders or a cell group leader to model ministry with them for the first ministry session or two.

As the Encounter God Manual and Instructor’s section of this Guide emphasize, no one should ever feel any pressure to share something they do not feel comfortable sharing. People should be open and responsive to the Holy Spirit without feeling any pressure from other people or the situation.

Be sensitive to the dynamics as the retreat progresses. Seldom do you need to make changes in ministry pairs in the midst of the weekend, but it is advisable to do so when one person has overwhelming needs. When this is the case, two people from the leadership team should minister to the individuals in this pair. In this way, the partner who is not getting as much ministry gets a break and has some time to receive ministry. If you know that someone is going to have a lot of needs before you begin the retreat, consider pairing them from the onset with a leadership team member or perhaps with a cell or small group leader who has already been through an Encounter Retreat.

Section 3: The Retreat Schedule

The Flow of the Retreat

The flow of the Encounter God Retreat is important to understand. On Friday night, people are expected to eat dinner before they arrive at the retreat. This simplifies logistics the first evening. Communicate clearly in your publicity and announcements that people should eat before they arrive.

The retreat starts with an icebreaker, announcements and a time of worship. The worship is important for connecting people to God and creating an atmosphere of openness. Be sure to give thought to this and delegate the worship leading to someone who will take it seriously.

The first night begins with two teachings. The first one explains the fundamentals of spiritual warfare and declares how we can be victorious through Christ's atoning death for us. The second talk actually has two parts and can be taught by either one or two persons. The first part explains the power of confession and the danger of involvement in the occult and false religions. The second part of the talk presents the healing pattern used at the retreat and how it works. It ends with a practical demonstration of ministry using the healing pattern. After this second talk, there is a brief ministry time in the ministry pairs.

It is important to do these first two talks the first night. Since the retreat begins on a Friday night, people are inevitably tired. If you get a late start, these talks will go very late. That's OK! Don't worry about it. Do both talks the first night and take the time necessary to complete them.

Including the second talk on Friday night, there are six ministry sessions in the weekend, they are:

- From Darkness to Light
- From Bondage to Freedom
- From Impure to Pure
- From Broken to Whole
- From Rebellion to Submission
- From Cursed to Blessed

The order of these six talks is the result of trial and error. After many test runs, we realize that this order facilitates ministry better than any other.

We begin with "From Darkness to Light" because it deals with a straightforward area that can usually be addressed without much embarrassment of in-depth sharing. This is important because the ministry pair may be beginning a new relationship and they are just becoming familiar with the healing pattern used throughout the retreat. The second and third talks go progressively deeper into more personal areas.

The fourth session, "From Broken to Whole," deals with hurts, resentment and forgiveness. This is often one of the most significant ministry times for people at the retreat. It comes in the last half of the retreat because the sharing and ministry is more involved. The "From Broken to Whole" session precedes the one on rebellion and submission because the source of rebellion is often past hurts and rejection. If the hurt and resentment is not approached first, it is less effective to teach and minister on the area of "From Rebellion to Submission."

Ministry in the last of the six healing sessions, "From Blessed to Cursed," is a little more complex and involves a slightly altered ministry pattern. Therefore, we put it last so as to not confuse the ministry pattern used throughout the majority of the weekend.

The retreat then concludes with two vital sessions — "Living in Victory" and "The Blessing Service." The teaching in "Living in Victory" communicates powerful principles on how to live out the victory that people have received at the retreat. This session is actually three mini-teachings followed by three short corresponding discussion and prayer times. By breaking this session at three points for sharing and prayer, we increase application. The faster format is also a nice change at this point in the retreat when people are likely tired.

The Blessing Service

The "Blessing Service" is the highlight of the retreat. Its format is very simple but powerful. You will create small groups with six to eight people in each one. Keep the ministry pairs together in the small groups. (If you happen to be doing a retreat with both men and women present, instead of keeping ministry pairs together, place married people together in the same ministry group.) Appoint two ministry leaders to each small group. These ministry leaders should be individuals that can give simple Spirit-directed ministry. They can come from your retreat leadership team or from participants at the retreat.

Have the ministry leaders bless and pray for individuals one at a time. Have the person being prayed for destroy their *Spiritual Freedom Inventory* by tearing it up and dropping it in the trash. Then put them in the “hot seat” to receive prayer ministry. After a time of ministry to each person, the person being prayed for should share one special need or concern for which they want prayer. This is also an ideal time to pray for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit. The person should then pray a prayer of fresh surrender and submission to Christ.

It is helpful to model this blessing ministry for the entire group by ministering to one individual. Then release the smaller groups. (If you are unclear how this is to work, look at the blessing demonstration on the Encounter God videos. You can even show this short video segment at this point if it would be helpful.) Ideally, you will have an adequate number of people to facilitate this kind of ministry. If not, model it for the group and then put two ministry pairs together to bless and pray for each other. This is not the preferred way to do this ministry, and it will yield uneven results, but you may need to do it this way if you don't have enough people who can lead in ministry. Close the retreat by gathering people one last time in the larger group. Emphasize the next steps in your church's equipping and leadership training process by talking about “Your Future Ministry.” Thank key people that helped make the retreat possible. Then close with a prayer of blessing.

Retreat Scheduling Options

On the pages that follow, there are three possible schedules for the Encounter God Retreat. The first format is the standard or “normal” retreat. Also, included are shorter and longer schedules.

The shorter schedule omits the teaching and ministry session on “From Cursed to Blessed.” This is a format that we used early in the development of the retreat. On the evaluations from our retreats, however, participants consistently said that the retreat was too short. When we extended the retreat into the evening, we were able to include the sixth session and allow slightly more free time. This extended length significantly improved the feel and impact of the overall retreat.

The longest retreat schedule goes into Sunday. This format allows considerably more time for ministry and building relationships. With this format, a Sunday morning communion service can be included, and you can add teaching and ministry specifically on being filled with the Holy Spirit. There is an Encounter God teaching written for this purpose, and you can download the computer visual presentation from the ‘Presentation Section’ of TOUCH Outreach Ministries’ website at <www.cellgroupppeople.com>. There is no corresponding

outline in the Encounter God manual, but that is not a problem. It is a change of pace for people to listen and feel no obligation to take notes! Although the longest format has distinct advantages, its disadvantage is that it requires considerably more time and expense.

If you have both women and men at the same retreat, we recommend that you do separate teaching and ministry for the two sessions “From Pure to Impure” and “Living in Victory.” These can run concurrently if you have two rooms available. If you use the Encounter God videos, there are two separate videotapes for men and women for these teaching sessions.

Before you finalize your schedule, you will need to check the meal times that are available at your retreat location. You may need to make adjustments. Camps especially tend to have set meal times that cannot easily be changed. If they require a later breakfast time, you might consider having your morning worship before breakfast.

Never give participants a printed schedule at an Encounter God Retreat. If you hand people a schedule or announce what it will be, they will expect you to follow it! Only the leadership team should have printed schedules. This allows you to easily adjust things as you go along.

Encounter God Retreat Standard Schedule

Friday:

7:00 p.m. Arrive, Register, Check into Rooms
8:00 p.m. Introductions, Worship, Announcements
9:00 p.m. Understanding Spiritual Warfare
10:00 p.m. Break
10:15 p.m. From Darkness to Light
How to Receive and Minister Healing
11:15 p.m. End of Session — Fellowship and Ministry

Saturday:

7:40 a.m. Breakfast
8:30 a.m. Worship
9:00 a.m. From Bondage to Freedom
10:00 a.m. From Impure to Pure
11:00 a.m. From Broken to Whole
12:00 noon Lunch and Free Time (For Prayer/Rest/Recreation)
2:45 p.m. Brief Worship Time
2:55 p.m. From Rebellion to Submission
4:00 p.m. From Cursed to Blessed
5:30 p.m. Dinner
6:30 p.m. Walking in Victory
7:45 p.m. Blessing Time
9:15 p.m. Your Future Ministry
9:30 p.m. Dismissal

Encounter God Retreat Shorter Schedule

Friday:

7:00 p.m. Arrive, Register, Check into Rooms
8:00 p.m. Introductions, Worship, Announcements
9:00 p.m. Understanding Spiritual Warfare
10:00 p.m. Break
10:15 p.m. From Darkness to Light
How to Receive and Minister Healing
11:15 p.m. End of Session — Fellowship and Ministry

Saturday:

7:40 a.m. Breakfast
8:30 a.m. Worship
9:00 a.m. From Bondage to Freedom
10:00 a.m. From Impure to Pure
11:00 a.m. From Broken to Whole
12:00 a.m. Lunch
1:45 p.m. From Rebellion to Submission
2:30 p.m. Walking in Victory
3:40 p.m. Blessing Time
4:40 p.m. Your Future Ministry
5:00 p.m. Dismissal

Encounter God Retreat Long Schedule

Friday:

7:00 p.m. Arrive, Register, Check into Rooms
8:00 p.m. Introductions, Worship, Announcements
9:00 p.m. The Battle and the Victory
10:00 p.m. Break
10:15 p.m. From Darkness to Light
How to Receive and Minister Healing
11:15 p.m. End of Session

Saturday:

8:00 a.m. Breakfast
9:00 a.m. Worship
9:20 a.m. From Bondage to Freedom
10:30 a.m. From Impure to Pure
12:00 noon Lunch and Free Time (For Prayer/Rest/Recreation)
3:00 p.m. From Broken to Whole
4:15 p.m. From Rebellion to Submission
5:30 p.m. Dinner
7:00 p.m. Worship
7:30 p.m. From Cursed to Blessed
9:00 p.m. Ministry and Fellowship Time

Sunday

8:15 a.m. Breakfast
9:15 a.m. Worship and Communion Service
10:30 a.m. The Gift of the Holy Spirit
11:40 a.m. Your Future Ministry
12:00 noon Lunch
1:30 p.m. Walking in Victory
3:00 p.m. Blessing Service
4:30 p.m. Dismissal

Section 4: Start Out Right

Receive the Blessing of Your Senior Leadership

Because Encounters are potentially pivotal to a church's entire ministry, anyone considering them should secure the blessing of the church's senior pastor. The senior pastor does not need to lead the Encounters, but the events should not be offered without the senior leadership's covering and encouragement.

Often the interest in Encounters begins with the senior pastor. But if this is not the case in your church, communicate clearly with your leadership and do not proceed until the senior pastor is fully supportive of launching an Encounter ministry.

Usually senior pastors are very open to any ministry that helps people get set free from sin and resentments! Yet pastors are naturally skeptical because of their God-given responsibility for the health of the church. So do not be surprised if it takes time for the idea to take hold. Pray, communicate and be patient.

See the Big Picture

Encounter God Retreats are awesome events where people experience God's power and healing. Nevertheless, it is not an isolated ministry. All the churches with Encounters that I studied offer them as part of an overall strategy to build up people and release them in ministry.

I suppose you could do the weekends just because God works wonderfully through them and you want to see people touched by God. But if that is your only motive, I challenge you to consider the bigger picture. How are you going to set people free, equip them and release them for ministry? What is your overall plan to mobilize people to extend God's kingdom? What do you really want to accomplish in your community and throughout the world? How are you going to multiply leadership for the harvest?

The Encounter God Retreat helps answer these questions, but it is only part of the answer. It is not an end in itself; rather it is intended to be one important part of an overall strategy. Look at them in that context and their impact can be even more incredible.

Experience an Encounter before Leading One

I strongly encourage you to experience an Encounter God Retreat before leading one. You can do this by participating in one that is done by another church or

by inviting others who have experienced leading the retreat to come and lead your church's first retreat. Experiencing the retreat first allows you to get a feel for the flow and mechanics of the weekend from the inside out.

If you choose to participate in the Encounter of another church, consider taking several others with you. Ideally you should involve key people who might help you launch your own Encounters.

If you cannot attend another church's Encounter or have someone come to lead yours, I recommend that your team work through the Encounter material in ministry pairs using the Encounter God videos, the manuals, and *Spiritual Freedom Inventory*.

Familiarize Yourself with the Material

Obviously, before leading the retreat you should familiarize yourself with the material. Encounter God videos are available if you don't want to teach the sessions yourselves. You can use these for all or for some of the sessions. You can download your Encounter God powerpoint® presentations for the teaching, using the username and password that may be found on the copyright page of this manual, from the TOUCH website at <www.cellgroupepeople.com>. These presentations illustrate and guide your teaching. They can be shown using a video projector or printed on transparencies (two slides to a page) and displayed using an overhead projector. They are not necessary, however. While developing the material, I used them every time. At one retreat, I was forced to lead the retreat without the visual slides due to technical problems. The teaching went great and I don't normally use the visual presentations now. Although the Instructor's Guide is very thorough, those doing the teaching might also want to view their respective sessions on the Encounter God videos.

Start with Your Leaders

To begin your Encounter God Retreat, first offer one for the church's key leaders. This refreshes them and familiarizes them with this pivotal event. It also builds momentum for later retreats by influencing the "movers and shakers" in your church.

When we first launched the retreats at our church, I communicated to our cell leaders that I wanted them to attend the Encounter. If they were unable to attend our

first one, I asked them to put the next one on their calendar.

Recently, my wife and I moved and we have just begun ministry at a different church. We are beginning our Encounter Retreats here by doing a men's Encounter and a women's Encounter for our small group leaders and our small group coaches. Later in the year, we will publicize them more broadly and thoroughly integrate them into our church's overall equipping and training system to involve all new Christians and members.

Consider Cooperating with Another Church

While I was researching how various churches were leading freedom weekends, I discovered that some churches in the United States and Canada were doing their retreats cooperatively with other local churches. Involving more than one church in a retreat offers several advantages. It enables you to simplify logistics, reduce costs and offer retreats more often. Cooperating with other churches is especially helpful if one or both of the churches are small or if you are just beginning your Encounter Retreats and need more resources, experience or people to gain momentum.

If you want to cooperate with one or two other churches in doing retreats, you can choose from two options. One option is for the churches to do the retreat planning, preparation and leadership jointly. A second option is simply to piggyback on the other church's retreat or let them piggyback on yours. With the second option, one church is carrying the ball, but they invite the other church to join in.

I enjoyed the second option while pastoring in Houston. Another church wanting their people to experience the Encounter God Retreat began sending their members *en masse* to our retreats. In time, they started offering their own retreats using the pattern and tools that we had developed. Because we could not offer our own retreats as often as we wanted to, we also began sending people to their Encounters. Both churches were well represented at all the Encounters no matter which church actually did the organizing.

If you want to cooperate with another church, the cooperating church does not need to be in your own community. I discovered two churches doing retreats together that were a long distance apart. The retreats were held at a camp located midway between them.

Section 5: How to Organize an Encounter God Retreat

Determine Who Before Deciding When and Where

The first step in organizing a retreat is answering the basic question of who should be involved in the retreat and its leadership team. First you need to answer questions like: Are you going to do your own retreat or cooperate with another church? Do you have the leadership at this point to do separate men's and women's Encounters or will you do your first retreat together? Who are you going to invite and encourage to attend your first Encounter? Who should form your Encounter leadership team or teams?

In time you will want to integrate the Encounter God Retreats into your church's overall equipping and leadership mobilization process; so, eventually everyone will experience the Encounters. Initially, however, you will want to offer the retreat to the core of your church. This creates ownership and teamwork related to the Encounters and enables you to get familiar with the design before offering it more broadly. If you have a smaller church or a small core of leaders, you can begin involving others in the retreat sooner, even at the first event.

When you know your target people for the retreat, then determine the best dates and proceed to form your team and find a venue.

For a Team

There are a number of roles related to doing effective Encounters. Begin organizing for the retreats by creating a team. If you are doing men's and women's Encounters separately, you will have two separate teams. Here are the roles that you need to fill. There can be some overlap of roles as long as it is clear who will do what.

Retreat Director: The director carries the overall responsibility for the retreat, both its advance planning and the direction of the retreat when it is taking place. He or she needs to recruit the team, lead planning meetings, delegate responsibilities and guide the actual retreat including the assigning of ministry pairs and the flow of the schedule. He or she is accountable to the Lord under the authority of the church's pastoral leadership. The rest of the retreat team is accountable to the director. Resources for the director are this guide and the *Encounter God Leader Video*, which we recommend that you show at your first team meeting. It covers some of the same material as this book.

Retreat Administrator: The administrator arranges the logistics of the retreat. This includes finding a location, preparing a brochure, publicizing the event, taking registrations and making any necessary arrangements for meals and snacks. The administrator does not need to personally do all these things, but he or she does need to insure that someone is doing each of them.

Retreat Instructors: A retreat is best taught by a team of at least two instructors. If you have gifted teachers who have experienced an Encounter, it is very easy to delegate the teaching because three resources are readily available to instructors: the *Encounter God Instructor's Guide*, Encounter God powerpoint® presentations, and the Encounter God videos. With these resources, it is easy to become familiar with the material and to present it. The instructors must realize the importance of following the schedule and the time suggestions for the talks. Most of the teachings in the weekend are short. If instructors go overtime it will diminish the ministry time and the overall impact of the event.

Publicize

Although publicity is the responsibility of the retreat administrator, the entire Encounter team should help strategize this dimension of planning and they should all assist in involving others in the event.

Besides using the existing communication channels that are available in your church (bulletin, newsletter, announcements, mail and email), especially utilize a well-prepared brochure and the short Encounter God promotional video. A sample brochure is provided as a model for you in the Appendix of this guide.

A well-prepared brochure explains the event and answers the questions about dates, location, costs, starting time, how to register, etc. The promotional video communicates the power of the event in an engaging way.

Target the brochure and video at your intended audience. For example, if you are offering your first Encounter for your leaders, send them each a brochure and letter, show the promotional video at your next leadership event, then consider contacting them personally to gauge their interest and encourage involvement. When you are ready to involve cell or small group members, you can have the brochures

distributed and the video shown in these home groups to generate interest.

Personal testimonies from persons who have been to an Encounter are also very powerful in generating interest. Invite people who have been to an Encounter to share how God used it in their life. This can be done in any of several contexts including your worship service, your small groups, your men's and women's events or any classes or leadership meetings.

As you integrate the Encounter into your equipping system, immediately communicate the importance of the Encounter to new Christians and new members as they come into the church. Again use brochures and the promotional video to communicate why they should come and what they can expect.

In time, the Encounters create much of their own publicity and momentum. But even as this happens, continue to strategize how to invite and involve those who most need this event.

Order Material

As the retreat date approaches and you have an estimate of how many persons will come, order the material. Everyone attending will need an *Encounter God Manual* and *Spiritual Freedom Inventory*. Order more than you need. There are always some people who register late or even at the last minute, therefore it is better to have additional copies than to be even one short. Extra copies can simply be kept on hand for future retreats.

Get Ready — Heart and Mind

Realize that preparing for the retreat is more than logistics. The most important part is to be praying for the event and preparing your hearts. Make prayer central to your team meetings and take time to work through some of the materials at points where your team itself needs ministry. The instructors should especially bring the areas that they are teaching to the Lord. Emphasize ministry pairs using the *Spiritual Freedom Inventory* and the healing pattern if there are special areas where ministry is needed.

Section 6: Encounter God Retreat Preparation and Follow-Up

Preparing People for the Encounter God Retreat

The preparation that you require of individuals attending an Encounter Retreat will vary depending on your church's assimilation and equipping system. The Encounter Retreat is usually placed near the beginning of a church's discipleship process. Before the event, people should have an assurance of salvation, an awareness of spiritual warfare, and a realization of the lordship of Christ over their lives.

These foundational teachings can be covered in a class or in one-on-one sponsor relationships. In the church where I previously served as cell pastor, we gave people two options for covering this material. One option was to work through the excellent booklet *Beginning the Journey*, written by Ralph Neighbour, Jr. and myself. A second option was to take a class entitled "Friendship with God" which covered similar material. However, if people were ready for an Encounter, and they were unable to take the eight-week class or work through the five-week booklet before the event, we still allowed them to come but asked them to get the foundational discipleship teaching as soon as possible.

At the church where I now pastor, we use short seminars to cover the same material. We are modifying the session just before the Encounters to communicate essential preparation for the retreat including:

- The nature of sin and spiritual warfare
- The lordship of Christ
- What happens at an Encounter in terms of instruction and ministry.
- The Encounter promotional video
- Two testimonies from Encounter alumni to build anticipation for what God will do.
- Encouragement to pray for the Encounter and to be open to God as the retreat approaches so that He can speak to each person ahead of time about areas where He wants to bring freedom and healing.

Some churches encourage those coming to an Encounter to fast two meals in the day leading up to the Encounter to focus their prayers and hearts in preparation for the retreat.

Encounter Retreat Ministry Follow-Up

When we first began offering our Encounter weekends, I had hoped that they would largely remove the need for the intensive ministry sessions that we had been doing with individuals. To an extent they have had this effect; however, sometimes the effect is reversed. Persons who receive wonderful breakthroughs at the retreat sometimes become hungry for even more of what God offers them and thus want more in-depth ministry.

I have learned that the answer is not "either/or" but "both/and." Besides the retreats you will still want to offer personal ministry sessions.

The big difference now is that the retreats become a prerequisite for the personal sessions. People come into the personal sessions having already received a weekend of teaching and ministry. By beginning the healing process with the Encounter God Retreats, you encourage people to take personal responsibility for their spiritual freedom and you develop a church equipped in the practicalities of spiritual victory.

In addition to the Encounter God Retreats, I encourage you to train and deploy gifted members who will be a first line of healing ministry behind the Encounters. These members can do most of this ministry. Once you have trained teams, involve pastoral staff only when needs are especially great. Realize also that not all emotional problems have spiritual roots and utilize the resources of other professionals when you discern that they are needed.

I recommend that you use the following guidelines for those requesting personal freedom ministry. Before offering personal ministry sessions, make sure they:

- Have completed the first step of your church's discipleship or equipping process.
- Have attended an Encounter God Retreat.
- Are actively involved in a cell or small group.
- Are willing to take responsibility for their own healing instead of blaming others.

If you do not have these simple and logical requirements, you will waste a lot of time and few of the people that you minister to will walk out their victory.

In personal ministry sessions, you can use the same ministry pattern as at the retreats. Normally two or three people will meet with the individual. As at the

retreat, it is usually ideal to have people of the same gender doing the ministry.

At the retreat, we do teaching and then ministry to one another in pairs. In personal sessions, we use the same *Spiritual Freedom Inventory*, but there is no teaching and the ministry is focused on one person instead of being mutual. The ministry is normally done in one extended session usually taking three to five hours. The person being ministered to walks through the inventory out loud identifying where they have sinned in each area. Then they confess sins and forgive others before receiving ministry. The section on “From Broken to Whole” normally takes much longer in this setting and often a couple of hours are spent discussing two or three key relationships where there is hurt and a need to forgive others and receive healing.

In all of this, realize that the primary focus is not counseling or ministry. The issue at stake is the lordship of Christ. The goal of all freedom ministry is bringing all of our life to Christ and in turn receiving His healing and empowering for service.

Free to Serve

Every church’s primary mandate is to proclaim Christ and extend His rule as more and more people surrender to Him and enter into the abundant life that He offers. To fulfill this mission, we need more and more workers. As Jesus pointed out: “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9:37-38)

If you have been praying for harvest workers, the Encounter God Retreats are likely an answer to your prayers. To raise up workers for the harvest, we must move people from immaturity to maturity to leadership.

For this maturing process to progress, they must be equipped in the basics of Christ, in relational evangelism and in leadership training. The Encounter Retreat should fall near the beginning of this process. In this way, it removes the obstacles in people’s paths and greatly accelerates spiritual growth.

Each Encounter retreat ends with a talk on “Your Future Ministry.” As the retreat closes, people are feeling free, excited and blessed; and they are wondering, “What next?” This is the perfect time to invite and challenge them to take the next step in your church’s equipping process. This is the time to let people know that the purpose of Christ and the goal of the Encounter is to set people free — free to experience abundant life and free to serve!

Encounter God

Leader's Guide



Session One

Opening and “Understanding Spiritual Warfare”

Ready:

- Plan to arrive early at the retreat location in order to take time to quiet your heart and to pray over the site, the event and those who will be traveling to the Encounter.
- This is the opening session of the retreat. As people arrive, they should register and make themselves nametags. There always seem to be people, however, that arrive late. As they arrive, simply have them join the session. They can register during the break after the session.
- This session opens with worship. This is important to set the mood for the session and the entire retreat. We are here to encounter God and let Him work in our lives.
- If you are not using the PowerPoint® presentation for this talk, use an overhead projector, white board, or newsprint to show the different worldview diagrams that are crucial to this talk.

Aim — In this session, people will:

- Open themselves to God in worship.
- Learn the ground rules in order to get maximum benefit from the retreat.
- Know that they have an enemy who creates strongholds in their lives.
- Realize that they can overcome their enemy and his schemes through the blood of Christ and the Word of God.
- Understand what sin is.

Fire:

- As people arrive, display slide 1 as it welcomes them.
- If, for some reason you start late, do not rush this talk! It is alright to have a shorter break or to go later on the first evening.
- Take 25-30 minutes for opening worship.
- Figure 5-10 minutes for the announcement and icebreaker.
- Allow 50-60 minutes for the first teaching and discussion time.

Understanding Spiritual Warfare

Welcome!

It's good to have you here.
Relax.

Introduce yourself to someone.
Pray that this will be a fantastic retreat
for each one here!

Display this slide as people arrive and before the session begins.

Worship!

Begin the session with worship.

Icebreaker. . .

- Find two persons of the same gender near you.
- Share these things with each other:
 - Name (if you don't know each other)
 - What was one of your favorite TV programs when you were a child?
 - What is one thing you want to receive or learn at this retreat?
- Say a very short prayer of blessing over one another and the retreat.

Have attendees do the icebreaker standing up.

Ideally they should find others that they have not met before or persons they have not talked to in a long time.

Our Goals for this Retreat

- Encounter God!
- Realize the Freedom and Presence of Christ in a Deep & Wonderful Way.
- Know how to Walk in Spiritual Victory.
- Be Equipped to Help Others Receive Their Victory in Christ.

Give a simple overview of the objectives of the retreat. You do not need to take much time on this slide. It is included to focus our attention and to build anticipation for what is to come.

If appropriate, you could share a brief testimony of how freedom ministry has changed your own life.

Announcements & Guidelines

- Please remain here for the entire retreat.
- Minimize contact with the outside world. We are on a Retreat! (Let God direct the outside world for the duration of this retreat.)
- Do not use a Television or Radio.
- Respect confidences.

The guidelines are straightforward:

- “Please remain. . .” If possible, do not leave the grounds or depart early.
- “Minimize contact. . .” Please eliminate or minimize using cell phones, pagers, radios and televisions. We are on a retreat!
- “Respect confidences!” We will share deep things this weekend for the purpose of prayer and ministry. If we agree to honor one another’s confidences, we can share and minister more deeply.

Make other needed announcements related to registration, ending time and the facilities.

The Battle and The Victory

This is simply the title slide to transition from the worship, icebreaker and announcement to the teaching portion of this session.

Make sure participants have their manuals and are ready to make notes as God reveals to them areas in their lives that He wants them to experience freedom.

It's a War Out There!

- Western Christians often do not realize it! Let's look at 2 Scriptures.

As we live in the world, we can tell we are in the midst of warfare, but as Christians we are often confused about the nature of this war and who our enemies are.

To understand the war and how to win it, we must look to Scripture.

It's a War Out There!

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

– Ephesians 6:12

Read this Scripture together aloud.

It is a spiritual war. There are spiritual forces that want to destroy us. The enemy is not people (the liberals or the government or non-Christians). We do not fight against people but against “spiritual forces of evil.”

It's a War Out There!

And there was war in heaven. . . . and . . . The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. . . . Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you!

– Revelation 12:7-12

This war began in heaven and it has moved to earth. Heaven's residents are relieved that the battle shifted from heaven to earth; now we are the ones with the problem! “Rejoice, you heavens. . . But woe to the earth!”

1. Understanding Spiritual Warfare

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12)

➤ There is a battle going on out there! Are you fighting to win?

NOTES	
<p>It's a War Out There!</p> <p>1. Western Christians often don't realize it.</p> <p><i>Our fight is not against flesh and blood. (Ephesians 6:12)</i></p> <p><i>And there was war in heaven . . . and the great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.</i></p> <p><i>Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you!</i> (Revelation 12:7-13)</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

It's a War Out There!

- The conflict of Satan & God takes place between Genesis 3:15- Revelation 20.
- Because of Man's Sin, Humankind and the World is Subjected to Evil.

What is a Stronghold?



A Heavily Fortified Place

What is a Stronghold?

- The word is used both Positively and Negatively in Scripture.
 - Psalms 9:9
 - Psalms 18:2
 - 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
 - We will look at these verses closer now.

God is Our Stronghold!

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

– Psalm 9:9

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

– Psalm 18:2

This conflict takes place throughout history.

Through our sin, the world has come under the influence and tyranny of evil.

How does Satan seek to penetrate our lives so that he can bring destruction and bondage?

A primary way that he does this is through strongholds.

A stronghold is a heavily fortified place.

The word “stronghold” is used in both a positive and negative way in the Bible.

Let us look more closely at these verses.

Do not read the verses now as they are on the following slides.

Do not dwell on this slide.

Read the Scriptures and point out that God is to be our stronghold.

Ungodly Strongholds

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

– 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

Ungodly Strongholds

- The word picture in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 is of the conquest of Canaan.
- The Israelites took the Land but not ALL of it was under their control.
- Certain Strongholds were under others control and remained holdouts for many years, even centuries.

What is a Stronghold?

- In the same way, though we have given our life to Christ, some areas may be “out of control.”
 - Ex: Anger, Lust, Fear, Resentment
- Satan gains ground in our lives through entry points.

Our Enemies Look for Entry Points

“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. – Ephesians 4:25-26

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

– Hebrews 12:15

The Bible speaks of ungodly strongholds.

The word picture is from the Israelite conquest of Canaan.

Although they conquered the land, there were still fortified pockets that were under enemy control.

For example the city of Jerusalem was not under Israelite control for over 200 years, not until King David conquered it.

In the same way, even though you and I have surrendered our lives to Christ as Lord, there may still be areas that are “out of control.”

How are strongholds created in our lives?

Satan gains this ground through entry points.

Read these Scriptures.

In these passages, God says that anger and bitterness can become “footholds” or “roots” that allow Satan to create bigger problems.

