



Session 5: Leaders are rooted in an encounter with God.

“I love the presence of God. How could we ever adequately express the beauty, power and reality of the glorious presence of God? For me, there is nothing to compare to the awareness of His nearness. We have nothing better to do in this life than be in His presence. Beholding God with the eyes of our heart we find Him more glorious in holiness and love than we had imagined. We can cultivate a depth of relationship with God that goes far beyond an hour on a Sunday. You can never be the same after encountering God. We must never settle for half-hearted and jaded religion that has to be endured, not enjoyed. God wants us to know Him. It really matters that every Christian cultivates a lifestyle of encounter with God. Seeking His presence is the only way to sustain a fire-filled Christian life. Encountering God changes everything.” *Set Me On Fire p23*

Encounter is developing a strong inner life connection with God

- Opening the door of our heart and life to Jesus
“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” Revelation 3:20
- Going on being filled with the Spirit – “Come, Holy Spirit”
“Be filled with the Spirit.” Ephesians 5:18
- Brokenness in seeking God – “Have mercy on me O God!”
“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.” Psalm 51:17
- A revelation of God’s love – “God loves me!”
“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:17-19

- Seeking God until He comes – waiting upon God
“Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unploughed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.” Hosea 10:12
- Reading scripture and letting God’s word form you
“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Regular prayer and reflection – spiritual formation.
“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” Mark 1:35

“My Meetings with God” – reflect on how God has met with you in your life. It may have been through scripture, a sermon, a friend, church service, worship time, a prophetic word or something else. Write your reflections here on your meetings with God:

Facing your shadows that harm spiritual life and leadership

It is always a challenge for leaders to stay close to God. No one honestly feels they have arrived. We are all still in process and on a journey. There is no condemnation in Christ. But, this does not mean we are to be satisfied to be lukewarm. There are dangers for leaders who lead when they are content to be distant and superficial with God. This may look like:

- Doing more than your relationship with God can sustain
- Focus on external markers of success rather than real fruit.
- No concern over a gap between who we are and what we do.
- Content to remain shallow in relationship with God – no conviction.
- Not addressing hidden motivations and deeper emotional issues such as insecurity, anger, people pleasing or hard heartedness. We may need help to unpack this is a healthy way.
- Striving in our own strength to live and lead.
- Solely depending on our natural wisdom, hard work or religious form for ministry.

How can I encounter God?

1. Recognise you need God and revival in your life, church and community.
2. Confess and repent of all sin.
3. Forgive everyone God brings to mind.
4. Be obedient to what you know God has said.
5. Seek to live a life of purity, simplicity, holiness and consecration (being set apart for God). Get rid of anything doubtful.
6. Abide in Christ through personal prayer, meditation on the Bible, worship, listening, quietness and contemplation on God's word. There are various ways you can do this. Some are informal, others are very structured. Everyone is different, so find what works for you.
7. Make a public confession of Christ as your personal Saviour.
8. Do you love Jesus with all your heart? (John 21:15-17) Tell Him!

As leaders, there is no substitute for the baptism of the Holy Spirit

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Matthew 3:11

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

The Leadership Garden: A personal reflection on abiding (John 15)

Jesus spent 90% of his life in obscurity and hiddenness. Then in 3 years of public ministry, in the power of the Holy Spirit, he changed the world. This was not done instantly, but over time.

In 2015, during what felt like a tough time; I felt the Lord gave me a picture of leadership at St Mary's. In it the church was a garden. I wanted to spend time in the garden with Father God; the Gardener. As a leader, I am not the gardener – God is! I am simply a branch in the vine. It was December, and the garden was untidy and messy. I felt God speaking to me that this was like the church. I really met with God that day standing in my wellies in my back garden, walking around in my wellies!

As a leader, I could see the 'messiness' of life in church. Some things were growing, but were also difficult. Some things were beautiful or overgrown. I realised can't do everything and though I want to be the gardener, I can't. I want to tidy it all up and make it pristine; but can't do it. But, that is not a real garden anyway. A garden is seasonal. It is supposed to be messy this time of

year. Sometimes the mess is part of the beauty of a garden. Some seasons the garden is tidy, sometimes messy. Sometimes there are weeds, sometimes pruning, sometimes planting and other times growing and harvesting.

I want to hear the voice of the Gardener in the garden and learn from Him. The Lord spoke to be powerfully from John 15 of the place of abiding in Him being the place of fruitfulness. My problem is sometimes, in the garden of the church, I mistake tidiness for fruitfulness. I am trying to get everything in order and as perfect as possible. Actually, it is okay for some mess and the seasons to lead. I am not the Gardener, which brings me stress because it is not my job..

My job is simply to abide and be fruitful. This means resting, loving, giving time, investing in relationship with God and people, listening, praying, depending and trusting. It means being connected to God through scripture, prayer, worship and hearing His voice.

I can stress sometimes trying to 'tidy up the garden' rather than abiding. It is Jesus who builds the church; and as a leader, my role is to stay connected to God and be fruitful. **Abiding is being saturated with God.**

Take the time to read and meditate on John 15 for your leadership. I can also recommend Andrew Murray's book, *The True Vine* as a real help.

A few of the verses that really stand out for me, I have underlined:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love

each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

John 15:1-17

Leadership Bible Character:

Elijah: A leader who encountered God in different ways at different times.

Read 1 Kings 18 and you will see Elijah's powerful confrontation with the prophets of Baal. It is a supernatural battle, which is won by fire from heaven. This is a huge moment of dramatic encounter. Sometimes our encounters with God can be life-changing and dramatic. God's honour was at stake in the nation and Elijah had God's word for the people. This had come from a life of consecration and submission to God – it was not lightly come by. I am more impressed by his back-story with God that brought Elijah to Carmel, than the dramatic day itself. That encounter did not come from nowhere, but from a man who really knew God.

- He repaired the broken altar, as we must do in our hearts.
- He prayed with boldness and confidence
- He defied the prevailing idolatry of his culture.
- He poured water on the sacrifice, making the impossible, even harder. Thus he saw God break in, in such a way as it had to be God, not human power! We need to see the same in our communities!

Now read 1 Kings 19 for a totally different kind of encounter. This time with a man who is tired, fearful, intimidated, broken, depressed, scared and running away.

- God ministered to his tiredness and physical needs
- God asked Elijah a question, "What are you doing here?" Has God ever asked you a question?
- God told Elijah at Horeb to get ready for Him to speak to him. Elijah must have wondered what was coming.

¹¹ The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 1 Kings 19:11-13

- Elijah was recommissioned by a gentle whisper – because God was in it. God can come to us dramatically or gently, but the key is – is God in the encounter?
- We need to know God himself. It is not about 'ticking the boxes' of worship, prayer... etc. But, do we know God? Have we met with God in some way – something that He Himself is in. That is the key, and that is what all leaders need most of all – to know God and lead from that place.