



***Experiencing
God's Presence***

Small Group Guidebook

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
How to use this guide.....	4
Week 1 Guide.....	6
Week 2 Guide.....	8
Week 3 Guide.....	10
Week 4 Guide.....	12

Introduction

I'm excited about the sermon series we're doing at Christ Church in June. It's called Experiencing the Presence of God, and a central focus is to lead the congregation in experiences of listening and responding to the Holy Spirit as part of our worship services. The sermons will focus on biblical events where God spoke to people in unique ways. They will also be shorter (around 20 minutes) in order to make time for extended communion including guided prayer. These will be unique, experiential services, and it would be a great time to join us in person if you haven't yet.

-Anson Hanbury
Executive Pastor of Campuses

How to Use This Guide

This guide is intended for Small Group discussions. Ideally, group members will worship in-person or online on Sundays, so that they are prepared to talk about the message and worship experience. However, the discussion guides are primarily scripture-based, allowing for meaningful participation even among group members who missed the service.

After taking a few minutes to greet everyone, leaders can guide the group through these components:

Fellowship

Start with a relational, conversational “warm-up” question to get everyone talking.

Scripture

Move through several discussion questions focused on pertinent biblical passages with opportunities to interpret the Word together, share personal reflections and experiences, and apply God’s truth to your lives.

Leaders should feel free to omit, add, or tweak questions, based on the make-up of their group and the Spirit’s leading.

Practice

The suggested practices offer a means of experiencing God’s presence together. There will be two weeks of practicing silence and two weeks of contemplative Bible reading (i.e., Lectio Divina). The goal is to slow down, tune into God’s presence, and cultivate a posture of openness and humility.

Leaders should not feel responsible for making sure something “happens.” Especially for virtual groups, this may be tempting. Offer the time to God and trust that He delights in us simply being with Him, even if there isn’t a tangible outcome! However, the practices may feel new and even uncomfortable for some, so the leader’s attitude and preparation may have a big impact on the openness of the group.

Small Groups are encouraged to substitute the practice of Communion for one or more weeks, if they are able. Leaders can use 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 to direct that time.

Reflection

Leaders can use these or other questions to provide a space for group members to process the contemplative practice, as well as the Sunday worship service.

Close in prayer, trying to draw in themes from the study, as well as personal and community needs that have been raised. Leaders can pray, ask someone from the group to pray, or allow for “popcorn” prayer.

Check in on requests from last week, if you can, and be mindful of any practical ways that group members may be able to care for one another.

Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or Katie Edwardson if you have questions or would like to share a story from your group.

Week 1 Sermon Guide

June 6, 2021

Fellowship

What is one of the best surprises you've ever had?

Scripture

Read Exodus 3:1-12.

What do you learn about God in this passage?

What does this passage teach us about how God speaks and how we are to respond?

Do you expect God to speak to you? Why or why not?

Have you ever had a "burning bush" experience? Did you notice, investigate, and respond? Or did you have a different reaction?

Practice

Spend some time attending to God's presence by practicing silence together. Read the Guidelines for Silence and Stillness. Set a timer for 2-5 minutes, then discuss the reflection questions below.

Guidelines for Silence and Stillness

1. Sit down, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths to help you settle into silence.
2. Choose a very simple prayer to express your openness and desire for God. (e.g. Abba, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Here I am, Come Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus have mercy on me)
3. Offer this prayer to Jesus, allowing His will full access in your life.
4. When you become distracted, offer again your simple prayer back to God.

*From Pete Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Course and Blog,
<https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/silence-the-oxygen-of-a-christian-leader/>*

Reflection

How is God making Himself known to you now?

How do you want to respond to God?

What was this experience and/or Sunday's worship service like for you?

Share personal prayer requests and close in prayer.

Week 2 Sermon Guide

June 13, 2021

Fellowship

What are you most grateful for today? What are you least grateful for?

Scripture

Read Exodus 19:3-13; 20:18-21

How does this interaction between God and Moses compare to the burning bush experience we discussed last week (Exod. 3)?

What does God require of the people before He appears? Why might He ask this of them? Consider the context of God's promise (19:5-6) and God giving the Ten Commandments to Israel (20:1-17)

What role does the fear of God play in your life?

What has Jesus changed about the way we approach God?

Practice

Spend some time attending to God's presence by practicing contemplative Bible reading together. Then discuss the reflection questions below.

Move through the four steps below. The leader or a volunteer will be slowly reading the passage (**Romans 5:1-5**) aloud four times, with time for silent reflection or journaling about the question between each step.

1. Read: What word or phrase stands out to you?
2. Reflect: How is my life touched by this word?
3. Respond: What is God calling me to do or be?
4. Rest: Rest in the Word of God and in the Presence of God.

From Gail Seidel, <https://blogs.bible.org/lectio-divina-an-ancient-practice-revisited/>

Reflection

How is God making Himself known to you now?

How do you want to respond to God?

What was this experience and/or Sunday's worship service like for you?

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Week 3 Sermon Guide

June 20, 2021

Fellowship

In honor of Father's Day, share briefly about one man you admire.

Scripture

Read Acts 2:1-4, 32-41

What does this passage reveal about God's presence?

What is the purpose and significance of the Spirit's arrival for the early church?

Do you believe you've received the Holy Spirit? Why might your experience of Him look different from the event described in Acts 2?

What role does the Holy Spirit play in your life? Is there a ministry for which He is empowering you?

Practice

Spend some time attending to God's presence by practicing silence and stillness together. Read the Guidelines for Silence and Stillness. Set a timer for 2-5 minutes, then discuss the reflection questions below.

Guidelines for Silence and Stillness

1. Sit down, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths to help you settle into silence.
2. Choose a very simple prayer to express your openness and desire for God. (e.g. Abba, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Here I am, Come Lord Jesus, Lord Jesus have mercy on me)
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Reflection

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How do you want to respond to God?

What was this experience and/or Sunday's worship service like for you?

Share personal prayer requests and close in prayer.

Week 4 Sermon Guide

June 27, 2021

Fellowship

When was the last time you were awestruck?

Scripture

Read Hebrews 12:18-29

What does this passage reveal about God's presence?

Compare the two mountains mentioned in this passage. What part of the description in verses 22-24 is most meaningful to you today?

Is there an area of your life where you are refusing God (v. 25), or where He's reorienting you to His unshakeable kingdom (v. 27)?

How would it look to "worship God acceptably with reverence and awe" this week (v. 29)?

Practice

Spend some time attending to God's presence by practicing contemplative Bible reading together. Then discuss the reflection questions below.

Move through the four steps below. The leader or a volunteer will be slowly reading the passage (**Psalm 103:8-14**) aloud four times, with time for silent reflection or journaling about the question between each step.

1. Read: What word or phrase stands out to you?
2. Reflect: How is my life touched by this word?
3. Respond: What is God calling me to do or be?
4. Rest: Rest in the Word of God and in the Presence of God.

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Reflection

How is God making Himself known to you now?

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