

Encountering, Growing, Participating

Notes 12th January 2025

Through a genuine and ongoing encounter with the Father, we are being transformed into obedient followers of Jesus, actively engaging in the life and power of the Holy Spirit.

As we begin this New Year, we take a moment to reflect on three guiding principles that shape both our shared and personal journeys of faith. These principles are designed to help us live with greater focus and intentionality in our collective faith community.

Encountering God

Individually we are regularly making space to encounter God. Collectively our church services, activities and events are places where people can encounter God.

Growing as followers of Jesus

What I do and how I live is an outworking of my relationship with Jesus. I seek to live the kind of life that Jesus would live if he was me. Collectively we seek to express his intentions and his life in all we do and say.

Participating in the life of his Spirit

My work and my commitments to my family, the community and the church are done in the power and with the abilities given to me through his Spirit. Through its ministries the St James faith community is spreading God's life, creativity, beauty and saving intentions in the world.

You can explore the Church Vision and Values on our website: stjamestaunton.org/vision-and-values)

Read Isaiah 6:1-8 and Discuss (read the three questions in one go)

- Who initiates the encounter?
- What does Isaiah's encounter with God look like?
- What are the outcomes?

Isaiah experiences God's presence and word in a vivid and transformative way. He is confronted with his own sinfulness, receives mercy, and is prepared to respond with commitment. This encounter reshapes his life and mission.

While Isaiah's experience was extraordinary, Christians encounter God in various ways, with different levels of intensity and vividness. Regardless of the form these encounters take, we all need to regularly hear from God, experience his love, guidance, and mercy, and renew our commitment to live out his message.

Reflect on your own life and experiences:

- Have you had a vivid or tangible encounter with God that you can share?
- What practices or habits help you connect with God regularly?

Read Mark 4:10-20

God's communication to us is constant and abundant, like seed sown generously by a farmer. However, just as a seed requires good soil to grow, develop, and multiply, God's word needs a receptive and committed heart to bear fruit.

Encountering, Growing, Participating

Notes 12th January 2025

Reflect on this:

- What attitudes of the heart make God's communication unfruitful in our lives (explore together the different soils)?

In the well-known parable of the Sower, Jesus teaches that the effectiveness of the seed depends entirely on the condition of the soil—representing the state of our hearts.

This parable is a call to self-examination. Take a moment to reflect on your own heart.

The leader provides post-it notes or paper for writing. As the following prompts are read, write down anything that comes to mind:

1. Am I resisting a specific word from God?
2. Is a current challenge or hardship weakening my commitment to Christ?
3. Are wealth, career, comfort, or popularity competing with my devotion to Jesus?

What's next?

Write your thoughts and commit to pray about them. Ask God for guidance and strength to act. Sometimes, sharing with someone you trust can help; their prayers and encouragement can provide accountability and support.

Prayer

God of every blessing, as this New Year begins, shape our lives to reflect your Kingdom more fully. Help me live out what I've heard today. Prune my priorities, sharpen my listening, and strengthen my choices so I can fulfil your purposes in all I do. Amen.