

WHEN WE ENCOUNTER GOD - ENCOUNTER SERIES

Good morning Life Fellowship. Hope everyone is doing okay this morning. I hope you are excited to learn about the tabernacle. Sometimes though when we think about the tabernacle it is not something we always want to learn about, because it is from the Old Testament, and there is a lot of symbolism involved. And mostly we are used to coming to church and hearing sermons from the New Testament. But I am really excited about this series because I think even though the tabernacle might be very foreign to us, I believe it is incredibly relevant to what you and I are walking in today, no matter where we are in life.

To give us a little background of the tabernacle we are going to be in Exodus Chapter 25 this morning so please turn there in your Bibles. And if you are new to church, or maybe you have never really heard anything about the tabernacle, I want to give you a history really quickly about what it was. God made a covenant with Abraham which is found in the book of Genesis. The covenant was with Abraham and his family and God renewed this covenant every generation. God told Abraham that He was going to make His name great, and He was going to bless the nations through his descendants.

So in the beginning of Exodus we find a nation. The problem is this nation is under bondage in Egypt, until God sends a prophet named Moses to be the deliverer for His people. So the first 15 chapters of Exodus are all about that story of the Israelites leaving Egypt. They cross the Red Sea and they come to Mount Sinai where God gives them the Ten Commandments. A lot of times when we think of Mount Sinai we think that is all God did, that He just gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. But what God also did was He gave Moses the plans for the tabernacle.

God wanted His people to have a place where they would worship Him. And I think this is important to understand that the tabernacle was God's idea; it was not Moses' idea. We are so used to modern churches today having buildings that were built with a pastor or leaders overseeing the church in the building of them. But Moses went up on the mountain not knowing what to expect, and God instructed him to make a dwelling place for His presence among His people. So what we have to understand then is the tabernacle was God's idea and not man's.

The other thing we have to understand is that the tabernacle is very important to God. Moses spends twelve chapters describing the tabernacle after hearing from God. The twelve chapters describe the design of the tabernacle and the very intricate things for it. There are as many chapters describing the tabernacle as it took from the beginning of Exodus to the Passover, so imagine that. In the narrative of Exodus we find all the exciting stories of the plagues, the burning bush and the Passover, but Moses also spends as much time describing the tabernacle as he had spent describing the actual events of the exodus. And that should tell us something, and that is that this was very important.

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If you are unfamiliar with the tabernacle, we are going to do something briefly very you. We are going to show you a picture of it. Maybe you have seen this in children's Bibles or you might even have googled it. But this is what the tabernacle looked like. I just want us to get a reference point because in future weeks we are going to do a much deeper dive into the nature of the different parts of the tabernacle.



You first have the veil that is around the entire courtyard. Then you have the altar where the priest would offer the sacrifices of the bulls, goats and lambs. Then you have the building with two rooms within that structure. One room is the Holy Place and the second room is called the Holy of Holies.

As we go through this series over the next ten weeks, we are going to be doing a deeper dive into the tabernacle, but I wanted you to get a frame of reference for it today. What we are going to learn from the tabernacle is how to encounter God in a fresh way. That is why we named this series, 'Encounter.'

Don't you love the word 'encounter?' Encounter is a cool word. If I come home from work and my wife asks me if anything happened today I will probably just say something like, 'Well, I went to Starbuck's today.' But if I come home and she asks me to do something I will probably tell her, 'I had an encounter today at Starbuck's.' Encounter means there is a story involved.

And I think that is what we want from you from this series. We believe that God is writing all of our stories. God is writing the story of our life right now, and many times God is doing different things in each of our lives. But here is what I know - when God encounters us there is a difference, there is a change that happens inside of us. We

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cannot be the same when we encounter God. And there is a story that God wants to do in all of us.

So this morning what I want to do is look at three outcomes when we encounter the one true God. These are things that I want our minds to be thinking about as this will be kind of an overview message of the tabernacle. We are not going to do a deep dive today, but I want to do a 30,000 foot view of the tabernacle.

I want us to read Exodus Chapter 25, verses 1 through 9, especially paying attention to verses 8 and 9. Now Moses has just gone up on the mountain, and this is the beginning of the 40 days and 40 nights that he is away from the people of Israel. The people are down in the valley and Moses is up there speaking to God privately. And this is what he says:

***“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, goatskins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breast piece.*”**

Verse 8: ***“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”***

This is something very powerful that God says here in verses 8 and 9. And the outcomes that God desires is not just for the people of Israel in the book of Exodus, but what He wants to do in us today. Now here are the three outcomes - Restoration, Transformation and Mission. We are going to look at these in detail.

Let’s look at restoration first because here is what we know - God is a pursuing God. What these verses teach us is that God is after us. He is not up in Heaven waiting for you and me to respond. He is not saying, ‘*Oh man, I am just going to sit up here and wait.*’ No, God is a God who pursues. And we see this in verse 8 about the tabernacle because He says, ***“That I may dwell in their midst.”***

God is the one who initiates the relationship. He wants us to know Him. Let’s turn to another passage in Chapter 29 and verse 45. It says, ***“I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.”*** There is that word ‘dwell’ again, and it is used two times here. God wants to dwell among us. God is a God who pursues us for relationship.

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This is important because you and I always begin life in a broken relationship with God. We don't start off neutral. We don't even start off with a relationship with God. We start with a broken relationship because we are sinners. Before that we don't want a relationship with God. God is the one who wants a relationship with us and so He pursues us. And God is always pursuing us.

We see this from the history of God's word. Even from the very beginning in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve's sin where they hide because they are ashamed, what does God do? Does He yell and shout down from Heaven at them? No, He comes to the Garden and He walks and looks for them. He speaks gently with them, but He also speaks truth with them. What God is always looking to do is He is looking to restore our relationship with Him. This is what God wants from us.

We see this over and over again in the Bible. God pursues Adam. Then He pursues Noah in the midst of a corrupt generation. He pursues Abraham out of the Chaldeans. He pursues Jacob, even though he was a swindler and a rotten human being. God is pursuing Joseph even when he is in a pit, and then when he is in Egypt in prison. And God is pursuing you and me today. God is a God who pursues us.

So what we need to understand here in this passage, and what we need to see in the description of the tabernacle, is that God is looking to make His presence felt among us. He wants us to understand His desire for us. The details of the tabernacle are meant to remind us of a place, and this is significant. If you want to do some studying later on this week, maybe as you are driving to work, put on your Bible app and listen to Exodus Chapters 25 through 40. If you want to make the most out of these ten weeks, then really listen to these chapters.

Now I will just tell you there are a lot of fine details about how God wants things done. And it might seem a little boring in some places, but there are some clues that God is telling us through those details. Here is what He wants to do - He wants the people of Israel to be reminded of the Garden of Eden. The point of the tabernacle is to point back to Eden when God walked with man perfectly, when God had a full relationship, when there was harmony between man and God. And so what God wants to do is restore the communion, He wants it to go back to the way it was.

I have been to Europe a number of times and I have led a couple of Reformation tours. It is one of my favorite places to go to study history because I am a huge history buff. I love studying church history, and on my days off I love reading books about church history. That is the kind of dork I am, okay? So when I go to Europe one of my favorite cities to go to is Prague. If you have never been to Prague it is just amazing. It is one of my favorite cities not only because it is beautiful, but because it is also really cheap. You can get a lot of good food for a cheap price in Prague.

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But here is what is so fascinating to me about the city of Prague. Prague was never bombed in World War II. Whenever you go to a major city in Europe there will be some old sections and buildings that look like they are old, but when you look at pictures from back before 1945 you realize the entire continent of Europe was almost completely flattened by bombs. And so there is so much about Prague that has this feeling of ancientness to it, a feeling of walking in history.

So whenever I am there I think, *'This is the way Europe should have looked.'* And I think about that when I am in the beauty and the history and the majesty of Prague. You get this sense of it being untouched by the ravages and destruction of war. And that is what God wants - He wants to restore our lives. He wants us to come back and find out what it should look like. God wants our lives to look like the way they should look like with God at the center. God wants to restore our communion with Him.

Next, the tabernacle also tells us something very profound. It is to remind us of two very important things. Number one - God is incredibly holy. Even though God wants to be dwelling among us, remember in the picture we looked at where there are veils, there is an outer courtyard, and there are rooms. And the glory of God must be some way shielded because His holiness is so special that it must be veiled amongst sinful humanity.

So there is this tension between the holiness of God and sinfulness of man which is always our problem. Yet the tabernacle teaches us that God always brings a provision to meet the gap between His holiness and our sinfulness. And we need to understand something that happens in the middle of the passage about the tabernacle. And that is that between God's giving Moses plans for building the tabernacle, and the time for the actual building of the tabernacle, there is a very crucial event. And do you know what that event was? It was the story of the golden calf.

God had originally made His covenant with His people, and then His people break the covenant. And here is what I think is so amazing about the covenant relationship of God that is so different from any human relationship that you and I may have. And that is God does not lessen His holiness to make sure that He can relate to us, but He also does not withhold His intimacy from us.

See, whenever someone wrongs us or whenever there is an offense that you and I may walk into with another person in our lives, whether it is a friend, or our spouse, or our children, many times what we will do is we will try to compromise the level of holiness to accommodate the sinfulness in the relationship. Or we withdrew our intimacy. And what the tabernacle shows us is that God wants to be intimate with us, but at the same time He never lessens His holiness.

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This is a picture that we need to remember. The reason why there is so much sacrifice and blood and coverings and atonement is because God never wants us to forget His holiness, and likewise He never wants us to forget His intimacy. So we see God wants to restore His communion with us.

And God also wants to restore the beauty of creation. Now don't miss this. Notice what I just read in the first seven verses of Exodus Chapter 25. You were probably thinking that was a long list of stuff needed. But look again in verse 3 where it says, "***And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns.***" What is God after? God wanted this structure to be beautiful. God wants beauty. He wants beauty in our lives. But He also wants us to create beauty.

The tabernacle was to be a colorful, alive, brilliant place in the midst of a desert. It was to be a symbol. And there is a symbol of what you and I walk into on a regular basis as well. When we walk into the world we are walking into a world that is bound by the curse of sin. There are these reflections of the desert all around us. And what God wants us to do is to bring beauty and life wherever we go.

The reason why I love this so much is because this part of Scripture speaks very profoundly to artists, to those of us who are craftsmen, or designers, or musicians. Those people who create with their hands, or who create beauty in some form. Here is what we should not forget - God has given you a gift to use for His glory in the world today. God is not just a utilitarian God that just wants us to get things done, and doesn't care how things look. God cares about every minute detail of things. And He wants it to be beautiful.

And if you are someone that He has given gifts and abilities to for you to be able to create beauty in this world, know that is for a reason. You are to create beauty in this world because you want to give people a taste of Eden. If you are a designer or an artist, whatever you might be, you should read this passage of Scripture with intense prayer, asking God how you can create how these people did, because you want to reflect His glory in creating beauty for the world to see. Beauty is a very important word when we understand the tabernacle.

So God is after restoration, and I want you to see what this looks like, because this is a very profound moment when God begins this story of restoration with the tabernacle. I want us to turn to Revelations Chapter 21 to see that God continues His work of restoration. The high point of restoration is obviously the cross of Jesus Christ. So if the high point of restoration is Jesus when He sheds His blood for our sins and dies on the cross, the culmination of restoration is found in Revelations Chapter 21.

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Verse 1: ***“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”*** What do we read right there? We see holiness and we see beauty. The shadows of which we see in the tabernacle unfold in this display we read about and that you and I will see someday.

Verse 3: ***“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.’*** Did you see that? This is the same thing that He said back in Exodus Chapter 29. God is always after the same thing, and what God is after is you. He wants your heart. He wants your life.

And some of you have forgotten that. Some of you have walked away. Some of you are cold. Some of you are wondering, ‘*God, where are you in my life?*’ And God wants to restore you. Some of you don’t know what restoration looks like because your heart has grown cold, or numb, or distant, or you are uncertain about life.

But here is what restoration looked like in verse 4. ***“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*** That is restoration. And God wants to begin that work in your life now. What we have to understand is this is what God is after. When we understand and we walk into this tabernacle we are going to be learning about the altar where sacrifices and blood took place. We are going to learn about the significance of lampstands and tables of shewbread and the Ark of the Covenant. And don’t lose focus on the details but understand what all of it was for. It is about restoration.

And this is what I want to ask all of you - it is a very simple question - how many believe that God is working to pursue you right now? And maybe this is what you and I need to believe - God is pursuing someone that we love right now, even though we may not see the evidence. Never stop believing that God is pursuing because this is who He is. And that is what the tabernacle shows us.

There is a second outcome that we have to understand and that is the outcome of transformation. Let’s look back in Exodus Chapter 25 again. Now I didn’t catch this the first time I read through the passage of the tabernacle, but I caught it the second time. And I think this is very profound. Look at verse 9 of Chapter 25 where God is speaking to Moses: ***“Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”***

Now drop down to verse 40 where God says: ***“And see that you make them (talking about the furniture) after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the***

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mountain.” Now let’s go to Exodus Chapter 27 and verse 8 where it says this: “***You shall make it hollow, with boards. As it has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made.***” What is God saying? What God is saying is He was going to show Moses the exact precise way in which he was to make this. He was going to show Moses the exact precise way in which they were to worship Him. He was telling Moses that he had to follow His instructions. If His people were to worship God they were the ones that had to conform, they were the ones that had to come to God His way.

Listen, what you and I are always in battle with God over is how to worship Him. What you and I want to do is worship God in a way that is convenient and comfortable for us. And what the tabernacle shows us is that God is not interested in that; God is not interested in our comfort and convenience. God is not interested in what works for us, or what is best for our schedule. What God wants is a people that are conforming to His ways, and what He wants. What God wants is for us to be transformed into His image, because as much as God is pursuing us to restore a relationship with us, God is also pursuing us to change us.

The restoration is all about come as you are. God wants to restore us even where we are. He is searching and pursuing us to restore us to a right place, but here is what we also need to understand. Even though we can come as we are to God, He does not want to leave us as we are. He wants to change us, to mold us, and to conform us. And what you are going to see is there are a lot of instructions and standards and rules for how people worshipped God at the tabernacle.

We are the ones that have to conform to His holiness and not the other way around. And you and I have to fight against this all the time because we are consumers. By nature we are consumers. We drive to church and we walk in instantly thinking with a consumer mind. This is the water that we swim in. We are evaluating everything. ‘*That song was a little slow for me.*’ ‘*That song was SO loud.*’ ‘*I can’t believe they wore that on the stage.*’ ‘*I love that song.*’ ‘*I hate that song.*’ ‘*That sermon was too long.*’ ‘*He turned to too many passages.*’ (Laughter.)

That is what we do. ‘*Hey, how was church today?*’ ‘*Well, probably a seven out of ten today.*’ ‘*The message was a little off.*’ This is what we do. We come in here and we think about us. And what God is confronting in our hearts is we need to come in here conforming to Him. When we approach God’s presence with God’s people, are we the ones that are saying, ‘*I need to be the one that conforms.*’ ‘*I am the one who needs to change.*’

Listen, we are consumers. Friday, my wife and I went to see a movie. Now you need to understand my wife has home schooled for eight years, but this year the kids are all in school. And it is like ‘freedom!’ So Friday was my day off, and it has been years

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since I have had a day off with my wife and without any kids, and it was just like, ‘*What are we going to do today?*’ So we could go see a movie at 10:30 in the morning if we wanted to, and we did. We could go to Birkdale, or to Northlake, or even to Concord Mills - whatever we felt like. And I was like, ‘*Honey, let’s go to the good seats at Concord Mills.*’ You know they have those seats there that recline. Have you ever watched a movie in those seats? So we realized we could go wherever we wanted, see any movie we wanted, at any show time we wanted, and we could pick any seat we wanted.

Listen, this is the air we breathe. We breathe the air of consumerism. And because we breathe this air we need to always be confronted that we cannot bring this into the church. And we do not bring that into our relationship with God, because God is looking to change us. God is looking to conform us into His image. We are the ones who must change.

So we all want to worship God, we all want God and His blessings, but most of us want it on our terms, and on our timing. And so we have to be confronted with this issue. I was reminded of this last week. I am a huge U2 fan and I was listening to a song that was probably on one of their worst albums, ‘Zooropa. If you know what I am talking about there is not much good on ‘Zooropa’ for a U2 fan. But their last song on that album is called ‘The Wanderer,’ and it is a great song. It was written by U2, but it is sung by Johnny Cash. And that was a great combination. I love Johnny Cash and I love U2 so it was a really good song.

It was a fascinating song because it is about someone’s journey of life. And the journey that they have deals with the hypocrisy of the church and also the hypocrisy of the person’s own life journey, and how they ultimately have to keep looking to Jesus. Now I am not here to defend the Christianity of Bono or anything like that, but here is what I will say. There is a line in this song that struck a very deep chord with me as I was studying this passage. The line is talking about the hypocrisy that is seen amongst God’s people. It says, ‘*I stopped outside a church house where the citizens like to sit. They say they want the kingdom, but they don’t want God in it.*’

And that is what you and I are in danger of every day. We want the kingdom, we want the blessing, we want the goodness that God brings, but we do not want God in it. Because when God is in the middle of it, He is the one who makes the rules. We are the ones that have to submit to Him. And what we have to understand is that transformation does not happen without submission. Transformation does not happen without submission. And everything about the tabernacle that we see requires submission. You have to bring a certain kind of offering when you do this kind of sin, at this time, to this person, in this place. You don’t get to determine those things. Only these people are

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allowed in this room, and only this person is allowed in this room. God is making the rules.

When the cloud over the tabernacle moved, and the cloud represented God's presence here on earth, guess what the people had to do? They had to pull up the pegs, move the tabernacle, and go to wherever the cloud stopped again. Everything about the tabernacle was about submission. It was about the people having to follow God. They were the ones that had to submit to what He wanted.

And so this morning where are you? Where are you as far as letting God transform you into His image? If you just want God to bless your life or affirm what you are doing, then God is never going to be able to transform you the way that He has designed you to be. At the tabernacle there was a daily reminder of God's holiness and their sinfulness, but there was also God's provision and love for them. I said this about restoration that when you recognize your own sinfulness and God's holiness, and understand that God's provision is given to us out of love it should help to make us want to change.

And that leads us to the third outcome which is mission. So God pursues us to have a relationship with us, God pursues us to make us like Jesus, but God is also pursuing us so that we can pursue others. God is pursuing us so that we can pursue others. One of the things that you will notice about the tabernacle, and we are going to spend some time on this later on in this series, is the entire structure, the furniture, the sacrifice, and the priests all picture, and model, and shadow Jesus. The entire thing points to Jesus and what He accomplished for us on the cross.

So here is what is so cool to think about. The New Covenant under the blood of Jesus, not under the blood of bulls and goats, is not like the old. We no longer have to go to a tent to worship, or a building to worship. Yes, we come in here and we worship, but listen, you can go out of here today and you can be in your living room and you can worship God. You can go to a coffee shop and worship God. You can go to the middle of a forest and worship God. You don't need the tabernacle to be able to worship, because here is what is so beautiful about what God is doing, and that is the tabernacle was not the culmination of worship - Jesus is. And now under the New Covenant we become the tabernacle because now God's presence dwells in us.

One of the reasons why this is so important for us to learn about the tabernacle is to understand that we become the living embodiment of the tabernacle wherever we go. We should be agents of restoration wherever we go. We should be agents of transformation wherever we go. And we should model and display the presence of God wherever we live, wherever we work, wherever we play, and wherever we go. We are living representatives of God's presence and God's glory.

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So now we become the instrument of the tabernacle that God instituted as found here in Exodus. And that is because now God's dwelling place is not just with us, but in us, through the Spirit of Jesus. We sang that this morning, and it is good news. And here is what we have to understand - people that truly encounter Jesus want others to encounter Jesus as well. People that encounter Jesus want others to encounter Him also.

I always know when my sons come back from soccer practice. You know why? It is because I can smell them. (*Laughter.*) And they just look like it too, because there are grass stains and dirt all over them, plus they smell. If my sons walk into a room and they are wearing this gear, and they look like they do, and they smell like they do, then I know where they have been, and I know what they have been doing.

And in a more profound way, the more that we encounter God on a personal level, the more we spend time with Jesus, the more that we spend time in prayer, and the more we spend time in His word learning about Him, the more it becomes part of our lives. And the more that we walk in communion in the presence of God, the more people can tell where we have been, and they can tell who we have been with.

I want to leave you with three reflection questions and then we will close. The first one is this - what is God restoring in your life right now? Listen, God is pursuing something. He is pursuing you about something, and He is pursuing you for some reason. And God is always working a work of restoration. He is always working to bring you closer to Him, to draw you in. That is what I want you to think about this morning - what is God restoring in your heart right now? What is He looking to build relationally with you right now?

Maybe for some of you it is even starting that relationship, because sitting here this morning you are thinking, '*Ben, I don't even have a relationship with God. I am not even sure what that looks like.*' If that is you I hope today you can find that. Maybe some others of you do have a relationship with Him and it is just feels like something is off. You feel distant. You feel cold. You feel numb. I just want you to understand that God is pursuing you; He is wanting something out of your relationship with Him.

The second question is this - where is consumerism driving your worship? And I am not just talking about Sunday mornings, though that is a very important part. But how do we walk with Him in a spirit of worship and transformation every day, so that we are not asking God to conform to us, but that we are asking God how we can conform to Him.

The third question is this - who do you know that needs a God encounter? Listen, we are going to be studying the tabernacle, and I know that doesn't sound super exciting for some people who have never been to church. But I am just telling you right now over the next ten weeks if people are interested, this will be one of the most interesting studies.

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If people are interested in learning about God in Scripture and His plans for salvation, then this will be a wonderful opportunity to bring people to learn what it means to encounter a very holy God, but also a very intimate God of love.

I am going to pray first, and then we will have our time of invitation. And this time of invitation is for you to come and respond however you feel led to respond. Maybe you want to come and pray at the cross, or maybe you would prefer to pray with a counsellor up here. I don't know how God might want you to respond this morning, but this is a time of reflection. And this is a time for understanding what it is God wanted you to hear and to take away from His word this morning, as you think about how God dwells among us, how He restores us, how He transforms us and how He wants to send us on mission. Let's pray.

God, we are thankful for just the power of Christ imagery, the design, the beauty, the holiness and the intimacy that we find all here in the picture of the tabernacle. And God, may we see how you are working right now to transform us and to draw us closer. God, I just pray right now that any heart that is cold towards you this morning that you would give them a fresh vision of who you are, the God of love who pursues, the God of love who transforms, and the God of love who sends. So God, we give you the praise, the honor and the glory, and we just ask that every single person in this room today would have an encounter with you that would be life changing. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.