

LIVING WHOLEHEARTEDLY AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD



YOUTH GROUP SESSIONS

AUTUMN/WINTER RESOURCE PACK 2022-23



IMYC
Irish Methodist Youth and Children's Department

IRISHMETHODIST.ORG

YOUTH GROUP SESSIONS

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ENCOUNTERS 1

THE PRODIGAL SON



Topic:

Encounters 1: The Prodigal Son: God's Wholehearted Love For Us

Duration:

75mins (can be adapted to longer or shorter)

Resources needed:

Bible, print outs of passage, pens, projector, speaker, laptop, father's love letter print outs



GAME

Choose one of the [attached games](#) or you can choose one of your group's favourite games.



INTRODUCTION

2 minutes.

The story of the prodigal son is a story where we see the extraordinary and unconditional love of God. Sometimes it can be hard to believe that God could love us this much, maybe we are hard on ourselves when we make mistakes or strive to be perfect and when we don't reach that then we tell ourselves that God couldn't love us. The story of the prodigal son is the perfect illustration of God who always has His arms stretched wide open and is running towards us to embrace us. Always. Throughout this session we will be looking at the prodigal son and the love his father showed to him, how extraordinary this love is and when we know and feel this love it shapes who we are and how we live.

Pray to begin the session. Invite God to be with you all as you dig into the story of The Prodigal Son and learn about how we can live our lives knowing that God loves us unconditionally and that nothing can ever separate us from that love.



ENCOUNTERS 1

THE PRODIGAL SON



SCRIPTURE

5 minutes.

Assign roles to your group - this won't require everyone, but if your whole group wants to be involved you can create extra characters like crowd, friends, or even pigs.

Get a narrator to read **Luke 15:11-32** and each character acts out and says what they hear in the story.

Ask your group to notice what is happening in the story and to think about how they would feel if they were the prodigal son or the Father.



ACTIVITY

10 minutes.

Have a brief discussion about what the story teaches them and then spend some time flipping the story and try and act it out again.

This could be done as a group discussion or as an improv drama.

What is the opposite story to the Prodigal Son?

What is the most common or expected response to the prodigal son?

Do we see people who are loving and forgiving?

Or people who are judgmental and full of rejection?

Don't spend too much time on this - the aim here is to show how extravagant and extraordinary the reaction and love of the Father is.

ENCOUNTERS 1

THE PRODIGAL SON



INPUT

10 minutes.

Some input has been prepared below. You are welcome to read this out to your group as a bit of a talk, you can adapt the content or make it into a powerpoint with some of the information. Have a read through it and think about what would suit your group the best.

To look at the story of the prodigal son, we must remember that it sits alongside two other parables.

At the beginning of Luke 15, Luke explains:

“Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering round to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.” Jesus told three parables; The Parable of the Lost Sheep, The Parable of the Lost Coin and the Parable of the Lost Son. Notice the wholehearted concern for the lost in all three parables. In the first two a lost sheep and a lost coin. If one can rejoice when a sheep or a coin is recovered, how much more rejoicing there will be when a person who is lost is recovered?!

In Luke 15: 11-32 there are three characters; The father, the younger son and the elder son. Imagine the pain of the father as his younger son walked out of their relationship. It was devastating to the entire family as this son walked away from his family responsibilities and they lost one third of their wealth. The father wholeheartedly loved his sons but he knew he could not forcefully maintain their relationship and so he allowed his younger son to make his own decision. The father grants freedom, even the freedom to reject his love.

Yet this initial unexpected reaction to his young son’s request later enabled the relationship to be restored. His wholehearted lavish love was rejected by his son but the actions of his son could not destroy it. God the Father’s deep and persistent longing for his son did not diminish. When the father saw his son he “...was filled with compassion for him; he RAN to his son,...” This was totally undignified, a man of his age would never run, and to do so he would have had to lift his robes, revealing his legs which was humiliating. But he races towards his son, getting to him before the rest of the village had time to vent their anger, disapproval and disappointment on his son, taking that humiliation on himself. What an amazing picture of God the Father, not staying aloof in heaven, but coming towards us in Jesus.

It seems there is no limit to the humiliation or lowering of himself with this Father. Those

ENCOUNTERS 1

THE PRODIGAL SON



who posed the question which prompted the three parables were the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They were/are the law abiding, obedient elder son who stayed at home but their love for their Father was absent. Now the challenge comes to them, your Father has come out and down to plead with you, to come to the party, to the family meal, to enter into the joy of welcoming 'your brother', to love your father and brother, what are you going to do? In Jesus, God the Father came down, lowered himself, pleads with them – What are they going to do? Will they enter the party? What were they wholeheartedly focussing on?

This elder son may have believed that he had to earn his father's love through his obedience. His younger brother clearly did not earn it so it was clearly unfair that he did! Without any effort!! – this was crazy! Indeed, Jesus was using this very parable to open the Father's heart to the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Their question or muttering about Jesus welcoming sinners and even eating with them prompted the three parables. This boy is saying to the elder son: 'your father has received a sinner and is going to sit and eat with him', even worse – He has thrown a huge party and is providing the best meat on the farm for this sinner!

This is God's heart! David Benner has put it like this: "When God thinks of us he feels a deep, persistent longing – not simply for our wholeness but, more basically, for our friendship." P27

The response from the father is extraordinary and unconditional. The love of God is extraordinary and unconditional. There is nothing that can separate us from that love and God does and always will, run to us with open arms.



SCRIPTURE

5 minutes.

Luke 15:11-32

Allow the young people time to read through the passage again themselves. You can provide print outs of the passage, have bibles for them or they can use the bible app or internet for this.

This will allow some quiet reflection and encourages your group to read the bible for themselves.

ENCOUNTERS 1

THE PRODIGAL SON



DISCUSSION

15 minutes.

This discussion time can be done in small groups or as one group. Again, whatever works best for your group.

1. What stands out to you about the prodigal's encounter with his father?
2. What do you think the son was expecting? What was the alternative? In the world today, what reaction do you think is most expected?
3. How does the Father's love impact the life of the son?
4. The youngest son returned feeling not good enough of this love. Can you think of times when you felt not good enough for God's love?

Note: If the answers to these questions came out naturally during the activity and these feel repetitive, you're welcome to adapt the questions or dig a little deeper with your group.

FEEDBACK

5 minutes.

If the discussion was in small groups, give a few minutes for feedback and allow your group to hear from each other.

ENCOUNTERS 1

THE PRODIGAL SON



RESPONSE/CHALLENGE

15 minutes.

Ask question:

How could the Father's love shape who you are and how you live?



Watch Video:

Play it by Ear (GG1)

<https://youtu.be/kS8RKiOpBSY>

Allow young people to ponder the question.

You can choose whether you get them to share their thoughts or keep them to themselves.

Give a copy of [The Father's Love Letter](#) to each young person

Do you know you are loved, unconditionally, by God?

Close the session by listening to 'Pride of the Father' by Hillsong Young&Free and give your group some space to read through the Fathers' love letter and reflect on the words of the song.



Song:

Pride of the Father - Hillsong Young&Free

<https://youtu.be/j8jnnOzUeeo>

Invite them to allow this to inform how they see themselves - knowing that they are worth God's love and that there is nothing they can do that will ever remove them from it.



CLOSING PRAYER

2 minutes.

A leader can pray the words of the father's love letter over the group before they leave.



ENCOUNTERS 2

CALEB

**Topic:**

Encounters 2: Caleb – Living out “wholeheartedly”

Duration:

75mins (can be adapted to longer or shorter)

Resources needed:

Bible, print out of passage, paper, pens, lego bricks/jenga blocks, laptop, projector, speaker.



GAME

Choose one of the [attached games](#) or you can choose one of your group's favourite games.



INTRODUCTION

2 minutes.

God is bigger than all things, He is bigger than anything we can even imagine that we could worry about or be afraid of. How easy do we find it to trust God in all things and to give our entire lives to Him? Even the things that feel risky or way out of reach. Caleb's story in the Old Testament is where we are going to focus during this session, and it is a story of a man whose heart was consistently aligned with God's; even in the scary parts. Caleb lived for God and was bold in believing and sharing that with God all things were possible. We will hear Caleb's story, discuss our view of life, whether we see obstacles or opportunities, or maybe a bit of both and pray that we leave here today knowing that God is bigger than anything we will face.

Pray to begin the session. Invite God to be with you all as you dig into the story of Caleb and learn about how we can live our lives wholeheartedly, trusting in God.



ENCOUNTERS 2

CALEB



SCRIPTURE

5 minutes.

Numbers 13:1-3 and 13:17-32

If you have a group that is up for some acting, then you could have a narrator who reads the verses and assign characters to the story or just allow your group to listen to what is being said and jump in and act it out.

OR

Have print outs of the passage and allow everyone to read it through themselves and underline anything that stands out to them.

You could do both options if your group are up for it; it will encourage some fun along with personal bible reading experience.



DISCUSSION

10 minutes.

This discussion time can be done in small groups or as one group. Again, whatever works best for your group.

1. What stands out to you about Caleb's encounter with God in these passages?
2. What was the difference in the attitude between Caleb and Joshua and the others in the group?
3. Who do you relate to more? Someone who sees obstacles or someone who sees opportunities.

FEEDBACK

5 minutes.

If the discussion was in small groups, give a few minutes for feedback and allow your group to hear from each other.

ENCOUNTERS 2

CALEB



ACTIVITY

10 minutes.

This will require a little bit of set up time!

What are the obstacles that we face?

This activity allows an opportunity for young people to think about the obstacles that they feel are in their life, whether it is time, relationships, self-doubt, worry etc etc.

Have some stations set up around the room (this can be the room you are already in or set up in a different space to move the group around).

Stick up some areas that young people have in their life, for example, school, church, family, friends, sports teams, etc.

Under each area have a few examples of the obstacles they may face in those areas (these will overlap, but that is ok).

And in each area, have lots of Lego bricks.

Everyone takes a little time to go to each area and lift a Lego brick for each obstacle they feel they face; they do not need to share these with the group, just lift the bricks.

Bring everyone back together and as the leader delivers the input, they can create something from their bricks.

Examples:

School: pressure, insecurity, comparison, anxiety, relationships, busyness

Home: family dynamics, sickness, sibling comparison, pressure, anxiety, time

Church: few the same age, insecurity, not feeling good enough, busyness

Friends: trying to fit in, comparison, insecurity, anxiety in groups, arguments

Sports teams: pressure to be the best, insecurity, comparison, commitment

(Again, you will know your group best so if you can, include some examples that you know they will relate to).



ENCOUNTERS 2

CALEB



INPUT

10 minutes.

Some input has been prepared below. You are welcome to read this out to your group as a bit of a talk, you can adapt the content or make it into a powerpoint with some of the information. Have a read through it and think about what would suit your group the best.

We meet Caleb at a time where the Israelites had been miraculously delivered from Egypt already, and it is within the first few years of their time in the desert. Their known reality of God was of One who could split the sea to deliver them, to feed them with manna from heaven, and to guide them with cloud by day, and fire by night.

From the start, they were assured that the God who had led them out of Egypt and sustained them through miracles, signs and wonders was giving them the territory and called them to be of good courage (Num 13:2, 20b). For Caleb, that was all he needed to know - his wholehearted faith told him that God knew what they needed, and that He would give them what He promised.

Caleb's life was marked as someone who had received and believed in a God-given vision of what had been promised, and he lived his life in belief and pursuit of that vision. This meant ongoing, sacrificial, and intentional choices to partner with the promises of God. Caleb saw beyond the challenges, the obstacles, and the reasons to fear. Caleb saw beyond the giants with a heart that believes God is greater. He was shaped by being assured of who his God was and what his God would do.

Caleb was consistent in his lived-out encounter with God, this led to action that transformed his entire nation. The amazing thing is that his attitude and the way he approached times of crisis gave voice to a prophetic vision from God; that more was possible, that there was a different way, and that when God was given space to act, that He could, and He would.

Our foundation, as Methodists is one that chooses an inconvenient, sacrificial, and intentional way of being the body of Christ, so that the world will be changed as a result. Living wholeheartedly is not a call to 'do better' or 'try harder.' It is an invitation to see and to lead with heavenly eyes by living in submission to God.

With a clear vision of what we can become in Christ, no ocean or difficulty is too great. Without it, we rarely move beyond our current boundaries.

We read that Caleb's choosing to follow God wholeheartedly meant that he got to enter

ENCOUNTERS 2

CALEB



and see the Promised Land, whilst all the others died before that happened. His character and his choices meant that he got to partner with God in the fulfilment the vision of his promise.

Scripture doesn't explicitly say so, but it's clear from the fruit in his life that Caleb had continued walking with the same vision and zeal for God. Caleb kept going and chose the difficult territory that others feared, because he wholeheartedly believed that the promise God made all those years ago was still true.

Wholeheartedness is a calling for ALL of us, and will mean making decisions that, with human eyes, seem strange, even reckless. Caleb's request was ridiculous in many ways, and there were surely those who quietly rolled their eyes or outwardly mocked him. If we are to pursue God wholeheartedly, we surely should expect no less, both from within the Church and from without.

But his persistent and persevering vision led him to make wholehearted choices to seek first the Kingdom of God in his context as best he could.

Like it was said before, Caleb saw beyond the challenges, the obstacles, and the reasons to fear. Caleb saw beyond the giants with a heart that believes God is greater. We all have obstacles and things that we are afraid of; but how often do we trust God with those things and trust that He is bigger? Do we choose to focus on the obstacles, or do we choose to look at the opportunities and know that with God we can accomplish so much more.

VIDEO

5 minutes.



Movie:

Facing the Giants; Scene: The death crawl

<https://youtu.be/b3wnK-Cphgs>

ENCOUNTERS 2

CALEB



RESPONSE/CHALLENGE

10 minutes.

God is bigger than all of these things that we see as obstacles and see as impossible to get through. He is bigger even when we feel it is risky or when we feel we won't have strength to do it - God has strength!

Play the following song and invite your group to take their Lego creation apart and throw each piece into a bin of some kind - start to take down your obstacles and know that God is bigger than these obstacles. He is bigger than all of the giants that are in your life.



Song:

We Praise You – Brandon Lake

<https://youtu.be/5yy9vvdPFoM>



PRAYER

5 minutes.

Invite the young people to pray together.

Again, you will know what is best for your group - if they are comfortable, they can pray for each other, you could open it up to a big group to pray aloud together or pray in small groups. They could also spend a couple of minutes writing down their prayers and then say them together.

Leader to close in prayer.



ENCOUNTERS 3

TIMOTHY

**Topic:**

Encounters 3: Timothy - Our wholehearted love for God

Duration:

75mins (can be adapted to longer or shorter)

Resources needed:

Laptop, projector, speaker, print outs of passages, pens, paper.



GAME

Choose one of the [attached games](#) or you can choose one of your group's favourite games.



INTRODUCTION

2 minutes.

Throughout this session we are going to look at the character of Timothy from the New Testament. Timothy had many life changing encounters with God but maybe not in the way that you would think of a life changing encounter. Too often we think of a significant encounter with God to be a very big and intense moment or series of moments but not all encounters with God involve one identifiable life changing moment. Timothy was a young and timid man who encountered Jesus through the continued support and encouragement of his family, friends and the church. His gentle encounter led to an example of sincere faith and a willingness to wholeheartedly follow Jesus.

Pray to begin the session. Invite God to be with you all as you dig into the story of Timothy and learn about how we can live our lives wholeheartedly for God.



ENCOUNTERS 3

TIMOTHY



OVERVIEW VIDEO

5 minutes.

There are 2 video options - please be sure to watch these before choosing which one to use as they are catered to different ages. One is aimed at the younger age group and one to the older. One may feel too childish for your group or at the same time, you may know that your group engage with the cartoon style videos. You as the leader will know which one works best.



The Bible Project (Deeper context)

<https://youtu.be/7RoqnGcEjcs>



Crossroads Kids (Lighter)

<https://youtu.be/Z9Mz4I9w4Gs>



SCRIPTURE

5 minutes.

1 Timothy 4:12-16

Allow space for your group to read this creatively. Give each person a printed version of the passage with some pens. Read through it individually and invite your group to underline what stands out to them, circle what they think is most important and put a question mark next to anything they have questions about or don't understand. Allow a minute or two for feedback after this and lead straight into discussion.



ENCOUNTERS 3

TIMOTHY



DISCUSSION

10 minutes.

This discussion time can be done in small groups or as one group. Again, whatever works best for your group.

1. What stands out to you in these verses?
2. What does this passage tell us about Timothy?
3. Do you think that age is important when serving God? Why or why not?
4. Timothy was young and timid. Have you ever felt like you were too young to experience God or to bring change to the church?

FEEDBACK

5 minutes.

If the discussion was in small groups, give a few minutes for feedback and allow your group to hear from each other.



DISCUSSION

2 minutes.

When we look at the story of Timothy, we see that God was in his everyday life, we see that Timothy faithfully followed the teachings of God and continued to grow in his relationship with God. Sometimes we can wait to experience God, sometimes we can hold back until the next big event, a worship night or a special service in church and sometimes we can lose sight of the fact that God is with us every day and we can experience Him every day. We can encounter God while we are at home, in school, playing sport or washing the dishes. God is with us while we go through our everyday life; how easy or difficult is it to see God in everyday things? It's time we stopped holding back and waiting for the next big thing. It's time to see God in the everyday ordinary things, and realise he speaks and moves in everything, the big and the small.



ENCOUNTERS 3

TIMOTHY



INPUT

10 minutes.

Some input has been prepared below. You are welcome to read this out to your group as a bit of a talk, you can adapt the content or make it into a powerpoint with some of the information. Have a read through it and think about what would suit your group the best.

Timothy was a disciple, he had a sincere faith, and he was well thought of by other believers. We see that Timothy travelled with Paul, worked with him, wrote with him, and was sent by him. It was while he was living in Ephesus, where Paul had sent him as a delegate, that he received letters to encourage him in his ministry.

Paul loved Timothy and what we see in these letters is a personal correspondence and a loving encouragement for Timothy in his ministry.

So, what does Paul letters reveal to us about Timothy? He was young, timid, and had issues with his stomach. But, while these may be seen as negative or limiting characteristics, we see a believer who was sincere in faith, who was called and gifted by the Holy Spirit, and who was living and working where God had placed him. Paul shows us that this life of faith was rooted in Timothy's encounter with God.

Timothy encountered God in different ways: through his family, his friends and his church. Timothy had a mixed family background – his father was Greek, and his mother was Jewish. From infancy he was taught from the Jewish Scripture, and we can presume that this teaching came from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. Paul reflected nostalgically and fondly on the faith he witnessed in this family and is keen to remind Timothy to remember these roots and how this learning impacted his life.

An encounter with Christ followed this foundation of learning, when this family was converted to Christianity. Timothy and his family encountered Christ through the sharing of the gospel and so decided to follow him. When Paul met Timothy, he was referred to as a disciple. Timothy's faith had developed from those infancy teachings, and as his friendship with Paul developed, he then learnt from his example and continued on his discipleship journey.

Timothy encountered the Holy Spirit through the church. Timothy was set apart for ministry and Paul reminds him that through the Spirit he was gifted for this task. The Spirit was working in Timothy's life through other believers – those who spoke out a word of prophecy, and those elders who laid hands on him, confirming his call and gift, and authorising him to exercise it.

ENCOUNTERS 3

TIMOTHY



An encounter doesn't have to have the emotional stirrings like that of the Father's outstretched arms welcoming the prodigal son home; nor does it have the brutal honesty and accepting grace of Jesus' words to the woman at the well... These encounters with God, through family, friends and church, seem somewhat dull in comparison. There's no grand conversation to hear, or spectacular action to witness; instead, we see a mum teaching her child, day-to-day life with a friend, and the prayers and support of a church. Yet through all of these an encounter with God happened, and we see the life of Timothy changed and the community around him impacted.

Timothy was in Ephesus, a trading hub, a mixed population, so a range of religions and philosophies. Many people went to the huge temple at the centre of the city to worship the goddess of women, fertility, childbirth and hunting. There was opposition to the new Christian church, and Paul identified that there were many issues with false teachers, with heresy and with believers being led astray. Into this context Paul commissioned Timothy to be a leader in the church.

Ephesus was not an easy place to be. Paul wanted Timothy to stick with it, not to run away, but remain and carry out his calling. Paul recognised the difficulties Timothy had with this. He encouraged him to be wholehearted in his calling, to remember how he encountered Christ and to use that to spur him on in his ministry.

Timothy perhaps and understandably felt inexperienced for the mission Paul had given him. From time to time he needed affirmation and reassurance. Timothy's characteristics, and the context of Ephesus, may have made it hard to be wholehearted in serving God. But Paul reminded Timothy that the grace of God was sufficient for his need. He had encountered God, and had been given a gift... and so Paul urged him to use it! For someone who had a sincere faith – a faith that was strong, unhypocritical, authentic – his unwavering belief in Christ, and the equipping of his Spirit could help him to fan into flames the gift he had been given. Although Timothy was young and timid, and was working in a difficult context, he could live wholeheartedly as a follower of Jesus for the transformation of the world.

ENCOUNTERS 3

TIMOTHY



ACTIVITY

10 minutes.

Timothy had important people in his life that walked with him, he listened to them and was guided by them; he recognised the wisdom and love that they carried. Who we allow to invest in us is crucial when it comes to our walk with God.

Who are the people around you?

Draw yourself on a page and recognise the areas in your life; home, school, church, sports, clubs etc and write down the people in those areas that help you walk with God.

Take notice of who these people are, they are in your everyday life and help you in your everyday relationship with God. As we heard in the talk, There's no grand conversation to hear, or spectacular action to witness; instead, we see a mum teaching her child, day-to-day life with a friend, and the prayers and support of a church. Yet through all of these, an encounter with God happened and we see the life of Timothy changed and the community around him impacted.



RESPONSE/CHALLENGE

10 minutes.

Use **Romans 12:1-2** to invite your group to respond and be challenged.

Give out print outs of the passage or have big print outs up around the room for them to walk around and read. Ask them to reflect on the words of the passage and think about what is important to them as they move forward in their walk with God.

Invite them to take note of what has challenged them and to make an action point for the next week that will encourage them to live out their everyday life with God.



PRAYER

2 minutes.

Invite the young people to stand in their own space and the leader can pray the Romans passage over them.

LIVING WHOLEHEARTEDLY AS FOLLOWERS
OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WORLD