

ENCOUNTER

A pair of stylized wings, drawn with thin orange lines, are positioned behind the word "ENCOUNTER". The wings are spread out, with the left wing behind the "C" and "O" and the right wing behind the "U" and "N". The lines are curved and layered to create a sense of movement and depth.





ENCOUNTER

Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for **IT IS THE TIME TO SEEK THE LORD**, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.
HOSEA 10:12

IT'S EASY TO LIVE on spiritual autopilot. We scroll, we strive, and we survive, but rarely do we seek to truly encounter the living God. And yet, this is what we were made for. We are made not just to know about God, but to know Him. Not just to follow religious patterns, but to walk in His presence daily.

At Upstate Church, our next step is seeking the Lord with greater intentionality than ever before.

This season, **God is calling us to Encounter.**

What does that mean? It means we're not content with casual Christianity. We're not satisfied with spiritual apathy or surface-level faith. We want to live with holy desperation, to hunger and thirst for the living God. Like Moses crying out, "Show me your glory," like David declaring, "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere," we want to be a people marked by His presence. We aren't taking for granted all the amazing things God has already done in our church, but like Habbakuk, we are praying, "Do it again, Lord."

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Encounter is not a program. It's not a temporary emphasis. It's an act of surrender. It's a posture. A heart's cry. A renewal in spirit. A new way of living.

We believe that everything flows from encountering God:

- Joy that isn't shaken by circumstance
- Peace that surpasses understanding
- Conviction that leads to obedience
- Power to live on mission
- Worship that isn't manufactured, but Spirit-born

Over the coming months, we will be making room for a movement. We will create space for the Spirit to move—through prayer, worship, and Scripture. **We'll practice presence over performance, intimacy over image, and desperation over distraction.**

This is more than a moment, more than an emotional experience. This is an invitation to behold God, to be changed by God, and to walk with God.

Let's be a church that doesn't just talk about God,
let's **ENCOUNTER** Him.



WE LIVE IN A TIME OF SPIRITUAL DISTRACTION. Noise is everywhere, but clarity is rare. Many believers today are living busy but powerless lives, not because God is distant, but because we have stopped seeking Him with desperation.

We believe it's time for something more than predictable programs, polished events, and premeditated prayers.

The time has come for us to intentionally seek God with unreserved expectation. At Upstate Church, we are entering a season of pursuing one thing above all else: The presence of God.

We are not simply after God's blessings, but His presence. As a church, we want more than just activity for God. We want intimacy with Him.

We want to be a people who live to know God, hear His voice, walk in His ways, live on His mission, and experience His power.

This is the heart behind Encounter.

We're not just growing deeper, we're drawing nearer.

PRAYER: A House of Prayer for All People

"My house shall be called a house of prayer."

– Matthew 21:13

We believe prayer is where true encounter begins. Prayer isn't just part of the Christian life; it is the Christian life. Jesus didn't say His house would be known by preaching or music. He said it would be a house of prayer. We are called to be a people who regularly and expectantly seek the face of God together.

What this looks like:

- Encounter Prayer Nights
- Reimagining Intentional Prayer Ministry at Upstate Church
- Creating family and small group prayer guides
- 100 weekly intercessors trained and mobilized



PRESENCE: A Life Lived In His Presence

"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you."

– Psalm 63:1

God doesn't just want our church attendance—He wants our hearts. He wants His people to live aware of Him, to long for Him, to worship Him not only in public but in the quiet places of our lives. True discipleship is not behavior modification but presence-driven transformation.

We want to cultivate the disciplines and hunger required to live in daily fellowship with the living God.

What this looks like:

- Church-wide emphasis on spiritual disciplines (fasting, solitude, Scripture)
- A new Rule of Life resource guiding families and groups
- A Presence Pathway: 30-day challenge to seek God daily
- Sunday sermons and small groups emphasizing intimacy with God
- 1,000 families adopt a weekly family worship rhythm

POWER: A Cry for Revival

"O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known."

– Habakkuk 3:2

We believe that when people encounter God's presence, they are changed—and so are their families, their marriages, and their cities. We are crying out for God to move again, not just in the world, but in us. We long to see revival—not manufactured but miraculous.

We want to be a people who live with expectancy, believing that God still heals, restores, saves, and transforms. We want to open space for revival—through gospel proclamation, repentance, and Spirit-filled obedience. Part of the Power we seek is the spiritual courage to share the gospel personally with friends and family. To experience the power of God to save those we love and those we meet. Realizing the power of God to use someone like me.

What this looks like:

- Launching Encounter Revival Weeks
- Strategic focus on seeing marriages renewed
- Prayer coverage over every weekend service (strategic emphasis of prayer for weekly service)
- 1000 baptisms across campuses by end of 2027
- 100 stories of restored marriages and renewed lives shared
- Creating space for intentional response on Sundays



THE INVITATION TO ENCOUNTER

This initiative isn't about pressure; it's about presence. It's not about hype; it's about hunger.

If the Spirit of God doesn't move, we have nothing. But if He does, everything changes. We believe now is the time to seek the Lord afresh.

Let's be a people of prayer. Let's be formed by His presence.

Let's walk in His power.

Let's Encounter God together.





ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH SALVATION:

BRAM PORTER

Bram and his wife, Kathy, have been married for 48 years and have attended First Baptist Simpsonville | Upstate Church since 1995. They have three adult sons and six grandchildren. While Kathy grew up in church, Bram did not. For years, he felt an emptiness he couldn't explain. To fill the void, he turned to drinking and eventually drugs.

God began working on Bram's heart through the death of loved ones. Within two years, he lost his father, aunt, and both in-laws. During that time, Kathy faithfully shared her faith and witnessed to her husband, but Bram resisted the tug he felt from the Holy Spirit.

In 1999, Bram met with Pastor Randy Harling, "I told him I didn't believe in God, but I just wanted to see my dad again." That day, Randy shared the Gospel, and Bram gave his life to Christ at 43 years old. Everything changed—his marriage was restored, and his family began going to church together. In time, all three of his sons gave their lives to Christ.

Today, Bram has been free from drinking and drug use for 25 years. He says, "I didn't like who I had become. I always needed to be in control, but it took surrendering my control to God... I found acceptance and love in Christ."

His advice to anyone searching is to start seeking Jesus. If you're trying to fill a void, allow the Lord to fill that void because encountering Him is the only thing that will satisfy us and give us true purpose.



ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH RESTORATION:

JEFF & NITA LYDA

Jeff and Nita Lyda began attending First Baptist Simpsonville | Upstate Church in 1997. For years, they were deeply involved—Jeff served as a deacon, and Nita led women's discipleship.

After 13 years, they experienced hurt that led them to step away from church for nearly a decade. During that season, life was hard. Jeff suffered a heart attack, faced a cancer diagnosis, and lost both of his parents. Nita underwent knee surgery with a long recovery. They describe that time as “wandering through a desert.” Nita admits, “I had allowed people to take God’s place on the throne...We were looking for the church to fill a God-sized hole.”

Friends invited the Lydas to visit Upstate Church Haywood, but Nita was hesitant. When they finally did visit, everything changed. Nita encountered God in a fresh way and just six weeks later, she and her husband started attending regularly.

Through surrender and grace, God restored their faith and their marriage. Today, they pray together and have a renewed sense of purpose. “We’ve encountered God in such a way that we’re now better parents, better partners, and better friends. It took God breaking us down and taking our brokenness to bring us back to Himself.”

Their story is a reminder that only Christ can fulfill you—and He’s faithful to restore what’s broken.

ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH DISCIPLESHIP:

SYDNEY ROGERS

Sydney and her husband, Anthony, have been attending Upstate Church for almost two years. Recently, they became new parents as they welcomed their daughter, Madison, on May 17, 2025.

Their journey at Upstate Church began in the fall of 2023 when Sydney started a new teaching job where she met Alicia Williams, who invited her to a women's small group. That simple invitation opened the door to community, discipleship, and life change. "We came in wanting to just dip our toes in and ended up diving in head first—this church quickly began to feel like home," Sydney said.

Though Sydney grew up in church and accepted Christ at a young age, she walked through a season of doubt and shallow faith as a young adult. Getting connected at Upstate Church helped restore her assurance and deepen her faith. Sydney and her husband have been married for five years, but early on in their marriage, they struggled with infertility. Alicia and Stephen Williams took Sydney and Anthony under their wings. Sydney recalls that time in her life marking when her personal relationship with God grew from checking off a list to truly encountering the Lord: "I wanted to stop hurting—I memorized Scripture and studied attributes of God to learn who He truly is." She learned to trust God's goodness and encountered His presence amidst her suffering.

Community played a key role. What began with attending a small group grew into serving at church and building friendships that carried the Rogers through hard seasons. "I don't know where we'd be without these people—without God using His people to reveal Himself to us," Sydney remarked.

Her encouragement to others: step out of isolation and pursue biblical community because you never know how God might use it to transform your life.



SEPTEMBER 28

John 20:11-29

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb.

¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.

¹³ They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

[illegible]

OCTOBER 5

Matthew 21:12-22

¹² And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.

¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.

¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant,

¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read,

" 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise'?"

¹⁷ And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

¹⁸ In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry.

¹⁹ And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.

²⁰ When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?"

²¹ And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen.

²² And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

OCTOBER 12

Psalm 63:1-8

¹ O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.

³ Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.

⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.

⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,

⁶ when I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;

⁷ for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

⁸ My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

OCTOBER 19

Habakkuk 3:2

² O LORD, I have heard the report of you,
and your work, O LORD, do I fear.
In the midst of the years revive it;
in the midst of the years make it known;
in wrath remember mercy.

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

ENCOUNTER

A pair of stylized, symmetrical wings rendered in orange line art. The wings are positioned behind the word "ENCOUNTER", with the central part of the wings overlapping the letters "C" and "O". The wings have a delicate, feather-like structure with multiple layers of lines.



