

ENCOUNTERS: YOU ARE NOT YOUR LABEL

Scripture used: [Jeremiah 29:12-13 \(NLT\)](#); [Matthew 16:15-18 \(NLT\)](#); [Luke 22:60-62 \(NLT\)](#)

OVERVIEW

Pastor Hurmon delivered the second message of the Encounters series. Each encounter with Christ leads to a radical change in understanding who we are, and our place in the world. In our Scripture, we witness the Apostle Peter's repeated denials of Jesus during a time of reckoning. After the fact, Peter "weeps bitterly", and feels deeply ashamed and completely worthless, because his actions were completely contrary to Jesus naming Peter as "the Rock" upon which His church would be built. Peter later has a transformative encounter with Jesus, which reminds him that his life's purpose from God cannot be destroyed, and God's love for him cannot be diminished. As Peter encounters the reality of the resurrected Jesus, full of grace and glory, Peter is transformed and renewed as a faithful disciple, one who is willing to give his life to serve as he rejoices in God's glory.

KEY POINTS

1. Encounters with God's love are not just found in Scripture; they are a part of everyday life. Andy Winfield, a partner at NBCC, gave a moving testimonial on how he experienced dramatic midlife struggles: his marriage ended, he fell into drug use and a full-blown addiction to methamphetamine. He was arrested for drug possession. He was estranged from his children and experienced deep loneliness. He attended a Promise Keepers conference and heard God speaking to him about his estranged relationship with his kids. He started going to church, and tried and eventually succeeded to get off drugs (now 22 years sober). Many years later, he was serving at NBCC when he met the man who had arrested him all these years ago. He told the man that this particular event had been an integral part of his life turnaround. The man was retired from the force, and said he was heartened by the story as positive outcomes with meth addiction and criminality are rare.
2. This random meeting was a reminder that everything comes full circle – God has a plan. In the past many years, Andy worked in the recovery ministry at Abundant Life, and led a men's group. He has been a recipient of Christ's love – meth is hard to get over, but he has no cravings as his heart is full of gratitude, and he has a profound sense of being valuable and "of use". He later owned and ran a restaurant, and is happily remarried. For Andy, Peter is a mirror of every man's failure, and every man's chance at redemption and recovery.
3. There is a difference between our public titles, and our own private labels. Many of us live in dread of the gap between the two: people's perception of us, and the reality of who we are. Yet what matters is Jesus' perception of us: "What Jesus says about us". In middle school, Pastor Hurmon was embarrassed by the label "PK" (preacher's kid), when acting as a clown. He thought of himself as a nobody, not smart, ugly. The "PK" label burdened him with a call to be a leader and pacesetter - a responsibility he did not want and did not feel he could ever meet. Peter was rock-solid, then caved in, lied, and denied Jesus when he was most needed. Yet, Jesus says "it's in you" – there is repentance, destiny, purpose. For Pastor Hurmon, it was a schoolteacher's trust in him, and admonishment to him. There was a whisper from God: your private label is now to "become someone of value". We must position ourselves to hear the whisper from God, receive it, and make it our private label.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - What are the "private labels" or "public titles" that shape your identity? Have you experienced problems from allowing these labels or titles to be central to your own self-conception?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Consider [Matthew 16:15-18 \(NLT\)](#). What do you think Peter felt during this interaction with Jesus? What did Peter feel after [Luke 22:60-62 \(NLT\)](#)? How does the tension between Jesus' words to Peter and Peter's human frailty make us think about the affirmation of God in our own lives? How do we respond when God "calls us" to a high standard of fulfilling His plan and purpose for our lives, and to be a witness for Him? How do you think God hopes we respond? Reflection question: What private label(s) do I have that interferes with my ability to accept how Jesus sees me?
- 3) **DO** - It's not too late to join our PF40 (40 Days of Prayer and Fasting) season! Consider how to make space (fasting from an activity or food), prioritize prayer, and pray for our own needs and 3-5 people God has put on our hearts in this season. Join us next week as we continue our series, Encounters!