

Encounters with God

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Lost in her religion, a devout religious woman in Asia is seeking truth. Overwhelmed with hopelessness, she twice attempts suicide but just ?happens? to survive. She then encounters God and is compelled by Him to find a community of believers.

An African man seeking truth receives spiritual prompting to go to a specific place at a specific time to meet someone he has never seen. Accordingly he approaches a man, who himself is arriving for an unplanned hotel stay. This man ?happens? to be an evangelist and consequently helps the African man encounter God.

A young Asian woman ?happens? to come to a camp about local culture to serve as a translator between student attendees and their foreign guests. While there, she experiences something so compelling in the lifestyle of these guests, that she travels later back across the country to visit one of the foreigners, expressing the desire to encounter the God she saw in their lives.

A dozen African men coming home from working in the fields ?happen? to hear music played in their own language in their own cultural style. They are compelled to go over and join the man playing the tape and listen to everything on it, after which about half of them encounter God through the stories about God being played on tape.

A South American people group cries out in the jungles, believing they are the last people in the world and they are afraid. They are challenging their spiritual leader to call out for help from any spirit or god who might listen. At the same time, three girls ?happen? to feel God calling them to an area where supposedly nobody is living, but as they finally go to no man?s land, they are found by this people group. God had already shown their spiritual leader who these girls were in a dream and they encounter God as a community.

A young European boy, growing up in a small town, sees lots of Christian religion, only to be turned off by the strong denominationalism, which demonstrates separatism and lacks the evidence of Godly love. Later in life he ?happens? to live for a year in a community of another country where two caring women ?happen? to come over and share their heart to help him, including providing opportunities to go to a local church by offering a list of all the Christian churches in the area. Theirs was a key witness in this young man?s ability to encounter God

These are real stories of living people from Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe. God is living too, and foundational to real life is the relationship he offers us as we encounter Him. He ?happens? to use situations in life like those that are captured in these stories. The whole Bible ?happens? to be full of stories, some of them as songs, others as poems or proverbs, or thematic questions, or narratives - styles that even the most revered literate scholars come back to in order to illustrate their theses. They ?happen? to be oral forms of communication, they ?happen? to be everywhere, they ?happen? to be foundational, they ?happen? to be the way Jesus communicated as demonstrated in the gospels. Literary forms are certainly able to complement, document, and facilitate study, but they are not meant to replace oral forms. With all the great blessings that academic study and literate materials can provide, they cannot replace real life encounters with God that mostly ?happen? in the setting of a story. All of us together need to at least consider seriously including approaches that contain relevant oral strategies. I believe that all of us will find that it ?happens? to be one of the keys that God will use help people have encounters with Him.