

UNIT

2

VERSE TO MEMORIZE

"Some take pride in chariots,
and others in horses,
but we take pride in the name
of the LORD our God."

PSALM 20:7



LOOKING TO GOD

College Campus Bible Studies

A church I pastored began to sense God leading it to launch an outreach ministry to the university campus. Neither I nor our church had done student work before. Our denominational student-ministries department recommended we begin with a Bible study in the dormitories. For over a year we tried to start one, but it did not work.

One Sunday I pulled our students together and said, "This week I want you to go to the campus, watch to see where God is working, and join Him." They asked me to explain. God had impressed on my heart these two Scriptures:

- "There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God" (Rom. 3:10-11).
- "No one can come to me [Jesus] unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44).

I explained, "According to these passages, people don't seek God on their own initiative. They won't ask about spiritual matters unless God is working in their lives. When you encounter someone who is seeking God or asking about spiritual issues, you are seeing God at work."

I also told the students, "If someone asks you spiritual questions, whatever else you have scheduled, cancel your plans. Go with that individual and look to see what God is doing in that person's life." That week our students went out to see where God was at work on their campus so they could join Him.

On Wednesday one of the young women reported, "Pastor, a girl who has been in classes with me for almost two years approached me after class today. She said, 'I think you might be a Christian. I need to talk to you.' I remembered what you said. I had a class at that time, but I skipped it. We went to the cafeteria to talk. She said, 'Eleven of us girls have been studying the Bible, and none of us are Christians. Do you know someone who could lead us in a Bible study?'"

As a result of that contact, we started three Bible-study groups in the women's dorms and two in the men's dorm. For two years we had tried to do something for God and failed. For three days we looked to see where God was working and joined Him. What a difference that made!

DAY 1

GOD-CENTERED LIVING

To know and do God's will, you must deny self and return to a God-centered life.

Part of the Book of Genesis is the record of God accomplishing His purposes through Abraham. It is not the record of Abraham's walk with God. Can you see the difference in focus? The focus of the Bible is God. The essence of sin is a shift from God-centeredness to self-centeredness. The essence of salvation is denying self instead of affirming self. We must deny ourselves and return to God-centeredness in our lives. Then God has us in a place where He will accomplish His eternal purposes through us.

A Self-Centered Life

- Is focused on self
- Is proud of self and self's accomplishments
- Is self-confident
- Depends on self and abilities
- Affirms self
- Seeks to be acceptable to the world and its ways
- Looks at circumstances from a human perspective
- Chooses selfish and worldly living

A God-Centered Life

- Places confidence in God
- Depends on God and His ability and provision
- Focuses on God and His activity
- Is humble before God
- Denies self
- Seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness
- Seeks God's perspective in every circumstance
- Chooses holy and godly living

1 In your own words, write definitions of the following terms.

Self-centered: _____

God-centered: _____

2 In each pair of biblical examples, write **G** before the one that illustrates God-centeredness. Write **S** before the one that illustrates self-centeredness.

- 1a. God placed Adam and Eve in a beautiful, bountiful garden. He told them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom, so she ate it (see Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-7).
- 1b. Potiphar's wife daily begged Joseph to go to bed with her. He told her he could not do such a wicked thing and sin against God. When she tried to force him, he fled the room and went to prison rather than yield to temptation (see Gen. 39).

God promised to give the land of Canaan to Israel. Moses sent 12 men into the promised land to explore it and to bring back a report. The land was bountiful, but the people living there appeared to be giants (see Num. 13-14).

- ___ 2a. Ten of the spies said, "We can't attack the people because they are stronger than we are!" (13:31).
- ___ 2b. Joshua and Caleb said, "If the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land. ... Don't be afraid of the people of the land" (14:8-9).
- ___ 3a. King Asa was facing Zerah the Cushite's army in battle. He prayed, "LORD, there is no besides you to help the mighty and those without strength. Help us, LORD our God, for we depend on you, and in your name we have come against this large army. LORD, you are our God. Do not let a mere mortal hinder you" (2 Chron. 14:11).
- ___ 3b. King Asa and Judah were being threatened by Baasha, the king of Israel. Asa sent gold and silver from the temple and his own palace to Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, asking for his help in this conflict (see 2 Chron. 16:1-3).

Self-centeredness is a subtle trap because it makes sense from a human perspective. Like King Asa, you can avoid it at one time and fall into its trap at another. God-centeredness requires the daily death of self and submission to God (see **John 12:23-25**). Illustrations of God-centeredness are 1b, 2b, and 3a. The others illustrate self-centeredness.

GOD'S PURPOSES, NOT OUR PLANS

To live a God-centered life, you must focus on God's purposes, not your own plans. You must seek to view situations from God's perspective rather than from your own human outlook. When God starts to do something in the world, He takes the initiative to reveal His will to people. Throughout history, God, in His wisdom, has chosen to involve His people in accomplishing His purposes.

3 Answer the following questions. Find and read the Scriptures listed if you do not already know the answers.

- a. What was God about to do when He asked Noah to build an ark (see Gen. 6:5-14)? _____
- b. What was God about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah when He came to Abraham (see Gen. 18:16-21; 19:13)? _____
- c. What was God about to do when He came to Gideon (see Judg. 6:11-16)? _____
- d. What was God about to do when He came to Saul (later called Paul) on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-16)? _____
- e. Why is it more important to know what God is planning to do than to focus on your plans? _____

John 12:23-25

"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces much fruit. The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

To know and do God's will, I must deny self and return to a God-centered life.

I must focus my life on God's purposes, not on my own plans.

I must seek to see from God's perspective rather than from my own distorted human outlook.

I must wait until God shows me what He is about to do through me.

I will watch to see what God is doing around me and join Him.

God was about to destroy the world with a devastating flood when He approached Noah. When God prepared to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He told Abraham. God came to Gideon when He was about to deliver the Israelites from the oppression of the Midianites. God encountered Saul when He wanted to carry the gospel to the Gentiles around the known world. Without a doubt the most important factor in each situation was what God was about to do (b).

Let's use Noah as an example. What about his plans to serve God? They would not make much sense in light of the coming destruction, would they? Noah was not calling God in to help him accomplish what he was dreaming of doing for God. God never asks people to dream up something to do for Him. We do not sit down and brainstorm what we want to do for God and then call God in to help us accomplish our plans. The pattern in Scripture is that we submit ourselves to God. Then we wait until God shows us what He is about to do, or we watch to see what God is already doing around us. Then we join Him.

4 Write your Scripture memory verse for this week. Then review your verse from last week.

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

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From Death Row to Life Row

God-centered living always affects other people. Being certain God is always at work around you will affect your relationships with others.

When **Karla Faye Tucker** was on death row in the Gatesville Women's prison in Texas she became a Christian. Some faithful Christians led her through *Experiencing God*. Her life was transformed, she began to teach other inmates on death row. So many came to know Jesus as Savior the women themselves renamed it Life Row because they came to know true life in Christ. Eventually, Karla was executed for her crime, but her testimony affected a nation and touched a world.

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GOD'S PLANS VERSUS OUR PLANS

DAY 2

Who delivered the children of Israel from Egypt—Moses or God? God did. God chose to bring Moses into a relationship with Himself so that He [God] could deliver Israel. Did Moses ever try to take matters into his own hands? He did!

In **Exodus 2:11-15** Moses killed an Egyptian who had struck a Hebrew. What might have happened if Moses had tried to deliver the children of Israel through a human approach? Thousands of his countrymen would have been slain in battle. Moses tried to personally deliver one Israelite, and that cost him 40 years of exile in Midian working as a shepherd and reorienting his life to God-centered living.

When God delivered the children of Israel, how many Israelite lives were lost? None. In the process God even led the Egyptians to give the Israelites their gold, silver, and clothes. Egypt was plundered, the Egyptian army was destroyed, and the Israelites did not lose a single person.

Why do we not realize that it is always best to do things God's way? We cause some of the wreck and ruin in our churches because we have a plan. We implement the plan and accomplish what we can do. We ask God to bless our plans, and then we promise to give Him the glory when He does. Yet God is not glorified by making our plans succeed. He receives glory when *His* will is done, *His* way. Christ is the Head of the body—the church. What a difference it would make if we obeyed Christ as the Head of that body! He could accomplish more in six months through a people yielded to Him than they could do in 60 years without Him.

FOLLOWING GOD'S WAYS

- 1** Read the following Scripture and look for God's response to those who will not follow His ways. Then answer the questions that follow.

"I am the LORD your God,
 who brought you up from the land of Egypt.
 Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.
 But my people did not listen to my voice;
 Israel did not obey me.
 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts
 to follow their own plans" (Ps. 81:10-12).

- What had God done for Israel? _____
- What did God promise His people? _____
- How did the people respond? _____
- What did God do? _____

- 2** Now read the next two verses to see what could have been true for Israel.

Understanding what God is about to do where I am is more important than telling God what I want to do for Him.

Exodus 2:11-15

"Years later, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his own people and observed their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his people. Looking all around and seeing no one, he struck the Egyptian dead and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, 'Why are you attacking your neighbor?'

'Who made you a commander and judge over us?' the man replied. 'Are you planning to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?'


Then Moses became afraid and thought, 'What I did is certainly known.'

When Pharaoh heard about this, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in the land of Midian."

"If only my people would listen to me
and Israel would follow my ways,
I would quickly subdue their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes" (Ps. 81:13-14).

What could have been true if Israel had listened to and followed God?

3 Locate in your Bible and read Hebrews 3:7-19. Why were the children of Israel denied entrance into the promised land?


We are His
servants, and we
adjust our lives
to what He is
about to do.

We adjust our lives to God so *He* will do through us what *He* wants to accomplish. God is not our servant to adjust His activity to our plans. We are His servants, and we adjust our lives to what He is about to do. If we do not submit, God will allow us to follow our own devices. In following them, however, we will never experience what God wanted to do on our behalf or through us for others.

God brought Israel out of Egypt with many miraculous signs and wonders. Wouldn't you think the Hebrews would trust in every circumstance after that? When they arrived in the promised land, however, they did not trust Him to conquer it for them. As a result they spent the next 40 years wandering in the wilderness. In Psalm 81 God reminded Israel that He would have conquered their enemies quickly if they had only followed His plans rather than trusting in their own strength and wisdom.

4 Answer the following questions.

a. In your own words, describe how God works. _____

b. Why are people satisfied to pursue their plans when God has so much more for them to experience? _____

YOU NEED TO KNOW WHAT GOD IS ABOUT TO DO

One year denominational leaders came to our city to discuss long-range plans for an emphasis we had scheduled in the metropolitan area. Top denominational executives were going to work with us to achieve the goals we had set. Yet I was asking myself, *What if God calls our nation to judgment before that time?* I realized how much I needed to know what God had in mind for my city. Planning what I wanted to do in the future would have been irrelevant if God intended to do something else.

When God called the prophets, He often had a twofold message. God's first desire was "Call the people to return to Me." If the people failed to respond, they needed to hear God's second message: "Let them know that they are closer to judgment than they have ever been." God's word to the prophet was "Tell the people: this is what I have done. This is what I am doing right now. This is what I am about to do. Then call them to respond."

Do you suppose it was crucial for the prophets to understand what God was preparing to do? When God was about to bring a devastating judgment on Jerusalem and destroy the entire city, was it important to know what God was about to do? Certainly!

5 How close do you think your country is to God's judgment? Check one.

- I do not believe God will bring judgment on my country.
- I believe God's judgment is a long time off.
- I cannot understand why God has waited this long. I believe we are on the verge of a major judgment from God.
- I believe we are already experiencing a disciplinary judgment like that described in Isaiah 5:1-7.
- I believe we have already experienced part of God's judgment.

What evidence can you give to support your answer? _____

What effect does your belief have on the way you live? _____

Understanding what God is about to do where you are is far more important than telling God what you want to do for Him. What good would it have done for Abraham to tell God about his plans to take a survey of Sodom and Gomorrah and go door-to-door witnessing the day after God was going to destroy the cities? What good would you do by making long-range plans in your church if God brings judgment on your nation or church before you implement them?

You need to know what God has on His agenda for your church, community, and nation at this time in history. Then you and your church can adjust your lives to God so He moves you into the mainstream of His activity before it is too late. Though God will probably not give you a detailed schedule, He will let you know one step at a time how you and your church should respond to what He is doing.

6 Pray now, asking God to guide your response to Him ...

- in your personal life;
- in your work;
- in your family;
- in your community;
- in your church;
- in our nation.

You may want to make notes in the margin or on a separate sheet of paper.

In 1209 **Francis of Assisi** heard a sermon on Matthew 10:7-10. He immediately recognized it was God's word to him to sell all he had and devote his life to preaching the gospel and ministering to the poor. As Francis obeyed, others were soon attracted to his ministry. Ultimately, many thousands of men and women devoted their lives to this cause and blessed thousands of people in need. God's word to one young man impacted multitudes of people across Europe and around the world.

When God began to speak to **John and Charles Wesley**, He was preparing to bring a sweeping revival across England that would save the nation from a bloody revolution like the one France suffered. Through these men, along with **George Whitefield** and others, God did a mighty work and completely turned England around spiritually.

In your community there are people rushing headlong toward disaster. God wants to intercept those people to bring about His purposes. Suppose He wants to do



Understanding what God is about to do where you are is far more important than telling God what you want to do for Him.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Do things God's way.

God will accomplish more in six months through a people yielded to Him than we could do in 60 years without Him.

I am God's servant. I adjust my life to what He is about to do.

Understanding what God is about to do where I am is more important than telling God what I want to do for Him.

it through you! He comes to you and talks to you. But if you are self-centered, you may respond, "I don't think I have time. I don't think I am able to do it. And I..."

Do you see what happens? The focus is on self. The moment you sense God is moving in your life, you give Him an extensive list of reasons He has enlisted the wrong person or the time is inconvenient (see Ex. 3:11; 4:1). You always need to seek God's perspective. God knows you can't do it! He wants to do it Himself *through* you.

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

DAY 3

GOD TAKES THE INITIATIVE

God's revelation of His activity is an invitation for you to join Him.

Philippians 2:13

"It is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose."

I was working at my office one day when I received a letter from a woman who told me about an expectant mother who was attending an *Experiencing God* class until she suffered a miscarriage. She was devastated and quit attending the study, as well as the church services. The woman writing the letter included the young woman's phone number. I sensed it was God's invitation. I called the woman. I told her that God still loved her. We prayed and wept together. I learned later that she rejoined the group and her church. God blessed her with several more children and led her to begin a ministry in her church for women who suffered the loss of children. I have learned that as God's servant, I must always be ready for my next assignment.

Throughout Scripture God takes the initiative. When He comes to people, He reveals Himself and His activity. That revelation is always an invitation for people to adjust their lives to God. None of the people God encountered could remain the same afterward. They had to make major adjustments in their lives to walk obediently with Him.

God is the Sovereign Lord. Strive to keep your life God-centered because He is the One who sets the agenda. He is always the One who takes the initiative to accomplish what He wants to do. When you are God-centered, even the desires to do the things that please Him come from God's activity in your life (see **Phil. 2:13**).

What often happens when we see God at work? We immediately become self-centered rather than God-centered. We must reorient our lives to God. We should learn to see things from His perspective. We need to allow Him to develop His character in us. We must let Him reveal His thoughts to us. Only then can we gain a proper perspective on life.

God's revelation of His activity is an invitation for you to join Him. If you keep your life God-centered, you will immediately join His activity. When you see God at work around you, your heart will leap within you and you will say, "Thank You, Father, for letting me be involved where You are."

1 Answer the following questions.

- a. Write out in your own words how people become involved in God's work.
- b. Which of the following are ways God may reveal His plan or purpose to you? Check all that apply.
 - (1) He lets me see where He is already working around me.
 - (2) He speaks to me through Scripture and impresses on me a practical application of the truth to my life.
 - (3) He gives me an earnest desire that grows stronger as I pray.
 - (4) He creates circumstances around me that open a door of opportunity.

God always takes the initiative. He does not wait to see what we want to do for Him. After He has taken the initiative to encounter us, He waits until we respond to Him by making ourselves available to Him. In question b, all four are ways God may reveal His plans to you. There are others as well. The last two (3 and 4), however, must be carefully watched. A self-centered life tends to confuse its selfish desire with God's will. In addition, circumstances do not always indicate a clear direction from God. Open and closed doors do not always indicate God's guidance. Check to see that prayer, the Scriptures, and circumstances agree on the direction you sense God leading you.

LEARNING TO WALK WITH GOD

You may be thinking, *That all sounds good, but I need practical help in learning how to apply these concepts.* In every situation God demands that you depend on Him rather than a method. The key is not a method but a relationship with God. Let me illustrate by telling you about someone who learned to walk with God by prayer and faith.

George Müller, a minister in England during the 19th century, was concerned that God's people had become discouraged. They no longer expected God to do anything unusual in their midst. They were not trusting God to answer their prayers. They had little faith.

God led Müller to pray. Müller's prayers were for God to lead him to a work people could only explain as an act of God. Müller wanted people to learn that God was a faithful, prayer-answering God. He discovered Psalm 81:10, which you read in yesterday's lesson: "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." God led him in a walk of faith that became an outstanding testimony of faith to all who heard his story.

Whenever Müller had a need in his life or ministry, he would pray to God about it but tell no one else. He wanted everyone to know that God had provided for the need in answer to prayer and faith. During his ministry in Bristol, Müller started the Scriptural Knowledge Institute for the distribution of Scripture and for religious education. He also began an orphanage. By the time of Müller's death, God had used him to build four orphan houses that cared for 2,000 children at a time. The orphanages had provided for more than 10,000 children. He had distributed more than eight million dollars that had been given to him in answer to prayer. Yet when he died at 93, his own worldly possessions were valued at eight hundred dollars.¹

How did Müller know and do God's will?

- 2** Read the following statement by George Müller and list things he did that helped him know what to do. Then list things that led him to make mistakes in knowing God's will.

I never remember ... a period ... that I ever SINCERELY AND PATIENTLY sought to know the will of God by *the teaching of the Holy Ghost*, through *the instrumentality of the Word of God*, but I have been ALWAYS directed rightly. But if *honesty of heart* and *uprightness before God* were lacking, or if I did not *patiently* wait upon God for instruction, or if I preferred *the counsel of my fellow men* to the declarations of *the Word of the living God*, I made great mistakes.²

a. What helped George Müller know God's will? _____

b. What led to mistakes in knowing God's will? _____

Müller mentioned these things that helped him:

- He sincerely sought God's direction.
- He patiently waited on God until he had a word from Him.
- He looked to the Holy Spirit to teach him through the Word.

The following things led to mistakes.

- Lacking honesty of heart
- Lacking uprightness before God
- Impatience to wait for God
- Preferring the counsel of people over the declarations of Scripture

Here is how Müller summed up the way he entered a heart relationship with God and learned to discern His voice:

1. I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the trouble with people generally is just here. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord's will, whatever it may be. When one is truly in this state, it is usually but a little way to the knowledge of what His will is.
2. Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If so, I make myself liable to great delusions.
3. I seek the will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the Holy Ghost guides us at all, He will do it according to the Scriptures and never contrary to them.
4. Next I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate God's Will in connection with His Word and Spirit.
5. I ask God in prayer to reveal His will to me aright.

6. Thus, through prayer to God, the study of the Word, and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge, and if my mind is thus at peace, and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly.³

3 Check the correct answer for each of the following questions.

- a. How did Müller begin his search for God's will?
- (1) He tried to determine what the best thing to do was.
 - (2) He made sure he had no will of his own.
 - (3) He tried to get to the place he wanted only God's will.
 - (4) Both 2 and 3
- b. What did Müller say leads to possible delusions or false directions?
- (1) Basing a decision on feelings alone
 - (2) Following the slightest impressions
 - (3) Looking to the Spirit alone for direction
 - (4) All of the above
- c. In which of the following pairs did Müller look for agreement?
- (1) His desires and circumstances
 - (2) The Spirit and the Word
 - (3) The counsel of others and his desires
 - (4) Circumstances and a sense of peace
- d. What was the final test by which Müller came to understand God's will?
- (1) He identified whether the door was open or closed.
 - (2) He submitted his decision to his local minister.
 - (3) He went with his best guess and hoped it worked.
 - (4) He used prayer, Bible study, and reflection to find lasting peace about a proposed direction.

#3 answers: a-4, b-4, c-2, d-4

I hope Müller's example has helped. Don't get discouraged if the way to know God's will still seems vague. We have much more time to study together.

4 Practice quoting aloud your Scripture memory verses or write them on a separate paper.

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"I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter."

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What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

DAY 4

GOD SPEAKS TO HIS PEOPLE

*God has not changed.
He still speaks to
His people.*

Years ago I spoke to a group of young pastors. When I finished the first session, a pastor took me aside and said, "I vowed to God I would never again listen to a man like you. You talk as though God is personal and talks to you. I just despise that."

I asked him, "Are you having difficulty letting God speak to you?" He and I talked, and before long we were on our knees. He wept and thanked God that He had spoken to him. Don't let anyone intimidate you about hearing from God.

1 Read the following Scriptures and answer the questions that follow.

Hebrews 1:1-2—"Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son."

John 14:26—"The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have told you."

John 16:13-14—"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you."

John 8:47—"The one who is from God listens to God's words. This is why you don't listen, because you are not from God."

a. In the Old Testament ("times past"), how and through whom did God speak?

b. In New Testament times ("these last days"), how did God speak?

c. In John 14:26, whom did Jesus promise the Father would send in His name?

d. What is the work of the Holy Spirit as described in John 14:26; 16:13-14?

e. Who is the one who hears what God says? _____

f. What does John 8:47 say about a person who does not hear what God says?

2 Write a summary in the margin of what these Scriptures say about God's speaking.

In the Old Testament God spoke at many times and in a variety of ways. Through Jesus, God spoke to His people. Now God speaks through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will teach you all things, call to your memory the things Jesus said, guide you into all truth, speak what He hears from the Father, tell you what is yet to come, and glorify Christ as He reveals Christ to you.

Does God really speak to people today? Will He reveal to you where He is working so you can join Him? Yes! God has not changed. He still speaks to people. If you have trouble hearing God speak, you are in trouble at the heart of your Christian experience.

HEARING GOD'S VOICE

Sin has so affected us (see Rom. 3:10-11) that we cannot understand God's truth unless the Holy Spirit reveals it. He is the Teacher. When He teaches you the Word of God, listen carefully to Him and respond to Him. As you pray, watch to see how He uses Scripture to confirm God's Word in your heart. Watch what He is doing around you and in your circumstances. The God who is speaking to you as you pray and the God who is speaking to you in the Scriptures is the God who is also working around you.

3 Look on the inside back cover at the fourth reality. Then answer the following questions.

a. When Jesus returned to heaven, which Person of the Trinity was sent to speak to God's people? Check one.

God the Father Jesus The Holy Spirit

b. What are four ways the Holy Spirit speaks? _____

c. When He speaks, what does He reveal? _____

God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways. Later we will study the ways God speaks. I cannot give you a formula, however, and say this is how you can know for certain when God is speaking to you. I will share with you what the Bible says. The Scriptures can encourage you at this point. When God chose to speak to people in the Bible, they knew it was God, and they knew what God was saying.

In John 10:2-4,14 Jesus said:

- "The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.
- The sheep hear his voice.
- The sheep follow him because they know his voice.
- I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me."

The key to knowing God's voice is not a formula, nor is it a method you can follow. Knowing God's voice comes from an intimate love relationship with God. That is why those who do not have the relationship (John 8:47) do not hear what God is saying. You must watch to see how God uniquely communicates with you. You will not be able to rely on other people's walks with God. You will have to depend on God alone. Your relationship with Him is crucial.



If you have trouble hearing God speak, you are in trouble at the heart of your Christian experience.



Knowing God's voice comes from an intimate love relationship with God.

4 Which of the following best describes the way you will know God's voice when He speaks? Check your response.

- a. God will give me a miraculous sign. Then I will know God has spoken to me.
 b. In an intimate relationship with God, I will come to recognize His voice.
 c. When I learn and follow the correct formula, I will hear God speaking.
 d. If a verse in the Bible jumps out at me, it must be God's word for my life.

5 What is the key to knowing God's voice? _____

The *relationship* is the key to knowing God's voice, to hearing when God speaks. The correct answer is b. What about a, c, and d? Sometimes in Scripture God gave a miraculous sign to assure the person that the word was from Him. Gideon is an example (see Judg. 6). However, asking God for a sign often indicates unbelief. When the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a miraculous sign, Jesus condemned them as a "evil and adulterous generation" (Matt. 12:38-39). They were so self-centered and sinful they could not recognize when God was in their midst (see Luke 19:41-44).

A formula is not the way to recognize God's voice either. How many other burning bushes did God use besides the one with Moses? None. God does not want you to become an expert at using a formula. If there was a formula to hearing from God, you would not have to seek God with all your heart. You could mindlessly use the formula and neglect your relationship with God. He wants an intimate love relationship with you. He insists that you depend on Him alone. Hearing God does not depend on a method or a formula but on a relationship.

Some may wonder why answer d is not acceptable. They may ask, can't I get a word from the Bible? Yes, you can! But only the Holy Spirit can reveal to you which truth of Scripture is a word from God for a particular circumstance in your life. The Holy Spirit must help you understand how a particular verse specifically applies to you. Even if the biblical circumstance is similar to yours, only God can reveal His word for your circumstance.

You also need to be careful about claiming you have a word from God. Claiming to have a word from God is a serious matter. If God has spoken to you, you must continue responding to that word until it comes to pass (even for 25 years, like Abram). If you have not been given a word from God but say you have, you stand in judgment as a false prophet: "You may say to yourself, 'How can we recognize a message the LORD has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the LORD's name, and the message does not come true or is not fulfilled, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously" (Deut. 18:21-22). In the Old Testament, the penalty for being a false prophet was death (see Deut. 18:20). That certainly is a serious charge. Do not take a word from God lightly.

God loves you. He wants to have a close personal relationship with you. He wants you to depend on Him when you seek a word from Him. He wants you to learn to hear His voice and know His will. Your relationship with Him is the key to hearing when God speaks.

6 Consider praying this prayer: "God, I pray that I will grow in my relationship with You so that when you speak, I immediately recognize Your voice and respond in obedience."

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God has not changed. He still speaks to His people.

If I have trouble hearing God speak, I am in trouble at the very heart of my Christian experience.

God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.

Knowing God's voice comes from an intimate love relationship with God.

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

GOD SPEAKS WITH A PURPOSE

DAY 5

We tend to want God to speak to us so He will give us a heart-warming devotional thought to make us feel good for the rest of the day. If you want the God of the universe to speak to you, you need to be ready for Him to reveal what He is doing where you are. In Scripture God is not often seen coming and speaking to people just for conversation's sake. He was always working to accomplish His purposes. When God speaks to you through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, the church, or another way, He has a specific purpose in mind.

When God spoke to **Abram** (see Gen. 12), what was God about to do? He was about to begin building a holy nation. Notice God's timing. Why did God speak to Abram when He did? Because it was then God wanted to start building the nation. The moment Abram knew what God was about to do, he had to adjust his life to God. He had to immediately follow what God said.

The moment God speaks to you is the time He wants you to respond to Him. Don't think you have the next three or four months to decide whether it is God's timing. The moment God speaks to you is God's timing. That is why He chooses to speak when He does. He speaks to His servant when He is ready to move. Otherwise, He wouldn't speak. As God enters the mainstream of your life, the timing of your response is crucial. When God speaks to you, you need to believe and obey Him.

Do not assume, however, that the moment God calls you, you are prepared for the assignment. How long was it from the time God spoke to Abram until Isaac, the child of promise, was born? Twenty-five years (see Gen. 12:4; 21:5)! Why did God wait 25 years? Because it took God 25 years to make Abraham a father suitable for Isaac. God was concerned not so much about Abram but about founding a nation. The quality of the father will affect the quality of following generations. As goes the father, so go the next several generations. God took time to build Abram into a man of character. Abram immediately began adjusting his life to God's

*God develops
character to match
the assignment.*



The moment
God speaks
to you is the
time He wants
you to respond
to Him.

ways. He could not wait until Isaac was born and then try to become the kind of father required to raise a patriarch of God's people.

How long was it after God (through Samuel) anointed David king before David mounted the throne? Maybe 10 or 12 years. What was God doing in the meantime? He was building David's relationship with Himself. As goes the king, so goes the nation. You cannot bypass character.

How long was it after the living Lord called the apostle Paul until Paul went on his first missionary journey? Maybe 10 or 11 years. The focus was not on Paul; the focus was on God. God wanted to redeem a lost world, and He wanted to redeem the Gentiles through Paul. God took time to prepare Paul for the assignment.

1 Mark each statement that applies to you.

- a. I read my Bible to be a good Christian, but I don't expect God to speak to me through the Scriptures.
- b. I seek a word from God so I can be encouraged to have a great day.
- c. I seek a word from God so I am alert to what He wants to do in and through my life.
- d. When God speaks, I immediately adjust my schedule to respond to what He said.
- e. When God speaks, I write down what He said, but do little about it.

We are so oriented to a quick response that we abandon the word from God long before He has developed our character. When God speaks, He has a purpose in mind for our lives. The moment He speaks is the time we need to begin responding to Him.

CHARACTER THAT MATCHES THE ASSIGNMENT

When God called Abram, He said, "I will make your name great" (Gen. 12:2). That means "I will develop your character to match your assignment." Nothing is more pathetic than having a small character when you have a big assignment. Many of us don't want to give attention to the development of our characters; we just want God to give us a big assignment.

Suppose a pastor is waiting for a big church to call him to be their pastor. Then a small church calls and asks, "Will you come and serve bivocationally to help us here in the west side of Wyoming?"

"Well, no," the prospective pastor responds. He thinks, *I am waiting for God to give me a significant assignment. I have a lot of education, I can't waste my life by working a secular job when I want to serve in a church full-time. I think I deserve something much more substantial than that.*

2 How would you classify that response? Check one.

- God-centered Self-centered

Do you see how self-centered that viewpoint is? Human reasoning will not give you God's perspective. If you can't be faithful in a little, God will not give you a larger assignment. He may want to adjust your life and character in smaller assignments first to prepare you for the larger ones. That is where God starts to work. When you make the adjustments and start to obey Him, you come to know Him by experience. This is the goal of God's activity in your life—that you come to know Him. Do you want to experience God mightily working in and through your life? Then adjust your life to

God and pursue the kind of relationship in which you follow Him wherever He leads you—even if the assignment seems to be small or insignificant. Then one day you will hear it said of you, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matt. 25:21).

Should you automatically assume every small assignment is from God? No. Whether the assignment is large or small in your eyes, you must still find out whether it is from God. However, always let God tell you. Do not rule out an assignment, large or small, on the basis of your preconceived ideas. Remember, you will know what you should do through your relationship with God. Never bypass the relationship.

3 Suppose you had planned to go fishing, watch football, or go shopping. Then God confronts you with an opportunity to join Him in something He wants to do. What would you do? Check your response.

- I would finish my plans and then fit God’s plans into the next available time slot in my schedule.
- I would assume that, because God already knew my plans, this new assignment must not be from Him.
- I would try to find a way to do both what I want and God’s will.
- I would adjust my plans to join God in what He was about to do.

I have known some people who wouldn’t interrupt a fishing trip or a football game for anything in the world. In their minds they say they want to serve God, but they eliminate from their lives anything that interferes with their plans. They are so self-centered they do not recognize the times when God comes to them with a divine invitation. On the other hand, if you are God-centered, you will immediately adjust your life to what God wants to do.

God has the right to interrupt your life anytime He wants to! He is Lord. When you accepted Him as Lord, you gave Him the right to help Himself to your life. In Jesus’ parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30, suppose that five times out of ten when the master had something for the servant to do, the servant said, “I’m sorry. That’s not on my schedule.” What do you suppose the master would do? He would discipline the servant. If the servant did not respond to discipline, sooner or later the master would no longer assign any tasks.

You may wish you could experience God working through you the way He works through other people. But every time God goes to them, they adjust their lives to God and obey. When they have been faithful in little assignments, God has given them more important assignments.

If you are not willing to be faithful in a little, God will not give you larger assignments. God uses the smaller assignments to develop character. God always builds character to match His assignment. If God has a great task for you, He will expand your character to match that assignment.

4 Answer the following.

- a. What would you like to see God do through your life?

- b. Have you been frustrated or disappointed with how God has used your life so far? Why? _____

Matthew 25:21

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy.”



If God has a great task for you, He will expand your character to match that assignment.



c. Can you think of a time when God probably wanted to use you in an assignment and you chose not to follow His leading? If so, briefly describe the situation. _____

d. Is the Holy Spirit saying anything to you now about your character? If so, what is He saying? _____

e. Do your actions clearly demonstrate that Christ is the Lord of your life? If not, what adjustments do you need to make so He has total control of your life today? _____

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

The moment God speaks to me is the moment God wants me to respond to Him.

The moment God speaks to me is God's timing.

God develops my character to match the assignment He has for me.

God has a right to interrupt my life. He is Lord. When I accepted Him as Lord, I gave Him the right to help Himself to my life anytime He wants.

When God tells you what He wants you to do, accept it, and seek to clearly understand it, then give God all the time He wants to make you the kind of person He can trust with that assignment. Is it for your sake God takes time to prepare you for His assignments? No, not for you alone but also for the sake of those He wants to bless through you. For their sake, devote yourself to an obedient love relationship with God. Then when He gives you an assignment, He will achieve everything He wants in the lives of those around you.

5 Write your Scripture memory verse (Ps. 20:7) on the following lines.

6 Review your other Scripture memory verses and be prepared to recite them to a partner in your small group session this week.

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

1. For further reading on George Müller, see A. E. C. Brooks, comp., *Answers to Prayer from George Müller's Narratives* (Chicago: Moody Press) and Faith Coxé Bailey, *George Müller* (Moody Press).
 2. Basil Miller, *George Müller, The Man of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1941), 51.
 3. George Müller, *Answers to Prayer*, 6.



LOOKING TO GOD

SESSION 2

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

1. If the Christian life is radically God-centered, then it is important that we constantly look to God, listen to God, and watch to see what His directives are going to be.
2. Our tendency is to start our story with ourselves but the Bible starts with God.
3. When we turn our eyes to ourselves, we see all of the reasons why we can't. But when we start with God, we open ourselves up to His power. It's no longer a question of what we can do, but what He can do.
4. What God initiates, He also completes. He never purposes anything He doesn't bring to pass.
8. God began a work before us that will continue after us and we are just part of the journey.

YOUR NOTES

UNIT REVIEW

Mark the following statements *T* (true) or *F* (false).

- ___ 1. God asks people to dream up what they want to do for Him (p. 34).
 ___ 2. God always takes the initiative in my relationship with Him (p. 39).
 ___ 3. I know God's will by following the correct formula (p. 44).
 ___ 4. The moment God speaks is God's timing (p. 45).

Choose from the following words to fill in the blanks in the statements.

ability *belief* *character* *unbelief*

- a. Asking God for a sign often indicates _____ (p. 44).
 b. God develops _____ to match the assignment (p. 46).

Check your answers, using the pages cited in parentheses.

Scripture Referenced

Exodus 3
 Exodus 14

Sharing Time

- The questions about God's judgment, activity 5, page 37
- The questions on lordship and character building, activity 4, pages 47–48
- One of the most meaningful statements or Scriptures from this unit's lessons and your prayer response to God. Choose one from pages 34, 38, 41, 45, and 48.

Streamable session videos are included with the purchase price of this book. Look for your access code on the insert attached in the back of this book.