

UNIT

5

VERSE TO MEMORIZE

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

JOHN 8:47



GOD SPEAKS, PART 1

God's Activity in Africa

I had the privilege of ministering to missionary personnel in Africa. During the week I met a wonderful African-American missionary serving in Zambia. He told me of the millions of AIDS orphans in Africa and of the terrible suffering they endured. He shared his burden for African-American churches in the United States to minister to this enormous need. As the missionary shared, the Holy Spirit impressed on me that I was to be a part of God's activity to meet this need. I told the missionary that I was deeply moved by what he had said and that I would be glad to help in any way I could. I explained that I did not have many contacts in African-American churches. Nevertheless, I would be praying, and I would respond to whatever God directed me to do next.

I had been home for about two days when the phone rang. The call was from a leading African-American pastor in America. He said he was hosting one of the largest gatherings of African-American church leaders and wanted me to speak to them. I instantly recognized that God was giving me my next set of instructions.

Not long after that, I received another unusual invitation. This time it was to speak to a group of ambassadors from Africa at the United Nations. After I shared with them about being spiritual leaders in their homelands, they gave me their business cards and asked me to visit their countries. Since that time, God has steadily revealed to me His great love for the people of Africa and for the millions of people who suffer there daily. As I responded to the request of one missionary, I had no idea God had so much He wanted to do through my life. Every conversation with God has limitless possibilities attached to it, because He "is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20).

DAY 1

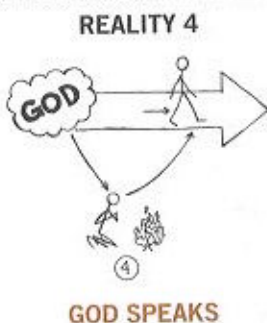
GOD SPEAKS IN DIFFERENT WAYS

If a Christian does not know when God is speaking, he is in trouble at the heart of his Christian life.

A critical requirement for understanding and experiencing God is clearly knowing when He is speaking. If people don't know when God is speaking, they are in trouble at the heart of their Christian lives. In this unit we will discover ways God speaks through the Holy Spirit to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways. We will also examine ways God speaks through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church or other believers.

GOD SPOKE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

"Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways." (Heb. 1:1). A truth that is evident throughout the Bible is that God speaks to people. In the Old Testament God spoke in many different ways. He spoke through—



- angels (see Gen. 16);
- visions (see Gen. 15);
- dreams (see Gen. 28:10-19);
- the use of the Urim and Thummim (see Ex. 28:30);
- symbolic actions (see Jer. 18:1-10);
- a gentle whisper (see 1 Kings 19:12);
- miraculous signs (see Ex. 8:20-25);
- other ways.

How God spoke in the Old Testament is not the most important factor. *That* He spoke is the crucial point. Those He spoke to knew He was God, and they understood what He was saying.

1 Do you have difficulty hearing God speak? If you do, why do you think that is? _____

2 When was the last time you sensed that God was speaking to you? What did He say? _____

That God spoke is the most important factor, not how He spoke.

That God spoke to people is far more important than *how* He spoke. When He spoke, the person knew God was speaking, and he understood what God was saying. Four important truths characterize each instance when God spoke in the Old Testament. The burning-bush experience of Moses in Exodus 3 illustrates these truths.

1. When God spoke, the experience was usually unique to that individual. For instance, Moses had no precedent for a burning-bush experience. He could not say, "Oh, this is my burning-bush experience. My fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had theirs, and this is mine." There were no other times when God spoke this way. God's speaking is

unique because He wants our experience with Him and His voice to be personal to us. He wants us to look to Him in a relationship rather than depend on a method or a technique. If Moses had been around today, he would have been tempted to write a book titled *My Burning-Bush Experience*. Then people would search all over the countryside for *their* burning bush. God spoke to Moses in a way that was unique to him. The key is not *how* God spoke but *that* He spoke. That has not changed. He still speaks to people in unique ways today.

3 Has God communicated with you in a unique or unusual way?

If so, describe it. _____

2. When God spoke, the person was sure God was speaking. Because God communicated to Moses in a unique way, Moses had to be certain it was God. Scripture testifies that Moses had no question that his encounter was with God—the “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14). He trusted God, obeyed Him, and experienced Him acting just as He said He would. Could Moses logically prove to someone else he had heard from God in a burning bush? No, all Moses could do was testify to his encounter with God. Only God could cause people to know that the word He gave Moses was a divine message.

When someone like Gideon lacked assurance, God was gracious to reveal Himself even more clearly. When Gideon first asked for a sign, he prepared a sacrifice. Then “the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the Lord disappeared. When Gideon realized it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, ‘Oh no, Lord God! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!’” (Judg. 6:21–22). Gideon was sure God had spoken.

4 What confirmation do you typically look for to confirm that what you heard was from God? _____

3. When God spoke, the person knew what God said. Moses knew what God was telling him to do. He knew how God wanted to work through him. That is why Moses raised so many objections. He understood exactly what God wanted him to do. This was also true for Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David, Mary, Daniel, and others.

5 Where do you struggle the most?

Understanding what God said.

Believing what God said.

Obeying what God said.

4. When God spoke, that was an encounter with God. Moses would have been foolish to say, “This has been a wonderful experience with this burning bush. I hope this leads me to an encounter with God!” His experience *was* the encounter with God! When God reveals truth to you, by whatever means, that is a divine encounter. That is an experience of His presence in your life. God is the only One who can cause you to experience His presence.

- 6** Do you focus more on the process of knowing God's will, or on the Person, who is revealing His will to you? Give an example.

This pattern of God's speaking is found throughout the Old Testament. The *methods* He used to speak differed from person to person. The important points are:

- God spoke uniquely to His people.
- They knew it was God.
- They understood what He said.
- When God spoke, that was an encounter with God.

- 7** Briefly identify times when you have experienced each of these truths.

When God speaks to you by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church, you will know it is God, and you will understand what He is saying. When God speaks to you, that is an encounter with God.

A WRONG PATTERN


I hear many people say something like this: "Lord, I really want to know Your will. Stop me if I am wrong and bless me if I am right" or "Lord, I will proceed in this direction. Close the door if it is not Your will." This approach isn't found in Scripture.

Don't let experience alone guide your life. Don't allow yourself to be led by tradition, a method, or a formula. Often people trust these ways because they appear easier than cultivating an intimate walk with God. People do as they please and put the whole burden of responsibility on God. If they are wrong, He must intervene and stop them. If they make a mistake, they blame Him. God is not obligated to stop you from making a mistake!

If you want to know the will and voice of God, you must devote time and effort to cultivate a love relationship with Him.

- 8** What might a danger be if you assumed you should enter "open doors" and quit proceeding if the door "closed?"

God's Word is our guide. The pattern in Scripture is that God always gives a direction on the front end. He may not tell you all you want to know at the beginning, but He will tell you what you need to know to make necessary adjustments and take the first steps of obedience. Wait until God gives you instructions. If you proceed before you have God's directions, more than likely you will make mistakes. One of the most difficult things for Christians to do is to wait on the Lord. However, waiting reflects our absolute trust and dependence on God.



If you want to know the will and voice of God, you must devote time and effort to cultivate a love relationship with Him.

DOES GOD GIVE SPECIFIC DIRECTIONS?

A common teaching today claims that God does not give specific instructions. Instead, He merely sets your life in motion, and then you try to figure things out using your God-given mind. For these people, freedom to choose is the highest good. This implies that a Christian always thinks correctly and according to God's will. It doesn't take into account that the old nature constantly battles with the spiritual nature (see Rom. 7). Our ways are not God's ways (see **Isa. 55:8**). Only God can give you the specific directions needed to accomplish His purposes *His way*. From God's perspective, doing His will is the highest good and results in the greatest joy.

After God spoke to Noah about building an ark, Noah knew its size, the type of materials to use, and the way to put it together. When God spoke to Moses about building the tabernacle, He was extremely specific about the details. When God walked on the earth in the Person of Jesus Christ, He gave specific directions to His disciples—where to go, what to do, how to respond, and what to say.

What about when God called Abraham (Abram) and said, "Go . . . to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1)? That was not very specific. That required faith. But God did say, "I will show you." God always gives you enough specific directions to do what He wants you to do *now*. When you need more directions, He gives you more in His timing. God later told Abraham about the son to be born to him, the number of his descendants, the territory they would inhabit, and that they would go into bondage and eventually be delivered.

The Holy Spirit gives clear directions today. Because God is personal, He wants to be intimately involved in your life. Therefore, He will give you clear guidance for living. You may say, "That has not been my experience." Be careful! Base your understanding of God on Scripture, not on your personal experience or lack of it.

9 Underline the suggestions in the following paragraph that will help you look to God for direction in your life.

If you do not have clear instructions from God in a matter, pray and wait. Learn patience. Depend on God's timing, which is always best. Don't get in a hurry. He may withhold directions to cause you to seek Him more intently. Don't skip over the relationship to start doing something. God is more interested in a love relationship with you than He is in what you do for Him. If God is having you wait, He may want to develop a deeper relationship with you before He gives you your next assignment. He may have you wait because the timing is not yet right.

10 In your own words, summarize the directions you underlined.

11 Write your Scripture memory verse for this unit on the following lines and review your verses from other units. Remember, you may select a different verse or translation if you want to.

Isaiah 55:8

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways.' This is the Lord's declaration."

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

If I do not know when God is speaking, I am in trouble at the heart of my Christian life.

God speaks to His people.

That God spoke to people is far more important than how He spoke.

When God spoke, it was usually unique to that individual.

When God spoke, the person was sure it was God.

When God spoke, the person knew what God said.

When God spoke, that was an encounter with God.

If I do not have clear instructions from God in a matter, I will pray and wait. I will not try to bypass the love relationship.

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 2

When I understand spiritual truth, it is because the Holy Spirit is working in my life.



When the disciples heard Jesus, they heard God.

GOD SPEAKS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Hebrews 1:1-2 declares, "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."

GOD SPOKE IN THE GOSPELS

In the Gospels God spoke through His Son, Jesus. The Gospel of John begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1,14). God became flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ (also see 1 John 1:1-4).

The disciples would have been foolish to say, "It's wonderful knowing You, Jesus; but we would really like to know the Father." When Philip said, "Lord . . . show us the Father, and that's enough for us" (John 14:8), Jesus responded, "Have I been among you all this time and you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who lives in me does his works" (John 14:9-10). When Jesus spoke, the Father was speaking through Him. When Jesus did a miracle, the Father was doing His work through Jesus.

Just as surely as Moses was face-to-face with God at the burning bush, the disciples were face-to-face with God in a personal relationship with Jesus. Their encounter with Jesus *was* an encounter with God. To hear from Jesus *was* to hear from God.

1 Write a summary statement of the way God spoke during Jesus' life.

In the Gospel accounts God was in Christ Jesus. God spoke by Jesus. When the disciples heard Jesus, they heard God. When Jesus spoke, that was an encounter with God.

GOD SPEAKS TODAY

When we move from the Gospels to Acts and to the present, we often change our mind-set. We live as if God quit speaking personally to His people. We fail to realize that an encounter with the Holy Spirit, who lives within us, *is* an encounter with God. God clearly spoke to His people in Acts. He speaks to us today. From Acts to the present, God has been speaking to His people by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit takes up residence in someone's life when that person becomes a Christian: "You are God's temple and ... the Spirit of God lives in you" (1 Cor. 3:16). "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God" (1 Cor. 6:19). Because the Spirit is always present in a believer, He can speak to you at any time. We have already learned that God speaks to His people. Here are some of the key ideas we examined.

- In the Old Testament, God spoke in many different ways.
- In the Gospels, God spoke through His Son.
- God spoke in Acts and speaks in the present by the Holy Spirit.
- God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways. (We will study reality 4 in the coming days.)
- Knowing God's voice comes from an intimate love relationship with God.
- God speaks when He has a purpose in mind for your life.
- The moment God speaks to you is the time He wants you to respond to Him.
- The moment God speaks to you is God's timing.

2 Based on these truths, answer the following questions.

- a. How did God speak in the Old Testament? _____

- b. How did God speak in the Gospels? _____

- c. How did God speak in Acts and in the present? _____

- d. How do you know God's voice? _____

- e. How do you know God's timing? _____

Let's review several other things you learned in earlier units about ways God speaks through the Holy Spirit.

- Because of sin "there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one" (Rom. 3:11-12).
- The Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).
- Spiritual truths can be revealed only by God: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived—God has prepared these things for those who love him."—God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except his spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the



An encounter
with the Holy
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with God.



Truth is never
discovered;
truth is revealed.



thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:9-12).

- Jesus said the Holy Spirit would "teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you" (John 14:26).
- The Holy Spirit will testify about Jesus (see John 15:26).
- "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 16:13-14).

ENCOUNTERING GOD

When God spoke to Moses and others in the Old Testament, those events *were* encounters with God. An encounter with Jesus *was* an encounter with God for the disciples. In the same way, your encounter with the Holy Spirit *is* an encounter with God for you.

Because you have the Holy Spirit, He guides you into all truth and teaches you all things. You understand spiritual truth because the Holy Spirit works in your life. You cannot understand God's Word unless the Spirit of God teaches you. When you read the Word, the Author Himself is present to instruct you. Truth is never *discovered*; truth is *revealed*. When the Holy Spirit reveals truth to you, He is not leading you to an encounter with God. That *is* an encounter with God!

3 Has God been speaking to you during your study of this course?

Yes No Review each day's final activity in units 1-4.

- Read the statements or Scriptures God called to your attention.
- Read and pray again your prayer responses.
- Review the things you sensed God wanted you to do in response to the lessons.

4 Briefly summarize what you sense God has said to you so far in the course. If you don't sense God has spoken clearly, you don't need to make something up. Just leave the lines blank for now.

5 Have you responded to what God has called to your attention? How would you describe your response to His leading thus far?

6 What do you sense is your greatest spiritual challenge now?

7 What is one question you have about God speaking? Perhaps we will address it in the coming pages, or you may want to process it with your small group.

RESPOND IMMEDIATELY

When God spoke to Moses, what Moses did next was vital. After Jesus spoke to the disciples, what they did next was paramount. What you do immediately after the Spirit of God speaks to you through His Word is critical. Our problem is that when the Holy Spirit speaks to us, we tend to debate. Moses engaged in a long discussion with God (see Ex. 3:11–4:13), and it limited him for the rest of his life. After that discussion Moses had to speak to the people through his brother, Aaron (see Ex. 4:14–16).

Regularly review what you sense God has been saying to you. If God speaks and you hear but do not respond, a time could come when you do not hear His voice. Disobedience can lead to a “famine of . . . hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11–12).

The Gospels indicate that when Jesus invited Peter, Andrew, James, and John to abandon their fishing careers and follow Him, they did so immediately (see Mark 1:16–20). Strive to be like the disciples and instantly obey every word from God.

In Luke 8:5–15, Jesus told the parable of the sower and the seeds. The seed that fell on good soil represented someone who heard God’s Word, retained it, and produced fruit. Then Jesus said, “Therefore take care how you listen. For whoever has, more will be given to him; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him” (Luke 8:18). If you hear God’s Word and do not apply it to produce fruit in your life, even what you think you have will be taken away. Be careful how you listen to God! Make up your mind now that when the Spirit of God speaks to you, you will do whatever He says.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

An encounter with the Holy Spirit is an encounter with God.

I understand spiritual truth because the Holy Spirit is working in my life.

When I come to God’s Word, the Author Himself is present to instruct me.

Truth is never discovered; truth is revealed.

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?

A Businessman Learns to Hear God’s Voice

I once had a businessman tell me, “Henry, you claim God speaks to people, but He didn’t say anything to me when I was considering taking a new job as CEO.” He ultimately took the job but it proved to be a disaster. I asked him, “What did your wife think about that job possibility?” “Oh, she was totally against it” he said. As I probed, I learned that several of his Christian friends had cautioned him about that company and even his teenage son had expressed concern. Because none of those people had been CEOs of large companies, he had discounted their concerns. I told him, “You asked God to guide you and then you ignored everything that He said!” When you pray for guidance, it is crucial to keep your spiritual eyes and ears wide open!

DAY 3

*God's revelations
are designed to
bring you into a love
relationship with Him.*

GOD REVEALS

God speaks to His people. When He speaks, what does He reveal? Throughout the Scriptures when God speaks, His desire is to reveal something about Himself, His purposes, or His ways. God's revelations are designed to bring you into an increasingly deeper and profound love relationship with Him.

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF

When God speaks by the Holy Spirit, He often reveals something about Himself. He reveals His name, His nature, and His character.

1 Read these Scriptures. After each one, write what God revealed about Himself.

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him, saying, 'I am God Almighty' (Gen. 17:1). _____

"The LORD spoke to Moses, 'Speak to the entire Israelite community and tell them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy'' (Lev. 19:1-2). _____

"I, the LORD, have not changed. ... Since the days of your ancestors, you have turned from my statutes; you have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,' says the LORD of Armies." (Mal. 3:6-7). _____

I am the living bread that came down from heaven.
If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever (John 6:51). _____

God revealed Himself to Abram by His name—God Almighty. To Moses He revealed His holy nature. God spoke through Malachi to Israel to reveal that He is unchanging and forgiving. Jesus revealed Himself as Living Bread and the source of eternal life.

God speaks when He wants to involve a person in His work. He reveals His character to help the person respond in faith. The person can better obey God's instructions when he believes God is who He says He is and when he believes God can do what He says He will do.

2 Stop for a minute and meditate on why God revealed Himself as He did to the people in the previous Scriptures. When you think you have an idea of why each revelation was given, continue reading.

- Ninety-nine-year-old Abram needed to know God was almighty (all-powerful, able to do anything) so he could believe God could give him a son in his old age.
- Through Moses God said He was holy. His people had to believe He was holy so they would respond by being holy themselves.

- Through Malachi God revealed His forgiving nature so the people could believe they would be forgiven if they returned to God.
- Jesus revealed that He was the source of eternal life so people could believe, respond to Him, and receive life.

3 Why does God reveal Himself—His name, His nature, and His character?

God reveals Himself to increase faith that leads to action. Listen attentively to what God reveals to you about Himself. What He shows you will be critical when you come to a crisis of belief.

- You will have to **believe** God is who He says He is.
- You will have to **believe** God can do what He says He will do.
- You will have to **adjust** your thinking in light of this belief.
- Trusting that God will demonstrate Himself to be who He says He is, you then **obey** Him.
- When you **obey**, God does His work through you and demonstrates that He is who He says He is.
- Then you will **know** God by experience.
- You will **know** God is who He says He is.

When did Abram know God was almighty? He knew it in his mind as soon as God said it. However, he came to know God to be almighty by experience when God did something in his life that only God could do. When God gave Abraham (100 years old) and Sarah (90 years old) a son, Abraham *knew* God was God Almighty.

4 In the margin, write what God has recently revealed to you about His character. How have you responded?

GOD REVEALS HIS PURPOSES

God reveals His purposes so you will know what *He* plans to do. If you are to join Him, you need to know what God is doing. What you plan to do for God is not important. What He plans to do where you are is critical. God always speaks with a purpose in mind. This point should be a review for you (see pp. 38–41).

When God came to **Noah**, He did not ask, “What do you want to do for Me?” He revealed what He was going to do. It really did not matter what Noah had planned to do for God. It was far more important to know what *God* was about to do. He was about to destroy the world, and He wanted to work through Noah to accomplish *His* purposes of saving a remnant of people and animals to repopulate the earth.

Similarly, God came to **Abram** and spoke to him because He had a purpose in mind. He was preparing to build a nation for Himself. God intended to accomplish *His* purposes through Abram.

When God prepared to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He did not ask Abraham what he was planning to do for Him. Knowing what *God* was about to do was crucial for Abraham.

This sequence is seen throughout the entire Bible in the lives of the judges, David, the prophets, the disciples, and Paul. When God was about to do something, He took the initiative to come to His servants (see **Amos 3:7**). He spoke to reveal His purposes and plans. Then He involved His people and accomplished His purposes through them.



God reveals Himself to increase faith that leads to action.



God reveals His purposes so you will know what He plans to do.

Amos 3:7

“Indeed, LORD God does nothing without revealing his counsel to his servants the prophets.”

In contrast, today we often set about to dream up what we want to do for God. Then we make long-range plans based on priorities of *our* choosing. What is important is what *God* plans to do where we are and how He wants to accomplish it through us. Notice what the psalmist said about our plans and purposes:

The LORD frustrates the counsel of the nations;
he thwarts the plans of the peoples.
The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
the plans of his heart from generation to generation (Ps. 33:10-11).

Proverbs 19:21

"Many plans are in
in a person's heart,
but the LORD's
decree will prevail."

5 Read Proverbs 19:21 in the margin and Psalm 33:10-11 above.
Why does God reveal His purposes? _____

6 Based on Psalm 33:10-11, answer the following questions.

- a. What does the Lord do to the counsel of the nations? _____
- b. What does the Lord do to the plans of the peoples? _____
- c. What happens to the Lord's counsel and plans? _____

Do you see why you need to know God's plans and purposes? If your plans and goals are not God's, you will not experience God working through you. God reveals His purposes so you will know what He plans to do. Then you can join Him. His plans and purposes will be accomplished. The Lord foils and thwarts the intent of the nations and the purposes of the peoples.

Planning is a good thing to do if it is inspired and guided by God. But often our plans reflect our own priorities and understanding. We tend to trust more in our plans and in our reasoning abilities than in God. We may be able to achieve all of our goals and yet be far from God's will. Planning is a tool God may lead you to use, but it must never become a substitute for trusting Him. Your relationship with God is far more important to Him than any planning you will do. The biggest problem with planning is that we often plan and carry out things in our own wisdom that completely misses what God intended. We cannot know the when, where, or how of God's will until He tells us. Just because we accomplished our plans does not mean we are pleasing to God.

God wants us to follow *Him* daily, not just follow a plan. If we try to spell out all the details of His will in a planning session, we tend to think, *Now that we know where we are going and how to get there, we can get the job done.* Then we forget about the need for a daily, intimate relationship with God. We may set about to accomplish our plans and forget the relationship. Or God may try to lead us to do a new thing, but we reject it because it is not in our long-range plan! God created us for an eternal love relationship. Life is our opportunity to experience Him at work.

It isn't wrong to plan. Just be careful not to plan more than God intends for you to do. Let God interrupt or redirect your plans anytime He wants. Remain in a close relationship with Him so you can hear His voice when He seeks to adjust your plans.

7 What has God recently revealed to you about Himself or His purposes?

GOD REVEALS HIS WAYS

God's ways and plans are radically different from people's. God uses *kingdom* methods to accomplish *kingdom* purposes. God reveals His ways to us because they are the only means to accomplish His purposes. We must do God's work God's way.

God discloses Himself to people to draw them into a love relationship with Himself. His ways are redemptive. He acts in a manner that reveals Himself and His love. He does not simply wait to help us achieve our goals for Him even if we promise Him all the glory when we are successful. He seeks to accomplish His own goals through us—in His way. God said,

My thoughts are not your thoughts,
and your ways are not my ways (Isa. 55:8).

God's ways are not our ways! In fact, I often say that if a method makes perfect sense to me, it probably didn't come from God! We will not accomplish God's work in our own ways. This is one of the basic sin problems people face:

We all went astray like sheep;
we all have turned to our own way (Isa. 53:6).

8 Why does God reveal His ways? _____

Our methods often seem attractive to us. We may even achieve moderate success with them. When we try to do God's work our way, however, we will never see His mighty power in what we do. With God, *what* you do is not the only important thing. God is also concerned with *how* you do something. It is possible to do the right thing, the wrong way. God will always lead you to act in a way that honors Him. Yet sometimes Christians act in ways that build their own reputation but dishonors God's. When God works through us, His people come to know Him. They recognize that what happened can only be explained by God. He receives the glory!

Jesus taught His disciples kingdom methods. When He asked the disciples to feed the multitudes, they responded, "Send them home!" Jesus, using *kingdom* methods, had them sit down, fed them, and had twelve baskets of leftovers. What a contrast! The disciples would have sent the people home empty and hungry, but God displayed His love and power to a watching world. This approach drew people to God. The disciples witnessed this kind of mighty display many times as Jesus taught them to function according to *kingdom* principles to do *kingdom* work. As a result, they experienced kingdom power and kingdom results. God's purposes, accomplished His way, bring Him glory. You must learn to do kingdom work in kingdom ways.

9 What might be an example of trying to do God's work, the world's way? _____



God reveals
His ways to
us because
they are the
only means
to accomplish
His purposes.



Using kingdom
methods,
Jesus fed
five thousand.

10 Match the things God reveals with the correct reasons. Write the correct letters in the blanks.

- God reveals ...**
- ___ 1. Himself
 - ___ 2. His purposes
 - ___ 3. His ways

- Because ...**
- a. He wants me to know how to accomplish things only He can do.
 - b. He wants me to know what He is about to do so I can join Him.
 - c. He wants me to have faith to believe He can do what He says.

#10 answers: 1-c, 2-b, 3-a

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God's revelations are designed to bring me into a love relationship with Him.

God reveals Himself to increase my faith.

God reveals His purposes so that I will do *His* work.

God reveals His ways so that I can accomplish His purposes.

When I was first learning how to walk with God, I depended too much on other people. I would regularly ask others, "Do you think this is really God? Here is what I think. What do you think?" I would depend on people rather than on my relationship with God.

Finally I had to say, "I am going to go to the Lord to clarify what I think He is saying to me. Then I am going to proceed and watch to see how God affirms it." I began that process over a period of time in many areas of my life. My love relationship with God became all-important. I began to discover a clear, personal way God was making His ways known to me.

Tomorrow we will look at ways God speaks through His Word. In future lessons we will look at ways God speaks through prayer, circumstances, and the church to confirm His will to us.

11 Practice quoting your Scripture memory verses aloud.

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 THROUGH THE BIBLE

DAY 4

God speaks to you by the Holy Spirit to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways. Perhaps the questions people ask most about God's speaking are:

- How does God speak to me?
- How can I know when God is speaking?
- How can God be more real and personal to me?

God speaks uniquely to individuals, and He does it in any way He chooses. As you walk closely with God, you will come to recognize His voice. You will grow to know when God is communicating with you.

Jesus compared His relationship with His followers to a shepherd's relationship with his sheep: "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" (John 10:2-4). In this way, when God speaks to you, you will recognize His voice and follow Him.

God speaks through a variety of means. Today God primarily speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church. These four ways are difficult to separate. God uses prayer and the Bible together. Often circumstances and the church, or other believers, will help confirm what God is saying. Frequently, God uses circumstances and the church to help you know His timing. We will talk more about that in the next unit. Today let's look at ways God speaks through the Bible. Tomorrow we will look at God's speaking to us through prayer.

- 1 Write down a verse in the Bible that God used to speak powerfully to you. God may have used it in your life to bring you to salvation or to sense His specific leading in your life. Take a moment to reflect on how God used that verse in your life.**

The Bible is God's Word. When you open its pages, the Holy Spirit will take its words and apply them specifically to your life. It might be during your daily devotional time, or during a sermon at church.

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

The Bible describes God's revelation of Himself to humanity. God will speak to you through the Bible. As you have already learned, however, a person cannot understand spiritual truth unless the Spirit of God reveals it. The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). The following diagram should help you visualize how the Holy Spirit speaks to you through God's Word.

When the Spirit directs my attention to a truth, I write it down, meditate on it, and adjust my life to it. I alert myself to watch for ways God may be that way in my life during the day.

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE BIBLE



This is a diagram of an encounter with God. When the Holy Spirit reveals a spiritual truth from God's Word, He is personally applying it to your life. That is an encounter with God. This is the sequence:

1. You read God's Word—the Bible.
2. The Spirit of truth takes God's Word and reveals truth.
3. You adjust your life to God's truth.
4. You obey God.
5. God works in and through you to accomplish His purposes.

2 Using the description and the diagram, summarize the way God speaks through the Bible. _____

3 Which books of Bible do you find that God uses most often to speak to you: _____

In order to receive the whole counsel of God for your life, be sure you are reading from the Old and New Testaments. Meditate upon the Psalms. Gain wisdom from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Read from the prophets and hear their concerns for justice and righteous living. Read the Gospels so you always have Jesus in view. Each book of the Bible has a particular focus and makes a unique contribution. While it is ok to have your favorites, allow the Holy Spirit to use all of Scripture as He guides your life.

The Spirit uses God's Word (the sword of the Spirit; see Eph. 6:17) to reveal God's character and His purposes. The Spirit uses the Bible to instruct us in God's ways. We cannot understand God's truths on our own. Unaided by the Spirit of God, it will appear to be foolishness to us. Aided by the Spirit, we can understand everything God has for us (see 1 Cor. 2:14-15).

4 God has probably used a particular Scripture verse to speak to you at some time during this course. Look back through units 1-5 and find one passage of Scripture God seems to have called to your attention.

- a. What is the reference? _____
- b. What does that verse reveal to you about God, His purposes, or His ways? _____

1 Corinthians
2:14-15

"The the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually. The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything."

Meditate on this verse and pray. Ask God to continue speaking to you about the truth in this passage. Keep in mind He is more interested in what you become than in what you do.

c. What does God want to do or be in and through your life? _____

d. What adjustments would you have to make to align your life with this truth—

- in your personal life? _____
- in your family life? _____
- in your church life? _____
- in your work life? _____

e. Write a prayer of response to God in the margin about this truth and its application to your life.

f. Since you first came to understand this truth, has God done anything in your life that required you to apply the truth or share it with someone else?

Yes No If so, what? _____

Understanding spiritual truth does not lead you *to* an encounter with God; it *is* the encounter with God. You cannot understand God's purposes and ways unless the Spirit of God teaches you. If God has revealed spiritual truth to you through this passage of Scripture, you have encountered God Himself working in you!

RESPONDING TO TRUTH

I always approach the Scriptures with excited anticipation. The Spirit of God knows the mind of God. Because He knows what God wants to do in my life, He begins to open my understanding about God, His purposes, and His ways. I take that seriously. Therefore, when God reveals truth to me in His Word, I write down the passage of Scripture. Then I meditate on it, immersing myself in its meaning. I adjust my life to the truth and thus to God. I agree with God and take any actions necessary to allow God to work in the way He has revealed. Finally, I watch for ways God may use that truth in my life during the day.

You may want to follow the same process as God reveals truth to you. When God leads you to a fresh understanding of Himself or His ways through Scripture, respond to His revelation in these ways.

1. Write down the verse or verses in a spiritual journal.
2. Meditate on the verse.
3. Study the verse to immerse yourself in its meaning. What is God revealing about Himself, His purposes, or His ways?
4. Identify adjustments you need to make in your personal life, your family, your church, and your work so God will work this way in and through you.
5. Write a prayer response to God.
6. Make the necessary adjustments to God.
7. Watch to see how God may use that truth in your life during the day.



Understanding
spiritual truth
does not lead
you *to* an
encounter
with God; it *is*
the encounter
with God.

Here is an example of the way God may use His Word to speak to you. Suppose you are reading Psalm 37. Although you have read this psalm many times before, you come to verse 21 and read, "The wicked person borrows and does not repay." You are drawn back to that verse. You read it again. Then you remember a debt you have failed to repay. You realize this Scripture applies to you. You immediately take action and repay your debt.

The Holy Spirit has just spoken to you through that verse. You have encountered truth. Now you understand that those who borrow and do not repay are sinning in God's sight. The Holy Spirit has called your attention to a specific instance in which this verse applies to you. He is convicting you of sin. He is the only One who can do that. God has spoken to you by the working of the Holy Spirit and through His Word. God wants you to have no hindrances to a love relationship with Him in your life.

5 If you are in this situation, what should you do next? Following the sequence in the diagram on page 104, what do you do after the Holy Spirit reveals an understanding of truth to you? _____

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God speaks uniquely to individuals, and He does it in any way He pleases.

When God speaks to me, I will recognize His voice and follow Him.

I cannot understand spiritual truth unless the Spirit of God reveals it.

God is more interested in what I become than in what I do.

Once God has spoken to you through His Word, your response is crucial. You must adjust your life to the truth. In this case the adjustment is this:

- You must *agree* with the truth: those who borrow and do not repay are morally wicked in God's sight.
- You must *agree* that the truth applies to you in the particular instance God has brought to your attention. This is confession of sin. You *agree* with God about your sin.

In this way you have adjusted your understanding about borrowing and repaying to agree with God's will in this matter. To agree with God, you must change your understanding to comply with His. This requires an adjustment. Is that all you must do? No!

Agreeing with God in confession is not enough. Until you repay the debt, you have not repented of your sinful ways. This is where obedience comes in. You obey God's will by repaying the debt and making any necessary amends. After you take action, you are free to experience a more complete relationship with God. Always connect a revealed truth with your understanding of God and your relationship with Him.

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 THROUGH PRAYER

DAY 5

If you are not keeping a spiritual journal, you need to. When the Creator of the universe tells you something in your quiet time, it's worth writing down! Record it before you forget it. Then write your prayer response. I record the verse of Scripture through which God spoke to me and what He has said about Himself from that verse. I write down the prayer response I am making so I have a record of the encounter with God, what He said, and the way I responded to Him. I also write what I need to do to adjust my life to God so I can begin to experience Him in that way.

*Prayer is a relationship,
not just a
religious activity.*

TRUTH IS A PERSON

Truth is not merely a concept to study. Truth is a Person. Jesus did not say, "I will teach you the truth." He said, "I am ... the truth" (John 14:6).

When God gives you eternal life, He gives you Himself (see **John 17:3**). His Holy Spirit, who lives in you, reveals truth. When the Holy Spirit reveals truth, He is not teaching you a concept to consider. He is leading you to a relationship with a Person. *He is your life!* When God gives you eternal life, He gives you a Person. When you became a Christian, Jesus didn't give you a *thing*; He gave you Himself.

"I am ... the truth."

—Jesus

1 Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the previous paragraphs.

- Truth is not just a _____ to study.
- Truth is a _____.
- The Holy Spirit reveals _____.
- The Holy Spirit is leading you to a _____ with a Person.

John 17:3

"This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent —Jesus Christ."

Here is the way I try to live my relationship with God.

- God creates in me the desire to participate in His mission to reconcile a lost world to Himself.
- I come to God seeking to know His will.
- When God reveals a truth to me, I know He is alerting me to what He is doing in my life.

PRAYER IS A RELATIONSHIP TO A PERSON

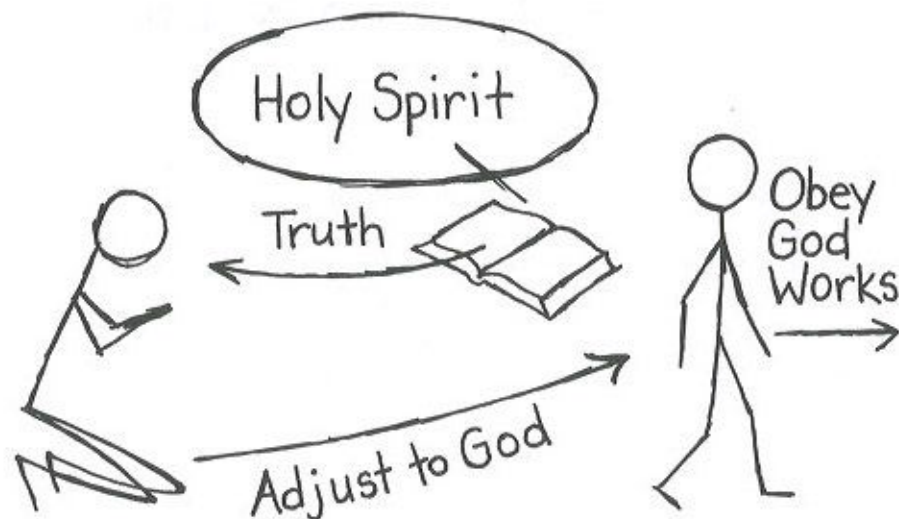
Prayer is two-way fellowship and communication with God. You speak to God, and He speaks to you. Prayer is not a monologue in which you merely list everything you want God to do. Your personal prayer life may primarily be one-way communication—you talking to God—but prayer is more than that. Prayer includes listening. In fact, what God says in prayer is far more important than what you say. God already knows what you are going to say. You, however, do not know what God is thinking.

Prayer is a relationship, not just a religious activity. Its purpose is to adjust you to God, not to align God with your thinking. God doesn't need your prayers, but He wants you to pray because of what God wants to do in and through your life as you

*What God says
in prayer is far
more important
than what
you say.*

pray. God speaks to His people by the Holy Spirit through prayer. This diagram shows the way God speaks through prayer.

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH PRAYER



When the Holy Spirit reveals a spiritual truth to you in prayer, He is present and actively working in your life. Genuine prayer does not lead to an encounter with God. It is an encounter with God. What happens as you seek God's will in prayer?

2 As you read the following list, underline or circle key words or phrases in each statement.

1. God takes the initiative by causing you to want to pray.
2. The Holy Spirit takes the Word of God and reveals to you the will of God.
3. You pray in agreement with God's will.
4. You adjust your life to the truth (to God).
5. You look and listen for confirmation or further direction from the Bible, circumstances, and the church (other believers).
6. You obey.
7. God works in you and through you to accomplish His purposes.
8. You experience God just as the Spirit revealed in your prayer.

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

The Spirit of God uses the Word of God when you pray. When I pray about something, Scripture often comes to my mind. I don't see that as a distraction. Instead, God uses it to guide me. As I pray about a particular matter, the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and applies it to my heart and mind to reveal the truth. I immediately stop praying and open God's Word to the passage I believe the Spirit brought to my mind. I assume God wants to give me specific direction through the Scripture He led me to. Sometimes as I pray, the Spirit places a particular person on my heart. I assume God is alerting me, through prayer, to someone He wants to minister to through me. After I pray, I look for ways God leads me to minister to that person.

3 Read Romans 8:26-27 in the right margin and answer these questions.

a. Why do we need the Holy Spirit's help when we pray (v. 26)?

b. What advantage does the Holy Spirit have that we do not have (v. 27)?

c. What does the Holy Spirit do for us? _____

We are weak and do not know how to pray as we should. The Holy Spirit has an advantage over us: He already knows God's will—He is God. When He prays for us, He is interceding in agreement with God's will. He then helps us know God's will as we pray.

For his sixth birthday my oldest son, **Richard**, was old enough to have a bicycle. I bought a blue Schwinn and hid it in the garage. Then I had a task—to convince Richard that he needed a blue Schwinn bike. At first Richard was interested only in small toys that would have quickly broken. I sought to elevate his desires until he desired something of quality and durability. We worked with him for a while, and he eventually decided that what he really wanted for his birthday was a blue Schwinn bike. Do you know what Richard got? The bike was already in the garage. I just had to convince him to ask for it. He asked for it, and he got it!

What happens when you pray? The Holy Spirit knows what God has “in the garage” for you! It is already there. The Holy Spirit's task is to convince you to want it—to get you to ask for it. What will happen when you ask for things God already wants to give or do? You will always receive it. Why? Because you have asked *according to His will*. When God answers your prayer, He gets the glory, and your faith is increased.

How do you know what the Holy Spirit is saying? I cannot give you a formula, but you will know His voice when He speaks (see **John 10:4**). You must decide, however, that you only want His will. You must dismiss any selfish or fleshly desires of your own. Then as you start to pray, the Spirit of God touches your heart and leads you to pray God's will (see **Phil. 2:13**). When you pray, anticipate that the Holy Spirit already knows what God has for your life. He does not guide you on His own initiative; He tells you what He hears from the Father (see **John 16:13**). He guides you as you pray.

When I pray and read God's Word, I always write down what God says to me and what He leads me to pray. As I begin to see what God is telling me about Himself, His purposes, and His ways, I often see a pattern develop. As I watch the direction the Spirit is leading me to pray, I get a clear indication of what God is saying to me. This process calls for spiritual concentration!

You may be asking, How do I know the directions I am praying are the Spirit's leading and not my own selfish desires? Do you remember what George Müller said he does first in seeking God's directions?

4 Look back at item 1 on page 40. What did Müller do at the start?

First, deny self. In all honesty with yourself and before God, come to the place where you are certain your only desire is to know God's will. Then check to see what the Holy Spirit is saying in other ways. Ask yourself:

- What is He saying to me in His Word and in prayer? Do they agree?
- Is He confirming it through circumstances?
- Is He confirming it through the counsel of other believers?

Romans 8:26-27

²⁶“The Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

John 10:4

“When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice.”

Philippians 2:13

“For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.”

John 16:13

“He will not speak on his own, but he will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come.”



Watch for God to use the written Word to confirm or correct what you sense in prayer.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

When the God of the universe tells me something in my quiet time, I should write it down before I forget it.

Truth is a Person.

Prayer is two-way communication with God.

Prayer is a relationship, not just a religious activity.

I need to make sure that my only desire is to know God's will.

God will never lead you to do something that contradicts His written Word. If what you sense in prayer runs contrary to Scripture, it is wrong. For instance, God will never lead you to commit adultery. He is always opposed to that. Watch for God to use the written Word to confirm or correct what you sense in prayer. However, don't play games with God. Don't just look for a Scripture that seems to say what you want to do and then claim it is God's will. That is dangerous.

5 Write the following key words in the correct sequence: *purposes, adjust, confirmation, Word, initiative, experience, agreement, obey*. If you need help, look at the list below the diagram on page 108.

1. God takes the _____ by causing me to want or need to pray.
2. The Holy Spirit takes the _____ of God and reveals to me the will of God.
3. In the Spirit I pray in _____ with God's will.
4. I _____ my life to the truth.
5. I look and listen for _____ or further direction from the Bible, circumstances, and the church (other believers).
6. I _____.
7. God works in me and through me to accomplish His _____.
8. I _____ Him just as the Spirit revealed as I prayed.

6 Has God spoken to you by the Holy Spirit through prayer during this course? Yes No If so, describe what you sensed He was saying in one of the times He has spoken. If you do not think He has spoken, ask Him to reveal the reason to you. _____

7 Has God affirmed His word to you through the Bible, circumstances, or the church (other believers)? Yes No If so, what did you sense He was saying? _____

8 Review your 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?



GOD SPEAKS, PART 1

SESSION 5

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

1. Scripture has to be your guide for knowing when God is speaking.
2. In the Bible, the important thing was never *how* God spoke but *that* God spoke.
3. When God spoke, people knew it was God, and they knew what God was saying.
4. When God has something to say to you, the most important thing is to recognize His voice and to respond in obedience.
5. God will never tell you something that doesn't align with His character or His Word.
6. Oftentimes, God has spoken to us, but we haven't finished what He told us to do.
7. Sometimes we can't hear from God because we are not ready for the next thing.

YOUR NOTES

UNIT REVIEW

Using the hints below, write the other three important factors in the way God spoke to individuals in the Old Testament (activities 3–6, p. 91).

1. When God spoke, it was usually unique to that individual.
2. Sure: _____
3. What: _____
4. Encounter: _____

When God speaks by the Holy Spirit, what are three things He reveals (activity 9, p. 101)?

God speaks by the Holy Spirit to reveal _____,
His _____, and His _____.

Match the things God reveals with the correct reasons. Write the correct letters in the blanks (activity 10, p. 102).

- | God reveals ... | Because ... |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ 1. Himself | a. He wants me to know how to accomplish things only He can do. |
| ___ 2. His purposes | b. He wants me to know what He is about to do so I can join Him. |
| ___ 3. His ways | c. He wants me to have faith to believe He can do what He says. |

Check your answers, using the pages cited in parentheses.

Scriptures Referenced

John 16:7, 12–15
Ephesians 4:29
John 8:32

Sharing Time

- What God has been saying in this course (activity 3, p. 96)
- What God has said through the Bible (activity 4, p. 104)
- What God has said through prayer (activity 6, p. 110)
- One of the most meaningful statements or Scriptures from this unit's lessons and your prayer responses to God. Choose one from pages 94, 97, 102, 106, and 110.

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.