

## UNIT

## 6

## VERSE TO MEMORIZE

"Jesus replied, 'Truly I tell you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son likewise does these things.'"

JOHN 5:19





# GOD SPEAKS, PART 2

## Please Cancel My Request!

Have you ever prayed for one thing and received another? I have. When that happened to me, some dear soul would inevitably say, "God is trying to get you to persist. Keep praying until you receive what you are asking for." I kept asking God for one thing, but I kept receiving something else.

During one of these experiences I started reading Mark 2, which tells the account of the four men who brought their crippled friend to Jesus to be healed. Because of the large crowd they opened a hole in the roof of the house and let the man down in front of Jesus. Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5).

I started to read on, but I sensed the Spirit of God saying, "Henry, did you see that?" I went back and meditated on that Scripture. The Holy Spirit revealed to me a wonderful truth: the four men asked Jesus to physically heal the man, but Jesus forgave the man's sins. They asked for one thing, and Jesus gave another! This man and his friends asked for a temporary gift, but Jesus wanted to make the man a child of God for eternity so he could inherit everything!

I found myself weeping before God and saying, "O God, if I ever ask You for one thing and You have more to give me than I am asking, please cancel my request!"



# DAY 1

*Only the Spirit of  
God knows what  
God is doing or  
purposing in my life.*

1 Corinthians  
2:10-12

"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 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."



You must  
decide whether  
you will do what  
you want and  
ask God to bless  
it or adjust your  
life to where  
He is working.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU PRAY?

If I start asking God for one thing and something different happens, I always respond to what begins happening. I have found God always has far more to give me than I can even ask or think. Paul wrote, "Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us—to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen!" (Eph. 3:20-21).

You can't imagine a prayer that comes close to what God wants to give you. Only the Spirit of God knows what God is doing or purposing in your life. Let God give you all He wants to bestow (see **1 Cor. 2:10-12**). Never be satisfied with less than God intends for you!

- 1 **Are you experiencing what God intends for you, or are you experiencing only what you have asked for?** \_\_\_\_\_  
What is the evidence? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 **Who alone can guide you into the center of God's will?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 **Suppose your church wants to start a mission church in a particular area of town. You have taken a survey to identify needs. You have made long-range plans. You have asked God to bless and guide your work. Then God begins to bring to your church a group of ethnic people to whom you did not intend to minister. What would you do?**
  - ☐ a. I would not be diverted from starting the mission church we had planned.
  - ☐ b. I would add the ethnic group to our future plans.
  - ☐ c. I would start asking God questions to learn whether we should start an ethnic mission church instead of or in addition to the other one.
  - ☐ d. Other \_\_\_\_\_

In this situation I would immediately go before God to clarify what He is saying. If I have been working and praying in one direction and I see God working in a different way, I adjust my life to what God is doing. You must decide whether you will do what you want and ask God to bless it or adjust your life to where He is working.

We started a special emphasis to reach university students in Vancouver. We began with 30 students in the fall. By the end of the spring semester, about 250 were attending. Two-thirds of these were international students. We could have said, "We didn't plan for a ministry to internationals. Please go somewhere else, and may God bless you." Of course, we didn't do that. We adjusted our plans to what God was doing around us.

### SPIRITUAL CONCENTRATION

Our problem is that when we pray, we usually don't relate our prayers to anything that subsequently happens. After you pray, practice spiritual concentration. When you pray in a particular direction, immediately anticipate God's activity in answer to your prayer. Throughout Scripture when God's people prayed, He responded.



Here's what happens if you pray and then forget about what you prayed. Things start to happen during the day that are unusual. Seeing them as distractions, you ignore them and fail to connect them with what you prayed about earlier.

When I pray, I immediately begin to watch for what happens next. I prepare to make adjustments to what happens in my life. When I pray, the idea that God is not going to answer never crosses my mind. Expect God to answer your prayers, but stick around for the answer. His timing is always best.

- 4** Have you ever persistently prayed for something and not received it or received something different? ☐ Yes ☐ No Briefly describe one of those experiences. \_\_\_\_\_

- 5** Are you currently praying for anything God is not granting? ☐ Yes ☐ No If so, what are you praying for? Why might God not have granted your request yet? \_\_\_\_\_

- 6** If you answered yes to 5, pause and ask God to help you understand what He is doing in your life. Then watch to see what happens next or pay attention to what He begins to reveal to you through His Word.

## THE SILENCES OF GOD

I went through a lengthy time when God was silent. You have probably have had that experience too. I had been praying for many days, but God was silent. I sensed heaven was shut up, and I didn't understand what was happening. Some people had told me that if God does not answer my prayer, I have sin in my life. However, I had repented of and confessed all known sin. I could not understand God's silence.

Do you remember a biblical person who had a problem like this? **Job** did. His counselors told him all his problems were caused by sin, while Job claimed he and God were on good terms. Job did not know all God was doing during that time, but his counselors were wrong. God had another reason for His silence.

- 7** If you have experienced silences of God, briefly describe one such time. \_\_\_\_\_

All I knew to do was to go back to God, believing that the God who was in a love relationship with me would let me know what was happening in my life when and if I needed to know. So I prayed, "Heavenly Father, I don't understand this silence. You are going to have to tell me what You are doing in my life." He did—from His Word. This became one of the most meaningful experiences in my life.

I did not frantically search for an answer but continued my daily reading of God's Word. I was convinced that as I regularly read the Word of God, the Spirit of God—who knew the mind of God for me—was in the process of helping me understand what God was doing in my life. God will let you know what He is doing in your life when and if you need to know.

One morning I was reading the account of the death of **Lazarus** (see John 11:1-45). John reported that Jesus loved Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Although Jesus received



God will let you know what He is doing in your life when and if you need to know.



word that His good friend was sick and at the point of death, He delayed going until Lazarus died. In other words, Mary and Martha asked Jesus to come help their brother when he was sick, but Jesus remained silent. All the way through Lazarus's final sickness and death, Jesus did not answer. They received no response from the One who claimed to love Lazarus. Jesus loved Mary and Martha too, yet He did nothing.

Lazarus died, and Mary and Martha went through the funeral process, preparing his body, putting him in the grave, and covering it with a stone. Still, God's silence continued. Finally, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let's go."

When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead four days. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died" (v. 32). Then the Spirit of God began to help me understand something. It seemed to me as if Jesus said to Mary and Martha: "You are exactly right. If I had come when you asked, your brother would not have died. You know I could have healed him, because you have seen Me heal people many times before. If I had come when you asked Me to, I would have healed him. But you would have never known any more about Me than you already understood. I knew you were ready for a greater revelation of Me than you have known before. I wanted you to experience that I am the Resurrection and the Life. My refusal and My silence were not rejection. They were opportunities for Me to disclose to you more of Me than you have ever known."

When that truth dawned on me, I almost jumped out of my chair. I said, "That's what's happening in my life! God's silence means He is ready to bring into my life a greater revelation of Himself than I have ever known." I immediately changed my whole attitude toward God. With great anticipation I began to watch for what God was going to teach me about Himself. Then some things happened that I might never have responded to without that readiness and anticipation.

#### SUMMARY STATEMENTS

O God, if I ever give You a request and You have more to give me than I am asking, cancel my request.

Only the Spirit of God knows what God is doing or purposing in my life.

God will let me know what He is doing in my life when and if I need to know.

Sometimes God's silences are caused by sin.

Sometimes God is silent as He prepares to bring me to a deeper understanding of Himself.

#### 8 What are two possible reasons for God's silence when you pray?

Now when I pray and God is silent, I still pray through my sin checklist. Sometimes God's silences are indeed caused by sin in my life. If unconfessed sin is in my life, I confess it and make it right. If God is still silent after that, I get ready for a new experience with Him. Sometimes God is silent as He prepares to bring you to a deeper understanding of Himself. Sometimes His silence is designed to bring you into a state of absolute dependence on and trust in God. Whenever God is silent, continue doing the last thing God told you and watch and wait for a fresh encounter with Him.

You can respond to God's silence in two ways. You can become frustrated, feel guilty, or be impatient. Or you can expect that God is about to bring you to a deeper knowledge of Himself. These responses are as different as night and day.

Do you know what set me free? Truth. Truth is a *Person* who is actively involved in my life. The moment I understood what God might be doing, I adjusted my life to Him. I put away my discouragement and guilt. I quit feeling that I was of no use to God and He wasn't listening to me. I made a major adjustment in my life to an attitude of expectation, faith, and trust. The moment I did, God began to show me how I could respond to Him in such a way that I would know Him on a deeper level.

#### 9 Start memorizing your Scripture memory verse for this unit and review your verses from other units. Remember, you may select a different verse and translation if you want to.



**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?

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## GOD SPEAKS THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES

### DAY 2

The Holy Spirit uses the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and God's people to speak to us—to show us the Father's will. This third means—circumstances—is illustrated in the way Jesus knew what the Father wanted Him to do. This is how Jesus knew the Father's will for His life and daily activity. Jesus described the process in John 5:17,19-20.

*To understand your bad or difficult circumstances, God's perspective is vital.*

**1 Verse 19 is your memory verse for this unit. Try to recite it now.**

Jesus said He did not take the initiative in doing anything for the Father (see v. 19). Only the Father has the right to initiate a divine work. The Father had been working right up until Jesus' time on earth, and He was still working (see v. 17). The Father would let the Son know what He was doing (see v. 20). When the Son saw the Father's activity, that was the Father's invitation for the Son to join Him.

**John 5:17**

*"Jesus responded to them, 'My Father is still working, and I am working also.'"*

**2 We have already looked at Jesus' example. To review, see if you can fill in the blanks in the following sequence, using the key words below.**

**Then check your answers on page 16.**

*working everything watch Father doing initiative loves nothing*

The \_\_\_\_\_ has been working right up until now.

Now God has Me \_\_\_\_\_.

I do nothing on My own \_\_\_\_\_.

I \_\_\_\_\_ to see what the Father is doing.

I do what I see the Father is already \_\_\_\_\_.

You see, the Father \_\_\_\_\_ Me.

He shows Me \_\_\_\_\_ that He Himself is doing.

God used circumstances to reveal to Jesus what He should do. The circumstances were the things Jesus saw the Father doing. There are certain things only the Father can do.





Jesus did not  
have to guess  
what to do. Jesus  
did not have  
to dream up  
what He could  
accomplish for  
the Father.

**3** Turn to page 83 and review the list of things only God can do.

Jesus always looked for where the Father was at work; then He joined Him. The Father loved the Son and showed Him everything He was doing. Jesus did not have to guess what to do. Jesus did not have to dream up what He could accomplish for the Father. Jesus watched to see what the Father was doing around His life, and then immediately adjusted His life to His Father's activity around Him. The Father then accomplished His purposes through Jesus.

This is exactly what Jesus wants us to do through His lordship in our lives. We see what He is doing; then we adjust our lives, our plans, and our goals to Him. We are to place our lives at His disposal—where He is working—so He will accomplish His purposes through us.

**4** Reflect on your life. Is anything happening in you or the people around you, that only God could do? Is anyone showing an unusual interest in God? Is anyone under conviction for their sin? Does anyone have an unusual concern for God's word or prayer? If so, list the situation in the margin. How does God want you to respond?

## GOD'S PERSPECTIVE IS VITAL

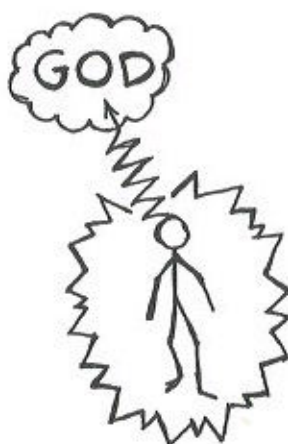
Jesus' example is a positive way God speaks through circumstances. Sometimes circumstances appear to be negative. Maybe you have found yourself in the middle of a difficult situation and asked God, "Why is this happening to me?" You are not alone. Job had an experience like that. He did not know what was happening when everything he owned was destroyed, when his children died, and when he developed excruciating sores all over his body (see Job 1–2). Job wrestled with understanding his circumstances. They certainly appeared bad! He did not know what was happening from God's perspective (see Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7). Neither did He know the last chapter of the story (see Job 42:12–17), in which God would restore his property, his family, and his health.

Job's friends, thinking they had God's perspective, told Job to confess his sin. Job could not find any unrighteousness in his life to confess. If you didn't have that last chapter and didn't know God's perspective, whose side do you think you would be on—God's or Job's? You would probably be with Job, saying, "I want to ask God what's going on. Why is He allowing this to happen?" You would think God was being cruel to Job.

To understand your painful or difficult circumstances, God's perspective is vital. When you face hardships or confusing situations, they can overwhelm you. When you look at God from the middle of your circumstances, you will always have a distorted understanding of Him. For instance, you might say, "God doesn't love me" or "God isn't fair." Both of those statements about God are completely false.

**5** Have you ever been in the middle of a tragic circumstance in which you accused God of things you knew were not really true of Him?  
☐ Yes ☐ No If so, describe one of those circumstances in the margin.

Perhaps you began to question God's love or His wisdom. Maybe you were afraid to say He was wrong, but you said, "God, You misled me in letting me believe this was the right thing to do. Why didn't You stop me? If I had known things were going to turn out like this, ..." You can get into spiritual difficulty if you look at God from the middle of circumstances.





What should you do? First, go to God and ask Him to show you His perspective on your circumstances. Look back at your circumstances from the heart of God. When you face confusing events, the Spirit of God will take the Word of God and help you understand your circumstances from God's perspective. He will reveal to you the truth of your situation.

At the beginning of unit 3 I told you about our daughter **Carrie's bout with cancer**, a challenging situation for our whole family. The doctors prepared us for six to eight months of intense chemotherapy, plus radiation treatments. We knew God loved us, so we went to Him in prayer and asked for understanding of what He was doing or was going to do in our lives. We wanted to be rightly adjusted to Him through this time. We prayed, "What are You purposing to do in this experience that we need to adjust ourselves to?"

As we prayed, a Scripture promise came that we believed was from God. Not only did we receive the promise, but we also received letters and calls from many people who quoted this same Scripture promise to us, sensing this verse was from God for our circumstance. The verse reads, "This sickness will not end in death but it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). While it would have been natural for us to claim this verse for our daughter, we sensed God was giving us this Scripture as His word for our circumstances. Our sense that God was speaking to us grew stronger as the Bible, prayer, and other believers' testimonies began to agree. We then adjusted our lives to the truth and began to watch for ways God would use this situation for His glory.

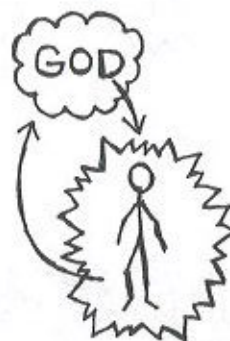
During this time people from many places in Canada, Europe, and the United States prayed for Carrie. Individuals, college-student groups, and churches called to tell us of their prayers. One thing surfaced in conversations with these people. Many said something like this: "Our prayer ministry had become so dry and cold, and we hadn't seen any special answers to prayer in a long time. But when we heard about Carrie, we felt motivated to pray for her regularly."

After three months of treatments, the doctors ran more tests. They said, "We don't understand this, but all the tests are negative. We cannot find any trace of cancer." I immediately communicated this answer to prayer with those who had committed to pray for Carrie. In instance after instance people said God used this answer to prayer to renew their prayer lives. Church prayer ministries were revitalized. Student prayer groups found new life.

Then I began to see what God had in mind for this circumstance: through this experience God was glorified in the eyes of His people. Many people sensed a fresh call to prayer. They personally began to experience anew the presence of Truth—Truth as a Person. Some of Carrie's closest friends began to pray fervently. Some students even became Christians after observing what God had done in and through Carrie. God indeed brought glory to Himself through this sickness.

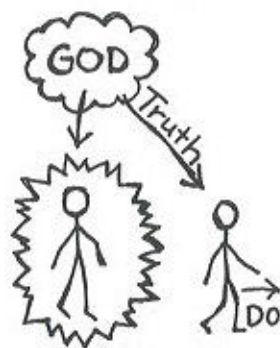
Do you see what happened? We faced a trying situation. We could have looked back at God from the middle of our circumstances and developed a distorted understanding of God. Instead, we went directly to Him and sought His perspective. The Holy Spirit took God's Word and revealed to us God's perspective on the end result of that circumstance. We believed God and adjusted our lives to Him and to what He was doing. Then we went through the circumstance looking for ways His purposes would be accomplished in ways that would bring Him glory. So when the answer to prayer came, I immediately knew that my job was to glorify God with everyone I could. In the process we came to know God in a new way because of the compassion He showed us by revealing His perspective on our situation. Let me summarize how you can respond when circumstances are difficult or confusing.

Go to God  
and ask Him to  
show you His  
perspective  
on your  
circumstances.





- 6** As you read this list, circle a key word or phrase in each statement.



### When Circumstances Are Confusing

1. Settle in your mind that God has forever demonstrated His unfailing love for you on the cross. That love will never change.
2. Do not try to understand what God is like from the middle of your circumstances.
3. Go to God and ask Him to help you see His perspective on your situation.
4. Wait on the Holy Spirit. He may take God's Word and help you understand your circumstances.
5. Adjust your life to God and to what you see Him doing in your circumstances.
6. Do all He tells you to do.
7. Experience God working in and through you to accomplish His purposes.

### SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God used circumstances to reveal to Jesus what He was to do.

Jesus watched circumstances to know where the Father wanted to involve Him in His work.

To understand my bad or difficult circumstances, God's perspective is vital.

- 7** In your own words, summarize what you need to do when you find yourself in confusing or difficult circumstances. \_\_\_\_\_

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Remember God is sovereign. You may face a situation like the one Job experienced in which God does not tell you what He is doing. In those instances, acknowledge God's love and sovereignty and trust His sustaining grace to see you through the situation.

**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?

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

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

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# THE TRUTH OF YOUR CIRCUMSTANCE

## DAY 3

You cannot know the truth of your circumstance until you have heard from God. In Exodus 5–6 **Moses** did as God instructed and asked Pharaoh to set the Israelites free. Pharaoh refused and multiplied their hardship. Then the people turned against Moses and criticized him for causing them so much trouble.

*You cannot know  
the truth of your  
circumstance until you  
have heard from God.*

### 1 What would you have done if you had been in Moses' place?

Check one or more responses.

- ☐ a. I would have become angry at Israel and gone back to tending sheep.
- ☐ b. I would have become bitter at God and told Him to get somebody else to do the job.
- ☐ c. I would have concluded I had misunderstood God's will.
- ☐ d. I would have patiently gone back to God and asked Him to give me His perspective on this difficult circumstance.

Moses' story really encourages me. The first three responses above are more like the ways we usually respond. If you haven't read Exodus 5–6, you may have the idea from what I have said that Moses picked response d. He didn't! He blamed God and accused Him of failing to do what He had promised. Moses said, "Lord, why have you caused trouble for this people? And why did you ever send me? 23 Ever since I went in to Pharaoh to speak in your name he has caused trouble for this people, and you haven't rescued your people at all" (Ex. 5:22–23). Moses was so discouraged he was ready to quit (see Ex. 6:12).

I'm glad God is patient with us! He took time to reveal His perspective to Moses. God explained He wanted Pharaoh to resist so the people could see God's mighty hand of deliverance. He wanted the people to know Him by experience as the great I AM. Learn from Moses' example. When you face confusing circumstances, don't blame God. Don't give up following Him. Go to God. Ask Him to reveal the truth of your circumstances. Ask Him to show you His perspective. Then wait on the Lord.

Radically orient your life to God. The most difficult thing you will ever have to do is deny self, take up your cross, and follow Him. The most challenging part of your relationship with God is being God-centered. If you recorded a day in your life, you might find that your prayers, your attitudes, your thoughts, and your actions are intensely self-centered. You may not see things from God's perspective; rather, you may try to explain to God what your perspective is. When He becomes the Lord of your life, He alone has the right to be: the Focus of your life; the Initiator in your life; the Director of your life. That is what it means for Him to be Lord.

## HEARING FROM TRUTH

When the Holy Spirit talks to you, He reveals Truth. He communicates with you about a Person—about Jesus. Truth is a Person (see **John 14:6**)!

The **disciples were in a boat during a storm**, while Jesus slept at the back. If you had gone to those disciples in the middle of that tempest and asked them, "What is the truth of this situation?" what would they have said? "We perish!" Was that the

**John 14:6**

*"I am ... the truth."*



# Luke 7:11-17

"Afterward he was on his way to a town called Nain. His disciples and a large crowd were traveling with him. Just as he neared the gate of the town, a dead man was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the town was also with her. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said, 'Don't weep.' Then he came up and touched the open coffin, and the pallbearers stopped. And he said, 'Young man, I tell you, get up!'

The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Then fear came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has risen among us,' and 'God has visited his people.' This report about him went throughout Judea and all the vicinity."



Don't evaluate  
your situation  
until you have  
heard from Jesus.  
He is Truth.

## SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Never determine the truth of a situation by looking at the circumstances.

truth? No, Truth was asleep at the back of the boat. Truth is a Person. In a moment Truth Himself would stand up and calm the storm. Then they knew the Truth of their circumstance. Truth is a Person who is always present in your life. You cannot know the truth of your circumstance until you have heard from God. He is Truth! Truth is present and active in your life!

## 2 Read Luke 7:11-17 in the margin and answer the following questions.

- Suppose you were attending this funeral. Before Jesus came, how do you think the **widow of Nain** would have responded to this question: "What is the truth of this situation?" She would have said ...
- When Truth (Jesus) was present, what difference did He make?
- When Truth (Jesus) revealed Himself to that crowd, how did they respond?

If you had asked the widow in her only son's funeral procession, "What's the truth of this situation?" she might have replied, "My husband died several years ago. I had one son, and I anticipated he would comfort and care for me in my old age. Now my son is dead, and I must live the rest of my life without anyone to care for me." Was that the truth?

No, Truth was standing in front of her! When Truth reached out, touched her son, and restored him, everything changed. You never know the truth of any situation until you have heard from Jesus. When Jesus revealed Himself in this circumstance, "fear came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has risen among us,' and 'God has visited his people.' This report about him went throughout Judea and all the vicinity." (Luke 7:16-17). Never determine the truth of a situation only by looking at the circumstances. Don't evaluate your situation until you have heard from Jesus. He is Truth.

## 3 In your Bible, read John 6:1-15 and answer the following questions.

- Five thousand hungry people** were with Jesus. He wanted to feed them. If you had asked the disciples what the truth of the situation was, how do you think they would have responded?
- Why did Jesus ask Philip where they could buy bread (vv. 5-6)?
- When Truth (Jesus) was present, what difference did He make?
- When Truth (Jesus) revealed Himself to the crowd, how did they respond (v. 14)?

I wonder whether God ever tests our faith as He did Philip's. Does He say, "Feed the multitudes," and our church responds, "Our budget can't do it"? If you had asked the disciples about the truth of that situation, they might have said, "We can't do it. Lord,



the truth is that this situation is impossible." Was that correct? No. We know the other half of the story. Wouldn't we be better off if we trusted God with the other half of the story in our lives? Truth Himself fed five thousand men, plus their families, and had 12 baskets full of leftovers!

Suppose God says to your church, "Take the gospel to the whole world," and the church says, "We can't. We're too small." Truth stands in the middle of that church, as the Head of that congregation, to say, "Believe Me. I will never give you an order without releasing My power to enable it to happen. Trust Me and obey Me, and it will happen."

*I cannot know the truth of my circumstance until I have heard from God.*

*The Holy Spirit takes God's Word and reveals God's perspective on the circumstance.*

**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?

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## SPIRITUAL MARKERS

## DAY 4

The diagrams I used for circumstances (pp. 118–20) may imply that the circumstance is a bad situation. That is not always the case. Sometimes the circumstance is a decision-making situation. In a decision-making time your greatest difficulty may not be choosing between good and bad but choosing between good and best. You may have several options that appear to be equally attractive. At a time like this, begin by saying with all your heart, "Lord, whatever I know to be Your will, I will do it. Regardless of the cost and regardless of the adjustment, I commit myself ahead of time to follow Your will. Lord, no matter what that will looks like, I will do it!"

If you cannot say that when you begin to seek God's will, you do not mean "Thy will be done" (Matt. 6:10, KJV). Instead, you mean "Thy will be done as long as it does not conflict with my will." Two words in a Christian's language cannot go together: "No, Lord." If you say no to God, He is not your Lord. If He really is your Lord, your answer must always be yes, Lord. In decision making, always begin at this point. Do not proceed until you can honestly say, "Whatever You ask of me, Lord., my answer is 'yes!'"

*When God gets ready for you to take a new step or direction in His activity, it will always be in sequence with what He has already been doing in your life.*

**"YES, LORD!"**

## PHYSICAL MARKERS OF SPIRITUAL ENCOUNTERS

When **Israel crossed the Jordan River** into the promised land, God gave Joshua the following instructions: "Choose twelve men from the people, one man for each tribe, and



These stones  
were to serve  
as a sign.



These altars and  
stones became  
physical markers  
of great spiritual  
encounters  
with God.

command them: Take twelve stones from this place in the middle of the Jordan where the priests are standing, carry them with you, and set them down at the place where you spend the night." (Josh. 4:2-3). These stones were to serve as a sign to the Israelites. Joshua explained, "In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean to you?' you should tell them, 'The water of the Jordan was cut off in front of the ark of the LORD's covenant. When it crossed the Jordan, the Jordan's water was cut off.' Therefore these stones will always be a memorial for the Israelites" (Josh. 4:6-7). The stones were to remind the people of God's mighty act on their behalf. On many other occasions people built altars or set up stones as a reminder of significant encounters with God.

**1** Select one of the following persons you would like to study. Check the box beside the person you chose. Read about his encounter with God. Then answer the questions that follow.

- ☐ Moses—Exodus 17:8-16 or 24:1-11
- ☐ Abram—Genesis 12:1-8 or 13:1-18
- ☐ Isaac—Genesis 26:17-25
- ☐ Jacob—Genesis 28:10-22; 35:1-7

- ☐ Noah—Genesis 6-8
- ☐ Joshua—Joshua 3:5-4:9
- ☐ Gideon—Judges 6:11-24
- ☐ Samuel—1 Samuel 7:1-13

Briefly describe the encounter between this person and God. What did God do? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think the person built an altar or set up a stone marker? \_\_\_\_\_

What, if any, special names of God or of the stone/altar does the text give? \_\_\_\_\_

Often people in the Old Testament set up stone markers or altars as reminders of their encounters with God. Places like Bethel (*house of God*) and Rehoboth (*room*) became reminders of God's great activity in the midst of His people. Moses named an altar *The Lord is my Banner*, and Samuel called a stone *Ebenezer*, saying, "The LORD has helped us" (1 Sam. 7:12). These altars and stones became physical markers of great spiritual encounters with God. They provided opportunities for people to teach their children about God's activity on behalf of His people.

## SEEING GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

God works in sequence to accomplish His divine purposes. What He did in the past was accomplished with a Kingdom purpose in mind. What He is doing in the present is in sequence with the past and with the same Kingdom purpose. Every act of God builds on the past, with a view toward the future.

When God called Abraham (see Gen. 12), He began to develop a people for Himself. When He came to Isaac, Isaac saw God's perspective when God reminded him of His relationship with Isaac's father, Abraham (see Gen. 26:24). To Jacob God identified Himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac (see Gen. 28:13). When God encountered Moses, He helped Moses see His perspective on what He was doing through history. He said "He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Ex. 3:6-10). At each new step in His divine plan, God involved a person. Often in the call God rehearsed His previous activity so the individual could see God's perspective on what was happening at that moment.

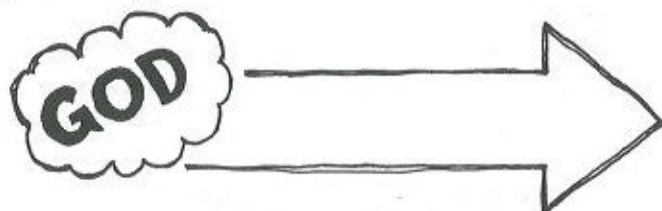




Israel needed  
to see the new  
direction was  
in line with  
all God had  
done previously.

Throughout Deuteronomy **Moses** reviewed all God had done for Israel. God was preparing to move the people into the promised land, and He wanted His people to have the perspective of history as they took this new step. In Deuteronomy 29 Moses briefly summarized the nation's history. At this time of covenant renewal, Moses wanted to remind the people to be faithful in following God. They were getting ready to change leaders (from Moses to Joshua) and move into the promised land. They needed to see this new direction from God's perspective. Israel needed to see their current undertaking was in line with all God had done previously.

In the diagram on the inside back cover, God's purposes are illustrated by the arrow at the top of the diagram.



**2** Look at the perspective God gave Moses when He called him into service at the burning bush in Exodus 3. On the lines that follow, write:

- *past* beside items that speak of God's past activity with His people;
  - *present* beside items that speak of what God was doing at the time He spoke to Moses;
  - *future* beside items that speak of what God was going to do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ a. "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (v. 6).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. "I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and I have heard them crying out because of their oppressors" (v. 7).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. "I know about their sufferings, and I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians" (vv. 7-8).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ d. "Therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (v. 10).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ e. "I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I am the one who sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain" (v. 12).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ f. "I have promised you that I will bring you up from the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites ... —a land flowing with milk and honey" (v. 17).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ g. "I will give these people such favor with the Egyptians that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. ... So you will plunder the Egyptians" (vv. 21-22).

#2 answers: Items a, b, and f are past. Items c and d are present. Items e and g are future.

Do you see what God was doing with Moses? He was helping him see his call from God's perspective.

- God had been working with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and even Moses' father to build a nation.
- God had promised Abraham He would bring the people out of bondage and give them the promised land.
- God had been watching over them in Egypt.
- Now He was responding to their suffering.

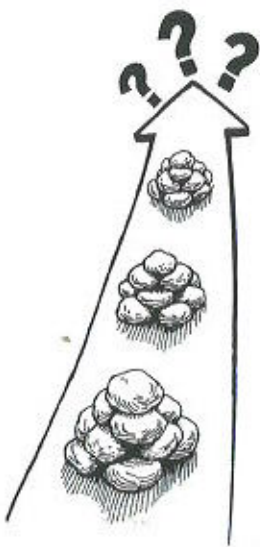


- God had chosen to involve Moses in His divine purpose for Israel. He was going to use Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egypt and plunder the Egyptians at the same time.
- After Moses obeyed, God would bring them to this very mountain to worship. This worship service on the mountain would be Moses' sign God had sent him.

God wants to involve you in His purposes. God has been working in the world all along (see John 5:17). He was accomplishing His purposes for your life prior to your birth, and He has been active in your life since you were born. God said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). When God is ready for you to take a new step or direction in His activity, it will always be in sequence with what He has already been doing in your life. He does not go off on tangents or take meaningless detours. He builds your character in an orderly fashion with a divine purpose in mind.



A spiritual marker identifies a time of transition, decision, or direction when I clearly know God has guided me.



## A SPIRITUAL INVENTORY

I have found it helpful to identify spiritual markers in my life. Each time I have encountered God's call or directions for my life, I have mentally built a spiritual marker at that point. A spiritual marker identifies a time of transition, decision, or direction when I clearly know God has guided me. Over time I can look back at these spiritual markers and see how God has faithfully directed my life according to His divine purpose.

When I face a decision about God's direction, I review those spiritual markers. I don't take the next step without the context of God's full activity in my life. This helps me see God's perspective for my past and present. Then I examine the options before me, looking to see which direction is most consistent with what God has been doing in my life. Often one of these opportunities will be right in line with what God has already been doing. If none of the directions seem consistent, I continue to pray and wait on the Lord's guidance. When circumstances do not align with what God is saying in the Bible and in prayer, I assume the timing may be wrong. I then wait for God to reveal His timing.

- 3 In your own words, write a definition of *spiritual marker*. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 Using the previous paragraph, describe in your own words how you could use spiritual markers to help you discern God's direction at a time of decision. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Why do you think spiritual markers are helpful? What do they help you do? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

When I was approached about taking a position with my denomination to direct its emphasis on prayer and spiritual awakening, I had never held such a job. Only God could reveal whether this was part of His divine purpose. I recalled the **spiritual markers in my life** to see this decision from God's perspective.



My heritage goes back to England, where a number of my family were graduates of Spurgeon's College at a time when Charles Spurgeon was trying to win England to Christ. I grew up in a town in Canada where an evangelical witness for Christ was desperately needed. My father served as a lay pastor to help start a mission church in that town. In my teen years I began to sense a deep burden for communities all across Canada that did not have an evangelical church. When I was in seminary, God assured me He loved my nation enough to want to bring a great movement of His Spirit across our land. When I accepted God's call to go to Saskatoon as a pastor, God used the prospect of a spiritual awakening there to affirm my call. While I was in Saskatoon, a spiritual awakening erupted in that city and spread throughout Canada and across the world.

One day a man called me and said, "Henry, for more than two years we have prayed about filling a position for the Office for Prayer and Spiritual Awakening. Would you consider coming and directing our denomination in the area of spiritual awakening?"

As I reviewed God's activity in my life (my spiritual markers), I saw that an emphasis on spiritual awakening was an important element throughout my ministry. I said, "You could have asked me to do anything else in the world, and I would not have considered leaving what I am doing, but spiritual awakening has been a deep current that has run through my life since the time I was a teenager." After much prayer and confirmation in the Word and by other believers, I accepted the position. God didn't shift me; He focused me on something He had been doing throughout the course of my life.

- 6 Prepare a spiritual inventory of your life and identify your spiritual markers. These may begin with your heritage, your salvation experience, and times you made significant decisions about your future. What are some times of transition, decision, or direction in your life when you clearly knew that God guided you? Using a separate sheet of paper, your spiritual journal, or a notebook, start preparing a list. If God used specific Scriptures to speak during those times, record the Scriptures. Add to it as you continue to reflect and pray about God's activity in your life.**

You will have an opportunity to share some of your spiritual markers in this week's small group session.

### SUMMARY STATEMENTS

In a decision-making time my greatest difficulty may not be choosing between good and bad but choosing between good and best.

Two words in a Christian's language cannot go together: "No, Lord."

God works in sequence to accomplish His divine purposes.

When God gets ready for me to take a new step or direction in His activity, it will be in sequence with what He has already been doing in my life.

A spiritual marker identifies a time of transition, decision, or direction when I clearly know that God has guided me.

**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?

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# DAY 5

## GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE CHURCH

*As I function in relationship to the church, I depend on others in the church to help me understand God's will.*

The Holy Spirit speaks to us through God's people, the local church. Later in this course we will devote a whole unit to ways a church hears and understands God's will. Today we will look at some ways you can understand God's will through the church.

**1** Let's review for a moment. Answer the following questions.

- How did God speak in the Old Testament? \_\_\_\_\_
- How did God speak in the Gospels? \_\_\_\_\_
- How does God speak from Acts to the present? \_\_\_\_\_
- What are four ways the Holy Spirit speaks? \_\_\_\_\_

### THE BODY OF CHRIST

One problem many churches face today is they have so emphasized the doctrine of the priesthood of believers they have lost their sense of corporate identity. What does that mean in simple words? Christians think their walk with God is independent of anyone else and they are not accountable to the church. It is true Christians have direct access to God through Christ. However, God created the church as His redemptive agent in the world. He has a purpose for the church. God places every member in a church to accomplish His redemptive purposes through that congregation.

A church is a body—the body of Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:27). Jesus Christ is the Head of every local church (see Eph. 4:15), and God places every member in the body as it pleases Him (see 1 Cor. 12:18). The Holy Spirit manifests Himself to every person for the common good (see 1 Cor. 12:7). The Father fits together the whole body (see Eph. 5:16), and the Holy Spirit enables and equips members to function where the Father has placed them in the body. The body builds itself up until every member experiences the fullness of Christ (see Eph. 4:13). God made us mutually interdependent. We need one another. What one lacks, others in the body can supply.

What God is doing in and through the body is essential to my knowing how to respond to Him. When I see Him working in my church, I immediately adjust and put my life in that place too. In the church I let God use me in any way He chooses to complete His work in other members. This was Paul's goal when he said, "We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ." (Col. 1:28). Paul constantly asked believers to become vitally involved with his life and ministry. The effectiveness of Paul's ministry rested on them (see Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3; 2 Thess. 3:1-2).

**Ephesians 4:15-16**

*"Speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part."*



**2 Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-31. Beside each statement, put a response from this passage.**

a. Paul addressed the Christians of a local church in the city of Corinth. What is a local church (v. 27)? \_\_\_\_\_

b. Circle the picture in the margin that best illustrates how your church functions (v. 12). \_\_\_\_\_

c. What does verse 25 say should be true of the church? Does this describe your church? \_\_\_\_\_

d. Based on verses 14-24, mark the following statements *T* (true) or *F* (false). Rewrite the false statements on the lines to state them correctly.

\_\_\_ (1) The church is a democracy. The majority rules. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ (2) Some members are more important than others, because they hold a greater responsibility. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ (3) In every church there are people who are hurting and upset about something. The church can't be distracted by such malcontents. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ (4) God speaks to the church staff or elders and they tell the rest of the church what God's will is. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ (5) If the church will not grant me more responsibility, I will start looking for another church. \_\_\_\_\_



A local church is the *body of Christ* (2-a). All believers worldwide are united in the kingdom of God under the rule of the King! But the local church is to function like a body. It is not *part* of a body. It *is* a body. God has always intended for the church to function as a unit, not as individual parts. A church should not be divided. If your church is fragmented, it is unhealthy. The Great Physician, Christ Himself, can heal the body if your church will let Him.

Apart from the body you cannot fully know God's will for relating to God's people. Without the eye the hand does not know where to touch. Without the ear the rest of the body may not know when or how to respond. Every member needs to listen to what the other members say. If the members are not talking about what they sense God is doing in their midst, the whole body will be disoriented to God.

## ALLOW GOD TO SPEAK THROUGH THE CHURCH

As I function in relationship to the church, I depend on others in the congregation to help me understand God's will. Let me illustrate this for you. Then in unit 10 we will spend more time studying the way members function as part of a body.

While I was in seminary, I was involved in a local church. The first year I taught teenage boys, and I did so with a willing heart. The next year I was asked to be the music and education director. I had never done either job in my life. I had sung in a choir, but I had never led congregational music. I knew nothing about directing the educational program of a church. Here is the way I approached this decision.

The people of God at this church needed a leader. As they prayed, they sensed God had purposely put me there to meet that need. I also saw the need and realized



Apart from  
the body you  
cannot fully  
know God's will  
for relating to  
God's people.



SUMMARY  
STATEMENTS

A church is a body—the  
body of Christ!

Jesus Christ is the Head  
of a local church.

God places every member in  
the body as it pleases Him.

God made us mutually  
interdependent. We need  
one another.

Apart from the body I cannot  
fully know God's will for my  
relationship to the body.

Every member needs to  
listen to what the other  
members say.

As I function in relationship  
to the church, I depend on  
others in the church to help  
me understand God's will.

God wanted to use me to meet it. As a servant of Jesus Christ, I did not have the option to say no. I believed the Head—Jesus Christ—could speak through the rest of the body to guide me to know how I should function in their midst. I said I would do my best.

For two years I served as the music and education director. Then the church voted to call me to be their pastor. I hadn't preached three sermons in my life. I had not gone to seminary because I felt called to be a pastor, but I had gone because I felt called by God into a relationship with Him for whatever He had in mind. I sensed I needed theological training so I would have tools with which to serve God. I didn't say, "I am going into foreign missions or home missions." I didn't confine myself to music or education or preaching. I said, "Lord, whatever You direct me to do in relation to Your body, that is what I will do. I am Your servant for Your purposes." I agreed to be the church's pastor.

In the church a need does not constitute the call. A need, however, is not to be ignored. Don't be afraid to let the body of believers assist you in knowing God's will. Also keep in mind that one individual is not the church. In the final analysis you must take all the counsel of people and go to God for clear direction. You will find that a number of things will begin to line up. When what you hear from the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church says the same thing, you can proceed with confidence.

You may say, "Henry, you don't know my church. I can't depend on them to help me know God's will." Be careful. When you say that, you have said more about what you believe about God than what you believe about your church. You are saying, "Henry, not even God can work through these people. He is not powerful enough." I don't think you believe that in your mind, but what you do says more about what you believe about God than what you say. This is the point where we need to focus on the crisis of belief. When God speaks, you have to decide what you really believe about God and act on it.

- 3** Write your Scripture memory verse (John 5:19) on the following lines.

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

- 5** If you have not completed your list of spiritual markers (day 4), try to finish it before your group session this week. Bring the paper or notebook with you to the session.

**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?

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

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

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GOD SPEAKS, PART 2

## SESSION 6

## VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

1. A circumstance is an event in your life through which God chooses to speak.
2. Just because a door seems closed to you does not mean it is closed to God.
3. Christians need the Spirit of Truth to explain the doors that are before us.
4. When trying to discern if God is speaking:
  1. Measure the source.
  2. Compare to other spiritual markers from your life.
5. All of the different ways that God speaks work together.

## YOUR NOTES

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

## UNIT REVIEW

Write the first four realities of experiencing God in your own words.

1. Work: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Invitation: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Speaks: \_\_\_\_\_

Check your answers on the inside back cover.

### Scriptures Referenced

John 14:6  
John 4:35-41  
1 Corinthians 1:18  
Acts 15:36-41  
Acts 16:6-34  
John 13:20  
1 Corinthians 12:12-31

## Sharing Time

- One of the most meaningful statements or Scriptures from this unit's lessons and your prayer response to God. Choose one from pages 117, 120, 123, 127, and 130.
- Spiritual markers in your life (activity 6, p. 127).

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.