

EXPERIENCING GOD

GOD SPEAKS, PART 1

A critical requirement for understanding and experiencing God is to clearly know when He is speaking. If Christians do not know when God is speaking, they are in trouble at the heart of their Christian lives. God speaks through the Holy Spirit to reveal Himself, His purposes and His ways. God also speaks through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and other believers.

God Spoke in the Old Testament

A truth that is evident throughout the Bible is that God speaks to His people. In the Old Testament, God spoke in many different ways...

- Through angels (Genesis 16)
- Through visions (Genesis 15)
- Through dreams (Genesis 28)
- Through symbolic actions (Jeremiah 18)
- Through a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19)
- Through miraculous signs (Exodus 8)

The fact that God spoke to people is far more important than how He spoke. Four important truths characterize each instance when God spoke in the Old Testament...

1. The experience was usually unique to that individual.
2. The person was sure it was God speaking
3. The person knew what God said
4. It was always an encounter with God Himself

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

If you want to know the will and voice of God, you must devote time and effort to cultivate a love relationship with Him. That is what He wants with you!

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. We must wait until He gives instructions before we act. If we start doing before we have clear direction from God, more than likely we will be wrong. One of the most difficult things for Christians to do is to wait on the Lord.

Does God Give Specific Directions?

A common teaching today claims that God does not give you clear instructions. He merely sets your life in motion and leaves it to you to try and figure out the directions. This implies that a Christian always thinks correctly and according to God's will.

Only God can give you the kind of specific directions to accomplish His purposes in His ways.

The Holy Spirit gives clear directions today. Because God is personal, He wants to be intimately involved in your life. He will give you clear guidance for living.

God Spoke in the Gospels

In the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) God spoke through His Son...Jesus. When Jesus spoke, the Father was speaking through Him. When Jesus did a miracle, the Father was doing His work through Jesus.

Just as Moses was face to face with God at the burning bush, the disciples were face to face with God in their personal relationship with Jesus. Their encounter with Jesus was an encounter with God.

God Speaks Today

When we move from the Gospels up through the present, we often change our mindset. We live as if God quit speaking personally to His people. We fail to realize that an encounter with the Holy Spirit, who indwells us, is an encounter with God. God clearly spoke to His people in the early church and He speaks to us today. Because the Spirit is always present in a believer, He can speak to us clearly at any time.

Encountering God

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. 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 your encounter with God.

Respond Immediately

After Jesus spoke to His disciples, what they did next was extremely important. What you do immediately after the Spirit speaks to you through His Word is critical. Our problem is that when the Spirit speaks to us, we want to debate like Moses.

If God speaks and you hear but do not respond, a time can come when you no longer hear His voice. According to Amos 8, disobedience can lead to a "famine of hearing the words of the Lord."

Make up your mind now that when the Spirit of God speaks to you, you will do whatever He says.

God Reveals Himself

When He speaks, what does He reveal? When God speaks through the Holy Spirit, He often reveals something about Himself, His nature or His character.

God speaks when He wants to involve you in His work. He reveals His character to help you respond in faith. You can better obey God's instructions when you believe God is who He says He is and when you believe God can do what He says He will do.

God Reveals His Purposes

God reveals His purposes so you will know what He plans to do. If you are to join Him in His work, you need to know what God is going to do.

What you plan to do for God is not important. What He plans to do through you is critical. God always speaks with a purpose in mind.

We often sit around and dream up what we want to do for God and make long range plans based on the 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.

If your plans and purposes 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.

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. Never forget about the need for a daily, intimate relationship with God. He created us for an eternal love relationship. This life is our opportunity to experience Him at work. Remain in a close relationship with Him so you can always hear His voice when He speaks to you.

God Reveals His Ways

Even the casual or uninformed reader of the Bible can see God's ways and plans are far different from ours. 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's goal is to reveal Himself to people to draw them into a love relationship with Him. He acts in ways that reveal Himself and His love. He does not simply wait around to help us achieve our goals. He seeks to accomplish His own goals through us...in His way.

We cannot accomplish God's work in our own ways. When we try, we will never see His power in what we do. With God, what you do is not the only important thing. God is always concerned with how you do something. When God accomplishes His purposes in His ways through us, people will come to know God.

God Speaks Through the Bible

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 pleases. As you walk in an intimate love relationship with God, you will come to recognize His voice. You will grow to know when God is communicating with you.

God speaks through a variety of means. Today God primarily speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and others. God always uses prayer and the Bible together. Circumstances and other believers will help confirm what God is saying to you.

Keep in mind that God is sovereign. He can do whatever He chooses. With Scripture as our guide, we know God speaks in unique ways. His people will hear and recognize His voice.

The Spirit of Truth

The Bible is God's Word. It describes God's complete revelation of Himself to mankind. God speaks to you through the Bible. As we have already discussed, a person cannot understand spiritual truth unless the Spirit of God reveals it.

When the Holy Spirit reveals a spiritual truth from God's Word, He is personally applying it to your life.

The Spirit uses God's Word to reveal God and His purposes. The Spirit uses God's Word to instruct us in the ways of God. We cannot understand God's truths on our own.

Understanding spiritual truth does not lead you to an encounter with God...it IS the encounter with God. If God has revealed spiritual truth to you, you have encountered God Himself working in you!

Responding to Truth

The Spirit of God knows the mind of God. Because He knows what God wants to do in your life, He begins to open your understanding about God, His purposes and His ways. Once God has spoken to you, your response is crucial. You must adjust your life to the truth.

God Speaks Through Prayer

If you are not keeping a spiritual journal or diary, you really need to. When the Creator of the universe tells you something in your quiet time, you need to write it down before you forget it.

Truth is a Person

Truth is not just a concept to study. Truth is a person. Jesus didn't 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. His Spirit lives in you and reveals truth to you. When He reveals truth, He is not teaching you a concept to consider. He is leading you to a relationship with a person. When you became a Christian, Jesus didn't just give you a thing...He gave you Himself.

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. It is not a one-way conversation where you list everything you want God to do for you. Now your personal prayer life may be this way but prayer is much more than that. It includes listening. In fact, what God says to you is far more important than what you say to Him.

Prayer is a relationship not just a religious activity.

God speaks to His people by the Holy Spirit through prayer. When the Spirit reveals truth to you in prayer, He is present and actively working in your life. Genuine prayer doesn't lead to an encounter with God...it IS an encounter with God.

Praying in the Spirit

The Spirit of God uses the Word when you pray. He takes the Word and applies it to your heart and mind to reveal the truth.

Unfortunately, we are weak and don't know how to pray. The Spirit helps us know God's will as we pray.

How do you know what the Spirit is saying?

There is not a formula but you will know His voice when He speaks. You must decide that you want to know and do His will. Once you make that choice, the Holy Spirit will speak to your heart and lead you to know God's will.