

God Speaks Through His Church

Series: God Speaks

Title: God Speaks Through His Church

Primary Text: Acts 15:1–35

Supporting Scriptures: Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 10:24–25

Central Truth: God has not designed us to hear His voice in isolation. Through the Holy Spirit working in His people, God brings direction, correction, encouragement, wisdom, and confirmation to His Church.

Introduction: God Has Never Intended Us to Walk Alone

We have been talking about how **God speaks**.

God speaks through His Word.

God speaks through prayer.

God speaks through circumstances.

God speaks through the Holy Spirit.

But there is another important way God speaks:

God speaks through His Church.

That does not mean every person in the Church is automatically speaking for God.

It does not mean every opinion expressed by a Christian is God's opinion.

And it certainly does not mean the Church replaces the authority of Scripture.

Rather, it means that **God has chosen to work through His people**.

The Church is not merely a building where Christians gather.

The Church is the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV):

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

God places us together because there are things He wants to accomplish **through us together** that we could never accomplish alone.

Sometimes God will speak to you personally.

Sometimes He will confirm what He has already been saying through another believer.

Sometimes He will correct you through another Christian.

Sometimes He will give you wisdom through the Church.

Sometimes God will use the Church to help you recognize what He is doing in your life.

And sometimes, perhaps most importantly, God will use His Church to keep us from being deceived by our own voices.

1. GOD DESIGNED US TO HEAR HIM TOGETHER

Hebrews 10:24–25 (NIV)

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Notice the language:

“one another.”

God’s plan was never:

“You and Jesus can figure everything out by yourselves.”

Christianity is personal, but it was never intended to be private.

God saves individuals, but He places those individuals into a body.

Ephesians 4:15–16 (NIV)

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

The Christian life requires relationships.

There are times when God speaks through:

- A pastor.
- A Sunday school teacher.
- A worship leader.
- A mature Christian.
- A mentor.
- A small-group leader.
- A friend.

- A parent.
- A fellow believer.
- Someone who lovingly confronts us.

You may say, “I just want God to speak directly to me.”

And God certainly can.

But sometimes God’s answer to your prayer is:

“Listen to My people.”

2. GOD USES THE CHURCH TO CONFIRM HIS DIRECTION

One of the clearest examples is found in **Acts 15**.

The early Church faced a major theological question.

Gentile believers were coming to Christ.

The question was:

“Do Gentile Christians have to become Jewish and follow the Mosaic law in order to be saved?”

This was not a small disagreement.

It affected the future of the Christian movement.

So what did they do?

They gathered the Church.

Acts 15:6 (NIV)

“Then the apostles and elders met to consider this question.”

They didn’t simply say:

“Everyone go home and pray individually and whatever you feel is right, that’s what we’ll do.”

They came together.

They listened.

They discussed.

They examined what God had already done.

They listened to testimony.

They considered Scripture.

And they sought the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Peter spoke.

Paul and Barnabas shared what God had been doing among the Gentiles.

James examined the matter through Scripture.

Then the leaders came to a conclusion.

Acts 15:28 (NIV)

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements.”

Notice that statement:

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

That is a powerful picture of Spirit-led Church leadership.

They weren’t saying:

“This is what we personally prefer.”

They were saying:

“We have sought God together, and we believe the Holy Spirit has led us.”

The lesson:

Sometimes God confirms His direction through the agreement of Spirit-filled believers.

You may have been praying:

“God, what do You want me to do?”

And God may bring someone into your life who says something that confirms exactly what God has already been showing you.

That isn’t coincidence.

God can use His people as part of His answer.

3. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE GIFTS OF HIS PEOPLE

The Church is filled with people who have different gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:4–6 (NIV)

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.”

God doesn't give everyone the same gift.

Why?

Because we need one another.

One person may have the gift of teaching.

Another may have encouragement.

Another may have leadership.

Another may have wisdom.

Another may have mercy.

Another may have faith.

Another may have discernment.

Another may have a gift of serving.

The Holy Spirit distributes these gifts so that **the whole body can function properly.**

1 Corinthians 12:21 (NIV)

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don't need you!’”

There is a danger in saying:

“I don't need the Church.”

But there is another danger:

“The Church doesn't need me.”

Both are wrong.

God has placed something inside you that the body needs.

Your testimony matters.

Your prayers matter.

Your wisdom matters.

Your spiritual gifts matter.

Your encouragement matters.

Your obedience matters.

God may want to speak through **you** to someone else.

4. GOD USES THE CHURCH TO CORRECT US

This is one of the hardest ways God speaks.

We love it when someone tells us:

“You’re doing great.”

We aren’t always as excited when someone says:

“You need to change.”

But correction can be God’s voice.

Proverbs 27:17 (NIV)

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

God puts people in our lives who will lovingly sharpen us.

Sometimes the person God uses to correct you is the person you least want to hear from.

But we need to learn the difference between:

criticism and **godly correction**.

Criticism tears down.

Godly correction seeks restoration.

Criticism says:

“You’re a failure.”

Godly correction says:

“I love you enough to tell you the truth.”

Criticism attacks the person.

Godly correction confronts the behavior.

Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”

Notice the goal:

restore.

God’s voice is not always comfortable.

Sometimes God speaks through the Church because we have stopped listening to Him ourselves.

5. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH SPIRIT-LED LEADERSHIP

God has established spiritual leadership within the Church.

Ephesians 4:11–12 (NIV)

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

Pastors are not given to the Church merely to preach sermons.

God gives leaders to:

- Equip.
- Teach.
- Shepherd.
- Protect.
- Correct.
- Encourage.
- Disciple.
- Prepare God’s people for ministry.

There are moments when your pastor may preach something that feels like it was directed specifically at you.

Sometimes you may think:

“How did he know?”

The pastor may not know.

But **God knows.**

God can use a sermon to speak directly into your situation.

God can use a Bible study to answer your question.

God can use a spiritual leader to give you direction.

God can use a conversation in the hallway after church to give you encouragement.

But we must remember something important:

Spiritual leadership must always remain under the authority of God's Word.

The pastor is not the final authority.

The Church is not the final authority.

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, and Scripture is the standard by which everything must be tested.

6. GOD'S VOICE THROUGH THE CHURCH MUST AGREE WITH GOD'S WORD

This is extremely important.

Just because someone says:

"God told me..."

doesn't mean God told them.

Just because someone has a title doesn't mean everything they say is from God.

Just because a church votes on something doesn't automatically make it God's will.

The Church must test everything against Scripture.

1 John 4:1 (NIV)

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

God's Word is our measuring stick.

If someone says:

“God told me you should abandon your marriage.”

We test it.

If someone says:

“God told me holiness doesn’t matter.”

We test it.

If someone says:

“God told me sin is no longer important.”

We test it.

If someone says:

“God told me you don’t need the Bible anymore.”

We test it.

God will never contradict Himself.

The Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture will never lead the Church in a direction that contradicts Scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NIV)

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

So when we say:

“God speaks through His Church,”

we are not saying:

“Whatever the Church says is God’s voice.”

We are saying:

“God speaks through His people as they submit themselves to the Holy Spirit and the authority of His Word.”

7. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE UNITY OF HIS CHURCH

There is something powerful when God’s people seek Him together.

Acts 2:42 (NIV)

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Look at those four things:

Teaching.

Fellowship.

Communion.

Prayer.

They weren’t just attending services.

They were living life together.

And when God’s people live in unity, something powerful happens.

Psalms 133:1 (NIV)

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!”

Unity doesn’t mean everyone agrees about everything.

Unity means everyone submits to Christ.

The Church doesn’t need everyone to have the same personality.

We don’t need everyone to have the same preferences.

We don’t need everyone to like the same music.

We don’t need everyone to have the same opinions about minor things.

But we must have **one Lord, one faith, and one mission.**

When the Church is walking together under the authority of Christ, God can speak powerfully through His people.

8. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE CHURCH TO CALL US INTO HOLINESS

This is where the Church must be different from the world.

The Church isn’t simply supposed to make us feel better.

The Church is supposed to make us **more like Jesus.**

Ephesians 4:22–24 (NIV)

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

God speaks through His Church by calling us higher.

He calls us away from:

- Sin.
- Bitterness.
- Pride.
- Sexual immorality.
- Unforgiveness.
- Greed.
- Selfishness.
- Gossip.
- Anger.
- Compromise.

And He calls us toward:

- Righteousness.
- Purity.
- Love.
- Mercy.
- Humility.
- Obedience.
- Forgiveness.
- Compassion.
- Christlikeness.

The Church should never simply say:

“Come as you are and stay as you are.”

The biblical message is:

“Come as you are—but let Jesus transform you.”

The Holy Spirit doesn’t merely forgive us.

He transforms us.

He calls us into a life of holiness.

1 Peter 1:15–16 (NIV)

“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

A Spirit-filled Church should be a **holy Church**.

A Spirit-filled Church should be a **loving Church**.

A Spirit-filled Church should be a **truth-telling Church**.

A Spirit-filled Church should be a **serving Church**.

A Spirit-filled Church should be a **missional Church**.

And when the Church lives this way, the world hears God’s voice through the witness of God’s people.

9. SOMETIMES GOD’S ANSWER IS SITTING BESIDE YOU

Think about how often God has used another person in your life.

Someone encouraged you when you wanted to quit.

Someone prayed for you when you couldn’t pray.

Someone gave you wisdom when you were confused.

Someone confronted you when you were going the wrong direction.

Someone believed in you when you didn’t believe in yourself.

Someone invited you to church.

Someone shared the Gospel with you.

Someone taught you the Bible.

Someone showed you what Christian marriage should look like.

Someone showed you what forgiveness looks like.

Someone demonstrated holiness.

Someone served you.

Someone loved you.

And through that person:

God was speaking.

You may have thought:

“That was just a conversation.”

But God may have been using that conversation to change your life.

10. DON'T ABANDON THE CHURCH WHEN YOU NEED THE CHURCH THE MOST

Hebrews says:

“Do not give up meeting together.”

Why?

Because isolation makes us vulnerable.

When we pull away from the Church:

We lose encouragement.

We lose accountability.

We lose spiritual perspective.

We lose opportunities to serve.

We lose relationships that God may use to speak into our lives.

And sometimes we become convinced that our own voice is God's voice.

There is a danger in being alone with your thoughts for too long.

You need people who love Jesus enough to tell you the truth.

You need people who will pray with you.

You need people who will celebrate your victories.

You need people who will walk with you through your failures.

You need the Church.

And whether you realize it or not: **The Church needs you.**