

During this Lent Season, I offer the sermon series with a book titled "Seven Realities for Experiencing God" written by Henry and Richard Blackaby. The reality of this week is "God Speaks."

Last week, I participated in the 5 Day Academy for Spiritual Formation at the Redemptorist renewal center in Tucson, AZ.

This retreat gave me the sacred time and space where God speaks to me. When I entered the chapel, I could see Hosea 2:16, "I will lead you into the desert and speak to your heart." As this bible verse said, God had spoken to me in the worship, the lecture, the silence, and the small group. This retreat was the unique time God speaks to me. I learned Wisconsin 5 Day Academy would be at the Siena Retreat Center from October 27 to November 1, 2019. Also, the Five Day Academy for Spiritual formation is offered in many places in the United States and other countries.

There are a unique space and time God speaks to us. Also, every day, every moment, God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal God's presence, God's purpose, and God's ways. The testimony of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is that God speaks to God's people. In our day God communicates to us through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit uses the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to guide us.

As we shared Moses' story, God came and talked to him about God's will. God wanted Moses to go to Egypt to deliver the Israelites. God revealed to Moses God's mercy, God's power, and God's purpose to keep God's promise to Abraham and to give Israel the promised land. When God spoke, Moses knew it was God. He knew what God said. Also, he knew what he had to do in response. God listened to the prayer of Israelite. God heard God's people when they cry out to God. God brought them, the Israelites out of Egypt.

God speaks in many different powerful ways. God keeps communicating with us in various ways. Today's message will focus on how God speaks in our prayer.

Here, I want to pause and change the point of communication between God and us.

“When do we want to hear what God speaks?” Only Sunday’s morning not during the week?

We often want to hear from God when we are in a tough time. Sometimes we seek God’s voice for a long time about big things, like a health issue or a difficult work situation, and things don’t get better. We wonder if God’s been paying attention. If the condition worsened, we bring questions like “Why aren’t you answering, God? Is it true that God speaks to us? How could it be true that you have “heard my voice and my pleas for mercy (Psalm 116:1)”? It doesn’t feel like you have “attended to the voice of my prayer (Psalm 66:19).”

Then, you may think “perhaps my faith wasn’t strong enough. Maybe I wasn’t good enough.” That moment makes you discouraged to hear what God speaks. Or you may even feel like God says, “Thank you for your prayers, but that’s not My will; please accept this.”

I had that moment “If God wanted to answer my prayer, God would and if God didn’t want to, God wouldn’t. So why waste my time, energy, and emotions on something that I had no control over?” Although I wanted to believe that my prayers were important to God, and God listened intently like a loving God, my heart became full of apathy.

Have you had that moment you don’t even want to hear what God speaks? Sometimes don’t we choose the time we like to listen to what God speaks? Most people who say prayer works these days mean God did what they wanted Him to do. As if prayer was a button to be pushed to release what they wanted from the vending machine. Prayer is not a button to be pushed; it’s a relationship to be pursued.

Prayer does ‘work,’ but it works very differently than we’d like. It still ‘works’: When we can’t trace out any direct result from our prayer, when the opposite of what we prayed for happens, or in those moments when we feel very distant from God.

Prayer is designed to adjust you to God’s will, not to adjust God to your will. If God hasn’t responded to what you are praying, you may need to adjust your prayer to align with God’s agenda. Rather than focusing on what you would like to happen, realize God may be more concerned with what God wants to happen in you.

Consider that even before you call on God, God has already begun to provide all you need. In Isaiah 65:24, God says “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.” Jesus wanted his disciples to learn how intimately God knew and loved each of them. That’s why Jesus told them to pray. Jesus assured them that even before they prayed, God knew all about their situation.

Again, why, then, should we pray?

Prayer enables us to experience God more intimately. Just as the more a child experiences the loving relationship with a parent, the more convinced he or she becomes of their parent’s love. When a child has the confidence to get help from their parent, he or she keeps calling their parents. Often a parent anticipates a child’s need before the child recognizes it and prepares in advance to provide for that need. Likewise, God is eager for us to experience God as God speaks.

Then what would happen when we are engaging in conversation and question about what God speaks?

I want to share the story of a Samaritan woman in John 4. As you know, Jesus had been talking with the Samaritan woman at the well. She is a woman, she has no name, but she meets Jesus at noon, in full daylight. The woman keeps asking questions and engaging Jesus in theological debate.

She had called him a prophet and had begun asking questions. Jesus called her “woman.” Her active curiosity made Jesus known about her. This woman had asked questions about where people should worship God or who Jesus is. Also, she shared with Jesus what she understood about the Messiah, saying that when the Messiah came, he would explain all of these things.

Jesus then answered that he was the Messiah. She then ran to tell the people in her community about Jesus and to bring them to hear him.

She demonstrates what can happen when we engage in conversation and questions about what God speaks. The woman at the well shows us that our conversation and questions in prayer are

about dialogue, about growth and change in our relationship with God. This Samaritan woman responds to Jesus in such a way that leads Jesus to reveal his true identity to her, and in doing so, her own identity evolves and changes.

I want to share my experience in the 5 Day Academy for Spiritual Formation. After Wednesday night prayer I stayed in the chapel to pray more. I prayed for the church about a half hour and then I wanted to leave the chapel. However, I felt God seemed to speak to me, "Stay with me." So, I stayed more with prayer. Then I wanted to leave the chapel again, but God seemed to speak to me once again, "Stay with me." It was strange to me. So, I stayed there with prayer. After a while, I felt God seemed to say to me, "Go now." Do you know what my response is? "No, I want to stay more because I need to pray more." At that moment, I realized that I have been so stubborn that I have wanted to do in my own way. I have convinced that I am ready to follow wherever God leads me. However, when I felt that God seemed to speak to me, I wanted to keep my way. Then I took the time to confess my sin.

God does want us to ask as God is always ready to answer for us.

God does want us to tell God the littlest details of our hearts as God always speaks to us.

God does want us to be patient to hear what God speaks as God is waiting.

God does want us to invite people with what God speaks as God is not only your Savior but also the Savior of the world.