

3

God Speaks Through His Holy Spirit

IN FOCUS: *The Holy Spirit guides us in knowing His will.*

SCRIPTURE: *1 Corinthians 2:6-16*



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this session's Scripture passages.

LOOK AT OUR WORLD

It's often easy to be led by our feelings or emotions. It just feels right. We know we can't always trust our feelings, but certainly there are times when that "inner voice" is accurate. God's Holy Spirit is separate from our conscience. The Holy Spirit helps us discern God's voice from other voices competing for our attention.

**When have you made a decision simply based on the conclusion that it felt right?
How would you describe the feeling?**

- ▶ God equipped us to respond to life with a variety of feelings. However, feelings can misguide us when making important decisions.
- ▶ The most reliable guide for believers is the Holy Spirit, who lives in each one of us and speaks to us. He not only reveals to us God's will but also helps us apply God's Word to our lives.

BONUS: How can you tell when you've heard God's voice? (PSG, p. 22)

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary,
available for purchase at biblestudiesforlife.com/adults.

1. 1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-8

We can't comprehend His will by our own power or reasoning.

Prompt someone to read aloud 1 Corinthians 2:6-8. Then, unpack the Key Words to illuminate how God's wisdom transcends time and human understanding.

KEY WORDS

- A Mature (CSB); perfect (KJV) (v. 6)**—To reach one's full potential, typically over a span of time. Bankers today use "mature" to describe a certificate of deposit (CD) that has reached its full value.
- B This age (CSB); this world (KJV) (v. 6)**—Jews used this term to refer to the current age, which they considered to be tainted and even ruined. This contrasts with the eternal age, which will be flawless.
- C Hidden wisdom (v. 7)**—Concealed or secret wisdom; refers to God's plan of salvation through Christ—a plan that had indeed been in existence prior to creation (2 Tim. 1:9). Jews personified wisdom, believing it was in existence before creation and that it would endure forever.
- D Mystery (v. 7)**—The root of the Greek word referred to a shut mouth. Among ancient religions, it could refer to teachings that were known only by the faithful and not the general populace.
- E Lord of glory (v. 8)**—Jews normally reserved this title for God alone. This is the only time Paul used this exact title. The phrase spotlights Jesus as God—divine and eternal.

Why is God's wisdom superior to our own? How can God's wisdom benefit us if it is a mystery?

- ▶ The wisdom and rulers of this age were non-believers, fallen and enslaved to sin. Paul wrote they were "coming to nothing" (v. 6), which means doomed to perish. The person on their own, separate from God, can't comprehend the things of God.
- ▶ Paul used the word "mystery" to represent something that had been previously "hidden" but is now revealed (v. 7). This revealed mystery is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's statement that they speak the "hidden wisdom" of God testifies that God's will can be discerned.

When have you struggled to discern God's will for your life? How much of the struggle was the result of applying human reasoning?

BONUS: What are some examples of the wisdom of this age? What do you find mysterious about God's wisdom? (PSG, p. 24)

DIG DEEPER: Use the information on public speaking on page 12 to show how Paul's message stood out. He didn't try to impress with style but pointed to substance—truth revealed by God.

2. 1 CORINTHIANS 2:9-11

The Holy Spirit reveals the mind of God.

Read aloud 1 Corinthians 2:9-11, using the Key Words to explore our dependence on the Holy Spirit to grasp God's will.

KEY WORDS

- F Revealed (v. 10)**—We get the English word *apocalyptic* from the Greek word for *revealed*. It refers to something that has been uncovered or unveiled.
- G Depths of God (CSB); the deep things of God (KJV) (v. 10)**—Truths that are, apart from God's revealing them, beyond human understanding (Isa. 55:8-9).

How do these verses affirm that God desires to speak to believers? How can believers have confidence in what the Spirit reveals?

- ▶ Verse 9 is clear: God intends that believers understand the truths associated with the unfathomable gospel of Jesus. Additionally, God has taken the initiative to make it possible: God reveals these things to us through the Spirit.
- ▶ Since the Spirit knows everything about God, He won't reveal anything contrary to Scripture (v. 10).

When have you experienced an "Aha!" moment when reading Scripture? What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you that you previously failed to see?

BONUS IDEA: Use the Bonus Idea postcard activity on page 12 of this book to demonstrate our need for the Holy Spirit to understand God's will and live out His truth.

BONUS: What do you think God has prepared for you that you can hardly imagine? When has the Holy Spirit revealed a truth to you at just the right time? (PSG, p. 26)

3. 1 CORINTHIANS 2:12-16

We must rely on the Holy Spirit to help us apply Scripture to our lives.

Assign a reader for 1 Corinthians 2:12-16. Then, use the Key Words to unpack the idea of having “the mind of Christ,” encouraging the group to consider how this impacts their relationships, decisions, and worldview.

KEY WORDS

- H Spirit of the world (v. 12)**—Not a spiritual being but the human way of thinking that opposes God and His will. This thinking causes a person to focus on his or her own desires, appetites, and wants: *What can I achieve? What can I get?*
- I Words taught by human wisdom (CSB); words which man’s wisdom teacheth (KJV) (v. 13)**—In Paul’s day, human wisdom was evaluated by the eloquence and persuasiveness of the speaker. This person, who would have been formally trained in Greco-Roman rhetoric, might be a teacher, debater, or scribe (1 Cor. 1:20).
- J Foolishness (v. 14)**—The Greek word used here is *moria*, from which we get our English word *moron*. Greeks used the word to refer to something or someone inadequate, such as food that was practically tasteless due to inadequate seasoning or a person who was physically sluggish. Most commonly, though, it referred to evidence of low intellect or someone mentally weak or dull.
- K The mind of Christ (v. 16)**—This refers to the attitude and disposition that Jesus showed. Paul described this mindset; it would be marked by humility, servanthood, and obedience (Phil. 2:5-8).

Why is the Spirit the logical choice for helping believers understand spiritual truth? Why is it important to rely upon Him?

- ▶ Every believer has received God’s Spirit, who knows everything about God. It makes sense that He would be the best choice to help us understand “the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor. 2:12, KJV), which includes Scripture.
- ▶ Verse 14 tells us that without the Spirit, spiritual things are “foolishness.” Spiritual matters require a spiritual interpreter, and the Holy Spirit is ours. He interprets more than basic meanings—the Holy Spirit shows us how to apply these truths to our lives.

What are some spiritual truths that would seem like foolishness to an unbeliever? When has the Holy Spirit led you to apply Scripture to your life in a practical way?

BONUS: How would you describe the spirit of the world? How would you describe having the mind of Christ? (PSG, p. 29)

LIVE IT OUT

The Holy Spirit is our main advocate for discerning spiritual truth. Here are some things we can do to increase our reliance on Him.

- ▶ **Pray.** Before your small group session or worship, say a short prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to God’s truth and how you could apply it to your life.
- ▶ **Study.** Learn what Jesus taught us about the Holy Spirit by studying John 16:7-15. Look for ways the Holy Spirit is glorifying Jesus as you read God’s Word.
- ▶ **Reflect.** Record in a journal the insights the Holy Spirit gives to you as you study God’s Word. Choose one that you can start applying to your life and produce an action plan to implement it.

PRAY & REMEMBER

Lord, thank You for desiring to reveal to us Your truth and Your will. Help us understand Your truth and follow Your will. Guide us by Your Spirit that we might understand more about You and Your plans for us. Let 1 Corinthians 2:9 shape our hearts and minds—may it be a verse we carry and remember daily.

IN FOCUS: THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES US IN KNOWING HIS WILL.

BONUS IDEAS

This optional activity supports 1 Corinthians 2:9-11: The Holy Spirit reveals the mind of God.

This activity demonstrates our need for the Holy Spirit to help us understand God's will and apply His truth to our lives. On our own, His truth can be undiscernible, but the Holy Spirit can help us see it clearly.

Materials/Instructions Needed:

- **Before the session**, create a number code for the alphabet starting with A = 7, B = 8, and continuing in order until Z = 32.
- **Use this code** to spell out the phrase "the mind of Christ" in numbers. If you follow the suggested code, it will look like this: 26 14 11 19 15 20 10 21 12 9 14 24 15 25 26.
- **Create a postcard** for each person with the number code for "the mind of Christ." Then create a separate card or poster showing the full alphabet code, or simply tell them "A = 7" and let them figure out the rest.

DURING THE SESSION, distribute the cards to the group and give them two minutes to decipher the message. After two minutes, reveal the code. Let them decode the message and then say, *In the same way we needed the code to reveal the message, we need the Holy Spirit to reveal God's will.*

DIG DEEPER

Paul contrasted the wisdom of this age with the hidden wisdom of God. The Greco-Roman emphasis on eloquence and rhetorical flair—especially in cities like Corinth—set the stage for Paul's deliberate rejection of persuasive speech. He wanted the Corinthians to see that God's wisdom isn't discovered through human brilliance but is revealed through the Spirit.

While Paul challenged the cultural norms of his time, the value placed on eloquence and influence remains deeply relevant today. That's just one of many reasons why public speaking consistently ranks near the top of people's lists of greatest fears. For some, the thought of giving a speech or presentation can be paralyzing. Listening to a gifted speaker, though, can be life changing and motivate us to action. The ability to speak well and influence others was a skill highly valued in first-century Greco-Roman culture.

In larger cities, such as Alexandria, Ephesus, and Corinth, trained public speakers would often be heard in the marketplace, in the courtroom, at a civic gathering, a festival, or even a funeral. Oratorical competitions were not uncommon. The best speakers used colorful and emotional language, word plays, exaggerations, and verbal rhythmic

devices to move or persuade their audiences. This style of speaking was introduced to Athens in 427 BC by Gorgias, who was from Sicily and lived about 485–380 BC. In time, training in this type of public speaking became an essential part of Greek and later Roman education. In the first century BC, however, the pendulum began to swing in the opposite direction. Orators began to present direct, clearer, and more concise speeches.

The people of Corinth would have been accustomed to both the flowery and eloquent speeches and the more direct ones. Paul used the latter. In writing to the Corinthians, he said, "I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom. . . . My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (1 Cor. 2:1b,4).

One of the men mentioned in the New Testament, Apollos, evidently had formal oratorical training. Luke said of him: "Now a Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian, an eloquent man who was competent in the use of the Scriptures, arrived in Ephesus" (Acts 18:24). For a while, Apollos was also in Corinth (19:1). The people there would have known him, which explains why Paul mentioned him in 1 Corinthians (1:12; 3:4-6,22; 4:6; 16:12).

**"God's wisdom
isn't discovered
through human
brilliance but is
revealed through
the Spirit."**

Apollos was likely a more-skilled orator than Paul. However, Paul used several rhetorical devices in his writings, many of which are lost to us in translation—literally! We don't know whether Paul had formal training in oratory or learned from listening to others. Regardless, his writing, under the inspiration and leadership of the Holy Spirit, spoke to believers in Corinth in the first century and continues to speak to us where we are, now centuries later.