

The Word & The Spirit:

How God Speaks to You



Charles H. Huettner



A fresh and inspired way to learn how to hear what God wants to say to you based on what He has told eyewitnesses. This book will invite readers to engage with the Bible and God's Spirit real time. It will offer an opportunity for greater intellectual thought and spiritual feelings, and show that God wants to have a personal relationship with us. "It's not about you and the church, it's about you and God".

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Introduction:

If you are reading this, then God is calling you. His spirit is drawing you toward Him and this book. I offer you a fresh and inspired way to learn how to hear what God wants to say to you.

Are you someone who only believes in what you can see and touch; yet you have a feeling that there is something more. You might love your church and attend it regularly, but want to learn more than what you have in worship service. Perhaps you have never actually read the Bible and don't know where to begin. You might have had a bad experience in church or have been hurt by people who believe that they are acting in the name of religion. As a result, you may have turned away from the church, yet you still seek answers. That is what this book will provide. It will describe how God will speak to you. It's not about you and the church, its about you and God.

If we cut through all that is said about God, religion, and the Bible there is a central message that God has told eyewitnesses to tell us. This message sometimes gets overlooked in all the religious discussion. This book will provide you a big picture view that ties together scholarly work, Christian belief, and the Spirit's work in your life. The ideas presented here offer you a different frame of reference for your belief.

This book will invite you to engage with the Bible and God's Spirit real time. It will offer you an opportunity for greater intellectual thought and spiritual feelings. God also speaks to us through mathematics including relativity theory, quantum

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mechanics, and string theory. We will explore a common thread between Bible scholarship and scientific discovery.

God does care about you, and wants to have a personal relationship with you. Once you see the big picture, you begin to see that God is greater than we have imagined and come to understand the power of the Bible and the Holy Spirit in your life. The result for you will be a more joyful daily life, less fear of death, and strength to take action in the face of difficulties and opportunities.

In the development of this book I was inspired by a chart from an article by Carlos Mesters², *Listen to What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches*. In this article Dr. Mesters uses a chart to illustrate his ideas of “listening to God today” from his work with poor Christian communities in Brazil. Dr. Mesters’ Brazilian example of “Popular Interpretation” of the Bible makes the case that poor oppressed people can see the Bible as “a mirror or ‘symbol’ of what they live today”. ‘ If God was with those people then, in the past, then he is also with us now in this struggle we are waging to free ourselves.’ They discover that God-with-us is the heart of Scripture. Once this occurs, communities of believers read and interpret the Bible based on their situation and understanding. “The aim of interpretation is no longer to interpret the Bible, but to interpret life with the help of the Bible.” The results in the community are actions that are focused on service and, sometimes, political action. Service focuses the community back on the Scripture to gain further knowledge, which brings the community closer, leading to greater service as the circular process continues. The result of this process is how the community listens to God today. This is happening in over 6000 communities in Brazil.

² Article first appeared in *Concilium* 1(1991), pp. 100-11. The translator is Francis McDonagh.

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The first thing that struck me in reading Dr. Mester's essay was the similarities to the early churches that Paul founded. While the poor in Brazil see the Bible stories resembling them, I was seeing how the Brazilian stories resemble the early church. In the early church, people began meeting in homes, read Old Testament (OT) texts, and received the gospel of Christ by word of mouth, then through letters from Paul. The early believers became communities of believers and provided service to each other. Those early communities of believers formed the basis for church belief today. It appears that God's methods of speaking to us today are the same as they have been in the ancient past. Only the context is different.

This brings up the issue of what the Bible really is and how God uses it and the Holy Spirit to speak to each of us today. This is the basis of this book. Like Dr. Mester, I will use a chart that provides a model of how God communicates with us. The chart will be our big picture guide for this book.

Chapter 1. God's Communication Model

John 6:44 (NASB)

44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

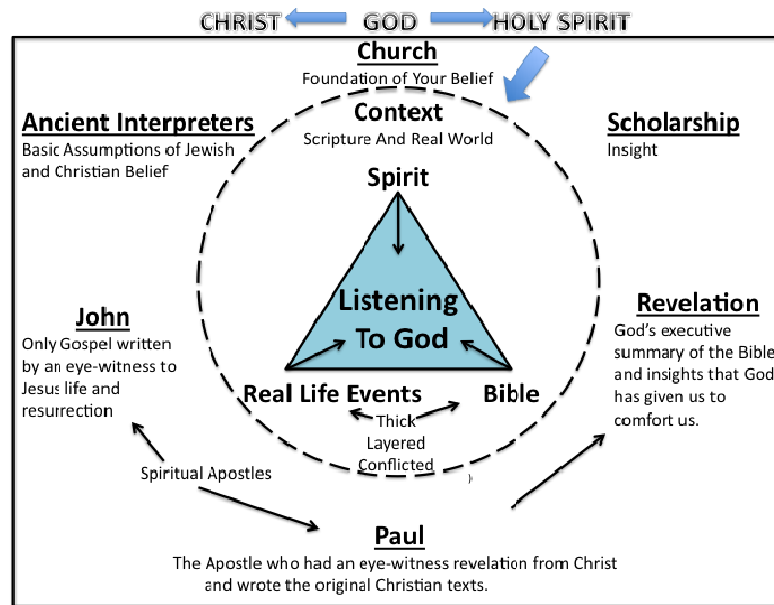
Growing up, I had a simplistic idea of God and the Bible. I thought that:

- the authors of the Bible were inspired by God to sit and write the words that have been translated into what we now read.
- the New Testament (NT) Gospels were written by eye witnesses to Jesus' life and resurrection,
- the Council of Nicea canonized the Bible as it is today,
- the Bible contains the single historical storyline that we are to believe, and
- that the scholars who discounted that story line were distracting us from the truth and our faith.

Almost all of this is wrong. The facts show that the three thousand year story of the Bible is much more complex. The surprise is that this complexity shows that God is greater than what we have imagined Him to be.

To understand how God speaks to you, we need to understand how He has spoken to our ancestors for thousands of years. Through study and awareness, we can come to a deeper understanding of the Bible and the work of God's Spirit in our lives today. I have developed the following model to help me tell the story and for you to use in your own efforts to listen to God. As we progress through this book, we will fill in the details behind this simple model. A copy of this chart is in Appendix 1 to which you may refer to as you read this book.

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I will briefly summarize the meaning of this chart. We will then devote a chapter to each section to provide the details. It would take a library to fully explain the concepts that are expressed in this chart. In fact, scholars have devoted their entire lives to studying individual aspects of what is captured here. My hope is that the chart will serve as a framework for your relationship with God. I will provide references to books that will help you dig deeper as we progress.

An adaptation of Dr. Mester's chart is the triangle in the center of this chart. His theme is how the communities in Brazil listen to God today. The Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the real world come together for us to listen to God today. God speaks to our heart, mind, and spirit. The key to understanding more about God and the Holy Spirit is to learn more about the Bible and its message to us. That is where the other parts of this chart become important.

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Surrounding the triangle in the center is the circle labeled context. There are actually two contexts involved. The first is the context of the passages before and after the scripture being focused on, and other parts of the Bible. The second is the background of the person or community searching for insights from the Bible. Both lead to greater insight into self and God's word, and are the field within which the Holy Spirit operates. I have also included Dr. Walter Brueggemann's concept of the three dimensions of both self and of the Biblical text - thick, layered, and conflicted. I will expand on this later.

Outside the circle are the primary forces that influence the Biblical context. We begin in the upper left corner with the Ancient Interpreters. There are four basic assumptions that form the foundation of what we believe today. From these interpretations, we move to the foundation of the Church. It began in people's homes. The early churches established the original interpretations of the Bible. When Constantine adopted Christianity, the church turned into the imperial Catholic Church with the trappings of imperial splendor. After the reformation, we see many denominations emerge based on their community of interpretation and belief. In some respect, it seems the church is coming full circle with scholars recognizing communities of belief reflecting early Christian churches. Church doctrine and theology have played and continue to play a large role in the context of how we read and understand the Bible. For most people, the church within which they were raised formed their basic belief in God.

The next place around the circle is Biblical scholarship. Scholarship adds insight and historical context to understanding the Bible. While scholar's search for many years has been to find a definitive answer to questions posed by Biblical text, it has actually shown that no single answer exists. In fact, Biblical

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scholarship has shown the Bible to be like the atom³, the deeper you look the more you find that there is no mass there, only energy and a probability of mass. Perhaps that says something about God. Yet scholarly insights do help us to understand the Bible better. For example, one of the lessons from scholarly research on the Apostle Paul is that Paul probably only wrote seven letters and that these letters are the oldest existing Christian texts. That brings us to the bottom of the circle on the graph.

Christ's revelation to Paul was also His revelation to us. We will devote an entire chapter to Paul.

The other spiritual apostle is John. The book of John has in it the basic information we need to believe in Jesus Christ. It says so itself.

Paul and John are the only authors in the Bible that Jesus spoke to directly.

But, there are many questions unanswered. That is where research into the book of Revelation comes in. The Holy Spirit worked to ensure that Revelation was written, made part of the canon, and not modified over the centuries for a reason. It contains God's executive summary of the Bible and insights that God has given us to comfort us and give us assurance during difficult times including the end-times as you will see.

Is it any wonder that man has not come to a definitive view of God's word with the combination of so many variables and contexts? I hope to show you that it is because of these variables that God is able to transform each of us according to His will.

³ See Appendix 2.

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This is a very brief overview of the chart from the inside out. We will begin our journey of understanding in reverse, from the outside in.

Let's begin with God.



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