

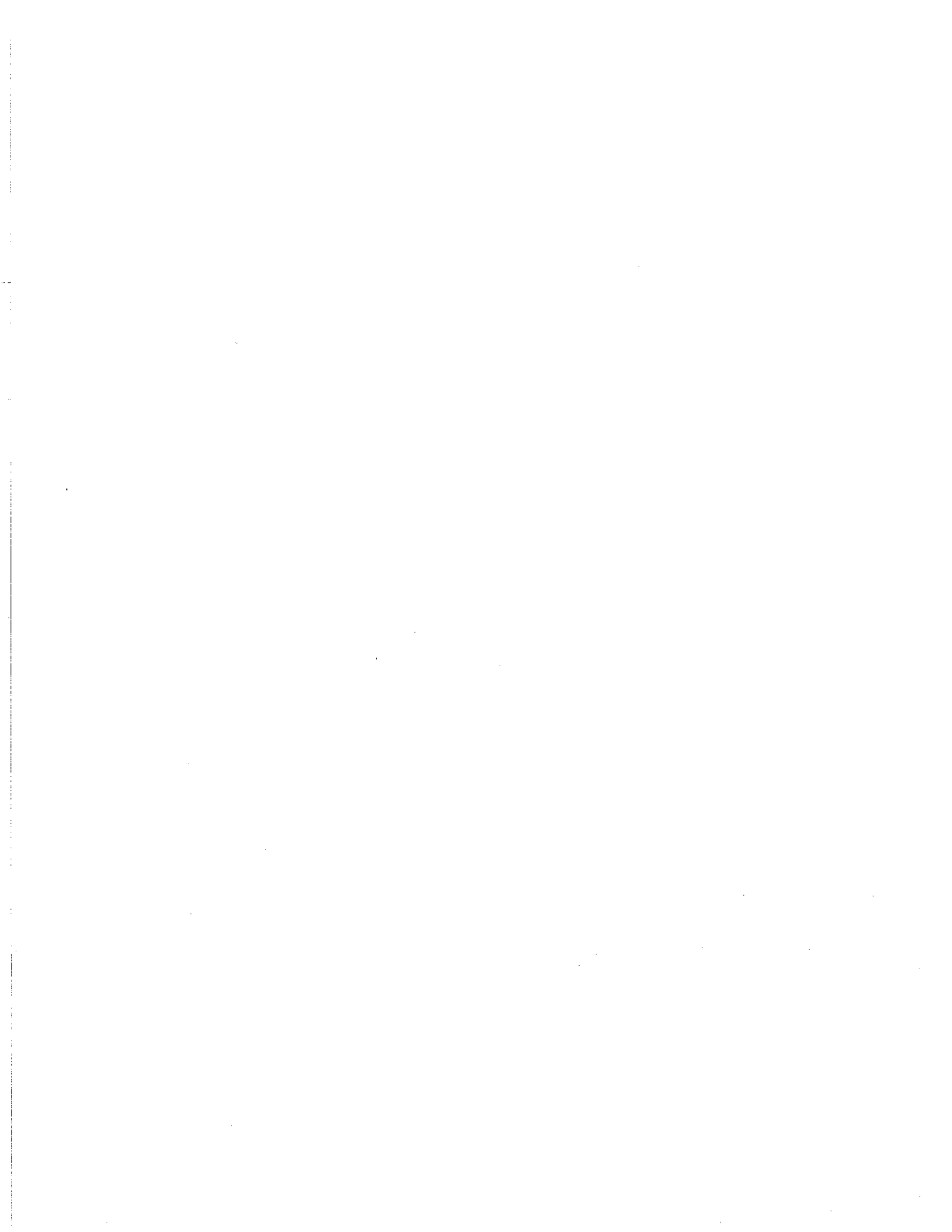
EXPERIENCING GOD

UNIT

10

VERSE TO MEMORIZE

10. "I will be a Father to the fatherless and a God to the orphan." — Psalm 146:3



God's Will and the Church

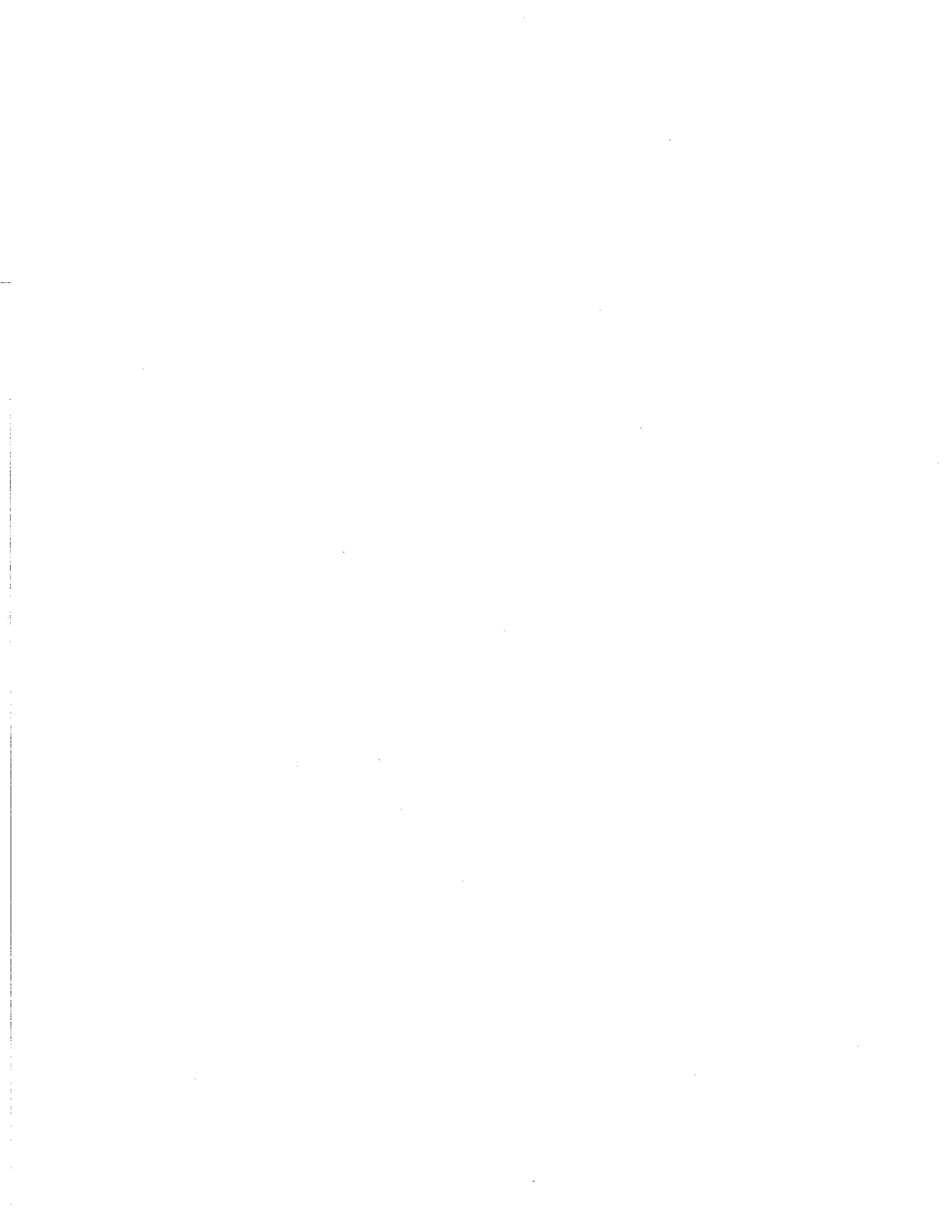
IVAH BATES WAS A "KNEE"

I've mentioned Ivah Bates before. A retired widow, she was one of the greatest pray-ers I have ever known. Our church was the body of Christ, and we called Ivah a knee. God put her in the body as a powerful pray-er.

When we had new believers in our church, Ivah taught them how to pray. She equipped many in our church to grow in their prayer lives. When we began our ministry to the university campus, Ivah didn't know how to reach college students. Our campus minister shared with Ivah how she could intercede for the campus. She did not change her role in the body but learned how to be the knee—the pray-er—for the campus. The students were told, "Whenever you are going to witness to somebody or have a particular assignment in our college ministry, tell Ivah about it. She will pray."

A student named Wayne said to Ivah, "Next Tuesday I will witness to Doug. Would you pray for me?" Ivah prayed through the noon hour while Wayne was witnessing. She did that every time the students told her what they were doing. The hand (Wayne) was touching the campus, but the whole body was fitly joined together to participate in that particular ministry. Each member functioned where God put it so the hand could be effective.

About three months later, a young man came down the aisle of our church during the altar call to place his trust in the Lord for salvation. I said to the congregation, "This is Doug. He has just become a Christian." I looked at Ivah, who was deeply moved and weeping. She had never met Doug, but she had prayed for him for three months. Who won Doug to the Lord? The body did!



DAY
I

The Church

WHEN A CHURCH
ALLOWS GOD'S PRE-
SENCE AND ACTIVITY
TO BE EXPRESSED, A
WATCHING WORLD
WILL BE DRAWN TO
HIM.

Church members need to know how to walk with God and to know how to hear Him speaking. They need to be able to identify things only God can do. As a pastor I was responsible for teaching members these things. During the first year of my ministry as a pastor, I took time to find out what God had been doing in the church before I arrived. Then I sought to lead members into the kind of relationship with God in which they understood what a church was and how it was to function.

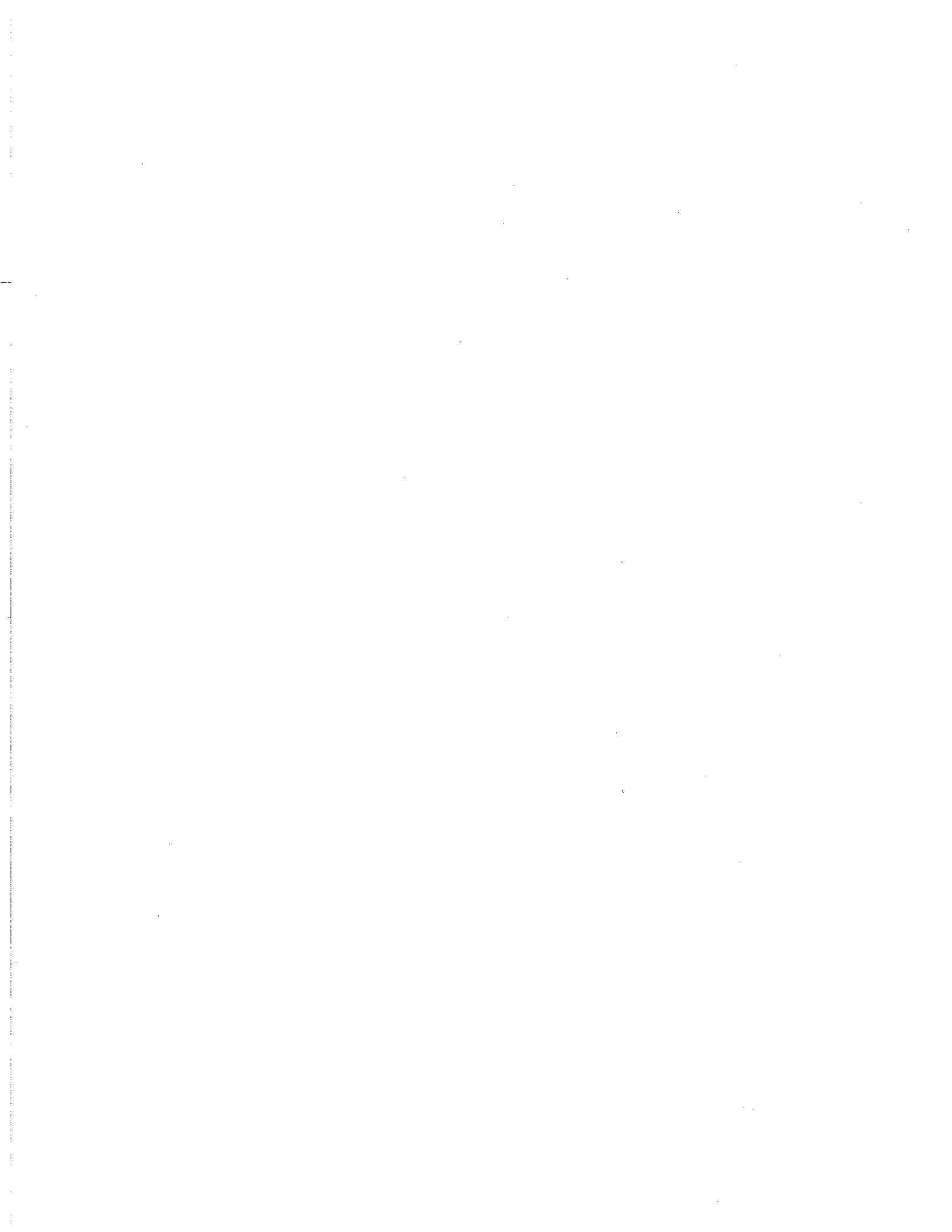
In the Bible God gave direction to people and enabled the spiritual leaders He called. These leaders then led the people. Their walk with God and their sensitivity to what God was doing among the people were crucial. A picture of this pattern is seen in Acts 6.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for Christianity in our day is for churches to walk with God so closely that the world comes to know Him through their witness. When a church allows God's presence and activity to be expressed through them, a watching world will be drawn to Him. How can your church be that kind of congregation? First you must understand who you are in relation to God and to one another:

1. A church is a creation of Christ. He builds His church (see Matt. 16:18), using Spirit-directed pastors and leaders (see Eph. 4:11-13); therefore, spiritual leaders and members should respect the pastor. God also arranges the members in the church according to His will (see 1 Cor. 12:18). Every member has been placed in the church according to God's plan to accomplish His purpose for that place and time.
2. A church is a living body of Christ with many members (see 1 Cor. 12:27). The church is not a building or an organization. It is a group of people built into a living body.
3. A church is uniquely related to Christ as Head of the body (see Eph. 1:22; 4:15-16). All matters in a church are to come under His lordship.
4. Members of a church are uniquely related to every other member of the church (see 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:11-16). All members are interdependent and need one another.
5. A church is on mission with Christ in our world to carry out the Father's redemptive purposes (see Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Cor. 5:17-20). "We are God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9).

1 In each of the following pairs of statements, one is human-centered, and one is God-centered. Check the God-centered statements.

- a. (1) An effective church is built by strong leadership, the active participation of the laity, and good organization.
- (2) Christ builds His church through the Holy-Spirit-empowered service of the pastor, other spiritual leaders, and members of His body.
- b. (1) Jesus Christ gives life to the church, which is His living body.
- (2) A church is a group of people who have been effectively organized into an institution in a local community.
- c. (1) Every church needs a CEO and a board of directors.
- (2) Christ is the Head of the church.



- d. (1) When the church gathers, members experience God at work in the body through the lives of other members.
 (2) Church attendance is important to show our support for the organization.
- e. (1) A church watches to see where God is at work and joins Him in His redemptive mission.
 (2) A church sets worthy and reachable goals, and members give their best to achieve them.

The God-centered statements are a-2, b-1, c-2, d-1, e-1. God works through the pastor, other spiritual leaders, and people in the church to accomplish His purposes. Many statements commonly used around churches indicate, however, that often we are extremely human-centered in our religious work. We give our human intelligence and abilities far more credit than they deserve. God is the One who gets the glory rightfully due Him for kingdom work.

Being Is More Important than Doing

Like individuals, churches are often more interested in what God wants them to do than in what He wants them to be. Being the kind of people who please God is far more important than doing something for Him. Yes, God wants a church to obey Him by doing what He asks. Yet He doesn't want a church to violate His commands to get a task done. Can you imagine how God must feel when a church splits because one group wanted to do something for God and the other group refused?

2 Circle your opinions below.

- a. God wants a church to complete an assigned task no matter what the cost to the church's unity. Yes No
- b. God wants His people to demonstrate love above all else. Yes No
- c. As long as a church is working for God, it can do it in whatever way it chooses. Yes No

For some people these are tough questions. Individuals often think a work for God can be done with whatever means are necessary. They don't hesitate to violate God's written will to accomplish something they think is His plan for them. God wants His people to be holy, clean, and pure. He desires unity in the church: "There should be no division in the body" (1 Cor. 12:25). He calls members to love one another, because the world will know we are His disciples by our love (see John 13:35). God will accomplish His work through His people in ways that are consistent with His commands and His nature. The New Testament expresses God's desires for the church. Keep these in mind as we study this unit together:

1. God wants His people to be holy and pure.
2. God wants His people to display unity.
3. God wants His people to love one another.

1. God wants His people to be holy and pure.
2. God wants His people to display unity.
3. God wants His people to love one another.

- God is always at work in and around a local church.
- God pursues a continuing love relationship with His church that is real and personal.
- God invites a church to become involved in His work.
- When a church sees where God is at work, that is its invitation to join Him.
- God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church.
- A church will face a crisis of belief when God invites it to become involved in a work only He can accomplish. Faith and action will be required.
- A church will have to make major adjustments to join God in His work.
- A church is totally dependent on God for accomplishing tasks of Kingdom value.
- Apart from God a church can do nothing of Kingdom value.
- As a church obeys God, it will come to know Him by experience as He does wonderful things through it.

3 Read the following Scriptures. Match each Scripture with one of the three statements in the margin. Write the number of the correct statement on the line beside each Scripture.

- ___ a. "I pray ... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me" (John 17:20-21,23).
- ___ b. "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us" (1 John 3:11,18,23).
- ___ c. "Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 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'" (1 Pet. 1:14-16).
- ___ d. "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life" (Phil. 2:14-16).
- ___ e. "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

4 How would you evaluate your church's faithfulness to these commands? Is your church holy, pure, united, and loving? Write your response

Answers are a-2, b-3, c-1, d-1, e-2.

Knowing and Doing God's Will as a Church

5 Much of what you have studied about experiencing God applies to churches as well as individuals. Review the statements in the left margin that have been restated from a church perspective.

The list could go on. In spite of these similarities, the way a church comes to know God's will and the way an individual comes to know God's will are different. A church is the body of Christ. A body functions as one unit with spiritual leaders and members. All are interdependent; they need one another. Each leader and member of the body needs the others to fully know God's will. Each member has a role in the body (see Gal. 6:1-5), and each leader has a responsibility to equip the members of the body (see Eph. 4:11-13). The pastor is responsible *for* the body as well as *to* the body.

Suppose your eye said to your body, "Let's walk down these train tracks (see the diagram in the opposite margin). The way is all clear. Not a train is in sight." So you begin to walk down the tracks.

Then suppose your ear says to the body, "I hear a whistle in the distance behind us."

Your eye argues, "But nothing is on the track as far as *I* can see. Let's keep on walking." So your body listens only to your eye and keeps on walking.

Soon your ear says, "That whistle is getting louder and closer!"

Then your feet say, "I can feel the rumbling motion of a train coming. We better get our body off these tracks!"

6 If this were your physical body, what would you do? Check your response.

- a. I would get off the train tracks as soon as possible!
- b. I would take a vote of all my body parts and let the majority rule.
- c. I would try to ignore the conflict and hope it went away.
- d. I would trust my eye and keep on walking. My eye has never let me down yet.

That may have seemed like a silly question. God gave our bodies many different senses and parts. When each member does its job, the whole body works the way it should. In our physical bodies we do not take votes based on majority rule, ignore conflicting senses, or listen only to one sense and ignore the others. To live that way would be extremely dangerous.

Because a church is the body of Christ, it functions best when spiritual leaders and members share with one another what they sense God wants the church to be and do. A congregation needs to hear the whole counsel of God through its spiritual leaders and members. Then it can proceed in confidence and unity to do God's will.

7 Briefly summarize the difference between the way a church comes to know God's will and the way an individual comes to know God's will.

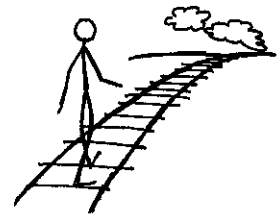
8 What questions do you have about the way a church comes to know God's will? _____

9 Your memory verse for this unit focuses on the church as a body. Write it in the margin and begin memorizing it. Then review your other memory verses.

When God wants to reveal His will to a church, He begins by speaking to one or more individuals. Because of the nature of his call and assignment from God, this is often the pastor, although it may be another member of the body. The pastor's job is to bear witness to the church about what he senses God is saying. Other members may also express what they believe God is communicating. The whole body looks to Christ—the Head of the church—for guidance. He guides all members of the body to fully understand His will.

You may have questions about how to practice these principles in your church. A church of 50 members would do this differently than one with 5,000 members. The most important factor is not a method but a relationship with a Person. Christ, the Head of His church, knows how each one can work uniquely with Him to understand His will. The Jerusalem church had more than 3,000 members, and Christ accomplished His work through them, with the guidance of the apostles as spiritual leaders.

As God moved and expressed His will to our church members, I guided them as their pastor to share with the other members of the body what they saw God doing. Everyone was given opportunities to testify, and each was encouraged to respond as God guided him or her. This happened not only in worship (usually at the close of a service) but also in prayer meetings, committee meetings, business meetings, Sunday School classes, home Bible studies, and personal conversations. Many called the church office and shared what God had said to them in their quiet times. Still others related



SUMMARY STATEMENTS

When a church allows God's presence and activity to be expressed, a watching world will be drawn to Him.

A church is on mission with Christ in our world carrying out the Father's redemptive purposes.

God wants His people to be holy and pure.

God wants His people to display unity.

God wants His people to love one another.

No one individual has the total vision for God's will for a local church.

A church needs to hear the whole counsel of God through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church.

Sharing what God is doing in my life may help someone else encounter God in a meaningful way.

what they had experienced at work or at school. The entire church became experientially and practically aware of Christ's presence in our midst.

10 When are some times members of a church body could tell others what they sense God wants the church to be and do? Include ideas from the previous paragraph and any other suggestions you may have.

11 Does your church take time for members of the body to share with the church what they sense God wants the congregation to be and do? Yes No If so, when? _____

Sharing what God is doing in your life may help someone else encounter God in a meaningful way. For example, when someone was led to make a significant commitment to the Lord in one of our services, I gave that person an opportunity to share with the body. Sometimes that testimony prompted others to respond in a similar way.

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

DAY
2

Discerning God's Will as a Body

A CHURCH COMES TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD WHEN THE WHOLE BODY UNDERSTANDS WHAT CHRIST—THE HEAD—IS TELLING IT.

1 Review day 5 in unit 6, "God Speaks Through the Church" (pp. 128-30). Write the most meaningful statement or Scripture you identified in that lesson. _____

The church does not come to know God's will in exactly the same way an individual does. Individuals come to know God's will through an intimate love relationship with God. The Holy Spirit speaks through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church

to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways. A church comes to understand God's will when the whole body hears what Christ—the Head—is telling it.

2 How does an individual come to know God's will? _____

3 How does your church currently make decisions about what to be and do? _____

Before Pentecost (in the New Testament), the Holy Spirit did not dwell in the lives of all God's people. He came only on chosen individuals to accomplish God's purposes. In the Old Testament God spoke to His people through a leader—a judge, a prophet, a priest, or a king. For instance, God told Moses His will for **Israel**, and Moses told the people what they were to do. Israel then did what Moses said (most of the time; for an example see **Num. 9:1-5**).

4 In the Old Testament how did Israel come to know God's will? _____

With the coming of the Holy Spirit on **the church** at Pentecost, God came to dwell in every believer. He created the body—a local church—so every member needed every other member. In the body of Christ, each believer has direct access to God. God can speak to any and every member of the congregation. He works through the whole body to reveal His will.

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit also led the apostles as they guided the church. God led the members and leaders in mutual interdependence as they served and made decisions. These New Testament examples illustrate joint decision making under Christ's lordship:


- Choosing Judas's replacement (see Acts 1:12-26)
- Selecting the seven (see Acts 6:1-7)
- Peter's witness to the Gentile conversions (see Acts 11:1-18)
- Sending out Barnabas and Saul (see Acts 13:1-3)
- The Jerusalem Council (see Acts 15:1-35)

Notice in these examples that different methods were used to arrive at corporate decisions. For example, the Jerusalem Council settled an important doctrinal and practical issue. After Peter and James had spoken, the "whole assembly ... listened to Barnabas and Paul" (Acts 15:12) also. "Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided" (Acts 15:22). "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28).

When God speaks to people about the church, they should relate to the body what they sense God is saying. As members tell what God is saying, the whole body goes to God in prayer to discern His will. In His timing God confirms to the body what He is saying. Individual opinions are not that important. God's will is crucial. No single method can be given for discerning God's will as a body. Pastors, other church leaders, and members are to have such deep relationships with God and the church that spiritual guidance is the outcome. When Christ guides each spiritual leader member of the body to function properly, the whole body knows and is enabled to do God's will.

Numbers 9:1-5

"The Lord spoke to Moses. ... 'Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover. ...' So Moses told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover, and they did so. ... The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses."


**The Head
 does the
 convincing on
 His timetable.**

5 The church is a body, and every leader and member has direct access to God. Which of the following describes the way a church should relate to God to understand His will? Check your response.

- a. The church should trust the pastor to hear from God on its behalf.
- b. Members of the church should present their opinions about what the church should be and do, then debate the issues. Then they vote and let the majority rule.
- c. The pastor, leaders, and members should pray and ask God for guidance. Then each person shares what he or she senses God is saying to the church. All the leaders and members then look to the Head of the body—Christ—and continue praying until Christ has convinced them of His will.
- d. Other: _____

A church learns God's will when the whole body comes to understand what Christ wants it to do. For a church, knowing God's will may involve many members, not just one, although God often speaks to leaders about what He wants to do. The leaders then share with the body what they sense God is saying. The leader does not have to try to convince the church that this is God's will, nor does he have to ask the congregation to follow him without question. The leader encourages the body to go to Christ and get confirmation from the Head—Christ. The Head does the convincing on His timetable. Then the whole body follows Christ. This is why a church must learn to function as a body with Christ as its Head.

A new mission church agreed to buy land for its first building. The pastor led the church to purchase the land based on promises made by the realtor. Problems arose for the church because the realtor did not keep his commitments after closing the deal. The group ran into financial problems and grew discouraged. Finally, the pastor brought the church together and told them about the negotiations and problems. Two members said, "Pastor, we knew the realtor was dishonest because he has deceived us in business dealings before. We were afraid to disagree with your plans because it would have appeared that we were opposing God." Fortunately, God was gracious, and the problems were eventually resolved. This incident points out, however, that the church needs to function as a body, with every member free to share what he or she knows or senses as God's will.

6 How does a church come to know God's will? Write a brief summary.

Church Decision Making

When God gave directions to our church in Saskatoon, He often provided them through members other than me, who sensed a clear direction of God and shared it with the body. We created opportunities for people to testify to what they sensed God was leading us to be or do. Our desire was not to find out who was for it and who was against it. In our business meetings we never took a vote, asking, "How many of you are for this, and how many of you are against it?" That is the wrong question. Every time you ask that question, you have a divided church, and you have acted as if our own opinions are more important than God's.

The right question is "With all the information we have heard and all our prayers, how many of you sense God is clearly directing us to proceed in this direction as a body?" This is a different question. It does not ask members for their opinions. It asks them to vote based on what they sense God is saying to His church. On critical issues we never voted at the time we discussed the issue. After discussion we would take time to pray and seek the mind of Christ.

Suppose 55 percent of the members voted, saying, "Yes, we sense God is clearly leading us to proceed in this direction." Forty-five percent voted saying, "We do not sense God is clearly leading us in this direction." What did we do? We never proceeded. That vote told me two things: (1) God seemed to be leading us in that direction. (2) However, the timing wasn't right, because the Head had not yet brought the rest of the body to the same sense of leading. We prayed, worked, and watched. We let the Head bring the body to understand what He wanted to do through us. God was in charge and was present to bring us to one mind and heart (see Rom. 15:5-6; 1 Cor. 1:10). We trusted Him to do that.

People often ask, "Did you always wait until you got a 100 percent vote?" No, I knew one or more members could be out of fellowship with the Lord and couldn't hear His voice. Others might be purposely disobedient. However, we usually waited until the votes were almost unanimous.

I did not get angry or disappointed with those who did not agree with the rest of the body. Their disagreement indicated they might have a fellowship problem with the Lord. As the pastor I would place my life alongside them to see how God might want to work through me to help them return to proper fellowship with the Lord. I always prayed through this situation carefully and responded only as the Lord led me.

7 Reflect on the following questions and check your response.

- a. Do you believe it is practical for God to bring the body to one heart and one mind about His will? Yes No
- b. Do you believe God is able to bring His people to understand His will? Yes No
- c. Do you believe God is able to bring your church to this kind of unity? Yes No
- d. Would you be willing to wait on God until He has had time to adjust the members of the body to His will? Yes No


One evening I received a long-distance call from a man who told me he was at his church, where revival had broken out. He related that the church had scheduled a special business meeting that evening to address some extremely contentious issues. Spent words had flared, and people had leveled angry accusations at one another. Someone rose and tried to restore unity to the troubled and divided church. He shared and some others were meeting on Sunday evenings and studying *Experiencing Christ*. The hour before the business meeting that night, they had watched a video explaining how a church was to function. He suggested they all take a break from the meeting and watch a portion of the video. As they watched, the Holy Spirit came upon many members who had not acted in a Christlike manner. During the video segment, people rose and apologized for their behavior. The members were reconciled, and revival broke out. What had seemed



The right question is "How many of you sense God is clearly directing us to proceed in this direction as a body?"

1 Corinthians 1:10

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought."



As a body we
must wait on
God's timing.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

A church comes to know God's will when the whole body understands what Christ—the Head—is telling it.

Every believer has direct access to God.

impossible only moments before was now occurring as God's people returned their focus to Him and His purposes for their church.

This may be another place where you have reached a crisis of belief. Ask God for help through this one. Can God bring a whole church to a sense of unity about His will? Yes: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6).

8 What is God saying to you through the previous two verses?

Good directions from God may be lost by missing God's timing. Not only does a church need to know *what* God wants it to do, but it also needs to know *when* He wants it to act. As a body we must wait on God's timing. God will seek to adjust us to Himself. Waiting on God develops confident patience in the Lord and loving trust in one another.

Real Motivation

I never tried to get members merely to support an organization, a program, or a person. Rather, I challenged them to ask God what He wanted. When they knew what God intended, the only realistic option was faithful obedience. That obedience could be and was often expressed through an organization, a program, or a ministry of the church.

9 Which one of the following actions will best motivate God's people to faithful obedience to God's will? Check your response.

- Ask them to find out what God wants as they walk in an intimate love relationship with Him. When He clearly speaks, they should obey Him.
- Ask them to support a program promoted by the denomination.
- Ask them to unquestioningly yield to their pastor's leadership.
- Ask them to go along with a committee's recommendation.
- Tell them, "I have a word from God" and expect them to accept it.

The churches I served had many traditions. I kept teaching until the Spirit of God, who is our common Teacher, brought us to one heart and one mind. We began to release ourselves to Him and to let God take all the time He needed. I believed my responsibility as a pastor was to lead God's people into such close relationships with Jesus Christ they would clearly know when He was speaking. Then I asked them to obey God, not follow a program, an influential lay leader, a committee, or me. God the Holy Spirit is a Christian's real Motivator.

Our business meetings became some of the most exciting times in the life of our church. People knew that at the business meeting we would clearly see God's directions and activity. They wanted to come to these meetings because they were such thrilling moments for our church to see God reveal His purposes and His ways to us.

The church is a body with Christ as its Head. The Spirit of God guides every believer. His indwelling presence can teach us and guide us. I always allowed my understanding of God's will to be tested in the life of the congregation, not because of what I thought the people were but because of what I knew the church was.

When I sensed God wanted our church to do something, as pastor I always ask the church family to work through it with me. If the people walked with God, I co

trust God to guide them. This is true for pastors and other church members as well. If the people did not walk in right fellowship with God, I depended on God to guide me in helping them become what He wanted them to be. God doesn't give up on His people, so neither did I.

Individual opinions are not that important. God's will is crucial.

A church must learn to function as a body with Christ as the Head of His church.

A church must wait on God's timing.

10 What is God saying to you about your church and the way it currently makes decisions? _____

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

The Body of Christ, Part I

DAY
3

Paul wrote to the church in Rome and gave the members instructions about how the body of Christ should function in relation to one another. A church needs to learn to act as the body of Christ. Paul's instructions will help you relate to your church as a member of Christ's body.

A CHURCH NEEDS TO LEARN TO FUNCTION AS THE BODY OF CHRIST.

1 Turn in your Bible to Romans 12. Read the verses listed below and answer the questions.

a. Verses 1-2: What two things did Paul recommend to members of the body so the whole body would be able to discern God's will?

- Offer your bodies as _____
- Do not conform, but be transformed by _____

b. Verses 3,10,16: What are specific things you can do to prevent problems caused by pride? _____

Romans 12:9-21

- Love others sincerely.
- Bless those who persecute you.
- Hate evil.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice.
- Cling to what is good.
- Mourn with those who mourn.
- Be devoted to one another.
- Live in harmony with one another.
- Honor one another.
- Don't be proud or conceited.
- Serve the Lord with zeal.
- Associate with people of low position.
- Be joyful in hope.
- Don't repay evil for evil.
- Be patient in affliction.
- Do what is right.
- Be faithful in prayer.
- Don't take revenge.
- Share with God's people in need.
- Overcome evil with good.
- Practice hospitality.



The Holy Spirit
is the Gift.

c. Verses 4-6: "Members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts." Why are other members of the body important to you?

d. Verse 5 is your Scripture-memory verse this week. Write it below and begin memorizing it. _____

e. Verses 9-21: Which of the many instructions given in these verses do you think members of your church need to practice more than they do? Read the list in the margin and check all that apply.

Living sacrifices and renewed minds are necessary to "test and approve what God's will is" (v. 2). Pride causes problems in the body. You should think of yourself with sober judgment, honor others above yourself, live in harmony, and associate with people of low position. Church members need to practice all of the instructions given in verses 9-21. Warning: following these instructions can be costly!

2 Pause to pray for specific ways God may want your church to act more like the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit Equips Each Member to Function in the Body

The first part of 1 Corinthians 12 says the Holy Spirit enables each member. Verse 7 says, "To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). The Holy Spirit is the Gift (see Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit manifests (makes visible, clear, known; reveals) Himself to each member of the body for the common good of the body.

3 Check the correct answer to each of the following questions.

a. To whom does the Spirit manifest Himself?

- Only to a few spiritual individuals
- Only to church leaders
- To every believer

b. Why does the Holy Spirit manifest Himself to believers?

- So the individual can be blessed
- So the individual can fulfill his or her ministry
- So the whole body can benefit from His work

Did you check the last item in both questions? Good! All members of the church—Christ's body—are gifted with the Holy Spirit's presence. Each person's experience of the Holy Spirit is for the good of the entire body, not for himself or herself. That is why we need one another. Without a healthy, functioning body, a church will miss much of what God provides for a church.

The Old Testament is the kindergarten for understanding the Holy Spirit's work. In the Old Testament the Spirit came on individuals to help them achieve particu-

lar assignments God had given them. Moses had a task as an administrator, so God equipped him by His Holy Spirit to administer.

God gave each of the judges an assignment. Then the Spirit of God came on each one and equipped him or her to complete the assignment that was given. David was called to be the king when he was a shepherd. How could such a young, inexperienced man rule during that dangerous time? The Spirit of God came on him and equipped him for the task. Ezekiel was called to be a prophet. How could he be a prophet? Scripture says the Spirit of God came on him and caused him to do everything God asked of him (see Ezek. 2-3).

Here is the pattern we see in the Old Testament:

1. God gave an assignment to a person.
2. God gave the Holy Spirit to that person to equip him or her to accomplish the task.
3. The proof of the Spirit's presence was that the person was able to complete the assignment effectively through His supernatural enabling.

The workmen who built the tabernacle clearly illustrate this pattern. God gave Moses specific details for building the tabernacle (see Ex. 25-31). Then God said, "I have chosen **Bezalel** son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts. Moreover, I have appointed **Oholiab** ... to help him. Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you" (Ex. 31:2-3,6). How would Moses know whether the Spirit of God was on those men? He watched them at work. If God enabled them to carry out the assignment He had given, Moses would know God's Spirit was on them.

Throughout the Old Testament the Spirit of God was always present to equip individuals to carry out divine assignments. God didn't give things. He gave Himself. The Spirit manifested His presence by equipping people to function where God assigned them.

4 What is the pattern for the Holy Spirit's work in the Old Testament? Use the hints below and describe the pattern.

Assignment: _____

The Gift: _____

The proof: _____

When members of a church begin considering spiritual gifts, they sometimes run into difficulty by thinking God gives them a *thing*, like an ingredient called administration. He doesn't give a thing; He gives Himself. The Gift is a Person. The Holy Spirit equips you with *His* administrative ability so His administration becomes your administration. When you see a spiritual gift exercised, you are observing a manifestation of the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit equipping and enabling an individual with His abilities to accomplish God's work.

5 Read John 14:10 and 1 Corinthians 12:7 in the margin. Which of the following is the better definition of spiritual gift? Check your response.

- A spiritual gift is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit at work in and through a person's life for the common good of the body of Christ.
- A spiritual gift is a special ability God gives a person so he or she can accomplish the work God has assigned to the church.

John 14:10

"It is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work."

1 Corinthians 12:7

"To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

The Holy Spirit is the Gift.

A spiritual gift is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit at work in and through a person's life for the common good of the body of Christ.

The Spirit decides whom to give assignments and enables spiritual leaders and members to accomplish His work.

God puts spiritual leaders and members in the body where He wants them to be.

The body is not complete without all the spiritual leaders and members God has given the body.

Members of the body should have equal concern for one another.

Spiritual leaders and members of the body have different assignments from God for the good of the whole body.

Jesus said, "It is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work" (John 14:10). Even in Jesus' miracles the Father was manifesting Himself. The Father was in Jesus, and He worked through Jesus to accomplish His purposes. The first definition above focuses on God and what He does through us. The second definition focuses more on what I receive so I can do something for God or His church. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). A spiritual gift is a manifestation of God at work through you.

The Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12

The first part of 1 Corinthians 12 says the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in different ways. He reveals Himself in every believer. The second part of that chapter talks about the body.

6 Read the following list of summary statements. Then read 1 Corinthians 12:11-31 and try to find at least one verse that supports each statement. Write the numbers of the verses beside the statements.

Verse(s) _____ a. The Holy Spirit decides whom to give assignments and enables each spiritual leader and member to accomplish God's work.

Verse(s) _____ b. The body is a single unit made up of many parts.

Verse(s) _____ c. Members of the body do not determine their roles in the body.

Verse(s) _____ d. God puts spiritual leaders and members in the body where He wants them to function.

Verse(s) _____ e. The body is not complete without all the spiritual leaders and members God has given the body.

Verse(s) _____ f. Members of the body need every other member of the body.

Verse(s) _____ g. The body should be united as one, not divided.

Verse(s) _____ h. Members of the body should have equal concern for one another.

Verse(s) _____ i. Spiritual leaders and members of the body have different assignments from God for the good of the whole body.

You may have identified fewer verses or different verses, but here are some possible answers: a, verse 11; b, verses 12-14; c, verses 15-17; d, verse 18; e, verses 17-20; f, verses 21-24; g, verse 25; h, verses 25-26; i, verses 28-30.

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

The Body of Christ, Part 2

DAY
4

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, a local body of believers, "You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12:27). Just as your physical body needs every part in order to experience a normal and healthy life, the church depends on every member in order to live a normal, healthy church life. No member can say of any other member, "I don't need you." Apart from the other members of the church (the body) you will not be able to experience the fullness of life God intends for you. When one member is missing or is not functioning as God designed, the rest of the body will miss the fullness of life God provides for the church.

God places members in the body as it pleases Him. If He makes a person an "eye," the Holy Spirit will equip him to see. If God makes a person an "ear," the Holy Spirit will equip her to hear. If He makes a person a "hand," the Holy Spirit will equip him to function as a hand. In New Testament Scriptures describing the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit's work enables a person to function in the assignment where God puts him in the body. Not every member is an apostle, a prophet, a teacher, and so forth, but each one has a God-given function. Each one serves where God puts him or her in the body so the whole body works together as it should.

When I was a pastor, a woman in my church approached me and said she wanted to lead the church's hospital-visitation ministry. I soon discovered that despite her enthusiasm, God had not equipped her for that ministry! When I stopped by the hospital, I discovered church members weeping because this misguided woman had visited them! She invariably told the sick church member that she knew someone else who previously had the same illness—and the person had died!

I had to gently take this sincere woman aside and tell her that the Holy Spirit had clearly not equipped her for a hospital ministry. However, I said, I had noticed that God always seemed to answer when she prayed. I asked her if she would be willing to serve as an intercessor. She agreed. I gave her a long list of names of people who were not Christians to whom our church was ministering and asked her to pray for them. Soon we regularly began to see those people coming to faith in Christ. The church and I grew to depend on her for prayer about every major need in the church. Even after I left that church, I continued to call and ask her to lift me up in prayer. God had uniquely equipped this woman for a special ministry in her church body, but she needed her pastor to help her find where that place was.

I UNDERSTAND THE
WILL OF GOD FOR
MY CHURCH WHEN
I LISTEN TO THE
WHOLE BODY EX-
PRESS WHAT THEY
ARE EXPERIENCING
IN THE LIFE OF THAT
BODY.

- 1** On the following page are some statements church members might make. They may reflect an incorrect view of the church as the body of Christ. If you heard a member of your church make the statement on the left, which biblical principle on the right could you use to help the person understand how God intends for the church to function? You may list more than one principle that may apply. Write the number of the principle beside each statement on the left. If you agree with a statement, write agree beside it. If you have serious questions about any of the statements, write your questions in the discussion in your small-group session.

Statements

- _____ a. "I think we should clean up our church's rolls and get rid of the names of people who don't attend anymore."
- _____ b. "Bill got himself into trouble by breaking the law. It serves him right to spend time in jail."
- _____ c. "I think I should be elected as the chairman of the deacons. After all, I have been a faithful member of this church for 25 years."
- _____ d. "If I can't be a Sunday School teacher, I'll just quit coming to this church."
- _____ e. "I don't care that the rest of the church thinks God is leading them to ask me to serve in that role. I have never been a _____, and I know I couldn't do it. I don't have the necessary talents."
- _____ f. "If those 10 families can't agree with the majority, that's tough. In this church the majority rules. If they don't like what we are doing, they can go somewhere else."
- _____ g. "Because God has told me what His will is for this church, you should listen to me. Anybody who doesn't agree with me is unspiritual and outside God's will."

Principles

1. The Spirit decides whom to give assignments and enables members to accomplish His work.
2. The body is a single unit made up of many parts.
3. Members of the body do not determine their roles in the body.
4. God puts members in the body where He wants them to be.
5. The body is not complete without all the members God has given the body.
6. Members of the body need every other member of the body.
7. The body should be united as one, not divided.
8. Members of the body should have equal concern for one another.
9. Members of the body have different assignments from God for the good of the whole body.

I believe each of these statements may reflect an incorrect understanding of the church as the body of Christ. Some of the principles I would use are a-5, 6; b-8; c-3, 4; d-1, 3; e-1; f-7; g-2, 5, 6. Anytime you evaluate the way a church body functions, you should keep at least three concerns in mind:

God's Concerns for the Body of Christ

1. Jesus is the Head of the body. The body ought to be Christ-centered.
2. God wants the body to maintain unity and oneness of heart.
3. Love like that described in 1 Corinthians 13 should prevail. Members of the body ought to love one another as they love themselves.

2 In the list of three concerns above, circle one or two key words in each that might help you remember them. As you read the following responses, underline statements that will help you function correctly

in the body of Christ. If you have questions or concerns, write them in the margin for discussion in your small-group session.

Statement a. "I think we should clean up our church's rolls and get rid of the names of people who don't attend anymore." The first question this church needs to ask is, Are these people members of the body of Christ—are they Christians? If God added them to your body because that is where He wanted them (see 1 Cor. 12:18), do you have a right to delete them? A church needs all the members God has given the body (principles 5 and 6). This church should pray and ask God to show them how to reclaim these wayward members for active fellowship.

Statement b. "Bill got himself into trouble by breaking the law. It serves him right that he has to spend time in jail." When one member suffers, everyone feels the pain (see 1 Cor. 12:26), even if the suffering is the consequence of sin. Members of Christ's body are commanded to love one another. Read 1 Corinthians 13 to see how love would respond in the body. Show concern for all members of the body (principle 8).

3 Are you remembering to underline statements that will help you function rightly in the body of Christ? Be sure to do so.

Statement c. "I think I should be elected as the chairman of the deacons. After all, I have been a faithful member of this church for 25 years." This could be a self-centered desire. We serve in the church by God's assignment (principles 3 and 4). We do not choose our own function. If God intends for you to serve in a particular capacity, the Head, Jesus Christ, can bring the rest of the body to recognize that. Will you trust Him to do that through your church?

Statement d. "If I can't be a Sunday School teacher, I'll quit coming to this church." The church needs to be sensitive to what others sense God may be leading them to do. Principles 1 and 3 focus attention on the fact that God is the One to decide where someone functions in the body. Trust Him to let the body know. A nominating committee for church-leadership positions must prayerfully discern God's will. Both the individual and the church must carefully seek God's will and trust Him to make His will clear.

Statement e. "I don't care that the rest of the body thinks God is leading them to ask me to serve in that role. I have never been a _____, and I know I couldn't do it. I don't have the necessary talents." One problem we face in the body is that we seldom see God at work. We just see people. I try to see God at work in His people. Principle 1 points out that the Holy Spirit enables a person to carry out any assignment God gives him or her. Just because you have never done something before or because you don't think you have the skills does not necessarily mean God is not giving you that assignment. Moses gave some objections like this one when God was calling him at the burning bush. Take very seriously what the body believes to be God's will. Talk to the Lord about what the body senses about you and trust God to guide you correctly.

Be willing to respond as to the Lord. Serve with all your heart as to the Lord. That assignment in your church could become an exciting place of God's activity. Don't do it just to fill a job. Do it because your Lord has led you to.

Can teaching unruly teenage boys become a special assignment from God? After I began teaching teenage boys at a church in California, 23 leather-teenagers walked into the church at the end of an evening service. None were Christians. God had put me in the midst of a group of hurting young men. Three months later 22 of the 23 teenagers had come to saving faith in Christ.



A church needs
all the mem-
bers God has
given the body.



God decides
where someone
should function
in the body.

Their changed lives broke up a gang called **the Untouchables**, and the crime rate dramatically dropped in the low-rent housing area where they lived. God can take your service in any part of the church body to impact your congregation and your world for Him.

God can display Himself anywhere in your church you are willing to let Him place you. Ask God to fill that ministry in the life of the church with His presence. You could become the catalyst to turn your church completely upside down.

4 In statements a–e review the things you underlined that might help you function more effectively in the body of Christ. Which one strikes you as the most important for your life right now?

John 17:20-21

"My prayer is ... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Statement f. "If those 10 families can't agree with the majority, that's tough. In this church the majority rules. If they don't like what we are doing, they can go somewhere else." The church functions by the rule of the Head—Jesus Christ. We often settle for majority rule because we don't want to wait until the Head has time to convince the body of His will. If we are willing to sacrifice the unity of the body so the majority can have its way, we are not taking 1 Corinthians 12:25 (principle 7) seriously. Didn't Jesus pray for the unity of the church in **John 17** so the world would believe in Him? We ought to have a similar burden for unity. Give Jesus—the Head—time to do the convincing. When He has brought the body to an understanding of His will, His timing will be perfect for you to proceed! Each member is precious to God. In God's kingdom, *how* you do something is as important as *what* you do.

Statement g. "Because God has told me what His will is for this church, you should listen to me. Anybody who doesn't agree with me is unspiritual and outside God's will." Principles 2, 5, and 6 apply here. When the eye begins to see, the eye has a tendency to say, "Hand, why don't you see what I see? You're not spiritual." Then the hand says, "I can't see because I'm a hand." The eye has forgotten that the body is not one part but many (see 1 Cor. 12:14). The Spirit of God manifests Himself to every person. Why? For the common good. When the eye sees, it is not for the eye alone. His sight is for the body. Sight is not for the eye's sake so he can say, "I thank God I have the gift of seeing. I wish all the rest of you did too." Sight is for the body's sake. All of the other members depend on the eye to tell them what it sees. As I illustrated with the parable of the train tracks in day 1, the eye will seldom get the whole picture of what God has for a church. The body needs everyone to express what he or she senses. When the church puts together what each member senses, the body comes to know God's will. No one individual can fully know all of God's will for a church. Leaders understand God's will for the church when they listen to the whole body express what it is experiencing in the life of that body.

I may come with a sincere heart and share what I sense God is saying through me as the pastor, but I never assume I know all God has for the church. I share and then listen to what the rest of the body says. Often I find that the blending of what God is saying through me and what He is communicating through someone else is God's will. Neither one of us knew the whole will of God. At other times I share and realize the Lord wants us to begin making some adjustments, but the timing is not right to start the work now. When God brings the body to unity, we know the timing is right. What I sense God wants us to do may not be wrong; it is just not complete. I need to hear what the other members are saying in order to understand fully what God is saying to me.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Jesus is the Head of the body.

God is concerned about the body maintaining unity.

Godlike love ought to prevail in the body.

God decides where I ought to function in the body.

I understand God's will for my church when I listen to the whole body express what it is experiencing in the life of that body.

Each member is precious to God.

5 Review your underlining in the preceding material. As the questions apply to you, respond to the following.

- a. What questions do you have that you would like to discuss in your small-group session? Write the letters: _____
- b. What is one thing you think God would like to change in the way your church functions as a body? _____
- c. What is one thing you think God wants you to do differently as you relate to other members of the body of Christ—your church? _____

6 Practice quoting or writing your Scripture-memory verses.

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

Life in the Body

DAY 5

I was speaking at a church's morning and evening services. That morning during the altar call, a **young girl came to the altar and prayed**. No one from the congregation joined her, so I came to stand beside her and discovered she was praying for her nine-year-old friend to become a Christian. At the close of the evening service, I saw this same girl walking down the aisle with another girl. Sure enough, her friend was declaring her decision to become a Christian. At the close of the service, the pastor began to do what the church always did by asking the congregation to formally vote to receive the new convert into membership. I interrupted him and said, "Pastor, you are hiding the activity of God from the people!" I recounted to the congregation what God had spoken to that young girl during the morning service and how she had responded to God for the salvation of her friend. Now, only a few hours later, we were celebrating the miracle of someone's eternal salvation, and the church was responding with a vote of membership. That dear pastor wept before his people because the church had been practicing religion but had not been watching for

RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD ARE FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN BUILDINGS, BUDGETS, PROGRAMS, METHODS, CHURCH PERSONNEL, SIZE, OR ANYTHING ELSE.

God's activity among its members. God was actively and powerfully at work in this young girl's life. As that church learned to recognize God's activity in the life of each member, an entirely new, exciting dynamic was created in the church.

As you and your church allow God to teach you how to effectively live as a body, you will see love and unity spring forth that you may not have experienced before. Effective body life begins when each individual is rightly related to God in an intimate love relationship. It continues as all members become rightly related to Jesus Christ as the Head of the church. Right relationships with God are far more important than buildings, budgets, programs, methods, church personnel, or size.

The Scriptures teach a church body how to be rightly related to one another.

1 Read each of the following Scriptures. Under each one write a brief statement or summary of God's will for relationships in the church body. You may want to look these up in your Bible to see the context for the verses.

- a. "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. Each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way" (Rom. 14:1,12-13).
God's will: _____
- b. "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" (1 Cor. 10:24).
God's will: _____
- c. "Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (Eph. 4:25).
God's will: _____
- d. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29).
God's will: _____
- e. "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:31-32).
God's will: _____
- f. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything" (Eph. 5:19-20).
God's will: _____
- g. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21).
God's will: _____
- h. "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (Col. 3:13-14).
God's will: _____

As you read the New Testament, you will find many instructions that speak specifically to the way God's people ought to live in relation to others. These guidelines are not in the Bible just for you to study, memorize, discuss, or debate. They are written so you can know how to experience abundant life in Christ. When you have doubts about how to apply a Scripture, take your concern to the Lord. His Spirit can help you understand spiritual truth. Here are some of my summary statements for activity 1.

1. Be patient and accepting of those whose faith is weak or those who are immature.
2. Don't be quick to judge others in matters that are disputable.
3. Don't be selfish. Seek the good of others even at your own expense.
4. Be absolutely truthful in all you say.
5. Don't be critical and tear people down with your speech. Don't focus your conversation on unwholesome subjects.
6. Be an encourager. Build people up. Keep their needs in mind as you speak.
7. Forgive one another as Christ forgave you. Don't let a root of bitterness remain between you and another.
8. Get rid of anger, inside fighting, and slander. Don't intentionally try to hurt another person (physically, emotionally, or spiritually).
9. Encourage one another in your joint worship of God. Make music together.
10. Die to self daily and submit to one another. Do this in reverence for Christ, who submitted Himself to death on the cross for you.
11. Be patient with one another, even when you have been mistreated or offended. Forgive even the worst offenses as God does.
12. Love one another.

This unit is not long enough for me to share all I want to express. You may finish today's lesson and say, "I wish Henry had told me what to do in this circumstance." I have some good news for you! You don't need for me to do that. The God who led my church to function as the body of Christ is also present in your church. Christ alone is the Head of your church. You don't need a method from me; you need instructions that are especially customized for your church from its Head. He will take the Scriptures and guide you to live in a way that will honor and please Him.

Let me take the remaining space to share about a few subjects the Lord may want to use in your life or your church.

A Covenant Relationship

First Corinthians 12:7,18 tells us God adds members to the body as it pleases Him for the common good of the whole body. When God added a member to our body, we rejoiced and immediately began talking about what being the body of Christ meant. As the pastor I led the congregation to establish a covenant relationship with the person. (A covenant is a sacred pledge or agreement.) Though I varied the process depending on the individual's experience, the covenant making usually went something like this.

I asked the persons desiring membership to briefly share their personal testimonies.

Then I asked the persons to respond to the following.

- Do you affirm before this congregation that Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord?

Have you obediently followed the Lord in believer's baptism? (Or do you desire to follow the Lord in believer's baptism?)

Do you clearly believe God is adding you to this body of Christ? (Or tell me how you have come to sense God is adding you to this body.)

Then I said, "God is adding you to our church for a reason. He wants to do something through your life to help us become all He wants us to become."

- Will you allow God to work through you to make this body more complete?
- Will you open your life to allow this body to minister to you and help you grow into all God wants you to become?

After the person answered these questions, I turned to the congregation and asked:

- From the testimony you have heard, do you believe God is adding this person to our body?
- Would you allow God to work in your life through him or her?
- Would you allow God to work through each of you to help this person become all God has purposed for him or her?

Then I reminded the church, "None of us know what this person may go through in the days to come. God may have added him to our body because He knew he was going to need our ministry. Will you covenant with this person to let God use you to help him become all God wants him to be? If you will so pledge yourself, please stand and let's thank God for adding this person to our body. Because God added this person to our church, we will be better equipped to respond to what God asks us to do next."

We took this **covenant relationship** seriously. Once a young woman asked me to remove her name from our membership roll because she had joined a cult. I told her, "We cannot do that. We entered a sacred covenant agreement with you. We believe you are making a mistake in this decision. Though you have broken your part of the covenant, we are committed to keep our covenant with you. Our church family will continue to love and pray for you. Whenever you need us, we will be here for you."

A few months later she came back, having realized that she had been deceived. She said, "Thank you for continuing to love me. Thank you for not giving up on me." That's what the body of Christ is all about. The body cares for each member of the body so that together all members become more complete in love and in Christ.

- 2** Read 1 Corinthians 12 once more. Ask God to speak to you about your church and how it can better function as the body of Christ. Ask Him to speak to you about your relationship to the body of Christ. Record anything you sense God is saying to you through His Word.

For my church: _____

For me: _____

- 3** If you want to continue letting God speak through His Word, read Romans 12 again and ask God to speak to you about how you and your church can function as the body of Christ should. On a separate sheet of paper record what you sense God is saying to you.

God Builds the Body to Match the Assignment

If you wanted to be a weightlifter, you would train your body so it could lift weights effectively. If you wanted to be a sprinter, you would train your body differently. When you want to do a job well, you train your body to match the assignment.

When God builds a local church as the body of Christ, He adds members to the body and trains them to match the assignment He has for that body. He builds a local church body in a way that enables it to respond to Him. Then God accomplishes His purposes through it.

Let me illustrate. In the early days in Saskatoon, our church had about 15 or 20 members. We sensed God wanted to use us to start churches in towns and villages all across Canada. As we prayed about this, we sensed God wanted to work through us to reach students on the university campus. We came to believe that if we would be faithful to witness on that campus, God would save many students. If we would then involve them in the life of the church, we believed God would call many of them to be pastors, church leaders, and missionaries who would dramatically impact our nation for Christ.

We had two major problems: we didn't have a single college student, and we didn't know how to reach students on a university campus. But we had an assignment. We began to pray and watch to see what God would do to help us become the kind of church that could fulfill that assignment to the campus. The first persons I baptized were a professor at the university and his daughter. Then God began to bring other students into the church, and the body began to grow.

God led us to **Robert Cannon**, an experienced college minister at a university in Texas. He sensed God was calling him to join us in Canada to work with students, but we had no money to move him or pay him. Yet Robert came, and God provided. When Robert arrived, I said, "Robert, you are here to equip the body so the body can fulfill its ministry of reaching students for Christ on the campus. The assignment for campus ministry has been given to our church."

4 Read Ephesians 4:11-13 in the margin. Do you follow what we were doing? Who had the assignment to reach the campus for Christ?

Circle one: **Robert Cannon** **our church**

5 Where did the assignment come from? _____

6 What was Robert's primary job? Check one.

- Start a Christian-student organization on campus.
 Witness door to door in the dorm.
 Equip the body to carry out its ministry to the campus.

The assignment came from God to the church. God added Robert to our body to equip it to carry out its ministry to the campus. Robert helped our intercessors know how to pray for the campus. He encouraged those with the gift of hospitality to link with students who needed a home away from home. He equipped others to witness. He helped the church know how to minister to the needs of the campus.

At least 50 students went on to seminaries to train for ministry. Many are now serving in churches. God built the body, gave it an assignment, and equipped it so He could accomplish His will through the members. The church was faithful, and God did what He told us He would do.

Because I know God builds the body to match the assignment, I pay close attention to the people He adds to it. Sometimes that indicates an assignment God is preparing us for. Over a short period of time, several persons in the medical profession joined our church, so we began praying to learn why God had added them to the congregation. When God assigned us to reach native Indians on reservations, this felt led to be part of that work. They went to the reservations and provided a

Ephesians 4:11-13

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Right relationships with God are far more important than buildings, budgets, programs, methods, church personnel, size, or anything else.

God doesn't add members to the body accidentally.

God builds the body to match the assignment.

God builds the body, gives it an assignment, and equips it to carry out its assignment.

I will pay close attention to the people God adds to my church.

wide variety of free medical help. While people waited in line to receive help, other members of the church talked to them and witnessed. The medical clinic opened doors for us to start Bible studies, lead people to the Lord, and start churches with the native Indians. Pay attention to the people God adds to your church.

7 Think about the people in your congregation. Pray now and ask God to guide you and others in your church to identify the assignments He has already prepared you for.

8 Have any ideas come to your mind as you have prayed? Write them below.

Continue praying for God's guidance. If the ideas grow into a burden, share with other members of the body what you are thinking and feeling. Their responses may help you understand what God wants to do in your midst.

9 Review your Scripture-memory verses.

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?

Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.

What does God want you to do in response to today's study?

Enriched Fellowship and Fullness of Joy

When I wrote *Experiencing God*, I did not intend it to be a theological treatise or an exhaustive book on the Christian life. I was simply trying to share what God had taught me through Scripture and as I walked with Him and His people for many years. The result of sharing these truths with others has been incredible. It has led to opportunities for me to speak in almost two hundred countries. It has allowed me to share God's truths in churches of every size and denomination. It has brought invitations to speak a word for God at the White House and the United Nations. It has resulted in a ministry to Christian CEOs of many of America's largest companies. Most significantly for me, it has resulted in the testimonies of countless people who have shared that through this course they learned to experience God for themselves for the first time. What a joy for me to know that as God walked with an ordinary person like me, He would do so much to encourage God's people around the world. Don't settle for less than all God intends to do through your life and your church as He walks with you.