

Chapter Two
When God Speaks, Say “Yes”
Obedience: To Hear and to Act

Moving my shoulders rhythmically up and down, and chanting, “Hmm, hmm,” I tried my best to imitate the Masaii choir performing on stage. Sitting in the back row of the Brackenhurst Conference Center’s auditorium, a few miles outside Nairobi, I laughed as the man in the next seat looked quizzically at me. *Who knows*, I thought mischievously, *maybe somewhere way back I have African blood!*

Twenty years after leaving Kenya, Jim and I had been invited back to participate in a conference for missionary doctors and their spouses. The smell of woodsmoke, the sound of women chattering in the surrounding tea plantations, and the smart salute of the guard at the gate brought back warm memories.

Seated in the packed auditorium, God imprinted another memory on my heart—the thrilling sight and sound of young Masaii men and women praising God in their own language and style. Singing Scripture put to tribal tunes, they stamped their feet, moved their shoulders up and down, and occasionally whooped and jumped high in the air, making the room come alive with joy. African blood or not, I couldn’t help joining in.

Nor could I help thinking back to those early unknown missionaries to the Masaii. *Could they have had any idea of the impact of their lives? Did they, by faith, believe the day would come when there would be Masaii churches, pastors, and choirs?* Tears crept down my cheeks as I thought of the difficulties they willingly faced to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to this proud, nomadic tribe.

That unique experience of listening to a Masaii choir often flashes in my mind. But stop for a minute and think about what happened to make that choir a reality. What lies behind the fact that people from every nation, not only the Masaii, now celebrate God’s love in Christ? The answer is simple yet profound. Ordinary men and women said yes when God broke into their lives, inviting them to walk with Him. Their response, like Abraham’s, had far greater implications than they ever could have dreamed.

What's So Important About Saying Yes?

Choosing to obey God is not always easy. Our human tendency is to want to call the shots, to decide what we want to do. We also think we know the best path to take and can figure out how to handle our problems. God knows this, having watched human beings going their own way from the beginning. Author Wayne Detzler says, "In this day of self-indulgence, the entire concept of obedience appears to be out of date, but it is the secret of spiritual living."¹ No matter how difficult yielding your will might be at times, saying yes is essential if you want to move forward with God.

Let's look at some reasons why.

God Is the Creator of All.

"The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth" (Isa. 40:28). God has a right to your obedience because of who He is: Eternally Existent, Almighty, All-Knowing, totally Holy, Just, and Loving. He created you for fellowship with himself and calls you to respond to His love by walking in obedience.

God Is Your Maker.

"When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Ps. 139:15-16).

God understands how you're formed and how you tick. Being all-wise, He knows what's best for you better than you do. He doesn't command obedience out of a perverse desire to deny you joy or fulfillment, but because He knows the damage that comes from going along certain paths. His commands are given for your protection. If you're wise, you'll follow what He says.

Jesus Is Your Savior.

Jesus died to give you God's best: freedom from a guilty conscience and power to live a productive and positive life. He washes away all the junk that has gone on in your life. You no longer need to fear standing before God, because Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sin. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus promises inner peace, healing from life's hurts and wounds, and power over your tendencies to hurt others and yourself. In addition, He fills your human need for purpose, significance, and security. In light of the price Christ paid to bring you into a relationship with God the Father, you're called to live in obedience: "Do not let sin reign in your

mortal body so that you obey its evil desires ... but rather offer yourselves to God” (Rom. 6:12-13).

Jesus Loves You Unconditionally.

The extent of Jesus’ love can’t be doubted when you consider the Cross. He, in turn, calls you to show your love by doing what He asks (John 14:21). Obedience proves you mean what you claim: that you belong to Jesus Christ, He is Lord of your life, and you love and trust Him. When you choose obedience, not only does God see but so do others. Disobedience doesn’t cut you off from His eternal love, but it does hinder your fellowship with Him, block His blessing, and cause others to stumble. Because He loves you, what He asks you to do is always for your eternal best. Obedience shows you believe this.

The root word for obedience means “to hear.” God doesn’t tell us merely to hear what He says and decide for ourselves how to respond. He commands us to obey. “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22). Long before James challenged Christians to do what God says, Abraham did just that. He went forward in obedience, experiencing, step by step, a relationship with God that far exceeded any earthly dreams of adventure or success.

Does God want your life journey and mine to be an adventure? Absolutely. In fact, He urges us to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” And obedience is the key.

God Takes the Initiative

How much Abraham first knew about God is a mystery. Even if his knowledge was meager, however, his life vividly illustrates the attitude that underpins all spiritual progress: Abraham chose to say yes when God spoke to him.

In recounting Israel’s history, Stephen said, “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’ So he left” (Acts 7:2-4). Can you imagine responding like that?

Here was Abraham—already well into mid-life—firmly settled in Ur, a thriving city deep in ancient Iraq. He didn’t live in some boring backwater. Ur was famous for worship of the moon god, its schools, libraries, and businesses, as well as its hanging gardens.

Visiting London’s British Museum many years ago, I looked with awe at the pottery,

jewelry, and other artifacts archeologists had dug up in Ur. The thought of God appearing to a real man, in a real place, at a specific time in history thrilled me. Abraham's story is not a myth. God broke into his life, calling him to move forward, to walk with Him into a new land.

Does it excite you to realize that this same God also calls *you* to follow Him, step by step, into His purposes for you?

To help you say yes to His plans, God wants you to know:

He sought you out.

He loves you unconditionally.

He speaks to you.

He leads you forward as you walk in obedience.

Sought by God

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible shouts the message, "God knows and cares about you!" Far from being a distant deity with no concern for His creation, Scripture shows us a God who breaks into human lives. He doesn't sit around in heaven waiting for us to desire Him; He takes the initiative.

Paul affirms this in his astounding statement that those who come to Christ were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Like an eager lover, God takes the first step, making us aware of His love and drawing us to respond. The apostle John adds, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). God purposefully seeks us out. Nothing can block His plan.

"Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?"

Drafted into Hitler's army near the end of World War II, Jurgen Moltmann was sent to fight Allied troops invading Europe. Poorly trained and equipped, he and hundreds of other young men were thrown into battle. A short time later he literally stumbled into a trench filled with British soldiers.

Taken to a prisoner-of-war camp in Belgium, he and other young German soldiers heard for the first time of the horrors committed by their nation against the Jews. Many fell into severe depression. Sickened and ashamed, some gave up the will to live.

In the camp, Jurgen Moltmann received a New Testament from the chaplain and read for the first time of God's love and forgiveness. "I found God," he said. "Or rather, God found me."

Sent to Scotland at the end of the war, he worked with other prisoners repairing the damage done by Hitler's bombs. While there, Christians befriended him and helped him grow in Christ. Today, Jurgen Moltmann is an influential theologian.

You might think, *I found God*, but the astounding truth is, God found you. Before you were even aware of God, He was aware of you. God knows the exact circumstances to use to break into your life—perhaps an unhappy marriage, a divorce, loneliness or emptiness, a hunger for more joy or purpose, the aching need to find forgiveness. Whatever the circumstances that draw you to Him, God takes the initiative and seeks you out. If you've put your faith in Jesus Christ, you can say with Jurgen Moltmann, "God found me."