

As a Christian, the most important question is not when, or how God will use you, but rather how you will respond when He asks. Consider two very different responses.

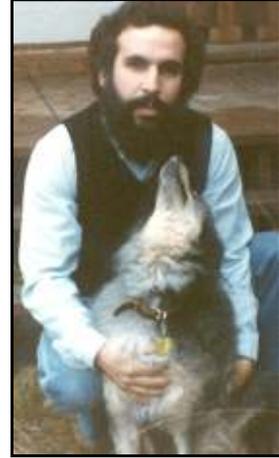
Finding Time  
Philip Van de Veer

The Clark Fork River empties into Pend Oreille Lake near the town of Hope, Idaho. Every year, spring runoff washes logs and debris down the river into the lake creating hazards for boaters.

To correct the problem, the U.S. Corps of Engineers constructed wooden booms, actually long docks, stretching across the mouth of the river. The booms deflect driftwood away from the lake into a back-water containment area. The booms must be maintained, or grass and weeds will grow between the boards, eventually breaking up the booms.

In the spring of 1976, I land a temporary job with the U.S. Corps of Engineers. For the last several days, six to eight of us have driven daily from the Albeini Falls Dam out to the Clark Fork and boated out to the docks.

Yesterday, a fellow worker lost his wristwatch overboard. It could've fallen into the water next to the booms or in a several hundred square yard radius. Gary, a fellow worker, volunteered to bring his wet suit, mask and snorkel to see if he can find the watch.



Next morning, as soon as we reach the booms, Gary puts on his wet suit and prepares to dive. The current is fairly swift around the booms, and the water is still clouded from the spring runoff. Silt, sand, and snags cover the bottom. As far as I'm concerned, that watch is long gone, but watching this show sure beats pulling weeds.

Gary starts a series of dives at the edge of the boom where we usually disembark. I don't remember how many times Gary dove into the milky water, only to come up out of breath and empty handed. I do, however, remember the last dive.

Three of us are standing together on the dock. I am standing far left. John Brooks stands to my immediate right, and to his right stands Jim Zubaugh. John attends the Assembly of God in Newport. Jim and I attend House of the Lord in Furport. The rest of the people standing around the dock and sitting in the boat aren't Christians.

What happened next takes about forty seconds, the length of Gary's dive.

Just as Gary submerges, a hand comes to rest on the top of my head. There is nobody standing behind me, and John's hands are still at his side. No doubt about it, though, someone just put his hand on my head. I can feel the palm and splayed fingers.

At the same instant, I hear a voice in my head state clearly and matter-of-factly, "I know who can find the watch." God has spoken simply and directly into my mind, and in such a manner that I am not surprised or frightened.

How do I respond? I have the Lord casually informing me that He can find the lost watch. That's like Fred Astaire telling me he can dance.

Now, I don't want to say anything stupid to God or, worse, tick him off, so I decide to play it safe and respond mentally, "Yes, Lord, I know you can . . ."

To which He replies simultaneously, "Why don't you say something about it?"

This is no vague mental impression where I wonder whether God has asked me to do something, or whether I am just imagining things. In other words, there is no way I can ignore this “request,” and He is not going to back off. It is a command, politely framed, like when Dad used to “ask” me when I was planning to mow the overgrown lawn. And just to personalize the request, I can STILL FEEL HIS HAND resting on my head.

But I am embarrassed. Embarrassed at the prospect of telling the people standing around that God can find the lost watch, worried I’ll come off looking like a fool. What if I pipe up and God doesn't find it? My co-workers will think I'm a religious loony and, as an extra-added bonus, I'll look like a perfect idiot in front of my fellow believers.

The bottom line is I don't want to do it, which means I am now in the impossible position of concocting some semblance of an excuse to serve up to God in order to avoid doing what He has directly asked me to do.

I half form my response, "I don't think . . ." just as His hand slides off my head to my right. It is positively unnerving just how real that hand feels, even though I know it isn't flesh and blood.

At just that moment, John to my immediate right pipes up, declaring in a loud voice "I know who can find that watch!" He rolls right on to answer his own question. "Jeesus can find that watch!" John announces to all present, then turns to Jim and me and says, "Let's pray that God will find the watch!"

Ah, just blooming wonderful! I screwed up, pissed off God in the process, and I am still going to wind up looking like a flaming loony. John, Jim and I turn, face each other, and start praying. John LOUDLY asks the Lord Jesus Christ to please help Gary find that watch. I'm praying and mumbling along with the others while thinking, "God, I hope you find the watch."

John finishes with a loud “Amen!” He couldn’t speak softly if his life depended on it!

As if on cue, Gary surfaces, holding the watch up for all to see.

My jaw drops, a real Neanderthal jaw drop.

One of the guys sitting in the boat exclaims, "They just prayed!" He’s impressed, like there may be some sort of connection between God, prayer, and finding the watch.

If John hadn't stepped up to the plate, I am certain God would have tapped Jim for the task. God was looking for a bit of help. He asked until He got it.

God allowed me to witness the inside workings of His selection process. If nothing else, my response to God provides comparison and contrast to the response of my good friend, Stan Fleming, to the prompting of God a few years later.

### The Hitchhiker Stan Fleming

In the early 1980s, I was a teacher and administrator at the House of the Lord Christian Academy in Oldtown, Idaho. Normally, I would be at school, but this one morning I was driving in my Volkswagen to Sandpoint for an administrative meeting when I came upon a hitchhiker.

The young man looks a lot like I did a few years back in my hippie days: long hair, full beard, mellow, groovy clothes. I like to pick up hitchhikers and share about the Lord Jesus, just like people had done to me in my earlier years when I was searching for truth.

This morning, however, I am in a hurry and would have probably passed him by, except that I am driving on a back road with few other cars. So, I stop.

“Thanks for stopping,” the man says as he gets in and tells me he is heading about eight miles down the road.

“Okay,” I respond, as I accelerate back onto the roadway. Neither of us wants to chat, and so we drive on in silence. As I am driving, it occurs to me that the Lord just might want me to say something to the hitchhiker. Based on the way he looks, and his demeanor, I doubt that he is a Christian.

As I continue driving, I comprehend a simple vision, like a parable that Jesus might tell. In the vision, I see the two of us arriving at the hitchhiker’s destination. My rider gets out of the car, and goes on to live his life; yet, because he never comes to know the Lord, he dies and goes to hell. I, on the other hand, drive on knowing the Lord, live my life for Him and, when I die, go to heaven.

The lesson of the vision convicts me, as I realize that I do not care anything about this man, and knowing what I know, I should! My passenger is unaware that the Lord Jesus died on the cross in atonement for his sins, just as He did for me. Then Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, defeating death and the devil and ascending into heaven until the day that He returns for His people.

With the revelation that I do not care about this man as I should, I begin crying out in my heart to the Lord and praying that God will give me His compassion for this stranger. God knows everything about him and loves him more than anyone. The man has no idea that I am silently crying out in my heart for God’s compassion.

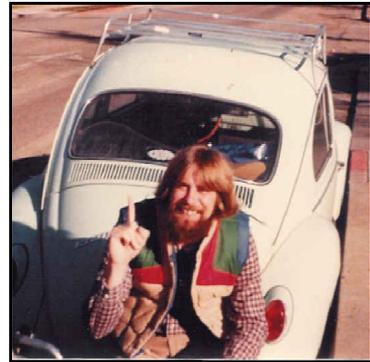
As I am praying, I have a second vision. I see a young, attractive woman in a white dress, standing in the middle of a green, grassy field and holding a single red rose in her hand.

When I see this, I get a bit perturbed. Why am I seeing this? Here I am asking God for compassion, and I wind up seeing a lady in a field with a rose. It makes no sense.

For a moment, I question and doubt what is happening. Then it occurs to me that I had been praying when I saw the vision. Perhaps, the vision actually has something to do with this stranger sitting next to me. I decide to take a step of faith, knowing that I will never see the guy again if I am wrong.

I look over at the hitchhiker and say, “This may sound like the craziest thing that you have ever heard, but does this mean anything to you at all, a woman in a white dress, standing in a grassy field with a red rose in her hand.”

The guy does two or three double-takes in my direction. Catching his thoughts and breath, he finally says to me, “Well! Yesterday, I was down in Boise. I went into a field with my girlfriend, who was wearing a white dress. I gave her a red rose, and I asked her to marry me.”



I don't know who is more shocked, the hitchhiker or me; but I quickly gained my strength and wits, responding, "Sir, there is a God in heaven who revealed that to me about you, so that you will know that the next words I say are from Him."

For the next six miles I told him everything I could about the Lord and His love for this man, the plan of salvation, and his need to be serious with God. I sensed that I should simply share the Gospel without pushing him to pray and accept the Lord.

The man was visibly impressed when we arrived at his stop. He shook my hand, twice for good measure, as he got out the car. Then he turned and watched me drive into the distance. I never saw him again.

I do not know if the man ever accepted the Lord, and I do not know if he married the lady with the red rose. I do know, however, that he will remember that ride for the rest of His life.

Phil is like family to me, a life time friend. He and I had two similar yet different experiences. They were similar because in both of these instances God gave us revelation about something that was hidden yet true. We were given the opportunity to respond, bring glory to God, and gain the reward of obedience.

The experiences were different in several ways. First, I was alone with a stranger while Phil was with friends. I would never see the hitchhiker again but Phil would have to live with these guys. Second, I was simply asking the hitchhiker if the vision meant anything to him or not. When I discovered that it did, I gave glory to God and witnessed to the man. Phil was being pressured by the Holy Spirit to ask the group to believe ("test") God in advance. Could God find the watch in the water? Finally, finding God's compassion for the hitchhiker was an important part of my story. I have since come to believe that there is a connection between God's compassion and the miraculous (Matthew 14:14). Regardless, it is not easy to take such steps of faith and all of us may falter at times.

However, the thing to keep in mind is that we as believers in Christ are in His school of training. He tests our faith level at times. In some sense it is not a pass or fail type of test; it is about training. As in Phil's story, God may use the guy next to us to show us that indeed it was God who was speaking to us. This can grow our confidence for the next test. Regardless of how one responds, God will continue to work with us because He loves us, wanting to transform us into His image (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:18).

Stan Fleming is a former teacher / principal of a private Christian school and pastor of the House of the Lord in Oldtown, ID. He currently is founder and president of Gate Breaker Ministries through which he travels and teaches around the world. He and his family live in Meridian, ID and attend Capital Christian Center.

Philip Vandever is a former elementary school teacher, lawyer, and law school professor. He currently serves as the district court judge for Pend Oreille County, Washington. He and his wife, Bobbie, are Gideons and members of the Spring Valley Mennonite Church.