

How to be Led by the Holy Spirit

Part 1, Consecrating Ourselves to God's Will

One of the most common questions Christians, and even non-Christians, have is how they can know God's will for their lives. I believe that we can know God's will, direction, and purpose for our lives. I also believe that He is constantly trying to communicate with us but we're just not listening or maybe don't know what His voice sounds like.

"Consecrating Ourselves to God's Will" is the first of four thoughts on how we can better prepare our hearts to hear from our Lord. Portions of the following were adapted from Kenneth E. Hagin's book "Following God's Plan for Your Life."

Let's start by taking a closer look at Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Matthew 26:36-42

36Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

39Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

40Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

42He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

These verses give us an example of Jesus' dedication as He consecrated Himself to do the Father's will.

Jesus said, "Yet not as I will, but as you will," because He knew that the scourging and the cross was before Him.

Think of all the sins committed by us, humankind, throughout all time -- all the immorality, debauchery, murder, and hatred. Second Corinthians 5:21 says that Jesus was made sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. But Jesus' death on the cross had to happen in order for all of us to be saved.

It was Jesus' consecration to His Father's will (and not His own) from the beginning that allowed Him to be led by the Spirit of God, and ultimately, to know the Will of the Father.

But what does consecration really mean? It's certainly not a word I hear used in casual conversation in our modern society.

Consecration:

ORIGIN- from the Latin consecrat- 'dedicated, devoted as sacred,' from the verb consecrare, from con- (expressing intensive force) + sacrare 'dedicate,' from sacer 'sacred.'

The above definition suggests that consecrating your life means to force your life into sacred dedication.

The prayer of consecration is not just a one-time prayer like that of a salvation prayer. The prayer(s) of consecration is (or should be) the fruit of a consecrated life! We will only be able to know and follow God's plan for our lives if we constantly maintain an attitude of consecration and surrender to the Lord's will, whatever it might be.

The consecrated life is a life of faith, a living by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Consider our own consecration to the Lord. If you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then you obviously trust Him with your salvation, but do you trust Him with the direction of the rest of your life? We (myself included) need to be willing to do anything that God wants us to do. We need to choose to commit ourselves to God and to obey His will every day for the rest of our lives.

So how are we doing?

Here are some practical things we can do to live a consecrated life:

1. Never say never.

Don't rule out something based on your preferences or probability.

For example: being called as a missionary to a foreign country that you dislike.

Choose to say Yes! to whatever God lays before you instead of saying, "I hope He doesn't call me to (fill in the blank) because I'd never do that."

2. Get rid of unwillingness in your life.

Being unwilling, even in the smallest area of our life, is not living in faith -- it's living in the flesh.

Just as "a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" (Galatians 5:9) so unwillingness has a nasty way of spreading to other areas of our lives.

At it's root, unwillingness is really saying that you think your will is better than God's. So stop it at the root by humbling yourself before God.

3. Life is full of choices; take them one-at-a-time.

Most people want to know the FULL will of God before they'll obey but that's not usually how God reveals His plan.

Don't get stuck on one choice thinking you need to have the answer for every choice after it.

As God allows choices to cross your path take them one at a time making your decision based on what God has revealed to you so far.

Part 2, Stay Filled with the Holy Spirit

If you've ever gone through life wondering if we can know what the will of God is, STOP wondering and know that you can!

"Stay Filled with the Holy Spirit" is the second of four thoughts on how we can better prepare our hearts to hear from our Lord.

When God seems to be less-than-descriptive with His plans for your life, know that you can always be a doer of His Word, and in so acting, you will be living in His perfect will for your life. In fact, sometimes when you just don't know what to do, doing only what the Bible says is the best thing you can do.

For example, the Bible is clear that we should...

- Pray for our brothers and sisters in the Lord
- Love and pray for our enemies
- Carry each others burdens
- Give out of our abundance to those who are in need
- Walk by faith, not by sight
- Meditate on God's Word

And this is just a short list, things off the top of my mind. If I were to ask all of you to name just one thing you know the Bible tells us we should do, we'd fill up pages of instructions. That's plenty to keep us busy for the rest of our lives doing exactly what God wants us to do!

However, there's one command in particular that's part of God's written will for us that will also help us to know God's perfect will for our lives as well. Let's look at Ephesians chapter five to find out what it is.

Ephesians 5:17-18

17Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

This passage tells us two things, 1) that we can know the will of God, and 2) that we need to be filled with the God's Spirit.

The phrase “be filled” in the Greek actually means “be being filled”; to maintain a constant flow of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Not just to be filled to overflowing once and never again, but to allow the Holy Spirit to constantly keep us filled with Him.

Romans 12:11 further supports the degree to which we are to be being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Romans 12:11 (AMP)

11 Never lag in zeal and in earnest endeavor; be aglow and burning with the Spirit, serving the Lord.

Is it possible to be filled with the Spirit once and be “aglow and burning”? Well, depending on how you look at it, yes and no. Yes, initially we can be filled and be aglow and on fire for God, but there are two things that will "drain" the fire of the Holy Spirit out of us:

1. The current world system (anything of the flesh) because it is at war with the Spirit (Galatians 5:17).
2. And we are given the command in Matthew 10:8 which says, “Freely you have received, freely give.”

The book of Acts records that the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit for the first time in chapter two. Then it says in chapter four that they were filled again upon their request!

So what happened to warrant a “re-filling”? Here's a quick list:

- Peter preached to Jerusalem, leading about 3,000 people to be saved and baptized.
- Many converts devoted themselves to the disciples/apostles teaching (they started organized church).
- Peter used to heal a crippled beggar.
- Peter again preaches to the crowds.
- Peter and John preached before the Sanhedrin, Sadducees, priests, and other church leaders.
- Many other miracles, signs and wonders were done by the disciples.

I know I sure would need a re-filling after God used me to do all of that! But instead of getting caught up in the specifics of what God did through them, let's back up and look at the whole picture. The disciples were just simple, unschooled men that followed the command of Jesus--the command to stay in the upper room till the Spirit had come. They obeyed and upon being filled with the Spirit, what did they do? Did they continue to pray and ask God to reveal His specific will for each of their lives?! NO!

After being filled, they simply did what they felt impressed to do because they were being led by the Holy Spirit. And if you notice, what they “felt” impressed to do are the same things we are told to do in the New Testament. Would you say that what the disciples/apostles did after being filled with the Spirit was actually God’s perfect, specific plan for their lives? YES! They were impressed to do the will of God just like we can be impressed by God today. I believe many times we become overly concerned with the specifics of God’s will for our lives instead of simply doing what we already know He’s called us to do.

Being filled and staying filled with the Holy Spirit is one of the best things we can do to make sure we are being led by the Spirit of God.

I think many times in pentecostal churches people are more concerned with getting filled with the Spirit then they are with maintaining the continued flow of the Spirit in their lives. Romans tells us how we must maintain the Spirit of God in our lives so that we may know His will.

Romans 12:1-2 says...

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.
2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

If you want to know God's good, pleasing, and perfect will than 1) guard your body by giving it to God and 2) guard your mind by renewing it in God’s Word.

When we allow the Spirit of God to continually fill us with Himself by actively guarding our bodies and minds from the things that hinder His control in our lives, then we will find ourselves naturally knowing and doing God’s specific will for our lives more and more.

So just to recap, being filled and staying filled (continually maintaining the Holy Spirit’s control in our lives) will put you in a better place for knowing and doing the perfect and specific will of God.

Part 3, Learn to be Led by the Holy Spirit

Romans 8:14 says, "those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Every believer in Jesus can learn how to be led by the Holy Spirit instead of by their physical senses and circumstances.

"Learn to be Led by the Holy Spirit" is the third of four thoughts on how we can better prepare our hearts to hear from our Lord. Portions of the following were adapted from Kenneth E. Hagin's book "Following God's Plan for Your Life."

Notice that I said learn how to be led by the Spirit. Knowing how to be led by the Holy Spirit does not come naturally right after a person accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior. Just as sheep have to learn to recognize the voice of their shepherd, so we have to learn to recognize the voice of our Lord.

The first thing we need to learn is that God leads us through our spirits.

John 4:24 says that God is spirit. He is not a physical being. And He's also not an intellectual cloud or "God Conscience" somewhere in the cosmos like many new-agers believe. Therefore the primary way He speaks to us is through our spirits instead of through our carnal flesh and mind.

And to further back this up...

1 Corinthians 2:11 (NASB) says...

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

And **Proverbs 20:27** (NASB) says...

The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the innermost parts of his being.

Both of these passages tell us that it's our spirit that really knows what's going on inside us and it's through our spirit that the Lord communicates to us.

Let's take a look at (learn about) three of the main ways God leads us so that way we can better recognize His voice when He communicates to us.

1. The first and foremost way God leads us is by an inner witness.

Romans 8:16 (NASB) says...

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.

The inner witness (also translated as testifies) is like an inner knowledge of agreement. It's when you just know that something is right. People sometimes call it a hunch or an impression.

Usually specifics (like exact words or images) are not conveyed with the inner witness but somehow you know exactly what it means.

Romans 8:16 tells us that it's with this inner witness that we know we are saved -- we just know that it's true because the Holy Spirit gives us that inner knowledge of agreement. And it's with this same "knowing" that God can and wants to lead you.

2. The second way the Holy Spirit leads us is through the inner voice or “still small voice.”

The main difference between the inner witness and the inner voice is that the inner voice actually has a voice.

1 Kings 19:11-13 says...

11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

There are three Hebrew words make up the phrase "gentle whisper":

dēmamah- whisper, calm, silence

daq- thin, small, fine, gaunt

qowl- voice, sound, noise; lightness, lighthearted

Combining these Hebrew words gives the impression that this method of communication is very light and airy, easy to be drowned out.

Also notice that in verse 11 it says “the Lord said” but in verse 13 it says “a voice said.” I believe it was written this way to clearly show us the distinction between the inner voice and the Lord's more direct voice (which we'll talk about next.)

Many Bible teachers suggest that the inner voice is actually the voice of your spirit which we call our conscience. The idea is that just as your physical body has a physical voice, so your spiritual body has a spiritual voice. And although we cannot hear our spirit voice with our physical ears, we can hear it through our conscience. Although the Bible does not clearly explain how the inner voice works, it is clear that there is a distinction between it and the Lord's more direct voice.

Usually when the inner voice speaks it actually conveys real words with coherent thoughts, not vague impressions like the inner witness.

3. The third way God leads us is through the authoritative voice of the Lord.

Although usually the authoritative voice of the Lord will not be audible, sometimes it can be.

Acts 9:1-7 says...

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.

In Saul's experience, the authoritative voice of the Lord was audible because the men with him heard the sound. This voice was very clearly the Lord's as Jesus declares in verse five.

The inner witness, inner voice, and authoritative voice of the Lord are the three main ways God speaks to us. There are other ways also but these three are used most of the time with most people.

So now that we know about them, how can we develop them? How can we recognize the inner witness and inner voice so well that they are more clear than another person's voice talking right next to us? As I meditated on that question the following three things came to mind:

We need to...

1. Ask for forgiveness for anytime we may have grieved the Holy Spirit.
2. Ask God to restore our sensitivity to His Spirit.
3. Act immediately in faith when we sense His inner witness, inner voice, or authoritative voice.

Yes, you will make mistakes and not "hear" correctly from time to time but that's how we learn. Just like it took years in the physical world for you to learn how to communicate with perfect listening and speaking skills, so in the spirit world it will take a while before we can correctly discern our Lord's voice from all the others in this world.

But as you "practice" (acting immediately in faith when you sense what you believe is His voice) it will become easier.

Just remember that we have this promise that we can know our Lord's voice.

John 10:4

[The shepherd] he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Part 4, Other Ways the Holy Spirit Leads Us

John 16:13 says...

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

"Other Ways the Holy Spirit Leads Us" is the fourth of four thoughts on how we can better prepare our hearts to hear from our Lord.

So far we've learned about three of the main ways the Holy Spirit communicates to us: through the inner witness, the inner voice, and the authoritative voice of the Lord. But there are several other ways also.

Visions

Acts 10:9-20 says...

9About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

14"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

15The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

16This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

17While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate.

18They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

19While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

In verse 10 it says Peter fell into a "trance." The Greek word used for trance is the same root word we use for the English word "ecstasy."

It literally means:

"a throwing of the mind out of its normal state, such as a lunatic or that of a man who by some sudden emotion is transported as it were out of himself, so that in this rapt

condition, although he is awake, his mind is drawn off from all surrounding objects and wholly fixed on things divine that he sees nothing but the forms and images lying within, and thinks that he perceives with his bodily eyes and ears realities shown him by God.”

Visions will sometimes contain God’s voice but not always. Also, visions will usually contain things in them that we recognize, although those things may be used or presented in an unusual way, such as Peter’s large sheet with unclean animals in it.

Visions that I’ve had have even contained myself in them, as if I were seeing a scene in my life played out from a third-person perspective.

However the vision unfolds, and whether God is directly speaking in it, you will know exactly what the purpose and meaning is behind the vision.

Dreams

Although dreams may at first glance appear to be the nocturnal version of a vision, according to the Bible they serve a different purpose.

In the New Testament the only the Magi and Joseph are recorded as having dreams. The Magi were warned not to go back to Herod after seeing the baby Jesus. And Joseph had three dreams all recorded in the second chapter of Matthew.

Matthew 2:13-15; 19-23

13When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." 14So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

19After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

21So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Although these New Testament examples limit dreams to simple warnings, we know that dreams can be a lot more when we look at the dreams of Daniel and Joseph in the Old Testament. Their dreams were visually rich and often were used to foretell future events.

I have had dreams of people from my past and after waking up decided that God wanted me to pray for them, but I'm not sure I would classify that as a biblical dream.

Gifts of Wisdom/Knowledge/Discerning

1 Corinthians 12:8-10 outlines nine gifts of the Spirit. All of the gifts are given as the Spirit directs (verse 11) and they are for the benefit of everybody involved (verse 7). Three of the gifts are the gift of wisdom, the gift of knowledge, and the gift of discerning spirits.

Let's take a quick look at the Greek meanings behind these three gifts of the Spirit:

Wisdom (sophia): broad and full of intelligence; used of the knowledge of very diverse matters

Knowledge (gnōsis): general intelligence, understanding

Discerning (diakrisis / dē-ä'-krē-sēs): a distinguishing, discerning, judging

So without repeating myself too much, we can see that a gift of wisdom is when God reveals to a person full and very broad understanding regarding something, the gift of knowledge is when God reveals understanding that is more specific or limited when compared to the gift of wisdom, and the gift of discerning of spirits is when God reveals the source of spiritual activity, enabling a person to judge/act correctly.

The book of Luke chapter five holds an example from Jesus regarding these three gifts.

Luke 5:17-26

17One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. 18Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 19When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. 20When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

21The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

22Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 25Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26Everyone was

amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

John 3:34 tells us that Jesus had the Spirit "Spirit without limit" so we know that all of the gifts of the Spirit were operating in His life, as the Spirit directed. So regarding this miracle in Luke we can see all three of these gifts being used.

First we can see that Jesus was given specific insight (the gift of Knowledge) into what the Pharisees and teachers were thinking. Second we can see that Jesus was then given a broader understanding (the gift of Wisdom) of the entire circumstance and its purpose -- using a physical healing to prove His ability to forgive sins. And lastly we can observe that Jesus also knew (the gift Discerning spirits) the source of the Pharisees and teachers hearts and acted accordingly.

The understanding that these gifts bring usually happens in an instance, and not the result of prayer, meditation, or in-depth Bible study. I say this because just like the other ways the Holy Spirit leads us, His understanding brings revelation to us with which we need to act on in faith. Having the gift of Wisdom/Knowledge/Discernment manifest in your life as the Spirit leads will not cause you to DO anything. You have to choose to do something with it.

Other Spirit led people

Acts 9:10-19 says...

10In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered. 11The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

13"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

17Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

In this example, Ananias came to Paul to share what the Lord told him, but at other times it can be us going to another biblically-grounded Christian and asking for advice. Either way, the most important key to remember is that the communicated message from the other Christian must be in line with the Word of God. If it isn't, throw it out!

Along with being biblically grounded, there should also be a confirmation within your heart that confirms what the other person is telling you. The reason why is because guidance from other Spirit led people usually comes after the Holy Spirit has already been communicating with you in some form.

Circumstances

Acts 16:6-10 says...

6Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

The important thing to note about the above passage is that Paul had to "conclude" what God was telling them after being circumstantially blocked twice and also having a vision. Paul did not receive a clear communication in this instance but acted in faith on what he concluded was from the Lord.

I've also experienced circumstances that prevented me from going down one path, but I've also had open doors that I needed to walk through before finding out that they were not the right path, just an experience gaining path. In other words, circumstances will not always be clear.

You may want to include the "second chance on life" circumstances in this category. This is when a person's life was divinely spared through some accident and out of that circumstance the person changes the direction of their life, concluding it was God that spared them.

The goal is to NOT be led by circumstances. I say that because it is not the most direct form of communication like the other ones we've examined. The good thing to remember is that God will speak to us any way He can in order to get our attention.

Finally, remember that God will personally lead you in your everyday life, obey the inner witness and voice in your spirit, and don't seek spectacular guidance.

May God increase your sensitivity to His voice so that we can truly be His sheep, following His voice.