

Spirit-Filled Pastor: How Does God Lead Us Today?

Whether it is the Spirit leading or forbidding in the book of Acts, or the Spirit leading throughout Christian history, it's clear that the leading of the Spirit is important.

In the Old Testament, it appears that the Spirit of God could be withdrawn completely from people, whereas in the New Testament He seals us until the day of redemption (Ephes. 1:13-14).

Refuel Your Spiritual Power

Although the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, won't depart, we can quench and grieve Him. In this case, in the same way that a fire dwindles down to a small flame if not fueled, the Holy Spirit is also waiting to be refueled for those who have quenched Him (Eph. 5:18).

The key to being led by the Spirit is to be filled with the Spirit. To clear the lines of communication, we must repent of besetting sin, spiritual apathy, arrogance and prayerlessness, and begin diligently pursuing God.

But how does God lead us today?

1. **First and foremost, He leads us with principles to follow through His Word.** Paul reminds us that all Scripture is inspired by God to teach us how to discern right from wrong. It also corrects us when we are off course (Tim. 3:16). From what type of person to marry to how to handle money, it's all there. Although the Bible doesn't cover every specific circumstance we may face, it does offer principles to guide us in every situation.
2. **Secondly, as we apply God's Word, we must be men and women of prayer.** I'm amazed at how many people think

they can adequately determine God's will without devoting much time to prayer (and fasting). Even Jesus spent the whole night in prayer before He chose the 12 disciples, and time fasting before beginning His public ministry. Prayer is the catalyst and the sustainer to knowing God's will.

3. **At some point, faith must come into play.** Hebrews 11:6 says that "without faith it is impossible to please God," and adds that God "is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." If we knew the answer to every situation, faith would be of little value. Faith is complete trust in God and in His sovereignty. Real faith isn't blind; it looks through the lens of God's Word. It applies wisdom to the situation, seeks the counsel of mature believers, prays fervently and waits on the Lord. In short, faith makes decisions based on God's Word and trusts Him for the outcome. How many of us supposedly step out in faith but make poor financial decisions, date the wrong person or take the wrong job all under the banner of "stepping out in faith"? Be careful, there is a fine line between faith and presumption—presumption often rushes ahead, whereas faith waits on God.
4. **Another key aspect of hearing God is thankfulness.** Parents, how easy is it to load your kids in the car and go shopping when they are happy compared to when they are grumpy and throwing a fit? The same holds true for us. It's much easier to be led by God's Spirit when we are thankful. Thankfulness aligns our heart with His will. Psalm 25:9 promises that God will guide and teach the humble. First Thessalonians 5:18 encourages us to, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." No guesswork here: Being thankful is God's will for your life. Worship, humility and thankfulness lead us straight to the heart of God.
5. **God often leads us through circumstances.** Acts 16:6-7 says that Paul and his companions went through a certain

region where they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word. And when they attempted to go elsewhere, the Spirit again prevented them. This reminds us that a *good-thing* isn't always a *God-thing*. Don't force doors open, but also don't immediately assume that a closed door will always remain shut. Take the situation to God in prayer. Wait on Him to make His will clear. Sometimes it's a closed door, at other times, the timing isn't right. Eventually, the Lord opened a door for Paul (2 Cor. 2:12).

I Had a Dream

What about burdens, dreams, visions, prompting, and 'words' from the Lord? According to 1 Corinthians 12-14, it's clear that God still uses the gifts of the Spirit to help us discern His will, but it's an area where we need to be careful.

Acts 2:17 declares that in the last days God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh: Sons and daughters shall prophesy—they will speak God's Word with boldness and clarity. And young men will see visions, and old men will dream dreams.

Most people who are led astray by visions, dreams or supposed 'words from the Lord,' spend very little time truly seeking God through His Word and even less time praying. As a result, they often rush ahead. If God uses a dream or a 'word' to help direct you, it will line up with His Word. It's a supplement, not a meal.

Unloading the Burden

When we feel a burden for the lost, the hurt or the wounded, we may start a ministry. When we feel a burden for certain geographical locations, we may consider going on the mission field. When we feel a burden for our nation we may begin a prayer meeting, and on and on it goes. God often loads us with a burden so we'll pursue His will and unload the burden. Ironically, the reason I began writing books was for a burden

to help people.

His Sovereignty—My Sanity

The key to finding out if your burden, dream, vision or 'word' is God-given is to apply everything we've discussed so far: Does it line up with His Word, will it help others, have you bathed it in prayer? Have you repented of besetting sin and are you committed to obeying His will? Are you waiting for God to open a door or are you rushing ahead?

In closing, always remember that God's sovereignty is your sanity. He guides us even when we make mistakes. His sovereignty has the final word.

Proverbs 16:9 and 19:21 both conclude that although we make plans it's the Lord who will ultimately guide us. There is great peace resting in God's sanity. His sovereignty is our sanity.

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