

Directions for Your Life

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala emphasizes the importance of being led by the Holy Spirit in making decisions for our lives based on biblical examples from the Book of Acts.

Duration: 26:41

Topics: "Direction"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being led by the Holy Spirit in making decisions, both big and small. He encourages the audience to trust in God's guidance rather than relying on human leaders or their own logic. The speaker shares a personal story of how he and his wife followed God's leading to pastor a struggling church, even when it seemed illogical. He also addresses the misuse of the Holy Spirit's guidance by some individuals and warns against falling into deception.

Transcript

Here's what we've been reading. We're reading right now through the book of Acts. I want you to get three little snippets, chapter eight, nine, 10, just a couple verses.

Look at three different men having three different things happen to them, Acts eight. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, go south, go to the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. So he started out, Philip did, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch.

That's a man from Ethiopia who served the queen, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the kandek, which means queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet, and the spirit told Philip, the spirit told Philip, the spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet.

Do you understand what you're reading, Philip asked? How can I, he said, unless someone explains it to me. So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Next chapter, chapter nine.

Saul has just been knocked off of his mount, Saul of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus persecuting Christians left and right, and now he's blind and he's all alone in Damascus, and in Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias, and the Lord called him in a vision. Ananias, yes, Lord, he answered. The Lord told him, go to the house of Judas on the straight street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he

is praying.

In a vision, he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight. Lord, Ananias answered, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem, and he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name. But the Lord said to Ananias, go.

This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel, and I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. Then in chapter 10, Peter has had a vision of a sheet with all kinds of animals being brought down above him in this dream, and some of the animals are prohibited to be eaten by the Jewish people in that day. And the Lord has told him now, no, don't call unclean, because the Lord told him, eat this, and he said, no, I won't eat it because it's unclean.

Don't call unclean what I call clean. And as he's pondering this vision, we read this. While Peter was wondering about the vision, the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate.

They called out, asking if Simon, who was known as Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, Simon, three men are looking for you so get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.

We have three cases in three chapters that we've read, and just as ordinary as we would read in the Gospels, and Jesus said to the disciples, no, we have to leave here now. We're leaving, we're going to another town. He said that all the time, and they followed his direction.

They belonged to Jesus, they were his disciples. And Jesus, in a physical body, would say, no, we're going to tarry here for a while. No, I'm going to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast.

And they would know what to do. And now here we have, just as ordinary in language, we're not used to hearing, but found in Scripture, and I've just read three accounts in Acts 8, 9, and 10, but if you want to go through the rest of the book of Acts, especially in the life and ministry of Paul, you'll find this more and more. What am I talking about? The Spirit said, just like Jesus gave instructions, the Spirit said, and they obeyed.

The Spirit told Philip, go up to that chariot. How did he know to go up to that chariot? Because the Spirit told him, go up to that chariot. And Ananias said, I'm not going to go to Paul and lay hands on Saul of Tarsus, I'm not going there.

This guy's the baddest persecutor in the world of Christians. But the Spirit said, or the Lord said, using the Holy Spirit's ministry, he said, no, you go. Don't you balk at it, don't you be afraid, because he's a chosen vessel.

Peter is up on a roof, waiting for a meal, and he's in prayer, and he has this vision. And then when he comes out of the vision, men have been sent by Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, who's going to change the history of the church. And he's pondering what he should do, and the Spirit told him, don't you be afraid of these men, even though they're Gentiles, you go with them.

You go against all the custom that you're used to. You go against everything you've been taught, up till now, because I'm doing a new thing. And the Spirit told him.

How did the Spirit tell him? It doesn't say. Was it an audible voice? Most likely not. It was a still, small voice, or some way, that the Spirit communicated with his heart, and he knew, go, stay, go, pray, go up to the chariot.

All through the New Testament, we have lost the very beautiful practice that we see in the Scripture, is that they were not only saved by Jesus Christ, and born again by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, but for the rest of their lives, they were led by the Spirit. They made decisions based on the Spirit. They moved from one geographical location to another, only because the Spirit told them to do that.

We've lost that. It's too supernatural for us. And we have a lot of unfortunate people who move in so-called full gospel, or Pentecost, or whatever charismatic circles who have abused this, and they act like they have an ongoing conversation with the Spirit 24-7, and some of the evangelists on TV are hawking money, and they're ripping people off, but the Spirit told me so many are supposed to give this amount of money, and it's been abused and prostituted by crooks, and scheming people, and emotionally unbalanced Christians.

Ah, but that's what the devil wants us to do, throw out the baby with the bathwater. Because in the middle is the Spirit still tells people what to do. Now, if you have a smartphone, like I do, you can hit that thing on the bottom, and it comes up, how can I help you? And you can ask any question in the world.

How many people live in Bangladesh? What's the capital of Bermuda? And on and on. But one thing that phone will never tell you is what the will of God is for your life. That phone will not tell you why Jesus saved you, and how and where He wants you to be living.

That phone will not tell you that. And that's the secret to joy and happiness. For the Bible says, he that does the will of God will abide forever.

The will of God, God has a plan for Alicia's life. Now, her parents might have had plans for her life, her peers have plans for her life, but God, before she was born, has a plan for every day of her life. Timothy has a plan for her life.

God foresaw anything anyone would ever do to her, hurt her, disappoint her, God has a plan for her life. But how do we find out that plan? How do we know that plan? Now, I'm not talking about moral decisions. Moral decisions are never made by getting direction from the Holy Spirit.

Moral decisions are made by Scripture. When you want to know what's right or wrong morally, you don't ask God to show you, you read it in Scripture. Don't say, you know, God, is it okay if I steal this money from my boss? Lead me that way, please.

You can't do that. Stealing is wrong. Hating people is wrong.

Immorality is wrong. Racial prejudice is ugly and wrong. Those are decisions that the Bible tells us.

But how about everything else in life? Who to marry, where to live, what job to take, when to leave a job, to go to school. Not to go to school. Is this guy who's showing that he cares for you, sister, is he the one that God has for you, or is it a trap? Why, there's no traps in life? Well, of course there are.

There's traps in life. How do we know? Does the Spirit still say, go and take her out to lunch and share Christ with her? Does the Spirit say that, or is that too supernatural and spooky for us? According to the

Bible, this ministry of the Spirit has never stopped. I'm not talking for long, but listen.

Jesus said, when I go, I'm not gonna leave you alone. I'm gonna send the Spirit. Who's the replacement for Jesus? The Holy Spirit.

Who's the only God that's working on the earth today? The Holy Spirit. Jesus is not here. He's seated at the right hand of the Father.

So when the Bible says the Lord says something, he's really the Spirit of the Lord, because the Spirit of the Lord, the Lord and the Holy Spirit are used synonymously in the book of Acts and in the epistles. But Jesus is not here. He's coming back.

How many believe it? Say amen. How many believe it? Say amen. He's coming back.

But until he comes back, he is in heaven and we're on earth. So how are we gonna know what to do on these important non-moral decisions? What should you study in school, young person? That job looks like a good job offer, but if you leave that job, what if it doesn't work out? No, I just, I can't take that boss anymore. I'm gonna quit.

Then you won't have a job. No, I know, but God will provide. You better be sure you're being led by the Spirit.

He might want you to put up with that boss for a little while longer, amen? Amen. What kind of heartache have we brought upon ourselves? What kind of heartache in our lives have we brought upon ourselves by making decisions not led by the Holy Spirit? Who knows everything? Who knows God's plan for our life? No, but I have a dream. Listen, your dream is nowhere near as good as the will of God.

There's a whole theology now today, very cheap, very shallow, follow your dream. No, I know all kinds of people who have followed their dream end up in a ditch. I want to follow God's plan for my life.

How many say amen? I want to follow God's plan. So let's review this. Philip, notice how the Spirit can lead illogically.

Philip is in Samaria, and he's holding a revival. He's a deacon. He's never been ordained as a minister.

He's a deacon. Titles never stopped anyone back then. They did as God led them.

He goes down to Samaria, as the Bible says. It was really north, but because Jerusalem was elevated, you would always find people going down to some place from Jerusalem. Like we would go down to Florida.

You wouldn't go up to Florida. But when you leave Jerusalem, you're going down to some place. So he goes north to Samaria, and there's a revival breaks out.

And he shares Jesus, and miracles, and signs and wonders are happening, and there's a great joy in the place. And then out of nowhere, the Lord tells him, no, leave this and go to a road to the desert. And that's all he tells him.

How many of us would have the faith to do that? Leave something exciting. Leave people happy, joyful. But the Spirit told him, no, you go to the road, that road that leads down to Gaza from Jerusalem, heading

toward the desert.

And what? Notice the Spirit doesn't tell him, and what? If you and I want to be led by the Spirit, you got to realize he only gives us enough information that we need, not everything we want. So he gets, obeys the Spirit, and he goes to this road, and now a chariot comes, and this Ethiopian eunuch is there who works for the Queen of Ethiopia. And now, is he just standing there? The Spirit tells him.

Notice how sensitive he must have been. How open he must have been. How in communion with God he must have been.

The Spirit told him, now go up and walk next to that chariot. The Lord wouldn't say that. The Lord would only say like big momentous things.

He'd never say, go join yourself to a chariot. No, the Spirit said, go join yourself to, now he's walking next to the chariot. Why is he there? Because the Spirit told him, walk there.

Why? Doesn't say why, just walk next to the chariot. And now the guy is reading the book of Isaiah, and he must be reading it out loud. And now, Philip sees this opportunity and says, by the way, do you understand what you're reading? No, how could I, unless someone comes and explains it.

He jumps into the chariot, explains it, and as the end of the story comes, he leads that Ethiopian eunuch, possibly the first African convert to Jesus, that changed the history of Ethiopia, history suggests. And because he led him to the Lord, the Ethiopian eunuch says, well, there's some water over here. What stops me from being baptized now that you've explained the gospel? No, let's get out, let's get this thing on.

We can roll this way right now in the water, and I'll baptize you. Notice, illogical, leave Samaria with people to go to a desert road. Now, inconsequential, join yourself to a chariot.

Amazing. And now we have the case of Ananias, who has fears and insecurities. He's open to God, and God tells him, now you go to this house, there's a blind guy named Saul of Tarsus.

He's blinded because I just blinded him, and I reveal myself to him. Now, you go and pray for him so that he can see, because he's a chosen vessel. No, I'm not going.

Just let somebody else. This guy has a track record of just a lot of bodies laying around who are Christians. No, the spirit tells him, you go, you go.

You do what I tell you. And he goes, and he lays his hands, and he calls him Brother Saul. What a beautiful picture.

And Saul now can see, and that's the beginning of Saul's not only conversion, but introduction into the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Remember, he'll always remember, when I got converted, the Lord appeared to me and sent some guy who I saw coming when I was praying, and he was sent, and he prayed for me. Oh, and it was all directed by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, Peter, who was carefully observant and wouldn't go to a Gentile's house, he sees this vision of this sheep coming down three times with all these animals in it, and the animals are unclean, and they're being prohibited by the book of Leviticus, the writings of Moses. Jews were not allowed to eat a certain number of things. So when the Lord speaks and says, eat, kill and eat, he goes, I'm not eating that.

He wants to show the Lord. No, I'm carefully observant. And the Lord says, no, don't you call unclean what I call clean.

What's he preparing them for? He's preparing them for the Gentiles to come into the church. That's you and I, except unless you're Jewish here today and a believer in Yeshua. So now he comes to, and he's trying to figure out what it's all about, and God has worked through the Spirit to tell Cornelius, this Gentile soldier, centurion, who believed in one God, went to the synagogue, prayed, gave to poor people.

He told him separately, you go send three men to get Peter. I'll tell you where he lives. Go to this place in Joppa and ask for Peter, who's called Simon.

And as Peter comes out of it, God has synchronized the whole thing, and whammo, there it is. He has three men going, Peter, Peter, is there someone named Peter here? And Peter's going, I'm not going with those Gentiles. And the Spirit tells him, you go.

Forget your prejudice. Forget your anxiety. You go.

How were these people directed? They were directed by the Spirit. How do people go to Missionsville? How did Hudson Taylor go to China? How does Elsie Larrison from our church go to Haiti, the one place she said, told the Lord when she got saved, I'll never go back to the place where I was born. I'm never gonna go to Haiti, but otherwise I'll do what you want me to do.

And the Lord said, you're going back to Haiti. Never tell God never, amen? Well, why'd she go? Because the Spirit told her. You think I ordered her? No pastor has a right to order his people around.

No pastor. That's human control. That's horrible.

I didn't die for anyone. How could I control anyone? Jesus died for people. Come on, can we say amen? Jesus died for people.

You respect pastors, you respect leadership. I had a deal with a pastor recently who was telling somebody, you go back to your church, but I'm unhappy there and I feel my time. No, you go back to your church and do whatever the pastor tells you.

That's wrong. That's wrong. That is wrong.

When it comes to God's plan for your life, you do not go by any pastor. You can bounce things off of a pastor, but you listen to the Holy Spirit. And then you get people who can confirm and affirm, yeah, God is saying that to you.

This is why people are stuck where they're stuck and it's the same old, same old, and nothing changes because they're not open and ready to move as the Spirit says move. No, this is where my mama and daddy grew up. This is where I grew up, Church of God.

I grew up Southern Baptist, gonna die Southern Baptist. Grew up Assemblies of God, gonna die Assemblies of God. Who says? Jesus has a plan for our lives.

The strangest thing, I'll close. My wife and I went in the ministry pastoring a church in Newark, New Jersey. Had a salary, had a couple hundred people.

Then they were ready to close up this church here overseen by my late father-in-law on Atlantic Avenue called the Brooklyn Tabernacle. It was down to less than 10 people for a lot of meetings. Had less than \$5 in the checking account.

My mother-in-law said, shut it down. That had been a lot of problems. And my father-in-law said, no, I don't think we should.

I feel led, we should give it one more try. Jim, Carol, you're young, you're strong. Would you go in both churches, stay in both? Try to pastor both.

Well, I was young, I was doing a terrible job in Newark so I thought, why not do a terrible job in two places? Why not double my pleasure here? So, that's the truth. So on Sundays, I would come and do a service without her. She would be in Newark.

We lived in Maplewood. I would do the nine o'clock service all along to a handful of people. The pianist, the keyboard player only knew how to play one song.

Oh, How I Love Jesus. And every Sunday, as God is my witness, I would stand up and say, I feel led to sing Oh, How I Love Jesus. Could we sing that song? I just love that song.

Anything else, she might take her hands off the keyboard. That's the truth. And I would warn her, Laverne, do not take your hands off the keyboard because then the people would get all kinds of discombobulated.

Then I would race through the Holland Tunnel and go to Newark and pick it up after the morning praise and worship and preach and then come back at night. And there was no salary. There was nothing at Brooklyn because it was just, does it stay open? And one day I just turned to my wife in the car and I said, you know, I feel like God wants us to leave the church that's stable in Jersey and put all of our efforts in Brooklyn.

And she just turned and said, I feel the same thing too. Made no sense. No salary, no money, no anything.

The church was so depressing, I didn't want to go and I was in charge, but God knew. All right, let me close here. So what do you have to do to hear from God? It's very simple.

You want to know how to be led by the Spirit? How many, first of all, how many would love to be led by the Holy Spirit in decisions small and large? Okay. You know, I was unsure what I should preach about when I was walking to the church today as God is my Savior. I told my witness, I haven't used notes for almost five years.

So I said, God, give me a sign. And when I got through praying upstairs with the prayer band, a woman named Brenda, who's in the prayer band, started praying out loud. There's witnesses to it.

And she kept saying, and God, make sure Pastor Simba's led by your Spirit. Make sure he and Carol are led by your Spirit. Lead our church by the Spirit.

And I just whispered to God, thank you. Because the Spirit speaks in all different ways. How many have ever been affirmed or moved by the Spirit and he directed you in some way? So here's all you have to know.

First of all, do you believe the Holy Spirit still speaks today? I'm not talking all the people who come from anti-Holy Spirit backgrounds, of which there's numerous ones. The con, the cop-out is this. No, Scripture's completed.

The Spirit doesn't speak anymore. I got that. I got that the Spirit isn't giving us new verses.

I got that. No new doctrine. This is all settled.

Anybody does anything in any meeting, I don't care what kind of culture. If it's not in the Bible, I don't wanna see it done. How many are with me? Say amen.

But listen, how would the Bible ever tell me to leave Newark? What verse says leave Newark and go to Brooklyn? There's no verse. There's no verses for 1,000 things that happen to us in our lives. Moral direction, yes, but not life movement direction.

You have to believe the Spirit still speaks today. You gotta put away all the bias that you have because you've seen weird things. Listen, if I told you everything I've seen in my life that Carol and I have seen that has abused the Holy Spirit, listen, from real little, I've seen the craziest things done in the name of the Holy Spirit.

I've seen a guy get out, have a seizure and knock down, I remember I was a little boy, seven years old, knock down 20 chairs, folding chairs, bump into ladies, knock them over, and he's all in the Spirit. He's no more in the Spirit than these tissues are in the Spirit. But that was just that culture, that church.

Oh, that's the Holy Spirit, why? Because he's acting crazy. Some people just act crazy. How many say amen? Amen.

Because it doesn't edify. When the Spirit moves in the service, it edifies the whole church, not one person. If it doesn't edify everyone, no one's allowed to do it.

You're not allowed to do it. Well, you gotta let the Holy Ghost, listen, the Holy Spirit says let everything be done to edification. That's why churches don't grow and don't make converts because they're just playing to the choir.

They're just, let's have church, praise God. The Holy Spirit edifies. How many believe he still speaks? Lift up your hand.

No, lift it up high so God will see. All right, put your hand down. Now, here's the harder question.

How many wanna be led? Well, listen, he might take you places you're not used to going. He might take you right where you're afraid. No solitarsis, have someone else pray.

I'm not going with those Gentiles. No, you go. Why should I leave Samaria when I go to a desert road to do what? No, shh, Philip, just obey.

I'll tell you the next step when you get to the next step. I believe there's some people here today, whether it's socially, a romantic thing, your job, relocation, your ministry, stepping out in what God wants you to do, he brought you here today because he wants you to know he will lead you. I will not lead you.

The bishop won't lead you. The apostle won't lead you. The pope won't lead you.

The famous evangelist won't lead you. God loves us so much, he said, no, I want you so close to me, I'm gonna guide you and lead you every step. And you'll hear a voice behind you say, this is the way, walk in it.

Close your eyes with me. If you're here today and you want God to speak to you, as I was talking, your heart burned a little bit within you because you're facing some decisions. If you go by logic, if you go by your education, you might miss it.

You might miss it. Not wrong to use your brain, not wrong to use your education, but ultimately everything must come down to this if you're a Christian. What will you have me to do, Lord? What will you have me to do? You purchased my life on Calvary.

You washed away my sins. Now I belong to you. If I belong to you, I belong to you.

I don't belong to myself anymore, I belong to you. And Lord, Lord, we have all learned that when we say, no, I want to do my thing, but have God bless it, we have ended up in some really nasty places. So we say to you today, speak, Lord, your servants are listening.

We remember what you said seven times in Revelation chapters two and three. He that has an ear, she that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. If you're here today and you want God to speak to you, lead you, whether it's this moment or today, later in a dream, somehow, somehow, you need direction from God.

Stand up right where you're sitting. Come on, just stand up and say, Pastor, that was for me. I'm at a crossroads.

The bottom's fallen out, now I don't know what to do. Sometimes I think it's the devil that made this happen, but it could be God blocking. How will I know? Spirit, speak to me.

Everybody standing quickly, come to the front. Quickly, come, quickly.

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