

# (Finding God's Will) 3. Guidance Through the Inner Witness

by Zac Poonen

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*God guides us through the Holy Spirit, who speaks to us through an inner pressure in our spirits, and we must obey the Spirit's promptings and checks.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:17, Luke 4:1, Acts 8:29, Romans 8:6, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 5:17, Colossians 3:15, 1 John 2:20

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Gods Will"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes that God rarely guides us in spectacular ways, but rather through the Holy Spirit in this New Testament age. Believers are encouraged to seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to listen to the inner pressure and peace that the Spirit brings. It is important to examine our motives and ensure they align with God's will, using tools like a 'balance sheet' to evaluate decisions. The inner witness of the Holy Spirit is highly valued as God's primary means of guidance, surpassing a mere moral code, as believers are called to live by the life of Christ within them.

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## Transcript

When we come to the subject of the means by which God guides us, we must bear in mind that Biblical principles are more important than the experiences of even godly men and women. God is not limited to work in any pattern we lay down. He is Sovereign and may at times choose to use the miraculous instead of the normal means of guidance. He guided Israel by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire in the wilderness, but that method ceased when they entered Canaan.

The Acts of the Apostles have a few cases of extraordinary guidance. An angel spoke to Philip and told him to leave Samaria and to go to the desert road (8:26). Ananias was told by the Lord in a vision to go and meet Saul (9:10-16). Peter saw a vision in which God revealed that he was to take the gospel to the heathen (10:9-16). Paul saw a vision directing him to go to Macedonia (16:9). He also refers to a time when the Lord gave him directions in a vision in Jerusalem (22:17-21). But these are exceptions rather than the rule.

We cannot entirely dismiss the possibility of God directing His children in similar ways today. But as in the Acts of the Apostles, such instances are rare.

In this book we are concerned only with the normal means of guidance.

In the Old Testament, ascertaining God's will appears to have been an easy task. The law of Moses was clear and specific in many things. The Israelites in the wilderness had only to observe and follow the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. They did not have to be spiritual to know when and where to move. They only needed good eyesight! When the high-priest sought to find God's will, all he had to do was to cast the 'Urim and Thummim' in the Lord's presence and they indicated 'Yes' or 'No'. It was all so simple, because it was external and easily apprehended by man's physical senses.

### Relying on the Holy Spirit

In contrast to all this, knowing God's will appears to be so much more difficult for us in this day and age. The reason is that God wants us to prove for ourselves what His perfect will is (Rom.12:2). The Holy Spirit now lives in a believer to be his Guide, and He replaces all the external means of guidance that existed in the Old Testament. External guidance is for the immature. Inward guidance is for the mature - and this is the way God desires to lead all His children today.

When seeking God's will, we need to ascertain what the Holy Spirit is saying to us in our spirits. It is essential therefore that we seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, "Do not be vague and thoughtless and foolish, but understanding and firmly grasping what the will of the Lord is....(therefore) be (ever) filled....with the Holy Spirit" (Eph.5:17,18). The words in Luke 4:1 are also significant - "Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit.... was led by the (Holy) Spirit." Throughout His earthly life the Lord Jesus was governed and guided only by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit - never by human coercion or advice or even by sympathetic appeal.

This sensitivity to the voice of the Spirit was found among the early Christians too. In the Acts of the Apostles, we find Philip acting on the inner urging of the Spirit and joining the chariot of the Ethiopian statesman (Acts 8:29); Peter obeying the inner voice of the Spirit directing him to go to Cornelius's house (Acts 10:19,20); and the leaders in the church at Antioch recognizing the witness of the Holy Spirit in their spirits confirming the call of Saul and Barnabas to foreign missionary service (Acts 13:2). The same Spirit desires to guide each of us today in every decision.

### Recognizing the voice of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit speaks to us through an inner pressure in our spirits rather than through an audible voice. He urges us inwardly either to take or not to take a certain course of action. Normally, this is the result of much time spent in prayer, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed course of action. However the Holy Spirit may also give us a sudden urge at times to go somewhere or to do something. But sudden impulses to do something ridiculous can come from Devil too - or from ourselves. So we must be careful. The Holy Spirit will in any case never lead us contrary to the teaching of the Bible.

We can distinguish the voice of the Holy Spirit by the increasing pressure He produces in our spirits and the growing peace He gives to our minds, as we pray over the matter. "The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom.8:6-NASB). The Devil's voice is usually harassing and often accompanied by threats of judgment, if we do not obey instantly. God invariably gives us sufficient time to consider and be sure of His will.

On some occasions the Spirit may lead us to do something our minds cannot fully understand. Stephen Grellet, an American preacher, was once led by the Spirit to a certain logging camp which he found deserted. But he was so sure of his guidance, that he went into the empty dining hall and preached his

sermon. Many years later, a man approached Grellet in London. Reminding him of the incident, he said he had been the cook at that camp and had been the only man there that day. He had hidden outside a window and listened to Grellet's sermon. He was converted and had gone on to work for the Lord. Such guidance however is extremely rare.

It is often not easy for us to distinguish between our own heart's voice and the voice of the Spirit, for our hearts are so deceitful. For instance, when considering a possible life-partner, we can easily mistake the emotional pressure and the "growing feeling of peace and joy at every contemplation of the proposed step", for the witness of the Holy Spirit. The chances of being deceived are, however, considerably lessened, if we examine our motives and make sure we desire the glory of God alone and are prepared to accept whatever He chooses for us. It is usually where such yieldedness is lacking or where motives are selfish that we go astray.

God's will may sometimes be just what we like ourselves, but it can also be what we do not instinctively like. We should not think God's will is always the most difficult course of action that lies before us. Neither need it be the easiest course of action. When we are in a difficult situation or a tough job, we may be tempted to run away from the place. This can easily be mistaken for the leading of the Spirit. On such occasions, if we are in doubt, it is better to take the more difficult step and to trust God to give us grace to manifest Christ's victory in our situation.

One practical step, when you have to decide on a course of action, could be to draw up a 'balance sheet'. Draw a line across a sheet of paper and write down all the reasons for doing a particular thing on one side, and all the reasons against it on the other. Pray over these reasons daily and revise the list as necessary. Be sincerely willing to accept either course of action. As you continue to pray, the Holy Spirit will give you a witness in your spirit as to what you are to do. If you experience a growing peace in your spirit about a particular course of action, this will usually be a clear indication of what God wants you to do. The Bible says, "Let the peace (which comes) from Christ (through the Holy Spirit), rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts - deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds" (Col. 3:15-Amplified). As, in a football game, all play stops when the referee blows his whistle (to indicate a foul), so we should check ourselves when we lose our peace. We should proceed ahead only when we have perfect peace in our spirits.

### Realizing the importance of the Spirit

It is essential that we recognize the importance of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, that we have spoken of in this chapter, for this is the chief means by which God guides His children today. We must always obey the inner promptings as well as the inner checks of the Spirit. It is not enough for a believer to be guided by the principle of right and wrong. That is the plane of the Old Covenant. We are called under God's New Covenant to live on a higher plane - sharing the very life of God and being governed by that life. These two planes of living are symbolized by the two trees in the garden of Eden - the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. It is good to have a moral code that tells us what is good and what is evil, and to live by that standard. But that is reverting to living 'under the law.' The Christian standard is higher (Matt. 5:17-48).

Watchman Nee in his booklet, Two Principles of Conduct, says, "It is a most amazing thing that the objective of so many Christians is only conformity to an external standard, though what God has given us by new birth is not a lot of new rules and regulations to which we are required to conform. He has not

brought us to a new Sinai and given us a new set of commandments with their 'Thou shalt' and 'Thou shalt not'....As a Christian you now possess the life of Christ, and it is the reactions of His life that you have to consider. If, when you contemplate any move, there is a rise of life within you to make that move; if there is a positive response from the inner life; if there is 'the anointing' within (1 John 2:20,27); then you can confidently pursue the proposed course. The inner life has indicated that. But if, when you contemplate a certain move, the inner life begins to languish, then you may know that the move you contemplated should be avoided, however commendable it may seem to be.

"Do realize that the conduct of many a non-Christian is governed by the principle of right and wrong. Wherein does the Christian differ from the non-Christian if the same principle governs both? God's Word shows us plainly that the Christian is controlled by the life of Christ, not by any external code of ethics. There is something vital within the Christian that responds to what is of God and reacts against what is not of Him; so we must take heed to our inner reactions....We dare not be governed by externalities, nor by reasoning, our own or other people's. Others may approve a certain thing, and when we weigh up the pros and cons we too may think it right; but what is the inner life saying about it?

"Once you realize that the determining factor in all Christian conduct is life, then you know that you must not only avoid all that is evil, but also all that is just externally good. Only what issues from the Christian life is Christian conduct; therefore we cannot consent to any action that does not spring from life....Many things are right according to human standards, but the Divine standard pronounces them wrong because they lack the Divine life....God's way for us is not known by external indications but by internal registrations. It is peace and joy in the spirit that indicate the Christian's path. It is a fact that the Lord Jesus Christ dwells within the believer, and He is constantly expressing Himself in us, so we must become sensitive to His life and learn to discern what that life is saying."

May God help us to learn this lesson.

#### Summary

1. God rarely guides us in spectacular ways. In this New Testament age, God guides us through the Holy Spirit. So we must seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
2. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through an inner pressure in our spirits. This pressure increases as we wait on God in prayer, and will be accompanied by a growing inward peace.
3. To distinguish the voice of the Spirit from other voices, we should examine our motives and see that they are pure.
4. A 'balance sheet', to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of a proposed course of action, can be helpful in enabling us to find God's will.
5. We must place great value on the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, for this is God's chief means of guidance in our day. God expects us to be governed by this in our daily lives and not merely by a moral code.

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