

“Learning to Discern”

Summary

What if the most important relationship we are neglecting is the one with the Holy Spirit? In a world where knowledge is doubling every thirteen months and information floods every corner of our lives, we are being called to ask a deeper question: whose voice are we actually listening to? This message takes us into the heart of spiritual discernment, reminding us that thoughts are not always our own. Drawing from Matthew 16, we see how Peter received divine revelation one moment and became a mouthpiece for a very different spirit the next. The same mind, two entirely different sources. This is the reality we navigate every single day. The Apostle Paul's words in Galatians 5 anchor us with a simple but profound challenge: if we live by the Spirit, we must also walk in step with the Spirit. That means moving, growing, and staying close enough to hear what God is saying. The natural senses we rely on so heavily are not always trustworthy guides, especially in moments of crisis or rapid change. Like a pilot flying under the hood, we need instruments more reliable than our own feelings and perceptions. The Word of God and the voice of the Holy Spirit are exactly that. We were created with spiritual senses, and according to Hebrews 5:14, those senses are sharpened through use. This is an invitation to stop keeping the Holy Spirit at arm's length and start practicing the kind of fellowship that actually transforms us from the inside out.

Small Group Study Guide – Learning to Discern

Based on "Janet Get Your Purse" Sermon Series

Overview

This session explores what it means to live in step with the Holy Spirit, how to discern the source of our thoughts, and why developing our spiritual senses matters more than ever in a rapidly changing world. Pastor Rob challenged us to move from passive Christianity into an active, daily fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Key Takeaways

- **The Holy Spirit wants to be included daily.** Acknowledging, including, and depending on the Holy Spirit are practical starting points for a deeper relationship with God.
 - **Not every thought is your own.** Thoughts have a nature and a source. They can originate from God, from ourselves, or from the enemy. Learning to discern the difference is a learnable, developable skill.
 - **Spiritual senses exist and must be exercised.** Just as natural senses help us navigate the physical world, spiritual senses help us navigate the spiritual one. They grow through use, not through passivity.
 - **Your natural senses are not fully reliable.** Like a pilot flying under the hood, we can be deceived by what we feel or perceive. God's Word and God's Spirit are the instruments we must learn to trust.
 - **We are living in a historically unique moment.** The explosion of knowledge and the speed of change described in Daniel 12:4 matches our generation precisely. This is not the time to be spiritually passive.
 - **The body of Christ carries collective wisdom.** No individual has everything they need. We need each other to fully access the mind of Christ.
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Discussion Questions

Opening (Getting the Conversation Started)

1. When you first heard the title "Janet Get Your Purse," what did you think the series was going to be about? Have you ever had a moment in a church setting where something felt unfamiliar or uncomfortable to you spiritually? What was that like?
 2. Pastor Rob described the Holy Spirit as someone we should greet and acknowledge each morning. How does that idea sit with you? Does it feel natural or does it feel like a stretch?
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Going Deeper

3. Pastor Rob referenced the example from Matthew 16 where Peter received a God-given thought and then, just moments later, a thought from a very different source. What does that tell us about the consistency of our own spiritual discernment? How does that challenge or encourage you?
4. Bishop Zink's statement was shared in the sermon: "Thoughts identify the spirits that are trying to rule your life." How does that reframe the way you think about your own inner dialogue? Are there recurring thought patterns in your life that you have never stopped to question the source of?
5. Pastor Rob used the illustration of a pilot flying under the hood to make the point that natural senses can be deceived, especially under pressure. Can you think of a time when

you made a decision based purely on how something felt or looked, only to realize later that your perception was off? What would trusting your spiritual instruments have looked like in that situation?

6. Hebrews 5:14 says that spiritual senses are developed by reason of use. What does that practically mean for someone who feels like they have very little experience discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit? What is one area of your daily life where you could begin practicing that kind of attentiveness?
 7. Pastor Rob pointed to Daniel 12:4 and the explosion of knowledge in our generation. Knowledge doubling every 13 months is a staggering reality. How does that pace of change affect your spiritual life? Do you feel more distracted, more overwhelmed, or more motivated to seek God's guidance?
 8. Pastor Rob asked a direct question: "At what rate is Christian maturity happening compared to the increase of knowledge in the world?" How would you honestly answer that question for yourself?
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Personal Reflection Questions

9. On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your current daily fellowship with the Holy Spirit? What would it take to move that number up by even two points?
 10. Pastor Rob described two dangers: being behind your calling and being ahead of it. Which of those do you feel more prone to, and why?
 11. Pastor Rob offered a simple filter for evaluating what we give our time and attention to: Is it moving me closer to God or further away? Apply that filter honestly to one area of your life right now. What does your honest answer tell you?
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Practical Applications

Choose at least one of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

- 1. Begin a daily acknowledgment practice.** Each morning this week, before reaching for your phone or beginning your routine, take two to three minutes to simply say out loud that you acknowledge the Holy Spirit, that you want to include him in your day, and that you are choosing to depend on him. Keep it simple and keep it honest. Report back to the group on what that experience was like.
- 2. Start a thought journal.** For three to five days, when a strong thought or impression comes to you, write it down. Note whether it seemed to draw you toward God or away from him, whether it lined up with Scripture, and whether it produced peace or anxiety. Use this as a tool to begin practicing discernment rather than just reacting to whatever enters your mind.

3. Read and reflect on one passage daily. Work through the following passages this week, one per day, and write down one thing each verse reveals about how the Holy Spirit communicates and leads.

- Galatians 5:25
- John 16:12-15
- 1 Corinthians 2:12-16
- Hebrews 4:12
- 1 John 4:1
- Hebrews 5:14
- Daniel 12:1-4

4. Have a conversation with someone in the body. Pastor Rob noted that we collectively carry the mind of Christ, and that no individual has everything they need on their own. This week, reach out to one person in the church and ask them a genuine question about how they hear from God or how they have grown in their relationship with the Holy Spirit. Come back to the group and share what you learned.

5. Conduct a personal media inventory. Spend fifteen minutes honestly evaluating what you are consistently feeding your mind through media, social platforms, news, entertainment, and conversation. Ask yourself whether those inputs are sharpening your spiritual discernment or dulling it. Make one concrete adjustment and stick with it for the week.

Closing Prayer Focus

Close your group time by praying together in the following areas.

- Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and for his willingness to guide, speak, and lead.
- Ask for forgiveness for the times we have been distracted, resistant, or simply inattentive to his voice.
- Pray for one another by name, specifically that each person in the group would grow in their ability to discern God's voice from all the other voices competing for their attention.
- Pray for your church community, that it would be a people who are not ashamed of the Holy Spirit and who are growing in step with him together.

A Note for Group Leaders

This guide is designed to create honest, unhurried conversation. Not every question needs to be covered in a single session. Pay attention to where the group is engaging most deeply and follow that. The goal is not to get through the material. The goal is for each person to leave with a clearer desire and a more practical path toward walking in step with the Holy Spirit.

Main Points – Learning to Discern

Sermon Summary: In this message, Pastor Rob continues the "Janet Get Your Purse" series, which is designed to help believers overcome hesitation and unfamiliarity with the Holy Spirit's work and move into genuine, daily fellowship with him. Drawing on a range of scriptures, the sermon makes the case that God is still speaking, that the Holy Spirit was given to guide believers into all truth, and that spiritual senses must be developed through use just as natural senses are. Pastor Rob connects the rapid acceleration of knowledge in the modern age to Daniel's prophecy about the end times, arguing that this is precisely the moment when believers must sharpen their ability to discern God's voice from the competing voices of the world, the flesh, and the enemy. The sermon calls the congregation to move from passive Christianity into active, Spirit-led living, acknowledging the Holy Spirit daily, including him in all of life, and depending on him for guidance, especially in an era of overwhelming information and spiritual deception.

Key Points:

- The "Janet Get Your Purse" series exists to help believers move past unfamiliarity or discomfort with the Holy Spirit and into genuine relationship with him
- Being born again means the Holy Spirit now dwells within the believer, and that new life is meant to function, not merely exist
- God is still speaking, and believers can silence him through distraction, disobedience, or a refusal to listen
- Thoughts are not always self-generated; they can originate from God, from the enemy, or from one's own soul, and the Word of God is the primary instrument for discerning the difference
- Natural senses are limited and can be deceived, and believers must learn to trust spiritual instruments, namely the Word and the Spirit, over emotional or sensory reactions
- Spiritual senses are developed through practice and use, not through passive observation
- The explosion of knowledge in the modern era directly fulfills Daniel's prophecy about the end times, making spiritual discernment more urgent than ever
- The "time of the end" is fundamentally about the end of self-reliance and independence from God
- The body of Christ collectively carries the mind of Christ, making community and connection essential to navigating this hour
- Every believer can choose, through an act of will, to draw closer to the Holy Spirit and invite him into daily life

Scripture Reference:

- Galatians 5:25, which calls believers to walk in step with the Spirit if they live by the Spirit
- Hebrews 5:12-14, which describes spiritual immaturity and the need to have spiritual senses exercised through use in order to discern good and evil
- John 16:12-13, in which Jesus promises that the Spirit of truth will guide believers into all truth and show them things to come

- 1 John 4:1, which instructs believers not to accept every spirit uncritically but to test them
- Daniel 12:1 and 12:4, which describe the end of the age, the deliverance of God's people, and the signs of increased travel and knowledge
- Hebrews 4:12, which describes the Word of God as a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart
- 1 Corinthians 2, which explains that spiritual truths are spiritually discerned and that the natural mind cannot receive them
- 2 Corinthians 13:14, which references the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
- Matthew 16, in which Jesus reveals to Peter that his confession came not from himself but from the Father, and shortly after rebukes a contrary thought as originating from Satan

Discussion Questions – Learning to Discern

Galatians 5:25 calls believers to keep in step with the Spirit -- what does it look like practically in your daily life to be in step with the Holy Spirit, and what are the most common things that cause you to fall out of step?

The sermon draws a distinction between thoughts that originate from God, from ourselves, and from the enemy, as illustrated in Matthew 16 with Peter -- how do you currently discern the source of the thoughts that influence your decisions, and what role does Scripture play in that process?

Pastor Rob describes the Holy Spirit as someone who wants to guide us into things to come, as Jesus promises in John 16:13 -- in what areas of your life have you most resisted that guidance, and what do you think has held you back from trusting it?

The sermon uses the illustration of a pilot flying under the hood to argue that natural senses can be dangerously unreliable without the right instruments -- how much do you rely on your emotions, reasoning, or cultural input to navigate life compared to the Word of God and the leading of the Spirit?

Hebrews 5:14 teaches that spiritual senses are sharpened through use and practice -- what intentional steps are you taking to exercise your spiritual discernment, and where do you feel the most underdeveloped in that area?

Pastor Rob warns that if people stop listening, God may stop speaking, drawing on the pattern seen throughout Scripture -- what habits or distractions in your life might be slowly shutting down your ability to hear from God, and what would it take to change them?

Daniel 12:4 describes the end times as a period of rapid movement and exploding knowledge -- how does the pace and volume of information in your daily life affect your spiritual sensitivity, and what boundaries have you set to protect your inner life with God?

The sermon argues that the time of the end is fundamentally about the end of self and independence from God, rooted in the choice made in the garden -- in what ways do you still operate independently from God, and what would fuller surrender look like for you?

First Corinthians 2 teaches that spiritual truths are spiritually discerned and that the natural mind cannot receive them -- how does this challenge the way modern culture, including AI and digital media, shapes our understanding of truth, and what does it mean for how we evaluate what we consume?

Pastor Rob emphasizes that the body of Christ collectively carries the mind of Christ, meaning we need each other to access the full wisdom God has for us -- in what ways are

you currently investing in genuine spiritual community, and where might you be trying to navigate life's challenges in isolation?

Scriptures – Learning to Discern

Here is a list of all scripture references mentioned or alluded to in the sermon:

Explicitly Cited:

- Galatians 5:25
- Hebrews 5:11-13
- 2 Corinthians 13:14
- Matthew 4:4
- Matthew 16:13-23
- John 16:12-13
- Hebrews 4:12
- 1 John 4:1
- Hebrews 5:14
- 1 Corinthians 2:13-16
- Daniel 12:1
- Daniel 12:4
- Psalms 32:8-9
- Romans 10:9
- Romans 6:23

Alluded To or Paraphrased:

- Genesis 2:16-17 (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil)
- Genesis 3:1-7 (the fall of man and independence from God)
- Genesis 2:15-3:8 (God walking with Adam and Eve in the garden)
- John 10:27 (my sheep hear my voice)
- John 3:3 (except a man be born again)
- Revelation 3:1 (the church of Sardis, having a name for being alive but being dead)
- 2 Corinthians 11:14 (Satan appearing as an angel of light)
- Romans 12:2 (renewing of the mind)
- Luke 12:8-9 (confessing Christ before men)

Devotional – Learning to Discern

Day 1: Keeping in Step with the Spirit

Reading: Galatians 5:25

In this verse, Paul calls believers not merely to possess spiritual life but to actively walk in alignment with the Spirit who gives that life.

Devotional:

It is one thing to receive the Holy Spirit at salvation. It is another thing entirely to walk in daily step with him. Many believers are spiritually alive but practically stationary, holding the gift without opening it. God has not called you to sit in possession of his Spirit while the world around you waits to see him on display. To keep in step means to move when He moves, pause when He pauses, and speak when He speaks. Today, ask yourself honestly: am I behind where God wants me, ahead of where he has led, or genuinely in step? The answer matters more than you may realize.

Reflection: In what areas of your life have you been moving independently of the Holy Spirit rather than in step with him?

Application: Begin each morning this week by verbally acknowledging the Holy Spirit. Say simply: "Good morning, Holy Spirit. I acknowledge you, I include you, and I depend on you today."

Day 2: Discerning the Voice of God

Reading: John 10:27; Matthew 4:4

In John 10:27, Jesus declares that his sheep hear his voice and follow him. In Matthew 4:4, he affirms that human life is sustained not by physical provision alone but by every word that is currently and continuously proceeding from the mouth of God.

Devotional:

God is not silent. He has never stopped speaking. The tragedy of our generation is not that God has gone quiet but that his people have grown too distracted to hear him. Every thought that enters your mind does not originate from you. Some thoughts come from God. Some come from the enemy. Some are simply your own. The Word of God, as Hebrews 4:12 describes, is the instrument that divides and discerns the nature and source of those thoughts. Without consistent

time in Scripture, your ability to recognize God's voice is significantly weakened. A sheep that never listens will never learn to recognize the Shepherd.

Reflection: How often do you sit quietly before God with the expectation that He will speak to you? What competes most loudly for that space?

Application: Set aside fifteen minutes today in silence with your Bible open. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through what you read. Write down any impressions, words, or convictions that arise.

Day 3: Testing the Spirits

Reading: 1 John 4:1; Hebrews 4:12

First John 4:1 urges believers not to accept every spirit at face value but to test them carefully, because many false voices have gone out into the world. Hebrews 4:12 describes the Word of God as the living, active instrument capable of discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Devotional:

The enemy does not announce himself. He does not arrive with obvious warning signs or a clear declaration of his intentions. He presents himself as something appealing, reasonable, and even illuminating. This is precisely why discernment is not optional for the believer in this generation. The speed at which information travels today, the volume of voices competing for your attention, and the sophistication of deception all demand a people who know how to test what they hear. The instrument God has given you for this purpose is His Word. A believer who neglects Scripture is navigating a fast-moving world without a reliable instrument panel.

Reflection: What voices, platforms, or influences have you accepted without filtering them through the Word of God? What fruit have they produced in your spiritual life?

Application: Evaluate one regular source of information or entertainment in your life this week. Ask honestly: is this moving me closer to God or further away? Is my discernment sharpening or dulling as a result of this input?

Day 4: Exercising Your Spiritual Senses

Reading: Hebrews 5:14; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16

Hebrews 5:14 teaches that spiritual maturity and the ability to discern good from evil come through the consistent exercise of one's spiritual senses. First Corinthians 2:14-16 explains that

the natural mind cannot receive or understand the things of the Spirit of God, because they are only spiritually perceived, yet those who are spiritual have access to the mind of Christ.

Devotional:

You were born again as a spirit being, but spiritual senses do not automatically mature on their own. Just as a physical muscle grows only through consistent use, your spiritual discernment develops only through regular exercise. Many believers remain spiritually underdeveloped not because God has withheld anything from them but because they have not practiced. You cannot grow in something you refuse to engage. God is not looking for a perfect performance. He is looking for a willing participant. The body of Christ carries collectively what no individual possesses alone. You need others, and others need what you are carrying.

Reflection: In what ways have you avoided exercising your spiritual gifts or senses out of fear, unfamiliarity, or past disappointment?

Application: Identify one person in your church community who carries a spiritual strength you lack. Intentionally connect with them this week. Ask them to share how they developed that area of their walk with God.

Day 5: Chosen for This Hour

Reading: Daniel 12:1, 4; John 16:12-13

Daniel 12:4 describes the end of the age as a time when people will move rapidly and knowledge will increase at an unprecedented rate. Daniel 12:1 promises that God's people will be delivered in that time. In John 16:12-13, Jesus promises that the Spirit of truth will guide his followers into all truth and will show them things to come.

Devotional:

You were not born into this generation by accident. The explosion of knowledge, the speed of change, the noise of competing voices, the sophistication of deception, all of this is the landscape God specifically placed you in to represent him. You were chosen for this hour. That is not a burden. It is a calling. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would not only lead you into truth but would show you what is coming around the corner. At the speed this generation is moving, that promise is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Your name can be found written in the book. Your life can count for something eternal. The question is whether you will walk in step with the One who placed you here.

Reflection: Does your daily life reflect an awareness that you were chosen for this specific moment in history? What would change if you truly believed that?

Application: Write out a simple prayer of surrender and commitment. Acknowledge the Holy Spirit's role in your life, invite him into every area of your day, and ask him to guide you into the truth your generation desperately needs to see on display.

"Father, I come to you in Jesus' name. I acknowledge I have been distracted by many things. But today, I confess my desire. I want to know you. I want to walk with you. I want to hear your voice. Give me ears to hear what your Spirit is saying to me and to my generation. In Jesus' name. Amen."