[Title Slide] So as ___ mentioned earlier, we're going to think about what is the Holy Spirit's role in terms of speaking God's Word to us or in guiding us. And to put it on the table upfront – I think our church gets accused of worshipping Father, Son and Holy Bible rather than Father Son and Holy Spirit. And I want to take that criticism seriously and highlight the Spirit's work and how he's working.

But it's also worth saying, that especially when it comes to the Spirit speaking to us, we each have different backgrounds, and different experiences. I want to be careful and tender with those experiences because our experiences really shape us. But I want us to be able to view those experiences through the lens of Scripture. So that we can have a right understanding of the Spirit, and we would be led to love and honour Christ.

And so let me start by sharing one of my experiences that is part of this topic.

[Slide – Bible Study] About a decade or so ago, I was attending a bible study for Christian workers during my lunch time. And I remember being at this bible study we were reading John's gospel. I can't remember exactly, but it was either John 1 or John 3. And after we read a bit, the leader said, let's take a moment to share what we noticed in the passage. And I remember the leader sharing that she noticed God's love for the world. And she went on to say – that it's really beautiful that God cares for the animals and the birds and so on. And I said, well I'm not sure that is what John's getting at. Because in John's gospel the world is often referring to the people that rebel against God. And she said to me, well the Spirit gives me understanding of this passage and it gives you an understanding of the text and so neither of us are wrong.

Thirty seconds with your neighbour, what do you make of that situation? How would you respond? [Slide – Discuss]

[Slide – Dove] Now, I remember walking away from this moment, a bit hurt and a bit baffled. Whether this part of John was talking about the world as a whole or just rebellious people mattered to me less, but what really got me a bit churned up, was what did I expect the Spirit to do and say. And if the Spirit was giving two different interpretations, what did that mean? On top of that, if, as the leader said, the Spirit spoke to us individually – then what was the point of bible study?

I actually stopped going to this work bible study – and I felt pretty guilty about that. And so, I hope that by the end of this talk, you won't feel guilty, or inferior, but you'll feel confident in how the Spirit speaks to us as we seek God's will for our lives in all things.

And so, let me pray in that light. Triune God, we pray that as we look at the Scriptures today, that you would enable us to know you better, and to know how you have promised to be with us to the very end of the age. Amen.

Just so you know where I'm going: I want to start with just the big picture idea of what the Holy Spirit is doing in terms of guiding us. And then I'm going to address two different ways we think about how the Holy Spirit interacts with God's Word.

Big picture first: come with me to John 16:12 [Slide – Text]

> **13** But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the 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. **14** He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. **15** All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

[Slide – Torch] So what does Jesus say the Spirit is going to do? He is to guide you into all the truth. Maybe there's a question here about what truth is he guiding us into – we'll come back to that in a second. But secondly, he doesn't speak on his own – in fact, he speaks what Jesus tells Him. And thirdly, do you see that he will glorify Jesus – that's the end goal of the Spirit.

And so, one of the key things we can take away then, is that the Holy Spirit and Jesus cannot be at odds with one another, they can't contradict one another. But the questions that still remain, are, what is the truth that the Holy Spirit will guide us to? Well I think we have to look earlier in the speech, and we notice this in chapter 14. [Slide – Text]

> **25** "All this I have spoken while still with you. **26** But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

[Slide – Light Bulb] The Holy Spirit's role is to remind specifically the apostles – those gathered with Jesus there, of everything that Jesus taught them and the Spirit will make sense of Jesus' death and resurrection. That is, the Holy Spirit is going to help them understand how sin and death is dealt with at the cross. The Spirit will show how the resurrection promises new life if we trust Christ. In other words, the Holy Spirit is going to lead them to Christ.

[Slide – Puzzle] Recently I was away for a little holiday, and I taught my three year old daughter how to do a jigsaw puzzle. And one of the things that makes doing puzzles tricky is if you don't have the box, or the big picture of what it looks like. And my daughter, didn't understand that you have to look at the picture in order to put the pieces together. And so given I had the big picture, I had to guide her through the puzzling process. And that's kind of what the Spirit is doing with the disciples. See, the moments in Jesus life and ministry didn't make sense – they were like puzzle pieces, but the Spirit would guide them as they made sense of it.

[Slide – Torch] So here is the broad summary: that according to Jesus, the Spirit will guide the apostles to Christ. But how does the Spirit guide us? And given that we now have the Bible, do we really need the Spirit? The answer to that of course, is yes!

I reckon there are two ways of thinking about this. The first is to say that the Spirit is active in the reading or proclamation of Scripture. In other words, they are intertwined together.

The second way to think about it is that the Spirit and the Word speak separately. Not contradictory, but separately. So in other words, when we read the bible, we read the bible. And when the Spirit speaks to us, maybe it's a feeling we get or we get a voice in our head or something like that. We're going to look at these in turn.

Let's start with the first one. Which is that the Spirit is active together with the Word. Now, I reckon we don't think that the Bible is spiritual. We think we just read the bible, and we use our mind. And so, in this way of thinking, you can understand why we end up without the Spirit – it's Father Son and Holy Bible. Reading the bible is an intellectual exercise. It's an ordinary thing – people who aren't Christian read the bible. The Spirit on the other hand, is powerful, it's out of the ordinary. But as we read through the Scriptures it's not the case, that the Spirit always manifests in special ways.

In the Old Testament, when prophets speak, the Spirit comes upon them. Take Ezekiel for example. [Slide – Text]

> **2** And he said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." **2** And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. **3** And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me… I send you to them, and you shall say to them…

[Slide – Scroll] And there are moments that the Spirit comes upon various people – including Isaiah, David, and Nehemiah and a couple of other examples – to essentially prophesy, or to bring God's Word to people. Now, we'll touch on prophesy in the final week in our series. But at least it's worth saying, that for a number of the Bible's authors – the Spirit comes upon them.

Similarly in the New Testament, it's not prophets, but eyewitnesses to Jesus. Let me show you 2 Peter 1. [Slide – Text]

> **16** For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. **17** For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," **18** we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.
>
> **20** Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. **21** For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

[Slide – Dove] And just like Jesus promised, the Spirit helped them to make sense of his life, ministry, death and resurrection. But it's not just that, as they wrote it down for us – they were doing so being carried along by the Holy Spirit. That is, the New Testament and I think Peter is extending to the Old Testament too, is not a the work of a human, but it's the Spirit's handiwork. He's the ultimate author. And so much so, that in Hebrews 3, the writer quotes from the Psalm 95. Now if we were quoting Psalm 95, we might say David says… but the writer actually says as the Spirit says…

[Slide – Bruce Springsteen/Ricky Ponting] I wonder whether we might know that but we think about it a bit differently. Perhaps we think of the Bible like a piece of memorabilia. Like it's touched Bruce Springsteen or whatever. And so it's kind of special. But it's obviously not the same as having Bruce Springsteen or Harry Styles or whoever in your home. But the Bible isn't a piece of Holy Spirit memorabilia. It's not just a copy of the Holy Spirit's work – but I want to show you, the Holy Spirit is active and speaking directly to us as we read the Scriptures.

Take for example at our conversion. And we'll look at the Thessalonians conversion. [Slide – Text]

> [4] For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, [5] because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the **Holy Spirit** and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

[Slide – Dove] Now, notice there, that the gospel came not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit. I wonder if you think about your own story about how you became a Christian. And I wonder when we tell someone else, do we mention the Holy Spirit? We might focus on the sermon or a bible passage, or the people involved in our lives, but miss the Spirit. Now why is that? I suspect it's because there wasn't anything miraculous that happens.

But let me show you the other description of the Thessalonians conversion in Acts 17.

> **17** Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. [2] And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, [3] explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." [4] And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

[Slide – Bible Study] So notice here, how they got converted? They reasoned with Paul in the synagogue. That sounds like a boring intellectual exercise. There's not a single mention of the Spirit. There's no additional Spirit coming upon them, or sign. And so can you see that when Paul says in 1 Thessalonians that the gospel came in word, power and the Holy Spirit – it's not three distinct things. The Holy Spirit is active in their thinking through the Scriptures.

That's at the start of our Christian life but what about as we continue on in the Christian life? Come with me to Ephesians 5. [Slide – Text]

> [18] And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, [19] addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,…

[Slide – Light Bulb] How are we to be filled with the Spirit? It's by addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. That is we are filled with the Spirit, when we engage with God's Word – not just when we read it but also when we sing it as well. The Spirit is speaking to us through the Scriptures. And as I've certainly heard some us say – the Scriptures sometimes read us. As Hebrews 4:12 says [Slide – Text]

> [12] For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

[Slide – Text] That is, the Spirit speaks to our deepest thoughts and intentions through the Scriptures. So when we read the Scriptures, and we feel it encourage us, rebuke us or challenge us, that is the Spirit working.

[Slide – Joe Satriani] Just to clarify how the Spirit and the Word are working together, let me illustrate with a guitar and a guitarist. Yes a guitar has capacity to make music. But the Holy Spirit works to bring it to life. And to extend the analogy, the guitarist can't be the guitarist without the guitar. In other words, whenever we read the Bible, the Spirit is at work.

[Slide – Bible Study] A couple of implications before we press on. Firstly, I wonder whether we fail to see the Spirit's work in our ordinary rhythms of the Christian life. That is, I hope it's an encouragement to say that the Spirit is speaking to you today! As you hear the Scriptures read and taught, as we sing together; or at growth group, as we wrestle over the bible. The Spirit is speaking to us. Now, we don't acknowledge the Spirit directly. That's ok, we don't need to – the Spirit us is guiding us towards Christ.

Now, to go back to my introduction about my experience in my work bible study. I think one thing to say that is true, is that the Spirit does work as we gather. But that the Spirit is not the opposite of the intellectualism. So understanding what, the author is intending is a profoundly spiritual activity. But I think that this idea that the Spirit gives us a direct word, or even a separate word. This idea that we expect the Spirit to speak to our hearts or mind.

[Slide – Fire] And I think the best way to explain this is best referenced from the first reading that we had from 1 Kings 19. It's the story of Elijah. The context here – if you have your bibles, is that Elijah has just had a massive showdown against some pagan prophets. And God revealed himself in a grand and miraculous way. And then God essentially speaks in what's famously known as the "still small voice". The actual translation is that it's just a gentle sound. The point is, not that God speaks in our hearts – but that God is active not just in the spectacular but also in the ordinary.

And I think this still small voice has found its place into what I'm calling Christian culture. But notice that in the story of Elijah, there's no mention of the Spirit. And it's not even that he hears a voice in his head. And as you look across the rest of the Old Testament, apart from the Spirit coming on prophets in order to speak God's Word, and that in and of itself, is not mentioned that many times, there are virtually no other references to the voice in our head or heart.

In the New Testament, I think as far as I can tell, that the Spirit only speaks to Philip to go to the Ethiopian Eunuch in order to share Jesus with him and baptise him. Now this was honestly a real surprise to me. And can I extend the challenge to you, to search the Scriptures and look for examples of the Spirit speaking to people.

[Slide – Donkey] Which is all to say, that there is barely any evidence in the Scriptures of the Holy Spirit speaking to people as an "inner voice". In fact, if you look across the breadth of Scripture, it's not really something we should expect. Or at least even if the Spirit can communicate to us in any way – because after all God is God, we should just as readily be expecting God to speak through a burning bush, or donkey or an earthquake or so on. Now, for whatever reason, in our Christian culture, I think it's more acceptable to say, I'm waiting to hear the Spirit speak to me, than to say, I'm going to wait outside the front for the bush to light on fire.

One more thing that's worth saying, is that at least in the book of Acts, you do get more visions and dreams – Peter has a dream about Gentiles becoming Christians, and Paul has a vision of the gospel going to a particular place. And I guess it's worth saying, we don't expect that as much as the voice. And maybe my hot take, is maybe we should expect a dream or vision more than a voice?

But I reckon many of us have had an experience of a voice in our head. Or maybe a feeling that seems like it's the Spirit communicating to us. What about those experiences? The direct answer, is that the Spirit could be recalling or applying Scripture in our minds, but it also might just be our own feelings and desires. We don't have time to look at it today, but I'll point you to 1 Kings 13 as something to look up later. But for now, I think we'll look at 1 John 4. [Slide – Text]

> **4** Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God,
> for many false prophets have gone out into the world. **2** By this you know the Spirit of
> God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, **3** and
> every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist,
> which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

[Slide – Torch] Now, this is particularly about prophecy. But maybe we can think about let's say "prophecy to ourselves". So if we get a voice or a feeling, we should test it. And what are we testing against – whether it aligns with the gospel. When he says – Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God – that's just shorthand for the gospel. And so again, I think the broader point here – is that just because we get a voice or a feeling that might feel supernatural – doesn't mean it's from the Holy Spirit.

Let me give you some examples of what a voice might say to us in our heads or hearts. So imagine if you had a friend say each of these to you – what would you say back to them? Have a chat with your neighbour? [Slide – Text]

- The Spirit guides them to a particular job or opportunity or job promotion
- The Spirit is guiding them to a marry a particular person
- The Spirit is guiding them to give half their money to gospel work
- The Spirit is guiding them to go to Africa on mission
- The Spirit is guiding them to forgive someone
- The Spirit is guiding them to repent of sin

So let me share a few of my thoughts on this. The overarching principle, remember is that the Spirit is guiding us to Christ and his glory.

So thinking about a job opportunity or job promotion, or who we are going to marry, I'm not sure that is taking us to Christ. And so they may be our own desires. Now, unless there's something inherently sinful about the job, like becoming a con man, or if you're wanting to date or marry someone who isn't a Christian – you have a lot of freedom. And if you want to do it – go for it. We don't need to overspiritualise it.

But I personally have never had anyone say to me, that the Spirit told them to give half their money to gospel work or to go to Africa on mission. But if you think about it – that is much more directly linked to the glory of Christ. After all, that's what the dreams and visions are about in Acts. So why wouldn't the Spirit be saying that even today? Now, I'm not saying just because you get the voice, doesn't mean you should look at your bank account, and your family plans and so on. But I am saying – maybe that is from the Spirit.

Finally, I often find when Christian brothers and sisters are in conflict, we don't seem to be very good at forgiving one another. Or sometimes we find it hard to throw off sin. The Spirit can and will convict us of sin – and we'll cover that more next week alongside the role of our conscience, so that's all on that for now.

[Slide – Dove] An interesting example that's been in my own life, is someone feeling like the Spirit is calling them to preach to a church, without actually being part of one. Without reading their bible. I think I would struggle to say they are a Christian. But the crazy thing was, that churches hired him to preach. And it's because they didn't test the Spirit – they saw his own voice as authoritative.

A second example, is I remember a long time ago, someone saying that in order to hear God, you have to sit in silence or go into nature. And don't hear me pooh poohing that. But I hope you've seen that the Spirit will speak to you when you want, the moment you open the bible. If you want the Spirit to speak, then be at church or growth group. If you want God to speak to you in nature, sure – just take your bible with you.

[Title Slide] Let's draw this to a close. This morning/evening we've seen two big ways of understanding how God's Word and Spirit works to lead us to Christ. We can see that the Holy Spirit is fully active as we read the Scriptures. That is, this is not just a dead letter – it's alive and active through the power of the Holy Spirit. But if the Spirit speaks to us via any other means, and he could, we are to test it against the Scriptures. And so again, the Word and Spirit must work together. See, the Spirit isn't trying to lead us to read the bible, or to a particular way of life – he's leading us to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let’s pray.

Father we thank you that you’ve given us your Word so that we would know what your will is – to know Christ. And so remind us that you are active in our lives, not always in the extraordinary but in the ordinary work of gathering together on a Sunday, in our growth groups, as we open the Scriptures in our homes, or with one another. We pray that you would keep showing us Christ, and give us ears to hear and eyes to see the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

We’re going to see Your Word. It doesn’t mention the Spirit – but as we sing it I want us to think about that.

But let me take you to the bridge.

Your word is more than just letters on pages.

I’ll add here it’s through the Spirit that
It’s life and it's love and it's freedom for us

It’s your Son, as a man, come to dwell here with us