

Week 2 — Hearing the Voice of the Holy Spirit

Primary Text: John 14:15–27; John 16:7–15 **Key Verse:** John 16:13 **Theme:** Learning to recognize, trust, and respond to the Holy Spirit's voice.

INTRODUCTION — WHO IS SPEAKING?

Last week we began this series with a simple truth:

God is still speaking.

The question isn't whether God speaks.

The question is:

Are we listening?

But that leads us to another question:

How does God speak to us today?

God has spoken through creation.

God has spoken through the prophets.

God has spoken through Jesus.

God speaks through His written Word.

And Jesus promised something else:

The Holy Spirit would come to live within His people.

Jesus said in John 14:16–17:

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth."

Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure.

They had walked with Jesus.

They had heard His teaching.

They had witnessed His miracles.

They had depended upon His physical presence.

Now Jesus tells them:

"I am going away, but I am not leaving you alone."

The Holy Spirit is coming.

God's presence would no longer simply be **with them**.

Through the Holy Spirit, God's presence would be **within them**.

And today, the Holy Spirit still speaks.

The question is:

Do we recognize His voice?

1. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD

Before we can understand how the Holy Spirit speaks, we must understand **who the Holy Spirit is.**

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force.

He is not simply an emotion.

He is not spiritual energy.

The Holy Spirit is God.

Acts 5:3–4 gives us a powerful example.

Peter asks Ananias:

"How is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit..."

Then Peter says:

"You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit.

Peter says he lied to God.

The Holy Spirit is God.

Jesus places the Holy Spirit alongside the Father and the Son in the Great Commission:

Illustration: a car's warning light system

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." — Matthew 28:19

Paul says:

**"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?"
— 1 Corinthians 3:16**

And again:

"Your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God." — 1 Corinthians 6:19

Think about that.

The God who created the universe chooses to dwell within His people.

That should change the way we think about the Holy Spirit.

We aren't dealing with a force.

We're dealing with God.

And when God speaks:

we should listen.

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT POINTS US TO JESUS

Jesus said in John 16:14:

"He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you."

One of the primary ministries of the Holy Spirit is to point people toward Jesus.

The Holy Spirit doesn't compete with Jesus.

He glorifies Jesus.

Jesus said in John 15:26:

"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me."

The Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:3:

"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit reveals Christ.

The Holy Spirit makes us aware of Christ.

The Holy Spirit helps us understand the things of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:12 says:

"What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us."

So here's one of the first tests for discerning God's voice:

Does what I'm hearing point me toward Jesus?

If a voice makes you more self-centered, be careful.

If a voice leads you away from Scripture, be careful.

If a voice excuses sin, be careful.

If a voice leads you away from Christ, it isn't the Holy Spirit.

Because Jesus said:

"He will glorify me."

The Holy Spirit always points us toward Jesus.

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT SPEAKS THROUGH SCRIPTURE

If we want to hear God clearly, we must begin with God's Word.

Jesus said in John 14:26:

"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."

The Spirit teaches.

The Spirit reminds.

The Spirit illuminates.

The Spirit applies God's truth to our lives.

Second Timothy 3:16–17 tells us:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..."

Scripture is God-breathed.

And 2 Peter 1:21 says:

"Prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

The same Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture helps us understand and apply Scripture.

Psalms 119:105 says:

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."

And Hebrews 4:12 says:

"For the word of God is alive and active."

This means we don't have to chase every voice that claims to be from God.

We start with the Bible. God's Word becomes our foundation.

And here's an important principle: **The Holy Spirit will never contradict the Word He inspired.**

If you believe God told you to do something that Scripture clearly says is wrong, you didn't hear from God.

God does not contradict Himself.

Isaiah 8:20 says:

"Look to God's instructions and teachings!"

So when you think you hear God's voice:

Test it against Scripture.

4. THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTS US

John 16:8 says:

"When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment."

One of the greatest ministries of the Holy Spirit is conviction.

But we need to understand the difference between **conviction** and **condemnation**.

Condemnation says:

"You're worthless." Conviction says: **"This needs to change."**

Condemnation says: **"There is no hope for you."** Conviction says: **"Come back to God."**

Condemnation pushes you away. **Conviction draws you toward God.**

We see this in Acts 2.

Peter preaches the Gospel.

Acts 2:37 says:

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"

They were convicted.

And Peter told them:

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

The Holy Spirit reveals our sin not to destroy us, but to lead us into repentance.

Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 7:10:

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret."

That's what the Holy Spirit does.

He puts His finger on something in your life and says:

"This doesn't belong here."

Maybe it's bitterness. Maybe pride. Maybe lust. Maybe unforgiveness. Maybe greed.

Maybe selfishness. Maybe an attitude. Maybe a hidden habit.

And when the Spirit reveals it, don't get angry at the conviction.

Thank God for it.

Because conviction is evidence that God is still working in you.

Psalms 139:23–24 gives us the right response:

"Search me, God, and know my heart... See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

That's a dangerous prayer.
Because if you ask God to search you,
He will show you things.

But when He shows you something, don't run.
Surrender it.

5. THE HOLY SPIRIT SOMETIMES INTERRUPTS OUR PLANS

One of the most important lessons about hearing the Holy Spirit is that sometimes God's voice doesn't agree with our plans.

Acts 16:6 says:

"Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia."

Paul had a plan.
It was even a good plan. He wanted to preach the Gospel.
But the Holy Spirit said:
"Not there."

Have you ever had God interrupt your plans?
You thought you knew where you were going.
You thought you knew what was going to happen.
You had everything planned.
And then suddenly:
A door closed.

Proverbs 16:9 says:

"In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps."

Proverbs 19:21 says:

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails."

Psalms 37:23 says:

"The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him."

Sometimes God says: **Go.**

Sometimes: **Wait.**

Sometimes: **Stop.**

Sometimes: **Not yet.**

And Acts 16 continues.

Paul eventually receives a vision of a man from Macedonia saying:

"Come over to Macedonia and help us."

Paul understood that God was redirecting him.

What looked like a closed door was actually a divine redirection.

Don't assume every closed door means God has abandoned you.

Sometimes:

The closed door is the voice of God.

6. THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES US

Romans 8:14 says:

"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God."

Notice that Paul doesn't merely say: "For those who believe."

He says:

"Those who are led."

Christianity isn't simply believing in God. It is learning to be **led by God**.

Galatians 5:16 says:

"So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

Galatians 5:18 says:

"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."

Walking by the Spirit means allowing Him to direct your life.

Ask Him to guide your:

- Marriage.
- Family.
- Finances.
- Career.
- Ministry.
- Friendships.
- Decisions.
- Priorities.
- Future.

Psalms 25:4–5 says:

"Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me."

That's the prayer of someone who wants to be Spirit-led.

But here's the problem:

You cannot be Spirit-led if you insist on being self-directed.

You can't say:

"God, guide me."

and then say:

"But I'll decide where we're going."

That's not surrender.

That's negotiation.

7. THE HOLY SPIRIT CALLS US TO SURRENDER

Ephesians 5:18 says:

"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

The phrase **"be filled"** points toward an ongoing reality.

This isn't simply a one-time encounter.

It's a continuing life of surrender.

Every day we say:

"Holy Spirit, have Your way in me."

Romans 12:1 says:

"Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

Notice:

Living sacrifice.

A sacrifice doesn't tell the altar what it is willing to give.

The sacrifice belongs to God.

Luke 9:23 says:

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

Galatians 2:20 says:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

That's surrender.
That's what the Holy Spirit is calling us toward.

Not:
"God, take this part."

But:
"God, take all of me."

8. GOD WANTS ALL OF YOU

Romans 12:1 says:
"Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God."

God doesn't want compartments.

He doesn't want:
"God, you can have Sunday, but Monday through Saturday belongs to me."

He doesn't want:
"You can have my church life, but not my private life."

He doesn't want:
"You can have my relationships, but not my ambitions."

He wants **all of us**.
Deuteronomy 6:5 says:
"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Jesus repeats this in Mark 12:30:
"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

First Thessalonians 5:23 says:
"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through."

That is the heart of holiness.
God isn't merely interested in changing our behavior.

He wants to transform our hearts.
There comes a point in our Christian walk when we need to move from:

"God, forgive me." to: **"God, take all of me."**

From: **"God, save me."** to: **"God, sanctify me."**

From: **"God, help me control my life."** to: **"God, You control my life."**

Entire sanctification is complete consecration.

It is saying:

"Nothing is off limits."

My will.

My desires.

My ambitions.

My relationships.

My future.

My reputation.

My possessions.

My plans.

Everything belongs to God.

9. WE CAN RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 7:51 contains one of the strongest warnings in Scripture:

"You always resist the Holy Spirit!"

Think about that.

People can hear the Holy Spirit and resist Him.

First Thessalonians 5:19 says:

"Do not quench the Spirit."

Ephesians 4:30 says:

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God."

Hebrews 3:7–8 says:

"Today, if only you would hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

God speaks.

We can listen. Or we can resist.

He can convict. We can ignore.

He can lead. We can refuse.

He can call. We can make excuses.

And every time we deliberately ignore the Holy Spirit, we risk becoming less sensitive to His voice.

Think about an alarm clock.

The first morning it goes off, you hear it clearly. You hit snooze. It goes off again. Snooze. Again. Snooze.

Eventually, you can sleep through the very sound that was designed to wake you.

Our hearts can become like that.

God speaks.

We ignore Him.

God speaks again.

We ignore Him.

Eventually, the voice that once troubled our spirit doesn't seem to bother us anymore.

That's dangerous.

Hebrews 3:15 says:

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

Don't wait.

When God speaks:

Respond.

10. WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT SPEAKS, OBEY

Acts 8 gives us one of my favorite examples.

Philip is ministering in Samaria.

Then the Spirit speaks.

Acts 8:29 says:

"The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.'"

Notice what Philip doesn't do. He doesn't say: "Why?"

He doesn't say: "How much is this going to cost?"

He doesn't say: "What if they reject me?"

He simply goes.

And because Philip obeyed, he encountered an Ethiopian official who was reading Isaiah.

Philip explained the Gospel. The man believed. He was baptized.

Think about the chain:

God spoke. Philip listened. Philip obeyed. Someone encountered Jesus.

Your obedience may be connected to somebody else's salvation.

Your obedience may be connected to somebody else's healing.

Your obedience may be connected to somebody else's breakthrough.

James 1:22 says:

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

Jesus said in John 14:15:

"If you love me, keep my commands."

Luke 11:28 says:

"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

Hearing is not the finish line. Obedience is.

HOW DO I KNOW IT'S THE HOLY SPIRIT?

When you believe God may be speaking, ask five questions.

1. DOES IT AGREE WITH SCRIPTURE?

Isaiah 8:20 says:

"Look to God's instructions and teachings!"

If it contradicts Scripture, it isn't God.

2. DOES IT POINT ME TOWARD JESUS?

John 16:14 says:

"He will glorify me."

The Holy Spirit always points us toward Christ.

3. DOES IT PRODUCE HOLINESS?

Galatians 5:22–23 gives us the fruit of the Spirit:

"Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

The Spirit produces Christlike character.

4. DOES IT AGREE WITH GOD'S CHARACTER?

James 3:17 says:

"The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit..."

God's direction will never require us to violate God's character.

5. HAS IT BEEN CONFIRMED THROUGH PRAYER AND GODLY COUNSEL?

First John 4:1 says:

"Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God."

Proverbs 11:14 says:

"Victory is won through many advisers."

God doesn't expect us to make every major spiritual decision in isolation.

Prayer matters. Scripture matters. Wise Christian counsel matters. The Church matters.