

Small Group Guide: Learning to Follow the Spirit

Overview

This week's sermon explored what it means to follow Jesus not just in belief, but in action -- specifically in learning to hear and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Mike walked through how Jesus himself followed the Spirit before doing miraculous works, and how that same Spirit is available to every follower of Jesus today.

Key Takeaways

Everyone Jesus calls, he sends. Jesus never simply asked people to believe in him -- he asked them to follow him. That call to follow is also a call to participate in his ministry.

Following precedes miracle-working. Even Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness before his public ministry began. Spiritual power is not a shortcut around spiritual formation.

Hearing God is more common than we think. The difficulty is not in receiving impressions, thoughts, or images from God -- it is in learning to pay attention and discern which ones are from him.

God partners with us rather than working around us. For reasons that stretch our understanding, God generally chooses to work through people rather than independently of them. That means stepping out in faith is part of how his work gets done.

Risk and awkwardness are part of the process. Learning to act on what God may be saying requires a willingness to look foolish. That is not a sign something is wrong -- it is often a sign you are on the right track.

Discussion Questions

Opening

1. When you first heard the idea that Jesus calls every follower to participate in his ministry -- not just specially gifted people -- how did that land with you? Does it feel exciting, intimidating, or somewhere in between?
2. Pastor Mike noted that Jesus never says "believe in me" but always says "follow me." What is the difference between believing in Jesus and following Jesus in your daily life?

Going Deeper

3. The sermon pointed out that Jesus himself was led by the Spirit into the wilderness before his ministry began. What do you think that period of testing accomplished in Jesus, and what might similar seasons of testing accomplish in us?
4. Pastor Mike described how God spoke to him through a mental image -- something he almost dismissed entirely. Have you ever had a thought, image, or impression that you later wondered might have been God speaking? What did you do with it?
5. In John 12, some people heard God speak audibly and thought it was thunder. What does that tell us about why we might miss what God is saying? What conditions in your life make it harder to notice when God might be speaking?
6. The sermon referenced Joel's prophecy (quoted in Acts 2) that in the last days God would pour out his Spirit on all people -- not just prophets or leaders. How does that change the way you think about your own access to God's voice?
7. Pastor Mike shared several stories of stepping out with what he thought God might be saying -- and getting it wrong several times before getting it right. How do you personally handle the fear of being wrong or looking foolish? What would help you take that kind of risk?

Reflection

8. The sermon suggested a simple exercise: before leaving a conversation or encounter, pause and ask God if there is anything he wants you to say or do for that person. What would it take for that to become a regular habit in your life?
9. Think about a time you felt an unexpected sense of compassion for someone -- a stranger, a coworker, someone in a crowd. Looking back, do you think that could have been the Spirit prompting you toward something? What did you do with it?

Practical Applications

This week, try one of the following:

- Before a meal at a restaurant, quietly ask God if there is anything encouraging he might want you to say or do for your server. Pay attention to any thoughts or impressions that come to mind, and consider acting on one of them.
- Start a simple journal. When a thought, image, or impression comes to mind that seems like it could be from God, write it down. Note whether or not it seemed to connect to anything real. Over time, patterns may begin to emerge.

- Practice the vision exercise from the sermon in a low-stakes setting. Before a conversation with a friend or family member, pause and ask God if there is anything specific he wants you to bring up or pray about with that person.
- Find a trusted friend or small group member and share one impression you have had that you were not sure what to do with. Invite them to weigh in. Learning to discern together is part of how the church is designed to function.

Closing Prayer Focus

Ask God to make your group more attentive to his voice this week -- not just in quiet moments of personal devotion, but in ordinary, everyday encounters with people. Pray for the courage to act on what you sense, even when it feels uncertain or awkward. Pray for one another by name.