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**Series: People in Step with the Spirit**  
**Message: The Leading of the Spirit**

**Transcribed Message**  
**January 13, 2019**  
**Romans 8:14**

If Jesus were here on earth and if He was living in your home and you had a decision that you needed to make, if you had a question that had come up that was troubling and perplexing to you, I am pretty sure that you would talk to Jesus before you talked to anybody else. I don't think you'd be calling a friend to ask advice for what it is that you might do or not do. I doubt if you would be seeking some counselor who could answer your question or give you some guidance. I don't think you'd be calling the church office and ask to talk to one of the pastors to get their insight into this issue, this problem, this question that you are facing. Yet the amazing thing is Jesus has said that we have it better today than those early disciples who lived at the same time as Jesus and could walk and talk with Him. It is easy for us to look back at them with a sense of envy. We think: What would it have been like if we could have done that? If we could have had an encounter with Jesus face to face and asked Him some questions or some issue or gotten guidance on some matter, how good would that have been? And yet you remember in John 14 in verse 16 Jesus said if I go to My Father I will send to you another Comforter, another Helper. He will not just be with you; He will be in you.

We are working our way through a study on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We've seen a lot of issues as we have done that over the course of these weeks together. For instance, we've looked at and seen the baptism of the Spirit. We looked at the fact that we are indwelt with the spirit. We're sealed by the Spirit. We're filled with the Spirit. The Spirit is actively sanctifying and setting us apart. Last week we looked at the fact that Holy Spirit prays for us. One of the most practical works of the Holy Spirit in our life is what we want to look at this morning, and that is the experience of the Spirit in giving to us direction and guidance.

This is what we want to see. With the Holy Spirit in you and God's Word before you, God actively guides and speaks to you through the words of this amazing book.

This lesson gives me occasion to step back and review a couple of things that we said very early on in this series. I want to do that as we think of the ministry of the Spirit and two common extremes. If you just think of a continuum, this line on which there are various views and opinions and ideas about this study that we're looking at this morning, I would suggest to you that on one end of the continuum would be the idea that there are those who relate to the Spirit in almost some mystical kind of way. A very emotional way, if you will. Every event, every impression, every experience in their life is somehow the Holy Spirit speaking to them with regard to whatever might be going on.

On the other end of that continuum I would say there is another kind of extreme. Maybe you don't view either of these as an extreme, but on the other end of that might be that those who relate to the Spirit in such a way that He is more of a theory than He is even a person. As they think of the work and the person of the Holy Spirit, their faith is largely cognitive, that is to say everything gets reasoned out. Everything has an explanation. It remains very much theoretical rather than in the realm of a personal walk and personal relationship. I would suggest to you that wherever you are on a continuum, whether you're at one of those points of extreme as I listed them or whether you're more likely somewhere in between those views. I think that our upbringing, our background, our church experiences, the traditions that we were brought up in, even the way God has wired each one of us differently and uniquely is going to contribute to a little bit of where you find yourself in terms of this matter of how is it that the Holy Spirit leads us and guides us and speaks into our life today.

That's what we want to look at this morning. The Holy Spirit and how He leads and speaks to us today. I'm going to begin at a place where I'm pretty sure all of us are going to be able to agree and say amen. We're going to begin with some common ground together. The first thing I would say is this. God has spoken to people in many different ways. I think we can all say I agree with that. I don't know where you're going in this lesson but right now we're altogether. God has spoken to people in lots of different ways. After all, when you open up your Bibles to Genesis one of the first things that you encounter is God walking and talking with Adam and Eve in the garden. So we have God obviously in a very personal, communicative relationship with the very first people He created. You get into the book of Exodus and there is Moses in the wilderness

talking to a bush, right? It is the voice of God that is coming out of that bush and talking back to him. We know the young man named Samuel is laying at night and he hears the voice of God. He doesn't know that at first, but God speaks to him and brings a word to that young Samuel. Job heard the voice of God in the whirlwind. With all the things going on in Job's life, God spoke to him in the midst of the whirlwind. David had an encounter with a prophet. God sent Nathan the prophet and said David, you're the man. This is a word from God that I'm speaking into your life today. Isaiah had a vision. Daniel had a dream. The apostle Paul is walking on the road to Damascus and he hears a voice from heaven. It is Jesus speaking to him. I am not saying that God is doing that today or that He is speaking and communicating to people this way or in all of these ways today. I'm saying He has done that. The Biblical record stands on its own, doesn't it? I would say that while we might say He's not necessarily speaking in all of those ways today, I would say that being God if He chose to speak in those ways today then obviously He has the right to do that.

What the Bible says secondly however in this regard is this. God speaks to us today by His Son. God speaks to us today by His Son. I'd invite you to turn to Hebrews chapter 1. Hebrews chapter 1 tells us that God speaks to us today through His Son. Verse 1: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world." This is just what we said. We just said that God has spoken in many different ways. Hebrews chapter 1 verse 1 says God has spoken to people in many different ways. It says long ago and at many times and in many ways God spoke. The next word is what? It's an adversative. The next word is "but", so there's a contrast here. But in these last days.

What are these last days? It's today. The days we're living in. These are the last days. We're living in what the Bible calls the end times. From the time of Jesus's glorification and ascension to today, until the coming return of Christ, we are in what the Bible calls the last days, the end times. In these days, the writer of Hebrews said, He has spoken to us by His Son. Notice that he said that He has spoken in this way and He continues to speak this way through His Son. It is not just in the past that He speaks through His Son, but he said He continues to do that in the present.

So the question that should come to our mind is how is it that God is speaking to us today? What is the message that He is giving to us today through Jesus? How is it that God has communicated His Word, His Truth to us through Jesus? What is it that He has said? He certainly without question revealed Himself through His Son Jesus. When you ask the question what is God like, obviously you can read a lot of different places in the Bible to get an answer to that question. One of the places that brings you the most in the most condensed and specific way is to go into the gospels. When you're reading in the life of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, what is it that God is doing in those books? The Holy Spirit is revealing in those incidents in the life of Jesus and the words of our Lord the very character of God. He is showing to us the glory and the majesty and the greatness of God. We have the answer specifically to the question: I wonder what God is like. Look at the life of Jesus and you have the answer to that question.

When the writer of Hebrews says that God in these last days is speaking to us by His Son, it is in the person and work of Christ that God is revealing the glory and majesty of His own character. He is in the life and work of Christ showing us this amazing plan of salvation. He is revealing to us that He has by Christ put forward a plan to redeem sinners and draw them to Himself. Look at verse 1 again of that passage and the writer of Hebrews is very careful to make the distinction between two different types of revelation. He wants us to see that. I've already noted that. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but ..." He is contrasting what He did and now what He is doing. He takes us back to that opening statement. God has spoken to people in many different ways but in these days is speaking to us by His Son. If you know anything about the book of Hebrews, as challenging as this book is, the simplest way to understand the book of Hebrews is Jesus is better. In my Bible, the lead-in to the first chapter is the supremacy of God's Son. The writer of Hebrews spends an entire book telling us why Jesus is better than the old way, why Jesus is better than the Old Covenant, why what Jesus has brought is the supremacy of the New Covenant and the New Testament. That's the picture that we have here. The supremacy of Christ.

So then the question is how does God speaks to us by His Son today? I'm going to just give you my personal testimony in terms of this question. I have never in 55+ years of being a Christian heard God audibly speak to me. I have never heard the audible voice of God. Now you may think less of me because I've never heard that or had that encounter. I'm just going to share with you my own personal experience. I've never even wondered did I just hear the voice of God. I would have to say that I have never had a vision or dream in which I thought that was a vision or dream directly from God. This is what I'm supposed to do in light of that dream. Like you, I have had a lot of dreams and I probably have awakened at times wondering what in the world did that mean. I have to be just straightforward and say in my personal experience – it doesn't make it right, doesn't make it different or better than yours – I haven't had a dream or vision in which I said that was from God and this is what He wants me to do. I would have to say that I've never heard God speaking in a bush or a whirlwind or any of the other things that I read in the Old Testament as regarding God's communication.

This is the third thing I want to put before you. God speaks to us by His Son through His Spirit in the Word. God speaks to us by His Son through His Spirit in the Word. The book of Hebrews is probably one of the last of the epistles in the New Testament. There are other books that would follow it, but by and large all of the letters to the churches have been written by the time the writer of Hebrews pens these opening words in chapter 1 and verse 1. It seems to me that what we can say based on this specific statement in Hebrews is first of all that God through His Word is giving us clear direction. God through His Son by His Spirit in the Word is giving us clear direction for how it is that He wants us to live life. I

If you're still in Hebrews, turn over a page to the third chapter and verse 7 where we read this: "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness." Did you see what He just said? The Holy Spirit says hear the voice today. He didn't say that He said (past tense) that we should have listened, but He is telling us that we should hear the voice of God's Spirit as He speaks to us today. He is quoting from Psalm 95. He pulls a quote right out of Psalm 95 and He is saying God in His Word and through His Word and through His Son and by His Spirit is speaking into our life today. He repeats

that idea a number of times as you work your way through that third chapter and into the fourth chapter.

Do you know what you come to in Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 12? In Hebrews chapter 4 verse 12, after saying to us be careful that you do not fail to hear what the Spirit is saying today, He says: "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart." The Word of God is alive and it is active. The Spirit of God says pay attention. It is speaking into your life today. So the Bible speaks to us today. The Holy Spirit speaks into our life today by means of the Word of God. God the Son speaks to us today through the Holy Spirit by means of the Bible.

Look at Romans chapter 12. You know this passage but we'll just go through it together. It is telling us the same thing. The Word of God gives us clear direction for how to live life. "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Here's just further insight into this very point that we're making. Our minds are renewed. Our minds are directed to the will of God, to the purposes of God through the Word.

John Piper says it this way: "God talks to me no other way, but don't get me wrong. He talks to me very personally every time I open my Bible in the morning to meet my friend, my Savior, my creator, my sustainer. I need Him and He talks to me. I'm not denying providence and I'm not denying circumstances. I'm not denying people. I'm just saying that the only authoritative communion I have with God with any certainty comes through the words of this book." John Calvin said it this way: "The Holy Spirit cannot be separated from His truth which He has expressed in Scripture. This means that the Holy Spirit shows His power only when we give Scripture the reverence and dignity that it belongs."

If you want to experience the guidance of the Spirit of God, then read your Bible. If you want to hear the voice of God as He speaks by His Son through His Spirit in the

Word, then listen attentively as the Word is taught. If you want to hear and discern the will of God for your life, as you get in small groups with each other, speak God's truth into each other's lives based on what the Word has said to us. Every time you open this book, the very first thing that should come to your mind, the very first words out of your mouth should be Holy Spirit, let me hear from you today through the truth of your Word. Speak into my life just exactly what it is that I need to hear from your Word.

Let me ask you a question. Why don't we read our Bibles? Why have we stopped reading our Bibles? Please don't tell me you don't have time. Unless you're a single mom with multiple littles and that's a totally different category, right? Or you're a young mom with lots of littles. There are seasons of life. I'm not denying that there are seasons of life. I'm speaking of the big picture. When questions are asked with regard to their belief in the Bible, everybody puts it way up as being inspired, inerrant, infallible. Do you read it? Not very often.

So let me see if I can help us answer the question as to why we don't read our Bible. I think in one word the reason we don't read our Bible is simply unbelief. Unbelief. In our heart of hearts, we don't really believe what we just read and what we are talking about. We don't really believe that to open my Bible and to say to the Holy Spirit: speak to me today on the basis of Your Word through Your Word into my life. We don't really believe that that's what's going to happen. We don't really believe that we can't do life apart from Christ. We don't really believe that we have to depend every moment of every day on the Holy Spirit of God to live life.

Listen! I'm speaking from personal experience. I've been teaching the Word for 38 years. I can fall easily on any given day into a routine that says I've done this before. I think I know how to do this and venture in and try to develop something apart from. At the end of the day, it truly is unbelief. At the end of the day, Paul nails in Romans 10:17 when he says faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the Word of God.

There is a spiritual battle raging. There's somebody who doesn't want you every day saying God, speak Your truth into my life on the basis of Your Word by Your Spirit to equip me and build me up and grow me in my faith. We yield in unbelief to the voice that says it's really not going to make that much difference anyway. First the Holy Spirit

takes the Word and He gives us clear direction for life. This, my friends, is God's will for your life. It is here.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit does it by changing our perspective. He does it by changing our perspective. We call this growing in Christ. We call this maturing in Christ. We talk about this as being walking in wisdom. Lord willing, we're going to go into the Old Testament and the book of Proverbs for our next series. It's just all about wisdom. It's about how to live life wisely. What this takes though is time, energy, effort and patience. What is it that we don't have or claim that we don't have? It's time, energy, diligence, patience. Don't miss my point. We would much rather just hear a voice from God. It's a lot easier just to see something that God might be saying to us than it is to be in this book and to be a diligent student of the Scriptures. But as the Word does its work in our life, the Spirit of God begins to change our outlook. He begins to change our perspective. If we're growing in our walk with God, then our minds are being transformed. We begin to see the world for what it is. It becomes less and less attractive because we realize that the Bible says to be a friend of the world and that means you can't be a friend of God. We begin to see that the approval of other people isn't nearly as important as we once thought it was. God begins to change our identity and begins to change our perspective. We begin to see ourselves as someone who is loved and valued by Him, irrespective of what anybody else might be thinking or saying about us.

The Holy Spirit takes the Word and He causes us to see that the resources of life that God has given to us – our time, our energy, our talents, our spiritual gifts, our material possessions – are to be stewarded. Not to be owned, but to be stewarded. You can just go down all of life like this. How you respond as a husband or a wife. What your parenting looks like. As a child, your relationship to your parents. God wants to change our perspective about every area of life, and He wants to do that as He speaks His Word into our life today through His Son by his Holy Spirit by means of this truth. The Word of God is the primary way that God does that. It is the primary source that God leads us, that God guides us, that God speaks to us today. The word of God is more sure than anything else that you will ever experience or realize. You might ask why do you say that? Because that's what the Bible says. 2 Peter 1:16. Peter, who saw the Transfiguration of Christ, actually said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, believe

the Word of God before you believe my personal experience. That's the certainty with which God speaks to us by means of His Word.

Let's look as we close at this matter of discerning leading of the Spirit. Discerning the leading of the Spirit. I want to put before you 4 principles. The first one simply is to reiterate what we've been talking about. God by His Spirit will never speak into our life, will never lead us in a way that is contrary to the Word of God. The Spirit's leading, the Spirit's voice, however you want to say that, will never be contrary to the written Word of God. Isaiah chapter 8 verse 20: "To the teaching and to the testimony, if they will not speak according to this Word, it is because they have no dawn." The fact that you as a child of God have the Holy Spirit of God living within you means one thing that is absolutely to be trusted and known for sure. That Holy Spirit will never ever lead you contrary to the Word of God. The Holy Spirit who indwells you is the author of Scripture. He's never going to tell you to do something different than He's already given to us. Never contradicting each other. It's impossible to be led by the Spirit and at the same time be in conflict with Scripture. You and I have probably sat with somebody, maybe many times, who is determining a course of life that is exactly what they were laying claim to. They were claiming that God the Spirit was leading them to do this even though it was absolutely, totally, completely contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

Someone said better to spend one hour on your knees pursuing the Holy Spirit than 10 hours studying the Bible. Now there's a Greek word for that. It's balonia. They're indispensable. They go together. The Spirit who indwells us speaks the truth of God into our life by means of the Word of God. Should we seek the guidance of the Spirit? Of course we should, but it's never going to be contrary to the Word of God. He is the author of that Word.

Secondly, I think it's going to be within the context of community. Most of the time it's going to be within the context of community. There is great value in community. This is why there is great value in being plugged into and being involved in and being part of a local body. Not just coming in and out quickly on a Sunday morning, but interacting and sharing life in some format. Being in a smaller setting because there is great value in that. You read and study the Word together. You sit together in the teaching of the Word. You exercise spiritual gifts together. As you read the book of Acts, it's clear that

the Holy Spirit used the church and the leadership of the church and people within the church to direct and give guidance as they did life together. Proverbs chapter 11 and verse 14 says: "Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."

I would say this in a very practical way. One strong indicator that you are walking by the Spirit and that you want the Spirit to speak truth in your life is when you do just that. You go seek godly counsel. You go and talk to a friend and you share what's happening and what you sense God is directing you to do, what the Holy Spirit is directing you to do, and you want to hear godly counsel even if it isn't exactly what you wanted to hear. One of the things that should be a red flag waving in your mind is when you don't want to hear what a godly counselor might say about a matter. When you do what we call "counsel shopping" and you go find people who you think are going to say the things that you want to hear. God values life together in community and He uses the different gifts and personalities and characteristics of the body life to direct us in His will and purpose.

Thirdly, I believe that this matter of discerning the Spirit's leading in our life involves life circumstances. The Spirit of God directs us in life's circumstances. Paul is an example here. He trusted the Holy Spirit to open and close doors as he went about the business of taking the gospel to the various parts of the world. It reminds me of what Jesus says in Revelation 3 verse 8 when He says I have put an open door before you and no man can close it. Or here is a door that is closed and no man can open it. What is that? He is telling us that there are life circumstances by which God directs us and speaks His truth into our life. We may call it the providence of God. It can just as easily be said to be God leading us by His Spirit through His Word as we discern the circumstances of life.

It's a wonderful thing to look at your life and to see all of the different ways that God in His providence intersects our lives with people and with circumstances and conversations. I love to just look back on my life and think of the ways that God has been incredibly faithful in closing the door over there or opening one over here. Obviously this is something that requires a great deal of wisdom. We can't interpret life and God's leading just simply based on circumstances. God called Jonah to go to

Nineveh. Jonah went down to the seaport. There's a ship that is headed for Tarshish. That must be God's will for me to get on that boat. There wouldn't be a boat going to Tarshish if God didn't want me to get on that boat, right? Circumstances by themselves are not enough. There has to be these other indicators as well in our life. As Christians, we don't believe in luck. We don't believe in chance. We don't believe in coincidences. We don't believe in knocking on wood or knocking on formica or knocking on steel or anything else. We believe in a personal God who lives within us and He has promised to direct our steps in the ways that we've been looking at. What an incredible blessing that is.

The last one. Believe God by His Spirit as we discern His leading in our human spirit. In Nehemiah chapter 2 verse 12: "Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me, and I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem." Isn't that interesting? Even in the Old Testament where we see God speak through a bush. We've seen dreams and visions. The audible voice of God. All the different ways that God spoke. In Nehemiah's case, he had a burden from the Lord. God spoke to him in some way in his spirit and put such a burden on his heart for Jerusalem that he just felt compelled to make the biggest life change that you can imagine. To actually step out of the king's service was to put your physical life in jeopardy if he decided that no, that's not what you get to do. He did so he says on the basis of this burden that God had put on his heart.

Christians call this different things. Some call it the prompting of God's Spirit or the leading of God's Spirit, the calling of God's Spirit. The desire that God has given. God has given me a word. God has put you on my heart. I have a particular burden. One of the first things, in light of everything that we just said, should come to mind in this one and to some extent the one previous – the circumstances issue – these two require the greatest amount of discernment. They require probably the greatest amount of caution in my mind because the truth of the matter is the voice I'm hearing in my head might be mine. It might be God, but it might be mine. I'm sure that if we wanted to, we could spend the rest of the day having different people share different experiences about this very matter. Some of the times I would have to say I thought God was directing, God was putting something before me, God was indicating something to me

and it didn't turn out that way at all. Other times I'm absolutely confident that God by His Spirit through His Word and the circumstances of life directed my steps in a certain way. But these are the ones that require discernment. I agree with the person who said more havoc has been brought into the church and the world following the words "God just told me to (blank)" than perhaps any other phrase. Someone comes along and says God has given me a word for you. I'm happy to hear that word, but I'm going to evaluate that word in light of my own walk with God, in light of the Word of God. I believe that's the discerning thing to do. Peter has told us the only certain word comes to us by the Son through the Spirit by means of the Word of God. That doesn't discount all of these other possibilities. It just says to us those are going to call for a greater amount of discernment. Personal experiences abound in this regard.

Many, many years ago Bonnie and I were living in Kansas pastoring a church there. God began to stir within our hearts a sense of there's something coming. How do you explain that? In this case, gladly both of us had that sense about the same time. I'm sure it doesn't always work that way. And don't you know, a church reached out to us and we began a process with them that looked exactly like what I talked about here. The door was open and all we did was walk through that door and then we walked through another opened door. It looked like that's what God is doing in our life. Then we get a call from the head of the search committee and have him say we just voted and we don't want you to come. Whoa! Where did that come from? We just went through open door after open door after open door. It seemed to us from our human viewpoint that God was clearly directing us into a move. It wasn't that at all. I'm not suggesting that God wasn't a part of that. I'm saying in my human wisdom and understanding I was seeing something happen that was very different than the plan that God worked out. Because it was within that same year that another phone call came. In that case, we did walk through those open doors and God directed us to this place. We both look back on that with incredible gratitude. As much as we thought God was moving us from that group of people that we dearly loved at that time, we look back and go wow. I'm glad we didn't go there because we got to come here. That's the leading of God. That's the Spirit of God by the Word of God directing our lives to accomplish His will. I believe absolutely that with the Holy Spirit within us and the Word of God before us God speaks into our

life His truth and guides us as we have a sensitive spirit to the things that He wants to do in our life.

Here's what we take away. Be careful of desiring a voice beyond the Scriptures. I don't mean to discount that. I'm just saying I think there's a caution involved there. Better to cry out open the eyes of my heart, Lord. I want to see the wonders and the riches of Your Word. My friend, there's nothing better, there's nothing greater, there's nothing richer than the gospel. That gospel that Jesus came to make known to us today through His Word by His Spirit. If we recognize that we've sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that God has made a provision for us to have those sins forgiven through the death of Jesus on the cross, if we believe that what Jesus did is all that needs to be done, God says He gives to us the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, we are thankful, we are grateful. Lord, we are blessed to be in your family, to call you our Father, to have Your indwelling Holy Spirit within us speaking Your truth into our life every day as we come to Your Word and listen to the voice of Your Spirit. Father, we pray for that powerful, continuing Word to do its good work in the life of this church, in the lives of each family and each person here. We pray again, Father, that You might open the hearts of those who have not yet trusted You to believe that Jesus is the Savior, that you have saved us from our sin. In Jesus's name we pray, amen.