

Discerning the Spirit's Voice

Pastor Gilbert Silva

8-10-2025

Romans 8:14 (NLT) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Isaiah 48:17 (NLT) This is what the LORD says your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is good for you and leads you along the paths you should follow.

Galatians 5:16a (NLT) So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives.

Introduction: Every believer in Christ is called to grow in their relationship with the Holy Spirit and to develop a sensitivity to His voice. The Christian life is not meant to be lived in our own strength or wisdom, but in step with the Spirit of God. That's why learning to discern His leading is so important.

However, we must be careful; any truth taken to an extreme can lead to error. Being "led by the Spirit" does not mean turning off our minds or expecting God to micromanage every small decision, such as choosing a vacation spot, picking out an outfit, or deciding between a latte and a cappuccino.

Being led by the Spirit does not excuse us from personal responsibility; rather, it calls us to align our hearts, minds, and choices with His Word and His ways. Thomas à Kempis once wrote, *"If we would discern the Spirit's voice, we must quiet our own."*

Today, I want to share with you several principles that have helped me discern the Spirit's voice in making decisions for both life and ministry.

The first is this: if we want to recognize the Spirit's leading, we must begin where God has already spoken; His Word.

1. His Word

Psalms 119:105 (NLT) "Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path."

Many Christians want God to speak to them but have not taken the time to read what He has already said. God's Word is our primary guide; it is His eternal voice preserved for us.

God can speak into your present situation through something He spoke thousands of years ago. His Word is timeless and living. If we want to recognize His voice, we must first become familiar with His written Word.

It's always best to start by asking, 'What does the Bible say about this decision? Am I following what is clearly written in Scripture?'

Imagine someone is praying, *“Lord, should I forgive this person who hurt me so deeply? Please give me a sign.”*

The truth is, God has already spoken about forgiveness, clearly and repeatedly, in His Word.

Passages like Ephesians 4:32, *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you,”* give us God’s answer without needing a special sign.

Many times, the guidance we’re looking for is already right in front of us in Scripture. The question isn’t whether God will speak, it’s whether we’ve taken the time to listen to what He has already said.

When we ignore what’s already written and keep asking for a fresh word, we’re really asking God to contradict Himself and He won’t do that. His Spirit will never lead us in a direction that goes against what He’s already revealed in scripture.

The second principle is to seek godly counsel. The Holy Spirit often confirms His guidance through the wise advice and encouragement of those walking closely with God.

2. Spiritual Leaders and friends

While the prophets and teachers in the church in Antioch were worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit gave them a message:

Acts 13:2-3 (NLT) “Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.” ³So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.

This demonstrates the Spirit’s active involvement in guiding the church and calling individuals to specific ministries.

God often confirms His guidance through repetition. If you hear the same encouragement or caution from different trusted believers, it may be the Spirit’s way of getting your attention.

Spiritual leaders can also provide balance and perspective when we’re unsure.

Proverbs 11:14 “In the multitude of counselors there is safety”.

Along with wise counsel, the Spirit also communicates through an inner sense of direction, what we might call a prompting or nudge. This leads us to our third principle:

3. Inner Positive Promptings

Sometimes the Spirit guides us by impressing on our hearts a deep, quiet assurance about a decision, even if we don't hear an audible voice. This inner prompting is a vital way He leads.

In Acts 8:26-29 As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south^[b] down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷ So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage."

The Holy Spirit *prompted* Philip, saying, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Philip obeyed this inner leading without hesitation.

This impulse led Philip to meet the Ethiopian eunuch, who was reading Scripture but didn't understand it. Philip's Spirit-led encounter resulted in the eunuch's salvation and baptism.

This story shows how the Spirit can give us specific, timely impulses, an inner "nudge" that guides us to opportunities for ministry and obedience.

For example: You're driving home from work, already tired and ready to relax. As you pass a grocery store, a sudden thought crosses your mind: "*Stop and pick up some groceries for so and so.*" You weren't planning to, and you don't even know if they need anything, but the thought comes with an unusual sense of urgency and peace at the same time.

You decide to follow it. When you get to their house, you find out they've been sick for days, unable to get to the store, and had just prayed, "*Lord, please send me help.*"

That inner nudge wasn't random; it was the Spirit prompting you to act in a way that directly met someone's need.

However, the Spirit doesn't just lead us forward; He can also lead by setting boundaries or cautioning us. This is our fourth principle:

4. Inner Restraints or Cautions

Acts 16:6-7 (NLT) Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. ⁷ Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there.

At times, the Spirit leads by closing doors or creating a sense of unease about a particular path. Recognizing these "red lights" is just as important as hearing a "green light."

Finally, one of the Spirit's clearest confirmations and our fifth principle is peace.

5. Inner Peace

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Colossians 3:15).

The Greek word for rule (brabeuō) means "to act as an umpire." Peace is one of the Spirit's ways of confirming God's direction. When you are in His will, there is a settled peace in your soul, even if the path is challenging.

Conclusion: As we put these principles together, anchoring ourselves in Scripture, seeking wise counsel, listening for inner promptings, respecting the Spirit's cautions, and resting in His peace, we can confidently discern the Spirit's leading.

The Spirit's guidance is not mysterious or chaotic; it is clear, consistent, and grounded in God's Word. Our responsibility is to keep our hearts open, our minds renewed, and our steps obedient.

Psalms 143:10 (NLT) Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your gracious Spirit lead me forward on a firm footing.