

Being Led through Prayer

Read [Matthew 6:9-13](#)

When we ask God for guidance, the first place we should look for it is **in His Word**. We should ask, “What does the Bible say about this decision I’m facing?” God will bring to mind Scriptures we’ve read, sermons we’ve heard, or promises we’ve memorized. As we’re faithful to read our Bible daily, we’ll be surprised how often we find it addressing the very issues we’re facing. The psalmist wrote: “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path*” ([Psalm 119:105](#)). The written Word will be our guide through this dark world.

I once read in a news story on the internet the following account. A Chicago bus driver was making his stops. His bus was filled with passengers—shoppers, people going home from work, teenagers. At the Clark and Webster stop, two men and a woman got on. The seasoned bus driver immediately called out, “Everybody, watch your valuables. Pickpockets on board!” All eyes fixed on the newcomers, as women clutched their purses, and men guarded their wallets. The pickpockets didn’t break stride as they promptly exited through the middle doors. Their plans had been spoiled by the driver’s warning.

The Bible is like that bus driver, given to conduct us safely on our journey through life. When you ask God for guidance, tune your ear first to the warnings and wisdom in his written Word.

That’s one of the basic ways God guides his people. Let’s look at the second one.

When we ask God for guidance, he directs us through his Holy Spirit

Did you know that Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, would talk to you? Jesus said of him: “**But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all 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**” ([John 16:13](#), emphasis added). Jesus was telling the disciples that the Holy Spirit was going to come to the church after Jesus returned to heaven. This happened on the Day of Pentecost (see [Acts 2](#)).

Jesus said the Holy Spirit would “**guide**” the church, and that he would do it by **talking** to them:

“**he will speak**”

“**he will tell**”

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would “**guide**” us, and that he would do it by **talking** to us. Remarkable! When we ask God to guide us, the second basic way he does it is through his Spirit.

How do we learn to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, then? A complete answer to that question would require its own book. But here are a few lessons I have learned about hearing from the Holy Spirit:

1) He speaks to us with varying degrees of intensity.

Often he will speak to us and we won't even be aware of it—we'll be hearing him **subconsciously**. This is the **lowest degree of intensity** with which he will speak to us. We will have a good idea, or make a decision that works out. Or it will come to our mind to pray for someone. We'll decide to help out in a ministry at church, which turns out to be a big blessing to others as well as to ourselves. The Holy Spirit led us in all these ways without us being aware of it.

He speaks to us through our **conscience, a higher degree of intensity** than when we hear from him subconsciously. People don't talk about the conscience much anymore in our society, but the conscience is one of the stars God uses to navigate us through life. Paul wrote the young minister Timothy and encouraged him to keep "***faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith***" ([1 Timothy 1:19, NASU](#), emphasis added). If we reject a "***good conscience,***" we can get off course and suffer "***shipwreck.***"

Have you asked the Lord for guidance? In your heart do you already know the morally right thing to do? The Holy Spirit is using your conscience to guide you.

I should add, however, that the conscience is not a perfect guide. Your conscience itself is ***not*** the Holy Spirit, but a tool in your soul or spirit that he uses. Some people's consciences are ***over-sensitive***—that is, they feel bad for things they shouldn't feel bad about. Or they over-react to a wrong they've done. Judas is an example of the latter. When he betrayed Jesus, he certainly should have felt remorse. However, his conscience drove him too far, leading him to commit suicide, thus compounding the evil. The Lord certainly would have forgiven him if he had come to him instead. What a tragedy.

Other people have what the Bible calls a ***seared conscience*** (see [1 Timothy 4:2](#))—a conscience that has grown callous and doesn't feel the pain it should feel anymore. Back in my bar-hopping days, the first drink I swallowed burned going down. The second one burned a little, too. But before long they went down like water. My throat was seared to the sensation. That's what happens to a conscience that is long ignored. Sin or hypocrisy that may have bothered it at first doesn't anymore.

The conscience is not a perfect guide. It can be ***over-sensitive*** or ***seared***. But it is a tool the Holy Spirit uses to speak to us. That is why it is important that we do our best to maintain a good conscience.

The Holy Spirit will also speak to us through a **sense of knowing**, another **degree of intensity** with which he speaks to us. The Apostle John wrote, "**But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you *know the truth***" ([1 John 2:20](#), emphasis

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added). The “*anointing*” refers to the presence of the Holy Spirit in us; John says that through that presence we will come to “*know the truth.*” That is, we will have a *sense of knowing* about the way we should go. We may not have it at first, but eventually it will come.

He speaks to us **with words**. This is probably the **highest degree of intensity** with which God speaks to us. Of course, he also uses words when he speaks to us in the above ways. But there is a communication from the Lord where the words are more direct, almost audible.