

Being Led through Prayer

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

One day, when I was a new Christian, I was walking in a neighborhood near the downtown area where I worked at the University when a man asked me for some money. I gave him some, but saw him later in the grocery store buying a load of beer. I was pretty angry at being taken advantage of.

A Saturday rolled around and I was looking forward to going to church the next day, when the thought came to me that I should invite the man. But then I thought, *No way, I don't want to invite a lying drunk to church with me.*

Then I heard the words in my heart: "But someone invited you."

The words seemed to "go off" inside of me. They were authoritative, but not condemning. They were filled with love. And they were *true*. Someone *had* invited me, and it had changed my life. (It was my wife and children).

I drove to the man's apartment and invited him. He agreed, and he came the next morning. He was the first person to respond to the invitation to accept Jesus. He became a new person. He quit drinking, joined the church, and became a personal friend.

His story is one of my best memories, and it's because of the words: "**But someone invited you.**"

The Holy Spirit speaks to us with varying degrees of intensity: subconsciously, through our conscience, through a sense of knowing, and through words.

2) A second lesson I've learned about hearing from the Holy Spirit is that he speaks to different people in different ways. I used to wonder if there was something wrong with me when God wouldn't speak to me in the same way he spoke to others—for example, through dreams or visions. (The main way I hear from the Holy Spirit is by meditating on Scripture: taking a promise or instruction or truth, and asking God, "What difference does this Scripture make in my life? How does it change my life?") I've come to realize that God made us all unique, and enjoys speaking to us in different ways. So don't worry if your experience doesn't quite match up with someone else's. That's normal.

3) The third lesson I've learned about hearing from the Holy Spirit is that we hear him better the closer we get to him. The Bible says that God speaks in "*a gentle whisper*" ([1 Kings 19:12](#)). You have to draw close to someone to hear him whisper.

You also have to be quiet. You have to tune out the other noise and listen intently to the whisperer.

Here is another story that I had read about: Before refrigerators came along, people preserved their food in icehouses. An icehouse was a building with thick walls, no windows, and a tightly fitted door. In the winter large blocks of ice were cut from frozen lakes or streams, hauled to the icehouse, and covered with sawdust. Sometimes the ice in the icehouses would last into summer.

One man lost a valuable watch while working inside one of these icehouses. He looked for it, raking through the sawdust, but couldn't find it. Other workers looked, but they had no luck either.

A small boy volunteered to give it a try. He went into the icehouse during the noon hour, and a little while later emerged with the watch.

"How did you find it?" the men asked.

"I closed the door. Laid down in the sawdust, and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking."

None of the men heard the watch because they didn't take the time to get quiet first.

It's the same way when it comes to hearing from the Holy Spirit. He is speaking to us, but it's a whisper. We have to draw close to him, quiet ourselves, and listen.

Learning to hear from the Holy Spirit is a life-long study, but understanding these principles will get you off to a good start:

- 1) God speaks to us with varying degrees of intensity.**
- 2) God speaks to different people in different ways.**
- 3) The closer we get to God, the better we hear him.**

So far in this teaching, we have seen that when we ask God for guidance, he directs us through His Word. He directs us through his Spirit. Let's look at one more basic way God guides his people when we ask him to.

When we ask God for guidance, he directs through his providence—that is, he either provides a way or he doesn't.

We see this in the Apostle Paul's ministry. On his second missionary journey, as he was taking the Gospel to the world, there was a point in his ministry when he wanted to head east but the Holy Spirit wouldn't let him.

6 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.

7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

[ACTS 16:6-7](#)

Paul and his companions were “*kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in province of Asia.*” We’re not told how the Holy Spirit prevented them from turning east, whether it was by circumstances, a vision, or their own reasoning. We’re just told “*the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.*”

For some reason, the door was closed. But another one was about to open.

9 *During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”*

10 *After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

[ACTS 16:9–10](#)

God closed the door to the east for them. But he opened one to the west. A “*man of Macedonia*” appeared to Paul in a vision and asked him to come preach the Gospel to them. Paul obeyed the vision and ended up taking the Gospel into the heart of Europe.

The point is, Paul received guidance for his mission by God’s provision. Somehow God closed a door to the east. But he opened one to the west. Paul followed the provision.

When we ask God for guidance, he will often use his providence to direct us—by either providing a way or not. You may ask God if you should change jobs, for example. But as you begin to investigate new opportunities, you find no openings, or no openings that pay enough. That may be God’s way of saying, “No, it’s not my will for you to change jobs.” Or you might be praying about whether you should help with the teenagers at church or the preschoolers. Which group do you prefer to be around? Which group touches your heart more? Those positive feelings may be God’s way of guiding you—his provision.

We should keep in mind, however, that just because God opens a door and directs us down a path, that doesn’t mean that we won’t have problems. When Paul crossed over to help the man in Macedonia, it wasn’t long before he was beaten and thrown in jail! And he wrote in another place: “... *a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me*” ([1 Corinthians 16:9](#)).

Opposition came with the open doors for Paul. God will guide us by his provision and by open doors, but there will still be obstacles to overcome. But if we’re in his will, he will give us victory over every situation. Paul also wrote: “**But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place**” ([2 Corinthians 2:14](#), NASU, emphasis added).

Do you need guidance? Sure, consult other people. Sure, think it through thoroughly yourself. But don’t forget to ask God what you should do! Jesus promised he would guide us.

SUMMARY

God still guides his people. Jesus said that we should pray for guidance: “***And lead us not into temptation***” (emphasis added). He wouldn’t have told us to pray a prayer that didn’t work. When we pray for guidance, God directs us through his written Word, through his Spirit, and through his provision.