5 Ways the Spirit Leads Us // Jesus, Continued... part 2 (John 16:7, et al)

Velcome, Summit Church, at all our locations around Raleighurham. Love time change Sunday! This edition of it. The one in the pring is of the devil. One church, meeting...

lotebook/Bible. Something I hope is helpful xegetical vs. big picture biblical theme.

ast week I ended, in most of our services, with the Old Testament tory of Samuel... the story of a young boy who kept hearing a voice alling his name at night. He mistakenly thinks it is his mentor, Eli, and e keeps running to his room to say, "You called me, sir?" Eli finally ays, "Next time you hear the voice, say, 'Speak Lord, your servant ears,'" and when Samuel does, God tells him what he wants from im. I told you that **this is a posture God wants** all of us to be in...

The Christian life not learning a bunch of stuff about God, or doing a bunch of stuff for God, it is following Jesus and yielding ourselves to him to let him do through us.

have a book that is releasing this week called *Jesus, Continued...* rom John 16:7... to our advantage...

he Holy Spirit would be in us just what Jesus was to his disciples: their ounselor, their guide; their help. By the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues he work he started in his ministry here.

he Holy Spirit appears 59 times in Acts, and in 36 of those he is peaking: guiding, instructing. (BTW, *whenever I start to talk this way, omebody says, "Well, you know, you can't use everything in Acts as* a pattern for our time... things were different with the Apostles." And yes, I get that there are some unique things happening with the Apostles. But you can't convince me that the only book God gave us with examples of how the church operates is filled with experiences o people that have nothing in common with our own. John Newton, the writer of Amazing Grace, said:

... said: <u>"Is it really true that that which the early church so depended</u> on for success—the leadership of the Spirit—has become irrelevant to <u>us today?</u> (Do we think we are that far advanced now?"¹)

(John Newton not a modern day TV evangelist with coiffed hair, or even a Pentecostal preacher driving a van with flames roaring down the side)



Well... except maybe for the coiffed hair. For 2000 years Christians have believed God moves dynamically within believers.

The normal Christian life is walking with, and following, the Spirit o God. <u>So here's my question today</u>: Do you know how to hear from the Holy Spirit about what you are to be doing in Jesus' kingdom?

5 Ways We Experience the Leadership of the Holy Spirit

¹ Paraphrased, from his commentary on 1 John.

et me start by saying that people have a lot of **bad** methodologies or hearing from God:

Some people have what I call "**random-coincidence Holy Spirit.**" They always equate the voice of the Spirit with some strange set of phenomena:

- "You won't believe this! I was praying about whether to ask Megan out, and driving on the interstate, I saw a billboard and the <u>background color</u> was the color of her eyes and the <u>last two digits</u> of the phone number were the same as her age, and right at that moment, <u>the sun broke</u> <u>through the clouds</u> and my <u>favorite Christian song</u> came on the radio ... and so I just KNEW God was telling me to ask her out! Jehovah Jireh!"
- (I don't even want to ask you girls how many of you have been subjected to that reasoning). Seriously, guys, man up and quit hiding behind God.

Other people have the "<u>Holy Spirit as Magic 8-ball</u>" method of hearing from God. (Remember the Magic 8-ball? Well, the **spiritual version of this** is you pray and then whatever floats to the top of your heart is the voice of God.)

Or the mysterious "peace in your heart = the Holy Spirit" philosophy. Whenever a decision is right you have a peace come over you. I once heard a very prominent Christian teacher say that a <u>restlessness in your spirit</u> before any decision was a sign that God wasn't in it. I wanted to say, "Really?"

- I am a type-A, overly analytical person, which means I always have a "restlessness in my spirit" about any decision I make.
- Furthermore, I can look back on my life and see that some of the best decisions I have ever made had been made with fear and trembling.
- And furthermore again (further-furthermore), I have people tell me all the time about some colossally stupid decision that, at the time, they said they had perfect peace.

- Nothing in Scripture tells us "tranquility in our heart" is proof of God; in fact, in Scripture I see an enemy whose whole goal is to give us "peace" about spectacularly wretched decisions. When Satan tempted Eve to eat the fruit, no he gave her a "peace" about it.
- And finally, perhaps worst of all, people use the "<u>Bible lottery</u> <u>approach</u>" to hear from God: You flip open your Bible, point to a random verse, and draw some mysterious guidance from it. *YOU'VE DONE IT.* Not only is this unbiblical, it can also be really dangerous... like the guy you may have heard about who prayed to know God's will, flipped open his Bible, and randomly pointed to Matthew 27:5: "And Judas went away and hanged himself." Feeling certain he'd made a mistake, he repeated the procedure, and this time his finger fell upon Luke 10:37: "Go thou and do likewise." Thoroughly rattled now, he did it a 3rd time, and this time he landed on John 13:27: "What you are about to do, do quickly!"

All bad ways. So I want to give you:

5 Scriptural Ways We Experience the Leadership of the Holy Spirit

- 1. Through the word of God
- 2. In our giftings
- 3. Through the church
- <mark>4. In our spirit</mark>
- 5. Through our circumstances

(I realized as I got into this I should have **left a couple of months** to teach through all of these... so I will only be able to give you the **big picture** view, which I hope will help you to see them all at a glance; but I **won't be able to unpack** it in nearly the detail I go into in the book.)

The key, for all five of these (*except* for the first) is to hold them lightly. There is a certain mystery, yousee to the Spirit's leadership.

Even when you consider the book of Acts. Of the 36 times he speaks, there's never a "standard" way that is given, no spiritual Geiger counter.

Sometimes it is in some dramatic supernatural way: like a dream or vision. Other times it is through prophetic word from someone in the church. Sometimes the Apostles deduce the voice of the Spirit simply in how he directs the circumstances.

Most of the time it doesn't tell us how he spoke:

- Act 16: the Spirit "forbade" Paul and Silas... how did he forbid? He doesn't tell us.
- In Acts 8:29, Luke records that the Spirit "told" Philip he should go engage a stranger with the gospel. How did Philip know? Is this similar to what I sometimes feel when I sense God "telling me" to share Christ with the person sitting next to me on the plane? It just doesn't say.

Jesus said that our experience with the Holy Spirit would be something **like experiencing the wind**: *"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."* (John 3:8)

• Which means if you're looking for a formula... you're not going to get that. It's mysterious.

o the key to all 5 of these, except the 1st, is to **hold them lightly**:

. Through the word of God

Based on what Scripture says about itself, it appears that 99% of the will of God is in the Word of God: 2 Tim 3:16–17, "All Scripture is given by direct inspiration of God... that the man of God may be <u>complete</u>, <u>thoroughly equipped</u> for every good work...'

Complete, thoroughly equipped... Those are pretty tall promises.

Furthermore, nearly every time we find the phrase "**the will of God**" in the Bible, it refers to the shaping of our moral character.

 I did a study on "the will of God" in college: I got out a concordance and looked up "the will of God" and chased down every single instance of it, and what I found out was that every time the phrase it is used it refers to **somethin you become** rather than something you *do*.

- **Romans 12:1**, Paul says that the will of God for you is to offer your life to God as a sacrifice in response to the gospel.
- **1 Thess 4:3** Paul says, "God's will for you is that you live a holy life."
- The Spirit of God's main work in us is to shape us into being the kind of people God wants us to be, because when we become th kind of people God wants us to be, we will do the things God wants us to do.
- The book of Proverbs, which talks a lot about decision-making, describes the will of God more like "a path" and less like a door.
 - We think of it like a door... which job: A, B, C? (girl to ask out; city)
- That's not how the will of God works in the Bible: **Proverbs says** that if we walk in the paths of wisdom, he'll guide us (often behind the scenes) without our ever knowing it, in doing what he wants.²
 - **Prov 3:6 promise: Sometimes the directing is** special; a lo of times it is in the background.
- A lot of times you have questions about what God wants from yo in a certain situation, and the answer is right here in the Bible. I want to say, "Quit making it hard! You don't even have to ask for blessing. The commands of Scripture have blessing pre-built in."
 - God's word says in 2 Cor 6:14 says that if you are believer you should not date or marry an unbeliever... The amount of people who try to talk me out of that staggers me: "But I know I can change him."
 - God's word says (Matt 19:9) you shouldn't divorce your spouse unless a very clear set of criteria are met. "But Go I want to be happy!" God says, "Follow me, I'll give you joy."

² Prov. 2:20–22; 3:5–6; 4:26–27

- Even when it comes to a question like your career, you start with Scripture: Gen 2... "I made you, in my image, good at something, so figure that out and do that. And you should be about the Great Commission (Matt 28:19), so pursue your career somewhere strategic.
 - So when we say, "Whatever you are good at, do it well to the glory of God, somewhere strategic for the mission, that's just our way of trying to get you to think through that decision beginning with Scripture.

99.4% of the will of God is spelled out in the Bible. God gave Scripture so that you could be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work... and you won't know the will of God any more than you know the Word of God.

So if you want to know the will of the Spirit of God, quit looking into your heart like a Magic 8-ball and get on your knees and get into the Bible.

. In our giftings

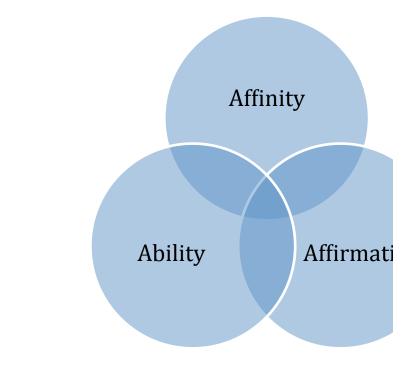
There is a scene in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in which "Father Christmas" gives each of the four displaced children a mysterious gift. They don't realize it at the time, but these gifts will prove essential in the coming battle they are to have with the White Witch. For example, in the heat of that battle, Lucy realizes that her gift, a healing ointment, has been given to her to bind up the wounded in battle. Peter realizes his sword was given to lead an assault.

• <u>I love Lewis' imagery:</u> They perceive what God wants by looking at their *gifts*.

The way you and I know what God wants from us is by looking at the spiritual gift he has given to us: I'd go so far as to say that if you don't know what your gift is, how can you know what God wants?

Paul tells us in 1 Cor 12: "To *each* is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7)

- Spiritual gifts: in 3 different places Paul lists out examples what these spiritual gifts are (Romans 12; 1 Cor 12; Ephesians 4). They include things like <u>hospitality, mercy, serving, generosity,</u> <u>exhortation, evangelism, leadership, vision, faith, prayer</u> as well as some of the sign gifts like healing and tongues.
- So how can you tell what yours are? Get a tingly feeling when I say it?
 - Some people like "spiritual gift tests" that help them pinpoint their gifts, usually through a Myers-Briggs-style, multiple-choice test. I suppose those might do some good but I've told you that I'm a little cynical on these because after my wife and I got engaged, she took one of those tests and her #1 gift came back as "Celibacy." True story. Ever since then, I've been a little jaded toward those tests.)
- There is a better way: A spiritual gift is usually the confluence of what in God's kingdom we are passionate about, what we're goo at, and what others affirm in us.
 - I've found this diagram helpful:



<u>Ability</u>" refers to what you are naturally good at, because a lot of mes (not all the time) a spiritual gift includes what you are naturally ifted for.

Evidently, **Paul was a great thinker and writer** *before* he became a Christian. He had been selected to apprentice under the highly respected Jewish leader Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). God used that to build up his church.

For example, my gift of exhortation coincides with a natural ability I have for public speaking, persuasion, and coaching.

- There are exceptions, of course. Sometimes, God gives spiritual gifts that have little to do with natural abilities just to show everybody it's not about human talent but his power.
 - One of the most effective evangelists I'd ever known girl so terribly shy, but when she started talking about Jesus people got saved... God did that to show off... to show that it's not about her personality but his power.

<u>"Affinity"</u> refers to what you feel passionate about (what burns in you) and <u>"affirmation"</u> refers to what other people see and call out i you. (A spiritual gift is an unusual effectiveness in a responsibility given to all believers—we're all supposed to evangelize; exhort; be generous; but some people just have an extraordinary delight and effectiveness in some of those—that's a sign of a spiritual gift.)

Where all 3 circles converge is typically the place of a spiritual gift:

I figured out early on what my spiritual gifts were (exhortation, evangelism, leadership, and faith), and I built my career on them. No all of you, of course, will do that, but you should all know what they are and they should be a key part of your life.

- I'd go so far as to say that if you don't know what your spiritual gifts are, you can't really know what God wants you to be doing.
- You learn what God has for you by looking at what God has put in you.
- If you're in high school or college, figure this out ASAP and orient your career around it! God <u>has given each</u> of you a gift to use in this mission. Do you know what yours is?

3. Through the church

- The most common way the Spirit speaks in the book of Acts is through the church.
- Sometimes it comes in the form of wise counsel.
 - Proverbs says, "In a multitude of counselors there is wisdom."³
- But other times it is something beyond mere wisdom. Example: "While [the church was] worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2. God gave the church specific insight into what Saul and Barnabas should do.

³ Prov 11:14

- Several times in Acts a guy named Agabus gave Paul instructions about what he should do.
- Paul did this with Timothy.

Nothing indicates that God has stopped doing this kind of thing. It's happened all throughout my life. The first I remember is at 4...

- When I was four years old, the pastor at my church told my parents, "I know God has something special for this one, to use him in ministry." At four years old I wasn't waxing eloquent about God, I wanted to grow up to be Spiderman.
- It's happened several times in my life since then. A mentor told me he could see that God had called me to be instrumental in reaching Muslims; recently a man in the church told me about a leadership assignment in the kingdom God had for me...

You need to be open to it... it's one of the main reasons you should be connected to a church, because God uses the church to guide you!

Now, I am compelled to tell you... people can be off with this, and just because someone says something to you, and claims they are getting it from the Spirit... doesn't mean they are. Scripture says we have to "test" or "weigh out" the prophecies to see if they line up with Scripture and what we see God doing in our lives. I've had very sincere people tell me things that were very wrong:

One weekend while in seminary, I accompanied a friend who had accepted an opportunity to preach at a small, country church in South Carolina. The piano player got sick that Sunday, and so when my friend got up to do the call to worship, he told the crowd that I played the piano beautifully and asked if I could lead the songs. The crowd clapped its approval of his request, a gracious response, but it ignored one particularly relevant fact: I do not really play the piano, and I am not a good singer. Actually, I could sort of play two songs—one, the old praise chorus "Alleluia," which has only three repeating chords; and the other, "Faithfully," by Journey, which I had learned to

pound out in high school to impress the ladiess. This was my entire repertoire, and my friend knew it. But we had made a pact that if either of us ever played a joke involving the other, we'd follow it through to the end. Probably not the wisest thing we ever did, but we had sealed it with a pinky-swear, and I didn't want to have my pinky broken. So I dutifully walked up to the piano and pounded out the chords to "Alleluia," trying to sing loud enough for the congregation to follow and (internally) swearing a swift and devastating revenge on my friend. After his message, however, my friend asked if I'd come back up to play the invitation hymn, which was ... you guessed it, "Alleluia." (I didn't have the nerve to play Journey's "Faithfully" in church.) After the service ended, the pastor's wife came up and (with a very serious look on her face) said, "Boys, God impressed something on m heart this morning which I have to speak over you." She looked first at my friend and said, "God says to you, youns man, that you are to be the next Billy Graham. You will preach to untold millions of people." Then she looked at me and said, "And you will be his traveling concert pianist The beauty of your music will draw in the crowds, and your friend will lead them to Christ. Let me see your hand so that I can pray over them." She could not have been sweeter or more sincere. But I am pretty sure she did not convey the voice of God to me. I keep rhythm about as well as a bag of popping popcorn, and my hands are more like meat cleavers than finely tuned instruments. And no one-not one person-has ever told me my music has blessed them spiritually. Made them laugh, yes. Gave them a headache, yes. Made them long for Jesus' return, definitely. Spiritually enriched them, no.

• Her word, though sincere, did not resonate with other things I saw God doing in my life.

The Bible tells us we are to "test" the prophecies: **Do they line up with Scripture**? Do they **resonate with what** you see God doing in your own life?

But just because we see them abused doesn't mean we throw out the possibilities of them altogether. On this issue most Baptists have thrown out not just the baby with the bathwater, but the institution of bathing altogether on this one. But Christians for 2000 years have believed God speaks through his church.⁴

If you disconnect yourself from the church, you are disconnecting yourself from direction from the Spirit of God, because he uses his church to guide you!

. In our spirit

lehemiah, the OT guy whom God used to rebuild Jerusalem after the xile, says this: "I had told no one what <u>my God had put into my heart</u> o do for Jerusalem." (Nehemiah 2:12)

Here's what is significant about that. Nowhere in Nehemiah is a **verbal command by God** recorded. **No handwriting** on the wall. No **mysterious appearance of the Virgin Mary** in the foam of his grilled cheese sandwich... Just "God put it into my heart."

: is clear that God sometimes puts into his people's hearts a burning mbition, some dream, some "holy discontent" that serves as his uidance for something he wants them to do.

Paul talks in **Acts 17 about** his spirit being provoked within him (Acts 17:16) and that being the Spirit's guidance to stay and preach in Athens.

David Platt, **a friend and fellow pastor** told **me**, he took a mission trip to Nepal last year and while he was there God put in his spirit, "I want you to focus your ministry more on the nations."

• It was literally on the way home from that trip that he got news about the president of the IMB retiring and they David describes it like how Paul talks in Romans (15:22) about a narrowing of his focus in ministry to preach Chris where he'd never been named. Paul's ministry started WIDE: build up the church; debate the Jews; plant churches... the longer he went, the more the Spirit *narrowing* his ministry by focusing his heart on one or two things.

This is what God does with you. He narrows your focus; provoking your spirit; gives you a "holy discontent" about... **For example:**

- An unreached people group with no access to the gospel
- Some group that is suffering: the immigrant, the homeless, the minority, the addicted, the mentally ill, the sick, the grieving, the unemployed, the incarcerated, the widowed, the elderly... we all care!
- A **career field** or segment of society (like international students) with little Christian influence or witness
- Some ministry in your church that needs development (When people come and complain... Maybe God put that restlessness in you because he wants you to do something about it!)
- Maybe your **heart is in turmoil** the thousands of children orphaned or in foster care, or the millions sacrificed in our country in the name of choice.
- Those are usually God's Spirit in your spirit provoking you!

Now, I want you... you can certainly get this wrong—lots of people have—Paul did in Acts—which is why I tell you to hold even this loosely...

After my wife and I had three kids, we sought God about whether to have more. At three kids, I considered my quiver full. At no point in the week did I feel like I needed more to do or another mouth to feed. But we also knew that rearing godly children is among the greatest ministries you can have (Ps. 127:1-4), so we thought, Well, why not have one more—for Jesus? God

contacted David about the possibility of him leading the IMB.

See Jesus, Continued... pp. 134-64.

had also touched our hearts regarding orphan care, and so we prayed about whether we should adopt. We set aside a day, April 28, 2009, for a time of prayer and fasting. At the end of that day, we both felt that God might be leading us to pursue an international adoption. What a beautiful picture of the gospel! But when Veronica woke up the next morning, she felt sick ... she took the test and sure enough, she was *pregnant*. I don't think I've ever had a prayer answered that guickly and definitively. While we sought God about what to do next, the answer had been (unbeknownst to us) growing inside of Veronica for nearly six weeks. But what about the "sense" that our next child would come through international adoption? Perhaps that's something we should pursue later, but clearly it was not God's will for the moment, as I had sensed. We began to support others pursuing adoption, but we have put any plans to adopt on hold, at least for a while.

o I would encourage you to hold loosely what you think God is aying to you.

God simply did not outline for us in Scripture a definitive way to know with *absolutely certainty* that he is moving in our spirits about something.

Christian leader who thought he was going to die; Isaac in the Bible.

And **you can get yourself in a lot of trouble** if you don't pursue this one humbly and Scripturally. More havoc has been wreaked in the church and society following the words, "God just told me to..." **Always test these impulses**; against Scripture, in counsel with others in the church.

et me be personal with you: I've seen too many people mistake their wn selfish ambition for the leadership of the Spirit. For example, say ou feel called to go overseas and live in a difficult area on the mission eld. You may have "church friends" or family who say, **"Why would ou throw away a promising career to do that? Why would you ubject your family to hardship?**" Clearly those are people not walking with Jesus. **But if you have faithful, Spirit-filled believers wh say to you**, "You know, right now, you're not really leading your famin well. You're struggling in your marriage. I don't think you/re spirituall in a place to do this right now. You need to first get things right in your life." That's advice you need to listen to, and you should submit the word you feel in your heart to the counsel of the church... hold them all in balance.

But what most of you need to realize is that Spirit guidance happens "There is no question but that God's people can look for and expect 'leadings,' 'guidance,' indications of what they are meant to do ... Men have been told by the Holy Spirit to do something; they knew it was the Holy Spirit speaking to them; and it transpired that it obviously was his leading. It seems clear to me that if we deny such a possibility we are again guilty of quenching the Spirit." — Martyn Lloyd-Jones (British Reformed guy!)

5. Through our circumstances

In Acts 16 Paul was doing what he thought God wanted him to do, going where God wanted him to go, when God shut a door right in face.

Every honest Christian I know admits there are times when God doe exactly the opposite of what you expected him to do.

You're doing one thing you think God wants you to do, when a door unexpectedly closes in your face. The job went to someone else. The girl said no. The home loan fell through. Your health declined. The visa was denied.

That's because God often leads us by his sovereign control of our circumstances. We see that in Acts.

In 1 Corinthians 16:8–9, Paul explained to the Corinthians

I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective /ork has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." 1 Cor 16:8– . No "Spirit voice"; just an open door.⁵

low, again, you hold this loosely, in balance with these other four, ecause a closed door doesn't automatically mean it's not God's will.

lotice in that passage, Paul talks about the problems, the dversaries: "Well, I thought it is God's will, but these problems show ne that it wasn't." He knew these problems are part of God's will, so ray I overcome them.

A difficulty doesn't always mean God isn't in something. So you didn't get into medical school the first time. Maybe you should apply again. Your first job search didn't turn up anything. Search again. So she said "no" the first time. Ask again. But don't do it a 3rd time because then that starts to get creepy

Ind, in the same way, an open door doesn't automatically mean omething is God's will: Jonah "happened" upon ship going to arshish (Jonah 1:3), a city 180 degrees in the opposite direction of /here God had told him to go. What if Jonan had been like, "Oh, you ave a ship going to Tarshish, 300 miles from where God told me to o? It must be God's will!"

o hold your interpretation of circumstances loosely, and always alance it against the other things.

Conclusion: Sheep Prayer

ways God leads you... One way is for certain. The other four you old loosely, balance with the others, but remaining open to the pirit's direction in them.

loes this freak you out? That there is only one sure way God leads ou, and another 4 ways he sometimes leads people but you can ever be absolutely sure about any of the other 4?

A verse that has brought me great comfort over the years: In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths. (Prov. 3:6 NKJV)

I read those verses like a contract. If I do my part ("in all my ways acknowledge him," which means *learning his word* and *availing myself* of every means he has given me for discerning his purposes), then he will do his part ("direct my paths").

- A lot of his leadership happens in the background...When he wants me to know something... he breaks in to tell me.
- You say, "But I'm too dumb to know..."
- I've found comfort over the years in a rather insulting analogy God uses for me frequently in Scripture: we, his children, are "the sheep of his pasture." Bad news: Sheep are idiots. They rarely make good decisions. They walk with their heads low to the ground and have notoriously bad eyesight, so they rarely see more than four or five feet ahead of them. Left to themselves, they walk headlong off of cliffs, drown in rivers, or fall down anc become "cast" (unable to turn over off of their own backs, like a cockroach).
 - **That's you** in God's mind. **If a sheep** is going to get to where it needs to be, it won't be because of his skill as a sheep, but because of the competency and compassion of his shepherd.

All he tells you to do is follow him, as best you know how, availing yourself of every means he's put at your disposal, *and he will guide you*.

Think of it like riding a bike. You get pedaling in obedience.

- God starts guiding...
- Sometimes he breaks in with special instruction. When he does that, he'll make it reasonably clear what he wants you to do, just as he did in Acts... because you are a sheep.

See also Colossians 4:3.

BUT **unless he breaks in with clear direction, we should just follow the paths of godly wisdom,** make the wisest decisions we can, and trust that he is guiding the whole process.

o DO YOU WANT TO WALK with the Spirit of God? Two WORDS:
SATURATION: Saturate yourself in the Word of God. You can't know the will of God... Let him shape you into the form of his will.
SURRENDER: Have you surrendered yourself to the Holy Spirit—realizing it is not a body of material to learn or a list of things to do but a person to surrender to and follow—have you ever said to him, "Speak, Lord..."?

lot a Christian? Spirit points you to Jesus!