

Hearing From God – Through the Holy Spirit

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Introduction

Many couples choose **Jeremiah 29.11** as a life verse when they get married. It and the following verses assured Israel of God's care for them, "¹¹For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹²Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³**You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.**" (Jeremiah 29:11–13, NIV84). While these verses were originally directed to Israel, there is no reason why the principles in them shouldn't be applied to each of His children who walk with Him today. These verses include promises that God will hear the prayers of those whose hearts are fixed on Him, and He will care for them, guide them, protect them, and bless them. He will reveal and unfold His will for them as they seek to walk with Him.

That relationship begins when an individual places his/her faith and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation from their sins, and they are born again – He makes them alive in Christ. When people are saved, they aren't merely given an admission ticket to heaven to be used when they die, but God has designed a plan for their lives to be followed now. He desires them to walk by faith, trusting Him, and doing so will not only honor Him, but it will be their best interest.

When people are genuinely saved, they embark on a transformed life; **Romans 12:2** (NIV84) "²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able **to test and approve what God's will is**—his good, pleasing and perfect will." The first part of the verses focuses on God's desire that instead of patterning our lives after the world, believers will be transformed by the renewing of their minds with God's truth. The second part of the verse draws attention to a discovery we make as our minds are renewed and our lives transformed – we will discover God's will for us – His good, acceptable/pleasing, and perfect will. Who could ask for more? Not just **good**, or **better**, - but **best**!

Beverley and I discussed this, and she shared the observations of a speaker who pointed out that since it is God's will, we readily agree that it is **good** and **perfect**. However, we often struggle with considering it, **pleasing**; that necessitates our acceptance and implementation – we need to embrace it as **pleasing**.

God, Who loves His children with an everlasting love, desires to reveal His will to them – He delights to do so and see His children embrace it, and watch it unfold. Just like a parent

watching their infant grow and mature and move through the stages of growth to adulthood and be equipped so they can be launched into society

I. Hearing From God Through His Written Word

The central way we hear from God is through His written Word – the Bible. A great deal of the guidance we find there is very straightforward and clear. We don't need to guess whether we should read and study our Bibles, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." (2 Tim 2:15, ESV). Nor is there any vagueness about whether lying is an acceptable practice, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." (Eph 4:25, ESV). Ephesians 4 and the first part of chapter 5 list **3 standards** to meet with what we say:

1. **Is it true?** 4:25
2. **Is it helpful?** 4:29 (NIV84) ²⁹Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but **only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**
3. **Is it wholesome?** 5:3–4 (NIV84) ³But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. **⁴Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place,** but rather thanksgiving.

These verses are not only abundantly clear on the topic of what we say, but several other topics are addressed in them as well.

Sometimes though, while the direction of the Scriptures is clear, we lack specific clarity in applying it, or working it out in our daily lives. Paul counseled the believers in Ephesus, "¹therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,** ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph 4:1–3, ESV). It's clear that we should walk worthy of our calling as followers of Jesus Christ and Paul went on to give some specific direction regarding what that looks like: "²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It is clear we should exercise humility and gentleness in dealing with other followers of Christ – and to be patient with them as well. And we should bear with believers, in love, and wherever possible, to maintain the unity of the Sp in the bond of peace. That of course doesn't mean we disregard and trample upon Biblical truth and set aside Biblical values in the pursuit of a compromised peace.

The application of these instructions in Ephesians 4 become very personal when the Holy Spirit places the image of a specific person, with whom we need to exercise humility and gentleness in dealing with, into our minds. Or it could be the image of a person that we try

to avoid and ignore, the one who is difficult to love – that the Holy Spirit inserts into our mind. Or the one where we have a fractured relationship with, not over a fundamental pt of doctrine, but a secondary matter – one that needs to be resolved and could be resolved – and that person’s image flashes before you like a neon sign, as you read this verse. That takes us a step beyond **hearing from God through His written word** and adds **hearing from God through the HSp**

II. Hearing From God Through the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity – that description of God which is so hard to understand – one God in three Persons! Most of us probably didn’t realize it at the time, but the first place **we heard from the Holy Spirit** was when He was convicting us of our lostness and that we needed a relationship with Jesus Christ so we could be made complete – spiritually alive and in a relationship with the God of this universe. I remember my own journey – the Holy Spirit, with the help of the Catholic Church made it clear to me I was a sinner, (**John 16.8** convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment), but it was the deep longing which the Holy Spirit created in my heart, that sense of emptiness, the awareness that something was missing, the guilt that accompanied my sins – that the Holy Spirit used to prompt me to search for an answer and uncover the solution for my sins. That culminated with the discovery that salvation from my sins was by grace through faith, through Christ alone; that salvation is not gained through works, but is a gift to be received from Jesus Christ by faith. Oh, I heard from God in an unmistakable and dramatic manner – my life was turned upside down.

Salvation though, as profound and life changing as it is, is just the beginning

1. A Distinctive of the People of God

When we were saved, not only were we made alive spiritually and a relationship with God began, but it was accompanied by another very remarkable thing. It too, is difficult to grasp – like the trinity. God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit took up residence in us.

In the Old Testament it was the Tabernacle, followed by the Temple, that pictured God’s presence among His people, but today God dwells in each one of His children.

1 Cor 6:19-20 makes it clear, ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.

The very thing Jesus promised His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion, happens when a person is saved, Jesus promised, **John 14:16–17** (ESV) ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for **he dwells with you and will be in you.**

The presence of the Holy Spirit is instrumental in being able to communicate with God, **1 Cor 2:11–12** (ESV) ¹¹For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, **but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand** the things freely given us by God.

That is absolutely amazing!

The Holy Spirit has taken up residence in each believer so that they might hear from Him and He might be active in their lives. One of the distinctives of a follower of Christ, is they are indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

2. The Role of the Holy Spirit in Revealing God's Word

The Holy Spirit is integral and essential in the life of every follower of Jesus Christ. To the believers in Colossae Paul wrote very similar instructions as those to the Ephesians:

Col 1:9–10 (ESV) ⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking **that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will** in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰**so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord**, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

It is the Holy Spirit who is instrumental in filling us with the **knowledge of God's will** as He illuminates God's written Word – and **gives us spiritual wisdom and understanding** – something we desperately need as we navigate through a fallen world. The Holy Spirit unfolds God's written Word for us, illuminating it – just like Jesus promised, **John 16:13** (ESV) ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Each time I read through the Bible I discover truths I hadn't seen before; sometimes the Holy Spirit enables me to see something in a different light – something I had missed before. A dimension of God's truth that I hadn't considered before – but all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit makes it clear – as He guides me into more and more truth. And always, the Holy Spirit awakens me an ever-expanding understanding of Who God is, and His relationship with me. He continues to enlarge in me my view of His majesty and magnificence. And as He does, I realize more and more the degree to which I fall short and need Him. But God's goal for us, isn't only to gain more info about Him – He wants us to experience and live out the truth of His Word in relationship with Him. He wants us to lay hold of His promises and provisions, and step out in faith – knowing that He will go with us, and before us.

3. The Role of the Holy Spirit in Providing Assurance

A very important ingredient in effectively living out our relationship with the Lord is affirmation that we are His child – that we realize we are secure in Him. To that end **we hear from God through the Holy Spirit** when **He assures us** we are one of His children, **1 John 4:13** (ESV) ¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. The presence of His Spirit in us is a key part of the evidence cf **Eph 1:13-14**. The Holy Spirit assures us through God's Word, **1 John 5:11-12** (ESV) ¹¹And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. It is the Holy Spirit Who comes alongside of us, as we review that our trust is in Jesus Christ for salvation from our sins; and we are reminded of the fundamental truth that He died on the cross and has risen from the dead – the Holy Spirit ministers to us in the depth of our hearts and **Rom 8:16** (ESV) ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

God wants us to know that we are secure in Him – not kept by our strength, but by His.

4. The Dynamic Nature of Hearing From God

It is very apparent that all the various ways God uses to speak to His children, and all are interwoven, first of all with Scripture, but secondly with one another. Having the assurance that we are one of His children, God wants us to press forward and implement His truth and His will in our daily lives – **He wants us to apply it** – He wants us to **walk in a manner worthy of the Lord** as **Col 1:10** makes clear. That is the tangible evidence a person is trusting in Jesus for his/her salvation. Christianity is not a static religion – rather it is dynamic and active. Walking worthy of the Lord will be confirmed by **bearing fruit in every good work**. And guess what? That will result in **increasing in the knowledge of God**. And those who walk worthy of the Lord will continue to hear from heaven.

In **Eph 5.1** God appeals to us through His inspired words penned by Paul, ¹Therefore **be imitators of God**, as beloved children.

I.e., pattern ourselves after God – not the world, but God. And to that end, in verse 10 we are told to ¹⁰try to **discern what is pleasing to the Lord**. We are to actively engage in discovering God's will – it is dynamic and ongoing.

The reason we need to know **what pleases the Lord**, is because it is pivotal to **imitating God** and added in **Eph 5:15-16** (ESV) ¹⁵Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

We must **align our walk with what the Lord reveals through His written Word**, accompanied by the **illuminating and prompting of the Holy Spirit**. That is the **outcome of hearing from God** – a **worthy walk**. Central to that happening is the regular

and consistent filling of the HSp; **Eph 5:18** (ESV) ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, **but be filled with the Spirit.**

Paul used a straightforward analogy, instead of being under the influence and control of alcohol, which leads to debauchery, be under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. The word translated, ***be filled***, is worth examining because it contains extremely important information. The verb is a present, passive verb meaning this *filling* should happen on a continuous basis, and because it is in the passive voice it means that we are the recipient of something God does, i.e., God is the One who does the *filling*.

While some emphasize that people need to ask God to fill them, the implication of this verb is that our responsibility is to put ourselves in the condition so that God will take the initiative and fill us with His Spirit – be filled with the Spirit is not dependent on **our asking** as much as it is in **our doing**. **An obedient, worthy walk** – is essential. **Hearing from God** and **Walking with God** are actively and dynamically connected.

This leads to **uncovering another barrier to hearing from God**. Some people want God to reveal His will to them so they can evaluate it and decide whether they like it, and if they do, they will decide whether to follow it or not. Others have heard from God but have chosen to disregard what He has said. Yet despite their outstanding disobedience, that expect Him to speak to them further, not realizing **their disobedience is a barrier to that happening**.

Charles Shepson points out in his book ***How to Know God's Will***¹ that God doesn't reveal His will to people to evaluate it before they accept it, rather God speaks to people who have accepted and committed themselves to following God's will before they even know what it is.

Sadly, those people are relatively few in number, but they are the people God is looking for and to whom He will gladly speak.

Hearing from God necessitates a receptivity and sensitivity to God's voice, evidenced by genuine willingness to follow His will even before He tells us what it is.

I have prayed innumerable prayers that go something like this, "*Lord please move upon so and so's heart and prompt them by your Sp to obey Your will in specific places.*" I grow discouraged when that doesn't happen – sometimes I wonder whether God didn't prompt or nudge, or perhaps, He didn't do it hard enough. But it struck me that the most common issue isn't a lack of God speaking and prompting

¹ Charles W. Shepson, *How to Know God's Will*, (Beaverlodge, AB, Horizon House Publishers, 1981), 29, 31

and nudging, but so many people, have allowed their hearts to become so hard, and they have their hands so tightly clasped over their ears – that they can't hear the voice of God even if He thundered from heaven, and even if He did, they have resolved they won't follow His direction.

The Barrier to hearing from God, is this: a lack of receptivity and obedience to God's will

Obedience to God, is fundamental to the regular and consistent filling of the Holy Spirit; **Eph 5:18** ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, **but be filled with the Spirit**

James emphasized that when he said, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (2:17, ESV)

There are those asking to hear from heaven and be filled with the Spirit, but it isn't happening – and the reason is they need to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

5. Following the Prompting of the HSp

I had planned to include several examples of the prompting of the Holy Spirit, but I realized on Thursday afternoon that I was going to run out of time. I will conclude with only one.

Let me preface it with this question? Have you ever had the experience when something that happened in your past, perhaps decades ago, something which you said or did, and which you have completely forgotten about and was no longer a part of your active memory, in a split second, without any warning, comes to the forefront of your memory as though it happened yesterday?

Sometimes we hear from God when we don't expect it and in ways we don't expect either. I don't remember exactly when this happened; I was a relatively new Christian – it was a year or two after the Lord saved me. But I vividly remember hearing from God about it. It is an example of the Holy Spirit highlighting a clear truth from Scripture and applying it.

I no longer remember what triggered it – perhaps nothing more than reading the eighth Commandment – ***Thou shall not steal***, or some of the reiterations of it in the New Testament like, **Eph 4:28** (ESV) ²⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

The Holy Spirit reminded me of an incident I had completely forgotten from years earlier. When I was a youth, prob 12 or so, a friend of mine and I had gone to the local **Red and White** store which sold 22 shells. In those days they weren't locked in a case, but were right there in the open – in the far back, left corner of the store, on a lower shelf – I can still picture it. It is very revealing what we would never do alone, but with a companion, we

gain courage – and both of us put a box of shells in our pockets and walked out without paying. I’m not sure, but it may have been a couple of times.

I thought I would get away with it – and I did for quite a while! Until more than a decade later, now having been saved, one day I heard a knock on the door of my heart – it was the Holy Spirit reminding me of my theft. Long before people captured videos on their phones, the Holy Spirit had watched it all happen and played the video for me; it was so vivid, it seemed like it had happened the day before. And the Holy Spirit didn’t just flash it before me and move on – but He was persistent, He didn’t let go; there was no dismissing it; wherever I prayed, it was right there. Knowing the Lord had forgiven me, didn’t erase it – this involved others and was something I needed to address, and could address.

There was no forgetting about it again. It was a humbling exp to write a letter to the owner of the store and acknowledge I had stolen 22 shells and I included enough money for retribution. **And guess what?** The Holy Spirit did what the Holy Spirit does with sin that has been dealt with – He removed it as far as the east is from the west.

Conclusion

As we address this critical topic of hearing from God, when the Lord speaks to us through His Word accompanied by the Holy Spirit prompting us to do something – obedience is crucial. I am sure that if I had put off dealing with my petty theft, my heart would have grown hard enough and I would have been able to rationalize it sufficiently to move on – at least sort of, but had I done that, it would also have become another **Defining Moment** – except in a negative way.

May we gain a new sense of urgency in hearing from God – through His Word and through the Holy Spirit. And coupled with that, a willingness to obediently follow-through with what God has said to us through His Word, or through the other ways God speaks to His children.

Jeremiah 29:11–13 (NIV84) ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹²Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³**You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.**

Central to the working out the promises of Jeremiah 29 in Israel’s day was obedience to the Lord’s plan for them – it is no different today.