

# The Spirit-Led Leader

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Early in my ministry, I was discipling a new Christian who had come out of a fairly rough background. He had a dramatic conversion to Christ and was growing well and addressing a lot of the issues he had in his life.



One day, he came to me and said, “Bob, I need to sell my boat.” “Okay,” I responded, to which he responded TheThe with energy, “No, Bob, you don’t understand. I used to go out on that boat and get drunk and do all kinds of things that I’m now ashamed of. That boat is an idol to me.”

At his request, I prayed with him that God would sell his boat without any advertising or word-of-mouth. To my amazement, God did so within the next two weeks. I was stunned. I celebrated with him, but I was so theologically devastated that I had to cancel all the rest of my appointments that afternoon to process the experience.

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I thought about it for a long time and I realized one important truth: I could have disciplined that guy until Jesus comes back again and I would never have addressed the number one lordship issue in his life. I realized right then that I was not smart enough to be the Holy Spirit. The best I can do is to help people listen to what God is doing in their life and then to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to see God’s agenda become a reality.

That was a life-changing, paradigm-shifting moment for me: recognizing the role of the Spirit in our lives. It has profound implications for how we listen to God and others, how we trust God and others, and how we see our own role. The best leaders in ministry today don’t lead from a place of self, but by listening to the voice and direction of God.

The world sees as leaders those who are full of confidence in themselves, who know the right answers, who always know what to do in every situation. Jesus' view—and the example he sets—of leadership is much different. He models a leadership that relies heavily on God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

We see him praying for his disciples, discerning who to invest in, and figuring out where to go next. “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19). It's a posture of humility.

Our being in cooperation with what God is doing in the lives of other people is what can truly make our leadership powerful—not our own skills or insights. As Henry Blackaby has written, “Find out where God is working and join him there.”

We can take this approach even in our strategic planning: staying connected to Jesus, listening for the voice of the Spirit, discerning our next step, then looking around and listening again. We might be able to see clearly the end goal where we need to go, but we often need to hear from God step by step how to get there. We can do this together with others on our team, listening to God together.

Consider my experience above and ask yourself: *Do you really believe that the Holy Spirit can speak to people? To you? To others?* Regardless of our different theologies, we can all agree that the Spirit communicates with everyone, although we may differ on how exactly he does that. All believers have the capacity to hear from God. If that's true, it changes everything.

We need to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit in all aspects of life: how he wants you to grow next, who he wants you to invest in, where he wants you to focus your energy. And we trust that God is working in others, too. Help them learn to listen to the direction of the Holy Spirit. This mutual leaning on the Spirit should be the default posture for our leadership, our discipling relationships, the way we are helping others develop, and our own personal life.

If it is not, we become the branch that is no longer connected to the vine, believing we can lead with no nutrients and no energy source. As Jesus said, “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (John 15:4).