

Following the Holy Spirit's Lead

Acts 8:26-38

26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) 27 So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." 30 Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he does not open His mouth. 33 In humiliation His judgment was taken away; who will relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth." 34 The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

1. How did Philip follow the Spirit's lead?
2. In what ways has the Holy Spirit prompted you to share the gospel with others? Do you have an example you can share with us?
3. How can we become more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading?
4. Read together the article: God Will Give You Something to Say

Wrap Up

Colossians 4:3-6

³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

1. Using this passage as a template, and as you consider the people where you live, work, learn, and play, what would you ask us to pray for you?

God Will Give You Something to Say

I would like to encourage you to enjoy a particular experience of the ministry of the Holy Spirit promised by our Lord Jesus.

When he made this promise, he had in mind mainly the tense and dangerous moments when the adversaries of Christianity bring you before authorities and give you a chance to speak. For example, he said,

“When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” (Luke 12:11-12)

Or later he said,

“When they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 13:11); compare with (Matthew 10:19)

Perhaps something like this has happened to you. But most of us in the West have not yet encountered that kind of official arraignment for being a follower of Jesus.

Yes, It Does Apply to You

Does that mean this promise of Jesus has no application to us? No. It does apply to us. Notice, when Jesus says in Luke 12:11 that they may bring us before “synagogues and rulers and authorities,” he is not thinking of only one kind of arraignment. Being questioned in the synagogue was not the same as being interrogated by a Roman governor.

Jesus’s promise that the Holy Spirit will teach us what we ought to say is not meant to free us from anxiety in only one kind of trial and then leave us to ourselves in another. The promise is that the Holy Spirit will help us in the most frightening settings, and so how much more may we depend on him in less threatening situations.

One of the reasons I want you to enjoy this particular work of the Holy Spirit is that I have found it so true and amazing and precious in my own life. I am thinking particularly of two kinds of situations. One is cold-turkey street evangelism, and the other is spontaneous question-and-answer sessions in front of hundreds or thousands of people.

Jogging in Minnesota

During the eight months when I jog outside in Minnesota, I regularly carry booklets and Gospels of John in my pocket. I pray for guidance for someone to talk to about Jesus, and for the help of the Holy Spirit in what to say. It is usually quite early in the morning, and I am running in what most people would call “the inner city.” If I find a guy standing alone, I may stop and say, “Good morning! My name’s John. I run through the neighborhood and pray for people. Is there something I can pray about for you?” From this point on, it is unpredictable.

But ordinarily they will give me something to pray for. Now and then it is something really significant. A couple months ago a young man said his girlfriend had just kicked him out, and he was devastated. He thought it would be long-term. Sooner or later in my interaction, I say something like, “Do you know the best news in the world?” Depending on what they say, I ask, “May I tell it to you?” Ninety percent of the time they say yes. So I put the gospel into as few words as I can and see where they are willing to go with that.

I come away from these brief encounters thankful and amazed at what just happened. Yes, I am often frustrated that I did not say things better. But I am also really happy that the Holy Spirit gave me something to say. Not only that, he inclined me to say it. He caused me to love it. He awakened compassion. He overcame anxiety. He put hope in my heart. He fulfilled the promise of Jesus, “The Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

Life-Preparation, Not Anxious Rehearsal

Besides thinking that the promise gives us infallibility and sure-fire effectiveness, we also should avoid thinking that the promise implies that the Holy Spirit will give wisdom and grace and power to a mind that is habituated to foolishness, flesh, and self-reliance. The promise says we should *not be anxious*, not that we should be empty-headed. We should be free from fear, not free from truth and faith.

It is plain from the life and teaching of Jesus, and from the ministry of the apostles, that the work of the Holy Spirit in “teaching us in that very hour what we ought to say” does not include creating new Scriptures in our heads. The way the Spirit works is by calling to mind the biblical truth we have already treasured in our hearts (Psalm 119:11), and by helping us with clarity and conviction and timing and situational discernment and love. Dozens of intellectual, emotional, verbal, physical, and spiritual factors coalesce into a spontaneous witness to the truth. The Holy Spirit governs them all.

But he does not start from scratch with every opportunity we face. He stirs up his people to “let the word of Christ dwell in [them] richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16). If we hope to lay hold on his promise to teach us what we need to say in a pressured moment, then we should remember another promise: “If *my words abide in you*, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7).

The words of Jesus have already been given to us. The four Gospels, formed out of Jesus’s teachings, are a mountain of treasures. We are to listen to the words of Christ (Mark 9:7), and give them a home in our minds (John 8:37), and treasure them (Colossians 3:16). This is the raw material that the Holy Spirit works with as he teaches us what to say. He inspired the words of Jesus the first time. He loves to use them when the time comes.

How the Spirit Works

Jesus modeled this for us when he was led by the Spirit to give an answer in crisis. When Satan challenged him in the wilderness, Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1), and was given the right word for every moment. It is written,

- “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)
 - “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” (Matthew 4:7)
 - “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” (Matthew 4:10)
- Jesus quoted Scripture every time. Clearly Jesus was not only full of the Holy Spirit, but full of the written word of God. This is how the Holy Spirit taught him “in that hour.”

Always Being Prepared

And that is how it works with us: “The word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:14). The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures in the first century. Then in our century, he moves us to love, and read, and understand, and store up the Scriptures. He transforms us by it. And then, in the moment of need, he puts that biblical truth to work in an amazing way as he teaches us what to say.

This is what Peter was getting at when he said,

If you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, *always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.* (1 Peter 3:14-15)

This is not a contradiction of Jesus’s instruction that we not “meditate beforehand how to answer” (Luke 21:14). Jesus is warning against *fearful rehearsing*. Peter is telling us to always be nurturing our hope by piling the kindling of biblical truth on the fires of confidence. If we feed the fires of our hope every day with reasons from God’s word, the Holy Spirit will take that fuel of “preparation” and “teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

Consider the Lilies

And lest we think that the only knowledge the Holy Spirit uses is Bible knowledge, remember Jesus said, “Look at the birds of the air. . . . Consider the lilies of the field” (Matthew 6:26-28). In other words, learn, learn, learn from God’s world as well as from God’s word.

When you are before the court, or in front of the classroom, or over lunch, or doing an interview, or witnessing on the street, the Holy Spirit is always putting to use your experience of the word and your experience of the world.

It Is Supernatural

Nothing is more natural, therefore, than to be anxious about whether your storehouse will be sufficient for the moment of crisis. That is why Jesus promises something supernatural, not merely something natural.

“The *Holy Spirit* will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:12). God is going to work for you. God!

If you think you can know the Bible well enough, and know the world well enough, to take away your anxiety, you nullify this promise. The whole point is that what is needed in this moment is beyond you. You need the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises he will be there. So live with him day by day. And when the hour of trial comes, he will be there to give you what you need. It is an amazing and precious experience. Come, enjoy