

**Sermon Title: The Gifts of the Spirit: Recognizing the Spirit's Still Small Voice**

What do people mean when they say they “hear God”? How you define this is often the tension.

**Today:** We are going to look at how the Spirit speaks to our spirits.

**CAVEAT:** If you struggle to hear God. Stop. Open your Bibles. Ask the Spirit to speak to you. Read. Reflect. Respond to what is written. The Spirit authored ALL of Scripture, and you can hear His voice clearly within its pages.

**A. The Still Small Voice: thoughts, ideas, understanding**

This is one of the most common ways in which God speaks to us. When Paul talks about receiving the “message of wisdom” or “message of knowledge” or “revelation,” it is most often in this form.

**And what does his voice sound like?** Often a thought, impression, idea, understanding that happens!

**Elijah heard it ... 1 Kings 19:11–13 (NIV)** <sup>11</sup> *The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

**Nehemiah described it as something that is put in our hearts.**

**Nehemiah 7:5 (NIV)** <sup>5</sup> *So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families. I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return. This is what I found written there:*

**One of the ways we can know that these are the Holy Spirit’s (God's) thoughts is if we receive them after we have asked Him for wisdom about a particular matter.**

**James 1:5 (NIV)** <sup>5</sup> *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

**The very reason Paul says in Corinthians to TEST revelations or messages from the Spirit is that they aren’t given with a handwritten note.** Rather, they are thoughts, impressions, understanding, knowledge that comes to our MINDS & HEARTS.

**2 Corinthians 10:3–6 (NIV)** <sup>3</sup> *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. <sup>4</sup> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

**Context:** Paul is specifically addressing the opposition he faced. But again – we see there is a **battle in the mind!** Our thoughts either lead us towards or away from Christ.

**1 Corinthians 2:10–16 (NIV)** <sup>10</sup> *these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.* <sup>11</sup> *In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God...* <sup>13</sup> *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.*

**The Spirit reveals heavenly wisdom – no one knows the thoughts of a person, or God, except themselves. The Spirit enables us to understand God’s thoughts and mind.**

**JAMES TEST: James 3:13–18 (NIV)** <sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

**We looked at this last week. The wisdom test holds for what we sense in Scripture and for other thoughts, words, impressions, etc. we may receive.**

- **Heavenly Wisdom:** truth, pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, impartial, sincere, good, etc.
- **Earthly & Demonic Wisdom:** Denies truth (denies Scripture), bitter, envious, selfish, bad fruit, etc.

**REMEMBER: The Testing Framework: Scripture Test, Character Test, Community Test**

**These Holy Spirit thoughts may be attended by feelings** as the Spirit operates with a Word upon our hearts. A sense of vividness, urgency, persistence, etc. **(CONVICTION)**

- **Sometimes Christians experience anxiety & stress because they become fixated on whether they can hear God speak or not.** (PRACTICE: Regular Bible study & STAR see Ready Soles Podcast)
- **Learning to distinguish God’s voice comes through experience.** Regular Bible study is one of the BEST places to glean that experience!
- **CAVEAT:** The Spirit can make Himself clear to anyone! Even unbelievers! (e.g. my story and many others! We heard the Spirit witness to our hearts and KNEW it was Him.) He wants us to SEEK!
- **REMEMBER:** Anyone can prayerfully read their Bibles and hear the Spirit speak! And CLEARLY.

**QUESTION: How often can we hear the Spirit speak?**

**OBJECTION:** A common objection I have heard from those who concede the Bible teaches the Spirit reveals things to us outside of Scripture is, “Fine, but you can’t make him speak, and it’s a rare occurrence.”

**ANSWER:** We are not given a metric for frequency in Scripture. We look at what is implied.

**The Old Testament:** the voice of God was heard by many but not all, including those who wrote the Scriptures and others who did not. We have prophets and prophetesses, etc., of whom we have no record of what they heard, only that they served in that office.

**Was it common?** NO! But more common than some insinuate.

### **We are living IN LIGHT OF PENTECOST.**

**The New Testament:** the NT does not provide a single statistical total; a breakdown of occurrences, instances, and categories illustrates how often the Spirit speaks, people hear God, or prophetic activity is described:

**1. Direct speaking/Commands to Individuals & Groups: 15-20 times**

- Acts 8:29, Acts 10:19, Acts 13:2, Acts 21:11, 1 Timothy 4:1, Hebrews 3:7, Revelation 2–3 (7 times), Revelation 14:13, Revelation 22:17: *"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.'"*

**2. Implied Speech, Inner Prompts, & Direction: 30+ times**

- **Restraints & Route Changes:** Acts 16:6–7, Acts 20:22–23 *"constrained by the Spirit"*
- **Inner Witness & Conviction:** Romans 8:16, Galatians 4:6, John 16:8 *"convict the world concerning sin and righteousness..."*
- **Inspiration while Speaking:** Matthew 10:20, Acts 4:8 & 4:31: Peter and the disciples being *"filled with the Holy Spirit"* to speak the word with boldness.

**3. Named Individuals & Groups Called "Prophets" in the NT: 28+ People**

- **John the Baptist** (Luke 7:26) **Anna** (Luke 2:36 – *prophetess*) **Agabus** (Acts 11:27–28, 21:10) **Philip's four daughters** (Acts 21:8–9) **Barnabas** (Acts 13:1) **Simeon called Niger** (Acts 13:1) **Lucius of Cyrene** (Acts 13:1) **Manaen** (Acts 13:1) **Saul / Paul** (Acts 13:1) **Judas Barsabbas** (Acts 15:32) **Silas** (Acts 15:32) **The Twelve Disciples at Ephesus** (Acts 19:6) **The Prophets in the Antioch Church Leadership** (Acts 13:1) **The Prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch** (Acts 11:27) **Judas and Silas as Prophets** (Acts 15:32)

**1 Corinthians 14:26 (NIV)** <sup>26</sup> What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

**ANSWER:** Though individual reception of how and when God speaks remains subject to Divine Sovereignty, the NT shows an active, regular expectation that the Spirit speaks to individuals and groups.

### **B. The Still Small Voice: Inner Healing**

Inner healing is something we have practiced for MANY years at Southland. It refers to a process where we allow the Spirit to identify lie-based thoughts and beliefs we have that are influencing bad behaviour; addictions, life-controlling behaviours, character, etc.

**Are we surprised by this? John 14:26–27 (NIV)** <sup>26</sup> *But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.* <sup>27</sup> *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

**This is not a New Age practice**; it is simply a modern title given to a deeply biblical dynamic that we should fully expect when reading Scripture and applying it to our lives:

- **Ephesians 1:17–18**: Paul prays that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened so that we may know Jesus more.
- **Hebrews 13:5 / Matthew 28:20**: Jesus promises that He will never leave us nor forsake us.
- **John 14:26**: The Holy Spirit brings to our remembrance everything Jesus has taught us.
- **1 Corinthians 14:3**: Prophecy is for comforting, building up, encouraging, etc.
- **John 16:13**: The Spirit guides you in the truth.
- **James 4:8**: Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.
- **John 14:27**: The Spirit leaves us with peace.
- **2 Corinthians 10:5**: Take every thought captive.
- **Romans 12:2**: We are transformed by the renewing of our minds.

**We call this process**: Inner Healing. When the Holy Spirit speaks truth into a person's life during inner healing, that truth always aligns with what He has already spoken in Scripture.

**The Holy Spirit takes a universal, objective truth from Scripture and applies it with surgical precision to your specific life story.**

- He moves that truth from an intellectual concept in your head down into an experiential reality in your heart.

### **C. The Testing Framework: Scripture Test, Character Test, Community Test**

Whenever we evaluate words received during inner healing—or any prompt heard through the Spirit's still small voice—we must put them through three crucial tests:

1. **The Scripture Test**: Does it conform to or contradict Scripture?
  - Any genuine word from the Holy Spirit will always align with the trajectory of written Scripture.
2. **The Character Test**: Does it lead to self-centred living or sacrificial love for Jesus?
  - What is the fruit, tone, and posture of the thought?
    - **Self-Improvement vs. Self-Sacrifice**: Self-improvement in itself is fine—it is good to grow in character, steward your health, and better your life. However, if self-improvement supersedes love for and devotion to Jesus, it can become an idol.
    - **Earthly & Demonic Wisdom**: According to James 3:14–16, thoughts driven by self-centred ambition, pride, or self-elevation are earthly and demonic in nature.
    - **Heavenly Wisdom**: As James 3:17 outlines, true wisdom from God produces self-sacrifice, deepens our love for God, and moves us to love others as ourselves—counting them more significant than ourselves (Philippians 2:3).
3. **The Community Test**: Do mature Christians get the same sense? (*“good to the Spirit and us”*)
  - 1 Cor 14 & 1 Thes 5 say we are to test these types of revelations within our community. Allow others the chance to weigh and test what you are sensing.
  - **Acts 15:28** “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us.”
4. **RESPOND**: Hold fast to what is GOOD! Reject the bad!