



Welcome!

Looking for God in all the Wrong Places

NOTE the limitations of this breakout session: This breakout session (*or notes below*) does not reflect everything there is on the subject. Due to the limitations of this session, all Scripture pertaining to this subject is not included. All Scripture used is ESV unless noted.

Oftentimes believers go beyond Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit when making decisions. In our culture today, Christians may believe the Spirit of God is speaking to them through feelings, circumstances, or open doors, which can add confusion to decision-making. Many of these beliefs can be subjective and lead believers astray on how the Spirit is directing them in life. Does the Spirit interact with believers in these ways? How do we help others be guided by the Spirit without looking for God in all the wrong places?

Do we believe the Bible is the very voice of God?

In 2007, John Piper wrote an article that says, “The great need of our time is for people to experience the living reality of God by hearing His Word personally and transformingly in Scripture. **Something is incredibly wrong when the words we hear outside Scripture are more powerful and more affecting to us than the inspired word of God.**”

Jesus tells us in John 16:12–15, “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth.” But what does this mean? Can this *inward voice* we experience be regarded authoritative in the same sense as Scripture?

Nancy Guthrie says, “You and I hear the voice of God speaking to us—
unmistakably, authoritatively, and personally—when we read,
hear, study, and meditate on the Scriptures.”

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-do-we-say-god-told-me/>

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NASB95) – For the time will come when they *will not endure* sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will *accumulate for themselves teachers* in accordance to their own desires and *will turn away* their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Walking through the Key Elements

Establish Involvement

These times are hard and many Christians are facing extremely difficult times. Christians can find themselves turning away from Scripture to discover answers elsewhere. A recent Gospel Coalition article (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/churches-battle-form-christians/>)



stated, “In the internet age, any given sheep is vulnerable to literally millions of wolves, whose overt or subtle dangers are only ever a few clicks away. **The search bar (or Google) is the spiritual battleground of our day.**”

When they turn to you for help, listen to their story and help them find their story in God’s story. Establish and develop compassion, respect, and sincerity towards the person. You will teach or remind them of the formative practice of reading, meditating, and memorizing God’s Word. Establish in the first session the Word of God is our hope!

Gather Data

As you regularly meet with your counselee, seek and acquire knowledge about the person. Gather all kinds of information in order to understand the situation more clearly (physical data; resources and relationships; emotions; actions; patterns of thinking; historical info.; etc.)

Ask a great deal of questions throughout your sessions to seek out the counterfeit truths they are living by... Culture? Politics? News? False Theology? Mysticism (false holy intuition, subjective feelings, mystical experiences, or goose-bump leadings, etc.)?

- Examples

Discern Problems and Give Hope

As biblical counselors, we analyze the problems biblically so that you may accurately understand the nature and causes of the person’s problem(s) and then provide accurate, helpful, and appropriate biblical counseling which motivates and influences them to make certain commitments or decisions that will facilitate biblical change.

Present ways to help them change biblically. We cannot rest on unbiblical foundations that will eventually collapse, but can rest on the Word of God that sets a firm foundation in the believer’s life. The role of hope is true spiritual growth and developing an ongoing intimate relationship with Christ. Take time to hear their suffering and pain. Have compassion and try to emphasize with their agony. Lend a caring ear to your fellow sufferers and fellow sinners in their painful story.

Use testimonies in your sessions to infuse hope – *Tim Keller story*

If you find the counselee is going outside of the Bible to gain insight or make biblical decisions, you must steer them back to Scripture to confirm God’s truth in the matter. They may communicate to you their “experience of God” communication is better for their soul and they passionately express to you their assurance of this experience.



- When this occurs, help them understand that “this experience,” which is outside of Scripture, is an *extra-biblical communication*, not trustworthy, or good for their soul. Jesus gave His life so we can have eternal life (John 17:3; Romans 6:23). Christ has made us alive in Him (Colossians 2:6-8).

James Hamilton, Jr. states in his book, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, “Jesus’ words result in life for those whom the Spirit makes alive. In other words, The Spirit’s life-giving work enables people to receive Jesus’ message. Anyone whom the Spirit makes alive understands what Jesus says, finds it compelling, and believes. Those who do not believe reject Jesus’ message – not because it is not true, but because they remain in the realm of the flesh and do not experience the life-give work of the Spirit.”

Give Instruction

Our instruction must be biblically based on the Scripture, biblically accurate, and biblically appropriate to the person’s situation. When counseling is based on the Word of God it is trustworthy and practical because the Bible deals with all aspects of life and gives hope.

I. The Dangers Outside of Me

We know the Bible is our true source of help, yet even believers are finding God in all the wrong places.

- Fate / Circumstances / Results
- Setting up conditions with God
- Ideas / Inner feelings / Impressions
- Devices: Signs / Reasoning
- Conscience seems clear
- Open / Closed doors

Romans 12:2 (ESV) – **Do not be conformed to this world**, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

“Test” is a means by which you determine what is *of good quality* or *proves to be genuine*. Sadly, believers can crave *the lesser authorities* or false teachers in the world. Christians’ truth comes from Scripture alone, not the temporal world. Believers must be aware Satan roams the earth disguising himself as light (2 Corinthians 11:14), so we must stay away from seeking life’s answers from the world.

Ephesians 6:10–12 (NASB95) - Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm **against the schemes of the devil**. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, **against the world forces of this darkness**, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.



When believers seek God’s truth outside of Scripture, it is dangerous and can be very deceiving.

1 Peter 5:8 (ESV) – Be sober-minded; be watchful. *Your adversary the devil prowls around* like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Sinclair Ferguson shares in his book, *The Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology*, “The focus of the original temptation (*by Satan*) was theological: to destroy confidence and trust in God’s fatherly benevolence. That motif continues in all Satan’s warfare against the elect of God. He knows he cannot destroy their relationship with God, so he endeavors in every way possible to hinder enjoyment of that relationship and pervert it from one of filial (*parental*) communion to one of slavish bondage.”

II. The Bible Is a Sure Thing – 2 Peter 1:16-19

1. **The Bible is our only source of truth** (John 17:17)

Apostle Peter says the prophetic word, the Bible is **more sure** (Greek: *bebaios* – *trustworthy; reliable; certain; dependable; verified*) than his eyewitness experience to the Transfiguration at which time Christ’s majesty was truly revealed.

2 Peter 1:16–19 (NASB95) - ... So we have the **prophetic word made more sure**, to which you **do well to pay attention** as to a lamp shining in a dark place...

2. **The Holy Spirit reveals God’s truth to those who belong to Christ** (John 14:26).

John 14:26 – But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

A.W. Pink states in his book, *The Holy Spirit*, “there is to be a concurrence between the Christian and the Spirit; our responsibility is to cherish and cultivate our graces, and to resist and reject **everything** which opposes and hinders them.

3. **God’s Word empowered by the Holy Spirit is sufficient for decision making.**



Principles of Biblical Decision Making (*Decision Making and the Will of God* by Garry Friesen)

1. Where God commands, we must obey.
2. Where there is no command, God gives us wisdom to choose.
3. Where there is no command, God gives us freedom and responsibility to choose.
 - What is the effect on other believers?
 - What is the effect on non-believers?
 - What is the effect on my spiritual life?
4. When we have chosen what is moral and wise according to Scripture, we must trust the sovereign God to work all the details together for good.

Kevin DeYoung explains in his book, *Just Do Something*, “God certainly cares about our decisions insofar as He cares for us and every detail of our lives. But in another sense, these are not the most important issues in God’s book. The most important issues for God are purity, theological fidelity, compassion, joy, our witness, faithfulness, hospitality, love, worship, and faith. These are His big concerns. The problem is that we tend to focus most of our attention on everything else. We obsess over the things God has not mentioned and may not mention, while, by contrast, we spend little time on all the things God has already revealed to us in the Bible.”

God has given us the Holy Spirit to understand His Word and make godly decisions. J.D. Greear in his book, *Jesus Continued... Why the Spirit Inside of You is Better than Jesus Beside You* states, “To seek God apart from God’s word is dangerous because it leads to mysticism. But reading God’s word with little awareness is legalism.” Greear adds, “Never elevate anything you feel or say to the level of Scripture. We must not let what we feel in our spirit trump what Scripture says. We can easily mistake our own ambition for the leadership of the Spirit.”

Assign Homework

Homework must help the person act on pertinent biblical directives and enable the counselee to practice and implement into their own life. Our aim in counseling is to teach others to rely on the Word of God empowered by the Holy Spirit in the person’s life in order to bring clarity to life’s issues.

- Bible reading and memorization – Study Psalm 119
- Topical books on the subject – See “Resourced Used” on page 6.
- Church community (regularly attending church service, growing/learning, using their gifts, etc.)



CONCLUSION: J.I. Packer states in his book, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, “Understanding the Holy Spirit is a crucial task for Christian theology at all times. For where the Spirit’s ministry is studied, it will also be sought after, and where it is sought after, spiritual vitality will result” Packer goes on to say, “Honoring the Holy Spirit is a crucial task in Christian discipleship today.”

Psalm 119:89 (ESV) – Forever, O LORD, Your Word is firmly fixed in the Heavens.

Book Resources Used:

- *Decision Making and the Will of God* by Garry Friesen
- *The Holy Spirit* by Arthur W. Pink
- *Jesus Continued...Why the Spirit Inside You is Better than Jesus Beside You* by J.D. Greear & Trevin Wax
- *Keep in Step with the Spirit* by J.I. Packer
- *Just Do Something* by Kevin DeYoung
- *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments* by James M. Hamilton, Jr.
- *The Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* by Sinclair B. Ferguson

Online Resources Used:

- Article: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/god-is-not-a-magic-8-ball/>
- Article: John Piper, 2007: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-morning-i-heard-the-voice-of-god>

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