

Spirit Led (part 2)

In this account, we see God leading in three different ways. Philip was led by God in a couple different ways. The first way was his *circumstances*. At the beginning of chapter 8, Philip went from Jerusalem to Samaria because the church was being persecuted. Now, we sometimes read as if it this was completely natural for Philip. When he had to relocate to Samaria to avoid persecution, naturally, he started sharing Jesus. But I don't think it is natural. It's not for us.

You see, we often have plans in life. We have ideas about where we want our lives to go. And some of us might even be dedicated enough to include God in those plans. If my things go the way I want them to God, I could do so much for good for God. But then our plans get derailed and we don't end up where we thought we would. And when the plans we had are disrupted, we start to sulk. And we ask, *"God, I wanted to do so much for you, but now all that's ruined! How could you let this happen?"*

Chances are, Philip was an evangelist in Jerusalem. He may have even had a personal goal to reach all the Jews in Jerusalem. But then the persecution broke out and he had to leave. I doubt he expected that. But even when his planned changed, probably

in his mind—for the worse. He did what he knew he was called to do. “Well, if I can’t serve Jesus in Jerusalem, then I’ll serve him in the armpit of Palestine. It doesn’t matter.”

You see, the trouble with focusing too closely on needing to hear specific direction from God is that we’ll often miss out on the opportunities we have right in front of us. We might even pray, God if you want me to talk to this person, just give me a sign. But you never need a sign or prompting from God to do what you know you should be doing. That’s when seeking the Holy Spirit can be an excuse for us. When persecution came to Jerusalem, Philip saw it as a sign that he was supposed to preach in Samaria.

That being said...the other way God led Philip is through *direct communication*.

“²⁶an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” Now, we don’t really know how this came down. The Greek word is the word *angelos*, which just means “messenger.” It doesn’t really say if the messenger was a being with white clothes and wings or if it came in a dream. A little later in verse 29 it tells us the “Spirit” told Philip something. I assume Spirit and angel are the same in this case.

I’ve never seen an angel (that I know of.) I believe in angels, but I still tend to be skeptical of people who say they’ve seen an angel. I don’t know why that is, but I just don’t believe every story people tell me about those kinds of things.

I’ve never seen an angel, but I do believe God has spoken to me. One was my call to ministry. When I was in high school sitting in church, I heard a voice that wasn’t

audible, but still entirely clear telling me to go into ministry. It was so clear, to this day, 30 years later, you couldn't get me to doubt for a minute that it was the voice of God.

I heard it again just a few months later when I was pursuing a degree in architecture (rather than ministry) where God said, "I told you to go into ministry and you can't do that here." I immediately got up and changed schools to pursue ministry.

There have been other times when I'm not certain, but I think God was speaking to me. Usually that happens in the form of a *stirring* or *longing* or almost a *spiritual hunger* in my stomach. One instance of that was when I felt God was telling me to leave the church where I was an assistant pastor and to lead a church of my own. Before that, I'd never had the slightest desire to lead a church. But I can remember laying in bed one night with what I can only describe as an intense longing that almost felt physical and I knew it was time to go. I didn't know where. God didn't say, "You're going to Waite Park Church," but I knew God was moving me.

And then there have been other times, when I've felt that God was speaking through me. Most of the time, I labor pretty hard putting together sermons. I probably spend 20 hours working on my sermon each week. But from time to time, a sermon comes so easy for me that I get almost giddy thinking about preaching it. When that happens, I can crank it out in an hour or two. I love those weeks.

And then there are times when I would say that I'm not as sure that it was God speaking, but I think it might have been when I look back in hindsight. And I think there

are two big hurdles people have when it come to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The first is the question, "How do I know it's God speaking and not just my own thoughts?" The second is, *"What if I'm wrong and end up looking silly?"*