**“Full of the Holy Spirit”**

There are certain questions that I get asked a lot. People who consider themselves Christian often struggle with similar questions.

*Can I really be sure that I’m saved*? That makes sense for two reasons:

1) Salvation is free and we know that nothing is free. We always feel like we have to pay something for anything. In this case it’s not free. It cost Jesus His life, but it is free to us. We don’t have to do or pay anything.

2) We’re not very good at living like Christ so we don’t feel worthy. No we’re not worthy, but through faith we are considered worthy.

*Is Jesus really the only way to eternal life*? That seems so “exclusive”. It turns away good people of other faiths. The truth is that no one gets eternal life by being good because no one is good compared to a sinless God. Jesus said I am the way, the truth, and the life. *No one comes to the Father except through me*. So unless Jesus is a liar or crazy, yes it is exclusive.

*Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people*? Once again, no one is good, but a better answer is that God gives us free will. Free will choices have consequences and not always for the guy making the choice. God can’t stop all bad things from happening without taking away our free will. And if He takes away “some” free will, what free will does He take away and what does He allow?

A question I get often from people who consider themselves Christ followers is: *How can I know the will of God*? It’s a great question. We should want to know what God’s will is if we’re committed to following Him.

I think, however, when Christians ask that question they have something more particular in mind as in, *How can I know God’s will in particular situations*? *Do I take this job? Do I marry this girl? Do I buy this house?*

My first answer: Identify God’s general will for all believers and pursue it. We can’t expect God to give us daily guidance if we’re not daily following the will He has already made clear to us. So first do what you know.

My second answer is that God’s will is usually not quite as specific as we imagine it. In most daily choices God’s will is rather broad. What’s more important is that we’re pursuing His ways and obeying His teaching. It’s one thing to accept Jesus as Savior, it’s quite another to pursue His ways and teaching.

Are you familiar with Eugene Peterson? He’s the guy who paraphrased the Bible in “The Message”. In a book published in 1980 he wrote, “*It is not difficult…to get a person interested in the message of the Gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain that interest*.”

His point is that people like the Savior idea but often don’t like the obey part. We’re probably not going to know the will of God for any particular situation if we’re not actively obeying in general.

Now, concerning those particular choices. If God told us what to do in every choice, it wouldn’t really be a choice would it? God doesn’t make those daily decisions for us because us He wants us to make them. He wants us to choose His will because that’s what’s in our hearts, not because He said, *Marry that girl!*

So what we should be asking is, *How can I get to where I make daily choices that follow God’s will*?

As we’re working our way through the Book of Acts we’ve been seeing that the dynamic that made the early church so effective doing God’s will is that they were “*full of the Holy Spirit*”.

Remember the seven men chosen to be Deacons of the Jerusalem church in Acts 6 were described as “*full of the Holy Spirit*”. These men made daily choices to obey God. In fact, that’s what drew the attention of the religious leaders who hated the Christian sect. It got Stephen killed but it was surely the will of God for him to live and proclaim the Gospel.

Two weeks ago we began looking at another of those seven men, Philip. When the church was scattered from the persecution that broke out after Stephen’s murder many Christians, including Philip, went to Samaria and while there, “*full of the Holy Spirit*” they effectively presented the message of Christ through word and deed. As a result many Samaritans believed.

What does it mean to be “*full of the Holy Spirit*”? Perhaps an illustration will help. Have you ever known someone who was “full of himself”? You know the type. Whatever you talk about eventually gets around to being about him. He speaks of himself a lot. As my Dad used to say, *He has an “I” problem*. His daily decisions are almost exclusively about what serves him; what brings him blessing and joy; what he wants in every situation.

To be “*full of the Holy Spirit*” isn’t about having some magical infusion that controls your daily choices. It’s about your heart being right so that you consider the things of God; you speak of God; you make daily choices that reflect and serve God.

One who is “*full of the Holy Spirit*” seeks to bring blessing and joy to God. His decisions are about what God wants in every situation.

The Holy Spirit helps us in this, but not by taking control. He helps us control ourselves so that we can live in a way pleasing to God.

Philip was “*full of the Holy Spirit*”. We’ll pick up his story in Acts 8:26, *An angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out.* Acts 8:26-7a

I don’t know how the angel spoke to Philip. Often when I’m praying about my teaching ideas come to me seemingly out of nowhere. I believe God is speaking the ideas to me so I immediately stop and write them down. I don’t want to lose them.

Philip knew this road. Everyone knew it. It was the main route between Egypt and Jerusalem. He also knew that the road went to the south and that it passed by Gaza. Gaza had been destroyed by the Hasmoneans in 93 BC then rebuilt in 57BC further south. The original site was called Old Gaza or Desert Gaza.

The angel said go κατα μεσημβριαν, according to the high sun. Of course that does indicate direction (south) but more accurately indicates the time when the sun is highest in the sky. That’s a tough time to be walking a desert road. Maybe not for an Ethiopian but it was for Philip. “*Full of the Holy Spirit*” and desiring to do God’s will, Philip was open to the will of God and immediately obeyed.

*On his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship*, *and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet.* Acts 8:27f

It’s unfortunate that we never got this guy’s name. He’s forever known simply as “the eunuch”. This un-named man worked for the mother of the King of Ethiopia. Candace wasn’t her name. It was her title. They didn’t name the king himself because he was considered the Son of the Sun.

Books didn’t come in codex form. They came in scrolls. If he’s reading in Isaiah it means he probably has already read from Genesis through the books of law, the Kings and Chronicles, the Psalms and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. How many have read that far through your Bible? Don’t raise your hands.

This man was a worshipper of YHWH, perhaps a proselyte or a God-fearer, the difference being that a proselyte has undergone baptism and circumcision and a God-fearer had not.

*The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”* Acts 8:29 The angel is here identified as the Spirit. It’s not a contradiction for it’s the Spirit of God that works in such matters whatever or whoever is the conduit.

There’s no indication of hesitation or argument from Philip. He heard and he obeyed. *Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet.* Acts 8:30a

It’s not surprising that he heard the man reading. People normally read aloud because ancient languages tended to be more about images than sound. In fact it would be odd to see someone reading silently. Augustine took special note of Ambrose that he read silently.

*“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.*

*“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. He was reading this passage of Scripture: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth. In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can speak of His descendants? For His life was taken from the earth.”*

*The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.* Acts 8:30b-35

The man said he needed a guide, a teacher. Philip knew what to do next. The man had been reading Isaiah 53:7-8, likely from the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Philip, “*full of the Holy Spirit*”, the same Spirit that fills us if we allow Him, explained the idea of The Suffering Servant.

This was a difficult concept to grasp. How could God suffer while still being God? Isaiah himself probably didn’t fully understand what he was writing. Peter wrote,

*The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come…searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He predicted the sufferings of Christ.* 1 Peter 1:10f

It’s much easier looking back at the Passion of Christ to see the connection between Isa. 53 and the Messiah, and there’s no evidence that anyone made the connection before His crucifixion - except Jesus did.

Peter once asked Jesus how He could be the Messiah when the scripture says that Elijah must come first. *Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?* Mark 9:12

At another time Jesus said, *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Mark 10:45 Two years before this event in Acts Philip wouldn’t have understood.

The Ethiopian man apparently liked what he heard from Philip, and Philip must have included something about the appropriate response to believing. Maybe he used Peter’s words, *Repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*.

*As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot.*

*Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.* Acts 8:36, 38

You may have noticed that I left out verse 37. That’s because verse 37 isn’t in the best of the ancient manuscripts of Acts. Someone copying the text at some point probably included on his own, *And Philip said, “If you believe from your whole heart you may”. And he said, “I believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God”*.

That was, after all a common formula used at baptism. The scribe possibly believed that Philip certainly would have used such a question to satisfy himself of the man’s genuineness.

I’m thinking the scribe had put a note about that in the margin (like we would use parentheses) and a later copyest included it in the text. However it got there, it doesn’t belong. The actual text goes from verse 36 to 38, then,

*When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.* Acts 8:39f

We don’t know much about Philip after this. He preached his way from Azotus, the ancient Philistine city of Ashdod, north along the coast through Lydda and Joppa and eventually to Caesarea. He shows up once more in Acts 21 when Paul and his companions stayed in Caesarea at the home of Philip for a number of days. By then Philip was an older man with four daughters, who happened to be preachers.

Now, let’s see if we can glean some lessons and principles from this that will help us know the will of God like Philip did.

Lesson 1: **If you want to know the will of God** even for daily decisions **you have to surrender your heart**.

Philip had chosen to surrender to Jesus. He was truly ready to follow Him whatever that meant. Like Isaiah who said, “*Here am I, send me!*” Philip had given himself to obey Christ in everything.

If you want to know the will of God in particular situations, surrender your heart to follow Jesus; no restrictions; no limitations. Why would He tell you His will if you aren’t going to follow?

Lesson 2: **If you want to know the will of God** even for daily decisions **you have to make yourself available**. Philip didn’t make any excuses or argue with the Spirit. Certainly he could have explained how inconvenient it was for him to go on that road at high noon.

         He could have said he’s too shy or he doesn’t know enough to talk to strangers about the Savior.

         He could have said, *that’s not my gift, besides I have different ministries I’m involved in. I’m a Deacon in charge of distributing food to widows*.

Philip didn’t do any of that. He made himself available.

If the Holy Spirit nudges, act. Act without hesitation or argument. Even if you don’t think you can do it. God is more interested in your availability than your ability.

If He nudges, act even if you’re not sure of where He’s leading you. We don’t know what God has planned for us.

Philip certainly didn’t but he trusted so he obeyed immediately. God had an appointment with this man from Ethiopia planned. God knew this man was going to be on that desert road at that time reading from Isaiah. God also knew the man had questions.

Travelling in a desert for a man from Africa is no sweat (pardon the pun), but it was for a man like Philip. Still God wanted him in the right place at the right time.

If you’re waiting for an audible voice of God to call you, you’ll probably miss His leading. He uses different ways to direct us: His Spirit in us; the Bible; our own thinking; other believers; even our emotions, if we allow Him to, but we have to be available.

Lesson 3: **If you want to know the will of God** even for daily decisions **you have to be active for Him**. When we’re stopped, or moving away from Him it’s rather difficult for Him to reach us. If we’re ignoring Him, if we’re not pursuing His general will that we already know, He’s probably not going to bother sending us anything new.

I would suggest that key to God leading us is that we’re

         first regularly in prayer, speaking and listening to Him;

         second we’re regularly in His Word, learning what He has already told us;

         we’re third consciously surrendering to His will whatever we learn it to be;

         then I would add one more thing, we’re open for Him to communicate with us.

This is what being “*full of the Holy Spirit*” looks like. When you’re “*full of the Holy Spirit*” you won’t have any trouble knowing God’s will. It’ll just feel right, not because it’s easy or convenient or comfortable but because our closeness to God makes us want to do His will.

Some principles about what God does through the Holy Spirit:

**#1 God guides us to people** and situations that we may not understand but He has a plan to connect us with someone **who needs to hear the Gospel**. He guided Philip to be in the right place at the right time to speak to that man.

Interestingly, the Holy Spirit even prevented Paul from traveling to Asia and some other places. He did so in order for Paul to be where He wanted him so Paul could meet the people He wanted Paul to meet.

We’re not told how the Spirit communicated to him, maybe it was by a vision or by some unmistakable inner conviction. However it’s what the Holy Spirit does. He orchestrates getting the right people in the right places at the right time.

We should accept that He may be guiding us to certain people who need to hear the Gospel from us. When we look back we can often see what used to be difficult to understand.

Think about some of the people God has put in your life. Do you think it’s possible that He put one or two in your life so you could share the Gospel with them? Just like He arranged the meeting between Phillip and this Ethiopian man, He probably arranges some of your meetings, wanting you to share the good news.

The Holy Spirit will tailor His influence of you to particular situations where He wants you to serve. That’s what He did with Philip and it’s what He’ll do with you.

**#2 God guides us through our ordinary love and concern**. When Philip arrived at the chariot he listened. Before he even tried to share the Gospel, he listened to learn the man’s need.

He also cared enough to ignore cultural and religious taboos in order to connect with this man. He loved the man enough to risk rejection in order to share with him.

If you’re loving and caring the Holy Spirit will nudge your sensitivity to connect with those He puts in your life.

**#3 God guides us to where people are, not where they should be**. Did you notice that Philip didn’t even invite the guy to church? He ascertained where the man was spiritually. The man already worshiped God but he didn’t know Jesus. So starting from where the man was spiritually, a God-worshiper reading Isaiah, Philip told him the good news of Jesus the Messiah.

It seems to me that many, maybe most Christians today start and stop with, *You should come to church*. Coming to church is a good thing, but more important is that people know Jesus. That’s why God put you in that relationship, to help him know Jesus.

One more principle. This isn’t from today’s text but from the mouth of Jesus. #4 **God guides in what to say when we speak to people**.

I’m confident this principle was at work in Philip that hot afternoon, just as it was in Acts 4 when Peter, although unschooled and ordinary yet “*full of the Holy Spirit*” spoke with eloquence before the rulers and Elders of the people.

Jesus said, *Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.* Mark 13:11

Don’t think you’re going to deliver a graduate level theological treatise like a trial lawyer giving an opening statement. Philip spoke from what he knew and the Holy Spirit guided him.

If you’re not experiencing Jesus in your life, if you’re not reading the Bible, if you’re not studying to be able to work with God’s Word, don’t expect the Holy Spirit to fill you with stuff you don’t know.

If you know Jesus, the Holy Spirit will help you share what you know.

If you read and know the Bible the Holy Spirit will bring to mind scriptures that apply to your situation and what the person you’re talking to needs.

If you’re a student of apologetics the Holy Spirit will help you express the ideas and conclusions you’ve learned.

We started by asking, *How can we know the will of God?* We already know it. We also know that the Holy Spirit orchestrates people and situations for us. If we’ve surrendered our hearts to Him, if we’re committed to being available, we’ll know the will of God. Then it’s up to us to respond to the people and situations He has given us.

The question we need to answer is: are we doing the will of God that we know?

If not, we need to ask ourselves is, what’s holding us back?