

A person is seen from behind, walking along a dirt path that leads towards a bright sunset. The path is illuminated by the golden light of the setting sun, which is low on the horizon. The landscape is hilly and covered in green vegetation. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

The Spirit-Led Servant

Russell Nash

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For all queries, please contact: russnash37@gmail.com

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First Edition: July 2026

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Preface

I hear a lot of ministry leaders talk about metrics, the measures that they use to determine how successful their ministry is. Ministry can be tiring and discouraging, especially when you aren't seeing the results you have decided upon despite the extensive effort you have put in.

One of the biggest tragedies in ministry is giving your all to something that God just isn't involved in. Some ministries, however well-intentioned, will see poor results due to the simple fact that it was either never God's plan for them to be started, or that God has a plan for its execution that hasn't been put into practice.

These same problems can manifest in our own lives also; taking paths that God never pointed us to or following through with decisions that are 100% of our own making.

We need as much of a relationship with God the Holy Spirit as we do God the Father and God the Son. Today's church has, tragically, almost forgotten the third member of the Holy Trinity.

God has made a point of laying out these truths to me, as well as showing me how a truly, Spirit-Led life can produce results that are clearly from Him and serve to build His Kingdom. In my gifts of preaching and teaching, God has emphasized these truths as practical applications to be preached from the

pulpit or taught through studies and interactions with other believers. “Lead my people back to my Holy Spirit” has been the clear call that I have heard and worked to be obedient to with His guidance.

Whether you are a ministry leader or an obedient servant, my prayer is that this book will guide you towards a relationship with our triune God that will be guided by His Spirit and fruitful for His Kingdom!

Part One: Why We Need to Be Spirit-Led

It is clear that Jesus is in charge of the church, and that it is intended for it to function under His lordship and direction.

Chapter 1: Who is Jesus to you?

When I asked my wife to describe how I communicate, she replied with the following statements:

- Very direct.
- Short and sweet.
- To the point.
- Saying what needs to be said.
- Kind but honest.

With this in mind, I'm going to ask you a direct question: Who is Jesus to you?

This is an important question for any Christian as it can very quickly reveal their beliefs. Allow me to give my own answer to this question:

Who is Jesus to me?

Let's start with these two verses:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

- John 1:1

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- John 1:14

- Jesus was in the beginning.
- Jesus is the Word, the "logos".
- Jesus is with God.
- Jesus is God.
- Jesus came to earth as both man and God.
- Jesus has Glory.
- Jesus is the Father's only Son.

- Jesus is full of grace and truth.

Beyond these two verses, Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, my savior. He is also my Lord and has dominion over me.

What else is Jesus to me? He is my example. In His time on earth, He showed us what it means to be a Christian and taught us that we are to love God, love our neighbor and obey God.

Again, Jesus is the perfect example of the perfect Christian. We are being sanctified into the image of Christ, therefore we should be imitators of Him.

In the temptation of Jesus we read the following:

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

- Matthew 4:2-4

Jesus response (from Deuteronomy 8:3) states that man's physical being is sustained by physical bread, but beyond his physical needs man has a living need for every "word" (Greek: "rhēma" - utterance, living voice, thing spoken, word) that comes from the mouth of God.

The Greek word "rhēma" has the characteristic of being personal, it is directed toward an individual or a specific moment, it represents actual words spoken. In comparison, the word "logos" (also translated "word" in John 1:1, for example) has the characteristic of a universal word, applying to all people at all times, representing an overall message. It should be noted though that these two words for "word" are sometimes used interchangeably. Sometimes "rhēma" is used to denote a message directly spoken by the Lord to an

individual or group, and sometimes to reference the detail of the actual specific words written to all, Ephesians 6:17 is a good example of the latter.

This messianic passage from the book of Isaiah says:

The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.

- Isaiah 50:4-6

The Lord “wakens [Jesus’] ear” each morning to “listen like one being instructed”. In response, Jesus has “not been rebellious” and “not turned away”. The Father’s instructions to Jesus were listened to continually and obeyed. Jesus followed God’s Spirit.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

- Romans 8:14

Upon this premise I write this book. If you and I don’t agree with the above, then reading the rest of this book will be pointless to you.

Now you know why my wife says I’m direct.

Questions for reflection:

1. Who is Jesus to you?

2. Has your answer to question 1 (since becoming a Christian) ever been different? How?

3. If your answer to question 2 was “Yes”, was this purely because of bad theology, disobedience or other reasons?

Chapter 2: The Problem

We are called to be servants of Christ, plain and simple. There are many references in the New Testament where Jesus makes known this calling:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- Mark 10:42-45

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

- Matthew 25:40

In so many ways, Christianity is upside-down compared to the world. The world presents a ladder to be climbed, the further up the ladder you can get the more successful you will be and, because you are higher, more people will see you and see your success, this is a breeding ground for pride. Christianity is the opposite, we must love with humility and lowliness of heart in faith if we are to truly please God. We must also not seek to be elevated in the eyes of others, unless God determines that it is necessary for His purposes, in which case He will grant you favor with people. Our aim must always be the glory of God.

We must become servants and pour ourselves out for others, we must show the love of Christ to a hurting, cruel and broken world, and we must do this in a way that pleases God. This makes for powerful testimony.

This chapter is entitled “The Problem”, so you may well ask “Why is needing to be a servant a problem?”. The problem here lies in the average Christian’s method of pursuing being a servant under their own power, direction and choices. We can be servants under the guidance of just our own flesh, and indeed there are many like this even in Christianity, but to be truly effective for the Kingdom of God, we must fully submit to God's guidance and leading. This is how we serve in a way that pleases God and is immensely more effective.

In the words of Jesus:

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

- John 15:4-5

We are “in me” (in Christ) if we are saved, but this is not the whole picture of what Jesus is referring to here. Jesus stated that “*No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine*”. Jesus is the vine, and He needs to be our source if we want to bear much fruit. We can do nothing without being in Him.

If we are not serving from a surrendered servant's heart that seeks to know what God's will is in all circumstances then we will not be effective for His Kingdom.

The church, or body of Christ, is designed to operate with Christ as the head.

Questions for reflection:

1. Think back to a time in your life, or even in your Christian walk after you decided to follow Christ, when you followed the world's model of pursuing success. How and why have your views changed about this approach?

2. What do you think it looks like to surrender to God?

3. What would it look like if our aim was always the glory of God?

Chapter 3: Christ Leads the Body

The Apostle Paul describes the church as belonging to Jesus and being His bride, he also describes how the church is intended to function:

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

- Ephesians 1:22-23

It is clear that Jesus is in charge of the church, and that it is intended for it to function under His lordship and direction. Without this, we are as good as an army with no overall commander or general, each unit doing what it determines to be best without overall coordination and singleness of vision.

Do you always know, without hesitation, what is best in every situation? Too shallow a view of that responsibility will result in unproductive chaos. Too deep a view of that responsibility will result in overload, burnout and even paralysis. This kind of leadership is a load we were never designed to carry, this is Christ's responsibility.

Only God can truly know the best action in every situation, He is the omnipresent Alpha and Omega who knows the heart and mind of every created being. Only He, for example, truly knows when helping is enabling or what words and how they are presented (however true) will hinder instead of heal.

The question is: how does the head communicate with the body?

Questions for reflection:

1. Has a task ever “burned you out”?

2. What caused that burn out?

3. What could have prevented it?

4. Have you ever been in a situation where you just didn’t know what to do?

5. How did you decide?

6. What could have prevented this indecision?

Chapter 4: The Solution

What is intended for the church is for Christ to lead, directing faithful believers through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

If we study the book of Acts, we can clearly see examples of the Holy Spirit guiding the early church:

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

- Acts 13:2-3

The Holy Spirit spoke to the believers at Antioch and gave them an instruction to "*set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*". The believers responded with prayer and fasting and then obeyed.

When gentile believers had questions regarding being circumcised and following the law of Moses, the apostles and elders were consulted. After consideration and discussion a decision was arrived at and a letter written. Part of that letter read as follows:

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:

- Acts 15:28

They had sought God's will regarding the question and the Holy Spirit confirmed the conclusion.

During Paul's travels with his companions to spread the gospel, they were guided by the Holy Spirit which kept them from preaching in Asia:

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

- Acts 16:6

The wording here is interesting, it doesn't say that the Holy Spirit "told" them anything, simply that He "kept" them from something. The Spirit will not always present Himself with words.

I have heard the arguments that the leading of the Holy Spirit is only for those in leadership positions in the church, such as the pastor. Bluntly, I find no biblical basis for this. In Acts 9, for example, Ananias was instructed in a vision to go to Saul after his Damascus Road experience. Ananias was simply described as "a disciple". In Acts 10, Cornelius was led by the Spirit to send for Peter. Cornelius had no rank within the church as it didn't even exist for him yet.

The Holy Spirit has many purposes:

1. Giving us power to be witnesses and ministers of Christ (Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 3:5-6).
2. Guiding us, teaching us and revealing truth (John 16:13-14; John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:12).
3. Transforming us and giving us new life (2 Corinthians 5:17).
4. Granting us freedom and fellowship (2 Corinthians 3:17; 2 Corinthians 13:14).
5. Interceding for us (Romans 8:26).
6. Guiding us to fulfill God's will (Romans 8:12-14).
7. To unify us (Philippians 2:1-2; Colossians 2:16-19).

One verse from item 6 is worth meditating on for a moment:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

- Romans 8:14

Note the tense of the Greek word “agō” that is translated “led”, it is the present tense. “Those who are led” not “were led” or “will be led”, this is a continuous state. Many mature believers are used to “occasionally hearing from” the Spirit, but it is the intention for us to be “continually led by” the Spirit.

A church that is continually led by the Spirit of God to obey the Kingship of the Head, Jesus Christ, will be unified. Unity of the church is a command of the scriptures.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

The Holy Spirit is the “nervous system” of the body of Christ. It is by the Holy Spirit that the head, Christ, instructs the body (us) to help build the kingdom of God.

Questions for reflection:

1. Have you ever experienced guidance from the Holy Spirit?

2. How did you know it was the Holy Spirit and not you?

3. Did you choose to obey or disobey?

4. How did you make that choice?

5. How did it turn out?

Part Two: Barriers to Being Spirit-Led

This world is a noisy place.

Chapter 5: Pride and Good Intentions Without the Spirit

These two things, pride and good intentions, may seem to be somewhat contradictory, but pride can sometimes hide very well behind good intentions.

*If anyone thinks they are something when they are not,
they deceive themselves.*

- Galatians 6:3

Imagine, if you will, a believer that is serving regularly. They are generous with the resources that have been entrusted to them, using them to help the poor and show a loving nature to both Christians and non-Christians alike. Now imagine that this believer is operating purely out of their own intellect; praying over everything, yet making all the decisions because they have not cultivated a relationship with the third member of the triune God, the Holy Spirit. Operating entirely in the flesh, likely believing that they are being prompted by the Holy Spirit, but using phrases such as “I think that was God” or “I’m pretty sure God told me to do that”. The reality is, in these kinds of circumstances, God has often not spoken. At this point I ask for faith in this assessment, with the promise that I will dig deeper into this topic in Part 3.

This can become a situation where the flesh becomes pleased with itself over time. As more and more “successes” take place, there is a silent patting of oneself on the back for being “able to hear God” and achieving the results that the believer wanted. This is pride with good intentions. Servant-hood which is, in reality, driven by the flesh and deceptively rooted in pride.

Please do not hear what I am not saying here. Works done as the result of faith are pleasing to God (Hebrews 11:6), but

we need to understand exactly what is meant by “*works done by faith*”. These are works born out of love and obedience to God. When we, for example, help the poor not just because God commands us to, but because our hearts are moved out of the compassion that comes from our love for Him and a transformed heart, we are demonstrating “*works done by faith*”. God examines the heart (Jeremiah 17:10; 1 Samuel 16:7) and rewards loving obedience.

Believers allow their own fleshly decisions to dictate outcomes when pride takes the lead; in such cases, the individual, rather than God, establishes the measurements of success. This produces works which place the spotlight on them instead of giving glory to God. It also places a barrier that prevents the pursuit of a deeper relationship with God driven by a sheep that has learned to know the voice of the Shepherd. This relationship won’t progress in the right direction until the pride is recognized, repented of and God sought for His glory instead.

Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.

- Psalms 127:1

Questions for reflection:

1. Do you believe there has ever been a time when you were guilty of this?

2. If so, do you think that pride was the issue, or perhaps spiritual immaturity?

3. What do you think is the best, biblical defense against works that God is not involved in?

Chapter 6: Anxiety and Negative Thoughts

What comes to your mind when you consider the topic of “negative thoughts”?

Certainly we have all had them. I would have a hard time believing any true Christian who claimed that they had never wrestled with them. They either come up in seemingly inconsequential moments or when we are facing a task that calls for boldness.

These things have one purpose, to combat God’s truth with doubt. The end result, if they achieve their aim, is fear:

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

- 1 John 4:18

John points out that love should not cause fear, if fear is preventing us from loving the way that we are called to love (how Jesus loved) then it is not from God. He goes on to further clarify: “*fear has to do with punishment*”, in other words the purpose of fear is to prevent us from doing something because we are expecting unwanted consequences for it. This exposes the purpose of the “*flaming arrows of the evil one*” (Ephesians 6:16).

John then says “*The one who fears is not made perfect in love*”, how are we made perfect in love? Only Christ, through the Holy Spirit, can make us perfect in love; “*There is no fear in love*”. According to Jesus, if we love Him we will obey Him. If fear can drive us to not obey Jesus, then our love for Him isn’t perfected.

We are either bold for Christ or we are fearful of what may happen if we are bold for Christ.

Where or in what circumstances or around what people are

we fearful and, as a result of that fear, not bold? This is a question worth seeking our personal answers to, because it shows where we are not willing to be obedient to the Holy Spirit.

God has not given us a Spirit of fear:

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

- 2 Timothy 1:7

The capitalization of “Spirit” is not inconsequential, in English this is used to denote a proper noun, i.e. the name of a unique person. In this case, it is not referring to our spirit but the Holy Spirit.

God has not given us His Holy Spirit so that we can be fearful, not abide in Him and not follow Him. He has given us His Spirit so that we can be transformed and so continually led by Him that we will not be fearful but bold instead.

“All well and good”, you might say, “but how does this help me combat anxiety?”.

Paul said:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 4:6-7

This verse tells us something 2,000-odd years ago that modern neuroscience confirms: It’s impossible to be thankful and anxious at the same time.

Within our minds, a constant tug-of-war exists between the amygdala, which functions as a survival panic switch, and the

medial prefrontal cortex, the region ignited by thankfulness, as they compete for dominance over our neural pathways.

When anxiety hits, turn it around, and thank and praise God for those very things you are worried about. For example, if you worry how you will cope if you lose your spouse, turn around and give thanks and praise to God for your spouse. Bring to mind every tiny little way that your spouse has and does bless you, and thank God in truthfulness for those things, recognizing that He is the one that gave them to you.

*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will
for you in Christ Jesus.*

- 1 Thessalonians 5:18

With habit this will eventually retrain your mind to gravitate towards thankfulness instead of fear and anxiety.

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as
members of one body you were called to peace. And
be thankful.*

- Colossians 3:15

Take this wording literally, we must LET the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. If we are striving to always want to understand the purpose or plan behind everything then Christ's peace will not rule in our hearts; but if we learn to trust that God knows what He is doing and that His promises to us are real, then Christ's peace will rule.

How's that for a transformation of your mind (Romans 12:2)?

Questions for reflection:

1. What produces fear or anxiety in you that you know you will come up against when choosing to obey scripture?

2. How can you apply thanksgiving to these things to transform your mind?

3. If you are honest with yourself, how much time do you spend wanting to know the purposes behind the events of your life?

4. What reasons can you give for trusting in God's purposes without knowing them?

Chapter 7: Hobbies and Distractions

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

- Luke 8:14

This world is a noisy place, finding peace and quiet in it involves finding a secluded place and getting away from all of our electronics as well. Even if we do find this kind of earthly peace occasionally, we still have our own minds to contend with.

Here's a fun exercise: Put your fingers in your ears, close your eyes and try to think about absolutely nothing for one minute.

How well did you do?

Don't worry if you couldn't get it to remain absolutely quiet in your head. Even if you think you did well, you still probably found yourself dealing with unplanned thoughts as they popped up to stop them from intruding.

The point of this exercise wasn't to show us all what abysmal failures we are, but to show how this world affects us.

What we choose to expose ourselves to affects the contents of our heads and, therefore, what our minds produce. As Christians we need to choose what we expose ourselves to wisely, no matter how innocent it seems. Why? Because what we allow even a small amount of to satisfy our flesh will taint our thinking and actions.

Paul said:

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is

contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

- Galatians 5:16-17

Our flesh and the Spirit are in a constant tug-of-war.

Paul also admitted:

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

- Romans 7:18-21

We need to be constantly aware of the evil that fights against us from our sinful flesh. But, as Paul said above in Galatians 5:16, if we walk by the Spirit the flesh won't get what it wants.

So, if we are at the mercy of distracting things, yet walking by the Spirit is the answer, what do we do about it?

David wrote:

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

- Psalms 139:23-24

David was presenting an attitude of mind that we need to commit to:

1. Be willing to be transparent, not that God needs our permission to see our heart but that He wants us to be willing participants in a process.

2. Be willing for Him to show us what drives us and what needs to change.
3. Be willing for Him to take apart our lives and our choices, even down to what seemingly innocent hobbies we have and what we spend our time on, and be willing for Him to want changes.

This process will be very thorough and likely even painful, and if we commit to it, we will see a lot of desires and things gently but firmly tugged away. If you are unsure whether something needs to go, try fasting from it and see how you react to its absence.

The Lord wants you to depend on Him and Him only, He is fully prepared to work with someone who is willing. In return He offers peace of mind and victory over things we have struggled with. Paul said to “*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2:12-13) and “*examine yourselves...*” (2 Corinthians 13:5), this is all part of that process.

The process won’t ever end until you see Him face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). This is why it is a continuous work and commitment. As you willingly remove things, other seemingly innocent things will try to creep in to replace them. Don’t let them! Be aware, keep fighting and be obedient to the Spirit’s leading.

The goal is not just to find your sufficiency in the Lord, but to only look to Him for it!

Paul said:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having

a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

- Philippians 3:7-9

The things that Paul said “were gains to me” (verse 7) were his genealogy, upbringing, status and human standpoint on what he should be doing for God. He gave up these things as a result of his experience with Christ on the Damascus road.

But, Paul also goes on to say (verse 8) “*What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...*”.

This highlights what was a choosing point for Paul: Quite simply put, “I can have the world, or I can have Christ”.

We can say “That sounds lovely and spiritual” and move on, or we can stop and drink the living water. Most Christians today choose to add Christ to their life, Paul chose to have Christ as his life to the exclusion of everything that the world has to offer.

Imagine you are pushing a cart around a store that is full of all that life has to offer us. The majority of Christians get to the aisle where they see Jesus sitting on a shelf, and place Him in their cart along with everything else they have acquired. They continue around the store, adding even more to their cart before heading for the checkout.

Paul pushed his well laden cart up until the aisle where Christ was, he then left his cart there, picked up Christ and went straight to the checkout. He counted it all loss for Christ.

Christians today aren’t willing to pay this big of a price. We want to worship Christ and worship the things of the world

too. The Bible says that God is a jealous God, He is truly calling us to give up all for Him alone.

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

- Luke 8:15

Questions for reflection:

1. When someone shows you their latest “toy” or purchase (car, house, boat, phone, TV, etc), what is your reaction?

2. What would you be prepared to give up for Christ?

3. What would you not be prepared to give up for Christ?

4. If you have answers for questions 2 & 3, what are the reasons why you would or would not be willing to do so? Reflect on these reasons and talk to God about them.

Chapter 8: Doctrinal Distractions

This is going to be a sensitive subject, one that may offend some people either because they see a finger pointing at them or they misunderstand the point that's being made here. These things alone could be enough of a reason to just drop this chapter from the book and never print it, but this subject is so important that I cannot just casually skip over it like it doesn't exist.

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.

- Romans 14:1

Let's not focus on the first half of this verse, not that it isn't important, but there is an important distinction in the second half that I want to focus on here: "*without quarreling over disputable matters*". This is the whole key to this chapter on Doctrinal Distractions: It's not that doctrine shouldn't be disputed, it's that it should never become a quarrel. Paul said:

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

- 2 Timothy 2:24-26

Our key takeaways here are: "[do] *not be quarrelsome*", "[do] *not [be] resentful*" and "*Opponents must be gently instructed*".

Don't underestimate Satan. Pride will make you underestimate him and humility will make you open to recognizing his tactics.

Doctrinal distractions are a key way that Satan tries to keep us occupied, divided and wasting our energy, all while poisoning ourselves with being quarrelsome and resentful by not gently instructing our opponents.

If you would like to understand this point better, try this exercise:

Go to YouTube and search for videos on Calvinism, find one with a high number of views, but don't even bother watching the video. Skip straight to the comment section and view the circus. It is highly likely that you will see what I have come to call the "World War I Trench Warfare". Lines clearly drawn with one camp (in this case, Calvinism) in its trench on one side, and the other camp (Arminianism) in its trench on the opposing side. In the middle lies "No man's land" which is completely forbidden. You are either in one trench or the other, firing your ordinance at the opposing side.

Please understand what I am warning against here:

I'm not saying that we should not strive for correct doctrine, we absolutely must, after all it is the truth that sets us free.

I'm not saying that we should not instruct those with incorrect doctrine, we absolutely should, but it must be done in a gentle and loving manner. You might never reach that person with the truth, but you don't know who else is listening that you might reach instead.

I am saying that we need to be aware of the devil's schemes, he will use so many different things to divide us, distract us and cause damage to the Kingdom of God.

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.

- Titus 3:10

Questions for reflection:

1. Looking back at that comment section on the YouTube video, what will unbelievers think of us when they see this “World War I Trench Warfare”?

2. What subjects can you think of that would be vulnerable to what this chapter warns against?

3. How could you go about rescuing a brother or sister in Christ that has been caught up in this kind of distraction?

Chapter 9: Lack of Biblical Rest

We all need our Sabbath days, but the truth is a little deeper than that. Is it enough for us to work six days and take it easy on the seventh? If those six days burn you out with worry, anxiety and questioning the plan then that isn't a spiritually healthy cycle.

Here's a popular gospel passage:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

- Matthew 11:28-30

The image Jesus is representing here is that of an older, mature oxen being yoked together with a younger, less mature oxen. The mature oxen will lead the younger oxen with example, growing the younger oxen into a mature one.

We've already gone over God's intent for the structure of His church in chapters 3 & 4, now we need to understand the reason for it a little deeper. It's intended that the head (Christ) does all the planning and instructing, and the body (us) takes each instruction and simply carries it out without question. In short, faith and trust will remove worry and anxiety. If we truly stand on who God has told us He is, then we have no reason to not trust His processes.

This may sound like the old sarcastic saying of "Don't worry" and then our worries all magically disappear. Realistically, our lives don't work like that. But, if we are consistent in our study time and the time we spend in private with the Lord then our trust in who God says that He is will be built as we see these truths demonstrated in our lives. God's faithfulness in the past is proof of His faithfulness in the future. Our

willingness to trust the headship of Christ brings peace and rest.

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

- Isaiah 26:3

Questions for reflection:

1. How much faithfulness does someone usually need to show you before you trust them?

2. Do you trust God's written promises in the Bible? Why or why not?

3. In what circumstances do you find it the hardest to let God call the shots? Why do you think this is?

Part Three: Hearing God

**With your mind transformed, the world
rejected and your willingness to be used by
and owned by God you will learn to hear God's
voice, know His will (without being deceived)
and be obedient to it.**

Chapter 10: God Has to Be the Teacher

Here is a truth that we need to get to grips with before we move on any further: Only God can truly teach you how to hear and recognize His voice and leading through the Holy Spirit.

Other Christians who have started down this path and are being taught by God can guide you, but ultimately it is the Lord Himself who will painstakingly train you how to hear and recognize Him when He speaks and leads. They can talk about methods and give examples from their own personal experience with His process, but it is He who will personally and patiently tutor you with immense wisdom and the knowledge of you that only He has.

In the previous paragraph, I used the phrase “who have started down this path and are being taught by”; this was deliberate. The process of being taught to hear God is continual, as soon as you think “I’ve got this!” you are opening yourself up to a life of prideful arrogance.

In this chapter, I want to share with you some of my own experiences of this process. Be prepared though for your own experience to possibly be different. You are God’s unique creation and may just possibly not be anywhere near as stubborn as I am, for example.

When I first committed to being taught how to hear God’s voice, so I could be led by Him instead of myself, the first hurdle was pure mistrust. Not mistrust of God, but mistrust of myself. I was fearful that absolutely every single thought I experienced was going to be mine and that I would never know the difference between His voice and my own thoughts. This brought with it the worry of following my own thoughts, thinking they were God’s voice. “Satan is going to have a field day with this”, I thought.

One determination that I am now sure of is that God's voice is usually the first one I hear, the first thought that comes into my mind. Another determination is that the voice, if it is truly God's, will come with a clarity and confidence that make it stand out. God's voice will never be confusing.

A method that God often uses to train and test me is to plant the simplest, most inconsequential thoughts in my head. Small thoughts like "pick up that piece of trash" or "move this item over there". Over the years, I have come to recognize these requests as tests and have learned the importance of obeying them. What better way for God to train you to hear Him than to ask you to do something that is, of itself, unimportant? There is no danger if it is actually your own thought and you obey, and nothing will be lost if you don't. Either way, each time you obey, or don't and realize you should have, you will become a little more finely tuned to hearing Him.

Above all, God will train you to test His voice against scripture. He will never violate His character or go against the rules He has already made known in His Bible.

Questions for reflection:

1. Why do you think it's important that God be your instructor?

2. Take some time to consider the encounters in scripture between God and His people, where He spoke directly to someone. Which ones stand out to you?

3. What is it about each encounter that stands out to you?

4. What scripture examples can you think of where God trained someone to hear Him?

5. What stands out to you about these encounters?

Chapter 11: Love God and Obey Him

Here is a well known passage from the gospel according to Matthew:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

- Matthew 22:34-40

And here is another related passage from John:

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

- John 14:15-21

There is no point in desiring to be Spirit-Led if we cannot commit to being taught obedience to these two passages.

It is clear from the Matthew passage that the most important thing we can do is to love God with everything that we are; heart, soul and mind. The passage from John teaches us that obedience is how we show our love for God and that its result is the Father's love, Jesus' love and His showing Himself to us.

John 14:15, when examined closely in the Greek, reveals the deep nature of what Jesus was saying about the condition He laid down here (*"If you love me, keep my commands..."*):

Greek Transliteration	Core Meaning
ean	A conditional particle used to express a hypothetical situation or requirement.
agapate	To love in a social or moral sense, denoting a deep affection or devotion.
me	The first-person singular personal pronoun used as the direct object.
tērēsete	To guard, watch over, or observe carefully as a duty or obligation.
tas	The definite article used here to identify the specific object belonging to the speaker.
entolas	An authoritative charge, injunction, or mandate given to be followed.

It's possible to read the above table and conclude, "Well, that matches the English". However, I think we can draw a little more depth here:

Jesus was saying *“If your love is an absolute devotion to me, then you will express it in your actions by living as obligated by, and carefully observing, those things that I have laid out for you to follow, placing me in the position of ultimate authority over you”*. I pray that the Spirit will give you the eyes to see the depth difference between this and *“If you love me, keep my commands”*.

Jesus said *“All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”* (Matthew 22:40), what does this mean? It's all based on love.

Everything we do must be the product of love and obedience to God. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul spoke to the church at Corinth about spiritual gifts, the form of the body of Christ and how gifts are distributed and by whom. He concludes this chapter with *“Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way”*. In chapter 13 Paul talks about various blessed gifts that he could make use of, but for each says that he would be just noise, be nothing and gain nothing if he didn't have love.

Paul's statements point back to Jesus' words we reviewed at the beginning of this chapter in Matthew and John: We need to love God first and foremost, which means being devotedly obedient to Him. Without this foundation our works will be nothing. Our works must be born out of obedience to God, which is how we show our love for Him; obedience to God's commands in scripture and through the Holy Spirit.

To fulfill that last sentence correctly, we must first know our scripture. Second, we must know how to hear God through the Holy Spirit. Third, we must filter everything we think we hear through the scripture to ensure it is obedient to it. If it breaks scripture, it wasn't from God.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,

holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- Romans 12:1-2

In these two verses Paul urges you to do something, it's that important to your Christian life that he doesn't just state it as a command but adds the weight of urgency to it. Do yourself a favor and picture Paul urging, begging, pleading with you to be obedient to this. A huge amount of the New Testament was written by Paul, he was the bearer of much revelation from Jesus to us; consider how important this particular revelation must have been for him to take this approach in presenting it. Paul urged you!

The steps, as Paul describes them, are:

1. Offer your body as a living sacrifice.

Give your whole self to God, relinquish your rights to yourself and your right to choose your life's path. You belong to God now (1 Corinthians 6:20), and this includes your reputation!

2. Don't conform to the world's ways.

Reject the wisdom of the world, you aren't on the wide path anymore that leads to destruction. Your wisdom, ways and truth now come from God and His Word. Reject all that contradicts, whatever the cost.

3. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Note, this doesn't say that you will be transformed, it says "be transformed", implying that we have a part to play in this. What part?

Obedience. Feed yourself with the word of God, study it in conjunction with the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). This, through the work of the Holy Spirit, is what transforms your mind and changes your thinking. Counter-intuitively, persisting in the world's ways pushes back against this process and hinders it.

You might ask "How come I'm able to push back against something as powerful as God's Holy Spirit?". This isn't a war of strength, it's a test of obedience: The Holy Spirit is a gentleman, He doesn't force His way in where He isn't wanted.

The reasoning for doing these things?

1. Because of God's mercy.

Quite plainly, God has done an amazing thing for you. He didn't just create you, He saved you from the wrath you truly deserve and committed to making a new creation out of you!

2. Because this is how you worship God properly and in truth.

Every creature worships God when it does what God created it to do. You were created to serve Him!

3. Because this is how you discover and follow God's will.

With your mind transformed, the world rejected and your willingness to be used by and owned by God you will learn to hear God's voice, know His will (without being deceived) and be obedient to it.

As I mentioned in chapter 10, God must teach us to hear His voice and to hear it correctly, including weighing it against

the scripture as one of the tests of its authenticity.

Questions for reflection:

1. How do we love God with our heart?

2. How do we love God with our mind?

3. How do we love God with our soul?

Chapter 12: That Still, Small Voice

It's important to keep in mind that God does not always choose to work through dramatic acts, like the walls of Jericho falling or Elijah calling down fire to prove that Baal was nothing and God was on the throne.

God made this point to Elijah when he was running scared from Jezebel and He called him out of the cave to be in His presence. The scripture says:

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. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 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?"

- 1 Kings 19:11-13

Despite the powerful wind, the earthquake and the fire, Elijah recognized God's voice when it came in a gentle whisper. God speaks very clearly to us through scripture, but hearing Him when He speaks directly to us requires us to be attentive and listening, and also to be able to recognize His voice when we hear it.

An analogy I like to use is to compare our hearing God to being in a busy, crowded room. When the room is crowded, you must concentrate to hear the voice of the person you are speaking with. You must learn to filter out the bombardment of other voices and sounds that compete with their voice, and

you must know what their voice sounds like. Our heads are often busy, just like that crowded room, but it is when we learn to empty that room that we will be able to hear God more clearly.

Part 2 of this book talked about things that distract us and fill our heads. We must learn to work with the Lord, willingly, to let these things go. This brings peace to your mind, part of the transformation mentioned in Romans 12:2, *“Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will”*.

We must be willing to bring the noise level of our lives down. So much of our 21st century living is about instant gratification that is easily accessible. In chapter 7 I mentioned “finding a secluded place and getting away from all of our electronics as well”, our smartphones can be a serious hindrance to hearing God. We are instantly available via calls, text messages, email and social media notifications. The continuous and rapid dopamine hits these things give us addict us to something that is anything but good for our Christian walk.

Which do you reach for more each day? Your smartphone or your Bible? You may remember, in chapter 7, that a good way to know if something needs to go is to try fasting from it and see how your flesh reacts. With smartphones, it may not be quite as simple as being able to get rid of them completely, but we can discipline ourselves as to when it deserves our instant attention and doesn't.

No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

- 1 Corinthians 9:27

Knowing what God's voice “sounds like” is achieved by consistently reading God's Word in His Bible; this teaches

you to recognize His character. This isn't achieved with casual study but with consistent study. We must be willing and eager to spend deep time in His Word every day, away from distractions. Also remember, from chapter 10, that God's "voice" is usually in the form of a thought or impression that He plants in your mind; very rarely is it audible words.

Questions for reflection:

1. How well do you do when it comes to listening to someone who talks very quietly? Does it cause you to focus harder or give up?

2. Think about someone you know very well, if you were in a place where you could not see them but heard them speaking from afar off, would you know it was them? Why?

Chapter 13: When He Thunders

This is very much the exception to the rule, but there are times when God's voice is loud and unmistakable. In my experience, 99.9% of the time God's voice is barely distinguishable from my own, and it is only from knowing the sound of His voice that I am able to recognize it, but for the other 0.1% it is loud and thunderous.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

- John 10:27

In my own Christian walk, I can only remember five times when this has occurred:

Three times were after "returning" from experiencing a vision.

Once was after awakening from a dream.

The fifth was a different circumstance entirely, which I will get into the details of shortly.

After the visions and the dream, I "awoke". For the dream I mean this literally and for the visions it is when I found myself back in normality when they had ended. In each of these experiences I heard God's voice loud and unmistakable in my head, telling me the meaning of the vision or the dream. In each case the purpose of the loud, clear voice was very clear; to make sure I understood His message from the experience I had just had.

The final circumstance was completely different. This was not long after a failed back surgery that had left me disabled. I was sitting at home, alone, and had decided that I needed to take some pain medication. I reached for it and heard God's voice loud and clear; "Don't! People from church are coming!". The irony of this situation is that I was startled by

it, yet I went ahead and took the medication anyway. It made me drowsy and, low and behold, friends from church arrived unannounced to visit, and I struggled to keep my eyes open and give them my full attention while they were visiting.

I will be honest and say that for some time I was unsure why this happened, what was God trying to teach me? Since that time, I have been led by the Lord to stop using the pain medication (which was a narcotic) and to allow Him to help me to live with the pain instead. *"I want you sober minded"*, said the Lord. The Lord made it very clear that a life on narcotic pain medication was not what He had planned for me, and He also used this particular circumstance to highlight to me the reasons why. This was an example of where the Lord wanted me to rely on Him, instead of man's ways.

Don't read too much into this conclusion, I'm not saying that as Christians we must never use pain medication. Consider the circumstances: my disability is permanent (unless God decides to heal me before I see Him face to face) and requires pain to be managed for the rest of my life on earth. God strengthened me to be able to manage the pain without narcotics, instead of my being under the control of them for the rest of my life.

Questions for reflection:

1. Reflecting on this chapter and scripture where God spoke loudly, why do you think He chooses to do this sometimes?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 and spend some time considering the amazing blessing that God has given us by giving us His Spirit. The last sentence says "*But we have the mind of Christ*", use some sound theology to describe what this means for believers who are led by His Spirit.

Chapter 14: How Much Does God Speak?

What are the ways that God speaks to us? The answers to this question will involve experience, but those experiences must be filtered through scripture as we know that God does not contradict His Word. It doesn't matter what we experience, if it isn't present in God's Word then it must be rejected. We must never allow our experiences to define what the Bible teaches, instead we must allow the Bible to teach us the truth about our experiences.

Through His Word:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The Bible is God's primary mode of communication, it is also the truth through which all other modes are to be weighed. God will not contradict Himself.

Through creation:

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

- Romans 1:20

The things of God that we cannot directly see with our eyes are communicated through His creation. We can see irrefutable evidence of His divinity and power. The sophisticated and intelligent design of the universe is a powerful testimony that there must be a Creator.

I cannot look at the intricate detail within an ear of corn or

consider the orbits of the planets in our solar system around the sun without marveling. Orbital mechanics (the physics of an object interacting with the gravity of another object) shows us the complex and exact forces required for one object to orbit another, these forces are exactly as needed for every planet, moon and asteroid in our solar system. I don't believe in coincidence.

Through circumstances:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

- James 1:2-3

God uses our circumstances to grow us spiritually.

Through our conscience:

The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

- 1 Timothy 1:5

Part of our new nature is a God given conscience that tells us what is right and what is wrong. God communicates with us through this so we can discern what His will is.

Through the Holy Spirit:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

- John 16:13-15

Everything that the Father has belongs to Jesus, they have all things in common. Of these things, the Holy Spirit takes from them and administers to us. The Holy Spirit is the administrator of the wealth of God, and we are sons, daughters and hence heirs. If the Holy Spirit is the administrator of that wealth, if we do not know how to relate to the Holy Spirit or deny His power because of bad theology, then we are heirs living like orphans.

The Holy Spirit speaks to us through our thoughts, planting desires in our hearts and thoughts in our head that are instructions and guidance. The key is learning to differentiate between these and our own (see chapter 10).

Through prophecy:

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.

- 1 Corinthians 14:1-4

Does “prophecy” occur today? In the strict Greek meaning of the word, yes. As Christians, we can “speak words from God” via the inspiration and prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Can prophecy share “New Revelation” today? No. The Canon of the Bible is complete and God’s instructions for living the Christian life are complete.

What about prediction of future events or outcomes? Yes. In the book of Acts, people who weren’t apostles predicted future events (Acts 11:27-28; Acts 21:8-11). As a personal testimony, there have been times in my Christian life where

the Holy Spirit has shared with me information about how events will unfold and even that certain events will be happening in my life. This is the loving guidance of an almighty God for His people.

But doesn't the Bible state that prophecies will cease? Yes it does, in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. But the key here is WHEN it will cease, according to these same verses that is "*when completeness comes*" (v.10) which will be when "*we shall see face to face*" (v.12) when we "*know [God] fully, even as I am fully known*".

Through dreams and visions:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

- Acts 2:17-18

The Lord uses visions and dreams to communicate with His people. As with prophecy this cannot be "New Revelation", but it can be words of comfort, answering questions, reminding the believer of what has already been spoken in scripture or even instructions.

Through audible words:

Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

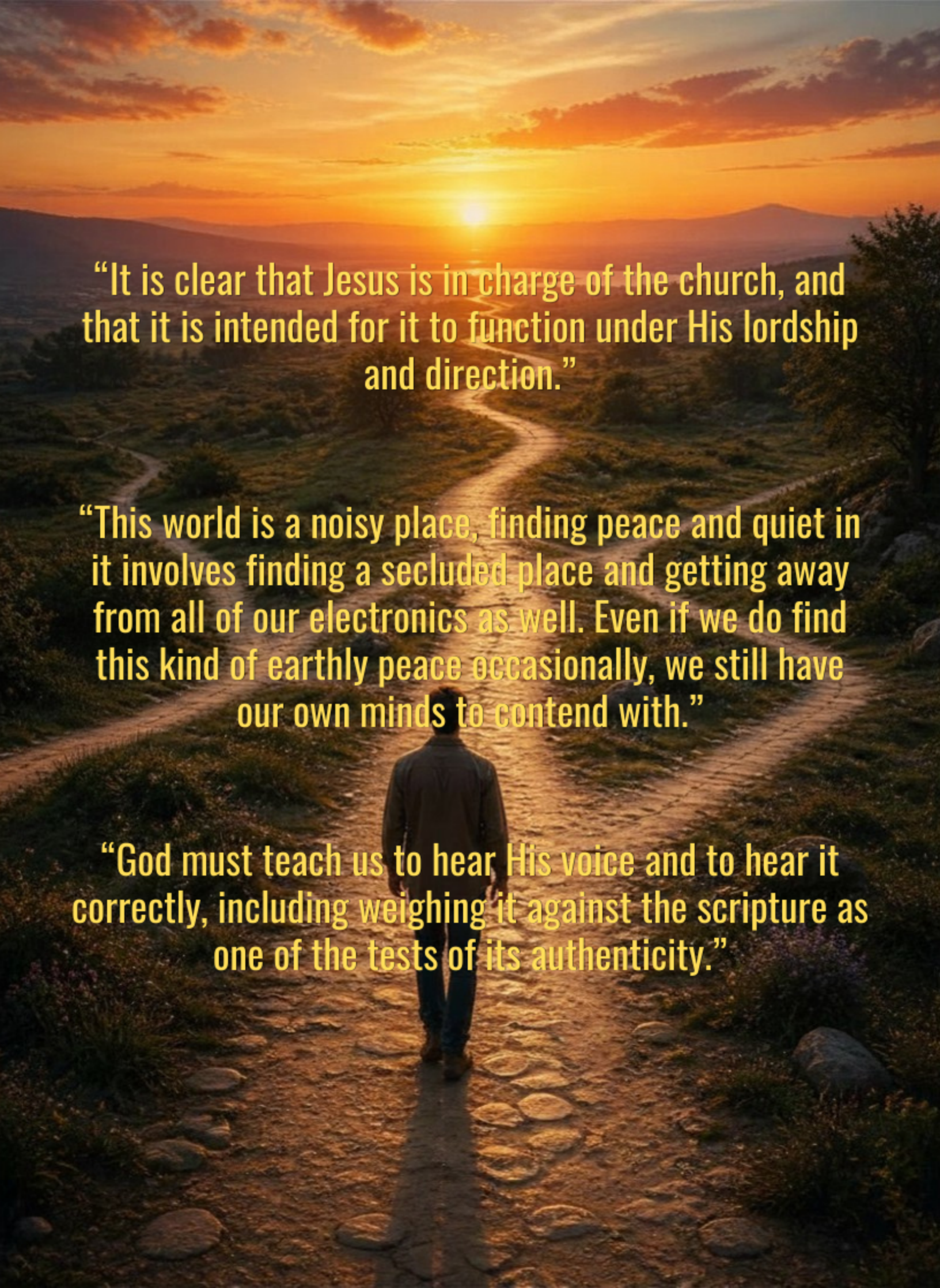
- Acts 10:13

In rare circumstances, God communicates through audible words. In my own experience this is very rare (see chapter 13), but there are situations where He chooses to do so. I have personally seen this as a part of visions and dreams, but have also had it happen when awake.

Questions for reflection:

1. Reflect on a time when God has spoken to you in any of these ways. How did your life change as a result?

2. Do you believe there is a scriptural basis for God giving you personal messages that are intended for someone else?

A person is seen from behind, walking along a dirt path that leads towards a bright sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the landscape. The path is flanked by green vegetation and small trees. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

“It is clear that Jesus is in charge of the church, and that it is intended for it to function under His lordship and direction.”

“This world is a noisy place, finding peace and quiet in it involves finding a secluded place and getting away from all of our electronics as well. Even if we do find this kind of earthly peace occasionally, we still have our own minds to contend with.”

“God must teach us to hear His voice and to hear it correctly, including weighing it against the scripture as one of the tests of its authenticity.”