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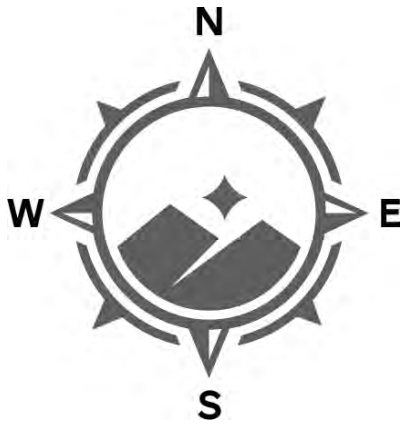
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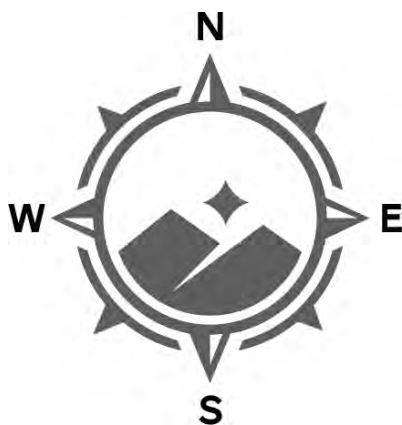
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**HEARING AND RESPONDING
TO THE VOICE OF GOD**



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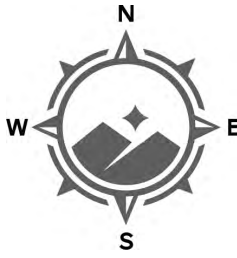
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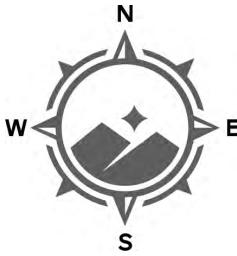
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INTRODUCTION

What career path do I take? Where do I go to school? Who do I marry? When do I need to make a change in direction? Who do I vote for? Life is a series of choices and these are just a few of the high-risk decisions we make throughout our lives. Each choice affects our quality of life. Each takes us one step closer to or away from the kind of life we want to live. But how do we know which choice to make? God, in His goodness, shows us the way. He has a plan for us to experience a life of abundance and blessing. And while His path is available to all by grace, we must choose to follow it by faith.

Every believer has been given a “divine guidance system.”

SPIRITUAL GPS

God has placed within every Christian an unction that directs our steps (see 1 John 2:20). Just like most cars today come with a navigational system (GPS), every believer has been given a “divine guidance system” to keep them on track regarding

DIVINE GUIDANCE

God's will for their lives. This spiritual GPS system is superior to Siri or the Google Maps voice because the Holy Spirit is always kind, unlike the GPS person. He directs us in all of life's decisions, without the delay or impersonal tone that often comes with natural systems. This "unction" is the Holy Spirit. But like natural GPS, He never forces us to take the best route. We cooperate with His leading through the choices we make along with the faith and trust we are willing to walk by. In Deuteronomy 30, God explained this concept to His people.

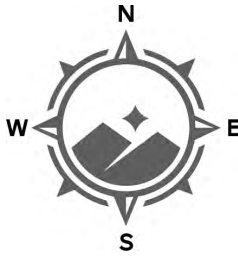
I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20, KJV

Every choice we make in life leads to life or death, blessings or curses. But in case you weren't sure which option was best, God gives us a hint: "Choose life." We must choose to obey God's voice. We must choose to heed the lead of His Spirit, to experience the kind of life and generational blessing He wills for us.

As believers, I know we all want that. We want to experience God's kind of life. We want to follow and fulfill His will. But many of us don't know how. Even when we know what God's will is (and many do not), we struggle to discern His voice and leading. I hope this book changes that for you. In it,

I explain the *how* beyond the *what*. I share how we can know God's will, the various ways He leads and speaks to us, and how He confirms His guidance in our lives. The application of this teaching has helped me walk with the Lord in confidence, longevity, and His blessings. It has taught me to navigate the trials, delays, and wrong turns of life with repentance and faith. I know it will be a blessing to you as well.



Chapter 1

OUR BIRTHRIGHT

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Romans 8:14, KJV

The Christian birthright is one of sonship and divine guidance. But what does it mean to be a son or daughter of God? As imperfect a comparison as it might be, consider your own parenthood. How do you, being evil as Jesus said, treat your own children (see Matthew 7:11)? You love and care for them. You provide for their needs. You help them with their homework. You guide them in their decision-making. You forgive them when they're grouchy. You hold them when they are sick or sad. You help them get back up when they fall down.

As a son or daughter of God, our heavenly birthright can be no less! Think about that. We are not alone. The Lord has

DIVINE GUIDANCE

given us His Spirit to guide and help us with the decisions and choices we make in life. What a tremendous promise! We don't have to "shoot from the hip" in hopes of hitting our target. God speaks to us. His word directs us. His Spirit leads us. All we have to do is choose to listen and act in faith-obedience.

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Romans 8:15-17, NKJV

If you've accepted Jesus as Lord of your life, then you are born again by the Spirit of God. You are now Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. Heirs, by definition, have an inheritance. And, as children of God, ours is not a run-of-the-mill inheritance. We are heirs to the King of kings and Lord of lords!

We possess a glorious promise of peace and divine guidance. It's our birthright, sealed in our inner man until the day of redemption. This is the Holy Spirit's primary mission in our life—to bear witness to our new condition as sons and daughters of God and to guide us into all truth.

We don't have to "shoot from the hip" in hopes of hitting our target.

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own

authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

John 16:13, NKJV

Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit would “*teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you*” (John 14:26, NKJV). The Holy Spirit never leads us astray. When He speaks, He speaks with God’s authority. He tells us things to come, but He also reminds us of all the things Jesus has said. In other words, He points us back to the Word. He influences our decisions in the light of truth.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Psalm 119:105, KJV

This understanding changed my life. Learning to heed the voice of the Spirit and in faith obey His lead was (and is) the key to my success. And it will be the key to yours. The Holy Spirit is like a transmitter. He is perpetually and eternally communicating God’s will and desires for our life. All we have to do is tune in to the right frequency—the frequency of truth—to receive a clear signal.

Philippians tells us to “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:12-13, NKJV). God is constantly at work in our lives, speaking to us and leading us by grace. Now we are to “*work it out*” and respond to that grace with faith (see Ephesians 2:8-9). We have to choose to hear and obey His voice to experience all the benefits of our salvation. Doing so brings Him pleasure.

**God is constantly
at work in our
lives, speaking to
us and leading us
by grace.**

Psalm 37:4 tell us the same thing: “*Delight yourself in the Lord,*” it says, “*and he will give you the desires of your heart*” (ESV). Many people misunderstand this verse. They think it says, “As a Christian, God gives me whatever my heart desires.” But that is not true. As we seek God and delight ourselves in Him, His desires, His will, and His purpose for our life becomes our own. I will elaborate on how this works a bit later in the book, but when we surrender to Christ and turn our hearts toward Him, God downloads His desires into our born-again spirits. This is the epicenter of our divine guidance system. From here, we tune our hearts to His voice. We develop an “ear to hear,” as Jesus said, and we learn to “heed the lead” of the Spirit. We learn to recognize how He speaks to us and then follow that leading through faith-obedience. Put these two verses together (Ephesians 2:8-9 and Psalm 37:4) and we see that God works with us from the inside out. He changes our heart’s desires by grace, and we simply follow His lead, working out our salvation by faith.

Let me give you an example. Before May of 1980, I was consumed with the desire to play tennis. I ate, slept, and drank the sport. I literally lived and breathed it. Everything I did, every choice I made, was for tennis. It’s how I spent my time; why I chose what I chose to put in my body. Even the people I knew were in some way or another connected to tennis. Tennis was my ticket out of poverty. (At least that’s what I thought at the time.) I went to college on a tennis scholarship and had a definite career path in mind when God intervened during my senior year.

A girl by the name of Sue Wolcott witnessed to me. And though I fought what she said with everything in me, I couldn't escape the love of God. At the time, I was in a backslidden condition. I had walked away from relationship with the Lord, and through a series of events and bad decisions had given up on serving Him. I believed the lie that I was unforgivable, unworthy, and damaged goods as far as God was concerned. I felt flawed and incapable of serving God.

In the process of Sue witnessing to me, I had an open vision of the cross. I saw Jesus die for me. I saw Him raised from the dead and ascend into heaven—and I was there, every step of the way. I literally saw myself in Him. When He died, I died. When He was buried, I was buried. And when He was raised, so was I. In that moment, I didn't realize I was witnessing a reenactment of scripture (see Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:5-6). Yet it was the most profound and life-changing moment of my life. I instantly recognized who I was in Christ. I experienced God's love and forgiveness firsthand, and my desires changed. It was supernatural!

My desire for tennis left. All I wanted to do was minister to others the gospel of grace and truth that had exploded within me. It was so radical I thought something might be wrong. But I had been love-slapped by God. My desire to serve Him and others replaced my desire for tennis, so I made a series of "high-risk" decisions that, in time, proved to be God's will for my life. God led me through my desires. The Holy Spirit worked in me by grace, changing my heart, and I worked those things out in my life through simple, childlike faith.

Dear ones, we are no longer under the old covenant law of doing things to get God to speak. We inherited a new covenant by birthright. Now the fullness of the Godhead lives inside us

We are no longer under the old covenant law of doing things to get God to speak.

in Christ. In this covenant we are not trying to convince God to speak or lead us. We are learning to listen. His Spirit is constantly speaking, waiting for us to recognize, understand, and respond to His promptings by faith. What a great inheritance! God does not lead us from the outside, like a frustrated parent at the county fair. He does not take us by the hand to pull us along His path of righteousness. He leads us by His voice. He leads us by His word, from the inside. This leading, though at times less obvious than what we may desire, assures us of His love and care. It reminds us that we are not just holding His hand but resting *in* His arms and hands.

WE ARE LED

Notice the words of Romans 8:14: “*For all who **are led** by the Spirit of God **are children of God**” (NLT). We are not trying to be led by God. Rather, because we are His children, we *are* (present tense) led by Him. Psalm 37:23 says, “*The steps of a good man **are ordered** by the Lord, and He delights in his way*” (NKJV). And again, “*A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord **directs his steps**” (Proverbs 16:9, NKJV). Someone said one time, “If that’s true, how did I end up here?” (a bad place). It’s not automatic. This promise is no different than any promise of scripture. You must mix faith with the promise to benefit from it (see Hebrews 4:2). You must yield to His voice or leading. Even when we dismiss His voice or override His leading, He is still leading us to repentance. He never gives up, in, or out on us.**

God is leading, but we are not always heeding His voice or the lead. He is faithful to prompt us with His voice and with His word, but we do not always yield. We have to mix faith with God's promise to lead and guide us. But faith is more than believing God can. It's even more than knowing He will. According to James, faith acts on what it believes (see James 2:14-26). Faith obeys.

**God is leading,
but we are not
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His voice or the
lead.**

GOD IS AND HE SPEAKS

Two things are always assumed in scripture. The first is that God exists. The first four words of scripture are, "*In the beginning God*" (Genesis 1:1). God is without beginning or end. He was before the beginning, and He forevermore shall be (see Revelation 1:8). Only the fool says in his heart, "*There is no God*" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1). God exists—and, in case you weren't sure, you're not Him (see Job 38–41)!

The next assumption in scripture immediately follows those first four words: "*Then God said*" (Genesis 1:3). The worlds were framed by the word of God (see Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 11:3). And they are preserved by that same word (see Hebrews 1:3; 2 Peter 3:7). God speaks. He is the Master Communicator who speaks to a people He created to hear—and, in case you weren't sure, that's you and me. From Genesis to Revelation, these two assumptions appear and reappear as a consistent theme through nearly every page. God is, and He speaks.

Many people today, both in the church and outside it, do not believe God speaks. Yet how can we sincerely believe God

As I was learning these truths, my biggest struggle came when learning how God speaks. God certainly can speak with an audible voice, but that mode of communication is the exception, not the rule.

wills to have relationship with us without also desiring to communicate with us? Relationship without communication is not the way we manage natural relationships, so why would it be true of our supernatural relationship?

“Well God does speak,” some say, “but only to a ‘select elect’ or the ‘super saints.’ Everybody else hears what God says through them.” That is not what scripture teaches. In the new covenant, there are no “super saints,” no mediators between God and man (see 1 Timothy 2:5). That is Jesus’

role. John says that since we have all received the Holy Spirit, we have no need of anyone to teach us (see 1 John 2:27, NLT). That does not mean there is no place for anointed teaching and preaching or that we can’t learn from one another. Jesus put those ministry gifts in the Body for our edification (see Ephesians 4:11-13). What it means is that God wills to speak to and lead us all—from the least to the greatest—by His Spirit (see Hebrews 8:8-12).

HOW GOD SPEAKS

As I was learning these truths, my biggest struggle came when learning how God speaks. I understood that He could and did speak to His people. I just didn’t know how. I would hear people say things like “God said” or “the Lord spoke to me” but

I thought that meant He spoke to them in an audible voice. And while we know from scripture that God certainly can speak with an audible voice, that mode of communication is the exception, not the rule.

Since I'd never heard God speak aloud, I thought those people who claimed to hear Him had a corner on God. That they were just holier than I or in possession of some secret that allowed them to hear God's voice. In reality, I just didn't know how God spoke. I didn't know how to tune my ear to hear Him. This ignorance led me to being unfruitful in and frustrated with my Christian experience.

If you've felt that way, let me encourage you. Scripture says, "*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17, NKJV). Faith begins and ends where the word and will of God are known. My breakthrough came when I learned that God desired to direct me with His voice. When I understood that God was always speaking and realized I just needed to learn the language of the Spirit, things changed. You see, every kingdom has a dominant language. In America, the dominant language is English. In Mexico, it is Spanish. The language of the Spirit is love, peace, visions, dreams (just to mention a few). I will spend chapters on the native language of the Holy Spirit.

Many good Christians recoil at the idea of God speaking to us because we have been conditioned to overlook His voice. The world calls those who hear God "kooks." (And to be fair, many who claim to hear God are kooks! But that doesn't mean God doesn't speak.) Even the church has encouraged us to deafen our ears to His voice because of so much abuse regarding what God says. And while I want to avoid Kooksville,

misunderstandings, and pride as much as the next guy, the saying, “Don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater” comes to mind. We can’t let possible mistakes and abuses of others keep us from listening for, hearing, and discerning God’s voice.

Instead, we need a solid understanding of how God speaks, what His voice sounds like, and how we can best position ourselves to discern His leading. That starts by learning to recognize all the ways we have allowed doubt to infiltrate our belief system. Instead of relying on God’s word to tell us who we are and how God speaks, many believers have allowed a worldly perspective to rewrite their identity. They have bought into the lie that being a Bible-believing Christian is abnormal. To avoid the characterization of the national media (including Hollywood) who say that people who “hear God” are one fry short of a Happy Meal, they have turned away from the truth.

But the world is not the only one to blame for this doubt. Many mainstream churches and false religions frown on the idea of a God who speaks. They like having a God who doesn’t

They like having a God who doesn’t speak to His people—or at least does so selectively—so they can control the masses.

Speak to His people—or at least does so selectively—so they can control the masses. If each of us can hear God, that threatens their position. I used to be perplexed at the idea of Israel worshipping idols, which the Ten Commandments forbids. I couldn’t understand why anyone would worship a graven image of a bird, calf, or frog. Then I realized people were drawn to such a “god” because it can’t speak! They could make it say or do whatever

they wanted. They could make up the “rules” as they went and only be accountable to themselves. If the idol spoke, they would have to obey.

Other Christians are driven by carnal-mindedness. They allow their five physical senses—taste, smell, sight, hearing, and touch—to dictate truth. But God is Spirit. Neither His voice nor His will is discerned in this way. Scripture says those who worship God must do so in spirit and truth (see John 4:24). God communes with us Spirit to spirit. He speaks to our spirit and from our spirit. He does not lead us from without like He had to lead Israel before the new birth. He leads from within.

We are trained, in western culture, that anything we cannot see, taste, hear, smell, or feel is not real. To hear God, we have to learn to discern with our sixth sense—our spirit. Christianity is more than a set of rules, regulations, and commands. It is relationship. Relationship with a God who helps, leads, guides, and speaks to us even in our failure.

WHAT ABOUT SIN

Growing up in church, I was taught that God could not fellowship with or speak to me if there was sin in my life. I was smart enough to know I could never be perfect, but no one would tell me which sin or weakness God unfriended me over. And if He stopped fellowshiping with me over this particular sin, how could He keep fellowshiping with Sister So-and-So for that one? Was God so hard up for fellowship He allowed certain levels of sin to slide? Of course not! While God does not participate in or ignore sin, He doesn't quit speaking to us when we fail. God's speaking leads us to repentance. His fellowship draws us out of sin and back into holiness.

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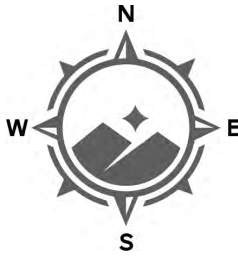
Another issue that hinders people's faith in hearing God is the abuse of others with the "God card." People saying "God said" when He did not say. This is using God's name in vain. We have all experienced people saying, "God said," and know that He did not "say" yet they persist in misrepresenting God and refusing any accountability. This is neither a positive witness to the lost or to the saved nor is it a pleasure to God. You would not want people saying "you said" when you did not "say." You certainly wouldn't appreciate it when what you "supposedly said" violated your nature and character.

Too many people use God's name to manipulate others and release themselves from earthly accountability. They say

**While God
does not
participate in
or ignore sin,
He doesn't quit
speaking to us
when we fail.**

and do things in God's name that God does not endorse, but just because there has been abuse in this area, that does not cancel out the reality of a faithful God who speaks to His people (see Romans 3:3-4). We all have to learn to separate God's character from people who fall short in displaying that character. We have to let God be true and learn to walk in our

birthright. God does speak and we can hear and obey. We can learn to discern and heed the lead, causing us to be blessed and be a blessing to others.



ABOUT DUANE SHERIFF

Duane Sheriff has over four decades of ministry experience and is known for his humor and ability to present the gospel with clarity and simplicity. He has a passion for helping people discover their identity and grow in Christ with his unique and insightful biblical revelation.

He is the founder of Victory Life, a multi-campus church in Durant, Oklahoma, where he served as the senior pastor for over 30 years and now serves as the senior elder. Duane is an author, international apostolic teacher, conference speaker, Charis Bible School Instructor, and host of the *Grace & Truth* broadcast.

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