



**Sunday, July 7, 2024**

**Speaker:** Pastor Shawn Brix

**Scripture:** Psalm 32:8-10

**Sermon Title:** Led by the Spirit Within

**Transcribed by:** Liza Perry



Good morning! It's beautifully comfortable to be here this morning. I preach in a lot of different settings and yet there's nothing like being with people whom you love and who you're loved by. It just creates a beautiful place in which to share God's Word. This morning's offering was denominational ministry shares. It's very fitting because, as you know, Calvin Seminary (where I now serve) is one of the ministries that your ministry share giving supports. So it's a good time for me to say thank you on behalf of the seminary. Thank you on behalf of the denomination for that faithful, consistent giving to God's kingdom through ministry shares once each month. You wouldn't believe the things God is doing through your giving. So we're blessed. I'm blessed to get a front row seat to at least some of that - to see some of what He's doing.

George reminded me of a video that showed one of the ways your denominational ministry shares are at work through Calvin seminary. Together Calvin seminary and Calvin College support a prison initiative in which we bring undergraduate education to prisoners in the Handlon state prison in Michigan. That entire prison has been absolutely transformed by the work that God is doing there. There's now a church within the prison that's led by equipped pastors and leaders from within the prison. It's a male prison, so in this case, men are being shaped and formed into Christ's likeness through that work. And that too, is supported by ministry shares. So what a blessing. Thank you for that.

This morning, I'm going to turn us to the Psalms. It might not seem apparent, at least initially, how this ties into the journey that Pastor John has us on through the book of Acts, but I hope that as we reflect on these verses, it's going to become plain to each of us as the morning goes on. So **Psalm 32:8-10**.

**8** I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. **9** Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. **10** Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.

Thanks be to God. Well, most of us have had those days - or I'm guessing, you've had those days - I certainly have where you wish that God would simply write His will in the sky for us. You've been wrestling with something. You've been struggling with some issue. You've been looking for His lead and you've been looking for an answer. And you thought, "Wouldn't it be nice to have a burning bush experience like Moses had?" God left no guesswork for Moses, did he? He just spoke clearly. Once Moses responded to His presence in the bush and God's voice spoke clearly. He spoke directly. He said, "Moses, you are to lead my people out of Egypt."

I think, "Wow, wouldn't it be great to have God speak so clearly to me?" There's my task. There's my role. "Moses, go. Go to Pharaoh. Lead my people out of Egypt." If you think about it, Moses had his bush. Gideon had his fleece through which God seemed to manifest Himself and lead. Abraham had his three angelic visitors who came to his tent. Ezekiel had these spinning wheels of chrysolite through which God spoke. Israel had their pillar of cloud by day to which to follow and their pillar of fire by night so it was clear where God was leading. His presence was obvious. Even even Balem had his donkey through which God spoke.

We think, "Wow, if only God would speak so clearly to me. Why won't He reveal His will to me in the same way that He seemed to reveal His will to so many in the Old Testament?" We've all probably found ourselves thinking that way at times. But here's the irony. Here's the irony. I'm convinced that not a single saint in the Old Testament would ever keep their experience of God if they could trade it in for our experience. In fact, all through the Old Testament, God's people longed for our experience of God. They longed, for instance, for the experience that the prophet Ezekiel described in Ezekiel **36:26**, "**26** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you...".

It was Isaiah that said that God would, (**Isaiah 44:3**), "**3** ... pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants." That was Isaiah's longing and Ezekiel's longing. Then Joel, the same thing. God's people wanted to experience the promise that Joel gave. Joel said in **Joel 2:28-29**, "**28** ... I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. **29** Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

Of course, all of those prophecies - Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, others as well - were fulfilled when the Spirit was given at Pentecost, which of course we celebrated just weeks ago. What the Old Testament prophets and what the Old Testament people of God longed for was our experience.

That is, the experience of the Spirit within. That was something they never tasted. That's what they longed for. The Spirit of God within. They longed for the day when they wouldn't have to rely on theophanies. Theophanies is one of those \$5 theological words which really means nothing more than a physical visitation of God upon his people. And they longed for the day when they wouldn't have to rely on those theophanies to be led by God but when they would have a Spirit living within them day by day, leading, guiding and revealing the will of God to them.

Time and again, in the Old Testament, you read of how the Spirit of God came upon someone. That's the language that's used, "The Spirit of God coming upon" someone. But that was always episodic. It was always temporary for a very specific situation, a very specific need, a very specific circumstance. The Spirit would come upon them temporarily. So the people of God wanted what we have. Not simply the Spirit of God upon. Not the Spirit of God that would be given for a moment. But rather they longed for the spirit within. Those prepositions make all the difference. Upon and within. It's a remarkable gift you and I have.

The apostle Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians about this, it sounds like he could hardly believe it. He wrote to the New Testament believers in Corinth and he said to them in **1 Corinthians 3:16**, "**16** Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" It was as though it was so hard to believe that Paul had to lay it on them in a surprising new, fresh way. He was saying, "Don't you get it? Miracle of miracles, God living in His people! Daily! Hourly! Moment by moment! The God of the universe is available to you and to me. He's available to us to be our teacher and to be our guide."

The apostle John, like the apostle Paul, was trying to get his hearers to understand the same thing. This is what he wrote in his first letter. He said in **1 John 2:22** and **1 John 2:27**, "**22** ... the Holy One has given you his Spirit, and all of you know the truth." **27** "... you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know."

What a difference that made to the early church. It is absolutely remarkable. In the book of Acts, (and of course, Pastor John has been leading us through that in the book of Acts) how many times have we seen already that, rather than waiting for dramatic signs, (not that dramatic signs weren't given sometimes) we find God's people time and again being led by the indwelling Holy Spirit and responding with joy and obedience to the Spirit's promptings?

The Spirit led Philip, for instance - some of these examples will sound familiar because pastor John has led us through them - to speak to the Ethiopian official in **Acts 8:29**, for instance. You read that the Spirit prompted him to approach the official. In **Acts 10**, the Spirit instructed Peter to go to Joppa. The Spirit said, "Go to Joppa with these men who are going to arrive at your door. There you will be introduced," as he found out once he arrived, "to Cornelius."

In **Acts 13**, we read that the Holy Spirit prompted the church to set Barnabas and Saul (Paul) aside to set them apart. To lay hands on them and set them apart to go on their first missionary journey.

In **Acts 15**, we read of how the church wrestled with how to embrace the Gentiles into the family of God. This was a brand new thing. Christianity was a movement of Jewish believers and suddenly there were these Gentiles - folks like you and I - being embraced and brought into the church. And the church was asking, "What are we going to do with this? Are we to expect of the Gentiles what we expect of the Jews? Are they to live like us?" And the leaders of the church came together in a great assembly to debate this. To figure this out. And at the end of that, they introduced their final decision beginning with these words in **Acts 15:28**, "**28** It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." was the way they introduced what they were going to require of the Gentiles.

More than once in **Acts 16**, the Holy Spirit persuades Paul to make a change to his traveling itinerary. We could go on and on and page after page. The story of the early church makes it clear that the indwelling presence of the Spirit given to every genuine believer, since the day of Pentecost, is a gift of God by which He leads, councils, directs and prompts us to action. Are you with me so far?

So we turn to the Psalm again.

**8** I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. **9** Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. **10** Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.

What the Psalm is saying, "I'll teach you and show you the way you should go." But that, for me anyways and maybe for you, sort of begs the question, "Well... how? How does the Spirit do that? How do we allow Him to take charge and to lead us day by day? For that matter, moment by moment?"

Well, according to the Psalm, according to what we read, it's not by bit and bridle. The bit and bridle is, of course, to control a horse the way you lead a horse or animal cattle, a donkey. The Psalm says, "God doesn't put us on a leash and drag us around." That's not his way. That's not his style. That's not His plan. That's how you treat horses. That's how you treat mules who have no understanding." They won't come to you unless you yank their lead.

I have a dog like that. He won't come to me unless I yank its lead. I don't know whether you have a dog like that, too. "That's not how I want it to be between you and I," the Lord says. He wants something deeper. He wants something richer. He wants something more mature for us. That's not to say that God will never pull us up short. The bit and bridle sometimes becomes, sadly, His only option at times. When we walk around with cotton in our ears. We're hearing the prompting of God, we're hearing His Spirit but we're stuffing it down. We're ignoring it. We're going our own stubborn way. There's a pride and there's an ego that's driving us. When God keeps whispering patiently. When He keeps convicting us. When He keeps calling us. When He keeps nudging us with His Spirit and we refuse to respond to those urgings.

Eventually, we force His hand. If He wants our attention, it's got to be the bit and the bridle. We've given Him no other choice. But that's not Plan A. That's what the Psalm is making clear. That's Plan B or Plan D or Plan L or something down the list. God's Plan A is to speak and to work quietly within us and for us to respond to those promptings with joy and with obedience. With surrender, if you want to call it that. To respond with joy and with obedience immediately to those promptings of the Spirit within. When that's the case, God doesn't need a bit and bridle.

When that's the case, when we're working daily to listen and then obey immediately, our relationship with God grows in depth and in maturity. That's His desire for you and me. Not a relationship where we have to depend on Him to discipline us or display dramatic signs or use drastic means to point us in the right direction, but rather a relationship where we learn to lean on the divine guidance that He provides us through His Word and through those gentle promptings of His Spirit.

So it's not through the bit and bridle that God would choose first to lead us but rather, the Psalm tells us, it's through the eye. Through the eye. The New American Standard Bible gives a more literal translation of **Psalm 32:8** when it says, "**8** I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will advise you with My eye upon you." Or in the words of the old King James Version, "**8** ... I will guide thee with mine eye." Think about it. The movement of the eye, you know, a glance to the side, a glance down. The movement in the eye is very subtle movements. A very, very silent movement, in fact, but we can discipline ourselves to watch for it. We can discipline ourselves to see it. Think of it this way.

Over the years, think of married couples who have worked hard at their relationship with being intentional with their relationship and coming to truly know one another. They learn to read one another's face, don't they? They often know simply from looking into the other's eyes, what it is that their partner wants or needs. A simple glance or a single facial expression can speak volumes between two people who know and who love one another. No one else may even notice it. You know, sometimes you're at a party or a group of people and there are glances exchanged and no one else may even notice it. But if they do, they might not even know what it means. This is intimate knowledge between those who speak it. Through love and through practice, couples can come to love and appreciate much about what the other is thinking, simply by a glance of the eyes.

God wants to lead us, in a sense, by the eyes. Of course, that kind of leading requires us to slow down regularly to listen to Him and to come to know Him. To study Him. To simply be in His presence. When we order our priorities in such a way that God is always at the periphery. It's not that we don't believe. It's not that we don't call ourselves Christians and seek to serve Him, but we hold Him off to the periphery. When that's the case, we'll never learn to read the subtleties and intricacies of face language. The language of a look.

You know, He may be nodding from a distance in a particular direction. He may be glancing in another direction, hoping that we'll catch His meaning, but we'll never notice if we're not seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness. When I'm living with Him at the center rather than with Him at the periphery, when I have him dead center in my life in my priorities, when I'm fully surrendered to Him and I'm learning to be in His Word, when I'm deliberately and intentionally gazing on His face but locking eyes with him, then I'm also in the position where I can be learning the subtleties of His glance.

We live in a world that is fast. We live in a world that's always looking for the immediate fix, the immediate answer. But learning the movement of God's eyes takes discipline, takes work, takes practice, takes trial and error. Sometimes the husband and wife, despite their relationship being intimate, do misunderstand one another. Sometimes it takes even trial and error to learn the sign and the signals of God's prompting. But if we invest the time, the dividends, the payoff is rich. In fact, the dividend is everything, according to the Scriptures. "Seek first my kingdom and my righteousness. Put me at the center. Learn who I am." **Matthew 6:33**, "**33** ... seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." "All the things you need. All the things you truly long for."

It's natural to long for the Spirit upon. It seems so dramatic. But we've been blessed with the gift that every Old Testament believer longed for. The Spirit within. The Spirit within. That's where relationship is found. A relationship with the One who delights to lead us with His eye. Thanks be to Him.

I want us to take just a few minutes this morning to stop, to listen to what the Spirit might be speaking in our midst here today. Will you pray with me?

Pause for a few minutes.

Father, we confess, we admit that we long for the dramatic at times. We long for the easy, make it clear, show up, speak directly. We long for the easy because we're not willing to do the work of really coming to know You. Just show us what you want, God. It's quick. It's easy. But You're inviting us to something so much different, Father. You're inviting us into a relationship where we invest. A relationship where we place You at center stage. A relationship where we learn to look at Your Word, we look into Your eyes, we look into what it is that You're longing to do in us and through us and for us. God, this morning your Spirit is speaking. Your Spirit is always speaking. The only issue is whether we're listening.

So this morning, Your Spirit is speaking and we take this moment right now to just sit quietly before You. To invite You, Spirit of God, to speak, to nudge, to encourage, to comfort, to challenge, to convict. Spirit of God, speak for Your people who are listening. What a remarkable gift, God. To be honest, we don't even quite get it. How the God of all the sovereign one of the earth and heavens and all it is, somehow that, God, You live within us. May the Spirit of Your Son Jesus take up residence in us and in our lives. From our eyes towards You, Father God, turn our lives towards You. May we learn what it means to be led by You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.