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What Is the Role of the Holy Spirit in Our Lives if He Doesn't Give Us Instructions?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, advice for someone who believes in God intellectually but struggles to understand how to have a "personal relationship" with him, and resources other than Greg's that teach the wisdom model for making decisions.

* If the Holy Spirit doesn't give us personal instructions, what does that leave the role of the Holy Spirit to be in my life?

* Do you have advice for someone who believes in God intellectually but struggles to understand how to have a "personal relationship" with him? I don't understand how others "feel his presence" or "hear from God."

* What resources (outside of your own) would you recommend in regard to the wisdom model for making decisions rather than a more charismatic approach of receiving impressions, whispers, etc. from God?

Transcript

Alright, Greg. Are you ready to answer some questions? We'll see. Okay, let's answer a question from Josh.

I've started rethinking my beliefs to align with yours on the topic of God, not whispering. So I asked not as a challenge, but rather trying to flush this out. What does that leave the role of the Holy Spirit to be in my life? Okay, this is, I get this question a lot.

And to be honest, it frustrates me. I'm trying to think of a parallel here, but I cancel, I'll just get straight to it. If a person is convinced that the Holy Spirit's job is to speak to us, and that's what he's all about.

And I'm saying the Bible doesn't teach the Holy Spirit, does that. And their responses, well, then what good is the Spirit? What the Spirit? That lets me know that they have know what theologians

call pneumatology. They have no doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

They haven't worked through for themselves. What is the Holy Spirit and what does the Holy Spirit do? And I don't necessarily blame the people themselves. I think the churches are falling on this.

Okay, well, Jesus says in John chapter three, all those who are born of the Spirit. Okay, well, that means rebirth, regeneration is a function of the Holy Spirit working on our lives. So if somebody says, well, what does the Holy Spirit do? Well, he regenerates us.

Okay. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. All things have passed away, old things have come.

For example, that's the role of the Holy Spirit. Okay. When we read in 1 Corinthians two or whatever Paul's talking about the Scripture, and he says taught not by human words, a human word wisdom, but by the Spirit.

Okay. So there you have another reference to what the Spirit does, and he helps us with regards to the revelation of God. So that's a role of the Spirit.

The Spirit is also called a comforter. I will send you a comforter. Well, the Spirit is the, the role, let me back up and put it this way.

The Trinity is sometimes distinguished, the individuals of the Trinity by the roles that they play. This is called the economic Trinity. Each one does different things.

Okay. So the Father, you know, elects or calls or however the Son dies, the Holy Spirit regenerates. Okay.

These are different things they do. Now, it turns out that that's the Holy Spirit has all kinds of different roles. Okay.

He witnesses to our heart that we are children of God and we cry out, Abba Father. This is John eight. John eight also says the Spirit intercedes for us with groaning.

I'm sorry. You're right. Romans eight in both cases intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

Jesus says in the upper room discourse in John, he says, I will send the Spirit who will bring to remembrance all the things that I've taught to you. So this is another thing the Spirit is doing. All one has to do is get, get a concordance if they want and just where's the word spirit show up and then just make a tally of all the things the Spirit does according to the text.

And you're going to find out the Spirit does lots and lots of things. Now, if you have a systematic theology, which is great for everybody to have as a reference in their home in their library, just

turn to the chapter, the section on the Holy Spirit. And it'll give you all kinds of discussion or being led by the Spirit.

Spirit leads us. Now, we have to be careful that we use that phrase with the meaning that Paul intended not what people mean today. Okay, because that's the whispers kind of thing, the nudge, mudge, hint, hint.

That's the Spirit's leading. That isn't what Paul meant. In Romans eight, he says, those who are putting to death the deeds of the flesh.

These are sons of God. Now, I'll leave you that for all that putting to death the deeds of the flesh, for all who are being led by the Spirit or sons of God. So you're being led by the Spirit out of sin and into holy behavior.

You're empowered by the Spirit to do that. So there's another reference. We see the same concept in Galatians chapter five.

You walk by the Spirit, you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. So the Spirit has all of these different, very, very important roles in our lives as Christians, but he doesn't whisper in our ear. Nudge, hint, hint, go here, go there.

I mean, the way people have characterized the work of the Spirit is not biblically sound. That's my argument from the text. You can't find that.

You find all kinds of other things, but it does indicate the lack of knowledge that people have about the Holy Spirit. If they're distracted by this other thing, they don't realize the robust kind of role the Spirit pays. It plays in our lives in ways that Scripture indicates.

I think Romans eight is a great chapter to read through because it mentioned so many of the things that you talked about and testifying to us that we are children of God. He dwells in us. Jesus sent him as our comforter to be with us after he left.

So he dwells in us. He sanctifies us. He gives spiritual gifts.

He empowers us to use those spiritual gifts. Both Peter and Paul talk about how when we serve, we serve in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit is empowering us to do the things that God calls us to do.

And he's enabling us to put our sins to death. This is the main point of chapter eight of Romans is that now because we have the Spirit, we are able to put our sins to death. He will enable us to do that to give life to our bodies.

And in the end, he will redeem all of our bodies so that we will have no more sin. And you mentioned that he intercedes for us. And that is also in the context of sanctification because it's

talking about how even when we are groaning in the fallen world, even when we don't know exactly what to pray for, the Holy Spirit is praying because God is working to make us like Christ.

And this is the whole point of the chapter. So he's interceding for us in that way. So I would say when I mainly think of the role of him as being the one who is sanctifying us, who is putting our sin to death and who is making us like Christ, and is fulfilling this very crucial role in our lives right now and testifying as to our being God's children.

This is all in Romans eight. And certainly there are other parts also. Can you think of anything else? I'm just like coming up with these spirit kind of verses that come to mind.

There are just so many of them. And all it takes is a concordance to kind of do a little pen work there. Just take notes and say, Spirit does this, it does this, it does this, it does this.

Keep in mind. He does this. He does that.

That's his preferred pronoun. So the spirit does this and et cetera, et cetera. But just keep in mind, when you read words, you have to understand the words the way the author meant them, not the way that we use them.

And the big one in that regard is led by the spirit. That's only twice in the New Testament. They're both Pauline, Romans eight, we mentioned Galatians five, we mentioned, and they both mean the same thing by Paul.

And it's not nudge, hint, hint, whisper, whisper. It's, it's the spirit taking us out of sins of the flesh and bearing fruit in the spirit. Be the language of Galatians five.

Let's go to a question from Amy. Do you have advice for someone who believes in God intellectually, but struggles to understand how to have a quote personal relationship with him? I don't understand how others feel his presence or hear from God. Could you read that last line again? I don't understand how others feel his presence or hear from God.

Okay. Well, the hear from God part is what we've partly been talking about so far, and that's, that's a mistaken notion is what I've argued in terms of scripture. Now, of course, I have to qualify this.

God can do anything he wants. And there's no question that people have heard from God scripturally. And even nowadays, God intervenes sometimes the very special way.

I wrote a piece about this. What last year came out is called when God speaks. It's a solid ground can find it on our website.

And I look at all the scriptural guidelines regarding that. Okay. But in so far as people expect this as a standard part of the Christian package, where Christians, we all get our own personalized

revelation from God.

He speaks to each of us individually. This is not taught. And this is actually very problematic for a number of reasons.

So we strike that last part. Now we're talking about a subjective sense of intimacy. And there are lots of things that affect that, Amy.

Part of it is if you think of a human relationship, you might know of a person, but you don't have a relationship with that person because you have not invested time in developing a relationship, which means being with that person and learning more about that person in the context of that relationship. So it may be, especially if you're a young Christian, that intimacy with God grows over time as you do the kinds of things that build intimacy. And that is talking with him and trusting him and reading scripture to know more about him.

So these are very standard staples, worshiping God. Here is a truism about life, about human beings. And the truism is the feeling sometimes comes first and informs the actions.

But basically, largely, the actions come first and create the feelings. And this is why someone said fake it to you, make it kind of thing. You need to be invested.

God doesn't tell you to feel things. He tells you to do things. And in the doing of the things, the other things kind of follow.

So prayer is not easy. It's not easy for me. I've been over half a century in the Lord.

It's not easy for me. Okay. But when I start praying and kind of break through a little bit, the effort, if you think about jogging, you know, you start jogging and, oh man, the first quarter mile is really painful.

It's awkward. But then you kind of get the rhythm and then you get break a sweat and you're into it. The same kind of thing happens in prayer.

Bible reading as well. Focus. Read.

And then let that information wash over you. And as you're doing these kind of worship, another example, especially being with a group of Christians in worship or maybe a group of Christians in prayer. Some people resonant.

That resonates to them. I know that's true for you, Amy. And so these are the kinds of ways that you feed the relationship.

And as you're feeding the organism, so to speak, the spiritual organism, there is going to be, that's when the results begin to show themselves. Now, that's a general truth, what I'm suggesting, and this is why we are told to do those things in the text because that's what nurtures

us spiritually. But there's also a dispositional element, I think.

Some people are just more affective in their disposition. They're more emotional. And maybe more, shall we say, right brain and others are more left brain.

I'm more on the left brain side, no duh. And I think people who are more left brain, this is a longer process. This is a harder process.

And that was the case for me. It wasn't that I didn't experience God in any sense. It wasn't that I didn't have a relationship with Him.

But it has always been kind of an effort for me to stoke the emotional fires a little bit. Now it's gotten easier and it's gotten more intimate over time. But it's something that I've prayed about, I still do, and talked to God about it.

But over time, I think even for a person like that, things get easier and more automatic. So I wouldn't worry about trying to hear from God in the sense you probably mean it. I would focus in on those behaviors that the Scripture describes as ones that will enrich you spiritually.

And that is being a student of the word, spending personal time with God in prayer. And I'm on a regular basis and learning more about God. And one of the things just saying that is something that a lot of times will accelerate the process.

I'm chuckling now because some of you are thinking, well, what is that? I want that. Well, it's hardship, difficulty and suffering. That's what it is.

And we read a lot about that in the New Testament as well. But that could be a great force multiplier in your own efforts to get closer with God subjectively. So, and you already said this, but I just want to say this really explicitly.

Amy, you're asking how you want to understand how to hear from God. And I can tell you exactly how to hear from God. Sit down, you open your Bible and you start reading.

There's, I mean, that's kind of a mind-blowing thought that you can hear from God any time you want to. Now, developing this sense, as you said, a more subjective sense, as you said, with, as with anybody, any relationship, it comes with time. And since we, as human beings, we have trouble with willpower, the best thing you can do is just be very intentional about developing a habit.

Because if all the habits you have in your life, you don't have to think about. You just do them automatically. That's what it needs to be a habit.

Yeah, you do certain things in the morning. You do certain things at certain times of day. And you don't have to think about it.

It's not a big effort. Every time you start a new habit, it is, it can be a huge effort. So the best thing you can do is figure out either the best thing you can do is if you already have a habit going, if you can tie the habit of Bible reading or prayer to that thing.

So when you've finished that thing, you automatically go into praying or reading your Bible. For example, let's say right after breakfast, you go and you read some of the Bible or you go and you pray or you tie the Bible reading to breakfast and then prayer to Bible reading or however you want to do it. And it's going to be hard at first.

And it's going to take a while. But once you have that settled, then you are spending a regular amount of time. And the more you are spending time, the more you will see, the more opportunities you have to experience God in some subjective way.

And it doesn't happen all the time. But you're seeking Him and you're leaving that space open to interact with God. As you're reading, you're praying, you're responding to God.

As you're praying, one thing you might want to do is write down what your prayers are. Either write out your prayer completely or write out what you're praying for. And then take some time to write about how you saw God working that day or what you saw Him doing or how He answered a prayer.

So it's journaling basically, spiritual journaling. So what you'll find is the more that you are paying attention to that and writing it down, the more you're going to see that. And when you see God working, that will move you to worship.

All of these things will move you to worship, seeing who He is, reading about Him, praying, all of these things move you to worship, but they just take time to develop. And, you know, it's the same with anybody. Any friend you have sometimes will be more wonderful than other times.

I mean, it's not going to be the same every single time. Some of our listeners remember Mullen to Penner. She was my partner in crime here starting Sandra Rees in almost 33 years ago now.

And she's with the Lord now, but she had been very involved, very interested in politics. So she'd get in the car to drive to the office, which took her about half an hour or so. And, you know, she'd listen to talk shows and stuff like that.

And then she changed her habit since she has to drive every time to the office in the morning. And this is a point you were making. You're taking something that you're already doing and you're attaching this new habit to it.

So it becomes a trigger or a stimulator. She said, she made a commitment. She said, I am not going to hear from man, so to speak.

I'm not going to listen to political jibber jabber until I first hear God's word. And so she would turn

on, I don't know, back then, you know, they didn't have a podcast the same like they have now. But she would listen to a show and listen to John MacArthur or somebody, Alistair Begg, doing a sermon or something like that.

So she'd listen to a sermon. She gets in the car. That's her trigger to listen to a sermon.

So she's starting her day heading to the office being taught by God's word, being informed by God's word. Through this preacher or teacher. And I find that when I only make one trip a week usually into the office.

But that's a great time for me. It takes me almost two hours. And this is where I have a very relaxed time talking with God.

So that's a trigger for me to have time with God. I get up in the morning usually when I'm not traveling and then I go get my coffee and then sit in my office. I have like an allowance chair of sorts, a leather chair.

And that's my a caca relax and then be before God. And so that's a trigger for me to pray and read the word. And so it's just like you said, building these things in but attaching them to something else that you're doing on a regular basis.

Actually, the first thing that I do when I get up the morning is I brush my teeth. But you're right. It's a habit.

I don't even think about it. It's not an effort. I just do it.

Wash my face, comb my hair, you know. And all right, that's done. But it's part of my routine.

You've built it into your life. Yes. I don't have to think about it.

Really. It feels odd if I don't do it because it's such a part of my life. Well, think about say somebody who has a skill.

Let's say they're a figure skater. When they first start out, they're going to be falling on the ice. They're not going to be able to do anything.

But then over time, as they learn the forms, then they can create real beauty and they're free to do all of these things. But it takes time to build up the repertoire. Yeah.

Learning an instrument. It's all sorts of things. You get better at it over time as it becomes more natural and ingrained in who you are.

Well, I want to throw one more question in here since we brought up the idea of hearing the voice of God. This one comes from Joey. What literary sources outside of your own are men's group has read those.

Would you recommend in regard to the scriptural moral wisdom council approach in seeking the will of God and making decisions rather than a more charismatic approach of impressions, whispers, etc. Actually, a couple of books come to mind. There's a great, fairly small book by Kevin DeYoung titled Just Do Something.

Now, he's got a very long subtitle like how to make decisions without voices from heaven, liver, quivers, blah, blah, blah, blah. It's very clever, but it's just do something. And that's a great single tone.

A larger book about decision-making in the will of God has that title. And Gary Friesen is the author of that. And I just picked up another book.

I'm trying to remember the title because it's sitting on my desk and I, since I'm writing on it, I wanted to hear what this guy had to say. And it's like how not to be an anxious Christian or something like that? How not to be an anxious Christian? And basically say, look at all these things in evangelicalism that are part of the evangelical received tradition of being a good Christian that aren't really biblical. And it drives you crazy because you're not living up to all these non-biblical obligations.

And one of them is hearing from God and making decisions, trying to find God's will, etc. Did you find it anxious Christian? No, do you remember? No, I can't remember. It's a new writer for me.

Something like... Kyle was outside the glass right now. He could tell me, but he's not there. Oh, yeah, because he knows this author, right? Something about being an anxious Christian.

Well, it'll be in the show notes. No, we don't do show notes like this. All right.

Well, good luck. That's okay. Yeah, we can't find it here.

Amy's usually good about this. I think you mentioned it on the other show. Well, if anyone really wants to know, they can email me through the website.

Yeah. And I'll see if I can find it for you. Yeah, that's good.

I guess that was a very unhelpful answer. There's a book out there, but we don't know what it is. Well, it's a fairly recent book, and there are a whole bunch of books out there that give you the wrong teaching on this.

I'm just saying, and it's written by people. In many cases, I know, and I respect, and it just drives me nutty. But it's not a personal issue, so I'm not going to go to names, but one has to look at the texts.

You look at the texts in their context and determine as best you can what the author is trying to communicate. And you're not going to get this other way of thinking if you keep it to that. Last

time I brought this up with another respected Christian teacher, he asked me what I was working on a few weeks ago in New Orleans.

And he's one of the speakers, and I said, well, you know, I'm working on this. It takes a while to explain it. It does God whisper.

And he was aghast at the point I was trying to make. And he said, well, what does it mean to be in relationship with God then? It's very interesting how people will use that as a leverage. They say, well, we're in relationship with God, and therefore that means XYZ, their view.

But if you can't find that in scripture as part of a relationship with God, then why are we declaring that that's part of a relationship? God is something everyone should expect to have happen. It doesn't happen to everybody. And when you are taught that this is what you should be expecting if you're a good Christian, then you're not experiencing it.

Then guess what? What follows? You're not a good Christian QED from that kind of thinking, and that really upsets a lot of people. It's a false expectation, and this is what this other writer about frustrating, anxious Christian, or whatever that book title is. See, there you go.

If you write a book, you've got to have a title that's snappy. Just do something, for example, decision-making and the will of God. Easy, okay? Tactics, story of reality, blah, blah, blah.

What's the foundational relationship with God? The problem is it's not in scripture. How to do listening prayer? There's no such thing in scripture as listening prayer. Well, what about relationship? Well, this is what I should have said.

What about it? Well, relationship is two-way communication, right? Okay. Okay, so we talked to God and He talks to us. Well, after a fashion, yes.

The question here is, how does He talk to us? You want to think He talks to us subjectively so we each get our own private revelation from God. But the classical view, the biblical view is God talks to us through His word. That's why we call it His word.

So there is a basis for a two-way relationship with communication. But what ends up happening is people neglect the word of God because they're looking to get their private revelation, which is more personal to them and more valued than the scripture. I guarantee you that's what happens.

I remember on the radio one Cal, many years ago, as I was explaining this, she said, well, what you're saying then is all we have is the book. All we have is the book. You mean the Bible? The Booby Prize? Yeah, that's it.

Okay. While you were talking, Greg, I was able to find out from Kyle the name of the author. He says it's Philip Carey.

So it's a book by Philip Carey. So that'll at least give them some... With a C-A-R-E-Y. C-A-R-E-Y.

So hopefully that's correct. I'm still not finding it. But hopefully... Let's see.

Yeah, that's what he says. Okay. So hopefully that'll give people... I feel like we've wandered around a bit at the end.

Sorry. I was trying to find that book for you. Okay.

That's it. Thank you so much. We really appreciate hearing from you.

Thank you, Jim and Ernie. Send us your question on X with the hashtag STR. Or you can always just go to our website.

That's at str.org. And if you just look for our hashtag STRAskPodcast page, you'll find a link there and you can send us your question. All we ask is that you keep it short about the size of the original... Well, not the very original tweets, but the second level of tweets, which was, I think, 180 characters. It's just about two or three sentences.

And that's kind of the link we're looking for. By the way, thanks to Jim and Ernie, but also to Josh, Amy and Joey. Josh, Amy and Joey.

Those were the last three, weren't they? That's why I've written down here. I didn't want them to feel left out. Oh, did I not say every one we talked about? We're doing great today.

Thanks to everybody. I love the whole world. Oh, my goodness.

Okay. Well, let's see. Did I tell the road? Yeah.

You're right, Craig. You know what? I don't know what's happening today. We are losing it.

Sorry, guys. Even a blind dog finds a bone once in a while. All right.

That was right. Okay. Thank you so much.

Next time, we will be more with it. Yeah, yeah. Promises.

Promises. This is Amy Holland. Great Coco for a stand to reason.