

"HOW TO DEEPEN AND DEVELOP SPIRITUAL RECEPTIVITY"

J.I. Packer, together with Carolyn Nystrom, has written a book titled *Guard Us Guide Us, Divine Leading in Life Decisions*. It was formerly titled *God's Will, Finding Guidance for Everyday Decisions*. In it he says we have to navigate between two extremes, which we label as the superspiritual and the subspiritual. The "superspiritual" perspective downplays the normal and most common forms of guidance which are the Bible's teaching, the exercise of wisdom and the counsel of fellow believers. It relies too much on some kind of felt "nudge" from the Holy Spirit and says too easily "God spoke to me". This opens the door to multiple mistakes. The "subspiritual" extreme by contrast is a mindset that has been described as believing in the Father, the Son and the Holy Scriptures. It is more common than it's superspiritual opposite, partly because of the rationalistic defensiveness that has marked so much popular theology in North America for more than a century; partly because so many of its exponents have constantly before their eyes the danger, as they see it, of losing rational control and lapsing into the superspiritual eccentricity of which we have spoken above; and partly, we think, because Satan dupes us into thinking that. He suggests it is a sort of deist doctrine of guidance – a doctrine that denies, ignores or otherwise leaves out of account all direct action of God the Holy Spirit in the deep Christian heart and consciousness.

Packer in that book is focused specifically on guidance, my concern in this class is broader. Spiritual receptivity is not just about guidance in terms of decision making, but insight, clarity, comfort, conviction and assurance as well.

Here's the chart I have used...

Overly Rationalistic Biblicist	Spiritually Discerning Disciple	Overly Impressionistic Charismaniac
Too dismissive of the mysteries of spirituality	Biblically Grounded And Spiritually Receptive	Too accepting of feelings and hunches.
Overly confident in the powers of rationality	Humbly relying on the work of the Spirit	<u>Emotionally dependent on spectacular experiences.</u>
Biblically rigid but selective	Biblical Integrity and Spiritual vitality	<u>Shallow emotionalism and And spiritual immaturity.</u>
1 Thess. 5:19-20 <i>Quenches the Spirit and despises prophesy.</i>	1 Thess. 5:21& 22 <i>"Test everything; hold fast what is good."</i>	1 Thess. 5:19-22 <i>"Inadequate testing and holding fast to abuses."</i>

So, with this framework in mind, our focus tonight is practical. How can we develop and deepen our spiritual receptivity?

1. Fill your heart with Scripture.

Psalm 119:11 *I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*

Colossians 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

2. Pray for spiritual enlightenment and a heart to receive it.

Colossians 1:9-14 *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

(See also Ephesians 1:16-20 and 3:14-20, Psalm 199:18, Philippians 4:6-7, James 1:5-8)

3. Cultivate the expectancy of child-like faith.

1 Samuel 3:8-10 *And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."*

James 1:5-8 *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

Matthew 7:11 *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

Luke 11:13 *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

4. Make time and space for quietness.

Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

Mark 1:35 *And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*

Luke 5:16 *Jesus, often withdrew to lonely or desolate places and prayed.*

It is important that we get still to wait on God. And it is best that we get alone, preferably with our Bible outspread before us. Then if we will we may draw near to God and begin to hear Him speak to us in our hearts.

I believe that much of our religious unbelief is due to a wrong conception of and a wrong feeling for the Scriptures of Truth. A silent God suddenly began to speak in a book and when the book was finished lapsed back into silence again forever. Now we read the book as a record of what God said when He was for a brief time in a speaking mood. With notions like that in our heads how can we believe? A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*. pp 81-82

5. Pay Attention.

The voice of the Spirit is as gentle as a zephyr, so gentle that unless you are living in perfect communion with God, you never hear it. The checks of the Spirit come in the most extraordinarily gentle ways, and if you are not sensitive enough to detect His voice you will quench it, and your personal spiritual life will be impaired. His checks always come as a still small voice, so small that no one but the saint notices them. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*. August 13)

6. Nurture a spirit of submission to God.

Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." The word servant is important. Samuel was presenting Himself as God's servant ready to receive God's instructions.

Oswald Chambers also said this: *Obey God in the thing He shows you, and instantly the next thing is opened up. One reads tomes on the work of the Holy Spirit, when one five minutes of drastic obedience would make things as clear as a sunbeam.... The tiniest fragment of obedience, and heaven opens and the profoundest truths of God are yours straight away. God will never reveal more truth about Himself until you have obeyed what you know already. Maybe never is a slight overstatement to make a crucial point. Take time to be alone with God for Scripture reading and reflective prayerful listening to God. Make Scripture memory a habit and listen for how the Holy Spirit leads you in your daily life. Ask for his wisdom and listen with a believing, responsive, obedient heart.*