



A Parent's Guide to
**HEARING
FROM GOD**

axis

“You mean we might draw a circle on the ground—and write things in queer letters in it—and stand inside it—and recite charms and spells?”

‘Well,’ said Eustace after he had thought hard for a bit. ‘I believe that was the sort of thing I was thinking of, though I never did it. But now that it comes to the point, I’ve an idea that all those circles and things are rather rot. I don’t think he’d like them. It would look as if we thought we could make him do things. But really, we can only ask him.’”

— The Silver Chair, C.S. Lewis

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This guide will help you discuss the following questions:

- ❓ Why is Gen Z exploring spiritual practices like divination and tarot cards?
- ❓ How can we know whether we're hearing from God?
- ❓ What should Christians think about the conscience?
- ❓ How does the Holy Spirit guide us?
- ❓ How can we know whether to pursue life opportunities?
- ❓ What is the purpose of hearing from God?
- ❓ How can hearing from God become a part of our spiritual maturity?

Introduction

What should I do with my life? Who should I date? Should I stay single? Who should I marry? Should I get married? Should I go to college? What college should I go to? What degree should I pursue? What job should I get? Where should I live? How should I live? How do I know I'm making the right decisions?

These are just a few of the questions the average teenager (heck, the average human being) will wrestle with at some point. And while some teens may ask parents or other caring adults, others will turn to prayer and other spiritual practices out of a desire to get “the right answer.”

People may desire spiritual guidance for a variety of reasons, but one of the biggest reasons is for help on what decisions to make. In this Parent Guide, we'll talk about how to encourage your teens to find dependable spiritual guidance in Jesus. We'll talk about the role of scripture, the role of the Holy Spirit, and share some principles to help you and your teens stay grounded along the way.

But first, we'll start with a broad survey of how some Gen Zers are seeking guidance through alternative spiritual practices (such as with tarot cards and divination), and why that's different from the way God desires to guide us.

Where should we look for spiritual guidance?

According to [an article in Religion News Service](#), a desire for spiritual guidance has led many Gen Zers to start exploring witchcraft, tarot cards, and divination. As of this writing, [#witchtok](#) has around 36 billion views on TikTok, with many videos about casting spells and other pagan practices. Summarizing research from [The New York Times](#) and [Pew Research Center](#), Heather Greene writes, “Sales of tarot decks increased 30% in both 2016 and 2017, the biggest bump since the mid-1960s, part of a wider increase in occult and New Age practices... [and] alternative beliefs are popular even among evangelical Christians.” The owner of the Atlanta-based “meta-physical store” Phoenix and Dragon [says](#), “The surge in sales is definitely fueled by the 18- to 25-year-olds searching for their spiritual path and answers to the challenges they are facing in an uncertain world.”

Gaye Weintraub (owner of Soul’ed Out, which she calls a “holistic wellness company”) [summarizes](#) the purpose of tarot cards this way: “Tarot cards do not tell the future; rather, tarot is a tool for spiritual guidance and enables the person receiving the reading to connect to his or her inner wisdom.” In other words, for the tarot enthusiast, the presentation of certain cards during a reading signifies the need to pay attention to certain concepts in their life.

The good news is that interest in practices like these suggests a hunger for a less compartmentalized spirituality in the rising generation—one where connection with the divine is considered a regular part of life. The bad news is that not all spiritual guidance is created equal, and the Bible contains many strong warnings against seeking guidance by way of these sorts of practices.

In [Deuteronomy 18:10-11](#), for example, The Lord says to Israel, “Let no one be found among you... who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist who consults the dead.” For the Israelites, prohibitions like these guarded against very real temptations—temptations which are still common today. As Skye Jethani at The Holy Post podcast [puts it](#), practices like these were prohibited “because they were designed to be controlling and manipulative of God, rather than trusting Him for his promises and outcomes.” In other words, these practices were designed to give people the illusion that they can control or know things that only God can know, manufacturing answers and definition around things God had left unanswered and undefined.

[Proverbs 25:2](#) says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.” But ancient Israelites, like people today, struggled with the patience that faith requires. They wanted answers right when they asked their questions. The allure of witchcraft and related practices is that they often claim to offer a shortcut to knowing the unknowable, as well as a greater sense of agency over unpredictable circumstances. Instead of submitting themselves and their prayer requests to God—and trusting the (sometimes very gradual) process of how God guides us— the Israelites caved to their desires for these things.

At its core, this desire for spiritual guidance is good, and it can be directed toward a spiritually healthy practice. God made us for a relationship with him, and Jesus says in [John 16:13](#) that he is sending “the Spirit of truth” to his church to “guide [us] into all the truth.” We can trust that God desires to make our paths clearer for us, while we also trust that He will do so in His own perfect timing.

At this point though, the question becomes, how can we know whether the “guidance” we may be seeking or receiving is actually from God, as opposed to from someone/something else? For that matter, how can we know whether our thoughts are from God, our own minds, or even from Satan? These are important questions to answer when it comes to spiritual guidance, and we’ll begin exploring them in the next section.

Reflection: Does this rationale make sense for divination and witchcraft? Why or why not? Why else might God have told Israel not to pursue these practices?

God, our own thoughts, or worse?

After watching a documentary about the 1994 Rwandan genocide, pastor [Carlton Pearson](#) was in anguish over the teaching of his church that, after so much earthly pain and misery, non-Christians would be also condemned to suffer eternal conscious torment in Hell. In a moment of anguish, he cried out to God. And in response he heard a voice, which told him in effect that nobody ends up in Hell.

Experiences like Pearson's open up one of faith's biggest questions: How can we truly know whether the voice we're hearing is from God, our own thoughts, or even Satan?

The most cautious answer would be to insist that we should only ever expect God to speak through the Bible, and never through any sort of direct, personal interaction. And to be sure, the church is filled with stories of God speaking to people through the pages of his Word. Some Christians have used the word "[rhema](#)" to describe the way some verses stand out in personally meaningful ways to someone as they are reading the Bible. (We can also agree that in a general way, God reveals his will to all people through his Word. As 1 Thessalonians 4:3 puts it, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified").

At the same time, the Bible itself is also full of stories of God speaking to people directly with specific guidance and instructions. We see examples of that in [1 Samuel 3:1-14](#), [Luke 9:35](#), and [Acts 18:9-10](#), just to name a few.

Of course, one of the problems with expecting God to speak directly is that it opens up the possibility of misunderstanding or mislabeling our experiences. [This guy](#), for example, believed that "God" told him to go into a Waffle House and commit murder. But given the fact that murder is one of the main things God said [not to do](#) in the Bible, we can be confident that what this man heard was not God, but rather his own mental illness, or perhaps the devil.

It's also important to point out that just because someone refers to the Bible doesn't necessarily mean they're on the right track. Some people have used the Bible like a deck of tarot cards, flipping to random pages and pointing to random verses for guidance; without knowledge of scripture's overall context, approaches like this can be very misleading. Sure, God *can* speak through these endeavors, but [Luke 4:9-12](#) also says that the devil knows the Bible well enough to turn verses meant for encouragement into occasions for self-destruction.

A more precise principle for Christians to follow is the fact that when it is God who is leading us—no matter what the topic or circumstance is—it will always look like Jesus. [Hebrews 1:3](#) says that Jesus is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” Jesus says that the greatest commandments of God are to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Given these, we can be confident that God will never lead us toward anything— whether a job, a relationship, a religion, or anything else—that involves loving or preferring someone or something else above Him, or not loving our neighbors as ourselves.

In light of this principle, moral questions become much easier to answer. So if our teens hear a voice or have a thought that says something like, “Go into this Waffle House and kill the employees,” “Prioritize your girlfriend above all else, including me,” or “Consider selling fentanyl and calling it heroin,” we can know it’s not God they’re hearing from.

Of course, not all questions are this morally obvious. Many of the decisions we struggle with will be between two equally good options, and we need guidance for these dynamics as well. But before we go on to talk about spiritual guidance for those kinds of questions, let’s briefly touch on two other important ways that God guides us in Christianity: through the conscience, and through the Holy Spirit.

Reflection: Have you ever known someone who believed they were hearing from God? Have you ever believed you were hearing from God? Looking back, how did it play out? Finally, what do you think it means for God’s guidance to always look like Jesus?

What is the conscience?

Reverend John Henry Newman [once said](#),

Conscience is not a long-sighted selfishness, nor a desire to be consistent with oneself; but it is a messenger from Him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by His representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ, a prophet in its informations, a monarch in its peremptoriness, a priest in its blessings and anathemas, and, even though the eternal priesthood throughout the Church could cease to be, in it the sacerdotal principle would remain and would have a sway.

In other words, even before someone becomes a Christian, the conscience is there with them as Christ's first representative. Sometimes teens test and judge one another by how far they're willing to go against their own consciences. But teens should be taught that the conscience is not something to ignore; it is not simply "our own thoughts," because we can't change the message our conscience gives to us. The conscience is given to help us discern right from wrong.

Some believe that once we become Christians, the Holy Spirit essentially begins functioning as an upgraded conscience. But there are many places in the New Testament where readers are still encouraged to obey their consciences. [1 Timothy 1:19](#) (NLT) says, "Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked." [1 Peter 3:15-16](#) says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience..."

With that said, the conscience is not infallible. Paul writes that consciences can be [seared](#), and says that even though someone's conscience [may be clear](#), that doesn't necessarily mean that they're innocent. In other words, the purpose of the conscience is not to perfectly convey every aspect of our moral status, but to generally police us according to the laws and norms we have been made aware of. We should try to keep our consciences clear as we make decisions, while also recognizing that they don't have the final say in our lives.

Reflection: What have you believed about the conscience in the past? Does this challenge or reinforce your beliefs about it?

What about the Holy Spirit?

Oswald Chambers describes the voice of the Holy Spirit like this:

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.

The Holy Spirit is called the *paraklētos* in Greek, which Blue Letter Bible [defines as](#) the one who is “called to one’s side, esp. called to one’s aid.” *Paraklētos* is translated as “comforter” and “advocate” in verses like [John 14:26](#), and [16:7](#). In other places, the Holy Spirit is called “the teacher,” and the “Spirit of truth,” as we mentioned above.

The primary way many Christians anticipate guidance from the Holy Spirit has less to do with comfort and advocacy, and more to do with convicting us of our sins—in other words, expecting the Holy Spirit to function as an upgraded conscience. Granted, if the Holy Spirit is our teacher, He *will* guide us toward truth and goodness. But in [Galatians 5:22-23](#), the Apostle Paul lists the following as evidence of the Spirit’s presence in our lives: “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control.”

Notice what’s absent from that list; the Holy Spirit doesn’t come maximizing guilt and regret. The Spirit comes to help us love Jesus, and to help us flourish.

Again, if the Holy Spirit is our teacher, won’t He teach us right from wrong? Yes—but by positive reinforcement and drawing us toward the good rather than merely away from what’s evil. And in a world that thinks that the answers to our problems come from changes in circumstances—from new jobs, new relationships, new cities, and new religions—the Spirit comes to show us that true love, true joy, true peace, etc., comes only through abiding in a relationship with our Creator. God cares about our questions around life’s purpose and how to choose wisely—but the Spirit comes to enable us to flourish wherever we are, whatever our life circumstances may be.

Still, sometimes the Spirit will direct us to do certain things or pursue certain opportunities. We’ll talk more about that in the next section.

Reflection: How else is the Holy Spirit different from the conscience? What else does the Holy Spirit do?

How can I learn to hear and obey God's voice?

In his devotional classic *The Secret of Guidance*, F.B. Meyer writes: “The Word is the wire along which the voice of God will certainly come to you if the heart is hushed and the attention fixed.” In other words, when we (or our teens) desire to know God’s will for us, we should spend time reading the Bible.

But Meyer doesn’t stop there; he then goes on to say that when we are praying about whether to make a certain decision, we should look for the alignment of what he calls “[the three lights](#),” which are God’s word, the prompting of the Spirit, and our life’s circumstances:

Sometimes [we] sigh for an angel to come to point the way [but] the time has not come for [us] to move. If you do not know what you ought to do, stand still until you do. And when the time comes for action, circumstances, like glowworms, will sparkle along your path... The circumstances of our daily life are to us an infallible indication of God's will when they concur with the inward promptings of the Spirit and with the Word of God. So long as they are stationary, wait. When you must act, they will open, and a way will be made through oceans and rivers, wastelands and rocks.

In non-moral decisions, spiritual discernment doesn’t mean making a decision based only on a feeling, or only on a verse, or only on a life opportunity—it means weighing all three together with prayer and also with patience.

Patience may be the hardest part for most of us, because our culture today does everything it can to make patience unnecessary. Everything is convenient, made-to-order, and instantaneous. As a result, we don’t have as many opportunities to practice patience anymore, and we get used to not having to wait for things. Part of the challenge of faith is learning to walk at God’s pace, instead of asking Him to walk at ours.

With that said, we do know that God desires to commune with us. The first thing God does in scripture is [speak](#). Jesus says in [John 10:27](#), “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” But most of the time, God’s voice does not come to us sounding like a thunderbolt. In [1 Samuel 3:1-14](#), the voice of God sounded so familiar to Samuel that he thought it was Eli calling him from the other room. The implication may be surprising: many of us may actually be

hearing from God on a regular basis, but we just haven't learned to recognize what His voice sounds like.

In [1 Kings 19:11-13](#), the prophet Elijah is exhausted and afraid when he begins to have a powerful experience with the Lord:

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.

Some translations call this gentle whisper "a still small voice," or "the daughter of a sound." The pattern shown here is that the Lord's voice to us is not necessarily explosive or destructive; it is gentle, though it may also be very firm. [Matthew 12:20](#) says about Jesus, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." God's voice does not come to crush the wounded into submission—it comes understanding our pain, helping us to heal.

This is the tone we should look for when expecting God to speak. [2 Corinthians 11:14](#) says that "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light." No doubt many Christians have mistaken the cruel accusations of [The Accuser](#) for some sort of "tough love" conviction by the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit embodies the fruit of the Spirit—we should expect kindness, goodness, and gentleness from the Spirit when we commune with him.

Reflection: How did you react to the idea of "the three lights"? In your own words, what does God's voice sound like? Finally, how did the section about the "tough love" of The Accuser strike you?

What else should I keep in mind?

Throughout church history, when Christians have talked about hearing from God, it has often been for the purpose of offering encouragement to others, not simply getting encouragement for ourselves. This is Paul's concern when he contrasts speaking in tongues with prophecy in [1 Corinthians 14:1-5](#):

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. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.

As a parent, or someone who cares for the next generation, this invitation is for you, too. God invites you to hear from Him and then to speak to your teen for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort—whether they're in the midst of trying to make a decision, or just going about their daily lives.

Offering strength, encouragement, and comfort *does not mean* making promises on God's behalf. Making promises that God will make something specific happen can be very damaging to someone's faith when/if those specific things don't happen. We can offer strength, encouragement, and comfort based on the general principles of who God is, not on what we specifically hope He might do for us.

Another thing to keep in mind is that sometimes the most important part of a decision that we or our teens need to make isn't *what to do*, but *why and how to do it*. Will we be people who will grow and demonstrate faithfulness in the midst of trial and uncertainty, or will we be people who will cheat, deceive, and cover things up in order to end up where we think we're supposed to be? As the Holy Spirit [revealed](#) through the Apostle Paul in Romans 3, good ends can never justify immoral means. Most of the time, Jesus cares much more about who we become along the way than about where we end up.

We live in a historically unprecedented time where we have to sift through an overwhelming number of options for just about every choice we make, and Jesus [cares](#) about the anxiety this can produce in us. At the same time, we can also know that God's desire is for us to become

people who are mature enough to make wise decisions without needing His micromanagement. As Dallas Willard writes in his book [Hearing God](#):

Obviously God must guide us in a way that will develop spontaneity in us. The development of character, rather than direction in this, that, and the other matter, must be the primary purpose of the Father. He will guide us, but he won't override us. That fact should make us use with caution the method of sitting down with a pencil and a blank sheet of paper to write down the instructions dictated by God for the day... Suppose a parent would dictate to the child minutely everything he is to do during the day. The child would be stunted under that regime. The parent must guide in such a manner, and to the degree, that autonomous character, capable of making right decisions for itself, is produced. God does the same.

God regards us as His beloved children, and is also the model for how we should interact with our own children. In that vein, an important prayer for parents and caring adults to pray is, “God, help me to partner with you in what you’re doing in the life of my teen.” It can be tempting to try to impose our own will onto our teens’ lives, and try to live vicariously through them. But God has been known to do [new things](#), and to use new [generations](#) to do them; may He grant us wisdom not to get in the way of the path He has charted for our teens.

Reflection: What do you think about the idea that Jesus cares more about who we become along the way than about where we end up? What’s one way you can offer strength, encouragement, and comfort to your teens?

Conclusion

In this Parent Guide, we talked about how God's guidance is different from divination. We talked about grounding our pursuit of spiritual guidance in the pages of scripture and the person of Jesus. We talked about the importance of the conscience, the importance of the Holy Spirit, "the three lights," and what we should expect God's voice to sound like. We talked about how the ultimate goal of hearing from God should not just be our own encouragement but the encouragement of others; we talked about the idea of God helping us to become mature; and we talked about the idea of partnering with what He's doing in the hearts and minds of our teens.

The invitation now is to put all this into practice. If we want our teens to have a relationship with God, we should first pursue a relationship with him ourselves, and model the importance of that. And after all, what's more natural to a relationship than talking and listening?

Reflection: Did anything in this Parent Guide change the way you think about hearing from God? Do you feel better equipped to help your teen navigate spiritual guidance? What's one piece of advice you want to impart to them about that?

Invitation to Generosity

We hope you enjoyed this Parent Guide. To help us equip more parents and caring adults to minister to the next generation, consider making a donation at axis.org.

Sources

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