

FLYING CLOSER TO THE FLAME

STUDY SEVEN

Those Unidentified Inner Promptings

Selected Scriptures

We have within us the compelling presence of the Spirit, whose still, small voice addresses the needs in our lives and makes known to us the truth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

Now we enter a realm of the Spirit's ministry that is, frankly, mysterious. We call this ministry of the Spirit, "unidentified inner promptings" (UIPs). They are "unidentified" because, at first, we may not recognize them as coming from the Spirit. They are "inner" because we experience them in the deepest parts of our soul. And they are "promptings" because we sense the Spirit moving in us rather than see or hear Him.

God created us with a unique ability to receive the Spirit's promptings. According to Pastor Chuck Swindoll, our souls include "secret inner chambers and hidden capacities other created beings lack." He continues,

I also would suggest that such an inner system provides for the reception of divine information and the understanding of biblical truths. . . . By being "fearfully and wonderfully made," we are equipped to grasp the Spirit's messages as well as sense His compelling, awesome presence. That explains why we can hear His "still small voice" and decipher messages of peace or warning, conviction or guidance. God created us with that capacity.¹



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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How does the Holy Spirit prompt us? Certainly, through words of Scripture, which penetrate to the core of our being, “cutting between soul and spirit” (Hebrews 4:12). But the Spirit also moves in our spirits through feelings of relief, a sense of peace, a surge of courage, an alertness to danger, a flash of insight, or even a flicker of intuition.

We’ve all experienced these unexplainable tugs on our soul, haven’t we? They are not like the random thoughts that bounce around our brain but solid reassurances of divine guidance and conviction. They are the Spirit’s *unidentified inner promptings*. Let’s find out more about them!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Thank God for creating us with the capacity for personal interaction with Him. Join the psalmist in Psalm 139:13–14 in offering Him praise, and invite the Spirit to minister in your innermost being as you study God’s Word.

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother’s womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it!*





TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

To shed light on the mystery of the Spirit’s promptings, we’ll explore four biblical examples of the Spirit’s inner ministry. Because we cover multiple passages of Scripture on the Spirit’s UIPs, we’ll use charts combining the observation and interpretation steps of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method.



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A Desperate and Lonely Prophet 1 Kings 19:1–18	
<p>Our first example of the Holy Spirit’s prompting comes from the life of Elijah. This account demonstrates that <i>in times of loneliness and desperation, the Spirit prompts hope and encouragement.</i></p>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. In <i>1 Kings 19:1–9</i>, what indicates Elijah’s desperation, and how did God help him? Where did Elijah go?</p> <p>1b. In <i>1 Kings 9:10–18</i>, how did God pass by Elijah? What contrasts did the author use to depict the true nature of God?</p> <p>1c. What did God’s UIP within Elijah convey to him?</p>	<p>2a. What is “the sound of a gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12), and what about God does this concept communicate?</p> <p>2b. Why did God give Elijah a UIP? How did it help Elijah?</p>

There have been times in my life when the Lord’s promptings have been just as real as Elijah’s. I didn’t hear a voice, I didn’t see a vision, but I felt His presence as real as if I could touch Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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A Determined and Faithful Apostle
Acts 20:16–24

Next, consider the apostle Paul when he gave his tearful farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. His resolve to go to Jerusalem illustrates that *in times of threatening fears, the Spirit prompts a calm determination and courage.*



Observation



Interpretation

1a. Begin by observing [Acts 20:16–24](#). What phrases in this passage describe Paul’s UIP?

2a. What did Paul mean by, “I am bound by the Spirit” (Acts 20:22)?

1b. What attitudes do you observe in Paul?

2b. Paul said, “The Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me” (20:23 NASB). What did Paul mean?



2c. How did the Spirit’s promptings firm up Paul’s resolve?

Normally, when we know that bonds and afflictions await us, we are frightened. But not when the Spirit of God brings a reassurance. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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A Life-Threatening and Harrowing Journey Acts 27	
<p>During Paul’s stormy sea voyage to Rome, the Holy Spirit encouraged Paul, demonstrating that <i>in times of danger and disaster, the Spirit prompts inner reassurance.</i></p>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. Read the account of Paul’s turbulent voyage in <i>Acts 27</i>. Locate the ports and cities in the map, “<i>Paul’s Journey to Rome</i>.” Which verses indicate the Spirit’s ministry to Paul during this dangerous journey?</p> <p>1b. What contrasts do you observe between Paul’s poise and the others’ panic?</p>	<p>2a. In what ways do you see Paul expressing his personal interactions with God (<i>Acts 27:10, 21–26, 33–35</i>)?</p> <p>2b. What principles does this account teach about how we can walk with God through crises?</p>

The Spirit of God prompted Paul in a night vision, giving Paul the reassurance that God was present in the trial and would keep His arms around those on the ship. Visions like this are rare but real. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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A Sorrowful and Painful Ordeal Romans 8:22–26; 2 Corinthians 12:6–10	
<p>Finally, we explore two passages from Paul’s letters explaining the Spirit’s ministry when we’re suffering. This UIP illustrates that <i>in times of great sorrow and grief, the Spirit prays for us and ministers grace to us.</i></p>	
 Observation	 Interpretation
<p>1a. What help does the Spirit offer when we suffer, according to <i>Romans 8:22–26</i>?</p> <p>1b. Observe <i>2 Corinthians 12:6–10</i>. In what situation did Paul receive a UIP? What did God reveal to Paul three times?</p>	<p>2a. What does it mean that the Spirit “prays for us with groanings” (Romans 8:26)? How does this ministry help us when we groan?</p> <p>2b. When Paul “begged the Lord,” God <i>said</i> something to him (2 Corinthians 12:8–9). How do you think God spoke to Paul’s spirit and brought relief?</p> <p>2c. Sum up the Spirit’s inner ministry to us in our suffering and weakness?</p>

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Have you ever been so overwhelmed and in need that you could not even articulate your prayer? At that moment, God interprets the groanings. He understands what is best and dispatches it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Role of Discernment

What if someone claims he or she received a UIP, but you're not certain the experience was from the Lord? Paul warned the believers in Thessalonica to use discernment, which is also a ministry of the Spirit. What were false teachers claiming, according to *2 Thessalonians 2:1–2*? How could Paul's readers know whether to believe their claims?

Spiritual experiences from the Spirit will always agree with God's Word. If they don't agree, don't believe them. "Don't be fooled," Paul warned. Pray for wisdom and discernment when others speak about their spiritual experiences, and always follow Scripture as a faithful guide for your own UIPs.



Application: Practical Guidelines

To sum up our study, review the four ways the Spirit prompted Elijah and Paul, which are four reliable examples for our spiritual journey.

1. Elijah's bout with despair illustrates that in times of loneliness and desperation, *the Spirit prompts hope and encouragement.*
2. Paul's resolve to suffer for Christ in Jerusalem illustrates that in times of threatening fears, *the Spirit prompts calm determination and courage.*
3. Paul's perilous sea voyage illustrates that in times of potential danger and disaster, *the Spirit prompts inner reassurance.*
4. Paul's thorn in the flesh illustrates that in times of great sorrow and pain, *the Spirit prays for us and ministers grace to us.*



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Which of these examples most closely parallels your current situation? How have these accounts encouraged you to press on with the Spirit's strength in your situation?

Take a few moments to be still before the Lord and to prayerfully reflect. Have you sensed any UIPs? Has God's Spirit filled your spirit with hope? Encouragement? Calm determination? Courage? Reassurance? Grace? Or perhaps another inner blessing?

If you're not certain that what you're sensing is the Spirit's prompting, first, test it against God's Word. And then, if you're still not sure, ask the Lord for further confirmation. But if you *are* certain, don't let others discount your experience. Treasure the Spirit's intimate ministry in you and give thanks!

What a blessing when He floods your soul with hope when all seems lost! How wonderful is the Spirit's relief during suffering, clarity through confusion, and grace to flourish despite pain! Thank the Lord for His Spirit who tenderly prays for you "with groanings that cannot be expressed in words" (Romans 8:26) and communes with you in the secret places of your soul.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the confidence I draw from Your Word and the reassurance I sense through Your Spirit. You give me peace amid pressure and hope to endure whatever hardship lies ahead today. Help me discern Your work in my life, and make clear Your voice among the many voices all around me. Thank You for Your calm, quiet work in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Flying Closer to the Flame* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 137.

