



LIFE ^{IN} THE SPIRIT

SHAPED BY HIS PRESENCE

03 | God's Presence Leads His People

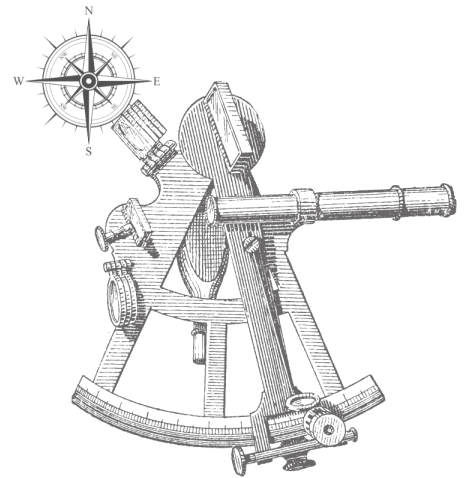
By: Steve Ellis | July 2026

Keeping Our Bearing

Every journey requires more than a destination. **It requires direction.** Here's something every sailor knows. **A ship with full sails can still drift.**

Long before satellites and GPS, sailors depended on an instrument called a **sextant**. A sextant helped the captain keep his bearing.

The good news is that God has never expected His people to navigate life alone. **The God who gives life also leads through his presence.**



A Story That Begins in the Wilderness

When Israel left Egypt, they had been freed. After generations enslaved, they were no longer under Pharaoh's rule. Crossing through the Jordan was only the beginning. Now they had to learn how to live as God's people.

Listen to how Moses describes those first steps.

"By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." (Exodus 13:21-22)

Later, Moses would summarize Israel's journey with these words:

"In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted." (Exodus 40:36-37)

Israel didn't travel according to their own timetable. They didn't choose the easiest road. **They followed God's presence.**

Jesus Walked the Same Path

When we open the Gospel of Luke, we discover that Jesus himself lived a life led by the Spirit. After His baptism, Luke writes,

"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness" (Luke 4:1)

Sometimes we assume that if God is leading us, life should become easier. But Scripture tells a different story. God's presence doesn't always lead us around difficulty. The wilderness wasn't evidence that God had abandoned Jesus. It was evidence that God was with him.

After the temptation, Luke tells us,

"Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit..." (Luke 4:14a)

The same Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness also strengthened him for the ministry ahead.

notes:

God's Presence Leads His People Today

The Apostle Paul recorded,

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.” (Romans 8:14)

Paul doesn't describe extraordinary experiences. Instead, he speaks about relationship. **Those who are led by God's Spirit belong to God's family.** Now Paul tells us that same Spirit lives within everyone who belongs to Christ.

How Does the Spirit Lead?

This is often where our questions begin, **“But, how does the Spirit lead?”** We want to know exactly how the Spirit leads us. *Does He speak through circumstances?* Does He open doors? Does He impress thoughts upon our hearts?

Those are important questions, but Paul seems more interested in something deeper. He wants us to know **where** the Spirit is leading us.

The Spirit is not simply interested in helping us make better decisions. **He is shaping our lives to reflect the character of Jesus.**

As we continue reading Romans 8, we discover that the Spirit reminds us we are God's children. He helps us cry, **“Abba, Father.”** He assures us that we belong to God.

Continuing the Journey

Let's return one last time to the *Elissa*. Imagine her sails are full. The wind is strong. The crew is experienced. Everything appears ready for a successful journey. But if the captain stops checking his bearing, the ship will slowly drift.

No one notices at first. The sea looks the same. The wind feels the same. The sails remain full. But over time, the destination changes.

notes:

The sextant doesn't control the ship. **It keeps the captain oriented to something he knows to be constant.** God has given us something even greater than a sextant. **He has given us his presence.**

As we continue our journey, I hope we'll begin to see that the Holy Spirit is far more than a doctrine to understand. **He is God's promised presence.**

One thing for us to remember today:

The Holy Spirit is God's promised presence, who leads his people.

notes:

Scripture Acknowledgement

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For Additional Study

[Empowered By The Spirit](#): God's Gift to Strengthen His People and Transform the World, *Wes McAdams*

[Who Is the Holy Spirit](#): *BibleProject Guide*

[What Role Does the Holy Spirit Play in Christian Life?](#), *N.T. Wright Online* (video)