

“God prompts us to action when we pray”

Proposition: “God prompts us to action when we pray”

Personal reflections on the Gordon Mc Donald exercise.....

Over the past month we have been looking at the whole topic of prayer and believing that God would not only expand our minds with information about prayer but our hearts with a desire to tune in to his voice 24/7. A good number of people were praying and fasting with me last Sunday and as a result I felt the worship at all services was just brilliant and the worship and the prophecies and the prayers last Sunday night were in my opinion fantastic.

Last week we left the topic of prayer by recognising what it means to pray without ceasing, and really sensing God’s invitation to us as a church, not just to be Christians on our way to heaven one day but to be supernaturally directed people moving in His presence daily. This morning I want to do two things. I want to look at the whole issue of testing those promptings we get in our heads which all sound like they could be God to the benefits of living in the presence of God for the rest of our lives.

I am sure that everyone here in different ways has experienced what I mean by getting promptings or whispers in your mind that suggests a course of action.

Let me give you some personal examples;

There have been probably 3 or 4 times now that I have had people come in to the church referred here by probation or the courts to do community hours. Now I depend on community workers for a lot of work around here and in helping folk in the community. Often folk have come and asked for hours and I have said no, I have enough here at the moment then seconds later I change my mind because I get this quiet whisper in my head, take them on Russell I am doing something in them. And so I do and many of them are now awesome church members.

Sometimes I will be shopping or rushing to some project and God just says help that person over there, just a whisper, just a prompting. Sometimes I will say but Lord I am too busy or that person is looking pretty grumpy are you sure about this? And I can easily ignore that whisper but if I go with it, follow that prompting nine times out I can see that God is at work and what he is up to.

Now visiting church members is one of my favourite things as a pastor. I see it as a treat. Most of my people time is spent with community folk or with new Christians or in support of leaders and so I don't get to visit much at all. But I cannot tell you how often I have had a budget client not turn up or a marriage counselling couple not turn up and I have just felt led to drop in on this family or that family. Seize the opportunity. Amazingly when I have done that it has been when a family has been in crisis or is facing a big issue. Last week I did such a visit and the lady I was visiting without warning said “Russell I have just had some dreams that need interpreting and I have been praying today that God would send you to interpret them.”

Now I don't always get it right. Going back a few years before God gave us John Reihana I used to worry about church security. So I would be driving home late at night after visiting a couple or a meeting and I would feel this prompting to check the church was safely locked up. That happened several times and each time there was no problem. That whisper in my head felt like a prompting from God but it wasn't. Looking back I recognise that it wasn't God but Russell worrying that caused me to divert back past the church and check all the doors.

Now you and I have read 2 Corinthians 11:14 and we know that Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. We know that not only does God drop ideas in our heads but so does the enemy and his demonic helpers. In Matthew 24:24 Jesus said that in the last days Satan will even try to deceive God's chosen people. Ephesians 6:10-18 tells us that there is a spiritual battle raging on around us and that we have some real enemies in the demonic realm.

As Christians we only want to help people, we don't want to hurt anyone and so we get a bit nervous about some of these promptings we get. If we prophecy over 10 people and we get one a bit wrong that one where we got our ideas mixed in with Gods seems to really discourage us. We don't want to follow the wrong promptings and make mistakes in our own lives or hurt others so what are the tests that will help us determine if that idea that just seemed to drop into our heads is from God or from the opposition?

1 John 4:1 Testing the spirits

1 Dear friends, don't believe every spirit. Test the spirits to see if they are from God because many false prophets have gone into the world.

3 TESTS TO APPLY TO YOUR PROMPTINGS TO SEE IF THE IDEA IS FROM GOD:

(I) IS IT CONSISTENT WITH SCRIPTURE?

Over the years I have heard some really tragic things said by believers. I know the bible says trust God for your provision and yet I have heard many times Christians say to me that God has told them to buy a lotto ticket or play the poker machines. Of course these people haven't won anything significant but what is tragic is they have really felt that the prompting was from God and yet it was so clearly unbiblical.

Another one I have often heard people say is that God has told them to take on this hire purchase or this big unsecured debt. A month or two later they are in seeing me for budget advice because they are in difficulties. The tragedy is they knew that the bible says owe no man nothing save the debt of love and yet they still thought this prompting usually to buy a really nice vehicle was from God.

Now I accept that because of violence or abuse or addictions or unfaithfulness that some marriages are not safe, and I know that divorce is not the unforgivable sin, but there has been a tragically large number of times a Christian brother or sister has come to me and said; I know I am married but I have met my soul mate at work, or I am really in love with this other person and we have started a relationship together, or I think it is OK for me to be sleeping with this person. I really believe that God understands and it's OK for me.

I feel it's OK for me to cheat, to steal, to speed, to lie on my time sheet.

The bible screams no, wrong, not of God at all those situations. If a prompting you get goes against the bible. Can it. Dump it. Flee from it. Resist it (James 4:7). It is NOT God!

Test number two.

(II) IS IT CONSISTENT WITH GOD'S GIFTS IN YOU?

It is possible that a prompting may be consistent with God's word but still not be from the Holy Spirit. For example nothing in the Bible says that Jesus should not turn stones into bread and yet when the devil ask him to do so he flatly refused. If you get a prompting that is consistent with scripture I suggest you apply this second test. Does it fit with the gifting and calling that God has on your life?

Some people are really gifted in maths or in computer work and yet they feel that God is prompting them to be worship leader for which they don't appear to have any gifting.

There are people who just come alive when they are in the outdoors who say I feel that God wants me to work in a small office?

This person may not enjoy or even like being around children and yet they say I feel God wants me to be a teacher.

God made you and I the way we are and when we received the Holy Spirit upon us he gave us a gift mix and

a ministry direction. Now I know that the Lord often stretches and challenges us, that's true but God doesn't make you a certain way and gift you in certain areas then ask you to do something that is totally different. That would be cruel, unfruitful and totally frustrating.

If you feel that God is prompting you to do things you are just not wired to do, be really cautious and check it out with other mature believers.

Test number three.

(III) IS IT CONSISTENT WITH A SERVANT ATTITUDE?

Usually when God gives you direction for your life or prompts you to say something or do something it involves a dimension of servant hood. If you get this idea that promotes your importance or is about getting people to scratch your back or help you, it's probably not for God. There have been many times when pastors say they feel called to another church and you find out its bigger, with more benefits, and better pay in a nicer area. I actually get more excited about those situations when a pastor or a mature Christian says God is leading them into a situation that is not as glamorous or comfortable as what they are in already.

Usually when God prompts us to action it involves humbly serving someone. Usually it's about helping others and not about you.

The apostle Paul would have to be one of the most influential people in world history. This is what he said about the prompting he felt to go to Jerusalem.

Acts 20:22-23

22I don't know what will happen to me in Jerusalem, but I must obey God's Spirit and go there. 23In every city I visit, I am told by the Holy Spirit that I will be put in jail and will be in trouble in Jerusalem.

He says I feel led by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem, to be given money; to be given fame; to have a better life? No to all, in fact he feels that the Holy Spirit is telling him that as he serves God he can expect to be put into jail and to face trouble.

If you feel you are being prompted to do something to get rich quick or get famous quick, it is extremely unlikely to be the Holy Spirit. On the other hand the devil works best through pride and selfishness and promptings that are about making life better for you should be handled very carefully.

Also be cautious, take things slow if these situations exist:

- a) If a prompting requires you to make a major life changing decision in a very short period of time, question it.**
- b) If a prompting requires you to go deeply into debt or place someone else in a position of awkwardness, compromise or danger, question it.**
- c) If a prompting requires you to jeopardize or hurt your family relationships or important friendships, question it.**
- d) If a prompting creates unrest in the spirits of mature Christian friends or counsellors as you share it with them, question it.**

Having given all those cautions and tests can I say please don't get too cautious about following them. Faith is spelt risk and if after you have applied a few of these tests what you sense God is telling you I would step out in faith and follow Him. People often stop following that still quiet voice when they get something wrong or they stop prophesying if they make a mistake. Don't do that. The walk of faith is a learnt thing and God is so kind and so patient and the world can be helped so much if you and I listen for His voice and obey. Most of my most exciting life experiences happened because I followed that little whisper in my mind, that little tug at my heart and God turned up. To use a well known cliché; God can steer a moving car. Keep

moving forward for Him.

You and I are called to a supernatural life; it begins when we believe, repent, die to self and receive the Holy Spirit upon us. From that moment we are new people and instead of just doing what we feel like or what we think is the best course of action His holy Spirit begins to interact with spirits and to guide us constantly.

Before we were born again, God loved us and was drawing us and convicting us of sin but we were in effect His enemies. Once we have been born again Jesus said (John 14:16-17) He gives us a counsellor to be with us forever, and he calls this counsellor the Spirit of Truth.

Now we are not just doing our own thing but where ever we go if we allow Him to he can interact with us and guide us to do what he wants us to do. He is the counsellor, the faithful friend, closer than even our hands and feet.

Hebrews 4:15

15 Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin!

He can relate to us and he never sleeps or ever gets bored of us. I have noticed that in human nature there is this real deep desire for companionship. No one wants to be alone for too long. We value our friends our spouses and our families. We have a need for companionship but ... even the best friend or spouse or family member will not always be there for you. Only the Holy Spirit can. Only He is always available, always faithful, always for you.

John 15:15

15 Servants don't know what their master is doing, and so I don't speak to you as my servants. I speak to you as my friends, and I have told you everything that my Father has told me.

That's a picture of just how closely God desires to live with you.

A humble monk called Brother Lawrence became famous many years ago because he coined the phrase 'practising the presence of God'. He discovered that anywhere he went, whatever he did, even as he washed huge piles of dishes in the monastery kitchen he could enjoy the Lord's company and hear his still quiet voice.

Now I will never pretend to be like Vera Newman or Glenice Jensen or Meleanie Mc Clurg or Glenda Winn or Christine Bartle or Winn Larsen. Those people are much more disciplined and powerful in prayer than I am. I think they know more about prayer than I do but ... as over this last month I have determined to become more disciplined in my prayer life I have also realized again, that the ultimate purpose of prayer for me is not what I can change as a co-labourer with the Lord, although that is very necessary but Who I can enjoy as I tune in to His voice and walk with Him daily. He is in giving hope to humanity, he is on us directing and empowering but best of all He is with us, so close all the time. For me that is the best thing about prayer.

IF YOU PRACTICE THE PRESENCE OF GOD THROUGH PRAYER YOU WILL:

- (i) Find that you can trust Him more easily.**

Because you are aware that He is closer than hands and feet you also become very aware of His character and strength and when you face life situations you will find that you are not fazed but you will have a real confidence in your companion.

I took my sister in law and Juliette out in my awesome little fishing boat a month ago. Two metre swells developed, horizontal rain that turned to hail, we had some fuel line problems but Gail even though she got pretty sea sick said to me, Russell I was never scared in your boat because I trust you, I know you.

You and I are going to face storms in life, guaranteed..... We all face grief, rejection, disappointment, betrayal and loss in life. There will be storms. But what if we know the One who is many million times wiser and more powerful than Russell, what if we live in His presence aware of His character and power daily. Then when we face those storms we will face them with confidence. We will turn to Him and say "Lord, I know you, you are for me, and we spend every day together. I know there is nothing too difficult for you. And so I am not freaking out, I am not giving up. I am just going to keep walking with you, trusting in you."

(ii) Find that you have more compassion for other people

The more time that you spend with the Lord, aware of His presence, tuned into His still quiet voice the more you will become more like Him. His heart, His love for people will rub off on you. As we went through the gospel of Luke we noted the change in the apostle John, this was the guy who wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans; he was an intolerant and angry man. But when he spent time in the Lord's presence he became the one they called the apostle of love and in 1 John 4:8 he would even say "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

2 Peter 1:5-7

5Do your best to improve your faith. You can do this by adding goodness, understanding, 6self-control, patience, devotion to God, 7concern for others, and love.

I do not believe that you can gain those virtues through just trying harder. Yes there are choices to make and priorities to set but I think we mature when we just spend time in His presence and His character begins to impact upon ours.

Family, each one of you was made for more than just a good productive life. You were made for more than a few good works.

God invites us to pray without ceasing, to enjoy and be transformed by His presence, you were made for a supernatural adventure that begins again each time you commune with Him.

In this life we are too busy NOT to pray.