

## SLOWING DOWN TO PRAY

Proposition: In a world where we are wired to live in top gear as much as possible. To really hear God's voice continually we need to find ways of slowing down our minds and tuning in our ears to His voice.

Today is for me, and I hope for you, a special day. A day to slow down racing minds that are full of projects and jobs and goals to achieve, to hear God's voice to us as a church and to receive His encouragement to bless this community.

Over the past three weeks we have looked at the character of God and the reality that He is willing and able to answer our prayers. He wants us to address Him as our Father and He is absolutely for us in this life and on into eternity. We have looked at patterns for prayer from Jesus' life, the Lord's prayer and how to use ACTS. Adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication: – i.e. requests as ways of broadening and deepening the way that we pray so that we avoid routine prayers that lack sincerity and power. Last week we looked at the painful issue of unanswered prayer; how do we cope with those times that come to all of us when God seems to say wait or no to what seems to us to be a totally reasonable, logical prayer of faith? We looked at being humbly honest with God, becoming comfortable with mystery and the fact that God is so much bigger and wiser than us. We looked at the fact that people who face an unanswered prayer yet keep on waiting and trusting in the Lord are to be celebrated and honoured. Today I quite literally want us to consider what it would take for you and me to pause more, to sit in solitude and quietness more often to listen for the voice of God.

Consider again the world that we live in, our culture. You and I have been raised in a world that constantly tells us time is money. That's why there is always so much talk in any organisation or business about efficiency or SMART goals. We carry mobile phones and ipods so we can do business anywhere at any time. You can take your work home on your laptop, you are encouraged to start work earlier and finish later. To arrange strategic meetings for your meal breaks etc. It's all about time management and getting more into your day. No one is immune to it. The stay at home mum not only keeps really busy with family needs she will try to fit in as much educational sport, music, drama and other extracurricular activities for her children as she can. There is one group of people I always look at with some awe and that is the solo parent who is working. How on earth do they do it? Hold down jobs during the day and do all the home and parenting things after work and through the evening.

If our cars are designed to run at around 4000 RPM and racing cars are designed to run at 10,000 RPM then this culture that we are living in will always be pushing you and I to operate at 10,000 RPM or more if you can find a way to do it. Our culture tells us to go hard all day every day at maximum revs per minute – but how does that impact on us hearing the voice of God and living each day a supernatural life?

I think that busyness, though incredibly satisfying, adrenalin pumping and fun could actually be the greatest enemy we face in our day and age to really living the supernatural life; a life where we are constantly connected to God and hearing his voice and responding to His promptings. A life where we are obviously listening to the beat of a different drum to everyone else, a life where there we are constantly fresh and energetic, a life where there is greater joy, more compassion, greater faith, stronger convictions, more revelation than can be seen in the lives of others.

King David described what a people living that kind of life would look like in Psalm 1:2-3

### **Psalm 1:2-3**

#### ***Contemporary English Version (CEV)***

***2*Instead, the Law of the LORD makes them happy, and they think about it day and night.**

***3*They are like trees growing beside a stream, trees that produce fruit in season and always have leaves.**

***Those people succeed in everything they do.***

That is the sort of people we want to be but busyness is our main obstacle whether you are a business leader, self employed, an employee, a parent, a pastor and especially a solo parent who works. If we live at 10,000 RPM what can we do to begin to slow down our minds and our lives so that we can hear the voice of God constantly and really live the supernatural life? How can we slow down enough to become what we were meant to be, like the tree; always happy, growing, productive and successful in the things that really matter? How do we become totally different from the other good people in the world and truly supernatural?

## **HOW DO YOU AND I SLOW OUR MINDS DOWN SO THAT WE CAN BECOME SENSITIVE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT'S VOICE?**

### **1. PRACTICE SOLITUDE**

It is said of the busiest man that ever lived, the Lord Jesus; that He would get up early and go to a quiet place to be with the Father. The impression I get from the gospel accounts is that He did this daily and it was often on the top of a mountain. He who always had people clambering for his attention, people with huge needs from sunrise to well after sunset would get up early and go to a quiet place alone.

Practising solitude, finding that quiet place where there are no radio's, cell phones, TV's, ipods, no MP3's blaring just to slow down our minds and to be with Father was Jesus' practice and the discipline of our church forefathers. We need to practice solitude.

### **2. WRITE DOWN YOUR REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS**

I don't do this very often, but I am aware that the Psalmist did and prophets of old often did. And I suspect in this age where there is more frantic activity and noise than at any other time it's a helpful tool to put pen to paper during prayer times.

A couple of weeks ago I suggested for the week that you write down some of your prayers and write down what you believed that God is saying to you. I hope you gave that a try. For me to write down what I think I heard God say and then pray in line with that actually built my faith for some significant answers that did come.

Gordon MacDonald wrote a book called "Ordering your private world" quite a number of years ago. This is what he suggested people do daily as part of their prayer time, as part of slowing down our racing minds from 10,000 RPM to something a lot quieter. He said get a spiral notebook like this and restrict your entries to one page a day. Begin each day's entries by writing the word 'Yesterday' then follow this with a paragraph or two recounting yesterday's events, a kind of past match analysis.

Write about the main things that happened, people you met, high points and low points, frustrations, insights from your bible reading, what you achieved or didn't achieve. He suggested that the process of evaluating or reflecting on yesterday actually stops people repeating the same mistakes or wasting time in the same ways again; that you learn more effectively from your life experience with God and are therefore better able to discern God's direction and make healthy changes. Then he suggests that you write down your prayers and pray them through.

I read Bill Hybel's account this week of how he did exactly what Gordon MacDonald suggested, even though he was sceptical at first. He wrote his reflections on the previous day, recorded today's prayers, prayed and found that in the process of doing this that the RPM's in his brain slowed right down so he could focus on the Lord and tune into the Holy Spirit's voice far more effectively. He went somewhere quiet and alone and debriefed with God on paper, reflected and prayed and found he could easily enter that place of peace and connection where he could here God's voice clearly.

### 3. ASK SPECIFIC QUESTIONS OF THE LORD

Lord what is the next thing you want me to do for my wife and family?

Lord what is the next step in my ministry?

Lord what is the next step in my vocation?

Lord what do you want to address in my character?

### 4. TAKE TIME TO LISTEN

I mentioned last week some of God's promises to those who wait upon the Lord. When you and I consider that God sees the whole picture, knows our needs, knows what is coming around the next corner of our lives, when He is infinitely wiser than us, it kind of makes sense to stop talking and just listen to what He says. Sometimes God answers straight away and sometimes he waits a while before he answers us but it would be crazy for us with our little pea brains to keep on talking all the time during our prayer times and not take time to listen to the Master and to note what He says to us.

### 5. RECOGNISE HIS VOICE

I had been a Christian for many years before I met Trish Clark. When I came to RBC I knew a lot about Prophecy and I was confident in Juliette's ability to prophesy but not so much my own. Trish Clark ran a course that was similar to the one that she will run on Sunday evenings at 5pm starting in a couple of weeks and I began to become confident that God was speaking to me and I was recognising his voice correctly. I remember one evening that Trish, Carol Hathornwaite and Gilbert Parker gave us the opportunity to stand in front of a complete stranger and ask God to tell us what their main spiritual gift was. I was nearly shaking with stress; I was thinking that this lady that I was about to prophesy over was probably going to regret that she got me. But I did what Trish asked me to do I said Lord what is her primary spiritual gift and immediately the thought teacher dropped into my mind. With shaky voice I said "it's possible that God has given you the gift of being a teacher" maybe? The lady was thrilled, she said yes I am a primary school teacher and teaching is what I love no matter what the context. Wow. Then those being trained were nudged to keep asking questions and speaking out what thoughts came into our heads, it was really scary but person after person the word was accurate and I began to realise that though God tends to whisper, like other Christians I was hearing those whispers rightly.

I have often recounted a conversation I had with a friend who used to fellowship here. Maybe 5 years ago now I was having a coffee with this mate and he said; "Russell, I am not sure if I can hear God's voice?" and so I asked him some questions.

I said, when you read the bible does it ever seem like some verses have been highlighted with a vivid to you? Yes he said, often. When you face life issues do bible verses that you have previously learnt pop up in your mind? Yes, actually they do. I said, do you ever get these random ideas in your head to pray for a person right now or phone a person right now and then you do you find out later it was exactly the right thing at the right time? Yes he said, that's happened to me quite a bit.

Do you ever go out and feel like something is nudging you to talk to a person or to help a person, like you have a sudden love for them and you are drawn to them? Yes he said. Have you ever noticed desires growing in your heart to do something for God and you begin to imagine yourself doing that ministry? Yes again. Have you ever felt a real peace, like a tangible sense of security when you pray? Yes. Have you ever looked at someone or a situation and felt somehow that you knew what God's will was for that person or situation? Yes again. I think the last one was dreams. I asked him if he had ever had dreams that he remembered clearly after he woke up that seemed to draw him close to God. Again yes. I get a lot of pictures or I see words in front of my face when I am praying with my eyes closed. God speaks to us in a whole lot of ways. Recognise His voice.

Incidentally I highly recommend Trish's course in a couple of weeks.

## 6. LEARN TO PRAY CONTINUOUSLY

### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

**16Always be joyful 17and never stop praying. 18Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do.**

I believe that you and I were made to live supernatural lives. And in order for that to happen we need to push against our culture of rush and business to fit just one more thing in. We need to practice solitude and do whatever it takes to slow our minds down. I am going to try the Gordon MacDonald approach but what has worked best for me in the past has been to walk and pray. Or others might say dawdle and pray because I walk pretty slow as I ponder. Do whatever it takes to slow down the revolutions in your mind daily so you can hear his voice and walk in his presence throughout the day. You need times of stillness and solitude to tune into His voice.

It's amazing to me to see how young mums are able to tune into their children's voices continually. There might be 10 children playing in the playground and 8 of the mums having a nice conversation just out of sight of the kids but when one of those children cries, even though they sound pretty much exactly the same to me the right mum will recognise her child's voice and run out to comfort. She has become tuned into her child's voice.

I don't know if you have ever worked in those places where there might be a work mate or another student just behind a screen out of your sight but in the same workspace as you. The strange thing is, even though you can't see them, you become very aware that they are in the room, you become tuned into their presence.

Personally I have found that when I have a great time with the Lord, in solitude and silence at the beginning of the day, I might be talking or typing or doing a budget but I am sensitive to His voice, I am aware that He is in the room. And if He wants to nudge me or give me a picture or drop an idea, a whisper into my head, odds are I will hear Him. It is like you are in communication with Him, tuned into Him even though you might be doing other things. It really is to not stop praying. And I think that is what we are made for and what God desires for each one of us.

One of the most awesome things I get to see occasionally, either in the church or through a parenting course or through marriage counselling is this. There will be a couple, often in their late thirties or forties. They have children of different ages and are really busy trying to give their kids every opportunity in sport, music, education, they are trying to fix the house and pay off the mortgage, both mum and dad are trying to hold down demanding jobs, this couple care about each other but they pass like ships in the night, or on the driveway as they come and go to work or to soccer practice. They are married but they are not really enjoying what marriage is meant to be. It feels shallow and even boring. Then one of them or both of them decide that they want a great marriage and a great family and that some things will need to go if they are to achieve something much more important in their relationship together. And so they decide to have a date night every week, they decide that the TV will be off for meal times and that they will stay around the table and talk for 20 minutes after each meal. That they will drop sports, and building projects and clubs if it means they can be a family and go on walks and enjoy each other's company. And these couples go from being married in name, on paper to being really connected as husband and wife at a heart level. I think that God invites us to make a similar type of decision.

We are Christians, we are saved and going to heaven, we sometimes hear from the Lord, but we are not like that tree planted by the stream, full of life, energy and fruitfulness. We are Christian but our experience, our faith has become shallow and powerless and even mundane at times.

I believe that God invites you and I to make that kind of decision that just a few amazing couples make in their marriages.

Are we willing to give up some things, to step off the treadmill, to march to the beat of a different drum, to deliberately lower the revolutions per minute in our minds? Are we willing to take time in solitude and listen for his voice? Are we willing to invest in being the kind of believer that we know in our hearts God is calling us to be? Are we willing to be one of those radical people that say's I don't want to live a normal life, I want to live a supernatural life, to daily live a life tuned into the Lord full of adventure, surprises, challenges and mysteries.

God has been desiring to communicate with us a whole lot more than we have been willing to listen. He is inviting you and I to come aside, to slow down, to re prioritise; to go from a normal life to a supernatural kind of life.