

## BodyLife Articles

### What Is God Asking Of You?

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It's been there for quite a while - a sense that Jesus is asking something of you. It doesn't nag you at every moment, but often something will happen or something will be said that triggers your memory and brings it to your attention again. Suddenly you're aware of a deeper stirring in your heart and even excited to think how it might come to be. Maybe you're even reminded of it right now while you're reading this.

But just as quickly that sense so often fades as it gets swallowed up in the daily demands of 21st Century living. Responsibilities at work, chores at home, family needs and the busyness of life take hold of our day and sends us careening from circumstance to circumstance until fulfilling our obligations takes up almost all of our time. We find ourselves so exhausted in the moments that remain that we can only muster enough energy for some brief amusement before falling into bed and starting the rat race again the next day.

This is the cycle of spiritual stagnation that can easily ensnare any of us. Instead of living in the adventure of Jesus' work and purpose in our lives each day, we get sucked into the world's way of thinking and focused only on daily survival. When that happens we become part of it again, so preoccupied with jobs, homes and activities that we lose our awareness that we are part of a greater kingdom. Even our spiritual passion is robbed by trading Jesus' ever-present voice for the obligations, traditions and models others tell us we must employ.

We think we're stuck in a dry time and that God's presence has passed us by when nothing could be further from the truth.

#### **Focus!**

He's right where he's always been, deep in your heart using everything he can to invite you alongside him so that you can participate in his glory. He will continue to offer you the next step in the journey and will wait for you to follow. That's why it is important for us to cultivate a heart that recognizes when he speaks and is intentional about following through as he shows you how. This is how we go on the adventure of living in him and escape the world's attempts to press us into its mold.

Jesus told his followers that their continued growth in his love would come as they followed his ways. "If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." (John 15:10) He was not talking here about observing the law, but about doing what he saw his Father doing every day. There is no life, passion and joy in this kingdom without Jesus leading us

and the choices we make to follow as best we can. He wants to be the voice that steers you through every situation, the peace that sets your heart at rest in trouble and the power that holds you up in the storm.

What is he asking of you right now? It could be as simple as taking a treat to a neighbor and getting acquainted, or as life-changing as using a gift God has given you to help advance his kingdom in the world. He might be encouraging you to start a lunch-time study at work, or help some brothers and sisters near you to find more intentional ways of living out community. He could be asking you to give money to someone in need, open a door to reconcile a broken relationship, or come alongside another person in what he has called him or her to do. Or it could be a million other possibilities.

### **A Voice We've Been Taught To Ignore**

The world makes fun of the notion that God still speaks to individuals. Some well-intentioned believers do as well. And you really can't blame them. You probably know a number of people who have done ridiculous or destructive things all the while claiming God told them to do so. It's enough to give listening to God a bad name. But just because people pass counterfeit money doesn't stop us from using the real thing. At the heart of our life in Jesus is the freedom to hear him and follow him. Paul told the Romans that this life wasn't about following rules anymore, but about following Jesus, "But now that you've found you don't have to listen to sin tell you what to do, and have discovered the delight of listening to God telling you, what a surprise! A whole, healed, put-together life right now, with more and more of life on the way." (Romans 6:22 - The Message)

Learning to think with God through our day is not the upgraded, only-for-special-people, option of the life of Christ. This is the basic, stripped down version of the life Jesus purchased for us. He wants you to learn how to think through every event and encounter with his wisdom and heart, recognizing his prodding and following him. The New Testament reminds us over and over again that each of us can know him, so that no one needs to tell us what to do, or decide for us what is truth or error. (John 16:13, Hebrews 8:11; I John 2:20 & 27).

What is he doing in you? What is he asking of you today? Almost everything I'm involved in today as a part of God's life in me resulted from simple actions I felt God asked of me years ago. Some of them were as small as making a phone call, volunteering at my daughter's school, spending time developing relationships or walking away from a conflict with a brother when I would have preferred to fight. Each choice set off a chain reaction that opened doors that have astounded me. At no time did I foresee with any accuracy how those things would turn out but I am amazed at what can unfold from the simplest obedience.

### **A Growing Conviction**

I don't want anyone to get the wrong idea. I don't sit down every morning and hear God tell me to go do

this or that. It isn't that contrived. Most times God speaks to me through a growing conviction in my heart over a period of time. Like everyone else I have fleeting thoughts and desires that sound like him initially, but soon prove to come from me and not him. How am I learning to tell the difference?

Give it some time. If it is not a spur of the moment opportunity like talking to someone on a plane, I let it settle for a few days. As I regularly spend time with Jesus, and season my mind with Bible reading and with the insights of other believers, I find God's leading becomes increasingly clear over time. This growing relationship causes his voice to rise above the distraction and distress of the world's ways.

I also measure whatever I'm hearing to the content and spirit of Scripture. Is this consistent with how God has revealed himself and how he works?

I never trust what answers my anxieties the easiest. Jesus warned us in Matthew 6 that a rising tide of anxiety would wash away our freedom to think kingdom thoughts. He reminded us that only by trusting God's care for us would we be at rest enough to know his ways.

I don't listen to guilt. Guilt drives us away from God's wisdom. Too many think they will only be led by God when they finally stop some temptation or act more disciplined. But they have it backwards. We cannot conform our flesh to God's ways but we can be led of him until our flesh is displaced by his presence and insight.

It also helps to let go of the tyranny of your own agenda. We all have things we want Jesus to do in our lives and the way we want him to do them. But our presumption that we know the best way to get there will keep us from simply doing things the way he asks of us. He is the one that taught us that you get to the top by serving and that first in line is found at the back. The more you grow to trust him to fulfill his purpose in you his way the easier it will be to recognize how he is doing it.

Don't let your sense of incompetence keep you from following. Your natural mind won't always be able to figure it out. You are not going to feel qualified to do what he asks of you, but he will go with you and empower you to do it. But you only experience that if you follow him far enough to see his hand at work through you.

And yes, you'll make some mistakes along the way; no one who walks this way avoids them. I certainly made my share in my younger days and am far from perfect at it now. But learning to follow him comes as much from our mistakes as it does getting it right. Experience is a valuable tool in the hands of God's Spirit.

And always be suspicious when you think what God is telling you is to make someone else to do something. God will lead you to follow him, not get you to make others do so. When God asks you to follow him, you will be the one to take the risk and pay the price for it, not someone else. While he may

use us to confirm something he is already telling others, we will not need to manipulate them to be true to what he's doing in us.

### **Now It's Your Turn...**

Few weeks go by that I don't hear of some incredible thing God is doing in people just because of their intentional choice to follow what God has put on their heart. A woman wrote me last week telling me how God was bringing her out of spiritual bondage that resulted from prolonged abuse by her parents simply by following what he has been asking her to do. He's given her simple steps to follow, but the freedom it is working into her life is amazing. I know people caring for people living with AIDs with the love of Jesus today because God asked one woman to go back and care for her gay ex-husband as he was dying of that horrible disease.

I know a man who sings in a mostly-gay civic chorus because God asked him to demonstrate God's love to the other members. I know many people around the world who have found amazing expressions of New Testament community simply by listening to God together and following his voice. I know deep and life-changing relationships that started just because someone picked up a phone or made a visit in response to God's leading. All of these things and the fruit that flows from them came from incredibly small choices to be part of something God put on their heart. It is amazing what will unfold in our lives when we are ready to obey the growing conviction in our hearts.

What has he put on yours? Find the time to simply ask him if you have lost sight of it. If nothing becomes clear in the next few days, don't be discouraged. For now he may just want you more than he wants you to do something. Just keep leaning into him and as your relationship deepens, watch for anything he makes clear to you.

Then do it.

It may even seem small and insignificant, hardly worth your time or attention. But until you simply take the next step Jesus has put before you, you will never know what it means to follow him, nor the glory he wants to share with you. You just never know where one small step in obedience will lead.



### **That Lot in Fairlie**

This summer Sara and I visited believers throughout New Zealand. Here is an incredible story excerpted

from Wayne's Blog of what happened when a group of people simply followed what Jesus had put on their heart to do. He won't lead everyone the same way, but you have to love how these were able to follow his lead together.

Fairlie is a small farming village in the center of New Zealand's South Island. For the last two years I had heard about some believers whom God led to give up the religious structure they had become part of to live as the body of Christ together in this region of the world. It was 1986 and some of its leaders felt like God was asking them to give up the structures that constrained their life together, which included not only the institution but also the building where they met. After weeks of praying together and considering this leading, the people unanimously agreed that this is what God was saying to them.

They agreed to lay it all down and let God lead them. The building they used was quite old and after donating all the furnishings that were worth anything to the denomination's district they were leaving, they offered the building to the fire brigade to burn as a training exercise.

The neighbors objected, however, to torching the large structure so close to their homes, so in the end they dismantled it. They took some of the remaining furnishings, like the offering bags, out to the country and burnt them. Then one day some of the brothers descended on the building with chain saws. As they walked in that day to the main meeting room they asked where they should begin. They all looked at each other and in the same moment said,, "The pulpit!" With relish the sawed it in half, kept going across the stage and eventually dismantled the entire building and hauled it away to the trash heap.

Sara and I laughed and shook our heads in awe as we heard that story while meeting with about two dozen or more of these people. They had not done these things frivolously or in rage at 'the system.' They had simply felt those things, as they had used them, had become an offense to God and he wanted them to get rid of them. They never said anyone else should do the same, they simply went on and learned how to be the body of Christ without all the trappings of institutionalism. After they disposed of the building they found some amazing doors open in the community. One man from the village was talking to one of the former leaders shortly after these events, "I feel like I can really talk to you now." They had no idea how much their baggage had turned off the very people God asked them to reach.

In the nearly twenty years since they have thrived in God's life together as his people in this community. It has not been easy, nor has it been without challenge, but many of them talked of how their relationship with God really began to grow when they removed the crutch that the institution had become. Not having everything planned out for them anymore, they had to listen to God and do the things he put on their heart. Now they are people who live at peace with God, in fellowship with each other and available to unbelievers in ways they never had when they were so busy maintaining their structure. Even the children from those days have continued on with the simplicity of living in God and loving each other in the process. What joyful simplicity and what an incredible life they've gone on to share together!

They are also affectionately known in these parts as 'that lot.' The whole community knows about the congregation that dismantled its building and stopped meeting every week on a regular basis. They also know they have lived on as passionate believers. Without all the machinery to maintain, they have been more available to help care for the families and neighbors.

"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." (John 12:24-25) As long as we hold tightly to the things we think we must preserve, we'll miss the incredible doors God would put before us every day as we simply live in him and follow his ways. True life is found in giving up, not in holding on, as we follow wherever God leads us.

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