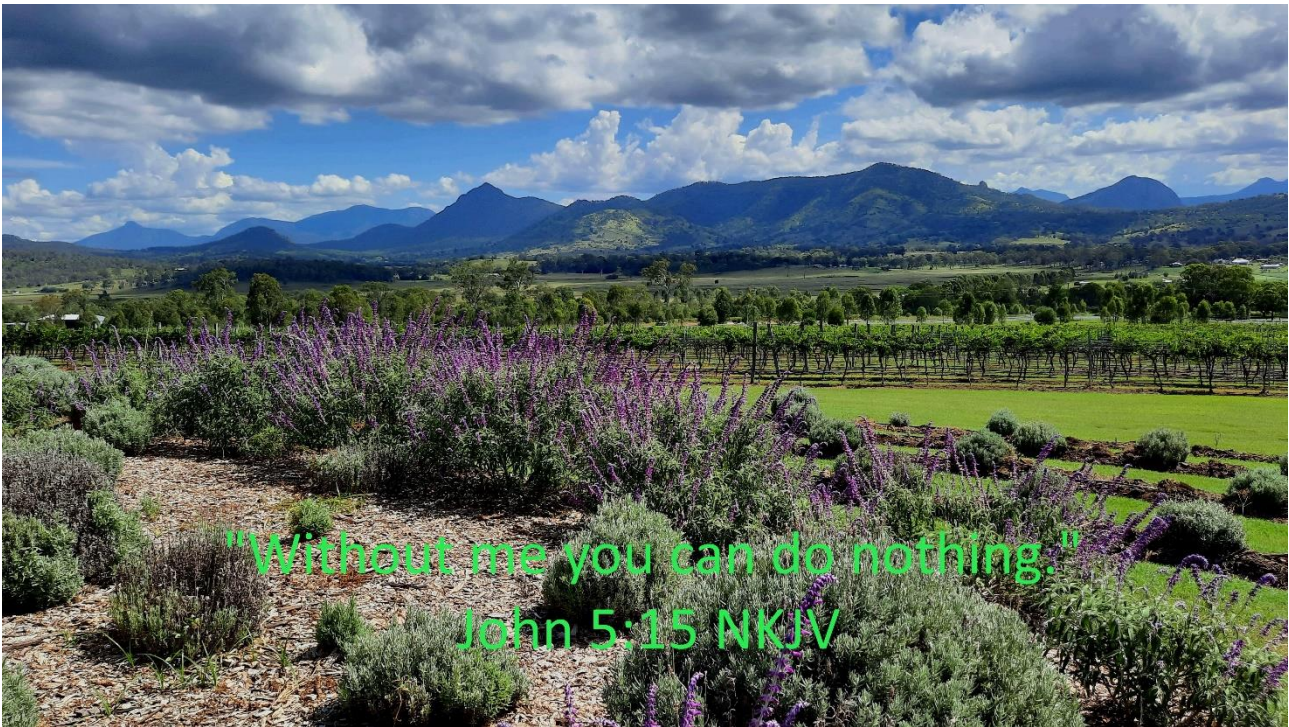


Awakening the Spirit – Part 3 -Listen to the Spirit (Revised 15/09/23)



In the first 2 articles we explored how Jesus and the Father WANT to partner with you and me by the Spirit.

Once we ask the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit we are asking to EXPERIENCE the very presence of Jesus and the Father to come and dwell within us - enabled by the Father's Spirit (see John 14:16,18,23,26). Their promise is that we will personally receive, we will find, and the door will be opened. Yet how will you and I discover this? Here are some steps that have made all the difference for me personally.

1. Decide at the beginning of your day to serve and live for Christ and not under the control of your natural 'soul -self'

We each have a new Master to serve and follow – Jesus. Paul expresses this thought well in 1Cor 5:15 when he says: *For the love of Christ controls us (ESV) and he (JESUS) died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.* (NIV) The voice of our natural soul-self rises with us every morning. Asking the Father for the gift of his Spirit, awakens my spirit and opens the door of my day to also hear God's voice and be aware of the presence of Jesus and the Father as my day unfolds. You only have today to serve Jesus. Ask him how he wants you to honour him with your love and service.

2. Invite Jesus into every role you have in your life and trust him to show up!

I am a Brother in Christ, a husband, a parent, an employee and employer, a commuter, a traveller, a carer, a friend, a neighbour, a volunteer, a shopper, a client, with home skills and hobbies - just to name a few. I invite Jesus every day to be my companion, my strength, my guide and my wisdom as I undertake any or all of these roles. I voice my fears, anxieties, problems and joys with him. When he says 'without ME you can do nothing' (John 15:5 NKJV) I believe him! My day is an unfolding conversation with him. His response is often in the small things such as finding the lost keys, reminding me to post that email or enabling me to purchase something that was difficult to locate. *Above all though, he wants to work through me to serve him.*

The key to understanding this idea of ‘inviting’ versus our traditional and necessary communication with Jesus and the Father through prayer, is that through the Spirit we are opening ourselves for them to INITIATE interventions into our lives. They will initiate interventions to deal with our blockages and strongholds which they know better than we know ourselves. This opening and yielding reminds me of David saying about the Lord: *...let him do to me what seems good to him.* (2 Sam15:26 ESV)

Many times Jesus’ response to my invitation here is via what I call a ‘thought voice’. A ‘thought voice’ is a thought message rather than a spoken message. It is like intuition but is typically clearer. One example for me was the need to visit Tony, a colleague and friend who was deteriorating in health in an aged care home. I had visited him on a number of occasions, and we had talked about God. This day the thought voice was insistent – ‘go visit Tony’. I adjusted my plans and was quite devastated to realise he could no longer speak but clearly recognized me with his smile and eyes. I knew we connected as I held his hand and spoke to him. It was the last time I saw him. Tony died that night.

People sometimes say to me, though: *‘well that was God’s hand in your case but how can I discern a message that is coming through God’s Spirit from just any ordinary thought?’* My response is that you can learn this. First you INVITE Jesus in; you TRUST he will respond; you LISTEN for his message; you ACT; you THANK HIM; and you REFLECT. Many times, the answer or guidance you and I are seeking comes when we least expect it such as in the shower or the semi-dreamlike moments as you awake from sleep. Of course, solutions and insights can also happen naturally from our amazing sub-conscious mind – you don’t have to be a believer to receive these. The difference for us, however, is that having invited Jesus in we are waiting upon him as our Lord the Spirit (2Cor3:17).

I need to add that while we are learning to **LISTEN** please don’t use these ‘thought voices’ as a test of faith, i.e., *is God there or not for me in this situation?* I’ve learned something different. It is OK sometimes to be mistaken about what you considered to be a ‘thought voice from the Spirit’ and reflect later that what you thought and acted upon was not very fruitful. Our faith, rather, needs to rest in a trust that nothing is impossible for God and that he will always support us as we work through these less fruitful outcomes. However, over time we become much more aware that any messages from the Spirit will reflect God’s love, his righteousness, and his goodness. Beyond ‘thought voices’ God can use spoken words, dreams, visions, other people, media of all types, and circumstances, to reach us. However, I want to turn now to the pathway of serendipitous circumstances. This is because serendipity has taught me more about experiencing the presence of God’s Spirit than any other pathway of connection.

3. Engage more deeply with the Scriptures

Jesus said: *The words that I speak to you are Spirit, and they are life* (John 6:63). When we actively reach out to the fullness of God’s scriptures across the Old and New Testament to speak to us, we are engaging with God’s Spirit. The treasure of scripture can guide, correct, and empower our lives in Christ. This is because the word of God contains the very life of the Spirit. It is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword to accomplish this (Heb 4:12). As discussed though, in the first article on Partnering with Jesus and the Father by the Spirit, the Jews had great knowledge of the scriptures but refused to come to Jesus to find life. My own insight, is that as my awareness of the presence of the Spirit in my daily life unfolded, the scriptures also came alive for me in new and living ways.

4. Serendipity is the happy coming together of circumstances. I have come to realise that over and over again God operates through his Spirit to influence circumstances in a way that reveals his presence to us and meets our every need.

Picture this situation with me. I am about to undergo an operation to save the sight in my right eye due to a retinal detachment in my late 40’s. I am told however, that I will be semi-awake so that I can respond to the surgeon and not blink at critical moments. This means the anaesthetist will use a mask clamped over my face to supply the anaesthetic and I am told this just moments beforehand on the table. No-one except me

appreciates that this procedure will trigger a panic attack which will sabotage the operation. The panic stems from a childhood operation when I unaccountably woke up, was forcibly held down and a face-mask re-applied. So, feeling this panic about to re-occur I asked God for his strength and presence...now!

A moment later the nurse conveying this information suddenly stopped. She said: *'I can see you are really afraid.'* I explained why. She then asked: *'you are a Christian aren't you?'* I said: *'I am'.* She then said: *'I want you to know that Jesus your friend will be with you every moment and I will be there too.'*

Today my right eye works beautifully. As the mask was clamped on, I felt 2 seconds of panic then a very real calm. When I awoke fully afterwards, I asked her how she knew I was a Christian. She replied: *I am a believer too and somehow, I also knew this of you.'* The serendipity in these circumstances has been unforgettable because that day my sight was at stake. Jesus and the Father have replicated similar serendipitous moments for me in very many subsequent situations.

Before I became a believer at the age of 27 I saw the universe's arrangement of circumstances as either 'good luck' or 'bad luck'. However, when I came to see God in my world, I had to overturn that perception completely. The scriptures explained clearly that every detail from the small to the great can be shaped by God even though his Universe conforms to laws and patterns that he has set up. I am raising this because it is so easy to be locked into the good luck /bad luck dimension. Operating under this perception will block our ability to trust and discern the serendipity of the Spirit. This is because the skepticism we bring will push us to discount events that God has directly influenced to respond to us and bless us.

The other great blockage to discerning God's serendipity is our natural self-reliance and self – sufficiency. Don't get me wrong here. We need confidence to live and act but the scriptures ask us first and foremost to place our confidence in God. How? By recognizing that when we haven't invited Jesus into our daily activities we are effectively operating under our own 'pride of life' which means we are taking Jesus and the Father for granted. We may not mean disrespect to God by our heedlessness but the secret of Jesus' true humility is that he said: *"...I can do nothing of myself but as my Father taught me..."* (John 8:28 NKJV).

5. Listen with thankfulness!

In our learning model of *"First you INVITE Jesus in; you TRUST he will respond; you LISTEN for his message; you ACT; you THANK HIM; and you REFLECT"*, you can see that phrase 'you THANK HIM'. An attitude of gratitude truly transforms your life in Christ. As you experience his grace through your day, that joy of forgiveness, peace and obedience from the heart can't help but overflow into thanksgiving. Your thanksgiving is living proof to yourself and God that you are awake and listening to the Spirit. Finally, as you REFLECT on your journey, ask: *How did I experience God (today/last week/ last month) and how did I respond?* Your positive answers will surprise you!

As we conclude these three brief articles, what can we take away? Hopefully you will have already connected to something that you did not know before or wanted to be reminded about. My hope though, is you will focus on the key reason I have written these thoughts to you and it's this. *If you choose to really live for Christ and not for yourself you need to be experiencing the presence of Jesus and the Father.* They will come and live within you by the power of the Father's Spirit awakening your spirit. They will transform who you are (ie. your soul) from the inside out. This learning model of Invite, Trust, Listen, Thank, and Reflect, is precious. It becomes our living connection to the hands of Jesus and the Father as they lead us into their Kingdom. Yes, today you can start and it's simple to begin – **just ask, seek and knock!**

Geoff Watson

