

# CHIEF MINISTRIES

April 2018

There is a most precarious and delicate subject regarding interpreting the presence of the Lord: the issue of guidance.

“How do I know the will of the Lord?” Is a frequently asked question - How many times have you heard someone say, “God led me to do this,” “The Holy Spirit told me to say this”, or “God has given me a word for you.”

There have been a good number of times I have for certain felt the “holy nudge” that turned out to be from the Lord, but there have also been times when I have felt a strong nudge to do something that proved to be of the flesh, not the Holy Spirit.

An impression may come into our hearts to do something but does that mean it’s from God? After all, *the heart is deceitful above all things and incurably wicked (Jeremiah 17:9)*. How can we trust what comes into our hearts?

There are three possible origins of a “nudge”: the flesh, the devil, and the Holy Spirit. How to know the difference is the big question! Most of my life I have sought to know when it is the Holy Spirit; when it is only me feeling something - the flesh; and when it is Satan giving me an impression. Among the daily petitions on my own prayer list is “Lord, help me to perceive quickly what is of the flesh, the devil, and the Holy Spirit and to accept only what the Spirit warrants.” The fact that I pray each morning does not guarantee I will be led by the Holy Spirit all day long. This is another reason we should watch and pray - in that order - when it comes to guidance.

In other words, we should have a good knowledge of the Bible, a solid theological foundation, and a genuine openness to the immediate and direct witness of the Holy Spirit. That will help us “watch.” We must keep our heads screwed on!

“The flakes you have with you always,” a friend of mine says. There are bubble heads out there, well-meaning people who fancy they have a hotline to Almighty God. Some are prophetic. Some are alive, some are with the Lord. The best of them sometimes get it wrong. Sometimes badly wrong. Yet most prophetic words are conditional, so who knows sometimes who’s getting it wrong.

I believe God hides his face from us to keep us from developing an over familiarity with Him. It’s an easy thing to do, especially when we have been used by Him. We begin to think we have a “special” relationship with God. This has happened to me when I felt a strong anointing when leading worship and giving a prophetic word in the midst of that. I began to imagine I had “arrived” and would have that anointing from now on. Wrong. The next worship service fell flat on its face and it was utterly embarrassing.

God knows what we need. He hides His face to keep us from feeling overly spiritual. A most intriguing verse is Ecclesiastics 7:16 - *“Do not to be excessively righteous, and do not be extremely wise; why should you destroy yourself.”* Mark it down: when we begin to feel we are one of God’s favorites, God will almost certainly show us how much He really loves us by whittling us down to nothing.

Have you ever felt overly righteous? Have you ever taken yourself too seriously? Have you ever thought you were unusually godly or highly spiritual? Have you ever thought that you loved God more than those around you?

Simon Peter thought that way. He was absolutely certain that he loved Jesus more and all the other disciples combined. When Jesus began washing His disciples’ feet, Peter thought he would score points with the Lord by saying, *“You shall never wash my feet,”* as if to say, “I respect You too much to allow You to lower Yourself to little old me.” But when Jesus replied, *“If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”* Peter quickly came up with another attempt to impress Jesus; *“Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” (John 13:8, 9)*. Jesus ignored this pretentious remark. He saw right through Peter all along. Peter went on to say, *“I will lay down my life for Your sake” (John 13:37)*. I am sure

Peter meant that, many of us have said things like that. In a moment of inspiration when the atmosphere is filled with powerful preaching and glorious worship and praise, plus a challenge to follow the Lord to the death, we fall on our knees and raise our hands in surrender. But later when the crunch comes, many of us show we are no different from Peter. Jesus said to him, *“Will you lay down your life for My sake? Truly, truly I say unto you, the rooster shall not crow until you have denied Me three times.”* (v.38). Peter did indeed deny the Lord. It was the worst moment of his life. When he heard the rooster crow, he *“broke down and wept”* (Mark 14:72).

Later on, during the 40-day period after Jesus’s resurrection when He unexpectedly appeared on the beach, He singled out Peter, asking if Peter loved Him more than others did: *“Do you love me more than these?”* Peter still thought he did: *“Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.”* (John 21:15). Peter was still very self-righteous - enough for God to disqualify him indefinitely for usefulness! Nevertheless, God did use him mightily!

You might think that Peter was cured of his self-righteousness after Pentecost. Surely the coming of the Holy Spirit would eradicate such wickedness from his heart. If only! Years later Peter showed cowardice again. He enjoyed fellowship with Gentiles in Antioch. So far so good. But when some influential Jews came there from Jerusalem - after having been with James – Peter *“withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision”* (Galatians 2:12). Paul was indignant and rebuked Peter to his face (v.14).

Do we ever outgrow being self-righteous? I doubt it. It is like the tongue - which no one can tame. If one *“does not err in word, he is a perfect man and able to also to control the whole body”* (James 3:2). But nobody’s perfect. Are you perfect? *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8).

I find this encouraging. If God can use Peter - and He did, mightily, - He can use you and me.

If God could use Elijah - and He did, mightily - He can use you and me. In the most revealing moment of his life Elijah regarded himself as being the only man of God worth his salt. *“I alone remain a prophet of the Lord”* (1 Kings 18:22). Wrong. Horribly wrong! Just a day or two before, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hid them into caves (v. 4). Yes, God can use people who have the Elijah complex. But he also sorts them out as he did Elijah (1 Kings 19:4-18).

Both Peter and Elijah felt righteousness in their hearts. Self-righteousness is despicable in the sight of God, but it is the last thing we see in ourselves. This is why Job was put through his long ordeal. You could not have convinced Job he was filled with self-righteousness until his “friends” wore him down and the poison that was there all along came spewing out of him like a geyser.

Do you trust your heart? Really? Do you not realize that our hearts can play tricks on us? This is why we have the admonition not to lean on our own understanding. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding”* (Proverbs 3:5) yes, you must trust in the Lord with all your heart - that means totally committed and motivated to relying on Him. But what motivates us can also deceive us.

God deserts us - as we saw with Hezekiah - to test us in order to see what is in our hearts (2 Chronicles 32:31). This was not because God was looking for new information about Hezekiah’s heart, as if He did not already know. He tests us that we might discover the wickedness of our own hearts. God already knew what was in Hezekiah’s heart. God Himself, was not waiting to learn something about Hezekiah! His testing was totally for Hezekiah’s sake. God already knows what is in us; He deals with us so that we might see the truth about ourselves. Jesus did not entrust Himself to His mesmerized onlookers, for *“He knew all men.... He knew what was in man”* (John 2:24-25). This is why Jesus was never flattered by the praise of people and he never had any illusion about us in the first place. Nothing surprises God.

Are you feeling a “nudge” to do something? Do you think it is from God? It may be. But what if it’s not? What if it’s of the flesh - that is, it’s your own idea? Or could it be of the devil? Never forget that Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

So you trust your heart? Be careful!

Moses, the greatest man who ever lived before Jesus came, needed tutoring in understanding what was a “nudge from God”. He thought that at age 40 his time had come. He felt a “nudge” in his heart to do something.

Stephen tells us that when Moses was 40, *“it came to his heart to visit his brothers, the sons of Israel”* (Acts 7:23). Moses grew up realizing he was a Hebrew. How did he know? For one thing, he had been circumcised. He knew he was different from other Egyptian boys. It was sobering for him to come to grips with his true identity. He was also deeply bothered

when he saw the way the Hebrews were treated by the Egyptians. He might have dismissed this, he could have repressed his feelings and not let things bother him. But he could not dismiss what he felt in his heart. This is where integrity kicked in.

An interesting but sobering thing about the heart is that it can be the vehicle of integrity or it can be the instrument of deceit. The heart is the “seat of personality”. “*As a man thinks in his heart so is he*” (Proverbs 23:7), “*set your heart on the right path*” (v.19), “*Guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it*” (Proverbs 4:23). Conscious - a divine gift given commonly to all - is rooted in the heart. Feelings come from the heart. Motivation is rooted in the heart. Envy too is rooted in the heart. Indeed, said Jesus, “*out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murderers, adulterers, sexual immorality, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*” (Matthew 15:18). *We are commanded to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength* (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37).

But how far do you go in trusting your heart? When Proverbs 3:5 says not to rely on your own understanding, it is pointing not only to our limited knowledge but also to the deceitfulness of the heart.

Do you trust your heart?

When Proverbs says for us to “guard” the heart, it shows that a part of us - call it the mind or will - can rise above the heart and gain some measure of objectivity about ourselves. That objectivity will never lead us to let our feelings be the ultimate verdict regarding what is true. Paul vulnerably revealed this when he said, “*My conscious is clear, but that does not make me innocent*” (1 Corinthians 4:4 NIV). It is the Lord who judges us. When God ultimately steps in, “*He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart.*” (v.5 NIV). That is why Paul said he did not even judge himself! We are not qualified to give the infallible verdict - which God alone will give - regarding our various opinions.

So what do you feel like when you feel something in your heart? Can you trust it? The answer is that you must be very, very careful. You may be right. You could be wrong.

Jeremiah, a godly man stood alone in his day and was even accused of treason by his fellow Jews, knew not to trust his heart. Look at Jeremiah 17:9; “*The heart is more deceitful than all things and desperately wicked; who can understand it?*”

How did Jeremiah know he had gotten it right? That is not an easy question for us to answer. We know he got it right because history and Scripture vindicate him. But why was he so willing at the time to stand alone? For one thing, Jeremiah was willing to die for what he prophesied - and eventually did!

So, let me ask you: Would you go to the point of being killed for a “nudge” you feel? I don’t want to be unfair, but if you wouldn’t, you may want to seriously question whether your nudge has its origin in the Holy Spirit.

Moses waited until he was 40 before he came to terms with his own identity. He could then wait no longer. It came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel (Acts 7:23). Did God put that nudge there? Yes. But does it follow that all Moses did after that was under direct leadership of the Holy Spirit? No!

What was Moses thinking when it came into his heart to visit his true flesh and blood? Did he think he would be their hero? Was he expecting them to cheer, jump up and down, and thank God that at long last a deliverer had come to set them free? Had he hoped that leaving the palace of the Pharaoh and mixing with the Hebrews would make them almost bow and worship at his feet? After all, it was not something he had to do; he was sitting on top of the world - the son of Pharaoh, living in luxury and security. He could have lived like that forever. Was he hoping to demonstrate how gracious he was?

Here is what actually happened. He went one day to where the Israelites were working. The Pharaoh had made their lives bitter “ruthlessly” making them work as slaves (Exodus 1:14). Moses looked on their burdens and suffering. He saw an Egyptian mistreating a Hebrew, one of his people. Moses looked in every direction, not wanting to be seen. And then he killed the Egyptian (Exodus 2:12). He did it in secret. Or so he thought.

What had come into his heart turned out to be a disaster

He visited the Hebrews the next day. This time he saw two Hebrews arguing with each other. Moses said to the man in wrong, “*Why do you strike your companion?*” The reply to Moses was, “*Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?*” (Exodus 2:13-14).

Oh dear! Moses was shaken rigid. He realized his murder of the Egyptian the day before was known (Exodus 2:14). This was not the scenario he was counting on. His greatest fear was that the word would reach the palace. It did. And it made Pharaoh his enemy. He could never return to the palace again. From that day on, Moses was on the run.

So, what was Moses thinking when it came to his heart to visit his brothers? Stephen tells us: Moses thought his people “*would understand that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not.*” (Acts 7:25). Moses was so sure they would.

All this happened because of a nudge Moses felt. Was it a holy nudge? Was Moses led by the Spirit to do what he did? Certainly. But things did not turn out as Moses expected.

Could there have been another reason Moses visited his people? Yes. The writer of Hebrews provides an answer: Moses was looking for his reward down the road. What came to his heart, then, was a motivation we don't learn from the account in Exodus. But the writer of Hebrews sheds light on Moses's motive: “*By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward*” (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Moses chose to be ruled by integrity. He was willing to lose everything which meant he could not lose! He knew he would win, that down the road he would never be sorry.

Did Moses jump the gun by killing the Egyptian? Certainly. But the holy nudge was at the bottom of all that would happen afterward. Not all he did was holy. But part of the mystery of God's providence is that what God permitted was His way of leading Moses to an era of preparation he would need. He was already instructed in the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in words and deeds (Acts 7:21). So, at the natural level he may have been quite ready to lead the Israelites. But he would need more than the wisdom of the Egyptians and to be good with words and deeds. He needed spiritual preparation. He needed to be enrolled in the University of the Holy Spirit. The curriculum called for 40 years of a different kind of learning.

Another example of a holy “nudge” at work was Jonathan, son of King Saul, was gripped by a conviction he could defeat the Philistines. The people of Israel were living in a time of great trouble. In humiliation they had “*hid themselves in caves, in hollows, among rocks and in cellars and cisterns.*” The people followed King Saul with “*trembling*” (1 Samuel 13:6-7).

Jonathan refused to be intimidated. An idea came into his heart, and without telling his father, he said to his armor bearer, “*Come, and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. Perhaps the Lord will work for us. For the Lord is not limited to save by many or by few.*” His armor bearer replied, “*Do all that is in your heart*” (1 Samuel 14:1; 6-7). Jonathan put a fleece out as it were. “*We will cross over to these men, and we will reveal ourselves to them. And if they say to us, 'Wait until we come to you', then we will stand in our place, and we will not go to them. But if they say, 'come to us', then we will go up, for the Lord has delivered them into our hand, and this will be a sign to us*” (v8-10).

The plan worked. Both Jonathan and his armor bearer showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. The Philistines said, “*Look the Hebrews are coming out of the caves where they have hidden themselves*” (1 Samuel 14:11). The men at the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor bearer, “*Come up to us and we will teach you something*” (v 12). This is the exact sign Jonathan hoped for. Jonathan said to his armor bearer, “*Come up after me. For the Lord has delivered them into the hand of Israel*” (v 12). Jonathan climbed up to them with his armor bearer, and the Philistines fell before them, they killed about 20 men. “*There was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and the raiders also trembled, and the ground quaked. It was the fear of God.*” (v 15). Then King Saul and all his men assembled and went into the battle. They found the Philistines in “*very great confusion,*” striking one another with their swords (v 20). In a word, “*the Lord saved Israel that day*” (v 23).

It all began with a holy “nudge”: Jonathan's heart conviction that God would give them that victory.

Does God give holy “nudges” today? Sometimes. Perhaps not every day. We must be guarded. Never forget that the heart is deceitful and incurably wicked. We are fools if we forget this, especially if we have a string of successes with following our “nudges”.

What's the difference between a holy nudge and the undoubted leading of the Holy Spirit? They are the same objectively, but they are not necessarily the same subjectively. Objectivity refers to fact, the subjective refers to feeling, or our

perception. Many factors may be involved when it comes to one's perception of God's leading. We must be able to differentiate between what we want or hope to be true from what the Spirit is truly saying. The Spirit may be speaking clearly, but if our minds are made up, we may well miss what He is saying. Therefore, the subjective must always give way to the objective if we are going to arrive at the truth.

For example, subjectively I felt led to help start a full Gospel worship service on Eastham unit. But objectively I was obliged to conclude that I perhaps was not altogether led by the Spirit. How do I know? Things have not panned out, oh, the services were scheduled and miraculously got on the schedule by the chaplain, baffling all of us, but things have digressed to an agenda driven service. The peace I had about it, I began to lose. The freedom of presence filled worship seems to have been replaced by the political stronghold of performance driven services which hurts my spirit.

Being objective is hard - sometimes extremely. Especially when we have a strong feeling or opinion about something. We naturally want to believe our opinion is correct. The problem, almost always, is our pride. But getting to the truth requires that we are impartial, neutral, evenhanded and detached from our ego. It may mean asking for and accepting critical input from others. It means we must be willing to be seen as wrong. That is so humbling.

Do you want the presence of the Lord so much that you are willing to admit when you get things wrong? How important is the true presence of the Lord to you? Do you want His honor or your personal vindication? I want to inspire you to want His presence more than anything in the world. But sooner or later we will have to ask whether our ego need is more important to us than the objective presence of the Lord. In other words, do we want the praise that comes from people or the reward and praise that comes from our heavenly Father. Jesus asked the Jews who did not believe in Him, "How can you believe, who receive glory from another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44).

I prefer His reward. I pray you will too in all that you do.

For Him and His glory!!

## ***Chief***

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***Christ's***

***Heart***

***In***

***Every***

***Felon***