

Sermon LV Feb 2018

The importance of asking

If any of you lacks wisdom you should ask God, who gives generously without finding fault, and it will be given to you. James 1:5 God wants to have a 2 way conversation with us all the time.

I've had a few shocks of late.

I mean there's not a lot more shocking or in your face, than one moment walking along a flat piece of ground and the next moment you roll your ankle on a tiny stone and lose control and your momentum propels you forward and causes you hit the ground face down and break your shoulder and now you can't move. Seriously?

It's like the 23rd of December and we have been at Rose's in Oakura Beach, NP for less than 2 hours.

And in that moment a few things flash through your mind. Like- the deep suspicion that this is not good and probably months of recovery... and what impact will this have on our plans for Myanmar? And it doesn't help when your son-in-law who is a resident doctor at the hospital has access to all the process and is tut tutting about how bad it is and how many fractures there possibly are and whether to screw it or not and the disbelief that I've actually managed to pull a chunk of bone off the humerus bone ... (fortunately no screws, no cast, just a sling and 7 weeks down the track I have pretty amazing movement.)

Trials and tribulations

Following on from having a piece of breast cancerous tissue last year and radiation and this ongoing waiting for the funds to get to Myanmar, you kinda feel like there's a few trials come your way and you wonder why? Is there a reason or a purpose?

James 1: 2-4 would seem to indicate that there is...

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 21 blessed is the one who perseveres under trial...

Hebrews 12: 7

Endure hardship as discipline...for God disciplines us for our good...no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

What shall we take from this?

Does God send calamity or allow it or is it an 'evil' attack or is it just life, bad luck?

I don't want to get down too deep in this.

But here is my approach to the things I have had happen in my life.

1. A default mindset: God is Good.

Some years ago, I hope when I was young, I determined that if ever a shopkeeper accidentally gave me the wrong change I would immediately say; hey you given me too much. It is my default mindset. I didn't have to think about it or reason it out, or come back later, I simply act on my decision to be honest there and then. The desire to be honest comes out of the renewing of the mind in Christ.

At some point in the past few years I came to another conclusion. I cast a die in the Lord's favour. I determined to believe that God is good. All the time. I determined to celebrate His goodness in blessing and tribulation; to give Him the absolute benefit of the doubt, to worship Him in spite of all

else. This is my default mindset, so when something happens I look to Him for peace and I give thanks.

This is a positive way of looking at every trial, all kinds of trials. They are for my good. My highest good. Whatever comes against me God will use for discussion and create the opportunity for me to grow, should I bother to ask Him about it and engage in the mission.

It makes sense in the natural. If you want to grow muscle you have to use your muscles, in fact push them beyond the comfort zone in order to get stronger.

It's the same in the spiritual. In order for the people of God to be strong and do great exploits like Daniel, we need our faith to be tested and refined, so that the resilience and capacity for God's work and for His glory can grow. For us to learn that 'no weapon formed against us will endure'.

So that's the first thing, I have learnt and am learning is not to lose my cool, my peace, when stuff happens, but to centre in God who is good. This truth is worth a lot of time but Bill Johnson has written a book called: ***God is Good: He's Better Than You Think*** and I would recommend it.

2. The second approach I have in trials is to engage with God around what this is about and to ask what He wants me to learn from it.

- In keeping with the belief that God is Good and He's always on my side, working all things out for my best then I want to hear from Him about what's going on and what I can learn from this trial or this blockage in my life. Instead of getting mad about it, I can ask Him what His perspective is. I have learned that Jesus is just waiting for these conversations. We must learn how to have conversational transactions with Him. And not let difficulties or problems pass by without receiving wisdom and insight.

Second Shock

The second shock which reverberated through my being while I was away and asking Jesus for understanding was an epiphany about my mind. Reading a book by Watchman Nee called *Spiritual Knowledge* (1973) an oldie but a goodie.

God began to talk to me about the *renewing of the mind*.

In Greek the word for mind is nous. We still have this word in our vocab...when we say that someone 'had the nous to go and do that'. ie the common sense to call the fire brigade when he saw the fire.

The nous is the part of the soul we call mind which pertains to intellect or reasoning.

Romans 12:2 tells us: *Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (nous). Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

- Bible tells us the mind before we receive Jesus is corrupted, depraved, darkened, foolish, fleshly, futile and vain, defiled. 2 Cor 4:4 the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ. We just don't see the true reality.

Of course we have a transformation when we receive Jesus and begin to embrace His truth. We see light where we were blind. But is it all sorted? No

- It's an ongoing process. It didn't just happen at my acceptance of Jesus or my baptism or even Holy Spirit baptism...no it's something that needs to be attended to daily. The mind is the battleground. This is what Satan targets. **Can you identify?**

- Illustrate: We can know a lot of things. **We are pretty good at knowledge.**
 Knowledge says: my old self was crucified with Him, my mind is renewed because I'm a new creation, but on that level it doesn't actually change anything. So when your temper flares yet again, or you find yourself passively aggressive you go to God again and ask: what do I do about this?
 Lesson after lesson you can learn things by talking to God and being weaned from trusting your own flesh and default ways of thinking. He takes His time!! It may happen again and again. If you keep asking, seeking, knocking you get more revelation, then sometimes more failure. It is isn't sorted yet. But always in the dealings you are growing closer to God and to understanding. Proverbs 3 says: Get understanding, wisdom and insight, not just knowledge. We will never know God without having transactions with Him. And I think that's what trials can be about. We need to learn to push in to know God and get answers.

Well, I thought I was doing ok...mind renewed...on the right track... but I learned a few things when Watchman Nee brought up things like this:

Symptoms of the Unrenewed mind.

1. How do I habitually think about other people? Am I giving a foothold to the devil by my attitudes, talk and behaviour?
2. How do I think about God? Words like doubt, lack of trust, fear come to mind. Do I doubt God's goodness?
 Am I embedded in the Word of God regularly, receiving revelation not just adding to my knowledge. We each ought to be able to receive directly from God and engage our mind and imagination in that. And we ought to be able to comprehend the good, pleasing and perfect will of God. When my mind is being renewed I will be much clearer about God's will.
3. How about the nous in relation to myself? Do I have clear thinking? Where is our God-given mental power going? Does my mind lead me all over the place, including in prayer? Is my mind in control?
4. I used to think introspection was good, but what I learned is that self-knowledge only comes through God's light. I am good at either commending myself or pulling myself apart when I examine myself. This is not the renewed mind. You may even begin to imagine that you have committed some unpardonable sin, or that God does not like you. It's dangerous.

Rather we should ask God to show us.

Once Dwight L Moody was walking on the street. He suddenly requested a homeowner for permission to use his upper room. He went in and prayed: "Oh God, stay your hand, for it is more than I can bear." If we ask God these sorts of questions we will find that God has given our nous more than we can contain. But the renewing of our minds is high on his priority for as I have said: the mind is where Satan gains control.

Let me illustrate through some of my conversations:

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASKING

Jesus said to me: you need to ask a question. This send me into another shockwave.

What's the question??? What do I ask for?

Until you ask the right question, you are never ready for the true answer that you need. Ancient rabbis. Then He said: What do you feel?

And some of the clue to what to ask is in what you are feeling.

I also ask Him for Scripture...He directed me to:

John 15:5f

If you remain in Me and I in you; you will bear much fruit.

Apart from Me you can do nothing.

If you remain in Me and My words remain in you

Ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

This is to My Father's glory that you bear much fruit.

So I learned if we don't ask, we don't bear fruit and we don't bring glory to the Father.

H: But Lord what do I ask? I need to know how to ask.

J: ask how to 'bear fruit'.

H: Ok how do I bear fruit? What fruit? What do I ask for? I don't even know.

I don't know what I want.

All I got at that point was Fruit of the Spirit. (things don't all come at once)

A few days later Jesus returned to this theme.

Here is an example of how a situation which I brought to Jesus was thrown open by the Word and by His gentle leading and conviction. I was having trouble with my mouth.

H: What do you want me to know about my badly triggered attitudes?

J: What is your feeling?

H: I feel like I'm in a battle and I lost.

J: Ask me for fruit. (this went back to the earlier conversation)

H: Which one?

J: self-control

H: eek ok.

J: bring your words, judgments, strength of character into the Spirit's control and direction.

H: Lord renew my mind. How do I do that?

J: Ask for it. 'Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with one another so that you are not able to do whatever you want. Gal 5: 16-17 Keep in step or in line with the Spirit.

Jesus was persistent,

J: let's talk more about self control. Look up self control.

What I discovered in the Greek was that self-control is about mastery from within. But true mastery from within is explicitly called a 'fruit of the Spirit'. Proceeding out from within oneself but not by oneself. Better called 'spirit-control' it can only be accomplished by the power of the Lord.

It comes from the derivative kratos -to have power and strength within; mastery over your own behaviour. As you seek righteousness you seek self/spirit in partnership-control.

www.spirithome.com

Real faith is superior to the human intellect in that it is the product of God's mind not ours.

Bill Johnson

What I learned

1. This fruit is more about a partnership of self and spirit-control. I can ask for this fruit and I should ask for this fruit because it forms the renewing of my mind.
2. It's way more than just about controlling bad behaviour and words; it's about the whole way I believe and think and then act or not. Learning self-spirit control is about harnessing creativity well, about goals and building focus and strategy into one's life. Making life count. It's about learning to release God emotions of passion and righteous anger for just cause and about giving encouragement and love. It's about not being passive in my mind and content with the past conclusions I have come to.

All I can say to this is I thought my mind was renewed but now I realise it's way bigger and that I need Holy Spirit help. I need to embrace a fruit of the Spirit which is a disciplined and actively focused mind, constantly seeking God's ways and thoughts and not defaulting to my unsaved mindsets.

I begin to pray everyday: Holy Spirit, renew my mind. Search my heart and mind and tell what you want to work on. Take me out of what I presently conform to and am ignorant of and help me see your perspective. Help me ask the right questions.

Finally

Develop in me a Divine or Heavenly Mindset:

We will know our mind is renewed when see from a divine perspective and the impossible looks logical. Bill Johnson

The further development of spirit-control is a renewed mind that is first of all spiritual or heavenly based. I am constantly asking for a spiritual or heavenly mindset. A renewed mind comes into line with a heavenly perspective. Our minds are intended to function from this. What has woken me up is that conviction that in so many ways I still have an earthly perspective, I default to my flesh and my will takes over and this is not in line with the Spiritual life, I am out of step with the Spirit.

This too is worth many sermons. It is certainly about the Goodness of God and it is about the finished work of Jesus on the cross and it is about His church coming into line with this prayer: YOUR KINGDOM COME ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.

“When what we believe is anchored in the reality of who Jesus is and what He has done, earth comes into agreement with heaven where the reality of His world increasingly invades ours, manifested in power and glory. He is able to do more than abundantly beyond all that we ask or think or imagine THROUGH US. He performs the unthinkable on our behalf and is perfect goodness personified. “

The greatest gift we could ever give ourselves is to anchor our mind and will into the strongest foundation possible—the goodness of God. Bill Johnson