

Real Followers are Spirit Led

Acts 20:22-24

Everton Hills

26 March 2017

I love a cool evening breeze. Finding a space to unwind, to rest in the present, to connect with my soul, to experience a gentle wind flow over me.

To be honest, it's been a while. These warm summer nights, at the beginning of autumn...

Do you pay much attention to the wind? How it can be so soothing on the one hand, and terrifying on the other? How, after a long hot walk, a gentle breeze can bring rest to the soul?

Jesus likens the Holy Spirit to the wind. We might not be able to see it, but we can see and experience its effects. The Hebrew word, Ruach, which we translate as Spirit, has both a spiritual and physical dimension; it can be incredibly calming – like a gentle breeze bringing rest to the soul, and it can be unsettling, raising stuff within us that makes us feel uncomfortable – like in the midst of a storm.

As we continue this series, Be Real, this week I want you to understand that Real followers of Jesus are Spirit led.

Now when I hear the word Spirit led, various images come to mind. *What images come to your mind?*

For some, to be Spirit led creates the image of dwelling solely in what we might call 'the supernatural' – that is, things that we don't see and don't fully understand.

I've been there. You may not be aware, but I have experienced some of those supernatural outworkings of the spirit. Many years ago, when Pastor Gemechis Desta Buba came to Australia, I experienced the weird feeling of falling to the ground for no apparent reason.

For others, being Spirit led provokes the image of holiness and obedience. Being Spirit led enables one to stand strong against temptation, or as one person has said "it has nothing to do with supernatural or mystical revelation, but everything to do with personal holiness."

Now I think both of those can be expressions of being spirit led. But, both of those expressions can also lead us away from the central work of the Spirit – the work of knowing Jesus

The first expression (that is what I might call 'the supernatural encounter') can lead us to focussing more and more on miracles and spiritual surprises, that we miss the greatest miracle – that is the miracle of God's love and grace for us in Jesus that gives an internal peace which passes human understanding. And there were certainly times when Jesus was reluctant to do miracles, because he didn't want people to focus on the wrong thing. The second expression, that of focussing on personal holiness, can also lead us away from God – as we can start focussing on our behaviours, and our own holiness, on what we do, rather than what Jesus has done.

I want you to hear what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit. Bear in mind, that he described this work just prior to returning to his Father...

“But I will send you the Advocate —the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me.” (John 15:26, NLT)

What is the work of the Holy Spirit? To testify all about Jesus. To help people know Jesus so that they can encounter the abundant, fulfilling, shame free, guilt free life, that Jesus spoke about. The work of the Spirit is to empower, equip and encourage Jesus’ followers to be aware of God’s presence within them... everyday!

And that leads me to the question that I want you to reflect on today...

What effect has the Holy Spirit had on your life?

How does the Spirit continue to lead you in your life?

As the early church began to expand, Jesus’ followers took greater and greater risks. They did that because they were so connected with the one who had transformed their lives and gave them hope, that they became bold in their hope.

And that is what we heard in the bible reading today. Notice how Paul responds to the Holy Spirit’s leading...

“And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don’t know what awaits me, except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.” (Acts 20:22–24, NLT)

Paul knew that he was on an exciting journey. On the one hand he knew that where he went there would be great opposition! On the other hand he knew that God had laid a powerful desire on his heart – the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.

Now to be honest, I am a bit of a wuss. I don’t like pain. I don’t hardship. I easily feel intimidated especially in hostile crowds. So, for example, when I go to the footy, if I find myself sitting in ‘the oppositions camp’, I go really quiet.

So how can Paul be so bold. It is through the work of the Spirit... the Spirit who teaches Paul all truth... that he is never alone and that he is greatly loved.

First Paul knew he was never alone! While Paul never met Jesus before Jesus’ ascension, Paul was powerfully aware of God’s presence in his life. In his letter to the Philippians he said, ***“For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:13, NLT)***

Do you know how that came about? It came about because he discovered what it means to find rest in God.

If you don’t know the story of Paul’s conversion it goes something like this.

Paul, who at the time was called Saul, had been travelling the countryside with plans to persecute the early church. As he travelled he had an encounter which left him blind. In that encounter, he heard the words, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” He was taken to Damascus and waited for three days. Eventually, this persecutor, this propagator of hate, encountered God’s love and grace through the work of Ananias, and the rest is history.

Now I know that that is a very brief version of the entire story. But what I want you to understand is that it was the encounter of God’s love and grace through the acceptance and work of Ananias, that led Paul to encounter the reality that the heart of God is love. It was an awareness of God’s love and grace that transformed Paul’s heart.

And it is out of that deep awareness that Paul would eventually write...

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6–7, NLT)

Do you see what is happening here? Through prayer, through growing in that **awareness of God’s presence in his life**, through becoming **aware of how deeply loved he is by God**, Paul encounters a peace that he says “will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Through prayer, through being able to hear God’s voice despite the cacophony of sound, **Paul’s perspective changed**, to the extent that he knew he could do all things through Christ who gives him strength.

In our busy world, which is filled with constant noise and movement, it can be so hard to hear God’s voice, to sense God’s leading, to grow in confidence and boldness.

But I wonder sometimes if that is because we are just not noticing.

You see all of life is a series of events... of experiences that shape who we are. And so often we bounce from one experience to the next, like balls in a **pin ball machine**, never really wondering whether God’s hand is involved. We live in a world which compartmentalises our experiences; our **work life**, our **family life**, our **social life**, and **recreational life**, and our **study life** and that leads us to fail to see that maybe all those experiences are **indeed connected**... and that God indeed, maybe teaching us and leading us through them all; both the good and the bad, the busy and the quiet, through both joy and brokenness. That maybe, whether it be a breeze or a gale, God’s invitation for us is simply to notice.

That’s why real followers are Spirit led. **They are Spirit led because they are learning to look for and notice God’s hand, God’s breath**, God’s presence, in all of their experiences, in all that they do... And knowing that God is present, knowing God deeply loves, in all of life, is what helps people encounter that peace that Paul talks about, a peace which guards their hearts and minds as they live in Christ Jesus, which in turn changes their perspective.

This week, take some time to notice how God might be leading you... and living in and through you.