

Fresh Start

By Jerry Bader

Is it God or Your Gut?

April 19, 2018

Before I came to Jesus nearly I rejected the notion that believers “heard” God. I had never heard God. Of course, because I wasn’t a believer (even though I convinced myself and those around me that I was) God may have been shouting at me and I wouldn’t have heard it. As my heart was being prepared to accept Jesus I asked an amazing woman (who I would know for far too short of time) if you can “miss” a message from God. She smiled and said, you’ll hear God; if you’re listening for Him. I thought of her on a recent business trip to Wisconsin’s state capitol.

A recent experience had left me praying often for opportunities to spontaneously help people. Weeks had gone by and God didn’t provide any opportunities (at least that I noticed). As I walked the busy streets of Madison from a business lunch, returning to my car four blocks away, I approached a panhandler on the sidewalk asking for loose change. My policy had always been not to encourage begging by giving panhandlers money. So, I walked past with sunglasses-protected eyes looking straight forward. That’s when the man said, “that’s right, pretend you don’t see me!” And I did just that.

I got less than a block away when my stomach got tight as a knot. What if it wasn’t that man who said, “pretend you don’t see me?” What if it was God reminding me that this was exactly the gift I asked for and now I was rejecting it? Nah...so I walked on. Two blocks away; I was now towing an anvil in my gut. If I listened closely, I think I could hear the Holy Spirit giving me an “ahem!” Three blocks away I think I actually felt Him tapping on my shoulder. And that was that - a block away from my car I did a 180 and headed back to the man and put a \$5 bill in his cup, among the scant dimes and quarters. I thought he was going to cry. He thanked me over and over. So how did I know and how can you know when it is God and not your gut?

1) I prayed for this moment. I had a recent encounter with two needy young girls and felt unsatisfied with how I could help them. So, I prayed for more opportunities to randomly help others. He provided one that required me to leave my comfort zone and take a step of faith that I was doing the right thing - *so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power* (1 Corinthians 2:5). Put another way - I had prayed (and prayed) for a chance to help someone and now I’m going to argue with God about whether the opportunity He provided is a good idea?

2) Believers know the Holy Spirit will guide them. *Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God* (Romans 8:26-27).

3) The joy you feel knowing you followed His direction: *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an*

inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8). The joy I felt, is indeed inexpressible. Both the man and I were near tears in the moment. On the walk back, I was absolutely giddy. That is joy - a blessing from God that leaves no doubt that you followed His direction.

I haven't given a moment's thought to what that man may have done with the money. I asked; God answered, I said yes. And following His direction meant taking a step of faith, a very tiny one compared with the many examples we find in the Bible. When we hear God's voice and trust His direction, even (or especially) when it leads us out of our comfort zone, the joy we feel will never be confused with "our gut." Keep your eyes and your heart open for the next opportunity He provides you. Ask, listen and say yes.