

## # 9 The Importance of Impressions

There are many ways that God moves us to minister prophetically in His Church. We have looked at God speaking to us through visions and in a still small voice. Over the next three weeks we will examine something a little more subtle: spiritual impressions. These impressions are more difficult to explain because they are unique to the individual receiving them, and they are easily opened to misinterpretation. However, the New Testament provides us with numerous examples of men moving prophetically by “perceiving in the spirit.” These perceptions may come in observing something about a person’s appearance or behavior, or a physical clue given in your own body. It may be a stray thought--something that comes to you “out of left field” as they say. God uses our senses to convey important information of benefit to an individual or a whole group. But because these perceptions are often born of stray thoughts or feelings, we can see that we must be careful in the application of this form of ministry. We need discernment and humility in ministering to others in prophetic impressions and not rely solely on our feelings.

Before we begin to examine how we can move prophetically using impressions, let’s look at some Biblical examples. We begin with Jesus. In Mark chapter 2, some friends bring a paralytic to Jesus for healing. Jesus says to the paralytic, “your sins are forgiven.” The Pharisees in attendance were offended. St. Mark tells us “And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, ‘Why do you question thus in your hearts?’” These Jewish elders had not said anything audibly, but Jesus had the impression that there was something amiss. He perceived “in His Spirit” that they had doubts and He confronted them about those doubts. The Spirit in Jesus is the same Spirit dwelling in us.

St. Paul often relied upon impressions when ministering in the Spirit. In Acts chapter 14, as he is ministering in the town of Lystra a man, crippled from birth was listening to Paul. It appears that the man didn’t know Paul, and Scripture does not indicate that there were any signs given to the Apostle that this man had a desire for healing. But St. Luke tells us that “he listened to Paul speaking; and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, ‘Stand upright on your feet.’ And he sprang up and walked.” St. Paul perceived in his spirit that the man wanted to be healed, and had the faith to do so. This prompted Paul to speak and work this miracle in the man’s life.

In Acts chapter 27, as Paul is being transferred to Rome via a sailing ship, he gets a warning from the Lord about the dangers he and the crew are facing. The warning comes not in a vision, or by a voice, but by a perception in his spirit. St. Luke records, “As much time had been lost, and the voyage was already dangerous because the fast had already gone by, Paul advised them, saying, ‘Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.’” The crew did not listen to the warning and ultimately the vessel was wrecked and sank. Paul had an impression and acted upon it.

God grants us these impressions in order to open our spirits to what He wants to speak to us, and through us to others. Impressions, perceptions in the Spirit, are important means utilized by God to grant us discernment of His will. We are cognitive and sensual beings. God has given us both a mind and physical senses with which to perceive. He uses these senses within us to relate to us sacramentally (e.g. hearing the Word, smelling the incense, tasting the Body and Blood), and to convey His purposes spiritually. And He has given us minds to understand the signs around us.

Next week we will examine how we can use impressions to perceive God’s prophetic Word.