


# The Spirit's whisper

Jim Loepp Thiessen

Five years into pastoral ministry, I hit a wall. What did it mean to pastor? How did my faith bear out in my work with people? I felt dry. Not disillusioned, but longing for *more*.

A person in my congregation who was on a journey of healing from their past asked if they could offer a prayer time and bring others to pray. A retired Mennonite pastor whom I had not met previously came and opened our prayer time by saying that he believed the Holy Spirit guided our praying. He then started to pray for the person who wanted the meeting. I had walked with the person requesting prayer extensively, and I felt I knew the issues present. The pastor prayed a prayer that essentially named and held all the key issues.



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I assumed that he had also counselled the person requesting prayer. It turned out, however, that they had never met. I was stunned. I had never encountered “listening prayer” with that kind of Spirit-led sensitivity. I left that prayer time thinking that whatever that pastor had, I needed it in my life too.

That experience began a journey of encounter. I was prayed for by others who prayed with a holy anticipation of the power and possibility of prayer.

Through prayer, I experienced Christ's deep and abiding peace fill my heart until it was almost bursting. As I was prayed for, thoughts with which I had struggled left—not from any force of my own but because of a deep flow of love that filled everything else and left no room for whatever else cluttered my heart.

This journey led me to a weekend event on praying and listening for the Holy Spirit's whisper. I was invited, in a room of two thousand people, to listen for God's heart for the stranger beside me, and—as a fun prayer experiment—to share what I sensed. As strangers listed what was on their heart for me, I felt a warm resonance. When I listened for them, I noted

a gentle whisper arising from within—something I would have ignored in the past. A name appeared in the breeze. It was so quiet I could have brushed it aside; but this was a stranger, and we were invited to listen. So I spoke the name that was on my heart: “I feel like there’s someone named Walter who is important to God’s heart for you—or has been important.” As I uttered those words, I thought, *This is nuts! Why am I doing this?* The man’s eyes grew wide. “Walter! Walter! He was someone I worked with. We had a falling out, and I felt like we’d dealt with it at the time. But he’s been coming back to mind lately, and your word is the encouragement that I need to go back to him and reconcile.” He excitedly called his wife, “This man received the name Walter!” They were both encouraged about the possibility of reconciling with someone whose name had risen in my spirit, and whom I had named in faith.

That season of life led me to much prayer, to being prayed for by others, and to much reading. Although many waters have flowed under the faith bridge since that experience twenty-five years ago, there are

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things from that season that continue to resonate with me. One is the power of creating an environment of spiritual expectation. As I grew in listening and praying for others, the possibility that God would meet us grew exponentially for me. When I pray with others, Scripture references sometimes appear in my spirit. As I follow them up, they often speak into situations in ways I could not. When invited, Jesus shows up to bring release to the captives, to let the oppressed go free, to be “the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our affliction” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4, ESV). Sometimes as I pray with people, tears arise, and I sense God’s heart for the pain people carry. Occasionally, when I am with people who are open to listen for the Spirit’s whispers and to intercede for others, I have them pray for me as I minister to others. I can even text them and invite them to pray, without disclosing anything about the people or situation where I am ministering: “I’m meeting with someone. If you hear anything as you pray . . .” Often their intercessory words have provided guidance and comfort—without breaking confidentiality. I can then say to those with whom I am ministering, “Here’s something

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someone shared who does not know details about our meeting. Does this fit what you're experiencing?" When we share, we always recognize that "we see through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12, KJV) and that we "do not despise the words of prophets, but . . . hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, NRSV).

A few weeks ago, I attended the church my in-laws lead. As is their pattern, they gave opportunity for receiving prayer by trained volunteers at the end of the service. I went forward. As the prayer flowed, I named my presenting request. The couple praying listened on my behalf. Then they named the even deeper request of my heart and God's hope for me in that desire. I left wonderfully encouraged. My question was known by the God who sees all and meets us in the gentle wind of the Holy Spirit.

### **About the author**

Jim Loepp Thiessen is a pastor at Floradale Mennonite Church in Floradale, Ontario. He has been a pastor in Ontario for almost thirty years, where he has pastored established congregations and planted a church in Kitchener.