

Two Pastors Talking: 'So How Do You Hear God?'

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Although Joseph Omoragbon and Fred Liggin are church pastors, both see their primary role to be that of missionary to their community. In most other ways they are different. Fred is a white American working in Southern United States. Joseph is a Nigerian immigrant, a pastor and church planter with the Redeemed Christian Church of God, serving in North East England. [Joseph](#) and [Fred](#) have already shared their stories with the Journal of Missional Practice. Martin Robinson, a lead editor of this journal invited them to come together, to reflect together on their stories and their experiences of hearing God.

Martin began the conversation by inviting Joseph and Fred to explore together three questions: How do you understand the word mission? How do you recognize the call of God? How do you recognize success?

Video time to 1:30 mins

Joseph explained that for him mission is to become relevant to the community, to be salt and light in the neighbourhood. In his early days in Britain the idea of bringing the church 'centre stage' had been important, in a culture where the church was quite irrelevant. With this challenge Pastor Joseph's young church set itself to pray, acknowledging their dependence on the Holy Spirit. In this context Joseph had been given the word 'something more than football'. They prayed for months to understand what this word could mean in that deprived region of the UK where football is all important. 'Something more than football' encouraged Joseph to volunteer as a football coach in schools and clubs and eventually to launch a series of popular football tournaments. According to a local reporter this initiative put the young church at 'centre stage' in the locality. That choice of language has been a source of motivation for Joseph since then!

Fred, listening, reflected that for Joseph and his group, mission had involved becoming part of a community, looking for what was important for that community and joining in. Through this participation the Kingdom of God had broken in.

Video times 1:30 min to 8:30 min.

Fred had been invited to be pastor of a well-established church some years ago, but he explains that he also considered himself to be primarily a missionary, responding to 'the soul of the city', its people, its narratives and broken spaces. It was his intention to allow this engagement to shape his ministry within the church. So Fred had invested time in the city, listening, attending city meetings about social concerns, serving on boards, always asking where in this, is the Spirit at work?

Video times 8:30 min to 11:00 min

During this time Fred had encountered a homeless family, and he and members of his congregation had become deeply involved in this family's life, watching them begin to overcome their difficulties. With deepening understanding of these and other families and the

structures and systems that marginalize families, Fred and his church had had the opportunity to be part of the solution to some of the city's problems. The make-up of their congregation had begun to change as other struggling families, people with intellectual disabilities and carers had joined them.[\[1\]](#)

Joseph reflected back to Fred what he'd heard. He quoted Matthew 5:16 'Let your light therefore shine before men...' Fred's church had done just that in its willingness to love and be available.

Video times 11:00 min to 15:30 min

The conversation turned to the question of hearing God. Joseph had enjoyed an experience of hearing God for thirty-two years and this has been central in his faith and ministry. It had been the key factor in his initial move from Nigeria to the UK, along with some unlikely and affirming events which had enabled them to make the move.

Video times 15:30 to 19:40

The clarity of God's voice in his life has given Joseph confidence in his call and covenant with God which has enabled him to cope with the costs of this way of life. In his experience 'the moment that you can pay the price, then the heaven is open for you.' Joseph shared another story to illustrate this expectation which had occurred when his church was in danger of losing access to their rented church space. A dream with a clear message 'You are secure' was remarkably fulfilled when the large church building with all its assets was given to this small congregation.

Video times 19:40 to 22:50

For Fred discerning God begins with an impulse, a conviction that there is a step that needs to be taken. Then discernment becomes a communal process. When a significant event occurs, for example the arrival of the homeless family, the practice of their church leadership is to ask two questions. First they ask: What could God be saying to us in this? For Fred a community is necessary because although the Spirit is in each one, an individual may be deflected by ego or bias. When a homeless family had arrived in their midst, co-workers and elders had explored and wondered what God was saying to them in this situation.

The second question followed: What do we need to do about it? In Fred's process this second question would be shared with a broader group, perhaps the whole church, in a time of prayer and fasting. For Fred this type of submission to shared decision making has been a protection from deception by ego and the temptations of power.

Video times 22:50 mins to 26:50 mins.

In response to this very different approach Joseph reflected that God does speak to people differently. He is confident of God's voice, but what he hears is always to benefit others. Joseph and Fred did agree that motivation is important. Both of them rejected the language of success, preferring to talk of faithfulness and obedience. For Fred 'it looks like always doing what is hard, not doing what is easy.'

Video time 26:50 mins to 31:00 mins.

[1] The carers included a group of Nigerian nuns who looked after a community of twenty-five people with intellectual disabilities. These disabled people had been turned away from two other churches.