

A PROMPTING AND A PRETZEL

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Interesting little thing happened yesterday. The kids were building a maze out of couch pillows with Brandon, and with everyone occupied I ventured out to the mall for a quick kid-free errand (I know, alone, a rarity but that's not the interesting part). The wind was blowing hard but I didn't care because the sun was making an appearance after several days of cloudy single digit temperatures, so I might as well have been in a musical — my mood elevator was that high. After making a brief stop to purchase some eye-liner and make a return I headed for the door to jet home to my little architects.

On my way out is when it happened.

I casually noticed an elderly gentleman parked in a chair by the entrance. Face full of wrinkles, and an oversized wool hat shading squinting blue eyes. The kind of bright blue that brings the oceans of Tahiti to mind, but nothing else about him induced the kinds of feelings a luxury vacation would incite. He was markedly different from the happy casual shoppers surrounding him. His skin was smudged with dirt — what little was showing from beneath his soiled clothing. He sat there listlessly. As if there was

not a purpose to cling to or an agenda of any kind calling him. Clearly he had meandered in with the purpose of escaping the abrasive winds I had noticed before. It was a brief moment, but our eyes locked; he in his reality and me in mine.

I pushed open the door and began the trek out to my car, and with every step my heart felt heavier. And the battle began.

I felt this deep, gnawing unsettledness. *Go back. Get that man some food.* My pace slowed, but I kept walking. *I'm almost to my car, I need to get back to my family, I'm a woman by myself — it might not be the safest idea,* I thought. *If I go home, right now, it's not like I'm doing anything different than anyone else here, it's not like I'm doing anything wrong.* And then this hit me:

"By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." — John 13:35

And then this:

"Come, you who are blessed by my Father... For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink..." — Matthew 25:34,36

At this point I was sitting in my car. I started the engine. *God, why this man? If this is what you want... I don't know, let me find a closer spot on my way out of here or something.* As soon as I said it, I realized how absurd it was. Did I seriously just ask for a sign?! I am not that girl, am I really going to weigh out my promptings based on a parking spot?! What if a spot didn't open up — was I going to feel an outpouring of peace because clearly I had misheard?! I have no idea why it was such a big deal in that moment. But I didn't feel shame, I felt urgency.

What do you expect of my promptings? You have asked me to use you. Do not ask and then ignore. If, after all of your prayers to be used by me, you fail to obey in this moment, why should you expect me to use you greatly?

I decided to comply. Someone was waiting for my spot, so I pulled out, and figured I'd circle back around and grab a different spot. And as I trekked down the aisle a truck pulled out of the first spot next to the entrance. Huh. *Well, God, I already made my decision — now you're just overdoing it!* I smiled and figured I better go get some food.

Fifty yards away from the man, as I was paying for pretzel dogs and a bottle of water (don't judge my choice, I realize in retrospect it was kind of pathetic); I started praying

again. *God, there are so many people around him over there; would you clear it out?! Just maybe? As a cherry on top of the deal for him? Because now I just want to preserve an ounce of his dignity.* I handed over my money, grabbed the food and turned in his direction — there was just one man left sitting close by. But he wasn't alone now, there were 2 others with him; also assumedly homeless. *Huh. Wow, God, way to make your interests here clear.* I actually had a moment of panic — what if they're not homeless?! This is going to be super embarrassing if they're waiting for family in the nearest store! Ugh, here goes.

"Um, excuse me — are you guys waiting on someone by chance?" I managed to ask. They looked at me in confusion, like I was a complete idiot. I guess I deserved that.

"Uh, No." was the blunt reply an older woman threw back.

"Could you maybe use this?" I offered the bottle of water and the woman's eyes opened wide as she quickly snatched it up. "Yes." It was all she said. Her need was too obvious to hide, she had no problem being honest. I then handed the blue eyed elderly man the pretzel dogs, and he muttered something I could not make out. They all looked... I don't know, intrigued I guess. Surprised, maybe? Hard to put my finger on it. It didn't take a genius to see the need; but all the same, they didn't seem to expect anything.

Regardless of the clumsy way I managed to obey his prompting over something that was really pretty "help the needy 101," I felt the warmth of God's pleasure as surely as I could feel anything. But I also felt sad. Over the broken state of the people I had just collided with. And my eyes were open to our learned indifference. It was a reminder that we live in a broken world. When we are shuffling around purchasing eye-liner and minding our business, there are people with needs all around us. God prompts. Let's agree to open our eyes and ears. In doing so, I believe we'll feel his pleasure, people will know his love, and we get to be part of something bigger than ourselves.