



Everything lines up perfectly ...should I still ask God?

by seth emery

In January 2015, I was having a skype chat with [Jeff Vanderstelt](#), when he presented me with an opportunity that I had somewhat been dreaming about since 2009. He asked if Michelle and I would consider moving to Seattle for 2 years to be part of the team at [DOXA Church](#) (a good sized church wanting to transition from an event based focus to a missional community mindset). He said it was early days so we'd look at my specific role later, but essentially, I would be trained up under him, through life-on-life discipleship, and then be sent back to Adelaide to plant Missional Communities.

To put things in context, Jeff has been one of the biggest and most helpful influences in my life in the last decade, specifically in the area of seeing that we are the Church. That Church isn't something we "do" or "go to". I've been listening to podcasts and following what God was doing in his part of the world for several years, and have a massive respect for him. So as you can imagine, when he asked me to join him, this was a no brainer... sign me up!

I talked it over with Michelle to see how she felt, and she was willing to go if that was where the Lord was leading us. Ironically, Michelle had just left Seattle in 2011, moved to Adelaide and settled

in here so we could get married. There would be pros and cons for Michelle moving back but she graciously put aside her fears because she saw this was something I really wanted.

The plan was never just to get up and go right then and there. I was a youth pastor at the time and had always said that when I was to leave, I was going to leave well. I knew that process would take at least a year to unfold in a healthy way. So, I caught up with the pastor of the gathering we were part of, shared about the opportunity and my plans to leave in a way that helped the youth. By June 2015 the transition was well underway. Though I had very little details to share with my church family, they were very supportive and encouraging about us moving to Seattle.

It was about this time that Jeff told me of their new training course, called "[Soma Sending](#)", which had just been set up for future church planters. It was a twenty one month 'apprenticeship' type training for hands on, experiential learning - which is exactly my learning style! Jeff said it would be better to come over at the beginning of the Seattle summer, because anyone who has been there knows summer is the best [only] time people are outside connecting. So we decided that we would head over at the end of May 2016.



Everything was lining up. The church supported it and many were willing to support us financially. There was a training course developed specifically for guys like me and Jeff himself asked me to be part of his team... At this stage, I was pretty excited that everything was going just as I wanted. In fact, I even took pride in telling people about this "amazing opportunity *I am going to have*".

But it didn't end there. On Christmas eve 2015, guys from Doxa skyped me to outlined my potential role while I was there. I was going to learn how to lead a missional community, under Jeff's leadership, while also being part of their Creative Arts team. This meant working on graphic designs, writing music/songs and leading worship. It was literally my dream job. Of course God was in this, how could he not be, it was all the things on "my list".

Yet for some reason I was hesitant to set a date for the flights and to start raising support. This was because the Spirit was poking me and I didn't know why. He starting asking me questions, when I stopped to actually listen. He asked, "*Would you still love me and follow me if you never got to do anything grand for my kingdom?* (eg. plant churches, lead bible studies, writing worship songs...)". He also put the question in my head saying, "*How can you tangibly show Michelle how precious she is to me?*". But God, what did these questions have to do with where I want to head? And so the process started where he would respond in more questions, highlighting my motives, digging deeper into the heart. But somehow, I still found a way of re-wording things to make them suit my needs.

It wasn't until January 16th, at the annual Soma Australia retreat (this time in Sydney), when the Spirit gripped my heart and got my attention. I had several conversations with people I respected, with good questions asked and advice given. But the most helpful was a chat I had Todd (from [Soma Tacoma](#)), who plays a key role with Soma International, he's a strategist and big picture planner. What said, was not what I was expecting

but as he unpacked it I realized the wisdom. He listened as I shared the opportunity Doxa has put before me, didn't say much, just heard my story. Then at then end, he outright said, "Don't go to Doxa." And gave 2 reasons...

- Is my time at Doxa, 2 years, really going to help/advance the church of Adelaide?
- It sounds like as a couple this wouldn't be a healthy move.

The first point was really hard to hear, and in a split second I had this conversation in my head, "*You did just hear how perfect a fit I am for this role right? It is what I have been wanting since 2009, it lines up with everything God has gifted me in and in case you missed it, Jeff Vanderstelt asked me, right, me to join! How could this not be a benefit to Adelaide?*"

Without knowing the little monolog going on in my head, Todd went on to explain the Doxa context. A big Church (up to fourteen hundred people), very wealthy, the building cost eighty grand a month to rent, and their sound system is worth something like three hundred grand. "*Seth, didn't you say Adelaide needs grassroot, life-on-life, community stuff, not more well run events?*" Then he said something that cut straight to my motives. "*Why don't you do the 2 year training at a different Soma Sending Church, maybe one that is just beginning like in Phoenix or LA?*"

It was at that moment, when I was about to respond, that I hear my words before I spoke them. "But Jeff won't be there!". *Seriously, was that really my main motive?* I realized I wanted to go, not because *I get to work with Jeff* (which God would have used), but because I will get to "tell others" that I got to work with Jeff. Subtle difference but it is huge! Though no one ever said this or would ever think it, I pictured people saying "*Wow, Seth, you got to do that! You must be pretty special and very gifted to get that opportunity.*" Ouch! Talk about touching on an idol. Though I would learn and grow, my main motive was to further my kingdom (to make me look good) not to further God's Kingdom, to reflect how good He is.



I began to see Todd's second point was true too. Everything revolved around me and what I wanted. I had talked it through with Michelle, but in my arrogance and stubbornness to my own plan, I wasn't listening to her or the Spirit. Michelle and I need to grow together. For us to get Soma Training for 2 years, though it would be awesome and would involve Michelle, it would still be "my thing" making her feel like she is just tagging along. This is not how either of us pictured being a team. I never want to drag my wife into my vision.

Ever since we were married, I have been leading Bible studies, running event's, speaking up the front... rarely getting to sit, shoulder to shoulder with Michelle, learning and growing together. My passion somehow made me blind to that. How is that loving Michelle as Jesus loves his church? What is that saying to Michelle about how I value her?

All this to say, the Spirit was clearly speaking. I was just struggling with what he was saying, because it meant letting go of my Idols and turning to His truth and my families needs (both my actual family and my larger Adelaide family). Right after Todd and I talked, I called Michelle and shared it all with her, my Idols, my motives and asked her to forgive me for not listening her heart. She said she would have gladly gone, but was honestly relieved at the thought of starting to live now, and not waiting another 2.5 years before things begin.

We knew that this shift in direction would affect a number of people in both Australia and America. It would mean that I would be "letting

people down" and Michelle's family wouldn't get to spend 2 years with us and our boys. It would mean some hard conversations with people and I would have to share, over and over again, about my arrogance/stubbornness and failure to listen. The sort of chats I would gladly run from. But God knows exactly what is needed to wreck my heart, so he can renew it. The crazy thing is during the previous 6 months, I had several people (I respect) tell me I shouldn't go, but in my haste to get what I wanted, I assumed they were the ones not listening to the Spirit. I have sat down with each of them and admitted my folly.

So even though thing may line up the way I want them to, that doesn't mean I just assume God's in it. That's like me saying, "This is what I want to do God, would you bless it for me."

Sorry, but this story doesn't have a tidy ending. In fact, we are not at the end at all, neither are we at the beginning. We are somewhere in the middle and it is messy. This will be an uncomfortable season because I will want to keep trying to control things again. But it is a beautiful mess because God has shown us, in just one of many ways, that he's plans and timeline is different to ours. Listen to his Spirit is always the better choice in every situation. We don't know what this year will look like, or the next ten for that matter. We just know that for a season we sit and do nothing but soak up his love, together as a family. How long is "a season"? We don't know, but you can be sure I will be listening very differently from now on.

