



## **“False Prophets” – Discerning those who are saying they’re doing good but are acting for their own purposes**

How would you define a “False Prophet,” and what should anyone look for when engaging with people that in the end makes it clear they’re a “False Prophet?”

This and more was the focus of the BELIEVES session titled “False Prophets” featuring Kasey McClure, Founder of 4Sarah, Inc.; and Michael Broughton, President of Atlanta CFO Services, on Tuesday, February 11, 2020.



Broughton, who grew up in Michigan, went to the University of Notre Dame for college, and then followed his sister to Atlanta, began the session sharing how he wound up in the profession he is in.

“My mom was a registered nurse and always wanted a kid to go into science,” he said. “She wound up with bankers and CPAs.”

Broughton told everyone that he began his career in accounting with a Big 4 accounting firm, and then worked for an aluminum company before launching his own firm in 1992 – Atlanta CFO Services, which primarily focuses on tax accounting and CFO work.

“In particular, a lot of the CFO work is focused on non-profits, including the likes of the Georgia Society for CPAs and Usher’s foundation, as well as various medical tech/pharma companies coming out of Emory.”

So amidst all the situations he faces, how does prayer exist for Broughton personally during the work day?

“I pray at night with my wife – and our puppy,” Broughton said. “I usually pray during the day in sticky situations, but also as much as possible, I’m able to sleep on it.”

Broughton's remarks were then complimented by a comment from a BELIEVES attendee, Eric Maust, a business banker at JPMorgan Chase.

"In the finance world, there's not always a clean answer," Maust said. "There's a good, better, and best answer, so it's possible to have the luxury of indecision. All of this has helped me to learn to be in the moment more."

Leslie Sharkey, also in attendance at BELIEVES, then related to what was being shared by stating, "On a lighter side, in yoga they call it 'making space.'"

CTK Parishioner John Ribka added, "When there's a fork in the road, we can go left or right, but there are a lot more options available – we can also stop, or turn around and go back."

The focus of the session then shifted to the core title of the BELIEVES session and what defines a "False Prophet?"

Broughton said, "I guess it's someone who says one thing and does another."

Broughton then went on to share the anecdote of his colleague who works for Usher's foundation, and one day was buying flowers for her wedding. When doing so she had used her cell phone and hadn't said who she worked for, but whomever she dealt with for the flowers must have Googled her to find out who she worked for.

"While at the flower shop, my colleague saw that the florist had written down, 'Make big money,'" Broughton told everyone at BELIEVES. "When she saw this, she told the florist, 'That's not me, I don't make lots of money, and I won't use your services.' Then she left. A little sneaky at best and a bait and switch ploy to be sure!"

He added, "Most of the time we're a gateway to keep people away from our clients."

Eric Maust, who had commented earlier in the session, then spoke again.

"For me personally, discerning selfish intent is very difficult. I agree that bait-and-switch is difficult to detect and deal with. I like to marinate to discern it."

CTK Parishioner John Ribka then remarked, "I particularly think about non-profits. I get pained by those that misrepresent."

With the focus on foundations and non-profits, Broughton was asked what steps he takes or recommends others take to discern intent and filter through possible charitable organizations to support.

"You can look at non-profits' financials on websites like Charity Navigator or GuideStar," Broughton said. "In particular, you'll see that their financials can be broken down into categories such as administrative, development, and programs. A good cutoff is that at least 70-75% of funds should be going to programs."

On a more direct involvement basis, Broughton said a lot of times he enters into situations with non-profits when there's a change.

"If the Board gets rid of the CEO, I'll ask, 'So what are you wanting to do, if that's the past?'"

And when it comes to clearly discerning a "False Prophet," what should someone notice or look for when engaging with people?

Broughton stated, "One thing that's happened in the past is getting a call from someone that's not referred to me. Typically these don't work out. Additionally, if someone's in a real hurry to get financials out, then they probably need to rethink their business. The red flag is that there's a lot of urgency."

CTK Parishioner Maureen Becker recalled the saying that "you can't do good business with bad people, and you can't do bad business with good people." However, she added there are a lot of good people who aren't profitable that can exist.

"That's a whole lot more common," Broughton responded. "It's often a cash flow thing, so you work with them to smooth it out."

Broughton was then asked by Eric Maust, "Given that you come in when change is occurring, when you look at financials, on paper can you discern things that indicate a likely 'False Prophet?'"

"Not really," Broughton responded. "Often you get a lot of stories. That's where you start to understand intent, but sometimes people are just incompetent."

Maust then followed by commenting and asking, "One of the toughest situations is a 'False Prophet' doing things for the right reasons, like having lots of people to take care of. Do you deal with this?"

"Yes," said Broughton. "There's a medical startup I dealt with that is involved with analyzing blood. The market changed, and they lost a corporate sponsor. In the end they stopped operating, though investors did get a little. It did impact folks."

"What would have happened if the medical startup had continued?" Broughton was then asked.

"It probably could have continued but it wouldn't have been easy to get financing for investment."

The session began to come to a close with some discussion among everyone present about the importance of people having values that are authentic.

John Laughter, SVP of Corporate Safety, Security, and Compliance, who was in attendance at the session remarked, "It's good to be around people with values."

He then added, "It's often easy to see the ends of the spectrum – 'False Prophets' are in the middle."