

# **From Vision to Vitality: How Biblical Discernment can Reawaken your Church**

**Rev. Dr. Tim Archibald, New Minas, NS**

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## **Appendix C - Four-Week Leadership Study Welcome Sheet**

### **The Spirit-Led Leader - A Four-Week Study for Elders**

- Sept. 26th - Chapter 1 (p.23-40) - *The Vision*: Fruitfulness in leadership requires the work of God in and through us. (*Secondary Chapters 2&3*) Please answer questions 1&2 (p.37-38) before we meet. During our time together we will explore the Speaking/ Listening/ Observing Exercise (p. 38-39) and some of the questions at the end of chapter 2.
- Oct. 3rd - Chapter 4 - (p.85-106) - *Aligning with God's Purpose*: Always Seek to Serve God's Purposes First (*Secondary Chapter 7*) During our time together we will explore some of the questions from the end of chapter 4 (p.103-105).
- Oct. 10th - Chapter 5 - (p.107-128) - *Seeking God Together*: God Works Powerfully as we seek his activity among us. (*Secondary Chapter 6*).
- Oct. 17th - Chapters 8-9 (p.175-206) *Trusting God and God's Grace*: Trust and Grace create the only Sure Foundation for Personal Transformation and Dynamic Spiritual Leadership.

At our first meeting you will be linked with a **Prayer & Reflection Partner** from within the group. You will connect with this person once each week for a minimum of 15 minutes to reflect and pray together about how God is leading you to grow in Spirit-Led Leadership. If you have discerned who God wishes for you to be linked with please email me in advance of our first meeting.

**We will meet from 7 to 8:15pm** each week in Emmaus at Kings Church.

Could we also have four volunteers who might prepare some coffee or tea for each

meeting?

Thank you for being willing to embark on this exciting voyage together!

Your Captain, Tim

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## **Appendix D - Discernment Worship Series Sermons:**

### **Setting Sail with the Currents of Grace**

*6 October 2013 - Away from Shore - Galatians 5:16-25*

So have you decided who you are voting for yet? Just two more days to go. When I was younger, voting in our family was an easy decision. You see we were Liberal and had been— since Confederation. In my maternal grandmother's estimation, if you were both Liberal **and** Presbyterian then you were next to God himself. But being dyed in the wool Liberals meant that we didn't listen very objectively to what the candidates were saying. We heard *sweetness and light* coming from the Liberal candidate and nothing worth hearing from the Tory candidate—the NDP wasn't even on our radar then. So why is that? We were smart enough people, we weren't particularly arrogant, but we weren't getting the full picture. Our egos and our expectations got in the way. We just heard what fitted our expectations. Kind

of like the story of the blind men trying to describe an elephant while only feeling one part of it. We also see it played out to our south in the American Congress these days: (SHOW SLIDE)

This same dynamic that can get in the way of our political listening also gets in the way of faith and our ability to truly hear God. In reading the Bible we can tend to only hear what we either already believe, or what fits our theology. We ignore much of the rest. If you believe the Bible speaks mainly about personal morality and responsibility, you won't really hear much of what it says about caring for each other and giving up of ourselves. If you believe the Bible speaks mainly about social justice, you won't hear what it has to say about self-restraint and self-reliance. The same happens when we hear sermons. Sometimes people hear me saying things that I never said and it's because they're listening for a particular point of view, and if I say something close to it, it will be the same as saying it.

Today begins a four-week series on the spiritual practice of discernment - intentionally seeking God's will and not just our own. More than any other time in history we are faced with so many choices: career, marriage, children, moving, care for elderly parents, choices for our own old age and choices in the church. If God is the telling influence in our lives then this must be reflected in the way we make choices, both individually, and corporately as a community of faith. How can we be attuned to the Spirit's guidance? Am I able to give up my own will for the sake of discerning God's will?

The first step to moving into the currents of God's grace is drawing up the heavy anchor of our own limited ego views and our tightly held opinions - and moving away from shore into new open water. Deeply engrained in us is our desire to run things our way. But pride and ambition deafen us to God's voice. On the other hand some have a tendency to be too compliant to the wills of others and are people pleasers. Either way we naturally tend more often to be interested in what we want or in pleasing others - than in what **God wants**. When it comes to prayer, we tend to seek the answers we already want, instead of going to God in prayer and asking - what do you want, God?

Consider Jesus, however. He was not tugged around by pleasing others demands and desires - he spoke truth to power. He stood his ground firmly and held onto his rock-solid resolve to pursue his mission. Yet personal autonomy was not grounded in himself, but in the will of the Father.

Everything he did was about fulfilling the will of God - the pinnacle of which was his prayer at Gethsemane on the night he was betrayed. As we see in Jesus it is our love for God and our deep desire for more of God that can make God the telling influence in our life.

Discernment helps us to be awake to the wind of the Spirit so that when it blows to direct our lives and wills we may not be caught dozing. It's not that our efforts can make it happen, rather it is pure grace. As Wilkie Au says: "In discernment we attempt to be as wide open and as undefended as possible so that when the wind of the Spirit comes, we will be sensitive to the

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slightest nudging of the divine breeze,"<sup>131</sup> and then respond in obedient living. We can never know God by studying God, rather is in the process of faithfulness, trust-obedience that we know God by doing God's will as we know it. The process stops if we are unfaithful to what we have heard, what we have seen and what we know to be God's will.

Conditions in the 21st century make it hard to live with a discerning heart. Rushed and busy lives put us at risk of becoming spiritually insensitive and out of tune. To live with a discerning heart is to believe, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning expressed it, that "earth's crammed with heaven" and that God is everywhere to be found in the holy ground of our everyday existence.

In football, each team is led by a quarterback who calls the plays during the huddles. The agreed-upon play determines how the offensive will carry out its attempt to reach the goal for a touchdown. Sometimes, however, immediately before the ball is put into motion, the quarterback suddenly changes the play because he notices how the defensive team has positioned itself. This spontaneous change of play is called an **AUDIBLE**. In real life, shifting circumstances often call for the same flexibility and openness to change and adaptation. To live a spiritual life is to stay alert to the "audibles" that God calls out to us and being willing to follow a new play—willingly. Being spiritually awake allows us to do this.

To be a discerning person is to imitate the response of Abraham who heard the divine audible to change the course of his life. Out of obedience and

undaunted by old age, he left the familiarity of family and homeland and proceeded into the unknown—trusting in God’s promise of a blessed future. To be a discerning person is to emulate the example of Mary when the angel Gabriel announced a dramatic turning point in her life. Hearing the call of God, Mary understood the challenge before her: to give up her own plans for her future and to say a willing “Yes” to her part in God’s plan—“to let go and to let God.” Not being too anchored in their own plans or even the expectations of others, Abraham and Mary were both able to hear God’s audible that announced a major departure from prearranged plans. We are called to similarly heed God’s audible.

Overall in the world faith is exhibiting an exciting new vitality. The Christian Church has never been larger, but the majority of its members are now in the global south. The former heartland of Western Christianity— Europe, Canada — have seen monumental declines in the last 45 years. In 1950, 60% of Canadians were in weekly worship, now its less than a third of that. God is giving us an audible to change our game plan, but many congregations are not hearing it, they’re more consumed with the will of their members, than with the will of God.

Who are we? What does God wants us to do? Are we willing to let something die in order to let God have room to start something new? What will we lay aside or leave behind so that we may be open to new gifts of grace or new expressions of ministry and these deep currents of grace that are surging in our globe? Wilkie Au suggests that discernment means allowing our preference to be shaped by the single criterion of what will enhance our ability to love God and to embody that love for others in the concrete context of our lives and community of faith.<sup>132</sup>

The voice of God is very gentle; we cannot hear it if we let other voices compete. Real love always heals fear and neutralizes egotism, and so as love grows up in us, we shall worry about ourselves less, and admire and delight in God and his other children more and more—and this is the secret of joy. When we are ready to ask God to haul up the heavy anchor of our own ego and pride, we shall no longer strive for our own way, but commit ourselves easily and simply, to God’s way, and in so doing find our peace.

<sup>131</sup> Au, loc. 179 of 2418. <sup>132</sup> Ibid., loc. 590 of 2418.

*13 October 2013 - Moving Closer to Christ - John 15:1-17*

We're in the midst of a worship series on the Spiritual practice of discernment: exploring how we welcome God more fully into the choices and decisions that are part of our lives, both as **individuals** and **corporately** as a community of faith. We're considering discernment in relation to the ancient view of the church as a boat. Last week we considered the first step of discernment: moving away from shore—allowing God to cut the heavy anchor of our own sin, pride, fear, deeply held opinions, and our need for personal security that tend to keep us from setting out into the current of grace. We looked at Abraham, who was pretty well set at 75 in his retirement houseboat in harbour when God called him to leave all that behind to journey out into open seas, to a destination yet to be revealed. And he set sail. We looked at Mary, a lovely young engaged woman from Nazareth with a wonderful conventional “in harbour” future, who was invited by God through Gabriel to move out into uncharted waters of pregnancy out of marriage, which could have gotten her stoned, in order to bear the son of God. And she set sail. What about you? Are you resting securely in harbour? Just allowing God to cut those anchors? Or are you already facing the choppy billows of open sea? Today we explore the next step in this spiritual journey: open sea—moving closer to Christ.

One week I was visiting in the hospital I met a seasoned old sailor from Lunenburg County. Facing serious health issues and his own mortality, he reflected through his experience as a sailor: “More than once at sea I thought I was done for,” he said. “But one night in particular I was certain we were going down. What a storm! The wind and waves beat against us, in that wide-open sea, and I was powerless, except to pray. And I prayed like I never prayed before. I relied on God like I had never relied on Him before. And just as we thought the ship was about to go down, there came a sudden completely unexplained calm. You never look at life the same again, after going through that.”

Did you think that moving out into open waters with Jesus was going to be like one ongoing summer harbour cruise, with a beautiful sunset? Oh no, as some of you can attest, setting sail with Jesus pushes us to the very end of our

own resources. So what does this all have to do with the vines and branches of our Gospel reading? As I shared at our discernment event last Sunday, the interesting thing is that the most coveted wines of the world are grown in places like Southern France, California, Australia, Chile, and Argentina. All of which have very arid climates. They get very little summer rainfall, so their roots have to dig deep in search for groundwater. The roots can go as deep as 150 feet down. It's this digging deeper that gives the wines their unique character and complexity—the flavour that comes into the grapes from the soil, the rocks, the limestone, the chalk, and anything else that might be deep in the ground. Good wines become great because they face great stress, which forces them to dig their roots deeper.

Everything about our life in NA is about ensuring safe-harbours of security, but closer to Christ is always cutting anchor and heading out into the open waters with nothing but Jesus, his community, and his grace to rely on. It's here in these crisis times, when like the trapeze artist we are forced to let go of one swing, gliding head-long through the air without being able to see the next swing to grab. And sometimes in real life the next swing doesn't suddenly appear, but must be discovered through a process of discernment and struggle. As Wilkie Au says: This place of betwixt and between is the place where real transformation can take place, because it's here that we must rely on God and his community of grace.<sup>133</sup> Nothing new happens as long as we are inside our self-constructed comfort zone, in harbour. Nothing good or creative emerges from business as usual. Much of the work of the Bible, says Richard Rhor, is to “get people into liminal space, (into open water) and to keep them there long enough so that they can learn something essential. It is the ultimate teachable space.”<sup>134</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., loc. 2031 of 2418.

<sup>134</sup> Richard Rhor, “Days Without Answers in a Narrow Space,” *The National Catholic Reporter*, 1 Feb. 2000:15.

The crises and stress of life's open seas are what can cause us to dig deeper into faith and move closer to Jesus. When we feel that we are in control, we are often close-minded in our pursuits. Pride and ambition deafen us to God's

voice. However when disruptions and crises throw us off track and we lose our way in life, we recognize that we are indeed “poor in spirit” and dependent on God for guidance. If you talk to people about when they experienced God the most deeply, they often talk about a crisis they went through when they had to surrender to God. It was then that they discovered God deeply in their lives. Christian spirituality encourages us to stay with liminal spaces by reassuring us that God is present and active during these fearful times of disorientation.

Remember when the disciples encountered one such time which is recounted in all three gospels. They had headed across the Sea of Galilee when suddenly a fierce storm swept down the lake, threatening to drown them all. They tried everything, but they were going down. And they cried out to Jesus who was asleep in the boat: “Save us.” And Jesus rebuked the wind and calmed the waves.

As Graham Standish says, “the slumbering Christ is present at the core of our churches, wanting to be awakened, wanting to play, wanting to bless us with his presence. When we realize that that Christ is in our very midst with us, ready to be awakened, and then open ourselves to Christ and his guidance, amazing things begin to happen in our midst.”<sup>135</sup> Our call is to be awake, aware and alive to the presence of Christ in our midst, giving us guidance, life and love.

The vine and the branches parable is a picture of growing vitality where increasing union with the Divine results in fruit bearing love that nourishes the world. Those who live in Christ and allow Christ to live in them will bear fruit that feeds the world. If we become aware and awake to God’s presence in our midst, the life of Christ will flow in and through us as we become alive in Christ. Our lives take on a new character and quality, we are infused with a new dynamism and energy.

What does a branch have to do to produce fruit? Simply make sure it’s connected to the vine. As long as a branch is connected to the vine, sap flows freely through the branch and produces fruit. Just keep connected to the vine and the branch bears fruit. And if we do, grace will just flow naturally through our lives. When that happens, the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) grows plentifully in and through us.



Haven't you met people whose connection to God causes them to radiate God's love and presence? What would it take to become a church that intentionally tries to awaken people to God's presence and grace in their midst so that they can connect with Christ more powerfully in their daily lives and produce fruit that nourishes the world?

A church of presence offers a pathway for people to experience Christ. It calls them to commitment, prayer, sacrifice, love and transformation. What matters most is allowing the life of Christ to flow through the church.

This is the kind of joy we can have if we are willing to live life connected to the vine. You are meant to be a branch that is grafted to Christ. You are meant to flow with grace. You are meant to be filled with joy. Reflect on your life: What are you doing to be grafted to Christ, to flow with grace, and live a joyful life?

*20 October 2013 - Closer to Each other - Ephesians 4:1-16*

I had been hearing in the news about the shale gas protestors in Rexton, NB. Then suddenly on Wed. what had been a peaceful witness erupted with violence, pepper spray, molotov cocktails, police gunfire, five burned police cars, and the arrest of 40 protestors. As much as we like to think of the Maritimes as a warm and friendly place, that myth died along time ago. It didn't seem like such a warm and friendly place for the family of the woman in Truro who's husband allegedly strangled her and then shoot himself. I remember waking up to all of this in the early '90s while watching a report from New Glasgow about a demonstration opposing hatred of

<sup>135</sup> Standish, *Becoming a Blessed Church*, p. 74.

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homosexuals. As peaceful marchers walked along Archimedes St. suddenly cat calls erupted and within seconds like a match to gas, hatred, violence and mayhem was ignited. I sat there watching it, stunned. These had been streets that, growing up, I had frequented every Friday evening with my parents. Where had all that hatred division and violence come from? And what is the antidote?

We're in the midst of a worship series on the Spiritual practice of discernment: exploring how we welcome God more fully into the choices and decisions that are part of our lives, both as individuals and corporately as a community of faith. We're considering discernment in relation to the ancient view of the church as a boat. The first week we considered the first step of discernment: moving away from shore—allowing God to cut the heavy anchor of our own sin, pride, fear, deeply held opinions and our need for personal security. Last week we explored the next step: open sea—how life's storms and uncertainties can force us to the end of our own personal resources and actually enable us to finally depend on Christ more than ourselves. Today, we look at how moving closer to Jesus also simultaneously begins a process of tearing down the barriers that threaten and divide us. An authentic moving closer to Christ automatically causes us to move closer to other people.

Yet that's not what most Canadians experience. The 2011 Canadian census reported that 67% of Canadians claim adherence to Christianity; yet only about 13% or maybe 15% of Canadians now attend weekly worship—the lowest percentage on record (In 1950 - 60% of Canadians attended weekly worship). Like an email I received recently from one of our members who moved away—and still hasn't re-connected with a congregation—most Canadians seem to think, "I can have a relationship with God without going to worship each week. I don't have to be part of the church to be a Christian." It's true, you can have a "kind" of relationship with God by not going to weekly worship or just showing up when you feel like it. It might be like the "kind" of relationship you would have with a spouse if you only talked to them when you felt like it, only kissed them and told them you loved them, when the mood hit. It would be a kind of relationship, but it wouldn't be "true love," which is transformative.

The majority of Canadians now say that religion is a private thing. So people decide to go their own way and adopt all sorts of spiritual wisdom and practices from different religions, but then they never adopt the one thing that is common and essential to all of them, which is **community**. The fact is that there is **no** spiritual tradition that emphasizes the individual over the communal. None. Every major religion emphasizes that to be truly spiritual requires community. Community is where the Spirit brings transformation. All the major world religions stress that to grow closer to God—or whatever

they understand God to be—we have to grow closer to each other - a connection with the Holy requires connection with each other. By ourselves it is all too easy for us to mistake our own desires for signs of God's will. The biblical way of life is decidedly centred on others. The neighbour is the epicentre of the Gospel. Private religion is no religion at all. Such individualism is just about me ending up creating God and religion in my own image. God becomes mostly about me getting what I want. Private religion is like settling for Burger King every night when you have a free open invitation to the Tempest or the Privet House.

And all our overdeveloped individualism is tearing us apart and doing us considerable harm. Graham Standish a pastor, theologian and former social worker observes, that it's led to a lack of commitment in relationships, marriages, parenting, workplaces, and so many other areas of life. It also leads to divisiveness because each of us believes our own truth is THE TRUTH; we find it hard to work together. We aren't always that open to other people's perspectives on truth.

Standish also sees it as related to high rates of depression. Worldwide studies have shown that the U.S., along with France, (two of the world's most individualistic countries) have the highest rates of depression in the world. Between 19% and 21% in both countries report suffering from depression. The lowest rates of depression tend to come from lower income countries that emphasize community. Americans have more money, more possessions, more opportunities than anywhere else, but they are also more depressed. Is this over developed individualism really the best for us?

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In sharp contrast to the culture around us, Ephesians 4 shows us our true north when it comes to God's intended spiritual path. It's all about unity and oneness. Did you notice how often that word appears in this passage? One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Yet in hearing that many of you may be thinking of a kind of 1950s oneness that seemed to force everybody to have to be the same—or pity help you for being different.

But sameness is not required for oneness, according to Paul. He uses the well-known analogy of the one body made up of a whole diversity of parts that are all joined and knit together; the eye is not a hand, the heart is not a fingernail, but all the different parts are held together in one great unity by the head.

Our diversity in community, whether in gifts, or in outlook, or opinion need not be a problem or a cause for division—but like a human body such diversity can actually be a great asset—when all are engaging and working together. And it is our individual connection with the head that facilitates this oneness. “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s building itself up in love.” So Paul’s oneness is not sameness, but it is a oneness that is okay with difference.

God’s oneness is itself a community of “three persons.” God’s unity is not uniformity; it is the unity of self-giving love. (The Son points to the father. The Father points to the son. The Son points to the Spirit and so on) Irenaeus: the Son and the Spirit are the two arms of God by which the Father reaches out to embrace humanity. The unity of God is the unity of peaceful difference and self-giving love.

What a church community does, when we are willing to work to be part of it, is that it pushes us to move beyond selfishness, self-focus, and self-reliance. It moves us more into God’s love by pushing us to connect with people we normally might ignore. It connects us with God’s vision of life, which is that we are to love each other without condition, no matter how different we all might be. The church has a calling to be a community of peace in the midst of cultures of enmity, to be a place of a peace-able difference. The church is not the creator of the peace, but is called to display it, to make it manifest, to perform it. The community does this when its members practice - humility, gentleness, patience, bearing one another in love.” (4:2) These are virtues to make and maintain communities of peaceable difference. When you’re part of a church, you’re part of something special that opens you to each other, to God, and to life in a way that transcends what you can do on your own.

*27 October 2013 - Moving Closer to the World God Wills - Micah 6:6-8*

One summer in the early '80's I was employed in my home community on a government grant. Part of our task was to research local history and the genealogies of our founding families. In Denver we did not have a great Smithsonian Institute for research, but our treasure trove of valuable history resided in Jean and Ruth Cameron—two spinster sisters in their 80s and 90s. The pair had gone off to Boston as young women and returned later to run the family farm. Ruth was the oldest, wore overalls, worked the farm and was almost deaf. Jean was the younger who had been a teacher. She wore a house dress, worked in the kitchen and waited on her older sister. Ruth's deafness meant she spoke loudly. Her favourite sayings were: "Jean, go out in the kitchen and get me my...." And the other was, "...not like in the good old days."

But were the good old days really so good? Who wants to go back to those days before indoor plumbing and electricity? Those days when women couldn't vote, and when their choice of professions amounted basically to nursing, teaching or secretarial, and if you got married you had to quit. Do we really want to go back to the good old days when men were obligated to carry on the family business, whether they wanted to or not. Or when our First Nations people were forced away from family to go to residential schools where they could be beaten if they spoke their own language. Or back to the good old days when people were excluded from church because they

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didn't have "good clothes" to wear. Or when a beloved church music director if found out to be a homosexual would be fired and removed.

Although I often offer you a critique of our current culture, I really am not someone who is longing for the "good old days." Perhaps one of the great advances we have seen in the last 100 years is toward a more just and fair society for all. Consider where we've advanced in terms of the rights of workers, the rights of women, access to education, openness to minorities, and the great levelling that has come with the digital post-modern age when anybody's view point can now be heard and valued. The recent Arab spring was a demonstration of this. Yes, we still have a LONG road ahead to becoming a justice society, but God has changed a lot in the past century.

And why do I say God? Where do you think this vision for justice came from, this will to work for the equality and good of all, especially the powerless. It came from people who were devote followers of Jesus. The birth of the social gospel 100 years ago prompted Canadian Christians to not merely see faith as a one-time "decision for Christ," but as something that should be lived out in social relationships in our country. John Shearer, a Presbyterian, advocated for the rights of disadvantaged workers, which grew into the union movement; Nellie McClung, a Methodist, advocated for women to have the vote, which grew into the women's rights movement, later Tommy Douglas, a Baptist, advocated for free public medicare for all Canadians - something we see as our greatest single accomplishment in the last century.

All of these visions came through people who worshipped, prayed, read scripture and followed God's lead. We saw the same in the Civil Rights Movement and more recently in the overthrow of Apartheid in South Africa. The vision again came from the God of justice who loves all people, not just some. The steel resolve demonstrated by people like Martin Luther King Jr., Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela did not just come from good will power, it came from a willingness to set aside their own wills, their own ego and self-focus to pursue God's will and the good of others.

But this doesn't happen to everyone who goes to church. In fact in some places we see how churches have been hijacked by human will and ego and instead have fuelled injustice, hatred and conflict, like in Nazi Germany, Northern Ireland, or like in many of our tired, inflexible and fading congregations where the focus is on "what I want." I think this is also why people are losing interest in politics; instead of it being about a vision, it's become more about marketing studies, public opinion, giving people what they want and staying in power. This is one of the greatest temptations in our Western consumer society. We have started viewing the church as a consumer where "what I want" becomes front and centre. Some entrepreneurial mega churches have responded by offering a host of therapeutic programs and sermons on how to parent better, how to manage my finances and how to love yourself. But this is counterfeit faith, because it feeds this idea of me "getting what I want," and using God to get it. And that's not the faith of Jesus. For Jesus, it's all about doing the will of the Father.

Don't get me wrong. If you have just started coming to worship and you have come out of your own need there is absolutely nothing wrong with that—you

are welcome here. But if you have been coming to worship for many years and are still stuck at just "getting what you need from God," then you haven't yet found the heart of Christian faith—which is not just seeking the gifts of God, but rather seeking God himself and learning to love God enough to surrender our lives to do his will each day, instead of my own. Anglican mystic, Evelyn Underhill wrote, "The more we get rid of self-chosen aims, however good, the more supple we are to God's pressure, the nearer we get to the pattern of the Christian life which is summed up in "not my will but Thine be done". Then, not before, we are ready to be used as God's tools and contribute to his purpose."<sup>136</sup>

We can come up with lots of great ideas and good things to do, but when it all centres around me, my plans, my ego—even good ideas run out of steam after a very short while. I remember hearing a story from a development worker who went to South Asia after the Tsunami. There was so much to do, so many needs, so few resources. She said: "I decided that there was just no time for daily prayer and Scripture reading and reflection. But after two weeks of that I

<sup>136</sup> Underhill, *The Fruits of the Spirit*, p. 68.

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was ready to go home. I had run out - I was overwhelmed - I had nothing left to give. So I started praying again each day. And when I saw my work as part of what God was doing, the life and energy began to return. You can't do work like this without daily walking with God."

And this is how our Micah reading puts it: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" We can't love kindness or do justice in any meaningful way unless we first walk humbly with God. We can't move closer to the world God wills, until we humbly surrender our wills for the will of God. "Walk with" means to live in communion with. Our prayer becomes the force that empowers us to engage the world.<sup>137</sup>

Underhill: Since God is the true doer of all that is done, it is always for him to initiate and for us to respond, and this willing response is the essence of obedience. Obedience means more freedom not less, for it lifts the burden of

perpetual choice, and in so doing actually increases our power of effective action by making us instruments of God's unlimited action. When the whole church is thus obedient to Him it will be what it is meant to be, "a fellowship of creative heaven- led souls" with power to fulfil its vocation of transforming the world."<sup>138</sup>

In the life of Jesus we see more clearly the world God wills: the blind see, the deaf hear, the lepers are healed, the outcast are brought in and the poor have good news preached to them and most radically - enemies are loved. Scripture then is like the score for your favourite piece of music - but on the page it just remains that. Sitting and reading the score is entirely different from singing it or playing it. The score only becomes music when the players or singers take it up and give it life by playing it - by living God's will in the power of the Spirit.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p.168.

<sup>138</sup> Underhill, *Life As Prayer*, p.68.

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## **Appendix E - Congregational Discernment Event**

# **Kings Church Congregational Discernment Event Outline Sunday, 6 October 2013**

In table groups, begin prayerful conversation around John 15:1-17 and the questions that follow.

Open with prayer. Then have someone read the passage once in **NRSV**. Listen for a word or phrase that particularly strikes you:

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. 2 He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes[a] to make it bear more fruit. 3 You have already been cleansed[b] by the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such



branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become[c] my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants[d] any longer, because the servant[e] does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Allow for a couple minutes of silence. Give short responses.

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Now read it again in **The Message**. What does this Scripture say to us about God's vision for Kings Church?

15 1-3 "I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken. 4 "Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. 5-8 "I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples. 9-10 "I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done—kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love. 11-15 "I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. You are my friends when you do the things I command you. I'm no

longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father. 16 "You didn't choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won't spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you. 17 "But remember the root command: Love one another.

- What do you love most about Kings Church? (e.g. What unique people and gifts, resources and potentials has God brought together in us? (You may use paper or clay to create a symbol)
- What is God inviting us to do with those gifts?
- After 40 minutes we will reconvene in the sanctuary as a large group and take ten minutes of song, silence, and prayer to invite God's guidance.
- Then we will share the highlights of each group's discussion and see what themes and words seem to hold the greatest enthusiasm and energy when it comes to describing the ministry and direction of Kings Church.
- We will record all results and circulate to the elders and participants in the Spirit-Led Leader Study Group.

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## **Appendix F - Discernment Retreat For Elders - Outline**

### **1. Opening Worship Time (2:00-2:30pm)**

- *Prayer*
- *Song*: Father, I adore you. Lay my life before you. How I love you.
- *Scripture*: Galatians 5: 22-25 ***”The Fruit of the Spirit”*** 22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.
- *Shedding* - Letting go of what would keep us from the Spirit’s leading. What is God asking you to shed or set aside so that you may be fully available to hear his voice?
- *Song*: Bless the Lord, my soul, And bless God’s Holy Name. Bless the Lord, my soul, Who leads me into life.
- *Scripture*: Romans 12:1-2 ***”The New Life in Christ”*** 1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,[a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual[b] worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world,[c] but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- *Song*: Take O take me as I am. Summon out what I shall be. Set your seal upon my heart, And live in me.

- *Prayer*
- **2. Divide into Three Small Groups (2:30-3:30pm) for Scripture reading, discussion, prayer and discernment around a vision for Kings Church. Designate a leader & a reporter. Read Ephesians 4:1-16 allow at least one minute of silence. Have the passage read again by a different person and from a different version. Discuss the following questions:**
  - *What do you hear God saying to us as we discern more clearly God's leading and will for Kings Church?*
  - *How is Kings different from other churches in our community? (e.g. What atmosphere do we tend to create when we are together?)*
  - *Why have we been assembled at this time?*
  - *How does God want to use this unique congregation for the good of our wider community? The world?*
  - *Close with a time of prayer.*
- **3. Enjoy a Break to Walk by the Bay. (3:30 - 4:00 pm) 4. Large Group Time (4:00 - 4:55pm)**

- *Song: Bless the Lord, my soul, And bless God's Holy Name. Bless the Lord, my soul, Who leads me into life.*

- Share the highlights of the small group work.
  - Determine what had the highest energy level in your discussion?
  - Begin to focus in on common words and themes.
  - How do these responses compare with the congregational discernment responses?
  - Are there common themes that emerge?
  - Which possibilities most strongly seem to come from God?
- 5. Break for 20 Minutes of Individual Silence, Followed by Supper.** (4:55 - 6:30pm)
- 6. Large Group Discussion Continued** (6:30-7:45 pm) - Is it possible to draw the elements together into a short, one sentence statement that captures the essence of a Vision for Kings Church?
- 7. Closing Worship with Communion.** (7:45 - 8:00pm)
- 8. Reconvene in two weeks** to pray and consider the summary of all that has been discerned.
- Is there a clear focus and vision for Kings Church?

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## **Appendix G - December Discernment Meeting For Elders - Outline**

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*Light Candle Song* - Emmanuel

*Shedding* - There are things that keep us from being available to God's leading and God's life giving presence: sin, ego, pride, guilt, worry, anxiety, fear, frenetic activity, fatigue...

*Prayer* - Advent means coming. Advent teaches us to say "Come Lord Jesus." And if Jesus is to come then there must be free space for Jesus to come into. Part of our work in Advent is learning to make room for the coming of Jesus into our midst. We so often crowd Jesus out with our much-ness and many-ness, our frantic busyness. But as the ancient proverb says: "If we keep a bare branch in our heart, a singing bird will come." So we come now to make room for Jesus - make free space in our midst for him to come into.

So let us invite Jesus into this free space. As we close our eyes let us begin to breath deeply - in and then out, inhale, exhale - breathing out all that would distract and keep us from being aware and open to the renewing grace of our Lord; breathing in the life and peace of our God - peace that builds trust and faith.

Come, Lord, Jesus. Come Lord Jesus and lead your people.

*Scripture* - Isaiah 43:19-20

For I am about to do something new.

See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness.

I will create rivers in the dry wasteland. The wild animals in the fields will thank me,

the jackals and owls, too,

for giving them water in the desert.

Yes, I will make rivers in the dry wasteland

so my chosen people can be refreshed (and sing my praises).

*Prayer*

*Scripture:* 1 Peter 4:7-11 (The Message) Everything in the world is about to be wrapped up, so take nothing for granted. Stay wide-awake in prayer. Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything. Be quick to give a meal to the hungry, a bed to the homeless—cheerfully. Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it: if words, let it be God's words; if help, let it be God's hearty help. That way, God's bright presence will be evident in everything through Jesus, and he'll get all the credit as the One mighty in everything—encores to the end of time. Oh, yes!

*Silence*

*Scripture:* 1 Peter 4:7-11 (NLT) The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. 8 Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. 10 God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. 11 Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it

with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

- *Other Reflections on Community:*
- Martin Buber: True community does not come into being because people have feelings for each other (though that is required too), but rather on two accounts: all of them stand in a living reciprocal relationship to a single living centre, and they have to stand in a living reciprocal relationship to one-another. The second event has its source in the first.... A community is built upon a living reciprocal relationship, but the builder is the living active centre."
- We need community to complete our humanity. Yet secular attempts at community are notoriously void of meaning.
- Loneliness is a commentary on our lack of authentic community. Often we are part of a crowd (of individuals), but not of a group.
- Yet in Christ we are all members of a body. Adam was not complete until there was Eve.
- People are always part of community, even when they deny it. We must be edged out of our so- called "rugged-individualism" in order to experience the wholeness of the Gospel which redeems us in community.
- "Our Culture," writes Henri Nouwen, " is a working, hurrying, and worrying culture with many opportunities except the opportunities to celebrate life." (Andrew holding up Kismet) We are a community of joy.



- We are not perfect, but in the process of being made.
- We are a community of servants -ones who do things for others, usually things they don't want to do for themselves. Going about their work quietly and gently, deferring to others. They stand under or along side. Our Saviour was born of poor humble parents, in an unimportant town, in the rudest of shelters. He made a life of rejecting marks of power and prestige.
- God works in community; biblical faith is a community affair. What makes the difference is faithfulness, obedience, servanthood, prayer.
- A community preserved by grace - nothing else.
- Frederick Beuchner: "The place God calls you to is where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.
- The vision is both God's and ours.