An aerial photograph of a vast, lush green valley. The landscape is dominated by dense, vibrant green forests covering rolling hills and deep valleys. The perspective is from a high vantage point, looking down into the valley. The sky is a pale, clear blue, and the overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

50

DAYS OF PRAYER

DISCERNING THE VOICE

MAY 5-JUNE 30, 2012

BY DAVID CHOTKA

THE PURPOSE

Some matters do not require great gifts of discernment.

For example, if you journey to a foreign city and find yourself in prison after a public beating (subsequent to casting out a “spirit of divination” from a slave girl and enraging her owners), and if you are singing to God in the dark, because all you can think to do is to worship, when your and everyone else’s chains fall off and the doors burst open in a sudden earthquake, and if the jailor almost commits suicide, and you stop him, and he falls at your feet and asks, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”, the discernment is rather clear: Tell him!

Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailor, and he (and his family) came to faith in the Lord (Acts 16:16-34).

Moses needed little discernment when the Voice spoke from the burning bush and told him to tell Pharaoh, “Let my people go.” Yet Moses didn’t discern the Voice until he decided to pay attention:

“When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him...”

God spoke when Moses’ actions pointed to a desire to discern (Exodus 3:3-4 NASB).

Discerning the Voice, a spiritual discipline, is a practice of sifting, being led by the Spirit, and doing the ordinary (or the extraordinary) as required by the leading in the moment.

These seven studies are designed to underscore that, whether by the miraculous or the mundane, the attitude of the believer must be to imitate Moses—turn aside to see.

May these studies give us an approach to perceiving what God wants done—so that we may live out our faith—and choose wisely at this next General Assembly.

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Alliance Pray Team
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CONTENTS

Week 1	4
Week 2	12
Week 3	19
Week 4	27
Week 5	36
Week 6	45
Week 7	54
About the Author	63

Week 1

Perhaps you can relate to a story like this one.

I entered into a large conference area to begin a seminar with a noted Bible teacher. There were something like two thousand attendees, each present to learn from the Word. The theme of the conference was healing prayer, and most, if not all of us, wanted to learn something of the holy mystery of praying for the sick and seeing both miracle and despair.

Spying me from a distance, a middle aged woman wearing an “altar prayer” tag approached me and asked if she might pray with me. After I had said yes, she placed her hand on my shoulder and began to pray. After a moment, she looked me in the eye and said, “You’re a draftsman. You’re unemployed and you’re depressed.”

I replied, “I’m a pastor. I have a job and I’m joyfully content.”

I think that the answer ruined her day. She certainly wasn’t very happy with me; she walked off in a huff, no doubt disappointed in her inability to discern. The event was harmless in itself, and a bit funny, upon reflection. But the woman’s attempt to discern the Voice was skewed.

How very different this is from the magnificent discernment arising from the voices of the prophets. If you know the Bible, you will know of numerous accounts of true discernment.

For example, Jesus our Lord told Peter that his voice was at one moment blessed of God and then, moments later, used by Satan to distract the Lord (Matthew 16:16-28). Agabus the prophet predicted a famine to set up a collection for the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:27-30) and a mob’s rejection of the Apostle Paul (Acts 21:10-14).

Yet God gave Nathan the prophet explicit information. The things that David did in the dark were bluntly revealed to a man of God in his prayer closet.

Nathan was given a calling to 1) speak hard truth to unmask the sin and 2) call the king to repent. God told Nathan to tell the “poor-shepherd-turned-king” about a rich man with hordes of sheep who stole the only (and much-loved) ewe-lamb from a poor man’s home, and of how the rich fellow ate it for lunch with guests.

The way David responded (as one who used to be very poor, who cradled ewe lambs himself) makes it clear that the discernment strategy given to Nathan by God was powerful:

Then David’s anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. And he must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion...” (2 Samuel 12:5-6 NASB).

Nathan discerned the Voice and spoke; when Nathan spoke, God spoke through him. When God had brought the now “rich man,” David, to a place of enraged compassion for someone robbed and poor, Nathan spoke again:

Nathan then said to David, “You are the man!”... (2 Samuel 12:7 NASB).

The prophet could have been killed for a confrontation like that, but God had commanded him to speak a corrective word. His discernment enabled him to not only “speak truth,” but also “speak David”—to use imagery and language that would resonate with a man who had been a poor shepherd, and who had suffered unjustly at the hands of a rich man (King Saul pursued him to kill him).

When God speaks, the Voice will draw together all the disparate threads of one’s existence and weave a garment that only the one receiving the word can wear. God, through Nathan, wove a word; only David could wear the weaving. And wear it he did (some think “on his sleeve”), yet David repented. Such is the power of discernment when it is “in the Lord.”

God's call on every believer is to make discerning the Voice the foundation of all believing, whether obeying, choosing, leading/following or simply living for the glory of God.

Discernment is the basis of all Christian leadership.

Even our Lord Jesus did nothing until he discerned the Voice. Ponder these texts and consider the implications. Bear in mind that the One speaking is none other than the Lord himself:

"For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak..."
(John 12:49 NASB).

... "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19 NASB).

"...yet not what I will, but what You will..." (Mark 14:36 NASB).

"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me"
(John 5:30 NASB).

His words, his miracles, his death on the cross and his judgments at the end of time arose and/or will arise from his discernment. If the Lord could do nothing without discerning the Voice, it is clear that we must claim to do considerably less. In fact, Jesus says as much:

*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, **for apart from Me you can do nothing** (John 15:5 NASB).*

Jesus, then, could do nothing apart from discerning what his Father was doing. And we can do nothing effective unless we abide in him. He, in submission to the Father, reveals to us what is given to him.

Jesus discerned and then, as one who had become fully human, obeyed out of his discerning. He prayed, healed, taught, called someone, re-directed a comment and walked away in obedience to what he had perceived, and God's will unfolded through his obedience.

JESUS WAS PUT
EXACTLY WHERE
WE ARE IN
SUBMISSION TO
THE MOVEMENT
OF THE SPIRIT

This explains why, from time to time, the Lord was surprised; he was astonished by the faith of the centurion, because his Father had not yet told him of it or of what to do to respond to it (Luke 7:1-10). This also explains the nature of the Tempter's attack upon the Lord (Matthew 4:1-11); the enemy of our souls was attempting to entice Jesus to act apart from discerning God's direction.

Our Lord needed to pray. He laid aside his absolute omniscience by entering the limits of the human condition and was put exactly where we are in submission to the movement of the Spirit.

In short, Jesus, by becoming a human, joyfully embraced the need to discern in order to accomplish the will of God (Philippians 2:7-8). By his own admission (or better yet, by his humble proclamation of the nature of ministry), Jesus needed to discern the Voice in order to accomplish anything.

With Jesus as our model, then we can do nothing apart from abiding within and discerning what Jesus is receiving from his Father.

Our ministry, at its very best, is only an extension of his. He "sees" it and, in his own inimitable fashion, he reveals it to us; in humble submission, we likewise perceive/discern, sense guidance and get it done, knowing that when it is finished, all that we can say is, "God did it."

We need to pray. We, like our Lord in his earthly humanity, are subject to the limitations of the human condition. Unlike the Lord, we need to factor in dealing with our sin issues; we need to be in submission to the movement of the Spirit in order to accomplish the will of God.

... “A slave is not greater than his master”... (John 15:20 NASB).

DISCERNING
THE VOICE IS
FOUNDATIONAL
TO ALL
CHRISTIAN
LIVING

In fact, we are to live out our faith just like him. Scripture puts forth this truth:

...By this we know that we are in Him; the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked (1 John 2:5-6 NASB).

Discerning the Voice is not merely necessary from time to time; it is foundational to all of Christian living.

- ▶ The Old Testament prophets needed to do this to walk in joyful obedience to the God of Israel.
- ▶ The Lord himself needed to do this to accomplish our salvation.
- ▶ The early church walked in discernment to carry out the ministry of the Lord.
- ▶ Godly leaders throughout church history practiced discernment to accomplish their God-given assignments.

We must do the same...

Week 1

1. Gather in a group and have someone read 2 Samuel 11 aloud. Notice:
 - a) David's failure to defend Israel (11:1).
 - b) The warning (11:3), the mutual sin decision (11:4) and the effect (11:5).
 - c) The attempted cover-up (no doubt in collusion with Bathsheba) (11:6-13).
 - d) The calloused hardening and the need for collusion to include the army commander (11:14-25).
 - e) The manipulative mask of care (11:26-30a).
 - f) God's response to hidden adultery/murder (11:30b).

2. To understand this better, substitute "David" with a current world leader of a nation and "Joab" with the chief of the armed forces and paraphrase/retell the account. What would current media do with a story like this one?

3. Somehow God told Nathan. We are not given the "how." He may have heard rumors from the palace courtiers, noticed the timing of the pregnancy, sought the Lord and put the facts together. God may have led him to the evidence or shown him in a vision. We do not know. But we know that Nathan was given a discernment approach, which enabled him to not only "speak truth," but also "speak David."

4. When God speaks, it will impact. Share a time when God spoke to you—and its effect.

TIME IN THE WORD

5. Notice that Jesus proclaims that his life was a life of discernment. Reread the passages from the ministry of Jesus, below. Share with each other what this means for you as a believer attempting to follow the Lord, and what this means for us as a movement:

*“For I did not speak on My Own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say and what to speak...”
(John 12:48 NASB).*

“...Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19 NASB).

“...yet not what I will, but what You will...” (Mark 14:36 NASB).

*I can do nothing on My Own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me”
(John 5:30 NASB).*

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15:5 NASB).



TIME TO PRAY

Spend some time before the Lord thanking him for the call on our lives to discern the Voice. Begin your prayer time with a time of thanksgiving. Perhaps you can use a Psalm to lead you in praise. (Psalm 103 is a favourite). Ask him to lead you in understanding how to discern.

This year, our movement is seeing the end of a 12-year era. Spend some time thanking the Lord for the ministry of President Franklin Pyles and for all that he has done.

This year, we are electing a new president. The new leader will cast fresh vision to set down the tracks for the next four, eight or 12 years. We need to discern how God would lead us. Pray for divine guidance in the selection of the new leader and for wisdom in each decision.

Share with each other the things that you need to discern. Ask the Lord to direct your growing together as followers of the God who speaks.

Week 2

God will speak to the hearts of those who prepare themselves to hear; and conversely, those who do not so prepare themselves will hear nothing even though the Word of God is falling upon their outer ears every Sunday...

— A.W. Tozer

A GOOD
BEGINNING
DOES NOT
GUARANTEE A
SOLID END

We have to want to hear and obey the Voice, or else all discernment will be wasted, and God will not be pleased. A good beginning does not guarantee a solid end. Solomon began by asking for wise discernment and ended by setting up idols for his foreign wives. The effect of his failure led to the division of his country, civil war and crushing despair for true worshippers of God for generations to come, especially in the northern kingdom of Samaria. The effect of his error echoes down through to the present day.

Yet God's intention was to redeem Solomon's folly.

And so we come to an Old Testament account sobering to any reader of Holy Writ. In 1 Kings 13, a Judean prophet is commanded by God to head north to curse the false altars of a king who had been set apart by God to rule the northern tribes. The new king's rule was to have been a rebuke of the structural apostasy of the last days of Solomon's deplorable compromise.

Solomon the Wise, the son of David, became a witless wonder; he had compromised the command of the Lord and married multiple idol-worshipping wives in the name of political expediency. Expediency regularly calls the believer to set aside the commands of God today. In Solomon's last years, to keep his foreign wives contented, he allowed them to build altars to their gods/goddesses.

The holy nation, whose *raison d'être* was to serve God alone, was now sanctioning the worship of the very gods it was called to rebuke, renounce and destroy. Joshua was able to conquer the Promised Land only because God had removed their protection (Numbers 14:9).

Early Canaanite faith observances, meant to guarantee rain, fertility and security, including child-sacrifice and ritual prostitution, were appalling and destructive. Solomon egregiously compromised the first and second commands of the very God whose temple he had dedicated to his glory, and God was not pleased.

This brings us to God's rebuke of Solomon and the house of David. In 1 Kings 11:26-39, a man named Jeroboam, without seeking this, found himself on the receiving end of a prophecy. The upshot of the prophecy was that he would receive the 10 tribes of the north and become not only king, but also the founder of an eternal dynasty authored by none other than God himself. The words found there are profound. Spend some time reflecting on them; it takes little imagination to understand what God intended.

A God-fearing northern kingdom would return to the Lord through the influence of a God-appointed king. That king would listen to the Voice of God, lead the nation toward the Lord and tear down the false altars of the unclean gods/goddesses.

Shiloh, established by Joshua as the centre of worship for the people of God (Joshua 18:1), was located in the north, in the tribal territory of Ephraim. Shiloh became a place of discerning the Voice. Tribes were apportioned their lands before the Lord (Joshua 18:8-10). It was the former resting place of the Ark of the Covenant, which held the Law of Moses and the budding rod of Aaron, the high priest. It was the place where Samuel the prophet had received his call; it was also the current home of Ahijah, the prophet who told Jeroboam he would receive the north.

The north would prosper in its walk with God; through its God-honouring successes, it would send a prophetic rebuke to the southern tribes (Judah and some vestiges of Simeon's, Levi's and Benjamin's ancestors) that needed to return to the Law of God.

God's intention was to redeem the entire nation. In time, the two houses would re-align, perhaps against common foes who detested the faith of both.

When David's house repented, the rebuke would no longer be necessary. To fulfill his word to both houses, all that would be needed to ensure a continuing dynasty for both would be for them to form common cause; they could intermarry without compromise. God's word to David and his subsequent word to Jeroboam would both prove true, and the two kingdoms would blossom, either separately, as allies, or together, as a reunited whole.

But that isn't what happened. Jeroboam received the northern tribes according to God's Word; yet out of jealous concern that his kingdom would revert to the house of David (if people had to worship in David's city Jerusalem), he created his own religion, with a set of idols (strangely, golden calves in Bethel and Dan), phony feast days and his own hand-selected "priesthood."

To indicate that his walk went sour is extreme understatement. Millions who had hoped for a return to the Lord now found themselves under a ruler who, though set apart by God for good, entrenched structural evil into the fabric of everyday life. His false idols remained a part of the life of Israel for more than 300 years.

So God sent a prophet from Judea; he was powerful in his discernment and clear in his mandate. He was to declare the false altar desecrated and prophesy of its future despair:

...“This is the sign that the Lord has spoken: ‘Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out.’” And when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar at Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, “Seize him.” And his hand, which he stretched out against him, dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. The altar was also torn down, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the Lord (1 Kings 13:3-5 ESV).

The unnamed Judean prophet rebuked both the false altar and the awful king; he did so with great power: Jeroboam received a dried up, withered arm, and the man of God was asked to pray for its restoration. He did, the arm was restored, and Jeroboam offered the man a meal and a reward.

Once again, the discernment of the prophet of Judah was clear in the extreme: he was not to eat bread or drink water in that place; he was to return to the land of Judah before breaking his severe fast.

Then comes the bitter twist—and the need for continual discernment, not just for ourselves, but also for others. An old prophet finds the Judean, invites him to his home to eat and drink, and does so by lying in the name of the Lord.

The old fellow tells the young prophet that an angel had sent him to feed him. Perhaps the old seer was ground down by despair and longed for fellowship. Regardless, the old prophet lies, and the young one gives in. Whether the hunger and thirst got to him, or whether the old prophet was a magnificent pretender is unclear from the account. What we know is that the young prophet did not attempt to discern the Voice when the liar wasn’t a gross sinner like the awful king.

The old man lied and the young man believed him.

They go for a meal, and while eating, the old prophet/liar experiences something he had known when God used him in the past—the power of the Spirit. God’s anointing “falls on him” as in days of old, and he is given a gift of prophecy.

...He cried to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because you have disobeyed the command of the Lord, and have not observed the commandment which the Lord your God commanded you, but have returned and eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which He said to you, “Eat no bread and drink no water”; your body shall not come to the grave of your fathers” (1 Kings 13:21-22 NASB).

DISCERNMENT IS THE BASIS FOR OBEYING

Both the old prophet and the young one realize that God had spoken. Neither says anything about the lie of the old one, the disobedience of the young one or what was yet to come. They both knew better. The old one helps the young one saddle up, and on the way back, the Judean is killed by a lion under very unusual circumstances. The

old prophet buries him in regret, and the words of both—when uttered in submission to the Lord—proved true.

Discernment is the basis for obeying. But we must want to hear and obey, or the discernment will be wasted. Clearly, in the life of two dynasties and three prophets, discerning the Voice was the foundation of all ministry.

God has commanded us to discern the Voice. And the leash is short. Those who know the Voice are held to a higher accountability than those who do not.

Yet we live in a better covenant. In the Old Testament, failing to discern led to death. In the New, we are to regard prophecies as temporary and in need of mutual submission to determine their veracity. In the New, error can be corrected by repentance (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

Week 2: TIME IN THE WORD

1. Read 1 Kings 11:26-39. What kinds of promises were given to him? What had the house of David done that grieved the Lord? How long was Jeroboam's dynasty to last (11:37-38)? How long would the curse on David's house last (11:39)? What does this say about God? About us?
2. In time, Jeroboam became the northern king, according to Ahijah's prophecy. Read 1 Kings 12:25-33. What did Jeroboam do well? What was his downfall? What did he do to set up trouble for generations to come?
3. Read 1 Kings 13:1-10. What did the Judean prophet do? What was he commanded to do? What happened to the king? What does this say about Jeroboam? About us?
4. Read 1 Kings 13:11-32. The old prophet lies about his discernment, and the young prophet fails to discern. What does this say about following the Lord?
5. In the New Testament, all prophesy was to be tested by submission to each other. The death penalty for false prophesy was paid by Christ. Read 1 Corinthians 14:29-33. What does it teach us about discerning the Voice?

TIME TO PRAY

The story of the Judean prophet and the old Samaritan one makes clear the need of believers and leaders to discern at all times. Those given a specific assignment must not be distracted from it. Pray that our movement will understand and embrace our calling and not be deterred from accomplishing it.

The reason we exist as a movement is to win the lost, disciple the found, walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit and, led by the Lord, make disciples who will become disciple-makers. In particular, the C&MA has been called and positioned to “hasten the return of the Lord” by proclaiming the Gospel in the least-reached regions of the world.

The C&MA in Canada is in more than 45 nations; the movement, globally, is in more than 80. We need strategies that work, and God has them in his heart. He is speaking to us about what we need to do to accomplish the work. It is our calling to discern that Voice and then obey.

- ▶ Ask him for a strategy for you to discern and obey in your sphere of influence.
- ▶ Ask him for a strategy for your local church to discern and obey in your town/city/region.
- ▶ Ask him for a strategy for your district to prevail in its church planting and sending out of workers.
- ▶ Ask him for a strategy for our national movement to accomplish the mission, which existed before the C&MA began in 1887, to hasten the return by proclaiming the Gospel in every nation (Matthew 24:14).

Week 3

The only sin which cannot be forgiven is blaspheming the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, that was to mock a dramatic manifestation of God's power and to ascribe God's grace to the demons after personally witnessing the astonishing (Matthew 12:22-32). All other sins can be redeemed, and God redeems those who fail well! If we fail to discern and give our failure to the Lord, he will buy it back.

And so we come to two accounts in the realm of discernment. In the one, Moses grieved the Spirit of the Lord through manipulation. In the other, his pupil saw redemption after failure. The two accounts are intertwined.

In the Old Testament, there was no better leader than the old warrior, Joshua. His mentor, Moses, taught him well, yet even Moses made a bad mistake—one that was so grim that God told him he couldn't enter the Promised Land. Joshua learned by watching him closely.

Moses' great mistake was to rob the Lord of his glory. Moses lived and breathed within the framework of the manifest presence of God. Apart from the Lord Jesus, no one else in human history had such amazing encounters with God—and God's Voice.

Moses knew the Lord face to face and communicated with him like a friend. He discerned the Voice and followed his leading, yet he became so utterly incensed at the bone-headed that he struck a water-bearing rock and claimed to be the author of a miracle. Moses made it appear that he was the water-source, the miracle worker and, by implication, the god!

God wanted the congregation to hear God speak through Moses' submitted tongue (word) under the cloud of his presence (Spirit) and have the rock explode or melt away at the Word of the Lord by the power of the Spirit. Everyone in that region knew some kinds of porous rock held water. Yet no one had ever spoken over rock to make it vanish! Had Moses obeyed, water from the rock would have been water from the Lord, and it would have been known that God would send them the water that satisfies.

Instead, everyone who had known about water-bearing rocks would have smelled a bluff. And the odor rose to the nostrils of God. The wilderness generation had all had the same 39 years in the same desert as Moses.

It was a sham, a fraud, and they knew it. The only thing that prevented everyone from saying so was that the cloud of the presence was there, and God spoke at the very moment of the mock-miracle. God said, “You will not bring this community into the land I give them” (Numbers 20:1-13). The implication is that God would be God, and no other; he would not serve the misuse of his Spirit.

Joshua watched it all and learned. God must be obeyed. God’s honour must never be besmirched. God initiates; we respond. All miracles have God as the centre and God as the source; any acts of power only serve God, not a glory-grabber.

GOD INITIATES;
WE RESPOND

When Moses died, God placed Joshua in the anchor role. He would lead the children of Israel into the Land of Promise. He was given a general command—go in and take the land—and then he was given various specific strategies, one discernment at a time, to get it done.

Joshua’s first steps were wonderfully discerned—he heard God correctly and he acted convincingly. At his command, the priests stepped into the waters of the Jordan during flood season, and the water piled up, nine miles up-river. Two million souls crossed the water and came out the other side.

He did the counter-intuitive at the command of the Lord. Joshua and Israel were instructed to take down the walls of the enemy city and march around the target once a day for six days in silence, carrying the Ark of the presence with them. They were to lead two million souls into a march seven times around the target on the seventh day, then sound a trumpet, watch the walls collapse and conquer the city. Joshua and Israel did exactly as the Lord commanded, and down the walls came.

After a setback in the little town of Ai, Joshua once again succeeded. Then an odd thing happened. A terrified city (called Gibeon) decided to fool Joshua and his leaders into agreeing not to fight them. They dressed up in old clothes and brought stale provisions and worn-out sacks, gloves, etc. They claimed to be from far away, spoke eloquently of their admiration of their faith and their God and asked to be given a covenant with them.

Joshua and his elders met them, checked out their claims, looked at their stale provisions and worn-out clothes and then failed to do what they needed to finally decide. They failed to discern the Voice:

So the men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not ask for the counsel of the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them (Joshua 9:14-15 NASB).

This failure was serious. Determining wisdom entails gathering data, thinking clearly and involving God's presence. Joshua and his elders did a very sacred thing; they made a covenant. In the Old Testament, a covenant was much more serious than our handshake agreements and written promises of intent. A covenant is eternal; Old Testament covenants could never be broken, except by death.

A covenant is the agreement made by two parties to determine that their destinies will be intertwined, not only for life, but also for every generation to the close of time (see Genesis 15 for the covenant between God and Abram). They would invoke the name of their God, split an animal or a group of animals, sprinkle the blood, walk through the animal parts and declare their eternal oaths to each other.

Each knew that to fail to keep their word was to agree that the other would have the right to do to the other as they had done to the animals. It was a blessing pact forever, ratified to eternity and upheld on pain of death.

Old Testament covenants were so strong that even those whose parents made them could not escape them, save by dying. This means that the old covenant is in effect unless we die to it; this is why Jesus had to die to bring in a new one, and why we have to die with him. To get past the old covenant, we must go to the cross and kill off not only our sins, but also our successes. Everything has to die so that we can enter into the new.

Joshua and the elders together do their research but do not search out the heart of God. They fail to discern and they make a covenant. All the leaders of Gibeon do it, and all the leaders of Israel return the favour. Then Israel discovered a sordid reality; the Gibeonites were a pack of liars. Now Israel's sworn enemies were bound to them by a blood-oath of blessing for every generation and forever.

In our culture, if a bad deal is done, liars are taken to court, the deal is declared pure deception and it is revoked. In ancient Hebrew culture, because they split the animals, walked through the parts and swore an oath in the name of the God of Israel, they could never revoke the deal. It was done, and now their children had to bless the children of their enemies. All that happened because Joshua and his leaders decided without involving the Lord. Strangely, they knew how to listen to God; they had listened before with success. Most Christ-followers can testify to the same. All of us have, at some time, known better and chosen poorly.

That is the sordid part of the story, but there is an amazing ending to this account. Joshua, his leaders and the entire nation brought their failure to the Lord and kept their word, even though it hurt to do so. Then God used their covenant-keeping to accomplish the most incredible miracle of the entire Old Testament. God rises to defend those who are faithful to their covenants.

Suddenly, five Amorite kings banded together to destroy the Gibeonites because they were traitors, defecting rather than defending. So the liars send a message to Israel, "come and help them. Joshua could have said, "Let them kill each other—they lied to us." But he can't. He has entered into a covenant, in which God is his witness, that he will defend them to the death. Joshua hears the Lord.

He discerns the Voice of God. The Voice tells him that God would fight on his behalf and that upholding this covenant would in fact become the beginning of a magnificent expansion of God's purposes. Joshua and his army defend their former enemies. They defeat the attacking armies so thoroughly that it becomes his major offensive in taking the land. Joshua knew that he needed more time to win the battle.

He prayed one of the strongest prayers in the history of the Bible. Joshua, upholding a covenant he never should have made, prays in the thick of the unexpected battle; he commands the sun to stand still, in the name of the Lord he is serving. God redeems his error completely.

GOD CAN
TAKE A BAD
DECISION AND
TURN IT INTO
A PLATFORM
FOR THE
ASTONISHING

Then Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Aijalon." And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped... And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, when the Lord listened to the voice of a man... (Joshua 10:12-14 NASB).

God can take a bad decision and turn it into a platform for the astonishing. In fact, God can take a bad decision made by your parents, child, spouse or leader(s) and turn it into the beginning of your greatest calling. Pray to discern the Voice of God from the very beginning. Yet failure to discern, whether through error, neglect or simply not listening, can become the foundation of a magnificent and astonishing new beginning.

Joshua repented, asked God what to do and kept his word, even though it cost him. Through his repentance and decision to keep the covenant, God blessed him in an amazing way. If God could do that for Joshua in the old covenant, imagine what he can do when his people take their failures to him. He can take our failures to discern the Voice and turn them into triumph.

Week 3

1. Read Joshua 1:1-9. What did God say to Joshua about promise, the attitude/stance he should take and the source of his strength?
 - a) Promise:
 - b) Stance:
 - c) Source:
2. Read Joshua 8:30-35. What did Joshua do to ensure that not only he, but also the nation, understood God's direction? How would this condition them to discern the Voice?
3. Read Joshua 9:1-15. Quickly recap the main points of the account.
 - a) The mutual aggression pact (9:1-2). How many people groups/armies were going to war? What would this mean for the Israelite army?
 - b) The deceptive plan, Israel's due diligence and failure (9:3-15). What did the Gibeonites do? What did the Israelites do well? What did they do poorly?

TIME IN THE WORD

- c) We do not conquer people with weapons, but witness with love. Still, what are we to expect when we begin to penetrate an area with the grace of the Gospel?

 - d) What should churches do in discerning? What method(s) does your congregation use to attempt to sift God's Voice from all other voices?
4. Read Joshua 9:16-27. What did Israel discover? What did they do?
- a) Briefly recap the history.

 - b) Have you (as an individual, a family, a church or a movement) ever entered into an agreement that wasn't helpful? Have you ever found yourself under someone else's decision that put you in circumstances you did not want? What would the counsel of this account be?
5. Read Joshua 10:1-15. What happened as a direct result of Joshua honouring the covenant with the enemy? Can God bring something wonderful out of something done poorly?



TIME TO PRAY

Begin your prayer time with a season of praise and thanksgiving. After you have properly placed yourself under God's grace, claim the attitude, the stance and the source that Joshua was given. Ask God to guide you into all of the above.

Share with each other the need to grow people groups in the knowledge of the Word. Ask God for a strategy to accomplish this in your church and in our movement.

Pray about any agreements that are helpful, and for elder boards and leaders to examine facts. Invite the Lord into our discerning together.

Pray for General Assembly, that our discernment would be wise.

Week 4

If we are to obtain from God all that we ask from Him, Christ's words must abide or continue in us. We must study His Words, fairly devour His words, let them sink into our thoughts and into our heart, keep them in our memory, obey them constantly in our life, let them shape and mold our daily life and our every act. This is really the method of abiding in Christ.

It is through His Words that Jesus imparts Himself to us. The words He speaks unto us, they are spirit and they are life (John 6:63). It is vain to expect power in prayer unless we meditate much upon the words of Christ and let them sink deep and find a permanent abode in our hearts... It is not by seasons of mystical meditation and rapturous experiences that we learn to abide in Christ; it is by feeding upon His word, His written words as found in the Bible, and looking to the Holy Spirit to implant these words in our hearts and to make them a living thing in our hearts.

— R.A. Torrey

Through my first years in Christ, no one told me how to discern the Voice and know with confidence that it was God. It was not clear how I was to know his wishes, what it felt like and how to make sure that it was not self-deception, or worse, complete delusion. Delusion is sickness, not godly conviction. Yet Scripture is replete with accounts that sound like this:

*Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea... in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, **the word of God came to John**, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness (Luke 3:1-2 NASB).*

*Now it happened after many days that **the word of the LORD came to Elijah** in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the face of the earth" (1 Kings 18:1 NASB).*

*Then Jesus **was led up by the Spirit** into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1 NASB).*

*They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, **having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word in Asia** (Acts 16:6 NASB).*

*Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. **It was because of a revelation that I went up...** (Galatians 2:1-2 NASB).*

Everywhere, we find biblical characters, whether leaders or led, who had the Word “come to them,” “lead them,” “forbid them” or “command them.” The leaders and the led would both know beyond dispute that it was God who was the author and finisher of these discernments. A paraphrase might run like this:

“God spoke.”
“I obeyed.”
“The work got done.”
“It wasn’t me—it was God.”

The attitude of the early church was “of course—God speaks.” The attitude of our culture at its worst is “only the deluded hear voices”; at its best, we demand proof with such force that few dare claim that they have discerned the Voice, and those who do brace themselves for trouble.

The apostle tells us that every word of prophecy should be tested by mutual submission (we have already examined 1 Corinthians 14:29-33 in week 2, question 6). Yet at the same time, the attitude of the apostle was to expect “words from God” as common. The text assumes that at each house church, three or four people with consistent gifts of prophecy would examine the one who claimed to speak a revelation, and that a multitude of spiritual gifts would be given to each assembly by the Spirit on a regular basis (1 Corinthians:12-14). Our more prevalent attitude is that God might do this a few times in a lifetime. We accept the mundane and admit the spectacular with reservation from time to time, in hushed tones and corner conversations.

Yet Alliance history is filled with accounts of the spectacular alongside the mundane. Dr. Robert Jaffray and some (not all) of his colleagues in South China were given gentle gifts of tongues and knew that it was God and not them. On one occasion, Jaffray spent the night physically wrestling in prayer with principalities and powers in his hut in Wuchow. At the end of that very long night, he and A.W. Tozer held that this spiritual-warfare prayer time was the pre-cursor to years of evangelistic success.

Read Jaffray's *South China Alliance Tidings*; he was, from time to time, given astonishing discernments—dreams, impressions, remarkable healings and visions of angels—as he developed strategies to win the lost in what was then called French Indo-China. His spiritual ancestors are now among our largest fields; Vietnam alone is home to over one million Christ-followers in the C&MA.

Jaffray was not alone in his experiences of the Holy Spirit's tangible gifts. A generation before, while climbing a mountain just outside the retreat centre at Old Orchard Beach, Maine, A.B. Simpson felt fiery heat coursing through his body as he cried out for God to heal him of chronic sickness. The fact that he became not only well, but also robust, motivated the name Healer as the third aspect of the Fourfold Gospel.

A generation after Jaffray, Harry Turner, the fifth president of the C&MA, embraced every gift of the Spirit and reveled in teaching about the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at the training centre in Nyack College, New York.

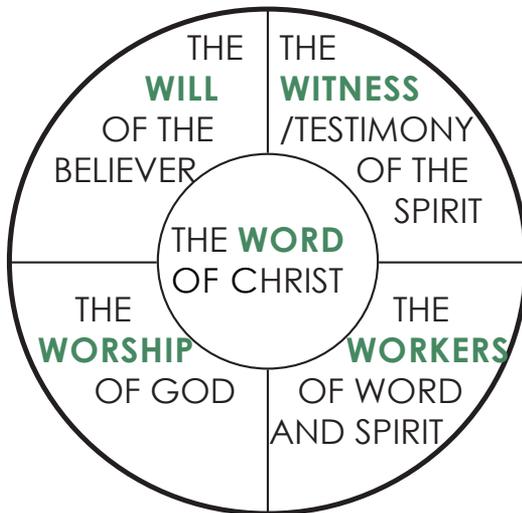
Discerning the Voice was a part of the foundation of this movement, and we share this gift with virtually all branches of the Christian Church. Read Luther, Calvin, Wesley, von Zinzendorf and the post-New Testament writings of the desert fathers of the earliest churches. Read the Quakers' journals (especially those of George Fox), the histories of the 19th-century holiness movements and the accounts of the churches/movements that these earlier movements birthed and served. God's desire is to lead and guide those who call on his name.

But how do we do it? How can we know when we have received genuine guidance, and when we are confusing something else with the Voice of God? Study discernment; the unusual and the spectacular are found there. But the spectacular is not the ordinary.

We delight in Simpson’s healing and Jaffray’s visions that led to discernment, but we know these because they leap out at us, and we feel a wistful yearning for more of them.

We need an “ordinary” process alongside the miraculous. Let us expect and embrace the miraculous, and in the meanwhile, do the ordinary.

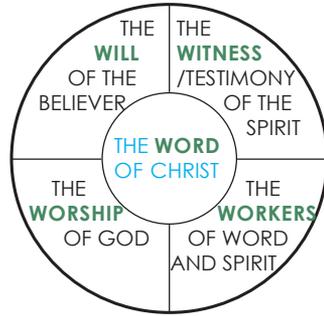
In studying those who sought the mind of God, five classic disciplines emerge. Other approaches appear, yet these five are consistent in the histories. They are pictured in this study in the shape of a wheel, for wheels need every part in place in order to turn toward the future. If one section is missing, the wheel can’t move; all five parts are required to make the wheel turn.



HEARING GOD'S VOICE: 5 STEPS TO DISCERNING GOD'S WILL

In short, the five Ws are:

1. The **Word** of Christ
2. The **Witness**/testimony of the Spirit
3. The **Workers** of Word and Spirit
4. The **Worship** of God
5. The need to set the **Will** of the believer



All five practices are found throughout both the Scriptures and church history. Providentially, all five can be found in a single text:

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father (Colossians 3:15-17 NASB).

WITHOUT THE
WORD, ALL
DISCERNMENT
FAILS

The centre of everything that we think, say and do is the Word, the message/covenant of Christ. The central hub is to “let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you”; without the Word, all discernment fails. Notice the principle that underscores all discernment: the Word is to *dwell* in us. The Word is not something that we merely read. Rather, the Word “reads” us! It penetrates like shafts of

light through the windows of our lives to illuminate the inner rooms.

The Word makes our hearts a home where Christ dwells. It does not merely touch the outer edges of our existence. It penetrates through the outer courts and then the inner doors to the centre of our being. The Word's clear teaching, and particularly that which concerns the life, death, resurrection and ongoing presence of the risen Lord, is to saturate our thinking, believing, relating and living. If I scratch you, bleed Scripture, with principles and promises pouring out from every wound. The Word is to dwell in us richly, not sparsely, occasionally, mostly or even mainly. It is to richly overflow from every pore.

We hold that the Bible is God's Word. The Westminster Divines, clergymen who drafted the Westminster Confession of Faith, called it "the Word of God Written." Yet "the Word Written" has a magnificent purpose that is more wonderful than a mere record of God's dealings with an historic people. The testimony of the Bible points to another Word—the very presence of Jesus, who was, is and ever shall be the Word of God revealed; he is the Word in action, God's very presence among us.

The Word Written points us to the Word Alive. That Word enters into us and "becomes flesh" by the Spirit of God moving upon our unformed substance, forming Christ within us. God's presence grows within by the Word's pervasive presence.

We humans speak our words, and things may happen or not. Unlike God, our words may prove true, false or partly right. Yet for God to speak is for God to act. God speaks his Word and reality shifts. When God spoke, the World was created. Millennia later, God the Word appeared; his name was Jesus, and through his appearing, God spoke. When we pay heed to this speaking, we are saved.

The Word is eternal, everlasting, forever binding in its truth and releasing in its redemptive effect upon us. It contains magnificent promises. It is God's express means of communicating to us who he is, the human condition, how we must live, what we must do and the way to God. It shows us the all-encompassing plan of God.

Let it never be said that the Bible is merely a culturally conditioned document with a historically conditioned message to an ancient tribal society. The Word, while birthed in a culture, is a trans-cultural document, with principles and precepts that cut across and transform every race and nation. It speaks to people in the Amazon basin and on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver; it speaks to English royalty and to people from the Ozarks, South Asia and Russia; it speaks to skilled computer technicians and to common labourers; it speaks to Africans in Muslim republics and to rain-forested tribal societies, to Australians and Latin Americans young and old. The Word speaks by gripping the hearts and minds of anyone who hears its message, inhabiting and changing them from the inside out.

The Word is eternal; it doesn't wear out, and its truths endure. Jesus said this in pre-scientific language to a pre-scientific culture. Jesus spoke about the end of time, stars falling from the sky and the stable earth being destroyed and replaced by a new creation. In all that, the Word remains. Change the idiom to that of the 21st century and it reads the same: if our sun goes supernova, and if the planets are incinerated by expanding solar flare, his Word will endure.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Mark 13:31 NKJV).

Jesus' Word will outlast the mountains. Jesus' Word will outlast the sun, the planets and the stars. Jesus' Word will outlast time itself. When all else is ended, the Word of God endures! Faith, hope and love endure relationally, but it will be the Word of Jesus that will make those three possible. The Word is a Person, and by the Word of God, we will be joined to him!

The first discernment principle that must undergird everything else is that we will discern nothing unless we do so from the clear teaching of the Bible. And so we need to saturate our lives with it. Let's commit to this magnificent reality.

Week 4: TIME IN THE WORD

1. Read Isaiah 55:8-11 and share about the power of the Word. What is the difference between our thinking and God's? What then should we do to see God at Work?
2. The study begins with several texts that contain certain guidance. Tell of a time when you knew you were guided, and how you came to believe it was God.
3. Turn to John 15:1-10, especially verses 7 and 10. Paraphrase those two verses in your own words.
4. What are the principles that lead to effective prayer? What must be done for each person in your study group to become more effective in walking in Christ's power?
5. Read the quote from R. A. Torrey at the beginning of the study. Share what this quote means to you about the power of the Word and the calling to pray within its promises.

TIME TO PRAY

Pray for the presence of the Lord to fill your study group/prayer group. Ask the Lord to deepen your commitment to reflecting on and saturating our lives with the Word. Pray for each other that this will be so.

Ask God that your church will develop its allegiance to the Word Written. Pray for our movement to become more biblical and more faithful to its moorings in the Word.

Pray for the slate of candidates who are considering the role of president. Let each one come to the General Assembly with a firm testimony of God speaking to them through the Word Written.

Lastly, pray that “the Word dwell among us richly.” Let every decision be saturated with Word-based principles and allegiance to the clear teaching of Jesus.

Pray for the concerns of your study group, as the sharing leads you.

Week 5

We have been learning principles of discernment and have discovered that throughout the Bible and Hebrew/church history, five distinct steps are present in most, if not all, spiritual perception.

The first, that the “Word of Christ richly dwell in us,” was the theme of week 4. Now we will examine the second W, what the Apostle Paul (and Calvin and Wesley) called “the Witness/Testimony of the Spirit.” In a classic passage about being “justified by faith,” the apostle indicates that the heritage of that magnificent grace is known in both the believer’s mind and the tangible experiences of the heart. The justified believer knows it in the mind, believes it in the soul and feels it in the realm of the emotions.



*Therefore, having been justified by faith, **we have peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... and **we exult in hope** of the glory of God... and **hope does not disappoint**, because **the love of God has been poured out within our hearts** through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:1-2, 5 NASB).*

These are the means by which God speaks. We might call this “the language of the Lord.” God “bears witness” and “testifies” or “speaks” by his presence within, and we know it experientially.

Tozer's famous lament was that we had abandoned the presence of God for a mere theory of our position in Christ, that mental assent was given priority in place of knowing God in all his fullness. Tozer, speaking of the Old Testament Levites and of us, calls us to the divine encounter:

The Flame of the Presence was the beating heart of the Levitical order.

*Without it all the appointments of the tabernacle were characters of some unknown language; they had no meaning for Israel or for us. The greatest fact of the tabernacle was that **Jehovah was there**; a Presence was waiting within the veil. Similarly the Presence of God is the central fact of Christianity. At the heart of the Christian message is God Himself waiting for His redeemed children to push in to conscious awareness of His Presence... The world is perishing for lack of the knowledge of God and the Church is famishing for want of His Presence. — A. W. Tozer*

Prior to these experiences in the realm of conscious emotion, believers trust Christ, placing their destiny in the hands of God with a simple prayer: "Jesus, save me, for I am helpless!" And God sends the answer. He sends his Spirit to move upon his Word; the two should never be separated. His answer is "Yes. You are helpless. So I will send my manifest presence within your deepest inner being and I will speak within you, to assure you that you are saved." The effect of the two together, recorded in Romans, tells of how the human spirit yearns for the presence of "another," deep within. False spirits lead to fear. The True Spirit leads to a tangible release from fear to family love.

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba, Father!"
*The Spirit Himself **testifies** with our spirit that we are children of God*
(Romans 8:15-16 NASB).

God "testifies," and we know it by 1) having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2) exulting in hope and 3) knowing the love of God within, as the Holy Spirit immerses us in his manifest presence.

This presence guides. When the presence moves, so should we. When the presence abides in stillness, so must we. The Colossians passage from last week's study says it succinctly:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... (Colossians 3:15 NASB).

The word “rule” is one of the interpretive keys. For 1000 years in Attic and Common Greek, *brabeuo* (to rule) was regularly used to refer to a referee in a sporting match or to an arbiter or judge, one who would discern between options and make the decision.

A paraphrase might be rendered this way:

Let the peace of the Christ who lives within by his tangible presence direct your steps, refereeing each decision you take. Let his peace serve as an umpire, judging/weighing each step you take, each option before you...

The peace that comes from knowing Jesus personally is to “call the play.” Though this is subjective (and needs to be tested by faithfulness to the Word and in submission to other workers), we need to recognize a simple reality:

- ▶ Should “the peace of Christ within” increase, this is a signal (though not the only signal) that God may be pleased.
- ▶ Should the peace diminish, we should be careful and re-examine our steps.
- ▶ Should the peace be grieved or jarred, God may be speaking; the word, if properly discerned, is likely a firm, but gentle, “no.”

Anytime that God speaks, be it “yes,” “test this,” “wait” or “no,” we should delight in the answer, for God is at work. To bring us into this teaching, let me “testify/witness” to one of the moments when this became clear to me through a “no” and an unexpected “yes.”

I was in my 20s and was chairing a team commissioned to organize a teaching event on “faith in the family” for a cluster of 19 (mostly little) churches in north-eastern Alberta. The congregation I served was in Lac La Biche and numbered about 70 souls per weekend.

Our team convened in a church basement and worked through things like location, budget, timing, etc. Finally, we came to the big issue: who would we ask to present? Well, that conversation took hours.

Finally, we decided on a weighted list; each of us put forward the names of those we thought would be able to make a significant contribution around our theme. We created a numbering scheme to get us to our first, second and third choice.

The first three were famous, seasoned, published authors, with a track record of godly living and excellence in presentation. The fourth was a solid pastor who lived in Edmonton and would do the event for \$50.00, the cost of his fuel and anything left over after costs from a love offering. That was the budget. The fifth was another solid pastor who could do it, should #4 not be able. Then the committee said, “If #4 or #5 can’t commit to our timing, feel free to ask anyone you consider solid. We know that our first three choices have a two-year planning window and probably won’t come unless it is to a major centre. Besides, they are way beyond our budget.”

We all laughed and drove home. I was commissioned to “work the list” on the phone—and in those days (November 1985), phoning long distance was very expensive. The team was quite happy to start with #4 and skip the first three presenters.

The next morning, while having a prayer time in my office, something unusual took place. It began in a rather ordinary way: a hymn of praise, a time of reflection on the Word, some journaling and praying through a list of concerns, accompanied by a quiet sense of gentle peace. And then came the moment that changed my future forever. I was looking at our list of top three presenters and settled on the name of #1.

He was a renowned author of 20+ books, the founder of the InterVarsity in Latin America, a church planter, medical doctor, practicing psychiatrist, university lecturer and international conference speaker. Once, I had sat in for one day in a three-week lecture series he was delivering at a seminary, though we had never met personally.

Remembering our budget (\$50.00 plus a love offering), I started to pray. The words are not exact, but here is the clear memory of the intent: “Lord, should we ask this man to do our area-wide event?”

The only way I can describe what happened next is to compare it to a punch in the stomach. Every muscle in my abdominal area suddenly seized up and contracted. The peace of Christ I had just enjoyed in the morning prayer-time vanished completely. The peace “ruled” and its admonition was clear: God was shouting “NO!!!”

Then a most unusual thing took place. This has only happened once in my entire walk with the Lord (and I have been a disciple for 38 years). I heard an audible voice. The tenor was “other,” neither male nor female, but commanding and authoritative. This Voice could not be disobeyed, but it released

I HEARD AN AUDIBLE VOICE

power, even as it commanded. I was given a clear picture in my mind of a long, flat highway on the bald prairie (as in South Saskatchewan), and at the end of the highway was a picture of two calendars that overlapped with dates on them: February and March 1987, a year and a half from that moment. The Voice “spoke.”

“Call him. Ask him to come to your church (not the area conference), and he will come then.”

So I called his publisher, obtained his number and dialed (it was a rotary phone then).

A soft-spoken male voice with an English accent gently answered the call. The man indicated that he was the one for whom I was looking and asked how the phone number had been obtained. When I told him that the publisher gave out the number, the gentle voice became irate:

“I *told* them to give that number to no one! I changed the phone yesterday, and that new number was for them alone; you are the first to call.”

After offering to hang up and tear up the number, the author said, “No, no, go ahead and talk with me. You are on the line now. This may be the Lord.”

And then I erred. Duty bound, I asked him to come to the regional event on faith in the family.

“No,” he said, “I have a policy. After writing on a subject and publishing, I no longer speak on those matters.” Suddenly, I understood that I had disobeyed the Voice. Apologizing to the Lord, I told the man that I was required to make that request in the name of a committee but had another purpose to my call. I made my pathetic request: “Would you come to a little church in North Eastern Alberta; we have from 60 to 70 on a Sunday...”

“Oh, the size doesn’t matter.” After a pause, he said, “Yes. Yes. This is from the Lord. Yes. I must come to your church. But there are conditions to my coming.”

“What are the conditions?” I asked.

He replied, “Well, first of all, I pay my own airfare. Secondly, I pay all of my own expenses. Thirdly, there will be no honorarium. Finally, you must consent to me becoming your personal mentor, or I won’t come.”

“What?” I said.

He repeated his conditions: no airfare, no expenses, no honorarium and a requirement that he mentor me. My reply did not include a long season of attempting to discern the Voice. I said, “Yes.” We started sharing and discovered that we had much in common. Then he indicated that there was a problem. He would not be able to join us until February or March 1987. When I told him I already knew that, he asked how, and I told him of the committee planning time, the prayer time, the vision of the calendars on the highway (with those very dates) and the Voice.

He said, “That is exactly what I am currently writing upon—the movement of the Holy Spirit in the evangelical tradition—and if you would have me speak on these matters, I will come to your congregation in February or March of 1987.”

And so he did. Dr. John White, author of *The Fight* and *Daring to Draw Near* (Inter-Varsity Press), came to Lac La Biche, Alta. in February 1987 and spoke of the contents of his almost-published book, *When the Spirit Comes With Power* (Inter-Varsity Press). Six different denominational churches partnered together, and one quarter of our town came to hear him. We were forever changed by that discernment.

Dr. White had turned 60 and was asking God in his prayer time what he should do in his latter years. He had discerned in quiet, gentle prayer a direction for his last years (Dr. White is with the Lord now). He sensed the Lord command him to use his time wisely and not teach what he had already taught, but to mentor one pastor a year through all his final years and bear all the expenses, as pastors could not afford much. He was to pay the airfare, all related costs and pour himself into developing the next generation for the Lord.

His only problem was that he didn't know which pastor God would send him to teach/lead. He asked and received a sense of gentle peace in his soul, an assurance that his answer would come the next day. And then I phoned on his newly unlisted number to ask him to come to a little church in the north. John White mentored me for a year and a half and remained a wonderful friend until the day he died. He taught me and many others to discern the Voice. God speaks by his presence.

Week 5: TIME IN THE WORD

1. Ask one person read Romans 5:1-5 aloud. Answer these questions to get at what was in the mind of the apostle:
 - a) What is the theme of the section (5:1a)? What did those new believers experience (5:1b, 2b, 3-5)?
 - b) How much involves the mind? How much involves the heart?
 - c) Who is the active agent to accomplish this (5:5b)?
 - d) What then is the evidence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?
2. Read Luke 24:32 and record what the divine encounter “felt like.” (Recognize that this “feeling” was not in isolation; rather, it pointed to Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection and manifest presence). Describe a time when you sensed an increase in the peace of God. Now describe a time when the presence diminished or disappeared. Was God talking to you?
3. Read Colossians 3:15-16. We have indicated that the Word is to “richly dwell within us” and that the peace of Christ is to “rule.” Look up Ephesians 1:13, 6:17; 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; and 1 Thessalonians 1:5. What do these passages imply about the relationship between the Word and the Spirit? What does this mean for us in our discerning?



TIME TO PRAY

Name among your group any issues that you need to sift before the Lord. Perhaps you are uncertain of a direction. Discuss what the Scripture would say to each issue and then gather around each other to ask God to minister by his presence. An increase of peace in the believer would lean you to a positive consideration; a decrease or a sense of confusion would lean you to a negative. Test this together and then test this with time. Weigh your decision for a week, until there is a consistent sense of “yes,” “wait” or “no.”

Pray for a sharpened sense of discernment in your local elder board and in your leader core. Pray for each one by name, asking God to make them sensitive to the witness of the Spirit.

Pray for the delegates who have been selected to travel to General Assembly, asking God to guide them in each major decision by his Word and by his presence.

Pray according to the needs expressed in your group, asking that God would guide.

Week 6

Jesus our Lord did everything by discernment, by submission to the leading of the Father.

For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak (John 12:49 NASB).

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works (John 14:10 NASB).

If you have read the New Testament, you will have been struck by the unearthly power of the words of Jesus. Some Bibles have those words printed in bright red ink so that we don't miss them. Yet here it is clear that these words didn't come from his own experience or imagination. In fact, it is clear that they didn't come from his memory of his pre-existent state, but from submission to the Voice. Jesus discerned the Voice. Then he spoke from his abiding/discerning. And we are still astonished at the presence unleashed by the power of those discerned words.

When we need to decompress, we laugh, chat, tease or talk nonsense. Jesus never did. He never chatted; he only perceived in S/spirit and spoke his Father's Word. Every word that Jesus spoke was God in Action. To this very day, when we hear those words, we discover God in Action within us and around us, for such is the power of the Word of God. No one else ever came close to that.

When Isaiah saw the Lord in a trance-state vision, his first sight was the magnificent presence. His first utterance was despair at his filthy lips; nothing could come out except polluted verbiage, until God cleansed his lips with holy fire (Isaiah 6:1-8). We need a cleansing, for we have a sin issue. Jesus never did. This principle of submission to the Voice wasn't limited to Jesus' speaking. Notice how he discerned and then acted:

One day He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing (Luke 5:17 NASB).

This text is striking in what it implies. Those who were in the room, including the Lord himself, became aware that there was a healing anointing in that place. The power was there, and Jesus, and at least one witness who told Luke, noticed it. Of course, the account goes on to describe a physical healing. Read verses 15 and 16; there is a vital link between the prayer life of Jesus and the acts of power in his ministry. Jesus submitted to a discerning; he became aware that God was going to heal someone and then he acted accordingly.

We can name other discernments in Jesus' ministry. He discerned that Simon Peter spoke from God the Father when Peter called Jesus "the Christ." Minutes later, Jesus discerned that Satan was using Peter's voice to sidetrack the Lord from his calling to the cross, and he directly rebuked the prince of demons behind the beguiling "common-sense" voice (Matthew 16:13-20, 22-28).

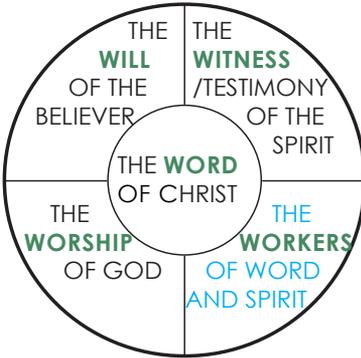
If Jesus is our model, and He did his ministry from prayerful discernment, so should we. Yet we try, and we fail to get it right. Like Isaiah, "we dwell among a people of unclean lips": our society is sin-saturated, and we contribute to it. Jeremiah discerned the fallen condition of the human heart:

*"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick;
Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9 NASB).*

THE PEACE DRAWS US INTO COMMUNITY

And so we need to admit the problem and work around the issues that come from being "born bent." Unlike the Lord, who could sift his will from his Father's quickly, we are wiser to take the larger issues of discernment to those who are walking in both Word and witness and submit our issues to a shared wisdom.

Now we discover something amazing. It is not just individuals who obtain "the peace of Christ," which is to rule/referee/serve as judge. Rather, that peace draws us into a community of mutually submitted believers. Here is the emphasis for this week: shared discernment through the shared presence of God, mediated by the ruling peace.



*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, **to which indeed you were called in one body**; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father (Colossians 3:15-17 NASB).*

Notice that each believer receives “the peace of Christ.” Each believer is directed by the increase or the withdrawing of that “presence/peace” as they discern what God would have them live and do. The experience of “the peace of Christ” draws believers together into an unearthly unity.

In reading Colossians and Ephesians, we discover an amazing society of mutual submission that the Greco-Roman world had never witnessed. Read Ephesians 5:18-21; we demonstrate our infilling of the Spirit by submitting to each other. Ephesians 5:22-6:9 outlines how those submissions were to occur. Here husbands and wives, parents and children and masters and slaves are all addressed in a public letter and commanded to submit to each other under Christ the Lord. Greco-Roman society required wives to submit to husbands but was astonished to hear an apostle command husbands to submit to their wives by loving them as Christ did. It was also understood that children should submit to parents by obedience, but none had heard of a father submitting to a son by nurturing him to become like Christ. Even more amazing was the word of submission between masters and slaves. While all accepted the submission of slaves to those who owned them, never in the ancient world did slaves get a direct word in a public letter about how their owners/masters should submit to Christ by demonstrating good will toward them! The peace of Christ does not rule the believer alone; it commands all believers to be “in Christ together,” with the peace of Christ “ruling.”

This astonishing series of submissions eventually undermined slavery and commands us to shared unity, despite the emphasis placed upon the individual that dominates most Christian thought in the Western World.

A clear example of submitting to the shared presence/peace is found in Acts 13:1-5. There, the presence of God, discerned in community, changes two lives and the first Gentile/Jew congregation's leader core forever. Saul was partly responsible for the death of Stephen the Martyr and was the fire-spark that led to the great persecution right after the execution. We know from Saul's testimony before Agrippa the King that, in his role as a leader in the Sanhedrin, he voted to kill off other Christians for the "crime" of Christ-following (Acts 26:10).

Saul went from being a working-class tent-maker from Tarsus, to a voting member of the highest ruling councils of his people in Jerusalem, to a has-been reject for embracing Jesus as Messiah, to one subjected to death threats by his former peers and an object of terror among his contemporaries in Christ. Only Barnabas was willing to accept him, and still he had to go home with nothing, his reputation ruined. One wonders what his orthodox Jewish family thought of him on his return. Yet on the very day Paul came to faith, the Lord told him he was called to be a minister of the Gospel, primarily to Gentiles:

...“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you” (Acts 26:15-17 NASB).

Saul got the call and became an apostle to the Gentiles. He had the Word of Christ and the Witness of the Spirit. And not a soul believed him (except maybe Barnabas). There were no Gentile Christ-followers when Paul came to faith. Most certainly, there was no Gentile congregation in which he could start his ministry. There was likely little will among Jewish believers to take any steps toward Gentile inclusion. Greeks and Romans killed them for obeying the Law of God, introduced them to crucifixion and nailed them by the thousands outside city walls for crimes against the conquerors.

Opinions are divided, but it seems that Saul spent a dozen years in Tarsus, claiming a vision to make him an apostle. And then some unnamed disciples led Gentiles to faith in Christ in Antioch, the third largest city in the ancient world (Acts 11:19-24). The church in Jerusalem, meanwhile, had seen the Spirit fall on a Roman centurion's family gathering and had accepted that "even Gentiles" could be saved by grace (Acts 10:1-11:18).

So they sent Barnabas, a dozen years older now, to oversee the work. Barnabas realized that the task was too large for him alone, and he remembered Saul, who had claimed that Jesus had told him he was to be a sent-one to the Gentiles. He brought him to this ground-breaking new work, ministering to a mostly Gentile congregation in a cosmopolitan centre. Barnabas broke him into ministry for a year and the has-been, Saul, together with at least three others, became a "prophet-teacher." About a year after this, something happened that changed them—and us—forever:

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit... they began to proclaim the Word of God... (Acts 13:1-5 NASB).

Something was afoot. Perhaps they sensed that a change was about to take place and there was a yearning to hear God's Voice. Whatever it was, the leaders of that church decided to carve out time to fast and pray. In our culture, skipping lunch is fasting. In that culture, it was more likely three to seven days. When they did not know what to do or when they sensed a need to "hear God," they went off to seek the Lord.

It was a setting in which leaders of Word (teachers) and Witness/Spirit (prophets) would gather in mutual submission to each other and the Lord to discern the Voice together. The effect of that prayer meeting was binding. The leaders of the prayer time were recognized by everyone as "the leader core."

This was not a whole church prayer meeting. This was a gathering of leaders with a track record of service in teaching and hearing God deciding to discern together, knowing that what came out of their time together would set the agenda for the future. Leaders must listen to discern God's Voice, accept that God speaks through mutual submission to Word and Witness and Workers together and lead out of the listening.

Suddenly, someone (or a group of someones) discerns. We are not told how it happened, whether there was a word of prophecy, a sudden knowing in Saul and Barnabas (verified by an increase of the Manifest Presence in each), a group awareness growing over days or some sort of theophany. All we know was that every single person in that group recognized that God was speaking, not them.

This was not mere opinion or a weighing of options. This was a gathering of prophets, after all. A group of peers who were set apart for their ability to teach and prophesy recognized that the calling of the Risen Lord on Saul a dozen years before was coming to pass and that the same calling was on Barnabas.

They continued to pray, fast and minister to the Lord. They laid hands on the two and sent off their former pastors to a new ministry. There was an apostolic anointing to intentional church planting. The discerning workers sent them, but this was an extension of their discerning God's action; they were "sent out by the Holy Spirit." God initiated. They responded. And when it was done, everyone in the church recognized that God had used them to "send them." Here is the progression:

1. The **Word** is the hub of our discerning: preach the gospel.
2. Saul received a personal **Witness of the Spirit**: he was told he was a minister to the Gentiles.
3. After a 12-year wait, he receives a year of tutelage under a godly, seasoned leader and submits to a prayer-saturated, Word-based, Spirit-led gathering of **Workers**. They discern the Voice together.
4. Then Saul (and Barnabas) are sent.

TIME IN THE WORD

3. Read Acts 13:1-5. Notice the ethnic diversity. Barnabas and Saul were orthodox Jews. Simeon was likely from Niger; Lucius was a Greek-speaking Gentile; Manaen was likely half-Jew, half-Gentile, well educated and politically connected. What does this say about ethnic mix in churches? In leadership?

4. What were the roles of those people in the prayer meeting? Was this a church-wide meeting or a meeting of selected leaders? What kind of leaders? (See what prophets did by examining the role of Agabus in Acts 11:28 and 21:9-14). Do we have prophets and teachers like that today?

5. What did they do to discern the Voice? Do we do this in our churches today? How might we enable that kind of leadership?

6. Who “sent them out” (Acts 13:3-4)? What did they do when they went? How then should we send out our workers to unreached regions?

TIME TO PRAY

Spend some time in doing what that leader core did two thousand years ago: minister to the Lord. Your praises please the Lord and give joy to his heart. So sing, recite his mighty acts, testify and share together to begin your prayer time.

Pray for the raising up of prophets and teachers among us and for apostolic anointing to come upon people who are being sent to plant churches and oversee the work of the Kingdom. Pray for local churches to develop ministries of Word, Spirit and Workers together.

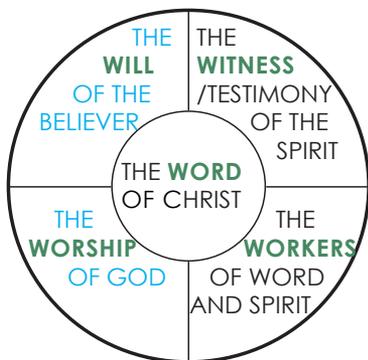
Pray for the International Workers (IWs) you know by name. Ask your pastor for a list of IWs, so that you can intercede for them effectively.

Pray for General Assembly, that God would guide us in all our decisions, about who to send and to which fields. Pray about who should lead us as president and in other leadership roles (district superintendants, field directors, local church pastors, elders, etc.).

Pray for the issues arising within your own groups.

Week 7

We hold forth five steps to discern. We need the Word, the Witness of the Spirit, Workers of Word and Spirit, the Worship of God after deciding and the setting of the Will. These are five steps in a process for groups of people to discern the Voice. The final two components are found in Colossians 3:15-17 and demonstrated in Acts 15.



*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, **to which indeed you were called in one body**; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father (Colossians 3:15-17 NASB).*

Notice that the Word dwells richly, that the peace rules and that it leads to a shared unity. This leads the community to worship (in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs) and to a determination to will (doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus).

Life unpacks these principles through trial, error, debate and, finally, resolution. This brings us to the issue before the Jerusalem Council. A major issue of discernment was before the early church; without this discussion, Christianity would be the poorer. The debate was whether the outpouring of the Spirit on newly converted Gentiles required them to obey the Old Testament food laws and circumcise their males, or whether it was evidence that God had used the Old Testament sacrifices of the Hebrews as a platform for an entirely new thing (a new covenant) rooted in the old (Galatians 2).

From their perspective, it was a painful church fight involving stakeholders who were prepared to die for their convictions—on both sides of the debate. The debate involved the working of God’s Word after the cross and resurrection of Jesus had shifted reality; the wrath had forever shifted to the end of time and the sacrificial system of offering animals for forgiveness was now unnecessary.

It involved a deep debate about how experiences of the Spirit were to be weighed in the realm of God’s providence and in harmony with the Word. It involved gathering a meeting of people of Word and Spirit to discern together. It involved coming to a resolution that brought the entire gathering to the peace of Christ in unity (worship) and will.

You see, the Word-faithful, Christ-believing Pharisees were not sure that the visions of Peter and the outpouring of the Spirit on the household of Cornelius and other Gentiles (through the preaching of Paul and Barnabas) were biblical.

To frame this, it is necessary to understand how deeply this teaching ran into the grain of Hebrew faith and society. Millennia before this moment, before the Law of Moses was instituted, God appeared and spoke to the patriarch Abraham. He told him that when he was 100, his wife (who was 90) would have a baby. Abraham laughed so hard that he hit the ground:

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” (Genesis 17:17 NASB).

It is the only recorded instance of a human experiencing holy laughter in the entire canon of Scripture (though Sarah giggled in her tent when she heard the news).

Yet the promise of a child proved true; Abraham and Sarah conceived and produced a son named Isaac, whose son Jacob changed his name to Israel. Israel’s 12 sons thereafter became known as “the sons of Israel,” and so was begun the tribal society that became the nation. Notice how often the word “covenant” is used:

God said further to Abraham, “Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations...”
(Genesis 17:9-12 NASB).

Here, an eternal covenant agreement takes place. God repeats himself to underline the command: this will forever—as long as your family line continues—demonstrate your faithfulness to me. Faithful believers kept that word—and died to obey this principle. In fact, there were three identity markers that emerged throughout Jewish history: Saturday Sabbath-keeping, the food laws of Leviticus 11 and the eternal covenant of circumcision. When the Jews believed that God had spoken, they would not compromise. Here is a text from the time between the Testaments. While it is not Scripture, it is Hebrew history:

A decree was issued... forcing the Jews to share in sacrificial meals, and ordering the execution of those who would not voluntarily conform to Greek customs. So it became clear that disaster was imminent. For example, there were two women charged with having circumcised their children. They were publically paraded around the town, with their babies hung at their breasts, and then they were hurled over the city wall. Other people who had assembled in the caves to keep the Sabbath day without attracting attention were denounced to Philip and all burned together, since their consciences would not allow them to defend themselves, out of respect for the holiness of the day...
(2 Maccabees 6:8-11 Jerusalem Translation).

This is a single text of many about how the Jews regarded those commands: Sabbath-keeping, food laws and circumcision were absolutes never to be abandoned. Ordinary people and leaders had died and continued to offer to die to uphold those truths. Then, the Lord Jesus, with all the promises of Israel collapsed into his person, killed off the demands of the old covenant forever. He lived sinlessly, fulfilled the Law's requirement and carried both the covenant and all of our sins with him to the cross. There he atoned and, by his ascension and kingly session above, released his Spirit to be poured out on all who call on his name.

But those who had died for the covenant of Abraham and the Law of Moses needed time to understand what had happened. God gave them that time by bringing them slowly to realize what he had done on that cross. He told them that they would receive power and the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be emissaries of the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:6-8). What follows in Acts is the unfolding of that action and the catch-up understanding of the new reality:

1. He poured out the Spirit on orthodox Jews from 15 language groups (Acts 2). The Gospel spread, but to Jews only. The idea that Holy Spirit is given to everyone who knows the Lord, not only to prophets, priests and kings, is new. The church adjusts.
2. Mixed-race Samaritans, partly Hebrew and partly Gentile, receive the Gospel and are baptized in the Holy Spirit. Now the Gospel has spread to “half-Jews,” and the church adjusts (Acts 8:1-25).
3. An African from Ethiopia (now Sudan) is led to Christ and baptized by Philip the evangelist. He was a Falasha Jew, a follower of the Law of Moses and part of a community that dates back to the time when the Queen of Sheba had received the wisdom of Solomon and took it back, 1000 years before. Here the Gospel was now given to an African who had believed in the God of Israel from the days of Solomon (Acts 8:26-40). The church adjusts.
4. Cornelius, a Roman officer who loved Judaism, has a vision of an angel telling him to send for Simon Peter, Jesus’ best friend, the primary apostle of the day and one who participated in the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Peter has a simultaneous vision, indicating that he is to go share the Gospel with Gentile God-fearers. The man was “the friendly enemy,” a Roman officer who had to enforce Roman law, but who was kind to the poor and helped the local synagogue out of love for the Law of God. The Spirit falls on him and his friends and family while they listen to Peter preach. Seven orthodox Jews are present to witness the same phenomena occur with the Gentiles that occurred with them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 10:1-11:18). The church adjusts.

5. Unnamed Jewish Christians preach to Greeks in Antioch and the Antioch church is born. Jerusalem hears of this and sends Barnabas to teach them. Saul joins Barnabas, and now a mostly Gentile church (with Jewish leaders) is born (Acts 11:19-26). The church adjusts.
6. Paul and Barnabas preach in Lystra to those who are completely Gentile (with no Jewish background at all) and only barely stop the crowd from offering sacrifices to them after a divine healing occurs. Angry Jews get so upset that they form a press gang to kill them. They stone Paul and leave him for dead (though he lives) (Acts 14). Now the church has reached a threshold; adjusting to this reality requires deep discernment. Positions have hardened, setting the stage for the church to discern the Voice together.

Can you see the problem? An eternal Word requires the circumcision of every generation through to the close of time, and an expanding circle of people who knew nothing of that background receive the Spirit of the very God who ordained that covenant. Let's make this clear:

- ▶ Paul and Barnabas were nearly killed for preaching the Gospel. In fact, Paul was left for dead after being stoned for preaching about the grace of God (Acts 14:19).
- ▶ Jews had been killed for upholding food laws and circumcision as the Word of the Lord.
- ▶ Believing Jews were delighted that Gentiles now believed in the God of Israel and thought that they should follow what they had believed for generations and be circumcised into Abraham's covenant.
- ▶ Paul and Barnabas believed that the goal of the covenant was to receive the Spirit of the Living God, and that God had bypassed the old way of getting that gift because Jesus did it all through the cross.

The two groups completely disagreed, and they both loved the Lord so much that they would die for what they believed. Word and Spirit were not coming together! So what was to be done? The Antioch church and the Jerusalem church together formed a team of Workers of Word and Spirit to discern the Voice.

Read Acts 15; this was no 10-minute discussion. This certainly took weeks, more than likely months. Here is what took place, in order:

- ▶ They had a heated debate about Word and Spirit (Acts 15:1-2).
- ▶ The Antioch church commissioned a team (including Paul and Barnabas) to discern the Voice with the leaders (apostles and elders) of the church of Jerusalem (Acts 15:2). Those leaders formed a discernment team (Workers of Word and Spirit). Leadership was upheld as a principle of wise decision-making; this was not a congregational debate.
- ▶ They examined Word and Spirit together, discussed the need for the Law of Moses and shared testimonies about their experiences of the Spirit. Peter indicated that the Spirit bore witness by releasing the presence of the Holy Spirit in a tangible way on Gentiles (Acts 15:7-11). Note that they debated—a lot (15:7)—and heard testimony from Peter (15:7-11) and Paul and Barnabas (15:12).
- ▶ They underlined the theological principle of justification by faith (Acts 15:11). An Old Testament Scripture (Word) indicating that God would restore Judaism by the Spirit's call for Gentiles to receive the same gift was found. Suddenly, Jews could remain Jews and Gentiles could remain Gentiles, without needing to resort to Jewish Law.
- ▶ James summarized the case. He harmonized Word (people of God from Gentiles found in Amos 9:11; Jeremiah 12:15) and the Witness of the Spirit (signs and wonders in the newly converted). He made a pronouncement, after due diligence was done, that the churches together had discerned the Voice.
- ▶ They commissioned a team to tell the church of their decision and drafted a public letter (Acts 15:22-29). They set their will to get it done.
- ▶ Then everyone worshipped God together (Acts 15:30-35).

EVERYONE
WORSHIPPED
GOD TOGETHER

Week 7: TIME IN THE WORD

1. Read Colossians 3:15-17. Name the five steps that are found there and the specific texts that relate to each W:

- a) Word of Christ:
- b) Witness of the Spirit:
- c) Workers of Word and Spirit:
- d) Worship of God:
- e) Will of the Believer:

Now, name a discernment that you need to make and test whether you have worked through each section of this process. Share this with your group.

2. Read Acts 15:1-35. Outline the specific steps that each group/person took. Name them below and link each action to the five Ws.

3. What does this tell us about discerning the Voice together? Can this be done in the 21st century? What would we need to do to enable this kind of process in our movement? In our board meetings? Among churches across denominational lines in a region? With our International Workers?

TIME TO PRAY

We now have a discernment process that we can use to help us discern what God would have us do. Feel free to adjust it to make it more helpful. Regardless, pray that we learn to discern the Voice.

Name the discernments that are needed:

- ▶ In your personal life
- ▶ In your work
- ▶ In your schooling
- ▶ In your community
- ▶ In your church ministry
- ▶ In your church generally
- ▶ In the movement

Pray into each, using the five Ws. You can begin at your meeting. You will likely need much time to be wise in making major discernments. Recite Colossians 3:15-17 at the beginning of each prayer to discern; let it remind you of its clear teaching.

Now pray for General Assembly to discern the Voice. We need to hear and obey the Lord.

NOTES

1. Week 2, page 12. Tozer, A.W. *The Root of Righteousness* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1986), 21.
2. Week 4, page 27. Torrey, R.A. *How to Pray* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1900), 68-69.
3. Week 5, page 37. Tozer, A.W. *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, PA.: Christian Publications, 1948), 37-38.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rev. David Chotka is Chair of the Alliance Pray! Team (APT), a ministry developed by the General Assembly of the C&MA in Canada. The APT serves as a catalyst to develop prayer-equipping events across the movement. The APT oversees the Canadian branch of the College of Prayer (COP) and has developed resources and events for use in the C&MA and beyond.

David is also the lead pastor at Spruce Grove Alliance Church (www.sgac.net) and a conference speaker. Ordained in 1983, he has been a prayer equipper and leader since he started in the ministry. He has led many prayer events, including various prayer ministries at the last five General Assemblies. Working in partnership with the COP in the U.S., David has taken teams from the congregation he serves to minister in Africa. Recently, David was selected to be a Canadian delegate to The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization.

David, who has spoken at the Alliance World Fellowship, is a frequent contributor to *CMAlliance Magazine* (www.cmalliance.ca) and the author of *Power Praying* (PrayerShop: Terre Haute, 2009). To order a copy, visit www.prayershop.org/Power-Praying-p/bst-chd-bk-001.htm.

David has developed a teaching DVD to be used in conjunction with the *Power Praying* book, so that churches and ministries can better learn how to intercede effectively. His burden is to link effective intercessory prayer to mission, so that God might “bring things about by prayer.”

David is married to Elizabeth, and together they have two children (one adult and one teen).



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