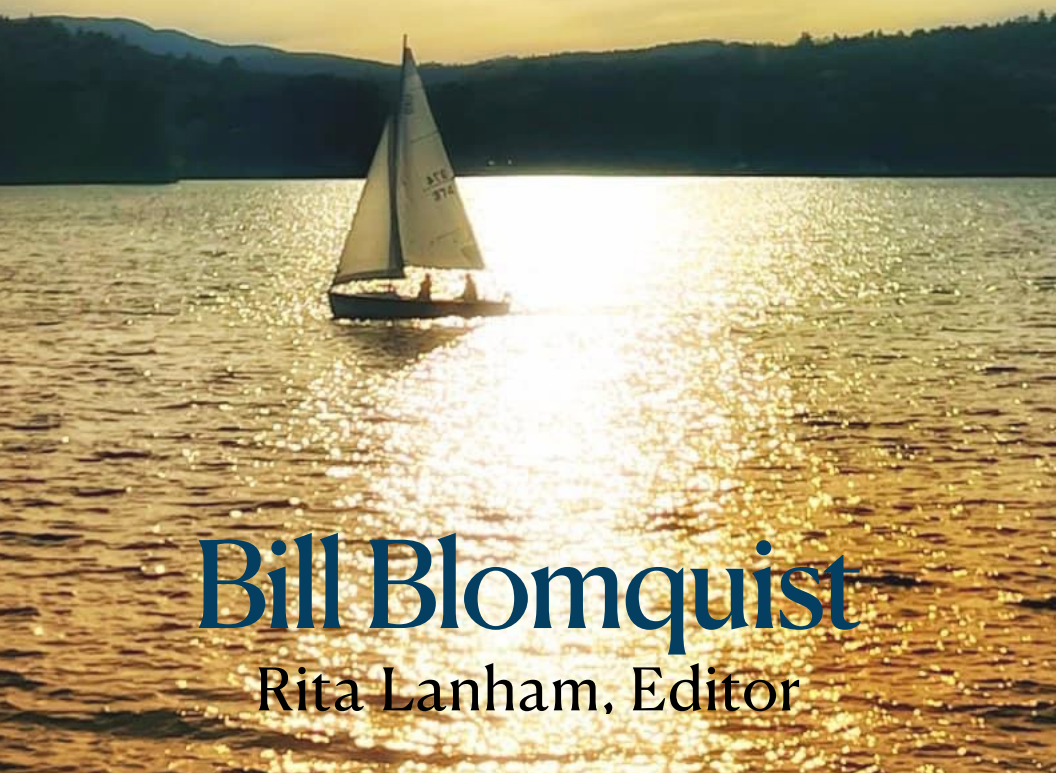


The Wind, the Lake and the Boat



Bill Blomquist

Rita Lanham, Editor

The Wind, the Lake, and the Boat
Edited by Rita Lanham

www.blomquistian.com

Prologue

Jesus says it best:

“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from, or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

John 3:8

As we take a look at the business of divine guidance - life on the lake of revelational buoys - it's fair to remember that nothing is certain. We are dealing with mystery.

Not logic, not formulas. Mystery. What would guidance be if it were not for faith?

Gusts rise, winds die. Sometimes they hit us from behind with such force that sudden course changes need to be made so as not to capsize. Other times you find yourself stagnant in the middle of the lake with no wind - having nothing to go on but the buoyancy of the water and the warmth of the sun on your face.

God is mystery, Jesus is mystery, the Spirit is mystery. By definition, mystery is something we can't figure out, only respond to, and it's something we cannot control. Wind has a mind of its own. We are not hard-wired to get our brains around that - and that is something we just have to understand as we set off from the dock.

Thus we really can't speak of specifics - i.e., a line of logic that, when all the stars are aligned, we come to the place where we can hear God's voice. Rather, in this business of divine guidance, we're speaking of general principles, a sense of *trajectory*, rather than detailed blueprints which provide no room for faith in order to be carried out. Divine guidance is more trajectory than coordinates.

In *The Wind, the Lake, and the Boat*, we'll take a look at a number of compass points to offer aid as we head out from the docks, through the lagoon, and out into the open lake. There are no formulas here, no bullet points that we can check off as we go along, no foreshadowed hints to ascertain what God is saying in any given situation. The channels of guidance are too unpredictable for that - and that for good reason. It forces us to meditate and contemplate God's heart in the midst of it all, in real time.

I guess that's why it's called mystery.

Introduction

My experience with sailboats has been "iffy" at best.

My first experience was with Uncle Walt. He and I hopped on a 9' Sunfish one sunny Saturday afternoon in the Banana River, Merritt Island, Florida. It wasn't good.

Uncle Walt was a heavy man, which may have accounted for the sludge-like progress we were making into the river. Yet it was the massive school of jellyfish that really ruined the thing. They appeared out of nowhere and wrapped themselves so much around daggerboard that we slowed to a creepy stop. As in slow motion, our little boat tipped to its side and edged us - despite all our gripping and climbing upwards - into the heart of the bobbing, unsuspecting jellyfish.

A bit later in life (now in the 9th grade) my dad took my brother and me on a week-long cruise in the British Virgin Islands. This time it was a 90' square rigger, the brigantine *Romance* - the one used in the movie Hawaii. Every morning we set sail for another island and every evening we'd harbor in a turquoise lagoon and do *Tarzan* swings off the cross-beams into the water with a giant splash.

Today, my curiosity about sailboats has stirred.

"Lord, what is it you're trying to teach me through these things?" I asked, peering down at a large boat in Portsmouth, NH one day.

At first it was all about the crew and their duties, how they all worked and scrambled around the decks as one unified team. I immediately thought he was teaching me about the Body of Christ and how, as the crew of the ship, each of us has a unique role to play in the sailing of the boat (the church) across the lake (life).

More recently the Lord has taken me a bit deeper (no pun intended). My thoughts drifted from what it takes to sail a boat and more preoccupied with the *movement* of the vessel, how the boat gets from one end of the lake to the other, the wind, how it is harnessed, and how it works in the ongoing movement of the boat. This was a real game-changer - as I am a real Spirit man and tend to see parables in just about everything.

Most recently I was no longer obsessed about the boat, per se, but about the wind that propelled the thing. Something in that was revealing, God was seeking to teach me about the mysterious ways of the Spirit. So, with only random exposure to the world of sailboating, I decided to press in a bit further.

I bought one.

Not a big one, just enough to enlarge the arena wherein God could teach me about the similarities between the winds of the Spirit and the winds of the lake, how they work in many of the same ways.

The day I slid my used 16.5" Catalina Capri into Webster Lake I moored it to the dock and looked at it for a very long time.

"What have I gotten myself into?" I muttered.

It made no sense to me. Cables going this way, pulleys attached to clamps for no good reason, strange knots and wing nuts in hard to reach places. I walked away from the dock scratching my head.

"I need to take sailing lessons."

So I did.

Four weeks later I was able to actually take my boat out, raise the mainsail, drop the dagger, point the tiller, set out the jib, and get to a place in the lake where God could speak to me. Over the course of the summer of 2023, I always sailed (or motored) back into the lagoon with at least one lesson gleaned each time I sailed. Those lessons are the main content of this book.

At the end of that summer I preached a sermon on "hearing God" and used my vast experience of sailing as leverage points which I was hoping to engage the congregation. It turned out to be a mixed bag. At the end of the thing I said Amen, and the congregation erupted in spontaneous applause. Later that week I got a call from an elderly guy who was sitting out there (whom I really esteem and respect in the Lord) and he flat out told me that it was absolutely the worst sermon he had ever heard in his life.

So it goes.

Anyway, for better or worse, what you are reading is that.

My prayer is that the Spirit will take these words to bring you to a deeper place of intimacy with the Father, and reveal to you a deeper experience of Christ's guidance as he sails with you across this mysterious lake of life.

Part I

**Life on
the Lake**

I

Faithful Waters

Hearing God's Voice isn't rocket science. Yet it still has its challenges. One day all will be known. Until then we see through a glass darkly.

In our humanity, hearing God and getting guidance, is a bit... "smudgy". Fortunately, God has provided spiritual *Windex* that helps us define him through the smudge.

It's called *Faith*.

Faith doesn't make God's will magically appear on the horizon with a rainbow, it wouldn't be "faith" if that was the case. But it does give us just enough *umph* to get us heading in the right direction. A faithful lifestyle is highly pleasing to God, essential if we are to sail with him.

Scriptures tell us that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 10:6). I would go one step further with that and say, without faith it's impossible to do anything lasting in the Kingdom; impossible to conceive the thing, impossible to glorify God, to pray effectively, and impossible to hear that still small voice.

While having faith doesn't automatically reveal God's will, it is essential in our relationship with him. We must have faith to please God.

Be sure of this: God isn't out to set you up for failure. He loves you. However, he is out to move you around, to raise up ambassadors who will give witness to the glory of his Name, people who will intercede and walk with him as one would walk with his or her best friend. And that kind of relationship can only happen in the realm of faith.

A Bit About Faith

Faith is where God lives.

To get in that space we need to sail in the *currents* of faith. It's where the action is. It's where people get saved, filled with the Holy Spirit, and are equipped with the wherewithal to walk the talk. In the world of faith, as in the world of sailing, control is an illusion. In my years as a pastor I have met people who would otherwise jump into God's will for them if it was not for them having to give up control.

No matter how hard a person tries, they simply cannot control God. He's that big.

When we step into the realm of faith God confirms and empowers us *as we go*, in real time. He doesn't reveal everything in its entirety, otherwise faith would have no role. But faith is essential. Additionally, as we move out in faith, it grows.

While faith demands that we trust in stuff we can't see, it is not without its navigational signposts, compass points, and buoys. After all, God is gracious. Along the way, from

the moment we set out from the dock, he provides encouraging affirmations. Untying the lines is by far the biggest leap of faith. But God is faithful. He reveals, confirms, and empowers as we head out from the lagoon and into the lake.

Our patriarch Abraham was led by faith to another land. But it wasn't blind faith. The invitation came first through an initial call, which was then affirmed throughout the journey, simply as he stepped out and took God at his word.

God didn't reveal the specifics of the whole picture to Abraham of course, as he won't for us. But every once in a while he revealed just enough to confirm that Abraham's pilgrimage was truly "of God". He confirmed it through nature (*look at the stars...*), provision (a ram caught in the thicket), favor, Godly fear (from others), and right on down the line.

While it can be said that we sail invisible breezes we cannot see, we are indeed able to discern certain channel markers that affirm we are sailing in the right direction. This is God's grace in action, his intentional disclosure to be a part of the people he loves. One day we will be hard-wired to see him face to face and not die. This side of the lake, however, God and humanity are simply two different entities with a bit of common overlap. That common overlap - the fellowship between creation and Creator - happens in the realm of faith.

New Every Morning

The problem with faith is, once you think you've got it all figured out, God scrambles it all up again and reconfigures all we know into a new thing, almost like starting from ground zero. You can be a new-be in the faith, or a sage at the end of the sail, it doesn't matter. Everyone who is committed to Jesus, young or old, still walks by faith.

I once had a roommate named Garrett. He was training to be lead singer in a heavy metal band in LA. During the week he was either in the studio or walking up and down our hallway perfecting his "scream".

On the weekends he hung out in Venice Beach whipping up a froth of human passion and sweat with other percussionists in something called a "drum circle." One Saturday night he came home clutching his ribs and wincing in pain. Something bad happened at the beach and he wound up breaking a couple of ribs. A few days later he was at the door of my bedroom still in pain. I asked if I could pray for him, he said yes, and God healed him. Not only that. Through the context of that healing and some additional conversation, Garrett wound up giving his life to Christ.

A few months later I was living in North Hollywood and decided to drive by the old digs in Burbank. Unbelievably, Garrett was sitting outside on the front steps. I pulled over and joined him.

The conversation got around to God and he shared how difficult it was for him to walk in this new life of "faith" in Jesus Christ.

"It must be easy for you," he sighed. "I mean, you've been in this thing for years and probably have it all figured out."

"All figured out?" I laughed. "Nothing could be further from the truth, Garrett. Walking day by day in faith is the one thing that we all have in common. If anything, I have the fruitful *experience* of seeing God working - which I suppose would give me greater courage to step out into faith. But you and I start from the same place each and every morning."

Faith in Plates

God can use anything to speak to us.

Wherever we are, wherever our attention is, God speaks. Be it a football game, a secular concert, church, a civic meeting, or a recording session. He delights in revealing himself wherever people are.

Shortly after that conversation with Garrett I was driving on the 405N, heading back to the foothills from the airport. I was just taking my time, enjoying the day, when my thoughts fell on the idea of heading back east to New England. (My mom, brother and his family lived back east, in New Hampshire.) I had been living in the LA area for a few years and it felt like things were coming to an end.

"I dunno, Lord. I'm not sure what's going on with me out here. I've been thinking a lot about my family in New Hampshire... I miss them. I wonder if you might not be calling me back east."

I drove on for a few miles, lost in thought, when a cobalt blue BMW came flying up the left lane and abruptly crossed over right in front of me. I slammed on the brakes and said a few choice words. As the space between us increased I caught a glimpse of his license plate. It read: "BAC EAST."

That's an interesting coincidence.

A couple of weeks later I was on the Ventura Freeway heading west, still thinking about the idea of going back east, when a red sedan speeded up the right lane and caught my eye. Its license plate read: "WMSON."

(Now "Williamson" is the last name of my mom who lived back east. She had a personalized license plate on her Honda Accord which read: +WMSON.)

"Okay, God." I mumbled. "This is getting a bit freaky."

Channel markers were appearing. God had gotten my attention by giving me a couple of hints, or compass points, to get my faith stirred up and headed in the right direction.

Just to drive the point home, not a week later I was driving on the Santa Monica Freeway and was grid-locked on the exit ramp towards near the pier. The traffic was heavy and

there were a couple of cars lined up. So I waited. Looking down I saw the license plate on the car in front of me. It read: "GO4IT".

From then on out, each time I drove anywhere I knew God was going to talk to me because of my faith in the plates. I became manic, looking this way and that way at every license plate knowing that license plates were the crystal ball through which I could be channelled to the Divine.

But it never happened again. Too many channel markers leads to too little faith.

That's the thing with God. Just when you get it all figured out (i.e. *this* is the way God speaks to me) he mixes it all up. It's not done maliciously, only to assure us and keep us walking in faith (where God lives). You see, as in my case, if it was that easy just to hop on the freeway and look for clues in passing cars, no faith would be needed (and it's impossible to please God without faith) and at the end of the day, my relationship with Christ would deteriorate to a legalistic contract, which is far from the adventurous sail in the Spirit he has for all of us.

This is what I was telling Garrett that day. It has nothing to do with how old or young you are in the Lord. If you've been in the thing for 2 months or 20 years, we all walk in *faith*. The channel markers are revealed to encourage, to scoot us along, and to guide us in God's purposes for our lives. Once they've done their job, they are rarely repeated.

In the following chapters we'll be looking at ways he guides, gently, tenderly, and lovingly. My hope is that we

would continue to learn and discern his most mysterious ways.

Teach me your way, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

Psalm 86:11

2

WHY EVEN SEEK GUIDANCE ANYWAY?

There is much concern in some Christian circles about getting God's will "right" for their lives, so much so that it seems like a matter of life or death. Some are so worried about getting the thing right that they inadvertently set themselves in dry dock, self-paralyzed to such an extent that God is unable to get them sailing.

Why do we seek guidance anyway? Answers are all over the map. I've heard them all.

- I don't want to *wreck* God's will for my life by doing the wrong thing.
- I don't want to *disappoint* him.
- I don't want him to be *mad* at me.
- I don't want to blow it by marrying the wrong person and *mess everything up*.

I rarely hear anybody say, "Well... I love him. And I want him to be a part of everything I do. I know he loves me no matter what. That's not the point. I just love him, and I love experiencing the joy of his presence. I don't seek guidance to get it *right*, I check in with him so we'll be tight. It's not a matter of life or death, ya know."

A Matter of Life and Death - Really? *Really?*

Some of us place such a strong emphasis on the discipline of hearing God that we equate it with salvation itself. But (lest we forget) salvation was secured for us as Jesus hung on the cross and rose from the tomb. Seeking God's guidance isn't a matter of salvation, or even life and death. It's about invoking his presence in the transformation of our hearts.

If we're seeking God's guidance out of fear, to earn brownie points, to atone for sins, or to get eternal life, we've already missed the boat. It's about transformation not salvation.

I have known people pressing hard into God, obsessed with wanting to do the "right thing" with such froth and fervor, hoping they will make the right decision, that they wind up missing the joy of sailing with God altogether.

It's like the *Young Life* skit of the girl who's praying the Lord's Prayer. Dead tired, she remembers she needs to pray. She slides off her bed with a sigh and drops to her knees. "Our Father... --"

And right then, as she is sacrificially seeking to perform her religious duty, she is interrupted.

"Yes?"

"Don't bother me. I'm praying." She resumes her clasped hands and scrunches her brow. "Now where was I?"

It's a wonderful thing to be passionately desperate for the Lord. I'm not suggesting it isn't, but for the right reasons. I've briefly mentioned some wrong reasons to seek God's guidance above. Let's look at them more closely here.

Fear. Fearful of doing the wrong thing. If we've come out of a place where "getting it right" was akin to the unforgivable sin (or if we're a first born), we may strive to enter the narrow gate of guidance as if our very lives depended on it. Ironically, the more we strive the less we arrive.

Assurance of Love. Following on the shirt tails of fear, comes the misguided actions of seeking guidance in order that God will love us more. Here again, God's love for us has always been and always will be complete. We already have all the attention of the God of Creation. What more do we need?

To Balance the Scales. Some figure if they do things right for a change, it will atone for the blunders of the past. It won't. All the blunders, and sins of the past, have already been made right at the cross. Someone has said, "Jesus Christ died for me 2000 years ago. I only found out about it recently."

Pride. Some believers are supernatural power-hounds. They need to seek a supernatural direction from God to prove to others they are really walking with God. They have an "in". They know Jesus in a way we don't know, like they have Jesus in their

front pocket, and it turns into a game of intimidation.

To Avoid Personal Responsibility. Some believers aren't good at making decisions. (This too can be motivated by pride. *I'm a Christian*, they may say. *I can't let people see my humanity*.) So what happens? They figure if God makes decisions about their life (where to live, who to marry, what to do, what to name their kids, etc.) and things go south, it's his problem, not theirs. It sort of has the same sentiment as Flip Wilson's saying, "The devil made me do it."

Witchcraft. Speaking of the devil, believers who have had a past in the cult or occult before coming to Christ will often seek guidance (inadvertently) to manipulate life circumstances or see the future. They already have a history of looking at horoscopes, boards, cards and may seek guidance as just another way to do life.

Loss of Perspective. Finally, some folks equate the need to hear God and get guidance over and above their own salvation. If they get it right, they'll get to heaven. If not, they will wind up shipwrecked. This is akin to idolatry and quite dangerous.

The interesting thing here is that these misguided rationales come from a perspective of "works righteousness," and not from a perspective of simply enjoying a relationship with God in freedom and peace.

The heart of a child seeks to please the heart of the father for no other reason than to experience relationship. In the early days, of course, the child takes a step, looks back to see if dad is still smiling (which he is). As the toddler grows, true freedom grows as well. Things have been learned, mistakes won't be repeated, and the child enjoys their autonomy and integrates their life within the experience of their relationship with their father into their decision-making.

As we mature in the Lord, our childish motives for seeking guidance morph into naturally doing life with him. In short, they morph into the fostering and enjoying of *relationship*.

It's Just a Spirit Thing

Imagine seeking guidance for no other reason than to enjoy intimacy with your heavenly Father! Or, another way to say it: Imagine that seeking God's guidance is really about fostering a relationship with your Lord, and less about getting guidance yourself.

Could it be possible to seek the Father - not out of a sense of fear, losing one's salvation, or making sure you get it right - but merely to have the joy of walking with God?

People with "this heart" have the best of both worlds. Not only do they have a sense in God's intervention as they do life; they also have the understanding that they are being renewed and revitalized, transformed and molded into the heart of Christ through their relationship with him. For

them, having to get get God's guidance about this or that is a far second to the honor of the opportunity to be with him. This lies at the heart of true spiritual renewal and transformation.

For them it's, "I get to," not, "I have to."

There is a spiritual depth, a certain divine intimacy evident in those who choose to lose their life and submit out of reverence and honor simply for the sake of Love. It's almost tangible: Moses' face shone, Stephen's face radiated like the face of an angel.

Paralyzing concern for doing the Father's will has little to do with it being the "right thing" and everything to do with the character of Christ forming in our hearts through ongoing fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Let me say it another way and be blunt: If you are seeking to do the "right thing" out of any other motivation than deepening your relationship with Jesus, you've missed the boat.

Getting guidance is important. We all want to do what's right. And many times we seek guidance from pure desires, because we love him and we simply want to please him. Yet - again - following God has is all about knowing God and choosing to do what the Father is doing, and nothing to do with doing the "right thing", per se. It's not what we do, it's about who we are in him.

Don't get me wrong, specifics matter - where we choose to live, our vocation, who to marry, of course - but spiritual obsessiveness won't get us the answer we're looking for.

But I Look So Good

As a young believer I smoked cigarettes - a lot. I knew Christians weren't supposed to do it. But I did it anyway.

Back in those days most Christian concerts ended with an "altar call," a time when people could make a public confession to Christ, come down up front, say prayers and receive council from trained ministers. It was also a time when Christians had the opportunity to recommit to Jesus, receive prayer, and repent of behaviors unpleasing to him. It seemed every time I went to a Christian concert I'd pray, "God if it is your will for me to quit smoking I'll throw this pack of *Winstons* on the stage and be done with it." Twenty concerts later I was still smoking - and worse, smoking with the belief that I was outside God's will for my life.

While seeking God's guidance is admirable, we can easily fall into a legalistic approach to guidance - wanting to improve ourselves so we are more acceptable - rather than out of a desire for closeness with God, wanting him to be in our lives, fully and totally. That was certainly my deal. I lived daily with the self-condemnation and knew God and I would be tighter without the sticks.

One day I was praying about it.

Lord, I know Christians aren't supposed to smoke. It's stinky, costs a lot, and it's getting more and more difficult to hide my bad breath from my Bible study friends. I'm sorry, Lord, I know I'm not in your will for my life.

That's when the Lord gently spoke to me.

Bill, I hear what you're saying but, believe me, I know you - and smoking is the least of your problems. I'm out to change your heart.

'My heart?' Now that was a new one. What did that have to do with anything? Back then I was way more concerned with what things looked like on the outside rather than what was going on on the inside.

As a hippie turned Jesus Freak, I came into the Kingdom looking... well, pretty grungy - a far cry from the Bible-thumping evangelicals I found myself fellowshiping with while doing my undergrad work at *Florida Atlantic University*, Boca Raton, Florida. There I was - auburn locks resting on my shoulders, wearing "worldly" t-shirts, torn blue jeans, flip-flops, and a mouth that could have peeled back the bark off the cedars of Lebanon with absolutely no knowledge of Christian culture, nor its norms.

By some random series of events I was invited to a Campus Baptist bible study which met on Tuesday nights. I really liked the group, but physically felt out of place. The students looked squeaky clean with wide smiles, sparkling eyes, and a passionate love for Jesus and his Word. While they welcomed me with open arms I'd get a strange angsty sense whenever I entered the room. I could almost hear them saying, "When is Bill going to get some real shoes, a pair of pants that isn't torn, and a haircut." (Probably projection from my *daddy issues*, but there all the same.)

Sometimes I would even catch a glimpse of them staring at me between the verses of the *Maranatha!* choruses we sang, Through the course of the semester I somehow came to the conclusion the real culprit standing between me and my total acceptance from them was the length of my hair. I figured if I looked like them I would be liked by them.

The length of my hair? Really, Lord?

Yup, I knew it. It my long-haired hippie-type hair that was creating the barrier between me and them. Even when I tucked up my hair up under my cap it made no difference. But I loved my hair. Was God really asking me to cut it off? The Bible study continued through the semester, and I could literally feel the eyeballs of everyone in the room boring into the back of my head.

One night I came to a sacrificial revelation: I would never fit into this group until I looked like them.

"Besides," justifying my sacrificial decision, "didn't Paul become all things to all people so he might save some?" So I did it. I cut it all off. It was an excruciating experience. But I did it.

For Jesus.

That next Tuesday night I showed up looking pretty much like everyone else. I wore a special button-down shirt, freshly ironed *khakis*, and clutched my King James Version in my hand. I finally felt like I belonged. I took my seat, my Bible and colored highlighters on my lap, and waited for

the handshake of fellowship. I was out for a sad disappointment.

No one recognized me. A couple of them even approached me welcoming me for my first time there.

Imagine that! Even when I showed them I had been obedient to God by cutting my gorgeous locks and ringlets, they didn't even seem to care (or notice)!

These two illustrations reveal a heart that truly wants to be about the Father's business, but for all the wrong reasons.

When we seek God's will in response to something we think we should be doing - or for any of the other no-no's mentioned above - we're sailing for the rocks and setting ourselves up for real disappointment. When seeking guidance, things like culture and "law" - the "should" and "ought's" - of course need to be part of the discernment, but not the prime focus. When we are sailing on the lake with a heart to be caught up in the wind, things will automatically iron out.

In the Gospel of John it is mentioned numerous times that Jesus "could only do what he saw the Father doing" (John 5:19). In one instance he is heard saying that the Father not only tells him what to say but even how to say it (John 12:49-50). And while it is true that Jesus chose only to speak the words of his Father - diligently submitted to the Father's will, even to death - he wasn't doing it so he would be a "good Son of God", to gain additional divine favor, or

because he was fearful that if he made the wrong decision he would go to hell.

He did so because he was passionately in love with his Father. For Jesus, obedience was a matter of increasing the ongoing intimacy with the Father, more than simply doing the right thing. The right things were there. They were just the result of his relationship, not the impetus of it.

In Christ you and I have that same freedom. Guidance for guidance's sake - apart from the co-eternal God indwelling in us - will always lead us back to a Law-based, never-quite-knowing-where-we-stand relationship with God, which is the very thing that Jesus came to free us from. Seeking guidance, however, with the expectation of loving God and enjoying his Presence blows the lid off the thing. It's a real game changer. It changes us from "I hope I'm making the right choice here 'cause I don't want to blow it" to maybe even an attitude that says, "You know, I don't think the choice really matters here. Maybe it doesn't matter at all. Maybe I can make my own decision. Who knows? All I know is that I love talking to him about this stuff and being transformed from glory to glory in the process."

I'm Getting Closer to My Home

As we mature in Christ we realize that pursuing intimacy far outweighs making making the right decisions. Realizing that in *all things* God makes it turn out for good for those

who love him (Romans 8:28) really takes the heat off. Even the worse decisions made in carnality can be transformed on the lake.

When we sail in these currents we no longer need to strive, worry, or sweat. Rather we enjoy a cosmic relationship with our Maker and would gladly choose to sacrifice just about anything to be where he is, to do what he is doing, and say what he is saying, for the sake of Oneness and fellowship with him.

We wouldn't want it any other way.

Sure, we may make a bad choice along the way here or there, like transversing too close to an island and scraping our daggerboard on the rocks, or wind up floating for hours in the horse latitudes. No worries, That's how we grow. At the end of the day, we'll always make it back to the safety of the lagoon.

It's "Christ in us" (Colossians 1:27), and living in him that counts. Guidance sought for no other reason than to enjoy increased fellowship with our Savior, to be co-adventurers with Christ, will merit the "right decision" all on its own.



3

BUOYS

There are places that are unsafe for us to sail. Those places are marked by buoys. Do all you can to spot them, heed their warning, and steer clear from them.

That first day I slid my boat into the water I really had no idea what I had gotten myself into. I stood gazing across the lagoon, studying Webster Lake nestled within the surrounding hills and swallowed hard.

A friend of mine appeared and stood next to me. Gooch knows the lake quite well. Over the next 20 minutes he filled me in on where to sail and - more importantly - where not to sail. He pointed this way and that way and said things like:

"Stay away from that beach."

"Don't get too close to that island."

"And, Bill - do you see those three buoys floating on the other side of the lake in a triangle?"

I cupped my hands and squinted into the shimmering water. "Yeah?"

"Don't even think about going there.

"Why is that? Is it the *Devil's Triangle*," I laughed.

He looked at me dead serious. "It's the Triangle of *Death*."

In the days that followed I developed a healthy respect for that advice, especially when sailing past the three buoys' *Triangle of Death*. Whatever it was, I didn't want any part of it. Even in those times when the winds seemed to be pushing me in that direction, I did everything possible to steer clear of that place.

From his own experience, Gooch knew the lake. There were just some places that were unsafe to sail. And those places were marked by buoys.

Sailing Within the Buoys

Buoys are precisely placed boundaries and guidelines that helps the sailor navigate the lake. Likewise, God has set up parameters (buoys) which are intended to safeguard us, too, and keep us sailing safely.

Buoys are essential. They provide a floating framework wherein we sail and safeguard us from running aground. Additionally, they assure the sailor of a safe and enjoyable journey, just the way sailing should be.

Buoys are everywhere, not only on lakes. Every day we are safeguarded by "buoys" in the form of speed limit signs, red lights, closing times, air traffic regulations, sports, and standardized FDA requirements. You can find them in music theory, nature (like gravity, for example), and church liturgy. In family life, buoys may take the form of healthy roles, defined boundaries, and scheduled dates with one's spouse.

In the kingdom God buoys bob up and down upon the lake of living water as well. They assure us, protect us, guide us, and set parameters around our lakes so we won't do something stupid and get wrecked. Parabolically speaking these are paradigms of the kingdom that need to be in place in order to sail safely with God.

Many of us spend way too much time buoy spotting than sailing. They are important of course, but we forget they are there to provide safety, not to be idolized. Let's look at some of the essential buoys that I have found helpful when seeking guidance.



Buoy 1
God has made the lake
for you to enjoy.

After all is said and done, the lake - for all it's inconsistent winds, currents, and obstacles - is meant to be *enjoyed*.

More than that, the lake actually desires your presence. Its gentle breezes serve as invitations to untie our boats and get into the thing.

Again, the invitation is there: Come on out! Don't stay tethered at the dock. You may miss the great adventure. He actually desires to sail with you in the doing of the thing. It all begins the moment you step off the dock and into the boat. The further out you get, the larger his heart embraces you. His excitement escalates when he sees you setting out into his purposes.

Sometimes we think the responsibility is on us to discover God's will. But that's not the case. We need not get our ducks in a row, perfect ourselves beyond measure, and then present our ideas to God for his blessing. His blessing has already been given.

Some spend their entire lives sitting in a boat, tethered to a dock with ropes of fear, unworthiness, or even the sense that all those boats out there are in another league, they earned it, they worked for it, or whatever. But the truth is that you and I have been set free to sail the lake (even to jump into it with a giant splash if we'd like!). It's that open.

Fears do arise from the depths - I know, I get that.

"It's too windy, it's not windy enough, I'm afraid of sailing into the triangle of death..."

And so it goes.

We all get that. I'd like to suggest more harm is done remaining tethered at the dock than ever could happen when untethered from the dock. Sailboats were made to sail. If your boat stays bound to the dock it will thump against the dock with the wind and waves and get all bruised and dinged up by doing absolutely nothing. If you stay there long enough slimy green stuff will grow on the hull (which is really gross and a pain to clean off). At least, if you're moving - even if you're only paddling around the lagoon - you're doing *something* of what God has created you to do. Heck, even if you get into trouble, the sweet wing of his mercy will get you home.

But simply sitting tethered at the dock? You were made for much more than that. The lake, your life, the sail, and the journey are all in place, waiting for you to enjoy. Just as it has been created for you.



Buoy 2
God sails with us
in real time.

God guides and accompanies us as head out - just as a friend, or any experienced crew mate, would do. He knows

everything we experience, as its happening, yet shares the the lake's disappointments and joys just as if he was experiencing it for the first time.

He doesn't let on that he's a know-it-all, but he is. He sails along with us, just as delighted in the gusts of wind and the thrill of the sail as we are. He toils along side of us and, at the end of the day, relaxes with us as we recall the say's sail with an umbrella drink.

One day Jesus looked around at his brothers and sisters with deep gratitude and said:

"No longer do I call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you *friends*, for everything that I learned from my father I have made known to you."

John 15:15

It may be hard to swallow, but Jesus actually *likes* you. He befriends you. And friends talk with one another. They work through things together. They do life together, in real time - talking, fellowshiping, and loving being around one another. He loves doing life with us, and - because we are Christians, made in his image and filled with his Spirit wind - we are hard-wired to hear him, understand him, and even learn the tenor of his endearing voice.

"My sheep hear my voice."

John 10:27

Isn't it lovely to know we're not in it alone when seeking spiritual direction? That he doesn't have to be coaxed or

coerced into liking us? Nope, he actually desires to be in relationship with us. Furthermore, he enjoys the process of disclosure to us just as if he, too, was experiencing it for the first time.

The *Easter Bunny* was a big hit when raising my two daughters. We never saw him, of course, but through the years we learned that he was a curious little fella, a bit of a prankster, and always keeping us on our toes with where he'd hide the Easter Baskets.

Year after year on Easter Sunday, the kids would hop off their beds, slide into slippers and bathrobes, and gingerly explore every nook and cranny of the house in search of their baskets. One would sneak up to the stereo cabinet and place her fingers on the latch.

"I think my basket is right... about... here!"

The door would flip open and, much to her surprise, nothing would be there.

"Shoot!"

"Hmm," I'd smile, "have you checked under the bed?"

Then she cautiously tippy-toed into the bedroom, with me behind her, enjoying the whole thing.

The other daughter would be frantically tossing out every crumpled piece of clothing from the laundry basket. "Nope - not in here, either," she'd shout.

Sometimes the hunt was fast and furious - like when the baskets were discovered under the sink next to the *Windex*. Other times, not so much - like when after a 30 minute search, the baskets were found swaying back and forth from the chandelier over the dining room table.

"Found them!" They'd giggle. "That darn Easter Bunny!"

The best prank from the Easter Bunny came when, after an excruciating search through every nook and cranny (and ceiling) of the house, I couldn't hold out any longer. I just had to say something.

"Perhaps the baskets aren't even in the house. Have you considered that?"

"WHAT?!"

They rushed out the back porch. Within moments their eyes widened with astonishment when seeing the baskets sitting atop giant blow up chairs and floating around in the deep end of the backyard swimming pool.

It was then when the Lord showed me something so very precious about his friendship and ongoing fellowship with his children. I knew, of course, where the baskets were. I mean (spoiler alert) I put them there. You could even say, I knew those baskets were pre-ordained to be discovered by my kids.

Even though I knew all that, however, I still had the capacity to hop out of bed that Easter Sunday morning, slide into my slippers and robe, and accompany them as

they searched through house. It was as if I was searching with them, even to the point of delighting and clapping hands and jumping up and down with them when they finally found their baskets.

In those moments I was caught up in exactly the same joy as they had, almost as if I had found the baskets myself.

It was almost as if I had forgotten who I was. I grew sad and disappointed when the baskets weren't in the stereo cabinet. And I jumped up and down with them in elation when they were found floating around the deep end of the swimming pool. I was there, riding along with them the whole way, caught up in the same joy and giggles and laughter as my daughters were in discovering the wily shenanigans of the Easter Bunny.

This is similar to sailing with God on the lake. Of course he knows what's out there (he made it and manages it). Yet through the highs and lows of the sail, he delights and fellowships with us in the discovery of the thing. We are never alone on the lake.



Buoy 3
God discloses himself in
accordance with our
formation in him.

God speaks just ahead of our maturity in him.

Further, his communication style, too, evolves with our maturity. He speaks a fathom beyond our current place on the lake to keep us faithful, and in faith. As we grow, his wisdom, guidance, and intimacy deepens, even changes at times. He doesn't do this with a hide-and-seek mentality. It's always about invitation, call us deeper and deeper, from glory to glory, into the deep waters of his heart.

The Apostle Paul writes:

"When I was a child, I spoke and thought like a child. But when I grew up I put away childish things."

1 Corinthians 13:11

We are never stagnant in the water with Christ. On the contrary, we are being transformed day in and day out into the image of his Son (2 Corinthians 3:18). Like clay on a potter's wheel, we are always being formed. This is a continuing and reliable dynamic in the life of a saint. Aren't you glad you're not the same sailor you were a year ago? That's the beauty of his life in us.

The writer of Hebrews reflects on this process of formation. He writes:

"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

Hebrews 5:12-14

In life, a parent will often communicate to her child in appropriate ways, in ways wherein the child can understand. God's guidance, communication, and self disclosure is no different. His voice changes in nuance as we mature in our faith.

It would be silly (and inappropriate) for a Spanish teacher to speak advanced *Castilian Spanish* to a high school freshmen class of kids who are only there to get their graduation credit. He'd give the class just enough to encourage them, but not enough to overwhelm them.

The Lord speaks in a similar way. Early on he may rush to answer our prayers for that perfect parking space at *Walmart*, answer a fleece, or encourage us with an elementary reliance on "coincidences", just to get his point across. Yet, as we mature, he kicks it up a notch. For those who have sailed the lake for a good chunk of life and have an experiential familiarity with the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), he may simply stand there with his arms crossed and an all-knowing grin across his face and say something like, "I dunno. What do you think we should do?"

I've often heard it said that a parent's job is to adequately prepare the kid to leave home and live successfully in life. I think God works on a similar principal. The older we are in the Lord, the more we are called into a riskier, more faithful obedience. Many times we're forced to make decisions based on what we know about the Person of Jesus and nothing else.

God's changing nuance in his voice and Presence is perhaps no better seen than in his ongoing relationship with Israel through the years. Before redeemed from their bondage and slavery in Egypt, Israel was a broken and busted people group with little hope (nor proof) that Yahweh was even around. When God showed up, God was very revealing. He knew they had to see him and he was ll in. He hammered the Egyptians with 10 visible plagues, opened the sea, lit the sky with a column of fire every night, and wrote his Law on stone tablets for them, clearly with his very finger. Through signs and wonders and miracles their belief was restored and Israel had truly become re-anchored in their covenant relationship with God. He fed them with manna and quail. They began to receive and believe and understand the nature of the One who called them out of darkness and into his magnificent light.

Then it was time to stretch their faith. Instead of having a front row seat to the miracles of God, the entire Israel nation was now invited to experience and follow God through a single person, Moses, who spoke with God face to face within the darkened intimacy of the tabernacle.

Some didn't like that. A mere man?! Yet this was God's voice to them. It was different than before, but it was the same Person. Through it all he was forming them into a people of promise.

As Israel matured and settled in the Promised Land (and for a variety of valid reasons), God's Presence seemed to "pull back" more so, which demanded even more faith to believe. When Israel needed correction, or a rediscovery of

their *True North*, prophets appeared with signs and wonders and prophetic language who sought to bring them back into the love and knowledge of their redeemer and promise of a future Messiah.

Jesus hits the scene and kicks it up to a new level. *Faith*. Through the Person of the Holy Spirit, he deposited God's love into humankind. This was an entirely new way of relationship, something new, given with the expectation that humankind would now walk in faith and fellowship of the Godhead until he returns.

At each turn of the sail God is coaxing, forming, and guiding his people in deeply personal ways, differently and all in accordance to his children's' forming maturity.

One of the biggest joys of my life is to have "grown-up" relationships with my children. We talk issues, we laugh as off-color jokes, and remember the days and pranks of the *Easter Bunny*. Many of us have raised children through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. Those early years of projectile diarrhea and *Gerber's* baby food? I wouldn't change them for the world (well, maybe a little). Yet, my true joy and love for my daughters in this day and age is over the top. I am now able to love and communicate with them as fully-functioning adults.

For the infant God honors the fleece. For the adolescent he deploys angels who wage warfare around us. For the sage he remains silently faithful. It's just how it works.

You may be thinking that the Lord isn't speaking to you like he used to, or that the excitement of your relationship

has waned for no good reason. I'm here to tell you that he hasn't changed. He loves you just as much today just as he did yesterday - and will tomorrow.

Yet, you are older now. You have matured. Your faith has increased. And, with that, his Presence is coming down in a new way - just a fathom deeper than where you are. We often look back and expect him to speak in the good old ways. But that's like a grown-up trying to ride a bicycle with training wheels.

God is still speaking. Of course, he is still there. Of course he is still faithful. His disclosure of himself is continuously happening in accordance to where you are spiritually. The mercies of the Lord are new every morning. He is singing a new song.

Don't seek to hear him in yesterday's voice. He is speaking now, right where you are, in today's voice.



Buoy 4
God's experiential presence
in the life of a Christian
is normative.

God has given us his Holy Spirit to be with us, day in and day out. Experiences of the Holy Spirit's tangible presence are meant to guide us around the lake.

Taking this fourth buoy seriously demolishes those doubts bubbling up in our brains seeking to convince us that we are all alone on the lake, or that it is up to us to make

something happen, or that the gusts of the Spirit he filled our sails with so many years ago have run out.

Oh, he's still around, we may say. But deep down we're convinced he's in a very far-away place, watching us dying on a windless lake under the blazing sun.

The thrill of the sail is only for the truly remarkable saints. Not me. That's something I'll never get to experience.

Every so often I have breakfast with a fellow pastor in town. He is a great guy - an educated, seasoned pastor who has birthed many ministry initiatives. I'll call him, "Gary."

Yet Gary is a *cessationist*, meaning he believes that the gifts and experiential Presence of God is no longer being revealed (or needed) anymore. To be fair, cessationanists do believe in the Holy Spirit, but their theology steers them clear of the revelational gifts of the Spirit (miracles, prophecies, healing, words of knowledge, visions, etc.). They used to exist, but ceased around the time when the Bible was put into print.

(We'll see later, whether a person is a cessationist or not has absolutely no bearing on God's ability guide them through life's lakes.)

At a recent breakfast I watched Gary slurp his coffee and butter his toast in haste. He was clearly troubled. He was up against a difficult decision in his ministry. The way he explained it was that it was up to him to come up with the solution, without any outside help from the Lord. At one

point in the conversation he looked into his fried eggs and sighed.

"This would be so much easier if I wasn't a cessationist," he confessed.

Many people, like Gary, believe they received the Holy Spirit at baptism (or conversion) as one time deposit that would get them sailing the rest of their life - not unlike the husband who tells his wife on their honeymoon that he loves her and mentions, "If anything changes, I'll let you know" and today, some 50 years later, she longs to hear her husband simply tell her he loves her.

The Apostle Paul has something to say about this. He writes:

Be filled with the Spirit and constantly guided by Him.
(Ephesians 5:18)

The Greek tense of this verse communicates something like the *continuous present*. It essentially translates to something like, "Be continually, all the time, wherever you are, whatever you're doing, filled with the presence with the Spirit of God. Always."

It's essential that we remain open to the supernatural guidance of God through the Holy Spirit. If we cloud accessibly to the fullness of the Spirit (even through well-intended things like rational thought, theology, or fear of spiritual abuse) we cut ourselves short. The Spirit is *everything*. It is the only way that God reveals his Presence and guidance on the lake.

Through the Spirit we are filled every day with spiritual fellowship. Through the Spirit we enjoy intimate and ever-present fellowship with God our Father. Through the Spirit God reveals what the Father is doing, just as he did with Jesus. Outside of his abiding ever-present Life in my heart, life would simply be one giant guessing game.

Psalm 23 is perhaps the greatest hit song in David's repertoire. It describes the life of the shepherd, a portrait of one that intentionally intervenes in one's daily routine.

David's shepherd is described as one who leads, renews, and guides him along right paths for his Name's sake; one who protects the sheep in danger, accompanies them, anoints them for healing, feeds them when hungry, fights for them when under siege, and even pursues them when he sees them sailing into the *Triangle of Death*. In short, David describes a Shepherd-God who actually and experientially *does life with his sheep*, lives with them, sojourns with them, and leads them into eternal pastures, all for his Name's sake.

This is a description of how Jesus, our Great Shepherd, shepherds us. It is his good pleasure to give us the kingdom (Luke 12:32). The good pleasure of being shepherded by God isn't something to be imagined from a distant hillside but to be experienced from within our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

A quick glance of some good old-fashioned songs, hymns and spiritual songs through church history attests to this marvelous truth. You may recall some of these affirming

lyrics of God's Spirit poured out into the hearts of his children.

Jesus, Savior, pilot me..

He walks with me and he talks with me...

Guide me, O Great Jehovah...

What a friend we have in Jesus...

I heard the voice of Jesus say...

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet...

Lily Tomlin has a great quote regarding the ongoing spiritual relationship between God and his children. She writes: "How is it that when a person prays we call him 'religious,' but when a person hears God we call him 'schizophrenic'?"



Buoy 5

It is less about the specifics the sail, and more about who you are becoming as you sail.

These truths - the above buoys - are all in place, set up for you from the foundation of the world. You didn't make them happen, he did. And he made them happen for you.

God cares more about our character - who we are becoming - than what it is that we do or accomplish.

This buoy, reminding us of the transformational nature of sailing, may be the most essential buoy on the lake. I have often seen people crippled, tied at the docks, because they are afraid of making the wrong decision.

In the late '70's and early '80s there were a slew of teachings regarding God's "perfect" and "permissible" will. His "perfect" will, as was taught, was what you were supposed to do - that all-perfect Christian that God wanted all of us to be - and his "permissible" will, what God resigned you to do if you made the terrible mistake of making a stupid decision that derailed you from his "perfect" will.

This teaching, as you may have figured, played havoc to single Christians dying to get married. *There is only one person out there that God has for you [his perfect will] and, if you miss it, or marry the wrong person, you've set a course for shipwreck [his permissible will].*

That teaching kept a lot of well-intended single people tethered to the dock. Not only does it assume that a person couldn't marry any one of a number of people and be perfectly content, it speaks in direct opposition to the freedom we have in Christ as autonomous human beings who have been made (as he is) in the image of God.

The way I see it is that God know exactly how he wants us at the end of the day and is committed to making that happen, no matter what. Sure, a "mistake" may have been

made here or there in the sail, which may force him to change the order a bit. But at the end of the day all we needed to learn and experience to become that perfect image of his will and design will have been accomplished.

Regardless of their reasons for their crippling (some of which may need healing prayer), some never get off the docks and into the thrill of the sail. Further, even when they do get out on the water, the crippling thoughts whirlpool around their minds like hornets, causing them to question their every move. It's a no-win situation. When they refuse to sail, they feel like they should have gone out. If they go out, they are consumed with the thought of why they went out in the first place. In short they are lukewarm and double-minded and isolate themselves from meeting God in the moment of their sail.

People like these remind me of an '80's punk song.

Should I stay or should I go now?
Should I stay or should I go now?
If I go there will be trouble
And if I stay it will be double
So come on and let me know

Should I Stay or Should I Go? The Clash,

Many of these folks place the outcome of the whole of their life upon fear, fantasy, or "what will be?". Thus, in their indecision, they become crippled. So sad. But there's no need to fear. God is so much bigger, even than our biggest mistake. Even when we blow it he has

promised to flip all things around for good for us who are called by his Name (Romans 8:28).

The bigger question is this: *Who are we becoming in the midst of the sail?*

Is it really about getting all the buoys in a row? Is this what really counts? Nope. God is way more concerned about who we are becoming, and way less concerned with getting it all right. In other words, what you think God wants you to do, and even how you think he wants you to do it, is secondary to who he wants you to become. We don't live for the tassels, but for the One who wears the robe.

As we walk the dock to the boat and gaze from the lagoon across the glassy lake we can now untether our life and seek an afternoon of sailing, knowing that God's buoys are floating firm in our hearts of faith.

Summary

Let's pull up an adirondack chair under the shade of a palm tree, take a sip of our ice cold beverage and reflect on the points of the day.

In summary, these buoys remind us that:

- God has made the lake for us to enjoy.
- God accompanies us on the lake, as if he too is experiencing the thrills and spills right along with us for the first time.

- God speaks to us in accordance to our faithful formation in Christ.
- His interaction in our life is not only normative, but intentional.
- When it comes to getting guidance from God, it's not so much about what we decide to do, but who we're becoming that really matters.

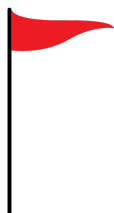
It's quite the mindblower to get that God desires to be in a relationship with me. I know people who would never want to be in a relationship with me. But God does. And he does for you, too.

Think of it: he wants to disclose himself to us - his heart, his desires, his companionship - willingly and freely, for really no good reason. Just because he can.

He does all that because that's what friends do.

I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

John 15:15b



4

Red Flags on the Lake

A personal story of attempting to rewrite the King James Bible in a language the average Joe could understand, not realizing that there were already a whole slew of translations available.

As a baby believer I had an incredible thirst for communicating the Bible in ways that other people could get.

If people could read the Bible in language that they really spoke and understood, more people would have the joy of knowing Jesus.

So I decided to rewrite the Bible.

Every night around 9:00 pm, no matter where I was or who I was with, I'd say my "good-byes", gather my belongings, head out the door, drive home, shoot upstairs, make a beeline for my bedroom, open my the biggest King James you've ever seen, pull out a pen and lined journal, and tediously continue the task of translating the entire Bible.

No one can understand this old King Jimmy. I'll make one that everybody - in their own language, a language they can understand - and the world will be a much better place.

One night I was out with some friends having a great time of fun and laughter. I glanced at my watch to see it was nearing the 9 o'clock hour. I quickly grabbed my coat and was heading out the door when someone asked, "Bill, where are you going? The party's just getting going."

"I have to get home. I'm onto something really big."

"Really big? How so?"

"Well..."

And I proceeded to share my complaint that there was only one version of the Bible and my passion to rewrite the thing.

"I'm doing one chapter a night and I'm already up to the Flood in Genesis." Adding, "It's going to be really bitchen."

[Awkward silence.]

One person drew nearer and scrunched up his face, trying to process what he was hearing. He sighed heavily and attempted a smile.

"Help me understand. You mean you're writing the Bible in a modern language so that people will understand? Am I hearing you clearly?"

"You got that right."

"So, Bill, may I ask you a question?"

"Sure?"

"Let me ask you." He leaned closer and softened his voice to a whisper. "Have you ever heard of a Christian bookstore?"

"A what? A Christian *what*?"

"You know, a Christian *bookstore*."

"You mean there are bookstores that are... *Christian*?"

"Um..." nodding his head. "And - guess what? - they sell *Bibles* there. Bibles with all kinds of translations," he added.

[Another awkward silence.]

Suffice to say he was right. I went to a local Christian bookstore the following weekend and found all kinds of books, numerous versions of the Bible, and even LP's of people like Larry Norman, Phil Keaggy, Daniel Amos, and the Second Chapter of Acts.

You mean there's even Christian music, too?!

In this chapter we're going to take a look at a few red flags in seeking guidance as we sail into the lake of God's purposes for our life.



Sign, Sign, Everywhere A Sign

This business of hearing God can be tricky, especially to the baby believer. A person can be so intent in seeking God's will that he or she may inadvertently wind up sailing sail up the wrong canal, especially when it comes to life's coincidences.

When we experience something "oddly coincidental" it's easy for the new-be in Jesus to immediately associate it with a sign from God, even though it might not be. Then, we keep noticing related coincidences because our senses have been alerted to it. After a while even a normal set of coincidences can spin off into self-fulfilling prophecies.

That "aha" event of discovering Christian book stores really flew me for a loop, After I figured out there was more than one version of the Bible (and that all my hard work had already been done by someone else) I figured I better go to a Bible school and figure this thing out.

So I prayed about it.

Lord, I've been thinking. Perhaps I need to go to a Bible school and get this thing figured out. But I want to be in your perfect will, not your permissible will. Please show me the exact school you want me to attend. Amen.

Not long after that I was driving through Exeter, NH, when I saw a shoe shop I had never noticed before. Across the awning was the word, "Moody".

"That's odd." I muttered. "I've been down this street a kazillion times and never once saw that shoe shop."

I mentioned it to my mom when I got home.

"Oh yeah that's Moody's Shoes," she mentioned. "They've been around forever. I'm surprised you've never seen it before."

I looked away, bewildered. "Yeah... me, too...."

Moody... Isn't that a Bible college in the Chicago area?

The following week I got a call from an old buddy from high school. We found ourselves talking about a guy we used to know back in the day, Mark Moody.

'Moody'... There it is again.

Over the course of the next month "Moody" was popping up practically everywhere I went. Moody this, Moody that. Moody over here, Moody over there.

One morning I was eating breakfast when my mom poured herself a fresh cup of coffee and sat across the table. She took a deep breath. I could tell by the look on her face she was deeply concerned.

"Is everything all right, mom?"

"Well." Stirring in a teaspoon of sugar. "I'm worried about your brother."

"You mean David? How so?"

"He sure has been moody lately."

There it is again... 'Moody.'

Then I was talking with my friend Rick about some of the old bands in the '70's we used to like when he got all excited.

"Dude," his eyes widening, "and remember that song, *Out and In*, by the Moody Blues?"

Unbelievable. There it is again.

It all came to a head when one day I was strolling around the Exeter public library, just taking random turns here and there, when I stopped right there in the middle of a row of books and prayed, "Lord, if you want me to go to *Moody Bible Institute* I will do it. Just give me one more sign and I'll make it happen. Amen."

I opened my eyes and stunned to see I was standing smack-dab in the middle of a collection of hard-bound *Moody Financial Reports*. They spanned to the right and left of me and rose above me for as far as the eye could see. It was indeed a miracle, a direct sign from the throne of the Almighty itself.

My knees weakened. I fell against the books behind me (which were also *Moody Financials*) and slid to the floor.

Hallelujah, I have seen God - and lived!

I knew then without a doubt God wanted me to go to *Moody Bible Institute*. I bought a plane ticket to Chicago and got over there just in time to join a weekend of other potential students discerning whether God might be leading them to attend the school as well.

It was a great weekend, loaded with numerous social events all geared to make the school attractive to people like me.

As the weekend wore on, I began to notice a vast difference between my ex-hippie culture and the majority of the student body there. I didn't look like them. They looked all put together. They were impeccably groomed while my hair was long and looked like an unbrushed bee's nest. And my wrinkled t-shirts had stains on them. Half-way through the second day, it was evident that I was trying to force a square peg into a round hole. I tried to overlook it but it just became clearer and clearer.

*But, God, you appeared to me in the Moody bush so many times...
What that about?*

The final day of the weekend all the prospective students, including some faculty and graduating seniors, gathered in a large hall for a social event. I was standing up against a wall sipping a paper cup of lemonade and eating a flakey sweet things when a couple of graduating students appeared.

"Well...," peering at my laminated name tag. "*Bill*. How has the discernment weekend been for you?"

"It's been great." I perked up and circled a lock of hair around my ear. "I mean, I loved sitting in on the Bible classes, and the skits on Friday night were incredible." I swallowed the rest of the lemonade and burped. "I'm really looking forward to applying and attending here this fall." One of the seniors lowered his voice. "You know, Bill. We can see you really love Jesus and we are really happy about that."

"Yeah," I nodded. "He's the Man."

"But - seriously - we're not entirely sure if you'd fit in here."

I tossed the cup into the trash can on my left. "What do you mean?"

Are they trying to tell me I'm not good enough? Are they doubting my ability to hear God's voice? These guys are really rocking my zen. They are clueless about all the Moody's God's been showing me in my life.

"No, I am convinced" clearing my throat and wiping my hands on my jeans. "You see, I was born to be here. God told me so himself."

"He 'told' you?" They drew closer. "Look, Bill, we like you, but we've got to tell you, even if you're accepted - which would be a miracle in itself - you'll really need to change some things in your life."

"'Change some things?' Like what?"

"For starters, you'll need to invest in some button down shirts - like these (pointing to one another)."

"And you'll have to tuck them in, too," the other added.

"Ah, no problem." I was relieved. "Heck, I'm just dressed like this because I'm on vacation of sorts, you know - just being cool. I can get a couple of shirts, no sweat."

"You may need to cut your hair, too - you know, just enough to get above your ears."

"My 'hair?'" I swallowed hard, but blew it off. "Dude, shine it on. I mean, I can become all things to all men, no problem. Besides, Jesus sacrificed more than a haircut to do the Father's will. Not a game changer."

Then they hit me with the big one. "And you'll need to shave your beard."

"My 'beard?'" I tugged my chin. "They'll want me to shave this? What does my beard have to do with anything?"

"We're not allowed to have beards here."

"It's just how it is," the other added.

I peered across their shoulders and cautiously studied the room eagerly in search of somebody, anybody, who even had the trace of a beard. They were right. No one had a beard.

My heart started a-thumping. "Like - you know having a beard or not having a beard has nothing to do with a relationship with Christ, right? It's all about the heart."

"Yeah, we know. All the same, if you come here you'll need to shave that thing off your face."

"You have got to be kidding."

I pursed my lips and looked nervously around the room filled laughter and chatter. Reality was setting in. I was growing angry, but in a Christian way. (I held it in.) I slid my hands into my pockets and clenched my fists, manically whittling away at my thumbnails. In the moments that followed I was able to see the stars. I looked back at the graduating men. They were right. I was completely out of place.

I leaned against the wall and looked to my right and left when I spotted something. There, just to my right stood a life-sized marble bust of Pastor Dwight L. Moody. He was, a profound man of God, a wise spiritual leader and the man who God chose to spearhead a major American revival, the namesake of the very school I was considering attending. I studied the statue carefully, taking note of bushy hair, deep penetrating eyes, chiseled face, and.... yup, you guessed it, *A. Full. Beard.*

"But - look at him," My voice rose in excitement. I pointed to the statue. "He has a beard."

They looked at one another, shook their heads, and walked away, leaving me and Dwight fully bearded and all alone.

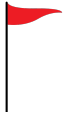
What had gone wrong?

I stared out the window of the DC-9 completely biffed. I had done everything right in seeking God's guidance. But, at the end of the day, even though he assured me I would be attending "Moody," reality had painted quite a different picture. I was drowning in the world of confusion, regret, and self-condemnation.

Didn't God speak to me? Why would he do this to me if he knew it wouldn't work? Did I make all this up myself? Does God even speak to people anymore? Do I really know God? Am I really saved?

And so it went.

Through that experience I began to understand mere coincidences were choppy waters at best. If we are intent to set our sails in the winds of mere coincidences, you can be sure the weight of our disappointment, confusion, shame, and even embarrassment before others have the ability to completely submerge us.



Private Personalized "Words"

Looking back on that Moody weekend, I am grateful that I didn't lose my faith. People have. Believing God never showed up, "veered them astray", or didn't give them the desires of their heart, some have washed their hands of the whole "Jesus thing" - forcing them to pull their boats out of the lake altogether - all because they wrongly read his mind. (This points to a larger issue of Christian discipleship.)

I was in Boca Raton, Florida, at *Florida Atlantic University* completing my undergraduate work in Marketing and Distributive Education. One Saturday afternoon I was in a Christian bookstore thumbing through the latest albums from Daniel Amos, Michael and Stormie Omartian, Farrell and Farrell, Phil Keaggy and Glass Harp, and some other early Christian rockers. A fellow student from the Baptist Bible study appeared with an all-knowing smile and devious look in her eye.

"Heeeey, Bill."

I looked up. "Oh, hi, Jill. Didn't see you there."

"It's so funny that I just happen to run into you. I mean, of all places, here we are, just you and me, here together." Her eyes lit with excitement.

"Yeah," I glanced up, then quickly back to the records. I picked up Kemper Crabb's, *The Vigil* and studied the cover. "How about that?"

She leaned her body across the stack of records and dropped her voice to a whisper. "Guess what God told me this morning during my quiet time? I can't believe it!"

"I wouldn't have a clue." I slid *The Vigil* back into the records under "K" and continued to browse. "Whatever it was, if it was from God, I'm sure it's pretty groovy."

"It's totally... groovy, Bill. This is going to blow your mind. Praise the Lord!"

A wave of concern flooded my emotions. I glanced up to see her scantily dressed body leaning across the records with blue eyes and a widening scary smile brightening her freckly face.

In my mind I heard a robot's dire warning. "Danger Will Robinson. Danger!"

I returned to thumbing through the records, trying to ignore the inevitable. But it didn't work. She circled in for the kill.

"He told me in an audible voice that you - get this, you Bill, are going to be my husband," tapping her finger to her heart. "We're getting married! Isn't that wonderful?"

I was reading the program notes on the back side of Daniel Amos', *Vox Humana*, from the ¡Alarma! Chronicles, Vol. III at the time of my meltdown.

A cold sweat bubbled across my forehead. The hair on the back of my neck rose and the words on the back of the record sleeve got all blurry, the album sagging in my hands.

(Don't get me wrong. Jill was a lovely sister in the Lord, but I had never *ever* seen her in any romantic way. I had only spoken to her once in my life and that was at a pizza joint off Glades Road with some other believers.)

I cleared my throat. "He - you mean God? He's the one who told you. He said what?"

She giggled with delight and clasped her hands. "He told me that we are going to get married! Isn't that a trip? You and me?! I mean, who would have ever thought of it!"

I tried to smile, wanting to be cordial and all. But it didn't work. She saw the skepticism in my eyes. I put the record down and glanced up. "Well, he hasn't told me that."

She immediately looked away, her face disappointed, her heart confused. She left the store in a hurry. That was the last time I saw her.

A few years later I was with my friends, the ones who were with me in the Pizza joint on Glades Road. I asked them. "Whatever happened to that thin girl with the freckly face?"

The response was sad. "Oh, Jill?"

"Yeah, that's her." I squirmed uneasily, remembering the awkward encounter in the record store. "Did she ever get married?"

"She has completely lost her faith. We haven't seen her in church forever."

Not an uncommon story. (Again, a discipleship issue.)



This Ain't No Party, This Ain't No Disco, This Ain't No Fooling Around

Praying about every little decision may seem rather over-the-top or odd to others. Do we really need to pray to God about going to a concert? Maybe. But then, don't be a stinker and rub in your decision if you turn out to be right.

When it comes to hearing God people can get really obsessive and scrambled up. People get crazy. They say God told them to do this or that. When it doesn't happen they start questioning everything. True, while God may use coincidences to affirm and confirm his will, he doesn't use them to exclusively be his will. Yet it happens to us all the time.

My brother once invited me to a show by the band Talking Heads. "They are playing downtown, in Boston."

My response? "I'll pray about it and let you know."

He said, "Right, and God is going to tell you to go to the *concert* or not?"

"Well..." The thought did seem a bit obscure, especially hearing it from his perspective. "Sure. Why not?"

"Bill," his voice raised to a boil and he got all red in the face, "don't you know there are people in insane asylums that think God talks to them?"

He had me there.

He slammed the door, got into his Ford *F-150*, and screeched down the road.

As things turned out, I did pray about going and didn't feel "the love" on it. So I told him God didn't want me to go. A few months later I saw my brother and asked him how the concert was.

"Oh. They wound up canceling it."

"Canceling it? How so?"

"They didn't have enough people or something. Something stupid like that."

"Really - how interesting!" (Back then I was a real instigator.) "Gee, do you think God knew the concert would be canceled and that's why he told me not to go?"

The door slammed, he got into his *F-150*, and screeched down the road.

So it goes.



I Want It, I Want It, I Want It, I Want It,
I Want It -
You Caaaaannnnn't Have It

We can be obsessive about hearing God and imagine ungodly guidance is actually of God. Stay away from this!

Mere coincidences - no matter how profound - do not compose the bedrock of our walks with Christ. We walk by faith, not by sight. God certainly uses them, but they are accolades of his Presence and not his Presence itself.

A close second to mere coincidences is the red flag of obsessiveness.

When a person is completely obsessive about going this way or that way, doing that thing or the other thing, and can't eat or sleep until they hear God and what he wants them to do, it's not a good thing.

Where's the freedom, grace, and self-autonomy in that?

In my experience, raw obsessiveness often flies in the face of the Father's voice. We can get so tunnel visioned about

hearing God with our known options and on our own timetable that his still small voice is all but smothered in the sea of our anxiety.

These are dangerous waters. The enemy enterprises on such impulsiveness and, without Godly wisdom, can actually make us believe unGodly things are actually Godly things. That's when a real shipwreck occurs. Fortunately, as Christians, we have a couple of things working in our favor.

The Art of Abiding

The way to counterbalance the preoccupation of red flags of coincidences quite simply, abiding in Christ.

Picture yourself in a boat on a river, sailing on a picture-perfect lazy sunny afternoon without a care in the world. All is well. Breezes are gentle. The sky is blue, the sea is green... What's wrong with this picture?

Absolutely nothing.

Here is perfect balance. We don't need to remain tied to the docks until we get a word, nor do we need to spin Scripture, or rely on subjective experiences to base the entire trajectory of the sail on. It is here when sailing actually becomes *enjoyable*.

The Scriptures say,

If you abide in me and my words abide in you you will ask what you desire and it will be done for you.

John 15:7

In other words: It's nearly impossible to be obsessive about God's will while abiding in Christ.

We sail on the lake of abiding. On this lake there is no rush, there is no fervor. Sure, there may be fear, concern, and even faithlessness. But even our most impulsive obsessions are drowned in the abiding arms of the Father.

The Father cares for us. True freedom happens when we decide to let go, release our agendas, and rest in the Lord of the Lake.

Up against a decision? Choose to abide.

I'm reminded of a glass of water swirled all around so much that the sand has completely made it murky. Only when the waters are stilled and the sand settles that clarity enters the picture. This may be akin to the verse, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

The Sunshine of His Love

A second remedy to safeguard us from rocking the boat is all about reading, following, and trusting God's voice in holy Scripture. God's Word is living and active and is all we need for his guidance (Hebrews 4:12). We "have it made in the shade", because we sail under the shadow of God's Word.

Not only do we abide in the waters of God's Presence, we sail under the authority of his written Word. In the life of a believer, the two work as one, complementing one another with checks and balances that assures grace in nearly

every sail. A perfect sail will have you abiding in God's care, under the overarching atmosphere of the Word of God.

Paul writes to Timothy:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong, and teaches us to do what is right.

2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)

Like the sun, the God's Word is living. It contains all that is needed to set our courses straight in life. When we intentionally steer and set our course according to Scripture (being keen to sail within it's channel markers, guidance simply happens.

Christians often think they need a "word", a special email from heaven detailing the specifics of what should be done in any given day, or even hour. God honors this (and even loved it), especially through the faith of new believers. I'm not arguing his ability nor desire to impart such *rhema* words in real time, as revelatory words through the Spirit are essential as we sail. On the other hand, let's not discount the wisdom of the Word. It's all right there, in the Bible.

I mentioned above that God's experiential Presence in our boats is *normative* for the sailor. What would happen if you never got another revelation from the Lord for the rest of your life? Would that be okay? Would you survive? Of course you would. It wouldn't be a thrilling, but you'd survive. Why? Because he has already given you

everything you could ever imagine - including divine guidance - right there in the ancient pages and divine writings of holy Scripture.

The story is told of an attractive young woman and handsome young man who have fallen head over heels with each other. They make the decision to marry and schedule an appointment with the Pastor.

"When are you thinking of getting married?" the pastor asks.

"Oh - as soon as possible." The woman scrunches her shoulders and giggles, staring at her lover with delight.

"We are so much in love and can't *wait* to tie the knot."

"Hmm." The pastor looks at the man, concerned, and asks, "Tell me, how did you both meet?"

Over the next 30 minutes they share story after story about how they met, the coincidental circumstances of their meeting, their co-passion for Jesus, and how all the stars in the universe have lined up to bring them together.

"And we can go on and on," the young lady giggles, tapping her perspective husband on his knee.

The pastor himself is mesmerized. He admits the ways they have been brought together are truly astounding.

"So you see, Pastor," the man smiles. "We know without a doubt this is God enfolding our relationship in his arms of

grace and we just can't wait to see his purposes as we become one in holy matrimony."

"It is all very impressive, but..." the Pastor takes a deep breath and scoots up to the desk. "Regardless of how you met, even with all the compelling coincidences, I can assure you both, this is not of God."

"Huh?"

"I do not approve of your relationship. Nor can I bless your union by performing a service of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony."

"But why?!" Looking stunned, "We love one another."

"Didn't you hear how we met? How could you deny us the blessing of God in our lives by saying such a thing?"

"I can say such a thing because..." The Pastor smiles, reaches into a draw and reveals a Bible, which he lays upon the desk. "... because you are both married to other people."

"'Other people'? What does that have to do with anything? We hate our spouses and, beside, the two of us are in love. Can't you see that?" Tears form in the woman's eyes.

The man grows angry. "Pastor, with all due respect, how in the hell do you know what God's will is for us?"

"The decision has already been made for you, two thousand years ago. You don't need a special sign to tell

you whether this is God's will or not. It's all right here, in the 10 Commandments."

A Lamp Unto My Feet

At the risk of redundancy, I'd like to emphasize the necessity and totality of God's Word being all sufficient for sailing in life. It's just that important.

The Word of God is the sun under which we sail.

A person can have absolutely no spiritual sensitivity, be a self-proclaimed "cessationist," and have absolutely no interest in the Holy Spirit's interaction in life and - guess what? - still know God's will for their life. There is enough guidance between the books of Genesis and Revelation to sail anyone through the lake of life and right up into heaven. This may come to a relief to some, and to others near blasphemy. But that is the innate power of Scripture.

Each morning before I crack my Bible open I pray, "Lord, open my heart to your Word, and your Word to my heart." I know, in the absence of rivers parting, children resurrecting, demons fleeing, or shadows healing people God's Word is still all sufficient for a great day on the lake!

The 10 Commandments, *Summary of the Law*, the powerful parables in the Gospels, the exhortations to live a Godly and righteous life found in the Epistles - and as we'll see later, the living Word residing in the Body of Christ - has everything any sailor would ever need. A sailor who chooses to set course within the obedience of Biblical precepts can expect a deeply fulfilling and purposeful life.

The Great Whatevers

Abiding in his love and living in the *Word* is by far the sweet spot of divine guidance.

It is where the maturing Christian can really do no wrong. He or she is bathed in the rays of the Word and floating effortlessly upon the waters of God's unconditional care.

The saint need not fret, compulsively digging into the thing like a mole in the dirt, trying to discover and decipher what God wants, needs, or commands. This is a place of wholeness, completeness, and unity in Christ. He is to be trusted and (almost unbelievably) he trusts you.

This gets is into the deeper waters of the great "whatever".

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.
Ecclesiastes 9:10

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord.
Colossians 3:23

*And **whatever** you do, whether word or deed, do it all in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*
Colossians 3:16

In other words, when we sail co-yoked and abiding in God's Word, *guidance happens*. It happens just as we enjoy the sail and simply do life, with very little effort - not because we've had 777 confirmations, numerous prophetic

words, or've had the church fasting 40 days for the revelatory breakthrough - but simply because you are doing life rightly, abiding in the everlasting care of the Lord and the power of his Word.

When we've rigged our lines, dropped our daggerboard, and head from the lagoon into the lake like this, I believe we can do pretty much *whatever we want* and it will go well with us. He is just that big

Could anything be more freeing and beautiful than that?

PART 2

**Compass
Points**

5

Perks of Revelational Compass points

We put a lot of emphasis on what we do, but what is important from a kingdom perspective is the relationships that are formed.

In God's economy, kingdom life has more to do with the relationships that are formed in the doing of the thing than the specifics of the thing being done.

Putting it another way: The things we do - servicing cars, waiting in grocery lines, singing on worship teams, putting our kids to bed, etc. - are not really about any of that at all. Subsequently, the things we do are substantially less important than the stuff which happens between us while we're doing the things we do.

God is revealed in relationships. The “do” may be the same in any given thing. But the “relationship”, or what happens while doing the “do”, will always be different. Look at your

"do"s as an opportunity for relationship, not as merely something to do.

Tasks are eclipsed by relationships.

That Darn Country-Western Music

This came brutally clear to me when I moved to Texas and my elementary school kids sailed down the dark and dismal canal into the world of country-western music.

Up to that point, I could tolerate most any music genre - even opera (though only for short periods at a time). The one style of music that really got under my skin was country-western music.

I'm sure it was an allergy of some type.

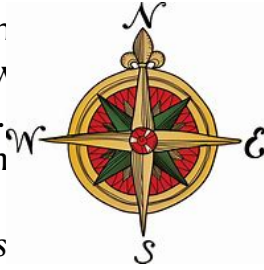
Yet my kids loved the stuff. Each time I'd pick them up from school, they'd hop into the cobalt-blue Volkswagen *Beetle* and - without even saying "hi" - switch from whatever I was listening to to the local country-western station.

Dear God, not again.

Not only that, they'd turn up the volume and sing at the top of their lungs all the way home.

Why me, Lord, I thought you liked me.

My fingernails dug in
popping grip. My jaw
breathing increased.
five-minute ride hom



reel with a vein-
eth clenched, my
do to tolerate the

That darn country-wes

As the school year progress things only got worse. I'd do everything I could to psych myself up for it, hold my sonic breath the entire way home, and exhale a great sigh of relief when we pulled into the driveway.

Halfway through the school year I noticed something had changed between my kids and me. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but there was a distancing of relationship happening.

Could it be my abhorrence to country-western music was creating a wall between us?

I took it to the Lord in prayer. "Lord, you know I hate 'country-western music.'"

"I know, Bill. I hate 'country-western' music, too."

[Just kidding!]

What he *did* say went along these lines:

"Don't think of it as 'country-western music', Bill. Think of it as an avenue of relationship, an avenue of relationship with your kids."

That's ingenious! An 'avenue of relationship.' What a novel idea!

The next day I picked up the kids - not with a hispanic station or the Newsboys', *Your Love is Better than Life*, or DC Talk's, *Jesus Freak*, or talk radio pulsating through the speakers - but with Toby Keith's, *I Want to Talk About Me* playing on through the Bose speakers instead.

When they hopped into the car their faces lit up, their feet started a-tapping, they broke out into conversation and - best of all - I wasn't that old curmudgeon they thought I was any more.

In the days to follow, whenever we got into the *Beetle*, an interesting dynamic happened. We sang together, played air-guitar, talked about stuff, and made fun at the syrupy ballads playing through the speakers. In short, that darn "country-western" music lost its power over me and became a welcomed excuse for something far deeper, something far more significant: an avenue wherein my kids and I bonded.

To Check In or Not to Check In?

When we actively and intently seek God in a moment-by-moment fashion, we will experience greater intimacy with our loving Father.

Before we head into Compass Points (essential as we navigate around the lake) let's do a quick review.

We've just seen how the importance of relationships is essential, even more so than what we're exactly doing.

In the last chapter I proposed that a healthy Christian, immersed in the Word and abiding in the Presence of

God's unconditional love already has everything he or she needs to enjoy an adventurous, purpose-filled, sailing experience with God. A person abiding in Christ and sailing within the precepts of Scripture has absolutely nothing to worry about. Decisions are made, children are named, retirement homes are purchased with no real need to "seek God". Their lives have been dedicated to the Lord and they are loving him with their whole heart, mind, and soul. Guidance simply happens.

Yet, that truth needs to be balance by the unbelievable fact that God takes absolute delight in accompanying us in the sail. He loves to sail with us. Even though he knows everything by his omnipresent nature, he loves to co-partner with us in "real time", just as if he too is experiencing life with us for the first time (remember the *Easter Bunny*).

While we may have the freedom to head out into the lake "on our own," so to speak (which we do), we also have the freedom to intentionally invite him onto our vessels for the day as well. It here when intimacy with God grows. We discover the mind of Christ and develop a real sense of his hand atop ours as we rudder this way and that way around the lake.

One might ask: Is it "better" to intentionally ask him to join us, or is it better just to live with the assumption that he doesn't need to be invited because he is already with us?

While some may answer differently according to one's theological perspective, I believe that in God's mysterious sovereignty, whether we sail with no sense of needing to

invite God into the thing (though I'd be curious as to why), or not makes absolutely no difference. In other words, those who sail dependent on hearing God's revelatory guidance, and those who sail without, as a friend of mine says, "checking in to see what the Lord is doing," will both wind up in the same place.

God is that big.

Perks to His Real Presence

The experiential joy in opening our hearts to revelational compass points is a real game-changer, and comes with the following perks:

- Our intimacy with him deepens.
- We become privy to his heart, his desires, and rationale for why he does the things he does.
- We fall in love with him more so each day.
- We have a greater appreciation for him which eases sleepless nights and shrouds us in his *shalom*.
- We are often surprised by his guidance.
- We begin to love all of humankind (and actually enjoy most of them), rather than simply tolerated or judged.
- We gain an innate appreciation and recognizability for his voice, his "tugs," his "how's," his "go now's," and his "no, not yet's" - all which enable us to deepen our knowledge and trust in him as the sail from the dock into the lagoon and out into the lake.

Lest I be misunderstood, I believe the lake of a person who intentionally sails and who is dependent upon these "revelatory compass points" is no better, or worse, off than

one who sails simply in the fear of the Lord and does whatever their hand finds to do (Ecc. 9:10). The only difference is the realized intimacy with God in the sailing of the lake.

With that in mind let's raise our sails and set our tillers towards the heart of the lake where the compass points of spiritual guidance await our attention.

"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

Isaiah 30:21

6

Peace

As we leave the dock, motor through the lagoon, and head into the lake we rely on essential way God guides us as we sail. No one wants to run aground on a sand bar, accidentally tack into the *Triangle of Death*, or worse yet shipwreck our boats.

For these reasons, God guides us through compass points. They are essential. He doesn't want any of this stuff happening to us either.

Before heading deeper, let's define "compass points".

Compass points are points of discernment lake, markers disclosing the trajectory of one's journey. They are rarely specific, and steer us in the right channels.

God reveals compass points as he sees we need them (which keeps us sailing in faith). There will never be a sail wherein all compass points are revealed, nor will we ever

have a bullet list of of them before we set sail. There are too many unknowns.

Compass points are fluid and are only discerned as we leave the dock. They are revealed in movement, as we move out. Further, compass points provide a sense of trajectory, rather than a precise snapshot of guidance.

I've Got Peace Like a River, Peace Like A River, Peace like a River in My Soul

Peace is a compass point. It can manifest differently in different people. We cannot manipulate it or cause it to happen, but can only receive it as God gifts it to us.

We begin with - what I believe to be the most important compass point: *peace*.

When up against a decision needing to me made people will often ask, "Do you have peace about it?"

Responses vary. I may be "feeling peaceful" because I'm sitting on a sofa with a cup of *Earl Grey* and listening to *Liquid Mind* on Pandora. Is this the kind of peace the Bible talks about, the kind of peace leading me in the direction I should sail?

Hardly.

Biblical peace (greek: *eirene*) rolls independent physical comfort and can even happen in the midst of a storm. Peace rains from above. It provides both a certain stillness

and a strange confidence comes with the empowerment of our spirit. With it we sail into it.



Biblical peace can't be varied, stretched up, or squeezed out. It is supernatural, completely objective, with no bias or shadow of turning. Nothing can influence it, nobody can buy it, not can anyone manipulate it. It simply is.

You may remember Paul's words to the church at Philippi:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4: 6-7

The Greek word "guard" here is akin to the word "umpire." An umpire is someone who observes the play, thinks through the information as he sees it, and "calls the shot" - objectively - either "yay" or "nay." The Apostle is essentially saying, after you have laid out your situation in prayer and thanksgiving, the Lord will lead you by his peace. He will call the shot, either "yay" or "nay," like an umpire.

There is another way to define peace: *the absence of strife, or angst caused by unbelief or a troubled heart*. When the heart is thumping, your torn between what you should and shouldn't do, you can't sleep, and you're preoccupied with the thing so much that you can't sleep in night, it's safe to say you don't "have peace" about it. So don't do it

Other times God's peace is revealed in the absence of these things and that is the peace. You may remember the

story of Elijah seeking God's voice in the wind, earthquake, and fire. It was in the absence of all the hubbub when God showed up, "In the quiet, gentle sound" (1 Kings 19:11-13). It was only then, in the absence of strife, when Elijah's panicked heart had peace and he heard the encouraging voice of his God.

As Christians, we are hard-wired to experience God's peace, We have the Holy Spirit living within our hearts and are filled with the very Prince of Peace himself, Jesus. He is our loving God, a living umpire guiding us faithfully this way and that way along the currents and storms of the lake.

You may recall the story which happened following Jesus' resurrection. The eleven disciples were hunkered behind closed doors, fearful they too would be persecuted, when Jesus passed through the door and physically manifested before the spellbound men. John records it as such:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"
John 20:19

Peace is the first gift of the the resurrected Christ. It's that important.

One of my mentors, Mike Flynn, taught me that, for him, the peace of the Lord manifested physiologically in the center of his chest. He'd describe it as a soft fluttering sensation. He often relied on God's peace in this manner

when making decisions, merely by checking what was going on physically with his body.

For me, I've learned to discern God's peace in two ways:

- A surge of clarity in my thinking or thoughts. In an instant a spiritual light bulb breathes clarity and all things simply make sense.
- A physiological surge of compassion for the thing I'm considering. Rather than Mike's "fluttering", for me it's like the warmth of New Hampshire maple syrup within me. Indeed, when praying for others, I often feel this surge of compassion rising in me and then rippling out to the one being prayed for.

Jesus says the peace he gives us is "not of this world" (John 14:27). It comes from heaven, and is completely independent of the peace that comes when your spouse gives you *hairapy* on the sofa at the end of the day - or the warm fuzzy you get after you've enjoyed a spicy Christmas beverage.

God's peace is alive. It is living. It's unpredictable presence swells as he "gifts" it, not as we conjure it up or seek to manipulate it into being. In a very real sense, he leads us with his presence, manifested as peace. For me, if I don't have peace on a matter, I will simply remain at the dock. No questions asked.

What's That Buzz, Tell Me What's-a-Happening

Jesus loves to give us his peace. Example of girl who release her shame and was filled with God's peace.

Peace is something Jesus loves to give. It is always a sign of God's favor, blessing, and invitation to sail deeper into the lake.

I was once praying for a college student in Boulder, Colorado, who was a real *New Ager*. She had been discipled into the pagan supernaturalism in a huge way, and had real power. She was transcending this way and that way, healing people of headaches from 5 miles away, and planning vacations around harmonic convergences.

She had amazing spiritual power, yet she had no peace in her heart.

A friend of hers brought her to my office one Friday afternoon. As she told me about her life it dawned on me that I had nothing to give her. She was asking for something but there was no book on my shelf that could ease her strife. The only one who could give her peace was Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

"I don't have anything for you." I confessed. How about we ask God to reveal what he'd like for you to know?"

"That sounds like fun." (*New Agers* are usually open to any kind of spiritual experience.) "Sure!"

We placed our hands on her shoulders. Within moments something very strange happened in the room. The Spirit filled the room in a way I have rarely experienced. Over the course of five minutes the atmosphere grew tighter and tighter and then, at the peak of its intensity, suddenly snapped, filling the room with a boatload of peace. With that, the girl burst into tears.

"What was that?" I asked. "What just happened?"

She looked up with a radiant smile and said, "That was shame. It's all gone now."

In the conversation that followed she asked what "power" we were "using" to make the shame leave.

"That was God," I assured her. "And he loves you."

"So much love," she mumbled. "Love like I've never experienced."

"Would you like to give your life to him?"

"Yes." She nodding her head. "I would."

And she did.

I Feel It in My Fingers, I Feel it in My Toes

Though peace is an essential compass point, it can be misleading if relied on solely.

Be it vibrating in your sternum or experiential love poured out in the midst of a ministry session, peace *on its own*, and in the absence of other compass points, can be misleading, no matter how good it feels.

You remember the story about Jill, whose emotional crush on me was so all-consuming that she actually thought God was telling her that I would be her husband? She was relying on [what she thought was] one manifestation of the Spirit on which she hung the whole of her heart. And she was wrong.

A bishop friend of mine has said numerous times. There are the things of God, there are the things of satan, and there are the things of *Daffy Duck*.

This is why it's crucial to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1), and plot your course in cahoots with other points on the compass. My experience is that God often confirms his will through numerous points on the compass. The more he reveals, the more we can confidently set our sails for deeper waters.

7

Illuminated Scripture



Gods Word, as revealed in the sacred text has, within itself, power to inform, transform, admonish, build up, and guide us as we sail.

The writer of Hebrews says:

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

I've heard it said that it took the Holy Spirit to write Scripture and it takes the Holy Spirit to read Scripture. Whenever I read the Bible I read with an "eye towards heaven," just in case God will illuminate a portion of Scripture to speak to me. Often it comes as I least expect it.

It has always astounded me how you can read a passage of Scripture one day and read the same passage of Scripture

another day and the Spirit will be highlighting different things. Many times his highlighting is prophetic, speaking directly into one's decision making.

When living in Boulder, Colorado, we had an opportunity to buy our first house. It was a big decision (and bit out of our price range), so you can imagine we prayed about it! The realtor assured us we could afford the payments, I had a great excitement and peace, and the timing of the thing seemed to all make sense. Yet, even so, I still had my doubts.

The morning came when my wife was slated to meet with the realtor. As usual, I had a cup of java and reading down stairs when I came across 1 Samuel 7. It was a familiar story. A bit boring, really. I had heard the story of David talking to God about building a temple so many times before.

Yawn.

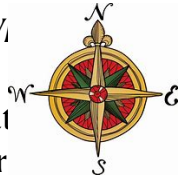
But then something strange happened. My thoughts became clear and I saw the Scripture in a way never before. God illuminated it. He made it pop!

Look, I am living in a house made of cedar, while the ark of God lives in a tent.

2 Samuel 7:2

Right there at my desk, half-asleep and slugging down my second cup of coffee, the Lord made those few words come alive.

A house made of cedar? Will



out?

It was so impacting that I found a similar Scripture in Solomon.

So do a word search and find it in Songs of

The beams of our house are cedars; our rafters are firs.
Song of Songs 1:17

This really got my heart pounding. Slowly the picture came into focus. The house we were looking at was a Swiss-styled chalet with rafters lining the ceilings in the living room.

Could it be, Lord?

I was sitting there contemplating what it all meant, when my wife, who was upstairs in a completely different part of the house, drinking her coffee and having her quiet time, let out a gasp which shook me into reality.

"O. My. God!"

"What is it? Everything okay?"

I left my office and went upstairs. She happened to be reading a portion of Scripture in 2 Chronicles. It was the exact same story I had been reading downstairs, but in a different book of the Bible. I was in Samuel. She was in Chronicles.

Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their leaders whom I commanded to shepherd my people, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

2 Chronicles 17:6

"I'm reading the same thing!" I shouted back. "This is so trippy!"

After discussing the "coincidence" I remembered the appointment with the realtor later that morning.

"When you get up there and meet with the realtor, ask her what this we're considering buying is made of," I suggested.

Later that morning I was in my office at work. The phone rang. "It's made of cedar." She said.

So we bought it.

This is a textbook example of how God illuminates Scripture to promote his will (but note there were other compass points involved, too).

Do You Believe in Magic?

Illuminated Scripture is not magic. As with other compass points, it is the revelation of the Holy Spirit that makes it come alive.

As a young Christian I thought the mere opening of the Bible released God's Spirit which filled the room with a living fragrance. I would even leave it open on my night

stand because I knew its power would fight the demons away while I was sleeping.

I've grown since then (a bit). God may have thought it was a little cute back then and cut me some slack. Yet, some people are so desperate to get a "word" from God that they do equally as silly things. Some may pray for something, close their eyes, open their Bibles, and run their fingers up and down the pages like an *Ouija Board* until their fingers magically stop, and that becomes God's word for them that day.

It reminds me of a story about a man who wanted to know what to do with his life. He closed his eyes, opened the Word, ran his finger down the page until it stopped where it read:

So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Matthew 27:5

"Hmm... that can't be right," he thought. He closed the book, closed his eyes and prayed, "Lord, speak to me, confirm your word through your Word."

He opened the Bible, ran his finger down the page and it came to the verse:

Go and do likewise.

Luke 10:37

Oddly enough, God can and does speak through any means, including Bible roulette. God speaks to us in

according to our faith. If we are children he has the ability to speak to us as children, but his intent is to grow us up sooner than later. The Bible has numerous examples of compass points that seem foolish, or simply don't make sense to anyone else before or since then. I'm reminded of a talking donkey, the shadow of the sun going backwards, visions of food previously known to be "unclean," people disappearing, shadows healing people, dreams, and visions - all being illuminated by the Spirit for his good purposes.

A person can lose his life playing Bible roulette. But when the Spirit is involved it has the power to sail one safely without a care in the world.

8

Repeating Circumstances

Believers in Christ should always have their antenna up for coincidences. We serve a God who is sovereign. He knows the hairs of our heads. He knows where we are going. He knows where we have been and orchestrates our lives in his good manner as a loving father.

There are no such things as coincidences (or even luckiness) in the kingdom of God.

We often hear people say things like, "What a coincidence!" or, "Boy, am I lucky!" or "I must be doing something right because this is happening again and again!" - even from seasoned believers.

But, in the Kingdom of God there are no coincidences. There is no luck. All is ordained, even the sparrow falling to the ground.

What's Luck Got to Do With It?

When my kids were younger we often listened to Five Iron Frenzy's - a ska band out of the Denver area - *I Feel Lucky*. I

got onto the band because a girl in the youth group was dating the lead singer of the band. One of the songs equivocally states in a cartoon-like voice, "There is no such thing as luck!" This became somewhat of an amusing mantra in our family. Whenever someone got "lucky", we'd remind each other time and time again (yes, in that same cartoon-like voice), "There is no such thing as luck!"


God uses repeating circumstances to guide our lives. He gets our attention by this repetition, almost like planting the seed and growing and nurturing it until we get it.

Like luck, positive circumstances are often idolized as stemming from good karma, eating well, living by the stars, harmonic convergencies, or avoiding un-Godly (or inharmonious) stiff. That being said, for the Christian, repeated circumstances remain avenues wherein God uses us to keep on course - and we should take note of them.

When things line up, doors open out of the blue, repeated themes arise as you do life, you can be sure that God has something to do with that. This hold true for repeated "bad" circumstances and teachable moments, as well as repeated circumstances, where God's guidance is at work.

Shortly after giving my life to the Lord on beach across from 35th Street in Cocoa Beach, Florida, I was sharing my testimony with one of my roommates. She herself was not a practicing anything at the time, yet listened with a compelling ear.

After my little sermon, she looked at me dead on. "You oughta be a pastor."

"A Pastor?' What does t^ldo with Jesus?"

She got up and went to g me alone with my thoughts.

A few years later, after graduating from college I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I returned to Epping, New Hampshire, and did some youth work in the local community church (fun and fulfilling!). During that time I got to know the Pastor Huddleston of the Epping Community Church and his wife, Bunny, quite well. One day he and I were painting the back of the parsonage when he asked me if I had ever considered going into the ministry.

Me, a 'minister.' I laughed. *That's the furthest thing from my mind.*

A year or so later I got a call from Leo Alard, a Priest who offered me a job as a youth director and third grade teacher at *St. John's Episcopal Church and Parochial School* in Homestead, Florida. It was an amazing time of teaching Bible to elementary-aged kids and having fun in a thriving youth ministry. A year into the thing Leo took me aside and asked me if I had ever considered the ministry.

"Not really," I swallowed. A strange feeling of *Deja Vu* clouded my mind. I heard Crosby, Stills, and Nash singing perfect harmony:

*We have all been here before.
We have all been here before.*

I shook the dust from my feet.

Three years later I was accepted into Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California for a M.A. in Christian Formation and Discipleship. Shortly after arriving I began attending a "Spirit-filled" Episcopal church in Burbank where my wife and I were hired as part-time youth pastors (again, really fun and fulfilling!).

One day the priest, Rev. Mike Flynn, pulls me aside and says (yep, you guessed it), "You know, Bill, I sense the Lord is calling you into the ministry, the ordained ministry. Have you ever thought of that?"

"Well, sort of," I confessed. And there went that song.

We have all been here before.

We have all been here before.

Three years later I had graduated from seminary and taken a job as a College Ministry Director in Boulder, Colorado, at St. Aidan's Episcopal Church. The same thing happened again.

Isn't that a strange coincidence? Four different questions - the same questions - from four different pastors, in four different parts of the country. I wonder if God is trying to tell me something?

Though I tried to fight it, it became clear, God was indeed calling me into the lake of ordained ministry. It wasn't

easy. I made many mistakes along the way. But at the end of the day God got his way.

Those are *repeating circumstances*. Call it a reoccurring license plate, a "funny you should mention that - again", or a series of pastors all asking the same question. No matter, when stuff like this happens, Christians need to take note.

In Acts 10 a similar event occurs. Peter is praying on a rooftop in a lovely seaside village when he sees something like a sheet being lifted up and down (three times) with all sorts of non-kosher (unclean) eatables. He hears the Lord's voice say, "Eat this stuff." (Well, not the true Greek, but the spirit of the thing is there). Peter outright refuses, as any good Jew would.

At the same time and up the coast, a non-Jewish man named Cornelius is praying. God tells him to go south, find Peter, get him off the rooftop, and bring him back to where he is. There's a knock at the door, Peter listens, accepts the invitation, and accompanies the men back to Caesarea where he soon learns the non-kosher food on the sheet actually had nothing to do with food and everything to do with Gentiles (unclean people) being invited into the Kingdom of God. Peter preaches about Jesus and the Holy Spirit falls on the place - just like he did on the Jews in Acts 2 on Pentecost. They were speaking in tongues and magnifying the Lord and everything.

Now that's a coincidence.

Circumstances aren't evident at first. There is a flow to them, a disclosure. They require contemplation, context,

and an open perspective to see them with regard to the circumstances around you. It's almost as if you need to "drone" yourself up to the rim of the atmosphere and gaze upon your life currents to make sense in them.

Some of us need multiple "coincidences" before we finally get it, like me. Others, so enamored with the revelation, simply know that God's Spirit is gusting, especially when integrated with another point on the compass.

Time of the Season

God breaks into our life (or we are graced with the eyes to see his work in the world around us) in real time. We understand there are two ways to define time: *kronos* time and *kairos* time. There may be other ways to define time which we'll understand in heaven. For now, there are only two kinds.

Kronos time defines our daily routines along a horizontal line of hours, minutes, and seconds. For example, my morning buzzer jolts me from dreamland at 6:00 am. I scream out the door, spilling coffee onto my suit, for the 8:05 train to the city, arrive at my desk at 9:10, take a break at 10:15, lunch at approximately 12:10 - 12:45, work through the day, rush to the train station by 4:55, catch the 5:00 train back home in time for the *ABC Nightly News with David Muir* at 6:30 EST. This is *Kronos* time. It is sequential, predictable, and something you can count on.

Jesus physically entered into our *kronos* time in Bethlehem around 4B.C.E. He lived 33 years and died on a Friday afternoon, rose on a Sunday morning all in order to bring

us into his own time zone, *kairos* time, which is where he lives.

With regard to his winds on our lakes, I have found his intervention in both *kronos* and *kairos* moments. God is eternal and isn't bound by *kronos* or *kairos*.

But *kairos* moments happen, too. We often refer to *kairos* time as a normal part of life when we say things like, "That was God's timing," or "That was a real 'God thing.'" *Kairos* moments often occur and reoccur here and there for no good reason, out of the blue. This is best described as "God breaking in."

For example traditionally the season of "Lent" is a time in the church calendar where the faithful practice various spiritual disciplines in order to draw closer to the heart of God and the life of Jesus. This is *kronos*. Yet, there are times in our journeys where it *feels* like Lent and it's not in Lent. God calls you into a time of fasting, repenting, intercession and you're not even expecting it. These *kairos* seasons run independently of "life" and call us into activities at God's prompting, not the prompting of any given calendar.

Again, looking at the life of our Lord, Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection were prophesied about him through prophets and sages (in *kronos* time). In this case both definition of times synced up. His *kairos* conception was born in our world of *chronos*. As God, Jesus lived at the intersection of both time zones.

Circumstances "coincidentally" collide in real time. These sparks of heaven provide real guidance in our otherwise mundane, living from day to day, existence. A serious saint will keep a journal of events where God has intervened in his or her life, as these revelatory moments can be lighthouses as we sail and do life. As one looks back and reads about his or her dreams, visions, poignant sermons, sermons, ministry times, and even song lyrics real clarity can be discerned through perhaps decades of *kairos* moments.

9

Godly Counsel

It requires humility to seek counsel and demonstrates that we truly have the desire to follow where Christ is leading rather than having our own desires affirmed.



here no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.
Proverbs 11:14 (KJV)

Godly counsel is something I wish I had had that day when I was standing in front of a boatload of *Moody Financial Reports*. At the end of that ill-fated weekend in Chicago, I was back home, on my knees, confused.

What a long, strange trip it's been.

On the other hand, things were different some 30 years later when driving on the 405N when that cobalt blue BMW came screaming up the left lane with the license plate that read "BCK EAST."

When that happened (both times) things were different. I had been perfected (fat chance!); well, at least I had the wherewithal to humble myself before the Body of Christ and get their take on it. I talked with people and sought spiritual wisdom from seasoned Christians and I spent real time contemplating how a series of revealing license plates fell in relation with the other compass points.

Nowadays, I rarely do anything outside of Godly counsel, not because I'm afraid to make a mistake and blow it (well, perhaps a little), rather because humility is a hallmark of the heart of Jesus. Stuff is revealed when you lay it out before a mentor, or trusted person. Not only that, but relationships are forged, people get to know us, and we begin to sense the real voice of our Father though, of all things, people.

From Christians

Christians help us discern God's guidance in the lake by affirming what we think we're hearing, or by confirming that our hesitation or reservations are warranted.

A caveat here: People aren't always right. They come with a plethora of mixed motives, personal history, and their own ideas about what others should be doing. But they have one thing going for them: they have God living within them. That is why, if they are truthful, they won't always tell you what you want to hear either.

I remember considering dating a girl while I was a cotton farmer on Kibbutz *Kiryat Anavim* in Israel. She was an attractive American, with a heart like mine who loved the

Jewish people and inter here and there through heart of it there was just force the thing to happen



venture. We met up and had fun, but at the end of it, like I was trying to

The big thing was is that she wasn't a believer. As much as I wanted to overcome it by brushing it off, I knew I had to take it to my spiritual advisor, Nick, already knowing what he was going to say.

"What do you think, Nick? Do you think I should ask her out?"

His response was sharp and to the point. "Stay away from her."

Why did I ask him anyway?

Later I found out, and Nick was right. It would have been a mistake.

That darn Nick.

In another instance (now three years later) I had purchased a round trip ticket to Sweden at an incredible price and couldn't wait to meet up with friends and family. The problem was that the youth group was exploding in numbers and spiritual depth. It was meeting twice a week, singing and praising a ton, and growing like a *Wandering Jew*.

Looking ahead I could see a real conflict happening. Here we were, just a couple of weeks out from the trip and kids

were coming to Christ. It was evident that God was "on" the group and I didn't particularly cherish the idea of throwing away a perfectly good round trip airfare to Sweden either.

One of our adult leaders, Rick, and I were standing under a royal palm tree and I was explaining my dilemma.

"If I don't go to Sweden, I'll lose the money for the ticket, but I'll get to hang here and see what's God doing with the kids. If I do go to Sweden, I'll get to see my family, but lose out of what God's doing here with the kids."

"I see."

"So what do you think, dude? Should I stay or should I go?"

He smiled. After a moment's thought he said softly, "You know Bill, I'm reminded of the place in the Bible where Paul wanted so badly to leave for heaven and be with Jesus."

I squinted my eyes. I knew what was coming.

"But he decided instead to stay for the behalf of the people he was pastoring."

*Crap. I did it again. Why did I go and have to ask him anyway?
That darn Rick.*

(To be truthful, I had reservations about those reservations from the moment I walked into that travel agent office and reserved them. I just decided to ignore them.)

Rick's advice, with my inner conviction of the Spirit, convinced me that I should blow off Sweden and stay stateside for the summer. But, what a summer it was! Kids came to Christ, worship was off the charts, outreach happened every week, we prayed for healing and laid hands on each other each time we met. And, by the grace of God, one kid was even healed of asthma!

As with all compass points, Godly counsel through Christians isn't the all in all of getting direction. Ideally good Godly counsel will affirm what has already been sensed, and not come in like a curve ball.

In the Atmosphere of the Saints

The atmosphere of the saints - the "fragrance of Christ" exuded from the gathered community of the faithful brings clarity, freedom, truth, and discernment.

Christians are supernaturally united with one another through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit reveals the mind of Christ which informs us what he's doing in the world around us.

More so, when a believer walks into a room, the atmosphere of that room changes. In a real way, the presence of a Christian reveals God's Kingdom. It may not be understood by those around us, but it's a spiritual reality.

This is partially because we smell. Our fragrance is a real thing. Paul says it best.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us triumphantly as captives in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. For we are to God the sweet aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an odor that brings death, to the other a fragrance that brings life.

2 Corinthians 2: 14-16

Some people hate Christians and really can't articulate why. We are even persecuted for no good reason. Other people are attracted to us and want to know more about this man Jesus we speak about. Even as a yet-to-saved believer, I was attracted to a certain "something" that I found consistent in all the Christians I met. This is what Paul means by the fragrance of Christ.

The fragrance of Christ is especially revealing of the kingdom in the presence of the saints, a christian worship concert, a church service, or even a small Bible study. Have you ever wondered why you feel a greater conviction of sin around others, and not so much so when you're alone? It's because the fragrance of the kingdom is revealed in the residing Spirit of the saints. And where the saints are, the mind of Christ is revealed.

Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:16

In a mystical way, Christians are Christ. We are his body. We are anointed as he was. We are the continuation of his ministry. We have his mind, his heart, his call. We sense what pleases him, and what abhors him. This grace-filled

phenomena gives us authority to discern what God is doing and "be Christ" just about everywhere we go. The atmosphere of the saints is where our minds are clear, our motives are revealed, and real guidance is showered among those seeking his will.

I once knew a woman who was dating a man and wondering if she should commit to him at a deeper level. She had had several "fall-out" relationships and didn't want another one.

"He's a really nice guy, Fr. Bill, but I don't want to make another mistake."

I leaned back in my chair and knew that clarity would come to her if they could both get into a place where the church was gathered.

"Sharon (not her real name). I have an idea. *Shrove Tuesday* is coming up and we're needing help setting up tables. Why don't you invite Barry (not his real name) to help set it up?" Sometimes clarity happens when we get around other Christians."

The following Tuesday Sharon and Barry walked into the parish hall with 20 other people and spent an hour helping, setting up tables, putting out silverware, napkins, chairs, maple syrup, whipped cream, the whole enchilada. The dinner was a great time and everyone went home.

The following day I ran into Sharon in the hallway. "Hey, what did you think about the evening last night? And,

more importantly, how did Barry like it? Did you get any guidance?"

"Oh, Father Bill," she gasped. "You wouldn't believe it. Last night when we were setting up tables and chairs, I looked at him across the room and I knew in my spirit he was not the one for me. I just *knew* it."

It was a no-brainer for her. God had spoken and it was merely the atmosphere of the saints that provided the guidance she was seeking.

From the Church

Spiritual oversight - overseers may be gifted by God to see things we cannot see, utter things we need to hear, and help us along our journey. We cannot be a Christian in solitude. We need the Church, and the overseers therein, to help guide us.

For the first three years of my new life in Christ, I had absolutely no spiritual accountability

Nobody is going to tell me what I should do. Like, I need them to tell me what to do?

Nor was I committed to any church.

It's just me and Jesus. Who needs the church anyway. All they want is your money.

To be sure, I did my share of steeple-chasing, attended Christian concerts, and read loads of books about the end

of the world, but I was completely unattached to any church, had few Christian friends, and of course was leery of willingly submitting myself to any form of spiritual accountability. It was "me and Jesus" and "me and Jesus only."

I don't need anybody. I have a direct line. I'm just going to keep on "Truckin' for Jesus."

(I even had a license plate on the front bumper of my Datsun 260 that said that.)

As I look back on those days I am grateful that he didn't wash his hands and move onto someone else. Even in the midst of my independence and arrogance, he met me where I was. I guess he knew where I would end up!

Let's talk about the Church. The church is an imperfect institution, I'll give you that. But the Church is the only Church we have. For some reason, God has decided to use the Church and grow his kingdom through her, her leaders, even in her structure, processes, and policies - even though it's hard to see at times.

Many of us so-called *Baby Boomers* are immediately suspicious of all things "institutional." We veer away from such "man-made" monsters, seeking a more organic solution and way of doing life. But we have to get over that. In addition to our conversion to Christ, we need to be converted to the Church.

There are numerous conversions in the life of a saint. The most important, of course, is our conversion and surrender

to Christ as the Lord and Savior over our life. Other conversions follow: conversions to worship, conversions to social justice, mission, sacramental life and even conversions to the Church.

What does it look like when I am converted to the Church? It means that I love her integrity (spotted as it is), I integrate her traditions and history into my life, I humble myself and seek to serve Christ through her leadership and her people. I do life within the framework of humility and freedom to her guidance and discipline. I enjoy being obedient to my elders, pastors, priests, and bishops. I actually trust Jesus through the operations of the Church and might even one day die for the creeds she believes.

She's done rotten things. And she is made of people like you and me. But somewhere in that God continues to roll out his kingdom through the ages. Spiritual oversight is a big part of the Church.

with the two references from the book of Hebrews following the one from Ephesians, it reads as though Paul wrote the book of Hebrews.

Paul reminds us of the blessing of submitting to one another out of reverence to Christ (Ephesians 5:21), to honor those who have Godly authority over us (Hebrews 13:17) and esteem those who speak the Word into our lives (Hebrews 13:7). These relationships form eternal bonds wherein God can direct, protect, and guide us along right paths for his Name's sake. There is nothing sweeter than the protection and grace offered through the words of a man or woman who has pastoral oversight with whom you

have embraced. This is the essence of mentoring and making disciples of others. It is the essence of the "great commission."

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

One of my most influential mentors was the late Mike Flynn. When I met him I was in my first year of seminary in Pasadena, California. I had just come out of three years working in a bi-lingual parish in Homestead, Florida, and was burned out. For me, escaping to California was like going to heaven. I could finally shed the dead skin of the denominational Church and be a Christian the way it should be done.

Famous churches and pastors were everywhere. McArther, Hayford, Wimber, Chan, Schuller, and the rest were there for the pickin'. On any given Sunday I'd go to any one of them, whenever I wanted, like a kid in a candy store.

Who needs the institutional Church anyway?

Additionally, because the Gospel was never revealed to me as I was a kid at *St. David's Episcopal Church by the Sea*, I carried a deep suspicion against anyone wearing a black shirt and a white collar.

So it goes.

After arriving at *Fuller Theological Seminary* in the mid-80's I was a happy camper.

It's a whole new world! They even Michael W. Smith and the Altar Boys playing at Disneyland!

My first glimpses of freedom were short lived. One of the first classes I took was an intense two-week evening course led by a tribe of people led by Rev. David Watson from the MotherLand (England). I couldn't figure these guys out. They were Spirit-filled, had great music, and taught the Word with real authority. The only thing wrong with them was that they were... *Anglicans*.

Can anything good come out of England?

Each night of the class the shoebox-shaped classroom was packed to the brim with students, the atmosphere filled with excitement and expectation. And the music was off the charts with hands raised, people singing in the Spirit, and prophetic words.

Hmm... Maybe these guys from the institutional Church aren't as bad as I once first thought.

As we got into the second week, God began to soften my heart and I actually began to wonder if these guys could be Christians. About mid-week I showed up late and wound up standing against the back wall with everyone else packing the room. We had just experience a powerful time of singing when a young Anglican dressed in a black shirt with a white collar approached the microphone with a prophecy, along the lines of this:

I believe there is at least one person here this evening that has a deep resentment for the organized Church - so much so that you are seriously considering leaving it. I want to encourage you - wherever you are in this room - to carefully consider the motives of your heart, for the reasons you want to leave are most likely selfish.

Crickets.

I froze. Pinned against the back wall, God had shot an arrow of exhortation into my heart. And he used an Anglican to do it.

After the course was completed, I began to ask around if there was an Episcopal Church in the L.A. Basin that was "Christian." It took a couple of months, but I finally found one. I was converted to Church, Church life, serving others, transparency, and spiritual oversight at *St. Jude's Episcopal Church*.

The Rev. Mike Flynn became a wonderful mentor for me, as he had with many others. Mike had been a pastor for over 20 years when he sensed God pulling him out of the parish ministry and onto the road to do "renewal" conferences. We traveled all over the world teaching, preaching, and praying for people in the power and Presence of the Holy Spirit. It was so much fun!

Years later I was called to a small church in Switzerland, Florida, just south of Jacksonville, called *Servants of Christ*. It had been a particularly hard time in ministry and I invited Mike to come down for a weekend of teaching and healing ministry. It was a fabulous time (just like the old

days) with the Lord healing and blessing others like he loves to do.

During one of the breaks I found myself sitting with Mike, pouring out my heart and watching ducks swimming and floating around a pond. I wasn't happy doing parish ministry. I didn't like where I was. Life sucked and I wanted out.

"What is it you see yourself doing Bill?" he asked, tossing some bread into the water.

I thought about that. What would float my boat, get the buzz back, and quench my thirst for travel and signs and wonders?

"I want to do what you do," I said. "Travel the world, do conferences, the whole deal."

Mike grew silent. I knew he was going to tell me to quit my job and hire me full time to travel with him, doing ministry and leading music all over the world, and I sat on the edge of my seat.

That's when the penny hit the ground.

With all the compassion in the world he sighed. His loving eyes gazed deeply into my heart.

"You're not ready yet."

Those were words I **did not** want to hear. They meant I had to stay there, face the music, go through the hardship, and not get to escape.

That darn Mike.

But hard as it was to hear those words, they were true. He knew what he was talking about. I didn't want to hear them, but it was wise counsel from the heart of God.

So I stayed. I continued in that ministry and it taught me how to love others, get freed from judgement, teach and disciple, and walk with others through dark valleys.

One day, as the compass points lined up, I received a call to go to *Church of the Holy Apostles*, Katy, Texas, where I would be the assistant in a church that would grow from 250 to nearly 700 over the course of a decade. It was exciting, challenging, and filled with opportunities for ministry.

Now this is fun!

This is the value of spiritual oversight. As we willingly submit to our mentors, pastors, priests, and spiritual directors we can trust God to see our hearts, the things that we cannot see ourselves, with perspective as we sail through life. Peter writes:

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.'

1 Peter 5:5

This verse, as well as other Biblical passages around the word "submit", has been abused, no doubt. Yet, there is nothing more beautiful and Godly than willfully laying down your pride, desires, and even your life for the sake of another. Spouses are encouraged to submit to one another out of love and respect, Jesus submitted to the will of the Father for his love for him, spiritual authority (Godly pastors, priests, bishops, elders, shepherds, etc.) are essential "ropes" on our boats, tightening the sails and moving us as we get off the docks and head out for the lake.

From Parents

Parents - parents can discern what is God's will for you even if they are not believers. Honor your parents.

Parents?

Parents.

You may be asking, "What do parents have to do with anything?" Parents, and our attitude towards parents can be an essential piece in discerning God's will. Consider carefully the following Scriptures.

'Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Deuteronomy 5:16

Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.

Proverbs 23:22

These are merely two out of over 30 verses that point to parents as compass points of wisdom and guidance.

I knew a young man with a lovely family who ran our sound system in *Holy Apostle's*, Katy, Texas. He was Indian, born and raised in Cranganore Port, India, the same town where the Apostle Thomas is said to have evangelized, planted a church, and died, just off the Malabar coast in Kodungallur. He was an amazing brother - his heart was deep and sincere and his face shown with the purity and of the Lord.

One night at rehearsal his wife and two daughters came into the church.

Such a beautiful family!

I asked him, "How did you meet your wife? You have such a wonderful family. How did it all happen?"

He smiled and looked up from the soundboard. "My parents. They brought us together."

"Your 'parents'? You mean your parents arranged for you and your wife to marry?"

"Exactly," he smiled widely. "My parents know me better than anyone in the world. They arranged for us to marry, and so we did. I've never been happier," he added.

"No dating? No getting to know the other person? No movies? No kissing? No nothing?"

"We met a few times before we married." He spoke in broken English, "But none of that stuff."

The writer of Proverbs underscores this truth:

*My son, keep your father's command
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*

*Bind them always on your heart;
fasten them around your neck.*

*When you walk, they will guide you;
when you sleep, they will watch over you;
when you awake, they will speak to you.*

*For this command is a lamp,
this teaching is a light,
and correction and instruction
are the way to life*

Proverbs 6:20-23

I often reflect on my friends statement, "My parents know me better than anyone in the world." Such wisdom. But can such wisdom come from parents that are not believers in Jesus.

Of course.

When I met my wife, Cinnamon, our relationship was nearly immediately confirmed by believers and non-believers in my family from the start.

Others may question the good advice of parents for other reasons. Perhaps they've disowned you, abused you, or drown you in their smothering personalities, so much so you don't even speak to them any more. Each case is different. Additionally, your parents may have passed away.

It's good to remember that "From Parents" is only one avenue wherein Godly council originates from. God will give you wisdom. In the honoring of parents, there is a long, healthy and fulfilling life. Parents - whether "Godly" or not - have amazing insight when it comes to their children, and should certainly be consulted when seeking guidance from the Lord. What they say may not be what you want to hear, or even what the Lord is saying, but the process alone of talking it through can be rich and meaningful.

Common Sense

Common sense - your own, as a committed follower of Jesus. God gave you a brain to think for a reason.

"Use your common sense," my mom always told me. "You have a brain for a reason. Use it."

The Bible is big on common sense. Some have more, others less. Oftentimes, when in the midst of making a decision I will pray, "Lord, please guide my thoughts as I think about this. Amen." Then I will sit back and genuinely think about the thing, using my common sense. The ability to think about something is a no-brainer.

If you are sailing under the warmth of the Lordship of Christ, and your boat is abiding on the lake of his love, good common sense can act as a compass point and get you sailing in the right direction. Like wisdom, it will steer you away from the jagged rocks, the shallow reefs, and keep you sailing in the grace of the Lord.

Common sense is often underestimated when it comes to spiritual matters. But good old-fashioned wisdom may be

In summary, we've looked at the Compass Points of Peace, Illuminated Scripture, and Godly Council. These Compass Points provide safe and secure ways wherein God's Spirit can lead, inform, direct, or shut down the sail altogether. Now that we've got our points, it's time to get off the dock, motor through the lagoon, hoist the sails, and let the breezes take us into the heart of the lake!

Part III

**Living
into the
Sail**



10

Introduction

In the summer of 2023, it seemed each time I got out on Webster Lake, God spoke to me.

A sacred space was created where his *kairos* voice broke into the day of my *kronos*. When I least expected it, winds shifted, eagles swooped overhead, and the atmosphere of the boat itself took on a magical feel. During those times it was just me and God, abiding on the water and sailing in the mountain breezes, under the warm rays of the sun in silence.

At first the silence was boring (and frustrating!). I have always prided myself on loving God's Presence, but on the lake that summer there were times when things got so boring that I just wanted to power up the engine and make something happen myself.

I was discussing this with Rev. Susie Skillen while taking my course to be certified as a spiritual director.

"I don't know, Susie. I get into these places where I know God is around and I just want to bold. I love Jesus, but my heart fills with angst."

"Bill," she suggested. "Could it be that it's not about being alone with God that makes you angsty at all, but being alone with *yourself*?"

Ouch!

She did have a point. I mean, it does say, "Be still and know that I am God," (Psalm 46:10)

I should give it a try.

From that point on, each time I got alone in the boat and bored on the lake, I intentionally stilled myself into the moment and embraced the angst.

I waited.

And waited some more.

Then somewhere in the currents the clouds parted and disclosure happened. He had been there all the time, teaching me, guiding me, and revealing stuff I myself needed to hear.

All than simply as I got still before the Lord and embraced the angst. Imagine that.

In the following short chapters, I'd like to share a few treasures I learned just by sitting out in the middle of the lake and doing absolutely nothing.

I invite you, too, to pause after each chapter and contemplate how your life has been formed - and continues to be formed - around the truths revealed as you simply sit, do nothing, and listen.



11

Paying Attention

You can see where the wind is by observing its effect on the water around you.

Perhaps there no better indication of what the Lord is doing than simply observing ones fruit, as fruitfulness provides a track record (and a clear forecaster) of God's past Presence and continued favor.

Wind. One may be unable to "see" the wind, but simply (and objectively) observing the water indicates that you are in the right groove. Take a wide scan of the lake and you'll see where the wind is (and where it is not) solely by its effect on the water.

Go there.

Channels. One may be able to discern where to sail by looking backwards. Where have you sailed successfully before? How has God revealed himself to you in the past?

Chances are what he has blessed in the past he will bless in the present, and right on into the future.

Get back into those channels.

Ripples. Ripples trail the boat. Ripples (or a small wake) are indications that the boat is moving, which is important.

Look around. Is the bow pushing water? Are there ripples trailing from behind? Can you see any evidence of movement?

Find the wind.

Get back to the channels.

Make Ripples.



12

God is That Big

*Regardless of One's Passion, Desire, and Faithful Expectation, You are
Always - And Always Will Be - At the Mercy of the Wind*

God is a Being who has a mind, a will, an agenda which all mysteriously folds into the decisions we make. That being said, at the end of the day, he's the one that controls the wind, the speed we sail, the waters we traverse, and where we'll wind up.

Some are all about getting God in their pocket to be successful, find the perfect spouse, vocation, or whatever. In reality, we are in his pocket.

Of course, we don't see it that way. Probably best that way.

I remember reading a satirical 1980 Gospel tract put out by Keith Green and *Last Days Ministries* about divine guidance. On the cover was a cartoon of a young "Jesus

Freak" sitting under an apple tree and reading a book entitled something like, "How To Do Everything You Ever Wanted To Do and Still Be at the Center of God's Will." That must have been an interesting read!

Truth is, while we certainly have choice in the minutia, we are wholly reliant on wind. Wind is wholly other, wholly independent, wholly unpredictable, unmoved by anything. The art of the sail is to go where the wind goes.

God's Spirit has his own gusts, its own mind, its own purpose. While he promises to give us the desires of our hearts, it's not a promise that we would get anything we wanted, nor is it a promise to do everything we ever wanted to do. All "calls" to "come and follow me" come with much surrender and personal sacrifice.

You may be sailing along and thinking you're headed for a sure destination on the other side of the lake, and may never get there. Sure, you want to go there, but the winds just aren't in your favor. You vainly tack this way and that way, maybe even spending half your life getting there, but never arrive. God is moving you elsewhere.

That's okay. The mid-course redirection here is completely normal. And - lest you think all those years are wasted (or some such baloney as that) - let me assure you that nothing in the Kingdom is wasted.

I'm reminded of Jason Gray's song, "Nothing Is Wasted."

And nothing is wasted
Nothing is wasted

*In the hands of our Redeemer
Nothing is wasted*

We serve a big God. A fish cannot swim outside of water, nor can a bird fly outside of the air. In the same way we cannot sail outside of the all-seeing, all-knowing care of the Father. He has the power to change our course, and he has the power to bring us successfully to our home port. He is that big.



13

Life in the Doldrums

*Sometimes You Have to Power Up
and Actually Work Your Way Over to Where the Wind Is*

Sometimes all the "fun" is happening on the far side of the lake. There you are, sitting in the middle of nowhere with no breeze, just you alone. A turtle surfaces and stares deeply into your eyes.

Really Lord?

A mere quarter mile away you see other sailors and other sailboats having the time of their lives - tacking this way and that way, laughing carelessly, with the froth of the waves splashing across their tanned faces. And here you are, stuck in the middle of doldrums and going nowhere, like an old barnacle stuck on the side of a barge.

How are we to interpret these "lags" in life?

One way to deal with them is to sulk and slump over the tiller and howl into the lifeless sky and cry.

Why me, Lord? Why meeeeeeee.....!

There are other ways to respond to the perceived lack of God's presence. (Note I said *perceived* lack of God's presence.) Still waters run deep. Truth be known, spiritual doldrums provide great opportunities to *chillax* and to "be still and know that he is God." (Psalm 46:10)

With a renewed attitude, a dreadfully boring time could become an ideal environment for intimacy, discipleship and, in that space, reconnection with God. The doldrums, times when the winds cease and there isn't much else to do but be memorized by the suns' dancing reflections on the water, are akin to when Elijah exchanged the wind, fire, and earthquakes - the rapture, zest, and thrill of it all - for the powerful silence of his stillness.

Getting Back Into the Mainstream

Flexibility is key. And humility. That's important, too.

There is much to be learned in the doldrums. And the Lord is God of the doldrums. But after a while, it's time to move on.

Say you've been in solitude with God for 5 minutes, half a day, or half a lifetime and you feel the gentle breezes of the Spirit encouraging you to move on.

Many sailors will do everything they can to get back into the breezes of heaven. They are just that sweet. You may see them heading below deck for an oar to physically row their sailboat back into the wind.

Rowing is real work. I know, I've had to do it more than once. However, this "work", "strain", and "discipline" is appropriate and good. Rowing may be for a short time or a long time. No matter. At the end of the day you can be sure to be caught up in the rush of God's Spirit filling your sails. It's so refreshing and revitalizing that we take it for granted and never want it to go away.

It's unclear why breezes dissipate in life. But they do. It can be very frustrating. Speaking spiritually, there are times when we've been working so hard on getting it right that we are just out of energy. We've fasted, gone to conferences, read the Bible, listened to Christian music, fed the poor on Wednesday nights, the whole enchilada, and we are still at our wits end, feeling like we've made no progress whatsoever.

The Apostle Paul writes about something like this in Act 26:14.

And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

What I'm talking about here is not like that. In Paul's situation, he was fighting and struggling against circumstances which clearly were not of God. He was a bit thick-headed and wasn't able to give into what God was up to so readily.

The sailor I'm speaking about is up against a sovereign move of the God. This is an intentional doldrum orchestrated by God himself for a specific purpose. Yet it takes a seasoned sailor to throw the oar in and simply wait for the breeze to come around. Most of us either fight it (like Paul), or struggle in vain to get through the thing, which is as problematic. Not only have we not made any headway across the lake, but now our attitude sucks. Our works of righteousness have beached us on a sandbar, we are exhausted, and we feel like we'll never experience God's precious breezes again. throwing in the towel. We have no more internal resources to get back to where we want to be.

In short, we are pooped.

Times and Seasons

In the Anglican tradition, as well as many "mainline denominations" we have traditions that provide tried and true currents for us to get back into the mainstream of God's activity. We pray prayers and do liturgies that are thousands of years old - these things have brought many back into depths, especially those of us that don't even have a prayer left.

Seasons of the church year force us to veer into the work of God through discipline and liturgy. When the wind fails to fill the sails, it may be time to break out the oars of the established Church. Even the most weary sailor can connect with these ancient currents.

Traditional disciplines - such as serving the poor, personal Bible study (grueling as it may be), almsgiving, regular church attendance, and other "not so very fun" things - are ways to get back into the wind.

For me, the way back is fasting. For the first 20 years of my conversion to Christ, I generally fasted the last weekend of every month. This was in addition to my weekly fast, which I chose to do on Thursdays. These days, I can get through a day or so, but the times goes deep.

While I was attending Fuller, I had the chance to go camping with some friends in northern California but I didn't have a tent.

No problem, I'll just check out the "For Sale" ads in the newspaper and pick up a tent.

So I perused through the "For Sale" ads in the newspaper (yes, I am that old) and - low and behold - I saw an ad for a three man dome tent.

"Only used twice." The ad said.

"Perfect!" I closed the paper, hopped into the car, drove about an hour, turned this way and that way and before I knew it was bumbling up a dirt driveway and saw a lovely dome tent which was all set up.

My *Honda* rolled to a stop on the green lawn. I shut off the vehicle and stared.

It's beautiful.

Just then, a man in his early thirties appeared from the house and walked across the lawn. I was immediately stunned by his dazzling appearance - a lanky Southern Californian wearing a flannel shirt, patched blue jeans, bushy blonde hair, and sparkling blue eyes. I got out of the car. We shook hands. He pointed to the tent with a tabgible sense of gratitude.

"It's a great tent. I've only used it twice."

"'Used only twice', you say?"

"That's it." He nodded. "Just a couple of forty day fasts."

"Fasting? Forty days? You? Here in this tent?"

"Yeah," smiling and sliding his hands into his pockets. "But I'm done now."

This guy did two forty day fasts in this tent and now he wants to sell it to me?

And so I bought the thing.

It was short lived, though. I used it for the Northern California camping trip but, shortly thereafter it got ripped off in Chinatown on my birthday.

So it goes.

The point being here is that spiritual disciplines, like those found in the traditions of the church (i.e. journalling, praying prayers written by the saints of old, fasting, etc.)

are tried and true ways to paddle back into life with God. Sometimes the wind is in our favor, other times not so much. It is in these times when real liturgy (ie. "the work of the people") can move us back into the mainstream of God's currents in life.



14

A Question of Balance

*The Leveraging of Wind to Rudder is Akin
to Wisdom and Humility.*

There is a saying among us mighty seafarers of old:
Flappy sails aren't happy sails.

When sails flap in the breeze the rigging clashes and clangs into the mast and across the boom. The result? Chaos invades a once pristine sail. When sails aren't flappy, they are filled snug and privy to the wind's full potential to capture the fullness of the breeze.

Discerning the "mind of the breeze" demands humility and wisdom from the sailor; humility to know that the wind is big and unpredictable and wisdom to discern how to best manage the thing into one's journey. As in life, discernment on the lake is *everything*, as it enables one to capture the full capacity of his Presence. And that is what sailing is all about.

Having discerned the direction and velocity of the wind it is easy to align ourselves with the will of the wind and

tighten our sails to capture all we can get. No flappy sails here, only bulging sails filled to capacity with the gentle breeze.

Any Way the Wind Blows - Really?

For me, flappy sails are akin to double-mindedness. Sails don't flap when the sailor is intentional. Flappy sails also happen when the sailor is simply ignorant of what's happening around the boat (another discipleship issue), or when one sees the phenomena and has no resolve to do anything about it.

But Christians aren't like this.

Christians have a call, a purpose; each one of us. We are not without a compass or buoy. True North is revealed in the Word and the Holy Spirit empowers us for the fulfillment of his purposes. For us, there is no reason to release lines, bail out of life, and pray for the best. We are **not** an "any way the wind blows" people. We are meant to capture wind, tighten sails, and soar like eagles in the wind.

One way to avoid flappy sails is to sync the direction, or angle, of the rudder with the wind filling the sails. There is a strong relationship between wind and rudder. When the two are aligned, it is the sweet spot of *sailhood*.

There is a unique relationship between wind and rudder, between God and our response, if you will. It's almost as if one can't happen without the other. I've done much study on the *Tabernacle of Moses* and found a similar dynamic. In

the Outer Courts there are two ministry stations, the *Altar of Sacrifice* and the *Brass Laver*, each with its own purpose. The altar was for the forgiveness of sin and the laver was for the cleansing and empowering of the priests. Each had its unique function, but neither operated independently of the other.

The relationship between God's wind and our rudder are similar. Think of the rudder as the Word and the wind as the Spirit working in cahoots with each other and mounting a natural tension with the forward momentum of the boat. The rudder steers you into the wind. Once there, gentle movements in direction allow the sailor to leverage the speed of his or her boat in a graceful manner. Leveraging needs to be balanced and done with awareness of both rudder and wind, without which will get you nowhere.

For example, one can have a full sail, be filled and anointed with the Spirit to heal the sick and raise the dead, but if your rudder is aimed into the turbulence of a non-Biblical lifestyle, you are headed for real shipwreck. The balance between God's Word and how you do life is essential.

I have met many in the church who have maintained their belief in the breezes of the Spirit, yet are not steering their lives in cahoots with the rudder of Holy Scripture. I see it all the time: unmarried Christians living together and enjoying all the accolades marriage (but lacking real commitment), believers who think nothing of aborting their unborn out of their own personal convenience, or people vaping pot on Saturday night and praising the Holy

Ghost on Sunday. People in these hypocritical lifestyles sail endlessly with no particular place to go, nor is their witness of any good to those needing the power of salvation in their life. The apostle Paul describes them as, "Having a form of godliness but denying its power." 2 Timothy 3:5. And adds, "Have nothing to do with such people."

These are sailors with whom rudder and wind are at odds with one another. And their lives give witness to that fact. And then they turn and wonder why things are so choppy in their sail.

I don't know why I feel so far away from God.

It's as if he's out there somewhere, but not with me. My life seems to be on hold.

It goes to prove a person can know the Bible, have memorized Scripture, and even teach kids in a youth group and, because of willing rebellion, be clueless.

A person can have it all, including anointing and gifts, yet if their life's rudder is aimed in a direction where the wind cannot be captured, they will go nowhere. It's an easy fix. They need to make some decisions and re-align their rudders, leveraging their life and aligning it in sync with the wind of the Spirit.

A good sailor won't tolerate flappy sails, but intentionally steer his or her rudder with the wind around the boat, to the best of his or her ability.

Back in the day there was a saying:

Too much Word and not enough of the Spirit?

You dry up.

Too much Spirit and not enough of Word?

You blow up.

But a perfect balance of the Word and Spirit?

You grow up.

In a similar way, flappy sails get you nowhere, especially if your rudder is aimed in the direction you want to go independently of the wind. On the other hand, if your sails are bulging with breeze, and yet your rudder runs without Biblical integrity, you'll probably wind up shipwrecked like *Gilligan* and the crew.

Sailing with Jesus isn't for the faint of heart. It takes real humility to discern what the Spirit is doing, then it takes decisive conviction to maintain a Biblical course without compromising. Yet, when lifestyle and Spirit are united, the thrill of abundant life is fully experienced.



15

Lull Life

*In the Lulls, it is Best to Rest and Enjoy the Stillness.
For the Next Visitation is Just Around the Corner and You Know Not its
Intensity, nor its Time of Arrival.*

Even for the most experienced of sailors, is hard to fully surrender to the boring lulls of the mid-afternoon.

There you sit; motor boats and jet skis are whizzing this way and that way all around you, water skiers (or screaming kids on floatation devices) criss-crossing before and behind, people on pontoon boats raising brown bottles as they pass with Boston's, *More Than a Feeling*, blasting on their sound systems.

Alone. Like a fish out of water.

Life in the Fast Lane

Our world is so fast-paced that it is nearly impossible to stop, be still, and know that he is God. Everything needs to

be bigger, better, more sensational. Even many churches have succumbed to the lie that church has to be different week to week with new songs and flashier ways to make the Gospel more attractive to the outsider and more tantalizing to the insider.

We hear crazy supernatural testimonies of how God did this or that in a person's life - as if they are screaming down the face of a 50 foot wave at *Mavericks*, and here we are, bobbing in our little lakes, tossing about in the boat wakes of others with no wind, no fun, no thrills, feeling scorned and shamed by everyone else on the lake.

Why isn't life like those guys? How rude!

Such is life on the lake of life. No question about it, God is still around. Our Biblical experience tells us so, yet we'd be hard-pressed not to turn inwards and wonder what we're doing wrong when we're in the lulls.

Is this my fault?

I've Looked At Lulls From Both Sides Now

But that's looking at the lulls from the wrong end of the dock. How much better it would be to release our thoughts from the comparisons (which often lead to self-condemnation) and simply toss it all to the wind, taking life entirely on God's terms for *us* (and not others). For example, instead of wondering why we're in the horse latitudes of life, why not take a chill pill and enjoy the

space? You know not when the next gust will hit you. Believe me, it will come. And you need to be ready for that.

God is like an untamed lion (as C.S. Lewis has said). He has the power to lift your boat right off the lake at the snap of a finger. If nothing is happening, nothing is happening for good reason. Instead of being a loser in the lull we need to seize this opportunity to rest, prepare, and wait with holy expectation, even if it means doing nothing but floating and smearing paba-free sunblock on your face.

In the Book of Ephesians Paul reminds us what to do in the lulls of life:

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Ephesians 6:13

Lulls are not the time to sit back and wonder "what the lull is happening?", what caused it to happen, or blame yourself for drifting into the lull in the first place.

Lulls give us opportunities to breathe, to contemplate. They are times to tend knots in the rigging, clean the deck of needless clutter, assure accessibility to your oars and - life jackets, to prepare and make ready your boat. A prepared sailor does life in the lulls well and will rarely be taken down by a rogue gust or a gale. If Paul was writing to sailors he may have said something like:

Therefore, prepare every inch of your boat - tend sails, untangle tangles, make everything ship shape - so that when the seas kick

up you'll be able to face them head on, and after you have done everything, to sail.

Two things here:

Make good use of lulls. Keep busy, tend your boat.

Enjoy them. For the "type-A" personality lulls can be excruciating. Nothing seems to be going on. But your time will come. You haven't missed the boat. Floating seems kind of passive. But maybe I missed the boat. When that next gust comes, you'll want to be prepared and ready for all it has to offer.



16

All Mixed Up

Tangled Lines Are Bad

In the vernacular of sailing, "lines" are the same as "ropes."

Lines are everywhere on a sailboat. They raise the main sail, loosen the job, stabilize the rudder, and even secure the boat to its docking place.

Oftentimes, after tightening lines, they need to be properly coiled and hung somewhere. If not careful they can pile up, get tangled, knotted, and clumped up. These things can really trip a good sailor up.

Lines seem to get tangled around feet at the worst possible moments. When lines are tangled, ease of movement around the desk is limited and constant attention (or irritation!) needs to happen to detangle them. The danger, of course, is that one can be so distracted and in making heads or tails with tangled knots and lines, that

the beauty of the say is spoiled by one's preoccupation of them.

I understand tangled lines as speaking to our thought life. When a sailor's lines are clean and coiled with wisdom, all is right with the world. On the other hand, when there are lines clumped over there and piled and interwoven within one another, all chaos breaks out. In short, when lines are all mixed up it speaks to double-mindedness. A double-minded person is unstable in every way for good reason. (James 1:3)

When a person flip flops this way and that way in their thought life, nothing is quite certain and everything becomes suspect. At the least, they lose the thrill of the sail. But it's much more than that. Confidence is key in the heart of a captain. If the captain is wondering if he or she should have left the docks in the first place, the entire duration of the sail is jeopardized. If the cruise goes well, then it was a right decision. If the cruise ends up in a sudden thunderstorm, then it was the wrong decision. Either way, tangled thoughts become subject to the fruitfulness of the sail. In the real "sail," a leader's competence has little to do with the weather and everything to do with confidence of the heart.

As a Director of Youth ministries at Christ Church, Denver, we took our kids on an annual white water rafting trip to a n outfit called *Noah's Ark*, in Buena Vista. It was an overnight trip. We'd raft an entire day, find a place to camp and sleep under the stars, and hop on the river the next morning and finish the course.

One particular year the snowmelt was so strong that it took the river up to a Category 4 (out of 5). It was risky, but we decided to go. The next day I woke to hear the constant roaring of the water.

That's interesting. I didn't hear that last night.

I approached the shore, horrified to see the water level had risen substantially. A tree floated past.

After breakfast I met with the staff at *Noah's Ark* who had confirmed the water levels had risen substantially and were at Category 5 status. Hearing this sent a chill down my spine, as I was responsible for 30 kids.

"The big issue isn't getting to the pick up point." One of the leaders explained. "It's getting around a portion of the river called *Seidel's Suckhole*.

I don't know what that is, but I don't like the sound of it.

The staffer explained that the suckhole was an inverted tornado that sucked you 15 into the water, under a rocky ledge, and spit you out down stream. Even in normal rafting, it was a danger to be reckoned with.

It was decided that the leaders would row the rafts around the suckhole. The kids would walk the shore until it was deemed safe to get back in them and complete the trip. Hearing the news that only the leaders would be making the trip (of which I was the leader) make all the blood in my face go south, my body tremble, and my voice quiver. One could say my mind was filled with tangled lines. We

were just about ready to drop the rafts up river from the suckhole of death when my fears got the better of me. In that moment I was gripped, paralyzed, by fear of drowning. I told another leader how afraid I was. Their response was priceless.

"Bill, you are our leader. We follow you. If you are afraid, we all are afraid. Lead like the leader you are to us."

My confidence was restored. After mounting the rafts and paddling around the rim of this burning-churning roaring inverted waterspout, it seemed like I had an edge on it. I stared into it's center and worked the oar with all my might. None of the five rafts went down. I was so relieved!

During that incident my lines were definitely tangled. And I was called out on it (from a high school senior no less!). Such is the power of double-mindedness.

As a leader, I've learned that sometimes it's better just to choose a line of action and go with it, simply ignoring any information to the contrary. God seems to like it when we choose one thing above another, when the thoughts of our minds are confident, and coiled smoothly, even in the face of danger. There's still a risk, of course. And we could be wrong. But God is big and can work through our confidence to bring about his glory. A mysterious gust rises sovereignly out of the blue and right decisions are made.



17

The Love Boat

Trust Your Boat



ars are made to drive, planes are made to fly, and sailboats are made to sail.

Sittin' On the Dock of the Bay

Spoiler alert: A sailboat that is moored to a dock cannot sail. It may look good - ropes coiled, rigging clanging against the mast, waxed and nestled gently against the dock. But it's going nowhere.

Let's talk a bit about why people never leave the dock. We know from Scripture that God has plans for all of us. He has wired us for "such as time as this," and actually had gone to great lengths to get us off the docks into the the lake for our life.

Despite all that goodness, many stayed glued to the dock. They finger through a white cup of black soil, find a Canadian Crawler, pierce it to a fishing hook, and plop it

into the lagoon where they spend the rest of their lives hoping they are lucky enough to catch a measly fish. All the while there are people just like them who have trusted God and are having the time of their lives just beyond the sleepy lagoon.

What's wrong with this picture? Why spend your whole life in a lagoon when God has made a way for you to really sail and enjoy life?

"The wind is risky, unpredictable and uncontrollable."

True, I'll give you that. But God is the God of wind. The Spirit is the breath of God. And he loves you.

"The lake rough today, and I don't want get sucked into the *Triangle of Death*."

Neither do I. But that's on the far side of the lake. You can sail all day and not even get close to it.

"I think I just got a nibble."

Jesus fished because we floundered. Do you want to flounder your whole life away?

"Isn't that a Larry Norman quote?"

Yes it is.

"Besides, I'll need to check with the weather man's report before I decide to untie my life and head out into God's mysterious currents."

The "weather man?" Why don't you trust in Jesus and he'll take care of the rest. He is the weatherman."

"Isn't that a Keith Green quote?"

Yes, it is.

And so it goes.

At the end of the day, the sun has set, you pick you your fishing gear and head to the house.

"Maybe tomorrow," you sigh. "Maybe tomorrow."

I'm not saying that people who fish all their lives are not in God's will. Nor am I saying we should haphazardly leap off the dock, throw caution to the wind, and set sails for the great unknown. Even a king going into battle needs to have a proper assessment of what he has to work with before going to war. (Luke 14:28-38)

It's just that lame *excuses* to remain tethered at the dock fly in the face of good old fashioned faith and adventure - which is why many people sit in their boats and wonder why nothing is happening.

Worse, a whole lifetime of lame excuses is far more worse for us than it is for God. After all, he only wants to bless you. He loves to see you caught up in the thrill of it all. He *enjoys* you. If you want to fish all day, it's up to you. He'll love you no less, or no more.

And on the outside chance that he was inviting you into the life of another sailor on the lake - or you could have helped a crying young child on her paddle board get back to the beach, or rescued someone stranded on an island because they sailed into the Triangle of Death - that's okay as well. God is bigger, he'll take care of them. You didn't "blow it" by sitting on the dock of the bay. You only lost out of the blessing you would have had by initiation the sail.

The life of a sailor is a life of action, a life of movement, surprise, [a little] risk, and sacrifice. The Lord continues to call us deeper into life, always will, despite our greatest excuses. Sometimes you just have to mentally override "cost" for the joy of being obedient.

Let's look at a few things that keep us from launching out into God's lake.

Fear

Some never make it out of the lagoon because the dock is safe, cozy and cuddly.

I like my dock.

Given enough time, the hull of your boat will be covered with a slime coat. If you're in salt water you can be sure barnacles be pretty much good for nothing. The wind will still invite you out, but the sludge that has formed on the hull of your boat will make the decision all the more difficult.

"All the sludge and slime on my hull will slow me down," you'll say.

And you will be right. And you'll sit there forever.

Fear is a deadly thing. It binds a boat to a dock, and will always do so until the lines of fear are broken. At least then, when the cords are cut, you'll have the freedom to decide to sail or not. The way it is now, you have no choice.

Control

Akin to fearfulness is "control", or loss of it. Some aren't necessarily fearful about heading into the lake. Rather, they are control freaks.

In theory, control freaks may like the *ethos* of sailing. They may like their boat, enjoy the gentle movement of the water, the bell-like clanging of the rigging on the mast, the glorious shadows at sunset. They may even understand that boats were built to sail, and the unpredictability of wind, lulls, and other sailboats on the lake make for a exciting time of adventure.

Yet they are still held back. They may know it in their heads, but their God isn't big enough to overcome the spirit of control in their hearts. Consequently, they remain moored to the docks by a multitude of "what if's", or a faithless fear that God isn't big enough to bail them out if water rushes over the rails, or if things get out of control.

This is a huge stronghold because control freaks know God is that big (in their heads), but loosening the ropes,

getting into the boat, and pushing off from the dock demands a whole different level of faith.

The Past

Sometimes it's fear, other times control. Still others are crippled because we have been out on the lake, and have been shipwrecked.

"I'm not getting back into that thing," they say.

"That thing" could be anything you'd like: dating, going to church, starting a new job, deciding to marry again after an abusive relationship - you name it. Sometime in the past - perhaps a long time ago - you ventured out into the lake and got shipwrecked and vowed you'd never venture out again.

As a young boy growing up in Cape Canaveral, Florida, I used to dream of becoming a profession surfer. I would spend hours watching the pros, slicing this way and that way and roller-coastering off the lips of the waves. I could *feel* it. Each day I surfed I was destined to be headed for this "lake."

One day I was surfing in rough seas. I had a major "wipe out" and plunged into the sea. When I finally reached the surface I popped my head out of the water just in time to get smacked in the head with the railing of my surfboard as it was pushed by the next wave. I flipped over backwards like a washing machine and swam to shore. Two black eyes and a lot of humiliation surfaced within a week and I was actually afraid of going surfing again. It

took a while, but I was finally able to get back out and enjoy the thrill of surfing into my late 20's.

Of course this example is a parable for the larger things in life that smack us in the face, causing us humiliation and deep pain. Examples run all over the map. Some of us took delight in significant ministry but reality smacked us in the face when a beloved leader was caught in bed with another woman's husband. Some of us had always wanted to be professional musicians but were smacked when our parents mocked our God-given gifts and told us to grow up and get a real job. Others, having been sexually abused as a child are unable to engage in a healthy sexual relationship in our marriages. Still others are unable to forgive family members of alcoholism and verbal abuse that happened decades earlier.

And the list goes on and on.

Past experiences are a big player when it comes to getting back on the lake. The great news is that God can get you freed from the docks of your past. It may take time, pastoral care, and counseling. That's okay - do whatever it takes. Sooner than you know, you be stepping onto the boat and heading back into the excitement of life on the lake - the way it should be. And you'll be all the better for it

Moral Failure

In the church there is a stigma that one's spirituality is somehow linked to a moral failure. Moral failure comes in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes they are big, sometimes they are little. The general feeling in church is that size

does matter, which is sad because sin is sin and all sin has been judged freed in the shadow of the cross.

A friend of mine was involved in a moral sin and was barred from returning to church. A friend of his took issue with that.

"The church is the place you need to be," she said. "Where else will you find healing, forgiveness, and restoration?!"

Yet, for those of us who have been buried in self-shame for something stupid we've done, the way a moral failure is processed could be the difference between life on the dock and life on the lake.

As a young priest I had great ideals about what a leader should be. I knew all the "boundary" pitfalls; even taught the stuff. I kept my lines tight and sailed my lake with utmost integrity. My parents had divorced and I didn't want to fall into that same groove.

Despite the warnings from my wife and others, while deeply influential in a very public ministry, I succumbed to my passions and fantasy and "fell from grace," as they say. Within a half-year I was escorted out of the church from by Bishop, invited out of my 25 year marriage by my wife, and had my priestly status removed from the Episcopal Church by the House of Bishops.

Ouch!

I was a mess - wrecked, spinning like a top going nowhere. During that time found an apartment, did some mystery

shopping, flipped a house or two, and spent loads of time in sacramental and private confession with remorse.

Once day a friend of mine called me from California.
"What are you doing?"

(I happened to be walking around in circles at the Bush Memorial Park in Houston taking a personal prayer day.) "I dunno."

"Why don't you come out here and work with me. We'll see if you've still got what it takes."

So I did.

Once arriving in North Hollywood Fr. Jose created a space for me wherein I could continue to heal and move into ministry as I felt comfortable. Four months into the thing, we were in the sacristy after a service. He looked at me and said, "You need to be a priest."

I wasn't too sure. I knew in my head that the gifts of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29), but I sure wasn't feeling the love.

Nevertheless, I made an appointment with Bishop Bill Thompson, Bishop of Western Anglicans (Anglican Church of North America). He asked me to share my story and listened intently.

Suddenly, while I was in mid-sentence, he scooted his squeaky office chair across the room and stuck his nose into my face. Then (like my mother used to do) he took my

face in his hands and stared into my eyes deeply. Very deliberately and slowly he spoke.

"You are not junk."

"What?"

"You are not junk."

My eyes filled with tears. His eyes were firm and loving. He continued.

"I would be proud to having you serve as priest in my diocese," he added.

In that moment, the ropes tying my boat to the dock began to loosen. They didn't unloosen all at once. I still had some barnacles on the old hull that needed to be addressed, but as the gentle breezes in the lagoon wore on me, I was able to humbly step back into the boat and venture out onto the lake. Today, my sails are wholly dependent on the wind of the Spirit and my confidence in ministry is humble and grateful.

This process took me over 10 years. And I am still healing. That's how deep moral failure runs. Without the prayers and unconditional love of the Body of Christ found in the church, I'd be hard-pressed to be in any boat whatsoever.

You may be one of those people. If you are, you may have left the house, but God hasn't. He still lives in you and will use your worse decisions to showcase his grand

redemption. The lake awaits. But move in his good time and don't rush it.

A New Kind of Ark

I am under the unique conviction that nothing lasting happens outside of the assembly of believers.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
John 15:5

This doesn't mean that God can reach out of heaven and reveal himself to someone unchurched. The Bible is filled with instances as such. But it does mean that fruitfulness (and hearty discipleship) only happens as we get around other followers of the Way. We can motor around life, independently on our own strength, and that may get us somewhere. But only as we intentionally commit ourselves to the Lifestream of Jesus within the fellowship of the Spirit in the saints will our lives have eternal significance.

With that in mind, let's take a broader look at this word, *boat*. For the sake of discussion, I'd like for you to think about this term "boat" as the church.

That's right. The church.

This institution called "church" has been around for two thousand years. If you include the faith communities of synagogue worship, we've been around for much, much *much* longer. Through the centuries these fellowship gatherings have served as an oasis, a temple, an embassy,

a colony, an empowering station, a hospital, and protection from the enemy for millions of people. With all her foils and atrocities, I still believe in the church. And I believe it should be trusted as a valid avenue through which we sail our life.

"Really, Bill? 'Trust the boat?'"

I know. I can hear it now. "Why are you saying I should trust the church? Don't you know the church is made up of sinners? It is filled with hypocrites who have in mind the things of man, not the things of God. Besides, the organized church is filled with so many rules and regulations that it takes forever even to win someone to Christ."

I know. I get that.

"Not only that, but with all the committees and processes, it takes forever to make a decision. It's like steering an ocean liner!"

"Yup. That's true."

"And have you ever tried to be a priest in the institutional church? It takes forever."

I know. But God has chosen it to so stuff. Last summer he really drove the point home.

"How so?"

I had about an hour before I had to get back to the office so I thought about hitting the lake for a quick sail. I was been apprehensive about going out but the summer was almost over and I thought I should take advantage of the wind while I had the chance (another parable here).

I launched from the dock with both jib and main sail unusually bulging with breeze and rocketed from zero to 7 knots in the blink of an eye, completely caught off guard. There was hardly time to drop the dagger when I cleared the peninsula and was immediately accosted by the full impact of the wind. It swooped the boat and swung us 90 degrees to the east in a blink of an eye where the waves were frothy with white caps cresting and stinging into my face. Within a matter of seconds of leaving the dock I was up a creek without a paddle, bouncing this way and that way with the rigging clanging in my ears against the howling wind.

Frick!

I found myself regretting the decision to leave the safety of the harbor.

What was I thinking?!

But there I was anyway.

White caps usually form when the wind is around 8 knots (10 mph). These were substantially larger gusts, slapping over the hull and half-blinding me. I clutched the rudder, wiped my face, and peered across the lake, in despair. I

needed to to a 180 degree turn about and get back to shore.

By some miracle of God the wind subsided, just enough for me to turn the boat around and head back to the lagoon. It didn't last long. Halfway through the turnabout a gale rose and jolted me high above the lake, the cockpit now filling with water. Within seconds I found myself riding the razor's edge between close *haul* and *beam reach* (terms describing the degree of the masts width and the sails' ability to maneuver). With one hand clutching the tiller and the other grasping a line, it was all I could do to leverage the boat by angling the rudder up against the velocity of the wind so I wouldn't capsize.

"This is not good," I shouted into the wind. Spray needled into cheeks like tiny darts. "This is not good -- Not at all!"

I was just on this side of a complete panic attack when - right there in the midst of all that fear and dread, of all things, I heard God's gentle voice.

"Trust the boat."

It was then when his *kairos* shalom was breaking into my *chronos* chaos.

"Trust the boat?!" I shouted back. "What does that have to do with anything? I'm in a crisis here!!

I heard it again, "Trust the boat."

In the midst of all that was going on, his words calmed me. I took pause, as if everything dialed down to slow motion. I eyed about the boat, looked up to the stern jostling and bouncing like a super ball, gracefully slicing through the chop. I looked up at the mast and heard the sounds of rigging clanging the mast, lines taught and confident. At my feet the daggerboard was vibrating cool sonic sounds with a reliable counterpoint to the wind. All seemed surprisingly *well*, even - dare I say - *normal*. Everything was intact. Nothing was falling apart. It was almost as if the boat was actually *enjoying* being the boat.

The tension left my body; peace displaced my panic. All in all, the boat was doing just fine. It was me that was having a meltdown.

In essence, the boat was doing what the boat was made to do. It was "boating." In fact, if it could speak, it would have probably said it was having the time of its life.

"Trust the boat."

I smeared the spray from my eyes. His words finally sank in. Intentionally and cautiously made the decision to exchange my fear and give myself entirely over to the integrity of the vessel.

After all, it was probably crafted for such a time as this.

Remaining completely engaged, a beautiful thing happened. My fear of "loosing it" was supernaturally transformed into a spirit of pure adventure. I looked around at the storm pelting me from all sides and began to

laugh, giggling like a little boy and *woo-hooing* at the top of my lungs. In fact, I was having so much fun that when I reached the safety of the lagoon to dock, I decided to turn the whole thing around again and head back out for the open lake!

"Trust the boat."

At the end of that tumultuous hour, I slid into the lagoon, dropped the sails, motored towards the shore, and secured the boat at the dock. Standing on the dock, looking like a wet rat, I couldn't have been a happier camper. I took a deep sigh and was reminded.

Trust the boat. Trust the Church. Trust her history, trust her seasons, trust her sacraments, trust her architecture, trust her processes, trust her rigging. Trust everything about her, stem to stern.

I was reminded of a church in Magdala, Israel (home of Mary Magdalene), on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Inside the sanctuary there is a life-sized boat complete with mast and sail, right there in the church. Just behind it is a window overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The boat serves as - of all things - an altar for Mass. During the services, as the Priest leads the congregation through the Eucharistic prayers he actually blessed bread and wine on the boat - all of which forms a powerful icon. The church continues to be a place of safety, protection, refuge, restoration, and nurture. It indeed is an ark, protecting the flock from the storms of the world.

An Understandable Mutiny

The Church is not without its flaws, but God has created the Church for his purpose, to further his kingdom. We need to trust the Church and God's sovereignty over it.

Many of us have been so disappointed, hurt, and abused by "the church," even more so by her clergy. With all the abuses of the ancient and modern day history, many of us have been tempted to write the whole "church thing" off, drop sails, and head back to the mainland. "Baby Boomers" in particular have an inbred suspicion of any formalized structure and see *big brother* as a pirate of sorts, greedy with impure motives, wanting to get into our pockets, ready to rip our sails and steal our treasure at the drop of a gold doubloon.

I get that.

Yet, regardless of all her failures and abuses, her atrocities through history and ongoing in-fighting over proper use of theology and orthodoxy, the church remains an expression of the very Body of Christ.

Go figure. Again, he is that big to take our water and change it to wine.

God has actually chosen to incarnate himself to the world through his church. In fact, Jesus *likes* the Church. He breathes through the Church. He blesses the Church. He does stuff in the the Church. For those reasons alone, it can be trusted.

It's a hard pill to swallow, especially for those who have been deceived, manipulated, and abused by the Church's leaders.

While in Holy Apostles, Katy, Texas, a woman made an appointment with me to talk about a new-styled service we were experimenting with. The service was called *A Service of Rest and Respite*, a low-key service, designed to be a safe and cozy place with smells of incense, candles, reflective music, and times of silence. I was sitting in my office the morning after our first service, reflecting how wonderful and "shalom-like" it was - everything I had hoped it would be - when a knock came at my door.

Standing there was a woman, looking terse and hollow. I had recognized her from the service the night before. She was a first time visitor. I invited her to sit on the sofa. She closed the door and insisted on standing.

"I was at the service last night."

"I know. I saw you." I studied her face. She was visibly upset. "It was great, don't you think?"

"Not so much. I have a question for you Fr. Bill." She stepped towards the desk, but then backed away.

"Sure. Anything." I was assuming she was going to tell me how much the service meant to her. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

She clutched her purse tightly and nervously asked, "Are you always going to wear... Are you always going to be wearing robes?"

"Robes"? At these services?" I tried to make the connection. "Yeah, I think so. We want the service to have a traditional sort of ancient-future feel to it. So, yes, robes will be a big part of that."

She bit the inside of her lip. "Well then, if that's the case, I won't be attending your services."

"Why is that? Something about the robes?"

Over the course of the next 15 minutes, remaining standing and clutching her purse, she confided in me exactly what "robes" were all about. With trembling voice, shaking hands, and deep sobbing she shared she had attended a church - years ago.

"Like yours."

It had been a traumatic season in her life. She caught her husband cheating on her with another woman (a friend of hers), hooked on pills, and a confessed sex addict. This caused her physical health to take a downwards spiral for the worse. Having no where to turn, she made an appointment with her priest. The two of them met one evening in his office and, after pouring her heart to him in trembling and complete vulnerability, he rose from the chair, stepped around the desk, and raped her.

And he was wearing robes.

My heart sank. "That was not Jesus," I said.

"I know, I know." She backed away towards the door and took the handle. "But I just can't do it. Not now, not here anyway."

I never saw her again.

Many of us, like this precious child of God, have been abused by the underbelly of the church, its barnacles, algae, and scum, for which I am deeply sorry. If you are one of those people I ask your forgiveness on behalf of the Church.

Even so, when it comes down to it, for saints, there is simply no where else to go, but into the ark of God. I'm reminded of Simon Peter's words when everyone was offended by Jesus and leaving him. Jesus asked him, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jon 6:67-68)

Even in the heartache, outrage, and deep wounding I remain convinced the Church can still be a place of healing, of safety and trust from the storms of life, even a vehicle whereby God leads, directs, and transforms his children into the very image of his Son.

The Church has been a seaworthy vessel for a long time. Her policies are tried and true, her care has been embraced by saints through the ages. Even in the normal process of

the business, God is his church. This is seen clearly in areas of accountability and due process.

When a priest does something stupid (and is exposed to his or her overseers), the shepherding elders of the Church at once step in to firstly protect the abused and secondly to seek a course of appropriate discipline for the priest as well, usually with intent for healing and restoration in order that he or she can continue their call in health and future accountability. Sometimes this is impossible, as the offending priest refuses Godly admonishment. However, when the priest humbles herself at the feet of Jesus, she becomes a stellar witness to God's grace to herself and others.

Take the Long Way Home

In the "process department," the Church is extremely thorough, excruciatingly so.

This is for the protection of the flock, and for maintaining a credible witness of Christ to the world. This is especially true in administering Sacraments and Sacramental Rites.

Marriage. Take the rite of Marriage, for example. The church maintains high Biblical standards for marriage. We don't want to be painted as a "marrying machine." Thus, real time is given in preparation and counsel before engaging in the rite. We sit with those seeking the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. We talk about roles, expectations, and what a Christian marriage looks like. We talk theology, we pray together and practice conflict resolution. We are serious about it and actually require

pre-marital counseling, before even setting a date for the ceremony. We know that anyone can go online to fill out a form to perform a ceremony for friends, and even get "ordained." But that is not how we do it in this branch of the Body of Christ.

Ordination. Or, how about the process it takes to get ordained as a priest or pastor?

In most mainline denominations, there are boards to stand before, tests to take, psychiatric exams, at least three years of graduate school (post graduate), more boards, written tests, oral tests, and internships. For me, when I was going through the process, it seemed like forever.

Geesh! Even Jesus himself would have trouble becoming a priest!

Yet, with all it's hoop-hopping, it's all very intentional. The church is adamant about keeping checks and balances. The Apostle Paul minces no words to Timothy in hastily ordaining or appointing individuals to positions of leadership and authority (1 Timothy 5:22). We want to make sure a person is called, anointed, tested, and educated before releasing them to be "mini-shepherd's" of souls. My journey to priesthood - in a nutshell - looks like this.

I was raised in the Episcopal Church and pretty much hated it. I served as an acolyte, went to youth group, and did all the religious stuff, mainly because there were foxy girls.

After graduating from High School I washed my hands of it all and began seeking God in all the wrong places. I eventually did "find Christ" (the terminology in that day) and - boy - was I surprised.

It's Jesus? You gotta be kidding me. I guess my church was right after all.

I surrendered to Christ, got filled with the Spirit (first time) and I tripped around the globe for three years as an on-fire Christian doing missions, farming cotton, and sharing my testimony to just about everybody who picked me up hitchhiking (it was safe back then).

One day I sensed the Lord say, "I want you to get back to the church."

I was appalled and argued. "The Church? The *Episcopal Church*?! You want me to go back there?"

"Yes."

"But Lord, you don't even live there!"

[Awkward silence.]

"Just check it out for yourself."

"Okay."

He won. (God always wins.) I found a cute place in Boca Raton, St. Andrews Chapel, and was really blessed. It was a bit of a culture shock, I'm not gonna lie. I had been used to

a "life in the fast lane" Christian lifestyle - preaching in the streets, laying hands of people for healing, seeing signs and wonders, and dancing through life anyway the wind blew. When I returned to the church it felt like I had spiritual whiplash. Like hitting a brick wall, I was slimed by the highest quality of New England Maple Syrup.

*Everything here seemed to be happening so very ... so very
ssllllooooooowwww.*

But I hung in there. In time, I saw that the fruit was lasting. Discipleship was happening (not as fast or as much as I would have liked - but, all the same, well-rooted.) These guys were the real deal. In the years to follow, most of the priests I met even had major conversion experiences and considered themselves even to be "Born Again."

The pace of the church is designed for the long road, the eternal road. Ours isn't a *wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am* spirituality, an inch deep and a mile wide steeple-chasing spiritual goose-bump sort of place.

In fact, the compression, the perceived holding back of things (often perceived in liturgy, prayers, and weekly Communion), in itself makes way for a much deeper and richer faith. It's like a garden hose with the water going full blast. Without a spray nozzle (or even your thumb holding back the water) the water would sloppily guzzle all over the ground. But when a nozzle is added - the disciplines of the Church - the water becomes channeled, compressed into streams that dig deep into the earth. Sure, it may not be as impressive as simply letting the water flow (nor as fun) but, at the end of the day, it provides a powerful, life-

changing spring which reaches into the heart of the garden.

Today, some 30 years later as an ordained person, I am more sold out on the Lord's wisdom in the Church than ever before, even with the knowledge of her ugly and hurtful underbelly. It's been quite a journey. I've been knocked down, blessed, disciplined, restored, and granted greater authority. I am a realist. I see her faults (and grieve her abuses). All the same, among my many conversions in Christ, conversion to the Church remains a close second to my conversion to Christ.

A beautiful prayer for the church - her call and purpose - is described in this prayer from the Anglican prayer book:

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on our whole church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Collects and Occasional Prayers,
Book of Common Prayer,
p.646



18

Summary

We are not meant to do life alone.

Two powerful verses assuring us of God's Presence and fellowship with us as we sail across our life-lakes are:

'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.'

Jeremiah 31:33

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

John 15:15

These Scriptures assure us of his Life in our life. Words like "covenant" and "friends" reveal a relationship that is certain, committed, faithful, and intimate.

As we drop our sails, tie our boats to the dock and sit in our Adirondack chairs with an umbrella drink (or two), let's do some reflecting on the waters we've sailed in this book. It's always good to reflect and recap one's significant moments of the day.

God's Maturing Voice

We've learned God speaks in accordance to our spiritual maturity.

While he doesn't give children a baby Holy Spirit and grown-ups a grown-up Holy Spirit, he does disclose himself in ways that we are understandable, regardless of our maturity in him. If you are a sage, his disclosure will be quite different than if you have only recently surrendered your life to him. Additionally, the means of his disclosure will vary throughout our lives, to keep us continually sailing in faith.

It's notable to mention his voice rarely is in sync with our maturity level, but is revealed a tad beyond where we are. Part of relationship with Christ is movement. We grow in the Lord, we are transformed from glory to glory, we were once children and now we are adults. This movement into maturity is his will for all of us. Thus, we will always discern his voice as being familiar, yet oddly remote, at the same time. Again, this God playing head games, or hide-n-go seek with us. It's his way of promoting growth and leading us into a faithful dependence upon him.

Not A One Shot Deal

Supernatural guidance is considered normative in the life of a Christian.

When we open our hearts to the reality of God it is far more than checking a box and going about life as we might ordinarily do. We enter into a *relationship* with him, we "sup" with him, we are considered "friends."

Many have been in churches their whole life and have yet to experience the saving grace of our Lord. They may think the Christian day to day experience is for the "Pentecostals", or that God rarely breaks into their *Kronos* times. Yet, we have learned that our conversion to Christ and fellowship with the Spirit are not static realities but living dynamics that ebb and flow throughout the whole of our lives.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, it was rare for people to communicate directly to God. Things have changed since then. Through our baptisms we gain entrance into the household of God. We become his temple. He takes up residence in our hearts. Thus, with the psalmist we can say, "Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" (Psalm 139:7) If you are a Christian, and Christ lives in your heart, his fellowship and guidance is considered normative. (See also Psalm 23.)

Without Faith Life Stops

The importance of faith (both believing and heading into the lake) cannot be under-emphasized. Of course, people can eat, live, and pray outside of faith, but true sailing occurs when a person steps off the dock and onto the boat.

Additionally the Bible attests to the importance - no, the essentialness - of moving into a life of faith.

You can never please God without faith, without depending on him. Anyone who wants to come to God must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely look for him.

Hebrews 11:6, NLT

Biblical faith requires two essentials: belief and action, both of which are two sides of the same coin. God's disclosed guidance is always met by action, or it is considered of nought.

Think of two circles: one circle is the Godhead, the other circle is you. The circles move towards one another and overlap - not by much, just about a third of the way or so. This overlapped space - the area where the circles have blended, is called "faith." It is the realm where we hear God, he fellowships with us, and where he calls us into action.

God, if you will, "lives in faith." While he's much bigger than the overlapping place between us and him, he reveals just enough to get us moving.

Simply hearing God's voice doesn't mean a person is "in the Faith." Faith demands response. For example, before I became a Christian I was sitting on a sofa completely blitzed out of my mind when my friend John put on a tune by the Eagles. Who would expect God's voice to be on the lyrics of Desperado. But they were. And they came at a time when I knew I needed to get right with him.

*You better let somebody love you
You better let somebody love you
You better let somebody love you
Before it's too late*

It may not take faith to hear his voice, but it always takes faith to step into the thing. Many hear, few respond. Faith is an action verb and God is always sailing us deeper into faith.

Nothing is Wasted

Even if we "miss God " and make a wrong decision, he will always make it right.

He is righter than our wrongest wrong, forgiving of our greatest sins, and more understanding of our mistakes than we'll ever be.

In his covenant of unconditional love and grace, there is really nowhere we hide from his Spirit. Even in the most miserable repercussions from poor choices he is bigger, able to reveal his love and redemption in the midst of the thing. He'll flip it all around for his glory, so when we glance back at the events from a year, a decade, or even half a century later, we will see his hand working in the thing to give the Father glory.

Many people believe that doing the "right thing" is Godly. But Godliness has more to do with who we're becoming than making right decisions. God is way more concerned about who we are in Christ - our character, fruitfulness,

and sanctification - than he is in the menial specifics floating endlessly in a lull and debating whether we should crank up the motor or not.

You may find yourself sailing up the wrong channel, or shipwrecked with tattered sails on a beach on a desert island. No matter. The Word assures us,

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

It doesn't matter if you have a hole in your hull or a starfish sucking the life out of the top of your head. As you respond to his invitation to get back onto the lake, he can fill the hole and give you the power to flip the starfish into the water like a frisbee.

He's just that big.

Theological Belief is Inconsequential

In the Body of Christ we have people who's theology forbids them to experience the thrill of adventure found in the wind and lake. Are these sailors excluded from the purposes of the Lord? Are they somehow inferior (like they have little sails), or something?

Hardly.

People who live for revelational supernatural experiences and people who don't believe in revelational supernatural experiences will, at the end of the day, wind up in the same place.

Again, God is that big.

One may hear God's voice in experiential thunder, another may live in the fear of God according to the precepts of Scripture and never even think of God speaking in thunder. No matter. Simply sailing in the fear of God, abiding on the waters of the Word, and humbly doing life under the rays of his sunshine will get anyone where they need to be.

We often underestimate, or limit, the tremendous freedom to live our lives as we simply choose to commit our ways to the Lord. (See Proverb 3:6.)

I am an experiential fellow. I love the holy-ghost goose bumps I get in worship, and I love seeing people freed from demonic strongholds. Still, I say, people who live from mountain top to mountain top, going from conference to conference, healing to healing, seeking one spiritual goose-bump after another give me the holy willies.

No doubt these "steeple chasers" have great passion - I'll give us that - but, oddly enough, an over emphasis on signs and wonders often flies in the face of the Person of Christ (oddly enough!). This phenomenon is nothing new. People in Jesus' day had it, too.

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

John 6:36

Signs and wonders will come - as will prophecies, tongues, miracles, and even license plates - but they will come as a result of us seeking the Person of God. In short, we live for the One who wears the robe, not for the tassels.

Sailing Within the Compass Points

Compass points (and buoys) give us the essential trajectory for a safe sail.

God's peace, illuminated Scripture, repeated circumstances, and Godly council are tried and true compass points to consider as you chart your course onto the water. We expect God to break into our life with intent and purpose. A good sailor would be foolish to ignore his *kairos* disclosure into our *Kronos* life.

The Thrill of His On-time Presence

Finally, the Lord takes delight in leading us into the lake while at the same time *accompanying* us in the sail as if he doesn't know where we're going. Then, when we finally reach our destinations, he is equally as joyful as we are. He is both our final destination and our current passenger, with the emotional fortitude to be both places at the same time.

He does that because he loves us, enjoys us, and wants to be in the most intimate parts of our lives. This is why, as we place our trust and hope in him through Jesus Christ, he talks with us, sails with us, and reveals the way we should go.

Remember that darn Easter Bunny?

You Can Get There From Here

I used to believe two lies:

1. I would never be able to hear God like other people because I wasn't good enough, religious enough, or "whatever" enough.
2. The other lie was akin to that, but a bit different: That hearing God's voice depended on me, and my works of righteousness. For example, if I biffed a quiet time, decided not to forgive a friend, or even got involved in intentional sinning, then I would be unable to hear the Lord until a certain self-manufactured time had passed.

Both these lies have their roots in something I do (or don't do) that limits God.

If I base my ability to discern God's disclosure in my heart upon things done or things left undone, I am self-limiting my own ability to hear him. My mentor, Mike Flynn, used to say, "We don't trust in our ability to hear God, but in God's ability to speak."

Perhaps you are on the outside of this thing, standing on the dock and wondering how it all happens. You've met sailors on the dock and spotted something in them. Perhaps it was a certain sparkle in their eye, a crazy zest for life in their hearts, or a rare authenticity in the way they spoke that attracted you to them. You yearned to have what they had. You wonder.

How did they get there? How was it they got onto the lake?

Well, in once sense, they simply decided. They responded to God's invitation and intentionally decided to step off the dock and onto the boat. From then on out it is about trusting the goodness of God and surrendering to his breezes to sail you in and out of harbors, keep you safe from shallow reefs, and bring you into the heavenly port at the end of life.

The Bible says it's as simple as opening a door.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

Revelation 3:20

He Knocks

The verse above says that he comes to you (not vice versa) and knocks on the door. When you hear the knocking, you respond. You pick up your *iPhone* and open the Google *Nest Cam* app to see who's standing on the front porch.

"Who is it?"

"It's Me," he replies. "Are you ready to eat?"

"Um... Just a minute."

You enlarge the camera and see he's standing on a dock next to a sailboat, holding a picnic basket and motioning, Come on, let's go! It's time."

You Respond

Fearfully and trembling you step onto the dock, first walking - but when you see a joyfilled smile breaking across his face - you begin running now to Jesus.

The further out on the dock you notice things you've never seen. The fog is clearing, the sky is blue. Even the lake seems to be calling you deeper.

The Encounter

He embraces you with wide arms and a whole-hearted laugh you've never heard before. He is actually glad to see you. There is no disappointment in his eyes, only pride. In his embrace his breath fills your lungs, his heat pulsates through your very being. Just standing there in his arms you feel like a new person.

He looks at you deeply and points to the boat, tethered loosely to the dock, sails up, deck sparkling, and motor idling, and waiting.

"What took you so long? Let's do this thing!"

You both laugh, hop into the boat and leave the dock behind. For the rest of the "day," he's right there, just over your shoulder, guiding you this way and that way into his perfect pleasure.

It's just that simple.

My prayer for you, dear reader, is that you would grant Christ access to your boat - your keel, rudder, main sail, and jib - right now, all if it.

If it's been a while, do it again.

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Matthew 4:18-20

Happy sailing.

Epilogue

Definition of Terms

I love the scene in *Jaws* where Chief Martin Brody (played by Roy Scheider) said to Quint (played by Robert Shaw), "We're going to need a bigger boat."

The boat will our final parabolic centerpiece, which we'll look at in a moment. Throughout this book we've been speaking in stealthy terms. Just in case there's any confusion, let's unpack these terms and take a quick review before we talk about the bigger boat.

The Sun

We sail under the sun (hopefully!). All we do is shadowed under his warm rays.

As we sail, or do life, all we do is done under God's unconditional love (under which all believers do life). Whether we are cresting around buoys or stuck going nowhere in the doldrums, the sovereign sun is the great overseer under which we sail.

Our Lake

The lake is what our boats sit on. It's reliable, firm, unpredictable, and solid. We do life on the the lake. The "sail" (our life) rides upon the ebb and flows of the lake. At best, the lake is that wholly graceful place that provides a

trustworthy assurance as we abide in his promises and the foundation of the Faith.

A person's lake can be a moment or last a lifetime. Daily sails or lifetime sails need the lake. It is the thing upon which we sail in the currents of God's call.

His Wind

All life is filled with the breath of God. Ever since Eden God's pentecostal breath has inhabited all of humankind.

Many of us are familiar with Zechariah 4:6. "Not by might, not my strength, but my my Spirit, says the Lord." I have often said nothing lasting in the kingdom remains if not motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Sailing on lake, our boats are solely dependent on wind.

The problem with us is that we want to Breezes, or winds are God's Spirit, leading us, inviting us, and pushing us deeper into the waters of his heart and his intent for our life's. The wind is an unseen variable (unpredictable, too), yet necessary to fill our sails, or hearts, for us to do life as God intended.

Our Boat

So what about the boat? Up to this point, we've been referring to the "boat" as a vehicle of movement, you, me, individual persons or families.

My body is a boat. The wind is God's call for me to sail my boat out of the lagoon and into the lake.

My boat is equipped with everything it needs to capture, harness, and embody the Spirit's Presence in my life. It's *sails* are made to capture divine disclosure and power. It's *daggerboard* maintains perfect balance through swells, and my rudder leverages my *will* into God's direction for me.

Other Facets

Someone once told me that God will speak through anything our attention is drawn to. Wherever we are, God will speak through that - be it a football game, a church service, a walk in nature, peering through a telescope, or a sailboat. He is just that anxious to reveal himself to us.

His words and truth revealed through sailing, in my experience, are inexhaustible - many of which I have laid aside for you to discover. You may see the sailor's life jacket as the amour of God (Ephesians 6:11-18), for example, or the lines attaching your boat to the docks as the anchor of your faith (Hebrews 6:9).

I've just given you enough to set you off in the right direction. In the words of the Moody Blues, *Out and In*:

If you think it's a joke
That's all right
Do what you want to do
I've said my peace
And I'll leave it all up to you



About the Author

Rev. Bill Blomquist is a musician, songwriter, and storyteller. After becoming a Christian he served as a lay leader until attending seminary and being ordained. He serves with his wife as Rector in a small vibrant church in New England. For more information on Bill, or to inquire about a workshop or travel to the Holy Land, visit his website www.blomquistian.com.