

**Empowered by the Spirit,**

**we are to make disciples of Jesus, of all people of all ages,**

**to the glory of God the Father.**

## Introduction

*Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. Jn 12:37*

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Eph 6:12*

*This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. Heb 2:3b-5*

- The objective of the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20) is the expansion of the Kingdom of God in this age, not just through new believers in each generation (converts) but by developing followers of Jesus who seek to live the way God intended (disciples).
- People do not generally believe and then follow Jesus without first experiencing some resistance, either internally or externally.
- This struggle originates in the spiritual realm, and (from our Western materialistic worldview) we do not acknowledge this spiritual realm in Western cultural behaviour and response to events.
- Without help from the Spirit, we cannot engage effectively in this struggle.
- The Spirit wants to equip and encourage us to be effective.
- God can intervene in any situation without us, but the Church brings glory to Him when its members humbly engage and participate in co-operation with, and in submission to, the Spirit's work in them and through them.

God has always confirmed his authority by signs, wonders and miracles – events and interventions in the physical realm that defy natural explanation and are consistent with his nature. The Old Testament is littered with these happenings which testified to God's sovereignty. Sometimes, these came as direct interventions from God himself (e.g. Exodus 14), and sometimes through the Holy Spirit resting on someone for a purpose, e.g. Saul prophesying in 1 Samuel 10:9-13

Jesus' ministry is packed with inexplicable (from a materialistic perspective) actions and events that supported his claims to have authority to forgive sins, set captives free, etc. John's Gospel refers to these actions and events as 'signs'. A sign points the way and provides meaning, in this case confirming that the Kingdom of Heaven was, indeed, very near. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the followers of Jesus regularly performed miraculous signs to demonstrate the authenticity of the gospel message. God also intervened directly to ensure that the gospel and its messengers were able to go to the 'ends of the earth'. We are the fruit and legacy of that endeavour.

God is a 'giver' by nature. The Father gave his Son. The Son has sent us the Holy Spirit. The members of the Trinity give gifts to us so that we might bring glory to God by also working together as a holy community. God the Father delights in us and our varied natural giftings point to the Creator's image and nature; we discover talents and abilities that we can develop as reflections of

his glorious likeness. Jesus gives gifts to the Church in the form of role holders – the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and the teachers (Eph 4:11) so that the holy community together is guided towards displaying the Father’s likeness. The Spirit gives gifts to Church, to individual believers in the form of ‘unnatural’ abilities including those listed in 1 Cor 12 (non-exhaustive). The one Spirit gives many gifts with the aim of interdependent ministry that honours Jesus as Lord, who is the likeness of the Father. These spiritual gifts are bestowed rather than acquired, for a number of purposes:

- To build up the Church community
- To minister to those within and without the Church community
- To build up the individual in their own faith
- To challenge the ungodly to turn around and receive the gift salvation
- To put bounds on the impact of sinfulness and godlessness on society, for example, through selfless service in the ministry of healing and compassion to those who are suffering, or to confront injustice

The conferring of a spiritual gift can come as a surprise to the recipient, it may strengthen and redirect an existing ability, and it may support and complement a calling and vocation. Gifts should be desired and individuals may receive more than one. The Spirit bestows these gifts and they are not earned or bought.

A spiritual gift can be used in whatever circumstances the believer is in and according to the true direction of the Spirit. Its use will not contradict the Gospel or the very nature of God from whom it originates. However, within the Church community, its use is also designed to encourage that community to true faith and to extend the Kingdom of God. Therefore, its use must also be in submission to godly authority within that Church community. The use of spiritual gifts in the Church community is an essential and integral part of the Church’s mission but history shows that this has often been neglected or discouraged.

Many people can recount stories of the abuse and misuse of spiritual gifts within the Church and beyond, and this remains a significant barrier to developing a healthy freedom to exercise these gifts in an appropriate and life-giving way. The aim of the remainder of this document is to assist in developing a framework for TGS to welcome and submit to the work of the Holy Spirit in public and private ministry. The following is not intended to be comprehensive, but a starting point.

## Purpose

The following sections propose the guiding principles and practical implications for our Church community, corporately and individually, if we are seriously committed to:

- Acknowledging the empowering work of the Holy Spirit both in us and through us;
- Accepting that without the Spirit’s presence, we labour in vain;
- Devoting ourselves to follow Jesus with all our heart, soul, mind and strength;
- Obeying the specific commands of Jesus and accepting his conditional invitations to a closer walk with Him;
- Praying for his Kingdom to come in our neighbourhood, country and around the world;
- Growing in the knowledge and experience of a Spirit-led life;
- Acting in faith in response to general and specific revelation;
- Standing together in the face of hostility, ridicule and persecution;

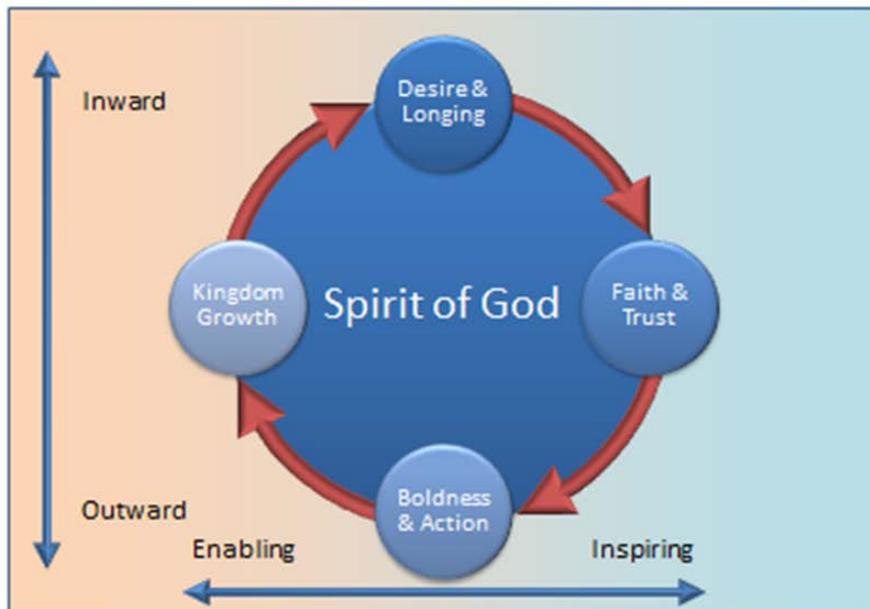
## Signs and Wonders at The Good Shepherd: The Next Step

- Embracing suffering, isolation, injustice and deprivation as a result of faithfulness to the gospel, in the pattern of our Saviour;
- Persevering in witness and intercession whatever our circumstances;
- Identifying with the normal experience of faithful, authentic followers of Jesus throughout history.

### Guiding Principles

1. Signs and Wonders authenticate the bold proclamation of the true Gospel.
2. We should always seek more of God, not S & W in themselves.
3. Courage, faith and risk are all necessary elements in working in obedience to the Spirit.
4. God blesses corporate obedience and unity of purpose, rather than individualistic zeal.
5. God does not force His will upon us; we must leave space for Him to guide and empower us.
6. S & W are a gracious gift of God; there are no formulae or guarantees that they will happen.
7. True S & W will restore hope, wholeness, freedom, health, relationship and joy.
8. True S & W will strengthen our faith, and challenge the unbelief of those watching.
9. True S & W will be consistent with the Word of God and the revealed character of God.
10. Discernment ensures that counterfeit S & W do not deceive, distract or dismember us.

### Spirit Empowerment Cycle



The above diagram attempts to show how the work of the Spirit in us individually and corporately may be leading us in a growth cycle of invitation and obedience. There is an Inward - Outward dimension and an Inspiration – Enabling dimension. The Spirit of God at work in us plants a seed of Desire & Longing, which invites an increase in Faith & Trust. This, in turn, is grounded by an outward act of Boldness & Action, which the Spirit translates into Kingdom Growth, either internally and/or externally. The seed of Desire & Longing is reinforced by the result, and the cycle repeats.

## Practices and Values

Rather than being prescriptive about the nature of our structure, activities and content of meetings, the following is a list of practices and values that could form the basis of 'the next step'.

1. **Prayerfulness** – Jesus was faithful in prayer and withdrew regularly before making significant decisions. This intensity of prayer always preceded major developments of his earthly ministry, including his frequent confrontations with the established religious order. It would seem that the focus was on listening to his Father, not speaking. Jn 5:19
2. **Receptiveness** – through our listening, we are open and receptive to what the Spirit reveals about our Father's will. We yield and abandon to the Spirit. Ps 51:17. We do not hold tradition, ritual and denominational identity tightly as though sacred, but offer these to God. The forms may have been effective and valid, but could have now become barriers to a new move of God. The New Covenant fulfilled and surpassed the Old Covenant, Heb 10:8-18.
3. **Creativity** – we seek, through our openness, to embrace new expressions of faith, worship, obedience, prayer, fellowship, communication, ministry, service, etc. Ps 40:3, Isa 43:18-19.
4. **Cohesiveness** – we act together as one, in unity of vision and purpose. We stand by each other in trials and difficulties. We cover each other's weaknesses and employ our strengths. We share, we give out, we receive. We are committed to glorifying our Father through our corporate impact and witness, not individual attainment. Jn 17:20-26.
5. **Action** – faith without deeds is meaningless and empty. We aim to put into practice what we believe. We trust in our Father and his good will for us. We choose faith over fear, and accept the risk of possible failure in preference to disobedience. Jas 1:22-25, 2:17,26.
6. **Encouragement** – we try out new ideas and know that often we may fall short of the ideal. We value obedience and courage, especially when overcoming past hurts and previous failures. We offer encouragement to grow and persevere so that challenges and barriers are overcome, 1 Th 5:11. We extend grace to those who fall, and mercy to those who humbly admit their failings. We nurture and love those who struggle to overcome unhelpful behaviours. Rom 15:1-7.
7. **Discernment** – we do not accept declarations, words, manifestations, etc. without testing and assessing the validity and underlying spirit of those contributions. We seek to humbly correct, teach and redirect when we discern an error has been made, or that other spirits are at work, 2 Tim 4:2, 1 Cor 14:29.
8. **Security** – we seek to protect the confidentiality of an individual's situation by keeping knowledge of specific personal ministry to only those present. We also seek to create a freedom for individual creativity and experimentation, avoiding destructive criticism, gossip or judgmental opinion. We discuss any concerns directly with the person involved as a first step, Mt 5:23-24. We act with integrity towards others, and do not become a stumbling block to their faith, Mt 18:6.
9. **Authority** – we celebrate that God does not change, and he does not contradict himself. The Spirit will not contradict God's written Word, or his revealed nature. We test the validity of contributions by their consistency with Scripture as well as discerning between true and false spirits, 1 Cor 12:10.
10. **Submission** – we accept that God promises to be present in our midst when we meet in his Name, i.e. think, speak and act in a way consistent with his character and under his authority. We accept that we may differ in our opinions from others or the majority. We submit to Jesus' command to love one another, Jn 13:34-35, Rom 12:10, and to show humility towards one another, 1 Pet 5:5-6. We only partially see and know in our current fallen human state, 1 Cor 13:12. We accept that order and structure also come from God, and that each should have the opportunity to contribute. 1 Cor 14:26-33, 40.