

# The Emerging Christian Way

## Session 4

In this session we will look at chapter 14, where Nancy Reeves looks at the question of discernment, and the final chapter with Michael Schwartzentruber.

Lenten Book Study Guide prepared by Norm Hennig-Pereira  
St. James United Church, Etobicoke

## Group or Individual Reflection

### Reading

(To be read aloud by a member of the group)

**A** religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. "Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?"

He answered, "What's written in God's Law? How do you interpret it?"

He said, "That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence - and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself."

"Good answer!" said Jesus. "Do it and you'll live."

Looking for a loophole, he asked, "And just how would you define 'neighbor'?"

Jesus answered by telling a story. "There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.

"A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill - I'll pay you on my way back.'

"What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?"

"The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded.

Jesus said, "Go and do the same." (*Luke 10:25-37 The Message*)

### Meditation

What role does the law (or scripture and tradition) play in the man's question and response? How did Jesus' response stretch his understanding of tradition, how was it transformative? (How would following Jesus' response be transformative for the man?) Based on Jesus' response, is correct belief what God wants most from us?

### Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen.*

“ ... allow the icon of the tree to be a symbol of your own life, which reaches and grows into the world, into relationships, toward the light; even as it roots, supports and sustains itself in community and in tradition. ”

- Tim Scorer, p. 46

### Time of Sharing

Please share a time where you did something out of the ordinary for you. What went into deciding to take that course of action? What happened?



Nancy Reeves

*“One of the foundations for developing our discernment muscle is self-awareness. Knowing ourselves makes it easier to discriminate between the voice of Spirit and our ego.”*

p. 237

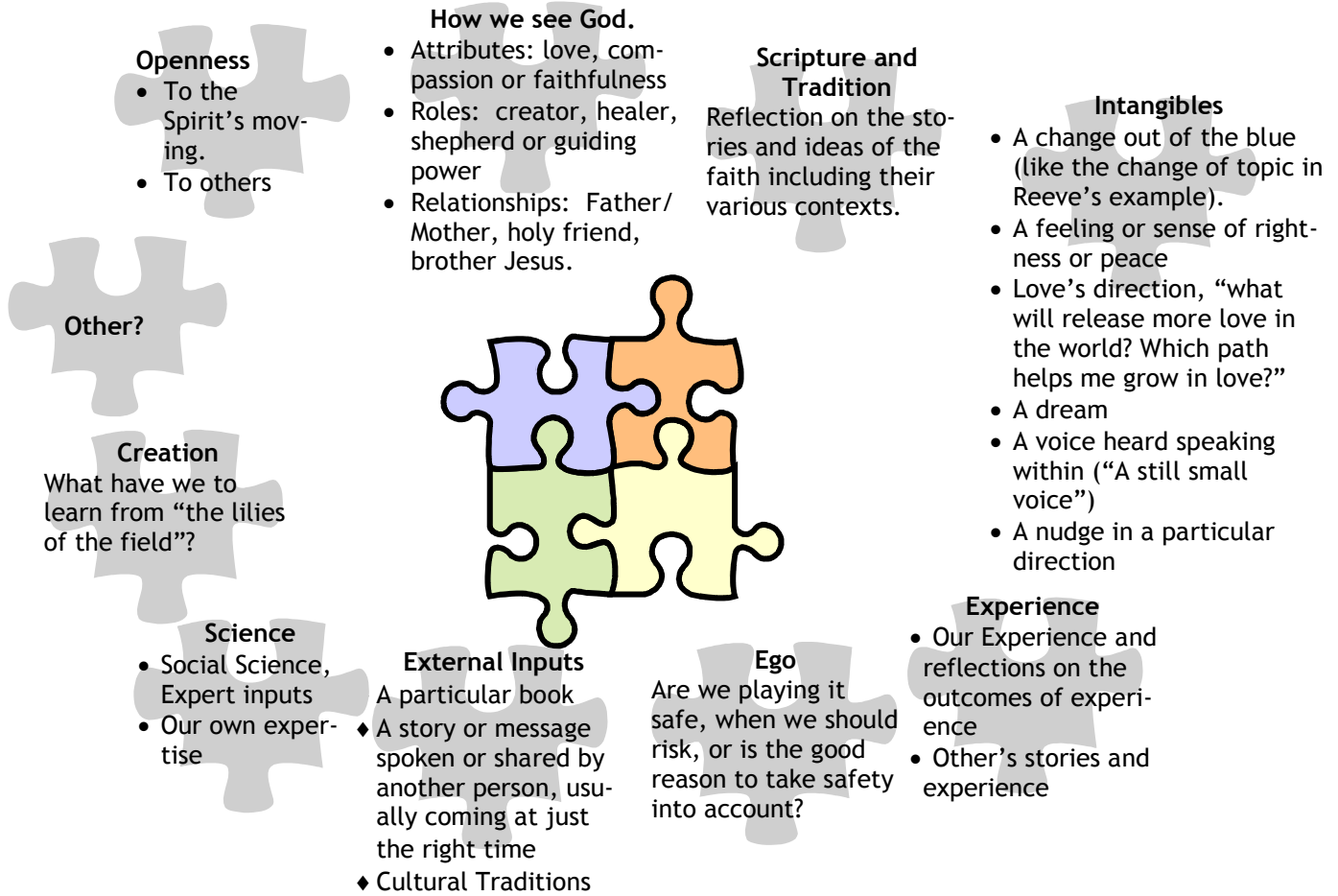
### Questions for Reflection

1. What are or were your first impressions of this chapter? What did you like about the chapter? What did you find that was reassuring? What was disturbing? Why?
2. How interested do you believe God is in our decisions? (cp. p. 238) What is God's desire for the world, and how does that relate to God's desire for us?
3. On page 236, Reeves writes, “Decision making is quite different than spiritual discernment. ... Spiritual discernment implies that God is also involved in the process and choice, and leaves room for messages or leadings from the Holy One. ... Spiritual discernment is undertaken not just to make good decisions, but to develop a richer relationship with God.” Is this an apt description of discernment? Is there anything you would add or change? What and why?
4. Reeves continues, “Many people view spiritual discernment as a procedure or tool—something to be done when making a major decision. If, instead, we view discernment as an *attitude*, we will discern always, and always be receptive to divine guidance.” How have you, or do you see spiritual discernment? How does one develop an attitude of discernment? What would need to be in place?
5. Reeves writes, “We are to be spiritual directors or companions rather than spiritual educators, gardeners nurturing spirituality rather than architects designing and building our children's faith.” How would this change what we do? Reeve's emphasis here is children, what if we were to take her advice for adults as well, how we change how we do adult education?
6. In speaking about discernment, Reeves writes, “No one is given complete information about the divine will for themselves or others. By giving us partial information, God invites us into deeper awareness of our core need to be in relationship.” Would you agree or disagree with this statement? How could you use this information?

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### Notes

### Dimensions of Discernment



7. Look at the “Dimensions of Discernment” above, which are based on Reeves chapter as well as some of what Tim Scorer has written in chapter 2, and we have explored in our worship time. Take a moment to reflect on each of the different dimensions beginning with openness.
8. How do you see the different dimensions interrelating? Are there times where an emphasis might be placed on one more than another?
9. What do you think about the idea that we might be “hard-wired for God”?
10. How realistic is Schwartzentruber being when he writes, “It’s all too easy to assume that most people believe as we do, especially if we have believed something for a long time. ... Yet in most congregations, you don’t have to scratch very far beneath the surface to discover real differences, and real passion around those differences. ... Ideally, ... we will have the courage to speak our truth and be committed to honoring and respecting the truth of the other.” (p.246)
11. Based on your readings and discussion, how do you relate to Schwartzentruber’s comment that, “It is a relief to discover that we are not alone, that there are other people out there who want a credible faith to embrace; and we are grateful that they have managed to articulate this faith so well.”? (243)



“ ... diversity and the tension it creates are part of a natural, evolutionary process that will inevitably take us to someplace new ”

p. 247

## Gleanings

What have you learned? How do you feel in general and about what you have discussed? Have you noticed a change in the way you feel from the beginning of this discussion to the end? If yes, describe the change. What are some of the insights that you will be taking home from this discussion?

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## Notes

*“Ultimately, it comes down to ‘walking the talk,’ to allowing our experience to transform our hearts and lives. This is, after all, the core, the very nature of the faith we proclaim.”*

(p 247)

## Closing Prayer



One: May the Lord bless what we have shared this day to our enlightenment and growth.

**All: May the Lord grant our hearts' desires for those we love, the human family and the whole of Creation.**

One: We pray for ....

(The prayer continues with members sharing a concern or name. After each concern is expressed, the group responds with ...)

**All: Lord, hear our prayer.**

(After all the prayers have been shared, the leader closes with ...)

One: Lord, hear our prayers, keep our desire for wisdom alive, help us to listen, act and grow, that all our days would be blessed with shalom—wholeness and peace.

**All: Amen.**



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### Feedback Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this Lenten series. To help us plan the next series, please fill out the following questionnaire and return it to your study leader, host or Rev. Norm.

#### The Book

Easy to Read		2	3	4	5	Difficult Read
Too few pages to read for each session		2	3	4	5	Too many pages to read for each session
Not enough chapters covered in the study		2	3	4	5	Too many chapters covered in the study
Disliked the book		2	3	4	5	Enjoyed the book

#### The Guide

I disliked the meditations		2	3	4	5	I greatly enjoyed the meditations
The “time for sharing” questions were not helpful		2	3	4	5	The time for sharing questions were very helpful
The margin quotes were unnecessary		2	3	4	5	The margin quotes were very helpful
The questions did not engage conversation		2	3	4	5	The questions were very good for engaging conversation
There were not enough questions		2	3	4	5	There were too many questions
The summaries, when they appeared were not necessary		2	3	4	5	The summaries, where they appeared were very helpful

#### The Study

I have not grown through this study		2	3	4	5	I have grown a great deal through this study
As a result of this study, I feel less confident about my faith		2	3	4	5	As a result of this study, I feel more confident about my faith
Overall I rate the study a zero		2	3	4	5	Overall I rate the study highly

Please rank the following in terms of your interest, circle any particular items that you specifically would like to know more about.

- Study a self help book like “the 7 habits of successful people” or “the 4 agreements” from a faith perspective.
- Studies on particular topics, such as, forgiveness, ethics and justice, discernment
- Books on the life a famous person, time or movement in history.
- Studies or Books on spirituality, such as prayer, meditation, contemplation, well being, etc.
- Books on theology, or current movements in theology.
- Studies on a particular book of the bible.
- Studies on people in the bible (Moses, David, Ruth, Deborah etc.), or bibles stories, like the parables.
- Studies on the image of God in the bible
- Studies on popular books or authors, such as “The secret”, Eckhardt Tolle,
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Are there any particular books or topics that you would like to know more about?

In terms of the time that these studies are held, please pick up to four time slots and rank them according to your preference:

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Early morning (ex. 9 am)							
Late Morning (ex. 11 am)							
Early Afternoon (ex. 1 pm)							
Late afternoon (ex. 3 pm)							
Evening (ex. 7:30 pm)							

Other Comments:

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