



**“Open, Yet Discerning”**  
**Bible Study: Book of Acts**  
**Chapters 10, 11 & 15**  
**July 6, 2008**  
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### **Prayer with Christians facing the Multiplicity of Spirituality**

*We are confused –  
By New Age spirituality and crystals,  
By goddess-talk and Christa,  
By borrowings of Native American traditions  
And Zen Buddhism,  
By charismatics, faith healers,  
And snake-handlers,  
By Tai-chi and yoga,  
By 12-step spirituality and spiritual direction, by contemplatives and revivalists, by Christian  
Scientists and Mormons, by Jehovah’s Witness and the Jesus Seminar.*

*We can have respectable dialogues with at least six clearly defined world religions, but not with these  
upstart heresies.*

*But your Holy Spirit doesn’t care about orthodoxy.  
The Spirit’s gift is poured out on those who don’t come to our churches,  
Who don’t sing our hymns, who don’t need committees....*

*You touch the tongues of all these strangers  
And they taste praise; you bless their lives  
And they are converted.  
Spirituality – it is so unrestrained, so profligate, so unexpected, so free of our control.  
We can’t keep water from them.  
When they are flowing with your love.  
God, take our hands – bring us close enough to be splashed.*

--- from Maren Tirabassi and Joan Jordan Grant’s, *An Improbable Gift of Blessing*  
(United Church Press, 1998) p. 122.

**Today, we have many options of religions**, spiritual practices or “no religion,” and it all gets rather confusing. How can we be both open to what is around us and yet discerning as Christians, choosing the right path for us?

Acts 10, 11, 15 provides some guidelines on this:

#### **1. Peter’s vision of openness and moving ‘beyond ourselves.’**

Ever since Jesus’ resurrection, Peter has been staying in Jerusalem, waiting for people to come to him and the other disciples (Similar, perhaps, to how we often expect people just to come to our church, rather than our seeking out spiritually-minded people). His staying put, makes sense, as a

Jewish Christian, because Jerusalem was the centre of Judaism. His vision, however, shows him that the Spirit of God can also come upon non-Jews and the dream is re-affirmed when he encounters the faithful Roman General. (see Acts 10)

## 2. Old routines to leave behind

Some of the Jewish Christians felt the new converts must also follow Jewish practices of diet and circumcision. Peter's response in Acts 15:9-10: "God who...always knows a person's thoughts gave them the Holy Spirit exactly as he gave them to us. He treated the outsiders exactly as he treated us, beginning at the very center of who they were and working from that center outward, cleaning up their lives as they trusted and believed him. So why are you now trying to out-god God, loading these new believers down with rules that crushed our ancestors and crushed us too?"

As a Christian community evolves, some old practices can become cumbersome and we realize these old habits aren't essential for living Christ-filled lives.

**In worship on July 6th, we discussed old routines we've left behind:** more people than just minister involved in leading worship -back to our Reformation roots that the Spirit speaks to all believers; that this congregation designed an open worship space rather than nailed-down pews of gone by years because we worship God in ways that involve movement beyond sitting and standing; types of music beyond an organ; formerly wearing hats and gloves to church; What other old routines can you think of that we've left behind or need to set aside to more fully worship God?

## 3. How do we be discerning of other religions and spiritual practices?

In Acts 15: 19-23, the early church leaders decided to not burden non-Jewish believers. They would be open and accepting, giving instruction to the new believers: "Be careful to not get involved in activities connected with idols, to guard the morality of sex and marriage, to not serve food (non-Kosher) offensive to Jewish Christians." In other words, while they were accepting and hospitable, they also set some boundaries on their openness.

### Guidelines for today:

1. **God is central to us:** Be wary of idols that detract from a God-centred life – be that our work, an addiction, etc.
2. **Relationships are sacred to us** and we treat them with respect and care.
3. **Respect another's cultures that have nothing to do with their ability to be faithful to God** (i.e. our United Church's past involvement with residential schools that tried to impose a white culture on First Nations' people)
4. **Our religion takes us beyond ourselves.** It involves service to others. This guideline is implied several times in our text – Peter discovers that his religion is beyond himself and the community he knows. In Acts 11:27-30, the early Church anticipates a famine in Jerusalem and sends aid to the people there. As Christians, this is a key way for us to be discerning about other religions and spiritual practices. Yes, this is a Christian bias and it's a good one. The mark of a true religion and spiritual practice is that it builds us up to be a better people and moves us out to be a community of God's servants in the world.