

Pastor Jeremy Peters
November 21, 2021
Sermon Transcript

Good morning.

The call to apprenticeship with Jesus, to follow Him wherever He leads, to really lean in to listen carefully for His voice, to grow in a wholehearted trust that He loves us and always knows what's best and then to unreservedly obey Him, without delay, without excuse or compromise, no matter the cost is a call that is issued to every one of us.

Jesus said in Matt.16:24: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

It is a call that is adventurous - rather than safe; challenging more often than easy; rewarding yet not without cost; and often surprising more than it is predictable.

Over the past many years, we've been returning to a verse in Proverbs that, in many ways, has been a synopsis of our experience as a church family on so many fronts. It's found in Prov.16:9 and says: "We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps."

All of these things characterize the journey that we as a church have been on, and more specifically as I'm going to share this morning, they characterize the journey that Lisa and I have been on as of late. The culmination of which is that this past week, I accepted another ministry assignment from Jesus and have tendered my resignation as the Lead Pastor of St. Albert Alliance Church.

While I realize that this will come as a shock to many of you, over the past 2.5 years now, Lisa and I have been experiencing many gentle, but persistent indications that the LORD was and has been preparing us for a major shift. I will outline an overview of our discernment journey in what follows, but first I want to be clear on a few things:

First, though I have resigned from my position as Lead Pastor, Lisa is not resigning from her position as Teaching and Women's pastor here at St. Albert Alliance.



We are so grateful that there is blessing and affirmation from both our Elders board and staff, as well as our District leadership to continue our life together with StAAC as our home church in the days ahead and for Lisa to continue to give pastoral leadership here.

Second, and related, the reason this is possible, is because the new ministry position I have accepted is with our denomination as part of our District leadership team (overseeing 116 Alliance churches in Alberta and NW Territories), and I will be based out of St. Albert (working from home when I'm not travelling).

This is what allows for a unique opportunity for our family to continue to be part of this church family, even though I am concluding my specific leadership responsibilities in lead pastoral role.

For as long as Jesus, in part through the direction of our Board of Elders, affirms and blesses this unique path, this will be our plan moving forward.

Third, the role I will be moving into is all about developing, equipping, and mentoring young leaders and pastors, as well as those who are new to one of our Alberta/NW Territory Alliance churches, in part through linking so many of the incredible people and resources within our District to one another in intentional relational networks.

This has been a kind of dream of mine since I was in bible college...so much so, that for a while, I wasn't sure if I would even become a pastor, because I really felt a call to invest deeply in the lives of other young leaders.

Fourth, this is painful and grief, disappointment and disorientation will be the experience for many of us for the next season. I have had the immense joy of serving on this pastoral team for 17.5 years (Lisa was only 12 at the time). This is the only church family our kids have any conscious memory of...and they're both in bible college now!

Earlier this week, Lisa and I were talking about the wide-ranging emotions that accompany this transition, and she described it as a 'tearing'; a pulling apart of what has been so deeply intertwined for the past 17.5 years.



We don't have nearly adequate language to reflect all that we are processing internally, and that will be true for some of you as well. Many of us will need to allow space to grieve, and though there are some common stages with grief, how and when we experience them are largely unpredictable and we need grace in the midst of it.

Fifth, we have a phenomenal leadership team of Elders and staff here at StAAC. So much so, that some people in our church who aren't participating today, won't realize I'm no longer the lead pastor for 3 months.

You are in exceptionally good hands as a congregation and I am so very proud and profoundly grateful for the team Jesus has brought together. They will lead and shepherd you well in this transition season and beyond.

Sixth, Jesus alone is the Head of the Church. Thank God, I have never been the head of this church. Jesus knows exactly what He is doing with us and He is irresistibly excited about His plans and intentions for St. Albert Alliance.

Some of you may not feel that way today. And that's ok. We need to be kind and gentle with our hearts.

But last week, Pastor Josh reminded us that in the long view of eternity, these days we're in now are extremely short. And all over the earth, it seems as though we are on an accelerated timeline for the culmination of human history before Jesus indeed returns to establish his eternal rule and reign in the new heavens and the new earth. One day - not that long from now (max a 100 years)...we will look back on these days and it will cause us to worship Him because we'll understand things we don't understand now about why this is His best plan for us.

So, perhaps one of the most important things that Jesus has entrusted to me while I have served as the Lead Pastor here, has been to help us as a congregation really learn to listen for the voice of Jesus, to discern His heart and His leading, that we might move more fully on to His agenda for our lives and His Church.



And so, for the remainder of our time here today, I am going to walk you through some of the key markers of our discernment journey, over what has been now, 2.5 years of Jesus speaking to Lisa and me about a major shift that was coming.

Discernment Journey

As I was starting to pull together an articulation of what this journey has looked like for us, I reviewed my listening prayer journal going back to July of 2019, to 'cut and paste' from my iPad all of the relevant entries related to the many 'burning bushes' that God has been using to get our attention...and the result was 47 type-written pages of recorded conversation with Jesus about this!

The sheer volume of written dialogue with the LORD about this has been a further confirmation that what we have been discerning is not a reactionary decision to the current opportunity, but a kind of culmination of this season of following Jesus.

The first prophetic word we received that God was going to do a new thing with us was spoken over us in July of 2019 while we were speaking at a small pastor's gathering in Australia:

"God sees your hearts and His Spirit is on you. He delights in you..."laughing out loud with joy over you" ...but He wants you to know there's more.

You look to the horizon and see what you feel it may hold...but what you see is a veil. God wants to tear the veil and show you that the actual horizon, your actual future is so much greater, so much more than what you are anticipating now."

Then a second prophetic word came in November of that same year (2019):

"Transition is coming. It will be a season of stretching. You will not be broken, but your capacity to carry His light will increase....

A transition time is super uncomfortable - I have a picture of a birthing delivery room...transition/delivery is a dangerous time when you can lose the mom or the baby and you really have to listen to the coach, the birth coach....and the Holy Spirit, is the greatest coach of all! ...



Even as He is stretching you, increasing your capacity, allow the Holy Spirit to anoint you fresh and anew; tuck away with Him because your life depends on it. He will never call us to something to destroy us but....He says 'Open your mouth wide and I will fill it with good things.'

We weren't sure what to do with either of these prophetic words shared with us (both given to us by people we didn't know well) but recorded them in our listening prayer journals.

Then early in the summer of 2020 (July), I had a friend and ministry colleague in our District ask me if I was considering running for District leadership at the next election.

I told him I had not given it any real thought, and he shared with me that he felt the LORD was urging him to challenge me to begin praying about some kind of District leadership. I had no internal impulse towards this at the time, but again, made a note in my journal.

Then a month later (Aug.2020), I asked one of our lifelong elders to do some listening prayer with me about a potential personal development opportunity. After a week of specific prayer about this, we connected again, and I asked him: "What do you think Jesus might be saying?" And he said to me: "I don't have any sense from the LORD about the development opportunity, *but I have had a strong sense that I am supposed to tell you that you are released from St. Albert Alliance.*"

He said that though the church would miss me, that God would undertake for the church; that we had a great team, and that though he didn't know the timing of God's call, he knew it was coming and that when it did come, that I should be free to pursue God's leading. I didn't think much of it at the time, but again, entrusted it to the LORD.

A month after this (Sept.2020), I unexpectedly had someone from our District team 'test the waters' to see if I had any openness to entering a discernment process about possibly joining the District team at that time.



It was a very disruptive couple of weeks for us, seeking to listen to, trust and obey Jesus, and during that time, I actually had a formal interview about a position and was invited to come in for a second interview.

During this two-week window of wrestle, when we shared some of the journey with Lisa's parents, we learned that they had felt the Holy Spirit say to them 4 years earlier, that in our son Caleb's gr.12 year that I would be moving into a District leadership role...and that they had been praying into this for the past 4 years. We were stunned (Caleb's gr.12 year was Sept.2020-June 2021).

However, in-between the first and second interview, we sensed Jesus speak with unmistakable clarity that we were not to move forward in the process...and so I withdrew my name from consideration before the second interview. Though we were willing to follow Jesus in this if that had been His direction, we were greatly relieved that He was not yet asking us to make this kind of transition.

We weren't sure what to make of this experience - but were slowly growing in our acceptance of the likelihood that we might not retire together at StAAC one day as we had previously hoped.

Since then, throughout the past 14 months there have continued to be small but persistent indications to us that some kind of major shift was still on the relatively near horizon, including a dream, three more prophetic words, some vocational mentoring and assessment, as well as some profound personal encounters with Jesus related to releasing our calling afresh to Him.

Then at the end of August of this past year (2021), one Saturday I received a text from a mentor/friend in our District who said this: *"Sitting here this morning, I found myself wondering where you are at in your leadership at St. Albert Alliance. You may be totally settled and feeling like that fellowship is the place forever or for the foreseeable future. But if there is anything going on in your brain (or Lisa's) that God is loosening the soil around your feet, I would encourage you to look [at a new ministry opportunity]... Just thought I would follow up on this in case it's some form of prompting from the Father."*

As I've been describing, we *have been* sensing that the 'soil beneath our feet has been loosening' over the past 2+ years, and so while the specific ministry



opportunity suggested by this mentor/friend did not stir anything within us, it did expose us to this current District leadership position for which I have now been hired.

An hour later, same day, I was together with a friend from another church in our District who out of the blue asked me if I had seen the job posting and whether or not I had been approached by anyone to consider it yet...they felt like I should be open to the possibility and to pay attention to anything Jesus might be stirring in my heart about this.

A week later, I was with some other leaders from across North America, and during a breakout session, was sharing some of my recent journey. And one of them shared with me that they thought Ps.37:4: "Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart" would be somehow important in our discernment journey. I didn't think too much of it at the time, but again, it went into my listening prayer journal.

A week after this, I had a sort of "Holy Spirit download" (where it's as though Jesus shows you a lot of things all at once and then it takes some time to unpack what you just experienced and what was revealed). Specifically, three important things came together in my mind all at once:

- 1) The Lord reminded me of how 17 years ago, after my own life-altering leadership development experience, that I began saying to the LORD that if ever I was no longer called to pastor in a church, that I would love to work for an organization facilitating the same kind of transformative leadership development opportunities such as I had experienced. For 17 years, I have expressed this to Lisa, feeling a deep sense of resonance and (potential) calling to this one day.
- 2) I had this thought that maybe what is envisioned for this District role is to have someone join the team to help to develop a transformative leader development pathway resembling my own life-changing experience that might accelerate the growth and fruitfulness of the next generation of leaders.
- 3) At the same time, I was reminded of the scripture shared with me a week earlier from Ps.37:4: "Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you the desires of



your heart” and I wondered if this District role might possibly be a provision from the LORD to see this long-term desire of my heart realized.

The following week, I had a couple of really profound experiences with Jesus as I was meditating on Mark 1 – I don’t have time today to go into it, but on two separate days, Jesus was so clear with me, that my one and only job as His apprentice, is to follow Him, wherever He leads.

No matter how things look to me; regardless of whether or not they make sense to me; regardless of how I interpret the timing...Jesus affirmed to my heart – my one job is to follow Him, to listen, trust and obey.

So, after some confirmation in Mark 1, I felt I was to continue to take the next step, to prepare to submit my application and my intention had been to submit it on Thursday, Sept. 16th. You might recall that the day before, Wed., Sept. 15th that our Premier announced that we would be moving back to significant health measures and restrictions starting immediately...and I thought to myself, ‘with all of this going on, how can I even think of applying for this role now?’

Where would that leave the church, staff, Elders if I were to transition now?’

The next day, Thursday (16th), was a bit crazy trying to pivot in preparation for our weekend services in light of the new restrictions, and needless to say, I didn’t apply that day...and honestly, I felt conflicted and wasn’t sure what to do.

But later that same day, I had someone approach me and say that they believed the LORD had a word for me and this is what they shared:

“The Father wants you to know that He sees you, He is proud of you, and He has put before you a green door.”

This person reflected that though they weren’t sure what it meant, that they were to be faithful to share it with me. Immediately in my spirit, I knew it was the LORD and I sensed Him saying “Jeremy, the door is still green (not yellow, not red, but green for ‘go’)...walk through it.”



Two weeks later, early in October, Lisa and I had the chance to get away for week of personal retreat and as I was meeting with a spiritual director, and recounting the story of our last 2.5 years, I was struck by how many people I named that have affirmed their sense that at some point I would be called to leadership beyond our church.

When I went back to my listening prayer journal, I counted 17 different people by name who have expressed some version of sensing/anticipating that God was going to be calling me to follow Him into some kind of wider church, and possibly denominational, responsibility.

Again, as Lisa and I reflected on this, we realized afresh that Jesus has been gently shining a light on this possibility of a major shift for a long time and through a lot of different means.

I was brought in for a first interview at the end of October, and later was invited to come back for a second interview just last week.

In-between these two interviews, we were away at our Pastors Prayer Retreat and after one of the sessions, Lisa and I went up for prayer. When the intercessor asked what we were seeking, all we said was: "We just want more of the Holy Spirit." We didn't give any other context or details - we just want more of the LORD.

As this individual prayed for us, three clear themes emerged:

- 1) He said that God was calling us up into a ministry where we were going to see signs and miracles released in new ways.
- 2) He said that God was going to entrust to us new spiritual gifts to fulfill the new work being given to us.
- 3) He said that he sensed the possibility of a 'major shift' that was coming our way.

I went back to our room after this and wept for the next two hours. I knew in my heart (and Lisa knew) that the LORD was calling me to this new assignment.



One week later (Nov.10), as I went into the second interview, Lisa and I had a shared sense that Jesus had been clear that if there was an invitation to join the District team, that we were to take this as the final affirmation of God's call on my life for the next season of ministry. This past Monday (Nov.15), I received the formal offer and we accepted.

Though we have and continue to experience somewhat of an internal firestorm emotionally as we follow Jesus in this (and as we informed our Elders and staff in the last few days, and now you this morning), we are so grateful that we continue to experience peace over our hearts that surpasses human understanding.

And we are so grateful that this role change for me does not require a role change for Lisa and that StAAC will continue to be our church home. Jesus continues to affirm that regardless of our plans, He - as the LORD - is determining our steps.

And just as He is determining our steps, He is also determining yours. He is being equally deliberate with what He's doing here at StAAC as He is doing with me and our family.

Just as Jesus has been speaking to us about our life with Him, and the call to follow Him, He has also been and continues to speak to you, His people.

Church, are we hearing Him? Or are we allowing the noise and clutter of our lives drown out the whispers of the Spirit? Are we patiently and actively and humbly waiting on the LORD, listening for His still, small voice? We should not expect to hear it clearly if we don't slow down to be quiet before Him on a regular basis.

Church, are we trusting Him? Or are we holding out trusting Him, demanding to understand the 'why' of whatever it is we may be going through first? Do we make decisions based on our best thinking and perspective... or on what He has shown us - even if we don't understand it all? We must be reminded that without faith, without trust, we cannot please God.

Church, are we obeying Him? Or are we being careless with what He has shown us? Are we making excuses or delaying obedience to Him in anything He may be



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asking of us – big or small? We must be soberly reminded that if we resist Him, it will severely hinder the flow of His blessing and favour over us.

When we talk about apprenticeship to Jesus, all we really mean is that we are actively learning to listen to, trust and obey Him.

That's the heart of it.

And the call to apprenticeship with Jesus isn't just for our sake. Not by a long shot. It is also for the community around us – our neighbours and beyond that desperately need to know that Jesus is Good News for them.

Lisa and I (and our children, Hanna and Caleb) love you so very much and we look forward to continuing to engage with you as part of our church family here at St. Albert Alliance, even as my day-to-day responsibilities shift to focus on strengthening the wider church by investing in the next generation of leaders.

May the peace and hope of Christ be with us all.

Pastor Jeremy

