

# **Buried Seed: Spiritual Direction and the Vineyard Movement**

**by**

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The Vineyard movement is barely twenty years old in New Zealand and has existed for not much more than thirty years in its birthplace, the United States. Spiritual direction, however, has been practised for centuries and for the most part in a context of tradition and formality foreign to Vineyard people here and overseas which is a sharp contrast to the New World and the Antipodes whose cultures are relatively recently formed. This presents an interesting and challenging juxtaposition that is expressed in the term “ancient/future paradigm”.

In choosing to investigate spiritual direction and the Vineyard movement I was attracted to common threads between Vineyard values and practice and spiritual direction. In researching the topic, I contacted spiritual directors who are from Vineyard churches and practise in a Vineyard setting. I am the first person from Vineyard Aotearoa New Zealand to train as a spiritual director which explains the absence of local Vineyard respondents; all the responses are from the USA and Canada where spiritual direction is growing in availability and acceptance in the Vineyard Movement. I hope this research assists those who train after me from New Zealand Vineyard churches and any who are interested in spiritual direction from the Vineyard perspective. I was unable to find any Vineyard spiritual directors in the United Kingdom. I interviewed eight people by questionnaire, five men and three women. Six of the eight are involved in the training of spiritual directors or teaching spiritual formation.

The origins of the Vineyard church lie in the Jesus movement of the sixties and the Calvary Chapel churches. The first Vineyard church was planted in Los Angeles by Kenn and Joanie Gulliksen out of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, in the early seventies<sup>1</sup>. John Wimber, who is most strongly associated with the Vineyard movement, was a leader of the Friends (Quaker) church in Yorba Linda, California. He and his family began attending there on his conversion and were an active part of the Friends church until 1977.<sup>2</sup> Gulliksen was conscious at the outset that God was doing something different with his church plant. His desire was to pursue intimacy with Christ and the worship at his church reflected that, looking less like the worship at

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, Bill. *The Quest For The Radical Middle: A History of the Vineyard*, ch 3, p80

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, ch 2, pp62-63

Calvary Chapel.<sup>3</sup> When John Wimber and his group joined the church and “field-tested the discoveries he had made at Fuller (Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth) on the correlation between signs and wonders and the growth of the church” tension began to mount between Calvary and Vineyard and they went separate ways.<sup>4</sup> By 1986 there were 139 Vineyard churches, necessitating the formation of the Association of Vineyard Churches.<sup>5</sup>

Vineyard is a church planting movement and a renewal movement. Wimber is regarded as a reformer. Intimacy with God in worship is the highest priority of the Church. “The number one goal in worship on God’s end is to receive our love; on our end it is to become, intellectually and experientially, intimate with God”.<sup>6</sup> Many songs are addressed directly to God rather than being about him and the music is contemporary and culturally relevant. Cultural relevance includes everything from dress (casual) to décor, outreach activities and the food and drink served. If the coffee is bad, it’s not a Vineyard church! Vineyard is orthodox and evangelical in belief, whilst practising Pentecostal power, occupying what Wimber described as the “radical middle” in between Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism.

Vineyard believes in inaugurated eschatology, that is, the rule of Christ and the coming of his kingdom began at the crucifixion. Humanity entered the “last days” at that time. The seemingly conflicting statements of Jesus that the kingdom has come, will come and is still to come are held to all be true. The kingdom came when Jesus came and it is here now, but will come in its fullness at Christ’s return. The Vineyard approach is to look for moments where the kingdom rule of Christ breaks in. Vineyard people attempt to be, as Gary Best<sup>7</sup> puts it, “naturally supernatural”. Looking for opportunities to “join God in his work”<sup>8</sup> by watching for what the Father is doing and responding to any sense of invitation to participate with him.

A typical Vineyard church service will include about half an hour of contemporary sung worship, utilizing songs that directly address God and encourage the individual to

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, ch 4 p87

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, ch 4 pp84,85

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, ch5 pp95-96

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, ch 8, pp132-133

<sup>7</sup> National Director, Vineyard Canada

<sup>8</sup> Best, ch 1, p21

personally engage; a time of quiet, waiting in the presence of God and allowing the Spirit to touch people and draw their attention to things God may want to do or say – this includes exercising the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, which are for today and accessible to every believer according to the will of the Spirit in a given situation; and preaching from the Scriptures and opportunity for people to receive prayer. Vineyard places a high value on the ability of any person to notice the presence of the Spirit and respond to it, to sense an inner picture, voice, words or physical feeling in their body – which may be for them personally or to help another person.

It is from this grid that I came to spiritual direction. I noticed many aspects of direction were similar to the practices we embraced in drawing close to God. Vineyard worship songs are peppered with the themes and love language of the mystics<sup>9</sup>. Prayer to the Holy Spirit (for which Vineyard has been criticized) is acceptable<sup>10</sup>. Vineyard looks for the physical signs of God’s movement upon a person and expects God to speak personally in and through images and metaphors. I was excited to find so much I recognized already. I wondered if there were other Vineyard spiritual directors and, if so, did they notice similar things in relation to their calling to spiritual direction and its practice in a Vineyard context?

The directors I interviewed all practise a contemplative model of spiritual direction. One specifically described her training and experience as being in Ignatian spirituality. The most experienced director has practised for six years, the freshest graduate one month. All are clear about the distinctions between spiritual direction, mentoring and counselling. Texts mentioned included Margaret Guenther’s “Holy Listening” and Barry and Connolly’s “The Practice of Spiritual Direction”, and terms used were “a companion along the way”, “co-discerner”, “guiding towards the next step”. One director spoke of the “christocentric and Trinitarian” nature of his practice and explained that he held Jesus to be the “icon” or reflection of God and operated from the assumption that God wanted us to be transformed into his image. This director looks for movement towards or away from Christ in the directee’s speech, thoughts or actions.

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<sup>9</sup> Ruffing, ch 4

<sup>10</sup> Keating, *Lectio Divina*

Defining spiritual direction is problematic even for those whose churches have a long history of it, so how do these new practitioners explain it to the uninitiated? Each had a clear understanding of their role in the life and faith of the directee, but some were more succinct than others. *“Spiritual direction is a way of listening to God with another person for the purpose of facilitating that person’s relationship with God.” “I tell them it is a series of one-on-one conversations in which the directee shares about their life and relationship with God. The director listens for the movements, invitations, themes of God’s activity in the directee’s life and experience. The director is not an ‘answer-dispenser’ or ‘advice-giver’, but a companion on the journey who can be helpful in the directee’s noticing, discovery and response to God’s movement in their life. A director might also be helpful in providing new avenues and practices for relating to God.”*

The Vineyard attitude of looking for what the Father is doing appeared quite clearly as directors put words to their ministry. *“Spiritual direction is in line with an old Vineyard mantra that our goal is both to see and participate in ‘what the Father is doing’. We’ve normally used this in power-encounter contexts (healing prayer for individuals). I tell people we’re extending the trajectory of this mantra and trying to discern over the course of months ‘what the Father is doing’ in a person’s life. We do this through prayer and ‘holy listening’.”* Another says, *“I explain spiritual direction as the process of seeing what the Father is doing in their life and being able to co-operate with it.”* In this instance both director and directee are seeking to discover what the Father is doing, and both co-operate in their own way, the director’s co-operation serves the directee in his or her goal of deepening connection with God. This also reflects the Vineyard value of servant leadership.

One director put it this way, *“The goal is for me to listen to their spiritual journey in order to discern how God is moving in their lives at this time and what kind of prayer he may be drawing them toward. This may involve some history of their lives as it relates to their spiritual journey. For their part, I ask for a teachable spirit and a strong desire to grow in the life of prayer. I explain that I ask God for words of knowledge about them and for them and I will use these to pray for them (outside the session) and minister to them.”*

Another director regularly asks new directees to practise the Examen for thirty days and record their consolations and desolations as a precursor to direction, *“We then unpack together what God might be saying and doing in their lives.”*

Acknowledging that it can appear that God is absent or inactive is included in the explanation of this director. *“It is a relationship between three: the director, the directee and the Holy Spirit. The relationship focuses on the directee’s experience of God in his/her life at the present. As the directee shares what s/he is experiencing (or not experiencing) the director is listening attentively not only to the directee, but with an ear to the Holy Spirit to discern in what way he may be moving.”* The focus of the session being on the directee’s current experience is an important point, as newcomers to spiritual direction may wrongly approach it as a kind of therapy for past spiritual problems.

The Vineyard spiritual directors describe “fluidity” in their sessions with directees. There may or may not be verbal prayer at the beginning or end of a session. There may or may not be suggestions made or sharing from the director’s personal experience. These things were described as being offered if it seemed “appropriate”. Elements common to all directors and every session were: listening (actively reflecting back to the directee), questions, “space” for the directee, freedom for the directee to speak about what is on their “mind and heart”, and ending with a summary or wrapping up of the ground covered with the possibility of action to take before meeting again.

All but one of the directors were confident in the use of silence and saw it as a helpful means of preparing the heart and mind. Silence is used for “centering” at the beginning of the session, and again at the end if appropriate, as well as during the session. One director expresses it well, *“As the session unfolds there are often times of silence when the directee is processing and thinking. I provide that space by not filling the air with comments. Sometimes when things have gone ‘deep’, and there is lots of movement in the person, I might suggest that we just sit in silence for a time and together ‘hold’ what has been surfaced up to and before God.”* The director whose use of silence is less confident is a new graduate and is aware that it is something she is not doing well,

*“The only silence I have used is when a person is looking within to try and articulate something.”*

Music, such a distinctive of Vineyard, did not feature much in the practice of these directors currently. Six have used music, one would like to and one doesn't use music at all. The music favoured is quiet and contemplative in style – “ambient”. If non-instrumental, the song is chosen because it *“fits the theme or the group.”* Two directors preferred to use music with no words or words in a foreign language, Russian choral music for example, so as not to distract the directee with words.

Vineyard is a Charismatic movement, believing the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to us today therefore insight given by the Holy Spirit is actively sought by those who minister to others. In fact a basic tenet of Vineyard is that “everyone can play”, so healing prayer, prophecy, words of knowledge etcetera are routinely experienced by ordinary believers who may have no titular role in the church. Offering these gifts to others is encouraged and is often done publicly or directly. Of course in spiritual direction the approach is the opposite. How then, do Vineyard spiritual directors respond to what they “see the Father doing” or what they may be “hearing”? Is there a conflict? Is an insight such as a prophetic word or word of knowledge directly given, or do they handle it differently?

Every director was aware of this and made a clear distinction in the handling of things shown them by the Holy Spirit. The spiritual direction session was not the time for giving direct input but rather a time for a directee to discern God's voice for him or herself. Any sense of the Holy Spirit leading the director towards an issue for the directee was approached by a question. Two mentioned giving “direct words” but emphasized their reliance on discerning its appropriateness and one emphasized it was *“occasional”*.

A director who now trains others had this to say, *“Great question, and one that we've discussed many times in our School of Spiritual Direction. I encourage budding directors to follow my practice and refrain from offering ‘words of knowledge’ to directees. As I see it, we're helping directees grow in their capacity to pray, that is, to*

*both speak to and hear from God. Offering 'words of knowledge' can undercut the larger goal by producing in the directee an inappropriate dependency on the director to hear from God on his or her behalf. If I feel strongly that I have a supernatural insight for the directee, I'm happy to hold on to that for a while and see if it persists. If it does I'll look for an opportunity to share that outside of the formal session."* Another, also involved in training, agreed. *"I would **never** say, God is telling me, or has shown me...this would put me in a position of power in the person's life and would add pressure to respond to what God has supposedly told me. I would never encourage any director to throw out words of knowledge in a direction session."* Another remarked that the insight, when kept to oneself, was a helpful focus in prayer regarding the directee and may only share it later, after the directee had realized what God was saying to them.

All directors have found spiritual direction complementary to Vineyard practices. They observed the emphasis in Vineyard on developing relationship and intimacy with God, on seeing what the Father is doing, on having God speak to one personally, on listening to and waiting on God and letting him speak in symbols, images and music, and on rejection of "hype" were all amply met in spiritual direction.

Directors were grateful for a framework in which to explore *"periods of darkness, dryness and it helps fill in the blanks for the sense of being lost that accompanies a long-time Vineyard person for whom the manifest presence of God has failed to change their character or has stopped working as a way to be passionate and excited about God."* There is recognition that spiritual direction can provide new pathways to move ahead, particularly as it is more concerned with the *"long-haul process of God's work in a person's life"*, which is a helpful perspective when the instantaneous has not occurred.

There are some challenges in the perceived "passivity" of spiritual direction and its inward focus, as well as it feeling *"imported, non-native"* to those who are unfamiliar with it. But these are regarded as springing largely from the ignorance of people with regard to spiritual direction, rather than problems with spiritual direction itself. Other issues directors encountered were it being too "Catholic" or people being concerned about "eastern mysticism". Opposition on the basis of it being "Catholic" is ironic as

Wimber (and Vineyard in general) emphasized love and acceptance of the whole Church<sup>11</sup>. For the most part, these directors report they have been trusted to develop the ministry of spiritual direction in their churches with the blessing of their leaders and where resistance has occurred good communication has resolved it. One observes, *“Until someone is ready for the inner journey it is difficult for them to understand why it is so valuable to open yourself to the Lord in this radical way. Since our church leadership is for it, I don’t have many things I bump up against.”* Personal testimony has been significant for another, *“I have been a pastor for more than 25 years and did not pursue developing a contemplative prayer life until I was burned out. I can usually spot the signs of burnout among pastors pretty quickly. I can usually share my story in such a way that other pastors can see themselves in my story – this usually changes the conversation.”*

When asked what response they had noticed from Vineyard leaders there was a wide swing from *“very positive”* to *“ignorance and fear of another fad.”* This director sums it up, *“It has been all over the place. Some have had previous experience with direction and have found it helpful, some are currently seeing a director, some have said they hope direction does not become the ‘next new thing’ in the Vineyard. Most have no idea what direction is, or are just ignorant in what they think direction is.”* The directors themselves are positive, though, feeling that it is an area of growth in the Vineyard. Perhaps an indicator of this is the mention of lectio divina at this year’s Vineyard USA National Conference. The director who mentioned this noted knowledge of lectio divina probably indicated interest and understanding of contemplative practices, if not spiritual direction. Anaheim Vineyard, the flagship church of the US, has a “Spiritual Formation Community”. In teaching and supporting spiritual formation it includes understanding of spiritual direction.

The participating directors all have Vineyard directees. Ratios vary from two out of nine being Vineyard to all being Vineyard. Two of the directors said that of their Vineyard directees half or more were leaders. Since the beginning of their practice, every director had noticed an increase in interest in spiritual direction.

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<sup>11</sup> Jackson, ch 7, p107

The expectation of the kingdom breaking through into everyday life, in healing and other transformative ways, is fundamental to Vineyard and the interviewees were all adamant that they saw this happen in spiritual direction, though it looked different, less demonstrative than Vineyard people are accustomed to. *“It’s always a breaking in of the kingdom when we see what the Father is doing and co-operate with that. Helping people see what the activity of God is in their life helps them be able to minister and follow God for themselves. It builds the intimacy we love, it builds in a higher potential to live our faith and co-operate with our growth.”* Another observed, *“It is the Spirit...it is in-breaking, but it is just different than how we often think of ‘kingdom in-breaking’ in peoples’ lives.”*

Spiritual direction is seen as bringing appreciation of the rich spiritual practices of the Church, providing a solid foundation in listening to God, noticing his activity in one’s life and giving a sound framework for discernment. In considering what spiritual direction brings to the Vineyard movement, the respondents felt the inward work of spiritual direction was an important component in spiritual maturity; that all people could benefit from the deepening of relationship with God and greater understanding of oneself that comes from noticing the inner movements of the Spirit, which gives a *“balance to the outer and more visible manifestations of the Spirit – inward growth is as vital as pressing into our outer and more visible gifting with spiritual gifts.”* This was not seen as happening in isolation from other believers but that a natural by-product of this deepening work would bring *“a greater understanding and practice of community.”* One said, *“I hope that as we ask questions like, ‘What is God doing in your life?’ and ‘What is God’s invitation to you at this moment?’ we’ll come to see them in the larger matrix of community. In other words, we’ll use the words ‘your’ and ‘you’ in the plural as well as the singular.”*

In discussing distinctives of the Vineyard and spiritual direction, one mentioned the benefit of understanding a full range of *“experiences in God”* (meaning the charismatic and the contemplative) was an advantage a Vineyard director has in helping a person integrate his or her experience. Willingness to draw on the charismatic gifts was seen as advantageous by this director, echoed by another who mentioned the need

of some directees for deliverance from demonic oppression and confidence to do that. The spontaneity of Vineyard style was considered a strength, along with its contemporary culture, especially when enriched by the addition of ancient wisdom. Few felt spiritual direction fitted so well within the Vineyard context they were more concerned people would want to add to it or tweak it to give it a distinctive Vineyard flavour - entirely unnecessary in their view. *“Let’s just take the historical practice, integrate it into our ministries, and let it be what it is...an aid in helping people journey with God.”*

One director, a trainer of spiritual directors and co-leader of an urban retreat centre affiliated with a dynamic Vineyard congregation housed in a traditional old church building, made this observation which may indeed be prophetic, *“We say we’re about relationship, and this is exactly what spiritual direction tries to cultivate. We say we’re about discerning the voice of the Lord. This, too, is fundamental to spiritual direction. Wimber had Quaker roots, so waiting with others to discern the Lord’s will was a part of his spiritual DNA. I happen to think that this “buried” seed is now beginning to produce shoots within our movement.”*

The observations and experiences of these Vineyard spiritual directors from overseas have confirmed my experiences here, which is reassuring and encouraging. That the same “buried seed” is sprouting in Vineyard Aotearoa, simultaneous with what is happening overseas, is surely a work of God.

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## Appendix

The following are two examples of Vineyard song lyrics reflecting the mystical love relationship between a person and Christ. The first, written by John Wimber, is regarded as a classic within the Vineyard, and was widely sung throughout many churches of differing denominations. The second is a more recent but by no means isolated example.

### **Isn't He**

Isn't He beautiful

Beautiful, oh isn't He

Prince of Peace, Almighty God, Isn't He

Isn't He wonderful

Wonderful, oh isn't He

Prince of Peace, Almighty God, isn't He, isn't He, isn't He

John Wimber. 1980, Mercy Vineyard Publishing.

### **Beautiful**

I need you like the rain

Come to me and sing again

I long for Your love so much

I've wanted Your pure touch

*You are beautiful, beautiful*

*You're beautiful, beautiful*

*So beautiful, beautiful*

I need you to be here

Come to me, I can feel you near

I love you, You are my hope

You love me as Your own

Samuel Lane. 2002, Vineyard Songs