

CATCH
the
WIND
of the
SPIRIT



How the
5 MINISTRY
GIFTS

*Can Transform
Your Church*

Carolyn Tennant

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Published by Vital Resources

1445 N. Boonville Ave.

Springfield, Missouri 65802

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Cover design and interior formatting by Prodigy Pixel (www.prodigypixel.com)

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ISBN: 978-1-68066-038-8

Printed in the United States of America

19 18 17 16 • 1 2 3 4 5

LIVING ON A CORACLE



In the days of the ancient Celtic church, (AD 430 to about 900), one could see some exciting ventures on the high seas. The Welsh, Irish, and Scottish had long been making small boats from which they would launch into the sea to fish and move from place to place.

Called a coracle (or *currach* in Scotch Gaelic), the boat was generally designed for one or two people and was in the shape of a walnut shell. Split willow rods were bent and interwoven to form a frame. Then this was covered with animal hide and the seams were tarred. The boats were light and easy to carry from place to place. Generally they were propelled by broad-bladed paddles.

The Celtic monks were by no means opposed to adventure, and they liked to build larger coracles that would hold more people and set out into the ocean. This would be adventurous by itself, but additionally the coracles were rudderless and often the monks would take no oars or paddles. They hoisted their sails and caught the winds and the currents, believing that God would take them where they were supposed to go to share the gospel.

Once I had the opportunity to set off into the Atlantic Ocean in a fairly small fisherman's boat to visit the island of Skellig Michael, an ancient and famous monastic prayer settlement

off the coast of Kerry in southwest Ireland. My students and I were all drenched after the twelve kilometers braving the waves, in spite of being given tarps. The reality of setting out into the ocean without oars is indeed monumental!

The monks (of course, Protestantism did not yet exist) would prepare carefully for such an expedition, especially in prayer and fasting. One such venture blew the missionaries from Ireland to the southern tip of Cornwall. The king of the area where they finally landed came out to greet them and was appalled that the monks had no oars. He decided to put his faith in the God the monks trusted so completely, and most of the rest of the tribe did the same.

Other monks built hermit huts or prayer cells or monasteries where they landed. People would inevitably gather around these men and women of God, and vibrant communities of faith would rise up. Many examples exist, but I vividly remember seeing for the first time the famous Irish Celtic church foundation of Iona, which was established by Columba as a vital missions point for Scotland.

The prayer history on that island has been so intense that people popularly say there is a “thin veil between heaven and earth.” Surely I can attest to the powerful presence of the Lord, and there I was, coming to Iona by boat on the very day (the day before Pentecost Sunday) that Columba had arrived in his coracle for the first time in AD 563. He named that beach where he landed Port a Churaich, or the Haven of the Coracles.

Another famous coracle journey was by Brendan of Clonfert (c. AD 484–577) who built a coracle large enough to hold fourteen to seventeen monks. In this traditional hide-covered vessel—this time with oars and a rudder—Brendan and his crew traveled on a seven-year journey that took them to Iceland and ultimately Newfoundland. Possibly they got as far south as Florida because of the kind of fruit Brendan described, making him a precursor to Columbus, who visited Brendan’s monastery to look over his

maps. A book about this journey became the European bestseller of its day for years and years: *Voyage of St. Brendan the Abbot*.

I believe the Lord is asking us today, both as individuals and as the church corporately, to set sail again—to trust Him. He is wondering if we are willing to pull in our rudders and even throw away our oars and let the wind blow through our sails.

Jesus said, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everything born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). This picture of Christians who are born of the Spirit is an enticing one. Jesus is basically saying that we are free to move and journey from place to place, not only physically but also in our spirits.

The Irish took this literally and were committed to going on what they called *peregrinatio*, which means travel/pilgrimage. They did this wholeheartedly, taking the gospel throughout Europe to become one of the greatest and most effective mission movements of all time. However, the pilgrimage was also personal.

In *The Celtic Way*, Ian Bradley notes, “Peregrinatio was the outward symbol of an inner change, a metaphor and a symbol for the journey towards deeper faith and greater holiness and that journey toward God which is the Christian life.”² Bradley also says that the purpose and goal of pilgrimage was “seeking the place of one’s resurrection.”³

JOURNEYING BY WIND AND CURRENTS

Our Christian lives should be viewed as a journey, a seeking, an opportunity for growth and transformation. At the end of it all, we will have a resurrection to eternal life, but God wants to bring us vivacity and renewal along the way as we travel through life. It appears to me that too many Christians, and also too many churches, have simply gotten stuck. They’re in a rut instead of on a journey.

The reason I think this to be true is not simply observation. Rather, people tell me this so often that I'm becoming distressed by the trend. They feel they aren't growing as they wish. Church life seems boring, they say. "We do the same thing over and over, and even the faddish changes seem pointless. We aren't going anywhere." People want to be on the move!

God has provided currents for us to catch. However, if the currents have been stopped up, we will be sitting still. We have rocks and debris that have gathered at the source of the spring that are hindering the free flow of what God wants to do. These important currents need to be invigorated to the level of strength that God designed. God wants to give and restore these five currents or ministry gifts and the complete leadership team that oversees them. He wants the whole church involved because these currents are His primary values for *all* of us.

Following Jesus is a journey. It demands movement and change, action and courage. Any journey involves some sort of risk and adventure. We have to move outside of our comfort zones and head into the unknown. God is calling His church right now to move out with Him. Where will the wind and the currents take us? We don't know, but this doesn't mean we can be excused from moving.

When the tide is rising and going out, everyone must choose. Will we stay on shore or will we jump in? If we put one leg in the coracle and then hesitate, the coracle will have us doing the splits in no time. We have to seize the moment and take off . . . or not.

Too many of us have decided to stay on shore, while the Spirit wants to take us on a ride. We tend to have a preference for the known over the unknown. How much more comfortable it is to play it safe. But what are we missing? We will never reach the new place God has in mind if we don't hop in and go for the ride.

George Macleod, founder of the present-day Iona Community in 1936, made this comment:

Christ is a person to be trusted, not a principle to be tested. The Church is Movement, not a meeting house. The Faith is an Experience, not an exposition. Christians are Explorers, not map makers. It is a present Experience made possible at Bethlehem, offered on Calvary, and communicated at Pentecost.⁴

Indeed, if we are ever called upon to make maps, we have to explore first. We must get up and launch forth. Jesus is ready to experience the wind and the waves with us. He will be in the boat and our faith will be built. We lose testimonies of His faithfulness if we do not take risks.

If Daniel had not continued to pray to God instead of King Darius, he would not have seen the miracle of the lions' den. If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had not refused to bow down to the golden image, they would not have been saved from the fiery furnace. If Queen Esther had not risked her life to go in to King Ahasuerus, her people would not have been saved. God has given us His Word full of stories, not just a list of principles, because the main point is to put principles into action. Indeed, stories of faith require risk and setting out into the unknown, but then we see God come through!

Brendan the Navigator was constantly encouraging his fellow monks to trust in God and have faith:

After fifteen days the wind dropped and they set themselves to the oars until their strength failed. Straightaway Saint Brendan began to comfort and encourage them, saying: "Brothers, do not fear, for God is our helper, our helmsman and our pilot, and he shall guide us. Pull in all the oars and the rudder. Just leave the sails spread, and let God do as he wishes with his servants and their boat." Then they continued to refresh their strength until the evening, as long as the wind did not cease to blow. Still, they could not tell from which direction the wind came or in which direction the boat was carried.⁵

Whether the wind of God is particularly active or not, as we wait on Him, we renew our strength to continue our journeys. He is most assuredly our pilot and wants to decide where we go, when we go, and how we go. This reliance on Him and obedience to His plans, ways, and timing are an essential part of what God desires to do today to renew His people and revitalize the church as a whole.

We were not meant to look to our own strength or attempt to make everything look more fashionable. Even the best looking boat in the world can capsize. What we need so desperately is God, the instigator of the wind of the Spirit and the prime mover of the currents of the church. When we feel out of control, He is definitely in control as we put our trust in Him. Often all that is expected of us is to be silent, rest in Him, and place our faith in the Helmsman.

I'm convinced that if we want to see church revitalization, this must be our posture. It is time for an adventure rather than playing it safe. Instead of thinking of the church so much as an organization, we need to think of ourselves as being on a journey with other pilgrims. Our leader is God. We have to stay close to Him or we will lose sight of where He is taking us right now. Sometimes it seems easier to keep our eyes on where He was yesterday than where He is today.

The late Irish poet John O'Donohue wrote this lovely little poem, which ironically provides a huge perspective on life:

FLUENT

I would love to live

Like a river flows

Carried by the surprise

Of its own unfolding.⁶

God wants us to flow along with Him, bouncing in the currents that He generates (not the ones society spawns) and being swept up in the wind that He blows. He longs to surprise us. Jesus wants us to experience the thrill of following Him and growing into His likeness. How do we live in a post-Christian society? Like Christ. End of sermon.

Journeys have always been part of God's plan. Consider Abraham and Sarah setting out for the promised land, Jacob and his treks, Moses and the Hebrew people wandering in the wilderness, Mary and Joseph going to Egypt, Paul's missionary journeys . . . there are so many examples. God keeps saying, "Go!" and we keep saying, "But I'm comfortable where I am. Not now."

When Jesus said in John 14:6 that He was "the way and the truth and the life," He meant that no one could find the Father apart from Him. However, this certainly means following Him on whatever way He calls us to go. Jesus didn't intend for us to become stagnant. To be Christian means to be a person who is on the way, a church that is on the move. There is never a sense of arrival, but rather a process of being, becoming, changing, and overcoming.

ADVENTURING

It's impossible to know what we're even looking for until we venture forth. We have this deep haunting feeling that there is more, but what exactly? Until we set out, we can't completely discover who we are. What is inside of us must be tested. Our potential has to be plumbed.

We all have to reach inside and find both the good and the bad that is there before we can hand it all over to the Lord to change. God doesn't expect us to tidy up everything and present Him with a perfect self. He knows us completely and wants to be an integral part of the process of transformation. He intends to be on the journey with us.

The Celtic church prayed a great deal, and this launched them on their journeys. Prayer has to be the basis for launching out, otherwise we'll mistake wanderlust for God's movement.

A remarkable example of this foundation of prayer was the Skellig Michael prayer community that I earlier referred to visiting. Established somewhere between the sixth and eighth centuries, it lasted into the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. This is a crag of a rock island in the Atlantic with 640 rock steps built by the monks into the steep rise. As we climbed the steps, they took us to a rock terrace 600 feet above the water where twelve monks lived in six rock corbelled "beehive" huts. Here they prayed in two oratories because their whole purpose was to be able to concentrate so they could "fight the Devil."

The monks lived on birds' eggs, fish, vegetables from their little garden, and rainwater. All food was eaten raw; no wood existed on the island. The wintertime must have been formidable. Nonetheless, for hundreds of years twelve monks lived on this island. When one passed away, another was allowed to take his place. Celtic crosses mark their small graveyard.

I believe prayer is dwindling among us. Could we find even one person so committed to it that they would eat raw fish eggs on an isolated island in the middle of nowhere—even for a week, let alone a lifetime? Could we find twelve? Certainly while these men were praying, Christianity spread. Irish monks took Christianity up into Scotland, Britain, and to the barbaric tribes all over Europe. Would you or I even be here as Christians today if those men and other believers like them hadn't prayed? In order for the church to be on the move, prayer is essential. It is how we catch the wind.

As the postmodern church moves beyond petition to ask what is on God's heart, I believe that we, too, will be called forth into new places. God will not ask all of us to be missionaries, but He will summon us to venture out of our ruts—and the church will

find renewal. This will be God's doing, and it will massively affect our postmodern society.

The church is meant to be the on-going presence of God in the world through union with Christ and the power of the Spirit. Following Jesus was an exciting activity in Bible times, and it still is today. He was and is cross-cultural, counter-cultural, and surprising. When the wind of the Spirit blows, He will take us into some unusual escapades, but following Him is always worth it. That is the only way we will truly be able to impact our society today.

RESTORING COURAGE

If the Celtic church could comment upon the present-day church, they would probably wonder at us. From their vantage point, they would likely say that we are boring and accuse us of letting fear and malaise hold us back. Real life with Jesus is never boring. When we follow Him, we will be challenged; there will be storms and raging seas. As we stay close to Him, however, He will guide us through.

Jesus' journey on earth took Him down a courageous path. Following the Father meant He would do some unconventional things. He would heal on the Sabbath, overturn the money changers' tables in the temple area, and spit in a man's blind eyes so he would be healed.

Jesus cast a possessed man's legion of demons into a nearby herd of 2,000 pigs, resulting in their going haywire and running into the lake to drown themselves (Mark 5:1-20). I can only imagine what environmentalists would say to that cleanup job! The townspeople were happy, of course, that the demoniac was clothed and in his right mind. No! They were afraid and asked Jesus to leave the region. Not a good precursor to church growth, eh?

Really, I wonder if we would still be considered respectable members of our churches if we accomplished just 10 percent of what Jesus did. Surely the Pharisees and Sadducees weren't excited about His methods. He was so out-of-the-box that they finally just wanted Him out of the way.

The church is trying to grab people's attention today, but we're attempting to do it from inside the box. We want everything to be in order and appealing according to society's standards. If the church is to be restored and revitalized, it must first decide that it will do everything God's way. Not a few things but *everything*. This is much easier said than done.

We feel we know what society needs and wants so surely that must be what the Lord wants. We move ahead and implement our ideas. We mean well, but is it God's way to accomplish what He desires? An old Yiddish proverb says, "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans." Rather than telling Him all about our plans and asking Him to bless them, we need to hear His plans.

The Lord reminds us that "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 55:8). There we have it: a verse we all know but usually ignore. When we take time to find out what God wants in each circumstance, we'll discover that He is full of variation. One never knows what He will decide to do next.

We can become so engrained in what has worked in the past that we make our habits into a structure, thinking it always has to be done a particular way. We assume we have "got it down now," similar to Moses striking the rock again instead of speaking to it as God asked the second time around (Num. 26:2–13).

Just as Moses and the Israelites who were saved out of Egypt didn't enter God's rest because they didn't listen to Him, so we can miss God's best because of unbelief, disobedience, and lack of faith (Heb. 3:16–19). God wants us to do His work, His way . . . and to believe that it will work and that it will be the correct thing.

His ways are right, sufficient, and perfect. We need to give Him the space to be the holy God that He is and to make the choices for us.

The church today is busy. The body is scattered. Ministers are trying to do what they think will draw people in. However, God doesn't ask us to devise our own ways and then set out to accomplish them for Him. He simply invites us to get into the coracle with Him and hold on tight. Come on! Let's catch the wind!

THINGS TO CONSIDER . . .

1. The author states that the Celtic church probably would have viewed the church today as being rather boring and unadventurous. Do you agree with such an assessment of our contemporary church? Why or why not?
2. What examples do you know of where the church today has been as courageous and adventurous as the monks setting out in their coracle without an oar?
3. Is there a difference between discovery and gimmicks or trying new methods? Explain your answer.
4. Do you think you could find twelve people from your church to live on Skellig Michael and pray for a lifetime? Why or why not?
5. In your estimation, is the church on the move today? Support your answer.
6. What is the difference between being busy and being on the move by the Holy Spirit?

7. The poem “Little Gidding” by T. S. Elliot has an interesting message:

We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring
will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time.

How does this poem relate to you personally?

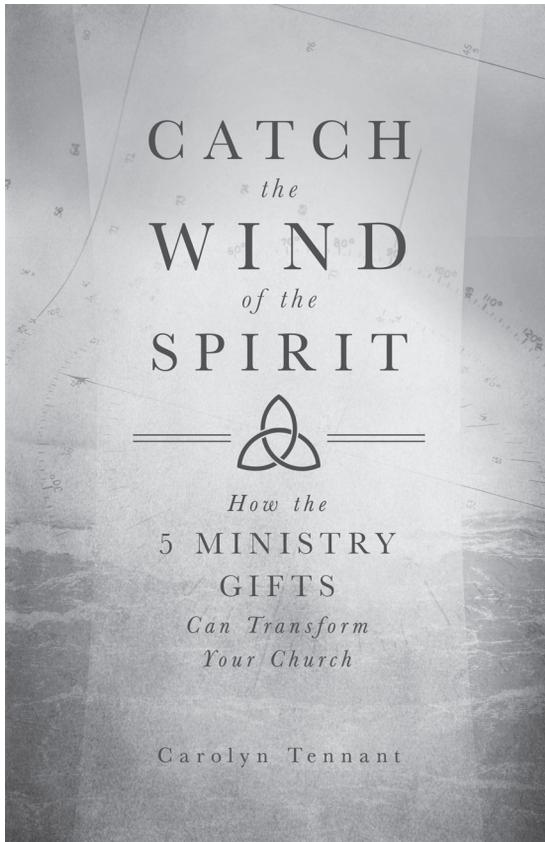
8. Where are you at in regards to your devotional life and prayer; that special connecting with God? Is it vibrant? Nonexistent? Something to check off your to-do list?
9. The author says that Jesus “was and is cross-cultural, counter-cultural, and surprising.” How have you seen this in action? Is this your view of Him? What Scriptures support these ideas?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Carolyn Tennant, Ph.D., maintains an active speaking schedule around the United States and internationally. She ministers in district and national conferences, pastors' retreats, district councils and camps, women's events, and churches. Dr. Tennant served for nearly thirty years at North Central University in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she was a professor and vice president. She is ordained in the Assemblies of God and presently is an adjunct professor teaching regularly in the doctor of ministry program at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary of Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri.

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“The truths Carolyn unfolds have the potential to revolutionize both individual believers and how the body of Christ impacts our planet. After reading Catch the Wind of the Spirit, my heart is longing to climb into the next coracle and head for deeper waters myself!”

—JODI DETRICK, DMIN—

- Do you long to see a revitalized church?
- Are you ready to follow the Holy Spirit into your personal God-adventure?

Carolyn Tennant shares five keys to transform the church today. Based on the five ministry gifts described in Ephesians 4 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher), she is emphatic that God has provided these gifts for whomever in the body He selects. As each believer follows the leading of the Holy Spirit, these gifts will become an integral and balanced part of a transformed church.

The choice is clear: You can either stay stagnant and passive on the shore or you can let the wind of the Holy Spirit move you into the fullness of God’s calling for your life. Come along and catch the wind of the Spirit!



Carolyn Tennant, PhD, served for nearly thirty years at North Central University in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she was a professor and vice president. She is ordained in the Assemblies of God and presently is an adjunct professor teaching regularly in the doctor of ministry program at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary of Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri. She and her husband currently reside in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



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ISBN 978-1-68066-038-8



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