

Discernment: Living Into God's Desire For Our Lives

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10)

All through Jesus' life, he gained increasing clarity about who he was and what he was called to do. God also invites us to know more and more clearly who we are and what God has called us to do and be. One word for this process is discernment. Discernment is about more than physical sight. It comes from a Latin word meaning "to separate, to sift". Discernment is the work of bringing our whole selves to God - with all our questions, experiences, dreams, and doubts - as we seek to know God's longing for our life. Discernment is opening our heart and mind to God's voice. God loves to speak to us and to give us good guidance.

Jesus said: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. (John 16)

There are several conditions that are essential to us hearing clearly God's voice and recognizing truth rather than just being led by our own imaginations or desires. They are:

1. Humility: We need to acknowledge that our own intellectual understandings are not enough. We need God's perspective. We need to look for guidance from God in the small and large decisions of life. *God guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way.* (Psalm 25)
2. Faith: We have to believe that God will speak to us. *Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.* (Hebrews 11)
3. A Clean Heart: We have to quietly ask God to show us any ways we've been living in self-will and going against His direction. Sin can block God's voice. *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.* (Psalm 66)
4. A Yielded Will: Guidance from God will be according to the amount of commitment and trust we place in God. Can God tell us anything and we will respond? How many conditions do we place on God?

Some Ways God Speaks

1. Bible
(All other sources of God's voice need to line up with the teaching in the Bible.)
2. Visions
3. Dreams
4. Rainbows
5. Creation
6. Angels
7. Supernatural signs
8. Circumstances
9. Direct Conversation without minds
10. Audible voice
11. Gifts of the Holy Spirit
12. Music and Poetry
13. Other people
14. A strong conviction
15. Peace
16. A sense or prompting of the Holy Spirit
17. God's physical touch

5. Waiting before God: We need to give God time to speak, serious listening time, where we focus on God and allow Him to say whatever He wants about our situation. *God says: But my people would not heed my voice and Israel would have none of me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart to walk in their own counsels. Oh that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways.* (Psalm 81)
6. Recognizing the source of the voice: God's voice is always reliable. Our own human reasoning and desires often try to tell us what we think the answer should be. Satanic and demonic powers can bring impressions to our minds as well. We can sift out the unreliable thoughts from ourselves or demonic influence in very

simple ways. By an act of our will we surrender to God what we think and what we want and ask instead for only what God wants. Command all demonic forces to be silent in the name of Jesus Christ. *He who trusts in his own mind is a fool. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. Casting down arguments we bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.* (Proverbs 28, 3, 2 Corinthians 10)

Discernment helps us to determine where we are going and what we need to do to get there. Some simple steps to help us in this process might be:

- Clearly define the choices that lie before you. Make a list of the pros and cons of each choice. Take some quiet time and pray with this list.
- Ask questions. Jesus loved questions.

Throughout his journey, Jesus fearlessly asked questions and with his words and actions He stirred questions in others. What happened to you? Where is he? Who is your neighbour?

- What motives are drawing you to choose one choice over another? Are these motives in line with your value system and also in line with God's will revealed in the Bible?
- Talk with others, consider your gifts, seek direction from your pastor or priest, a parent, or a spiritual guide.
- Listen to your feelings—What brings you discouragement? Where do you find satisfaction? What brings you peace and joy? What brings confusion?
- Above all, trust that God loves you and wants the best for you

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
(Psalm 23)

Like Jesus shedding everything as he journeyed, we too are beckoned to let go - of preconceptions, biases, stereotypes, or whatever hinders our vision - in order that we may better recognize God's loving presence in our life and respond with action in the world. Sorrow is another thing that can hinder our discernment. There is a time to grieve but prolonged grief over what has been lost to us can hinder us from seeing the possibilities God has yet in store. Fear can hinder discernment as well. We are afraid of the unknown, of what God might ask of us and our ability to carry it out. God planned

With discernment, it is crucial to have spiritual practices that keep us grounded. Prayer, journaling, church attendance, working with a spiritual director or sponsor or mentor, are all ways we can be attentive to what God is stirring up in us and to help us notice the presence of God in our life and experience. We need the discipline of looking long - of staying with a practice long enough to discern what it is really accomplishing in my life. Each of these practices can help to stretch our vision so that we are better able to see.

When the right decision comes, peace and joy can be signs that this choice is right for you.

Reasons Why God May Seem To Delay Answers

1. We may have asked the wrong question. It could be an unwise one or one that is not in the proper timing. (Example: many questions about the future we are to leave in God's hands.)
2. Is there something more important God needs to tell me first in order for the answer to fit in or make sense?
3. Am I asking God a question related to someone else's life that is none of my business?
4. Is there any disobedience in my life that hasn't been confessed and forgiven?
5. Are we out of order in regard to the accountability people we've built around ourselves? (Are we looking for God to tell us something because we didn't like what our sponsor or Christian friend told us?)
6. Is there someone we should be speaking with because God wants to use them to bring some clarity to us?
7. We may be consciously or unconsciously dictating to God the method with which we want Him to speak to us.
8. Some circumstances need to take place before God can use the desired method to bring the answer to us.
9. Sometimes we just have to trust God's grace to come through on time because we don't know the reason He seems silent. There's always more to learn.