

Discernment

LEARNING TO HEAR FROM GOD

WHAT IS DISCERNMENT?

In James 1 v 5-8 we are encouraged to ask for wisdom in making decisions that we can stick to and not be double-minded about. Wisdom is the art of knowing what matters (what is truly important) and how to make Godly decisions. Ignatius of Loyola writes about what is really important in his 'Principle and Foundation'.

Discernment is about seeking Godly insight or wisdom so we can then follow what God is calling us into. It's about finding our fit in partnership with what Jesus is up to in our world.

There's some tried and tested ways of doing discernment. These processes aren't for your everyday decisions. Rather,

discernment is for bigger decisions where there is more than one good option, and we are only able to act on one.

The book of James talks about wisdom like this:

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

- James 1:5-8

Some people have done a lot of thinking and reflection on what it means to discern. Let us introduce you to one of them.



NAME	Ignatius of Loyola
PROFESSION	Priest and theologian
PLACE OF BIRTH	Spain
DID YOU KNOW	Founder the Jesuit order in 1534. This order is known for it's missionary, educational and charitable works.

Ignatius writes: *"Human beings are created to praise, revere and serve God our Lord... The other things on the face of the earth are created for human beings, to help them praise, revere and serve God. From this it follows that I should use all things to the extent that they help me toward my end, and rid myself of them to the extent that they hinder me.*

To do this, I must make myself indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to my freedom of will and is not forbidden. Consequently, I ought not to seek: health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honour rather than

dishonour, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all matters. I ought to desire only the thing which is more in line with to the end for which I am created."

What Ignatius has to say is pretty radical. His point was that having decided to follow Christ, all subsequent decisions need to be made based on what God's desire is for me (or us). This is the purpose of our lives - to worship, love and serve God. So whatever will help us to do this is what we must choose. To put aside our own desires and be open to what God is calling us to.

"The last decision we ever make is the decision to follow the person of Jesus. Everything after that point is simply obedience."

7 PRINCIPLES OF DISCERNMENT

Ignatius has some pretty sound principles of discernment. These principles give us a vocabulary, help shape the process of discernment, and importantly, help us to become more self-aware of our own posture in the discernment process.

DISCERNMENT OR DECISION

Is this a time to discern or simply a time to decide? We make lots of decisions in life, discernment is for the bigger things, the choices that impact our engagement with the world. If there's more than one good option, and you can only act on one, perhaps it is worth discerning. Maybe it's choosing Job A or Job B? Should you move or should you stay?

HOLY INDIFFERENCE

Discernment starts with a Holy Indifference. This is the crucial difference between a decision and discernment. When we make a decision the choice is ours. When we discern we are asking 'What does God want?' because we only want what God wants. That is, we must be happy with either direction - a yes or a no, stay or go - we simply need to know God's will so we can obey.

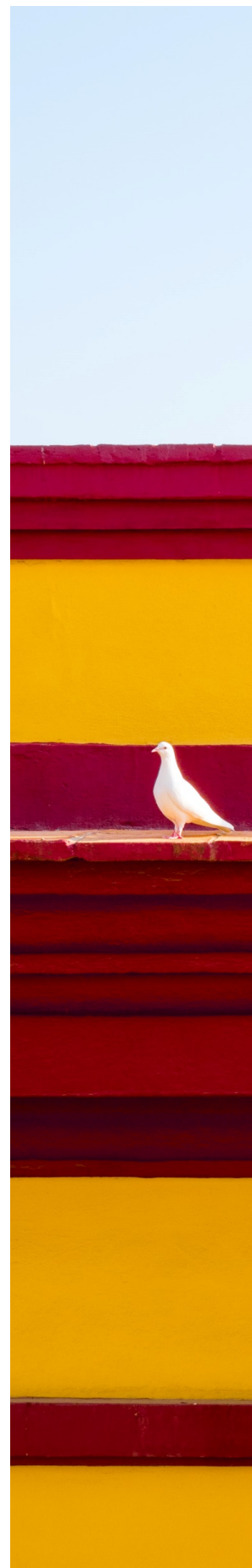
If you truly couldn't stomach one of the options, pray for God to replace your own desires with a holy indifference. If we are not open to discern God's will, we will make a decision based on our will. That's okay, but name it and own it! Don't pretend you are discerning when you're not open to God's call.

A CHOICE BETWEEN TWO GOODS

Discernment never replaces obedience to what Scripture makes clear or what we know is true. So we don't need to discern whether or not to steal, lie or commit a crime. Or if we are to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. Or to care for the poor and to set the oppressed free. A good read through Scripture will make the answers to this and other issues pretty clear.

CONFIRMATION

Discernment can lead us to a tentative or strong sense of what direction God is calling us in. Confirmation involves a second step in which we can, with the help of others, confirm our discernment process before we begin to put it into action.





SPEAKING WITH OTHERS

Discernment is always richer when we involve others in the process. Including others is helpful. Others can see things through different lenses, see parts of you that you might not, and God can speak through others. If the decision affects your community, then others from your community will need to be involved in the process.

OWNING OUR CHOICE

Entering a discernment process and inviting others to be part of the process with us helps us to make more Godly and wise choices. But at the end of the day, the choice is always ours. God calls us personally and always calls us to make our own choices and take responsibility for them.

OBEY

Entering a discernment process is based on a willingness to obey God's call.

HOW THEN DO I DISCERN? | A 10 STEP PROCESS

So what does a discernment process look like that holds all of these principles together? Here's a process based on our friend Ignatius. But to discern well takes time. You can't complete this in a one sitting. It requires being faithful to sit with God, with yourself, with others, with the context in which you find yourself, and being willing to listen for the voice of God in all those places and relationships.

1/ PRAY THAT GOD WILL GUIDE YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL GIVE YOU WISDOM

God is within you and calling you. Pay close attention to what goes on, both in the external world and in our inner world, our thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations. God's Holy Spirit leads us through all aspects of our lives.

"The word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe." Deuteronomy 30:14

2/ CLARIFY THE DECISION TO BE MADE

Write it down. What are the two choices? Brainstorm to make sure there are no other options. Be very clear about exactly what you are discerning and what the choices are in front of you. Have a clear question to discern, not a vague idea.

3/ FOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

CONSIDER WHAT IS GOING ON

Ask: Am I in a good space to make this decision? Be aware of your current state in relation to:

- **GOD** – Is God feeling close? Are there things you need to discuss with God first?
- **SELF** – How are you currently feeling? Are you feeling generous or closed off, courageous or scared? What other issues are pre-occupying your mind?
- **EACH OTHER** – How are you feeling about others involved in this process? Do you trust them?
- **WORLD** – Can you see how this is connected to the world around you? Is this decision important enough to do this process? What outside voices could diminish the voice of God in this decision?

Give yourself time and opportunity to come to a steady personal place and a healthy relational space before you continue your discernment process.

4/ BRAINSTORM THE OPTIONS

Think of the ways this decision could be made. Write the options down. Including others may be helpful.

5/ HEART & HEAD

What are the issues? What excites you? What scares you? What are the pros and cons? Write them down.

6/ HOLY INDIFFERENCE TO THE OUTCOME

Check you are truly open to whatever God asks. Can you be at peace with whatever God shows you in this discernment? If not, ask God to help with this. If there is a fear or blockage, acknowledge this to God.

7/ WHOLLY ALIGNED

Name and wrestle with any resistance.

What is the resistance showing you?

- Does this fit with Jesus?
- Does it fit with your (our) calling?

8/ CHECK-IN WITH YOUR WHOLE BEING

The following are some helpful questions to ask. Then reflect on your answers.

- Stand back and take a look at your decision and possible outcomes. What thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations do you notice coming up as do this?
- Imagine standing before God to explain your decision to say yes or no. How does that feel?
- How would you advise someone else if they were making this decision?

9/ CONFIRM

What happens when you make a choice and sit with it for a few days? How does that feel? Is there a sense of God's peace and consolation? Make the opposite decision. Live within that for a few days. Compare your reactions and responses to both. Take your process to your community and ask for their prayer and questions around this decision.

10/ GO AND OBEY.

Make your decision and live into it.



Want More?

Look at the following brief video on an Ignatian guide to Godly decision making:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJ7W5ldFqFM>

About This Booklet

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www.presencebasedchurch.co.nz

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*A slow and deliberate movement towards
solidarity with a people and a place.*
