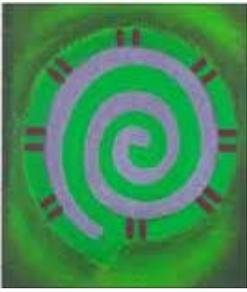


Spiritual Discernment in Decision-Making



Discernment Defined

Discernment is a process of making choices in the context of faith. The choices in discernment are often not between good and bad choices but between several possible actions that are potentially good. The process of discernment helps individuals to find the greater good – where God is truly calling them.

Discernment...

Is asking God for help in making a decision

Is gaining clarity with regard to how God is calling us to live out our purpose on earth

Is considering matters in a way that involves our hearts as well as our minds

Asking oneself, “Which alternative will lead to deeper, more authentic relationships with God, self and others?”

Requires a *practice* of deep trust in God (contemplation)

Assumptions:

- That we desire to grow in TRUST and a *felt*-sense that:
 - We live in a world permeated by God, a world God uses to keep in touch with us
 - God desires to help us make the best decision for us – has our best interest at heart: the **free** personal choice that will bring us toward the fulfillment of our unique purpose in life – God desires our happiness as much as we do and wants to help us claim it
 - We are not “accidents” but purposefully and uniquely created in an on-going process
 - God loves us. God *delights* in us! God *likes* us!
- That we desire to make a sincere commitment to become our best, authentic self – to grow in self-knowledge – and that God desires this for us too
- That we desire to deepen our relationship with God and awareness of His presence and guidance in our everyday lives – that we want to choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in each of us
- That our choices are choices between GOODS

Process

- **Prayer:** Pray for INDIFFERENCE: an openness to God’s will; asking God for the inner freedom and detachment from our own personal agenda to notice the better choice leading toward the fulfillment of our purpose in life; Pray for trust in His guidance
- **Tools:**
 - Pros/Cons: Asking God for the light and grace to see, without judgment or rush to decision, make a list of every possible motive “for” and every possible “con”
 - Your imagination: “Live” with one of the decisions
 - Journaling
 - Spiritual direction
- **NOTICE WHAT YOU NOTICE:** Pay particular attention to your FEELINGS:
 - *Consolation:* Peacefulness of spirit, *interior* clarity, joy, enthusiasm, deeper faith, greater hope and trust, greater love, confidence, courage; “life-giving,” feel closer to God, a choice that is in agreement with the person we are and our deepest values; leading toward greater inner freedom
 - *Desolation:* Lack of peace, feels distant/separated from God, disturbed, moving away from greater inner freedom, “life-constricting,” “darkness of soul,” disquiet
- **The Decision:** Make the decision, ask God for confirmation of the decision – see whether your thoughts, desires and feelings continue to support it

- Give thanks!

Things to keep in mind

- RESIST the urge to judge or compare your process with others' or to rush to a decision to avoid being "in limbo"
 - God's time isn't our time and God is always on time – waiting for a decision to become clear (be revealed to us) through the ordinary events of the day – God of surprises! "God, who is creating us continuously, knows the best time to reveal something that is wholly suitable for us." – Randy Roche, SJ
 - Choice is Clear
 - Choice isn't so Clear
 - Choice *really* isn't so Clear
 - Trust YOUR inclinations: *Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken.* Own and reverence YOUR process
 - An ongoing process – a "practice" of developing a discerning heart and "living into" answers
- RESIST the urge to judge a particular decision as "right" or "wrong" based on the outcome
 - Making a decision that is in line with God's desires for us does not mean that it will necessarily be accompanied by ease; it is helpful to reflect on/recall times when we have experienced living through a time of confusion or difficulty in order to arrive to a "graced" decision in order to grow in confidence that though we may feel to be "lost and in the shadow of death," that God is with us and does not leave us to face our perils alone.

"The place where God calls us to is where our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

– Frederick Buechner

"A rough and unshapen log has no idea that it can be made into a statue that will be considered a masterpiece, but the carver sees what can be done with it. So many... do not understand that God can mold them into saints, until they put themselves into the hands of that almighty Artisan."

– Saint Ignatius of Loyola

"Listen to what gives you joy; pay attention to what delights your heart at its deepest level and then choose that with all your might."

– Hasidic saying

"Everyone is not called in the same way, but we are all called to discover and do the good God has in mind for us."

– Peter Ryan, SJ

"Latent and sometimes locked within each human heart is a dream waiting to be born."

– Bergan and Schwan, CSJ

RESOURCES USED FOR THIS SUMMARY

From IgnatianSpirituality.com:

How Ignatian Spirituality gives us a way to Discern God's Will, Fleming, SJ

An Ignatian Framework for Making a Decision, Jim Manney

Discernment in Decision-Making, Randy Roche, SJ

From CatholicVocation.org.au: *Four Steps in Discernment*

The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything, James Martin, SJ

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