



Pursuing God's Will

Week 1:
The Habit of Discernment



The Seed
Community

Introduction

Why are you taking a course on discernment? What are you wrestling with? What are you longing for?

Lectio Divina

Read this passage four times slowly. What words jump out at you? Talk to God about them. Ask Him questions. How is God inviting you to respond to those words? Is there something He wants you to believe? To do?

*I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;
I will turn the darkness into light before them
and make the rough places smooth.
These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.*

Isaiah 42:16

Quotes for Reflection

In a most general sense is the capacity to recognise and respond to the presence and activity of God - both in the ordinary moments and in the larger decisions of our lives... Discernment is much more than mere decision making; it is, first of all, a habit, a way of seeing that can permeate our whole life...Discernment is a quality of attentiveness to God that, over time, develops into the ability to sense God's heart and purpose in any given moment. We become familiar with the tone, quality and content of God's voice. We notice how God is present for us in the moment... Cultivating the habit of discernment means we are always seeking the movement of God's Spirit so we can abandon ourselves to it.

~ Ruth Haley Barton

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

~ Romans 12:1-2

Consolation and Desolation

Consolation: the interior movement of the heart that gives us a deep sense of life-giving connection with God, others and our authentic self

Desolation: the loss of a sense of God's presence: we feel out of touch with God, with others, with our authentic self. It might be an experience of being off-centre, full of turmoil, confusion and rebellion

Am I aware of experiencing desolation or consolation? How might I turn from the shadow and face the sun?

Daily Examen

1. Become aware of God's presence

Take a moment to be still. Sit comfortably. Notice your breathing, in and out. Don't try to alter anything about your breathing but just notice it. Note the places in your body that work to help you breathe...the stomach muscles, the chest rising and falling, even your nose and mouth with the air moving in and out. Our muscles work to breathe in, and rest to breathe out. With each breath out, allow your body to become a little more relaxed. Become aware of being in God's presence where you are safe, welcomed, loved and listened to. Welcome the Holy Spirit to speak

2. Review the day with gratitude

Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details. As you notice these things, be specific and give thanks to God.

3. Pay attention to your emotions

We can detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. So reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Joy? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Frustration? What is God saying through these feelings? Note where in the day you felt a sense of consolation, of being drawn towards God, filled with His peace, energised and fully alive. Also note where in the day you felt a sense of desolation, being drawn away from God – a lack of peace, frustration, confusion... what might the Holy Spirit be illuminating for you in this?

4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it

Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling—positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. And listen.

5. Look toward tomorrow

Consider what tomorrow might bring and pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you anxious? Cheerful? Expectant? Fearful? Bring these feelings to prayer. Hold open your tomorrow before God. Ask him for help and peace.

*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually
doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore, will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

~Thomas Merton

Homework

Daily Examen - Reimagining the Examen App

Journal - where did I see God?

Recommended Reading

Pursuing God's Will Together - Ruth Haley Barton

Wheat Among Weeds - Thomas Green

Inner Compass - Margaret Silf

Even the Sparrow - Jill Weber