



On any given day, the average person tackles around 35,000 decisions, spanning from what to eat for dinner to pivotal choices like job offers. The comforting aspect in this decision overload is that the Holy Spirit equips us with the gift of discernment to navigate these choices.

WHY IS DISCERNMENT IMPORTANT?

The term for discernment in Greek, *diakrisis*, goes beyond mere judgment—it involves the ability to distinguish and assess people, statements, situations, or environments. In a biblical context, discernment isn't just about making the "right decision." It's deeply rooted in our relationship with God through prayer. This divine connection guides us in making choices that not only shape our lives to reflect the kingdom but form us to be more like Christ.

In *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Adele Calhoun writes:

“Biblical discernment involves more than good judgment, open doors and decision making skills. Right discernment arises out of a relationship with God in prayer. It is founded on the reality of the Holy Spirit's presence within us. Jesus makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is our Counselor and Guide into God's will and ways.”



Calhoun further emphasizes that the Holy Spirit can be counted on to:

- » Assure us of God's love, goodness, and trustworthy nature (Romans 8:16).
- » Convict us of sin, revealing the false self and all its agendas and attachments.
- » Lead us into truth, opening us to the cleansing power of repentance and freedom Jesus brings. (John 16:13).
- » Bring glory to God (John 16:14) through everything that happens to us.
- » Nurture the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

WHAT IS THE EXAMEN?

One prayer practice that is helpful in becoming more attuned in discernment is the Examen. The Examen is a reflective practice of opening ourselves up to God, to notice how God is moving and to notice our own God-given desires throughout the day.



Specifically, the Examen involves daily reflection on one's experiences, recognizing moments of **consolation** (what gives life) and **desolation** (what diminishes life). The process encourages a deeper awareness of God's presence and guidance in everyday experiences.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF EXAMEN?

Preparation: You may wish to light a candle. Do whatever helps you to experience unconditional love. For example, you may imagine you are in a favorite or safe place. To connect in the present moment, place your feet firmly on the ground, and take a few deep breaths. Imagine God's unconditional love, filling you with each breath, and when you breathe out, imagine his love fills your space

Consolation: Place your hand on your heart and ask Jesus to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful. If you could relive one moment, which one would it be? When were you most able to give and receive love today? Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so special. Breathe in the gratitude you felt and receive life again from that moment.

Desolations: Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful. When were you least able to give and receive love? Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so difficult. Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.

Gratitude: Give thanks for whatever you have experienced. If possible, journal or share as much as you desire of these two moments with a friend.

Reflect: Periodically look over your journal or discuss with your friend. Are there any themes or patterns in your consolations or desolations? Are there changes that occur during different seasons? Ask the Spirit to reveal any invitations to transformation in your reflections?

[Click here for a journaling resource, we have developed for you, with additional questions.](#)

HOW CAN WE USE THE EXAMEN FOR STRATEGIC AND TEAM-BASED DECISIONS?

Establish a Regular Reflective Session: Designate a regular time for a reflective session as a team, ideally at the close of your meeting, conclusion of a project phase, or as a midyear review of your team goals at the end of the day or the conclusion of a project phase. This session can serve as a collective Examen for the team.

Begin with Gratitude: Initiate the session by expressing gratitude for the team's efforts and achievements. Acknowledge individual and collective contributions, fostering a positive atmosphere.

Review Key Decisions and Actions: Reflect on the decisions made and actions taken during the day or the specified timeframe. Discuss the impact of these choices on the team's goals and overall mission.

Identify Moments of Consolation and Desolation: Adapt the concept of consolation and desolation to the team context. Identify moments of success, synergy, and alignment (consolation), as well as challenges, conflicts, or deviations from the team's objectives (desolation).



Here are some sample questions:

Consolation: Reflect on a decision or action that reflected the values of the kingdom and contributed to the flourishing of God's principles within the team.

Desolation: When did a decision or action fall short of embodying the values of the kingdom, potentially hindering the team's alignment?

Consolation: Consider a moment when the team's collective efforts promoted justice, equity, and compassion.

Desolation: Identify an instance where the team overlooked or neglected opportunities to advocate for justice and demonstrate compassion in its decisions.

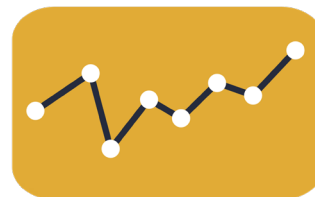
Consolation: Consider recent congregational high points or wins.

Desolation: Identify moments where the congregation experienced disappointment.

Consolation: Reflect on a successful strategy or approach that contributed to the fulfillment of your congregational goals.

Desolation: When did a strategy or approach fall short, leading to a setback?

Learn from Challenges: Instead of viewing challenges as setbacks, use them as opportunities for learning and growth. Discuss how the team can overcome obstacles and what lessons can be applied to future decision-making processes.



Draw out from Team Members: Encourage team members to share their perspectives on the day's or project's events. Open communication channels for insights, concerns, and suggestions related to decision-making and team dynamics.

Seek Improvement: If there were decisions or actions that did not align with the team's values or goals, encourage a constructive dialogue. Discuss how the team can improve or adjust its approach in similar situations in the future.

Look Forward with Strategic Vision: Conclude the reflective session by looking forward. Discuss the team's strategic vision, goals, and upcoming decisions. Consider how the lessons learned from the Examen can inform and enhance future strategies.

Document Insights: Keep a record of the team's insights and reflections. This documentation can serve as a valuable resource for ongoing decision-making processes, providing a historical perspective and aiding in continuous improvement.

THE ESSENTIALS:

The Examen, introduced as a practical prayer practice, encourages daily reflection on experiences, identifying moments of consolation and desolation. It provides a structured guide involving preparation, gratitude, reflection, and seeking improvement. Furthermore, the Examen can be adapted for strategic and team based decisions by establishing regular reflective sessions, expressing gratitude, reviewing key decisions, learning from challenges, and fostering a forward-looking strategic vision.

Calhoun, Adele. *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. IVP books, 2005.

Linn, Dennis, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn. *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*. Paulist Press, 1995.