



Discernment is essential in ministry and leadership because it enables us to recognize and respond to God's presence and activity, whether in the routine of daily life or in significant life choices.

Here are a few factors that emphasize the importance of discernment: [1]

- » **Recognizing where God is Moving:** discernment gives us the ability to distinguish between good (that which is of God and draws us closer to God) and evil that which is not of God and draws us away from God.
- » **Everyday Significance:** It's not just about big moments; discernment helps us find God in the ordinary.
- » **Guidance in Decisions:** Spiritual discernment acts as a guiding light, helping leaders navigate through life's choices.
- » **Distinguishing Paths:** It allows leaders to differentiate between paths that lead us closer to God and those that don't.
- » **A Commitment, Beyond Skill:** Discernment is more than a skill; it's a dedication to seeking and following God's will with the help of the Holy Spirit.
- » **Elevating Leadership:** This commitment raises spiritual leadership above mere management, infusing it with sacred purpose.



Before embarking on this journey of discernment with your teams, there's groundwork to cover:

- » **Shared Understanding:** Leaders must collectively grasp the essence of discernment.
- » **Recognizing Centrality:** There should be agreement on discernment's importance in spiritual leadership.
- » **Determination to Follow God's Will:** Leaders need a firm resolve to lead by discerning God's will.

DEVELOPING A POSTURE FOR DISCERNMENT

Developing a posture of discernment is foundational for both individual spiritual growth and collective leadership effectiveness. Here are some ideas for cultivating such a posture[1]:

BEGIN WITH SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION:



- » Recognize that corporate discernment starts with nurturing the spiritual formation of each individual.
- » Understand that discernment is not merely a cognitive process but a deepening friendship with God, fostered through prayer.

EMBRACE FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS OF DISCERNING LEADERS:



- » Understand that spiritual discernment occurs within the context of the Trinity, involving Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- » Acknowledge the impulse to discern as a positive force, cultivated to respond to Christ's leadership in the Church.
- » Hold a deep conviction in the inherent goodness of God, anchoring discernment in trust and faith.
- » Embrace love as the ultimate calling, extending towards God, self, others, and the world.
- » Commit wholeheartedly to doing God's will as it unfolds before us.

FOSTER COMMUNITY AT THE LEADERSHIP LEVEL:



- » Establish clarity and intentional commitment to group values, ensuring alignment with the principles of discernment.
- » Cultivate shared practices within the leadership community that facilitate living out these values and encountering Christ's presence together.
- » Formalize this commitment through a clear covenant, solidifying the group's dedication to collective discernment and transformation.

DISCERNMENT PRACTICES

Discernment practices are not mere strategies but pathways to deepening our relationship with God and sharpening our ability to recognize his voice amidst the noise of life. Here are a few practical approaches to nurturing a discerning spirit within ourselves and our communities:

» **Gather Co-Listeners [2]**

Recognizing that discernment is not a solitary endeavor, but rather a communal journey, we emphasize the importance of gathering co-listeners—trusted companions who walk alongside us, offering insights, support, and prayerful discernment.

Think about the people in your circle who:

- o Ask thoughtful questions.
- o Empower you to be your best.
- o Represent different stages of life and experiences.



» **Name the Narrative [2]**

In the process of discernment, we not only identify and articulate the stories that shape our understanding and decision-making but also look beyond mere moments to discern the overarching arc of our faith journey. By naming our narratives and recognizing the larger narrative arc, we gain clarity and insight into how God has been at work throughout our lives, guiding and shaping us for our good and his glory. Here are a few questions that can help unnamed realities rise to the surface:

- o What underlying assumptions or beliefs am I operating from in this situation?
- o What emotions or feelings are present that I may not be fully acknowledging?
- o What patterns or themes do I notice across different areas of my life?
- o Is there a dream I'm hanging onto?



» **Look for Arrows [2]**

Discernment involves paying attention to the subtle nudges, promptings, and signs that point us towards God's will. By looking for these "arrows" in our lives—whether in circumstances, conversations, or inner promptings—we discern the direction in which God is leading us.



» **Prayer Practices [1]**

At the heart of discernment lies a deep sensitivity to God's movement in our lives. Prayer serves as our tool for honing this sensitivity, shaping us to be finely attuned to God's guidance and leading by the Spirit.

DISCERNMENT PRACTICES



Indifference: We offer prayers for indifference, asking God to free us from attachment to our own desires and preferences, so that we may be open and receptive to his leading. In the prayer for indifference, we seek the grace to relinquish attachments that may cloud our discernment process. This prayer invites us to surrender ego, prestige, and personal agendas, allowing God's will to take precedence. We ask for the strength to desire only God's will, setting aside our own preferences and ambitions. Questions that guide us on our journey to indifference from our own agendas:

- » What am I willing to let die to give God room to start something new?
- » What will I lay aside or leave behind so that I will be open to new gifts of grace or new expressions of ministry?



Wisdom: In the prayer for wisdom, we humbly acknowledge our need for divine guidance, recognizing that true wisdom comes from God. This prayer challenges our assumptions about leadership, urging us to set aside our preconceived notions and open ourselves to God's perspective. We are reminded of the promise in Scripture to seek wisdom from God, understanding that it requires genuine humility to admit our lack of wisdom, especially in leadership roles. This prayer calls us to go beyond superficial requests and truly ask God for the wisdom we need, demonstrating our willingness to be receptive to God's unconventional wisdom, which may challenge worldly thinking.

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. (James 1:5)



Quiet Trust: In the prayer for quiet trust, we echo the sentiments of Psalm 131, recognizing our need to humbly surrender to God's guidance. This prayer invites us to quiet our souls and relinquish our need to understand everything, acknowledging that some matters are beyond our comprehension. Like the psalmist, we affirm our dependence on God, calming our hearts and minds as we trust in his wisdom and guidance. This prayer cultivates a posture of humility and trust, allowing us to be led by Christ even in situations that seem too complex or overwhelming for us to handle on our own.

My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content. Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore. Psalm 131

THE ESSENTIALS:

Leadership discernment is vital for recognizing and responding to God's guidance in both everyday and significant moments of our lives. Before starting, it's important to establish a shared understanding and commitment to discernment within our teams. Developing a posture for discernment and engaging in practices enhances our ability to discern God's guidance in everyday decisions.

RESOURCES:

- [1] Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups (Transforming Resources) Hardcover – May 18, 2012 by Ruth Haley Barton
- [2] The Next Right Thing: A Simple, Soulful Practice for Making Life Decisions Hardcover – April 2, 2019 by Emily P. Freeman