

Inner Movements: The Practice of Discernment, Part 1: Posture

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Part 1: Posture

The focus is to grow in the ability to see the traces of God in our own experience, our prayer, our desires; to notice the inner movements toward God and the inner movements that lead us away from God. (*Discernment of spirits*)

Part 2: Process

Based on the foundation laid in the first session, the focus is to learn to make wise choices in making life's decisions. How does one choose well, drawing from the wisdom outside ourselves and the wisdom inside ourselves?

Descriptions of Discernment

A way of life

Noticing how and where God is present and active

Following Christ more and more closely

A prayerful process of sifting through and purifying my felt needs and desires, spontaneous impulses, conflicting interior reactions

Wisdom, a gift of God to all people

Having all my intentions and actions focused on God's call to new life and fuller life-giving

A choice between two goods

The one necessary thing - to love God first

Noticing and interpreting those deep currents of feeling that shape what we want, which in turn influence what we do... Jim Manney

Presuppositions for Discernment

God is interested in me and loves me.

God wishes to deal directly with me and to communicate both love and direction.

God's revelation is such a pervasive reality in life that God can be found in all things.

The mission of Christ, as a cooperative human and divine enterprise, validates every religious experience.

I am a unique individual and capable of seeking truth within myself, in prayer and through relationships.

God has sent me the Spirit to help me choose.

Some choices are more helpful than others in building up the Body of Christ.

God is greater than each of us and all of us together.

Discernment is the art of fine-tuning one's innate ability to attend to the subtle movement of God's grace and presence within one's personal life, prayer, work, leisure and relationships.

2.

Essential Dispositions for Discernment

*Without these two dispositions and the ability to pray, one cannot discern. We need to beg God for the graces of **openness and freedom***

OPENNESS:

To share, question, grow, learn, be challenged.

To accept whatever happens in the process that is of God. God may want to be with me in unexpected ways, in ways important for me and God's people.

To accept the result of discernment. Once the choice becomes clear, I will embrace it.

To have passion and let it be directed by God.

To take a long, loving look at myself and God's presence and action everywhere in everything.

To have my options changed and horizons expanded.

To articulate my fears, thoughts, hopes, insights.

FREEDOM: God continues to *free us from* that we may be *free for* giving glory to God and making the best choice for the apostolic service of God's people and all creation.

Freedom from all that binds me to mediocrity and selfishness; expectations of others; control, blindness, prejudices, material possessions, cultural expectations, self-pity, stagnancy, apathy, fear, callousness, retaliation, personal limitations, clutching.

Freedom for entering others' lives and feelings; living with uncertainty; forgiveness, goodness, faithfulness, healing, trust.

Moments of Discernment

Prayer and review of prayer

Consciousness examen

Spiritual direction and retreat

Sickness

Loss and grief

Fruits of Discernment

Union with God's deepest desires for me and others

Increased intimacy with God

Peace, tranquility, excitement in my choice for a fuller life

Conviction of my deeper union with the "dear neighbor" and with all creation

Growth in personal freedom

3.

Recognition of personal unfreedoms

Trust in God's closeness

Openness to ongoing discernment

Discernment of Spirits

"Awareness of inner states and the ability to so interpret those states so that one's life can be gently guided by the Spirit of God." Ernest Larkin, O.Carm

"Discernment of spirits involves chiefly an interpretive sorting out in faith of inner, affective experiences, so that, through dealing properly with the experiences, one can find and be with God in every situation and moment of life." George Aschenbrenner, SJ

A discerning person, seeking God's will, God's intention, God's leading, consciously notices inner affective movements, sifts through them to become attuned to the Spirit and make choices in harmony with God's intention.

What are inner affective movements?

Spontaneous thoughts, lines of reasoning, imaginings,

love, hate, desire, fear,

feelings, impulses, inclinations

moods, daydreams, emotions

Discernment is a sorting and separating out inner experiences. We learn to rummage through the spontaneous movements stirring in our hearts to see the direction they are leading us.

"The enemy of our human nature" (evil spirit)

The enemy of our spiritual progress outside self

The world around us, society and culture

Inner stirrings of our humanity

Tendencies in our psyche which spring from egoism

Wounds we bear within: hurts, fears, self-doubt

Expressed in anxiety, sadness, disturbance, discouragement

Margaret Silf tells us: Notice the power of negative movements within yourself that can pull you off course or suck you down into the depths.

"The Good Spirit"

The Holy Spirit, created spirits

God's direct action in the human heart

God's working in us through grace

4.

All that urges us to love

All that urges us to reach out to others

The many influences for good that surround us in the world and in the communion of saints

Expressed in courage, strength, consolations and tears, inspirations and quiet.

A discerning person learns to recognize which of the interior movements orient her to God and which orient away from God. To discover the origin, we detect their orientation.

“By their fruits...” Gal. 5:19-23

QUESTION:

Is this interior movement leading me to an experience of profound interior peace at the bottom of my heart, to Gospel values of openness, compassion?

OR

Is it leading me to an experience of disturbance at the bottom of my heart, to selfishness, secretiveness, turmoil?

Is it drawing me toward God or away from God?

This is the reason we engage in the “discernment of spirits”.

St. Ignatius guides us:

Persons living **out of tune** with God’s intention for the world:

the action of the evil spirit is to propose apparent pleasures...fill the imagination with sensual delights and gratifications... With such persons, the good spirit uses a method which is the reverse of the above. The good spirit will use the light of reason, arouse the sting of conscience and fill them with remorse.

Persons trying to live **in tune** with God’s intentions for the world:

it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings that disturb the soul. With such persons, it is characteristic of the good spirit to give courage, strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and peace. (Fr. William A. Barry, SJ)

In the next week, notice the **traces of God** in your daily examen, in your reflection after prayer, in your everyday experiences. Also pay attention to the times when **a different spirit** is influencing you and leading you in a different direction. Notice times of consolation or desolation.

In Discernment Part 2 we will review today’s material and look at the process of making a decision by listening to God’s dream for us as well as drawing from our own inner wisdom.