

SOME SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT STEPS

These steps can be used in both personal and team settings. Much has been shaped by Ruth Haley Barton's books and podcast.

Prayer of Surrender

The first is the prayer of quiet trust as described in Psalm 131, "My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matter 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." It's simply acknowledging the issues before us are too complex and difficult for us to decipher on our own. It's coming before God like a young child who is at rest in the presence of a loving father and mother. We come before God and express our utter dependence upon Him who knows all things.

Prayer of Indifference

Another kind of prayer directly associated with discernment is called the prayer of indifference. This does not imply some form of passivity or insignificance toward the matters at hand. Rather, it's asking God to work in our hearts to make us indifferent to our own personal preferences and agendas and to anything but His will. It's taking the posture of Mary who after being told by the angel that she would give birth to the Messiah said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Prayer of Wisdom

When we come to a place of indifference, we are then ready for the prayer of wisdom: "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you" (James 1:5). Too often we ask for wisdom while we are already attached to some outcome that we think best. Indifference fundamentally replaces our own desire to be perceived as wise before others and places us in a position to receive the wisdom that comes from above. We are then ready to receive God's wisdom. It is essential that elders, staff and ministry leaders are personally on this journey of surrender as part of their spiritual preparation for leadership. Otherwise, the planning process easily degenerates to the "best ideas" in the room.

Prayer of Quiet Trust (Psalm 121)

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber;

indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life;

the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Gather Information & Facts

Having become surrendered, open, and humble before God next is time to gather information and facts, noticing without judgement.

Consolation and Desolation. Which choice brings the deepest sense of life, inner peace and freedom? (Deuteronomy 30:11-20, II Corinthians 3:17, Philippians 4:7) Is there a growing sense of wholeness, authenticity, and congruence with who I am in God or a sense of being disconnected from God and off-center within myself?

Direction and Calling. How does this choice fit with the over-all direction and calling of God upon my life? Is there one word that captures my sense of calling these days and does this choice enable me to continue living into my calling?

Life of Christ. Is this choice consistent with what I know about the mind and heart of Christ and his redemptive purposes in the world? Is there some aspect of the life of Christ that speaks to the choice I am facing?

Character Growth and Development. How will this direction nurture the fruit of the Spirit in me—particularly the fruit of love. What does love call for? What is God doing in my character and spiritual growth and will this choice continue to nurture this growth?

Eternal Perspective. Does this choice value what is eternal and permanent, and holds the deepest value rather than what is transient and impermanent? If I imagine myself on my death-bed, which choice would I wish I had made?

Community. How does this choice fit with others' observations of who I am and what God is doing in my life? Am I willing to open up every facet of this decision to a trusted spiritual friend for their wisdom and insight? Is there anything in the overall tradition of the Christian faith that might inform my decision?

Note: Once the decision is made, then is the time to begin strategic planning, not before the discernment process.
