
Perseverance – While I need to be flexible, to be open to change, to ‘roll with the punches’, being *faithful* to the vocation in which I find myself also carries a great deal of weight. If my “discernment” leads me to consider making drastic changes in my life (like walking away from my spouse, my family, my job) that take me away from my normal duties, obligations and responsibilities, I probably need to slow down...and definitely get input from others.

Moods – Does my discernment lead to greater peace or agitation? Do my decisions result in greater joy – real happiness – or greater desolation, perhaps even depression? My emotions can be powerful indicators of the state or progress of my soul: I need to pay attention to them!

Virtues – This should be obvious, but I need to consider my actions: am I practicing more – or less – virtue as a result of my choices? Am I accomplishing *more* – or *less* – good?

Time – Some decisions require and provide significant time for prayer, reading, reflection and dialogue. Other decisions must be made in a split second, on the spot, on the run. Learn the difference.

Avoid Second-Guessing – Be the process long or short, once I’ve made a decision, I need to move on. I will avoid rehashing old decisions over and over.

Live Today Well – I need to embrace each hour, each moment of this present day as best as I can. I take my cues from what is happening right *here*, right *now*...leaving the rest in God’s hands.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT FOR ME?

A Practical Guide for Discerning the Will of God

*Based upon an Examination of both Salesian
Perspectives and Contemporary Considerations
by John W. Crossin, OSFS*

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Introduction



- * Who am I supposed to be?
- * What am I supposed to do?
- * How am I supposed to do this?
- * When am I supposed to do that?
- * Why am I supposed to do this?
- * Should I try out for basketball?
- * Which school should I attend?
- * Which career should I pursue?
- * Is this the person I should marry?
- * How many children should we have?
- * Should I take this job transfer?
- * Is there a better way to do this?
- * Should I try harder, or give it up?
- * Do I stick to my guns, or go with the flow?
- * Do I say something, or keep my mouth shut?
- * Should I consider this new, experimental treatment?
- * Should I get a second opinion?
- * Should I put my dad in a nursing home?
- * Should my mom move in with me and my family?
- * Should I sell my house?
- * Is it time to retire?

As a person of faith, the questions I have – and the decisions I make – boil down to this:

What does God want me to do?

Keep a Check List

Unfortunately, discernment is not an exact science. While I can come to know God's Will for me in broad strokes – and sometimes even in the particular – I can't hope to know it all. And sometimes I will get it wrong.

Still, some of the things that can help me to know how God wants me to live my life include:

God's Signified Will – All the stuff I already know from the Scriptures, Commandments, Counsels etc., that clearly communicate what God considers to be good, virtuous and life-giving behavior.

Feedback from Others – Make good use of the wise counsel of friends, clergy, mentors, counselors and other people I trust. True friends will know when to tell us what we want to hear and when to tell us what we need to hear.

Flexibility – Francis de Sales observed that while all the saints are recognized for their conformity to God's will, no two saints followed God's Will in exactly the same way. I need to remind myself that discernment is about what God wants *me* to do in this situation, not somebody else. Sometimes, this may require me to 'think outside of the box', to stretch myself, to look at myself, my situation, my assumptions or my expectations in *new* ways. I need to be *open* to *change*.

Learn to Listen

The ability to listen is perhaps the single most important skill that I need to develop when it comes to discerning God's Will. Not surprisingly, being able to listen is also perhaps the most difficult skill to acquire. On any given day there may be a lot of static going on around me – and within me – that prevents me from listening clearly.

What do I need to listen to?

- Prayer
- Scripture
- Spiritual reading
- Church tradition
- Collective wisdom
- Other people
- Events, situations and circumstances
- My own mind, heart, feelings and attitudes



Seek Healing

I need to be liberated from things that prevent me from paying closer attention to the world around me and the world within me. Clinging to old ways of thinking, old ways of feelings, old hurts or disappointments, unfulfilled dreams or future fears can hamper my ability to discern what God wants for me right *here*, right *now*.

What steps can I take to experience this healing?

- Read and reflect on Scripture
- Share my thoughts and feelings with a friend
- Be faithful to personal prayer
- Celebrate Eucharist
- Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- Practice silence

Do the Right Thing

Discernment is not about choosing between right or wrong: it is about choosing among goods. If I happen to come across someone in need of medical attention, do I (a) administer first aid, (b) scream “help!”, (c) dial 9-1-1, or (d) drive the person to the hospital? This is where God's Will – and my ability to recognize it – gets played out.

Put another way, discernment asks the question: What virtue (or virtues) does this situation, circumstance, event and/or relationship require right now? The Book of Ecclesiastes tells us that there is “a time for everything” (3: 1 – 15): a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to search, a time to give up; a time to keep and a time to throw away; a time to be silent, and a time to speak; a time to tear, and a time to mend; a time to weep, and a time to laugh...and God makes everything beautiful in its time.”

Therein lies the fundamental challenge of discernment: as near as I can tell, what time is it *now*? What does God want me to do...*now*?

Get a Companion

Discernment often requires the help of a spiritual friend or guide. Some of my decisions should not be made in a vacuum: I should share my deliberations with someone who has my best interests in mind. That person could be a trusted friend, a mentor, a confessor or a spiritual director.

Francis de Sales counsels souls who are interested in devotion to seek a spiritual director. A contemporary definition of spiritual direction would be that of Sandra Schneiders:

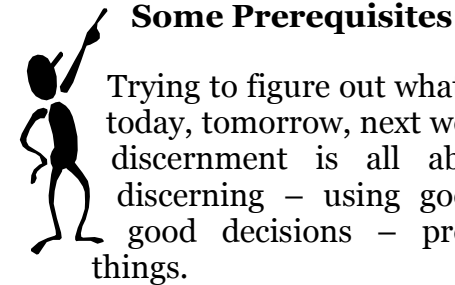


Spiritual direction could be defined as a process carried out in the context of a one-to-one relationship in which a competent guide helps a fellow Christian to grow in the spiritual life by means of personal encounters that seeks the directee's spiritual growth.

The demand for spiritual directors far surpasses the number of men and women who are certified to act in this capacity. Still, a trusted friend, mentor, counselor or confessor can serve as an invaluable sounding board when attempting to know what God wants for me...especially when it comes to weighty, serious or potentially life-changing issues.

In the end, I need to make my own decisions, but some of those decisions are better made if I include the opinions and/or observations of other people in the process.

Discernment



Some Prerequisites

Trying to figure out what God wants me to do – today, tomorrow, next week, next year – is what discernment is all about. The process of discerning – using good judgment to make good decisions – presumes a number of things.

First, and perhaps most obviously, discernment presumes that there is a God. After all, there must first be a God before there can be a Will of God.

Second, discernment presumes that God is always active in my life, regardless of whether or not I am aware of God always acting in my life.

Third, discernment presumes that God does have a particular will – a plan, a desire, a goal, a dream – for me that is unique to and for me.

Fourth, discernment presumes that God does communicate that particular, unique will for me to me.

Fifth, discernment presumes that I can actually come to know God's particular will for me.

Sixth, and finally, discernment presumes that because of God's grace, through my efforts and with the support of others, I can actually know – and accomplish – God's Will for me.

So, how can I come to know God's Will for me?