

?

Discernment must lead to choices, to action. Do your choices:

1. Help you to practice virtue?
2. Enable you to be faithful to your state or stage in life?
3. Increase your sense of peace?
4. Deepen your experience of joy?
5. Enrich the lives of others?
6. Respect the needs of others?
7. Make you a better listener?
8. Help you to do what is good, right and just in the eyes of God?
9. Help you to successfully integrate the various demands and responsibilities in your life?



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Decisions, Decisions

**SALESIAN
PERSPECTIVES**



Discerning the Will of God

“What does God want me to do?” This question, simply put, is at the heart of discernment. This question is also at the heart of the Salesian tradition.

Discernment presumes at least four things:

1. God exists.
2. God is near to me.
3. God has a will or desire for me.
4. I can come to know God’s will.

The Salesian tradition describes discernment as the experience of living between the “two wills of God.”

God’s *signified* will is that which God *is* communicating in general through the Commandments and Counsels found in Scripture; the authority and teaching of the Church; the lived experience and tradition of the Christian faithful; the inspiration of the Spirit; the duties of one’s state, or vocation, in life.

For example, if you are married and raising a family, God’s *signified* will for you would include such things as: living a life of virtue; honoring your father and mother; keeping the holy the Sabbath; believing that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist; nourishing your relationship with your spouse; raising your children in the faith; being a good parent.

God’s *signified* will in *particular* may also be expressed through the actual circumstances in life over which you have no control. You are on your way to an important meeting and you get a flat

tire. You are preparing to leave work when a co-worker needs your help. You are watching TV and your child asks you to review a homework assignment. All of these invite you to ask, “What is really important here?”

God’s *permissive* will involves those things over which you *do* have control or influence. Is today the day you confront a co-worker about an earlier dispute? Do you accept – or decline – that promotion? What do your children need from you at this moment? Should you put your parent in a nursing home? Where is your relationship with your spouse most in need of attention? Should you make time to perform volunteer work? How should you invest your money?

“Discernment is about choosing how best to follow God’s will, desires and longings for you now, today, this very moment,”

Discernment is the process of being open to how God’s *permissive* will is inviting you to live out God’s *signified* will in ways that are appropriate – and even required – by the circumstances, relationships and events in which you find yourself.

Put another way, discernment is about choosing how best to follow God’s will, desires and longings for you now, today, this moment. What is the *best*, or, what are some *better* ways, of imitating the example of Christ in this particular moment, cir-

cumstance or event, no matter how serious or commonplace?

How do you know what is better or best?

Develop the ability to listen. Develop the ability to filter out the external and internal “static” of your life. Recognize that the most pressing things are not always the most important. Realize, too, that the most important things must sometimes wait for the most pressing.

Focus on how God may be speaking through your family, friends, or co-workers. Pay attention to the demands and responsibilities of your state and stage in life, both the planned and the unexpected. Personal prayer, the reading of Scripture, celebrating the Eucharist, employing the assistance of a spiritual director, and experiencing the sacrament of Reconciliation can help you to sharpen your hearing.

Discernment never occurs in a vacuum. It always takes place within the context of your relationships with God, yourself, others, and the created order in which you live. Turn to trusted friends who can support your attempts to do what is right in the eyes of God.

Turn to your personal history, too. Learn from past successes. Learn from past mistakes.

Above all, regardless of the ease or difficulty with which you discern God’s will, place your confidence and trust in God’s presence. Even when you can’t see, hear or feel God’s voice, the Spirit is with you.

Ask God for the grace and courage to discern wisely...every day.