

“Where to Begin?” A Method of Discernment

1. **Continual Prayer**

A daily, living relationship with God is a precondition for good discernment. Seeking God’s will requires growing in one’s relationship with God. No one knows God’s will without knowing God. Regular prayer, with the help of a spiritual director, will enable you to see more clearly how God might be leading you.

- Do I have the desire to do God’s will?
- Do I have a sense of knowing God or knowing about God?
- Have I had experiences that help me believe God knows me and cares about me?
- Can I be open with God?

2. **Through Knowledge of the Options**

Discernment involves choosing between two or more options. Gathering and sifting through information regarding the various options is crucial to making a good decision. *Note: We never have *all* the information.

- Do I have an option between two or more choices?
- How much information do I have about each of the options?
- How much information do I need to make a good decision?

3. **Prayerful Reflection on one’s Freedom to Accept or Reject the Options**

To know and follow God’s will means that we are aware of the forces in our lives that keep us from making and carrying out our commitments. Material or psychological attachments, health issues, addictions, self-image, image of God, fear are just some of the factors that can keep us from being free to choose God’s leading.

- What are the forces or influences that work against me making a free decision?
- What am I most afraid of regarding each of the options?
- To what (or whom) am I too attached to make a free decision?

4. **Rational and Affective Weighing of the “Pros and Cons”**

The process of discernment involves both “using one’s head” and “trusting one’s feelings.” One needs the capacity to understand, reason logically, compare, and weigh different considerations and form judgments based on rational arguments. Equally important, however, is the ability to listen to our feelings, our “heart,” in that process of weighing the advantages and disadvantages of various considerations.

- List the advantages for each of the options.
- List the disadvantages for each of the options.
- Review each of the lists and prioritize them.
- Which option are you most attracted to? Why?
- What are your motivations behind wanting one option over the other?
- What would you advise another person if facing the similar choices?

- Imagine yourself at the end of your life. Ask yourself what choice from that perspective you wish you would have made.

5. Pay Attention to the “Great Desires”

Discernment is a way of sifting through our desires and passions, so that our lives may be shaped by the best of them. Our “great desires” put us in tune with God’s desires and express what God wants us to become.

- An artist is someone who cannot conceive of not painting. A writer also HAS to write. What is it, deep within you, which you MUST do to be true to yourself?
- If you could do your heart’s desire, what would it be?
- What do you think and feel God hopes for you?

6. Experience of Confirmation or its Opposite, Doubt and Confusion

After one makes a decision, either a feeling of “rightness” or peace confirms that decision, or one can feel more confused, unsure, doubting the choice made. If the latter occurs, continue to pray for clarity and light.

- Take a week imagining you have made the choice for one of the options considered. How does it feel? Is there peace? Restlessness?
- Take a week imagining you have chosen the other option considered. How does it feel? Peaceful? Restless?
- How do you feel when you tell God of the choice you wish to make?