

An Overview of Discernment

Discernment = finding God's will = finding my deepest, most authentic desires.
How do You want me to be? What do You want me to do? When do I feel most alive?

Find God (to the extent possible at the moment): know God's love for me, and God's forgiveness of my failings and mistakes and sins; the home of the Prodigal daughter/son.
Whatever I choose, whatever happens, I am safe in the knowledge of Your love for me.

Know myself (to the extent possible at the moment) and so love and forgive myself.
Identity precedes choice: What is my heart's desire? Where is my deepest self engaged? What is the real dynamic or drive of my being? What are my weaknesses and temptations? Is what I think God wants me to choose in tune with what I already know about God and myself?

Be indifferent (about all but desiring God).

There are many things I want, God, but I want You more than all of them and I am open to your Holy Spirit.

The way of Ignatius: experience → reflection → discernment → choice → action
In this, I look at myself always in a spirit of loving acceptance.

Discernment (i.e. my knowledge of what God wants) is **limited** to:

- What God wants **me** to *choose*: I can't discern God's will for someone else.
- What God wants me to choose **now**: I can't predict the future.
- What I have the **right** and the **freedom** to choose: I can't consider doing something impossible or morally wrong.

Three situations in which choices are made:

1. *I know I have to do this. God is in this. I just can't doubt it.*
2. *Which alternative gives me more faith, hope and love for God?*
3. *Which alternative most loving, all things considered? What are the pros and cons? What is more for the glory of God?*

This process of discerning God's will does not give certainty about what will come to pass, but it can give certainty about what God wants me to choose, now. God may want other people to choose differently. Human endeavours are vulnerable to all sorts of mishap. Just because things go wrong does not mean that you chose the incorrectly.

God can be trusted to give the Holy Spirit to those that seek God. So, if you do your best and don't ask more of the process than it can supply, then you can trust it.

Through the discernment process, God is getting me to purify and authenticate my desires so that I can be more consciously in the co-creation.

O Lord God, I have no idea where I am going, I do not see the road ahead of me, I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire to please You. And I know that if I do this You will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for You are ever with me, and You will never leave me to make my journey alone.

Thomas Merton