

DISCERNING GOD'S WILL

What is discernment? It is when we recognize and delight in the voice and will of God. It is the process we use to find the will of God and direction, and determine what to do.

Discernment involves more than good judgment, open doors and decision making skills. Right discernment arises out of a relationship with God in prayer. It is founded on the reality of the Holy Spirit's presence within us. Jesus makes it clear the Holy Spirit is our Counselor and Guide into God's will and ways.

Discernment depends on a deep trust in God's good intentions toward us. Distrusting God's intentions and fearing that his will could be life-thwarting rather than life-giving can sabotage our ability to listen and respond.

David F. White in his book, Practicing Discernment With Youth (which by the way is a great book for all ages) talks about the process of discernment through the lens of the first and greatest commandment: "Loving the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength." (Mark 12:30).

White states that we can love God with all our:
heart (by listening),
mind (by seeking to understand),
soul (by remembering and dreaming)
and strength (by acting).

Follow these four steps when seeking to discern God's voice, will and direction:

1. Listen to your feelings and then determine whether these feelings are what it means to love God or whether they need to be adjusted or abandoned.
2. Use your mind to understand the situation and the facts.
Get all the information you need to make a good decision.
3. Pray and read the Bible and reflect on it.
Prayer creates the space to change how we view God, neighbor and self. In prayer we are called to remember love and to be reconciled with God and neighbor.
The Bible cultivates an alternative perspective of the world, a dream in which the world is being reconciled. In these stories contained in holy writ we are given a way of seeing the world, God's work, and our role in it.
The Biblical story reveals a subversive grace at play in the midst of the

world's brokenness, opening creatures to their true glory and to each other, making the world anew. This story opens us to live in individual and corporate fullness.

4. Act after you have identified your feelings, gotten vital information, prayed and read and reflected upon scripture. In the process of taking action you should: clarify the aims of your action, brainstorm, judge, plan, implement and evaluate. For some Christians, their faith has become an inert identity or possession that only perpetuates their slumber, suppressing any response to the beauty or brokenness of the world. But at the very heart of Christian theology we are reminded of God's own work in creating the world and reconciling and empowering us as partners in creating and healing.