

DISCERNMENT



“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the *wisdom to know the difference.*” The final phrase in this prayer, asking for wisdom, is really a request for discernment.

Discernment is more than learning or physical sight. Discernment is the ability to have understanding and sound judgment in knowing and doing the right thing. Spiritually discerning people have the capacity to separate and sift what is good and what is best based on their knowledge of God and His ways.

From the very beginning God planned that we would know Him and live with Him forever. The Bible tells us ***“God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted***

eternity in the human heart but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end." (Ecclesiastes 3:11 NLT)

As humans we operate from day to day as though we are going to live forever in this world. We don't consult God with regards to what is best for us, because we think we know that intuitively and so we end up suffering painful consequences. The truth is that without God's wisdom, we don't know how to live successfully in this life, or what will happen to us in the next.

What are we to do? God has given us the answers in His word in the Bible. ***Deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees. I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes.*** (Psalm 119:124-125 NIV)

God invites us to know Him personally. His desire is that we understand and receive salvation through Jesus Christ. He also wants us to know the plan He has for each of our lives. When we spend time with God in His word, He will give us a discerning heart to know His ways. God wants us to seek Him for direction and, as we desire to know the plan He has prepared for us, He will give us discernment in our spirit about the right way to go.

Let those who are wise understand these things. Let those with discernment listen carefully. The paths of the LORD are true and right, and righteous people live by walking in

them. But in those paths sinners stumble and fall. (Hosea 14:9 NLT)

Discerning the ways of God is the work of the Holy Spirit who comes to live within us when we accept Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. The Holy Spirit directs our path and guides us into all truth. Some simple steps we might take to help us in this process are:

- ✓ list the known pros and cons of each choice.
- ✓ pray with this list, trusting that God will direct our steps in the way we should go.
- ✓ pray and seek guidance from someone who knows us well (pastor, priest, parents, spiritual counselor) about the way we are sensing to go. Consider the gifts God has given us
- ✓ Remember that we may plan our course but if we listen attentively to God, He will direct our path.

For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you," says the LORD. (Jeremiah 29:11-14 NLT)

In order that our own imagination or desires do not mislead us, we need to make an honest assessment of our own will versus God's revealed will. Things we need to look at include:

1. Humility: Acknowledge that our own understanding is not enough. We need God's

perspective and guidance in the small and large decisions of life. ***He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way.*** (Psalm 25:9 NIV)

2. Faith: Believe that God will speak to us. ***Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*** (Hebrews 11:6 NIV)
3. A Clean Heart: Sin blocks God's voice so ask God to reveal any way we've been living in self-will and going against His principles. ***If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*** (Psalm 66:18 KJV)
4. A Yielded Will: Intentionally place our trust in God by committing to His way. Guidance from God becomes clearer through obedience. Jesus said, ***If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.*** (Mark 8:34 NLT)
5. Waiting before God: Give God time to speak, time where we focus on God alone and allow Him to speak into our situation. ***God says: But my people would not heed my voice and Israel would have none of me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart to walk in their own counsels. Oh that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways.*** (Psalm 81:11-13 NKJV)

6. Recognize the source of the voice: God's voice is consistent with His word. If we submit our reasoning to Him, He will convey His answer through our spirit. Satanic and demonic powers can bring impressions to our minds. However, we can sift our thoughts by being willing to surrender our heart's desires to God, asking only to know His will. ***We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NLT)***

We need to let go of preconceptions, biases, stereotypes or whatever hinders our vision so we can better recognize God's will for our life. Sorrow over a loss in our lives can hinder our discernment. Fear of change can also rob us of the ability to go forward in a season of our lives.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-3 NIV)

When we have made a decision, peace and joy may be signs that our choice is in keeping with God's plans. Choosing our way forward based on

the wisdom and discernment that God gives will result in a life lived to the full as God intended.

Questions for Discussion

1. Where do I see evidence of growth in sound judgment and discernment in my life? How do I consciously make God a part of my decision making processes?
2. Which practices that help develop discernment are part of my daily life? What practices do I still need to adopt?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank You for bringing me from the darkness of sin and shame into the light of Your presence. Forgive me for the times I have ignored your guidance in favour of my own self-will. I ask You now for the gift of discernment so that I may make wise choices as I move forward into the plans that You have for my life. Lord, give me ears to hear that I might be attentive to Your word. Help me to respond to the urgings of Your Spirit in all that I do and say. AMEN