

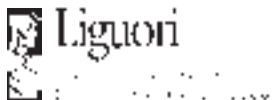
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Tuning In to GOD'S & CALL

Andrew Carl Wisdom, OP
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FOREWORD BY
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PART I

What Is Discernment?

*“Eternal God, eternal Trinity...I desire above all to see you,
the true light, as you really are.”*

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

DISCERNMENT is a process whereby we seek to discover God’s presence and action in our lives. Before making a decision, we intentionally stop to consider and reflect upon how our desires match what God wants for us. The goal of discernment is to discover God’s personal and wholly unique call to us, to me. As a person claimed by Christ in baptism, we believe God is always at work in us and that we are called to be the Lord’s instrument in the world. How God calls me to be that instrument is the stuff of discernment.

The Church invites all to make a generous gift of one’s life to God either through marriage, an intentional single life, the priesthood, or religious life. Which of these vocational choices represents the most generous gift of our self, not objectively, but subjectively? God wants us to not merely survive in our life choices, but—in accordance with Saint Thomas Aquinas’ thought—God wants our human flourishing. In what calling, although sometimes challenging, would one most flourish?

WAKING UP

SCRIPTURE: “I was sleeping, but my heart was awake.”

SONG OF SONGS 5:2

REFLECTION: Have you ever considered that so many of us go through this world as though asleep at the wheel of our lives? Yet our hearts lie awake with a gnawing hunger, an all-consuming thirst not easily quenched. This abiding hunger and thirst is actually a gift that, when fully acknowledged, awakens our whole being and compels us to go deeper, to seek after the *more*. How often have we glimpsed this thirst in ourselves and other people when they lament: *There has to be something more. This can't be all there is.* Indeed, these moments are a wake-up call from God to go deeper. There is a *more* to go to, and God nudges us toward it. That *more* is what gives our life its ultimate meaning and centers us in our truest identity.

When I was in the business world, the reaction of those who learned of my decision to leave my career and become a Dominican priest struck me. My co-workers commented: “It must be nice to know your meaning in life.” This is “the *more*” that speaks to our deepest hunger and allows us to live a life fully awake: knowing with every fiber of one’s being that meaning in life does not come from our roles and responsibilities but from our eternal identity as God’s beloved children.

Now go through this day, awake to the reality that beyond mother or father, Republican or Democrat, businesswoman or janitor, your deepest identity—the one before all others—is

an identity as God's beloved, the dignity of which no one and nothing can take away.

QUOTE: *"Savior, your divine plan for the world is a mirror for the spiritual world; teach us to walk in the world as spiritual men [and women]."*

SAINT EPHREM

ACTION: Make a quick list of your top five priorities. Are they reflective of what you find most meaningful in life, what you truly hunger for, or rather how you define yourself before others?

PRAYER: Tender God, this is your beloved child. I was asleep, but you have awakened my heart, and now my heart in your heart is awakening the rest of me to the truth of my identity in you. Help me to go about this day knowing my dignity as your very own beloved son or daughter.

ADSUM

SCRIPTURE: "Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.'"

LUKE 1:38

REFLECTION: Mary, the Mother of God, has always been the epitome of openness and God-centeredness for all women and men. Her "yes" to God changed human history. At an art exhibit by Holly Schapker, who inspiringly captured the life and work of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in paint and textiles, this short introduction to her collection speaks clearly to the message and disposition needed for discernment:

*“On the night Gabriel visited Mary, as the biblical passage goes, he asked her to bear a child who would be called Emmanuel, a name that means **“God is with us.”** Perhaps there was a pause until she answered, “Adsum,” which is the Latin expression for **“I am here.”** Not a word easily translated into the English language, Adsum means being in a state of mind where the person is completely available and willing to serve God. The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius allowed me to approach this state in my painting studio and outside of it.”*

HOLLY SCHAPKER

Being in a state of mind where the person is completely available and willing to serve God is the state of mind, heart, and soul for which we pray in the discernment process.

QUOTE: *“There are very few people who realize what God would make of them if they abandoned themselves into his hands and let God form them by his grace.”*

IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, SJ

ACTION: Can you imagine the many ways that you can be available, open, and willing to serve Jesus Christ? Make known to the Lord all of your feelings, hopes, dreams, and plans that come to mind.

PRAYER: My Redeemer, I feel within the depths of my being a great desire to be completely available to know you, to love you, to serve you. This desire must be a gift of your grace because it has come to me as a complete surprise, and it gives me great peace.

DISCERNMENT

SCRIPTURE: “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few.”

MATTHEW 9:37

REFLECTION: Are you struggling with important decisions in your life? Are you searching for a way to sort out and prioritize your options, opportunities, or to find a path of resolution with which you are content? This is discernment and the work of one who is discerning.

Discernment is not a straightforward, step-by-step process but an approach that will lead you to a place of peace with your most important decisions. Whether it is about a career or college choice, a relationship, or a life decision—your goal is to process information with openness and weigh your options in order to choose the best path before you.

Begin with a prayer. Teresa of Ávila speaks about prayer as a heart-to-heart conversation with the One who knows and loves you. Relationship with God is crucial as you make decisions, and a loving conversation with God is a necessity.

Clear discernment will also require research. This is like trying on new clothes to see what fits best. What is comfortable or what feels like something that is compatible with your personality? Check out and attend to the particulars of these choices. If it is a serious life choice, then speak with a counselor, a family member, or a trusted friend to further discern this option. Writing out the pros and cons and many aspects of the choices before you might be a clarifying action.

Important decisions are never easy to make and should not be taken lightly.

Perhaps you have prayed faithfully for months or sometimes even for years and researched, consulted, and gathered information. It is natural to feel confused and bewildered from time to time. “How,” you ask, “am I going to narrow this down and make any sense of what to do with my life?”

Relax! Jesus never said it would be easy, but he did say: “Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Wise mentors and objective friends are critical to the process. Trust is vital: Trust God, others, and your inner self as you think, pray, and feel your way forward and prepare to make the decisions before you. Recognize that you are the only one who can decide, and God gives you full freedom to discern and choose the path before you. Do not be afraid!

QUOTE: *“Once the love of God has released him from self-love, the flame of divine love never ceases to burn in his heart and he remains united to God by an irresistible longing.”*

DIADOCHUS OF PHOTICE

ACTION: List the ways that you can (1) trust more today and (2) remain in the truth.

PRAYER: Come, Spirit of God, teach me your ways. Continue to guide me with your tender hand. Show me where to seek, to knock, and to ask with trust.

THE THREE CALLS

SCRIPTURE: “Blessed are those who dwell in your house! O LORD of hosts, blessed the man who trusts in you!”

PSALM 84:5, 13

REFLECTION: Connie burst into the Campus Ministry office: “I just had a lightning-bolt experience! I saw that film on Mother Teresa and thought: *I want to give my life to the poor and help others, and I know that this is something I can do, want to do, and will do.* I remember thinking this same thought when I made my first Communion and again when I was confirmed. The bishop said that some in the class were called to be religious and priests, and in my heart I felt a strong call accompanied by a feeling of peace and joy! This same feeling returned tonight after the movie.”

This is a call from God that is considered unusual. It is much like the man who sees someone across a crowded room and is clear that this is the person he will one day marry. These moments, though rare, have proven successful and are beautiful illustrations of how God fulfills lives. A call like this one should still be discerned: examined, researched, and questioned before a decision is made to move forward.

Another more common type of call is *vocation by attraction*. A person experiences a grace-filled inspiration through another person, event, dream, interest, or desire. One may be drawn over time to a specific mission, ministry or way of serving God in religious life or the priesthood. The call is sustained

through thick and thin. Struggles and temptations may be a real part of the search for the truth of where one is best suited to serve God and attain salvation. Yet with direction, prayer, and soul-searching, a person moves toward a peaceful resolution and decision.

A third type of call is *vocation by reason*. In this call, the person is moved intellectually and with her eyes on God; she tends to search for the answer with an analytical bent. Saint Ignatius recommends a logical process for this discernment.

Each of these ways that God calls have some overlapping experiences, and each call is—in a sense—unique. The life call of each of us is written in the heart of God and is beyond any script we could have imagined or dreamed for ourselves. We look at God's way of mapping our lives and pray for the grace to respond to both small and large calls each day with a resounding YES!

QUOTE: *“God visits us with so many lights, with so many inspirations of his grace.”*

MOTHER CLELIA MERLONI
SERVANT OF GOD

ACTION: Sit in silent adoration before the Holy Eucharist. Place your desires on the altar, asking God to shed light on your decisions and help you respond to the Lord's call.

PRAYER: Lord, teach us the mysteries of love. I want to choose the life that draws love from me and spend my life serving your people.