

Discerning God's Will

- Introduction
 - Very happy to be here.
 - Very happy you're all dedicating yourself to this training in the art of spiritual direction. Becoming ever more needed in the Church. It's an essential aspect of formation. I also think it's going to be one of the things that God will most ask of members of Regnum Christi in the future.
 - I'm also very happy to have the chance to speak on this topic today. I've spend my entire priesthood trying to help people discern God's will and do it, but I've never been asked to speak formally about it. And so it's given me a chance to ponder what the Lord has taught me over the course of years and to compare more carefully that to the formal presentations given in Church documents and in the writings of some of the great spiritual masters.
 - Discerning God's Will
 - I've been asked to speak on the topic of discerning God's will. This is a very large and important topic that involves everything from trying to determine what God is trying to communicate to us in daily prayer and the little events of each day to the bigger questions of our vocation to sanctity and becoming perfected as God is perfect, to our vocation within that call to be saints, to proposed change of assignments in the mission to much more. There's obviously no way we can cover the topic exhaustively in an hour. But I hope to share some thoughts from the Church, from spiritual masters, from my priestly work and experience and from my own prayer life that I hope would be of some value to you in this course. I readily admit that I don't really know the details of what you've covered in terms of your spirituality course as a whole or this module on discernment in specific, so I apologize if some of what I say repeats what you already know. But as the old Latin aphorism goes, *repetitio mater studiorum!* "Repetition is the mother of all learning!"
 - Discernment and Pope Francis
 - The term and the whole subject of discernment has been getting a lot more attention since the election of a Jesuit as the 266th Peter 20 months ago. His training as a Jesuit retreat master and spiritual director through St. Ignatius' spiritual exercises has deeply impacted how he prays, how he leads and how he speaks. And he has been speaking a lot about discernment in his life and in the life of the Church.
 - During the interview with Jesuit publications last September he was asked by Fr. Antonio Spadaro, the young Jesuit director of *Civiltà Cattolica*, "How do you understand the role of service to the universal church that you have been called to play in the light of Ignatian spirituality? What does it mean for a Jesuit to be elected pope? What element of Ignatian spirituality helps you live your ministry?" Pope Francis replied, "Discernment. Discernment is one of the things that worked inside St. Ignatius. For him it is an instrument of struggle in order to know the Lord and follow him more closely. I was always struck by a saying that describes the vision of Ignatius: *non coerceri a maximo, sed contineri a minimo divinum est* ("not to be limited by the greatest and yet to be contained in the tiniest—this is the divine"). I thought a lot about this phrase in connection with the issue of different roles in the government of the church, about becoming the superior of somebody else: it is important not to be restricted by a larger space, and it is important to be able to stay in restricted spaces. This virtue of the large and small is magnanimity. Thanks to magnanimity, we can always look at the horizon from the position where we are. That means being able to do the little things of every day with a big heart open to God and to others. That means being able to appreciate the small things inside large horizons, those of the kingdom of God.
 - "This motto," the pope went on, "offers parameters to assume a correct position for

discernment, in order to hear the things of God from God's 'point of view.' According to St. Ignatius, great principles must be embodied in the circumstances of place, time and people. [St. John's principle about the incarnation: 1John 4:1 Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God.] In his own way, John XXIII adopted this attitude with regard to the government of the church, when he repeated the motto, 'See everything; turn a blind eye to much; correct a little.' John XXIII saw all things, the maximum dimension, but he chose to correct a few, the minimum dimension. You can have large projects and implement them by means of a few of the smallest things. Or you can use weak means that are more effective than strong ones, as Paul also said in his First Letter to the Corinthians."

- "This discernment takes time. For example, many think that changes and reforms can take place in a short time. I believe that we always need time to lay the foundations for real, effective change. And this is the time of discernment. Sometimes discernment instead urges us to do precisely what you had at first thought you would do later. And that is what has happened to me in recent months. Discernment is always done in the presence of the Lord, looking at the signs, listening to the things that happen, the feeling of the people, especially the poor. My choices, including those related to the day-to-day aspects of life, like the use of a modest car, are related to a spiritual discernment that responds to a need that arises from looking at things, at people and from reading the signs of the times. Discernment in the Lord guides me in my way of governing. But I am always wary of decisions made hastily. I am always wary of the first decision, that is, the first thing that comes to my mind if I have to make a decision. This is usually the wrong thing. I have to wait and assess, looking deep into myself, taking the necessary time. The wisdom of discernment redeems the necessary ambiguity of life and helps us find the most appropriate means, which do not always coincide with what looks great and strong,"
- He's also been proposing discernment to the people. He's preached about it several times. We can ponder what he said in January this year: "It is necessary to know the discernment of spirits, to discern whether something helps us remain in the Lord or takes us away from Him," he said. "Our heart always has desires, has cravings, has thoughts. But are these from the Lord or do some of these things take us away from the Lord?" "Test the spirits to see if they really come from God, because many false prophets have come into the world." Prophets or prophecies or suggestions: 'I want to do this!' But this does not bring you to the Lord, it leads you away from Him," he stressed. "That's why vigilance is necessary. The Christian is a man or a woman who knows to keep watch over his or her heart. And many times our heart, and with so many things that come and go, seems like a local market: everything you can find everything there... No! We need to test things - this is from the Lord, and this is not – in order to remain in the Lord." In order to discern whether something is from Christ or the Antichrist, the Holy Father stated that John's instruction, to recognize that the Word was made flesh, is to recognize the path taken by Christ that led to his death on the Cross. "That is the path of Jesus Christ: abasement, humility, humiliation as well. If a thought, if a desire takes you along the road of humility and abasement, of service to others, it is from Jesus," the Pope said. "But if it brings you to the road of sufficiency, of vanity, of pride, along the path of an abstract thought, it is not from Jesus." "So many times, our heart is a road, everything passes there... Put it to the test! And do I always choose the things that come from God? Do I know which are the things that come from God? Do I know the true criterion by which to discern my thoughts, my desires? Let us think of this, and let us not forget that the criterion is the Incarnation of the Word. The Word is come in the flesh: this is Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ who was made man, God made man, who lowered Himself, humbled Himself for love, in order to serve all of us. And may the Apostle John grant us this grace to know what is happening in our hearts, and to have the wisdom to

discern what is of God and what is not of God.”

- There’s always a reason why the Holy Spirit leads the Cardinals of the Church to discern the need for a particular man for the papacy. One of the reasons why he was doubtless chosen is because the Holy Spirit evidently wants him to lead the whole Church in a process of discernment. But we need people to know this art and be able to teach this art.
- What I’d like to do in this brief talk is to give an overview of the discernment of God’s will in ordinary and extraordinary situations of Christian life. Then, because I know you’re specifically learning St. Ignatius’ principles of discernment, to go over what he teaches us about the process of this type of discernment. Then I’d like to give an application of what St. Ignatius teaches by turning to a retreat conference given by Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio in 2006 to Spanish bishops about spiritual discernment in general, which I think will nourish our understanding of the theme of discerning God’s will and especially discerning the good and evil spirits that can arise in discernment. We’ll summarize by taking six different lessons of spiritual discernment we find in Sacred Scripture. Finally, I’d like to leave some time for your comments and questions.
- Overview of the Discernment of Choices
 - Back in 2011, the Vatican’s Congregation for Clergy published an excellent document for priests entitled, “The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors.” It gave a great summary and overview of the Church’s wisdom with regard to the crucial one-on-one formation that happens in spiritual direction and in the confessional. This has been the context in which the Lord has led me, both as a recipient and an instrument on a mystical adventure into the process of discernment. I’d like to frame our discussion of the topic from what this excellent document from the Congregation of Clergy provides.
 - It describes how priests as spiritual directors are meant to aid in the process of discernment. “The principal objective of spiritual direction is therefore to discern the signs of God’s will for our journey of vocation, prayer, perfection, for our daily life, and for our fraternal mission. Normally, we speak of discerning the illumination or promptings of the Spirit. Sometimes this discernment can be very urgent. It is always necessary to take account of the “charism” proper to personal vocation, or to the community in which the person seeking or receiving counsel resides. ... In seeking to discern the signs of God’s will, with the assistance of fraternal counsel, such consultation sometimes includes themes related to the moral life or to the practice of the virtues, and also presenting confidentially the situation which one wishes to clarify. However, a lack of a true desire for holiness will mean that spiritual direction has lost its objective. The objective of spiritual direction inheres in the process of faith, hope and charity (as configuration with the values, standards and outlook of Christ): It should always be guided by the signs of God’s will for the charisms that we have received. The person being directed must always assume his own responsibilities and initiatives. ... Seeking moral guidance, disclosing one’s problems in confidence, exercising the means of salvation must all be seen as part of seeking God’s will. Without a sincere desire for holiness spiritual direction would never have a specific objective or purpose in Christian life” (PMDM 78-80)
 - Then it gets more particular with regard to how to help discern through spiritual direction: “The works of the spirit of evil are accompanied by pride, independence, sadness, discouragement, jealousy, confusion, hatred, deception, disdain of others, and selfish preferences. It is very difficult to distinguish these areas especially in the absence of spiritual direction and taking into account temperament, culture, and natural qualities. The areas or themes that are to be discerned are those which belong to the path of vocation (as lived out in ordinary every day circumstances), contemplation, perfection, fraternal life and mission. There are, however, personal and community situations which require special discernment; these would include a change in the state of life, new insights or impulses, structural changes, some weaknesses, and extraordinary phenomena” (PMDM 99).
 - It adds something very important about how prayer — and discernment — is an art (*ars*) not a method (*techné*). “Since the Spirit blows where he wills (Jn 3:28) it is not possible to formulate strict norms about discernment. However, the saints and the spiritual masters continually refer to certain constants or to signs of the actions of the Spirit of love who acts outside of human logic. No spiritual situation can be well discerned without tranquility of mind which is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

It seeks out not one's own interest or to dominate others, but the best way of serving God and one's brothers and sisters. Spiritual counsel (in the context of discernment) operates with the guarantee of interior freedom which is not conditioned by selfish interests nor by the fashions of the moment. Necessary for discernment are: prayer, humility, detachment from preferences, listening ability, study of the life and teaching of the saints, knowledge of the teaching of the Church, careful examination of personal interior inclinations, ability to change, and freedom of heart. In this way we can train a good conscience or form that charity which wells up from a pure heart, from a clear conscience and from a sincere faith (cf. 1 Tim 1:5).

- So we've covered various things that are necessary for discernment of God's will to happen well:
 - Openness to discerning the *signs* of God's will for our:
 - Vocation
 - Prayer
 - Call to Perfection
 - Daily Life
 - Fraternal Mission
 - Attentiveness to the Holy Spirit
 - His promptings
 - His charisms
 - Charism of our a particular community
 - A desire for holiness
 - We have to have our priorities straight.
 - If serving God, our Creator and Lord, is the ultimate goal of our lives, then everything else in our lives must be kept in the subordinate position of a means to that end. This means that things such as opportunities, experiences, and relationships are to be valued and chosen only insofar as they contribute to our ultimate goal in life and rejected insofar as they deter us from that goal.
 - "What we want above all is the ability to respond freely to God, and all other loves for people, places, and things are held in proper perspective by the light and strength of God's grace. ...In coming to a decision, only one thing is really important – to seek and to find how God is calling me at this time of my life. ...God has created me out of love, and my salvation is found in my living out a return of that love. All my choices, then, must be consistent with this given direction in my life." (*Spiritual Exercises*, [16, 169, 23]).
 - Seek first the kingdom...
 - A desire for guidance
 - Actual guidance through Spiritual direction
 - A capacity to discuss one's problems in confidence
 - Tranquility of mind
 - Personal Freedom of heart and responsibility.
 - Ignatius describes three types of people and their differing approaches to decision making (*Spiritual Exercises*, [149-155]):
 - The first type is "all talk and no action." This kind of person is full of good intentions but remains so distracted by his or her busyness about so many relatively inconsequential things that they never get around to the "one thing necessary," namely, God's will for them. Not to decide ends up being their decision.
 - The second type of person does everything but the one thing necessary. These people may do all kinds of good things in their life *but* don't face the central issue of what God is calling them to. They are in effect putting conditions on what God can call them to. They'll do good things as long as it doesn't ask too much of them – especially demand a total commitment that would call them to adjust their priorities to what God is asking of them and thus put God's will first in their lives.

- The third type of person is the only one who is truly free. Their whole and deepest desire is to do whatever God's will is for them with no conditions attached. This is the attitude necessary to authentically find and follow God's will for us.
- Exercising the means of salvation
 - Grace
 - Prayer
 - Baptism and Regular Confession
 - Holy Eucharist
 - Word of God
 - Gifts of the Holy Spirit
 - Knowledge of the Teaching of the Church
 - Communion with, study of the teaching and following the example of the saints
- Discernment of spirits
- Unselfishness
- Humility
- Detachment from preferences
 - Can't have our mind made up.
- Ability to listen to God and others
- Capacity carefully to examine one's interior inclinations
- Docility and ability to change
 - Give God a blank check
- Purity
- Good conscience
- Sincere faith
- These would all be part of the preparation for discerning God's will, in terms of remote and proximate preparation for sure but also in terms of immediate preparation for discernment.
- I know on your Bibliography, you've been asked to read Fr. Timothy Gallagher's *Discerning the Will of God: An Ignatian Guide to Christian Decision Making*. The first of three parts is dedicated to this type of preparation and he describes many of these elements that are given to us by the Congregation for Clergy.
 - A choice that God is asking to be discerned and made
 - The foundation of everything being in God's love for us that leads to our seeking to live in that love
 - The disposition to do what the Lord wants
 - The following means
 - Spiritual exercises
 - The Eucharist
 - Sacred Scripture
 - Silence
 - Spiritual Direction
 - Review of the Spiritual Experience (after prayer, and the examen at night)
 - A key method of prayer which Ignatius recommends to help us with this is called "The Examen of Consciousness" or simply the "Examen." We begin the Examen with an awareness of God's presence with us and ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to prayerfully reflect on our day. We reflect on our day and ask ourselves how God has been present in the events and encounters of our day and in the feelings we experienced that day. We then look at how Christ has called us through these experiences as well as how we responded. Another helpful method for the Examen is to look at what we are grateful for and what has given us life this day. And then look, on the

other hand, at what we are not so grateful for and what has drained life from us. Reflecting on these patterns over time will help point us toward what God is calling us to.

- St. Ignatius on the Discernment of Choices
 - In his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius gives us three “times,” ways or modalities in which a sound choice can be made in paragraphs 175-188. These are a very rich and helpful description of how to do it right and well according to the way God normally leads us at different times of our life.
 - He observes that in making an important decision we tend to find ourselves in one of three basic situations. We tend to either (1) feel inner clarity or certainty about what to do, or (2) we feel inner conflict about what to do, feeling pulled in different directions (for example, feeling drawn to both religious life and having a family), or (3) there is not much of anything going on inside and we feel clueless. If we find ourselves in the first situation where we feel inner clarity, we’re lucky. Then we know what we should do and just have to go ahead and do it. If we’re not so lucky to have this inner clarity, and we’re often not, then Ignatius gives us suggestions to help us make a good, prayerful decision when we’re feeling conflicted and uncertain.
 - First Time. The first time is, when God our Lord so moves and attracts the will, that without doubting, or being able to doubt, such devout soul follows what is shown it, as St. Paul and St. Matthew did in following Christ our Lord. Second Time.
 - The second, when enough light and knowledge is received by experience of consolations and desolations, and by the experience of the discernment of various spirits.
 - Spiritual consolation is an experience of being so on fire with God’s love that we feel impelled to praise, love, and serve God and help others as best as we can. Spiritual consolation encourages and facilitates a deep sense of gratitude for God’s faithfulness, mercy, and companionship in our life. In consolation, we feel more alive and connected to others. It refers, in other words, to “every increase in hope, faith, and charity, and every interior joy which calls and attracts one toward heavenly things and to the salvation of one’s soul, by bringing it tranquility and peace in its Creator and Lord” (The Spiritual Exercises, n. 316). Paul’s letter to the Galatians lists the fruit of the Spirit as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (5:22-23). When you experience this group of movements in your being, you can be relatively sure that God’s Spirit is moving you.
 - Spiritual desolation, in contrast, is an experience of the soul in heavy darkness or turmoil. We are assaulted by all sorts of doubts, bombarded by temptations, and mired in self-preoccupations. We are excessively restless and anxious and feel cut off from others. Such feelings, in Ignatius’s words, “move one toward lack of faith and leave one without hope and without love.” The key question in interpreting consolation and desolation is: where is the movement coming from and where is it leading me?
 - For people who have closed themselves off from God’s grace, the good spirit disturbs and shakes up. It stirs feelings of remorse and discontent. The purpose is to make the person unhappy with a sinful way of life. On the other hand, the evil spirit wants such people to continue in their confusion and darkness. So the evil spirit tries to make them complacent, content, and satisfied with their distractions and pleasures.
 - For people who are trying to live a life pleasing to God, the good spirit strengthens, encourages, consoles, removes obstacles, and gives peace. The evil spirit tries to derail them by stirring up anxiety, false sadness, needless confusion, frustration, and other obstacles.
 - Third Time. The third time is quiet, when one considers, first, for what man is born -- namely, to praise God our Lord and save his soul -- and desiring this chooses as means a life or state within the limits of the Church, in order that he may be helped in the service of his Lord and the salvation of his soul.

- I said time of quiet, when the soul is not acted on by various spirits, and uses its natural powers freely and tranquilly.
- If election is not made in the first or the second time, two ways follow as to this third time for making it.
 - The first way to make a sound and good election contains six points
 - The first Point is to put before me the thing on which I want to make election, such as an office or benefice, either to take or leave it; or any other thing whatever that falls under an election that can be changed.
 - Ignatius suggests that we start the decision-making process by putting before our mind what it is we want to decide about. For example, we might be trying to decide whether or not to enter a specific religious community
 - It is necessary to keep as aim the end for which I am created, which is to praise God our Lord and save my soul, and, this supposed, to find myself indifferent, without any inordinate propensity; so that I be not more inclined or disposed to take the thing proposed than to leave it, nor more to leave it than to take it, but find myself as in the middle of a balance, to follow what I feel to be more for the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul.
 - In other words, we should try to the extent possible not to prefer one option to the other but only desire to do God's will. To help us maintain focus and perspective, he asks us to keep the ultimate end and goal of our existence clearly before us.
 - To ask of God our Lord to be pleased to move my will and put in my soul what I ought to do regarding the thing proposed, so as to promote more His praise and glory; discussing well and faithfully with my intellect, and choosing agreeably to His most holy pleasure and will.
 - Then we pray for God to enlighten and move us to seek only what is most conducive to God's service and praise.
 - To consider, reckoning up, how many advantages and utilities follow for me from holding the proposed office or benefice for only the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul, and, to consider likewise, on the contrary, the disadvantages and dangers which there are in having it. Doing the same in the second part, that is, looking at the advantages and utilities there are in not having it, and likewise, on the contrary, the disadvantages and dangers in not having the same.
 - When we do not experience inner clarity about the correct decision to be made, Ignatius suggests that we use our reason to weigh the matter carefully to attempt to come to a decision in line with our living out God's will in our lives. To do this we should, bearing in mind our ultimate goal, list and weigh the advantages and disadvantages for us of the decision at hand, for example, the reasons for and against entering religious life or a specific religious community. We are then to consider which alternatives seem more reasonable and decide according to the more weighty motives – not from our selfish inclinations. Looking over our list of “pros” and “cons” for the decision at hand, we should notice if any of the reasons listed stand out from the others and why and see which way

this might point us. This technique can help us move from inner confusion to greater clarity at least as to the issues that need to be attended to and help separate out which are more significant.

- After I have thus discussed and reckoned up on all sides about the thing proposed, to look where reason more inclines: and so, according to the greater inclination of reason, and not according to any inclination of sense, deliberation should be made on the thing proposed.
- Such election, or deliberation, made, the person who has made it ought to go with much diligence to prayer before God our Lord and offer Him such election, that His Divine Majesty may be pleased to receive and confirm it, if it is to His greater service and praise.
 - Having come to a decision, we turn again to God and beg for signs of God's confirmation that the decision is leading us toward God's service and praise. The usual sign of this confirmation from God is an experience of peacefulness about the decision. The confirmed decision has a feeling of "rightness" about it, and we feel a sense of God's presence, blessing, and love. This is a very important step, since the feeling of rightness, peace, and joy about a decision is a positive indicator that we have made the right decision whereas feelings of anxiety, heaviness, sadness, and darkness often indicate the opposite
- The second way to make a good choice according to this third time or mode
 - It contains four Rules and one Note.
 - The first is that that love which moves me and makes me choose such thing should descend from above, from the love of God, so that he who chooses feels first in himself that that love, more or less, which he has for the thing which he chooses, is only for his Creator and Lord.
 - The second, to set before me a man whom I have never seen nor known, and desiring all his perfection, to consider what I would tell him to do and elect for the greater glory of God our Lord, and the greater perfection of his soul, and I, doing likewise, to keep the rule which I set for the other.
 - One suggestion Ignatius makes is to imagine a person we never met who seeks our help in how to respond to God's call in the same decision we are considering. We then observe what advice we give this person and follow it ourselves. This is helpful since most of us are better at giving others advice than at figuring out what we should do.
 - The third, to consider, as if I were at the point of death, the form and measure which I would then want to have kept in the way of the present election, and regulating myself by that election, let me make my decision entirely in conformity with it.
 - The fourth, looking and considering how I shall find myself on the Day of Judgment, to think how I would then want to have deliberated about the present matter, and to take now

the rule which I would then wish to have kept, in order that I may then find myself in entire pleasure and joy.

- Another suggestion is that we imagine ourselves at the end of our lives either on our deathbed or after our death standing before Christ our Judge. How would we feel about our decision then? What would we say to Christ about the decision we have just made? We should choose now the course of action that would give us happiness and joy in looking back on it from our deathbed and in presenting it to Christ on the day of our judgment.
- Note. The above-mentioned rules for my eternal salvation and peace having been taken, I will make my election and offering to God our Lord, conformably to the sixth Point of the First Way of making election, i.e., such election, or deliberation, made, the person who has made it ought to go with much diligence to prayer before God our Lord and offer Him such election, that His Divine Majesty may be pleased to receive and confirm it, if it is to His greater service and praise.
- Application of this in the teaching of the future Pope Francis founded in *In Him Alone is Our Hope: The Church according to the heart of Pope Francis*, the retreat he preached to the Spanish episcopal conference in 2006. In the seventh of 12 conferences, one on “The Lord who battles for and with us,” he has a subsection on spiritual discernment that I’d like to share with you. It particularly applies the principles for the discernment of spirits that is necessary for us to know for the second “time” of the spirit of discernment. In it he tackles:
 - How we can’t bring about the kingdom through spiritual naivete.
 - How it’s necessary to recognize the work of God and the temptations of the devil.
 - How discernment is far more than just attending to one’s interior reactions
 - How discernment can’t take place from the sidelines but only on the battlefield.
 - How the evil spirit results in division.
 - What the intimate snares of the devil are
 - How to discern our idols
 - How to grow in intimate knowledge of the Lord, which will help us to come to know ourselves.
 - The role of the Cross in discernment
- What we learn from some Scriptural Citations on Discernment
 - Pray for a discerning heart that sees beyond appearances
 - 1Kings 3:9 Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong. For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?”
 - James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and he will be given it.
 - Prov. 4:7 The beginning of wisdom is: get wisdom; at the cost of all you have, get understanding.
 - Is. 11:3 and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, 4 But he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land’s afflicted.
 - 1Sam. 16:7 But the LORD said to Samuel: “Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the LORD looks into the heart.”
 - Seeking God’s will and voice in Jesus
 - Eph. 5:10 Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.
 - John 5:30 “I cannot do anything on my own; I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me.
 - John 10:4 When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow

- him, because they recognize his voice.
- Psa. 23:1 A psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack. 2 In green pastures you let me graze; to safe waters you lead me; 3 you restore my strength. You guide me along the right path for the sake of your name. 4 Even when I walk through a dark valley, I fear no harm for you are at my side; your rod and staff give me courage. 5 You set a table before me as my enemies watch; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Only goodness and love will pursue me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.
 - Allowing the Holy Spirit to lead
 - Acts 16:6 They traveled through the Phrygian and Galatian territory because they had been prevented by the holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to Mysia, they tried to go on into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them,
 - 1Cor. 2:14 Now the natural person does not accept what pertains to the Spirit of God, for to him it is foolishness, and he cannot understand it, because it is judged spiritually.
 - Importance of the Word of God in Discernment
 - Heb. 4:12 Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.
 - 1Tim. 6:3 Whoever teaches something different and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the religious teaching 4 is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid disposition for arguments and verbal disputes. From these come envy, rivalry, insults, evil suspicions, 5 and mutual friction among people with corrupted minds, who are deprived of the truth, supposing religion to be a means of gain.
 - 2Tim. 3:15 and that from infancy you have known [the] sacred scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
 - Transformation and Growth in discernment
 - Rom. 12:2 Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.
 - Phil. 1:9 And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, 10 to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,
 - Heb. 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties are trained by practice to discern good and evil.
 - Test the Spirits by the fruits
 - 1Th. 5:21 Test everything; retain what is good.
 - 1John 4:1 Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
 - Matt. 7:18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So by their fruits you will know them.
 - Proper discernment brings unity and peace
 - 1Cor. 14:33 since he is not the God of disorder but of peace. As in all the churches of the holy ones,
 - Satan is deceptive and brings disunity
 - Gen. 3:1 Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?”
 - 2Cor. 11:13 For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, who masquerade as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan masquerades as an angel of light. 15 So it is not strange that his ministers also masquerade as ministers of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

- Eph. 4:14 so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming.
- Comments and questions