

## A Brief Guide to Discernment



Here's a starter, rather than a comprehensive list...

### 1. Time & Space

The psalmist said, *'Be still and know that I am God'*

A fundamental starting point to hearing God is first to find some regular stillness. This is a universal truth, known and respected by all the world faiths. Even Jesus, had need to escape at various times, to be still with his Father. Tired bodies, stress, and a mind full of things to do, are the death of discernment

### 2. Pray

The obvious one that we often forget...

Tell God all about it. Verbally and in your minds eye place your will and your thoughts and opinions into God's hands.

*'Am I really willing to be directed; to let God decide?'*

### 3. Yourself

Be aware of yourself.

Our moods affect our head, heart, and ears. Snap decisions when we are low or indeed high, need to be prayerfully considered again at more emotionally even times. And on a deeper level, self-awareness and emotional maturity improve our ability to discern between the various internal voices.

### 4. Others

Speak to those close to you that you trust.

Ask people to pray for you. Speak also to someone not emotionally involved, who you respect. Throughout the Bible, there are examples of God's guidance coming via others (sometimes from the most unlikely quarters!) Jesus wanted his companions with him as he sought God in the quiet of the Garden of Gethsemane.

### 5. Common Sense

I know it doesn't sound very spiritual, but it dates back to St. Ignatius of Loyola and has proved valuable throughout the centuries. Let's say that you have the option of another job. Get two pieces of paper. On one, head it, 'Taking the new job' and list the advantages and disadvantages below. On the other piece of paper, head it, 'Staying where I am', and write the advantages and disadvantages below.

p.s. Don't make decisions entirely on the basis of these lists.

### 6. Conscience

Listen to your conscience.

In relation to decisions that include moral issues, Jesus said,

*'Why not judge for yourselves, what is right?'* (Luke 12: 57).

With decisions that have moral implications, we can often, with the help of the Bible and Church's teaching, judge for ourselves God's will.

### 7. Taste

Tell God your decision, and 'live with it' for a short period of time before actually committing yourself. How do you feel? Do you have a sense of peace / rightness that confirms your decision, or are you left feeling restless or disquieted?

### 8. Confused?!

What do I do when I still feel none the wiser? When, at times, I've done all of the above, and I've really had to make a decision, one way or another, I've made my own decision and at the same time told God to speak loudly if I've got it wrong! Where a decision doesn't need to be made... don't make it. Be willing to wait on God, for his timing, not yours. Deciding on ordination was a two-year process for me, which included shelving the questions for a year. I've not seen it written, but in my experience, God's never given me an answer before the time was right and I truly needed it.

### 9. Practice

I do think there is a journey we're each on, learning the voice and ways of our loving God. In my experience, the process has remained the same; the voice is still a small quiet one, but the difference is that experience has made me a little more trusting of it.

### 10. Read

There are also lots of good, practical, Christian book options on the subject (happy to make suggestions). Many people through the centuries have experienced God's guidance through the Bible. There are also Christians around who are trained in supporting others in the discernment process; they go by the fancy title of, 'Spiritual Director'.

*'Do not be conformed to this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,  
so that you may discern what is the will of God  
— what is good and acceptable and perfect.'* Romans 12: 2