

How to Make the Right Choice

Congratulations! You're about to take a step into the unknown toward a better future. But first, let me frame the discussion by saying...

Discernment is for you. Discernment is for me. Discernment is for married people, single people, priests, monks, nuns, millennials, the middle-aged and the elderly. Discernment is for every Catholic on planet Earth.

I spent most of my life looking at discernment the wrong way. I thought it pertained only to my vocation, and that once I chose a vocation I was done discerning. As long as I got the "right answer" I could breathe a sigh of relief and not discern any more. I also treated my Catholic faith like my personal direct hotline to God to tell him where I wanted to go.

How wrong I was.

The thought that I ought to scoot over, let God take the wheel, and tell me where *he* wanted me to go shouldn't have been a shock (after all, he's God,) but it was. When I discerned religious life, I had to face the fundamental question "Do I believe God can actually make me happier than I can make myself?" Facing that question was hard, but it was so good for the growth of a real, trusting relationship with him. Slowly, as I learned to trust him, I started to become less selfish and let God take the wheel.

I surrendered every situation and thing in my life to him, daily. I still do, albeit very imperfectly. At this point I have chosen a vocation, but *discernment has not ended*. When I discerned I was called to marriage, I had to discern which man out of the billions on the planet would be a good partner. Once I found him, we have had to discern endlessly. Where will we live, what jobs we take, how many children we will have, even how we spend our free time...all of those decisions take discernment. And there's no end in sight to the decisions.

That is why I want to shake that popular belief about discernment being only for your vocation and only being a one-time deal. Instead, this is how I see it now:

Discernment is the lifelong process of inviting God into our decisions by cultivating a trusting relationship with him and surrendering ourselves to his will.

I can't tell you the right choice for you right now, but I know that God has a plan for you in this present moment. I know that he loves you more than you could ever know, and that he has a future for you that will blow your wildest dreams out of the water. I am not a spiritual director, nor should I replace the advice of one for you; I am here to simply illuminate areas that are *always* right to grow in when you are becoming a discernment ninja. I know that God wants you to find and know his will, and that by slowing down and paying attention to it he will reveal himself to you. I sincerely hope that this guide will be a help to you for finding and living your best life!

So much love in Christ,

Stacey

Step 1: Taking Stock of Where I Am

Journal on the following questions to assess your current relationship with God.

What are my fears? What am I afraid will happen to me if I let God tell me what he wants for me? Do I get excited thinking about letting God unfold his plan, or do I feel terrified, or something else? What images come to mind when I think of God: a disciplinarian, a strict father, a tender heart beating with love, an angry bearded man striking people down, a shepherd? Do I have habitual sins or wounds from my past that cloud my ability to make decisions? Do I regularly spend time in quiet where I can hear myself think, or am I addicted to noise and technology?

Step 2: Surrendering to God's Will

Pray the following prayer SLOWLY every day. Pay attention to whatever part of you is hard to put into God's hands. Bring that to prayer and ask God to show you how you can trust him with it.

God, my Father, I thank you for all that You are, and all that you do for me through your son Jesus Christ. I praise you for my life, for your mercy and for your Eucharist. In Jesus' name, Father, I place myself entirely in your Heart.

I surrender to you my whole self, my heart, my mind, my memory, my imagination, my will, my emotions, my passions, my body, my sexuality, my desire for human approval, my weaknesses, my desires, my sins.

I surrender every person in my life to you. I surrender every situation in my life to you. I surrender every relationship I am in to you. I surrender every concern I have to you. I surrender every fear I have to you. I surrender every doubt I have to you. I surrender all confusion I have to you. I surrender all sadness I am experiencing in my heart to you. I surrender all the woundedness I have to you. I surrender all anxiety and worry I have to you. I surrender all that deceives me in my heart to you. I surrender my whole self to you. I trust you to care for me and others in a perfectly loving way.

As I have emptied myself, and surrendered everything to you, I ask you now, Father, to fill me with your Holy Spirit and all the gifts and fruits of your Spirit.

Holy Spirit you are the source of love, hope, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, tenderness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. Purify my desires.

Help me to open my heart to you. Help me to become perfectly receptive as a pure child. Help me to believe in your love for me. Help me to hope in your love. Help me to receive from the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus all grace and virtues necessary for me to become the person you created me to be. I ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ, Your son, God Almighty Father.

O Most Holy Immaculate Virgin Mary, I entrust this prayer to your heart, and ask you to press it to your wounded heart and intercede for me to your son Jesus. Please help me to be as you are, a perfect disciple, an obedient servant, a true child of God. Amen.

Step 3: Getting in Touch with My Deepest Desires

Journal these questions. Write freely and dig deeper as you go. You will likely realize that underneath what you thought were the answers initially there are even deeper desires.

When I die, what do I want people to say about me at my funeral? What virtues do I want to exemplify? What activities make me feel excited, hopeful, generous, expansive, or on fire? What would my absolute ideal day look like? What favorite stories did I have in my childhood, and why? Who are my heroes, and why?

Step 4: Decision Time

After a week of praying the Prayer of Surrender, keep praying it daily but start to use any of these tools that work for your particular personality. You will know it's the right choice when you feel a deep PEACE.

God's will for us is ultimately our deepest desire for ourselves. It's not selfish to want things; it's only selfish if we cling to those desires over discerning which is our deepest desire. Go after that deepest desire because it is God's will!

1. A good ol' pros and cons list.
2. Tell yourself in your heart that you're going to decide on one option for 3 days without going back and forth. Then, for the following 3 days tell yourself you're going for the other option. How do you feel having mentally committed to the first option versus the second option?
3. See if you can make steps in one direction without having to make a final decision. Can you visit the school for a weekend, or get a tour of the town where you are considering moving, or go for an extended retreat at a convent? Sometimes just living the life will help us discern where our peace lies.
4. Imagine you're on your deathbed and you're looking back at your life. What would you look back on and wish you had done in this situation?
5. Write a letter to God and tell him about your deepest desires and your current confusion. Listen for a reply from him in prayer.
6. God knows we operate in space and time, and that some decisions are time-sensitive. Make a choice and tell him, "If you want me to decide differently than the path I am deciding on now, then please change my heart by _____ (date.)"
7. Open up to someone you trust who has your best interests at heart and ask their advice. They may be able to illuminate things about you or the situation that you don't see yourself. If you are an external processor, you will benefit from just talking through the situation.
8. If all else fails, pick a path and go down it with confidence that God wants to reveal his will to you along the way. He will! He will pull you back or show you when you need to change direction if that's what he wants.

Happy discerning!