



*Module Five*



## ***Module 5: Embark with Courage***

Learning Points:

- What to do when you don't have a clear answer
- Why God often doesn't give definite answers
- Why you should welcome failure
- How to interpret potential "signs from God"
- Eight questions to distinguish God's voice from Satan's
- Learn seven tools from St. Ignatius for making a good decision
- How not to enter the SPD (the School of Perpetual Discernment)



### ***Video 1***

Learning points:

- The three good times to make a sound decision
- Why God often doesn't give definite answers
- What to do when you don't have a clear answer

### ***Three Good Times to Make a Decision***

Welcome to Module five, the final module of True North! Sooner or later, you have to arrive at a decision, and that's what this module is all about. St. Ignatius says that there are three good times to make a sound decision:

1. ***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."* Wouldn't it be nice if all decisions could be like this? To be convicted and have perfect peace? Those times are a divine gift! Life has taught me that those decisions, however, are rare.
2. ***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."* This time takes more thought and prayer. You tune into consolation and desolation, which we covered in Module four. Essentially, you're in touch with where the Holy Spirit is leading you. God dialogues with you through those consolations to find your best decision.
3. ***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.*" This is the one you can easily overlook when you're waiting to hear God's voice. St. Ignatius says that when you simply use your reason, free from unhealthy influences, keeping in mind the moral laws and your ultimate purpose of attaining heaven, you are in a good place to make a decision. Note that there's no requirement to hear God speak! St. Ignatius says that, as long as you're use your powers "freely and tranquilly," and morally, that's a good and valid choice.

### ***God Never Told Me***

This third case was true for me in my decision to get married rather than enter the convent. As you'll remember from previous modules, I discerned religious life. I took lots of action: I prayed the prayer of surrender every day, I visited five convents, and I attended daily mass. I received Jesus's heart in that beautiful vision he gave me, and I took that as confirmation that I was called to be his bride. I asked to enter with the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence, one of the orders I visited as part of my TV show, thinking I was called there. I was so excited!

Then I went back to my home on Long Island and started preparing to go to the convent. I became confused because I longer wanted to be a nun. When I prayed, I'd begin to cry imagining the husband and children I'd never have. The vocation director said this was normal; I'd have to grieve the loss of the family I wouldn't have. I felt like Jesus had pulled a bait and switch. I'd done all this work to open myself up to being a nun, and then my heart changed again and Jesus wasn't telling me what to do. What was up with that?

I felt like the star of *Hot Mess: The Musical!* For several months I wrestled, going back and forth. I would pray in the chapel and say, "God what do you want me to do?" And here's what was amazing, but frustrating at the time- he wouldn't tell me the answer. He'd say, "Do you know how much I love you?" It was incredible to receive affirmation, but I remember chastising him because he wouldn't answer me...which is a pretty silly way to treat God. I wanted his answer, but first and foremost he wanted me to know that he cares about me.

I look back at my struggle and all that stress over not hearing a direct answer. I wanted apodictic certainty, which means indisputable certainty. I wanted a cut-and-dry answer. However, but God in his wisdom never gave one. His reasons have become so much clearer since I became a parent. God is our father and he's loving us as a good father. I think about my will for my children and it reveals God's fatherhood to me in the following three ways:

1. First, I don't have a point-by-point itinerary for my kids' future. Nowhere in my brain do I hold them to, "you'd better choose this spouse or this job, or else..." My love for them isn't conditional, and neither is God's for you. As my seminarian friend Greg Sheffield said, "*God gave us ten commandments, not ten thousand.*"
2. Second, if you ask me what my will is for my children, I'll tell you right away, "I want them to be happy." That's a parent's will. That's God's will for you. I know they'll struggle plenty because it's part and parcel of life, but I am there to guide

them as their advocate. I'm not the ultimate authority or a master. In an interview, Dr. Scott Hahn said, *"God as a father wants us to exercise our wisdom and our freedom. I don't want to dictate to my six kids what they do. When it comes to pleasing a father, I think exercising our freedom brings greater pleasure to God as a father precisely because we're not slaves and he's not our master. I think we have to recognize in relationship to God and each other that there is a freedom in love much more than our culture will ever catch."* And that's today's North Star Quote.

3. Third, God's endless creativity is going to work all things for the good as long as you do your best and stay close to him. There are talents and gifts my children have which mean they're better suited to some paths than others. God's plan for you is the path for which you are best suited. But if you do something else that's objectively good, you're still doing something objectively good! You can still contribute to the world and you're still loved.

God is the ultimate good parent, and sometimes if you're not getting a clear answer it's because he's such a good parent that he wants you to choose.

### ***So How Will I Know?***

One of the questions I get most frequently is, "How will I know?" I call it the million-dollar question. I'm sorry if this sounds depressing, but in most decisions in life, you won't know beyond the next step. God prompts, he directs, he promises himself, but he doesn't show you beyond the next curve in the road. Your responsibility is to do everything in your circle of control and take the next step based on what you know. Rather than apodictic certainty, you'll likely make most choices with what's called moral certainty. Moral certainty means certainty beyond a reasonable doubt, but not absolute certainty.

I've never felt qualified to make any of the big life choices I had to make. Getting married, having kids, changing jobs, starting this ministry...I didn't know how it was going to go beforehand! One comedian's joke has stuck with me: *"my wife and I have decided we're not ready for kids. Nope. Not ready. Incidentally, we have two- but we're definitely not ready."*

My husband John discerned a vocation with the Carthusian monks. He told me that the Carthusians never assume someone has a vocation to their order until after they die. Yup, that's right. Sometimes they'll attend a brother's funeral and say, "that man was called to be a Carthusian." But they're strangely comfortable in the uncertainty of even their own vocations.

So how to even deal with this lifelong lack of perfect uncertainty? You deal by knowing that God loves you like a good father. He doesn't care about your report card of making the perfect decisions. The pharisees did that, remember? He cares about the extent and the depth of your love.

### ***God Respects Your Action***

Ultimately, here's what happened with my vocation. I had gone back and forth, over and over, in circles in my mind. I had been acting in my circle of control: I had surrendered to God's will, built a healthy prayer life, actively listened, and visited convents. After several months I told God, "I'm going to give you one more month. I'll do a holy hour daily, and mass. Please mold my heart to what you want for me. If I still feel such a strong desire for marriage in a month, I'm going to be open to dating again." A month later, the desire for marriage was even stronger. So, I became open to dating, and I had peace.

Be on the lookout for Satan to try to convince you to go to an extreme in your mind. He'd love to set you up against God. He'd love you to believe God's waiting to strike you down if you take one wrong step.

### ***Putting it into Practice***

Let's bring all this into practicality for your life. Today's worksheet begins with a checklist to ensure that you've done everything in your circle of control to make the decision. Remember how you set yourself a goal all the way back in Module one? This is where you check in with that goal and any alterations you made along the way. You want to be sure that you've done everything in your circle of control that you can do.



## Video 2

Learning points:

- Six tools from St. Ignatius you can use right now to decide anything

Today we're diving into St. Ignatius of Loyola's practical decision-making techniques. I love these so much because they're simple and understandable. They bring razor-sharp clarity to any decision, and they take away much of the nebulous stress surrounding decision-making.

So, let's get right into it:

1. ***“Deathbed and Judgement” Imagination:*** St. Ignatius writes, “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...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.” In other words, imagine yourself on your deathbed and facing your final judgement. Which course of action then will you wish you had taken now?
2. ***Outsider’s Advice:*** St. Ignatius says, “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.” In other words, sit down and write yourself a letter. Imagine what you'd someone who was in your situation, since you want what's best for them. This can be helpful because it gets you outside of yourself and your own head. Then, take your own advice!
3. ***Pros and Cons:*** St. Ignatius may have been the founder of the good old pros and cons list! “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.” In other words, list the advantages and disadvantages of option A and then option B that you have before you. St. Ignatius goes on to encourage that you look at the list with the eyes of reason. Make the decision based on good sense, not on emotion. Also, pay attention to which pros and cons have more weight. Which pros are more important to you, and which are factors that are less important? There may only be a few pros for a particular choice and many pros for the other choice, but that choice may be the best decision if the few pros are the most important.

4. **Confirmation:** St. Ignatius says that after you make a decision you “ought to go with much diligence to prayer before God our Lord and offer Him such election, (meaning decision,) that His Divine Majesty may be pleased to receive and confirm it, if it is to His greater service and praise.” In other words, you can ask God to confirm your decision. Your will to please him does please him, and you can be sure that if you feel a sense of peace then your decision has been confirmed.
5. **Three Day Option:** Imagine for three days that you have made the decision to do option A. Sit with it for three days. Don’t let yourself go back and forth, but act and think as though it was already a done deal. Then, for three days, imagine you had chosen option B. If you’ve been going back and forth and feel like a crazy person, this option is an excellent way of letting the dust settle and getting to the heart of the matter.
6. **Your Future Self:** Put yourself ten years in the future. Imagine yourself going through life having chosen option A, then option B. This is a little different than the deathbed and judgement option because what it reveals is the day-to-day realities of living with the choices before you. Is there a feeling of excitement and challenge in that vision of your future self, or a gripping sense of sadness?

And that’s it for today. This is a shorter video because I want you to have time to put these practical tools into practice. Always keep in mind today’s North Star Quote by Leon Bloy: “The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.” I am praying that the right decision emerges for you! I’ll see you in the next video.



## Video 3

Learning Points:

- Eight questions that distinguish the voice of God from the voice of the devil

Hello, and welcome back! As you tune into hearing God's voice, one of the hardest parts can be those conflicting voices in your head. How do you know who is speaking?

On May 10, 2020, the Feast of the Good Shepherd, Pope Francis offered a mini lesson to help distinguish the voice of our Shepherd from the voice of the evil one. The eight questions he asked are so good that I'm going to read them all in their entirety. Remember back in Module two, we covered God's so-called "tone," and the kinds of ways he speaks? These questions build on what we talked about there. Now that we're approaching the end of the course and your decision is at hand, you've had more time to digest all the lessons. These eight questions will help you hear the voice of Jesus our Shepherd more clearly. Here's the text of Pope Francis's lesson:

"The Gospel says that: "The sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (Jn 10: 3). The Lord calls us by name, He calls us because He loves us. But the Gospel then tells us, there are other voices, not to be followed: those of strangers, thieves and brigands who mean harm to the sheep.

These different voices resonate within us. There is the voice of God, who speaks kindly to the conscience, and there is the tempting voice that leads to evil. How can we recognize the voice of the good Shepherd rather than that of the thief, how can we distinguish the inspiration of God from the suggestion of the evil one?

One can learn to discern these two voices: they speak two different languages, that is, they have opposite ways of knocking on the door of our hearts. They speak different languages. Just as we know how to distinguish one language from another, we can also distinguish the voice of God from the voice of the evil one.

1. ***Am I still free?*** The voice of God never forces us: God proposes Himself, He does not impose Himself. Instead, the evil voice seduces, assails, forces: it arouses dazzling illusions, emotions that are tempting but transient.
2. ***Am I being flattered?*** At first it flatters, it makes us believe that we are all-powerful, but then it leaves us empty inside and accuses us: "You are worth nothing". The voice of God, instead, corrects us, with great patience, but always encourages us, consoles us: it always nourishes hope.
3. ***Am I looking forward?*** The voice of God is a voice that has a horizon, whereas the voice of evil leads you to a wall, it backs you into a corner.



4. ***Am I in the present moment?*** Another difference. The voice of the enemy distracts us from the present and wants us to focus on fears of the future or sadness about the past – the enemy does not want the present – it brings to the surface the bitterness, the memories of the wrongs suffered, of those who have hurt us, many bad memories. Instead, the voice of God speaks to the present: “Now you can do good, now you can exercise the creativity of love, now you can renounce the regrets and remorse that hold your heart captive”. It inspires us, it leads us ahead, but it speaks in the present: now.
5. ***Is it about my ego?*** Again: the two voices raise different questions in us. That which comes from God will be: “What is good for me?” Instead the tempter will insist on another question: “What do I feel like doing?” What I feel like: the evil voice always revolves around the ego, its impulses, its needs, everything straight away. It is like the tantrums of a child: everything, and now. The voice of God, instead, never promises joy at a low price: it invites us to go beyond our ego to find the true good, peace.
6. ***What aftertaste does it leave?*** Let us remember: evil never gives us peace, it causes frenzy first and leaves bitterness later. This is the style of evil.
7. ***Am I seeking light or hiding?*** The voice of God and that of the tempter, finally, speak in different “environments”: the enemy prefers darkness, falsehood, and gossip; the Lord loves sunlight, truth, and sincere transparency.
8. ***Am I led to trust?*** The enemy will say to us: “Close yourself up in yourself, besides no-one understands and listens to you, don’t trust anyone!” Goodness, on the contrary, invites us to open up, to be clear and trusting in God and in others.

Dear brothers and sisters, in this time so many thoughts and worries lead us to turn inwards into ourselves. Let us pay attention to the voices that reach our hearts. Let us ask ourselves where they come from. Let us ask for the grace to recognize and follow the voice of the good Shepherd, who brings us out of the enclosures of selfishness and leads us to the pastures of true freedom.”

In these eight points there’s much to consider. Your worksheet will allow you to consider these eight questions and help you to distinguish toward what decision God is guiding you. Hop to it, and I’ll see you in the next video!



## *Video 4*

Learning points:

- How three saints failed at discerning their vocations
- Why you should welcome failure
- How to interpret potential signs from God

Hello and thank you for making it all the way to the end of the True North Course! Today is the day you make your choice, either choice A or choice B, that you set for yourself in Module one. I pray you have perfect peace, but before I leave you, I want to discuss two final areas that may keep you confused and indecisive.

### *Signs from God*

The first is interpreting signs from God. It's so tempting to look for signs, right? They would take the hard work out of discernment and give us objective certainty! But if you're looking for a sign, it's quite possible you'll misread and think you see one everywhere. Not helpful. So how do you figure out whether a perceived sign from God is in fact a sign?

You have to read the whole book. Here's what I mean: I'll share a little story of a sign I received. After I closed the door on religious life, I met a guy and we got along great. We started dating and he invited me to meet his extended family by joining them at their beach vacation. I was packing and happily getting ready to go when I popped in to the chapel to pray. I had what seemed like this vision of myself, wearing a nun's habit. This was not in my plan. I was unhappy about this possible sign, but I knew I had to give God the first option in my life.

I drove to the beach and the first chance we had to be alone, I sat down with my boyfriend and told him what was going on. He listened with peace in his eyes, and when I was done, he said without a pause, "Stacey, I love you, and I have never felt like I owned you. If God wants you to be a nun, I'd be so happy to help you get there any way I can." That's it. No self-pity or whining. That moment clarified so much about his motives to me. He wanted what was best for me, at whatever cost that meant to him.

After sighing "You're so attractive" under my breath, I knew I had to go pray about it. So I did, and here's what time and prayer revealed:

The "sign" I had gotten had value, but it didn't reveal that I was supposed to be a nun as I initially thought. That sign was like reading one sentence in a whole book. If you open *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy and read, "Fly you fools!" and then close the book right there, you'll think Gandalf died. You can't say you know *The Lord of the Rings*. You have to read the whole thing to find out that he comes back and the plethora of other events. That sign I saw was one sentence in my discernment book, but it wasn't the whole story. My relationship with John was blossoming and I had no reason whatsoever to close off that relationship, other than the perceived sign. In the

story of my whole life and my entire journey, continuing my relationship and not going to the convent was the better choice.

So, three months later I got engaged to my husband John, and I had the peace of knowing that he wanted to love me for the right reasons. That supposed “sign” was a part of our marriage discernment. The takeaway message is: Take note of a perceived sign, and give it time. Read the whole book, not one sentence. That’ll keep you from taking something God says out of context, or of misquoting him entirely.

### ***Fear of Failure***

Let’s switch gears into the second area that may keep you indecisive. I have a question: are you afraid of failure? If so, sit back and listen to the stories of three amazing saints. The first two are two of my favorites- Sts. Louis and Zelig Martin. They’re the first married couple ever to be canonized together, and they’re the parents of my patron, St. Therese of Lisieux. Besides St. Therese, they also had four other daughters who all became nuns and lived holy lives. What an incredible family, right? But Louis and Zelig didn’t want to get married or have a family.

Louis wanted to be a priest, and Zelig wanted to be a nun. Louis flunked out of seminary because he couldn’t learn Latin. Zelig was given no reason whatsoever, but she was told by the mother superior that she wasn’t allowed to enter the convent she thought she was destined for. Both of them must have said, “I’m trying to do your will. God what is UP with this?”

And then even when they met and got married, they intended for it to be a Josephite marriage, meaning that they would never have marital relations. Their motive was to please the Lord. But thank goodness their spiritual director advised them to be open to children, because they gave the world one of the greatest saints of all time!

Another great saint, St. Camillus de Lellis, was a hot mess for a while in the sense that he wanted to join a religious order but, because of his health, they told him to leave not once, not twice, but three times. He kept coming back because he was convinced he was called there, and they kept telling him to leave. Eventually he went on to found the Red Cross and our modern-day hospital system. No small contribution to humanity right there, but he didn’t know what he was supposed to do for a very long time, and he persisted in the wrong direction many times!

So even great saints didn’t get the so-called “plan.” Holiness doesn’t come with a magical ability to predict future events. We are all taking it one step at a time. Despite being holy, seeking God’s will, and surrendering to him, these saints persisted in directions that they weren’t ultimately able to fulfill. If you’ve ever been afraid of failing, this should make you breathe a sigh of relief. Even using the term “failure” for temporal choices is problematic. The only real failure is failing to get to Heaven. You are going to change direction many, many times throughout life. God’s never done with you until your dying breath.

St. Catherine of Siena famously wrote today's North Star Quote: *"Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire."* St. Ignatius encourages: *"It is very helpful...to enter...with great courage and generosity towards his Creator and Lord, offering (God) all his will and liberty."* Don't overthink it. God will bless your actions, and he will steer you where he wants you when you pray and move your feet. Don't allow the voice of the evil one to paralyze you or enslave you to perfectionism. Embark with courage, and all will be well. Follow your True North, and Godspeed, my friend.