



YCP DISCERNMENT GUIDE

Discern God's Will for Your Life



YOUNG CATHOLIC
PROFESSIONALS

Intellect with Virtue: Laying the Groundwork for Discernment

“What if I make the wrong decision?”

“I feel lost and I’m not sure where my place in life is right now.”

“I think I feel called to marriage but I’m not sure.”

“I worry that if I pursue consecrated life, I’ll be cut off from the rest of the world.”

“God, why are you sending me these opportunities? I feel like a fraud.”

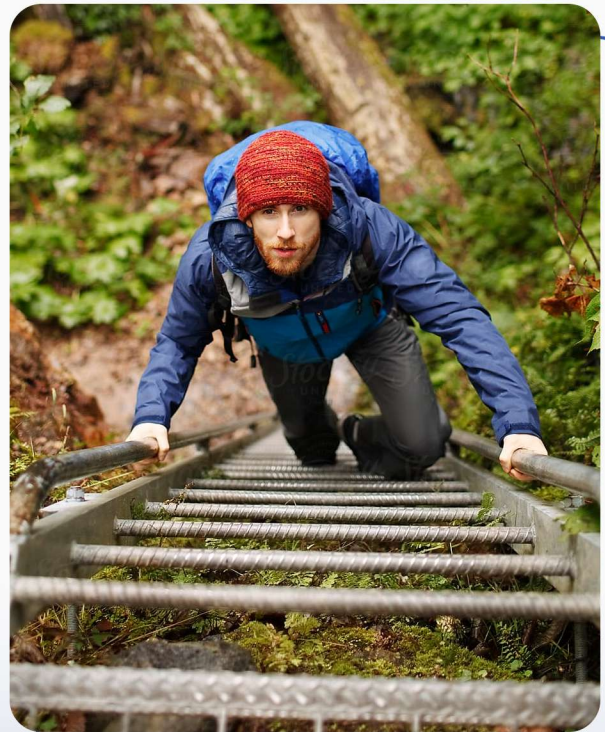
“God here I am, what’s the hold up?”

Do any of these sound like you recently?

Making big life decisions can be incredibly difficult. It’s easy for us to fall into overcomplicating things and agonizing over which path to take, wondering if we’ll make the right choice or take a misstep to be forever ripped from our destiny.

Discerning well only works when we take the time to pause and hear God’s gentle voice guiding us toward the next rung on the ladder.

But so many of us get stuck on one rung immobilizing us from truly reaching our full God-given potential.





It's not that He's not guiding us, sometimes we just don't know how to listen well. We become so distracted by the noisy world around us, the news, social media, or work conflicts, that we fail to quiet our minds with God, allowing us to truly hear His guidance and wisdom.

Let's break down the first step in discernment so we can learn how to move on to that next rung gracefully.

Intellect

By engaging our intellect through prayer, reflection, and mentorship, we're preparing the foundation for our decision-making process with a clear picture of our options and a path forward.

So, how do we engage our intellect?

Stay close to the Word of God

Deepen your prayer and relationship with God by practicing Lectio Divina. Choose a passage for the upcoming readings. Read it 3x giving yourself space to reflect on the reading between each read. After the 1st read ask yourself, 'What verse stood out to me?' After the 2nd, ask yourself, 'Why did it stand out to me?' After the 3rd, ask yourself 'What is God trying to tell me with this verse?' Dialogue with God to uncover what He might want to tell you through Scripture.

Seek advice from outside mentors

Seek a spiritual mentor or a loved one to guide you in your decision-making as someone who can help look from the outside in. Oftentimes, we need a new pair of eyes and ears from someone we trust to help us in our discernment process. Find someone close to you whom you trust to open up with and share your doubts and concerns.

Take account of your current commitments

Do you have a family? Are you single? Are you in the middle of finishing a degree? Be faithful to those commitments and act from a place of intention.



St. Henry as Empero

credit the artist: Joseph von Führich
(Austrian, Kratzau 1800–1876 Vienna)

We can look at the life of St. Henry II, Holy Roman Emperor and warrior as an example of this step in discernment. St. Henry was diligent in balancing what was expected of him as king without compensating a virtuous life as a Christian. When his queen died, St. Cunegundis, to whom he was truly devoted, St. Henry felt a strong urge to become a Benedictine monk. He sought obedience to the abbot St. Vanne at Verdun but this meant abandoning his throne. The abbot convinced him his desires were not of God and his responsibilities lay outside the monastery where he would do much greater work ruling the Empire.

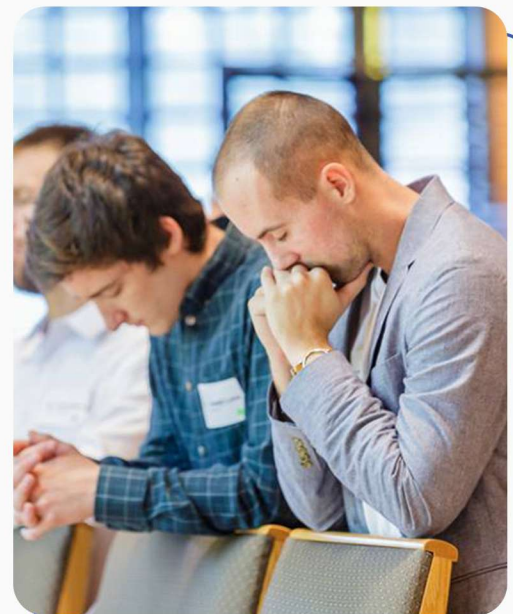
St. Henry had responsibilities and duties as king and Holy Roman Emperor. Although his heart was mourning and tired of sidestepping dangers and constant attacks, he was reminded that this was his vocation. Because he was loyal to his vocation, St. Henry went on to build schools, made the city of Bamberg a starting point for the missions to the pagan Slavic nations, and actively pushed for reform in the Church. Today, he has been adopted as the patron Saint of those rejected by religious orders.

Pray for his intercession if you feel called to religious life but that door hasn't quite been opened for you yet.

Gather information & take action

This final step is an exploration phase to collect data and gather information. If you're feeling a call towards a particular vocation but are unsure, there's wisdom in "just seeing", exploring, and seeking more to understand if this is really for you. The only requirement in this step is you **HAVE** to take action because clarity follows action. You can't just gather the information and then sit on it.

Go to that seminary talk, stay with the consecrated sisters for a weekend to live their daily lives, ask the girl out on a date. You have nothing to lose and there are no commitments in this step. Push yourself out of your comfort zone, get uncomfortable, and let the Holy Spirit guide you.





Ignore the enemy

Even when we earnestly seek the Lord, we still doubt ourselves, wondering if we missed the boat, didn't hear His call, or went the wrong way.

The enemy is always lingering and actively trying to confuse you, "You're not good enough, you don't belong here, you're nothing." Don't fall for his lies and confusion. Instead, remind yourself that our limited human understanding is nothing compared to God's infinite wisdom and flawless orchestrating of our lives.

Remember the stories of the Saints who overcame their insecurities and sense of unworthiness by continually surrendering their lives to Christ. Their faith-filled and zealous lives inspire us to surrender full trust and faith to God's divine plan in our lives.

Lastly, call on the Holy Spirit and ask for wisdom in your discernment. You can dedicate this simple Holy Spirit prayer to your morning offerings:

Oh Holy Spirit, You are the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. You are the Spirit of truth, love, and holiness, proceeding from the Father and the Son, and equal to Them in all things. I adore You and love You with all my heart. Teach me to know and to seek God, by whom and for whom I was created. Fill my heart with a holy fear and a great love for Him. Give me compunction and patience, and do not let me fall into sin.

Increase faith, hope, and charity in me and bring forth in me all the virtues proper to my state of life. Help me to grow in the four cardinal virtues, Your seven gifts, and Your twelve fruits.

Make me a faithful follower of Jesus, an obedient child of the Church, and a help to my neighbor. Give me the grace to keep the commandments and to receive the sacraments worthily. Raise me to holiness in the state of life to which You have called me, and lead me through a happy death to everlasting life. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Grant me also, O Holy Spirit, Giver of all good gifts, the special favor for which I ask {name special petition} if it be for Your honor and glory and for my well-being. Amen.



Understanding our Desires in Discernment

Now that we know how to develop our intellect in our discernment, we're ready to explore and understand our desires, the second step of discernment.

How do we know if our desires originate from God or ourselves?

God gives us desires and calls us to nurture them, not dismiss them. Similar to caring and tending to a plant to keep it from wilting, attend to your desires to see what God wants to reveal to you about them.

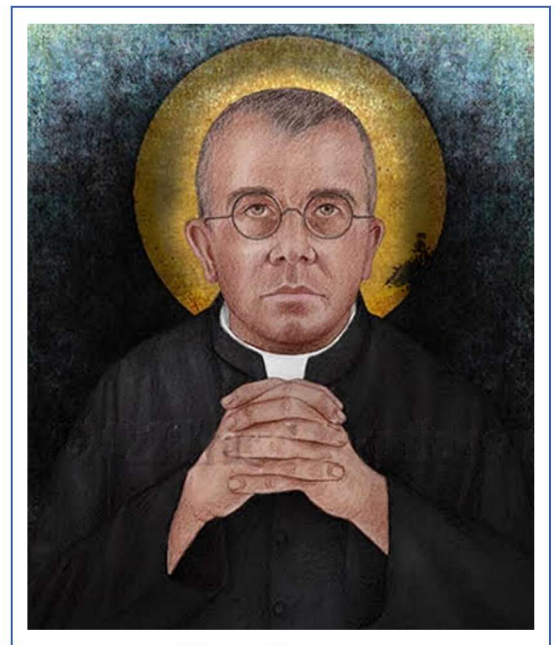
Follow these steps to understand your desires better:

1. Reflect on where your desires are coming from

Don't make decisions based solely on fear or anxiety. Sit with your desires and pinpoint where each one of them is coming from.

Do you feel pressured to follow a specific vocation because that's what your parents want for you? Or maybe it's something trending on the internet that looks cool so you're considering it. Ask yourself, does it lead you closer to Christ?

Take your desires to prayer and ask God for clarity. Do the *Surrender Novena* by Servant of God Don Dolindo Ruotolo surrendering all of your desires to God. Continue seeking outside spiritual direction to gain a broader perspective from someone you trust.



Fr. Don Dolindo Ruotolo (1882–1970)



A young Catholic seeking spiritual direction

2. Prepare mentally to pick up your cross

Remember that whichever path you walk comes with both joy and sorrow. Expect suffering, don't assume tough times automatically signal the "wrong" choice. Understand that we're here on earth to carry our cross, when the road gets tough (and it will), it doesn't necessarily mean that you've chosen the wrong vocation.

Our desires are good and God wants us to have them in our hearts, speak about them, ask for guidance, water and nurture them like little plants.

Understand that whatever vocation you choose will come with suffering and embracing our cross is central to every Christian vocation.

3. Bring your desires before Jesus in Adoration

Ask God to illuminate your next faithful step. Listen to His call and where He's leading you next. If you make the space and time for Him, He will guide you.

We can look at St. Francis of Assisi's story to see how God redirected his desires over time. St. Francis of Assisi dreamed of battlefield glory, he wanted to become a knight and considered it the most noble role as a Christian.

At the age of 19, he joined the war between Assisi and Perugia. But after being defeated, he spent nearly a year imprisoned in Perugia while his father scrounged up ransom funds. The solitude of prison combined with illness shattered Francis' self-confidence. Though he often turned to Scripture seeking comfort, its unfamiliar Christian values challenged him.



After his release, he soon faced another opportunity to return to the battlefield. But the night before the battle, Francis had a vivid dream that redirected his path. He envisioned himself in a hall lined with armor and banners when a voice asked "Francis, who is it better to serve, the Master or Servant?" Francis replied "The Master." The voice said, "Return to Assisi and all this will be yours." Through this, God began gradually guiding Francis away from earthly ambition and toward spiritual service. St. Francis was pursuing one track which he thought was his vocation but the Lord was calling him elsewhere.

One day, while praying in the deteriorating San Damiano chapel, Francis heard the voice again, this time coming from a crucifix painting hanging on the wall. "Francis," it said, "repair my Church which is falling to ruin." He impulsively rushed home, took expensive cloth from his father's storehouse, sold it, and gave the money to the priest for repairs. Initially believing he was called literally to reconstruct that building and two other dilapidated chapels nearby.

Eventually, Francis came to recognize the true vocation God was calling him toward was to spiritually rebuild the Church by proclaiming his witness and testimony of the power of the Gospel.

While attending Mass on St. Matthias Day, Francis heard the Gospel passage, ***"And as you go, preach the message, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not keep gold, silver, or money in your girdles, no wallet for your journey, nor two tunics, no sandals, nor staff; for the laborer deserves his living."*** (Matthew 10.7-10).

Francis instantly recognized this as God's call for his life and followed it wholeheartedly until his death. He pleaded with the wealthy to live simply and care for the poor as brothers and sisters in Christ. Venturing among outcasts, Francis tenderly cared for lepers and the poor. His radical devotion started attracting followers who also lived in poverty, preaching the Gospel with him.

Francis deeply yearned to live like Christ. He embraced poverty, humility, and suffering while overflowing with compassion. This God-centered sense of humor and grace often won over even hostile hearts, powerfully demonstrating the love of Jesus.



So many started to follow him that Francis wrote a Rule of Life based on the Gospel and traveled to Rome with his followers seeking the approval of Pope Innocent III to formalize this community into the Order of Friars Minor. Later, two more orders were born known as the Poor Ladies or Clares and Brothers and Sisters of Penance, known today as the Franciscan Order.

Francis grew to understand his desires and that his real mission was to reconstruct the emptiness of the human hearts around him, bringing fallen-away souls back to God through radical witness awakening the Church to live the Gospel more intentionally and profoundly.

The Lord patiently guided Francis' desires from serving earthly masters on battlefields toward serving Christ alone by example. So too will He shepherd your desires, refining and revealing new insights according to His will, as long as you keep your heart open.



St. Francis (1181-1226)

suffering or in ministry preaching, leading, with the poor.

With these tips on understanding your desires, we hope you'll reach the roots of your desires to understand what God wants you to do with them next.

What is the Lord asking you to prune or cultivate in your life right now? Carry that before Him in prayer.

As Father Ripperger says, "Ask Christ, 'make me strong, give me the willingness to suffer, keep me humble, and help me to keep the course.' If you ask for those four things, you will stay the course and you will attain that crown of glory that St. Paul talks about."

Acting on God's Will with the faith of St. Joseph

We've covered laying the groundwork for discernment, learning how to hear God's voice, and developing our intellect so we can understand if our desires are coming from us or God.

We're now ready to dive into acting on God's Will.

But how do we know when to act?

Firstly, never act under the impulse of your flesh. Instead, practice patience, obedience, and humility. In Jacques Philippe's, *In the School of the Holy Spirit*, he mentions the surest test of true humility is the spirit of obedience.

Divine inspirations establish us in peace, they are constant, and they impress on us a sense of humility.

Secondly, we have to remember that life is made up of trials, when God requires something of us, it's only to help us grow in love.

With this knowledge and understanding, we can set ourselves up for unwavering faith and resiliency even in the most horrific and miserable situations.

Acting with bold faith like St. Joseph

St. Joseph can inspire us when contemplating how to act on God's will without any knowledge of what God's plan is. We don't know much of St. Joseph, but we do know he was a man of action, loyalty, and conviction.

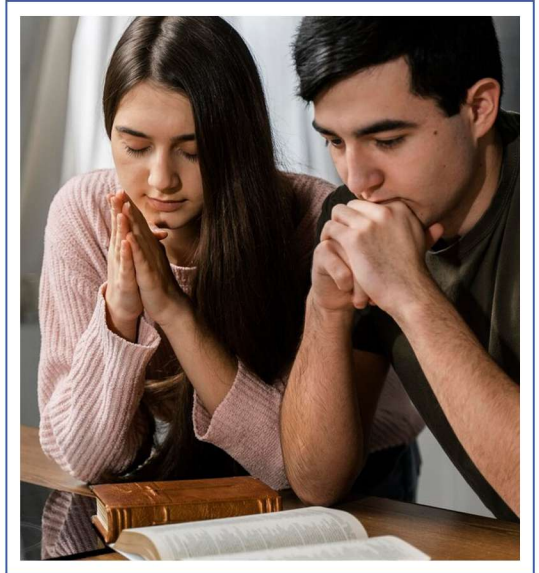
In the gospels, it's evident that St. Joseph faced several trials and decisive moments where he had to choose whether to act or wait for further direction. Decisions that must have been extremely hard to make, especially as a man responsible for leading his family to safety and security.



Accepting the Will of the Lord

When he learned of Our Lady's miraculous pregnancy, St. Joseph chose to end the engagement quietly rather than expose her to shame. (Mt 1:19)

Though shocked and confused, he responded with compassion. Once an angel confirmed in a dream that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, St. Joseph awakened and "did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife" (Mt 1:24), without any hesitation or doubt, despite the unprecedented situation.



The Flight to Egypt



Giotto di Bondone (1304–1306,
Scrovegni Chapel, Padua)

St. Joseph again acted instantly when instructed in a dream to flee with Mother Mary and Jesus to Egypt, protecting the infant Messiah from Herod's massacre.

When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him."

Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt.

He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son." (Mt. 2: 13-15)



The Return from Egypt

Likewise, when the angel directed him to return to Israel after Herod's death, "he got up, took the child and his mother and went" back to the land of Israel (Mt 2:21). Joseph obeyed God's call without question or delay at every crossroad and trial in his life.

When he arrived back in the land of Israel, he heard Herod's son Archelaus was reigning. This caused him fear, but as he was led by God to return to the land of Israel, so he waited for another message from God.

He didn't move in fear because of unfavorable conditions. Often we move in fear and not in faith, but this is not how God guides us.



Cornelis Cort (Netherlandish,
Hoorn ca. 1533–1578 Rome)

"The fear of man bringeth a snare." Prov. 29:25.

He chose to settle them in quiet Nazareth after discerning further threats in Judea and receiving yet another sign in a dream.

"And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee." (Mt 2:23).

St. Joseph's departure to Nazareth wasn't based on logic but on full surrender to the Lord. St. Joseph was led by God at each step, moving in dependence and obedience.

Here is a man who clearly shows us how we need to wait on God in lowliness and humility seeking His direction rather than being guided by appearances, the movements of others, presumptions, or fear.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." Prov. 3:5, 6

Acting with Prudence:



Saint Joseph with the Infant
Jesus by Guido Reni, c. 1635

Of course, acting on impulse without prudence is equally unwise. St. Joseph courageously acted on God's commands, but only after receiving confirmation through prayer.

He's a perfect example of what it looks like to stay grounded in contemplation among the unknown.

The gospels portray St. Joseph as a man of conviction and valor who took bold action based on faith in God's promises alone, without needing to understand the greater plan.

St. Joseph stands in contrast to the paradigm of seeking excessive signs or advice from others before acting on inspiration. We, too, show emotional and spiritual maturity and freedom when we make decisions confidently based on our discernment with the Lord.

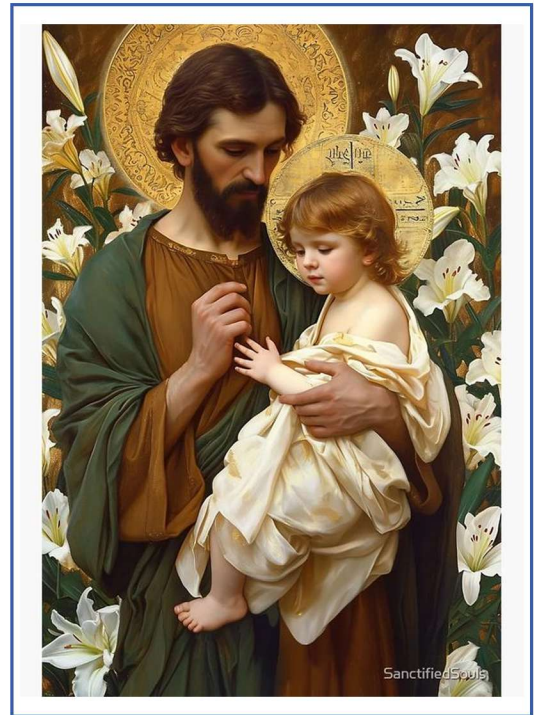
St. Joseph's example of action in prudence provides us with Biblical wisdom and confirmation that this is how Our Lord asks us to act on our desires through discernment:

- 1** Wait on the Lord in prayer and humility, rather than presuming based on logic or others' choices.
- 2** When you receive inspiration in prayer, act on it swiftly and decisively.
- 3** Move forward in faith, without requiring full insight into God's plans.
- 4** Remain rooted in prayer, contemplation, and readiness to respond to God's next call.



By taking to heart St. Joseph's virtuous model of valor, obedience, faith in God's promises, and attentiveness to the whispers of the Holy Spirit, we can learn to act swiftly and boldly when God calls us according to His purpose.

What divine inspirations might the Lord be asking you to act on today? Spend time in prayer and reflection asking for the wisdom, conviction, and trust of St. Joseph.



(Mexican, born 1696, active c.
1725–c. 1780)