

South Island Ministry
Conference
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Pursuing God's Will Together

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Perspectives and
Practices

Talk 1. POLISHING OUR LENSES: Just what are we trying to discern?

1. What's at stake in our seeing?

Discernment is an ever-increasing capacity to “see” or discern the works of God in the midst of the human situation so that we can align ourselves with whatever it is that God is doing. Every Christian is called to this kind of discernment. (Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together*, p. 20).

The example of John 9.

2. Before knowing how – knowing who and knowing what

Knowing who: Calvin's double knowledge

Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God. Our wisdom, insofar as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other. (John Calvin, *Institutes*)

Knowing what: What it is that we seek to discern

The will of God – tightrope? playground? or participation?

I'm responsible for paying attention to the Word of God right here in this locale. The assumption of spirituality is that always God is doing something before I know it. So the task is not to get God to do something I think needs to be done, but to become aware of what God is doing so that I can respond to it and participate and take delight in it.

(Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, p. 4)

The example of Paul – 1 Corinthians 10; Romans 14.

The Ignatian motto – *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam inque hominum salute:*

‘For the greater glory of God and the salvation of humanity.’

Ruth Haley Barton:

It is a dance in which God leads and you follow. It is a wave that God sends, and you ride it. It is the breath of God, and you are the feather that floats upon it. It is a wind of the Spirit that blows, and you lift your sail to catch it. It is a powerful current that is already flowing, and *you* are in that flow. (*Pursuing God's Will Together*, p. 16).

>> *What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of each of these ways of thinking about the will of God?*

3. Participation and the art of sailing

***“God leads and you follow”*: Responsiveness rather than control**

Acts 6

Learning to recognise the “wind of the Spirit”

God is always speaking to us, but it requires spiritual discernment to hear God’s voice, see what God sees, and read the signs in daily life.

(Henri Nouwen, *Discernment*, p. 42)

>> *How have you noticed the wind of the Spirit in your own experience – personally? as a community?*

Trinitarian participation: “... and you are in that flow ...”

That is the light of life. Behind it all is Jesus and his life with his Father in the fellowship of the Spirit. He shares his ideas with us, his joys and delights and loves, his burdens and interests. He shares his life with us and we are living it out. The great dance is being played out every day in our lives.

(Baxter Kruger, *The Great Dance*, p. 56).

For personal reflection and practice

1. Learn to notice what you notice!

Discernment requires attentiveness. Often our own inner responses are an important invitation to notice something important. So learn to notice what you notice. When you notice an inner response to something (whatever the context) – whether positive, negative, excited, angry, sad, confused ... whatever the response ... then PAUSE, PONDER, PRAY.

PAUSE – Don’t rush on, or brush your inner response away. Allow yourself to notice what you are feeling, and to name it.

PONDER – Like Mary, after Jesus’ birth, take time when something moves you in some way to ponder it in your heart, and to treasure those things that seem significant (Luke 2:19, 51). You could ask yourself questions like: *Why am I feeling this response? How does this connect to what is happening in my life, or my context? Might this be God, trying to get my attention?*

PRAY – Not everything we notice in the way of an inner response or feeling will be a nudge from God. Nonetheless, it is good to be open to the God who is with us in all things. *Lord, help me understand what I am feeling right now. Where are you in this situation? Give me eyes to see where you are at work? What are you inviting me to here?*

Notice ... Pause ... Ponder ... Prayer

2. *Participating in the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit*

Ruth Haley Barton suggests that each of us, whether we are aware of it or not, are already caught up in the flow of God's work in the world. How might that be true for you? The following questions may help you be more aware of the ways in which you are *already* participating in the life of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

- *Can you think of a time when you experienced a resonance with the heart of God, whether you were aware of it at the time, or only see it now in hindsight? Perhaps you actively forgave someone, or were forgiven by another. Perhaps you felt a deep sense of compassion, or a sharing in the burden of God. Perhaps for a moment you saw another person, or an aspect of creation, through the eyes of God. Perhaps, for a time, you felt fully alive and filled with joy.*
- *When you think about what you are most passionate about in your own life, and what you devote your time and energy to, what do you notice that is like the character and/or the work of the Father, Son or Holy Spirit?*

This is not an easy question to answer, but stick with it. If you are struggling to think of something, ask a friend who knows you well what they see in your life, work and gifts that reminds them of the character and work of God the Father, or Jesus or the Holy Spirit. The following examples might help ...

Aroha is a social worker. It's a tough job at times, and it takes her into some difficult and troubled family situations. But when she is able to help a family or an individual take a positive step towards safer, healthier, more life-giving ways of living, then she feels a deep joy, and is reassured that her job is really worthwhile.

*How could we see Aroha's work and passion as a participation in God? We certainly catch a glimpse of the way in which Jesus would seek out those on the margins of society, to be with them, and to help them towards healing and wholeness. We can also see Aroha participating in the Father's desire for people to know his *shalom* more deeply – dignity, purpose, peace and wholeness.*

Jim is a down to earth guy who works in a timber yard. At work and church he prefers not to be in any up front kind of role. But in his own humble way, Jim gets alongside people, listens to what's most important to them, and often offers a few quiet words of encouragement or wisdom. People value that about him.

What aspect of the Trinity do you recognise here? One answer that comes to mind is that Jim is participating in the work of the Holy Spirit as the one who comes alongside (the 'Paraclete'), to empower, encourage and give wisdom. The Spirit does not seek attention or glory, but rather directs our attention to Jesus and the Father. Jim seems to resonate with that in his way of being.

*Now, what about **you**?*

2. 'KNOW THYSELF': Discernment begins at home

Corporate discernment begins with attending to the spiritual formation of each individual leader. (Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together*, p. 37).

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

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 12:1-2)

1. Leadership structures: Forms that presuppose formation

The whole Presbyterian structure of decision-making and discernment is built on the assumption that people are formed in the way of listening to God, so that when they come together it doesn't matter by what *means* they make the decision; it will reflect the fact that ... these are formed people, and that they will arrive at something approaching God's will. (Mark Johnston)

2. Three evidences of transformed leadership

Transformed leaders: Christlikeness

Galatians 5:22-26

1 Corinthians 13

Transformed leaders: Clarity of self-knowledge

The importance of Calvin's double knowledge: knowledge of God, knowledge of self.

John 16:2-3; Luke 9:51-56 – knowing "what spirit" we are of.

An Anglican prayer of confession:

We need your healing, merciful God:
give us true repentance.
Some sins are plain to us;
some escape us,
some we cannot face.
Forgive us;
set us free to hear your word to us;
set us free to serve you.

>> *Do you feel able to risk asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate those aspects of yourself which "escape" you, and those which you "cannot face"?
That takes courage, and will require "true repentance" (metanoia).*

Ignatius and the “discernment of spirits” – those influences which draw us into closer alignment with the work of God *versus* those which warp our alignment.

A prayer from St Francis of Assisi:

Most high, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me right faith, sure hope and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge, Lord,
that I may carry out
your holy and true command.

>> *What question(s) would it be helpful for your spiritual director / supervisor / mentor to ask you each time you meet?*

Transformed leaders: Cruciformity

I appeal to you *therefore*, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as *a living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 21:1)

Paul’s goal in narrating the cross is not primarily to express his convictions about Christ, though the narratives do indeed accomplish that. *Rather, his chief aim is to form individuals and especially communities according to these narrative patterns.* That is, his goal is *formative*, not *informative*; it is *spiritual and behavioural*, not *theological* (narrowly understood as *convictional*) ...

Paul’s ultimate concern in narrating the love of Christ is to interpret his own life as a manifestation of that kind of love, on the one hand, and *to urge his communities to embody it well*, on the other.

(Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross*, p. 177, emphasis added)

Philippians 2:5-11 – the defining pattern of our leadership is to be cruciform love.

>> *What is the true source of my impulse to lead? In my need to be right? In my need to have my way? My need to be vindicated? Is it ego that underpins my leadership, or a deep, prayerful, Christ-sourced sense that the way of love demands this particular course of me, of us?*

Caring deeply and holding lightly – a willingness to let go – one form of cruciformity.

As leaders we have to care deeply, pray deeply and prepare thoroughly – I find it difficult to do all of that spadework and come to a meeting with enough passion to forward something, and yet still let go of my own agendas. It’s very challenging! It means I need to pray before going into the meeting and ask God for help to listen to what is most important. (Participant at leader’s breakfast).

Caring deeply and holding *firmly* – despite the cost – another form of cruciformity.

3. Spiritual practices for transformation

>> *What spiritual practices have contributed most to your formation as a leader?*

i. *Solitude and silence*

In solitude and silence, we become quiet enough to hear a voice that is not our own ... Spiritual leadership starts with listening for the one true Voice and learning to distinguish it from all other voices that clamor for our attention. (Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together*, p. 39).

What does this mean in practice? It can mean half an hour of silence and solitude first thing in the morning, as you break the seal on a new day and offer yourself to God afresh. It can mean setting aside a day every month or two, away from your normal environment, simply to reconnect with yourself and with God, and to be refreshed. It can mean taking a few days of retreat every year or two – days not filled up with work or any agenda other than being available to God.

ii. *Engaging the Scriptures for spiritual transformation*

Leaders who place themselves before the Scriptures in a way that allows God to speak to them personally are more disposed to hear from God in ways that affect their decision making when they are with others ... Whatever practices we use, cultivating patterns of listening to God in Scripture alone and together is essential to the fabric of spiritual leadership. (Barton, p. 41-42).

Lectio Divina (see next page)

Ignatian meditation (see page 9)

The contemplation of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18)

iii. *Prayer*

More on this in Talk 3.

iv. *Self-knowledge and self-examination*

Tools such as Myers-Briggs, Enneagram, StrengthsFinder can be useful.

See also the Prayer of Examen in Talk 4.

v. *Doing life together*

Community is not easy. Somebody once said, 'Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives.' In Jesus' community of twelve apostles, the last name was that of someone who was going to betray him. That person is always in your community somewhere; in the eyes of others, you might be that person.

(Henri Nouwen, "Moving from solitude to community to ministry," p. 83)

Praying with Scripture: Lectio Divina

“Lectio Divina” (Latin for “spiritual reading”) is a simple way to pray with a short passage of Scripture, and has been used since early Christian times.

Select a short passage to pray with, for example Psalm 1, Psalm 23, Isaiah 43:1-4; 49:13-16, Matt 6:25-34, John 15:5-12. Before you begin, take some time to settle yourself, relax, and prayerfully open yourself to God.

READ: notice what you notice ...

Read the passage through 2 or 3 times, and be aware of any word or phrase, picture or idea, that touches you in some way. It doesn't matter if you don't know why you respond to it, nor. Nor what *kind* of response you have ... it might be joy, sadness, gratitude, boredom, anger, etc. Just “notice what you notice” about your own inner responses to the reading.

REFLECT: meditate on the significance for you ...

Stop reading, and take time to sit with the words, picture or idea from the Bible passage that may have connected with you in some way. Ponder it. What is happening in your life that this may be speaking into?

Is there an invitation/challenge/insight here for you? What is it?

You could write your reflections in your journal, or draw a picture.

RESPOND: take your reflections into prayer ...

Prayer is a conversation. If you sense that God has spoken to you in some way, now is the time for you to talk to God about it.

- Your prayer might be in words, spoken or written.
- You could write a letter to God, expressing your honest responses in words that are for God's eyes only.
- You may like to draw something, or find some other way to express your prayer in non-verbal form.

REST: let go and be open ...

The final step is to take your hands off the controls and give some space time simply to “being” with God – to accept God's invitation: “Be still and know that I am God.”

See also David Benner. *Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010.

Ruth Haley. *Sacred Rhythms: Spiritual Practices that Nourish Your Soul and Transform Your Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Geoff New. *Imaginative Preaching: Praying the Scriptures so God Can Speak Through You*. Carlisle, UK: Langham Partnership, 2016; and *Live, Listen, Tell: The Art of Preaching*. Carlisle, UK: Langham Partnership, 2017.

Praying with Scripture: Ignatian Meditation

In his *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius of Loyola encourages us to bring their whole selves to God in meditation and prayer, including our imaginations. Taking an incident from the life of Jesus in the Gospels, e.g. Mark 10:46-52.

Prepare your heart

Settle and relax yourself. Deal with any distractions that become evident. Pray that you might be open and attentive to anything God wants to say to you. Ask that your heart will be receptive and your will ready to obey.

Set the scene

Read the passage through to remind yourself of the story. Now use your imagination to set the scene as vividly as you can. (Don't worry if you are not a "visual" person – it's not so much about seeing pictures as just imagining what it was really like). Use as many of your senses as you can. Ask yourself: What would I hear? What would I see? What would I smell? Who is in the scene? What are they doing? What is in the background? What is the emotional atmosphere? Take time to let the scene unfold.

Enter into the story

Now let yourself become part of this scene. Without forcing anything, what or who are you drawn to in the story? Perhaps you identify with one of the characters, and take their role. Perhaps you are a bystander, watching what is taking place. When you have found your place it is time to ...

Allow the story to unfold

Using the biblical story, allow the action to be played in your imagination. Notice how you find yourself responding – your thoughts, actions and feelings. It may be that the story unfolds a little differently to the biblical account. Notice what happens, as it may be significant. Do you find yourself interacting with Jesus? Is there anything you want to say to him, or ask him? Is there anything he seems to want to say to you, or ask you?

Reflect and pray

Ignatius encourages us to "savour the response." When your imaginary journey through the story has come to an end, take time to think back over what happened and how you found yourself responding. It might be helpful to journal your reflections. Allow them to lead you into prayer.

See also <https://pray-as-you-go.org/retreat/imaginative-contemplation> for further explanation and examples of this Ignatian approach to praying the Gospels.

3. LISTENING TOGETHER: Becoming a community of discernment

Jesus didn't choose a high-powered board or even a winning team to spearhead what would eventually become a worldwide movement. He chose to live with his disciples in an intimate expression of transforming community so that their ministry and their leadership could emerge from there. (Barton, p. 76)

1. A discerning community is willing to reflect on its corporate culture

Two ideas for drawing out people's experience of the collective life of your community or leadership group ...

i. To the angel of the church in ... <your place>

In the letters to the churches (Revelation 2-3), Jesus has a message for each of seven churches, starting, "To the angel of the church in ..., write ...". Then there follows a message for the church as a whole, in which there are usually some positive aspects that are affirmed, and some things that need to change. One way to think of the "angel of the church in ..." is to see it as representing the corporate spirit of the place – the ethos, or the spiritual essence of the community.

In a relaxed, retreat-type setting, with prayer and worship included, invite people to come up with descriptions that they sense would fit with the "angel" of your church, or your leadership team. You could do this with words, or by having available a whole range of pictures of angels with different characteristics. Everyone is invited to choose one that to them reflects something of their experience of the community/group. In a time of sharing, each person can show the words/picture and talk about what it means to them. It is crucial that this is well led, and that people can make their contribution honestly, without others contradicting them or criticising their perceptions. The facilitator can then help people notice common patterns, and to see how people feel about the picture that emerges. They might even write up all the different contributions into a "letter to the church at ...," when can then be the basis for more reflection and discussion by the leadership team.

ii. A timeline re-telling the story of the community/group

Again this would require the kind of time that a retreat day or half-day supplies. Draw up a time-line on a long sheet of newsprint which could be attached to the wall. Mark the years along the time-line, up to the present, and then invite people to write on it events in the church which they remember as significant – even if it was only significant to them. They might be personal events, in which the community was there for them (or not!). They might be good things worthy of celebration, but they might also be sad events, or periods of conflict/unhappiness in the life of the community.

Encourage people not only to write up facts, but feeling words associated with these events. Some might write up the names of key people who are no longer alive or part of the community.

Let the exercise become a springboard for conversation about the trajectory of the community's life. For which aspects of the corporate life of the community do people feel most grateful? For which do they feel least grateful? What deserves to be celebrated? What needs to be confessed and/or healed? Where has it felt that the corporate culture has been most in alignment with the mission of God? Where has it felt least like that?

This is a corporate form of 'The Prayer of Examen' – an Ignatian spiritual practice:

The Prayer of Examen

In the Examen, as an individual process, you take time, usually at the end of the day, to reflect back over what the day has held for them. Prayerfully review the main events of the day, allowing them to play on the screen of your memory like a video replay.

Notice what you feel about significant moments or experiences that come to mind. Then ask yourself one or more of the following pairs of questions:

For what in my day do I feel most grateful?

For what in my day do I feel least grateful?

Where did I get a glimpse of God's grace?

Where did I feel as though God was absent?

When was I most open to God, and to others?

Where did I close my heart to God or to another person?

Give thanks to God for the positive things of your day, as signs of God's grace. Talk to God about the less happy remembrances – pray as appropriate for comfort, healing or forgiveness.

The Examen is a way of weaving into daily events of our lives the habit of prayer and a deeper awareness of the God in whom "we live and move and have our being."

For guided examples, see <https://pray-as-you-go.org/article/examen-prayer>.

2. A discerning community creates space for God together

Praying together.

Corporate meditation on Scripture (e.g. Lectio Divina).

The mutual sharing of words, pictures, Scriptures with one another.

Retreat time together.

>> *What other ways has your leadership team found to create space for God together?*

3. A discerning community is one where people listen deeply to one another

For Christians there is no adequate measure of our success at discerning and doing God's will outside of our commitment to love one another.

(Barton, p. 134)

According to Peter Scazzero, in *Emotionally Healthy Church*, **listening well** to another person is one of the greatest incarnational acts of love we can offer. Count how many of the following questions you can say 'yes' to!

(If you are brave, ask someone who knows you well to answer too!)

1. I make a real effort to enter other people's experience of life.
2. I don't assume that I know what the other person is trying to communicate.
3. My close friends would say that I listen more than I speak.
4. When people are angry with me, I am able to listen to their side without getting upset or defensive.
5. People share freely with me because they know I listen well, and can be trusted.
6. I listen not only to what people say verbally, but also for what their body language, tone of voice, facial expression, etc, is saying.
7. I give people my complete attention when they are talking to me.
8. I am able to reflect back and validate another person's feelings with empathy.
9. I am aware of my primary defensive mechanisms when I am under stress, such as people-pleasing, shifting blame, advice giving, or becoming distracted.
10. I am aware of how the family in which I was raised has influenced my present listening style.
11. I ask for clarification when I am not clear on something another person is saying rather than trying to fill in the blanks myself.
12. I never assume something, especially negative, unless it is clearly stated by the person speaking.
13. I ask open questions when listening, rather than trying to mind-read or making assumptions.
14. I don't interrupt or listen for openings to get my point across when another is speaking.
15. I am aware when I am listening of my own personal "hot buttons" that cause me to get angry, upset, fearful, or nervous.

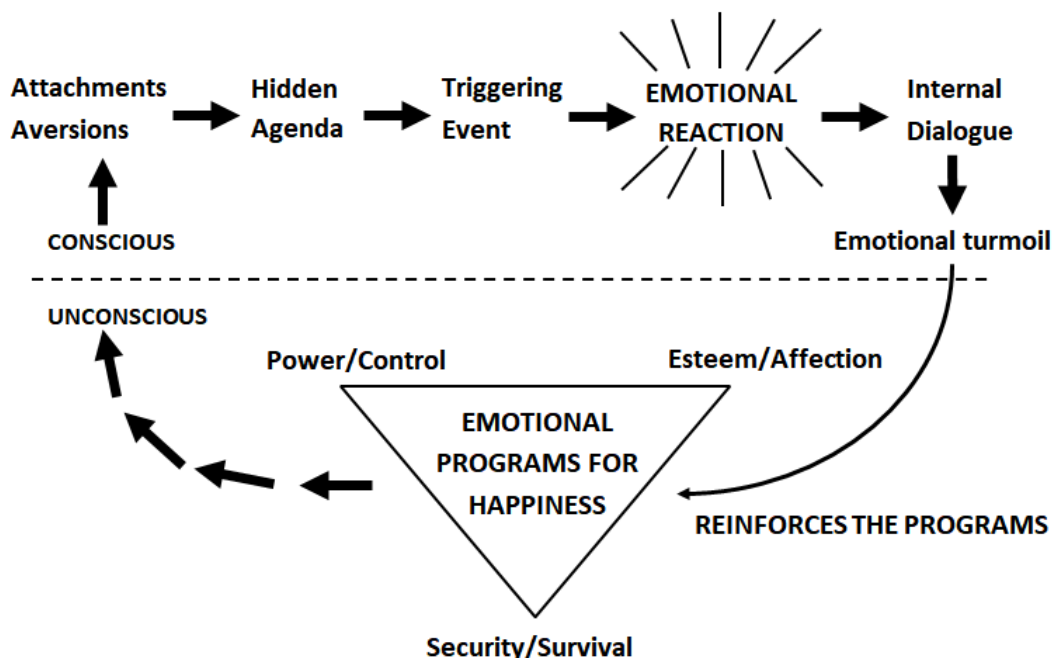
Scazzero suggests that if you can say yes to 12 or more, you are an outstanding listener; 8-11, very good; 5-7, good; 4 or fewer, poor – "you are in trouble"!

4. A discerning community is one where power is used positively

As leaders we bring a dynamic of power that we may not be aware of – when I speak, it can shut others down, and others tend to fall in behind. Both position and eloquence. Am I ... genuinely trying to draw folk out and help them see that they have a genuine part to play in this? (Breakfast discussion)

Those who are insecure in their position need to have power flowing toward them, and are threatened by the contribution of others. Those secure in their position and in their identity as the beloved child of God can allow power to flow to those around them, in an empowering style of leadership, and not fear that somehow they are diminished.

The following diagram represents one way of understanding why we find ourselves experiencing conflict, frustration or unhappiness in our interactions with others:



The point of opportunity comes when you strike the point of emotional reaction and catch yourself starting to rehearse your usual internal dialogue (self-talk). Having noticed this, you can then:

- Journal about it.
- Take it to God in prayer.
- Talk to a trust friend or colleague about what happened, and why it happened.
- If your leadership team relationships are strong and trustworthy, share it with your team and invite their feedback and prayers.
- Take it to spiritual direction, supervision or a wise mentor outside the situation.
- If you find these sort of patterns regularly interfere with your relationships, consider talking to a counsellor.

From the perspective of the diagram, the ultimate goal would be to transfer your dependence on old emotional programs for happiness onto God, and to find what is that you most deeply need in him. Invite God's healing work at the deepest levels of your being, which only he fully understands.

5. A discerning community is open to the spiritual wisdom of the past

The prayer of quiet trust

When we face discernment issues which make us feel anxious, confused or upset, it is good to remember that God is God, and we are not. God is for us, and not against us. God is with us, and will not abandon us.

Try to develop a simple prayer of trust that you can use to help you surrender your worry or your angst to God, in exchange for the peace that passes all understanding.

There is no set format to the prayer of quiet trust – it can be helpful to use Scripture. In Psalm 131, the psalmist feels like an infant on its mother's lap, content simply to rest in her love: "I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child with its mother." Based on this picture, a very simple prayer of quiet trust might be: "Loving God, I rest in your love." As you pray these words, picture yourself being held by God, secure in God's embrace, and allow your anxiety to melt away.

Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God." To pray the prayer of quiet trust might mean simply repeating those words of God to yourself, breathing deeply, and allowing stillness and reassurance sink into your soul.

The more you use the prayer of quiet trust in your own individual circumstances, the more natural it will be to draw on it the corporate settings.

Prayer for indifference

Indifference does *not* mean not caring, or not having an opinion or a preference. Rather it means coming to a place of genuine openness to whatever path God might guide us to. We are caring deeply, but seeking to hold lightly. It is the place Jesus came to in Gethsemane as he wrestled with the prospect of the cross: "Not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Of course he would have preferred not to go the cross, but he prayed until he could genuinely say, "I am prepared to do whatever you guide me to do."

Easy to explain, but hard to do. Hard to do when we have a vested interest in the outcome, when our egos or fears or desire to be in control are in the mix! That's why this is the prayer *for* indifference, rather than *of* indifference. Just as for Jesus in Gethsemane, it's a state of heart that we have to pray that God will give us.

The prayer for indifference is a prayer that God will help us set aside our predetermined agendas and our desire to control the outcome. Coming to this positive place of surrender and openness is a journey, sometimes a difficult one. So Ruth Haley Barton says:

It is essential that elders, staff and ministry leaders are personally *on the journey* to this kind of surrender to God as part of their spiritual preparation for leadership. (*Pursuing God's Will Together*, p. 43)

Consolation and Desolation

Ignatius of Loyola used the terms 'consolation' and 'desolation' respectively to refer to inner feelings that seek to draw us further into, or away from, the will of God.

We are not talking here about surface feelings. Think of it as being like a river. At the surface of the river the water swirls and splashes, sometimes surging forward, at other times making whirlpools or back eddies. Our surface feelings are like that. They come and go, they can go up and down several times in the course of a day. If we wanted to know the true course of a river, we wouldn't look at the surface layer of water. As we go down to a deeper layer of water, we will get a truer picture of the flow of that river, as it moves silently across the contours of the river bed.

In the same way, although our moods and surface feelings fluctuate, there is a deeper level that gives a truer picture of what is really going on in our depths. As Jesus wrestled in Gethsemane with the prospect of the cross, we sense that despite his obvious sorrow at what lay ahead, his prayer eventually brought him to a place of deep peace within himself. The obvious surface feelings would have steered him away from the cross. But the deeper place of knowing – the deepest part of the river of his soul – was aligning him with his Father's mission of reconciling love.

So, when we experiencing emotions that pull us one way or another, the challenge of discernment is to connect with what is deep rather than superficial, and with what is persistent, rather than fleeting.

When we pay attention that deeper level, do we sense a rightness, a sense of life-giving connection with God and ourselves, even if what we are facing is difficult, as it was for Jesus? Ignatius would call that *consolation*. Our river is flowing in harmony with the river of the water of life. So again, we are not talking about fleeting feelings of peace or happiness, but a deeper, steady sense of rightness and joy and peace. Jonah probably felt good when he jumped on board the ship that would take him in the opposite to direction to Nineveh, where God was sending him. But that was the superficial of relief of avoiding a hard call – a *false* consolation.

Desolation is the loss of a sense of connection with God, with others, and with what we know deep down to be true. Desolation is the alert that the course of our life river is now a cross-current in relation to the flow of God's purposes, and that change is needed. Again, we are not talking about surface feelings of apprehension, or concern, or doubt, but a deeper, persistent sense of unease and disconnection. We can feel this, even when things on the surface are going well. As Barton put it, "Your body knows and is telling you something your mind doesn't want to know or may not be ready to know yet" (*Pursuing God's Will Together*, p. 59). It is an invitation to open up this knowing to the light of God's love and direction.

Learning to recognise and pay heed to consolation and desolation complements the use of our mind to *think* our way forward, by bringing that deeper level of gut or heart knowing into the picture. Both ways of knowing need each other.

MOVEMENTS IN CORPORATE LEADERSHIP DISCERNMENT

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PREPARATION

- Clarify the question for discernment
- Gather the community for discernment
- Affirm (or reaffirm) guiding values and principles



PUTTING OURSELVES IN A POSITION TO BE LED

- Prayer for indifference
- Test for indifference
- The prayer for wisdom
- The prayer of quiet trust



DISCERNING GOD'S WILL TOGETHER

- Set the agenda for listening
- Listen to each other
- Listen to God in silence
- Reconvene and listen again
- Identify and work with options
- Agree together
- Seek inner confirmation
- Affirm God's guidance



DO

THE WILL OF GOD

- Communicate with those who need to know
- Make plans to do God's will as you have come to understand it
- Keep discerning as you do God's will

TRANSFORMING RESOURCES
A Ministry of the Transforming Center*

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4. READY, SET, GO! Community discernment in practice