

An Outline for the 7 Movements of Discernment (7Ws)

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In any discernment process, it is important to recognize that discernment is not merely our best thinking—but our faithful attempt to determine how God would direct us. Most attempts at a faithful process will yield a positive result—a direction, a leading, a step forward. But it would be unwise if we did not indicate that from time to time, some will not, as God in holy mystery asks us to simply wait. (Elijah waited three years in a foreign land, asking God for guidance, even while his friends and fellow prophets suffered, “back home” under evil leadership. Scripture records “After three years, the Word of the Lord came to Elijah;” we suspect that this caused him some concern!) Yet Scripture is filled with God’s guidance, as something ordinary, something we are to seek after. We have the assurance that seeking to know His mind pleases God.

All through the Bible, discernment was practiced by those who loved God; sometimes even the enemies of the Lord “tripped over” the voice of God! And so, we recognize that God is Sovereign—and we are commanded to discover all we can to “discern the voice.” It is with this attitude of humble submission that we begin this process of “Discerning the Shepherd’s Voice.”

1. A Discernment Team (DT) is selected by those who are invested in this decision. If it is a church, then the discerning team would be chosen by the Lead Pastor &/or the Board Chair or Head Elder. If this is being done by another kind of group, then those who are charged with leading the group should select a discernment team of up to 7 people.
2. The DT must define the limits of their authority—does this group make the final decision? Does it report its findings to another group

that makes the decision? This should be understood before any process begins—or it leads to needless frustration. Publish who will make the final decision in advance of the discernment and abide by this decision.

3. The DT sets apart a single meeting (three hours?) or places this in an overnight retreat (an evening, an overnight, and a morning together).
4. The DT leader and a recorder are selected.
5. The recorder ensures that there are markers, chart paper, handouts, for use in the Discernment Process. S/he also ensures that refreshments are on hand, and that the setting is comfortable and functional for the discernment process.
6. Lordship is ***not*** optional to discerning God's Leading. This step is not to be bypassed or weakened, but rather is required to ensure that the DT is focused on the Lordship of Christ, and not on advancing their current cherished view. To begin the process the leader asks the Lordship question of each participant, ***in full view of the other members of the team***, with the authority to dismiss the person if the answer is no:

Are you prepared to surrender your current cherished view on this matter should it become clear that the Word of Christ and the leading of the Spirit is asking us to do so?

Anyone who will ***not*** affirm their allegiance to the clear teaching of the Bible and the leading the Spirit through the Word cannot discern. They are to be dismissed from the discernment circle. Those who do affirm allegiance to Scripture and God's leading as more important than their current view may continue in the process.

The goal is that the entire team be public to each other and to their church congregation in their shared affirmation that Jesus' guidance by Word and the leading of His Spirit will be the center of all discernment.

*God's Will—Revealed by Word and Spirit...
Nothing More
Nothing Less.
Nothing Else.*

7. The DT thanks God that the Lordship of Jesus is more important than their current view.
8. The Clear Question is now presented for consideration. It is wise to ensure that everyone knows the question; perhaps it could be printed on a handout, so that it is always clearly before the team. It should also be placed on chart paper on a wall, for all to see together, or on a handout to each person in bold type. The leader will read the question aloud and ask if all are agreed that the question is the one that they will answer. If all do not agree to the question, then the leader works with the team to reshape the question until all are satisfied that the question is the one that they will consider as a team, together.
9. The DT now asks whether this is something that could be found acceptable within the clear teaching of the Bible. Should Scriptures come to mind, the recorder writes them out. They should be placed on chart paper and left up for all to read (these Scriptures frame the conversations/discernment). The leader then asks the group whether they hold the view that this question may be answered within and under the Lordship of Jesus. If the consensus of the entire team is that the question is within the framework of the Bible's teaching, the team can now enter the next phase...
10. The DT leader asks each person to pause in prayer--separately. Perhaps the team decides in advance that there will be a 20-30 minute break for each team member to go pray, either by walking and reflecting or sitting still. After the break, each team member returns to report whether their experience of God's Presence increases or diminishes as they consider this question. The leader asks each person by name to contribute to the conversation: Frank/Jane/_____... Did you experience a nearness to the Lord as you considered this option (An increase if Godliness is called "consolation")? Were you distracted from Christ as you considered the question (this is called "desolation")? Each team member shares their first "sense", knowing that the next step involves their best thinking. Agree in advance that the team will not end the process at this point—rather, the best thinking happens in team.

11. Now the team places three pieces of chart paper on the wall. One is labelled “pros”, the second is labelled “cons”; the third page is called “feelings/hunches/leadings.”
- a. The facilitator asks each person in turn to name only “pros”. Everyone gets a turn, until every person names what they believe to be a positive until everyone has had a chance to contribute. The Leader will ensure that no one is allowed to name any negatives, or leadings, etc. until the entire team has focused on this. Only pros, until all pros are named.
 - b. Then the facilitator asks each person in turn to name only “cons.” Once again, each person gets a turn, until every person names all the negatives they can name. No one is allowed to name any positives or leadings until the “co” list is exhausted and completed.
 - c. Then, each team member names their sense of leading, “feelings” or “hunches”—positive or negative or mixed—and place that on a separate chart paper. Once again, each person gets a turn—and only their sense of leading/feelings are allowed at this point.
 - i. It is imperative that the DT leader ensure
 - 1) that each person speaks in turn,
 - 2) that the category is exhausted before the next one happens,
 - 3) that no one person is allowed to pass, or be overlooked, and
 - 4) that no single voice dominates.

This process surfaces the best thinking of the entire team and puts it visually in front of everyone.

*If the process is happening in a single meeting,
it is time to set apart a break.*

Everyone takes ½ hour without speaking to others, perhaps a walk, or a solo a prayer time, or simply sitting apart from the others in the DT etc. The ½ hour is completely theirs.

If this is done in an overnight,

end the evening with this step; let each person sleep on what they have heard. The team leader determines the time of the next step—whether a ½ hour later, or the next day. The chart paper remains on the wall, for the group to see at the next session.

12. As the team reconvenes, the goal is to pray together. This requires significant time. Remind the group of the Scriptures that have been named in the process and have them read aloud. Reflect in silence on those texts and pray for guidance. Then have the team review the positives, the negatives and the sensing/feeling shared by the team, and pray through them, paying heed to whether there is an increase in the presence or a diminishing of that in each team member. The team is looking for “shared consolation” or “shared desolation.” With the Scripture and the teams best thinking within everyone’s heart and mind, pray aloud together. Then rest in silence as you ponder the question.

- *Righteousness, peace and joy*, growing within the entire team, means “yes” this is a godly choice.
- *Distraction from God’s Presence*, a diminishing or righteousness, peace and joy, means “No: This is not as God would lead us.”
- The DT leader will be careful to give time for this to be completed and then ask, “Have we come to a decision?”
- Whether this is “yes” or “no”, the team should be of one heart and mind. Whatever the answer, it should lead to a profound sense that God has spoken.

The leader names the question aloud—the team affirms a “yes” a “no” or perhaps, “wait.” This leads to the next movement:

13. Worship. After the decision is rendered, everyone should know in their deepest soul that God is pleased. There should be a sense of “lift” as each one senses that the decision has been weighed and brought before the Lord. A word of caution. There may be a person who has no sense of consolation or desolation. That person may not wish to get in the way of the rest of the team (S/he may choose to

“stand aside” and allow the remainder of the team to take the decision).

14. Finally, the DT ends the process, and brings the discernment to those who are charged with final authority. If the team is the group with the final decision, they now move forward with ordinary planning around making the decision happen: Announce the decision, allocate staff or volunteers to oversee this, set a budget, determine timelines, etc. If the team is to report their findings to a board or a congregation, they inform that governing body, and send their findings to them for final approval and planning.
15. End by thanking God, that the desire of the Lord to speak is even more profound than our desire to pay heed.

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