

SEEKING GOD’S WILL FOR DECISION-MAKING IN DAILY LIFE AND IN LIFE’S MAJOR TRANSITIONS

Notes from The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola — A Summary from My Various Studies

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Discernment: An Introduction

All decisions are a means to an end, but where? and with whom? And for whom?

In cognitive research, psychologists and neuroscientists are offering unprecedented insights into our inner landscape, especially into how our associated memory and subconscious operate when it comes to making decisions. We have a confirmation bias in that we will look for reasons to move ahead based on what we already want while ignoring even self-evident reasons not to.

An introductory secular definition of discernment is the ability to separate what is important from what is not — irrelevant or misleading.

It is a decision-making process of judging what is true and ought to be and moving past our limited perceptions using prudence and a reasonable assessment of all the factors. It is both a skill and a methodology.

Discernment as Decision Making

To address that concern of limited perceptions, there are a variety of decision-making tools and techniques, in addition to multiple ways to view the process as directive, analytical, conceptual, or behavioral. Which one to use? Which one fits my personality, temperament, and circumstances? Which ones to use for everyday decisions, and which apply to life transitions or life-altering decisions?

Yet, in a decision-making process, there are more questions to be asked: “Is this option more consistent with who I am?” What integrative decision-making tool will take into account not only who we are but how we are to be, how it fits our life’s end goal, and how to evaluate if a decision will be the means to our end goal? And beyond that, we need a way to evaluate how those decisions fit with our deeper self in answering those ontological and existential questions: “Whose am I?”, “How am I being called?”, and “Where am I called to do God’s will?”

For a Christian, decision-making involves much more. We are to use the foundational principles within the Catholic social teachings: dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, charity, and justice, and to use discernment in following God’s will.

This tool — discernment — is applicable to circumstances of daily life decisions and life transitions. This is where St. Ignatius comes in; he practiced and wrote about discernment: *discerning God’s will* and *discernment of ‘spirits’* with its rules. Today we can find them in his notes, which have come down to us in his Spiritual Exercises.

The Way of St. Ignatius

About five centuries ago, Ignatius of Loyola realized from his personal experience, and also in working with others, that we have a deep well of self-serving irrationalities and biases that can and do affect our decision-making. He knew the most critical element needed for good decision-making was **to know one’s end goal**, and that every decision was a means towards that end.

He saw the need to be indifferent to our biases, which he called *attachments*, in order to discover the path forward that fits best with who we are and what better serves our end goal. For Ignatius, his end goal, and ours today, was to love and serve God in all that he did and to be with God in heaven. Such an end goal encompassed who he was,

whose he was, and how he was to be and act. Every decision was weighed against that end. See the section on the **Principle and Foundation**.

Note: More on attachments to come.

Bringing Glory to God

The end goal of discernment in Ignatian Christian tradition is a decision that best brings glory to God in growing into more of who He dreamt us to be.

“The glory of God is a human being fully alive” (St. Irenaeus)

“Be who God meant you to be, and you will set the world on fire” (St. Catherine of Siena).

Tools for Discernment

For a Christian, the decision-making process involves much more: it is to apply love to the situation. For love, as Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, is this: *love desires the good of the other and does what one can to support the other’s good*. Love is applied through action because we have been created and sustained by a God who is Love, loving. In discerning and applying the good through love, we have a road map from our Church.

1. Prayer
2. Gifts of the Holy Spirit
3. Ways from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius
 1. Principle and Foundation (SE#23)*
 2. Rules of Discernment of Spirits (SE#313–336)
 3. Decision Making - Discernment of God’s Will (SE#169–189)
4. Principles within the Catholic social encyclicals: the dignity of the person, solidarity, subsidiarity, rooted in charity, and justice in serving the common good.

*SE refers to the paragraph numbers in the text of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola

The Principle and Foundation

“I am created to praise, love, and serve God.”

In the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius invites us to first pray over the *1st Principle and Foundation*. There he presents us with a road map for life, starting with who we are, our purpose and our destiny, and how best to live our lives to achieve that end.

The 1st Principle and Foundation (SE#23)*

“Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.

- The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created.
- Hence, man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him.
- Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent* to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition.
- Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things.
- Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.”

*St. Ignatius of Loyola (translation by Louis J. Puhl, SJ)

The 1st Principle and Foundation: A Contemporary Version**

**by David Fleming, SJ

- The goal of our life is to live with God forever. God, who loves us, gave us life. Our own response of love allows God's life to flow into us without limit.
- All the things in this world are gifts of God, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily. As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God insofar as they help us develop as loving persons.
- But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives, they displace God and so hinder our growth toward our goal. In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance before all of these created gifts insofar as we have a choice and are not bound by some obligation.
- We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one.
- For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a deeper response to our life in God.
- Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want, and I choose what better leads to God deepening his life in me.

How God Speaks to us

God speaks to us through our soul's given faculties (intellect and will) operating throughout our brain/body. We are called to become intentionally aware of our thoughts that arise (words and images), our emotions (what rises up within us as felt feelings), and our desires (those deeper yearnings), and to assess and determine (understand using our intellect) their source and to choose (using our will) what better gives glory to God - based upon the Principle and Foundation.

Note: Not every thought or desire is to be acted upon. St. Ignatius gives us a way to determine what may be God's will for us in a particular situation. We have clues. It can be found in those clearest, truest desires: those God places in our hearts – as if imprinted on our soul – desiring truth, goodness, and beauty.

Functions of our Personality

Believing

Perceiving

Thinking

Feeling

Deciding

Acting

Decision Making Criteria - Where we feel most alive

There are two foundational questions we can ask to discover God's will for us: **"Where am I called to be of greatest service for others?"** and **"What better leads to more of God's life in me?"** In fulfilling our mission, our purpose, we will know it when we are feeling most alive. Our desires and our feelings matter.

We are invited to ask:

- *What am I good at?*
- *Where do I feel most alive?*
- *What does the world need?*

We feel most alive when we are using our natural, God-given gifts. God created us with a purpose, and that purpose is to use these gifts in the service of others. That is God's will for us: to bring forth the greatest good based upon Jesus' commandment: Love God, love your neighbor as yourself. Remember, love is desiring the good for the other as other, which also includes ourselves. We can only care for others, within our limited capacity, and equally have the responsibility to care for ourselves.

And so, we are to ask from a place of openness—a place of freedom—freedom from attachments.

Introduction to Ignatian Discernment of Spirits (SE#313–336)

The discernment of the spirits has been a practice handed down to us through the Church that came out of the Desert Fathers and Mothers tradition of the 4th c.

The medieval view of the mind and one's interior life is different from the way we see the mind from a psychological view.

Here you will discover a familiar term, 'spirit,' used in two different ways - 'spirits' in this tradition are classified into two different categories: interior and exterior.

In the human soul/mind/body/brain there are 'spirits' – our interior life consists of thoughts, emotions, desires, feelings, memories – all these are the non-material – spiritual – thus called 'spirits'. Ignatius describes them as moving – since they are changing throughout the day – they are moving in a direction either towards God or away from God. Towards love, truth and beauty or away from.

He knew our thoughts and beliefs preceded our actions. His process of discernment was to be aware of these internal 'spirits', to look at which direction they are heading and to understand where they came from (influences, ours or others'), and to make a decision to accept or reject them.

Next: What is the cause of a given impulse within the human soul and where are the influences on that impulse coming from?

There are different 'spirits' and other influences on one's interior 'spirits' that St. Ignatius writes about in his Exercises. The term spirit is also used as a noun and as an influencing action. For 'spirits' can be judged by the end they seek (fruits) and their mode of action.

- The 'good spirits' are God and angels that act upon our reason and conscience, while the 'bad spirits' are devils or Satan that act on one's imagination and senses.

- A 'good spirit' is also the influence of God the Holy Spirit, the Church's teachings, and the implanted good in one's soul; a 'bad spirit' is the influence of the enemy, the world, and the flesh.

Now that you have a framework for how the words 'spirit' and 'spirits' are used, we can now explore those interior movements within us - thoughts, feelings, urges, impulses and decide what to do about them. For we can become lost in life's circumstances, letting our unconscious, reactive thoughts, emotions, and actions (rooted in fear and inordinate or disordered desires) take the lead.

Discernment of spirits in action: We are to ask: where are these interior movements leading me? We may experience am I being drawn (God draws gently), or am I being driven (pushed or rushed)?

The key to discernment is humility, which also requires calm, rational reflection. We are to take into account our concupiscence (a tendency to sin – sin being an act of willful or unintentional neglect of grace).

Two ways of discerning the 'spirits' can be either by a charism (God's spiritual gift) or by our actions (always and only) with God's assistance through acquired knowledge – formation, i.e., studying the biblical truths, learning what to look out for, and practicing the skills of listening to our inner world which comes from praying the Examen.

In building up our minds on the word of the Word, we put on the mind of Christ.

The Interior Life

Our interior landscape from a psychological viewpoint consists of 3 areas:

- intellect (thoughts [words/images], reasonings, memories, and imaginings)
- will (urges, impulses, motivations, and desires)
- affect (emotions, feelings, and moods)

The soul's rational faculties for St. Thomas Aquinas consist of the intellect and will, whereas memory and imagination have been added by others over the centuries.

The Elements of Our Interior Life

Psychological

Affect is a psychological term for our underlying experiences of emotion, feeling, or mood.

Emotions

- Can be defined differently depending upon the discipline. It is an experience (positive or negative) to significant events (what we may or may not remember) or what we hold as valuable (our faith or ethics) capable of triggering distinctive bodily changes (chemical reactions that are experienced as felt feelings) and subsequent behaviors. It's an innate system that arouses the autonomic nervous system and is usually a primary driver of motivation (that needs to be evaluated and checked before taking action – see the Examen). They are composed of multiple internal components – the subjective experience, cognitive processes, expressive behaviors, and psychophysiological changes.
- In discernment we look at emotions as arising from within, and are to be evaluated through reasoned reflection: where did they come from, and why, and are they to be acted upon? See process of discernment.

Feelings

- Feelings express an innate emotional state, yet not always. Feeling is an essential part of consciousness, arising from a combination of emotions and thoughts. Feelings can emerge from biological, psychological, natural responses, and spiritual causes. One can have a feeling of knowing such as when grace flows in but it is not preceded by a conscious emotion or a feeling – it is an infusement of grace that one responds to. We are to become aware (the 'felt feeling') of what (name them) and where they originated (the why of that

feeling). In testing for a feeling, we use words to describe an experience. For example: I feel sad (not I think sad); I feel contented (not I think contented).

Mood

- A mood is a psychological state with or without a known cause, a general orientation that can last a day or years.

Human Spirits

It is in the *interactions of our intellect, will and affect* thus producing what Ignatius calls the **movements of the spirits**. **The 'human spirits'** are our thoughts, insights, feelings, emotions, moods, urges, impulses, desires, imaginations, attractions, longings, inclinations, and even resistances that *spontaneously arise within us* which have their influences (*it is when our preconsciousness breaks through*).

For what influences our intellect, will, or affect, St. Ignatius uses the terms the 'good spirit' or the 'enemy of our human nature' (or 'bad spirit').

Desire and God's leadings

Ignatius believed that our **desires** are the main way we can discover God's will for us.

Desire for him was the key to a fulfilling life. For Ignatius, in those desires there is at the core our deepest yearning that points to our ultimate end – to be with God.

Yet he needed to know how to determine if a particular decision would serve that end goal (as in the Principle and Foundation) in finding God's will (desire) for us. And what was needed was **clarity** - from those self-serving irrationalities and, more importantly, to be aware of one's inordinate desires and disordered attachments that hinder one's freedom to respond to that call and those influences.

Spiritual Freedom

Spiritual Freedom - is freedom from disordered attachments and inordinate desires so as to make a choice that is within God's will (desire) for us which is to flourish in all that we were created to be and do thus giving greater glory to God not just by words but by actions.

Spiritual Feelings

Spiritual Feelings – are feelings through the lens or perspective of faith.

These 'spiritual feelings' are what we are discerning. They are experienced (using two categorical terms) as either consolation or desolation, which indicate to us a direction – either we are moving towards God and God's will (a felt sense of consolation) or away from God and God's will (a felt sense of desolation).

We are to notice our interior movements (human spirits) during and after prayer, discern where they came from (from our good or bad side; God or the enemy), and then choose what to follow or not. This time of discernment is where we begin to learn more about ourselves and where God wants to lead us. We are to ask God to help us understand what was aroused, emerged, within us and why.

Do you sense being drawn or driven?

God draws; the enemy drives.

What 'voice' is speaking?

Whose 'voice' are we listening to?

'voice' as the influencer

St. Ignatius used imagination and tested his interior senses. He came to realize that the peace and joy he felt when imagining life as Jesus' disciple was a sure sign that this was the choice he should make to give the greatest glory to God through all he did.

He called that inner sense of peace a **gift of consolation**. Those inner senses producing disquiet, which he saw as pointing away from God, he termed **desolation**. He tested every potential decision by his inner sense of consolation or desolation.

Consolation & Desolation - Natural vs. Spiritual

Natural Consolation & Desolation

Natural consolation or desolation comes from a cause.

- External – what we experience from a movie or nature.
- Internal - from our personal insights

Spiritual Consolation & Desolation

Consolation and desolation are spiritual when they have God as their source, and God as their object; it is a felt awareness of our internal response to God and God's truth. The grace from God is experienced and termed an infusement as experienced at times in contemplation.

Spiritual consolation is not necessarily 'felt arising from an emotion', yet it is known when it happens, as if coming out of nowhere (we had no part in its arrival). We can 'test' it — did it come from God, from the enemy (false consolation), or from myself?

The criterion to 'test' whether it is a 'good spirit' is its results – either by the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) or any increase of the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity).

Spiritual desolation comes when we have moved away from God, such as following a temptation from self or a 'bad spirit' which is moving into areas that are not God's will for us, leaving us with a sense of desolation, a sense of disquiet.

Sensing Spiritual Consolation & Desolation

- Spiritual Consolation – we have a felt sense of comfort, solace, relief, support, reassurance (positive feelings - they come to me).

"Consolation... a quasi-technical term in Catholic theology of the 16th century. In general, it meant a warm, pleasant, affective experience within a person that God stimulates for the purpose of edifying the person, or communicating his will; as opposed to the ordinary, pleasant emotions, that one experiences by virtue of being human. Consolations are distinguished from ordinary emotions in the terms of: 1. their intensity, which is disproportionate to whatever stimulated them; 2. the fact that they remain long after the stimuli are gone; 3. they make burden and suffering seem light, even welcome, and in the service of God; and 4. they generate greater faith, hope, and love in the person. Ignatius consolations exhibit all these qualities in the testament. Ignatius provided his own description of consolations in the spiritual exercises SE316". (pp. 114–115, n. 17, from A Pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, edited by Barton T. Geger, SJ)

- Spiritual Desolation – we have a felt sense that leaves us a sense of dryness, emptiness, sadness, despair, or anguish (negative feelings – they come over me).

“Desolation in contrast, are unpleasant affective states that lead one ‘to obtuseness of the soul, turmoil within it, and impulsive motion towards low and earthly things, or disquiet from various agitation and temptations. These move one towards lack of faith, and leave one without hope, and without love. One is completely listless, tepid, and unhappy, and feel separated from our Creator and Lord’. (SE 316 translation Ganss, 122).” (pp. 114–115, n. 17, from A Pilgrim’s Testament: The Memoirs of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, edited by Barton T. Geger, SJ)

Many writers have advocated that we should pay little attention to consolations, for they could be easily misinterpreted. They could also have an addictive quality and be a temptation of desire for their own sake, as opposed to serving God through our love for Him. Yet, Ignatius saw consolations as a significant way, or evidence, that our thought or desire has come from God. And that in discerning God’s will, consolations provided direction to what we desire and are to choose.

The primary determination if it was truly from God, for it will be known by its fruits.

False Consolation

False consolation: If we find ourselves feeling a bit rebellious to constructive criticism when we are doing good, or we find ourselves reactively hurried and overzealous, or may not want to share our reasonings in making a decision (a sign of lacking indifference), we are not deciding in spiritual freedom but by unconscious or conscious attachments. We are trying to console ourselves with ‘reasonings’; we are experiencing a false consolation.

And a core principle of discerning God’s will is using our talents and gifts at the service of others within our limited capacity. We will know we are out of God’s will, even when serving others, when we have gone beyond our capacity.

Influences on our Human Spirits

What are our ‘spirits’? They are our thoughts, feelings, and desires.

This listing has been drawn together from several sources: the Spiritual Exercises, several talks given by Fr. Timothy Gallagher (and a training course for spiritual directors), and the Catechism.

The ‘good spirits’

- God (CCC 798) – The Holy Spirit is “the principle of every vital and truly saving action in each part of the Body.” The Spirit works in many ways to build up the whole Body of Christ in charity.
- Sanctifying grace (a ‘good influencer – spirit’; habitual grace) is poured out in Baptism, it makes the soul holy – it is a state of the soul – there we receive the Giver of gifts, the Trinity, and we are sealed to become adopted sons and daughters being able to receive other graces (actual graces). Sanctifying grace remains with us unless it is lost by mortal sin; this first comes to us in Baptism and then through the other sacraments.
- Actual grace is help given to us for a particular time to enlighten our minds and to move our will to do good and avoid or shun wrong; it must be acknowledged, received, interiorized and put into action.
- The Holy Spirit who works directly in our minds (and hearts) through promptings and illuminations.
- The Theological Virtues – Faith, Hope, and Charity; and all the other infused Virtues - Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Courage.
- The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord, which are given for personal sanctification.
- Individual God-given charism for serving others. Charisms are oriented toward sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church: service, teaching, exhortation, contributing, acts of mercy, and prophecy are these gifts.
- Other good influences – such as other people, information in books and podcasts

- And all of the good influences that are from God and directed toward God

NOTE: (From Spiritual Theology by Fr. Jordan Aumann ch. 4). Following the teaching of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas maintains that a person in the state of sanctifying grace still needs the further assistance of grace, first, “because no created thing can proceed to any action whatsoever except in virtue of the divine motion,” and secondly, because of the actual state of human nature, subject to ignorance and weakness of the flesh and further hampered by the wounds of original sin. Moreover, even when endowed with sanctifying grace and the infused virtues, the just person needs the stimulus of actual grace to actuate those supernatural powers. Every act of an infused virtue requires a previous movement of grace to set that virtue or gift in motion. Actual grace also serves to activate the infused virtues.

The ‘bad’ OR ‘false spirits’

‘The enemy’ – of our human nature: the devil, the world, and the flesh (the lower part of our soul)

- Things around us in the world that can lead us away from God
- Satan and the associated fallen angels – offer temptations. The enemy works within our human vulnerabilities and disordered desires, telling lies and false reasonings
- Our flesh: what is internal in us such as a legacy of original sin - which is concupiscence (an inclination to commit sins). In Christian theology it has a particular meaning: the movement of a sensitive appetite contrary to the operation of human reason. The apostle Saint Paul identifies it with the rebellion of the “flesh” against the “spirit” (CCC 2515). Because man is a composite being, spirit and body, there already exists a certain tension in him; a certain struggle of tendencies between the “spirit” and “flesh” develops. It’s a consequence of sin and at the same time a confirmation of it. It is part of the daily spiritual battle (CCC 2516).

Other Influences (KSW’s)

Tendencies of bad habits - specified in our tradition as the seven capital sins, which lead to other sins.

Our vulnerabilities – these are not ‘spirits’ but are areas of weakness, to be aware of and take action to guard, and to look for healing and reconciliation.

Shame is an experience that comes from sins against us in particular when we are in a vulnerable state such as our age or whatever or wherever we are vulnerable – it can leave us with wounds that need healing – or leave us with a set of beliefs of being unworthy or of less value which alters the way we interact or react in a way that is not how God designed us.

Guilt from a sin that is not acknowledged, confessed, or from not making recompense; or believing we were not or could not be forgiven due to believing in our unworthiness which comes from shame* (that comes from sins against us).

St. Ignatius’s Rules of Discernment - Rule #2

Of the 14 Rules, this Second Rule helps clarify the difference between consolation and desolation.

This is taken from Fr. Gallagher’s handouts in training spiritual directors and what is in (_____) is my writing.

Rule #2. “In persons who are rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord”.

“And it is proper to the good spirit (God, angels) to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing and taking away all obstacles, so that the person may go forward in doing good.”

(Even in correcting us toward becoming our better selves, God desires us to be how we have been created to be; we are given the grace to hear it and to act it; the inner 'Voice' – Holy Spirit is gentle and soft; yet if we are moving away, the voice is firm; we are given the grace of awareness and will experience guilt followed by sorrow.)

- “For then it is proper for the evil spirit to bite, sadden, and place obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, so that the person may not go forward to do the good” or push us to go beyond our human capacity.

(We feel driven - the 'voice' is the hyper-critical, self-punishing for not being perfect or not doing something we should have, feeling shame or not worthy for having limitations, not realizing we set ourselves up with unrealistic expectations, etc.)

Note: Guilt is what we feel when we have moved away from grace, while feelings of shame tend to be what others who moved away from God did to us or what we do to ourselves as self-hate.

The Rules of Discernment for Everyday Living

Translation from Original & Fr. Gallagher's Summary *The 14 Rules for Discernment of Spirits* *

* I have made slight modifications, for additional clarity, to Fr. Timothy Gallagher, OMV, *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide to Everyday Living* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 7–10, and from the course I took with him on teaching discernment to directees and retreatants.

Rules for becoming aware of and understanding, to some extent, the different movements which are caused in the soul, the good, to receive them, and the bad to reject them. And these rules are more proper for the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises.

First Rule. For persons who are going from mortal sin to mortal sin · In these persons the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures to them, leading them to imagine sensual delights and pleasures in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins. · In these persons the good spirit uses a contrary method, stinging and biting their consciences through their rational power of moral judgment.

Second rule. For persons moving from good to better In persons who are going on intensely purifying their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord, the method is contrary to that in the first rule. · For then it is proper to the evil spirit to bite, sadden, and place obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, so that the person may not go forward. · And it is proper to the good spirit to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing and taking away all obstacles, so that the person may go forward in doing good.

Third Rule. Spiritual Consolation. · I call it consolation when some interior movement is caused in the soul, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and, consequently when it can love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but only in the Creator of them all. · Likewise when it sheds tears that move to love of its Lord, whether out of sorrow for one's sins, or for the passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other things directly ordered to his service and praise. · Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy that calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord.

Fourth Rule. Spiritual Desolation. · I call desolation all the contrary of the third rule, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to low and earthly things, disquiet from various agitations and temptations, moving to lack of confidence, without hope, without love, finding oneself totally slothful, tepid, sad and, as if separated from one's Creator and Lord. · For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts that come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts that come from desolation.

Fifth Rule. Never make a change. · In time of desolation never make a change but be firm and constant in the proposals and determination in which one was the day preceding such desolation, or in the determination in which

one was in the preceding consolation. · Because, as in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us more, so in desolation the bad spirit, with whose counsels we cannot find the way to a right decision.

Sixth Rule. **The type of change needed is prayer of petition.** Although in desolation we should not change our first proposals, it is very advantageous to change ourselves intensely against the desolation itself by insisting more upon prayer, meditation, upon much examination, and upon extending ourselves in some suitable way of doing penance.

Seventh Rule. **In desolation left to our natural powers, we are to resist since we have sufficient grace, though we do not feel it.** Let one who is in desolation consider how the Lord has left him in trial in his natural powers, so that he may resist the various agitations and temptations of the enemy; since he can resist with the divine help, which always remains with him, though he does not clearly feel it; for the Lord has taken away from him his great fervor, abundant love and intense grace, leaving him, however, sufficient grace for eternal salvation.

Eighth rule. **To be patient, and work contrary to negative movements.** Let one who is in desolation work to be in patience, which is contrary to the vexations which come to him and let him think that he will soon be consoled, diligently using the means against such desolation, as is said in the sixth rule.

Ninth rule. **The 3 potential causes of desolation.** There are three principal causes for which we find ourselves desolate. · The first is because we are tepid, slothful or negligent in our spiritual exercises, and so through our faults spiritual consolation withdraws from us. · The second, to try us and see how much we are and how much we extend ourselves in his service and praise without so much payment of consolations and increased graces. · The third, to give us true recognition and understanding so that we may interiorly feel that it is not ours to attain or maintain increased devotion, intense love, tears or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is the gift and grace of God our Lord, and so that we may not build a nest in something belonging to another, raising our mind in some pride or vainglory, attributing to ourselves the devotion or the other parts of the spiritual consolation.

Tenth rule. **When in consolation prepare for desolation and what he/she will do when in it.** Let the one who is in consolation think how he will conduct himself in the desolation which will come after, taking new strength for that time.

Eleventh Rule. **Be humble in consolation and in desolation remember we have sufficient grace taking strength from God:** · Let one who is consoled seek to humble himself and lower himself as much as he can, thinking of how little he is capable in the time of desolation without such grace or consolation. · On the contrary, let one who is in desolation think that he can do much with God's sufficient grace to resist all his enemies, taking strength in his Creator and Lord.

Twelfth Rule. **Stand Strong**

How the enemy acts when faced with strength or weakness. o it is proper to the enemy to weaken and lose heart, fleeing and ceasing his temptations when the person who is exercising himself in spiritual things confronts the temptations of the enemy firmly, doing what is diametrically opposed to them; and, o on the contrary, if the person who is exercising himself begins to be afraid and lose heart in suffering the temptations, there is no beast so fierce on the face of the earth as the enemy of human nature in following out his damnable intention with such growing malice.

Thirteenth Rule. **Break the Silence**

How the enemy, wanting to keep secrets, will flee if such is shared with another.

When the enemy of human nature brings his wiles and persuasions to the just soul, he wishes and desires that they be received and kept in secret; but when one reveals them to one's good confessor or to another spiritual person, who knows his deceits and malicious designs, it weighs on him very much, because he perceives that he will not be able to succeed with the malicious undertaking he has begun, since his manifest deceits have been revealed.

Fourteenth Rule. **Strengthen our weakest point**

The enemy looks for our weakest point to tempt us.

He, the enemy, conducts himself as a leader, intent upon conquering and robbing what he desires. For, just as a captain and leader of an army in the field, pitching his camp and exploring the fortifications and defenses of a stronghold, attacks it at the weakest point, in the same way the enemy of human nature, roving about, looks in turn at all our theological, cardinal and moral virtues; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and attempts to take us.

Ignatian Decision-Making: A Discipline of Contemplation

An Ignatian way for decision-making is integrative since it takes into account the **head and heart**. It is deciding between several ‘good’ options, seeking to achieve self-knowledge in knowing what we are good at and in loving to do the will of God, offering us the greater freedom to choose rightly and justly.

We are invited to reflect on the matter, noticing the interplay of *reason, affect, and experience* in our decision-making process. We sift through our thoughts and feelings, while using reason to carefully weigh the pros and cons, facts and factors and how such a decision matches with our values and the end goal for which we were created. When the head and heart align – we sense a harmony, we will feel enlivened and generally at peace. When we experience what Ignatius called consolation, it is an indication we may proceed with that decision.

We each have a unique gift and a call that no one else can fill

In looking back at past decisions that seemed to be a fit – what was that moment, that final moment, when you realized something was just for you? Remember it, savor it and look for it again.

Discernment & Decision Making

Discernment in the spiritual life is a supernaturally supported decision-making process of cooperating with God’s grace to grow in holiness day by day in choosing the greater good, while discernment in the world is a decision-making process also using our natural human faculties alone (without the acknowledgment of grace – since God is always operating in the background waiting to help).

St. Ignatius gave us 14 Rules for Discernment in choosing God’s will in serving the greater good. They are a tool for living the spiritual life daily, helping you understand yourself at the deepest level in your interior struggle between good and evil. He describes what is happening inside us, what to look out for, how to differentiate who is ‘speaking’, and what we choose to discern what to accept or reject.

- Aware
- Understand
- Choose (Accept or Reject)

The 3-step process – to be aware, to understand, and to accept or reject – seems simple enough, yet there is more. We need to know who all the players in the spiritual life are, and how they act in our interior life. The Rules give us not only what to look out for and how to act depending on where we are, and who and how they (spirits) are acting within us.

These spontaneous movements can arise from either the self, or a ‘good spirit’ (God, angels) or a ‘bad or false spirit’ (the enemy of our human nature, the world). Our freedom consists in choosing (using our free will through God’s grace) to either accept or reject these movements and their directions. Our free will, a gift from God, is a faculty to be used – proactively through God’s grace.

Without acknowledging God's grace we will fail due to pride. Pride is one's perspective (based upon one's beliefs and values) that we are the cause. Humility is the perspective that we are but the vehicle and not the cause.

A 'false spirit' is any movement from within us that would lead one away from God and away from faith, hope, and love. A 'false spirit' also brings about false reasonings and deception.

We use the vocabulary of desolation and consolation to describe those sweeping, small, or situational movements of one's interior life; it's a state of being. It can be called a mood. One can be in a spiritual desolation or a physical desolation. Or be in a spiritual consolation with a physical desolation for they are two different states, we could call that a difficult consolation. Yet we look to provide the same treatment – to avoid making major life decisions, to be firm with anything that is false, to be gentle with oneself, and to pursue the virtue of hope. We need patience for we can walk the path from desolation to difficult consolation (needing humility) to joyful consolation for it is God who provides the grace and timing. Remember we cannot self-manufacture spiritual consolation.

Happiness is a natural, though fleeting, self-consolation, while joy comes from a grace that is sustained by God as consolation.

Indifference in Decision Making

**Indifference: "The attitude of disponibility (Ignatian indifference) which enables us to receive the divine call ... The truly indifferent Christian knows that he has no choice left, only one desire: to order everything, truly everything towards the perfection of Christian love. The concrete disponibility is to make this step – if God so desires it – is therefore the sign of a pronouncement of self-governance and the sign of Christian love lifted out." ... Mary the perfect model of indifference, since she lives completely in the openness of love for the Lord. Indifference is casting off of disordered affections... so indifferent, consistently liberating oneself from everything that misdirects creaturely freedom from its supernatural end. It is the return of finite freedom to its original constitution by way of self-surrender to the infinite freedom." (xxxvi Balthasar; An Anthology by Jacques Servais SJ)*

Ignatius's Advice: The Three Situations and The Role of Discernment of Spirits in the Decision Making

Translation of Puhl (SE#175–188), with my notes in (____).

"First Time Consolation without Cause"

"When God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that a devout soul without hesitation, or the possibility of hesitation, follows what has been manifested to it. St. Paul and St. Matthew acted thus in following Christ our Lord."

(You just know it, without cause, a sense of confirmation, as if it just 'fits')

"Second Time - Testing the spirits"

"When much light and understanding are derived through experience of desolations and consolations and discernment of diverse spirits."

(As one goes through a line-by-line pro and con of each category listed, while imagining its outcome, one tests the 'spirits'. Does one have a sense of what is more life-giving?)

"Third Time – Reason"

"This is a time of tranquility. One considers first for what purpose man is born, that is, for the praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of his soul. With the desire to attain this before his mind, he chooses as a means to this end a

kind of life or state within the bounds of the Church that will be a help in the service of his Lord and for the salvation of his soul. I said it is a time of tranquility, that is, a time when the soul is not agitated by different spirits and has free and peaceful use of its natural powers.”

“If a choice of a way of life has not been made in the first and second time, below are given: Two Ways of Making a Choice of a Way of Life in the Third Time”

“First Way of Making a Good and Correct Choice of a Way of Life”

“This contains six points

1. First Point This is to place before my mind the object with regard to which I wish to make a choice, for example, an office, or the reception or rejection of a benefice, or anything else that may be the object of a choice subject to change.
2. Second Point It is necessary to keep as my aim the end for which I am created, that is, the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul. Besides this, I must be indifferent, without any inordinate attachment, so that I am not more inclined or disposed to accept the object in question than to relinquish it, nor to give it up than to accept it. I should be like a balance at equilibrium, without leaning to either side, that I might be ready to follow whatever I perceive is more for the glory and praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of my soul.
3. Third Point I should beg God our Lord to deign to move my will, and to bring to my mind what I ought to do in this matter that would be more for His praise and glory. Then I should use the understanding to weigh the matter with care and fidelity, and make my choice in conformity with what would be more pleasing to His most holy will.
4. Fourth Point This will be to weigh the matter by reckoning the number of advantages and benefits that would accrue to me if I had the proposed office or benefice solely for the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul. On the other hand, I should weigh the disadvantages and dangers there might be in having it. I will do the same with the second alternative, that is, weigh the advantages and benefits as well as the disadvantages and dangers of not having it.
5. Fifth Point After I have gone over and pondered in this way every aspect of the matter in question, I will consider which alternative appears more reasonable. Then I must come to a decision in the matter under deliberation because of weightier motives presented to my reason, and not because of any sensual inclination.
6. Sixth Point After such a choice or decision, the one who has made it must turn with great diligence to prayer in the presence of God our Lord and offer Him his choice that the Divine Majesty may deign to accept and confirm it if it is for His greater service and praise.

“Second Way of Making a Correct and Good Choice of a Way of Life”

“This contains four rules and a note.”

First Rule The love that moves and causes one to choose must descend from above, that is, from the love of God, so that before one chooses, he should perceive that the greater or less attachment for the object of his choice is solely because of his Creator and Lord.

Second Rule. I should represent to myself a man whom I have never seen or known, and whom I would like to see practice all perfection. Then I should consider what I would tell him to do and choose for the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater perfection of his soul. I will do the same and keep the rule I propose to others.

Third Rule. This is to consider what procedure and norm of action I would wish to have followed in making the present choice if I were at the moment of death. I will guide myself by this and make my decision entirely in conformity with it.

Fourth Rule. Let me picture and consider myself as standing in the presence of my judge on the last day and reflect what decision in the present matter I would then wish to have made. I will choose now the rule of life that I would then wish to have observed, that on the day of judgment I may be filled with happiness and joy.

- Note Guided by the rules given above for my eternal salvation and peace, I will make my decision, and will offer it to God our Lord as directed in the sixth point of the First Way of Making a Choice of a Way of Life.”

The Way of Discernment: An Integrative Approach

It's a way of making a decision – rooted in prayer, sifting through our thoughts and feelings, using reason, carefully weighing the facts and factors, to achieve self-knowledge and greater freedom.

When we have something important to decide, we often have inner conflict. The way forward is to observe and interpret those interior movements (of intellect, will, and affect) and to choose what will best serve God and that which moves us towards consolation.

We desire many things, yet we need to prioritize to put the first things first – our ultimate end goal. We are to identify those attachments that can pull us in one direction or another – to become indifferent to them for the goal is freedom - to be spiritually free to choose what will give the greatest glory to God, thus our greatest joy, which is our end goal.

In decision-making, we are to ask, *“Is this action consistent with who I am or who I am called to become?”*

As a skill of reflective awareness, we are to interpret our inner workings. In discernment, we are to ask: what are my thoughts and feelings? They indicate where you are heading - towards consolation or desolation, towards God and godly ways or not.

- What affections do I have that are disordered that I am attached to?
- What feelings and thoughts are not serving me well?
- Are these thoughts and feelings reflective of my best self?
- If not, we are to use our ‘intellect and will’ to change direction.

(Note: The Examen)

How do we discern we are in God's will?

Where do you feel most alive?

When do you feel most yourself?

What feeds and nourishes you?

What gives you joy?

It is known by the fruits it produces!

A Summary of Ignatius's Advice on the Three Situations We Find Ourselves In

1. **Inner Clarity** – we sense there is no doubt about it, through a gift of consolation.
2. **Inner Conflict** – here we move through the discernment of spirits, testing how we are moving and being moved. What emotions are presenting, what feelings and thoughts are provoked and where are they leading. Here we can use the line by line listing of comparing the two goods, and test the spirits.

3. **No Inner Movements** – here we have no particularly strong feelings, or thoughts in one way or another in looking at two good alternatives, not sensing God. Here we move into a decision that is tentative. We look for confirmation as we’re moving forward.
 1. The first approach would be analytical: what would make the most sense in reviewing the pros and cons; there we ask God to help us in making it clear.
 2. The second approach is using our imagination.
 1. What advice would we give someone else?
 2. Imagine being on our deathbed. What choice would we wish we had made looking at the long-term consequences?
 3. Imagine standing before God at the last judgment, and what choice you wish you had made.

“The glory of God is a human being fully alive”

St. Irenaeus

“Be who God meant you to be, and you will set the world on fire”

St. Catherine of Siena

Steps of Decision-Making using Discernment of Spirits

PRELUDE: Seek your better self for inner freedom - by practicing the daily Examen

- Address inordinate desires, and rearrange disordered priorities

OBJECTIVE

- List all facts (+) and (–) for each option
- Gain outside advice

SUBJECTIVE

- Look for inner clarity

Listen for those inner movements leading towards consolation - sense of peace, a contentment. This is where God is leading you.

- If having inner conflict

DESIRES - look deep within for those inner desires, cherish them, then gently put them aside.

- Set aside your preferences (attachments) – this allows you to become ‘indifferent’ to them. Also put aside the shoulds, coulds, or woulds.
- Now let God take the lead.

HARMONY - Listening within the heart.

- Imagine the two outcomes – DREAM - spend time in imagination.

Listen for those inner movements leading towards consolation - God’s loving tug

- When harmony between head and heart aligns = where you feel most alive? – choose that one.

GREATEST SERVICE

- If still neutral, or no indication
- Go with the greater option - align with your VALUES - Best Judgement using cardinal virtues

CONFIRMATION

- Seek a confirmation in a revisit

Summary

Alignment

Weighing Pros & Cons

- Objective - Reason
- Subjective - Feelings
- Values - Insight

Seek Deepest Desires

Use Imagination

Harmony of Head and Heart

Greatest Service

The Examen as A Daily Retreat

The words of this Examen were taken directly from the Jesuits of South Africa Video

“The Daily Examen is a prayerful experience of God. Experience alone does not teach us much; it is when we reflect on our experience that we really begin to learn. The Examen can help us see God’s hand in our daily-lived experience. It’s a simple prayer that has the capacity to transform our lives by helping us become more aware – of the gifts” of God.

Step 1 Preparation

- Slow your mind and calm your body and gently relax into God’s presence. Imagine God welcoming you.

Step 2 Review the Day with Gratitude

- Ask God to show you the day through God’s eyes. Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God.
- Notice any joys and delights; and focus on the day’s gifts.
- Look at the day, look at the work you did, look at the people you interacted with. What did you receive from them? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

Step 3 Review the Day Again Notice Your Feelings

- Notice moments when you were fully alive, times when you felt at peace, joyful, happy, comforted, whole, your best self, and moments when you felt close to God. Allow some of these moments to come to mind. These are times of consolation.
 - Pick a moment that you feel **most grateful for** and stay with it, savor it.
 - Notice how God is drawing you to more of those experiences. Take some time to give thanks to God.
- Now remember anything that you are **less grateful for**. Experiences that caused you to feel drained of energy, frustrated, irritated, angry, sad, alone, isolated, unaccepted, fragmented...less than your best self.
 - Bring these memories before God; ask God to bring you the healing you need.

Step 4 Choose one feature of the day and pray from it

- Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling - positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person, or moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may seem something that’s rather insignificant. Look at it.

- Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart, whether it be intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

Step 5 Look Forward to Tomorrow with Hope

- Look forward to tomorrow. Ask God to give you grace for tomorrow's challenges.
- Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what is coming up. Are you doubtful, cheerful, apprehensive, full of delightful anticipation?
- What do you think you particularly need for tomorrow: strength, energy, patience, courage? Ask for that gift.

The more you practice the Examen way of prayer, the easier and clearer it will become, shedding light on the path that God has dreamt for you.

<http://www.jesuitinstitute.org.za/>