



THE POWER OF
DISCERNMENT



“Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, If you seek her as silver, and search for her as *for* hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom.” Proverbs 2:3-6

We are products of the decisions we make. The wiser and more spiritually sound our decisions, the more fruitful and productive our lives will be. However, the opposite is also true. In order for us not to live life by trial and error and be consistently productive, one of the valuable tools the Lord has made available to believers is the ability to function with discernment.

Discernment very simply is the ability to make the right decisions based on information that was accessed supernaturally. Discernment is extremely powerful, because we live in a world where our natural senses are limited to what we can see. Discernment shows us what the natural eye cannot see, which in turn gives us the ability to make spiritually sound decisions, which could be the difference between life and death, success or failure in God’s agenda and so much more.

This series we are exploring the power of discernment and its ability to significantly impact the trajectory of our lives. Our prayer is that as we dive deeper into this, the Holy Spirit will help us function in increasingly greater levels of discernment.

Day 1

Knowing What God is Saying

“For God may speak in one way, or in another, Yet man does not perceive it.” Job 33:14

Discernment is the ability to function more by our spiritual senses than our physical senses. God gave us this ability because He didn't plan for us to make decisions based solely on our physical senses. Even though He's always speaking, unfortunately we may not discern that He's the one speaking or what He's saying to us.

“...Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.” Matthew 16:3

When the Pharisees and Sadducees tested Jesus by asking for a sign, He gave us a powerful insight into how to identify seasons in life by discerning the times. Life isn't meant to take a believer by surprise, rather we're meant to be well positioned to maximize whatever God is doing at the time and whatever season of life we're in. Unfortunately many times we either miss the signs completely or don't discern them accurately. Not being able to discern accurately will make us misinterpret what God is doing on earth, what He's doing in our lives and how we're to respond.

“All these are the beginning of sorrows.” Matthew 24:8

“...but with the temptation will also make the way of escape...” I Corinthians 10:13

Throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation we see illustrations of how God gives signs about what He's doing or about to do. For instance in Matthew 24 Jesus goes into great detail about the last days and the signs we should pay attention to. But the fact that He's told us what to expect doesn't automatically mean we will pay attention to the signs or identify them when they're in operation. If we miss these, we're also likely to miss the escape routes and opportunities He's made available for us even in dark days.

Prayer: Lord please give me a discerning heart so I can perceive when You're speaking and what You're saying to me. Help me grow in the ability to discern the times and know what to do

Day 2

Preservation from Unnecessary Battles

“But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors...but they [Israel] did not ask counsel of the LORD. So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.” Joshua 9:3-4, 14,15

Life consists of many battles, but accurate discernment protects us from unnecessary battles. Joshua and the leadership of Israel were deceived by the Gibeonites and entered a covenant with them because they took what they were told at face value. Unfortunately, this is how many of us function and we make decisions based only on surface information. Some decisions may be as simple as choosing where to go during the day, others may be more far reaching such as selecting where to work or choosing a life partner.

“Come up to me and help me, that we may attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel.” Joshua 10:4

There are some alliances we enter (knowingly or otherwise) that trigger contention and warfare. Even though Joshua was a man who heard from God, he chose not to ask God’s counsel about the Gibeonites and became their covenant allies. This alliance triggered 5 kings to initiate warfare with Gibeon and as covenant partners Israel had to engage in a battle on their behalf. Yes, Israel won, but it was a battle that may have been avoided had Israel discerned that the Gibeonites were lying to them.

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” Matthew 7:15

Our natural eyes can only see what is presented to us. However, when we form the habit of consistently engaging the Holy Spirit in our daily decision making, He starts giving us insight into what is really going on behind the scenes. As we practice this, we start becoming more accurate in assessing the character of people, the true situation of what we are experiencing and how best to protect ourselves so we are not drawn into battles we’re not meant to fight.

Prayer: Lord help me practice engaging You daily on every decision so I grow in discernment. Help me navigate people and situations accurately so I don’t have to fight unnecessary battles.

Day 3

Going beyond appearances

“This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour.” Acts 16:17-18

To put this in context, Paul and Silas were on a missionary journey so this wasn't familiar territory for them. The girl was a local resident and to the casual observer she may have appeared to actively support the men and their mission. Some may even have suggested her joining the company as she did this daily which may have been taken as evidence of commitment.

But the Bible tells us Paul was “greatly annoyed” which meant there was something about the girl that irritated his spirit that others couldn't see. He had discerned that the girl was functioning with an evil spirit, very likely with the intention of infiltrating their church and cause problems later on, perhaps after Paul and Silas had left. We know it was discernment and not something physical because the Bible says Paul spoke to the spirit in the girl. He had discerned that the girl was functioning under an evil influence, and he cast the spirit out.

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. John 7:24

The Bible warns against judging by appearances as logical as it may seem. In the course of life we will encounter many people and make decisions based on the actions they demonstrate to us or our pre-conceived ideas about them. But God doesn't work that way. He knows what's really going on behind the scenes and the spirit sponsoring the actions we see. If we judge solely by appearances, we can end up being deceived and take decisions that may lead to drawing closer those who inwardly mean to harm us. Likewise, we may reject or ignore those the Lord sent to help us simply because we are judging by appearances rather than by the counsel of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Lord help me not to judge by appearances, but with a discerning heart so I accurately identify the spirit promoting the actions of those around me.

Day 4

Identifying Manipulations

Afterward they traveled from town to town across the entire island until finally they reached Paphos, where they met a Jewish sorcerer, a false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He had attached himself to the governor, Sergius Paulus, who was an intelligent man. The governor invited Barnabas and Saul to visit him, for he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas, the sorcerer (as his name means in Greek), interfered and urged the governor to pay no attention to what Barnabas and Saul said. He was trying to keep the governor from believing. Acts 13:6-8

Not everyone who is with us has our best intentions at heart. Here we see Barnabas and Saul (Paul) trying to bring salvation to the governor who actually wanted to hear God's word, but there was someone close to him who was actively stopping this from happening. Bar-Jesus/Elymas was described as a false prophet which means that only those with discernment could tell he was a fraud. Very likely he had maneuvered himself into proximity to the governor because of the prestige and access such a relationship would give him and we can only imagine how many things he had perverted.

Elymas was clearly manipulating the governor and influencing decisions to his advantage. Elymas knew he would lose his hold if the governor accepted Jesus, so he actively interfered with the governor accepting Barnabas and Paul's preaching. It is very likely also that the governor didn't even know he was being manipulated and may even have kept Elymas in his confidence not knowing that he was empowering his manipulator.

"...[Paul] was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he looked the sorcerer in the eye. Then he said, "You son of the devil, full of every sort of deceit and fraud, and enemy of all that is good! Will you never stop perverting the true ways of the Lord? Acts 16:9-10

Many times, we may not even realize we are under a negative influence until we have been delivered from it. Discernment helps us identify who we should align with, bring into our confidence and allow to influence us – or not. Elymas was clearly adept at deceiving people to his own advantage and perverting what God wanted to do in their lives. But Paul discerned because he was filled the Holy Spirit and His presence always exposes the activities of darkness in and around us.

Prayer: Holy Spirit please fill me again. Let Your light shine in and around me, expose any manipulations of the enemy and bring me back into the place of alignment with Your will.

Day 5

Selecting People

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Matthew 10:16

No man is an island and in order to progress in our journey, we will interact with people and at times have to select them either as employers, employees, volunteers, colleagues, etc. Those we interact with will be from diverse backgrounds and will have equally diverse objectives. For some, their focus is adding value and making honest gain, while the opposite is true for others. Regardless of how people may appear, only the Lord can show us the true state of their heart and intentions toward us.

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7

Oftentimes our selection decisions are based on a defined set of indices and once people demonstrate competence, we take them on board. When it was time to select the new king, Samuel was convinced by Eliab’s appearance that he was the one the Lord had chosen, however from God’s perspective Eliab had been rejected. To reject something means to consider it not fit for purpose. So even though Eliab ticked all the right boxes for Samuel, there was a deeper insight that the Lord brought to bear which disqualified him from the role. The only reason Samuel knew this was because of His relationship with God which enabled him to discern what the Lord was saying.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6

Life is filled with “unknown unknowns”, those things we could never consider or plan for simply because we’re not aware of them. This is why the Bible teaches us not to depend on our own understanding – especially when it comes to people. We have no way of knowing what is truly in a person’s heart or what that person will be in future. There may be times when someone seems perfect on the face of things, but we just have a niggling feeling that he/she isn’t the right one for the role. In such situations we would do well to ask the Holy Spirit to show us what He’s saying and direct our next steps so we don’t run into error.

Prayer: Lord You know the hearts of people, help me follow Your guidance first in selecting who to work/partner with so I don’t run into error

Day 6

Protection from Danger

"A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences." Proverbs 22:3

There are many decisions we would make differently if we knew that the end result would bring harm to us. Some relationships we wouldn't get into, some jobs we wouldn't take, some journeys we wouldn't embark on. The Bible tells us that the prudent (discerning) foresee evil and protect themselves, which suggests that it's not every danger that must consume us. How do we know that danger lies ahead especially when nothing in the natural suggests it? This is the power of discernment.

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future." John 16:13

With the Holy Spirit, we don't have to worry about what the future holds because He is available to tell us about the future so life shouldn't take us by surprise. Even if we do not have the specifics, our spirit will have an inkling that something is either safe or dangerous which acts as an internal alarm system. Unfortunately at times we ignore the signals especially when experience, emotion or relationships tell us otherwise.

"...Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul." Acts 27:10-11

Paul had supernatural insight that the ship he boarded was headed for disaster however the people around him relied more on natural sight and experience. As expected there was a major disaster that cost almost all their cargo, which could have been avoided had they listened to Paul. This tells us that we must be careful who we listen to, always test the spirit behind advice given to us and seek the Lord's counsel in our decision making.

Prayer: Lord please show me the things to come concerning my life and assignment so my steps are aligned with Your will

Day 7

Preservation in Famine

“There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar. Then the Lord appeared to him and said: “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you.” Genesis 26:1-2

Both Abraham and Isaac experienced famines in their lifetimes. During Abraham’s time, the solution was to go to Egypt and he left there a very wealthy man. When famine struck again in Isaac’s time, he wanted to do the same thing his father did, but the Lord gave him another instruction - stay where you are. When there was a famine in Joseph’s time the strategy was completely different. We can’t box God into a “formula”, and assume we will succeed just by copying what worked for someone else.

“...And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.” Matthew 24:7

Famines are not new and will intensify in the last days. Nowadays the famines may not just represent food shortages but also economic recessions which we are seeing across the world. None of these come as a surprise to the Lord and He has already made provision for His children to not just survive, but thrive in the middle of tough economic times. The key is our ability to discern the specific survival strategy for us. Each famine had its own survival strategy and we must be discerning about what God is saying specifically to us.

“From the tribe of Issachar... All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take.” 1 Chronicles 12:32

“They will not be disgraced in hard times; even in famine they will have more than enough.” Psalms 37:19

The Issacharites knew two critical things: what was going on and what to do about it. The Holy Spirit gives us similar insight, prompting us about what is to happen and the strategy for survival. Global economies are constantly going to experience shakings to varying degrees, but we don’t have to be casualties as we discern God’s personalised strategy for us.

Prayer: Lord give me understanding of the times and Your specific strategy for me to thrive in economic hardship

Day 8

Making Time Count

“You have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer.” Job 14:5

Time is a precious gift and it is limited in supply. We all get only 24 hours a day and beyond that, we also have a fixed period of time allocated to us to exist on this side of eternity. It’s possible to live all our allotted years productively, and it’s also possible to live never doing what the Lord put us here to do. The key to even knowing what we’re supposed to do and when lies in discernment.

“But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” Hebrews 5:14

The word “evil” in this scripture doesn’t mean doing wicked things. Rather it speaks of things that are not such as it ought to be. Meaning that without discernment we won’t know what ought to be, what we should be doing from God’s perspective. Without discernment we can formulate our own plan, execute it and score ourselves well based on the material benefits we may have obtained. Meanwhile heaven may not have any corresponding record of those activities in the record of what we’re supposed to be doing. And from God’s perspective that would mean we have missed the mark and used time poorly.

“Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.” Psalms 90:12

“Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word.” Psalms 119:37

Through the power of discernment, the Holy Spirit shows us what should be our priorities on a daily basis. He gives us clarity on what really matters and what’s irrelevant in the context of what we should be doing with our lives. This isn’t something that we become experts at overnight, which is why the Bible tells us we must exercise ourselves in obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit. In doing so we can get to the point that our discernment is sharpened, we are able to maximise the gift of time fully and live productively as God intended.

Prayer: Lord help me to realize how valuable time is and to depend on You to prioritise what I do with the time You’ve given me

Day 9

Success in Leadership

'Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?' I Kings 3:7-9

Discernment is spirit-led decision making and one of the critical areas it's required is in leadership, be it in our homes, families, places of business, communities and so on. Wherever we find ourselves in a position of influence hierarchical or otherwise, is an opportunity to demonstrate spirit-led leadership.

When Solomon became king, he had to reign after his father David who was much loved by the people who would have numbered over 3 million people. His half brother had tried to make himself king, so Solomon knew there was already opposition and not everyone was loyal to him. Solomon was well aware of his limitations and the very high expectations of his leadership and when the Lord appeared to Solomon this is what he asked God for.

'Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you.' I Kings 3:11-12

'When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; But when a wicked man rules, the people groan.' Proverbs 29:2

When discernment is in operation, we can accurately navigate between both supporters and opposition, all the while bringing out the best in those around us. Because Solomon led with discernment, Israel prospered greatly from his leadership and he is still regarded today as one of the wisest kings of Israel. Likewise, when we ask God for the ability to lead with discernment, we will definitely make an indelible mark in our sphere of influence and those we are leading in whatever capacity will benefit from it as we lead based on His governing principles.

Prayer: Lord give me a discerning heart so everything under my leadership prospers and brings You glory.

Day 10

Making The Right Business Decisions

“Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: “I am the Lord your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go.” Isaiah 48:17

One of the things that consumes the mind of the average business person is how to keep the business running efficiently and profitably. Many have had sleepless nights looking at the dynamics involved in running a business and the various decisions that must be made on a constant basis, sometimes on the spot. Leaning solely on our expertise or the expertise of others is one way to address this challenge. But we have access to the best expertise through the Holy Spirit.

“I hear the Lord saying, “I will stay close to you, instructing and guiding you along the pathway for your life. I will advise you along the way and lead you forth with my eyes as your guide. So don’t make it difficult; don’t be stubborn when I take you where you’ve not been before. Don’t make me tug you and pull you along. Just come with me!” Psalms 32:8-9 TPT

There’s a specific pathway for each business that will lead to profit and the Holy Spirit can lead us on that way. His guidance is critical because He knows the future trends, challenges, opportunities and the specific strategies for our peculiar circumstance and environment and He leads us through discerning what He is saying. It’s difficult to be led by someone we’re not close to because we may mishear or misunderstand what He’s saying. This tells us that being successfully led by the Holy Spirit requires intimacy with Him.

The world at large is in a state of volatility and uncertainty and the only safe place is in the counsel of the Lord. As we choose to walk with Him, He gives us both direction and the capacity to weather the storms that come from decisions by governments, economic trends etc. and the ability to identify the opportunities for growth and success in the business world.

Prayer: Lord help me to take advantage of the valuable guidance You’ve made available to me to teach me how to profit in my business. Give me the grace to prioritize my walk with You so I have a discerning heart and can accurately follow Your leading.

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