

Spiritual Discernment **Galatians 5:13-26**

Spiritual discernment means to see the heart of the matter with spiritual eyes; to see from God's vantage point, through God's eyes; beneath the surface of events. Spiritual discernment is practicing a habit that is steeped in prayer and scripture.

Godly leadership demands that we be servants in the spirit and attitude Jesus speaks of in Mark 10. Success is not necessarily defined as hitting a target or well-drawn goal somewhere in the future. Success has to do with the process that gets us to the future. It's about the character and integrity with which we are faithful in the small things. God is more interested in how we are living and relating along the journey than He is with what we may imagine lies at the end of the road.

Movements in the Spiritual Discernment Process (Practical Tools): Spiritual discernment has two sides that are held in relationship with each other: being and doing. To be discerning is to be steeped in the faith, like saints whose insights were gifts from God. Doing discernment involves the individual and the community in a process that includes specific movements and practices. The movements are not meant to become a mechanical set of procedures. Rather the movements are a creative mix that can be adapted to the situation in which one is involved.

1. Framing: identify the focus for discernment of God's will. Our focus is to be and do those things necessary to get to a healthy spiritual place where we are able to select a pastor search committee and call the next permanent pastor who will then join FBC as we work together to fulfill the mission and ministry Christ has for us in this community. That healthy place will be free of the conflict and dysfunction that has been the pattern that has hindered effective ministry for so long.

2. Grounding: form a guiding principle from the values, beliefs, and purpose of the discerning community. Set boundaries. Our boundaries are that we will be about those things in attitude, word, and deed that bring honor to God, glorify Jesus through our witness within the fellowship and without, and build up the body of Christ.

3. Shedding: lay aside ego, preconceived notions, false assumptions, biases, and predetermined conclusions in order to openly consider the matter. This has to do with letting go of the past, releasing personal agendas, forgiving those who have offended us, and refusing to participate in those conversations and activities that criticize, complain, find fault, threaten, or sabotage the primary work of the church of Jesus Christ.

4. Rooting: connect religious and biblical stories, themes, and images with the situation at hand. We will listen and apply the counsel of God and give freedom to the Holy Spirit to convict, teach, and shape us into a body of unique members committed to love God with all our heart and live out this same love before our brothers and sisters to impact the community for Christ. Unity (not uniformity), love, humility, service, sacrifice, patience, and faithfulness will form a foundation for our application of what it means to experience God at FBC.

5. Listening: enable the prompting of the Spirit of God and the voices of all in the discerning community to be heard. Body Life gatherings, Points of Light, mid-week fellowship, combined celebrations, and church business sessions will be some of the venues to practice listening as a

community of faith keenly attuned to God's Spirit.

6. Exploring: identify possible options and paths that lie within the guiding principle. Before rushing ahead to action and activity it is imperative that we measure our steps to assure they honor God, glorify Jesus, and build up the body. The result is such that we are the church as defined and instructed by Christ to preach the Good News, raise up disciples, and minister to those without a shepherd so they too will experience Him. We imitate Him as He lives through crucified self.

7. Improving: work in consultation and prayer to improve each option until it becomes the best it can be. New churches grow faster than established churches largely because the focus is more like that of a laser beam than a floodlight. We must do what is necessary to bring the laser into play to not become distracted by those peripheral and petty things that keep us from reaching people in the name of Christ and discipling the faithful to be genuine Christ-followers. Being good or religious is not the same as being a Christ-follower. Focus is achieved through personal and corporate time with God in prayer and Bible study and humble service to one another.

8. Weighing: sort and test the options or paths in response to the leading of God's Spirit. Those things that fail to stay within the guiding principle or fall outside the spiritual boundaries must be discarded or adjusted in such a way that we remain on task and on target.

9. Closing: bring the explorations to a conclusion, moving toward the selection of an option that is given weight by the Spirit of God. Along this journey conclusive decisions will have to be determined. If the conclusions are a result of the weight given by self and without careful consideration of God's perspective, then we must carefully reexamine our conclusions.

10. Resting: test the decision by allowing it to rest near the heart to determine whether it brings primarily feelings of consolation (a sense of peace and movement toward God) or desolation (distress and movement away from God). Godly decisions result in godly peace. Blessing follows those decisions that honor God, glorify Jesus Christ, and build up the body. If distress, chaos, and dysfunction follow, we are not aligned with the purpose and method of God. In process we should experience the presence and peace of Jesus Christ, and our character and attitude will look like Him.

Reference: Morris, Danny E. and Olsen, Charles M. *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*. Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1997.

Additional remarks added by Steve Manuel, Pastor of FBC, DeLand, FL, 2009.

See Matthew 6:33; 18; 28:18-20; Mark 12:30; John 17; 21:15-17; Acts 1:8; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Galatians 5:13-26; Philippians 2; 4:4-9; James 1:19-27; 3; 1 Peter 4:7-10; 1 John 3;