



Resourcing for Prayer Network Guidelines

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

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Many Prayer Groups and Intercessors are asking us for help in knowing what God is saying to us today. God answers prayer, but not always in the way we expect. How do we receive guidance from the Holy Spirit? How can we discern what God is saying and not confuse it with our imagination?

There are two essential elements in understanding what God is saying to us. They are

- Discernment and
- Distinguishing between spirits.

Both of these are essential for prayer groups and Intercessors to ensure that they are rightly hearing from God.

This month we will deal with "**Discernment**" and next month with "**Discerning between spirits**".

DISCERNMENT

Discernment is not a spiritual gift. It is an intellectual exercise - but one which is taken under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

- *Discernment can (and should) be exercised by all mature believers.*
- *It can only be undertaken by believers who have submitted their intellect to God.*
- *It does not depend upon IQ, or the level of human ability, or education, or rational capacity.*
- *It is entirely dependent upon the level at which you are able to bring your mind into submission to God.*
- *It is what Otto calls the 'numinous' capacity; the ability to experience the transcendental - or to transcend the limits of human reason without losing the capacity for rational thought processes.*

This is important to understand discernment because to enter what the prophet Jeremiah called '*the counsel of God*' (Jeremiah 23.18) does not mean going into a trance - quite the reverse. It means being fully alert with all your human senses at a heightened level; almost akin to entering a strange house on a dark night and you have to feel your way through to find where the main switch is located to put on the lights. All your senses are at maximum alert.

It is that kind of experience, without the element of fear. Far from being lulled into a trance-like state of mind, when you are being led by the Holy Spirit your brain is on overdrive, you are incredibly alert. Your thought processes are connecting with the transcendental, the 'wholly other'; the One whom the great prophets of Israel referred to as 'the Holy One' - the One who is beyond our normal everyday experience. Yet although he is 'wholly other' he is not beyond our reach. He has made it possible for us to communicate with him through our close and intimate relationship with Jesus.

The two essentials to this communication are, first that we be fully committed to the Lord Jesus and secondly that we have received the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is the means by which the word of God is conveyed to believers; to those who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and through his blood have entered into a covenant relationship with him.

Knowing God

Discernment comes through **knowing God** - knowing him so well that in the words of Augustine, you can 'think God's thoughts after him'. It is like having a really intimate relationship with someone you love and who you've lived with for many years and you know them so well that you know what they are thinking; you can glance at them across a crowded room and communicate without a word being spoken aloud.

The way to get to know God really intimately is to read and study the Bible - to really **study** the word of God - the whole Bible, and not just odd bits. Of course, there will be parts of the Bible that will be more meaningful for you and will lead you to an understanding of the very nature and purposes of God. But as you become more familiar with the God of the Bible who revealed himself to the great Prophets of Israel, and fully and finally through Jesus, you find yourself talking to him in ordinary everyday situations in life - not necessarily aloud but silently, in your mind, and as you do so your spirit becomes more and more attuned to him.

Learning More

As you learn to know God more, so you respond to him just as you do in your human experience. As you come to know and love a human being, so your trust in them grows. In the same way your love for God and your trust in him grows. You are happy to trust him as part of your love relationship and as you do so you find your rational thought processes are being refined. This is surrendering your intellect to him. You are not losing it!! Neither do you lose control, but God becomes so much a part of present reality that you don't have to make a conscious effort to be in touch with him. He is with you all the time, an essential part of your experience.

It is at this point that you are able to exercise discernment. Discernment is knowing when God has spoken to you. It is knowing truth. It is to know the word of the Living God and to separate it from the things of the world. It is distinguishing between what is false and what is genuine. That is discernment. It is a rational process that results from the right exercise of a mind that has been trained to know right from wrong in the ethical and spiritual spheres of our human experience. That is what is meant in Hebrews 5.14.

The biblical teaching on this subject is found in **Ezekiel 22 and 42** and **Hebrews 5**.

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