

# *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life*

## **“Discernment” Learning Activities**

(LifelongFaith Associates)

Review the “Educating for Christian Practices Guide” for additional assistance in designing a learning plan for Christian practices.

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- 1) Educating for Christian Practices Using the 4MAT Learning Process
- 2) Sample Program Design for the Christian Practice of Discernment
- 3) Resources for Developing the Christian Practice of Discernment

## **Educating for Christian Practices using the 4MAT Learning Process**



In **Quadrant One** (Connect to Learners) the union of elements creates personal meaning, the way we question the value of new learning by connecting it to ourselves. The question to be answered is “Why?” Why is this of value to me? Why do I sense the need to know this? *This is never telling, this is something that happens, something that intrigues them (a problem to solve), or connects to them (a situation that has real meaning in their lives), or touches them in a way that links to their humanity.*

In **Quadrant Two** (Information Delivery) the union of elements creates conceptualized content, structuring knowledge into significant chunks that form the essence, the coherence, and the wonder of new ideas. The question to be answered is “What?” What is out there to be known? What do the experts know about this? What is the nature of the knowledge I am pursuing?

In **Quadrant Three** (Skill and Fluency Development) the union of elements creates usefulness (and the more immediate the better), the transferability into one's life, problem solving with the learning. The question to be answered is "How?" How does this work? Will this streamline my tasks? How will this be of use in my life? *This is where learners take the learning and do something with it, something that has meaning for them. This is where relevance is demonstrated.*

In **Quadrant Four** (Creative and Authentic Performance), the union of elements creates creative integration, the way we adapt the learning into something new and unique. The question to be answered is "What If?" If I use this in my own way, what will happen? What can I create and how will that creation expand, enhance, and maybe even transform the world I know? *The world "per-form" means to form through and that is the essence of this step. It represents the merging of the learning and the learner.*

McCarthy emphasizes that knowledge must be used. It must operate in one's life. And because all human beings are unique, we use and then integrate learning in our own inimitable, incomparable ways. What we learn is transformed into a particular use, a distinct way of doing, a matchless refinement of a method, a unique understanding. It is transformed. It becomes for us. It is in the transformation that real understanding happens.

#### 4 MAT References

- Website: [www.aboutlearning.com](http://www.aboutlearning.com)
- *Teaching Around the 4MAT Cycle – Designing Instructive for Diverse Learners with Diverse Learning Styles*. Bernice McCarthy and Dennis McCarthy. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2006.
- *About Teaching: 4MAT in the Classroom*. Bernice McCarthy. Wauconda, IL: About Learning, 2000.
- *About Teaching Companion: The 4MAT Implementation Workbook*. Bernice McCarthy and Dennis McCarthy. Wauconda, IL: About Learning, 2003.

### Examples of Methods for Each Stage of the Process

#### Quadrant 1. Connecting to the Learner

##### ■ Why do learners need to know this?

- Actual case studies
- Stories (audio, video, illustrated)
- Personal storytelling
- Direct experience / field trip
- Simulated experience or game
- TV-style game show
- Interactive dialogue
- Personal reflection/journal
- Feature film segment
- Media presentation (PowerPoint): images and music
- Dramatic presentations
- Personal reflection tool/worksheet
- Quiz
- Self-assessment or inventory
- Prayer or ritual experience
- Witness presentations

## Quadrant 2. Delivering Information

### ■ What is it that we are teaching the learners?

- Video presentation
- Audio presentation
- PowerPoint presentation with content and images/music
- Guided reading and research
- Interviewing experts
- Demonstration
- Prayer or ritual experience
- Lecture
- Panel presentation
- Study groups: read and analyze/reflect on selecting readings, and present findings in a small group or to the large group
- Project-centered learning: develop a project that involves study, creative activity, and presentation of the project
- Debate
- Inquiry-oriented discussion
- Learning tournament

## Quadrant 3. Developing Skills and Fluency

### ■ How will the learners use it in their lives?

- Case study demonstrating how to use the information
- In-session practice activities and exercises (specific to the content of the session)
- Mentoring
- Role play / skill practice
- Field work
- Simulations
- In-field observations
- Demonstrations
- Panel presentations
- Compare and contrast activities
- Creative writing activity, e.g., learners rewrite Scripture stories or hymns in contemporary language and situations
- Presentations by learners of a project
- Creative activity: learners create an art project, song/music video, video or PowerPoint presentation, dramatic presentation, advertisement/commercial

## Quadrant 4. Creative and Authentic Performance

### ■ What will the learners become and do as a result of the learning experience?

- Conduct a demonstration
- Write a report, article, or story describing performance to share with others
- Create action plans
- Create a photo or video documentary of practice
- Field trip / mission trip
- Participate in a church ministry (within the church or in the wider community)
- Keep a journal or log of performance efforts
- Get involved in an action learning project (e.g., service project, teaching others, leading an activity).

## 4MAT and the Living Well Process

Each chapter in *Living Well* is developed around five movements:

1. **Yearning** taps into our hunger for living well by addressing a basic area of human need through the real-life stories of people who seek meaning and purpose for their lives through a particular practice.

2. **Reflecting** gives you, whether individually or with your household, an opportunity to become aware of how you experience the basic human need and hunger for the Christian practice in your own life, and how you may already be living this practice.
3. **Exploring** presents the biblical teaching on the practice, how the practice addresses our basic need and hungers, and why the practice is important for living a Christian life.
4. **Living** provides you with a variety of tools – activities, ideas, and strategies – that you can use to integrate each Christian practice into your daily life.
5. **Praying** concludes the chapter by offering God thanks and praise, and asking for God’s help.

Here is an application of the 4MAT learning cycle to teaching Christian practices to a large group (families, multiple generations, or adults) using the 5-part process of each *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life* chapter.

## **Quadrant 1**

### **Part 1. *Yearning: The Hunger for the Practice***

- Illustrating the hunger for the Christian practice in story, music, film, and/or current events.

### **Part 2. *Reflecting: Reflection on the Hunger***

- Guiding the individual or family in identifying how they see the hunger in their own lives and world.
- Helping people become aware of how they already engage in this practice, and the things that distort or hinder the practice.

## **Quadrant 2**

### **Part 3. *Exploring: The Christian Practice***

- Grounding the Christian practice in the Bible by describing how the biblical story(s) deepens our understanding of the Christian practice.
- Describing what people today, and throughout history, actually do when they are engaged well in a particular practice – people or communities that live the practice with exceptional grace and skill.
- Connecting the Christian practice to human needs and hungers. Identifying how and why it is important to living a meaningful life. Describing the benefits of living the Christian practice – for the person, family, and for the community and world.

## **Quadrant 3**

### **Part 4. *Living: Application of the Christian Practice to Daily Life***

- Giving people tools – activities, ideas, resources – for living the Christian practice in their daily lives – at home, at work, at school, and in the world.
- Showing people how to make the Christian practice part of everyday life.
- Guiding people in performing the Christian practice and then reflecting on it.

## **Quadrant 4**

### **Part 4. *Living: Application of the Christian Practice to Daily Life***

### **Part 5. *Praying: Prayer for the Practice***

- Entering more deeply into the practice through prayer and reflection.
- Offering God thanks and praise, and asking for God’s help in living the practice.

# Sample Program Design for the Christian Practice of Discernment

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To illustrate how these five elements are incorporated in a learning resource, here is an outline of a large group program using the “Discernment” chapter from *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life*. During the session, children can use the Discernment activities in the *Living Well Children’s Workbook*.

## Preparation

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### Materials

- The following handouts are included with this session:
  1. *Making Life Choices*
  2. *Making Decisions (Children)*
  3. *Discernment Guide*
  4. *Try It! – Making Good Decisions (Children)*

### Suggested Setting

- Organize the participants into table groups. Have a Bible on each table.

### Preparation of Learning Activities

- Prepare for the dramatization of the “Temptation of Jesus” in Luke 4:1-13:
  1. Select a narrator to read the non-speaker parts of the Gospel story.
  2. Select a person to role play Jesus and three people for the Satan role – one for each temptation. Highlight the lines each actors is going to recite.
  3. Create or find contemporary props that illustrate each temptation (e.g., lots of food, the world’s possessions/money, etc.). Have a crew ready to bring out temptations at the appropriate time.
  4. Rehearse the actions as a group.
- Prepare examples of the process of discernment to demonstrate the process in action. It is important to have examples that are suitable for your participants, e.g. a family example, a teenage example, a young adult example, an adult example, etc. (You can use the children’s process on the handout *Try It – Making Good Decisions* if you are developing a children’s example.) Here are several ways to prepare the demonstration:
  1. You can create real-world examples of the process in action by using case studies, such as the five opening stories on pages 3.2-3.3, and then use the *Discernment Guide* to develop a response to the questions/actions. This will illustrate how an individual or household can utilize the process.
  2. You can invite several people from the church to share personal examples of how they have practiced the discernment process using the *Discernment Guide* as a framework for their presentation. Be sure to have a variety of situations to connect with the participants.
  3. You can use a segment from a film in which an individual or family is faced with a decision. Use the film to “set-up” the situation and then use the *Discernment Guide* to develop a response to the questions/actions, illustrating how someone might use the process in this situation.

# **Session Plan**

## **Quadrant 1. Connecting to the Learner: Experiencing Discernment**

### **1. Yearning—Discernment in Real Life**

Introduce the session with these words (from page 3.2 in *Living Well*):

*Life is full of choices. Sometimes these choices are momentous: deciding on a career path, choosing a marriage partner, having children, or retiring from full-time work. Other choices are not quite as momentous, but they are important nonetheless because they give shape to our life: moving to another place for a new job, pursuing further education, finding a new church, caring for aging parents – all these decisions shape who we are and who we are becoming.*

Share with the group the five opening stories about discernment and making choices on pages 3.2–3.3 in *Living Well*. Use a different reader for each story.

Invite the participants to think back over the past year and recall issues or struggles at home, work, or school that required them to make an important decision. Give the individuals and families time to think about examples and then ask them to share their examples at table groups.

When each table has finished their sharing, invite one person from each table to report on the types of decisions that people have had to make in the past year. Record the list on a PowerPoint slide for all to see.

### **2. Making Choices**

To help the participants reflect on their experience of making decisions, give them a copy of the worksheet, *Making Life Choices*, and ask them to complete the questions. Families can choose to work together on this activity. Children can use the children’s version on the handout, *Making Decisions*, while their parents reflect on their own experience of making decisions. (Note: Tell people that they will not be sharing the content of their responses to the four questions.)

#### Making Life Choices

Take a few moments to reflect on decisions you have made.

1. Recall a decision that in retrospect was a wise one. How did you make it? What factors did you weigh? With whom did you consult? How did you manage opposing points of view? What would have been the consequences if you had made a different decision? Where was God in this decision?
2. Recall a decision you made that you now regret. What was the process by which you made that decision? Have you since discovered clues about how you could have decided differently? Where was God in this decision?
3. Make a short list of persons you might call when you are faced with a tough decision. What do you look for from these persons? How do they help you?
4. When you think about the major decisions you have made in your life, how have your religious or spiritual values influenced your decisions?

At table groups ask the participants to share insights they gained from completing the four questions. *What did they learn about making decisions and the process of discernment from their responses to the four*

questions? Remind the table groups to give everyone a chance to share their insights before any discussion.

When each table group has finished their sharing, ask the participants to identify the key ingredients for making good decisions. Invite one person from each table group to report on the types of decisions that people have had to make in the past year. Record the list on a PowerPoint slide for all to see.

## **Quadrant 2. Delivering Information: The Christian Practice of Discernment**

The Exploring section of the “Discernment” chapter on pages 3.7–3.9 in *Living Well* presents four building blocks of discernment from the Gospels.

- 1) Believe in the Goodness of God
- 2) Believe that Love is Our Primary Calling
- 3) Believe that God Communicates with Us
- 4) Believe in Life

### **1. The Christian Practice of Discernment**

Introduce the Christian practice of discernment using the text on page 3.6 in *Living Well*. Use a PowerPoint presentation to share your key points.

### **2. Jesus and Discernment**

Use the “Temptation of Jesus” in Luke 4:1-13 to create a drama to illustrate how Jesus needed to engage in decision-making and discernment throughout his life. Prepare the dramatization in advance. Here are several suggestions:

1. Select a narrator to read the non-speaker parts of the Gospel story.
2. Select a person to role play Jesus and three people for the Satan role – one for each temptation. Give each actor a copy of the Scripture passage and highlight the lines each actor is going to recite.
3. Create or find contemporary props that illustrate each temptation (e.g., lots of food, the world’s possessions/money, etc.). Have a crew ready to bring out temptations at the appropriate time.
4. Rehearse the actions as a group.
5. Present the drama.

#### **Alternative**

Instead of the dramatization, you can create a PowerPoint presentation with photos illustrating the temptations Jesus experienced in Luke 4:1-13, using contemporary examples of the temptations of power, prestige and status, and money. Have a narrator read the Gospel story as you present the images. You can have actors read the parts of Jesus and Satan.

After the drama (or presentation) share with the group the following reflection from page 3.5 in *Living Well*.

*The story of Jesus’ temptation in the desert is an exercise in discernment. Jesus recognizes the temptations for what they are: invitations to satisfy what one hungers for, to be admired, even worshiped, by people, and to own all imaginable goods. The spirit of these temptations runs counter to the Spirit of God in the life of Jesus. This wilderness scene gives us a vivid image of the discrimination involved in discernment.*

*We need to pay attention, to look deep into our lives and sort out the various motivations for our thoughts and actions. Of the many inner and outer voices that prompt us, which will we heed?*

Ask the participants at table groups to discuss the following question: *What are the things that distract us ("tempt us") from making good choices?*

After a few minutes, ask one person from each table group to report on the types of decisions that people have had to make in the past year. Record the list on a PowerPoint slide for all to see.

### **3. Building Blocks of Discernment**

Present the four building blocks of discernment using the material on pages 3-6-3.9 in *Living Well*:

1. Believe in the Goodness of God (Psalm 139:1-6)
2. Believe that Love is Our Primary Calling (Mark 12:28-31)
3. Believe that God Communicates with Us (John 14:16-17, 26)
4. Believe in Life (Deuteronomy 30:15-16, 19)

Develop a presentation (using PowerPoint) that explains each building block using the Scripture reading and the key points in the commentary. Select four people who will each read one of the Scripture passages as part of your presentation.

Conclude your presentation with table group discussions using the following questions. Give each person/household an opportunity to think about the questions and then invite people to share their responses. Display the questions on a PowerPoint presentation or on newsprint for all to see.

- What insights about making decisions and discernment did you gain from the four building blocks?
- How could you apply these building blocks to making decisions as an individual and/or household?

## **Quadrant 3. Developing Skills and Fluency: Ways to Live the Christian Practice of Discernment**

### **1. Examples of Practicing Discernment**

Introduce the participants to the process of discernment on pages 3.10-3.13 in *Living Well* by creating several demonstrations of the process in action. Use the handout, *Discernment Guide*, to structure your responses. Here are several ways to conduct a demonstration of the discernment process. Feel free to combine these ideas in your demonstration. It is important to have examples that are suitable for your participants, e.g. a family example, a teenage example, a young adult example, an adult example, etc. (You can use the children's process on the handout *Try It – Making Good Decisions* if you are developing a children's example.)

1. You can create real-world examples of the process in action by using case studies, such as the five opening stories on pages 3.2-3.3, and then use the *Discernment Guide* to develop a response to the questions/actions. This will illustrate how an individual or household can utilize the process.

2. You can invite several people from the church to share personal examples of how they have practiced the discernment process using the *Discernment Guide* as a framework for their presentation. Be sure to have a variety of situations to connect with the participants.
3. You can use a segment from a film in which an individual or family is faced with a decision. Use the film to “set-up” the situation and then use the *Discernment Guide* to develop a response to the questions/actions, illustrating how someone might use the process in this situation.

## 2. Applying the Discernment Process

To help the participants envision ways to use the discernment process in their lives ask them to review the two decisions they identified at the beginning of the session: the wise decision and the one they regret.

Have them analyze the two decisions using the 10 “steps” in the *Discernment Guide*. Explain that they should work through each step in the process. Have them note things they did and did not do, and what they would do differently now that they have the process in the *Discernment Guide*. (Note: If a family is analyzing a “children’s decision” that can use the children’s process on the handout *Try It – Making Good Decisions*.)

At table groups ask the participants to reflect on the following question and share insights they gained from applying the discernment process: *How can using the process of discernment be beneficial to me and my family and improve our decision-making?*

Conclude by presenting “The Benefits of Discernment” on page 3.13 in *Living Well*.

## Quadrant 4. Demonstrating Creative and Authentic Performance: Living the Practice of Discernment

### 1. Practicing Discernment Daily: Paying Attention to God

Conclude the session by introducing people to the Prayer of Examen and then leading them through the process as a group. The Prayer of Examen is found on page 3.15 in *Living Well*. Create a PowerPoint presentation with the five elements of the Prayer of Examen. Play reflective music in the background during the prayer. Use the following information to guide people through the process:

The Prayer of Examen helps us look for traces of God’s actions in our daily life, individually or as a household. It is usually done in the evening, looking back over the day, or it can be done as a household at the evening meal. This is a time of quiet to spend alone or with each other in the presence of God.

1. First, note the gifts God has given you today. Give thanks for all God’s gifts and benefits.

*Pause for reflection.*

2. Ask God that this reflection be a time of special grace and revelation. You can use these words:

*Be near us now Lord. Let us look together at the day.*

*Pause for reflection.*

3. Review the day with God. Look at the stirrings of your heart, your thoughts, your choices as the day progressed. Which have been of God? Which not? What does God want to say to you about both?

*Pause for reflection.*

4. Give God thanks and ask for forgiveness for any failure or omission, and for healing from their effects. Use these or similar words:

*Gracious God, everything is a gift from you. I give you thanks and praise for the gifts of today, such as ....*

*I ask your forgiveness and mercy for ....*

*I ask your healing in ....*

*Pause for reflection.*

5. Look forward to the next day, and plan concretely with God how to live it according to God's desire for your life. Ask for the graces you desire for tomorrow.

*Lord God, continue to be present with me in my life each day.*

*Pause for reflection.*

(From: *The Art of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision-Making*, by Elizabeth Liebert)

## **2. Closing Prayer**

Use one or both of the prayers on page 3.16 in *Living Well* to close the session. You may also want to use the following excerpt from the Prayer of St. Patrick.

I bind unto myself today  
the power of God to hold and lead,  
an eye to watch, the might to stay,  
an ear to harken to my need;  
the wisdom of my God to teach,  
a hand to guide, a shield to ward;  
the word of God to give me speech,  
the heavenly host to be my guard.  
Christ be with me,  
Christ within me,  
Christ behind me,  
Christ before me,  
Christ beside me,  
Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me;  
Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet,  
Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

(Text attributed to Saint Patrick, trans. Cecil F. Alexander)

# Making Life Choices

*Complete this reflection as an individual or as a whole family.*

1. **Recall a decision that in retrospect was a wise one.**
  - How did you make it?
  - What factors did you weigh?
  - With whom did you consult? How did you manage opposing points of view?
  - What would have been the consequences if you had made a different decision?
  - Where was God in this decision?
  
2. **Recall a decision you made that you now regret.**
  - What was the process by which you made that decision?
  - Have you since discovered clues about how you could have decided differently?
  - Where was God in this decision?
  
3. **Make a short list of persons you might call when you are faced with a tough decision. What do you look for from these persons? How do they help you?**
  
4. **When you think about the major decisions you have made in your life, how have your religious or spiritual values influenced your decisions?**

# Making Decisions

Discernment is big word for **making decisions** in a way that you think about the choices you have and keep God involved in helping you make good decisions.

## Think about it. . . How do you make decisions?

What kind of things do you have to make decisions about? Check the ones that you make decisions about, either alone or with your parents or family.

- school projects
- meals
- spending your allowance
- sports, music, or other activities
- family trips
- family vacation
- clothing you wear
- what to watch on TV
- which friends to hang out with

When you make decisions, who do you usually talk to? Read the list and check who you talk to before making decisions.

- friends
- parents
- brothers or sisters
- grand parents
- teachers
- pastor
- friends
- God
- Jesus
- Holy Spirit



# Discernment Guide

**1. Name the issue.**

**2. Pray for enlightenment.**

**3. Gather appropriate data.**

- consult Scripture
- seek the advice of trusted advisors
- heed the collective sense and wisdom of the Christian community
- read widely and deeply the best ancient and contemporary thinking
- pray

**4. Sort our thoughts and data.**

- thoughts toward our self
- thoughts toward God
- thoughts toward evil

Is the choice that seems to be emerging God's way for us?

**5. Virtually live the decision.**

**6. Look for a confirming sign.**

- Can we live in the two weeks of virtually implementing the decision?
- Is there a confirming sign?
- Is there joy, peace, or consolation or is there discomfort, restlessness, or anxiety?

**7. Make the decision.**

**8. Implement the decision.**

- Can my decision be broken down into steps? If so, note an appropriate order.
- Does anyone need to be informed about this decision in advance of its implementation? If so, what is the best way to do that?
- Who besides me might be involved in carrying out the decision? How will I invite them to this role?
- If some of them choose not to join me, what will I do?
- Who will support me along the way?
- If reflecting and praying on these practicalities elicits some fear or resistance, weigh this against the experience of spiritual freedom that resulted from your decision. Ask for the grace to act from that place of spiritual freedom.

**9. Ritualize the decision.**

**10. Guard your heart and watch your thoughts.**

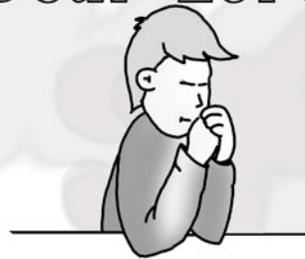
# Try It! — Making Good Decisions

Think of a decision that you just made, or need to make, and practice the process of “discerning” a decision by walking through the steps below.



❶ What’s the decision you need to make?

Dear Lord...



❷ Ask for God’s help in making your decision.



❸ What choices do you have? What do you know about these choices?



❹ Imagine what it’s like to live your decision for a few days and see how it feels.



❺ How will you make a good choice? Put a “heart” in front of good and loving choices and a “U” in front of bad or unloving choices.



❻ Make the decision!

# Resources for Developing the Christian Practice of Discernment

“Discernment.” Frank Rogers. *Practicing Our Faith*. Dorothy C. Bass, editor. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

*Discernment: A Path to Spiritual Awakening*. Rose Mary Dougherty. New York: Paulist Press, 2009. [DVD also available]

How does God fit into our decisions and life choices? How do we discern what fits with who we are? How do we live discerning lives? Discernment is the process of realizing, and then following, our spiritual paths. In this book, lifelong spiritual guide Rose Mary Dougherty explains the essentials of cultivating a discerning heart. Drawing on the teachings of Christianity, other spiritual traditions, and her own life experiences, the author guides readers across the sometimes difficult terrain of spiritual discernment and invites them to explore their own experiences. She reminds them that opportunities for discernment are embedded into all of life and that ultimately discernment is a way of life in and of itself.

*Living into the Answers: A Workbook for Personal Spiritual Discernment*. Valerie K. Isenhower and Judith A. Todd. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2008.

*Living into the Answers* teaches a way to ask for and receive God’s guidance as you approach an issue or choice. “Large or small, the decisions of life point toward particular paths,” write Isenhower and Todd. “Paying attention to the process of discerning God’s desire for our life starts us on a journey that leads to abundant life. ...It opens us to a larger number of life choices and to a more interactive relationship with God who calls us for future possibilities.”

Discernment isn’t magic. It isn’t passive. Discernment isn’t a complicated mystical practice. Rather, it’s a process of listening and choosing based on the understanding that God is to be at the center of decision making. The authors explain how to live in a way that satisfies the yearning for a deeper connection with the spiritual. There may not always be one “right” answer because there’s no shortcut to knowing which job to take, house to buy or relationship to pursue. But we don’t have to make these decisions alone. As people of faith, we know every aspect of our lives is important to God, who created us for a purpose. *Living into the Answers* is an inspiring and practical personal workbook that introduces tools and practices that invite God in as we consider priorities and alternatives, guides us to create prayerfully considered options, and helps us live with the confidence that God will use our choices to invite us into a deeper and more fruitful relationship.

*Sacred Compass: The Way of Spiritual Discernment*. J. Brent Bill. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2008.

How do you discover God’s will for your life—every day? *Sacred Compass* offers a fresh and deeper way of living a God-directed life. J. Brent Bill draws on the quiet beauty of the Quaker path to show how spiritual discernment is more about sensing God’s gracious presence than it is about making the right decisions. As you use this book to chart your own spiritual course, you will find yourself led to unexpected places, comforted by the knowledge that God uses all of our experiences to bring us close.

*Tools Matter for Practicing the Spiritual Life*. Mary Margaret Funk. New York: Continuum, 2001. (See chapter 7. Tools of Discernment)

*Tools Matter* presents more than two dozen “tools” or practices of the spiritual life. Many of these (such as fasting, vigils, ceaseless prayer, and manual labor) derive from desert mothers and fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries, but just as many come from later times: the

practices of the Jesus Prayer, of emptiness, of recollection, of self-abandonment, of the presence of God, and of colloquy. The book concludes with a chapter on discernment, spiritual direction, and the limitations of each tool.

*The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making.* Elizabeth Liebert. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

How can Christians invite God into their decision making? Liebert says that discernment is about aligning human will with God's. Unlike ordinary decision making, it requires prayer and the accountability of a faith community to help us know which way to go. Drawing on Christian thinkers through the ages, from Ignatius of Loyola and Jonathan Edwards to Frederick Buechner and Thomas Merton, Liebert teaches that discernment is both a spiritual gift and an acquired habit that can be honed through regular practice. To that end, she provides extensive exercises to help readers identify and work through discernment issues in their own lives. Readers should plan to take time with this book, because the exercises yield their richest rewards through careful and slow implementation—ideally over a period of 11 weeks. While the author cautions that absolute certainty is rarely possible, a diligent practice of discernment can lead to confirmation. Liebert's wise spiritual counsel will aid many seekers as they determine their next step.

*The Way of Discernment: A Small-Group Experience in Spiritual Formation (Companions in Christ) (Participant's Book).* Stephen Doughty, Marjorie J. Thompson. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2008.

*The Way of Discernment: A Small-Group Experience in Spiritual Formation (Companions in Christ) (Leader's Guide).* Marjorie J. Thompson. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2008.

We stand before the forest of our own wonderings. Then bit by bit, we become aware of a path through the forest. "What do I do now?" From deep within us there's a desire to do the right thing, to make wise choices, to live in a fruitful manner. There are simple steps anyone can take that will open understanding. The scriptures repeatedly acknowledge the existence of a sure pathway in life. "Even the most exacting circumstances lies a way that leads to greater understanding of God's desire and, therefore, of what we are to do," write the authors. "...We pray for deeper understanding. We wait. We struggle. We search. Then, aha! Understanding comes. Perhaps it flares forth suddenly. Perhaps it emerges with the slow, growing radiance of the morning sun. Either way, we know we have not brought the insight into being ourselves. It comes from beyond us." So, how do you discover God's guidance for personal and congregational decisions? Discover the way to greater clarity in *The Way of Discernment*, a 10-week study for small groups. More of a journey in discernment than a how-to guide, this study gently leads to a prayerful path for a richer, wiser life. *The Way of Discernment* offers a biblical, theological and practical framework for understanding the practice of discernment. It provides principles of personal and group discernment, daily exercises to help you move from information to experience, weekly meeting plans (in Leader's Guide) designed for group sharing and worship, and penetrating questions to aid the process of discernment.