

Spiritual Discernment: At the Core of Christian Spirituality

by

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How are we to live our lives thoughtfully and faithfully in the midst of all the forces, options, and decisions that characterize modern life? Discernment, the Christian practice of seeking God's call in the midst of the decisions that mark one's life, may very well be the single most important Christian spiritual practice for dealing with this contemporary dilemma.

Elizabeth Liebert¹

We are strongly encouraged in Scripture to turn our ear to wisdom, to apply our heart to understanding, and to call out for insight. If we diligently search for wisdom and insight (as for hidden treasure, or something very valuable to us personally), then we will “understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding” (Prov. 2:1-6). The psalmist in Psalm 119:125 provides a good example for us: “I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes.” The writer of Hebrews in the New Testament tells us that discernment is a matter of our spiritual maturity and speaks of “those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:14). Spiritual discernment, therefore, has to do with the ability to differentiate or discriminate between that which is of God and draws us closer to God and that which is not of God and draws us away from God.²

Paul, speaking to the church in Romans 12:2, shows us that the ability to discern

¹ Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), ix.

² Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 10-11.

is a natural by-product of seeking spiritual transformation both individually and together in community with others:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (ESV)

Genuine spiritual transformation is thus an essential ingredient to appropriately discerning the voice and the will of God. As we grow in grace and knowledge, our spiritual senses mature and we are able to see more clearly the direction in which the Lord is leading us both personally and corporately in the church.

Some Definitions

As mentioned above, discernment is a form of *discrimination*. To discern (Latin, *discernere*) means to separate or distinguish. As we practice discernment we learn to distinguish between that which is good and that which is not good, between that which is authentic and valuable as opposed to that which is counterfeit. Discernment means seeing the heart of a matter with spiritual eyes from God's vantage point, thus seeing "beneath the surface of events, through illusions with human systems, and beyond the immediate and transient."³

Author Elizabeth Liebert believes that since discernment deals with the mystery of God, it resists being confined to one single, all-encompassing definition. In general, however, she says that,

³ Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997), 23.

Discernment means making a discriminating choice between two or more good options, seeking the best for this moment. These choices, while personal and conditional, are set within the community of faith and honor our previous well-made decisions. Discernment does not bring us absolute certainty, but rather operates in a climate of faith. Seeing to follow God's call moves us toward that which is better for us individually and for our world, and assures us that God will accompany us into the unknown.⁴

Biblical and Theological Foundations

Morris and Olsen accurately state that discernment is deeply rooted in both the Old and the New Testament.⁵ Those whom God called to his service were to be agents of discernment:

Elders who were wise and who discerned the wisdom of God sat at the gates of passage and commerce and made God's ways known to the community. Schools of prophets grew out the charisma of particularly gifted and insightful people. Often their simple and austere spirituality validate their calling and freed them to speak to the powerfully elite while advocating justice for the poor. National rulers had court-appointed, in-house prophets who could discern God's will and provide counsel in political, economic, and military matters.⁶

Old Testament examples include such as Elijah who discerned the still, small voice of God in silence, the priest Eli, who recognized the voice of God in the young Samuel, Samuel himself who discerned that David was to be chosen as king, Moses who discerned the voice of God in the burning bush, and Jacob who recognized that "surely the Lord was in this place" (Gen 28:16). In the New Testament we see Mary who yearned for more insight and wisdom regarding her son. Her cousin, Elizabeth seemed to have a natural bent for discernment (Luke 1:36-45). Jesus, always our perfect example, discerned the heart and mind of God. The descending of

⁴ Liebert, 10.

⁵ Morrison and Olsen, 28.

⁶ Ibid., 24-25.

the Holy Spirit upon him at the time of his baptism provided a foundation for deeper discernment of God's will for his life. As Morris and Olsen observe:

When he was driven into the wilderness tempted, he saw through illusions of power and fame, and possessions and chose servitude, humility, and poverty. Seeing clearly the kingdom of God, Jesus told stories that cut to the heart of human self-deception, illusion, and desire. Jesus was a sage, embodying the heritage of the wisdom tradition. His passion and faithfulness presented a criterion for discernment and offered good news for the poor and sinful. From his baptism – when a voice from heaven announced, “this is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17) – throughout his ministry – until his death and his final cry “It is finished” (John 19:30) – Jesus' life bespoke a total commitment to discerning and doing God's will.⁷

Scripture tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. We must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek Him diligently (Heb. 11:6). Our image of God (who he is and what he is like) is important in that it affects our thinking about ourselves and the way we interact with both God and others in our world. Though we say that we believe in a God who is real and good, oftentimes we Christians live out our lives as “functional atheists.” That is, in some aspects of life we can say that God is real and that God is good, but in some parts of our lives we act as if everything depended upon human effort and upon human structures. Elizabeth Liebert appropriately states that “without a living, growing faith in the reality of God and the possibility of communication between God and humans, discernment makes no sense.”⁸ She also confirms that “Coming to know this God personally and intimately through the life of Jesus of Nazareth gives us the strongest grounding for our discernment and helps us to believe that, no matter what the outcome of our discernment, God's Spirit is still with us.”⁹ Ruth Haley Barton believes that not only is

⁷ Ibid., 26-7.

⁸ Liebert, 15.

⁹ Ibid., 19.

belief in the goodness of God—trusting that God’s intentions toward us are deeply good—crucial for right discernment, but also believing that love is our primary calling—the standard by which everything in our lives is measured. In other words, any process of discernment that fails to ask where is love in this decision misses the point of Christian spiritual discernment. Discernment, she says, is “intended to take us deeper and deeper into the heart of God’s will: that we would follow God passionately into love—even if it takes us all the way to the cross.”¹⁰

The theological understanding that God is present in all of life is also foundational to spiritual discernment. In Him we live and move and have our being writes Paul (Acts 17:27-28). Seventeenth century spiritual director, Jean Pierre Caussade, calls this ever-present activity of God a *sacrament* in which God’s Divine action pervades and flows over and accompanies all of his creatures. He wrote that,

Everything proclaims him to you, everything reveals him to you, everything brings him to you. He is by your side, over you, around and in you . . . your suffering, your actions, your impulses are the mysteries under which God reveals himself to you.¹¹

Jesus explicitly tells us that “I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you” (John 14:20), giving us the assurance that he is not only present but that he knows us and that we are able to discern his voice to us. He confirms this principle in John 10:27 where he is quoted as saying, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

The New Testament apostles, of course, were able to discern the will of God in many situations as they faithfully proclaimed the gospel. Examples include Peter’s

¹⁰ Barton, 116-118.

¹¹ Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982), 3, 18.

discernment of the meaning of Hebrew Scripture on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21), his discernment to heed God's call to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10), and Paul's hearing the words of Jesus and discerning God's will for his life (Acts 9:1-22). Group discernment is clearly seen in the Jerusalem church where the book of Acts records specific occasions of seeking to discern God's will: The choosing of Matthias (Acts 1:12-26), the choosing of administrators for the daily distribution (Acts 6:1-7), and the discernment that Gentiles were to be accepted into the household of God (Acts 11:1-18, 15).¹²

For early Christians spiritual discernment was primary in understanding and in imparting the Word of God to others. Note the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual." Likewise it was found necessary to be on the lookout for false prophets and to test the spirits: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).¹³

Discernment as a Way of Life

While discernment is a gift from God which can and should be desired and prayed for, it must be cultivated to be effective in our lives. The development of the habit of discernment is a matter of both recognizing and responding to the presence of God. It is a quality of attentiveness to the Spirit of God that over time leads to an

¹² Morris and Olsen, 27.

¹³ Ibid.

intimacy in relationship empowering us to have an intuitive sense of the mind and the heart of God in any given moment. Barton writes:

We become familiar with God's voice—the tone, quality and content—just as we become familiar with the voice of a human being that we know well. We are able to grasp the answers to several key questions: Who is God for me in the moment? Where is God at work, continuing to unfold his love and redemption? Who am I most authentically in response? It is a way of looking at all of life with a view to sensing the movement of God's Spirit and abandoning ourselves to the experience of floating down a river.¹⁴

As we become more practiced in recognizing the presence and the activity of God in all of life, we are better equipped to align ourselves with what God is doing at any given moment and this is when life can become really exciting!¹⁵

Cultivating spiritual discernment is not without its challenges, of course. True spiritual discernment is more than just an exercise in following certain procedures for decision-making. It is a way of being that is shaped by the practice of spiritual disciplines such as the prayerful, meditative reading of Scripture, growing in the awareness of God's presence through silence and solitude, and an honest examination of inner motives and feelings.¹⁶ God's desire is that we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), allowing him to complete the work that he has begun in us (Phil. 1:6). This requires intentionality on our part in seeking his Kingdom first in our lives. The *Message* version states it this way: "Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions . . ." (Matt. 6:33). If we are not intentionally seeking the will of God in our lives or in the life of our church, we may be simply doing what seems best to us according to our own thinking and desires or what is most

¹⁴ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 111.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁶ Morris and Olsen, 14.

convenient or self-serving. Practicing principles of discernment, however, can open us to an entirely different reality—the wisdom of God that is beyond human wisdom and ingenuity (I Cor. 2: 6-10).¹⁷

As we have seen, discernment is a very important matter in our spiritual life. It is an essential aspect of our Christian spirituality that takes us on a journey into what author Calvin Miller calls “the depths of God” where “eyes see the invisible, ears hear the inaudible, and minds conceive the inconceivable.”¹⁸ It is a way of perceiving of what is normally not seen but what is “visible to the heart in which God dwells.”¹⁹ The good news is that God does provide the way for us to recognize and respond to his presence and his activity in all aspects of our lives. It can become a way of life for us—an integral part of our daily living. In order to begin to make this a personal challenge, you might ask yourself the following questions: How different would my life be if I would frequently and earnestly ask God, “What is your will?” Also, what would my church be like if at every important juncture, I and other members of my faith community would consciously and intentionally take the time to ask, “God, what is your will?”²⁰

Dynamic Elements of Discernment

Spiritual discernment involves a number of dynamic elements such as: Belief in the goodness of God, understanding the connection between love and discernment, and knowing that the Holy Spirit speaks.²¹ As author Ruth Haley Barton states,

¹⁷ Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together*, 11.

¹⁸ Calvin Miller, *Into the Depths of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2000), Cover.

¹⁹ Jean Stairs, *Listening for the Soul: Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 56.

²⁰ Morris and Olsen, 18.

²¹ Barton, 117-119.

To really open myself to knowing and doing the will of God requires trust in God's intentions toward me are deeply good. Discernment requires interior freedom, the state of wide-openness to God and the capacity to relinquish whatever might keep me from choosing for God.²²

As also mentioned earlier, it is important in spiritual discernment to understand that love is the primary calling of the Christian. In light of this truth, two important questions should be taken into consideration when seeking discernment regarding a matter:

What does love call for in this situation? And *What would love do?* Thirdly, we must believe that the Holy Spirit as our counselor and guide does speak to us and does lead us into deeper levels of truth as we are able to bear it. Again, Barton relates:

The practice of discernment assumes a deep-seated theological belief in God's presence and action through the Holy Spirit in the midst of my daily experience. It assumes that God's will is continuing to be revealed as it is needed and as I am able to bear it and respond to it.²³

As has been stated, a basic premise of spiritual discernment is that God is present and active in all of life. If we seek to effectively discern God's presence and activity, it is necessary to increasingly become aware of not only intra-personal nuances of the Holy Spirit but also to learn to sense God in our interpersonal and communal relationships as well as in Creation. These arenas of life are listed below.

Arenas of Life²⁴

Below are arenas or aspects of life that, when paid attention to, can help us to develop a discerning spirit with regard to where God is at work.

²² Ibid., 118.

²³ Ibid., 119.

²⁴ This concept is taught in the Diploma in the Art of Spiritual Direction Program, San Francisco Theological Seminary. For a more detailed discussion see "The Experience Circle as a Tool for Widening Our Horizons" Bumpus, Mary Rose; Langer, Rebecca Bradburn (2005-11-01). *Supervision of Spiritual Directors: Engaging in Holy Mystery* (Spiritual Directors International) (Kindle Location 2735). Church Publishing Inc.. Kindle Edition.

Arenas of life:

Intrapersonal—Relationship to self, for example prayer, inner healing, body awareness, self-awareness.

Interpersonal—Relationship to another, for example a friend, spouse, or child.

Structural and communal—Relationship to structures and relationships in communities, for example in families, in corporations, or churches.

Environmental—Ecological interdependence, relationships with and in nature, physical settings, place.

The great reformer John Calvin tells us that there is a direct connection between God-knowledge and self-knowledge.²⁵ Thus, from an intra-personal perspective, knowledge about ourselves, as uniquely created in the image of God, opens up avenues of spiritual discernment that if not paid attention to may hinder our perception of God's activity in our lives. Such internal qualities as memory, intuition, body, imagination, thoughts and feelings all play a very important role in the art of spiritual discernment as they provide insight and wisdom beyond what may on the surface be apparent. Paying attention to our own personal desires is also a fundamental key to discernment. Taking note of our deepest desires over a period of time, allows us to be more attuned to the God who gives us the desires of our heart (Psa. 37:4). To a large extent, our personal identity is expressed in the things that we commit ourselves to because they flow from what we most deeply desire. As Elizabeth Liebert says, by not taking note of our desires, our deepest loss will be that "we are unable to discover the true core of our longing that could lead us more deeply into God—a core that is expressed through our desiring."²⁶

²⁵ Liebert, 23.

²⁶ Ibid., 26.

Other important elements to be considered in the process of discernment include being open to the process of self-examination and God-examination in the spirit of David who said, “Investigate my life, O God, find out everything about me; Cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I’m about; See for yourself whether I’ve done anything wrong—then guide me on the road to eternal life” (Psa. 139:23-24 MSG). Also, the spiritual formation exercise of an “awareness examen” or Examination of Consciousness is a significant practice for learning to appropriately discern. This involves a prayerful, meditative time spent in God’s presence in which there is a review of one’s daily activity for the purpose of perceiving what has produced a sense of “life” and also what has produced a sense of “draining of life” during the day. Also, and, most importantly, is a dialogue with the Lord about where He was present in each event that comes to mind. This is not merely a practice of self-analysis or self-examination, but an acknowledgement of the presence God in all of our life’s activities and a willingness to see his perspective in light of our own view of things.

Another dynamic element of spiritual discernment is the *prayer of indifference*. Indifference in this context does not mean apathy or not caring. It means asking God for a spirit of desiring his will more than anything else on the matter at hand. There must be a sense of relinquishment on our part of all aspects of our own willfulness that may hinder the will of God. Finally, there is the *prayer for wisdom* in which one applies the principles of the instruction in James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

There are also certain questions (good questions prompt good answers) that can be very helpful to consider when we are involved in the process of discernment on any given issue. These include: 1). How does the choice that I or we are making fit into God's calling on my life (or the life of my group)? 2). In this choice is there a growing sense of authenticity—in congruence with who I am in God? 3). Is there a particular scripture that is speaking clearly to me in the context of this decision? 4). Does this decision conform to the mind and the heart of Christ as I understand it? 5). Does this choice fit with the observations of others in the Christian community who know me and who are discerning as to what God is doing in my life? Also in the context of community, is there anything in the Christian faith tradition that might help to inform my decision?²⁷

Conclusion

Scripture reveals that discernment is a gift from God. Although we cannot make it happen, we can position ourselves to receive it. It does not come through a specific method or formula but involves inviting God to guide us in our knowing. The capacity for spiritual discernment corresponds to our relationship with God and is therefore “cultivated through prayer, times of quiet listening and alert awareness.”²⁸

Ultimately, there are no guarantees to making perfect decisions in the process of spiritual discernment. The good news, however, is that when we intentionally invite God to be part of the process, we can know that He will be pleased and involved in all that transpires regarding whatever decision is reached.

²⁷ Adapted from Barton, *Pursuing God's Will*, 124.

²⁸ Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 116.

As Paul prayed in Philippians 1:9-10, “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.” Author Frank Rogers Jr. states this principle well when he writes that in the end, “spiritual discernment depends on faith. We do our best within the forms we have, but we ever depend upon the mysterious emergence of the Holy Spirit who resonates and persuades and, always, comes as a gift.”²⁹ This gift of discernment then, which is at the core of Christian spirituality in all of its import, can be cultivated both on a personal level and on a group level. In the following section, examples for entering into the process of spiritual discernment both individually and collectively in the group setting are provided.

The Process of Discernment

Divine guidance can be found in the books we read, the nature we enjoy, the people we meet, and the events we experience. Through the practice of discernment, we can test our calling and find vocation. We can open our hearts to the divine presence. We can discover who we really are. And we can ascertain when to act, when to wait, and when to be led. Spiritual discernment is an ancient Christian practice with many wells of wisdom from which to drink.

Henri Nouwen³⁰

Elizabeth Liebert in *The Way of Discernment* lists seven steps that are involved in the discernment process. They are not necessarily linear, following a logical progression every time, but they are always a part of discernment:³¹

²⁹ Frank Rogers Jr., “Discernment” in Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 114.

³⁰ Henri Nouwen, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), xxix.

³¹ Liebert, 19-21.

1. Seek spiritual freedom, the inner disposition upon which discernment rests and which creates the climate for discernment.
2. Discover and name the choice you face.
3. Gather and evaluate appropriate data about the issue.
4. Reflect and pray.
5. Formulate a tentative decision.
6. Seek confirmation.
7. Assess the process.

Various procedural formats have been developed that involve the above steps.

Below are two discernment frameworks, one for personal, individual discernment and the other for group discernment. They are adapted from principles found in Ruth Haley Barton's book *Pursuing God's Will Together*.

Guiding Principles & Procedures for Spiritual Discernment

For the Individual - *Personal Spiritual Discernment*

1. Spend some time in silence, quieting and calming your spirit within.
Suggestion: Take several slow deep breaths and begin to focus on how God is present to you in this moment. You may also want to consider how He has been present to you over the past 24 hours. You may also want to read a portion of Scripture several times such as Psalm 46:10 ("Be still and know that I am God"), and spend time in dialogue with God considering:
 - a. (First Reading) What word(s) stand out to me in this passage?
 - b. (Second Reading) How do these words apply to me in my life right now? How do they apply to my need for discernment today?
 - c. (Third Reading) Spend some time in silence listening for God's voice to you in this moment.
2. Read Psalm 131. Consider if there is anything that you may need to relinquish in order to be fully present to the Spirit's presence during this time. Suggested question to ask: "What needs to die in me for God's will to be revealed? Pray for the help that you may need to do this.
3. Continue to create a sacred space for God to enter by slowly praying from the heart the Prayer of Daily Surrender (See below). Pay special attention to the part of the prayer that refers to *indifference or detachment*, realizing that a spirit of true indifference (desiring God's will alone) is a gift and not something we engender within ourselves. Pray to receive it as the Lord provides.

4. Pray for wisdom, believing that God will honor your request. Remember James 1:5 “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”
5. Present the issues of the concern you are bringing before God with as much detail as you wish. Allow yourself to be open about both your thoughts and feelings realizing that God is big enough to handle them all for you. Be open to God’s presence and love.
6. Spend time in silence for hearing the Lord’s voice to you in this matter. You may want to consider the following as you listen:
 - a. What is the source of deepest pain or the greatest draining of energy from you in this matter? Name it for what it is in the Lord’s presence.
 - b. What brings a sense or would bring a sense of energy and “life” for you in this matter?
7. Ask the Lord to show you ways to approach the situation and to the best of your ability begin to form a strategy for going forward. Consider the following:
 - a. The good in each option.
 - b. Possible improvements.
 - c. Combining various options.
 - d. What does love call for in this situation?
 - e. The promptings of the Holy Spirit in this moment.
 - f. Praying for inner confirmation and peace.
8. Take a 5-10 minute break and return to summarize options, decisions and next steps.
9. Close in prayer thanking God for His presence and whatever insights, guidance, and questions that arose during this time of spiritual discernment.

For Group Decision-making – *Group Spiritual Discernment*

1. Group settles in by a brief sharing of how God has been at work in each person’s life. Spend time in praying through a scripture or a written prayer that relates to spiritual discernment (See A Prayer for Openness to God’s Creative Leadership below).
2. Begin to create a sacred space through an interactive discussion on the meaning of a scripture relating to discernment asking:
 - a. What does this verse mean?
 - b. How does it apply to me personally?
 - c. What is God saying to us as a group?

3. For the purpose of opening space to receive the gift of God's presence, each member pauses in silence to consider anything they need to relinquish in order to be fully present to the Spirit's presence during this meeting (Suggested question to ask: "What needs to die in me for God's will to be revealed?" Following the silent prayer, together pray a prayer of relinquishment or of surrender (see examples below).
4. Pray and Test for Indifference.
 - a. Facilitator asks each member to pray silently a prayer for indifference with the reminder that indifference is something God does in us rather than something we can make happen. It is a true heartfelt desire that God's will be determined: Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.
 - b. Facilitator asks: "How many are indifferent?"
 - c. Facilitator summarizes the group response thanking everyone for their honesty and acknowledging that although some may not have yet reached a point of indifference on the matter, the group should continue in prayer for each other as next steps are taken.
5. Pray for Wisdom
 - a. Facilitator asks each person to pray silently for wisdom, remembering James 1:5.
 - b. Following a time for this prayer, members all pray together for wisdom.
6. Discussion of presenting issues. Each person is given adequate time to express their views while the group listens without comment.
7. The group spends time in silence for hearing the voice of God (10-20 minutes). Members can be asked to consider what brings a sense of positive energy to the matter and what brings a sense of negativity or a draining away of energy from the matter. They may also consider:
 - a. What does love call for in this situation.
 - b. The promptings of the Holy Spirit in this moment.
 - c. Praying for inner confirmation and peace.
8. Facilitator summarizes
 - a. The good in each option
 - b. Possible improvements
 - c. Combining various options

9. Facilitator solicits each member's mind and heart regarding the matter(s) of discussion.
10. Facilitator calls for a break to provide a time for inner confirmation and peace for each member.
11. Facilitator summarizes options, decisions and next steps.
12. Close in prayer thanking God for His presence and whatever insights, guidance, and questions that arose during this time of spiritual discernment.

(See the above-mentioned prayers below)

Prayer of Daily Surrender³²

Heavenly Father, I come to you today, just as I am. I give you all my strengths and weaknesses, vices and virtues, hopes and fears, successes and failures, faith and doubt.

I cast all my fear and anxiety and insecurity upon you, trusting that you will do your part, trusting that you will show me what my part is (if any), and trusting that all things will work together for good - because I love you, and because I am called according to your purpose.

I receive your mercy, grace, and love into my life. Help me to surrender to your love for me today, extending it to myself and others as well.

Lord, grant me a spirit of freedom that I may truly desire your will alone. No more, no less, and nothing else. Please give me the discernment and wisdom to *know* your will for me, the willingness to *accept* it, and the courage and strength *to do* it.

I need your help in each of these ways,
for I cannot do any of them on my own.

Provide me with what I need for today –physically, spiritually, and emotionally, that I may be fully alive in you.

May I live today with a heightened sense of your presence. May I catch glimpses of the eternal in all things. May I be aware of, listen to, and be submissive to the promptings of your Holy Spirit.

I place my life completely and unreservedly in your hands, and trust that you will not let anything happen to me outside of your loving care for me.

I ask these things in the name and the power and the authority of Jesus Christ, my savior, my Lord, and my friend. Amen.

³² (Adapted from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/6790754/Daily-Prayer-of-Surrender>)

Prayer for Openness to God's Creative Leadership³³

God of passionate patience and lively waiting, in whatever way you choose,
 be with us in our eagerness and in our uneasiness
 as we balance on the edge of a newness disguised as familiar,
 a mystery lurking in the taken-for-granted,
 a discovery waiting in the common,
 a love fevering to be expressed,
 a hope waiting to be born out of pain,
 and the wonder of it all as it hushes our hearts and disquiets our certainties.

God, without you we are truly scared stiff of making mistakes,
 of being ridiculed or rejected
 or missing out in our always fumbling uncertainties.

So we pray that your Spirit will hover over us to enable us to separate, with
 you, the light from the darkness in the change that seeks to shape us,
 and which we seek creatively to shape.

We pray that your Spirit lift us and encourage us
 to keep getting up and going on,
 no matter how many times we have tripped up and fallen crying down.

We pray that your Spirit empower us to crack the smothering crust of
 deadening habits and goad us to set out after fresh dreams.

We pray that your Spirit liberate and lead us
 in laboring for healing for the broken, justice for the exploited,
 chances for the oppressed, peace for the violated and violent of the earth.

So move in and among us that we may grow in your Spirit,
 rejoice in your kingdom, and live with passion this amazing life that,
 by your grace, is in us and that we are gratefully in. Amen.

³³ Ted Loder, *My Heart in My Mouth: Prayers for Our Lives* (Philadelphia, PA: InnisFree Press, Inc., 2000), 24-25.