

Discerning the Will of God
Seeking Discernment as a Community (the church)
Lesson 4

Remembering last week's objective: Being with Jesus to know the will of God

This week's main objective: Apply how we discern God's will as a church (Hillcrest)

Guiding Scriptures as it pertains to Godly discernment – Note: There are three passages below. As you prepare to teach the lesson, you may decide to leave out a passage due to time constraints - Acts 14:26 through 15:35; Acts 1:15-26; and Acts 6:1-6

Theme of the lesson

Although every situation requiring Godly discernment is different, there seems to be some common elements that are necessary for God-centered discernment and decision-making. As we read through each of these scriptures, we will consider how each of the following elements were practiced by believers in the book of Acts. (Note, you may see other elements in addition to these, so please feel free to point these out.)

Seven key elements are seen across the Scriptures above as to how Godly discernment took place: (Note, it might be helpful to provide a handout listing these, or to write them on the white board in front of the class).

1. The discernment process was directed by people accepted as leaders.
2. Prayer for God's help was an important part of the discernment process.
3. The Scriptures were seen not as a source where an exact answer to every question could be found, but as the place where God's intentions could be known.
4. The discernment process was not hurried.
5. The voices of those with contrary opinions were listened to during the discernment process.
6. The experiences of believers who were known to be serving in the church were given attention during the discernment process.
7. The discernment process resulted in a decision being made, rather than an ongoing discussion that leads nowhere.

Possible questions to ask class members after the Scriptures are read: (Note: It might be helpful to provide these questions to class members in the form of a handout, or write them on the whiteboard.)

1. Where do you see the six elements of Godly discernment displayed in the verses we just read?
2. Personally, what parts of the discernment process would you find most difficult?
 - a. Consider [Galatians 5:22-23](#) - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
3. To advance the kingdom of God, what would applying the elements of discernment look like at Hillcrest, even in matters where we as believers may disagree?
 - a. Consider Philippians 2:3-8 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your

own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

4. As a member of the body of Christ and Hillcrest, how can you be a helpful part of the discernment process?
 - a. Consider Ephesians 4:1-6 - As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
5. What parts of Godly discernment make for congregational unity and ease of working together?

Read Acts 14:26-15:35 (the council at Jerusalem: opposing and affirming the acceptance of Greeks into the church)

In case the classroom discussion runs short, here are some elements of discernment seen in Acts 14:26-15:35 that can be discussed:

1. Verse 2: The discernment process was directed by people accepted as leaders.
2. Verses 3-4: The experiences of believers who were known to be serving in the church were given attention in the discernment process.
3. Verses 5-11: The voices of those with contrary opinions were listened to in the discernment process.
4. Verse 13: The discernment process was directed by people accepted as leaders.
5. Verses 15-18: The scriptures were seen not as a source where an exact answer to every question could be found but as the place where God's intentions would be known.
6. Verse 22, 30-31: The experiences of believers who were known to be serving in the church were given attention during the discernment process.

Final thought as it pertains to Acts 14:26-15:35: The process of discernment was applied, and the conclusion of the matter was known throughout the churches in the region, which resulted in peace, unity, and growth of the kingdom of God.

Read Acts 1:15-26 (the selection of Matthias as an apostle to replace Judas)

In case the classroom discussion runs short, here are some elements of discernment seen in Acts 1: 15-26 that can be discussed:

1. Verse 15: The discernment process was directed by people accepted as leaders.
2. Verse 20: The Scriptures were seen not as a source where an exact answer to every question could be found but as the place where God's intentions would be known.

3. Verses 24-26: Prayer for God's help was an important part of the discernment process.

Final thought as it pertains to Acts 1:15-26: As a result of the discernment process, the group remained united, and they were ready for service to the Lord, which in many cases would prove very difficult, even life-threatening.

Read Acts 6:1-6 (the apostles choose seven to help distribute food)

In case the classroom discussion runs short, here are some elements of discernment seen in Acts 6: 1-6 that can be discussed:

1. Verse 1: The voices of those with contrary opinions were listened to during the discernment process.
2. Verse 2: The discernment process was directed by people accepted as leaders.
3. Verse 3, 5: The experiences of believers who were known to be serving in the church were given attention during the discernment process.
4. Verse 6: Prayer for God's help was an important part of the discernment process.

Final thought as it pertains to Acts 6:1-6: As a result of the discernment process, tasks were delegated, individuals within the body of Christ were able to use their talents accordingly, and there was unity.

Further study:

- Movie: *Of Gods and Men*; Based on a true story, this movie contains many of the elements of discernment we have discussed. A group of Christian monks are serving a village in Algeria. They are warned to flee, as there is a threat from an enemy that wants to kill them. The men struggle with each other and with God as to whether they should leave and save their lives, or should they stay and continue serving the village.
- Waltke, B. K. (1995). *Finding the will of God: A pagan notion?* Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI.
- Johnson, L. T. (1983). *Scripture and discernment: Decision making in the church.* Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN.

Looking forward to next week:

Next week will focus on the practical application of the past four lessons related to the discernment process.