



Let go of your own desires.
Sense God's will.
Make good decisions.

I decide who I am and what life means to me as a consequence of all the many decisions which I make during my life. But I often make decisions not on the basis of free choice, but on the basis of partiality, aversion, or compulsion. Ignatius of Loyola's discernment of spirits can help me to make free and good decisions. How does that work? Together with God – as if I were with a good friend – I observe myself in the particular situation, in which I find myself. I allow thoughts and feelings to come, which I might be reluctant to acknowledge otherwise.

Step 1: I ask myself whether it is really necessary to make a decision. I especially ask myself this when I am feeling confused or under a lot of pressure.

Step 2: With imagination and courage I identify all the possible alternatives, in order to avoid a compulsive "either – or" approach. Have I seen and considered all the possible courses of action?

Step 3: For each possible choice I list the pros and cons objectively. I pay special attention to what is within my capacities, reasonable, and morally acceptable. The following questions might help: What is in harmony with important decisions which I have made in the past? What fits within the scope of the tasks which I have? What would Jesus – or a person who is important to me – do?

Step 4: I sense attentively the stirrings in my soul in relation to each option – all the various feelings, emotions, and sensations. I pay especially careful and sensitive attention to the ways in which I might be constrained by my own fears and compulsions. Which of the voices within me are especially loud? What is being drowned out? What barely dares to make itself heard?

Step 5: God has great confidence in me and wants the best for me. God speaks to me through my inner promptings. I tell God what my question really is and where my deepest longings are leading me. I ask for courage and freedom.

Step 6: I now look again at the whole picture and all the various options. And I try to ascertain (or savor) where I sense that I would be freer and calmer, with more space for personal growth, and with more of a future: How is love expressed? And what helps love grow stronger? Where does my heart become open to greater faith, hope, and love, even though a particular path may actually be more difficult? It is in these gentle stirrings that the call of my creator can be heard.

Step 7: This is the direction which I choose to take as the basis for my future decisions and actions. *"Few souls understand what God would effect in them if they should give themselves entirely into his hands and allow his grace to act."* Ignatius of Loyola

