

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

A large, ornate Celtic cross stands in a grassy field. The cross is made of dark stone and features intricate carvings, including a central circular motif. In the background, there is a low stone wall and rolling green hills under a clear blue sky.

Anam Cara

"Soul friend" ~ A companion on the path to God ~ spiritual direction, rooted in the Celtic tradition, involves a deep, sacred relationship where a guide offers compassionate, non-judgmental companionship and sacred listening to help someone explore, discern, and grow in their personal spiritual journey and relationship with God.

A Guide to Spiritual Direction with Fr. Blair

A Pastoral Guide to understanding Spiritual Direction with Fr. Blair

This document provides a comprehensive guide to spiritual direction and insight into my approach as a Spiritual Director. I will explain how as a sacred trust, the director's role in guiding souls toward Christ is through vigilant waiting and discernment, contrasting it with life coaching and therapy, and detailing traditions, particularly Ignatian and Celtic influences, while emphasizing obedience, overcoming fears, and interpreting spiritual consolation and desolation as essential for deepening one's relationship with God and navigating the spiritual journey .

To guide a soul is to accept a sacred trust. The spiritual director's first and most essential lesson for the directee is this: Wait on the Lord—listen. Live every day in anticipation and recognition of God's Love. This is the heart of vigilant waiting. I believe that those who are spiritually accompanying others are called to be steady companions, helping those we guide to quiet the world's noise and attune their hearts to God's divine love.

The purpose of this guide is to help you understand 'Spiritual Direction' in general and my particular approach. Both of us must engage in vigilant waiting, an unwavering reliance on the Holy Spirit, and the wisdom to navigate the practical challenges of discernment. Drawing from the Church's spiritual tradition, we will explore how souls move from anxious striving to patient, prayerful obedience. My role is not to provide answers but to create the sacred space where you can encounter Christ and, in that encounter, discover your unique path to holiness.



The Danger of Fixation: It is a big mistake to make the entire spiritual life about "this one decision." When a person becomes so fixated on discerning their future that they neglect their present relationship with God, the primary goal—growing in union with Christ—is harmed.

Avoid "Too Many Directors: The spiritual director's role is a privileged position reserved for one priest, a religious, or at times, a trained and formed lay person. Although your mom, uncle, best friend, three of the ladies at daily mass, or a few other friends might indeed be helpful, they are not usually the best persons for this kind of spiritual accompaniment and guidance.

The Director's Role: My role as spiritual director is to accompany, to clarify, and to point always toward Christ. The journey of discernment is one of obedient waiting, empowered by the patient work of the Holy Spirit. By helping souls navigate their fears, correct their misconceptions, and interpret God's loving delays with wisdom, I can guide you not merely to a state in life, but into a deeper and more authentic union with the God who calls you by name. A spiritual director isn't crucial for discernment in daily life, however this type of relationship can be extremely helpful especially during difficult seasons of the spiritual life and when focusing on vocational discernment. Find a guide who is not only 'holy' but also knowledgeable and wise. Once you have a spiritual director, listen to them. This ministry is complex, yet it is a source of immense grace.

Traditions in Spiritual Direction

There is no doubt as a spiritual director I am firmly in the Jesuit tradition, that is, Ignatian. However, there are important distinctions within this tradition that those seeking spiritual direction will discover in the approaches of spiritual directors. While the core of Ignatian spirituality is the same, there are important historical differences between the French and English Jesuit traditions of spiritual direction.

The French Tradition

The French tradition tends toward a more intense, contemplative mysticism and the English tradition focuses more on practical spiritual experience and individual discernment in active life. French Jesuits were associated with the "mystical invasion" of the 17th century, cultivating deep contemplative prayer and mystical literature. It emphasized a profound awe and adoration of God the Father and a Christocentric spirituality rooted in the theology of St. Augustine and St. Paul. A key theme was the call for men and women to commune intimately with the divine life of the Trinity, leading to a focus on interiority and the following of Christ's example of surrender.

The English Tradition

The English Jesuit Tradition was shaped by the specific circumstances of the Church in England and a pragmatic approach to living out faith. The English tradition tended to emphasize the practical application of the *Spiritual Exercises* and relied heavily on personal spiritual experience in daily life. It placed a strong emphasis on the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits as a practical method for making decisions in accordance with God's will amidst complex realities.

In essence, while both traditions drew from the same Ignatian sources, the French emphasized the *depth* of mystical union, and the English focused more on the *breadth* of applying that spirituality to all aspects of a Christian life in the world. I would describe my personal approach to spiritual direction as French in spirit and highly influenced by the Celtic approach to spiritual accompaniment (3rd-8th century) that utilizes the practical anchors found in the English tradition.

The Celtic approach to spiritual accompaniment centered on the 'Anam Cara' (soul friend) - a deep, sacred friendship where a mentor guided another in their spiritual journey, emphasizing vulnerability, confession, and shared discernment, often within monastic settings, blending ascetic practices with a profound connection to nature and community, fostering growth through witnessing, listening, and translating faith into embodied action, with the goal of awakening to the Divine within.

Key aspects of the way of the Anam Cara:

Deep, Intimate Friendship: More than just spiritual direction, it was a profound bond where individuals shared their deepest selves, fostering belonging and mutual understanding.

Shared Spiritual Journey: Both the Anam Cara and the individual sought God together, with the director acting as a companion and witness to the Holy Spirit's work.

Vulnerability & Confession: A central element involved confessing inner thoughts, struggles, and hidden aspects of life, allowing for healing and growth.

Discernment: The Anam Cara helped discern God's presence in daily life, guiding the other to translate awareness into faithful action.

Commitment: The Anam Cara took on the spiritual consequences and rewards of the person they guided, highlighting the deep responsibility.

Embodied Spirituality: Practices included physical asceticism (like penitential pilgrimages) to engage the body in spiritual dialogue, not just the mind.

Nature as Divine: The Celtic world saw God's presence in the natural world, influencing how they experienced and interpreted their spiritual path.

Holistic View: This approach acknowledged the interconnectedness of life, death, and the divine, valuing intuition, dreams, and community.

Role of the Spiritual Guide

Mirror to the Soul: Helping the individual see themselves and God more clearly.

Companion, Not Dictator: The focus is on leading the person to hear the Holy Spirit within, not imposing personal will.

Bridging Inner & Outer Worlds: The guide helps integrate spiritual insights into daily life, actions, and relationships.

The Ignatian Way: Consolation / Desolation and the Rules of Discernment

Effective spiritual discernment will move you beyond simplistic interpretations of emotion and be equipped to handle the sophisticated nature of spiritual consolation and desolation. We must be vigilant against the tendency to reduce the "complex process of discernment of spirits laid out by St. Ignatius of Loyola into a vague idea of 'being at peace'. Authentic discernment is about more than 'feelings' or recalling what gave you goosebumps one time when you were praying.

Consolation – is when some interior movement in the soul is caused, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord; and when it can, in consequence, love no created thing on the face of the earth 'in itself', but in the Creator of them all. Both consolation and desolation are states of being rather than a feeling / feelings. St. Ignatius writes that consolation can be marked by deep sadness for the times we've turned away from God or said no to Gods call to love. He also described consolation as "every increase in hope, faith, and charity, and all interior joy which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord."

Desolation – according to St. Ignatius is "the contrary of consolation, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of different agitations and temptations, moving to want of confidence, without hope, without love, when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from his Creator and Lord." St. Ignatius writes that there are three principal reasons why desolation occurs: 1) We can become desolate through our own negligence to the matters of the spirit. 2) God allows desolation because he wants to try us to see how much we desire to love and follow him, even if we don't feel consolation. 3) God allows desolation to occur simply as a reminder that we're not in control of God's grace.

**Understanding Consolation & Desolation:
An Ignatian Guide to Spiritual States**

Context: In Ignatian spirituality, "discernment of spirits" is the process of understanding our interior movements. We are always under the influence of either the "good spirit" (Holy Spirit) which leads to God, or the "evil spirit" which moves us away. Consolation and Desolation are the two primary states that help us recognize which spirit is at work.

CONSOLATION: DRAWN CLOSER TO GOD

DESOLATION: FEELING SEPARATED FROM GOD

EXAMPLE
Signs include increased faith, hope, charity, and interior peace. Can also manifest as deep sorrow for sin, which draws you closer to God.

KEY FINDING
Caused by spiritual negligence, a test of faith, or a reminder of humility. Its purpose is not punishment, but to strengthen us and affirm our free will.

A state of being inflamed with love for God.
More than a feeling; it is a lens of God's love for viewing the world.

HOW TO RESPOND:
Savor these moments of grace. Store these memories to draw strength from during future times of desolation.

The opposite of consolation: a state of spiritual darkness and disturbance.
Characterized by a lack of confidence, hope, and love.

HOW TO RESPOND: Do NOT change major decisions made in consolation.
Instead, intensify your prayer and patiently trust that consolation will return.

It is not enough to understand the first set of Ignatian rules. It is critically important for both the director and the directee to understand the second set of rules. These rules deal specifically with how the Devil tries to appear as an 'angel of light' and use false experiences of consolation to lead a soul astray. This is a more advanced but crucial area of discernment. You must be prepared to read up on both sets of rules so you can properly interpret the movements of the heart. SE 313 Rules for understanding to some extent the different movements produced in the soul and for recognizing those that are good to admit them, and those that are bad, to reject them. They are:

Ignatian Rules for Discernment

RULE 1 SE 314 In the case of those who go from one mortal sin to another, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures. He fills their imagination with sensual delights and gratifications, the more readily to keep them in their vices and increase the number of their sins. With such persons the good spirit uses a method which is the reverse of the above. Making use of the light of reason, he will rouse the sting of conscience and fill them with remorse.

RULE 2 SE 315 In the case of those who go on earnestly striving to cleanse their souls from sin and who seek to rise in the service of God our Lord to greater perfection, the method pursued is the opposite of that mentioned in the first rule. Then it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings that disturb the soul. Thus he seeks to prevent the soul from advancing. It is characteristic of the good spirit, however, to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and peace. This He does by making all easy, by removing all obstacles so that the soul goes forward in doing good.

RULE 3 SE 316 *Spiritual Consolation.* I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.

RULE 4 SE 317 *Spiritual Desolation.* I call desolation what is entirely the opposite of what is described in the third rule, as darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is the opposite of desolation, so the thoughts that spring from consolation are the opposite of those that spring from desolation.

RULE 5 SE 318 In time of desolation we should never make any change, but remain firm and constant in the resolution and decision which guided us the day before the desolation, or in the decision to which we adhered in the preceding consolation. For just as in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us, so in desolation the evil spirit guides and counsels. Following his counsels we can never find the way to a right decision.

RULE 6 SE 319 Though in desolation we must never change our former resolutions, it will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation. We can insist more upon prayer, upon meditation, and on much examination of ourselves. We can make an effort in a suitable way to do some penance.

RULE 7 SE 320 When one is in desolation, he should be mindful that God has left him to his natural powers to resist the different agitations and temptations of the enemy in order to try him. He can resist with the help of God, which always remains, though he may not clearly perceive it. For though God has taken from him the abundance of fervor and overflowing love and the intensity of His favors, nevertheless, he has sufficient grace for eternal salvation.

RULE 8 SE 321 When one is in desolation, he should strive to persevere in patience. This reacts against the vexations that have overtaken him. Let him consider, too, that consolation will soon return, and in the meantime, he must diligently use the means against desolation which have been given in the sixth rule.



RULE 9 SE 322 . The principal reasons why we suffer from desolation are three: The first is because we have been tepid and slothful or negligent in our exercises of piety, and so through our own fault spiritual consolation has been taken away from us. The second reason is because God wishes to try us, to see how much we are worth, and how much we will advance in His service and praise when left without the generous reward of consolations and signal favors. The third reason is because God wishes to give us a true knowledge and understanding of ourselves, so that we may have an intimate perception of the fact that it is not within our power to acquire and attain great devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation; but that all this is the gift and grace of God our Lord. God does not wish us to build on the property of another, to rise up in spirit in a certain pride and vainglory and attribute to ourselves the devotion and other effects of spiritual consolation.

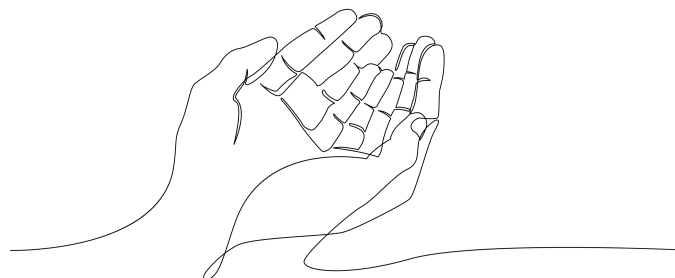
RULE 10 SE 323 When one enjoys consolation, let him consider how he will conduct himself during the time of ensuing desolation, and store up a supply of strength as defense against that day.

RULE 11 SE 324 He who enjoys consolation should take care to humble himself and lower himself as much as possible. Let him recall how little he is able to do in time of desolation, when he is left without such grace or consolation. On the other hand, one who suffers desolation should remember that by making use of the sufficient grace offered him, he can do much to withstand all his enemies. Let him find his strength in his Creator and Lord.

RULE 12 SE 325 The enemy conducts himself as a woman. He is a weakling before a show of strength, and a tyrant if he has his will. It is characteristic of a woman in a quarrel with a man to lose courage and take to flight if the man shows that he is determined and fearless. However, if the man loses courage and begins to flee, the anger, vindictiveness, and rage of the woman surge up and know no bounds. In the same way, the enemy becomes weak, loses courage, and turns to flight with his seductions as soon as one leading a spiritual life faces his temptations boldly, and does exactly the opposite of what he suggests. However, if one begins to be afraid and to lose courage in temptations, no wild animal on earth can be more fierce than the enemy of our human nature. He will carry out his perverse intentions with consummate malice.

RULE 13 SE 326 Our enemy may also be compared in his manner of acting to a false lover. He seeks to remain hidden and does not want to be discovered. If such a lover speaks with evil intention to the daughter of a good father, or to the wife of a good husband, and seeks to seduce them, he wants his words and solicitations kept secret. He is greatly displeased if his evil suggestions and depraved intentions are revealed by the daughter to her father, or by the wife to her husband. Then he readily sees he will not succeed in what he has begun. In the same way, when the enemy of our human nature tempts a just soul with his wiles and seductions, he earnestly desires that they be received secretly and kept secret. But if one manifests them to a confessor, or to some other spiritual person who understands his deceits and malicious designs, the evil one is very much vexed. For he knows that he cannot succeed in his evil undertaking, once his evident deceits have been revealed.

RULE 14 SE 327 The conduct of our enemy may also be compared to the tactics of a leader intent upon seizing and plundering a position he desires. A commander and leader of an army will encamp, explore the fortifications and defenses of the stronghold, and attack at the weakest point. In the same way, the enemy of our human nature investigates from every side all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral. Where he finds the defenses of eternal salvation weakest and most deficient, there he attacks and tries to take us by storm.



Spiritual Direction vs. Life Coaching / Therapy: Key Differences

Spiritual direction differs from life coaching and self-help by focusing on a deep, transformative relationship with the Divine rather than achieving specific, external goals, with directors acting as guides to discern God's presence through deep listening and reflective questions, not giving advice or creating action plans. While life coaching is task-oriented, focused on measurable outcomes and personal growth (ego-focused), spiritual direction emphasizes spiritual transformation, awakening, and becoming more attuned to God's guidance, often involving ancient practices and a less structured, more organic process of becoming who God calls you to be. In simple terms, the Life Coach asks, "How can I help you *get* somewhere?" (e.g., get that promotion, build that habit). Whereas the Spiritual Director asks, "Where is God *leading* you, and how can you follow?" (e.g., deeper faith, inner peace).

The Art of Spiritual Direction: A Guide to Your Inner Journey

Understanding Spiritual Direction

A Sacred Companion, Not a Problem-Solver
The director's role is to accompany you and help you listen for God.

The Goal is Union with God
The focus is on your spiritual transformation, not just making one big decision.

Spiritual Direction	Psychological Therapy	Life Coaching
 Focus: Relationship with God; faith journey.	 Focus: Mental health; emotional wounds.	 Focus: Achieving specific, tangible goals.
 Goal: Deepen spiritual awareness.	 Goal: Heal psychological issues.	 Goal: Create action plans for results.

The Practice of Discernment

Reading the Heart: Consolation & Desolation
These are spiritual states, not just emotions, that indicate movement toward or away from God.

Navigating Common Obstacles

Fear of making a wrong decision, others' opinions, or unworthiness are common hurdles.

Not All Delays are Obstacles
God sometimes uses waiting periods for healing, personal growth, or spiritual maturation.

Spiritual Direction:

Focus: Attending to the soul's inner workings, discerning God's presence, and growing in intimacy with the Divine.

Goal: Transformation, spiritual awakening, and union with God, not problem-solving.

Role of the Guide: Asks deep questions, listens, and helps you notice God's movement; does *not* give advice.

Approach: Often rooted in ancient traditions, less structured, organic, and focused on *being*.

When to Choose Spiritual Direction: You want to deepen your faith, explore calling, navigate spiritual dryness, or feel a pull toward contemplative practices and connecting with God.

Life Coaching / Self Help:

Focus: Setting and achieving specific, tangible goals in career, relationships, or personal development; future-focused results.

Goal: Measurable progress, overcoming limiting beliefs, and achieving desired outcomes.

Role of the Guide: Provides tools, accountability, and strategic plans to help you take action.

Approach: Method-driven, structured, and focused on *doing*.

When to Choose a Life Coach: You need help creating action plans, staying accountable for specific goals, or overcoming obstacles to achieve tangible results.

Spiritual direction and therapy, while both involve talking and support, have distinct focuses, with therapy addressing psychological issues, trauma, and behaviors for mental health, while spiritual direction centers on discerning God's presence, spiritual growth, and your relationship with the Divine, often involving prayer and faith exploration, not clinical problem-solving. A spiritual director guides your inner spiritual life, while a therapist helps heal emotional and mental wounds, often referring to a therapist when deep psychological issues arise.

Spiritual Direction

Focus: Relationship with God, spiritual growth, discernment, purpose, faith journey.

Goal: To notice God's movement and presence in your life, deepening your spiritual awareness.

Method: Soul companionship, prayer, reflection, contemplation.

Role of Director: A guide helping you explore your faith and spiritual experiences.

Psychological Therapy (Counseling/Psychotherapy)

Focus: Mental health, emotional well-being, behavior, relationships, trauma, anxiety, depression.

Goal: Healing psychological wounds, resolving conflicts, developing coping mechanisms, improving mental health.

Method: Diagnosis (if applicable), cognitive-behavioral techniques, processing emotions, treating disorders.

Role of Therapist: A licensed professional trained in psychological treatment and mental health.

Key Differences & When to Choose Which

Choose Spiritual Direction if: You're seeking deeper meaning, purpose, prayer guidance, or to understand your spiritual journey.

Choose Therapy if: You're struggling with anxiety, depression, trauma, difficult relationships, or need to process emotions and behaviors.

They Can Complement Each Other: Therapy can heal the underlying psychological issues that hinder spiritual growth, allowing a spiritual director to better guide your faith journey.

When to Seek Spiritual Direction: 6 Common Invitations

Navigate Big Life Decisions
Get help discerning between multiple good options for your career, vocation, or a move.

Walk Through Spiritual Dryness
Find a companion for times when prayer is difficult and faith feels distant.

Explore New Spiritual Practices
Discover fresh ways to pray when your usual methods feel stale or less fruitful.

Uncover Your True Self & Calling
Move beyond external expectations to live from the unique heart God is creating in you.

Find a Safe Space to Heal
Talk about struggles and questions in a confidential, non-judgmental environment.

You Simply Feel an Invitation
A curious desire to explore spiritual direction is a perfectly sufficient reason to begin.

Source: Brian Hohmeier, OCL

The Indispensable Role of the Holy Spirit

Why would Jesus hold back his disciples when they were so zealous to proclaim the Gospel? St. John Chrysostom provides the crucial insight: "the Lord would never send out His disciples without arming them first." The waiting period was not arbitrary; it was essential preparation.

Just as soldiers are armed before battle, the disciple must be armed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not an optional extra but is rather the essential "armament" for the mission. A crucial point of encouragement for you is this: the waiting is not for an absent God to arrive. You already have the Holy Spirit! God is at work in you, right now." The task is to become more sensitive to the Spirit who is already present and active.

These foundational truths—obedient waiting and reliance on the Spirit—prepare the soul for the deeply personal, experiential faith from which true discernment flows.

Common Misconceptions

The "Happiness Hinge": One of the most damaging misconceptions is the overwhelming belief that, "If I don't pick the right path, I'll never be really happy." This places unbearable pressure on a single decision. We must reframe God as a loving Father who "challenges and encourages (like a dad teaching his kid to ride a bike) but He is also gentle, loving, and, most importantly, always faithful," not one who would "banish us to a lifetime of misery" for an honest mistake.

Suffering as a Negative Sign: Many wrongly believe any struggle is a sign they are on the wrong path. But the fact that something 'is hard,' is not the same thing as, 'it's wrong.' Formation for both priesthood and marriage are "full of suffering." However, this requires careful discernment. While suffering is a normal part of formation in every vocation, we must also recognize that at times, the suffering being experienced *can be* a sign of being on the wrong vocational path. It is a signal that must be prayerfully examined, not dismissed.

Foundations of Discernment

Vigilant Waiting: The first lesson in discernment is often the most difficult: learning to wait. This is not idleness, but a prayerful and profoundly obedient waiting. In the Acts of the Apostles, the resurrected Christ gives his disciples a "simple but strong command": he "ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait..." (Acts 1:4). This command contains a wealth of wisdom for the soul in discernment.

Obedience in the Face of Fear: The disciples were ordered to wait in Jerusalem, "the place where Jesus was killed." From a human perspective, this was the most dangerous place to begin their mission. Yet, their obedience required them to remain in the very place of their fear. God's call often requires us to trust His command over our own strategic thinking.

Waiting Characterized by Prayer: The disciples' waiting was not empty. We are told, "they continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14). This active waiting is a model for discernment. It is a time for intensifying one's relationship with God, not for idly anticipating a sign.

Waiting Without a Timeline: Christ never told the disciples when the Holy Spirit would come, "yet the disciples remain vigilant." They had to forsake their "own ideas of how to unite themselves to God's Will" and patiently "tarry-wait-for the fulfillment of God's Promise."

The Question of Obedience

This experience of divine love naturally leads to the foundational question of obedience. The discernment process ultimately crystallizes into a choice about one's primary focus: "this world, or Life in Christ." A heart touched by the fire of Christ's love desires to respond in kind. Therefore, the key questions I will help you to explore ask are not just about large life decisions, but about the posture of your heart in daily life.

- "Are you sensitive to the commands of the Lord... even the ones that may seem small or insignificant?"
- "Am I willing to not only seek the Lord...but to obey Him?"

A heart transformed by love and committed to obedience is the necessary ground for navigating the practical obstacles that inevitably arise in the discernment process.

DISCERNING THE WAIT: GOD'S TIMING VS. OUR OBSTACLES

When facing a delay in spiritual discernment, it is crucial to distinguish whether the pause is a human obstacle born from fear or a divine period meant for preparation and growth.

FEAR OF JUDGMENT

Worrying about what friends and family will think can paralyze your decision-making process.



SELF-IMPOSED WAITING: OBSTACLES TO DISCERNMENT



FIXATION ON SACRIFICE

Focusing excessively on "what you have to give up" overshadows what you will gain.



FEELING UNWORTHY

Believing you are not "holy enough" is a common but incorrect roadblock to moving forward.



TIME IS NEEDED FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

God may be waiting for important personal, emotional, or psychological development to occur first.



GOD-ORDAINED WAITING: DIVINE PAUSES FOR GROWTH



A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING IS REQUIRED

You may need more time to truly comprehend key concepts like celibacy or suffering.



YOUR SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR COUNSELS PATIENCE

A wise spiritual director may intentionally slow your process down for your own benefit.

Obstacles in Discernment

Another primary role for me is to help you identify and overcome common impediments to clarity. It is crucial to teach that these obstacles often arise not from God but from internal fears, external pressures, and procedural missteps. Distinguishing these obstacles from the purposeful waiting that God Himself ordains is a key task of spiritual direction.

Fear-Based Impediments

Fear of a Wrong Decision: Many are paralyzed by this thought. Be assured that if you are praying daily, striving for virtue, and remaining close to the Sacraments, you will be guided. It is also important to acknowledge the struggle: listening to God is difficult because God doesn't normally speak with an audible voice. We have many 'voices and influences that we must sort out.

Fear of Others' Opinions: The natural desire for acceptance from parents and friends can become a powerful obstacle when they might not understand or completely accept your decision. You must become able to ground your identity in Christ rather than in the approval of others.

Fear of Sacrifice: It is common to focus excessively on the sacrifices or what must be given up. My role is to help you reframe the conversation around the immense love and joy being offered, rather than focusing solely on the cost.

Fear of Unworthiness: A pervasive obstacle is the feeling of not being worthy or holy enough for the path to which God is calling you. This often stems, for example, from viewing priests or religious as somehow more angelic than human, or marriage and family in its ideal perfections. We must not forget that God calls sinners and that holiness is the goal of the journey, not the prerequisite for starting it.

Interpreting God Permitted Delays

It is a moment of grace when a director helps you to distinguish between a frustrating obstacle and a necessary, God-ordained period of waiting. Sometimes you might feel that God is holding you back, but with spiritual guidance you might just discover that God is using this delay for your growth. The following are common reasons God may ask someone to wait.

Need for Personal Development: God may require a season of waiting to address specific "personal development issues that need attention." This is an act of loving providence, preparing a sound foundation.

Healing from Deeper Wounds: Sometimes, deep / serious emotional or psychological issues which are contrary to personal growth and holiness must be addressed. God's desire for the person's healing precedes the desire for them to enter a specific state of life. This delay is a gift of mercy.

Maturity in Understanding Celibacy: For those discerning priesthood or religious life, a delay may be necessary to cultivate a deeper need to understand celibacy. This is a spiritual maturation in understanding the gift of a life given entirely to God.

Correcting Spiritual Pride: You may believe religious life is the "holiest way" and marriage an "easy way out." God may ask you to wait until you understand the truth: the best vocation for you is the one to which God is calling you. God can use marriage to make you holier than if you follow your own wisdom into the celibate calling.

Guidance from a Wise Director: Providentially, having a spiritual director who "slows you down" can be a clear sign of God's own pacing. A director who counsels patience is often an instrument of God, protecting you from impulsiveness.

Understanding these divine purposes for waiting moves the discernment process from frustration to fruitful cooperation, requiring more advanced spiritual tools to navigate accurately.

Cultivating the Heart of a Disciple

The disciples did not follow Jesus because of abstract theological arguments. While they were eventually taught about His two natures, that is not what initially moved them. They followed Him because they experienced the fire of His Love. This experience was the catalyst that made them recognize the need for change in themselves—a change made through the fire of purifying love.

My primary task is to help you shift your focus toward this experiential reality. The central engine of discernment is not "What should I do?" but rather, "How do I experience this purifying love of God in my life? When a person begins to *Live from Communion to Communion-to live for that very union with our Lord*, their discernment begins to clarify not as a choice to be made, but as a response to a love already received.

As you integrate spiritual discernment with your pilgrim journey, you will be guided from what we might call purely intellectual understanding to the internal posture required for true discernment. The call of God is not an abstract puzzle to be solved but an invitation into a deeper relationship.



Father Blair
DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE, FL

Peace doesn't just happen, it's made!

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for[a] those who make peace." James 3:17-18

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