

# Torrey Conference 2012, Discernment

## By Michele Sanchez

Announcer:

All right, well, welcome to the Thursday afternoon workshop here in Kraal. You know what, our speaker today doesn't need much of an introduction. She's been speaking in the two sessions earlier today. I've been struck by her, her honesty and just her wisdom. But the way she talks about God is not about a God, just kind of in a principled way, not just about God. And this is what God says in the Bible, but in a way that she understands who God is in a very personal way. And she's been trying to explain that to us. And I just really appreciate her heart coming here from Boston, Massachusetts, to share her wisdom with us today. We're going to be talking about discernment about how to understand what God's presence is and what his will is for our lives. So let's welcome Michelle Michelle Sanchez.

Sanchez:

Hi, everyone. Welcome to my wonderful seminar. You know, when I was preparing for the workshop that they asked me to do, I had a very different thing in mind. When I heard the word workshop, I thought it would be a small group.

I thought you'd like to be around round tables and all of that, because for me, a workshop means that I'm not going to be doing all the work, but like, we're all going to be working together and

not sitting you talking at you the whole time. But you're also going to be talking to me and to one another. So yesterday I was in Sutherland and I decided that I was going to try that I was still going to try to be interactive. And I was not sure how it was going to turn out, but it worked out pretty well. I was really happy with it and I got good feedback from students. I still did most of the exercises I was planning to do. I still heard from the audience how the audience talk to each other. So that's my plan. My plan for today is still to try that, even though it's a pretty large group. But I do want to recommend that you find yourself a conversation partner.

OK, so there's several different times that I'm going to stop in the presentation and just ask you to discuss with your neighbor. So make sure that you have someone to talk with. And if you don't, I mean, pick that person now. Right. And so if you don't have somebody to talk to, then please find someone, OK? Find someone else. Are there any like any people that are just you need somebody to talk to, please raise your hand and then just find another seat. Because I think that's something that happened yesterday, I didn't do that in the beginning, and because I didn't do that, I think there might have been some people in the audience that that weren't actually talking to anybody the whole time. So so if you need a conversation partner again, raise your hand. Anybody anybody still need somebody need to match. OK, good. I hope that will work for our time together.

So we're going to be talking about one of my favorite topics, which is discernment, it was not always one of my favorite topics. And I look forward to telling you a little bit more about how it

became that before I do, I like I always like to introduce myself in the context of my family. And this picture is a little smushed. We're like really disproportionate there. But anyway, that is my husband Mickey, that I've been married to for ten years. He works at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and my son, who is now about two and a half. And we have big plans for him to take over the world for Jesus. So far, it is all going according to plan. So I'm really happy about that. If you would, let's open in prayer for our session today.

Father, thank you so much for calling us into your work, your mission of redeeming this world, we want nothing more than to make good choices and to discern where you are at so that we can join you. Thank you for all the ways that you are going to use this time and work in and through us for your glory. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen. All right, so let's start by talking about why discernment, why is this an important topic? So in order to successfully follow Christ and accomplish his mission, I feel that there are two critical activities that we need to be able to do. We need to find God and then we need to follow God.

I think a lot of the Christian life, a lot of abiding in Christ, as we talked about today, or being a contemplative in action, all that stuff. I'm really actually honing in on even more in this time together. Find God and follow God. That is discernment. Discernment is also the point at which prayer and action meet, and so that, by the way, is a very important insight because neither one of those activities is complete by itself. Prayer by itself is not much use and action by itself is also not much use to the Lord. But there is something about that intersection between the two

that is the real sweet spot that is discernment where prayer and action meet. And I think that there are few topics more important than this one.

If we want to follow Christ and make a difference in the world, if we really want to be missional. So I want to actually cover two big topics regarding discernment today, and in the first part, I'm going to talk a little bit more traditionally about discernment and some perspectives on discerning the will of God. And in this first section, the focus will be a little bit more on techniques, you know, like like strategies or techniques for discerning God's will. And those are very, very helpful to have and may be what a lot of you were looking for when you came to this workshop.

However, I also want to move beyond that in the second part and talk about discernment as a lifestyle discernment, not as something that you just do when you have a decision to make, but discernment as a way of life and as a relationship with God. So this is a maybe a new thing for some of you, but a very important thing to graduate beyond just techniques to that relationship and the lifestyle way of thinking of discernment to start us out.

I would like you to discuss this question with your conversation, partner, and that is, what aspects of decision-making do you look forward to and which aspects do you dread? OK, so

that's the question and I'll give you about a minute. So try to answer succinctly and hear from each person within that time. Go ahead. All right, please hear from the other person if you haven't yet. All right, wrap it up. And I would love to hear from a few of you about how you answered this question, what do you look forward to and what do you dread about decision making?

[inaudible audience comment]

All right. The fear of being wrong. Pretty big fear. OK. Yeah, OK, so she said the peace that comes after making a decision, just being done with it and feeling the peace of that. Huh, good. All right, so we don't like making the decision, but but, you know, it's gratifying to follow through with it and act good, maybe one more. Yes. OK, so I actually like decision making, but actually the follow through, not so much. Yeah. OK, good. Well, your answer is for the most part, mirror the experience that we had yesterday in our workshop. Two, that most people, the way that they answer this question and actually completely skip the first question and just talk about what they don't like regarding decision making.

The first answer I got with this question yesterday was, yeah, we decided that we don't like anything about decision making. So. All right. But that's sort of what I suspected. And that's

because, you know, I'm with you. For most people, there is really a lot to dread about decision making. Now, I will say, OK, on the positive, right. Usually when it's time to make a decision, it's an important time of your life. It's an exciting time of your life. Right. One of the reasons we like to watch movies is because basically we're seeing people make a series of critical decisions. And it's really fun to kind of watch how they do that and then see the aftermath of all of those decisions. It's exciting, right? And usually signifies a big change in your life that could happen or something, you know, an opportunity that you have at the same time. Right. There is a lot of fear. What if you make the wrong decision? You know what, if you're plagued by regret, you know, for a long time after that, what if you disappoint yourself or God or others? Um, you know, so those are all things, I think, which tend to make decision making and discernment, something that people do not look forward to.

However, I would like to suggest a different way to approach discernment. So just a little bit about how I came to love this topic. So when I was in seminary, there were a number of decisions I had to make. I won't go too much into that now because I don't have time. But there were just a number of decisions that I needed to make that I knew were going to determine the course of my ministry and my life, really. And I was absolutely paralyzed by those decisions. Just paralyzed. Some of them, by the way, were theological decisions, right? I mean, I had to decide what denomination to join and all these different things. And it was just so much burden and kind of stress around that. And so it I just became paralyzed. It became a kind of a dark time, like just trying to figure out. And some of you might relate to me. I am very much a perfectionist, you know, and I just want to get all the answers right and every decision I need to make, I want

to get it right. And if I don't, I just feel this guilt. You know, it's a terrible burden. So so discernment was really not fun for me, especially in seminary.

But at a certain point, a couple of things happened. Um, I began to despair of my ability to make perfect decisions. None of us can do that just right. And I begin to realize, hey, this is maybe this is not about the decision. Maybe this is more about Christ and about knowing Him. And around that same time, I took a course which was about the spiritual classics. And so I had to read St. Ignatius of Loyola, who became a very good friend of mine. He out of all the saints that I know, wrote the most and focused the most on this issue of discernment. And I had to write a paper kind of summarizing what I took from him. And I want to read you the first line from from this paper. My professor liked it so much that when she was handing back the papers, she said, OK, I need to read this first line from Michelle's papers is great. Right. And so then she read it to the whole class.

And this is what it said: Discernment is not an occasion for spiritual panic, but an opportunity for spiritual practice. And the whole paper was essentially expanding upon that idea, and it's a concept which has marked my life since then and really changed my approach to discernment. Essentially, what I learned from St. Ignatius and just along the hard route of life was that it is possible in discernment to fixate so much on the decision that we miss God. We just miss him because we think it's about the decision when actually it's about growing closer to God. Times of discernment are times when you are, um, you know, it can be cloudy, confusing, can feel a little

dark, you're not sure where to go. That is the perfect occasion for you to take hold of God's hand. And to grow closer to him in a new way, those are the times where faith can deepen, right? So actually you can look forward to discernment not just as a holy God, I've got to get this thing right.

But you know what? This is a time that I can grow closer to God no matter what I decide. Right. What a freeing concept. So so this is the this is the general approach. I want us to keep in mind today as we talk about discernment. And I will expand a little bit more on it later. But remember this concept, it will bless you, I promise, next time you have a big decision to make. So, as I said, we're going to focus first on. Sort of the techniques, OK? And as I do this, I want to tell you about this outstanding resource. It's a book called How Then Should We Choose? And it talks about three views on God's will and decision making. This is this book was also a very, very helpful tool for me in my journey. And part of that is because, you know, you hear a lot from different people about how to make Christian decisions. Right. And how to make godly decisions. But a lot of the advice you hear conflicts. Right. And then it's so it's hard to distinguish, well, what's the difference? And is are some of these people wrong or some people right? It's another decision you have to make. Great.

But so what was really helpful for me was to learn kind of very clearly, OK, there are different perspectives on how to do this. And maybe what we should learn how to do is take the best from each. All right. So here are the three major views for how to make decisions. The specific will



view the wisdom of you and the relationship view. Now, these are all, in my opinion, valid Christian ways to make decisions. And by the way, the wisdom view is at the top of the triangle there. But that doesn't mean it's on the top or it's the best way. It's just the way that we've laid it out.

But again, understanding that there are three perspectives was very helpful to me. So let's go through each of these. And as I describe them, something that I'm going to ask you to discuss with your your partner there is how have you made a decision like this before? Because I'm pretty sure that we've used all three of these in our lives. So the first one specific world view, I think many people think this is the most common evangelical view, the specific will view says God has a specific plan for each of our lives and wants to communicate that to us.

Discernment is learning how to hear God communicate that specific plan for us.

And in this view, God communicates his will about that specific idea that he has for you through specific impressions like peace or disease or hunch or coincidences or through signs of various kinds, of course, impressions can also come through more common means, like scripture, prayer circumstances or other believers, but in all cases are helping to point you toward a specific thing that God wants you to do.

Here is a quote from someone who holds this view, OK? They say it makes sense for God's sovereign will over all things to entail specific plans for each of us within that overall plan. God knows everything and controls everything. Scripture states that he knows the number of hairs on one's head and that a single sparrow cannot fall to the ground. Apart from the Heavenly Father's attention, that seems quite specific. There are biblical examples of God directing individuals very specifically, thus it seems that the all knowing and all powerful God of the whole universe would have plans for each part and each person of the universe.

As one supporter of the specific will the remarks, God doesn't want us to be confused. He wants us to know his plan for our lives, and he'll use whatever means possible to communicate that specific will. Your job basically is to be a detective and figure out what it is.

OK, so again, I would like you to to discuss this with your partner. Think about a time when you or maybe someone that, you know, made a decision this way through kind of a hunch and impression, a sign of feeling things kind of along along those lines. A coincidence. But you felt pretty certain that God was saying this is the specific thing that I want you to do. Right. And then you did it. OK, so go ahead and tuck.

All right, please hear from the other person if you haven't yet. All right. So I'd love to hear a couple of examples of how you or someone, you know, made a decision this way. Mm hmm. OK, so they talked about coming to Biola through a variety of different kind of impressions that they were getting, coincidences that happened, they just felt like this is where God has me to come. Thank you. Another one. Yes.

So his answer was, yeah, I don't really do this very much, you know, I don't see those flashing signs. I wish I did, but I don't. Thank you. Anybody else want to share one? Yes. Um. OK, that's great. So we have someone who at emmissions conference felt like God was saying to her, you need to change your major. And actually, she didn't really want to do that, you know, but but felt like that's what God was saying and now has turned us.

It's turned out OK.

So very good. Thank you. A personal example for me was when I joined the Ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ and left Goldman Sachs to do that.

I really I really I was making so much money and the idea of raising money was crazy to me, but I just wanted to make sure I at least made the call to ask the question. And when I did and they described the job to me about international student ministry at NYU, they had no idea. They didn't really know about anything that had happened with me, but I just knew, oh, my God. Like that has my name written all over it.

It is absolutely the specific thing that God wants me to do. I felt very convicted by that. And so that's why I did it. And I think that there's many examples of specific will in the Bible as well. You know, every time there's a spectacular call like God's calling of Moses or Jesus appearing to Paul and telling him he'd be a light to the Gentiles, that's pretty specific stuff there. And God calling people to do his will. So I think we see it in the scriptures.

The second view is the wisdom view. And in this view, the idea is that God treats Christians as adults and gives us great freedom to make choices. Discernment means using wisdom to make decisions within the bounds of God's moral law. All right. And for this one, I'd say there's about you know, there's something like four key principles. The first one is where God commands. We must obey. So if you're wondering about something, whether you should do it or not, first looked at the scriptures, is it there? If so, do you know there is your answer. Where there is no command, God gives us freedom and responsibility to choose. God also gives us wisdom to choose.

And then when we have chosen what is moral and wise, we must trust the sovereign God to work all the details together for good. OK, so that's kind of standard wisdom view. And by the way, as I'm going through these and even giving the examples, just keep in mind some people hold these views pretty in a pretty extreme way so that this is the only way you can make decisions. So I feel like this this quote here is an example of that sort of view. So this author says, we must face the fact, how do you know the will of God and making lives decisions? That is not a biblical question. The Bible never tells us to ask it. The Bible. The Bible never gives us direction in answering it. And the pursuit of some personalized version of the will of God often leads us toward disobedience.

It's pretty strong stuff, right? When we find ourselves facing the tough choices in life those day in, day out decisions that we that make up the very fabric of our existence, we shouldn't seek special messages from God. Instead, we should ask how do we develop the skills necessary to make wise and prudent choices?

OK, so this is the wisdom view in its most extreme form, it says don't seek, you know, signs from God or things like hunches and stuff. Just use your brain. God gave you a brain. So use it and use the wisdom that you have acquired and other people have acquired and make decisions based on that. So I want you to think of an example when you made a decision in this way. And

what I mean by that is what we're maybe you didn't actually devote a ton of time to praying about it or something, but but you just you thought about it, maybe got some advice and you made the decision. OK, so go ahead, share. All right here from that other person, please, if you haven't. All right, I'd love to hear from you time when you made a decision mainly just based on wisdom or maybe some good advice.

OK. All right, so you kind of did have these, but the idea being deciding where to go to grad school, you know, you really tried to use resources like making lists of pros and cons and, you know, kind of rationally thinking about it. And you came out to a place which did match the hunch you had, but that that's what you did.

Another example. I know everybody was talking, so you said something. Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah, good. So she talked about dropping out of cheerleading at Biola, that was a hard decision to make for lots of reasons, but got some counsel from her mom thought about it and made a decision. She did also say that in praying after she she's felt like that was affirmed, but that's how she made the decision.

Good. Thank you. So I think for me, an example would be when I went to seminary and I chose Gordon Cornwell specifically, I don't really remember praying a ton about it. I felt like in

conversations with my husband and I really finally choosing that couple of things that that we thought about were, hey, we I think we want to end up doing ministry here in New England. We feel called to New England. So Gordon Cornwall's in New England, probably a good idea to get educated in the same place. They gave us some really nice scholarships to go. Our pastor recommended the school highly. He had also gone to Gordon Cornwall. So it just seemed logically to make a lot of sense. And so we decided to go to Gordon Cornwall.

Um, in the Bible I think that we see this view in many places as well. I think the Book of Proverbs is one which wisdom view proponent's constantly refer to. You know, God has given us lots of principles, good principles for wisdom. And we are to take those principles and make our decisions for him and seek counsel from others again. OK, so then the third view is the relationship view. Now, this one is a little harder maybe to wrap your mind around, but I'll try to do my best to explain. God's will is primarily for us to cultivate a strong love relationship with God, out of which good choices can naturally arise.

Discernment, therefore, is more than just a tool to attain information. It is a way of life in which one actively seeks to align one's heart with God and God's purposes during decision making.

Those who are mature in discernment view all decision making as an opportunity to grow closer to God and to glorify God. So I think someone who holds this view essentially would say, you know, the actual thing you decide doesn't matter all that much to God. What matters to him is how you go about it, how you go about making the decision.

Here is one person's perspective on that, Simon Chan said the question of discernment cannot be dealt with apart from the question of spirituality. Knowing God's will is not just a matter of grasping a piece of information. It has to do with our whole attitude toward God and ourselves, with an ongoing relationship with God and loving him, it requires practical wisdom that no amount of formal study can impart. That is a kind of spiritual sensitivity that comes with long experience. That's the more important issue in discernment.

This is a very important line. The more important issue in discernment has to do with the process of discerning rather than the products of the activity. The how is far more important than the what when it comes to the question of God's will, so someone who holds this view would say, love God and do what you like. That's that's attributed to Saint Augustine, by the way. You want to figure out how to make a decision. Great. Align your heart with the Lord. Love God, make sure your heart's good, and then you'll make good decisions. God will be happy with whatever you decide. OK, so that's the relationship view.

The question is, can you think of example, when you or someone else made a decision in this way and to help you a little bit more with that, it might have been a time where you said, you know what, I'm not really sure what to do, but but my heart, I don't feel like I'm in the right place



with God. So I think I just need to go, like, just spend some time with God, like pray kind of get my heart in the right place as I consider this. And that's kind of what really shaped, you know, how you approach the decision is through your relationship with God. All right, so please share with one another [pause]. All right, please hear from the other person [pause]. All right, so I realize I'm not giving you much time at all to think or to talk, but if you were able to come up with something for this one, I would love to to hear a few examples. Yes?

[Inaudible audience comment]. Oh, that's interesting. OK, so that's a kind of very extreme way of applying this. OK, so her example as well, I ran away from home, you know, because I think I want to get away from my parents. But what I told myself was, no, it's because I want to spend time with God and be in solitude and whatever. But really, she just wanted to get away from her parents. So that's a that's a very unique application here. Others?

[Inaudible audience comment]. Good. So she talked about her relationship with her sister, where she's always asking the question, how do I interact with her in this situation or in that situation? And she got some good advice to think about what God would do, the character of God and how he would interact or engage in that situation. So so you're thinking really about God and your relationship kind of to him as you're interacting with your sister to figure out the right thing to do at any given time?

It's good. There was a hand right here. Do you like to give your example? Yeah. Yeah, so she talks about where to go to college and really felt like kind of anguished over that, I'm going to mess up God's plan. She spent a lot of time praying on her knees, all that kind of stuff. But then she got some good advice that it's impossible to thwart God's plan and that the spirit is in her and they're going to make the decision together. And so really in relationship with God, she made the decision to come here, I am assuming.

Yes, good. So one quick example from my life was actually preparing for these seminars and these talks that I'm doing here at Biola. So I was really thrilled for the opportunity to come, but also really apprehensive because I am like a super busy working mom right now. And I just thought, why am I gonna have the time to write any of these things and how am I going to come? What am I going to talk about? What am I what am I gonna really focus on? And so that was a decision that I needed to make. But I got some I got a really, really great piece of advice from a mentor.

And when I was talking about, OK, how how to prepare for this time and she said, you know, it sounds like you just need to prepare by going in, like, connecting with God. You sound really frantic, so like go and spend some time with God and the point was not go and spend time with God so that he can tell you what to do. You know, it was just just just you're not at peace. I spent

some time with the Lord, you know, just just chill. That was great advice for me in preparing for these seminars, because I felt like, as I really did kind of align my heart with God and just get back in the right place with him kind of spontaneously. I knew what I wanted to to share with you all. So that's an example of when I use that that that technique, I suppose.

So I think that we also see this in the scriptures. An example would be Philippians, Chapter one where where Paul writes, 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 for the day of Christ. And this is a unique connection that Paul is making between the growth of our love and the growth in our ability to discern things that we wouldn't necessarily think connect but do.

All right, so we've taken a look at all three of these views, and perhaps the best thing to do is not to demonize any of them or to stick too closely to any one to the exclusion of the others. Perhaps what we want to do is try to take the best from each of these views. And whatever way you feel makes the most sense, for example, in specific will to remain open to God's supernatural communication, to him communicating through science or through coincidences or impressions that he gives you or feelings try to remain open to. That wisdom is to use rational decision making tools and resources.

This young lady gave a good example. She had a hunch, but also decided to use some tools like pros and cons, list some things to figure out what to do. So that's helpful. Very helpful to do as well, especially for big decisions and for from the relationship view to pay attention to your heart as you're making a decision. And this is really key, kind of like, you know, sharing and preparing for these talks. Often when we are discerning our heart, we are like panicked for some reason or just really out of sorts internally.

And the question we have to ask ourselves is why? You know, what is up with that? What is it that you're worshipping in a way more than God? What are you so afraid of? You know, identify the idol that's that's getting in the way of your thinking clearly and hearing from God, perhaps, um, focus on the heart, getting that right in the right place, trying to start out at a place of peace because you're confident in the grace and the love of God. That's the great principle to work with as well.

Now, after having said all that and very diplomatically arguing for all three, I do want to say that if I had to kind of say, OK, well, what which one of you should take primacy for believers? I would argue that that would be the relationship view, again, not to the exclusion of the others. But there is a way in which our relationship with God clearly grounds everything else. For

example, if your relationship with God is good, you will be wiser over time. Wisdom will be built in you. And as scriptures say, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Right. And if you know the Lord, if you have a good relationship with the Lord, if you're familiar with the way that he works, then you'll be more able to recognize him when he speaks. When you know that that sign comes with coincidence or the impression it's like you'll you'll be able to sniff God out, you know, because you know him. You're in relationship with him and you know what he looks like, what he smells like, what he sounds like. You'll be able to tell. Right. So, so. And then, of course, you know, identifying any idols of your heart, that's pretty basic.

I won't even go into that. But but for for all of these, I think our relationship with God is pretty, pretty critical and that this is going to lead us into our next section. So for time sake, I'm going to I'm not going to actually cover everything on these next slides. But just to say briefly, as you're trying to make then a particular decision, you want to draw from all of these for wisdom. Again, rational consideration of options and your obstacles.

For number two, I have their combined relationship and specific will extend time for prayer and reflection. Make sure that you take some time out, stop running around being distracted by many things, you know, like Mary and just sit at the feet of Jesus. He may say something specific to

you or it may just be an opportunity to to clear your mind and your heart and get it right with the Lord. So you need that time. I recommend.

And then finally, community provides a place of accountability and also affirmation if you are trying to make a decision, but everybody in your community thinks you're making the wrong one, that's big. You know, that's something to really pay attention to. We are part of the body of Christ, and so we lean also on our community to help us make decisions. OK, so, yes, I said I'm going to skip through these. Um, and now we're going to talk about the the expansion of this topic of discernment, right. To something which is not just something that we do to gather information, but a lifestyle and an ability to discern the presence of God. And as we do that, again, I want to ask the question, why discern?

You know, and the answer is because we want to change the world. If we want to change the world and make a difference with our lives, we need to move from technique to lifestyle, from technique to knowing God, being able to find and follow God. And it's really exciting for me to share this with you today, because I think when you realize this discernment shifts from being a burden and something to be afraid of because you're not trying to figure out everything what you need to do for God, but it then shifts to recognizing that God is already at work. And I just need to notice and I just need to join him. It's a totally different posture and I think it becomes one of adventure, right?

Finding God following God, the world coming aflame with the glory of God because you begin to see his presence in action everywhere. I think this is what Jesus's life was like to not, you know, stopping with every decision and trying to figure out what to do, but it became very natural for him a lifestyle of seeing what his father was up to. So I want to ask you this question, I want to start with a little exercise in finding God and what you think about a time from this past week where you felt God's presence or you saw God at work right a time.

Anything could be anything but a time from this past week where you felt God's presence or saw God at work. Please share that with another person. Please switch to the other person if you haven't. All right. This time, I'm not going to ask you to share about those experiences, but I hope you all came up with something. And the question I have just a rhetorical question, but the question I would ask you to think through is how did you answer that question?

How did you answer it, like how did you say or decide that, yeah, that was God, that was at work there? I want to propose that most of us already know how to find God. We already know how to do it because we have the Holy Spirit. And so often it just comes down to asking the questions, asking ourselves the right questions. I think often it just comes down to looking. That's it, right? Just to looking, just look back and see where it was.

God. And God will help you, you have the spirit and he longs for you to see him. He is active and ever wanting to be found by you. So, you know you know how to do it. You just need to exercise the muscle. If we want to change the world for God, we want to start asking questions not only about how God is generally present, but also how God is on the move and mission, how he's present in the brokenness of the world and trying to redeem it.

This is a quote that I mentioned earlier and I really love if we are to be constantly engaged in God's world, we need to be constantly in touch with God. This means that we need to cultivate a reflective spirit in the midst of our busy lives, people who are both actively attentive to God and promptly responsive to his leading. In other words, people who find and follow God, actively attentive to him and promptly responsive to his leading, and I do believe that Jesus is our perfect model for this, who said that he could do nothing by himself, but only what he sees the father doing?

Because whatever the father does, the son also does. So I am proposing that Jesus lead a lifestyle of discernment and that for him it became a very, very natural. He didn't have to stop and figure out things. You know, every time there was a decision to be made, it became more of a natural outgrowth of his relationship with God and his ability to see God around him. And I think ultimately that's what God wants for you. I want to share a few insights from St. Ignatius of



Loyola, who I mentioned before, he was a Spanish saint and mystic and founder of the Jesuit Monastic Order, and arguably, he wrote the most famous Christian work on discernment entitled *Spiritual Exercises*. So for Ignatius and his friends, finding God often meant noticing where God was already active in their lives. And we can know as God not only in the peak moments and the obvious places. But also in the daily events where God's presence is often overlooked.

God is always inviting us to encounter the transcendent in the everyday. The key is noticing, OK? So all of this, I think, is just a general Christian principle, but St. Ignatius really focused in on it and made it accessible for us, I think. And another way in which he made it accessible was by designing a way of praying. And I hear that this is something that happens at Biola. And at the end, they're going to tell you a little bit more about where and when it happens.

You can gather in community for this, but something that we call the examine the prayer of examine the daily examine is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern his direction. For us to examine is an ancient practice in the church that can help us see God's hand at work in our whole experience.

And so something that is important to recognize, you know, I think people have heard some of what I've had to share the last few days and ask me afterward, OK, well, but how do I really see

God? You know, how do I do it? And again, I think a lot of it is you already know how to do it. You already know. You just have to kind of calm down and think about where do you see God?

But then also, I think a lot of it is kind of practice. We're not used to looking around for God. We're used to, you know, being distracted, thinking about lots of different things, you know, or an iPhone or on Facebook, you know, whatever. We're just, like, totally scattered. We're not really used to trying to notice where God is at. And so the prayer of examine helps us through finding God and reverse looking back, which is a great way to practice that muscle.

You know, there's that place in the scriptures where Moses asks to see God, God's face. Right. And God responds by saying, well, you can't see my face, but you can see me as I pass by. You know, you could see my back. And I think that's a fun kind of way of thinking about what the examine is, that God is often very easy to see in reverse. And I think as we do that, more and more and more, we'll be able to see him in front of us right now in the present moment.

So I want us to actually practice the examine together, and so I'm going to tell you what those steps are. And by the way, there are actually many ways of practicing the examine. And so I'm just going to I'm going to have one here. But there are many ways that you can do this. So before you begin, as you should in all prayer, remind yourself that you're in God's presence and ask God

to help you with your prayer. And then you begin with gratitude, by the way, I'm going to ask you to do this with yesterday. I don't know about you. It's hard for me to remember even like a day before. But as I'm talking, just think like what happened yesterday, what happened yesterday. So you want to recall anything from the day in which you are especially grateful and give thanks. You know what? Actually, it's five o'clock. No, no, no, do this with today, do this is today, because yesterday I thought it made more sense to talk about the day before.

But I think actually a lot of your day has already passed. Do it with today. So gratitude first and then second is review. Recall the events of the day from start to finish, notice where you felt God's presence and where you accepted or turned away from any invitations to grow in love. These two steps, I would say, fall into that finding God category mostly.

Yeah, sorry, that's the second one review. And then the next steps focus on following God, the first one is sorrow, recall any actions for which you are sorry. And then ask for God's forgiveness. And by the way, this doesn't have to be something, you know, big or kind of egregious.

It could even just be a way that you thought, you know, negatively or judgmentally or something like that. It could be very, very internal. And then finally, Grace, ask God for the grace you need for the next day, for tomorrow and the ability to see his presence even more clearly.

OK, so as I said, I would like to give you just a few moments to go through these and I will walk you through them. So we'll start from the beginning. So first, remind yourself that you are even now in the presence of God. And ask God to help you with this prayer. Now, recall anything from today for which you are especially grateful and give thanks for that. Now, recall the events of your day from the beginning until now.

And just notice, where did you feel God's presence? Where did you accept? An invitation to love or turn away from that invitation to love. Now, recall any actions for which you are sorry. And ask God's forgiveness. And then finally. Ask God for the grace you need for the next day, for tomorrow. And the ability to follow him. To see his presence more clearly. Now, I would just like to give you, um, just a minute to share anything that you would like to say about that experience, obviously there's many things that are private about that that you wouldn't want to share.

But, um, but with your partner, just talk about maybe some insight that you got away, that you saw God, um, just how the experience was for you. Anything that you like. I want to give you a little time to process that together. So go ahead. Please hear from the other person if you haven't yet. So I would like to summarize where we've been today and also leave you with a very important final point, OK?

So the first, if we want to effectively follow Christ and do his work in the world, we must gain a missional vision. We need to learn to see God, in other words, we need discernment.

Discernment, though, it's not just about techniques to figure out God's will, although those are extremely helpful to have. I don't want to downplay them in any way. They're good to have and good to practice. At the same time, discernment is more about your entire relationship with God, and I think like Christ, it should become an entire lifestyle in which you learn to find and follow God in all things, and you can grow in that.

But just practicing a little bit every day. And I know that when I've started to practice this, um, now it just becomes so much easier as I use that phrase that the world becomes aflame with the glory of God. It really is true that I am so much more easily now able to see God just in the moment. And it's beautiful, really, but it comes through practice. And so I encourage you to practice a final important point I actually want to make.

And I didn't I didn't share this yesterday, but this is something that in conversation afterward, um, I realized was actually a wonderful, wonderful point to make. And it was a conversation with Todd Todd Pickett, who's here at Biola, and he said that in his conversations with students, he's often noticed something. And I think this this is right on often. Um, a lot of our fear about discernment, about making a good decision is because we're hoping that we can be safe.

No, we're hoping if I can just make the right decision, like things will go well for me.

Right. I'll be safe. Everything will be OK somehow. In your mind, you're equating those things. But something that's really critical to realize is that often you'll be right in the center of God's will, but suffering for that. And we think about the apostle Paul, let's say, I think that he was a pretty good to Cerner, but he had a lot of troubles, a lot of troubles, difficulty with colleagues and disagreements and churches that he founded, but which didn't really support him.

And he got shipwrecked and beaten and all of that. Does that mean he didn't he wasn't discerning properly? Oh, no. He was discerning very well, actually. But he ended up in some difficult situations. And of course, our ultimate example of is Christ best discern or there ever was,

wouldn't you say? But you look and see what happened to him. He had a bunch of disciples, most of whom, you know, left him at the end, disappointed him at the end.

Was that a good a good choices? Right, or you just think about the end of his life while the choices that he made and he ended up getting crucified, a terrible way to die at that time and not a very successful ministry in the eyes of the world. Does that mean he didn't make a choices? Course, he made good choices. He was following his father in every single thing that the father told him to do. And sometimes that resulted in fanfare and palm leaves and Hosanna, you know, yes, Jesus is so great and life is great.

And other times that resulted in betrayal and disappointment and pain and then even death. So. When we talk about making good decisions for Christ, just remember, um, that it's not we're not talking about that life. Everything will be comfortable and well and wonderful. We're just talking about following Jesus. And in the end, of course, that is the best thing that we could possibly do. And regardless of how difficult it is along the way, in the end we will hear well done, good and faithful servant enter into my father's joy.

We will not regret following Jesus Christ.

But just remember. Just remember, it's about that and nothing else. So I'm going to end with this final scripture from Romans and a prayer, and then I believe there's some announcements for you. Um, what worked yesterday? Very well. I didn't answer questions from from the front, but I was happy to stay after and I am today. If you have any questions about the presentation or any kind of personal questions, I'm happy to stay for a little bit and to to talk to you about that, OK?

So let's end with Romans 12 one through two, I appeal to you there, four brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice wholly and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 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. Father, I pray for everyone who is here, for all of these precious students that you love and have brought to this university.

God, I pray that you will indeed give them the power to present their bodies as living sacrifices and to transform them by the renewal of their minds. Give them eyes to see all of the great things that you are doing in them and around them and help them to experience the great adventure of following you. I pray all of these things in Jesus name, Amen.

Announcer:



Thank you, Pastor Michel, for such an artistic and articulate unpacking of that word, discernment can be so confusing. You made it so practical for us. Thank you very much. I just want to highlight three things for us. If something was said today and you want to practice what this is, this is this idea of discernment, we do three things on this campus. First is every Tuesday at five o'clock, we have something called fives and we do a version of the Ignatius examine. And also on Fridays, there's something called the Dwelling Chapel. And what we do is we practice discernment in a slightly different way, but we try to unpack what was said on Monday and try to discern what is the call that God is asking you to move toward? And also not this Saturday, but the following Saturday is going to be our second Sabbathing for the semester, three hours from nine to 12, where we're going to talk about this relational discernment a little bit more. We're also going give away 250 copies of one of the books that Pastor Michel referenced, listening to God in Times of Choice by Gordon Smith CO. See you guys later.

[Musical conclusion]