

5 C.S.'s of God's Guidance¹

God speaks to us and reveals his will for our lives in various ways. It can be helpful to identify some of these in order to have a balanced and well-rounded approach to discernment with open ears. We don't want to be super-spiritual and think that God doesn't speak through "earthly" means like common sense and advice from others. At the same time we shouldn't rely so heavily on reason that we aren't really seeking what the Lord might be saying to us through more "spiritual" means like prayer.

In the end, we make the best decision we can based on the "light" that God has given us. If we approach discernment well in genuine pursuit of God's will not our own, we can trust that he will indeed guide us. If we have to make a decision without full clarity we shouldn't be anxious but can be confident that if God wanted something different he would have shown us.

1. Commanding Scripture

Some things we don't need to "discern" because God has already revealed his will and guidance for how we should live through Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium of the Church, e.g.

- We don't need to discern whether or not to pay our taxes. God has already commanded us to do so (Mark 12:17).
- A Christian doesn't need to discern whether or not he/she is called to mission. We know we are all called to make disciples (Matthew 28:19); the question for every Christian to discern is the context for living out that call.

So, when discerning something we should first ask, "Has God already given guidance on this matter?"

2. Compelling Spirit

Sometimes the Holy Spirit might speak to us in prayer to compel us about a particular course of action, e.g.

- a "voice" from the Lord we hear in our hearts as we pray
- a verse from the Bible that jumps out to us as we prayerfully read
- a prophetic word given to us via another person
- a sense of peace about a particular direction

3. Common Sense

God doesn't just guide us through "spiritual" means. He's given us brains and he wants us to use them! God can often guide us about the best course of action by helping us to figure out rationally what makes the most sense, e.g.

- Identifying and weighing pros and cons
- Making lists of key criteria and comparing options
- Figuring out through deliberation what is the most prudent course of action

4. Counsel of the Saints

God guides us through the advice of those he has put around us, especially fellow Christians, or "saints" with a small "s", though the "Saints" can help us too! Some of the best guidance we can find will be from wise counselors who know us well and know the Lord too, and often have more experience in the Christian life than we do.

5. Circumstantial Signs

God can also speak to us through our circumstances. He may open doors or close doors. He can get our attention and steer us in a direction through coincidences that aren't actually "coincidences" but "God-incidences". This "C.S." can be particularly difficult to discern because it's not always easy to tell whether or not something is actually a sign from God. It is therefore particularly important not to over-relate to this means of guidance, and to combine it with others as we discern.

¹ Adapted from The Alpha Course.