

## **Discernment**

Every Christian at some point in his or her journey of faith ends up asking the question: How do I know when the thoughts I have are from God? Discerning the will of God is not always easy to do, but the Ignatian tradition of discernment of spirits can help.

Ignatius of Loyola wrote down his Spiritual Exercises, which he developed based on his own experiences in prayer and discerning the will of God. Discernment of spirits is all about being conscious of the spiritual battle we are all in and knowing how to respond to different thoughts and emotions in order to know the will of God in our lives.

When you enter into the interior life, you enter into a battle. The devil does not want you to pray, and he will do whatever he can to stop you. He will find your weaknesses and attack them. He will try to convince you that you are worthless and that all your efforts toward God are in vain. He knows how to convince you that your worst fears are true. He knows how to twist your thinking and make you believe his lies. For those engaged in the spiritual battle, the enemy's goal is to keep them from discerning the will of God. It's much harder to do the will of God if you have trouble determining what His will is. As difficult as discernment can be, the fact of the matter is that you don't have to be a slave to the devil's confusion and fear. Scripture warns us about fear and tells us that fear works in opposition to love. The apostle John tells us:

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.” -1 John 4:18

The Word of God teaches that you don't have to live in fear. You don't have to be subject to the illusions of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Through the teachings of St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises, particularly his fourteen rules for discernment of spirits, you can learn how to discern the voice of God and come to a place of peace that the world cannot provide.