

5 Ways to Cultivate a Discerning Spirit

Discernment is a vital gift in an age when false apostles, deceitful workers, demonic angels of light, false signs and wonders, false prophets, false teachers, false christs, false revivalists and other falsities are rising in the church.

Some believers have the gift of discerning of spirits but every believer can develop a discerning spirit. Indeed, we need to hunger for discernment in this hour because signs and wonders will mark the next great move of God but the enemy will come in—as the Bible warns in 2 Corinthians 11:13-14, 2 Peter 2:1-3, Matthew 24:24 and other places—with deceptions and counterfeit anointings at the same time.

Even people who walk closely with God and hear His voice accurately can massively miss it. The Gibeonites tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them and he ended up having to go to war to defend them. The Bible says he “did not ask counsel of the Lord” (Joshua 9:14). A young prophet didn’t discern an old prophet lying to him and paid for it with his life (1 Kings 13:1-24). Even Samuel, a prophet whose words never fell to the ground, missed it by relying on his natural eyes. He thought surely Eliab was God’s choice to replace Saul (1 Sam. 16:6-13).

We need discernment in the spiritual realm but we also need discernment to navigate the many decisions in our life. We need to know what the will of the Lord is. Discernment is not a feeling. It’s a knowing. If you have a feeling, don’t act until the feeling is a knowing. Your emotions will betray your discernment. You need to see with your spirit and not your soul. So how do we get discernment? Here are five ways.

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1. Ask for discernment. Like wisdom, discernment flows out of a fear of the Lord and you can ask for it. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without criticism, and it will be given to him." You could put "discernment" in that verse and it would still ring true.

Matthew 7:7-8 promises, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." And remember Solomon, who asked for "an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and bad" (1 Kings 3:9).

God wants you to have discernment. He wants you to be wise regarding the manifestation of spiritual gifts and decisions about your life. If you need discernment, ask for it. But don't just ask for it in the moment you need it. Ask for it regularly.

2. Seek godly counsel. Remember, our emotions can betray us. Seek counsel from those who are more experienced in life or more discerning than you. Personally, I always seek counsel from various perspectives when I face a problem or need to make an important decision. I hear the voice of the Lord in good counsel.

Proverbs 11:14 tells us, "Where *there is* no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors *there is* safety." And Proverbs 15:22 says, "Without counsel, purposes are disappointed, but in the multitude of counselors they are established."

You can sharpen your own skills by listening to good counsel.

3. Stay in the Word. The Word of God gives us God's perspective on all matters of life. The book of Proverbs, in

particular, is an excellent tool for strengthening your discernment. When we need discernment, we should pray and ask the Lord—then go to His Word. Judge your discernment against the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us, “For the word of God is alive, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart.” And Romans 12:2 warns, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

If you know the Word—and you know the character of God by studying His Word—you will cultivate discernment. Anything that does not line up with God’s Word does not come from God because the Spirit and the Word agree (1 John 5:8).

4. Exercise discernment. In a biblical warning of apostasy, Hebrews 5:11-14 says, “Concerning this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become hard of hearing. For though by now you should be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God and have come to need milk rather than solid food. Everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a baby. But solid food belongs to those who are mature, for those who through practice have powers of discernment that are trained to distinguish good from evil.”

We need to be open-minded but, as it’s been said, we don’t need to be so open-minded that our brains fall out. When you meet new people, use discernment. The Bible says to know people by their fruits (Matt. 7:16).

5. Don’t go by what you see with your natural eyes. Remember, Joshua and Samuel both went by what they saw or heard. Paul,

by contrast, didn't let what he saw or heard move him. When the damsel with the spirit of divination followed Paul and Silas around declaring, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:16), Paul waited to discern what was happening.

On the surface, she spoke facts. But the Bible says the girl did this for many days. Paul was greatly troubled in his spirit—he discerned something was wrong. Finally, he turned to the spirit and told it to come out in the name of Jesus. Paul illustrated what John 7:24 admonishes us to do: "Do not judge according to appearance, but practice righteous judgment."
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