

Speak, for Your Servant is Listening Discerning God's Voice with Young People

Spiritual Direction (or Discernment) is the act of paying attention to God, calling attention to God, being attentive to God in a person or circumstances or situation... It notices the Invisibilities in and beneath and around the Visibilities. It listens for the Silences between the spoken Sounds.¹ -Eugene Peterson

Young people are faced with important decisions every day at school, church, home, and extracurricular activities. These decisions may be in regard to relationships, important transitions, life after high school, whether to partake in something or join others in doing something, drugs and alcohol, schoolwork, spirituality, money, jobs, etc. This generation of youth have more opportunities of experience and pursuit of interest available than any before them, thus decisions may become very overwhelming. The church has a great opportunity and role to be a space for teaching youth about discernment. Below are a few suggestions to help guide youth in their important decision making, while remaining open to God's voice and God's direction.

Scripture Suggestions

These Scriptures may be used in a group discussion or personal reflection. Invite youth to explore stories of God asking people to serve God's purpose in the Bible, and narratives that involve decision-making.

- Exodus 3-4
- Jeremiah 6:16
- Psalm 139
- Psalm 46:10
- Proverbs 3:5-6
- Romans 12:1-2
- Philippians 1:4

Song Suggestions

These songs have lyrics calling upon God to use us for God's purpose. They may be used in a worship or Bible study setting as opening or closing songs to help frame the discussion.

- *Take O Take Me As I Am*, Taizé Song
- *Spirit of the Living God*, Daniel Iverson
- *Guide My Feet*, African American Spiritual

Discernment Retreat

Take intentional time away to focus on how God is working in the lives of God's children and what God is speaking to and through young people. Go to a local camp or retreat center for an overnight or weekend retreat. The following activity options may be used to facilitate both corporate and individual discernment and reflection.

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration of Vocational Holiness*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 181.

Clearness Committee - The Quakers developed a method for addressing discernment issues called a “Clearness Committee,” which seeks to protect the individual voice while drawing from the experience and wisdom of other people. “You take a personal issue to this small group of people who are prohibited from suggesting ‘fixes’ or giving you advice but who for three hours pose honest, open questions to help you discover your inner truth.”² Your group may benefit from exploring and experiencing a “Clearness Committee” when dealing with decisions that need to be addressed by the group, such as leadership issues and group rules and boundaries.

Swamp Crossing - This requires a group to work together to get everyone across to the other side of the “swamp.” To assist the mare boards (or other materials) that they can use to step on across an area you designate. The goal is to get all participants across the swamp without touching the ground. Do not hand out enough boards for all to have one. Participants must maintain contact with their boards at all time, or they lose it in the swamp (take it away). If a participant touches the ground, they must go back to the beginning. *Materials Needed:* Small pieces of wood (or other materials that a person could stand on with at least one foot). Following the activity, debrief the activity by asking young people to reflect upon who took on what roles and how the group made decisions.

Group Counting - Give the following instructions: Your task is to count. If you have 6 people, your goal is to count to 6. Start with groups of 5-6 and combine groups if they complete the task easily. You can only speak once and say one number. You cannot use a sequence (count in a pattern, ex-2,4,6 or 1,2,3), or say the number that is directly before or after the person who spoke before you, so the order must be random. You can’t speak after the person on either side of you. You cannot make eye contact or use hand motions or visible finger counting. You cannot discuss a strategy. If the group messes up, start over. This can be a very challenging activity! Remind participants of the rules often. Following the activity, debrief by asking young people how they decided to speak, what worked well, and what it was like to make a “blind” decision that affected other people.

Faith Journey Maps - Give each person paper and markers to draw a roadmap of their life. Encourage them to add important faith events, relationships, births and deaths, personal achievements, and other landmarks that have been important to who they are today. Leave space on the road to write future decisions, events, and possibilities. Share a few important points on the road with the group, and encourage the group to reflect on how their past experiences will affect their future decisions.

Walk a Labyrinth - Allow time for the youth to walk a labyrinth or use a finger labyrinth (a personal sized labyrinth made of clay or drawn on paper). Encourage youth to ensure there is enough space in between them that they will not catch up with each other during their journey. Share the following guiding thoughts to consider while in the labyrinth:

- When entering, consider questions you want to lift up to God, or decisions you are seeking guidance on.
- In the middle take some time to sit in stillness and listen for God. Spend time journaling.
- On your way out, consider what, if anything, has been brought to your attention, and how you might continue in prayer about the experience.

Prayers of Discernment - Invite young people to craft prayers of discernment asking God to speak to them and guide them with current and future decisions and situations. Incorporate various learning styles by offering the option of painting, writing poetry, drawing, etc. Here is an example of a simple discernment prayer that may be helpful to share:

“Dear God, may thy light shine on me now, as it once shone on the shepherds as they kept their flocks by night. Amen.”— Oszaki

² Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, (San Francisco: Joney-Bass Inc., Publishers, 2000) 92.

Recommended Resources

Bass, Dorothy. *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens*. Edited by Don C. Richter. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002.

Johnson, Ben Campbell. *To Will God's Will: Beginning the Journey*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987.

Palmer, Parker J. *Let Your Life Speak*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 2000.

Ward, Ginny Holderness and Forrest C. Palmer Jr. *Career and Calling: a Guide for Counselors, Youth, and Young Adults*. Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001.

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