

8th Grade: Discernment

OVERVIEW

OBJECTIVE:

To recognize the movement of the Holy Spirit in your own life through Saint Ignatius' rule for discernment of spirits.

MAIN CONCEPTS:

- Being able to recognize the quiet voice of God in one's life helps people to discover not only their future vocation but also the good paths God is leading them on right now.
- Sin clouds discernment.
- For a person in the state of grace, the Holy Spirit works through consolation.
- If in mortal sin, the Holy Spirit works through conviction.
- For a person in the state of grace, the enemy works through desolation.
- For a person in the state of mortal sin, the enemy works through pleasure.

PLANNING DIRECTIONS:

Choose the components you wish to use given the time you have and the needs of your students.

INTRODUCTION

2 min

Summarize today's theme.

Through these lessons we hope to become familiar with the vocations to which God calls people so that you will be able to follow his call always. Right now, you are in the single state of life, but someday God may call you to a particular vocation—married life, priesthood, or religious life. Today's focus is on discernment. In a vocational context, discernment means being able to judge well which path to walk and to understand one's life. We will discover some clear ways to recognize God's voice, as well as become armed against our enemy's tactics.

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DISCERNMENT

"My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand." - JOHN 10:27-28

ESTABLISHING THE CONCEPTS

INTRODUCTION TO DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

Ignatius's Discovery

Discovering a Sacred World: Ignatius Loyola's Spiritual Exercises and Its Influence on Education by John J. Callahan, S.J.

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/Heartland3/r-discovering.html>

In his Autobiography, Ignatius describes "his first reasoning about the things of God." As he lay on his bed of pain after the third attempt to fix his shattered leg, he had asked his sister-in-law for something to read. He would have preferred some romances of the time, but all that was in the house was a *Life of Christ* and a *Lives of the Saints*. He read and reread them. Ignatius dreamed about imitating the deeds of St. Francis and St. Dominic. He also dreamed of knightly deeds in service of "a certain lady." Gradually, he began to notice a difference in the way these competing daydreams affected him. He examined his feelings and found that through these "movements of the spirits" God was at work in his life. When he dreamed of the lady and knightly honor, he was joyful. Later, he found himself dry and unsatisfied. When he dreamed of imitating the saints, he was also joyful. But the joy and satisfaction remained. By analyzing these "spirits," Ignatius discovered God's loving desire. He had found "God's will" for himself.



The conversion of St. Ignatius

Consolation and Desolation

From www.ignatianspirituality.com, a service of Loyola Press

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/introduction-to-discernment-of-spirits/#sthash.z2zWJobb.dpufy>

The feelings stirred up by good and evil spirits are called "consolation" and "desolation" in the language of Ignatian spirituality.

Spiritual consolation is an experience of being so on fire with God's love that we feel impelled to praise, love, and serve God and help others as best as we can. Spiritual consolation encourages and facilitates a deep sense of gratitude for God's faithfulness, mercy, and companionship in our life. In consolation, we feel more alive and connected to others.

Spiritual desolation, in contrast, is an experience of the soul in heavy darkness or turmoil. We are assaulted by all sorts of doubts, bombarded by temptations, and mired in self-preoccupations. We are excessively restless and anxious and feel cut off from others. Such feelings, in Ignatius's words, "move one toward lack of faith and leave one without hope and without love."



St. Ignatius was a spiritual master whose "Spiritual Exercises" have been used by famous saints for almost five centuries.

VOCATION LESSONS | 8th Grade: Discernment

1

OPENING PRAYER

2 min

Let us draw near to God during today's lesson. The Bible says:

"My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand." - JOHN 10:27-28

Pray a simple prayer from the heart or:

Thank you, Lord, for speaking to us. Please help us to live in conversation with you. We want to know you. Sharpen our minds today for discerning the messages we hear. AMEN.

OPENING ACTIVITY

10 min

SUBTLE ADVERTISING

1. Bring in some magazines with plenty of advertisements.
2. In groups, individually, or as a whole class, identify subtle (or not so subtle) messages being used to sell a product. For example, a shampoo ad depicts a woman strutting confidently down the street smiling and tousling her hair. A good-looking man notices her, “proving” the effectiveness of the shampoo. The subtle message is that happiness comes from attention and looking good – which you can have if you use the product.

Like advertising, when you are faced with a situation in life there are all sorts of messages that you are being sent, both from God and from Satan. Being able to recognize the difference in the types of messages can mean a world of difference in terms of being happy and truly living according to who you are.

ESTABLISHING THE CONCEPTS

25 min

ST. IGNATIUS’ DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

1. Read through the reading page individually, in small groups, or as a class.
2. Use the questions to spark class discussion, or assign students to write answers to the questions.
3. Quiz the students a bit to see if they grasp the concepts. If it is helpful, refer to the Vocation Glossary found at www.vocation-lessons.com/glossary.

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ESTABLISHING THE CONCEPTS *continued*

The key question in interpreting consolation and desolation is: where is the movement coming from and where is it leading me? Spiritual consolation does not always mean happiness. Spiritual desolation does not always mean sadness. Sometimes an experience of sadness is a moment of conversion and intimacy with God. Times of human suffering can be moments of great grace. Similarly, peace or happiness can be illusory if these feelings are helping us avoid changes we need to make.

Rules for Discernment

In *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius provides various rules for the discernment of spirits (*Spiritual Exercises*, 313–336). Good and evil spirits operate according to the spiritual condition of the individual.

For people who have closed themselves off from God's grace, the good spirit disturbs and shakes up. It stirs feelings of remorse and discontent. The purpose is to make the person unhappy with a sinful way of life. On the other hand, the evil spirit wants such people to continue in their confusion and darkness. So the evil spirit tries to make them complacent, content, and satisfied with their distractions and pleasures.

For people who are trying to live a life pleasing to God, the good spirit strengthens, encourages, consoles, removes obstacles, and gives peace. The evil spirit tries to derail them by stirring up anxiety, false sadness, needless confusion, frustration, and other obstacles.

Discernment of spirits is a challenging task. It requires maturity, inner quiet, and an ability to reflect on one's interior life. Discernment takes practice. It is something of an art. Ignatius Loyola's rules for discernment provide a framework, not a program. We must be ready to improvise and adjust because God works in each of us so uniquely. That is why most counselors recommend undertaking discernment of spirits with the assistance of a spiritual director.



Discernment means carefully listening to God so we can choose our path in life.

Be Curious:

- How did Ignatius “discover the rules of discernment?”
- What are the rules of discernment for a person in a state of grace? For a person in mortal sin?
- Why do you think that God works through these ways?
- Where have you noticed these rules in effect?
- How can you use the “discernment of spirits” as you think about your vocation?

EXPLORATION

15 min

COMMON MOVEMENTS OF THE SPIRITS

1. Through discussion with students, identify some common ways that God wants a middle school student to succeed. What does a middle school student's enemy want? What might some common consolations be? What might some common desolations be?
2. Have students write a dialogue between themselves, God, and the devil.
3. Optional: choose one of the best dialogues and have students act it out.

REFLECTIVE PRAYER

5 min

GOD'S VOICE

1. Introduce the meditation.
Now is a prayerful time for you to internally interact with God. Feel free to close your eyes.
2. Permit the students time to assess what God is communicating to him/her through an awareness of feelings/voices. This personal assessment can be done in the way of free writing journal entries or lists.

Alternatively, students may sit in silence and think through these things or even draw responses to the questions. Inform the students that these questions will not be collected.

Given what you have learned about discernment of spirits, what do you think God is communicating to you? What are some of the lies being told to you from the enemy, and what is the way out of them? What good resolutions is God leading you to make?



DISCERNMENT

EXPLORATION

DIALOGUE WITH GOOD SPIRIT AND BAD SPIRIT

Have you ever seen the cartoons in which a little angel is sitting on a character's shoulder, and a devil on the other shoulder? The angel offers good advice, and the devil offers bad advice or temptation. Often this is a silly part of a cartoon, but it is not too far from the truth. St. Paul writes in Ephesians 6: 12.

"For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world ruler as this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens."



Write a dialogue between yourself, a good spirit, and a bad spirit. Make it serious, not cartoonish. Choose from these scenarios:

1. An unpopular girl is crying near her locker. What would God want you to do? What are you tempted to do? Or not do?
2. You feel called to the priesthood or religious life. What does the devil tell you about that call? What does God tell you?
3. You receive an unusual amount of money for your birthday. What would God want you to do? What are you tempted to do? Or not do?

Write the dialogue as it takes place in your mind. For example:

Me: Geez, that girl is crying again. I wonder what's wrong with her?

Bad spirit: Mock her by saying "boo-hoo" and laugh as you walk by.

Good spirit: Ask her what's wrong.

Bad spirit: Just ignore her.

Me: Yeah, maybe I should just ignore her.

Good spirit: Put yourself in her shoes. Wouldn't you want someone to be kind to you?

Etc.

End the dialogue by describing the actions you end up taking.

VOCAL PRAYER

The Magnificat

My soul proclaims
the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor
on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations
will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.
He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty
from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help
of his servant Israel
for he remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be forever.

AMEN.

VOCATION LESSONS | 8th Grade: Discernment 3

VOCAL PRAYER

2 min

MAGNIFICAT

1. If you have not already introduced the Magnificat, explain it to them.

Priests and consecrated religious pray the Liturgy of the Hours throughout the day. Besides many psalms, the Liturgy of the Hours also has prayers and other scripture readings. Canticles are prayers within Scripture. The prayer we have here, called the Cantic of Mary, is prayed every evening. When Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth and both women were pregnant, it became very obvious that God was powerfully at work; Mary quoted a poem of Hannah's from the Old Testament, giving thanks to God for her son. This Cantic reminds those who pray the Divine Office of Our Lady and is a beloved transition from the work of the day into night. It is always followed by the Glory Be.

2. Students pray the vocation prayer: *Magnificat*.