

St. Ignatius Rules of Discernment

Concrete Guidance to Become a True, Free Child of God

Below is a summary of the first 14 Rules of St. Ignatius. For more details, obtain: *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living* (by Fr. Timothy Gallagher, O.M.V.)

Initial Principles

-First, God loves us and wants a deep friendship with us. He is active in our lives. Since He is our Creator and has a plan for our lives, He cares about our decisions. St. Ignatius gives us rules to help us develop this friendship and to make good decisions. Following God's plan keeps us spiritually healthy.

-God's will is something we can know, but we cannot be sure that we know it perfectly.

-We are capable of doing God's will once we properly discern it. Learning to interpret our feelings/emotions is one of the best ways to discern God's will for our choices in life. St. Ignatius believed that God deals directly with us. He works in our minds and our feelings.

-We can have alternating moods, but they are full of spiritual meaning. The trick is to understand that meaning.

-Discernment refers to the process of making decisions. Decisions lead to more decisions.

-We don't have to have it all together to make sound decisions. We don't have to be perfect. We don't need to be deterred by imperfect knowledge and murky circumstances. If we are earnestly seeking God, we won't get off track too far. Sometimes we will make mistakes. The decision is not the goal. The goal is to grow in relationship with God. We should say: "I want and I choose what better leads to God's deepening life in me."

Keys Terms

-Spirits: affective stirrings/movements of the heart: joy, sadness, hope, fear, peace, anxiety, etc.

-To discern spirits—process by which we distinguish between different kinds of spiritual stirrings in our hearts, identifying those that are of God and those that are not, in order to accept the good and reject the bad. E.g., when you go into a home, you may sense that something is not right; or, you may feel peace.

-"Evil spirit"/"enemy" = demons, our own weak tendencies which spring from egoism and disordered sensuality, individuals who can lead us away from God to some extent, and bad worldly thinking.

-"Good spirit" = God, angels, theological virtues implanted in us from Baptism, influences for good (saints, holy family members, good friends, the Bible, *Catechism*, and other good books)

Steps to Advance Spiritually and Make Decisions

1. Become aware of the stirrings in our hearts.
2. Understand—reflect on the stirrings and notice what is from God and what is not. (We must continue to study the Bible and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in order to know what is truly from God and to form our conscience.)
3. Take action—accept and live according to what is of God; reject and remove from our lives what is not of God.

H.U.A. 1. Listen to the stirrings of your heart.

2. Understand—is it of God or not of God?

3. If it is of God, act on it.

If it is not of God, pray it away and reject it.

First Rule. In persons who are going from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures to them, leading them to imagine sensual delights and pleasures in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins. In these persons the good spirit uses a contrary method, stinging and biting their consciences through their rational power of moral judgment.

Second Rule. In persons who are going on intensely purifying their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord, the method is contrary to that in the first rule. For then it is proper to the evil spirit to bite, sadden, and place obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, so that the person may not go forward. And it is proper to the good spirit to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and quiet, easing and taking away all obstacles, so that the person may go forward in doing good.

Third Rule. Definition of spiritual consolation.

Consolation is when some interior movement is caused in the soul, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and consequently when it can love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but only in the Creator of them all. Likewise when it sheds tears that move to love of its Lord, whether out of sorrow for one's sins, or for the passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other things directly ordered to his service and praise. Finally, consolation is every increase of hope, faith, and charity, and all interior joy that calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord.

Fourth Rule. Definition of spiritual desolation.

Desolation is all the contrary of the third rule, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to low and earthly things, disquiet from various agitations and temptations, moving to lack of confidence, without

The Daily Examen Prayer

hope, without love, finding oneself totally slothful, tepid, sad, and, as if separated from one's Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts that come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts that come from desolation.

Fifth Rule. When in desolation, do not change your goals or your prayer life.

[If you say the Rosary everyday, keep saying it everyday no matter how you feel.]

Sixth Rule. When in desolation, be active and work against it by doing more prayer, meditation, examination (of root causes), and penance.

Seventh Rule. When in desolation, know that the Lord is really with you and has given you enough grace to resist agitations and temptations from the enemy. This is a test for you. Trust that the Lord is near and has given you enough grace for eternal salvation. Keep calling out to Him.

Eighth Rule. When in desolation, be patient and know that the Lord will soon console you. Again, keep working against the desolation as in the sixth rule.

Ninth Rule. There are three principal causes for desolation: (1) you are tepid, slothful, or negligent in your spiritual exercises (prayer and study); (2) God is testing you; and/or (3) you need to realize that consolation is a gift and grace from God and that you did not achieve it (protects you from pride).

Tenth Rule. When in consolation, strengthen yourself and think about how you will act when desolation comes again.

Eleventh Rule. When in consolation, be humble and thank God for this grace. When in desolation, take strength in God and know that, again, He has given you sufficient grace to resist the enemy.

Twelfth Rule. The evil spirit is a bully. You must confront him head on and be firm and oppose him. If you do not, he will take advantage of your weaknesses and weaken you further.

Thirteenth Rule. The evil spirit conducts himself as a false lover in wishing to remain secret and not be revealed. Reveal secret evil thoughts, temptations, and problems to a good confessor or to another holy confidant—those who know how the enemy works.

Fourteenth Rule. The evil spirit will attack you in your weaknesses. Know your weak points and strengthen them quickly with the Lord. Again, apply the sixth rule.

The Daily Examen is a great form of prayer to stay **vigilant** and **watchful** every day for the Lord. It is not necessarily an examination of conscience. It is used to see where God is working in your life this day. Steps:

1. Pray to the Holy Spirit to help you do a great examination of your last 24 hours. For example:

Prayer to the Holy Spirit (by St. Augustine)

Breathe into me, Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Move in me, Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Attract my heart, Holy Spirit, that I may love only what is holy. Strengthen me, Holy Spirit, that I may defend all that is holy. Protect me, Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy. Amen.

2. Tell God what you are thankful for.

3a. During the last 24 hours, did you experience courage or strength to do the right thing? Did you receive any consolations from our Lord? Did you shed any tears of gladness? Did you receive any inspirations? Did you have peace in your soul? Were any obstacles removed?

3b. During this time, did you experience any impatience, anger, or sadness? Did you have any fears, worries, or doubts? Did you hear any negative talk in your head? Did you feel like you had to be in control? Were there any obstacles placed in your path? How did you respond to these things?

4. Have a spontaneous conversation with God about what you noticed today. God wants to hear about your day. Ask Him a question if you wish. Listen in your heart. Are you drawn to a Bible passage? Are you drawn to any saint or your Guardian Angel to pray for you and with you? Feel free to pray a Glory Be at the end of your dialogue.

5. Are there some plans you want to make with God regarding the next 24 hours? End by praying a Hail Mary, asking for Our Lady to help you get closer to Christ.

God wants us to do well. He wants us to approach Him without being afraid. You can talk to Him about anything—nothing is off limits! Spending quality time with the Lord calms us down and recollects us. We think more clearly and get healing.

See Lk 10:38-42. **Mary sat beside the Lord at His feet listening to Him speak.** She chose the better part, instead of being anxious and over-working. Set daily prayer goals to spend time listening to the Lord!