

◆ TIMES OF CHANGE ◆
TIMES OF CHALLENGE



*When You
Have A
Decision
To Make*



RON DELBENE

with

MARY & HERB MONTGOMERY



*You will decide on a matter, and it will be
established for you,
and light will shine on your ways.*
—Job 22:28

*May this book be a help to you
as you seek to make wise decisions.*

*All titles by the authors
in the
Times of Change, Times of Challenge Series*

When You Have A Decision To Make
When You Are Living With An Illness Which Is Not Your Own
When An Aging Loved One Needs Care
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When Your Child Is Baptized
When Your Son or Daughter Divorces

When You
Have A
Decision
To Make



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When You Have A Decision To Make

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We have to make decisions every day: What am I going to wear? What will we have for dinner? Who is going to pick up the kids? The problems we face and the decisions we make create the unique design of our lives. Even decisions that we make routinely build one upon the other, leading us in a certain direction.

In my work as a pastor and spiritual director, people generally don't come to me for help with their everyday decisions; they come when they are facing major decisions. They are uncertain whether to get married, to move, to change careers, to search for a birth parent, to keep a child or give it up for adoption. I have no easy answers. Rather, I share what has been helpful for me and for those whose lives have touched mine. Often I encourage people to go through a prayerful, clear-thinking process known as discernment. Making decisions through the discernment process is not new; various approaches have been used through the ages. In this book I share an approach I use in my ministry.

May your choices bring the sense of peace that comes from being in touch with the God who calls us through the deepest desires of the heart.

Ron DelBene

Editor's Note: The stories in this book are true. Personal names and some details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals involved.

Decision Making and Discernment: What's the Difference?

Walk in the way of insight.

—Proverbs 9:6

Harold, a successful businessman in his mid-forties, was offered a job in another city and was trying to decide if he was going to accept it. “All day long I make corporate decisions and train people in decision making,” Harold told me. “Making decisions is so much a part of my profession that I feel really strange coming to you for help. But somehow I know this decision is about more than just a job and a move.”

As we talked, it became clear to me that through prayer and his life within the faith community, Harold had come to experience God not as some distant entity but as an abiding presence. Now that he was faced with a major personal decision, he felt the need not only to make the right choice about the job and the future of his family, but to look within himself and to be aware of God’s activity in his life. His decision required him to seek God’s will, which is the purpose of discernment.

The word *discernment* has its root in two Latin words: *discernere* and *discretis*, which mean to divide or to separate or to render discreet. In the discernment process we use our best human resources—in a context of prayer and an orientation toward God—to understand our innermost yearnings and to discover where God is calling us.

Discernment is not something to be used on every decision. Our lesser choices fall into a harmonious pattern if

we live the values of Jesus. The discernment process is used when we feel a compelling inner need to make a right decision—when we think the decision is one that may have repercussions we don't quite understand. In this book I suggest three ways to follow the process of discernment: by yourself, with the help of another person, and with the help of a group. The way you choose will be determined by your circumstances and personal preference.

Principles of Discernment

I am with you always.

–Matthew 28:20

The principles of discernment are based on the belief that God is with us and is present in the everyday workings of our lives. When we make decisions based on the following principles, we can experience the peace that comes with knowing we have been as honest and conscientious as possible in seeking the next step in our journey with God.

- **Discernment is done in an atmosphere of prayer.** Prayer in discernment involves more than saying a prayer before beginning the process and one after it is completed. Throughout the discernment we have a prayerful attitude that keeps us attentive to God's involvement in our lives: through people, through something we read, through nature, through silence, and through the many other ways God has of speaking to us. In a discernment we consciously say, "I believe that God is involved in my life and is calling me to something new."
- **Discernment is done in a situation of freedom.** The choice in a discernment has to be one that we are free to make. For example, Bob shared with me how, after a year of marriage counseling and trying every type of reconciliation, his wife had filed for divorce and wanted no more discussion on the matter. "I've got to discern what God's will is for me regarding divorce," Bob said. I pointed out that he was not in a situation of freedom about that. Why? Because the decision whether or not to divorce was no longer Bob's to make. In his case, I suggested a discernment that had to do with the single

life: What choices did he have now? What would he commit himself to?

Discernment must also involve choosing from among positive choices. Half-jokingly, Bob said that maybe he could solve his financial problems brought on by the divorce by embezzling funds or robbing a bank—obviously not choices suited to a discernment!

- **Discernment is done over a period of time.** People who come to me for help with a decision sometimes have months in which to decide; others have a week or two; still others have only a few days. Whatever the deadline, I suggest taking at least two periods of time in which to reflect, to pray, and to examine the possibilities.

Although there are occasions when a discernment is done alone, the process is usually most beneficial when it involves another individual or a group of people who gather for the purpose of helping you. Assistance in making a decision does not mean that someone will be deciding for you. Rather, the people you involve help you analyze the situation and support you in prayer. In selecting people to help with a discernment, good friends are not necessarily the best people to turn to. For example, a friend who would miss you if you moved may have difficulty staying objective about the possibility of your relocating in another part of the country.

- **Discernment requires a commitment to abide by the decision.** People for whom decision making is difficult sometimes go through the process and then say, “Well, I’m really not certain. Maybe I should go back and do it again.” Before beginning a discernment, it is important to understand that when the process is over, you will choose to live into the decision you make. If you invest your time in the discernment and enter the process prayerfully, freely, and in honesty, you can trust the decision and should be willing to go along with the outcome.

What Is God's Will for Me?

The kingdom of God is among you.

—Luke 17:21

When people say, “If only I could find out what the will of God is for me . . . ,” I like to share this fanciful scenario with them.



Sometime in 1942—either when I was conceived or when I was born—God opened a huge book bound in red Moroccan leather with gold edging on the pages. On the left-hand page in large letters it said, NAME. God wrote my name: Ronald Norman Christopher DelBene. On the right-hand page in equally large letters it said, MY WILL FOR HIM. God filled that space in as well.

Then the game began—a game much like that played with childhood friends, only in this game God is “up there” somewhere and I am “down here” trying to find God’s will for me. Sometimes God says, “Warmer, warmer, you’re getting warmer.” And sometimes God says, “Hot! hot! hot!” Other times I hear God say, “No, cold, cold, . . . now you’re freezing.”



Invariably the people listening to this scenario recognize themselves and we all laugh. So many of us look at God’s will as something that is clear to God but hidden from us; it is something we have to find. Our belief goes like this:

God has only one will for me.

God’s will for me is eternal.

God knows what that will is.

I don't!

The word *will*, which we translate from the Latin *voluntas*, means yearning in both Hebrew and Greek. So the question, What is God's will for me? is more appropriately, What is God's yearning for me? This word *yearning* is the same word used to describe the yearning two people in love have for one another. When someone yearns for us, and our yearning is awakened, we come together in some way. Thus God's yearning is not something I find outside myself, but rather something I become aware of and experience within.

In a discernment we look at ourselves—at our feelings, our values, our priorities—and try to uncover our deepest yearnings. The following questions help in determining whether our yearning is a response to God's yearning for us:

- Will following my yearning make me more loving?
- Will I be a better servant of my gifts?
- Will those I love and those for whom I am responsible benefit?
- Will I feel more fulfilled?
- Will I have a greater sense of inner peace?

When we are able to answer yes to these questions, we know that we are responding to God's yearning call.

What Are My Choices?

If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

—Galatians 5:25

When Ben was undecided about whether to live on campus or to stay at home and commute to a local college, I encouraged him to enter into a time of discernment. Because the decision would also affect Ben's parents, I suggested they go through the process with him.

Ben had two choices: one was to move to the campus and live into everything that meant; the other was to stay at home and live into everything that meant. In a discernment, there is no decision by default. Discernment is decision by choice. For Ben, it was not a matter of *If I don't live at school, then I end up living at home*. Before beginning the discernment, he agreed that whatever his decision turned out to be, he would enter the outcome wholeheartedly.

A decision always involves at least two choices, although in some instances there may be more. Whatever the number of options, these questions apply:

- Which choice will help me become a more full and complete person?
- In which situation will I be more loving toward others and use my gifts to greatest advantage?
- Where is my listening toward God directing me?

Our choices must also take into account those for whom we are responsible as well as the other important people in our lives.

Because a discernment takes time and effort, it is natural not to want to go through the process. When I am faced with a major decision, I often wish God would make it for me. And I know I am not alone in feeling this way. Wouldn't it be wonderful if God walked up to us in the supermarket and told us what to do?

We cannot avoid the probing and soul-searching that are integral parts of discernment. But God is with us throughout the process, and the help of others is available if we reach out for it. Although it is possible to do a discernment alone, it has been my experience that the best and most complete discernments happen when they are shared with at least one other person who gives feedback and asks clarifying questions. This might be a relative, friend, pastor, teacher, counselor, or therapist. If you ask several people to help, choose those who are insightful, forthright, and prayerful. You may find the help you need in a Bible study class or in some other group where you have a history of feeling supported and nurtured. If you are not part of such a group, ask for the assistance of three to six people you believe would be willing to help you through the discernment process.

Whether alone or with help, we tend to be taking the best next step in our life journey when we understand our choices and make decisions by being honest with ourselves and attentive to God.

Scripture and Decision Making

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

—Psalm 119:105

Scripture doesn't always give precise answers to specific questions; instead, it serves as a guide for making decisions that keep us moving toward wholeness. One of the fascinations of scripture for me is how it keeps revealing itself.

In the midst of a discernment, Roger had an image of himself sitting on a rock. When he told me about it, I asked him what scripture came to mind.

"Peter was referred to as a rock," Roger said, "and was supposed to start something new. And then there's the one about building on rock, not sand." Roger was thinking of assuming a youth leadership role in the church. It was an important position, and he knew he needed to make it on a solid foundation of facts. To him, the rock image indicated that he needed to know more about the tasks, time, and talent the position would require of him.

When people mention an image from scripture in either their night or day dreams, I often refer them to a Bible dictionary. Roger looked up the word *rock*, and when he found the various places it is used throughout scripture, he discovered even more ways God's word applied to him.

Jennifer's recurring image was not directly from scripture; hers was the well-known picture of Jesus knocking on a door that has no handle. This image led her to the scripture, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you" (Matt. 7:7).

Jennifer realized she had not been asking for the help she needed to decide whether to break her engagement or to go forward with her wedding plans.

Stan's favorite story was that of David and Goliath. He liked it because of the confidence David showed in facing a seemingly impossible challenge. Stan told me that he, too, liked challenges and faced them in his work. As a manager with a large corporation, he was frequently sent to trouble spots. Another company had offered him a job as a troubleshooter and he had to decide whether to take it. Stan's identification with David helped him recognize his own gifts and was an important factor in his decision to take the demanding new job.

Do you have a favorite Bible story? Are certain verses from scripture often in your thoughts? Do lines from a hymn come unbidden and play in your mind? The lyric or the image in the passage might be calling you to something. Those things to which we feel a strong connection tell us a lot about ourselves and what we are being called to do.

Prayer and Discernment

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, . . . and it will be given you.

—James 1:5

God doesn't intend for us to struggle alone. People of prayer can live their lives knowing that God and God's resources are always available. But praying involves more than simply talking to God from the heart. Prayer is an attitude toward life. A prayerful attitude helps keep us attentive and obedient to God.

The word *obedient* comes from the Latin words *ab* and *audire* meaning to listen toward. If I cup my hand behind my ear and lean forward, I am listening toward. I am also listening toward if I strain to hear what someone I love is whispering to me. Listening toward God means that we are attentive to all the ways God speaks to us. God might use a book, an inner voice, an ad in the paper, a movie, or an offhand remark that is just what we need to hear to point us in the direction we are to go.

Steve was offered a job that would involve training people, and he didn't know if he had the gifts for it. In a meeting totally unrelated to his work, someone remarked, "You know, Steve, you're a really helpful person and would make a good trainer. What kind of work do you do?" Steve believed that God was speaking to him through this friendly comment.

One day Linda picked up a professional journal and was glancing at the back page of ads when her eyes fixed on one for the C.S. Lewis Institute in Oxford, England. She had the sure sense that she was being called to go there. Linda's husband had died a year earlier, and her adjustment to

being a widow had been difficult. Even though going to the institute alone was a scary prospect, she was at a point in her life where she felt it was important to risk and to venture. “The ad had a gray-shaded background,” Linda later recalled, “and the print was difficult to read. But on that entire page, one ad popped out at me. I had been praying for direction, and I think this was God’s way of giving it to me.”

At a time in my life when I felt called to do something that didn’t make sense objectively, I happened to see the movie *Field of Dreams*. One of the film’s messages, “Go the distance,” was just what I needed to hear, and when I took that next step, the decision I faced became clear. There have been enough such incidents in my life to make me believe that when we listen toward God, the messages are there for us.

Sometimes in stillness we literally hear God in our thoughts and get the guidance we need, or in a silent reflection we suddenly get an idea or feel drawn in a certain direction. People who listen toward God learn to pay attention to their inner urgings and follow them. This inner sense of knowing is often referred to as intuition. Some people who find it difficult to trust their intuition enter into a discernment to determine whether or not what they feel to be God’s calling is centered in God’s yearning. To help determine this, two questions are helpful:

- Is the choice I am considering consistent with what I have been doing?
- Will I be more loving or of greater service to humanity if I follow this inner urging?

Just as prayer takes many forms, God’s responses come in a variety of ways. If we go where our prayers take us, we find ourselves making decisions that satisfy both our deepest yearnings and God’s yearning for us.

The Breath Prayer

Be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

–Romans 12:12

Sandra faced a difficult decision about whether to end an abusive marriage. “I start and end my day with prayer,” this young mother told me, “but in between I get so caught up in the whirlwind of a job and home and kids that I can’t think beyond the next thing that needs doing. With days like mine, how can I stay focused on God and be in an attitude of prayer?”

For Sandra, as well as people of all ages and lifestyles, I suggest using the breath prayer. This prayer is not something to be learned; rather, it is a prayer within—a prayer we can discover and say as easily and naturally as we breathe. Whatever a person’s age or personal situation, the breath prayer is one way to be more attentive to God’s presence and to follow the apostle Paul’s call to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

To discover your breath prayer, follow these simple steps:

Step 1

Sit comfortably and relax. Close your eyes and remind yourself that you are in God’s loving presence. Recall a passage from scripture that puts you in a receptive frame of mind: perhaps “The Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23:1) or “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

With your eyes closed, imagine that God is calling you by name. Hear God asking, “(*your name*), what do you want?”

Step 2

Answer God directly with whatever comes from your heart. Your answer might be a single word: *peace* or *insight* or *guidance*. It could be a phrase: *to feel your presence* or *to find my way*. Your answer might be a sentence: *I want to make a wise decision* or *I want to see the way clearly*.

Step 3

Combine your name for God with your answer to the question, What do you want? and you have your prayer. Typical breath prayers for discernment would be: *Let me feel your presence, God* or *Please, Lord, let me see the way clearly* or *O Creator, be my light and my guide*.

Some prayers are more rhythmic when God's name is placed at the beginning of the prayer; others require it at the end. When your prayer seems right for you, begin to use it throughout the day: while driving, combing your hair, preparing a meal, waiting in line. Use it every time you reflect or think about making your decision. With continued use, your prayer will become as much a part of you as breathing. This prayer that expresses your desire will help keep you focused on God and attentive to the many ways God is speaking to you in the everyday circumstances of your life.

Sharing the Breath Prayer

People doing a discernment often share their prayer with those who are helping them through the process. Others share their prayer with family and friends who know they are facing an important decision. Because this is a personal prayer that arises from the heart, sharing it is a way for people to pray not just *for* but *with* you—a way to be united in God's Spirit by being united in prayer.

Doing a Discernment by Yourself

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
—Philippians 4:13

The discernment process outlined here is based on having two weeks in which to make a decision. Time, however, is not the key element. What matters most is that the process be entered into honestly and prayerfully. If a decision has to be made quickly, the process can be satisfactorily completed in a day. The following outline is intended to be a model that you adapt to meet your needs and time frame.

- **Set aside time.** Plan for quiet, uninterrupted time to begin the discernment process.
- **Pray.** Be aware that you are in God's presence. Ask to see clearly as you are being led by God's spirit. Pray the Lord's Prayer or repeat your breath prayer several times.
- **Use the Discernment Form.** Copy the form on page 23 onto a sheet of paper that has enough space for the entries. Write in your choices and the date when the decision must be made. List advantages and disadvantages. Then set the form aside for a week. (Although it is unusual to face more than two choices in a discernment, it sometimes happens. For example, a student might have to choose from among several colleges. If you face more than two choices, adjust the form accordingly.)

- **Add to the form throughout the week.** Ideas come when we are prayerful and listening toward God. Ask frequently for guidance.
- **At the end of the week, set aside time.** Begin with prayer. Then review your lists and make changes if necessary. Note any other ideas and experiences that may have a bearing on your decision. Then set the form aside for another week.
- **Add to the form throughout the week.** Remain prayerful and be aware of all the ways God is speaking to you.
- **At the end of the second week, set aside time.** Begin with prayer. Read over the entries. Make final additions or changes. Count the entries. If your decision is not clear, rate each advantage and disadvantage on a scale of one to five (one being the least and five the most important). Add the numbers and you should be able to make your choice with confidence.

Discernment Form

This decision must be made by _____

CHOICE #1

Advantages

Disadvantages

CHOICE #2

Advantages

Disadvantages

Discernment with the Help of a Facilitator

Encourage one another and build each other up.

–1 Thessalonians 5:11

Amy, an only child whose father had died five years earlier, came to see me because her mother was no longer able to live alone. After investigating several options, Amy narrowed them down to two: her mother would live with her or she would go to a care facility. I suggested that Amy do a discernment, and she asked for my help as a facilitator. If Amy's mother had not been mentally confused or if another close relative had been willing and available, I would have suggested that a family member be part of this discernment. It is always best if everyone who will be directly affected by a decision is involved in making it.

A discernment done with a facilitator is typically done in three meetings with time in between for reflection. The amount of time between meetings depends upon when the decision has to be made. In Amy's case, the time was one week.

What follows is the model on which Amy's discernment was based. (*If the facilitator for your discernment is not familiar with the process, ask him or her to read this book, paying special attention to this section.*)

First Meeting

- **Pray together.** Pray the Lord's Prayer, read a psalm, or express your hope for the discernment in your own words. If you have a breath prayer, begin and end your time together by repeating it aloud two or three times, or sit in

silence for two minutes while each person says the prayer silently.

- **Use the Discernment Form.** Prior to the meeting, copy the form on page 23 onto a sheet of paper that has enough space for the entries. (Although it is unusual to face more than two choices in a discernment, it sometimes happens. Adjust the form accordingly.) Each person doing the discernment needs a form and should fill it out. (The facilitator does not fill out a form.) The person or persons doing the discernment each share briefly what they see the choices to be. Then they write in their choices and the date the decision must be made.
- **Arrange a time for another meeting and end with prayer.** Agree to remember one another in prayer between meetings.

Between Meetings

- **List the advantages and disadvantages on the form.** Write as many as you can for each choice. Throughout the week make changes and additions as ideas occur to you.
- **Be prayerful.** Listen toward God and pray for guidance. Be aware of all the ways God is speaking to you.

Second Meeting

- **Pray together.** (Refer to suggestions for the first meeting.)
- **Read the lists out loud.** The facilitator listens and asks clarifying questions: “Amy, why would you feel guilty if your mother didn’t live with you? In what ways would the care facility provide better care than you could?” No advice is given and no judgments are made by either the facilitator or those taking part in the discernment.
- **Arrange another meeting time and end with prayer.**

Between Meetings

- **Reconsider your lists.** Clarify your entries in preparation for the final meeting. Continue to listen toward God and pray for guidance.

Third Meeting

- **Pray together.** (Refer to suggestions for the first meeting.)
- **Tally the lists.** Again, read the lists aloud. Count the advantages and disadvantages and compare the totals. (If more than one person is doing the discernment, lists are combined and duplicated ideas dropped before tallying the totals.) Usually the choice is obvious, but if it is not, rate each entry on a scale of one to five (one being the least and five the most important). Add the numbers.
- **Discuss ways the decision may be implemented.** As a result of the discernment process, Amy gained perspective on her mother's needs and on her own need to be the "good daughter" and care for her mother. Amy decided to have her mother live with her, but she clarified limits in caregiving and realized that at some point her mother would probably have to go to a care facility.
- **End with a prayer of gratitude.**

Discernment with the Help of a Group

Guide me with your counsel.

—Psalm 73:24

One or more persons may do a discernment with the help of a group. Those in the group need to be people of prayer who can view the situation objectively.

Arthur and Ellen were retired and trying to decide whether to continue living in Chicago, where they had spent all their married lives, or to move to a retirement community in the Southwest. Arthur and Ellen invited six people whose insights they valued to help with their discernment. One of the people agreed to act as the group leader.

What follows describes how Ellen and Arthur's discernment was conducted. (*If those helping with your discernment are not familiar with the process, ask that they read this book, paying special attention to this section. It is especially important that the leader be familiar with this group discernment process.*)

First Meeting

- **Place and time.** Arthur and Ellen's home on a Friday evening for an hour and a half. After a brief period of socializing and refreshments, the participants sat in a circle in the living room.
- **Prayer.** The group leader led the group in saying the Lord's Prayer. She then explained that they had gathered to help Arthur and Ellen see where God was calling them.
- **Presentation of the issue.** (10-15 minutes.) The group leader used a timer to keep the meeting on schedule.)

Arthur and Ellen took turns describing the issue as they saw it.

- **Silent reflections.** (2-5 minutes) Participants reflected on the situation and their role in it.
- **Clarifying questions.** (30-40 minutes) Participants asked *only* clarifying questions. Instead of saying, “You should investigate housing costs,” a participant asked, “Have you considered the difference in housing costs?” No advice was given; no judgments were made.
- **Silent reflection.** (2-5 minutes) Everyone reflected on what had been said.
- **Sharing of insights.** Arthur and Ellen shared their thoughts, and the participants asked additional questions.
- **Close with a brief prayer.** Ellen and Arthur shared a breath prayer they were using together. Everyone said it aloud five times.
- **Assignment.** The group leader asked each person, including Ellen and Arthur, to write a brief paragraph about what he or she perceived God’s call to be in this situation. The assignment was not to include directions or advice. Everyone was asked to listen toward God and make a note of anything relevant to the discernment–insights, dreams, ideas from any source. They were also asked to hold one another in prayer and not to discuss the discernment outside the group meeting.

Second Meeting

- **Time and place.** Three evenings later in Arthur and Ellen’s home.
- **Prayer.** The group leader led everyone in saying Arthur and Ellen’s breath prayer aloud five times. They then had a minute of silence.
- **Reading the paragraphs.** (If some participants do not bring the assigned paragraph, allow 3-5 minutes for them to write one. Writing down observations avoids having people talk on and on, and if asked to repeat what they said, they are able to do so word for word.)

Beginning with Arthur and Ellen, everyone took turns reading their paragraphs that included non-judgmental observations such as, "It's obvious you will miss your grandchildren if you move" and "Clearly you do not like cold weather."

- **Silent reflection.** (2-5 minutes) This was a time to think about what had been read.
 - **Sharing.** Arthur and Ellen shared what they heard and what they were feeling. Everyone then shared additional observations and asked questions, but gave no advice.
 - **Prayer.** Arthur said a prayer of gratitude for the help the group had given.
 - **Making the decision.** Within a week, Ellen and Arthur made their decision. The discernment helped them see that what they really wanted was to stay in Chicago near family and friends. They promised themselves winter vacations in a warm climate and made new commitments to do volunteer work and to participate in other activities that enriched their lives where they were.
 - **Inform the group.** Ellen and Arthur called their friends to let them know their decision and invited them to come another day to celebrate.
-

Being an Effective Group Leader

- Familiarize yourself with the group discernment process.
- Use prayer to unite the group. Decide who will lead the prayer. A breath prayer may be shared.
- Review why the group has come together.
- Keep the meeting moving on schedule. You may want to use a timer.
- Remind everyone only to offer observations or to ask clarifying questions.
- Give clear directions for the writing assignment.
- Remind the group that the discernment is not to be discussed outside the meeting.

What's the Next Step?

Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal.

—Philippians 3:13

A decision reached through discernment is not something to be second-guessed. Some people might say, "I had better give this a little more thought. Maybe I didn't have all the facts I needed." That defeats the power and purpose of discernment. Instead of looking back, we commit ourselves to the choices we make and put our energies into being attentive to the present and building for the future.

It is important to remember that we are always in transition, and no decision is forever. One decision may lead us to a series of decisions, like steps taking us to a new destination. Marilyn, a pastor who decided to get a doctorate but postponed her studies for three years, needed to make decisions about how she was going to work toward her goal. Because life demands that we make so many decisions, we may have to turn to the discernment process often so that our decisions are made by choice, not by default.

Frequently when people get through a discernment and have a sense of rightness about their decision, they panic. Usually this happens because for the first time they really see their gifts. Living into our gifts is risky. Whenever we reach out to try something new, we risk failure, and that is always scary. But if we have done all we can to make good decisions, we can trust that God will bless our choices and guide us in meeting the challenges they involve.

Celebrating Your Decision

Rejoice with me.

–Luke 15:6

Completing a discernment and committing to the decision call for celebration: a celebration of your giftedness and a celebration of the peace that comes with knowing that your deepest yearning and God's yearning for you have been satisfied.

To celebrate, you may simply call close friends and tell them of your decision. Or, you might have a special dinner. If a group was involved in the discernment, why not have a party?

Whatever you do, your celebration will be an expression of who you are and of your use of the discernment process to make a decision in the context of faith and prayer. When your intent is to stay focused on where God is calling you, the help you need to make wise decisions will be revealed through the people, circumstances, and events of everyday life. That alone is cause to rejoice and be glad.

Decision Maker's Prayer

So often I am at a crossroads, God.
I make one decision and set off in a new direction,
but then the road forks, and once again
I have to make another decision.
I know that my life is uncharted.
It is a path that no one else has ever taken.
There is no map; I have no specific directions.
Be my guide, O God.
Direct my feet on the right paths.
Let every decision that I make
be a step in my journey of faith. Amen.

About the Authors



Ron DelBene has been doing spiritual direction and leading programs in the areas of prayer, spirituality and personal development since 1963. Ron holds a Master's degree in Theology and a Doctor of Ministry in Spirituality and Organizational Systems. He has done additional post-graduate work in education, psychology, and counseling. He is an author, poet, artist and Episcopal priest. He was an assistant professor of theology, director of a campus ministry center, and national consultant in religion for an education division of CBS.

Since 1980, Ron's organizational system's leadership has been primarily in churches, empowering them in understanding their mission, goals and structure for effective and creative ministry. Ron and his spouse, Eleanor, reside in Trussville, Alabama, and have two grown children and two grandchildren.

Mary and Herb Montgomery are full-time writers who have created numerous books and educational projects to help both children and adults grow in faith. The Montgomerys live in a Minneapolis suburb.

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