

# MODULE 8: CALLING AND DISCERNMENT

# INTRODUCTION



In this module, **Connie Willems** defines calling and vocation and describes how you can live out your God-given vocation in every stage of your life.



Then, **Jared Boyd** teaches a simple framework for practicing discernment in the everyday decisions of your life.

This module's teaching will help you answer two central questions:

1. How do I identify and live out my God-given vocation?
2. How can I learn to discern God's will in the decisions of my life?

# SESSION 1: DISCOVERING YOUR CALLING

## *Video Notes*

- 1. Vocation involves being: who you are and what you carry from and about God; and doing: how you live that out.** (Romans 16). Sometimes, how you live out your calling from God and what earns you money align, but sometimes they are different. The interplay between who you are (being) and how you live it out (doing) influences the roles you fill in your lifetime.
- 2. You identify your vocation by paying attention to what attributes of God you uniquely carry.** Are there parts of you that feel completely ordinary that people comment on as unique? Do you have any giftings that are so powerful, they've gotten you into trouble or you're getting sick of them, or they've created trouble for others? Are there places where you're entirely aware of your humanity and brokenness, but something from God keeps happening there anyway?
- 3. As you consider vocation, you should expect the following:**
  - Your vocation may feel ordinary because it comes so naturally.
  - You need others to help you discern your vocation. (*God's vocational invitation may not match the norms of your family or culture.*)
  - Your vocation will need to be matured.
  - Your vocation will look different from the inside than from the outside.
  - You will express your vocation in different ways throughout your life.
- 4. Ways to get started discerning vocation:**
  - Do the thing in front of you, in the life you already have.
  - Do the thing in front of you, as you.
  - Do the thing in front of you, with God.
  - Accumulate snapshots. Look for consolation. Ask God to help you notice and experience the sweet spot, the goodness, when you experience it.
  - Above all, dwell, abide, remain in Jesus, the vine. (John 15:5).

# SESSION 1: DISCOVERING YOUR CALLING

## *Reflection Questions*

- 1.** Connie teaches that vocation is a combination of being and doing. How is this description of vocation different from how you may have described it previously? What do you like about Connie's definition?

What do you find challenging about this concept of vocation?

What feels life-giving or exciting to you about this concept of vocation?

- 2.** You can get a clearer idea of your God-given vocation by paying attention to what feels natural.

What is something people have noticed about you that you don't even realize you're doing because it feels so natural?

- 3.** Vocation looks different at different stages of life. Consider the stage of life you are in right now. What does the process of discerning vocation look like for you right now? How is that different from how you explored vocation in a previous life stage?

- 4.** Connie teaches that a big part of vocation is doing what you are doing with God and following God's next step. How do you invite God into decisions about what you do?

How would you like to grow in dwelling in God as you make these decisions?

# SESSION 2: THE BASICS OF DISCERNMENT

## *Video Notes*

- 1. Discernment is the art of finding God's will in the concrete life situations that confront us.** If you're trying to follow Jesus with your life, this means you're orienting your life around the assumption that Jesus is the one leading you. And so this assumption, that God is leading you and you are following, or at least attempting to follow Him, carries with it an underlying reality that you're trying to pay attention to how God might be leading.
- 2. The first step in the discernment process is getting clear and gathering the facts.** If the discernment process that you are in is related to a specific decision you are facing, ask, "What are the actual choices in front of me?" Then, get curious about who those choices will impact, and how each of these choices might affect people differently. Finally, pay attention to the feelings that emerge as you think about the possible outcomes of your decision.
- 3. Then, you pay attention to two movements: consolation and desolation.** As you grow in intimacy with God, you grow in your capacity to notice how God is moving in your life.

Consolation is when you feel increased faith, hope, and love. It can feel like a quiet, settled steadiness inside your soul. The Holy Spirit uses consolation to lead you toward the things God is doing.

Desolation is that interior movement and experience where our faith, hope, and love feel like they're in low supply. Desolation can include feelings of doubt, fear, and discouragement.

Discernment comes from noticing the movements of consolation and desolation and recognizing the impact of those interior movements on your thinking. The enemy, primarily using desolation, wants to confuse you, discourage you, and lead you away from the things of God.

- 4. Next, you pay attention to three scenarios: smooth sailing, conflicting winds, and no wind.** If you imagine yourself sailing in a small sailboat, you can think of the movements of consolation and desolation in terms of the presence or absence of a steady, helpful wind in your sails.

Feeling filled with consolation is like a wind at your back, filling you with joy as you consider your decision. This scenario happens in the discernment process, but is not the most common.

More likely is the feeling of gusty winds of consolation countered with those of desolation: excitement or joy followed by discouragement or anxiety. Much of the work of discernment feels like this because of what it is to partner with God: the Holy Spirit is active, trying to guide with energy and faith, and the enemy is trying to put up obstacles and headwinds to prevent that progress. In this scenario, it is important to seek the wisdom of others, and, many times, to lower the anchor and wait on the decision until clarity comes.

The final scenario is when there is no wind; when there is a decision in front of you and you don't have clear movements of consolation or desolation. In these situations, God may be giving you the freedom to decide.

**5. Finally, seek confirmation** (James 4:6). Once you've gathered the facts, paid attention to the movements of consolation and desolation, and sorted out which of the possible scenarios you are experiencing, the final step is to seek confirmation.

You seek confirmation from God by asking Him to stir up some wind, to give courage and energy, or to dry it up.

You seek confirmation from others by sharing the decision with those who have been with you throughout the process. While sometimes these people may show you things you have missed, most often the people who have walked with you through the process can affirm and support your decision.

## SESSION 2: THE BASICS OF DISCERNMENT

### *Reflection Questions*

- 1.** What decision, direction, or sense of calling are you currently trying to discern in your life? How clear or confusing does that situation feel to you right now?
- 2.** What strong desires, fears, or attachments might be influencing how you're viewing this decision? Are there things you're holding too tightly that might be clouding your freedom to follow God's will?
- 3.** As you think about your options, where do you notice feelings of consolation (peace, hope, joy, love) or desolation (fear, discouragement, confusion)?
- 4.** Which discernment "scenario" do you most relate to right now—clear wind at your back, swirling conflicting winds, or stillness? How does that help you understand what kind of discernment work you may need next?
- 5.** Have you shared your discernment process with trusted friends, mentors, or spiritual directors? What kind of confirmation or insight might community offer you at this point?