



PACEM in TERRIS

HERMITAGE RETREAT CENTER

A YOUNG ADULT'S DISCERNMENT RETREAT

Where Are You Sending Me?

For those standing at a threshold — uncertain about vocation, relationship, education, or simply the next faithful step. This retreat does not give you the answer. It teaches you how to listen for it.



A Three-Day Self-Directed Silent Retreat

Foundation: Before You Begin

What discernment is · Why Ignatius · How to use this guide

THE HONEST STARTING PLACE

You are not lost — you are at a threshold

Uncertainty about the future is not a sign that something is wrong with you or your faith. Every major biblical figure — Moses, Mary, Gideon, Paul — stood at a threshold where the way forward was not clear. The uncertainty you feel is not the absence of calling. It may be the very place where calling begins.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

— Proverbs 3:5–6

WHAT DISCERNMENT IS — AND IS NOT

A clarification before we begin

Discernment is NOT: a formula for finding the one perfect choice, a guarantee against future uncertainty, or an escape from the difficulty of deciding.

Discernment IS: a practiced attentiveness to where God is moving in your life, a way of distinguishing between the voice of fear and the voice of God, and a growing freedom to choose from love rather than anxiety.

THE IGNATIAN GIFT

Consolation, desolation, and the movements of the soul

Consolation: interior movements toward God — peace, deep joy, a sense of rightness, clarity, love.

Desolation: movements away — anxiety, confusion, spiritual flatness, restlessness, constriction.

Ignatius teaches: pay attention to these movements. They are data. God speaks through them.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Four questions for your journal

- What decision or question am I actually here about? (Name it specifically.)
 - What am I most afraid the answer might be?
 - What do I most hope the answer might be?
 - What would I choose if I knew I could not fail — and approval from others didn't matter?
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“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

— Jeremiah 29:11

Day One: Who Am I?

Identity before decision · The self that God made · Receiving before choosing

Ignatius insists we cannot discern well until we are grounded in who we are and whose we are. Identity confusion — which is epidemic in young adulthood — produces decision anxiety. Today we return to the bedrock: you are God’s beloved child, and his love is not contingent on your next choice.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

The voice that names you

Read Matthew 3:13–17 — Jesus’s baptism. Before ministry, before decisions, before any of it: ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ The Father speaks identity before he speaks assignment. Close your Bible and sit in silence for fifteen minutes. Ask: What does God say about who I am — not what I do?

Journal: How much of your sense of identity is tied to having the right answers about your future? What would remain of you if you removed the question of what you will do with your life?

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

— Matthew 3:17

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Psalms 139: Known before you knew yourself

Read Psalm 139:1–18 slowly. ‘All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.’ God’s knowledge of you precedes your knowledge of yourself.

Journal: What does it do to your anxiety about the future to sit with the truth that God already knows it — and knew it before you were born? Does it help? Does it frustrate? Be honest.

MIDDAY — THE DISCERNMENT EXAMEN · 20 MIN

1. Gratitude: Three specific gifts from this morning.
2. Consolation: Where did I feel peace, joy, or a sense of rightness in prayer today?
3. Desolation: Where did I feel anxious, constricted, or spiritually flat?
4. The question beneath the question: Is the decision I’m facing really about logistics — or about something deeper, like fear of failure or disappointing someone?

AFTERNOON PRAYER · 45 MIN

Imaginative Contemplation: The Call of the Disciples

Read John 1:35–51 using Ignatius’s method of imaginative contemplation. Place yourself in the scene — by the river, following at a distance. Jesus turns and asks you: ‘What are you seeking?’ Do not answer quickly. Sit with the question.

Journal: What are you actually seeking — beneath the job, the degree, the relationship? What is the deeper hunger? Name it as precisely as you can.

“Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, ‘What are you seeking?’”

— John 1:38

EVENING WALK • 30 MIN

Walking as listening

Walk slowly without music or a podcast. Carry one question: ‘What do I love?’ Not what I should love, not what impresses people, not what is practical. What do I genuinely, unmistakably love? Write it down when you return.

Evening

Read Psalm 62:1–2. You do not have to solve anything tonight. Simply rest as the known and beloved child of the God who holds your future.

“For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.”

— Psalm 62:1–2

Day Two: How Does God Speak?

Consolation and desolation · Desires, gifts, and the fruit of each path

Ignatius believed that God speaks through the interior movements of our soul — through desires, through the quality of peace we feel in different directions, through the fruit we observe in different paths. Today we learn to read those movements with more precision.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Delight as data

Read Psalm 37:4: ‘Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.’ Many young adults have been taught to distrust their desires. But Ignatius believed that when we are rightly oriented to God, our desires become one of the primary channels through which he speaks.

Journal: When you imagine yourself in each possible path, what do you feel in your body? Peace or constriction? Aliveness or dread? Be honest. This is data.

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The Ignatian Discernment Exercise

Take the primary decision you named on Day One. Work through these steps carefully in your journal:

5. Path A: Imagine yourself one year into choosing this path. Write in detail: What does daily life look like? How do you feel when you wake up? What relationships does this path serve? What does it cost?
6. Path B: Do the same for the alternative path. Do not compare yet — simply inhabit each one fully.
7. Notice: Which scenario produced more consolation — more peace, energy, or a sense of rightness? Which produced more desolation? This is real and important data.

SECOND PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Gifts and fruit

Read Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4–11. God gives specific gifts to specific people for specific purposes. These gifts are clues to calling.

Journal: What do you do that feels effortless to you but remarkable to others? What do people consistently come to you for? What work produces energy rather than depletion?

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”

— Romans 12:6

AFTERNOON · 45 MIN

The voices that are not God’s

Read John 10:27 — ‘My sheep hear my voice.’ There are many voices speaking into your discernment: parental expectation, peer comparison, cultural pressure, financial fear, the desire for approval.

Journal: Make a list of all the voices speaking into this decision. Then ask of each: Is this the voice of God’s love, or the voice of fear? Which voices have you been obeying most?

MIDDAY EXAMEN

8. Where did I feel most drawn toward God today?
9. Which path, when I imagined it, felt more like consolation? More like desolation?
10. What surprised me about what I discovered today?

Evening

Read Acts 16:6–10 — the Holy Spirit redirecting Paul’s journey. Sometimes the Spirit says no to one direction in order to say yes to another. A closed door is not a failure of discernment. Sleep with open hands tonight.

Day Three: The Faithful Next Step

You don't need the whole map — just the next step · Freedom and commitment

Discernment does not always end with certainty. Sometimes it ends with a faithful next step taken in freedom, trusting the God who knows the rest of the path. Today we practice that freedom — and we practice beginning.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Not the whole map — just the next step

Read Psalm 119:105: 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' A lamp to the feet illuminates only the next step — not the whole road. Most of our anxiety is about steps five, ten, and twenty. God offers light for step one.

Journal: What is the single next faithful step in front of you — not the whole decision, just the very next thing? Name it. Can you take just that one?

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

— Psalm 119:105

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The Gideon principle: Testing in humility

Read Judges 6:36–40 — Gideon's fleece. God is patient with our need for confirmation. It is appropriate to ask for confirmation — through trusted mentors, through doors opening or closing, through the sustained quality of peace over time.

Journal: Who are three people whose wisdom you trust enough to share your discernment with? What specific question would you ask each of them?

THE SUSCIPE — FOR YOUNG ADULTS DISCERNING

Lord, I give you my plans and my fears, my hopes and my ambitions, my need for certainty and my dread of getting it wrong. I give you this decision — the one I have been turning over for months. I cannot see the whole road. I am asking you to light just the next step. Take my freedom and use it for something greater than my own safety. Give me the courage to choose, and the trust to walk forward. Give me only your love and your grace. They are enough for whatever comes. (After St. Ignatius of Loyola)

SECOND PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

Freedom and commitment

Read Galatians 5:1 and 5:13. Ignatius prized one quality above all in discernment: holy indifference — not cold detachment, but a holy freedom from the compulsions of fear, approval, and security. When we are free from needing a particular outcome, we can finally hear what God is actually saying.

Journal: On a scale of one to ten, how free are you right now from needing this decision to turn out a specific way? What would increase your freedom?

FINAL EXAMEN · 30 MIN

What I am leaving with

11. What is the most important thing God said to me in these three days? Write it in one sentence.
12. What is the one next faithful step I will take in the next seven days?
13. Who will I share this retreat with — and ask to pray with me as I move forward?
14. Write a short prayer — your own words — releasing your future into God's hands. Date it. Keep it.

A NOTE ON ONGOING DISCERNMENT

This is not the end — it is the beginning of a practice

Discernment is not a one-time retreat event. It is a lifelong practice of attentiveness to where God is moving and freedom to follow. Consider finding a spiritual director trained in Ignatian discernment. Consider a monthly examen. Consider returning to this retreat in six months to see where God has moved.

Go, Beloved Seeker

You came here uncertain. You may still be uncertain. That is all right. You are leaving with something better than certainty — you are leaving with a practice, a posture, and a God who is not finished speaking. The path will become clearer as you walk it. Begin.

“He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

— 1 Thessalonians 5:24

Core Practices & Extra Scripture

Ignatian tools · The discernment community · Extra scripture

PRACTICE

The daily examen for discernment

Each evening for the next month: Name one consolation from today. Name one desolation. Ask: which direction — in the overall pattern of these days — produces more consolation? The pattern over time is more reliable than any single day's feeling.

PRACTICE

The two-list exercise

On one page, write everything life-giving, energizing, or 'true-feeling' about each possible path. On another, write everything draining, false, or fear-producing. Do not analyze — just list. Over several days, the patterns become clearer.

PRACTICE

Find a spiritual director

Ignatius designed the Exercises to be made with a guide. For discernment especially, having a trained spiritual director is invaluable. Ignatian Spirituality (ignatianspirituality.com) has a director locator.

SIGNS OF GOOD DISCERNMENT

How to know you're on the right track

- Sustained peace over time (not just initial excitement)
- The choice serves others, not only yourself
- Trusted mentors confirm what you're sensing
- The path increases your freedom rather than feeding compulsion
- You could explain the choice without fear as the reason
- The decision aligns with your gifts, not just your ambitions

EXTRA SCRIPTURE

A treasury for ongoing discernment

- Isaiah 30:21 — Your ears shall hear: 'This is the way, walk in it'
- Romans 12:1–2 — Be transformed by the renewing of your mind
- Philippians 4:6–7 — The peace of God which passes understanding
- James 1:5 — Ask God, who gives generously without reproach
- Micah 6:8 — What does the Lord require of you?
- Luke 12:22–31 — Seek first the kingdom and these things will be added
- John 10:3–4 — The shepherd calls his own sheep by name; they know his voice