

Discernment of Spirits:
we are not created to be controlled
by our emotions reactions or feelings.

I. Human beings operate by a blend of **intellect** and **will**.

Intellect = knowledge: i. clear fact / objective
 ii. inferred / subjective

Will = feelings: i. “sensible” emotions / chosen responses
 ii. reactive feelings / spontaneous (uncontrolled)

A. **Reactions** are self-preservation responses to life

1. Protect and preserve – life itself
2. Provide pleasure / comfort – “quality of life” desires

B. **Objective knowledge** = truths knowable to all who try to learn

1. Scientific – laws of nature / mathematical precision
2. Human nature – psychology, etc. (what is being described here)
3. Faith – revelation from God through the Bible and the Church

C. **Subjective knowledge** = the evaluated perspective of the individual

Personal preferences (e.g., likes / dislikes) based on life experiences

D. **Sensible emotions** = describing subjective knowledge in reactive terms

examples: “I enjoy coffee” “I hate cold weather”

II. Human beings are “relational” by nature;
that is, we exist in juxtaposition or opposite to others.

We have relationship to: i. self: physical, mental, spiritual aspects
 ii. material reality: people / things
 iii. spiritual reality: God, saints, angels / (evil, too)

While we all *react* to these “others” in our lives, relationships cannot be sustained on reactive feelings. Evaluations lead to judgments which lead to decisions which establish how we functionally relate to self, others, and God.

III. **Discernment** / Decision Making must incorporate certain steps.

1. Identify reactive feelings.

These are our first responses to the experiences of life. Hold these feelings “suspect,” i.e., they may / may not be appropriate because they are *always pre-rational*, un-thinking or non-reflected, emotional responses. [There is no moral right or wrong to these reactions because no “choice” has been made yet.]

2. Identify any/all objective knowledge associated with the experience.

Regardless of how we might agree or disagree with this objective truth, this is the *real foundation* for any valid decision and must be a part of the discernment process. In faith, these are God-given truths to protect and guide us in the correct direction.

3. Reflect upon the subjective ideas about the moment.

What are the expectations, wants, or needs, (met or unmet), which create my reactions and lead to the evaluations I hold onto about the moment, incident, circumstance, or event about which I am obliged to make a decision? Reactions, while un-thinking in themselves, are founded on interiorly held wants, needs, or expectations. We must identify these ideas to determine if they are in line with the objective truth that is meant to govern our decisions and choices. We correct ideas inappropriate to the truth, and we bolster proper ideas in keeping with God’s will.

4. Commend the will to embrace and act upon the recognized personal truth.

These are sensible emotions. Through reflection (discernment) we have discovered the appropriate ideas to hold and choices to make. Now we must “love” what is truly good and “hate” (reject) what is truly bad, regardless of personal preferences or reactions. Discernment leads to being a living example of God’s will in action.

IV. **Spiritual Discernment** – how I live my faith in life – follow the same steps.

This is about the ultimate relationship between myself and God in this world, and through my choices here and now, my relationship with God in the world to come.

1. How do I react to God?

I may tell myself I am *supposed* to love God, but what are my reactions to God in my life experiences? We will never heal hurts and pain if we are not honest about our reactive feelings.

2. What do I know about God from His revelation of Himself through Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church?

We may not always like what the Bible teaches – we must lose our life in order to save it – but we must accept the God’s revealed truth as foundational to the discernment process. To reject any of this truth is to remain in error about our chosen response to God in our lives.

3. How do my reactions and lived attitudes about God and His Church line up with God’s revealed will for me?

There are many challenges throughout the Scriptures to keep us busy our whole lives, but if we want to be true to our self and respond appropriately to God, we must accept these challenges. Making excuses will only keep us unsatisfied with life.

4. I must move myself to value God’s will ahead of my own.

The only way we will improve ourselves and reject what is contrary to God is to surrender my will (what I want) to God’s will (His plan). This means I have: (a) identified my reactions and wants, (b) found what is in keeping with God’s plan; then (c) consciously reject whatever I want that is against God’s will for me, and (d) purposely give personal value to the “good” as God shows it to me. My weaker will may not like God’s plan, but I must embrace it for my own greater good.

V. What is “of God” or not?

1. God is not about passing goods or pleasures but about that which endures and that which leads people to Heaven. God does not bless one person at the direct expense of another. God’s blessings, somehow, are meant to be for all people, greatest to least.
2. To evaluate our “feelings” or reactions, visualize them as universal values. Do they preserve themselves? Values are forever! Do they provide surety and security, or merely passing enjoyment? God wants us to “feel” what belongs in His eternal presence. All else is less than holy.
3. God proves His presence with *unshakable* peace even in the absence of human pleasure or enjoyment. Pain or suffering does not mean God is not there, because He calls us above the good / bad of this world. Grace empowers us to accept our earthly limitations.

4. Constant anxiety brought on by unfulfilled desires to “be in charge” or to possess what is beyond our reach is a sign of remaining fixated on what we believe this world must provide. We want God to bless us **now**, so there is no trust in God, and no peace with life as we experience it.
5. When we can jump into the unknown without fear, we know we have placed ourselves in God’s hands. He is in charge, not me. I trust I will have whatever I need, and I align my feelings with life as God offers it to me.
6. To live no longer for self but for God and the service of His people proves our attachment to Heaven and not to earth. Constantly to weigh the cost of giving and to expect return for what is given proves we are still attached to this world and its limitations.