



SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

THE POWER OF A DISCERNING SPIRIT

KEY PASSAGE: Psalm 119:66 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:130 | Ezekiel 44:22-23
John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:13 | 1 Corinthians 2:10-15

► SUMMARY

Do you sometimes find it difficult to discern whether it's God's voice you're hearing or your own?

These challenges help us recognize our need for spiritual discernment, which is the ability to see beyond the appearance of our circumstances, perceive God's viewpoint on them, and make wise judgments in response. If ever there was a time for this gift, it's now. Today, culture bombards us with all sorts of information—but not necessarily truth. Therefore, it's vital that God's children attain spiritual discernment. Understanding this, King David prayed, “Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments” (Ps. 119:66). Likewise, this petition must echo in our lives.

► SERMON POINTS

Discernment is essential to ...

- **Understand God's will.** God will clearly communicate His purpose for our lives, but we must also discern His guidance on decisions that affect them. For example, the question of who to marry must be directed by God and compatible with His calling. Some people choose a spouse based on appearance, social status, financial security, or other fleshly qualities. But these things should never be the deciding factors. The important issue is whether or not the Father's guidance has been sought and obeyed. Otherwise, our decisions lead to disaster.
- **Distinguish truth from error.** Since truth is often mixed with error, only a discerning spirit can separate the two.

This is why it's quite common these days for young people who have been raised in church to lose their faith while in college. Either they attended a church that poorly nurtured their faith, or they were never taught to judge rightly. Considering this danger, it's important for parents to prepare children using the Word of God and explain how to hear His voice.

- **Avoid being deceived by sin.** The pleasures of sin are momentary, but their consequences affect us for a long time. When we're tempted, discernment helps us by bringing the following question to mind: What will the consequences of my actions be? This precaution not only applies to obvious sins or moral matters, but also to any life choice from shopping expenses to music selections and more.
- **Differentiate between good and best.** As followers of Jesus Christ, our aim is for excellence. If we settle for things that are good enough, we may hinder ourselves from receiving something better. A discerning spirit, however, prevents us from committing to a “good deal” before it's necessary. Although you must sometimes make quick decisions, it's wise to step back and consider your full range of options, asking God which is best. This is true with shopping for example. While some may argue that God doesn't need to be consulted on every purchase, people often wish they had, once the bill comes in. In other words, it's always best to seek His wisdom not when we're in trouble, but before it occurs.
- **Distinguish between legalism and liberty.** Simply put, legalism is the pressure of personal preferences we impose on others as moral mandates from God. Therefore, when someone insists that Scripture be

interpreted a certain way, a discerning spirit will prompt us to seek God's wisdom on the issue. In reality, the Bible is clear on any moral question; we just need to study it to find answers.

- **Recognize when God is speaking.** Do you know how to listen to God? Sometimes people think He isn't speaking, when the truth is they have not learned to recognize His voice. It's crucial that we do so because He's willing to speak into every decision and protect us from dangers we can't foresee.
- **Receive godly counsel.** When searching for a counselor, believers must be wise in their selection by choosing one who is spiritually discerning. Not just anyone with a "Christian counseling" license will do. You should be confident in that person's ability to seek God's perspective on your situation. Otherwise, your actual needs—those that can only be revealed by the Spirit—will not be adequately addressed. As the Word of God tells us, the natural mind does not grasp spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:10-15).

What is the source of spiritual discernment?

- **The Holy Spirit.** Before ascending to heaven, Jesus promised His disciples the coming of the Holy Spirit. He referred to Him as the "Helper" and described what He would provide in the lives of believers. The Holy Spirit gives us direction, helps us understand truth, and reminds us of Jesus' teaching. Dwelling inside of us, He enables our spiritual discernment (John 14:16, 26). And, thanks to His guidance, you and I never have to make decisions on our own (John 15:26).
- **The Word of God.** In Psalm 119:130, we're told that light enters us by the Word of God, which is our basis for all discernment. There is not a single moral question or problem in life that does not have an answer in Scripture. Our ability to see this develops as we continually absorb biblical principles. Over a period

of time, our minds become so filled with them that we learn to see their application in any situation.

- **Godly teachers.** With a biblical foundation in place, discernment can be fostered even further through godly teachers. In the Old Testament, one of the Levites' priestly roles was to teach the Israelites how to "discern between the unclean and the clean" or between the holy and profane (Ez. 44:22). Similarly, we can learn discernment from biblical teachers and godly role models.
- **Experience.** Lastly, our spiritual discernment will be enhanced as we obey God's promptings. At times we'll make mistakes, confusing His voice with our own thoughts, but we can learn from these instances. The process of trial and error is a great teacher if we're honestly pursuing God and are faithful to fill our minds with His Word. Over time, we'll be able to hear His voice more clearly and intimately.

► RESPONSE

- Each day we're confronted with situations that require a discerning spirit. We live in a world that mixes truth with error and attempts to blur the line between good and evil. But as children of God, we can be protected from deception. By knowing the Father's purpose for our lives—and walking in the center of His will—we'll learn to recognize the choices that are best and most pleasing to Him. Thankfully, everything we need for spiritual discernment is available through the Holy Spirit's guidance, the written Word, and godly teaching. When we acknowledge these sources, the One who leads us in all truth will direct our steps (John 16:13).

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