



Quaker Way of Individual Discernment

Overview:

Individual practices focusing on decision-making and spiritual discernment..



30 min.



All Ages



Newcomer Friendly

Aims & Objectives:

When you have completed this topic, you will have experience in decision making and spiritual discernment.

Materials & Set-up:

You may want to have a journal to record your thoughts.

Reading List (optional):

These practices were drawn from Nancy Bieber's book, *Decision Making & Spiritual Discernment* (2010), available through QuakerBooks.

[Link to purchase book:](http://tinyurl.com/j6uodey) <http://tinyurl.com/j6uodey>

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Instructions:

Are you facing important decisions? Trying to balance everything that pulls on your daily life? Searching for ways to include God's wisdom in your decision making and life shaping?

Below are three invitations to practice individual discernment, from Quaker author Nancy Bieber. As you search to listen deeply for the guidance of Spirit in your life, consider adopting one or more of these practices. After some time, meet with your Spiritual Deepening group to share what you learned about yourself and about the wisdom of the Inner Teacher.

Deepened Listening

In this practice, you give yourself space in which to listen deeply and attend to the Spirit. New insights may come, but your purpose is to be fully present to your life and open to God. Allow yourself a generous amount of time.

1. Find a physical setting that helps you quiet your mind: a place where distractions of sounds and activities will not disturb you.
2. Offer this time to God. You might say your intention in words: "Here I am, willing to receive whatever understanding comes." Or "I give this time to being open to the Spirit." Or perhaps a gesture or symbol will express your intention.
3. Allow your mind to wander freely. The purpose of this practice is not to solve a problem but to be open to God. You could ask yourself, "How is God present in this part of my life?" If new understandings come, hold them lightly, with gratitude.
4. When the time is drawing to an end, acknowledge your gratitude with a few prayerful words. Notice how your body and spirit have been nurtured.

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This Season of Life

While each stage or ‘season’ of our lives brings changes, sometimes we don’t recognize the freedoms and limitations different seasons offer. In this exercise you will look at the present and discover how it has both limited and freed you.

1. Specify the season of life you are in right now. While there are broad life stages that are widely recognized (early adulthood, parenting preschoolers, retirement, etc.), you might need to be creative in describing the unique season where you are now. For example, it could be the “newcomer in town” or the “leader who is no longer leading” phase of your life.
2. Reflect on the limitations that are built into this stage of your life. These may be in areas such as responsibility, relationships (family or others), economic security, health, or energy levels.
3. Reflect on the freedoms you have in this stage of your life. Sometimes freedoms are more challenging to identify than limitations, particularly if the new freedom involves diminishment (such as the loss of a spouse). You still have the freedom to choose how you live with the loss.
4. Sometimes the same reality both limits and opens your life. Retirement or job loss can severely limit your spending but open you to a different way of living (less shopping at the mall and more use of library books, videos, and computer services; less eating out and more experimentation in the kitchen). What aspects of this season both limit and free you?
5. As you reflect on what you have written, use it to remember your desire to live this season guided by God’s wisdom and light. What would it be like to live the limitations gracefully? What would your life look like if you really embraced the freedoms offered by this season?

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Bulbs in Winter

This meditation focuses on the gift at the heart of waiting by using the image of a sleeping bulb.

1. Find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. Settle yourself in a comfortable position and notice your breathing, allowing it to quiet and calm you. Simply be present in the moment.
2. Imagine yourself settled deep in the earth as a bulb. Inside you rests all you will need to begin sending out that precious green shoot, but it is not yet time for that. Picture snow and cold winds above your snug nest, and take some time to be quietly resting and waiting. Accept this time; recognize that you need this cold in order to grow well, that this inactive time is a gift.
3. Return to your awareness of your human waiting time and reflect on the experience of being snugly protected in your waiting. How did you feel as a waiting bulb?
4. Reflect on any gifts you find in this present time of inactivity. How will you know when the waiting is over-- when it is time to send out shoots?