

A group of monks in a forest procession. In the foreground, a monk in a white and gold vestment holds a large, ornate sunburst-shaped object. Behind him, several other monks in white and blue robes are walking along a path, some holding books. The background is a dense forest with green foliage.

Discerning God's Call for Your Life



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WELCOME

Thanks for downloading our **Discerning God's Call for Your Life** eBook. In this guide we will walk you through some basic steps towards discerning where God may be calling you. You will learn the basic vocation types within in the Catholic Church and what types of practical steps you can take towards growing in understanding of what God wants of you. We will also share with you some things NOT to do!

I am the vocation director at the **Community of Saint John** and I would love to talk to you about where you are in your journey and, if appropriate, provide you with further discernment resources no matter what direction you feel God wants you to go. You see, the awesome thing about discernment is that there isn't a matter of right and wrong, it's a matter of discovering what will fulfil you the most. It's exciting and energizing to discover.

If you're a young man who is ambitious and want to go all out discerning God's calling, I'd love to introduce you to the Saint JPII House of Discernment. Take 9 months without distraction to step out into the deep and dive right into discerning. Just ask.

Happy learning, happy praying, happy discerning.

God Bless,



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Introduction to Discernment

Young Catholics—and Catholics of all ages, for that matter—who are truly seeking God's will for their lives often throw around a very common word, and one that can cause all kinds of emotions, from excitement, to stress, to anxiety, to worry, to frustration: vocation.

What exactly does this word, "vocation," mean? It comes from the Latin verb "vocare," which means "to call" – so it quite literally refers to one's specific call from God. Your vocation is the manner in which God is calling you to holiness in this life.

Let's back up. Every single person has a vocation to love, first and foremost. The Catechism says, "Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being" (2392). We are all called to love God by loving our neighbor; but we all are given a unique way of doing that. A vocation is how God is asking you to love; it's how you see yourself living out this call to love. And ultimately, your vocation and how you love in this life are what will ultimately help you get to Heaven.

**"Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being."
Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2392**

Types of Vocations

A **priest** is called to love—to sacrifice himself—for the Church. Once a man takes priestly vows, he becomes, essentially, wed to the Church; and his call is to love the Church—the souls entrusted to his care. He does this by making the sacraments available, hearing confessions, anointing the sick, and by pastorally making Christ visible in his parish or in his religious order, whatever his charism may be. A vocation to the priesthood can look different depending on the path one takes. The two main types of priestly vocations are:



Diocesan Priesthood: These priests commit to working within a diocese under the direction of a bishop. Their roles are typically administrative or pastoring a church within the diocese.



Religious Priesthood: These priests are also religious brothers (see below) and rather than taking direction from a priest they take direction from the superior of a religious congregation. Religious life typically is more ministerial or apostolic than diocesan priesthood and includes world missions, serving the poor, teaching and preaching, etc.



A vocation to the **consecrated religious life** has many facets; but at its core, religious life means a taking vows of “chastity,” “poverty,” and “obedience”. These men and women commit their lives to the mission a religious congregation. Religious communities include congregations such as large groups such as Franciscans, Dominicans, Benedictines but also smaller groups such as Community of Saint John, Missionaries of Charity, and the Norbertines. You probably know these people as “brothers” or “sisters” (brothers or nuns). Some brothers eventually become priests, but not all. Whatever the mission of the congregation (missionary, educational, medical, etc.), the religious brother or sister gives his or her entire life—body, soul, mind, heart—to Jesus and their call is to love in whatever way He asks through the way of life of the congregation and direction from its superiors. Most congregations are “active” but some are “contemplative” or “cloistered” – meaning the vocation of that congregation is to pray.



Married men and women, too, have a unique call to love. Their call is to make Christ visible by loving one another—as St. Paul puts it, a man’s call in marriage is to love his wife as Christ loved the Church. Husbands and wives are called to a unique vocation in that their call to love also involves the many self-sacrifices of physical parenthood. (Similarly, though, priests and sisters can be said to have many, many “spiritual” children whom they labor over in prayer and sacrifice, as well.)



There are several other unique vocations in the Church. One is the **single life**; sometimes God calls individuals to lay down their lives in other ways rather than a religious vocation or marriage. The single life allows one to devote more time and energy not only to prayer, but also to lay service to the Church. Some single people choose to consecrate themselves under a bishop, solidifying their call to remain single and chase for the Lord.



Similarly, **the mission field** is also another vocation to which many are called. It takes a special kind of person to leave behind one’s own familiar life and go minister to a others (usually in a foreign land); but this vocation entails a special kind of self-sacrificial love, not just for the missionary but also for his or her family.

Ask us if you would like additional resources on any type of vocation. We’d love to help.

How To Discern



An object in motion stays in motion, we all know the law of inertia from Newton. The question, “what is my vocation?” is a little like contemplating what you’re going to be when you grow up—but in this case, it’s your soul and service to God that are the focus, not your career. Many young people, especially, can become overwhelmed by the discernment process—the process of prayer, research and contemplation by which one decides which vocation to pursue.

Many priests, religious, and married people will say that their vocation story was not anything like choosing a career; rather, it usually (though not always!) involves a bit more of an internal struggle and perhaps even a struggle with God than choosing to be a writer or an accountant or a lawyer.

So how does one discern God’s will for their life in terms of a vocation?

The best place to start is by acknowledging God’s love and sovereignty; He created each of us and knows us better than we know ourselves. So clearly, he knows what vocation is best suited to help get our soul to Heaven. This means that even if the idea of marriage terrifies you, or if you feel anxious thinking of religious life—if God is calling you to either of those vocations, He truly does know what is best for your soul and will

gradually take care of those fears to lead you on His path, provided you approach Him with an open heart. The best first step on any discernment journey is being open to God's will and earnestly praying, "not my will, but thine be done."

Fervent prayer is, of course, helpful; it's hard to know God's will if you aren't talking to Him regularly! But active discernment also helps, which may involve praying very specific vocation prayers, being open to what God is calling you to do, and exploring opportunities that interest you.

FOR EXAMPLE, if you have been praying about your vocation and feel even a small degree of attraction towards religious life, the best way to determine if this is an authentic call is to go visit a religious order and gain a better understanding of what religious life is really like. Similarly, if the diocesan priesthood sound attractive, talk with priests about their vocations. Go to the seminary for a visit, and if you still feel called, apply and see what happens.

In the priesthood and in religious life simply visiting, even entering or going to seminary, does NOT mean you must stay there forever. There are many opportunities throughout the formation process where you will be given the opportunity to discern more – to confirm what God wants of you. If it is not right, at least you've tried. Sometimes the process of elimination is what we need. That's okay!



In terms of dating, if you meet someone who is earnestly pursuing holiness, and has a heart for Jesus (and if you're attracted to them!), get to know them in a chaste dating relationship. Acknowledge that a natural desire to want to be married is a good thing. When dating, you're essentially discerning marriage with the other person. The best way to discern if you're called to marry a specific person is to, first and foremost, get to know them better.

And if you're intrigued by missions, there are many opportunities to participate in this same sort of "active discernment" by going on a mission trip or spending an extended period of time working in the mission field.

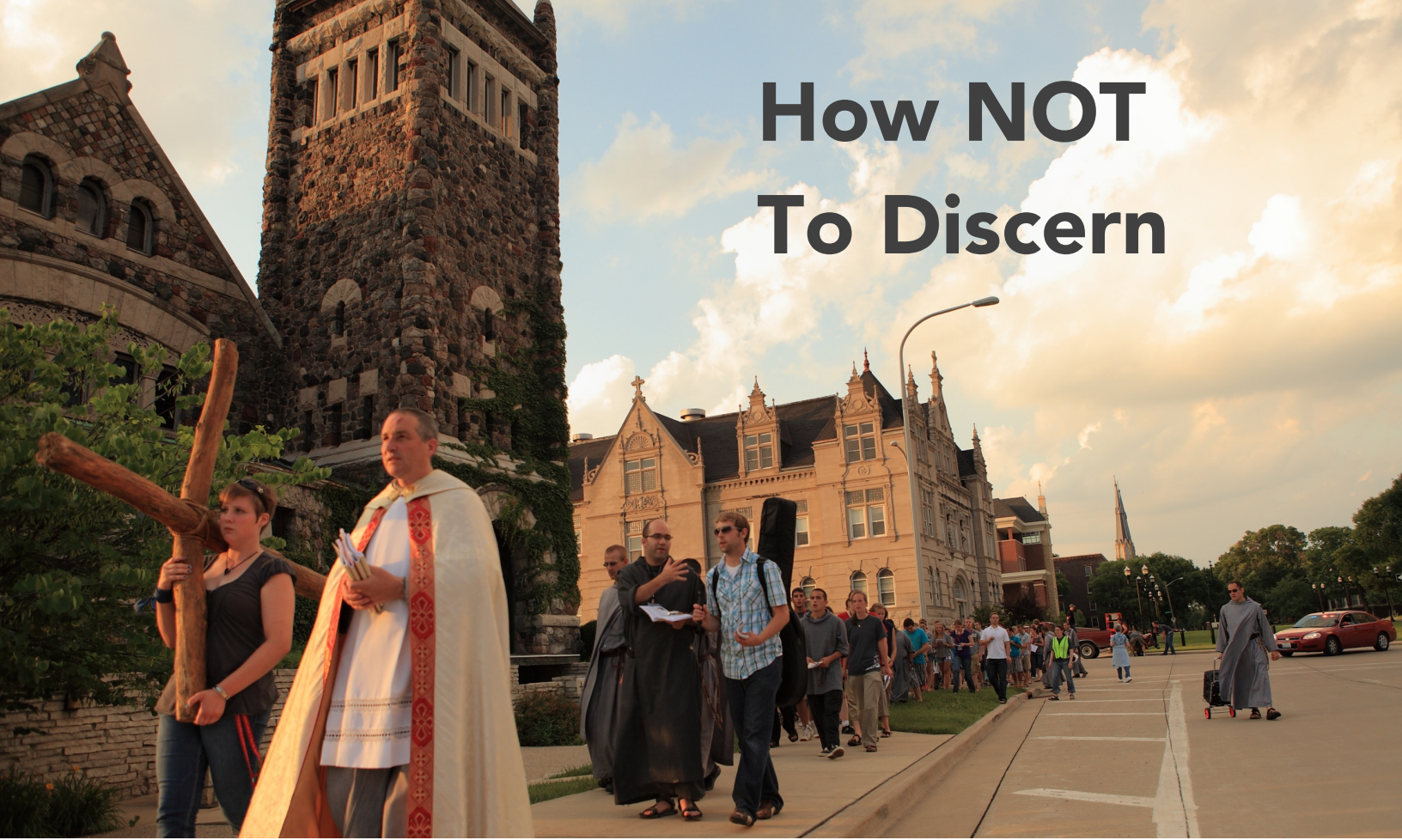
It's helpful to surround yourself with wise, holy people who truly have an honest, impartial concern for your soul (meaning they don't have a strong desire to see you pursue any particular vocation). Consult with wise people in your parish, trusted priests, a spiritual director or confessor, and family and friends you can trust.

READY? SET. GO! The best way to discern is first to pray, and then to act.

Let God work within your heart and your action. You must also be willing to commit to at least trying **something**, whether it's visiting with priests or religious, dating someone to discern marriage, or another method of active discernment. There is also such a thing as too much discernment! Sometimes making a decision to further investigate can help you determine if that avenue is what God is calling you to do.



How NOT To Discern



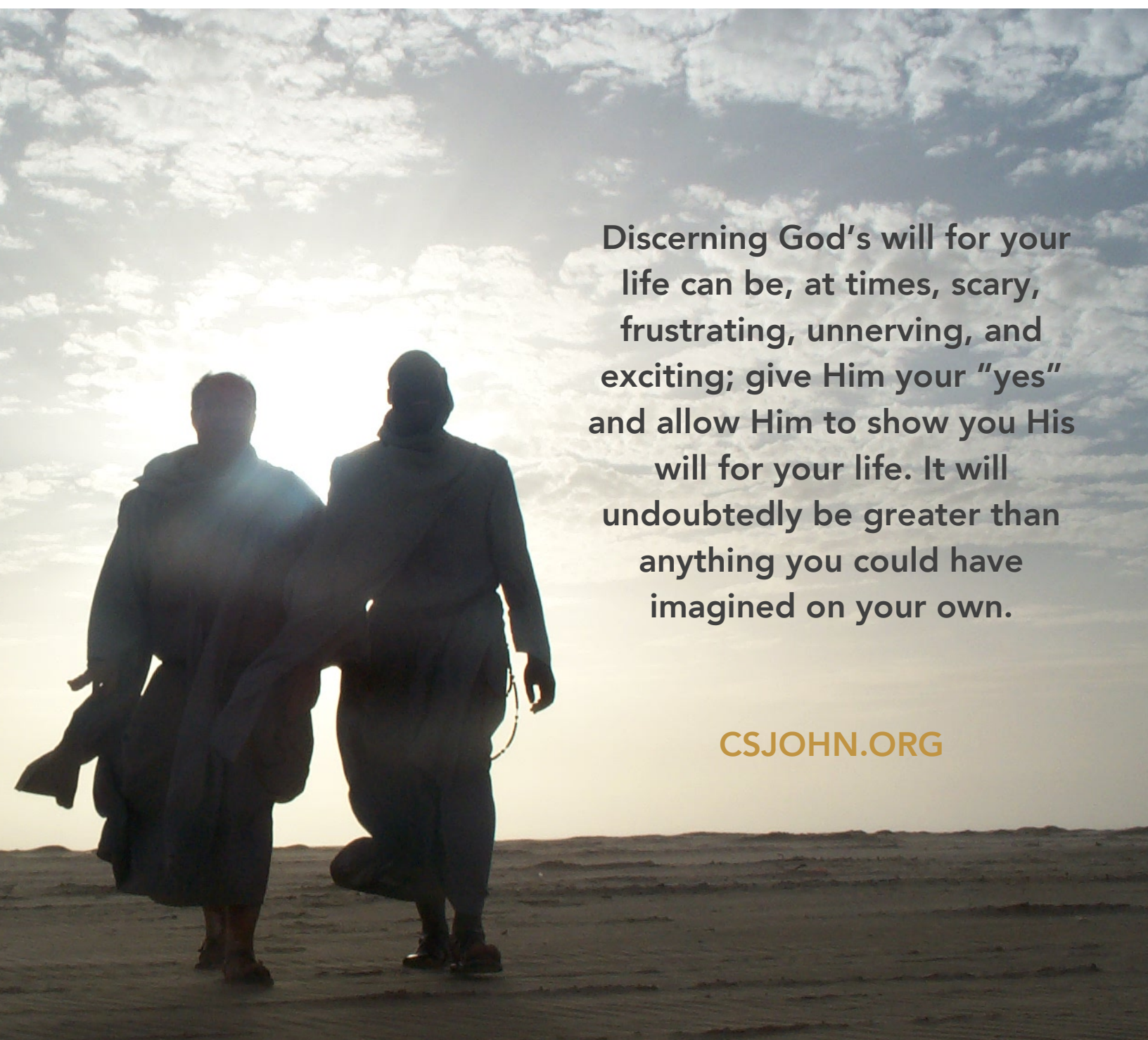
There are a few things to try to avoid when discerning God's call for your life, as well. For one, don't give God time limits when it comes to your vocation. In other words, have patience as God gradually reveals His beautiful plan for your life; His timing is perfect, and though you might think you need to know what He wants you to do now, He in His wisdom may think you're not quite ready to know what it is He wants you to do.

Don't shut your heart to anything; you might know for sure that you have no interest in religious life after praying on it and even after visiting convents or speaking with religious sisters—and that's okay! But it's important to give God your will, and let Him open and shut the doors for you.

Your worthiness—or your sense of unworthiness—has no bearing on God's will for your life. You may feel like you wouldn't make a good priest or a good spouse because you feel unworthy of either role. But as the saying goes, "God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called." This goes for every vocation; God's power is made perfect in weakness, so your weaknesses don't preclude you from a particular vocation; they will just allow you to let God's grace into those areas all the more.

He's Waiting for Your "Yes"

Most importantly, don't be anxious. God will not force you into anything—rather, He's waiting for your "yes" to whatever it is He's calling you to do with your life. You can love and serve God and your neighbor in any vocation and you can do so beautifully; just because you don't become a priest or a religious sister doesn't mean you don't love Jesus enough. It just means God is calling you to holiness by way of a different path.



Discerning God's will for your life can be, at times, scary, frustrating, unnerving, and exciting; give Him your "yes" and allow Him to show you His will for your life. It will undoubtedly be greater than anything you could have imagined on your own.

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