

How do I Know What my God-Given Mission is?

In his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren sums up the answer to this question beautifully: “The best use of life is love. The best expression of love is time. The best time to love is now.”

In a sense, *how* we choose to spend our lives on loving God is mere detail, is simply a commentary on this real core-mission of every human being. However, in fact, details *do* matter and God does care about the manner in which we live out our commentary on the commandment of love.

Discovering our own unique and personal calling is what Christians often call the art of “discernment,” which simply describes the process of making intelligent life decisions that are informed by living faith. Even more, it means that our faith must be *the* life-organizing principle around which every deliberation and decision is made. Here, doing God’s will and heeding Jesus’ teachings echoed in the teachings of the Church serve as our *first and last thought* any time we deliberate what to do next.

Discernment also means that we must be people of *prayer*, who have a living and real-time relationship with this God who invites us to join Him in the dance of co-creating and co-redeeming this world. Knowing God’s will requires not just knowledge, but love; not just correct ideas, but a close friendship.

Our Catholic tradition has much to say about key aspects of good discernment, so let me share seven principles here just to whet your appetite for more...

- As you consider God’s will for the future, be sure to “give your all” to doing that will in the present. Be faithful to your present duties for God’s sake and joyful in carrying your crosses with Jesus. Those who are not striving to be faithful to God now will not be faithful in the future.
- What God asks of us, in the final analysis, is really about matching our desires, gifts and talents to the needs of the Church and the world. As Frederick Buechner said so beautifully, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”
- While God always *commands* us to do what is good and avoid evil, He only *invites* us to do the *greatest* good possible in every situation. Another way of saying this is that God never commands heroism but invites us to choose it when it is called for. This is the meaning of the Jesuit motto, “For the *greater* glory of God.”
- Knowing God’s will with sufficient clarity to make a decision is *always* possible, though the *full* mystery of God’s plan will always remain unknown. This is why trust is essential for discernment.

- Discerning God’s will requires that we are free from as much bias and prejudice as possible. We must always work to be detached from our own preferences, fears, addictions, agendas, excessive desire for ease or praise, etc., and be wide open to the possibilities of God’s plan. Here having truthful and wise confidants who know us well and who can “tell it like it is” is crucial.
- We can discern only what to *try*. With the exception of permanent commitments like marriage and priesthood that cannot be unchosen, when we choose to explore an option, we only choose to risk a try and see what happens. Once we have begun down a new path, good discernment continues.
- When we live our lives sincerely seeking God’s will, *nothing* is ever wasted. No loss or failure, no sin repented of, no wandering about in the dark night of faith. All that is given to God—all that is done with the intention of glorifying His love and mercy—is swept up into His eternal work of “making all things new” (Rev. 21:5). In the Age to Come, we will see the masterpiece God makes of our stumbling lives.



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