

EVERYDAY DISCERNMENT

Tim Ferrara

Founder of Discerning Dad



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WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT EVERYDAY DISCERNMENT

*“Spurgeon said, ‘Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong, knowing the difference between right... and almost right.’ If ever there was a time for Christians to be discerning, now is the time. In *Everyday Discernment: The Importance of Spirit-Led Decision Making*, Tim Ferrara lays out the case for how our decisions impact our daily lives, and the lives of those around us. From the movies we watch to our choices as parents, God wants to be involved. If you’d like to learn how to invite God into every aspect of your life, this important book should be on your list!”*

Heidi St. John,

Author, Speaker, Podcaster, MomStrong International

<https://heidistjohn.com/>

“Tim does an excellent job at handling the topic of discernment. He thoroughly and wisely covers multiple topics and how to develop discernment in each of those areas. The discussion questions at the end of each chapter prove to be a useful tool for developing much needed discernment in life. This book is a must read for any Christian who is serious about making well thought out, wise, Godly decisions.”

Patrick Antonucci

Founder of Dad Hackers: Becoming the Men God Designed Us to Be

Host of the Dad Hackers Podcast

<https://dadhackers.us/>

“In a world that is quick to tell you what you need and what will make you happy, Tim has found a way to capture what is truly important in all areas of life...discernment. A life without discernment is like knowledge without wisdom. You may have lots of money, friendships, possessions or charisma, but if you lack discernment, those will all come crashing down or found to be meaningless. In a very concise and transparent way Tim shares what God has shown him throughout his life and lays out a framework for others to follow.”

Nathan Bentley

Senior Pastor

LifePoint Church - San Tan Valley, Arizona

Somewhere, between the pages of this book and the pages of your heart, God is speaking - in this very moment. Tim Ferrara calls us to walk in discernment daily, if you need clarity about your next step in your faith journey this book is for you. Tim gives practical steps to increase your reliability on the scriptures and it will encourage you not only to read God's Word, but to faithfully apply it to your life. Thank you for being obedient in writing this much needed message, Tim!”

Rashawn Copeland

Author, Speaker, Podcaster, Founder of I'm So Blessed Daily

www.rashawncopeland.org

"Tim Ferrara has started a discernment revolution! I have witnessed Tim's personal commitment to the exceptional biblical shaping of his marriage and his fatherhood. I pray millions of Christians join Discerning Dad in this discernment journey!"

Rev. Shawn Capozzi

Senior Pastor of New Season Christian Fellowship in Apache Junction, Arizona

C.E.O Ethos Counseling Institute and A.I.M.

"In today's fast-paced, distracted, information-saturated (and opinion-saturated), social media-inundated, hedonistic, and subjective truth culture, it is important, now more than ever, for Christians to be able to discern Truth from 'kinda-sort-a', 'sounds spiritual', 'feels good to me' truth and to know how to live out the Christian life. Tim hits the nail on the head for the need for Biblically-based and Spirit-led discernment and guides us through key areas needing such discernment in this book. This a great resource for a baseline understanding of the role of God's logos (written word; i.e., the Bible) and His rhema word (i.e., the spoken word as revealed by The Spirit of God) as it relates to discernment for the Christian."

Aaron M. Long

Podcaster, Writer, and Founder of "DadInTheTrenches"

www.dadinthetrenches.com

"Lack of discernment, and even hostility toward discernment, constitutes a major factor precipitating decline in our nation. Consequently, Tim Ferrara's book Everyday Discernment provides a much-needed emphasis on this crucial component of the Christian life. Some mandates of Scripture are categorical and easy to apply. However, others require serious discernment in their application. Ferrara points us in the right direction, focusing on Scripture as the ultimate source of this crucial capability.

Especially helpful is his directing our attention to areas of the Christian life where discernment is especially needed."

Paul Brownback PhD, Author

www.truthforu.com

"Tim does a great job of helping readers to make better decisions. If you need help with discernment, then read this book."

Daniel Rhee

Pastor, Author

danielhrhee.com

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This is dedicated to my Dad who has been the primary example of discernment in my life and who has shown me the importance of obedience and faithfulness to Jesus.

FOREWORD

The gifts of the Spirit can be some of the most useful attributes to Christians today. But they can also be the most abused.

For those who do not know how to use the gifts of the Spirit, they are missing out on the supernatural ministries God gives to those who believe. It's not magic, or show, or entertainment, but it's God's way of utilizing every member of the Body to build His Kingdom.

Those who abuse the gifts have caused confusion and doubt in the world. I believe God will deal with them in due time. But because of this confusion and doubt, supernatural moments in God's Kingdom have been stifled and many have been pushed away from the Christian faith.

There are few books outside of the Bible that give a clear understanding of how to use the gifts in a godly manner. Tim has done just that in his book, *Everyday Discernment: The importance of Spirit-led decision making*. Although Tim doesn't cover every spir-

itual gift available, he has taken what I feel is one of the most important ones, discernment, and given an amazing outline of how to better our understanding and knowledge on spiritual and worldly matters.

With a better understanding of the gift of discernment, we all can make better, godlier choices. I encourage every man and woman to dive into this book, highlight the good parts, and start applying it today!

Jody Burkeen

Author, Pastor, and Speaker

Founder of Man Up: Becoming a Godly Man in an Ungodly World

Author of:

Man Up: Becoming a Godly Man in an Ungodly World

Pursuit of a Godly Life

Marriage Advance

Hacksaw Ridge Men's Devotion

www.manupgodsway.org

INTRODUCTION

If you had told me a year ago that I would be writing this book, I would have thought you were crazy. In many ways, the journey to write this book has been taking place my whole life, but more specifically, it started about a year ago with a lesson on the gifts of the Spirit at my church.

Taking a test online, I confirmed that my strongest gift was discernment, which I already could have guessed. It was like a “data download” in my brain during a particular service about the website and blog I needed to create called “Discerning Dad,” and I came home and wrote frantically in a notebook about my inspiration for the logo, design, and content, along with a business plan of sorts with short-term and stretched-out goals. Writing a book was one of those stretched-out goals but took place a lot sooner than I had expected. A few months later, it was like another data download about the title, concept, and content of the book, which you now hold in your hands (or read on your smart device).

Working in management for over twenty years, I have seen many leaders come and go, some great at leading and others not so much. The poor leaders I have seen are very reactionary and more passive in their approach. They seem to go to work and put out “fires” all day without planning and being strategic about their routines or the future of their business.

On the other hand, the great leaders I have seen have great routines; they face new challenges with a plan and make firm decisions. Great leaders are the figurative “captain of their ship,” turning the wheel in the direction they decide, charting a course ahead of them while being fully aware of the challenges they will face. Those who struggle to lead seem to get tossed by the wind and waves without having a clear vision for what is ahead of them; they make weak decisions without taking accountability for them.

Growing up in the church all my life and now being in leadership, I have seen Christians who are in control of their walk with the Lord. They are strong in their faith and have a purpose and plan for their lives. Even when doubt or distraction comes, they have a battle plan ready to face the challenges. Other Christians seem to get tossed by the wind and waves of life, either leaving the faith altogether or living a low-impact life for God. Many of these Christians have good intentions but have either never been trained on a practical strategy for their new lives in Jesus or have not acted out in obedience to what they have learned.

Usually when I watch the news, I ponder many times why people in general make the same mistakes generation after generation. Why isn't there a manual for how to live that keeps people from experiencing the same hurt and sorrow due to poor choices? I believe the answer to this question is the Bible.

I feel like the calling in my ministry is not to put the focus on me but to figuratively hold a sign with a big arrow on it pointing to the Bible. For the Bible is where we can gain wisdom to understand how to live, and it is by following the rules and standards set forth in the Bible that we experience freedom. The Bible does not only look forward or in the past but allows us to look inwardly and change how we act outwardly as well.

My goal in the coming chapters is to help you reflect on each topic and how it relates to decisions you have made or will make in those areas. I will barely scratch the surface on each topic. In fact, each chapter could be expanded into a whole book of its own, and there is already a wealth of resources out there for all of them.

This book is not meant to be consumed in one sitting. My hope is that, at the end of each chapter, you can analyze what was discussed in relation to your walk with the Lord. The questions at the end of each chapter are designed to be utilized either for individual reflection or group discussion. Pausing to take time to answer them before moving on to the next chapter will help you apply the material to your life.

A goal of this book is to ask yourself, “Why do I believe what I believe, and how can I grow in my discernment daily in my walk with the Lord?” After all, the purpose of having Christian discernment is to test all things in light of the Bible. I would expect no less from you as you read this book. You should have discernment about this book and anything else you read for that matter. If you don’t agree with something I write, ask yourself why.

Be open-minded and ask the Lord for insight into what He is trying to tell you as you progress through the content.

It is my prayer that this book is a blessing to you as much as it was to me in writing it.

Let’s discern together...

CHAPTER I: DISCERNMENT DEFINITION

As humans, we are blessed with the free will to make choices. When we were children, we desired independence but had our parents who helped us with decisions as we grew in knowledge and wisdom. The impact of many factors throughout our childhood defines who we are when we reach adulthood. The blend of nature and nurture gives us a structure for our beliefs and personality and creates a presupposition in how we make decisions daily.

One study estimated that an average adult makes around 35,000 decisions daily.¹ These decisions can be as trivial as what movie to watch or what to eat for breakfast and as poignant as whom to marry and what career to pursue. Many times, it is a history of poor decisions that leads people on a path they never intended to be on. As Christians, our independence

that was so fought for as children must be subjected to God. The way we subject our will to God's and make better decisions is through discernment.

Discernment is a spiritual gift, along with many others described in 1 Corinthians 12. God provides every Christian with spiritual gifts; however, not everyone uses them. Christians can specialize in a spiritual gift which can lead them to use it along a path of ministry. They can also be used in specific times at specific places at God's discretion. Unfortunately, the spiritual gifts can be ignored, too, and many Christians fail to move in the power of God that is readily available to all believers.

The Greek word for discernment is *diakrisis*. This describes the ability to distinguish, discern, judge, or appraise a person, statement, situation, or environment. It can be related to the "discerning of spirits" as in 1 Corinthians 12:10 or between good and evil in Hebrews 5:14 (NASB). "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Discernment is not only a spiritual gift but also has practical applications that are not always based on spiritual promptings as much as common sense built on the foundation of our faith.

I have seen discernment discussed in primarily two places: The Catholic Church and New Age platforms. It's important to note that discernment is explained and encouraged in the Bible, and I feel it is critical for our processing of decisions in life with the help of the Holy Spirit. With this said, discernment should be a

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talking point more among Christians and in churches today and is a reason that I am passionate about the subject.

I like to personally define discernment as “spirit-infused decision making.” C.H. Spurgeon defines discernment as “not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right.”² Sometimes, discernment goes beyond our thoughts, feelings, opinions, and faith into the very will of God for our lives.

The gift of discernment may come easier for some as God empowers them through the work of the Holy Spirit. If it does not come naturally, it can be improved on as wise decisions are made through knowledge of the Bible and deepening intimacy with Christ. Discernment can be a process that happens over the course of various life decisions, or it can happen immediately as the Holy Spirit guides. I tend to visualize instant Holy Spirit-led discernment as almost a slow-motion action scene that you see in the movies where you are presented with choices and you receive a prompting or insight on which one to choose.

Decisions made without the wisdom of godly discernment can be successful; we make decisions based on common intuition. We have made decisions our entire lives without seeking God first; we have also made decisions and expected God to bless them. Many poor decisions are the result of not seeking out any wisdom or spiritual insight.

Not every decision we make has to be put through the test of discernment and prayer. Based on the thousands of decisions we make daily, that would be impossible. God *is* concerned with the small details of our lives; however, God has also entrusted us to make wise decisions out of the common sense that He has given us. If we go to God and ask questions like “What should I eat for breakfast? Where should I go shopping today? What clothes should I wear?” we are trivializing discernment and our decision-making productivity will be impeded.

The purpose of growing in discernment is to make wise decisions in key areas for the future and to allow for self-reflection on your past. If you are thinking, “Eh, I’m doing pretty well so far with decisions I have made,” that very well could be true. I would, however, encourage you to have an open mind as you read through the different aspects of how discernment can be used and seek God for how you can apply it to your life.

No person will be perfect in all decision-making, but we *can* make better decisions based on the information we have and through the prompting of God’s Spirit in us. It’s like taking a multiple-choice test in school. If you study for the test and put in the time and effort, you have a better chance of passing and even acing the test. I found that, even when I did well on tests, there were still many questions that came down to eliminating two of the four choices. From the remaining two, I had to choose what I thought was the

best answer. Sometimes, I was right; other times, I was wrong.

Sometimes, there is not a “right” answer to decisions. Sometimes, it’s like the choice between mint chocolate chip ice cream and butter pecan—both are great choices! God is not looking down, tapping His foot, waiting for us to make the “right” decision or punish us when we make the wrong one. However, God does equip us with a working mind, His Word, and the Holy Spirit to help us make better decisions overall. Even if we make some wrong decisions, if we live our lives trying to exercise spiritual discernment and get most of the choices right, we will receive the benefit.

Famous businessman Zig Ziglar said, “If you learn from defeat, you haven’t really lost.”³ By recognizing an area where we did not use the best discernment and learning the lessons of that experience, we will be equipped the next time we have a similar decision to make.

Think of discernment as one of our “spiritual muscles.” If we exercise it, put it through rigorous tests and practice, it will get stronger. Bodybuilders are not built like they are in an instant; it requires dedication, endurance, perseverance, and failure. Discernment comes through exercising our faith, making a commitment to learning about God, and being aware of mistakes in judgment.

So what are the benefits of exercising spiritual discernment?

In its simplest form, the benefits of not making a bad choice are making a good choice. We know what good choices look like based on our history of making decisions. Sometimes, discernment comes down to making a decision that is in line with obedience to God. Jesus said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28).

Higher-level discernment is sometimes the difference between a blessing and a curse. The Israelites in Deuteronomy 28 were given many blessings for obedience to the law and curses for disobedience. Decisions that we make poorly and without discernment can easily lead to a lifetime of negative consequences. For example, marrying the wrong spouse, choosing the wrong career, substance abuse, breaking the law and going to prison, being in bondage to sin, etc. are usually not direct consequences from God but the result of living in a sinful world and making sinful choices. Many times, we have no one to blame but ourselves for the choices we make and the consequences we have to live out.

It’s important to note that, even if we make all the “best” choices available to us, we still will face persecution and trials from being a follower of Jesus. The Bible says that “everyone who lives a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). This is not a popular topic preached from the stage of churches, but it’s important not to forget that millions of our Christian brothers and sisters face persecution on a daily basis.

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We also face the consequences of other people's choices not on our own volition. These become reactionary choices once we are faced with a decision (for example, an abusive spouse that we choose to leave). However, many times, proactive choices will keep us on the offensive before we have to play defense. We need to have a "game plan" for our lives before we face decisions, but we also need to be able to call an audible on the fly as situations arise.

Other consequences we face are simply the result of living in a sinful world and make us feel paralyzed (for example, being struck with a crippling sickness or disease). Trying to have discernment in a situation where you feel helpless can lead to frustration. Even in that season, we can rely on God for strength and for insight on how to proceed in areas that we feel we have no power in.

We cannot use this topic of discernment as a way to think that our lives will be that much more prosperous if we make better decisions. I am not trying to present a formula that will make our lives more comfortable. There are many examples in the Bible of men and women being persecuted from no fault of their own other than being obedient to God. Many Christians today are still martyred for their faith.

Sometimes, the blessings that God rewards us for following Him obediently will not come until we are in glory with our Savior.

CHAPTER 1 REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How have you heard the term discernment taught within the church or more broadly in society? What are some notable differences?

2. What spiritual gifts are your strengths? (There are tests online for this if you are unsure).

3. What is an area of your life in which you feel you have had good discernment? In what areas are you seeking a greater level of discernment?

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4. If you learn from defeat, you haven't really lost. Think about a situation that resulted from poor decisions. What can you pull from this experience for your future or to help others?

5. When, if applicable, have you faced persecution for your choices as a Christian? Why do you think some Christians are surprised when they face persecution?