

FIVES VS OF DISCERNMENT

Mark Williamson

MARK WILLIAMSON ENCOURAGES US TO CONSIDER THE FIVE VS OF DISCERNMENT, TO ENABLE US TO GIVE PURPOSE TO OUR EXISTENCE AND, ULTIMATELY, TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.

It's a major benefit when we discern more clearly what we are called to be doing with our lives. It gives purpose to our existence, gives us a reason to get up each morning and therefore contributes enormously to an emotionally healthy sense of well-being.

But it should obviously benefit far more people than just ourselves. If the purpose of our lives is from God then it will involve serving others and making the world a better place. It will lead to changed lives, orphans looked after, corporations becoming more ethical, people coming into relationship with Jesus... and more. All this comes as a result of discernment. That's why it is so powerful and so important. I've come to realise that there are several things bound up within this whole concept. I believe there are five Vs of discernment that every person should consider. Discerning them will lead to a changed life, and therefore a changed world, on a whole new level. The five Vs are Values, Vitality, Vocation, Vision and Voice.

VALUES

Values are the way you do things. Your values should stem from what you see in Jesus, so would include things like honesty, love and compassion. But there may also be some values you have taken on due to experiences you've had. Being hurt, or going through painful experiences, should make us want to ensure other people don't have to suffer in a similar way. So, a person who was often criticised in their childhood may decide they want encouragement to be a key part of their make-up.

What are the values that you hold most dear? One of my values is inclusivity, by which I mean to always look for the person on the outside of a social group, and bring them closer to the centre. Perhaps this comes from being bullied at school, and often finding myself on the outside of social groups when I was younger. So now when I see others experiencing it I want to do something about it... it has become a core value that leads to action in my life.

VITALITY

Vitality is about where you get your energy from. We all know that some people are extroverts (i.e. they gain energy from spending time with people), whilst some are introverts (i.e. they gain energy from being alone). Discerning where you are on this scale is useful, but there is far more to energy.

I'm fascinated by the story of Jesus and the woman at the well, in John 4. At the beginning of the story Jesus is described as being tired from the journey. He's also hungry and thirsty. He's so tired that he doesn't even join his disciples when they go into town to buy food. Yet by the time they come back, he is animated and lively... so much so that they think someone else must have brought him some food! And then he tells them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me' (John 4:34). Can we say that Jesus gets tired out by travel, but is renewed by having evangelistic conversations that bring people closer to God? For Jesus, there is some work that brings him energy. And there is for you too. Doing the will of your Father in heaven, the work you were created for, can bring you energy. So, what brings you vitality?

VOCATION

Vocation is an older word the church used to talk more about, but which has now gone out of fashion. A more modern word for it is mission. Your mission, or your vocation, is the work you are personally called to take on. Often this is related to vitality - to the thing that makes you most come alive, but it can also be discerned through looking at your gifts. How has God made you? What are your natural talents and spiritual gifts? What can you seemingly do more easily than others? These are great clues as to your vocation, i.e. the work you are called to perform.



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VISION

This is where I find things start to get exciting. The vision is the big picture change you would like to see; I don't think the church talks about vision enough. Often, we help people to discern a vocation, and stop there. Society does this too - we ask children the question 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' and are satisfied when we hear answers like doctor, athlete or astronaut. These are all vocations, perfectly good ones to be called to; but if we discern a vocation and have no vision, we simply end up occupying a position. So, it's crucial to ask the next question, 'What's

your vision?' What's the change you want to see as a result of your vocation? What's the big picture that you're working towards? How are you furthering the Kingdom of God as a result of your work?

What has God placed on your heart? How do you want things to be different in your church, your organisation, your town, or your nation? What do you see in an ideal future? People who currently live on the streets actually having their own homes? Friends or family members who don't know God coming to a living faith in Jesus? Nations currently struggling with poverty, disease and corruption being able to stand on their own feet? This is the vision - what you see in a better future. This is the reason for carrying out your vocation.

VOICE

This is a relatively less written about V, but I think it is no less crucial in the discernment process. By voice I mean the little voice inside of your head; who is speaking, and what does it say to you? Is it a critical voice, telling you that you will always be a failure, or that you have no right to expect certain things? This is a common one. Less common is a voice of super confidence, which sounds far better, but can then dangerously lead towards arrogance, and a belief that the normal rules don't apply to you.

We all have competing voices in our lives trying to tell us different things, but what are the loudest ones saying to you? We live in a spiritual reality, so this is one of the ways that Satan most tries to gain a foothold in our lives. He is a thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy, and he often does this by whispering with a voice of lies or of accusations. These lead to temptation, which in turn lead to sin, and then ultimately to death. Identifying the lies or accusations that Satan most regularly throws at us is a very powerful thing to do. But even more powerful is to then consider what God may actually be saying to you on these things. God's voice is surely the one we want to be hearing from the most. So, what has he already said to you? And what do you think he would say, when confronted by the lies and accusations that are flung at you by the enemy?

So, values, vitality, vocation, vision and voice - all of them to be discerned, and each one related to the others. It's partly through discerning our values and our place of vitality that we can then discern our vocation. Knowing our vocation and our values helps to bring clarity to the vision we are seeking to implement. And discerning what the voice of God is saying to us, helps us to persevere in the vision when obstacles come and when the voice of the enemy wants to bring discouragement.

Mark Williamson is Chief Executive of One Rock International, a charity training spiritual leaders to fulfil God's vision for their lives. One Rock are developing a new coaching tool to help church members have deep discipleship conversations with each other about the five Vs mentioned above. If you'd like more information, email Mark: mark@onerockinternational.com

