

# MODULE 6: DISCERN

## MODULE OBJECTIVES:

**Experience** Seed's process of discernment

**Deepen** awareness of longings, motivations and personal barriers to transformation and participation

**Discern** how God is inviting us to experience personal redemptive transformation.

**Seed Tools:** *Personal Development Planner*

**Selected Readings:** Ruth Haley Barton's *Pursuing God's Will Together*, Part 2: chapters 9,10,11 & 12.

## MODULE OVERVIEW:

This module focuses on becoming who God made us to be through the lens of discerning our longings. After introducing Seed's process of discernment, working through personal barriers and reframing longings, this module concludes with the *Personal Development Planner*. This tool provides participants the opportunity to deeply think through their spiritual formation and unpack strategies for how they might move intentionally toward becoming who God made them to be.

## MODULE BREAKDOWN:

- 6.1 Introduction to Discernment
- 6.2 Beginning a Discernment Process
- 6.3 Discerning Our Longings (in two parts)
- 6.4 Reframing & Restorying Our Longings (in two parts)
- 6.5 Personal Development Planner

## Important Information for the Grower:

This module is highly reflective and may be challenging for any participant who is not used to self-reflective, introspective work. There may be some in your group who will relish this module and others that may find it a challenge. Anyone uncomfortable with vulnerability may struggle. We recommend you start by acknowledging this and even reassuring your group that there is no perfect process of discernment, the goal here is not to get all the answers or come out a "better" person or Christian. The goal is to open ourselves up to God, that's our part in this.

## Grower Tips:

- You may want to read all of the content aloud for both 6.2 and 6.3 before inviting participants to spend time on both sections. There is a nice flow to 6.2 and 6.3, but this may be too much in one go for anyone who is struggling with the introspective contemplative work.
- If you make time for people to share with the group, be aware of the highly personal nature of the content. Start by affirming the confidentiality of the group and ask participants not to offer advice or solutions. Although part of the discernment process is opening ourselves up to solutions that may come from others, we recommend a posture of listening in this module to avoid offering any advice that is rushed or hasty.



## 6.1 INTRODUCTION TO DISCERNMENT

SUGGESTED TIME: 10-15 MINUTES



In module 5 we began unpacking the complexities of our *Current Reality* with the perspective that before we work on making sure our participation is aligned with God's story, we need clarity on where God is already at work.

We mentioned discernment in the last module, where you were invited to prayerfully consider which *Steps of Change* stood out to you. In this module we are going to expand on the idea of discernment, undertake a process of discernment as it relates to our interior reality, specifically our longings, and respond to what we learn by beginning to reframe our longings.

We will be applying the same discernment process in module 7 to our external contexts and all that clarifying work you have been doing on the Assets and Barriers of your *Current Reality*.



### WHAT IS DISCERNMENT?

Discernment is the capacity to recognise and respond to the presence and activity of God in both ordinary moments and the larger decisions we face in life.<sup>1</sup>

### HOW WILL I RECOGNISE GOD'S PRESENCE AND ACTIVITY?

Confirmation that you are observing God's presence and activity can come in the form of experiencing overwhelming peace, as described in Philippians 4:7. It may also come from someone else who is listening and discerning on your behalf. Whatever the source, discernment should ultimately leave you feeling encouraged, confident and calm, with a sense of peace and rightness about the choice.

### AND WHAT ABOUT THE WILL OF GOD, IS THAT IMPORTANT?

Absolutely, it is paramount! The last thing we want is to mistake our will for God's. The steps in our process help to mitigate this but it is also important for us to go into this process aware of God's plans as laid out in the scriptures. There are two places in scripture where God's plan is clearly articulated, Ephesians 1:9-10 and John 17:22-23. Here we see the plan is "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth" and "complete unity" in Christ. Wherever you land in your discernment process, consider whether it is ultimately bringing about the reality where everything is becoming one in Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together*.



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## GROWER NOTES



**Connect** — welcome participants to the session.

Ask them how they went with identifying the Assets and Barriers of their contexts between modules? Mention that we will return to this design question in Module 7.



**Read** aloud the text above. You may want to read in the full the two scriptures mentioned there, Ephesians 1:9-10 and John 17:22-23.



**(Optional) Invite** participants to respond to these notes and ask any questions they have on discernment or prompt them by asking *How does this concept of discernment sit with you?*



## 6.2 BEGINNING A DISCERNMENT PROCESS

SUGGESTED TIME: 15-20 MINUTES

Before you begin a discernment process, we have a few tried and tested steps that will set you up to be more open to God's presence and stirrings. There are both cognitive components (we have intellects that often find comfort in being in control) and physical components (as we are also beings inhabiting bodies).

### Step 1: Pre-plan who you will share this process with.

Community is one of the best places to discern God's presence and activity because we all form different parts of the one body and all have different ways of recognising God. A community of believers may also bring confirmation and accountability.

Consider, who in my life do I trust to help me in this discernment process?

If undertaking parts of the process in times of solitude, make sure you

pre-plan who you will invite to offer perspective on where you landed.

### Step 2: Assess your motivations/desires going into this discernment process.

We do not want to manipulate the discernment process into giving us what we want to hear. Although we can't actually manipulate God, we can fool ourselves!

*Ask yourself, is there a particular answer you are hoping to hear? ▼*



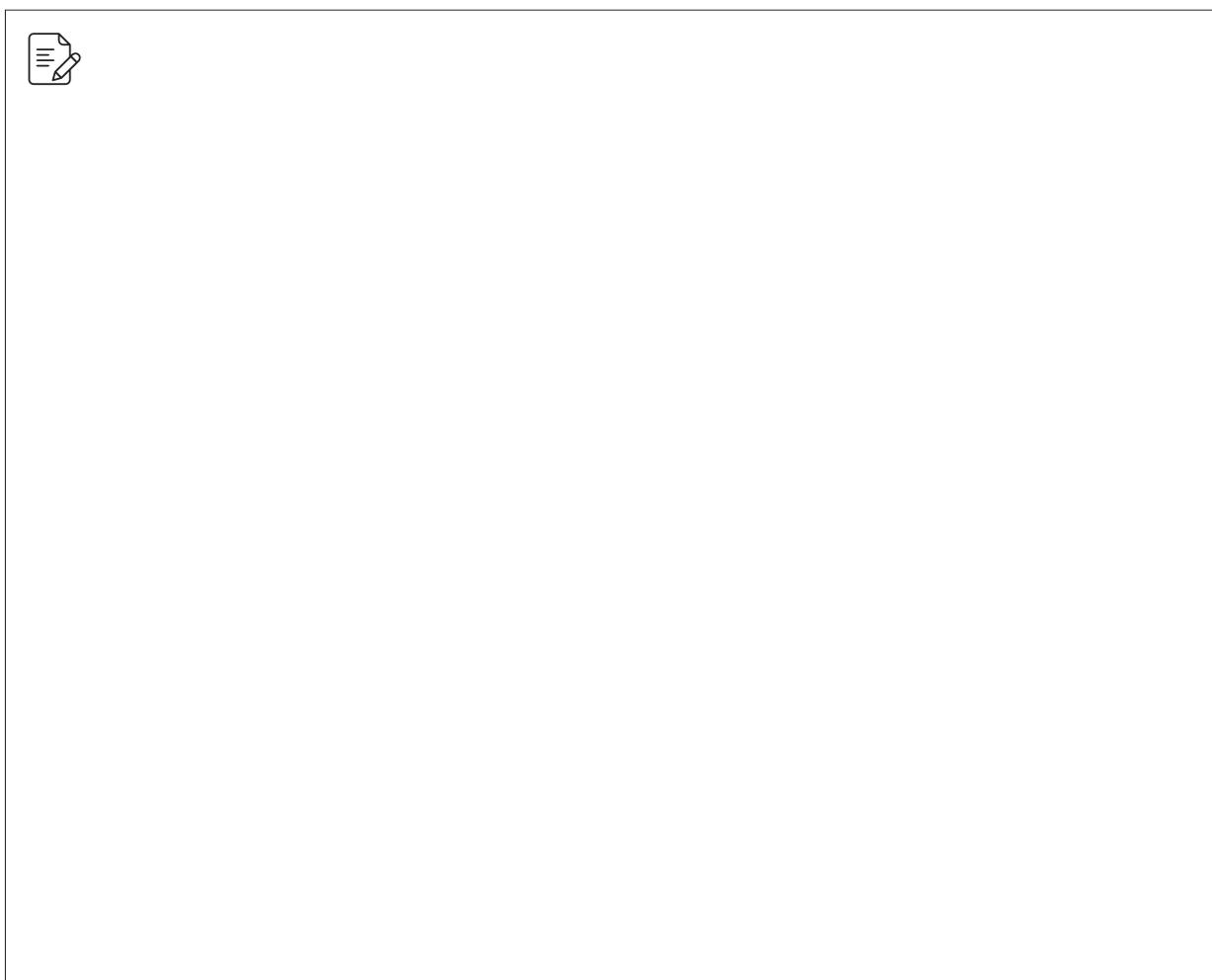
If so, you may want to follow this brief process of opening yourself up to releasing that desire and being ready to head where God may be leading you.\*

Ask yourself these follow up questions:

1. Do you trust that God is an active presence and participant in your life?

2. Do you trust God to provide for all of your needs?
3. Are you willing to be transformed by this process?

If you struggled to answer yes to any of these questions, take some time to ponder what in particular you are struggling to release, what desire or fear or past disappointment stands in the way?



Pray and ask God for the grace to desire his will and to release control over whatever it is you wrote above.

\*The point of this exercise is not to arrive at a perfect place of trusting God and being perfectly able to hear from him! These are not processes that will ever be finished for any of us. The goal here is to ready ourselves by becoming more willing to deepen our trust in God.



### Step 3: Connect with your body and connect with God.

You may want to get up and go for a brisk walk (if you can) or do some other form of movement, to help you feel connected to your body and to aid your focus.

Then spend a few moments meditating on a scripture or contemplative prayer. We recommend reading Ephesians 1:9-10 slowly, out loud, a few times:

*“He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ. To be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth.”*

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## GROWER NOTES



**Read** aloud the notes above.

Even, if your group has developed trust and you have the time to listen and provide feedback to each other, you can mention that there may be other trusted friends or mentors who people may want to share with.

You likely won't have the time for people to get active before the process, it can be enough to do some chair squats together if you are all able! Or just encourage people to do some form of brief exercise before they continue the discernment process in their own time between sessions.



**Invite** participants to work through these three steps. You may want to encourage people to get up and find a solitary space to contemplate (if possible).

**(Optional)** You may prefer to read ahead to the end of 6.3 together and then allow people time to work through both 6.2 and 6.3 alone, before coming back for a debrief rather than interrupting their progress to move onto 6.3. *Just make sure you pray together first!*



**Pray** together before starting this process of discernment. Invite the Holy Spirit to come and guide reflection and provide insights.



## 6.3 DISCERNING OUR LONGINGS

SUGGESTED TIME: 20-40 MINUTES



We have already done some work on our own stories back in Module 3. When we read back over our story we can see God's providence, how He shapes us, and where God is already at work within and around us.

It's a much bigger exercise than what you will have time for but having this perspective will yield incredible insights.



Before we commence a discernment process to deepen our understanding of our own hearts, go back and briefly read over your *Purpose Storyboard* on page 27 and review how you responded to the questions on pages 31 and 37.

***What, if any, growth has occurred in your story so far?***

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### GROWER NOTES



**Read** aloud the text above.

**(Optional)** You may want to read aloud the notes in the second part of 6.3 before inviting participants to reflect. This would allow them to work through both parts of 6.3 without interruption.



**Invite** participants to read back over their responses on pages 31 and 37 and record any growth they think has happened since then. Mention that they will be posed these questions again in a different way on the next page.



**(Optional)** Ask participants to share any growth they can observe since module 3.



## 6.3 DISCERNING OUR LONGINGS (CONT.)



### WHAT DO YOU LOVE?

“To be human is to have a heart. You can’t not love. So the question isn’t whether you will love something as ultimate; the question is what you will love as ultimate. And you are what you love.”<sup>1</sup>

**What are your ultimate loves? How do these shape your daily life and habits?**



A large empty rectangular box for writing or reflection, with a small icon of a document and pencil in the top-left corner.

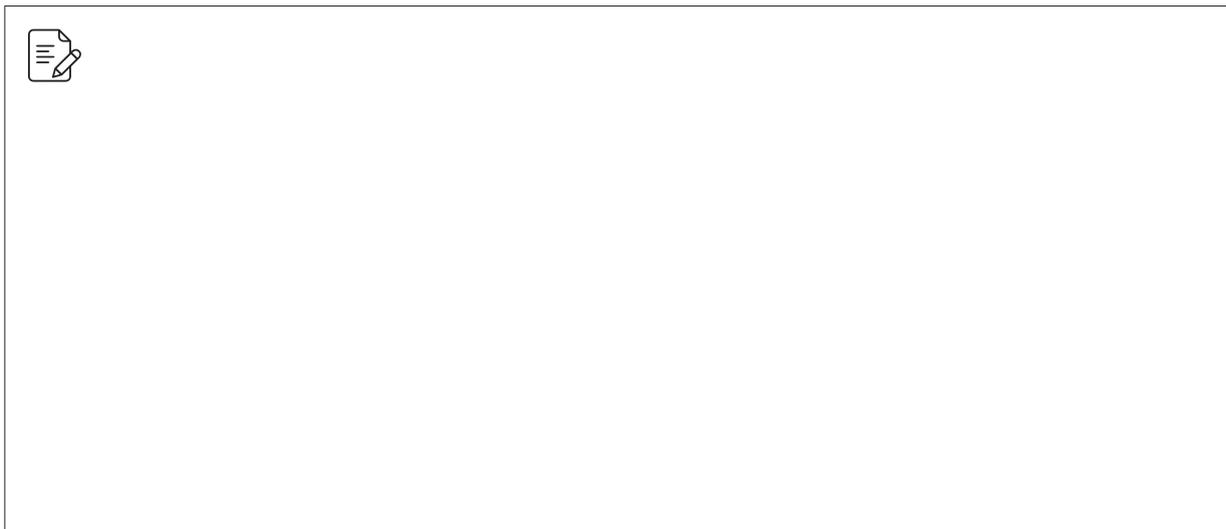
<sup>1</sup>Smith, James KA. 2016. You Are What you Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit, 10.



## WHAT ARE YOU LONGING FOR?

Another way to phrase this is what is your heart hungry for? It is helpful to recall James KA Smith's work here that teaches us that there is often a gap between what we want and what we think we want.

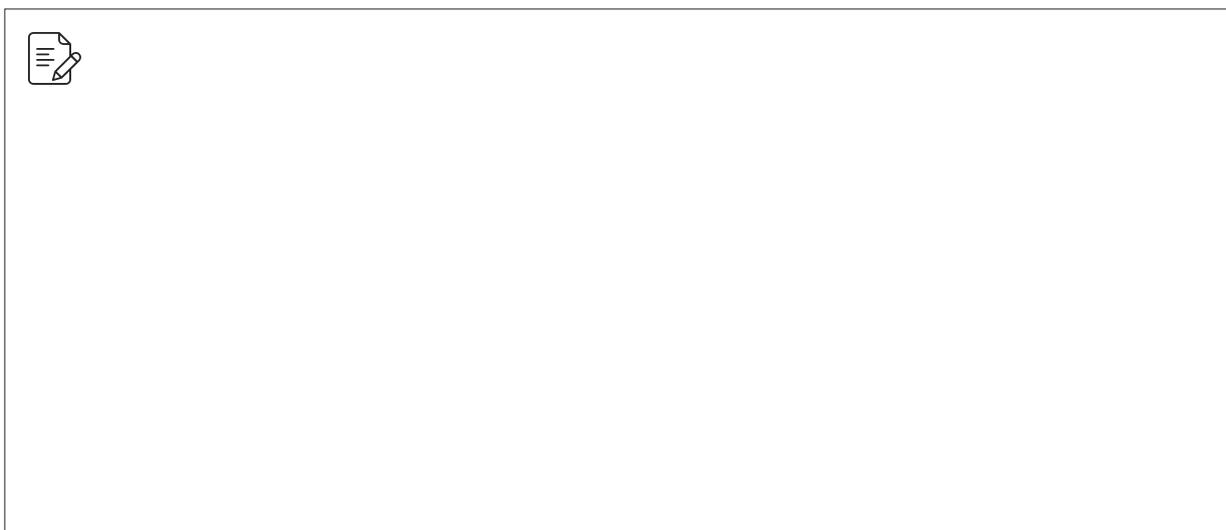
**What do you truly long for, what future do your behaviours, habits and daily routines work towards? What do you want to long for? And is there a gap between these two?**



## WHERE ARE YOU LOOKING FOR SALVATION?

Sometimes, the things we are longing for can take the place of God in our lives. We might long for financial security and stability so that we are safe, instead of trusting God to provide for our every need.

**Are you hoping for salvation in the things you long for? How much can we trust God to define our existence, provide for our security, prove our worth and value?**



## WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

Fear can have a significant impact on our participation in God's story. Reflect on what might be holding you back from participating, from seeking God's will for your context. Reflect on 1 John 4:18.

**What fear might you invite God's perfect love to cast out?**



A large rectangular box for reflection, containing a small icon of a document with a pencil in the top-left corner.

## WHAT MOTIVATES AND DRIVES YOU?

Christ's example of being human compels us to orient ourselves to a particular way of both seeing and being in the world. It is a way of love. Jesus radically and intentionally crossed cultural and social barriers to love others well. This extraordinary example of a self-sacrificing love models to us a posture

that contradicts the prevalent self-interested worldview currently saturating our society.

**What is motivating and driving you? How can you open yourself to being more influenced by Christ's example of being human?**



A large rectangular box for reflection, containing a small icon of a document with a pencil in the top-left corner.



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## GROWER NOTES



**Read** aloud the questions above and invite participants to consider which one jumps out at them.



**Invite** participants to jot down their immediate reflections on any of the questions. Due to time, you may want to invite them to only answer the one question that stood out to them the most and come back to the others in their own time.



**(Optional)** Share in pairs/triplets the key things that stood out as you started to discern your longings. *Allow 3-5 minutes.*



## 6.4 REFRAMING & RESTORYING OUR LONGINGS

SUGGESTED TIME: 20-40 MINUTES

It can be difficult to actually experience personal transformation, even when we want to, even when we have clarity about what areas God might be calling us to submit unto his redemptive plan.

We have found that developing a series of questions that you can pose to yourself will often open us up to new possibilities of exploring how to effect change, and ultimately provide even more clarity and discernment around what change God is calling us to participate in. This is a process we call reframing, or restorying.

Before we start, quickly review what you wrote down in 6.3, and **pray**, asking God what he might be calling out as a significant growth area in the coming weeks and months.

Then consider this question: ***how can you more wholeheartedly participate in God's story? What is a significant barrier that is preventing you from confidently participating in God's ongoing work of redemption and renewal?***



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## GROWER NOTES



**Read** aloud the text above.



**Invite** participants to prayerfully consider what is the most significant, or pressing, personal barrier which might be holding them back from participating in God's story.



**(Optional) Invite** participants to share in pairs or in the group where they landed. It may be the case that the group can immediately offer some encouragement to a participant but be careful not to be dismissive

of someone's felt barrier. For example, someone may mention a lack of confidence but appear self-sufficient and confident to you. Their inner world may be different to the image they project to others. Use this time to listen rather than fix, and thank each participant for their vulnerability.



**Pray** together before moving on, briefly commit each barrier that was identified to God and acknowledge that we want to partner with him to see change and not do any of this work in our own strength!



# 6.4 REFRAMING & RESTORYING OUR LONGINGS (CONT.)

We now want to take that area of personal barrier and pose a question, or a series of questions that will prompt you to consider what possibilities are present to partner with God in his work of redemption in this area.

First ask yourself:

**If I can overcome [barrier], what would I hope is the desired outcome?**

For example, If I can overcome *my fear of anyone at work finding out that I am a Christian*, what would I hope is the desired outcome?

Feel free to refer to your *Imagined Future* for inspiration.



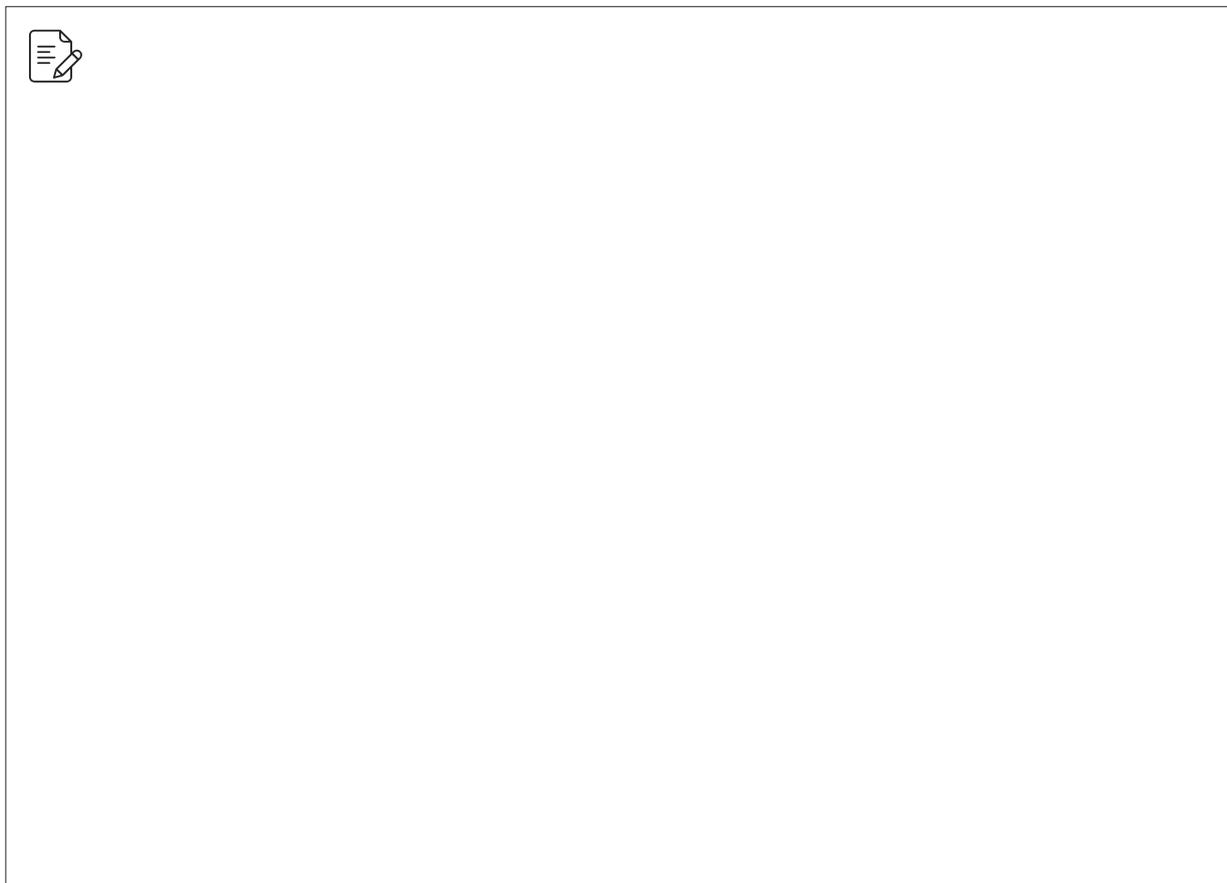
Then phrase your own question, starting with *How*:

**How can I address this [barrier] so that [desired outcome]?**



If you found multiple aspects of a desired outcome/imagined future, then ask more than one question of yourself!

Once you have landed 1-3 questions, try responding to them here:



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## GROWER NOTES



**Read** aloud the text above.



**Invite** participants to work through the exercises above and arrive at 1-3 questions before attempting to answer the questions. Mention that the goal of this exercise is to be curious and open to possibilities. Rather than landing the “right” answers, we want to explore questions that prime us to think of our barriers in new ways.



**(Optional) Ask** participants to share their questions and responses with the whole group.

*Be clear these questions are not for the group to solve or answer but rather provide examples to learn from*

**Note: Due to time constraints you may want to invite participants to consider their responses to the questions as homework between sessions.**



## 6.5 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNER

SUGGESTED TIME: 5-10 MINUTES

Seed's *Personal Development Planner* has been designed for you to use to drive intentional personal formation and growth.

We have drawn from Robert J. Clinton's research that uncovered three main areas of formational activity: spiritual formation (**inner life-becoming**), ministerial formation (**doing-activity**) and strategic formation (**future-vision**).<sup>1</sup>

You'll see that the **inner life** (spiritual formation) is on the bottom of the planner, this is to remind us all of how foundational this aspect is, what we do will flow out of who we are. Who we are becoming is determined by what is shaping our inner lives, and this is an opportunity to tune into that and increase our awareness and influence over those aspects.

In the middle is **what we do** (ministerial or vocational formation). This is any activity in our lives that is directed to instilling leadership skills.

The top line is **our vision of the future**, what change do we desire to participate in? This is where we can focus on the development of our values or focuses that will orient us toward our God-given visions.

The *Personal Development Planner* encourages us to pay attention to how God is growing us in all three areas of formation.

 Before populating your *Personal Development Planner*, go back and read over the work you just did in 6.4, label any possible growth area according to the three formation domains.

### **Can you identify a growth area for each domain?**

If not, try reading back over your work in 6.3 as well until you find a growth area for each domain of formation.

Prayerfully consider your responses to the questions on the Plan:

- **Why is this area a priority for you?**
- **How will you grow?**
- **What support do you need or can you seek for this growth?**



<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Clinton, J. Robert. *The Making of a Leader*. Fuller Seminary. 1995.



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## GROWER NOTES



**Read** aloud the text above.



**Invite** participants to work through the questions above and populate their *Personal Development Planners*, we recommend setting this task as homework and just reading the text together before finishing for the session.



**Pray** to close, thanking God for the time together, the new revelations and the invitation to both participate and become.

## BEFORE NEXT TIME

- Complete the *Personal Development Planner*
- Have a conversation with someone you trust, a mentor or spiritual director would be good, about what has been uncovered through this discernment process
- Keep taking notes on what Assets and Barriers are present in your context (from Module 5) and be ready to work on those in Module 7.





# PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT Planner

3.  
THE CHANGE I  
WANT TO  
PARTICIPATE IN  
(MY FUTURE)

2.  
WHAT I  
WANT TO DO  
(MY ACTIVITIES)

1.  
WHO I AM  
BECOMING  
(MY INNER LIFE)

GROWTH AREA	WHY?	PRACTICES	SUPPORT
	Why did you prioritise this?	How will you grow?	What support and resources do you need to help you grow?

