

# 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



## 6.1 INTRODUCTION TO DISCERNMENT

 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*.





NOTES / COMMENTS



## 6.2 BEGINNING A DISCERNMENT PROCESS

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? ▼*



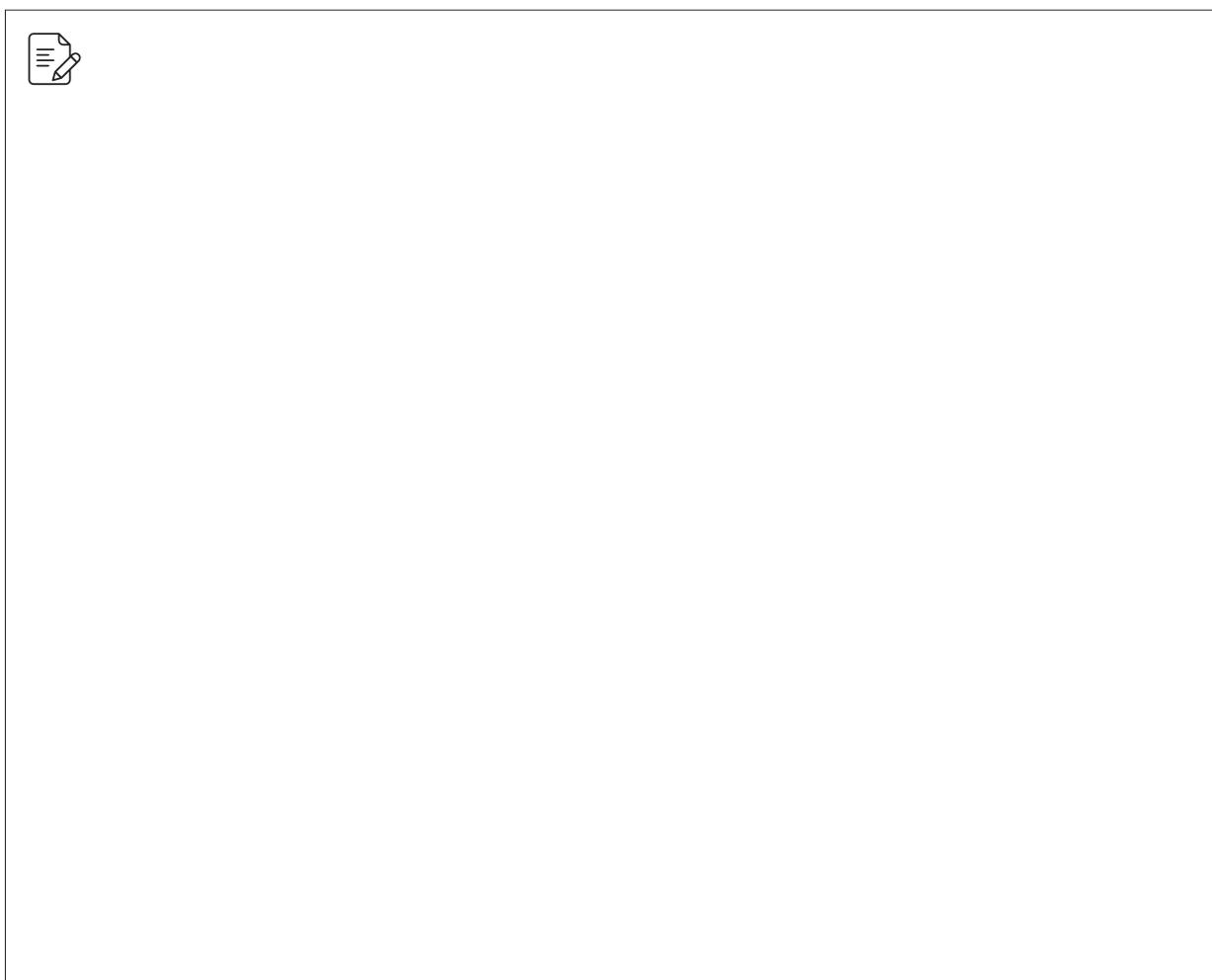
If so, you may want to follow this brief process of opening yourself up to releasing that desire and being ready to head where God may be leading you.\*

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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## NOTES / COMMENTS



### 6.3 DISCERNING OUR LONGINGS



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 26 and review how you responded to the questions on pages 30 and 36.

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

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## 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?**



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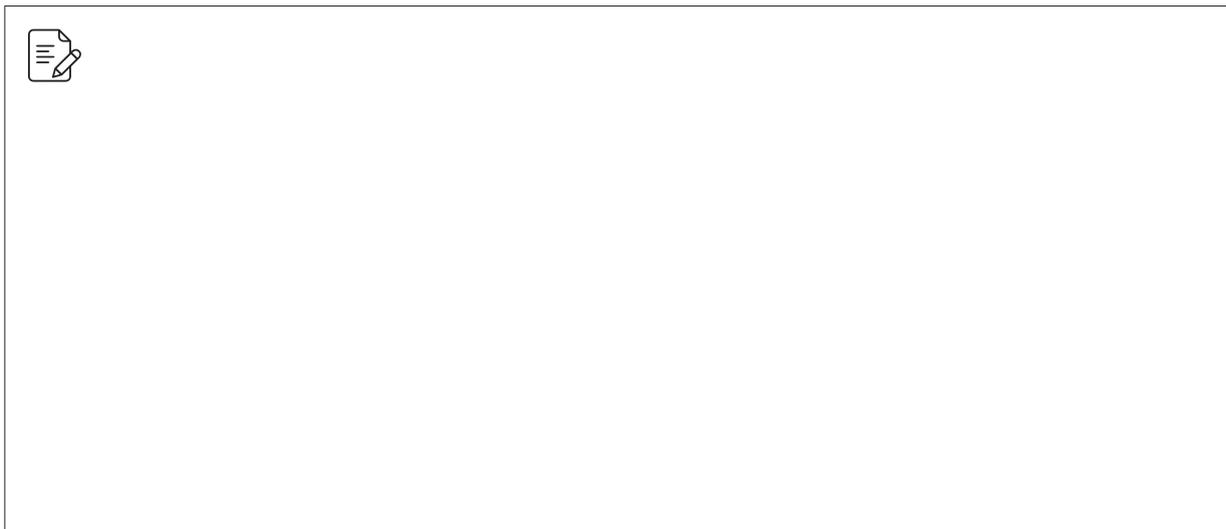
<sup>1</sup>Smith, James KA. 2016. You Are What you Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit, 10.



## 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.

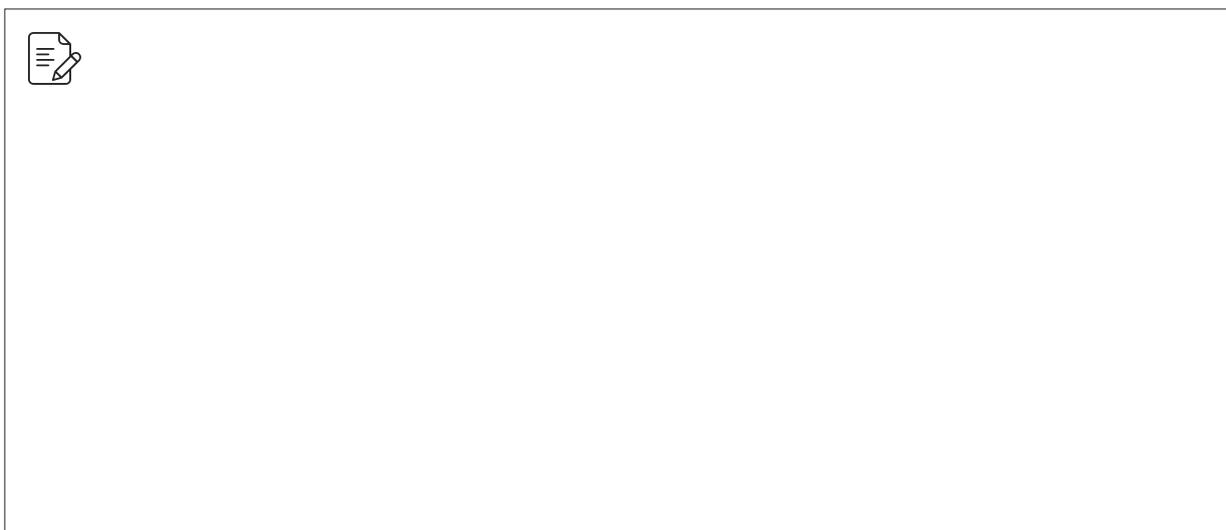
**What do you truly long for, what future do your behaviours, habits and daily routines work towards? What do you want to long for? And is there a gap between these two?**



## 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?**



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## 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?**



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NOTES / COMMENTS



## 6.4 REFRAMING & RESTORYING OUR LONGINGS

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?***





NOTES / COMMENTS



## 6.4 REFRAMING & RESTORYING OUR LONGINGS (CONT.)

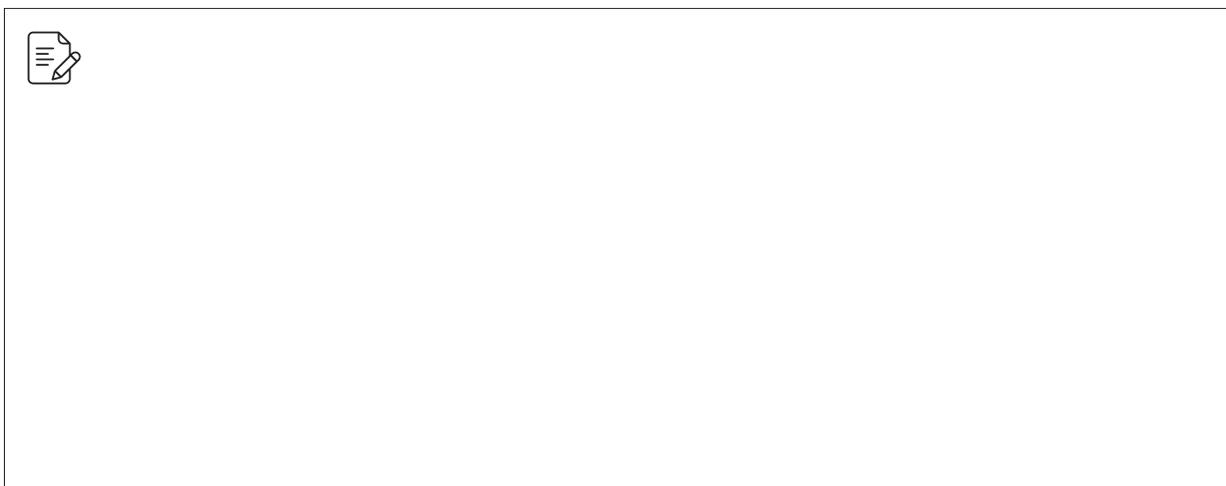
We now want to take that area of personal barrier and pose a question, or a series of questions that will prompt you to consider what possibilities are present to partner with God in his work of redemption in this area.

First ask yourself:

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

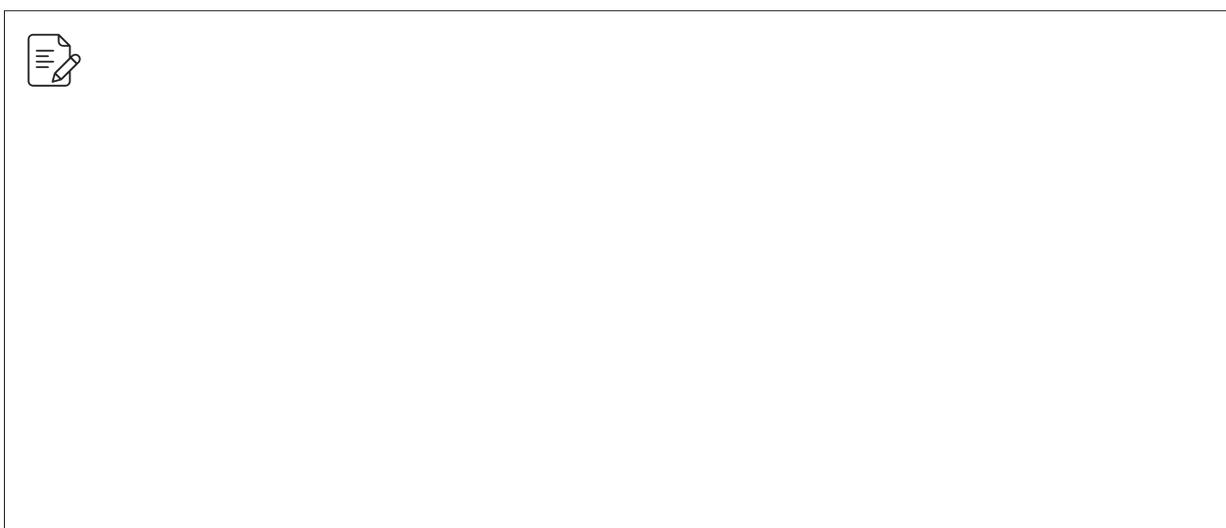
For example, If I can overcome *my fear of anyone at work finding out that I am a Christian*, what would I hope is the desired outcome?

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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## 6.5 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNER

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.





NOTES / COMMENTS





# 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?

