A hand holding a black and white compass with a yellow ring. The compass face is white with black markings and green hands. The background is a blurred landscape of mountains and water. An orange horizontal bar is in the top left corner.

Discernment: *“seeking to be attentive and alert to God’s activity in and among us so that we can respond faithfully.”*

—Ruth Haley Barton,
Pursuing God’s Will Together



Practice of Cultivating Awareness

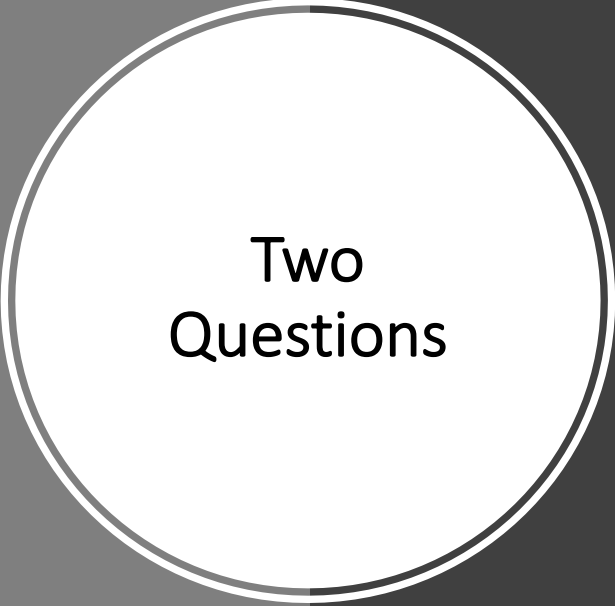


Dwelling in the
word

Luke 10: 1-11
NRSV



Circle of
Trust
Touchstones



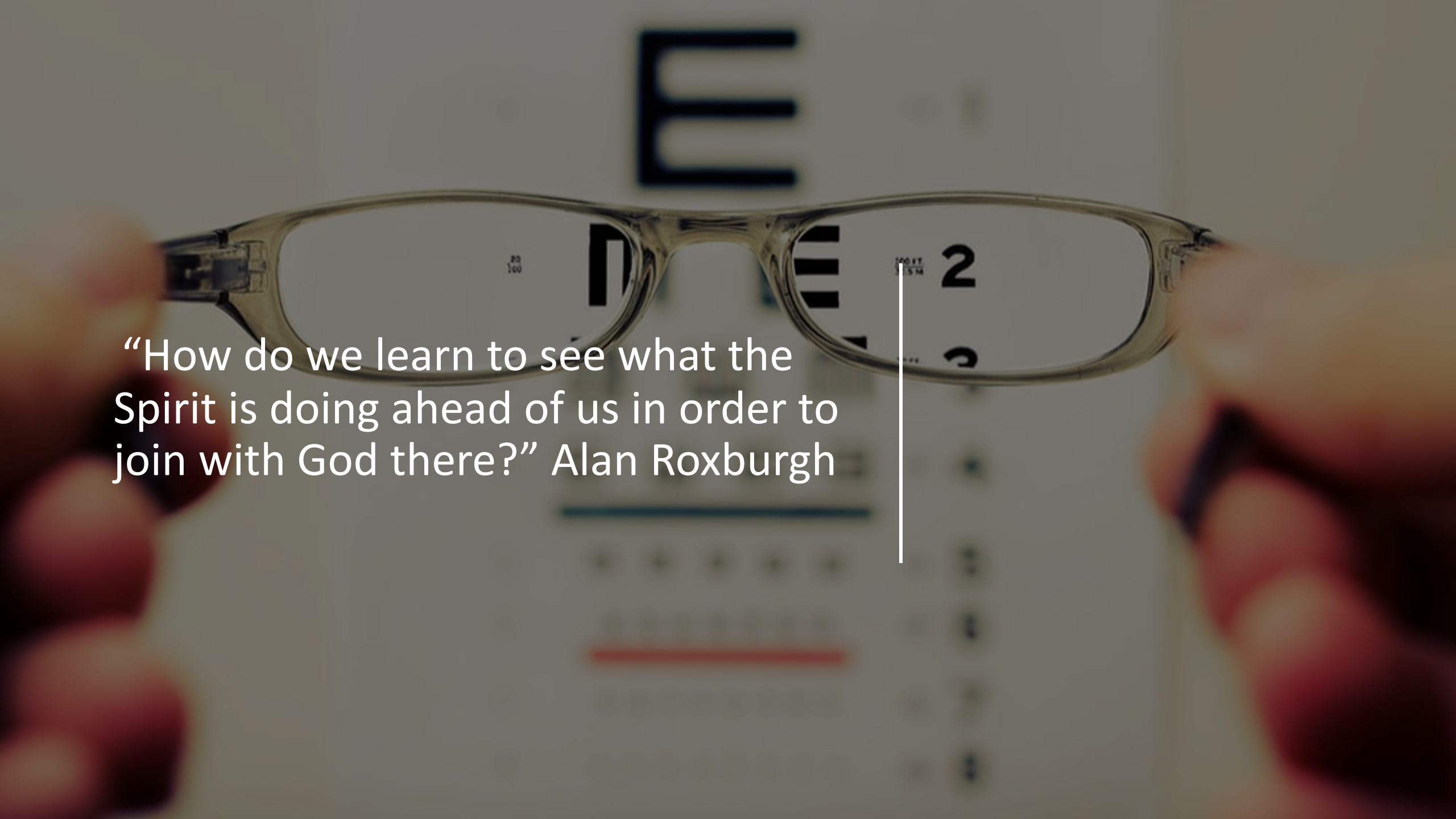
Two
Questions

- **If this is all God's project, don't we want to ask God about it?**

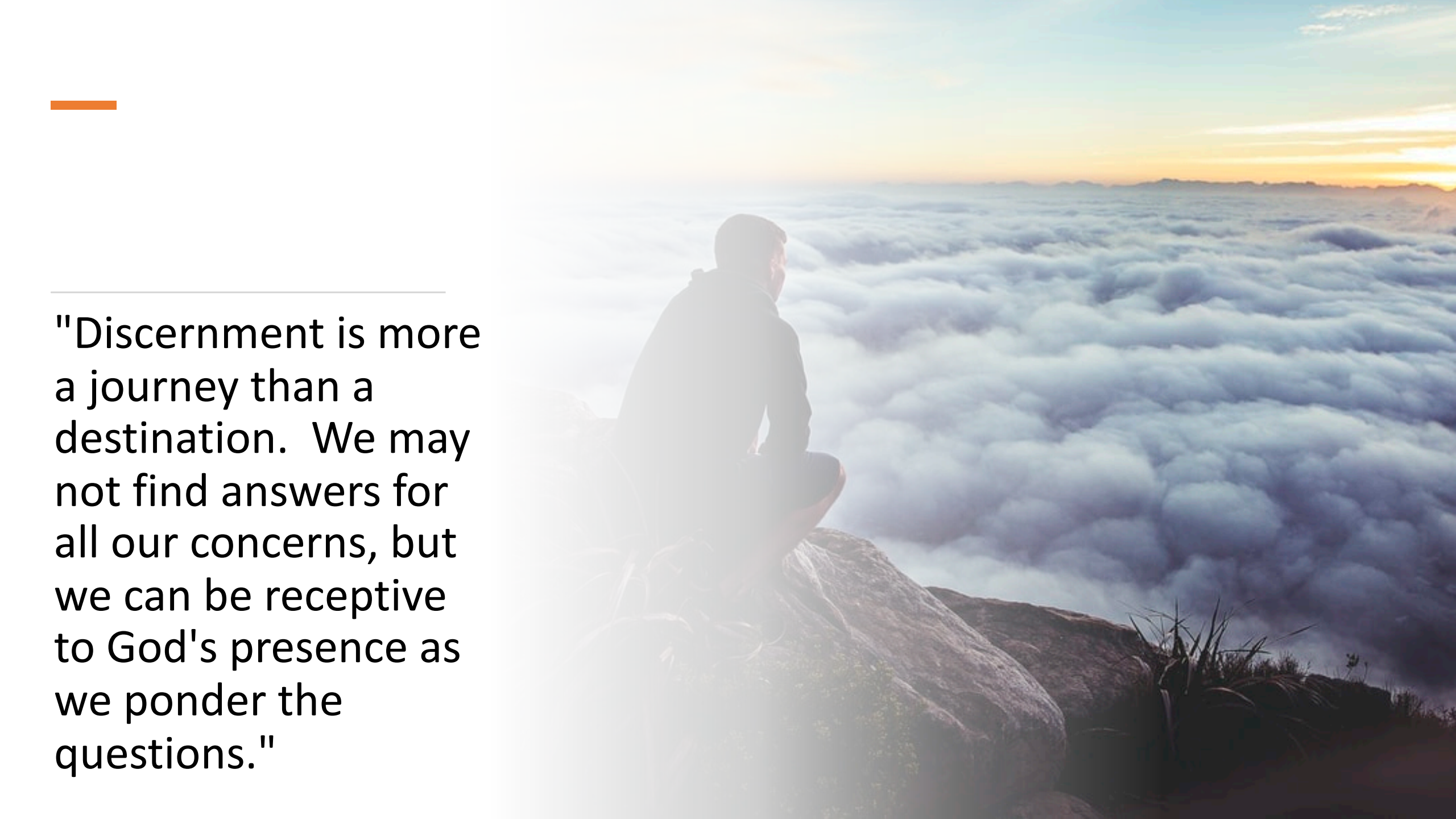
–Sister Donna, Sisters of the Holy Spirit (Pittsburgh, PA)

- **If we are not pursuing the will of God together in fairly intentional ways, what are we *doing*?**

–Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together*

A pair of hands is holding a pair of clear, rectangular-rimmed glasses in front of a blurred eye chart. The chart features various letters and numbers, with a large 'E' at the top. The glasses are positioned horizontally across the middle of the frame. The background is a soft-focus eye chart with various letters and numbers. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

“How do we learn to see what the Spirit is doing ahead of us in order to join with God there?” Alan Roxburgh

A person is sitting on a large, dark rock on a mountain peak, looking out over a vast, endless sea of white, fluffy clouds. The sky is a mix of soft pinks, oranges, and blues, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The person is silhouetted against the bright light of the sky. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

"Discernment is more a journey than a destination. We may not find answers for all our concerns, but we can be receptive to God's presence as we ponder the questions."

¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

—Ephesians 3:16-21 NRSV






God knows our deepest potential, sees the hidden complexities of our circumstances, comprehends our situation in relation to the larger picture, and grasps the broader implications of our plans. Discernment is our effort to tap into the flow of this divine wisdom...



Discernment is distinguishing the voice of God from other voices that speak to us: the voice of our parents echoing from years past, the voices of friends, voices of urgency or fear...

A photograph of a forest path. The path is a narrow, light-colored dirt trail that winds through a dense forest of tall, thin trees. The trees have dark trunks and some are covered in green moss. The foliage is a mix of green and yellow, suggesting an autumn setting. The lighting is soft, with sunlight filtering through the trees, creating a dappled effect on the ground. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

Discernment is a prayerful, informed, and intentional attempt to sort through these voices to get in touch with God's Spirit at work in a situation and to develop a sense of the direction in which the Spirit is leading...

Sound rational analysis based on the best available information is crucial to good discernment. Yet spiritual discernment goes beyond the analytical to engage our senses, imaginations, and intuition as we wrestle with issues. It often points toward a decision, but it is not problem-solving. The goal of our discernment efforts is to find the mind of Christ...





Discernment is a mode of prayer that involves opening our entire selves to the working of the Holy Spirit. It bids us to let go of preconceived ideas so that we can be open to new possibilities with a readiness to view things from new perspectives. Discernment beckons us to be still and listen with the ear of our heart. It draws us into alignment with God...



Discernment is central to doing God's work. To serve God, we must constantly be alert to the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit... Christ is present at the center of each person and alive in the group— speaking, forming, and touching— waiting to be heard and recognized.

—Farnham, Hull, and McLean, *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations Revised Ed.*, p. 5-8



What captured your attention in these reflections on discernment?

Where do you sense an invitation for you or the congregation?

Who is the God of discernment?

The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. ²² Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

—Exodus 13:20-22 (NRSV)



Assumptions about God and Discernment

adapted from several sources including Elizabeth Liebert (*The Soul of Discernment*), Morris and Olsen (*Discerning God's Will Together*), and Mark Thibodeaux (*God's Voice Within*)

1. **God is real.** We can trust that God is actually alive and at work in the situations in which we find ourselves.
2. We can participate *with God* in co-creating the future.
3. God did not just create “in the beginning” and then leave creation to make its own way, but God is continually creating, upholding, and enriching persons and communities.
4. God’s invitation and presence are not withheld. God is self-disclosing in a variety of forms, and at all times. God is still speaking! (Continuing Revelation)
5. We can “hear” the voice of God in nature, music, art, the stories and perspectives of others, scripture, the movements of our hearts, our intuition, imagination, and dreams. God’s voice does not sound like only one thing, but by paying attention to the signals of the Spirit we learn to differentiate the voice of God from other voices.
6. Discernment is the place where our desires and God’s desires intersect.
7. It is impossible to fall outside of God’s grace and love.



The Value of Engaging a Process of Discernment as a Faith Community

- Forms us individually and communally in a critical practice of Christian discipleship
- Cultivates in the community deep resources and practices for future decision-making
- Deepens our relationships with God and each other
- Welcomes diverse perspectives while working toward group consensus
- Widens our perception of what is possible
- Can bring new energy, life, and purpose into the community as we witness and follow the Holy Spirit at work among us
- Helps us live our mission with integrity and faithfulness whether in joyful or challenging times

Elements of a Discernment Process

Intent	Set our collective intent to be open to God and one another
Clarify	Clarify the Heart of the Matter
Review	Review God's movement and presence in our history
Gather	Gather relevant data from many sources and ways of knowing
Prayer	Take it all to prayer and sift through what has been discovered
Confirmation	Seek confirmation of the Holy Spirit
Action	Identify the next faithful steps and take action

“You do not have to have it all together to begin. **All that is necessary is the desire to listen for God’s call in the midst of your life. That is enough.** We bring our little drop of generosity, and God responds. We ask for spiritual freedom, and God assists us to grow in it. We seek what is better in a particular situation, and God meets us in that seeking...

“Believe that God accompanies you wherever your decisions take you. In this sense, you cannot fail at discernment. A poor choice may not necessarily be bad discernment, because discernment is not measured by outcomes but by our increasing sensitivity to God’s gracious invitations and desires for our welfare. The only ways we can fail at discernment are by stubbornly turning our back on spiritual freedom or by deciding not to seek God’s call in this situation at all. Even then, God remains with us.”

–Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment*

“Rest assured that the most important activity in all that follows is simply to hunger for God’s life to come more fully- in you, in others, in the world. All the rest is God’s job. And God is faithful, beyond our ability to ask or imagine.”

-Elizabeth Liebert, The Way of Discernment



What have we been
doing?

Conversations

POWERED BY ACTIVE



Conversation Partners



Next Steps



“There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about. Ask “What’s possible?” not “What’s wrong?” Keep asking. Notice what you care about. Assume that many others share your dreams. Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters. Talk to people you know. Talk to people you don’t know. Talk to people you never talk to. Be intrigued by the differences you hear. Expect to be surprised. Treasure curiosity more than certainty. Invite in everybody who cares to work on what’s possible. Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something. Know that creative solutions come from new connections. Remember, you don’t fear people whose story you know. Real listening always brings people closer together. Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world. Rely on human goodness. Stay together.”





A scenic landscape featuring a vibrant rainbow in the sky. In the foreground, a wooden walkway with a metal railing leads towards the horizon. The ground is rocky and uneven, with some sparse vegetation. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Small Group Reflections

When have you experienced God's presence when looking back at times of decision?