



*The Flow*

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# Growing in Discernment

**Ephesians 6:12**

**Fostering Spiritual Growth in the Church**

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**Paul J. Bucknell**

## Understanding Spiritual Discernment

“But what is this discernment? The word used in Psalm 119:66 means “taste.” It is the ability to make discriminating judgments, to distinguish between, and recognize the moral implications of, different situations and courses of action. It includes the ability to “weigh up” and assess the moral and spiritual status of individuals, groups, and even movements.” –Sinclair Ferguson

- Spiritual discernment is the God-given ability to observe and understand the spiritual realm along with one’s own life and surroundings (John 3:3).
- The Spirit of God works in new believers (Acts 1:8) bringing a whole new ability to relate to God and observe the dark and light forces around them. At each stage of spiritual development, one’s learning takes on different aspects.

## Different Spheres of Discernment

### PARENTING

#### **Lack of Discernment**

Child needs firm controls due to their ignorance and sinful nature

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**Instruction and discipline**

#### **Inconsistent Discernment**

Young people need to develop how to live in fear of God

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**Parents moderate consequences. God gives wisdom.**

#### **Growing Discernment**

Older teens apply God's wisdom to each area of life/ their choices.

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**The responsible need to shoulder the consequences.**

## Understanding Spiritual Discernment

*“For our **struggle** is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).*

### Perception

Awakened to  
God, His  
presence, and  
one’s sinfulness

I have **sinned**  
against God.

Begin to discern  
God and Satan’s  
voice from one’s  
own

I am not what I  
**hear**.

**Consistently**  
rejects the evil  
one while seeking  
God’s will

I seek to **obey** God.

## Level 1 - New Believers

### Awakened to God and Recognition of Evil

The new believer's new life creates a life of learning experiences including sensing God's presence and sensing their sin.

- I sense evil associated with a certain person or situation.
- The Bible is really special!
- I am so regretful for my sin.
- There really is a devil!

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## Level 1 - New Believers

## Awakened to God and Recognition of Evil

### New Believer's Weaknesses

### Discernment

- I am not very aware of God's leading.
- When the temptation gets too great, I just give in.
- I go to church. I'm not too sure what it means to meet with God at other times.
- I am not clear how Satan tempts me.
- I just try my best. Repentance is not part of my life.

New believers are impressed with God and the direct influence His presence has on their own lives, such as God's holiness upon their own sinfulness. We first see that in genuine salvation (Mat 5:3).

## Level 2 – Young Believers

### **Discern God and Evil One's Voice From One's Own**

The young believer begins to discern God and Satan's words in contrast to the evil one's words. This is the struggle lurking behind temptation. He or she will learn how to properly respond to God's words and use them to protect him or herself and fight off temptation.

- I am beginning to see how the devil tempts me.
- I am quite surprised by the evil thoughts that pop into my mind sometimes.
- I am now alert that on how the evil one tempts me through the week.
- I often still fall to temptation.
- I sense evil associated with a certain person or situation.

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## Level 2 – Young Believers

### Discern God and Evil One's Voice From One's Own

- I wish I could hear from God more. He does seem so distant at times.
- It is rather rare when God 'speaks' to me.
- I am not too sure what it means when people say God speaks to someone.
- I get rather dull at times and start crossing the line of obedience.

## Level 3 - Mature Believers

### Consistently Reject Satan and Seek God's Presence

The mature believer further develops what has been said, but focuses on enriching times of worship, being coached, guided, and protected by God, all being able to be used to pinpoint ways God wants to bear fruit through his or her life.

- Temptations come quite often but I have learned to quickly deal with them.
- The highlight of my day occurs when God speaks to my soul.
- My desire to know God more drives me to meet with Him regularly.

## Level 3 - Mature Believers

### Consistently Reject Satan and Seek God's Presence

#### Summary

- Christians develop their knowledge and special skills dependent upon their stage of spiritual development.
- Spiritual growth is the sum of how the Spirit of God has intentionally developed His child in various areas.
- Believers can grow in many more areas than above such as the discovery and use of spiritual gifts.
- The fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) enable and complement others aspects of spiritual development.



# The Flow

## Discussion Questions

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1. What is one way that you would like to grow in spiritual discernment?
2. Name one or two times you heard God clearly guiding, warning, or otherwise speak to you?
3. Name one or two of the greatest dangers that you face in the path ahead.



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