

Lenten Study

Discernment

Finding Clarity in the Chaos

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Lent 2020

Session 4

Discerning with a Clearness Committee



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Session 3: Discerning with a Clearness Committee (Week of March 22)

75 minutes

Purpose of this four-week study

To expand our individual understanding of discernment as a “gift of the Spirit”
To learn and share spiritual practices that support us in discernment
To discover and experiment with how we may be most authentic with God.
To appreciate that each of us has our own unique approach to discernment.

Purpose of this session

To introduce the spiritual practice of a Clearness Committee, and how the focused, disciplined support of spiritual friends can help us find a deeper, holy wisdom of discernment within ourselves.

Check-in

How are you doing with all the change going on around us?

Where are you finding your spiritual center?

Where and how are you getting off-center?

Opening Prayer *as written or spontaneous*

Loving God, we come into your presence today with a spirit of discernment,
a longing to find your deeper will in our lives,
a willingness to explore together what that means.

Whatever resistance, whatever hesitancy, whatever fears we have today,
we invite you to work through them, to speak through us,
that our lives may magnify more clearly your presence in the world around
us.

Be with us in our time together: in our speaking and our listening.
This we pray with grateful hearts and holy expectation. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Acts 17:24-28

Take turns reading the scripture three times, asking the following questions before and after each reading:

1. *What word or phrase jumps out at you?*
2. *What word or phrase do you need right now?*
3. *What word or phrase will make a difference for you this week?*

Preaching to Athenians at the Areopagus, Paul said:

*The God who made the world and everything in it,
the one who is Lord of heaven and earth,
does not live in shrines made by human hands,
nor is God served by human hands, as though God needed anything,
since God himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.
From one ancestor God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth,
and allotted the times of their existence
and the boundaries of the places where they would live,
so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for God and find God—
though indeed God is not far from each one of us.
For “In God we live and move and have our being”;
as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are God’s offspring.”*

Questions for further Reflection

Are there times when you feel like you’re groping (searching blindly and with uncertainty) to find God? When and what are those times like?

Is there a particular question, challenge, issue that you’re wrestling with right now and trying to find where God is in it?

Are there 2-3 friends whom you could imagine helping you with this decision, who could ask open, honest questions of you? Who?

Clearness Committees

Today we consider the Quaker concept of a “Clearness Committee,” a small group designed to help you find the inner wisdom of God as it exists in you.

The following resources have more information about how to form a Clearness Committee:

The Center for Courage and Renewal:

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/clearnesscommittee/>

The Friends General Conference (Quakers)

<https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/clearness-committees-what-they-are-and-what-they-do>

The distinguishing mark of a Clearness Committee is that they ask open, honest questions of you, in order to help you find the deeper wisdom of God residing in your soul.

They do not give advice, they do not seek to psychoanalyze, they do not share their own perspective, they merely ask you questions and help you come up with the answers.

Open and Honest Questions -- from Parker Palmer

The best single mark of an honest, open question is that the questioner could not possibly anticipate the answer to it;

e.g., “Did you ever feel like this before?”

There are other guidelines for good questioning.

Try not to get ahead of the focus person’s language;

e.g., “What did you mean when you said ‘frustrated?’” is a good question, but “Didn’t you feel angry?” is not.

Ask questions aimed at helping the focus person rather than at satisfying your curiosity. Ask questions that are brief and to the point rather than larding them with background considerations and rationale—which make the question into a speech. Ask questions that go to the person as well as the problem—for example, questions about feelings as well as about facts. Trust your intuition in asking questions, even if your instinct seems off the wall;

e.g., “What color is your present job,
and what color is the one you have been offered?”

Watch a four-minute video about Open and Honest questions

<http://www.couragerenewal.org/stories/inner-voice-honest-questions>

And/or read the summary from the Center for Courage (link above).

Trying a Clearness Committee -- an exercise

Ask for a volunteer willing to try this out as the “focus person” or the Clearness Committee. They can choose whatever topic or issue they want to focus on, some question they are discerning. Ask for two volunteers to serve as the committee members. Set a timer for 20 minutes, and

Quaker Clearness Committees usually take 2 hours.

Today we will do one or two mini-sessions for 20-25 minutes each

1. a focus person presents a problem challenge being discerned. It can be faith-related, professional, relationship issue - 5 minutes
2. 15 minutes of questions, answers and deeper questions
3. 5 minutes committee mirrors what was heard
4. group debriefs the experience
How did that go for the focus person? What was your experience?
How did it go for the other committee members?
Which questions elicited helpful responses? Which ones took you deeper?

Repeat with a new group.

Looking Ahead

Next week, we will look at ways that we may bring our discernment practices into the rest of our lives: our church community, our families, our workplaces, our communities.

Exercise for the week ahead

We encourage you to return to one of the spiritual practices we have introduced in the previous weeks:

- the spiritual examen
- daily gratitudes
- lectio divina

And consider forming your own Clearness Committee in your own context (prayer partner, family, workplace, school). What are some of the honest, open questions you can ask yourself? Try writing in a prayer journal about them.

Closing Prayer *invite participants to say their own prayers aloud as part of this prayer.*

God, be with us in the days ahead

as we seek to find your kind of clarity in whatever chaos exists around us.

Day by day, let us pause, listen, ask open honest questions, breathe deep,

and listen for your voice.

Hear these prayers we offer here together (*participants can offer their own prayers*).

We entrust to you these prayers,

both spoken aloud and those heard only in our hearts.

Give us the clarity and the strength to discover your inner peace

and your undying love and share it freely wherever we go. Amen.