

An Ignatian Framework for Making a Decision

11 Steps for Making a Decision Following the Ignatian Method

1. Identify the decision to be made or the issue to be resolved.

The issue should be *practical*—about doing or not doing something.

It has to be *real*; that is, there really is a decision to be made—a question about whether you should or should not do something.

It must be an issue about which you have the *right to make the decision*.

You must have or be able to *obtain the necessary information* to decide intelligently.

If you have difficulty identifying the issue, follow this five-step procedure:

1. List the various issues you might be deciding about in the next few weeks or months, or in the next year's time.
2. List the actions you might take about these issues.
3. Make a list of pros and cons for each issue or possible action.
4. Rank the issues and possible actions in the order of preference as you currently experience them.
5. Use the issue or possible action ranked first as the focus of your discernment.

2. Formulate the issue in a proposal.

State it as a *positive, concrete choice*.

Make it as *specific* as possible (What you will do, where, and when).

State it in the way that God initially seems to be drawing you.

State it in the form of X vs. non-X or X vs. Y.

Example of an X vs. non-X proposal: “*I will take enough courses next term so that I can graduate this coming May.*”

Example of an X vs. Y proposal: “*I will stay in my current job with company A or I will accept a job offer from company B.*”

3. Pray for openness to God's will, and for freedom from prejudice and addictions.

Ask for that inner freedom and balance that allows you not to be inclined more toward one alternative or option than to the other. This means to ask to be free enough to be influenced only by this one value: *which alternative will give most glory to God and be expressive of my own deepest self, my authentic self?*

To arrive at this absolutely necessary inner freedom, you may wish to discuss the matter with a spiritually mature person who can help you. In particular, discuss what obstacles could be limiting your freedom by blocking you or inclining you to one alternative over the other.

Possible obstacles: projections, disordered attachments like inferiority complexes, superiority complexes, or glorified self-images; “shoulds” or “oughts” that tyrannize you; perfectionism, fears, materialistic greed, and possessiveness; past hurts and self-pity; competitiveness that leads to envy; impatience with yourself or others; lust, ingratitude, and irreverence; desire for control, power, status, prestige, exclusiveness, and so forth.

As preparation for your prayer, read over slowly, carefully, and attentively the following Scripture passages:

[Luke 17:5-6](#) [Luke 12:22-32](#) [Matthew 13:44-46](#)

[Matthew 14:22-33](#) [Luke 18:35-43](#) [Mark 10:17-22](#)

[Matthew 5:13-16](#) [Luke 14:33](#) [2 Timothy 1:7](#)

[Matthew 7:24-25](#) [Luke 16:13](#) [Philippians 3:7-10](#)

[Luke 11:5-13](#) [Matthew 20:26-28](#)

Note the passages that strike you most strongly. Make these passages the source from which you talk with God about the particular areas where you need freedom. Where do you need greater detachment about the alternatives or options in your proposal? Bring them to God in prayer. Ask above all for a deep love: love for God, for the people being affected by the decision, and for your own true self or authentic self. Pray that no self-centered attraction or aversion about a choice will sidetrack you from what the Holy Spirit is pointing you to. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all this.

4. Gather all the necessary information.

Find out all the relevant specifics relating to the decision: Who? What? Where? When? How much? Why? Be satisfactorily informed.

Be sure to *consult* with everyone who will be intimately affected by the decision being made: spouse, children, other family, friends, colleagues. Get their input about it, including their feelings and desires. **Discuss this matter with someone** sensitive to Christian spiritual values. This could be a friend, counselor, priest, or minister—someone who will be honest and objective

with you. Discuss the matter in detail—its values and possibilities, your strengths and weaknesses.

5. Repeat the third step: Pray for openness to God’s will.

Pray about the matter again in light of the data you have gathered and the counsel of others. Most likely new feelings and desires have been stirred up that need to be shared with God so that they might be purified of any prejudgment or disordered attachment. This is a “freedom check.” Are you free enough to be influenced only by this one value: **which alternative will give most glory to God and be expressive of your own deepest self, your authentic self?**

6. State all the reasons for and all the reasons against each alternative in the proposal.

For a proposal of the X vs. non-X form, make two lists: “Advantages for me” and “Disadvantages for me.” For a proposal of the X vs. Y form, make a table with four lists: “Advantages for Me” and “Disadvantages for me” for each alternative (See the table below.)

Stay with Company A		Take a New Job with Company B	
Advantages for me	Disadvantages for me	Advantages for me	Disadvantages for me
1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.

Begin with *a short prayer* asking God to be with you as you make your lists. Ask particularly for light to see clearly what God chooses for you and what will best honor and serve God, your neighbor, and your true self.

List *all the reasons* you can think of. Do not prejudge their merit. You will evaluate them in the next step.

7. Do a formal evaluation of all the advantages and disadvantages.

The point of this evaluation is to see which advantages and disadvantages seem to be coming from the influence of the Holy Spirit and which ones do not.

Attempt to get in contact with your motives and values. To do this well, you may have to spend considerable time on this step. It may take weeks if you are making a major life decision.

Repeat Step 3, praying for openness and freedom. Pray for light about factors that inhibit freedom and openness to God. Are there any? Beg God for the help to be detached from disordered attachments that might be influencing you. Pray for a deeper faith in God and love for God.

Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages by asking four questions:

- Which reasons are the most important? Why?
- What values are preserved or realized by each option? (Many advantages and disadvantages may be pointing to the same value.)
- Which option *more* evidently leads to God’s service and *better* serves the growth of your *true* self in the Holy Spirit?
- Which option seems more consistent with your own faith journey and history with God?

8. Observe the direction of your will while reflecting on the advantages and disadvantages.

As you evaluate the choices, your *desires* will be influenced by the Holy Spirit; that is, your will becomes more inclined toward one option and less inclined toward the other. These inclinations may fluctuate between options. Pay attention to these inner movements. Pray for light from the Holy Spirit about them. Eventually, your will is likely to focus on one of the alternatives.

If your will does not settle on one choice but continues to fluctuate between the two, a disordered attachment may be influencing you. This is a signal to do some more prayer. Return to Step 3. Ask God to free you from any selfish inclinations and lead you to worthy motives. Pray that the Holy Spirit draws your will and its desires to God's will.

9. Ask God to give you feelings of consolation about the preferred option.

This is the third of three states of the discernment. First, you asked the Holy Spirit to transform your *thoughts* (listing advantages and disadvantages). Second, you asked the Holy Spirit to transform your *desires* (your will) while evaluating the lists of advantages and disadvantages. Now you ask the Holy Spirit to stir *feelings* of spiritual consolation. These are feelings of joy, enthusiasm, deeper faith, greater hope and trust, greater love, confidence, courage. These thoughts, desires, and feelings are all parts of your inner experience of the Holy Spirit guiding you to the truth.

These feelings of consolation accompany your desires when they are clearly pointed toward loving and serving God, others, and your true self. They are very different from the feelings that accompany your desires when they are influenced by disordered attachments aimed only at your selfish ways.

If your feelings fluctuate between consolation and desolation, you may be under the influence of mixed motives and disordered attachments. If so, return to Step 3: pray for freedom and openness to God.

10. Trust in God and make your decision, even if you are not certain about it.

11. Confirm the decision.

Live with the decision for a while to see whether your thoughts, desires, and feelings continue to support it. If not, new data is needed and the process must be redone.

By Jim Manney