

# **Discerning Difficult Decisions:**

## **An Ignatian Guide to Making Life's Important Choices**

### **Leader's Guide**

Dear Leaders,

We thank you for taking on this key role. Our world has many people trying to make important decisions. Ignatian style discernment will help these people to make Spirit-led decisions. Your influence, encouragement, and openness are essential.

But you don't have to be an expert in Ignatian Spirituality to facilitate a group through this process. The videos and the workbook are mostly self-explanatory. So while it certainly helps to be familiar with St. Ignatius and the Rules for Discernment, it is not essential. What is essential is to have a consistent guide to gather the group, play the videos, and encourage and invite involvement throughout the gatherings.

While there are many aspects of this guide that most likely apply to your group, perhaps not all of them do apply. Use your best judgement, and when appropriate, adapt the guidelines so that they fit your group.

This *Leader's Guide* includes all of the material of the *Participant Workbook*, and it also includes helpful facilitation ideas for shepherding a group through the video series and the suggested daily materials. All instructions for facilitation are in blocks with a gray background to be easily differentiated from the participant material. In this way, you have the same material in front of you as all participants, and you have the suggestions for facilitation.

The suggestions for facilitation only appear on the first days of the week, because we anticipate that your members will be working on their own for the rest of the week. We strongly suggest that you as leader also do the daily activities. This will allow you to best understand what the other members of your group are doing.

The following page introduces the workbook. On your first gathering, you may want to refer to it and encourage people to do a little bit of work each day to more deeply understand the content being presented.

## Introduction

This workbook will help you to have a deeper understanding of the material presented in our seven-part video series. Use the information and activities according to your schedule and energy. You don't have to do everything, but make sure you do something!

Notice that this is a *Work*-book. To benefit from the processes being described, you must move beyond understanding the information intellectually and actually practice the methods for your own situation. That takes time and effort and you will find that this work helps build your house on solid, holy ground.

St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, is famous for his Spiritual Exercises. The rules for discernment come out of these spiritual exercises. He taught that not only our physical bodies need exercising; our prayer life needs to be exercised as well. Our heart, mind, and spirit must be engaged in activity that draws us closer to God. St. Ignatius gave us numerous contemplations and meditations to do this prayerful exercising. The goal was, as it still is, to increase our spiritual health.

So as not to confuse our suggestions with those of St. Ignatius, we will use the term "practice" for some specific spiritual invitations that we offer. Our goal is to enhance and illuminate the exercises of St. Ignatius.

Most days there is something for you to practice. And notice that the word practice is a term we use for something we are trying to learn, which is indeed the case here, but the word practice also means to regularly do something. Our prayer practices are ways we connect with God. We are not just learning these practices; we are trying to establish them as regular habits in our lives.

So if it feels like spending time on this every day is too much work, keep in mind that opening our lives to God's call is indeed the most important thing we can do in our whole life. Isn't that something worth spending time on each day?

Let's acknowledge, though, that feeling guilty because we have not met our prayer goals is not healthy if it lowers our feeling of self-worth or our sense of being loved by God. Yet feeling guilty can be a positive force in our life if it helps us better organize our day and our priorities. Let's all remember that God's voice is ever encouraging and understanding. This workbook will help us to follow that voice of the Good Shepherd.

The work will be to pray, meditate, contemplate, journal, and immerse ourselves into the ideas of St. Ignatius. Thanks for joining us on the journey. Keep practicing.

## Section One

### **Who is St. Ignatius Loyola and Why Should We Care?**

- This first segment will briefly review St. Ignatius' life journey
- He teaches us to listen for the voice of God to guide our decisions.
- *Hello, Lord* – music video included

## Day 1 Who Is St. Ignatius and Why Should We Care

On this first day, after greeting the members of your group, you can read the opening prayer, or you may ask for a volunteer to read it. But before you read the prayer, it will be helpful to mention that tonight's schedule will include:

- Prayer
- Watching a 20-minute video
- Journaling
- Discussions
- And instructions for work throughout the rest of the week

### Opening Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for inspiring St. Ignatius Loyola to become a great leader and teacher of your ways. You took a proud soldier and led him up the mountain to lay down his sword forever. It was you who nudged him to recognize the emptiness of a world of glamour, money, and fleeting romance. You offered him the cup of salvation. You patiently waited until his boredom led him to pick up the book that would change his life. That book of stories about saints drew him to you. Help us to also follow in your path. Help us to recognize your grace in our lives. In your name, Jesus, we pray this prayer. Amen

**Before starting the video consider introducing it by reading the following statement: We are now going to watch the first video of a 7-part series. Each week we will watch one of the videos. Each one will last about a half an hour. Tonight's video we will learn about the founder of the Jesuit order St. Ignatius Loyal. It is his system of discernment to make difficult decisions that we will be immersing ourselves in.**

**Watch the Video:** *Who Is Saint Ignatius?*

**Immediately after watching the video, invite participants to spend a few minutes journaling about their reaction to the video.**

**Journaling**—Take 5 minutes to write down any thoughts or feelings that occur to you after watching the video.

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**After the journaling, invite the members of the group to read one by one the review points of the video.**

**Review of Video—Share key takeaways including:**

- Making decisions isn't easy.
- It's estimated that we make about 35,000 remotely conscious decisions per day.
- We make perhaps 226 food choices in a typical day
- Inigo Loyola was born in 1491 in the Basque Country of Spain. He was the youngest of 13 siblings. He lived a privileged life. He excelled at womanizing, gambling, and dueling. He had a police record for having attacked a priest who had insulted the family name.
- As a soldier leading his men to refuse to surrender in 1521 he was struck by a cannonball which damaged both his legs.
- During in his nine-month recovery he read the book The Lives of the Saints. He was particularly inspired by St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic.
- He gradually shifted his alliance from the King of Spain to Christ the King.
- Inigo noticed that when he thought about returning to his lustful ways and winning honor and fame for himself, it brought him immediate pleasure, but when the excitement faded, he became agitated and uneasy. When he was honest with himself, he felt a deep emptiness settling in.

- Whereas when he thought about following the saints and surrendering everything to follow the great king, the Eternal King, there was great pleasure, and afterwards there was an abiding peace in his soul that lingered on and on.
- In 1594 Inigo gave up his sword after praying all night in front of the Black Madonna statue in Montserrat, a Benedictine monastery in Spain.
- Inigo became angry after a Muslim traveler disagreed that Mother Mary had been a virgin. Inigo wanted to take a dagger to the one who didn't share his faith, but he decided to let his donkey pick the route, and the donkey chose not to follow the Muslim traveler.
- Inigo once wrote that "no one knows the good that God can accomplish in us, if we but allow ourselves to fall into the hands of our God who gave all, that we might learn to entrust ourselves into God's care." But oh, how difficult is that journey of trust.

**Invite the group into discussion.**

### **Discussion Questions**

What seems important about this session? What part of St. Ignatius' story stood out to you? What feelings are stirring in you as you consider the content shared?

**Invite a member of the class to read the following scripture verse. After it is read, ask if anyone has an idea of how this scripture applies to what has been covered tonight.**

### **Scripture to Strengthen You**

Slowly read these words. Consider reciting them a few times. Let them sink in. Consider memorizing them.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
on your own intelligence rely not;"  
—Proverbs 3: 5

**For the closing prayer, consider inviting your group to read it out loud together, or invite one member to read it for the group.**

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord, thank you for this chance to learn to follow you, and not our vain pride. Open our hearts so that we may more fully experience you. Help us to recognize your presence that dwells within each of us. It is easy to be confused, to make wrong choices, and to seek that which at first seems pleasurable, but turns out to leave us empty inside. You are the key to abiding peace. Your soothing, healing touch is sometimes fired at us like a cannonball knocking us to the ground. You

change our lives forever so that we might find everlasting joy. We thank you for your good aim. We praise you, Lord, Jesus. Amen

Closing comments. Finish your time together encouraging people to spend a little time on each of the activities suggested in their participant **workbooks**. Remind people when you will meet for your next session. Thank people for coming and let them know that you look forward to seeing them next **time**.