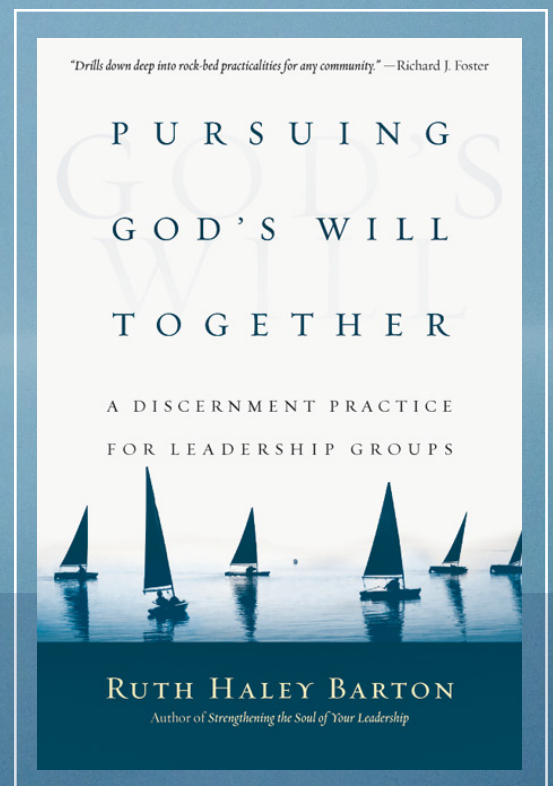


Pursuing God's Will Together

Retreat Guide

Designed for governing boards
Inspired by Ruth Haley Barton's book
"Pursuing God's Will Together"



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Retreat Guide

Written by Chris Conrad
Inspired by Ruth Haley Barton's book
Pursuing God's Will Together

GOAL:

For the governing body of the church to move from deciding to discerning God's will by taking the necessary step of growing in knowledge of each other and the principles of discerning in community.

NOTE:

This retreat can take place either as an overnight retreat or as an "all day Saturday" retreat. The times are suggestions, nothing more. Let Holy Spirit guide your time together. No two retreats using this material are exactly the same because each retreat is made up of different individuals. This is the way it should be!

There are great resources available to you at:

pursuinggodswilltogether.com

SESSION ONE:

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

In order to serve with each other effectively, it really does help if we know each other more than at the most basic levels. This session is aimed at helping us get to know one another better.

(Tip: You do not need to answer all of these questions, pick a few that you think will spark the conversations resulting in people truly coming to know each other better.)

QUESTIONS:

- 1- You have a free day to do anything you want to do – something that will refresh your soul. What do you do?
- 2- Where did you grow up?
- 3- Name (at least) one way that the environment you grew up in still impacts your life today?
- 4- When did you first open up your heart to a relationship with Jesus Christ? What were the circumstances surrounding that event?
- 5- Who is someone who had a significant impact on your growth spiritually?
- 6- Can you think of a time when you grew significantly in your spiritual walk over a short period of time? What were the events surrounding that growth?
- 7- Talk about a time when you went through a spiritually dry period (this is sometimes called the “dark night of the soul.” A time when your faith or at least your joy was significantly attacked.
- 8- Do you tend to be an external processor (you talk as you attempting to discern) or an internal processor (you take everything in, think about it, and give you opinion when you feel like it is settled in your own mind/heart)?

SESSION TWO:

DECIDING V.S. DISCERNING

Read Acts 1:12-26

How do the disciples choose the replacement disciple?

Does this appear to be an overtly spiritual process of discernment?

Where else is Matthias found in the New Testament? (Hint... don't bother looking... you won't find this Matthias anywhere else in the Bible).

Read Acts 13:1-4a

What were the leaders of the Antioch church doing (according to the first part of verse 2) when Holy Spirit spoke to them?

It doesn't say the Holy Spirit spoke in an audible voice. It appears they discerned His voice speaking to them. What do you believe is important in order to hear Holy Spirit speaking into your spirit?

The church leaders didn't make the decision to send out Paul and Barnabas lightly. Even after they first heard Holy Spirit talking to them, they went back and fasted and prayed some more – they wanted to make sure they heard His voice.

Read at Acts 15

If you have time, read the entire chapter. If not, simply read verses 24-29.

Give particular focus to what James (who appears to have written this statement) says at the beginning of verse 28. This appears to indicate that, like what happened in the church of Antioch, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem were most interested in listening to and obeying the voice of Holy Spirit.

SESSION TWO: DECIDING V.S. DISCERNING

Read this quote from Paul Anderson:

If Christ is alive, He desires to lead His church. If Christ desires to lead His church, His will should be sought. If His will can be sought, it can be discerned; and if it can be discerned, it deserved to be obeyed. This is nothing more than the basic Christian life.

Without any sense of condemnation or guilt, would you say that the boards you have served on have had as their #1 assignment, goal, and practice to actually discern God's will in the midst of their work? (Hint, most boards pray a prayer at the beginning of their meeting and another prayer at the end of their meeting... and assume they are discerning God's will. But is that really true?)

Read Romans 12:2

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” (HCSB Translation)

Think back in your own life to a time when you rushed through a decision-making process and probably didn't really discern “the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”

Can you dare get really honest with each other? Can you think of a time when you as a governing body, might have decided instead of discerned?

Again, without any desire for guilt or condemnation, it's one thing if we “decide instead of discern” if we're going to have communion once a week, once a month or once a quarter in our church services. But some decisions we are asked to discern, could have eternal ramifications.

Closing Thoughts

As we close this session, what do you think should motivate us to become a leadership discerning community together (instead of just a group of folks who made decisions for the church)?

SESSION THREE:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PART #1 OF PURSING GOD'S WILL TOGETHER

Read Part One

Simply go through Part 1 of the book and discuss together what were the “aha moments” as you read.

The ultimate question you want to ask yourself as you do this is:

“What do we sense Holy Spirit is inviting us into as a community of leaders who have been asked by our congregation to discern His will?”

Speaking of this, you might want to also have a fun conversation around the topic of the fact that as board members, you have not been elected to represent the congregation's wishes to the board. You were not elected to serve in the Congress of the United States. There's nothing wrong with being an elected official – in fact that is a high honor. But as a Board Member of a local church, we have been elected to this position to discern God's will for the congregation. Our focus is not on what a congregant wants, but on what God desires. Remember, it's His church, not ours. If we truly take on this mindset, how does that shift how we think coming into meetings?

What do you think of the “prayer of indifference?” How do we get to the point where we can actually say, “Not my will, Jesus, but Yours be done... in Your church?” Is there something you need to do to prepare yourself to have that type of mindset/approach as you come into a board meeting?

SESSION FOUR:

PRACTICE MAKES IT MORE NATURAL PART #2 OF PURSUING GOD'S WILL TOGETHER

Read Part Two

What “hit you” as you read the 2nd part of PGWT?

What would need to change in our typical board meeting practices in order to actually discern instead of decide?

Make this practical: Take a subject matter that you feel like is going to need discernment (or is right now in need of discernment) in the life of your church and begin to practice the principles outlined in PGWT.

Pay attention to desolation and consolation going on in your spirit.

Slow down and take time to actually listen to each other.

Spend time in praying the prayer of indifference.

Take time in silence to listen to what Holy Spirit is saying to you.

Closing Thoughts

End with an Exercise of Encouragement

Close out the retreat by going around and speaking out loud what you value in each person around the table.

“Mike/Michelle, what I really appreciate about you is:

- The wisdom you have about financial matters.

- When you pray, it really ministers to my heart.

- I really appreciate how you encourage us to look at an issue from both sides as we are discerning it together.

Spend time praying and asking Holy Spirit to continue to guide you and mold you into a leadership discerning community.