

**Discernment: Consolation and Desolation**

TV game shows require contestants to make quick decisions that have “significant” consequences—get it right and win a million dollars; get it wrong and go home empty-handed. In real life, few of our decisions carry that same kind of drama; however, many of them are indeed very significant. Luckily, we usually have more than a few seconds to make most of our significant decisions in life. One of the things we can do with the time we have before making a decision is to practice discernment. In the Ignatian tradition, discernment involves two key words: *consolation* and *desolation*. In her book, *The Inner Compass*, Margaret Silf provides an excellent description of the role these two words play in our process of discernment.

What do we mean when we talk of consolation and desolation? We are really only talking about our orientation, and the bottom line is this: which direction is our life taking us—toward God [consolation] or away from him [desolation]?

Here are some of the main symptoms of desolation and the most commonly experienced blessings of consolation.

**Desolation**

* turns us in on ourselves
* drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings
* cuts us off from community
* makes us want to give up on things that used to be important to us
* takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision
* covers up all our landmarks
* drains us of energy

**Consolation**

* directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves
* lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people
* bonds us more closely to our human community
* generates new inspiration and ideas
* restores balance and refreshes our inner vision
* shows us where God is active in our lives and where he is leading us
* releases new energy in us

What to do…

***In Desolation:***

1. Tell God how you feel and ask for help.
2. Seek out companionship.
3. Don't go back on decisions you made in consolation.
4. Stand still and remember your inner map.
5. Recall a time of consolation, and go back to it imagination.
6. Look for someone who needs your help, and turn your attention toward them.
7. Go back to 1.

***In Consolation:***

1. Tell God how you feel and thank him.
2. Store this moment in your memory to return to when things get tough.
3. Add this experience to your life map.
4. Use the energy you feel to further your deepest desires.
5. Let the surplus energy fuel the things you don't like doing, and do them.
6. Go back to 1.

excerpts from [*The Inner Compass*](https://www.loyolapress.com/inner-compass-ignatian-spirituality-10th-anniversary.htm) by Margaret Silf