INTUITION VS. DISCERNMENT

Hearing God's voice and understanding his guidance in our personal lives is not always easy. A good starting point (and maybe only a starting point) to begin thinking about God's guidance is to differentiate between intuition and discernment. It is risky simply to attribute to God whatever intuition we might get, for example, after praying direction and guidance in our lives. What we need is discernment. Discernment is something that builds up as we grow as Christians.

Discernment is little bit like expertise. Two years ago before Christmas I went to the doctor because my right eye was totally pink. The first young doctor inferred quite quickly that it was Ophthalmia (eye infection). But after taking antibiotics for one whole week, my eye was still as pink as before. Fortunately a friend told me about his father-in-law, who was an experienced eye doctor (and who wouldn't take money from "men of the kingdom"). I went to see him. He looked at my eye (with his "naked eye", without using any tools) and asked few very specified questions. After that he told me his diagnosis: Uveitis. I cannot help but think that the first doctor based her diagnosis on very fallible seemings, whereas the experienced doctor had experience and expertise through which he could deduce the right diagnosis. It is as if the first doctor based her judgement more on her intuitions, whereas the second doctor had more discernment.

It doesn't mean that the longer we are believers, the better we can hear God's voice year by year. Maybe many do. But the point is that through Bible-reading, prayer, reflection and fellowship our thought-world becomes more saturated by Biblical thinking and Christian experience so that even when we don't know exactly and clearly what God wants us to do next, we can still take wise steps forward.

TEXTS

Phil. 1:9-10 (NIV): 9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Room. 12:2 (ESV): Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Prov. 15:22 (NIV) Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

QUESTIONS

1. Give examples of a) intuitions and 2) beliefs that are reached through discernment.
2. Can you mention some examples where someone you know has followed their intuition, thinking that it’s God's voice, and the consequences have not been positive?
3. Do you know people who clearly have ability to discern what is a wise thing to do in a particular situation?
4. Do you believe God has a specific plan for all of our lives; e.g. who we should marry, what we should study, where we should work, what church we should go to etc.?
5. J. Oswald Sanders in his Book Spiritual Leadership says that knowing God's exact will for your life doesn't necessarily come any easier when you get older – it might actually become harder! If so, how do you think this should affect our thinking about discerning God's will?
6. In what kinds of situations you personally wouldn't trust simply your own discernment (even if your thought-world is saturated in Biblical worldview) but you would like to get some help from other Christians?
7. It is inevitable that we will listen to "human wisdom" – whether it's coming from johnipers (=preachers), georgeclooneys (=celebrities), paulocoelhos (=popular thinkers) or from our parents. Even in developing a Biblical worldview we need some help from others (=people). If this is true (you're allowed to disagree), what kind of people we should strive to listen to? What criteria would you have for a mentor (someone who you allow to speak into your life)?

1 Intuition can be defined as "a thing that one knows or considers likely from instinctive feeling rather than conscious reasoning".
2 Discernment can be defined as "perception in the absence of judgment with a view to obtaining spiritual direction and understanding".
3 In Finnish: värikalvon tulehdus. After googling "uveitis" I immediately realized that's what I had. The first doctor would've made the right diagnosis if she had simply consulted Wikipedia.