

## Truth and Discernment

In recent years we have experienced a proliferation of conflicting news. Everyone seems to have a new theory, the inside scoop, or have just read a news article explaining what is “really going on.” This has had a significant impact on our people, even creating conflict within churches. How should we respond when faced with contradictory information, and how are we to determine what to believe? Perhaps more importantly, how can we as leaders sort through this barrage of information and guide our congregations in truth?

The goal of this writing is to address these questions. We have divided the content into four parts. This is to make it more readable as well as to assist church leaders who desire to share this content in church bulletins, newsletters, or periodicals.

### PREVIOUS SECTION

#### The Problem

##### Part 1: What is Truth?

God’s people are to be known as lovers of truth. When we believe and pass on false narratives, our witness is muted.

##### Part 2: Why the Struggle?

Why are we having difficulty? We look at seven conservative Anabaptist strengths which have corresponding weaknesses.

### IN THIS SECTION

#### The Solution

##### Part 3: Building a Personal Foundation for Discernment

How committed am I to truth, and what can I do to develop Godly discernment in my own personal life?

##### Part 4: Steps to Godly Discernment

When reading a news article or listening to a narrative, how can I know what to believe?

##### Addenda: Ideas for Growing in Discernment

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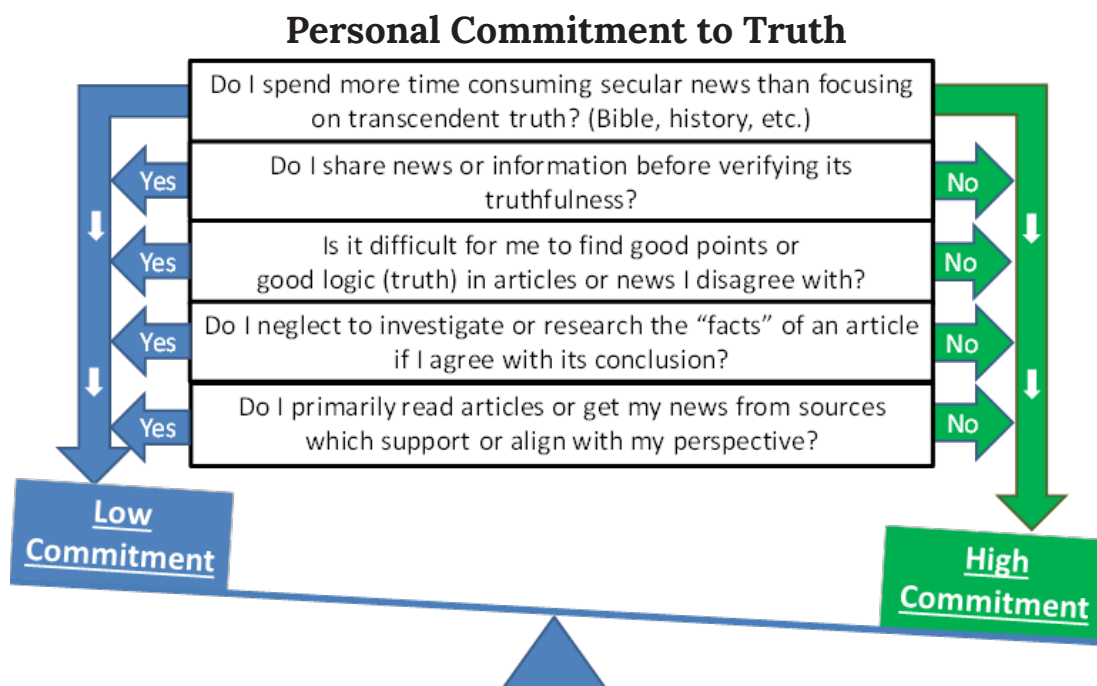
## Part 3: Building a Personal Foundation for Discernment

How can we encourage wise Biblical discernment, avoid misinformation, and keep ourselves from gullibly chasing the scams and false narratives that seem to plague our plain communities? More importantly, how can we develop and help others develop a personal Biblical foundation capable of sorting through the conflicting “facts” we face in this time of information gluttony?

### A Look Within

It is essential that we begin by looking within. How vibrant is our personal commitment and connection to Truth Himself? Are we walking with Him and seeking direction as we navigate this challenging time? When weighing news sources, medical propositions, financial offers, and other claims—how strong is our personal commitment to truth?

The questions on the chart below are designed to help us take personal inventory. While no individual question will be conclusive, each provides a clue about our personal love for, and commitment to, truth. If someone would monitor the inputs into our lives on a given day, where is most of our information coming from? How diligent are we about ensuring that what we read, watch, listen to, and pass on to others is founded on truth? Are we drawing from multiple news sources with divergent perspectives and viewpoints, or do we gravitate to sources which primarily confirm our opinions? How much thought have we put into understanding a source’s biases or ensuring an organization’s accuracy in reporting? If we are going to become judicious, discerning followers of Jesus, we must begin by analyzing our own daily habits and the wells of information we are drawing from. Leaders in particular must model good discernment skills.



## Identify and Confess Your Own Biases

We understand that news sources are biased but often forget that each of us is biased as well. Bias is a little like wearing colored glasses. Information flowing into our minds is always colored by our experiences and assumptions. We are also influenced by what we want to be true and tend to see every new piece of information as confirmation of our previously held belief.

For a person who believes that the earth is flat, every article promoting his opinion will confirm his position. Conversely, every article which points out the flaws in a flat earth reinforces his suspicion that the round earth theory is a clever and deceptive hoax. The better the arguments for a round globe, the more deceitful the round globe deception appears. Regardless of what he hears or sees, everything has the potential to confirm his belief.

We tend to laugh at others who get caught up in this cycle. But the tendency to arrogantly believe that our own perspective is balanced and correct is universal. This is why all of us immediately insist on investigating claims which disagree with our opinion, while feeling little need to research claims which agree.

We must be willing to purposefully and ruthlessly investigate our own assumptions and allow others to do the same. If we are going to help our congregation become men and women of discernment, it is important that we model this humble willingness to have our cherished opinions scrutinized. Is my love for truth actually stronger than my love for what I want to be true?

## Humble Confidence

It is tempting for leaders to back away from controversial topics and fail to provide solid leadership. But failing to provide guidance increases susceptibility to false narratives. And often these are being promoted by the most outspoken and the least informed. Leaders need to listen, as people need to be heard. But there is also a time for leaders to humbly share their own perspectives. While there is much in the political and scientific world that we cannot be absolutely sure of, God has not left us without recourse. Jesus, knowing His disciples would be called to lead in difficult times, told them to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Mt. 10:16).

We may not be able to provide absolute proof that Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon. But we should be capable, with humble confidence, to examine the evidence, respectfully listen to differing opinions, and arrive at a functional conclusion, even regarding current events of the day. So how are we to do this? Let’s look at some ways we can help our people build a good foundation for wise discernment.

## Loving God with Our Minds

When Jesus was asked which commandment is the greatest, He responded with, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment” (Mk. 12:30). We talk about loving the Lord with all our soul and strength, and we hear sermons on the importance of loving God from our heart. But

what does it mean to love God with our minds? Loving God in this way speaks of using our minds as God intended. The brain, like a muscle, requires proper exercise and nourishment to operate optimally, and this is essential if we are going to develop intellectual strength. This is part of loving God with our mind.

A godly person with strong intellectual character will be known for his love and commitment to truth. More than a desire for fame, wealth, or proving that his opinion is correct—he wants to know and understand how things really are. He is constantly seeking to align his life with reality. He understands he has inherent blind spots and is committed to continuous learning. A person of intellectual character is willing to keep asking questions, even if those questions reveal his own ignorance and make him appear foolish. He wants truth! He understands that feeding upon good information is vital to developing a healthy mind, and his judgment will be no better than the material he feeds on. So, what kind of material will he feed on? What will his bookshelf look like?

## The First Two Books

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” (Pro. 9:10). If we are going to be people of discernment, we will need to begin with a foundational knowledge of God. We need continual reminders that there is a God, and we are not Him. For centuries, theologians have referred to two books which reveal the glory of God—His written Word, and His book of creation. There is no better way to keep the majesty of God before our eyes than by a continual and thoughtful study of the Bible and careful observation of His creation. The Psalmist describes the man of God as “a tree planted by the rivers of water” (Psa. 1:3). This is a person who meditates on the Word of God day and night, has developed a healthy fear of the Lord, and is prepared to properly discern. He isn’t going to be moved by the latest unverified rumor or get-rich-quick scheme. He believes that beginning with the Bible and seeing the world through God’s eyes is better than starting with sensational headlines and going through the day making sense of events through the world’s eyes.

The Bible is the meat and potatoes for developing the character of one’s intellect and, in ways difficult to quantify, gives us a basis for accepting or rejecting truth claims. It helps the child of God interpret life’s events, keeps us concerned about the issues that are concerning to God, and causes us to focus on all of life from God’s perspective. Coupled with the Holy Spirit, the Word of God helps a judicious person maintain an awe of God and is essential in his continued development. The Bible is the most important book on a wise person’s shelf.

The second book, our natural world, is also important. Carefully considering creation reveals much about the mind of the Creator and prepares our minds for proper discernment. The anthill instructs us in the importance of sensible planning, the lily reminds us of God’s faithfulness, and ordinary grass teaches us about the brevity of life and the foolishness of trusting earthly wealth (Pro. 6:6, Mt. 6:28–29, Is. 40:6–8, Jm. 1:10–11). A person who wants to develop his or her mind will spend time considering and meditating on the diversity in plant life, the power in thunder, and the constancy of the morning sun. All of these provide a proper foundation for evaluating the latest claim or fearful headline. Whatever the latest political shenanigan or scandal, the cycles of creation teach us that God is unmoved by the current drama. A wise person will spend less time

in the news, and more time considering nature. Psalm 8 describes the result of simply gazing up into the night sky. “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him?” (vv. 3–4). The Apostle Paul built on this thought, noting that the character of God can be known, simply by observing nature. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20).

Is it really possible for the person who has been considering the complexity and immensity of our universe to become anxious over a passing rumor? After pondering the fact that it takes light over four years to travel to earth from the closest star, how concerned will I be with a drop in the Dow Jones? Carefully pondering the Word of God and creation helps us keep the latest news or theory in perspective. As one author has said, “Nature is one big, beautiful symphony that is always playing, if only we take out our earbuds long enough to listen.”<sup>1</sup> If we are going to be people of intellectual character, these first two books are the most important. Yet they are not the only books a prudent man or woman will read.

## A Wise Man’s Bookshelf

A wise person will also draw from inputs which hone his ability to discern and accurately process information. One of these is a good understanding of history. Individuals who have studied the past are less inclined to unhealthy kneejerk reactions and have less tendency to immediately accept simplistic answers to multifaceted dilemmas. Life can be complex, so reading broadly helps us look for nuances that others might miss. Good books stretch our minds and increase our capacity to process. Whether a biology textbook, an account of someone who lived in another era, or a biography of a leader who had to make difficult decisions during a critical time, good books give us a foundation to consider truth claims. Reading about the past or about people living in a different culture helps us realize our limited perspective. We put the book down with a greater understanding of how much there is to learn and a deeper appreciation for our own finiteness.

The cumulative effect of habitually reading good books is profound, an integral part of developing sound judgment. Men and women who love truth have an ongoing childlike curiosity about our natural world. They are slower to immediately accept the latest slick theory and are humbly seeking God for direction. “Lead me in Your truth and teach me,” the Psalmist prayed (Psa. 25:5), and this is the consistent posture of the child of God. Wise people are willing to learn from other wise people. They understand that God speaks through His Word, through an inner voice, and through the writings of others who have wrestled through issues. Godly people are humble enough to learn from others. Their bookshelves will reveal this truth.

## A Humble Reliance on Brotherhood

Godly people know from experience that they desperately need brothers and sisters whom they have given permission to speak into their lives, brothers and sisters who are willing to challenge and to share different perspectives. This is one of the reasons God has placed us in church

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1 McCracken, Brent. *The Wisdom Pyramid*. Wheaton, IL, Crossway, 2021, p. 105.

families (1 Cor. 12:4–25). More than most of us understand, we need local churches who do more than just meet on Sunday mornings. Frequent dialogue regarding values and current events can be an excellent filter against erroneous thinking. It helps us interpret life, avoid tunnel vision, and harmonize Biblical truths.

There are other inherent blessings to church life. The wisdom of habitually gathering each Lord's Day and listening in silence to someone else expound on the Word of God is becoming more apparent in our day. We live in a noisy world, and it is essential that we periodically sit and listen without opportunity to respond or disagree. Through the week we rub shoulders with a culture that is constantly telling us, in an endless variety of ways, that everything is about *me*. Technology subtly increases this belief that my opinion is important, my preferences should be honored, and my desires should instantly be fulfilled. Church services require sitting in quiet contemplation and being reminded that life isn't primarily about *me* after all!

In an age of social media bombardment and political whiplash, commitment to the local church is stabilizing. It is a place where we listen to ideas we disagree with, endure individuals who rub us the wrong way, and even submit to decisions which seem illogical. None of this is easy for the natural man. But the wise, godly discerner understands that there is no better training ground for intellectual character than the local church. The church leader who is intent on developing his people and preparing them to wisely sort through conflicting information through the week will encourage vibrant church life and facilitate times of healthy discussion. He will look for peaceful, respectful formats where members in his congregation can learn from each other. He will also be alert to the individual who carelessly consumes the sensational but avoids a deep perusal of the Word of God, fails to immerse himself in good reading material, and avoids transparency within the brotherhood.

## Trust within the Brotherhood

A healthy brotherhood is one where trust exists between its members. Where trust exists, we feel safe asking others for their opinion about a particular medical claim, financial offer, or some questionable headline we recently wondered about. Healthy brotherhoods are an excellent filter, helping us to navigate challenging times. We will not always agree, but it is possible to disagree agreeably, and to learn from each other. Ron and Don, whose story is told in Part 1, saw the COVID situation from completely different perspectives and were unable to communicate. But if they had been able to trust and openly communicate, each could have learned from the other.

When trust is lost, candid conversations regarding controversial topics are difficult if not impossible. Fear that discussion might drive us further apart immobilizes us. So, afraid of increasing tension within the brotherhood, we stick to inconsequential, lighter topics. Controversial topics are set aside, and healthy dialogue occurs only with friends who share the same perspective. But so much is lost when we fail to engage with different viewpoints. Not only do we fail to learn, but a lack of trust within a brotherhood almost always leads people to unmerited confidence in other unverified, and many times dangerous, sources.

## Purposefully Screening Consumption

Helping our people develop a personal foundation for discernment is a task each church leader should take seriously. Our Anabaptist churches are not doing well with discernment. Called by God to be truth bearers, we are in danger of becoming known as conspiracy sharers. But it doesn't need to be this way. Much of our failure is due to our casual approach to the information we consume and neglecting the hard work of developing vibrant trusting relationships within the brotherhood.

It is essential that we intentionally examine both the quality and quantity of our information intake. We cannot constantly consume the light and fluffy, the newest funny video, or the latest shocking headline, and expect to become godly discerners of truth. Just as a hopeful Olympic weightlifter cannot afford to diet on donuts and cotton candy, we cannot afford to consume the silly and sensational while expecting to develop into godly discerners. Good thinking is predicated on good information and on humbly understanding that we are incapable of handling unlimited information. We can retain only so much. It is much better to consume carefully than to assume the more material we imbibe the better.

It is time for our people to develop godly discernment. This will require regularly feeding deeply on the Word of God and considering nature, reading good books, frequently engaging thoughtfully as a brotherhood, and purposefully screening and limiting media consumption. This is a difficult task! Yet the discerning leader understands that the cost of neglecting this reality is much higher! With a desire to develop his people, he will frequently encourage his people to avoid the transient and invest in the transcendent.

But beyond developing a solid personal foundation for discernment, what steps can we take to determine the believability of the claims we encounter? How can we know which news is fake? We will look more closely at this in Part 4.

## Part 4: Steps to Godly Discernment

We have looked at the importance of developing a solid Biblical foundation for truth. Let's assume we have been engaged in this. Now we read a news article and want to determine its accuracy. What should we do and where do we start?

Let's look at some steps we can take in determining the veracity of truth claims.

### Steps to Discernment

#### **Recognize that bias is inevitable.**

Based on our knowledge, motives, and past experiences, all of us carry some bias. This is true individually and also true of organizations and companies. Consider news media. A wise person understands that a perfectly balanced news source, regardless of the claims, doesn't exist. News organizations are owned and staffed by biased people. Every article is composed by individuals who have certain prejudices, and this will be reflected in the content in subtle ways.

Imagine two reputable newspapers reporting on the progress of the Civil War in 1863. One is located in the North and the other in the South. Do you suppose their articles would be identical? Of course not. Even their headlines would probably differ. One might say, "The Northern Aggression Continues," and the other, "Southern Rebellion Lingers." They are reporting on the same war, yet the reader wouldn't have to be informed on which side of the Mason-Dixon line the headline originated. Both sides may desire objectivity, yet they can't avoid a bias.

The scientific community is no different. Scientists are people. They live real lives, have past experiences, and despite their goal to be objective, each carries some biases. In addition, academic credentials are no guarantee that a man or woman cares more about truth than they do about prestige or power. Educated people are biased, just like everyone else. The medical community also has its biases. Pharmaceutical companies, motivated by profit, may encourage more drugs than needed. Every human, including medical practitioners, is susceptible to human greed. But, of course, so is the natural herb salesman who insists you need his products. Be suspicious of those who insist they only have your good in mind or claim they have exclusive understanding.

Yet, the fact that every human is biased doesn't mean the information they provide should be automatically dismissed. The prudent person understands that bias is universal and multiple informational inputs are essential. We listen to, and learn from, the used car salesman. But we also understand that he might be concerned with more than just our family's transportation needs. So we get additional information from others and then make the best decision we can by weighing all the input we have received.

#### **Respect accumulated knowledge.**

While understanding that everyone has biases, it is dangerous to conclude that suspicion alone is the solution. I would be foolish to take my car to an auto mechanic and then doubt everything



he tells me. Accumulated knowledge still counts. The mechanic is skilled in his field, has years of experience, and is much better qualified to work under the hood than I am. Assuming I know more than experts is just as irrational as blindly believing everything I am told. I am foolish if I believe I am an expert in medicine because I read a well written article, or that I can beat the financial markets because my friend told me about a good deal. When faced with a question, we should have enough humility to admit that years of experience and/or education in a given field demand some respect and credibility. Years of experience or letters behind a person's name do not ensure they are always right, but there is still great value in accumulated knowledge. We are foolish to dismiss it.

### **If it sounds too good... look for the catch.**

Most of us have grown up hearing the maxim, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is." The reason that saying has been passed down through the years is because we have a human tendency to look for easy solutions, ignoring the ratio between risk and reward. We tend to assume there is some easy way to circumvent the curse on our world brought on by Adam's sin. So when someone shows up offering high returns and little risk, we think this must be the solution we have been searching for. But the brokenness of our world runs deep, and whenever you find an offer with high reward, you can generally assume there is high risk as well. Men and women of discernment understand this is a rule in our material world. We should be reminding our people, especially in the area of financial offers, "If it sounds too good to be true—it probably is."

### **Be wary of widespread conspiracies that rest on self-sacrificing people.**

Most false narratives seem to rest on a group of people (doctors, scientists, government officials, researchers, etc.) who have united with a common desire to deceive the masses. As addressed earlier, governments and marketers have always attempted to persuade the public for their own purposes. But the larger the group of people purported to be involved and the less each has to gain from it, the less credible the report. Let's look at an example.

Leukemia is a dreaded type of cancer which impacts the lives of many each year. The treatment is expensive, and the results are not guaranteed. But let's assume that a simple cure was found, maybe some common natural herb, that would effectively cure the disease. Keeping this reality from the public so pharmaceutical companies could continue to profit from their drugs would mean persuading many thousands of researchers, doctors, lab technicians, and university professors (many of whom have nothing to gain from this untruth) from sharing the truth. Any one of them could bring this simple herb to market, demonstrate its efficacy, and make a fortune. Or even (in the interest of helping humanity) post an anonymous YouTube video, share the potential of this herb, and allow others to try for themselves. Instead, many thousands of people selfishly remain silent, some even watching their own children die, so a few owners of a pharmaceutical companies can make a good return on their investment. Does this sound reasonable?

If you have been faithfully reading your Bible, you will understand the extreme improbability. This scheme does not fit God's description of humanity. Man is self-centered at his core, his heart

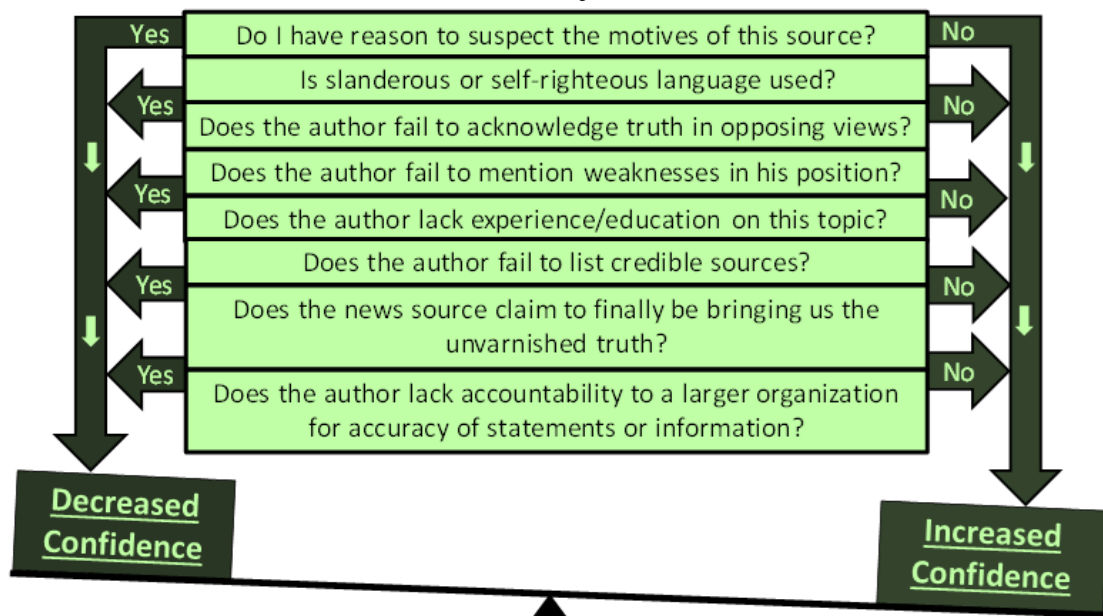
is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9), and our tendency is to seek our own selfish interests (Phi. 2:21). We struggle to give up potential personal gain for a larger good. When you hear that a large group of people have united with evil intentions, be careful. The larger the scheme and the more people involved, the less plausible the theory.

**Search for clues of credibility.**

Discerning what to believe in today’s news isn’t easy, and a headline, regardless how bold the font, doesn’t ensure accuracy. Headlines are dramatic by design, and sources which rely on advertisements for revenue profit from the sensational. That’s what sells. As one writer has said, “Nothing brings us back for more headlines (and therefore ads) like anger and fear. They get rich, and we get mad.”<sup>2</sup> Some prefer subscribing and paying for news rather than relying on sources funded by advertisements, and in our current climate this is worth considering. But regardless, if you care about truth, it is essential that you draw from multiple sources and different perspectives. Ironically, our tendency is to dismiss the mainstream media while immediately accepting a lone voice who claims to see the world’s problems quite clearly. While the majority isn’t always correct, there is still safety in a multitude of counselors (Pro. 24:6).

The Credibility Scales chart below provides some questions you should ask when evaluating the believability of written material. Discerning truth while sorting through the massive amount of information coming at us isn’t easy, and it is unlikely that one question will singlehandedly prove its accuracy. But a wise person considers multiple aspects including a writing’s source, potential motive, credibility of content, and the spirit in which it is written. Be very suspicious of articles that defame those with a different perspective, or who fail to list credible sources for their

**Credibility Scales**



2 Earley, Justin Whitmel. *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*. Downers Grove, IL, IVP Books, 2019, p. 85.

claims. Much of the “news” being presented today is more opinion than an accurate portrayal of reality, and many times there is another motivation beyond providing accurate information. Be suspicious of news sources that keep reminding you that while other sources are not accurate, they are. A source with a history of accuracy doesn’t need to waste print defending its integrity or speaking disparagingly of other sources. Straightforwardness with the message, fairness with facts, and transparency with sources tell much about a writer’s commitment to truthfulness.

At the far ends of the political spectrum of news reporting (both right and left), bias increases and consequently, credibility decreases. We need to reckon with this reality whether or not they promote Biblical values or claim to share news from a Christian perspective. We must not assume, for example, that just because a news source is anti-abortion it is automatically credible. Sometimes, unfortunately, some secular sources show less bias than those proclaiming Christian values. These realities increase the need for careful and prayerful discernment.

## The Great Need for Humility

God is very particular about the type of individual He is willing to guide and inhabit. “For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit’” (Isa. 57:15). If we are going to properly discern and sort through the massive amount of confusing information we are currently confronting, humility is essential. No one is capable of being an expert on every subject or of seeing our world with complete accuracy, and there are some things we can know only by degrees. We need to confess that there are many things we cannot know with absolute certainty and have enough humility to listen to others who do. C.S. Lewis once said: “A society where the simple many obey the seers can live: a society where all were seers could live even more fully. But a society where the mass is still simple and the seers are no longer attended to can achieve only superficiality, baseness, ugliness, and in the end extinction.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, a society where the masses of unlearned are willing to listen to the few who studiously research subjects can survive. A culture where everyone studies and becomes wise sages would be even better. But a society where people neither dig deeply, nor humbly listen to those who do, is doomed.

America has become a nation of self-proclaimed sages. Anyone with access to Google, or even information received from a trustworthy friend, feels confident challenging the experts. But our people should stand out as different. We should be a people who insist on truth, not a titillating mixture of fact and falsehood. Most false narratives contain some truth. But as Charles Spurgeon is reported to have said, “Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right.”<sup>4</sup>

Wise, discerning people are humble, willing to have their own perspectives challenged. Their passion for truth is greater than their ego, and they understand their limitations. People of discernment have confidence that God “gives [wisdom] to all liberally” (Jm. 1:5), they are

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3 Lewis, Clive S. *Miracles*. San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1947, p. 67.

4 Attributed to Charles Spurgeon (<https://apologetics315.com/2013/02/charles-spurgeon-on-discernment/>); we were unable to locate the original source.

constantly seeking that wisdom, and are humble enough to receive it regardless how God chooses to deliver it. “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jm. 4:6).

## The Bottom Line

If our churches are going to be the pillar and ground of truth God desires, demonstrating wisdom and discernment, we must take a closer look at ourselves. Is it possible that much of our problem stems from forgetting who we are and why God has placed us in this world? Has greed and a love of material things drawn us to get-rich-schemes and involvement in financial scams? Have we been attracted to health fads and frauds due to an improper emphasis on our physical well-being? Are we easily stirred over political fiascos because we are focusing on the wrong kingdom?

Understand, there is nothing wrong with earning an income, caring for our bodies, or attempting to understand issues that face our national leaders, when our priorities are aligned with Jesus and His kingdom. But can you imagine the Apostle Paul getting involved in a get-rich-quick scheme, obsessing over the latest health craze, or getting upset about some scandal in Nero’s palace? Of course not! People who have surrendered themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ have a completely different vision and focus. Paul’s overriding goal wasn’t to live his best life now, or to ensure everyone knew what was “really going on” in Rome. He was focused on the glorious kingdom of God! His passion was seeing God at work, lives redeemed, and Jesus making all things new! Paul knew that the worst situation this world could throw at him was redeemable, and he was excited about the opportunity to be a co-laborer with God. Yet, even early in the church, there were times he had to call followers of Jesus back to their vocation. Paul reminded the church at Rome that “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17). There is nothing wrong with discussing meats and herbs, but let’s keep our focus on what really matters, and on the work Jesus has given us to do!

As leaders, we may have members in our churches who easily become ensnared by misinformation. Perhaps we have tried to reason with them, and they have an answer for every question. People who are prone to false narratives rarely abandon them when confronted with facts or logic. Debate (however well intended) may simply further entrench erroneous thought patterns. But we can listen to their perspective and then lovingly challenge them to turn their focus to building the kingdom of God. Inspire them to abandon the questionable and embrace the absolute. God is at work in our world. He has a grand vision for humanity, and there is nothing more important or exciting than working together with Him! Encourage them to pour their energy into advancing the kingdom of God, concerning themselves with things that really matter not only now, but throughout eternity!

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*This paper was prepared by ViewPoint: Anabaptists working together on current issues.*

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**ViewPoint builds** on the Anabaptist value of community wisdom. A team comprised primarily of older, ordained men forms the core executive group. Subcommittees are then formed to address particular issues, drawing in people experienced in the subject.

ViewPoint was formed in response to repeated calls for help in addressing issues facing conservative Anabaptist leaders. A number of church leaders asked Faith Builders (Guys Mills) to facilitate the effort. The ViewPoint executive committee includes Steven Brubaker (PA), Merle Burkholder (ON), John Coblentz (PA), Matt Landis (PA), Gary Miller (ID), and David Yoder (KS).

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## Addendum 1

# Practices that Nurture Growth in Personal Discernment

<b>Evaluate the foundation</b>	Periodically, compare the amount of time you spend browsing online or reading news with the time you spend meditating on God’s word, observing creation, and learning from other thoughtful reading. Prioritize hearing from God and loving Him with your mind (Ps. 1).
<b>Visit with wise people</b>	Identify people who are discerning, have a breadth of perspective, are not reactionary, and have a reputation as being wise. Spend time with them or make an occasion to converse. Prepare questions to ask, and then listen carefully (Pro. 13:20).
<b>Ask good questions</b>	Exercise some healthy skepticism when encountering new information, ideas, and truth claims. Are the assumptions correct? Where did this writer or speaker get his “facts?” What is the goal or agenda of the writer? Strive to become astute without being cynical (Mt. 10:16).
<b>Seek broad counsel</b>	When trying to understand an issue or current event, purposefully read or listen to reputable people on both (or various) sides of the issue (Pro. 15:22).
<b>Practice humility</b>	Look for flaws in your own thinking instead of focusing on proving yourself right. Assume that others you meet (especially fellow believers) are people you can learn from. Demonstrate love for truth by eagerly embracing it even when that means letting go of previous views (Jm. 1:19; 3:13–18).
<b>Read news carefully</b>	Familiarize yourself with the background and possible biases of the sources you frequently use. Ask wise brothers and sisters about their news and information sources. Draw from a variety of news sources with differing perspectives. Intentionally avoid those from extreme ends of the political spectrum (Pro. 18:13).
<b>Identify personal biases</b>	Acknowledge the “lenses” that shape your perspective of the world—biases based on life situations or experiences. How may these biases distort your view of reality? Seek out people whose perspective may offer a corrective lens (Pro. 3:5–7).





## Addendum 2

# Ideas for Nurturing Discernment in the Brotherhood

<b>Model listening</b>	As a leader, model being a good listener. Demonstrate by example a willingness to have your own perspectives challenged without becoming defensive.
<b>Encourage dialogue</b>	Encourage those with differing perspectives to sit down and carefully listen to each other without immediately providing a counterargument. After listening, each should restate the other person's opinion making sure they accurately and fairly articulate the other's position.
<b>Nurture trust</b>	Create opportunities for fellowship. Social time together as a local church body can help foster relational trust and broaden perspectives. "Barn raisings" and potlucks also provide space for church people to engage informally with the issues of the day in a context of caring for one another.
<b>Teach foundational truths</b>	Share fitting messages: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The value and blessing of openness and honesty in the brotherhood and how to be able to disagree agreeably (Eph. 4; Phil. 2).</li> <li>2. The importance of being able to lovingly communicate and live with differences of opinions (the meat and herbs in Rom. 14).</li> </ol>
<b>Foster discernment awareness</b>	Be a change agent in your congregation regarding personal discernment. Some have found it helpful to use "descriptors," short, memorable phrases that capture a much bigger idea. Examples: "Sources matter" or "Overcoming personal bias." Introduce descriptors and what they mean in teaching or preaching opportunities, then use them regularly to reinforce truths. Hopefully, they will become part of your church's everyday language and help people think carefully.
<b>Discuss important issues</b>	Choose solid books or articles that deal with important issues. Distribute copies and discuss them in suitable segments in a midweek service or other meeting time. Consider having knowledgeable and godly laymen lead the discussion.
<b>Pick your battles</b>	Some current issues or hot topics do not need to be fully debated or resolved. Wisely choose to avoid fanning discussions that are peripheral to the church's core mission.
<b>Enable patient discussions</b>	When facing controversial issues, have a meeting to hear from everyone without the pressure of voting or arriving at a conclusion. At some point go around and ask each person (even the quiet ones) to share their perspective. When people can listen and talk without the pressure of an immediate resolution, they are likelier to appreciate the complexity of an issue and later come together around a solution.
<b>Affirm valuable practices</b>	Reaffirm and encourage church traditions or practices (testimony time after the sermon or discussion during Sunday school) that put a responsibility on the brotherhood to be discerning participants in finding and living truth.

