



Episode 3-11: Discernment vs. Critical Spirit

Resources:

Books

[Who are you to Judge - Erwin Lutzer](#)

[The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment - Tim Challies](#)

Websites

[Restoration Men's Ministry](#)

Transcript:

Jocelyn: I don't just need to feel better. I need the truth. And ultimately that will make me better.

Janet: I just want to make it as totally simple as possible for ladies to see that the Bible is really applicable to their everyday life.

Jocelyn: When they understand theology, the application flows out of it quickly with joy.

Janet: It is a journey, but even the journey itself is joyful when I'm doing it, holding the hand of my savior and trusting him all along the way. This is the joyful journey podcast, a podcast to inspire and equip women to passionately pursue beautiful biblical truth on their journey as women of God. When you choose truth, you're choosing joy.

Janet: This is Janet back once again with my lovely co-host, Jocelyn.

Jocelyn: Hi friends.

Janet: And on today's episode, I'm gonna try to accomplish a couple things. One's just to help you understand what is discernment. We hear that word a lot and I just think we hear it in a lot of different ways. But then secondly, how is that different from a critical, self-righteous spirit?

Jocelyn: I can't wait to hear about this.

Janet: Well, cuz I really think that many times people say that they're exercising their gift of discernment, when what they really mean is, I have a very strong opinion and you need to hear it. What is the difference? one of the books I read a while ago on this subject is Erwin Lutzer's book, Who are You to Judge? And in it he quotes John MacArthur defining discernment. And you know how we are, we love to define our terms. He says it this way, the ability to distinguish truth from error or more accurately, to distinguish truth from half truths.

Jocelyn: That's really true.



Janet: Yeah. I mean, can we all agree we need to know how to do that?

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: So, Jocelyn, here's what I'd like you to do, is read these verses and you know me, I'm gonna have a little something I wanna say probably after each one, but

Jocelyn: that's surprising.

Janet: These are verses that are about discernment. I just want us to see that it's all around scripture.

Jocelyn: All right, well, we're gonna start with First Thessalonians 5:21 and 22. It says, test everything. Hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

Janet: Okay. Think about what that just implies. I have to know what is evil and what is good.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: I'm already discerning.

Jocelyn: Yep.

Janet: I can't just say, well, I just believe everybody, or I'm not gonna be able to do what that just said.

Jocelyn: Yeah. The next passage is Acts 17:11. Now, these were more noble minded than those in Thesalonica for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Janet: Their standard was the scriptures.

Jocelyn: Yeah. That's really helpful to hear.

Janet: Yeah. I mean, that seems obvious. But I'm gonna suggest that's just not always what we do. It's more, well, that just makes sense to me.

Jocelyn: Colossians 2:8 says, see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Janet: Okay, see to it. How are we supposed to see to it? We're gonna have to know the difference between empty deception and the truth according to Christ.



Jocelyn: First John 4:1 says, beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Janet: I think that's really interesting. So now we're told we have to test things. But how do we test them? Well, I'm gonna suggest, we have to see if their teachings were consistent with the scriptures. But we're gonna see that more in some passages in the future.

Jocelyn: Second Corinthians 10:5 says, we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Janet: So again, we need to be able to discern between what's a speculation, and what is truth that we take our thoughts captive to.

Jocelyn: Yeah. I really love that passage. Romans 16:17 through 18 says, now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause descensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ, but of their own appetites, and by their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Janet: So if I don't want to be unsuspecting or deceived, I have to know what is contrary to the teaching. So again, I'm gonna have to be able to discern. I mean, there are many others, but I wanted you to at least begin to see this common theme throughout scripture. We're expected to know what we believe. And why. So that we can live faithful lives. And that's gonna include the necessity of biblical discernment.

Jocelyn: Yeah. So how serious is this though? Don't you think you could just leave that to professionals?

Janet: Well, you would think, and don't we hear that? like, well, you know, I just, I'm not a theologian. So let's think about how serious is it? Read for us some verses that are this sad alternative.

Jocelyn: Okay, second Timothy 4:3 says this, for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves, teachers in accordance to their own desires.

Janet: Oh, and I think that's really sobering. If I don't know sound doctrine, I'm just gonna look for a teacher that says what I wanna hear.

Jocelyn: That's really scary.

Janet: That is. So am I learning sound doctrine or am I living for my own desires?



Jocelyn: And you could be surrounded with a bunch of people who counsel you in exactly what you wanna hear.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: And you're not gonna know that it's not right.

Janet: That's right.

Jocelyn: Well, the next passage is from Titus 1:10 through 11. It says, for there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision who must be silenced because they're upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.

Janet: So in this passage, these are teachers that are saying not only do you need to believe in Jesus, you need to be circumcised. And it says they were upsetting many who were not able to discern the truth. I mean, they're still teaching the gospel. All they did was add circumcision. So is that even a big deal? Well, apparently it was to them because what was the thing?

Jocelyn: They had to be silenced.

Janet: They must be silenced.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: So do we have enough discernment to see that that's a big deal.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: We're gonna have to know. I contrast this one where Paul tells them, they've gotta be silenced, with Philippians 1:15 to 19, where Paul says that there are people preaching Christ out of bad motives.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: And I think that's really interesting. All he says is, I don't care as long as they're preaching Christ. So what was the difference between them? Well, I would suggest in the first they were adding to the gospel, so that's not true. Even if they were sincere, those teachers might have been sincerely believing that that was what they should teach, but it was not true. In Philippians one, Paul says their motives are to make Paul's life miserable. And he says, I don't care as long as what you teach is the truth?

Jocelyn: But it was the truth. Right.



Janet: Yeah. As long as it's an accurate representation of the true gospel. So we need to know truth, so that we will know that as well.

Jocelyn: Matthew 24:4 through 5 says, and Jesus answered and said to them, see to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in my name saying I am the Christ and will mislead many.

Janet: Just think about that. If we're waiting for the Christ to come, if we don't know how to discern, we're gonna be easily misled.

Jocelyn: Yeah. Hebrews 5:11 through 14 says, concerning him, and they're talking about Jesus, we have much to say and it is hard to explain, since you've become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk, is not accustomed to the word of righteousness for he's an infant. But solid food is for the mature who, because of practice, have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Janet: So basically a sign of immaturity is the inability to discern good and evil.

Jocelyn: That's so interesting.

Janet: Yeah. But the positive is here as well. The mature. we can train ourselves it says, because of practice, have trained themselves to discern good and evil. We can all do that.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: I know in my life personally, I don't see the big picture patterns in the Bible naturally. But I've been around Brent, I've been reading through the Bible every year for several years, and over time, I'm starting to notice more than I used to. I mean, there is hope for all of us.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: And I think if you're in a church or a ministry with solid teaching, it's especially easy for us to become lazy thinkers.

Jocelyn: I agree. And it's sad because it's easy when you know that people who are teaching you are solid. It's easy to just think, open my brain and let them dump inside of it.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: And I think about it cuz I just trust them and I kind of get lazy in how I think about stuff.



Janet: Right. And it's understandable. But what we've seen in those verses, that's a really dangerous place to be. Not only are we more susceptible to deception, but we all have a level of influence over somebody else, and we may be leading them astray.

Jocelyn: That scares me to death to think about that.

Janet: I know. Me too.

Jocelyn: It makes me very careful.

Janet: So let's just be sobered and committed to growing in our understanding of the word and growing in discernment as God allows us.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: When we're being more influenced by other sources, we can even begin to think that discerning is not only unimportant, but damaging.

Jocelyn: That's really scary, isn't it?

Janet: I know. I mean, Jocelyn haven't you heard things like doctrine divides, love unites. Or let's just focus more on loving each other and not fighting over doctrine.

Jocelyn: Which you can see what they're trying to do is saying love is super important. But love and being unified is not more important than being doctrinally accurate.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: And sometimes when you're doctrinally accurate, it does divide. So our greatest goal and value can't be unity and feeling loved. It has to be doing what is right.

Janet: Yes. Which will

Jocelyn: believing what is correct.

Janet: Which will lead to the greatest unity, yes.

Jocelyn: The actual real unity.

Janet: Yep. I love that. Cause it does sound good. And Jesus said, love is the badge of discipleship.

Jocelyn: Yeah, it's true.



Janet: That's true. We're to be known for our love for each other, not for our arguments all the time.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: But is biblical unity truly achieved by ignoring doctrine?

Jocelyn: That can't be.

Janet: Right. Is biblical love flourishing apart from sound doctrine?

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: Lutzer says this in his book, *Who are You to Judge?* By proclaiming disunity to be the greatest of sins, every doctrinal, aberration imaginable is allowed to flourish.

Jocelyn: And it's interesting because unity was important to Jesus.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: But righteousness was what Unity was founded on.

Janet: Right. I love that. That's an excellent way to put it. So how are we to be women of the word, understanding the importance of sound doctrine, while also being known for our love. I really think that it's imperative that we learn how to do that.

Jocelyn: Yeah. I agree.

Janet: To be women of sound doctrine, we will need to be lovingly discerning.

Jocelyn: And that's the key. It's lovingly discerning.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: Not pridefully discerning.

Janet: Exactly. And so the foundation of that has gotta be humility.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: Which means I have to know myself accurately. Quite frankly. If I really know myself more and more the way Jesus actually knows that I am, there's nothing to be proud of.

Jocelyn: No. I agree, for me.



Janet: So pride in my knowledge.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: That's what's destructive. It's not that doctrine is destructive, it's not that discernment is destructive, but pride in my knowledge is very destructive.

Jocelyn: Interesting.

Janet: So to help us begin to think about this, cuz this can sound overwhelming. I really don't think it is. But I loved this concept. I read Tim Challie's book, the Discipline of Spiritual Discernment. Loved that book. And in it he quotes Al Mohler, with his concept of theological triage.

Jocelyn: I really love this concept. It has very much helped me as I think through stuff.

Janet: Yeah. I think it's really good. What is triage? It's just a process for sorting injured people initially, into groups based on their need for or likely benefit from immediate medical treatment. In other words, there are some things that are more important and serious

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: Than others. and they had to treat them accordingly.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: The guy bleeding out was a higher priority than the guy with a splinter. So Mohler just took that concept and he applied it to the area of discernment. So this is just his way of looking at it. This is not the Bible.

Jocelyn: Right. Application.

Janet: It's just a way to try to think about it.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: And so he talks about first, second, and third level issues. First level issues he would define as this: most central and essential to the Christian faith. Those things that are directly related to the gospel.

Jocelyn: So we would call those like salvific issues.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: Like they pertain to our salvation.



Janet: Yes. So things like the Trinity. Atonement. Did Jesus atone for us.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: The fact that Jesus was God and fully God, fully man.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: The fact that we're justified by faith alone, the fact that our source of truth is the scripture.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: If we deny any of these, , we have to abandon the biblical doctrine of Christianity.

Jocelyn: And so first level issues are of the utmost importance.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: Absolutely essential to the Christian faith.

Janet: Exactly. Then there are second level issues. They're important and they will frequently form boundaries between believers. And they're normally, they surface in different denominations. So they're among true believers, but they're important enough that you would end up in a different denomination because of it. Something like the mode and the meaning of baptism.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: Continuation or cessation of miraculous gifts.

Jocelyn: So we would say those people could believe differently and still be true believers, but we would probably not be in the same local body fellowship with them.

Janet: That's right.

Jocelyn: If we didn't think the same way they did on that issue.

Janet: That's right. Yes. So at that point there are brothers and sisters in Christ. But it will limit the degree of unity. It doesn't limit the love.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: I can love as my brother or sister, someone who believes differently on one of these.

Jocelyn: Right.



Janet: But we're not gonna be able to teach the same and be in the same denomination.

Jocelyn: Fellowship. Right.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: Then there are third level issues, which true believers can disagree and maintain very close fellowship. And be in the same local church serving together. Things like Christian liberty issues, we call them. Should you drink alcohol or not? Not should you get drunk cuz scripture talks about that.

Jocelyn: Clearly it's, that's forbidden.

Janet: Right. But should you drink or not? Should you eat out on a Sunday? Should you go to a movie? How do you observe the Sabbath? Jocelyn and I can come to different conclusions on that.

Jocelyn: Absolutely.

Janet: And it doesn't limit our fellowship or our unity at all.

Jocelyn: Exactly. And we respect each other's ability to decide on those issues.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: The Bible doesn't teach clearly one way or the other in a way that we could say to do this is righteousness and to not do this is sin.

Janet: And what you've just pointed out it's, is because what the Bible,

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: Where the Bible is specifically clear. We have to be.

Jocelyn: Exactly.

Janet: So I love that. So let's just go through a couple of examples. How about authority of scripture, Jocelyn, first, second, or third level?

Jocelyn: Well, with this way of breaking things down, that would be a first level issue because that's our source of truth. So, is the authority of the Bible going to be what tells us how to live?

Janet: Yep.



Jocelyn: Well that would exclude things like the Roman Catholic Church because they have an authority in addition to the Bible.

Janet: Yep.

Jocelyn: Or any church like that uses a different source of truth like the Koran or the Book of Mormon. Or even like what I think about something, my experience, what makes sense to me, cuz I'm asking what is the thing that I believe is, and if it's different than the Bible, then it's a first level issue.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: That's absolutely a first level issue.

Janet: Excellent. Okay. How about this one? I need to learn how to forgive myself. Is that first, second, or third?

Jocelyn: That's a tricky one. I think second and third level. But it has serious implications.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: And it's a good reminder that even though it's on a lower level, all of truth is important and it's not inconsequential, and it's going to have implications on the rest of my theology. So not first level, not salvific, but definitely important.

Janet: Excellent. Okay. How about, just do one more. How about baptism? Is that a first, second, or third level?

Jocelyn: This is a trick question.

Janet: Yes, it is.

Jocelyn: It can be a second or third level issue, like infants. Should they be baptized as a sign of the covenant?

Janet: Yep.

Jocelyn: But if you believe that you must be baptized for salvation, that's a first level issue because then baptism affects regeneration. So either baptism of infants initially saves an infant, or it's a necessary activity alongside of your belief, which some churches would teach.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: That's a very tricky issue.



Janet: That's the first level. Yep.

Jocelyn: That's a very tricky issue.

Janet: And that's what we see is, okay. It depends on. Is it about salvation? Is it first level. So you're already getting it. That's great. So today all we're gonna focus on, first level issues.

Jocelyn: Oh, that's gonna be helpful.

Janet: In Erwin Lutzer's book, he lists some propositions of the gospel and I outlined them, and I will have them in the show notes if somebody wants to get them there as well, just as a way to categorize those first level issues. So if we could just grow in discernment at that level, I really think we would be greatly helped and protected.

Jocelyn: That's good to know.

Janet: But before I list his propositions of the gospel, I'm gonna give you one he didn't say, but that's an undergirding assumption.

Jocelyn: Okay. I'm ready for it.

Janet: The Bible is inerrant and the sufficient word of God.

Jocelyn: Okay.

Janet: And I get that 1 Timothy 4, 2 Peter 1:3. It's all we need for life and godliness. What do I mean by that? In its original, the Bible's totally without error and is sufficient for us to live godly lives. So that means we're gonna base our beliefs on the word, not on our experiences, our dreams, our visions, our intellect, our rationality. I'm not gonna lean on my own understanding. Not on scientific theories, social science theories like self-esteem. I'm not gonna be putting out my fleece. You know, people must not read that in context. God did not tell Gideon to put out his fleece. That's not how I'm supposed to do that. I've talked to people before that pray for open and closed doors. How do I know whether God closed it cuz he doesn't want me to go, or Satan's trying to close it and I need to kick it down for the glory of God.

Jocelyn: Exactly.

Janet: I don't know. So we're gonna say the Bible is our authority. and now here's his list.

Jocelyn: Okay.

Janet: Number one, we affirm that God is holy. Leviticus 11:44. Without holiness, we won't see God. And what is holy? He is like none other. He's distinct. He's separate. He's unique. what are the implications there? Well, he would have to be not like us, if he was able to die for us. It's



because of his holiness that there has to be a sacrifice for us to be in his presence. It's because of his holiness that we need to be completely righteous to approach him.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: I can remember after 9/11, way back in the day, when the Twin Towers fell years ago, all of a sudden there were signs everywhere. God is back. And it would say, God bless America. And I remember driving by a porn shop that said God bless America.

Jocelyn: I don't think he blesses it through that.

Janet: I just don't think so. So what are they saying? We're all gonna call on his name now, but they're not realizing he's holy.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: That is an offense to the truth of his holiness. So we affirm that God is holy. Number two, we affirm that Jesus is God in the flesh. I will have this in the show notes, there's verses there that affirm that (1 John 4:1-3, John 1:1,14, Hebrews 1:8). Jesus is God, the deity of Christ. And he came in the flesh, the incarnation of Christ. He's fully man. Well that means we have to exclude other doctrines like the Jehovah's Witnesses. Because they believe he's a created being.

Jocelyn: So then we can't believe the same.

Janet: That's right.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: Or the Jesus seminar, which was very popular back in the day where they were

Jocelyn: I don't even know what that is.

Janet: Oh my heavens. A bunch of academicians getting together to try to figure out who he really is.

Jocelyn: Oh. Wow. If only they could read the bible.

Janet: You would think. But from their perspective, he's just a man. Good man.

Jocelyn: Oh wow.

Janet: But a man, or this phrase, there's the universal Christ. He's in all religions.

Jocelyn: In all religions. Yeah.



Janet: Well, that's not, that's not what we, Jesus is God in the flesh. Number three, we affirm the substitutionary atonement. Christ bore our sins on the cross and took the penalty we deserved and exchanged with us his righteousness that we need in order to see God.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: Well, that would mean that there are not other mediators. Dead saints, angels, Mohammed Krishna. No. Only Christ was able to die in our place. All of those others would need to die for their own sin. or if they happen to be sinless, they could maybe pay one person's. Only an infinite God could die for all of us. And he's the only way. So, so far, I'm sure our listeners are going, I know. This is really not hard.

Jocelyn: Basic doctrine.

Janet: Yeah. Four. We affirm that we are sinners by nature and by choice. Man is sinful and wicked and deserving of hell. That's called anthropology. Your view of man. This, what are the implications there? This must be true for the substitutionary atonement to be necessary.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: God doesn't save us apart from the sacrifice of Christ, which means we couldn't do it

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: Man isn't inherently good-willed in a bad environment. Man is wicked from birth.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: That also makes, works salvation impossible.

Jocelyn: Because we can't get rid of that problem.

Janet: Exactly. God isn't obligated to save us because of what we see as our goodness. Because it isn't good. Number five, we affirm that the means of receiving salvation is faith alone. It's a free gift, completely paid for by somebody else. We need the righteousness of which we have none to offer. No sacraments or obedience will suffice. For example, if you Google the definition of religion, even among the Mormons, it sounds Christian at first. Through Christ's atonement all mankind may be saved. And then listen to this, by obedience to the law an ordinance of Christ's Gospel. So we're saying it's salvation by faith alone. What the Mormon Church is saying is, oh yeah, Christ's Atonement is what saves us.

Jocelyn: Plus

Janet: by obedience



Jocelyn: yeah

Janet: to the law

Jocelyn: plus

Janet: for us.

Jocelyn: Yep.

Janet: So, no, then we would have to say, that's a first level issue. And the last one, we affirm that assurance of salvation comes through resting in the sufficiency of Christ's work in our behalf. His work is sufficient. Our good works don't keep us saved.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: They're just an evidence of what's happened. And what that results in is all the glory goes to him. He raised me from the dead. He keeps me saved. It's all of him. There's no reason for boasting or self-righteousness. It's all of grace. I owe him everything. I'm suggesting right now that everything I just read is so basic, everybody listening is going. Okay. Tell me...

Jocelyn: And it's really encouraging, actually, like I, love being reminded of the basic doctrines that we believe in.

Janet: Yeah.

Jocelyn: It's reorienting.

Janet: And then to realize if we actually read other things or listened to other people with just those six things in mind, I think we'd be surprised at what we see.

Jocelyn: We would be, we would be much more clear because we would have just six truths to hold up next to any opposing truth.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: So we can see how it measures up against it.

Janet: So some foundational questions that are gonna undergird all of our discernment and they're consistent with the six statements that I made, but I think they're really three very helpful questions when I've done discerning, especially listening and reading other people. if I were to ask you, Jocelyn, I know you love this topic. What is my purpose?

Jocelyn: I do love this topic.



Janet: Why am I here? What would you say?

Jocelyn: You know, I would say I know my purpose because I have studied it in the scripture, and if anyone else tells me what my purpose should be, my mind automatically goes to what Jesus said my purpose is. So my purpose is to live for God, to please him, to represent him, to be conformed to the image of Christ, because Christ was the only one who was ever actually perfectly conformed to God. The purpose that God made all of us to do, Jesus is the only one that was ever capable of doing it. And so he pleases God the most. I wanna be like him. And Luke 3:22 says, you are my son, whom I love, with you, I am well pleased. I want to be like Christ because Christ pleases God, and that helps me to fulfill my purpose, living for the glory of God, representing him accurately.

Janet: Excellent. Excellent. So if someone asks, if you're, when you're listening, reading from someone else, what are they saying your purpose is? Is it about pleasing God, representing him, being conformed to his image? Good.

Jocelyn: And if it's, Then I should not believe that's my purpose.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: I shouldn't listen to that other thing.

Janet: My discerning needs to go off. And I need to be careful. Right. Okay, what do I need?

Jocelyn: Oh man, this is a hot question because you know, the world thinks there's a billion things that I need.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: And without, which I will be completely unfulfilled and miserable.

Janet: But a good thing, we're saying our authority is scripture.

Jocelyn: Right. So what does scripture say? I need forgiveness. I need to be restored in my relationship with God.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: He made me for him. My unrighteousness separates me from him, and I need that to be forgiven. If I was created by God, for God and to live with God. I need a way to God.

Janet: Yes.



Jocelyn: I need God's love. I need God's acceptance, and I need righteousness because without that, I cannot be around God. I cannot see God.

Janet: Excellent.

Jocelyn: So I need a lot of things, but none of those were anything I've seen listed on social media lately.

Janet: I know. And they're all things I get from God.

Jocelyn: From him.

Janet: Yes. Good. So for those who are believers, we've already set our purposes to please God. Is it possible to be in a position where I'm unable to please God?

Jocelyn: Absolutely not.

Janet: I think that's really important. And as we start looking at examples, that would be even more important. Are you hearing, I had to? You know, so, as I grow in my knowledge of the word, I grow in a right understanding of the big picture of the Bible, a right view of me, what my purpose is, what I need, and a right view of God.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: Challies says this, where thinking rightly about God will lead us always to Jesus Christ and always to the cross, worldliness, a lack of discernment, will lead us to ourselves. I think that's really important. Jesus is the central character in my story. Not me.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: When I asked you your purpose, it was to be like Jesus. It wasn't to be the best me I could be.

Jocelyn: It wasn't to be a better self-actualized version of myself.

Janet: Yeah. It was to be Jesus. I now live for him and for his glory. I don't use him to make myself famous. It's just not about me. Jesus is holy. Jesus gave me his word so I could know him. Jesus is the hero who sacrificed himself for me while I was dead in sin and yelling at him on the cross. Jesus did it all, and now it's joyfully all about him. So all that I've said so far, let's put it together. Here are some questions then when you're reading or listening to someone, some questions to ask yourself. Number one, what is the source of truth being implied or stated? Is it God's word? Is it experience? Is it common sense? Is it psychology? Is it research driven? Truth? What is it?



Jocelyn: That's a good question.

Janet: So I have to look at that. The weight that I give what comes after it should be based on the source of truth.

Jocelyn: That's an excellent point.

Janet: Is Jesus then the hero of this story? Is reading this, listening to this person, is this encouraging me to be more like Jesus? And what was he like? My favorite passage that I think screams his character is John 13 at the Last Supper. We don't have time to fully explore that passage, but knowing what was about to happen, Jesus loved them to the end, he says.

Jocelyn: It blows my mind.

Janet: He considered what they needed above what his heart was longing for that night. He loved most, first, sacrificially, and to his own hurt. And all with the goal of their maturity. I've found it helpful to have a working definition of love that gets me beyond thinking that love's either an emotion or it's appeasing someone else.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: I'm not trying to make them happy. I'm not trying to make their life easier. Biblical love makes it easier for the other person to do right.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: That means that my loving Brent means I'm not judging his sin, but I'm not overlooking his sin. I'm instead responding in a way that would encourage him to do right. All of that comes back, cuz what's my purpose?

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: I wanna be like Jesus. I wanna help the people around me to be like Jesus. So as you're reading something, am I drawn to Christ? Is my focus lifted to him? Or am I thinking about how this will make my life easier? Who's being glorified here? And not just God as that can mean many different things to different people. Challies states it this way. When Jesus is magnified, we know that we're pursuing what's true.

Jocelyn: I think that's an important distinction because God does mean a million different things to a million different people.

Janet: And so it sounds like good God talk.

Jocelyn: Right. Right. We could assume that we're on the same page when we're actually not.



Janet: That's right. So who or what's the focus of this material? Is it God or Jesus that's the focus? Or is the focus man?

Jocelyn: Because even a lot of Christian material talks about Jesus stuff, but the focus is not Jesus. It's on how Jesus makes your life better.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: Or makes you happier, or whatever.

Janet: Right. So then the focus is on man. Right.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: So, is Jesus the hero? So first, what's their source of truth? Is Jesus the hero? And what's the view of man being proposed?

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: Is man viewed as basically good? Or sinful? Is it, it's only because they were in a certain environment that things went wrong? Cuz that makes me feel better. If I read well, it's because of how you were raised. Well it's because... is that what we read in our six statements? No.

Jocelyn: Statements of documental truth. Right.

Janet: What is man's purpose according to this author? Is it the glory of God or is it to be happy? What is the goal of the author? Is the author trying to show the glory of God? Or man's happiness apart from God's glory. This is a good one. What does man need according to this author?

Jocelyn: That is a good one.

Janet: You know, I need to be with people who don't trigger me. I need to be loved and accepted, and if I'm not I ...boundaries. Then I don't wanna be around you. What do I need? And are my thoughts pulled toward the vertical? Am I being pulled toward a hope in God, an eternal view, supernatural peace, regardless of circumstances. Or are my thoughts pulled toward the horizontal: comfort, ease, no conflicts, poor me.

Jocelyn: That would be, these would be some handy questions to have printed on a bookmark that I could just use to mark my spot in any book I'm reading.

Janet: Okay. Note to self, JJP Merch.

Jocelyn: Make a bookmark.



Janet: Discerning bookmark. Yes. Because I would think up to this point, everybody's probably in agreement on all these basic things. and you may even be thinking, I thought discernment would be harder. Be encouraged by that. These are really the truths that you need to know.

Jocelyn: And they're very basic.

Janet: Right, right. But I do wanna hit, I haven't hit yet, so what about that critical spirit? How is true, humble, biblical discernment different from a critical spirit? Well, first of all, let's distinguish between judging that's commanded. And judging that's forbidden.

Jocelyn: That will be very helpful.

Janet: We are forbidden from judging motives. Only God knows what's in the heart of man.

Jocelyn: That's been really helpful for me to remember over my lifetime of following Jesus. Like I don't know why anyone does what they do and I can't assume that I do.

Janet: Yep. And yet we want to assume, don't we?

Jocelyn: Yes. And I especially can't assign it to them. Like, who am I to say why someone did something. Sometimes I don't even know why I do stuff.

Janet: Right. But I'm sure I know why they did.

Jocelyn: Of course.

Janet: Yes. Yes. In Matthew 18, where we see an example of church discipline, it's an example of judging actions without judging motives. In that chapter, someone is confronted for sinning ,which was something he did.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: And they refused to repent.

Jocelyn: And that's just black and white actions.

Janet: Right. So after repeated attempts to bring him to repentance and some increasing pressure they're told to treat him as an unbeliever. That's passing a judgment. They aren't told that he is an unbeliever, or that they should judge his heart and try to figure it out. But that they can look at the fruit of his life, and at that point he's behaving as an unbeliever, so they're to treat him as an unbeliever.

Jocelyn: So the fruit of his life causes them to know how to deal with him?



Janet: Yes. And the Lord knows the heart.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: We don't. First Corinthians 2:11, no one knows another's thoughts. And we're also forbidden to judge matters of conscience. Romans 14:1-4 tells us this and tells us to live within the bounds of our own consciences, and we've gotta provide others the same freedom as well. This is true in areas not spoken of decisively in scripture. In Romans, this specifically had to do with whether food offered to idols was okay to eat, or if some days should be treated differently. Since the Bible didn't clearly state teaching on that, we're not to judge others whose conscience leads them to different conclusions.

Jocelyn: I actually think about this passage all the time because it seems very egregious to me that someone would consider eating meat that was offered to an idol. And I think about this often when I think about my own choices in my life. Like if Paul said we shouldn't judge over that, then who am I to judge over something way, way less significant.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: I'm very thankful that this passage is in the scriptures.

Janet: Yes. And I think, you know, today, I don't think we talk about food offered to idols.

Jocelyn: At least not in America.

Janet: Right. But maybe it's some family rules. Like we don't drink any alcohol because we believe that there is nothing good that can come from it.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: Versus we use alcohol in moderation. Okay. We don't go to movies, versus we go to God honoring movies. We don't support Netflix, versus we only watch wholesome things on it.

Jocelyn: The list goes on and on.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: All of the things that could be considered matters of conscience.

Janet: And when we fight over those things, that's not love. So we are not to judge matters of conscience. We are not to judge motives. But we are commanded to judge or to discern actions and stated beliefs. Back to that first Thessalonians five passage, test everything. we've gotta test someone's actions and their statements. In other words, we have to compare them to the word of God to determine if they're true. It's so fascinating that Matthew seven is the passage that's most



frequently used to say that all judgment is wrong. Judge not that you be not judged. But Matthew seven says, Get the log out of your eye first, and then in verses 15 to 16, it actually tells them that you need to judge false prophets by their fruit.

Jocelyn: So just don't judge other people when you are sinning first and can't see clearly.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: But don't never judge.

Janet: Right.

Jocelyn: That's not what they're saying.

Janet: Exactly. So if I have a log in my eye and I'm going, I can totally tell that Jocelyn, I need to tell her. Well, I can't even see. Get the log outta your eye.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: Then I'll see to maybe go

Jocelyn: be more, more clear oh my

Janet: word, Jocelyn wasn't even doing anything wrong.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: It was just totally me. Or you can talk to her.

Jocelyn: You can see what is going on so that we can talk about it.

Janet: Based on not what I think of your conscience.

Jocelyn: Right.

Janet: Not what I think of your motives, but actions.

Jocelyn: But how I'm acting.

Janet: Yes.

Jocelyn: Right. What I'm doing.

Janet: Yep. And we're commanded to judge or discern only based on the standard and authority of the word of God. Which means I've gotta be humble and I've got to be under the authority of



the word myself. Not self righteously just wanting to be right. This is so fascinating to me. Authority of the word. We say that and everybody's like, that's right. It's the Bible. Yeah. Yeah. It's the Bible. Let's just look at an Old Testament example and a New Testament example of this.

Jocelyn: Okay.

Janet: In the Old Testament, prophets were chosen by God to speak his words. And especially before we had the completed word of God, that's how the people heard from God. But the people had to be able to discern between true prophets of God and false prophets and they couldn't go to the completed word yet. Deuteronomy states two ways they did this. In Deuteronomy 18:21 to 22, they're told if what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord doesn't take place or come true, that's a message the Lord hasn't spoken. Well because we know his word is always true, so if it didn't happen, it wasn't God's word.

Jocelyn: Clearly it wasn't God's word. Yeah.

Janet: Fair enough. But does that mean that if it happened, we should assume it was God's word?

Jocelyn: That's a trickier question.

Janet: Yeah. Deuteronomy addresses that. In Deuteronomy 13:1-3. It says, even if a prophet gives a sign or a wonder, even if they do a miracle, if his message doesn't line up with the written word of God, they already had to that point, they weren't to listen him. So which one clearly had primacy, a miracle or the word of God?

Jocelyn: Clearly the word of God has primacy.

Janet: Yeah. I love that. And then in the New Testament, this one just cracks me up in Acts 28. I'm gonna just read what Paul went through. They were shipwrecked, and they swam to this island. Once safely onshore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. Paul gathered a pile of brushwood, and as he put it on the fire, a viper driven out by the heat fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, this man must be a murderer. Here we go. They're gonna judge. For though he escaped from the sea, the goddess justice has not allowed him to live. But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead. But after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a God. I'm like, are you kidding me? They went from assuming he's a murderer to assuming he's a god.

Jocelyn: All based on what happened.



Janet: Yes, faulty interpretation of circumstances. Why? They didn't have a source of truth

Jocelyn: yeah

Janet: that was always accurate. And when I'm not going to the right source of truth, I come to very wrong conclusions

Jocelyn: yeah

Janet: that make complete sense to my eyes, cuz it did to them.

Jocelyn: And it's incredibly wishy washy. Like they went from one extreme to the other. It's a very unstable way to live.

Janet: Yes. And probably did both of them very confidently.

Jocelyn: Right, right.

Janet: Which cracks me up.

Jocelyn: Absolutely.

Janet: Like, okay. All right. So at this point, I hope we're at least able to see that there is judging and discernment that is important and commanded.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: And how dangerous it can be if we don't know how to do that. If I'm gonna judge based on action and stated beliefs as they compare to the standard of the word of God, that assumes I know the word of God. I've gotta be a student of the Bible, and not first a follower of a godly person.

Jocelyn: What a great important point.

Janet: It's similar to how counterfeit money is detected. There are people whose job it is to detect counterfeit money. You might think they'd spend a lot of time examining all the counterfeits so they can recognize 'em. But the best way to recognize a fake is to be intimately familiar with the real.

Jocelyn: Absolutely. My daughter is cash register person at a grocery store. She's a checkout girl at a grocery store, and sometimes people pass fakes to her and she catches them. And I say, how did you catch it? And she says it because it didn't feel like the way it was supposed to feel. Like, you can tell the fake because you're very, very intimately acquainted with the real.



Janet: I love that. I love that By studying all the details, even how it feels, of money, they can quickly find out when something doesn't measure up. And I think the implications for us, I hope are clear. We should be so saturated with the truth of the word that something that doesn't measure up to that truth quickly stands out. And that means faithfully, consistently ingesting the word.

Jocelyn: It'll be much easier for you to detect the red flags that should be coming up while you're reading or listening, or thinking about material that is questionable, if the truth of the word of God is very, very, very saturated in your mind.

Janet: Yes. I remember when my son was real little. I watched, a TV show of a TV preacher that I don't agree with, just because I wanted to see what he had to say. And as I listened to him say that God wants all of your dreams to come true, I wasn't thinking about the fact that my son was sitting next to me. And but you know what? That's not what he heard at our house. And it's funny, I didn't say anything to him. He looked up at me and he goes, is that true?

Jocelyn: Oh, that's interesting. Like, oh, that doesn't sound right.

Janet: And I said, why do you say that? And he goes, is he supposed to make my dreams come true or am I supposed to live for what he wants? And I went, thank you, son. Now that's what I wanted to see because I wanted to learn, but I thought he's already learning.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Janet: Just because if you're saturated with the truth, he didn't know to say, that's a false teacher.

Jocelyn: That's Yeah. That's false theology.

Janet: He just was like, that doesn't seem right.

Jocelyn: That doesn't sound right.

Janet: And that's what's gonna happen more and more. I'm gonna be able to discern biblically and seriously. Can you really spend much time having the thoughts and intentions of your heart exposed through the word and come out arrogant and critical?

Jocelyn: No, you shouldn't be able to.

Janet: I wouldn't think so. So we will be more humble and will be more discerning. So I encourage you to study this more on your own and practice. If I were doing this in person, and when I've done this with my own ladies at our church, we get excerpts from a bunch of books and we just start applying these tools. And I encourage you to do that because what I've found is



that many of us know all the things I've already said. We would pass a theology exam and yet, We're still easily deceived and buying things that contradict what we said we believe.

Jocelyn: Oh, absolutely. I remember when you did this training at a women's ministry training. You taught this part, and then we did some practice and you just quoted modern popular literature that was bestsellers in that year.

Janet: Christian.

Jocelyn: Yeah, Christian literature, and you just quoted sections of it and said, does this agree with scripture or not. It was so helpful cuz we weren't bashing the author. We weren't bashing the publisher. We were saying based on their actions of writing this. How should we discern, how should we judge about this material? It was super helpful.

Janet: That was helpful to me too and my hope is that the questions we've given you can help you see where you can be growing and make sure that you're not on a practical level believing something different than what you've said you believe. I recommend, Tim Challie's book, the Discipline of Spiritual Discernment, Erwin Lutzer's book, Who are You to Judge? And obviously saturating yourself in the book.

Jocelyn: Yeah, in the word of God.

Janet: In the Bible. And hopefully that will help you. And I am glad you joined us for this episode and that you'll be with us for our next one on this journey.

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