

November 2011 – I love toolboxes! I've got several of them.

I've got one that sits in the garage atop a makeshift workbench that is always propped open, ready when I need to snatch a pair of needle-nose pliers or a Phillips-head screwdriver.

I've got one that is stashed away in a cabinet that is filled with the tools I have stockpiled through the years from various family members who, either by trade or hobby, loved to use their hands to craft and create.

I've got one that showcases my prized possession of hand drills that core a hole as good today as they did decades ago when my great-grandfather would call them into daily service.

And I've got a "grab and go" toolbox that is just waiting for me when I go mobile and head out to one of my son's homes for a little Saturday afternoon fixer-upper project.

So here's the point. Leaders need a variety of toolboxes to meet the variety of challenges they face. And within each toolbox, they need an array of tools at the ready to tackle the task at hand.

I want to think with you for a moment about one particular toolbox and one particular tool in it.

The toolbox is called SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT. As leaders, arguably our most important assignment is to understand what God's will is. At its essence, it is the simple prayer, "Lord, in this situation, what would YOU have me do?"

Now of the many tools to assist us in the process of spiritual discernment, I want to shove into the spotlight one in particular: the tool of INDIFFERENCE.

Surprised? Sound a bit strange?

Indifference is an important prerequisite to the prayer for wisdom, because the wisdom of God is often the foolishness of this world.

–Ruth Haley Barton

What does it mean to be "indifferent"? Indifference is not a "whatever" attitude of disinterest or disregard. In the realm of spiritual discernment, indifference is to bring no preconceived gameplan, no personal agenda, no hoped-for outcome to the circumstance before you. It is a resolve

that the ONLY thing that I am after is God's will. That's it. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Need an example? Got one!

Step back 2000 years to an olive grove called Gethsemane and in the stillness of the night and reverence of the moment—where EVERYTHING hangs in the balance—hear the words of the Son to the Father: “Yet not as I will, but as You will.”

Indifference is releasing your will. It is releasing your plan. It is releasing your preferred outcome.

Can I state the obvious? As a leader, that is hard—really hard. Everything within me shouts out, “I HAVE a plan! I HAVE an opinion! I HAVE an idea of how this situation should turn out!”

(Are you with me here? I'm not the only one, right?)

This attitude, this approach seems counter intuitive, huh?

Yet it is this attitude, this prayer of indifference, that may be the tool that is just right for the job.

While this need for indifference is true in my life and leadership on an ongoing basis, I received a refresher course recently. I was participating in a process of discerning God's guidance regarding a matter in our church. The problem was that I (emphasis on “I”) had a particular endgame in mind—and was advocating accordingly. And we were getting nowhere. Frustrated by the gridlock, and more importantly, convicted by my arrogance (note to self: since when am I the SOLE possessor of all things wise and true?!), I began to pray a prayer of indifference. In a word, the shift was palpable. My posture changed. My RMPs dropped. I began to listen—really listen (not just nod my head while mentally teeing up my next talking point). And I began to offer input and perspectives...but not outcomes. This shift kicked open doors of collaboration and creativity that to that point were slammed shut. And ultimately impasse gave way to a shared solution.

So next time you are faced with a decision that requires careful discernment, dig into your toolbox and grab hold of the tool of indifference. Chances are good it will be just what you need.

Lord, I confess it is hard for me not to impose my ideas and opinions. Help me to open my hands and heart to a spirit of indifference so that YOUR will may be my singular pursuit.