



Discerning the next best step

When you know it is time for a change

“I can’t do this any longer!” “I feel like I’m hitting my head against a brick wall.” “We just keep hitting obstacle after obstacle.” “Something has to change.” “I wish God would just tell us what to do.” If you find that you are telling yourself any of these things during your infertility journey (or any challenging season of adult life for that matter), take it as a sign that it’s time for a change. Are you perplexed, overwhelmed or stuck trying to figure out what exactly that change should be or where God is calling you next? Try these seven steps both on your own and with your spouse to help you discern your next best step.

Seven steps to clarity

★ 1) Identify where you are

Like those maps we see at landmarks, we need to mark that little “You are here” star on our map of life. What challenge/obstacle/dead end/fork in the road/major question are you facing? How are you feeling at this place? What, if anything, might you be grieving as you face your next steps? Remember: sometimes we may experience “disenfranchised grief”, which can include things such as grieving the loss of long-held dreams or expectations, the loss of our health, the loss of knowing our place in the community etc.

★ 2) Pray

Continue this step all throughout your discernment process - before, during and after. Bring to the Lord all of the aches and challenges you listed above in step #1. Pray daily. Ask Him to guide you in discerning your next step and to provide you and your spouse with insight and wisdom. I highly recommend finding times when your local parish is open for prayer or adoration and making time to stop by once a week, especially while you are in a season of discernment.

★ 3) Remove distractions

Although it can be tempting to chat with every dear friend and family member regarding your current situation, use prudence and caution with what you decide to share and with whom. While it can be helpful to seek wisdom from others, consider giving yourself a quiet week or two in prayer before seeking the opinion or input from others, other than your spouse. This will allow you to listen to your own heart and experience, as well as to the

promptings of the Holy Spirit, without the noise of opinions from those around us. If and when you decide to ask for wisdom, insight or support from your “support team” while you are still in the discernment process, be selective and let them know what you are looking for from them (eg: “Could you tell me about your personal experience with adoption?” or “I’m taking a class on foster care - any ideas of questions I may want to ask?” or “We are discerning whether to pursue further medical testing and treatment and are feeling really overwhelmed. We could really use your emotional support and encouragement as we learn more.”). Remember, the final decision is ultimately between you and God. With certain people in your life, it may be more appropriate to share with them after you’ve made your decision. In addition, consider if there are any other distractions in your life that you may want to pause or quiet so you can better hear God’s voice (eg: is your daytime and evening smartphone use potentially holding your attention so you have fewer opportunities to pay attention to God’s promptings on your heart?)

★ 4) List what you know for sure

This step should include a wide variety of items, eg: what is and isn’t working in your treatment plan, medications you’ve had poor or positive reactions to, conclusions from tests, how your treatment plan/approach to growing your family is affecting your marriage and your mental health, any gut feelings you have regarding your doctor, medications, or a particular adoption agency, steps you have been asked to take and are uncomfortable with, misgivings you have in taking a certain direction, steps you feel interested in learning more about or pursuing etc. Write them all down, big and small.

★ 5) List what you don’t know

It’s ok to not have all the answers. Write down your questions and brainstorm ways to address them or ways to find answers or feel more at peace about them. Your list of what you don’t know could include side effects of a medication, how long the adoption process will take or how you will afford it, how trustworthy is your surgeon, how you will know how to care for a child you adopt or foster if you have no prior experience, or how many more medications you should try before you feel comfortable walking away from NaPro. Write down every question in the left hand-column and some possible ways you could find information in the right-hand column.

★ 6) Identify what you really need next

Pray over your lists of what you do and don’t know. First identify the state of your soul and of your emotions. Do you need your next step to be one of rest, of exploration, or of movement/action? Your situation might call for more than one kind of step - that’s ok!

Rest - If you are feeling agitated, angry, despondent or rushed, now is not the time to make any decisions. Take some “rest”, whether it be for a week, a month, or many months. Rest physically by prioritizing a full night’s sleep. Take time off from making any decisions related to your area of discernment and take a break from your discernment being the main object of conversation with your spouse. Rest emotionally by engaging in activities alone

and with your spouse that are rejuvenating. Rest spiritually by taking time in prayer, reading scripture and diving into spiritual reading related to God's great love for you.

Exploration - You might be unhappy with your current treatment plan: your next step may be to research other medical professionals you may want to switch to. Maybe you're considering new medications or medical testing; your next step could be to research benefits, side effects and second opinions. Perhaps you're considering a future without children or looking into adoption or foster care: your next step could be to reach out to those in your community with personal experience or take a class.

Movement - Maybe you're at a place where you've been praying, you've done your research and reflecting and it's time to act. If you're ready for movement or action in the medical field, your next step may be to start TTC again and restart charting, it may be to request a surgery or medication trial from your doctor; or it may be to officially end your NaPro appointments and step away from medical treatment. Perhaps the next step for you is to sign up for some training, perhaps it is to arrange a home study to officially begin the process of adopting or fostering. Everyone's path looks different.

★ 7) Spouse check-in

When you have gone through the above discernment steps yourself, take some time to find out where your spouse is at. What has been working/not working for them? Do they feel God calling them in a particular direction? Do they feel strongly about pursuing or stopping a particular option? What next step do they feel that they need? Listen well and validate where they are coming from. Pray and chat together to discern your next step. Looking at the list of what you know from step 4, the list of what you don't know from step 5, and the type of step you need to take from step 6, select one or two next action steps to take. Picking just one or two action steps makes it more manageable for you to actually act on. Agree on a date by which you'd like to have your action step completed.

I heard recently on a podcast that God gives us just enough light for our next step, not enough to illuminate the entire football field. Don't expect God to email you Google Maps directions for the next 20 years of your life. Instead, turn to Him in prayer and ask Him for guidance on just the single next step in front of you. Trust that He will continue to guide you one step at a time as you go along. As long as you've been regularly putting it to prayer with your spouse, trust the nudges you feel the Holy Spirit is sending you.

- For more help with discernment, check out our discernment audio-meditations, available for free on the Hallow app. Directions for how to access the meditations can be found [here](#) or by searching the discernment filter on our blog.
- For more insight on discerning next steps, check out Emily P. Freeman's book and podcast, both entitled The Next Right Thing.

Discerning the next best step

Example

Using the suggestions from previous pages as inspiration, take some time in prayer to work on your discernment process below. We encourage you to invite your spouse into the process as well, and spend some time answering these questions both separately and together.

1) You are here

The current question/obstacle/dead end I am facing is:

Which direction/path should we choose next?

The feelings I have surrounding this situation include:

Frustration, anger, fatigue, confusion, grief

I feel this way because:

Frustration and anger b/c my current doc doesn't seem to be listening to me or basing his decisions off of my bloodwork. I'm exhausted from medical things that aren't helping and really wanted to find a new path. I'm grieving that pregnancy doesn't seem like it will ever be a reality for us.

2) Pray

Daily "prayer appointment" time: *7am before breakfast*

Weekly adoration time: *Tuesday evenings*

3) Remove distractions

Some distractions I will limit/remove from my life over the next 2-3 weeks:

Delete Instagram or set it to lock after 10 min. Delete Facebook app, don't sign in.

News only 1x daily at lunch

Individuals who may offer us wise counsel/objective wisdom/emotional support after my spouse and I have spent time discerning:

1. My friend Samantha 2. Spiritual director

4) What I know for sure

What is working or not working, deepest desires of your heart, action steps you feel a strong prompting to take, actions you feel strongly about ending.

~ I'm no longer comfortable or confident with my current doctor

~ I don't trust my current doc b/c he is not basing his decisions on my bloodwork and isn't able to explain his rationale

- ~ I want to quit with my current doc
- ~ My friend really loves her NaPro doc and has recommended her to me
- ~ I have been thinking about adoption for a while
- ~ Adoption training is currently being offered online so we wouldn't have to travel, and our schedule is currently clear so we would have time to take it
- ~ I feel strongly that something needs to change

5) What I don't know

Include questions you still have and things you feel unsettled about.

Question/uncertainty	How I might be able to find out more info/address my concerns
<i>I feel sad about signing up for adoption courses bc it feels like I am closing the door on pregnancy</i>	<i>Take a break, find things that are restorative physically, spiritually and emotionally. Check out books and podcasts about grieving. Schedule counseling session.</i>
<i>Uncertain if I will want to follow new doctor's advice if we get an appt with her</i>	<i>Can play it by ear - at each appointment, decide what I'm comfortable with</i>
<i>Concerned about how I'd feel if we adopted and had to maintain relationship with birth family</i>	<i>Ask people I know who have adopted about their experience. Take the course and see if they address those points</i>

6) What I need next

Choose which type of steps you most need to take right now. Fill in one or two specific actions you need to work on that step.

Rest	Exploration	Movement
What I need rest to look like right now: - take a break from appointments for 3 months - schedule outing with friends this month - plan weekend trip with hubby within next month - weekly adoration	Action(s) to help me explore: Complete exploration by:	Action(s) I am ready to move forward with: - request second opinion from new doc - sign up for adoption course Complete actions by: - Within 3 months

7) Spouse check-in

Don't forget to check in with your spouse for their input on the following areas:

- Their thoughts on what is or isn't working, what they feel strongly about pursuing or stopping

- What questions they have

- Their thoughts on next steps

Hubby has similar concerns to me regarding adoption. He is interested and open in taking the course. He wants to make sure I am in a good place emotionally before we start with a new doc and that if we say yes to a new doc, we know there are no guarantees. He agrees about trying a new doc if I'd be more comfortable. He is wondering about the cost of adoption and what requirements they have.

Our next step as a couple:

Same as rest and movement steps above, while making sure to ask hubby's questions during adoption course.

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Your turn

Using the suggestions from previous pages as inspiration, take some time in prayer to work on your discernment process below. We encourage you to invite your spouse into the process as well, and spend some time answering these questions both separately and together.

1) You are here

The current question/obstacle/dead end I am facing is:

The feelings I have surrounding this situation include:

I feel this way because:

2) Prayer

Daily “prayer appointment” time:

Weekly adoration time:

3) Remove distractions

Some distractions I will limit/remove from my life over the next 2-3 weeks includes:

Individuals who may offer us wise counsel/objective wisdom/emotional support after my spouse and I have spent time discerning include:

4) What I know for sure

What is working or not working, deepest desires of your heart, action steps you feel a strong prompting to take, actions you feel strongly about ending.

5) What I don't know

Include questions you still have and things you feel unsettled about.

Question	How I might be able to find out more info/address my concerns

