

# Understanding Ignatian Indifference

*Grace: Ask for the grace to be open to God's will for you and whatever God may desire for you in your life.*

## Introduction:

Ignatian indifference is a bold proposition. Saint Ignatius continues to develop his thinking on the First Principle and Foundation by saying that you should become indifferent to all created things. This does not mean that you are apathetic or don't care, far from it!

With Ignatian indifference, you care and may even have personal preferences; however, you make a commitment to put your desires and preferences at the service of God. That means if somehow having a short life serves God more than having a long life, you would prefer the shorter life and serving God more than enjoying a long life and feeling that you are not serving God as fully as you believe possible. Hence, you become indifferent to length of your life and prefer first and foremost praising, loving and serving God.

The same goes for riches, honors, and privilege. You begin to evaluate all that you have received from God and to ask the question, "What is my appropriate response?" Your faith might be put to the test at times and so you try to prepare yourself to respond appropriately.

In a sense, you are trying to become more open to God's will. Are you open to God's will in your life? Can you become like clay in God's hands? What do you think God is trying to make of your life? Do you resist God's attempts to form you? How has God tested you in your life? How serious are you about your relationship with God? How much of yourself do you really offer and give to God?

Saint Ignatius suggests the notion of *tantum quantum* – that you use the things of this world in so far as they help you to grow in holiness. Anything that does not help you to become closer to God you should avoid (even if it seems to be something pious or good). Ultimately, if something keeps you from truly drawing closer to God, then it is not spiritually good for you. What things might you need to let go of to be closer to God? Are there any relationships that God might be inviting you to be more open to? Are there any relationships that God might be asking you to let go of because they are not healthy?

Read the Scripture passages. Underline the words and phrases that stand out to you. Can you identify the theme? Go back and re-read the Scripture passage that speaks most strongly to you. Spend some time with the words, phrases and images that come to mind. How are you like clay? What might you be asked to sacrifice? What might God be asking of you out of obedience? What is your response?

Are you really able to be indifferent about your vision, the things in your life, your relationships, and your own desires? If not, do you have the desire to be indifferent? Do you desire to be more open to God's will in your life regardless of what that will might be? If so, you are likely drawing closer to God, opening yourself up more to God's will and beginning to practice Ignatian indifference. If not, you may wish to pray for the desire to have the desire to be more open.

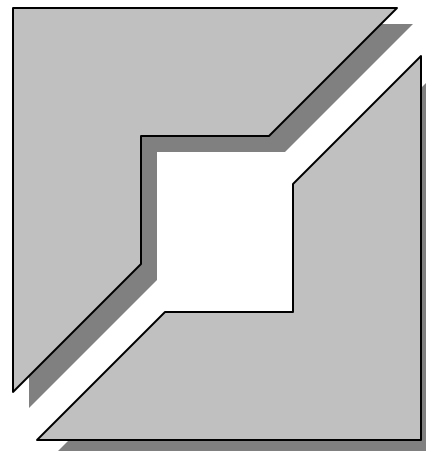


**Jeremiah 18:1-6** - This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."

**Genesis 22: 1-18 Abraham Tested** - Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

**Phillipians 2:5-11** - Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**In these or similar words ...** The image of Abraham raising his knife, about to sacrifice his own beloved son to follow God's instruction serves as a powerful example of the ideal of Ignatian indifference. But even though I know that God is highlighting the need for indifference to all creation, for if his son's purpose, as a part of creation, is to help Abraham praise, reverence, and serve God, then this sacrifice is achieving that ultimate goal, I still find it hard to put it to practical use and follow his example in my own daily life. Even though it sounds great to be doing God's will and makes "sense" under the ideals of indifference and the First Principle and Foundation, I find it nearly impossible to imagine myself in Abraham's position. In the Genesis passage, Abraham "reaches out his hand and takes his knife to slay his son", but it doesn't convey to me any of the mixed emotion that I would feel if I were in the same position. If I imagine myself with a dagger in hand about to slay a beloved family member, I would probably stop short before the angel stopped me to tell me it was all a test. I believe this reaction to the Scripture indicates a larger need to grow in Ignatian indifference. I find it hard to be indifferent towards things like my family and friends.



You see, I want a lot.

Maybe I want it all:

the darkness of each endless fall  
the shimmering light of each ascent.

So many are alive who don't seem to care.  
Casual, easy, they move in the world  
as though untouched.

But you take pleasure in the faces  
of those who know they thirst.

You cherish those  
who grip you for survival.

You are not dead yet, it's not too late  
to open your depths by plunging into them  
and drink in the life  
that reveals itself quietly there.

--Rainer Maria Rilke

**Practicing What You Preach ...** To increase your openness to God's will and to become more indifferent, write down a list of your 10 favorite possessions. Prayerfully consider what it would be like to sacrifice one of those possessions. You do not actually have to give the item up in order to gain a greater sense of freedom. Keep in mind, the primary purpose of Ignatian indifference is to give you greater FREEDOM to be loved by God.

