

Overview

What is involved in exploring and working out our vocations as a calling from God? How can we know that a calling is of God and is not just us satisfying our own needs? People have been struggling with this issue for thousands of years so there is a lot of experience to draw upon. In this topic we suggest a structured approach that we can use to help us discern God's call in our lives.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and questions

Facilitator

Offer a quick overview of this session. You may be doing this session as a one off topic or as part of a series on exploring vocation over a number of sessions with a group

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Facilitator

Introduce the question below to help the group to reflect on their experience of feeling sure about what they were doing.

Question

How do you sense when you are doing the right thing in life?

Facilitator

Ask the group to share their responses and see what themes emerge

Facilitator

Introduce the reading of the story of Moses and the Burning Bush. Ask group members to share in the reading. The reading is available on a separate handout. Ask the group to think about what they can learn from this story about being called by God.

Reading

Exodus 3 – 4 : 17

Facilitator

Ask the group to reflect and make a note of points of learning in response to the following question

Question

What do you learn from the story of Moses and the Burning Bush about being called, and living our vocation?

Facilitator

Invite the group members to share their insights and draw out any useful learning.

Some points to note might include:

- *Moses' previous experience now makes sense*
- *Moses is not a gifted speaker –God gives him Aaron to help him*
- *Moses' commitment to the Hebrews began a long time ago*
- *God values Moses' tenacity and willingness to struggle*
- *Burning bushes can happen anywhere*
- *God equips those he calls*

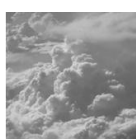
Facilitator

We now want to explore the process of discerning a calling from God.

Here are 10 ideas which show how God might call us. Invite the group to look at the different images, and express what that image says about how God communicates. What has been their experience of these and other ways in which God calls? What are some of the risks of interpreting these calls?

Activity

Look at the images below, which show different ways in which God might communicate. Which have you experienced? Are there any that you have not considered?



Through dreams that may need to be interpreted



Hearing a voice within



A feeling of being prodded



Some vision or fresh insight



Damascus road experience



A niggling feeling that will not go away



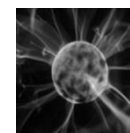
A persistent curiosity



Through another who then pass a message to us



Prayer and reading scripture



A sense of energy

Facilitator

Lead a discussion to draw out people's experiences of a sense of calling. The points need to be made that all these, and others, are valid experiences. God may already be calling people, but because it is not dramatic, they may not recognise it as such.

Facilitator

Ask the group to address the following question

Question

From our own experience and in light of scripture, in what ways does God communicate to his people?

Facilitator

Ask the group to think about what they can do to make themselves more open to the possibility of hearing a call from God. Calling is based on a conviction that the God who brought the universe to birth speaks powerfully, mysteriously and instantly into our lives. Introduce and read through the following perspective stopping at whatever points any of the group want to make a comment or add a point from their own experience.

Perspective

Discernment – some guidelines

Our idea of what God is like may severely restrict the kinds of things that we expect God to call us to do. We need to be careful in listening for God's invitation to us, for it may not be God we are listening to but an inner policeman, or head-teacher, or critical parent, or religious authority figure. The true God is concerned with life and longing and will draw us out of ourselves in ways that we never imagined possible.

Discernment is a process that takes time, years even and cannot be forced. God's calling continues throughout our lives and is not a one off thing. Our previous experience may suddenly become meaningful and relevant in ways we had not expected. At the heart is the discipline of prayerful listening to God and waiting expectantly and silently. Reading scripture, especially the gospels, opens us up to the presence and life of God. We need to open ourselves up to God's action in the world where he is trying to grab our attention to engage with something on his agenda. We need to remember that our calling is to share in the life of the risen Christ who has come to bring God's kingdom to earth. Being open to the movement of the Spirit within the world means we also have to be open to the movement of the Spirit within ourselves. God speaks to us through the language of everyday events. Each new moment or situation holds a clue to God's call and we always find our call in the circumstances and experiences of daily life.

St Ignatius observed that when we choose a particular course of action we should try to discern how it makes us feel. Does it fill us with a sense of joy, peace and consolation or does it make us feel ill at ease, restless and disconsolate. Sometime we need to monitor our feelings over time since a decision which initially brings us peace can in time make us feel deeply uneasy. For the most part we will probably experience God's call in listening to his voice in the every day and trying to discern in each present moment what it is that God requires of us.

At other times we encounter what seems to be a maze with dead ends with no obvious way ahead. Even yet in the middle of such confusion we are prompted by some force which leads us on. This only seems to make sense in retrospect.

Some of us will affirm never to have heard the voice of God or felt any promptings but yet still remain committed to a journey because they know that God is with them even though no call has come to them.

Based on work by Stephen Ferns in 'This is our Calling', edited by Charles Richardson (2004, SPCK)

Facilitator *Invite the group to think about the things they could do to help them to keep focused on God during this overall process of exploring vocation*

Question **What can you do to ensure that you keep focused on God during this process of discernment?**

Facilitator *Introduce the perspective from Francis Dewar about how to test a calling. We will come back to explore some of these issues later on if the group is completing the other sessions in his vocations series.*

Perspective **Testing a Calling**

Francis Dewar, author of *Live for a Change*, suggests the following criteria for testing whether a calling is of God. A calling should:

1. Be good news for the impoverished?
2. Release the imprisoned and oppressed?
3. Give sight to the blind
4. Put you on the side of the neglected, or the powerless, or those without a voice?
5. Be a generous giving of what you are and of your gifts?
6. Be a new departure, a fresh initiative, something not done before, or not in that way?
7. Feel risky?
8. Be beyond our unaided powers?
9. Be a step, however tiny, towards a more just and equitable world?

If your answer is 'yes' to the last five questions, and to at least one of the first four, that would seem to be pointing in the right direction.

Francis Dewar adds four further points to help with discernment.

1. It is likely that the call will be something that, basically you love to do, whatever risk, or even suffering it may bring.
2. It is more likely, statistically, to be in the 'secular' sphere than in the church, simply because there is more of it!
3. It is unlikely that it will be full time, at least in the early stages. Indeed what you do may be episodic, done in short bursts, like evenings or weekends.
4. You will be every fortunate if it is something that you are paid for

*From 'Live for a Change' by Francis Dewar
(Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988)*

Facilitator

If the group are going on to explore the other sessions in this vocation series as a combined course then it is helpful to describe how the other sessions fit together and how they will provide a useful framework for exploring vocation now and at any point in the future.

The following topics will be explored:

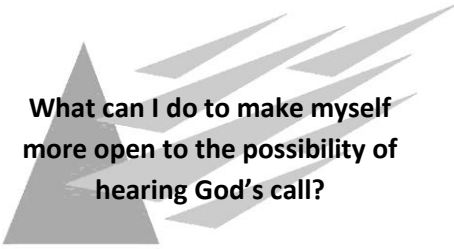
- Topic VOC3 *My Story*
- Topic VOC4 *Looking Inward*
- Topic VOC5 *Turning Outward*
- Topic VOC 6 *Signposts and New Beginnings*
- Topic VOC 7 *Sustaining Vocation*

If Topic VOC1 Debunking Vocation has not yet been completed it would be helpful to work through it too.

Together these Topics offer a helpful structure. It is best to aim to work through them over a period of 6-8 weeks.

Facilitator

During the week, you might like to reflect on :



**What can I do to make myself
more open to the possibility of
hearing God's call?**

Facilitator

Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.

Ponder

What did you learn from this session?

Facilitator

The following prayers focus on each of the stages in the After Sunday process for Exploring Vocation. In a group ask different member to read a section in turn.

Prayer

Vocation is from you

God, you call each of us individually and by name and you call me. I want to explore with you what you might have in mind for my life and how I might belong to you. I give thanks that my call is no less or more important than anyone else's and that you long for me to respond to you as only I can. **Amen**

Vocation is about being open to you

God, you speak to me in many different ways but I know it is sometimes hard to get my attention. Help me to stop and listen to what you have to say. Help me to make the time and space to explore bushes that are ablaze with your message of love for your world that we meet in Jesus Christ. **Amen**

My Story and my journey into you

God, you breathed life into me when you formed me from the dust of the earth. You have been with me, seen and unseen, during my growing and my grieving, my rejoicing and disappointments, my blossoming and my dying. Take the person I have become and shape me in the fire of your love to reflect your glory more each day. **Amen**

I am wonderfully made

God, you knit me to your pattern in my mother's womb. You planted gifts within me to grow for your delight. You gave me a voice to sing a song that only I can sing. You made me to be unique but not alone. Help me to discover who I am when seen through your eyes. Help me to know myself well so that I may give myself to others. **Amen**

You grab my attention

God, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. You call me, in the name of Jesus Christ, to play a part in your mission of love to the world. You help me to focus clearly on the work that you need to have done for your sake. You call me to engage with life in all its mess and confusion and you call me to service. **Amen**

You call me into new beginnings

God, you call me in the power of your Spirit to venture out, to take a risk for your sake, to transform my mind that your world might be transformed. You call me to let things go that are cluttering the channel of your grace that you call me to be. Help me to appreciate what to put down and what to pick up that I may more fully offer my whole self in your service. **Amen**

You call your church

You call us into community as you are a community of never ending love. Help us as members of the body of Christ to support and encourage each other as we exercise our calling in our daily work and life in your world. May your Church be ever renewed as we find ourselves in you. **Amen**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore . Amen