

Living a Purpose-Driven Life/Foundation Principles for Discernment:

Scripture and the Lives of Saints testify that a call and vocation do not come from us but from the Lord. "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last..."(John 15.16). How can we cooperate with this Divine Initiative in our life? Here are some guiding principles which can help you in your discernment of God's Call and Purpose for your life:

1. **Prayer and interior life lead us closer to Christ and the Church:**
 - a. The interior life is absolutely essential if we are going to discover the Lord's vocation in our life. In a life of prayer we come to realize that we are created in God's image and are loved by Him. Prayer leads us to an ever deepening friendship and intimacy with the Lord. When we see our lives as sacred, we understand that we are not masters of our life but stewards who give our life back to Him in a spirit of gratitude. In I Corinthians 6.19-20, St. Paul speaks of how we are temples of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Father Burke's advice when I entered the seminary: "You will find your vocation in the Blessed Sacrament chapel." It may take hundreds of hours but the life of prayer nurtures our relationship with the Lord and develops an intimacy such that when the time is right, He will reveal to each of us our vocation. This involves a prayer which is an open conversation with the Lord and is able to express our deepest concerns, questions, and desires.
 - c. Intimacy with the Lord in prayer leads to a deeper love for the Church as the Body of Christ and as the Bride of Christ. By drawing closer to the Bride we come closer to the Bridegroom. The Mass is the renewal of our Covenant with the Lord and all Sacraments become personal encounters with Christ and His Body, the Church. Through the Church we are instruments of God's grace to one another through prayer and service.
 - d. Devotion to Our Lady. Throughout Catholic history a devotion to the Blessed Mother has been a most powerful means of growing in holiness and remaining strong in our Catholic Faith. Father John Hardon S.J. advised me before ordination to pray one rosary every day just for myself, so that I would be faithful in my vocation as a priest. If a full rosary is too much, then pray one decade a day for your vocation.
2. **Trust in God:** All the spiritual masters speak about one of the starting points in the spiritual life is that we do not have overconfidence in ourselves, but in God.
 - a. John of the Cross spoke of how we are "nada" compared to God and yet he is able to transform our "nada" into his work if we allow ourselves to be clay in his hands.
 - b. Mother Teresa: She was so aware of how the Lord was able to work through our littleness. She would say as she pounded her chest, "Look what God can do with nothing."
 - c. Therese the Little Flower (St. Therese of Lisieux) and her Little Way.
 - d. Father Benedict Groeschel spoke before his accident that in the spiritual life the Lord starts us out in the shallow water. Little by little he takes us into deeper waters asking all the while that we learn to trust in him. Father said that as we mature through the stages of the spiritual life, the water gets deeper until we are almost always in water over our head and yet we are able to be at peace because we have learned to trust in the Lord.
3. **The importance of ongoing conversion for healing and discipleship:**
 - a. Conversion from sin: In order to have intimacy with the Lord we need to share with him our weaknesses and sins. Isn't it interesting that the greater the saint, the more they regard Confession as important in their life? By going through general confession(s) the Lord is able to help us heal from sins and wounds of the past. We are then better able to live in the present moment and to listen and follow the way the Lord is leading us in our vocation.
 - b. Conversion through discipline of our senses: Custody of the eyes, ears, imagination, moderation in eating—fasting and abstinence. If we are slaves to our senses and to pleasures obtained through them, we will not be able to have the self-mastery to hear the Lord's call and lead. Pornography is an example of an addiction, which destroys countless vocations in our society today. In all of this we are not disciplining ourselves so as to be more worthy for the Lord. Rather, we call upon the Lord and invite him into our lives so that it is his grace which is working in us and helping us to discipline our senses and convert closer to him. This is a subtle yet important distinction. We cannot make ourselves holy. It is the Lord who works His holiness in us.
 - c. Conversion of life: As we learn to conform our moral choices to Christ and we grow in the life of virtue, then this gives us the courage to offer the Lord, not just part of our life, but our whole life. Thus, we gain the courage to seek the Lord in our vocational choices.
4. **Learning our Faith and learning through the lives of the Saints:** We cannot love what we do not know. We cannot love God if we do not know Him. What kind of spiritual reading do you do? There are so many materials available now in books and CD's. Allow the writings of the saints to show you how to listen to the Lord in your life. The saints teach that reading helps us to meditate, which helps us to pray, which helps us to contemplate.
5. **Learning to wait in trust and never to give up the search:** The best things in life take time. Many times people will go on a retreat and seriously seek God's call for them for a time and then when the dry times inevitably come, they give up and they never discover their vocation.
 - a. In the story of the three hunters, the first hunter is so nervous in the woods, that he scares away the deer. The second hunter is so laid back that he sleep by a log and every now and then looks up. He misses the deer. The third hunter is vigilant and after seeing fresh tracks in the morning, spends all day searching and waiting. Not until the end of the day does he spot a buck in the distance and continues to wait another hour. Finally within range he takes the shot. To be a good hunter the person has to have vigilance, patience, and never give up. The hunter who gets the buck in the first minute of the season is a lucky hunter. The good hunter is the one who perseveres. Do you want to be a good pray-er or a lucky pray-er? If the Lord were to answer your prayers in the first little

- while after you pray, you will only be a lucky pray-er. The Lord will allow you to wait long periods in your life, not out of punishment, but because he is training you to be a good pray-er. (cf. Spe Salvi, #33)
- b. Think of the Magi who spent months and months seeking the Messiah. What if they would have quit half way into the journey? Three quarters? There is a treasure for each of us—a calling from the Lord. Don't give up until you discover the vocation God has for you.
6. Tests are good and necessary if we are to learn trust and discipleship:
- a. God doesn't cause but He does allow trials and even temptation in our lives in order to strengthen us. See Hebrews 12.7-8 and James 1.2-4.
- b. The analogy of Boot Camp: When a man joins the army, they don't have pizza parties for him for months until time for combat. They train him and take him to the limit so that he learns endurance and the skills necessary for combat. Then when he gets to the front line he will stay alive and will be able to protect the lives entrusted to his care. The Lord will allow tests in our life so that through his grace we will be strong and faithful and be able to protect the souls entrusted to our care.
- c. Traditionally, we speak of temptations coming from the world, the flesh, and the devil. The first two have their origin in our wounded human nature. The devil will try to wear good people down through busyness, distraction, persecution, pleasure, sensuality, fear, self condemnation, etc. (See Ephesians 6.10-20)
7. Learning the language God speaks:
- a. The Lord speaks his own language through consolations and by allowing desolations. He speaks to us through thoughts, feelings, and the deepest desires of our heart. As we learn to deepen in prayer the Lord will reveal Himself through these affective movements of the heart and will be able to guide us. Only through silence, prayer, listening, will we be able to hear him speak to us through the various levels of the heart. We can speak of the 3 Hearts (external, psychological, and spiritual).
- 1) Example of Mother Teresa from Come, Be My Light, p. 188.
- 2) Spe Salvi: Saint Augustine #29; Paul Le-Bao-Tinh (+1857) #37
- 3) The Ignatian Exercises are a reliable and proven method to learn how the Lord speaks to us through the desires and movements of the heart.
8. You need a Guide:
- a. "*Nemo est iudex in causa sua.*" ("*No one is a judge in his own case.*") The saints have always said that if you rely on yourself as your guide, you have a fool as your leader. Example: You would never climb Mount Everest alone without a guide. You would be a fool after a couple of weeks—dead. Heaven is infinitely higher than the highest mountain. How much greater the fool we would be if we try to get to Heaven without a guide. We have the teachings of the Church, Magisterium, Scriptures, Catechism, and the lives of the saints, etc. To whom do you hold yourself accountable? Whose moral code do you follow? What map do you follow?"
- b. If you are contemplating your call from God in your life it is important to have someone else as a guide. It could be five minutes in confession. It could be a person who is further down the road of life than you. If you are contemplating a call to the priesthood or religious life then it is essential that you seek a guide because there are so many ways people can fall off the road. Spiritual direction is not only necessary for those seeking a religious vocation; It is also one way to help people to stay faithful to their vocation as it holds them accountable and helps them continue to conform themselves regularly to the God who called them to their vocation.
9. "God doesn't call the equipped. He equips the called."
- a. Saint John Vianney was almost not ordained because of academic difficulties and yet because of his holiness, a railroad had to be built to accommodate the pilgrims who came to him for confession in Ars, France in the 1800's.
- b. Saint Padre Pio had poor health. The Lord gave to him a share in His Passion through the Stigmata. It was because of his life of holiness that the Lord was able to do so many miracles through him.
- c. Mother Teresa would often say, "Look what God can do with nothing."
10. Discern from the inside:
- a. If a man feels called to marriage, he needs to date. He cannot find his vocation looking in from the outside.
- b. If a man feels called possibly to the priesthood, he can only discern so much from the outside. If you feel the attraction but cannot get past a certain point, you may need to "date" the priesthood by visiting a seminary, making some retreats, and even entering the seminary to see if this is God's call for you.
11. Aim High: Ask God for the grace to do something difficult for Him and for others. In finding our vocation we can learn a lesson from the front line: In preparing for battle the foot soldier doesn't tell the commander where he will be in the front line. The commander tells the foot soldier where he is needed. Similarly, in our Confirmation we become soldiers of Christ. Therefore don't stay in the barracks seeking an easy life. Don't tell the Lord where you will go on the front line. Ask the Lord where he needs you and go wherever he tells you to go.
12. Have many children: Each of us is called to a spiritual fatherhood or motherhood. Priests and those in Consecrated Life are fathers and mothers. Parents give physical life and lead their children spiritually as mothers and fathers.

**"Of my own free will, dear Jesus, I shall follow You wherever You shall go
in search of souls at any cost to myself and out of pure love for You." --Mother Teresa**

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