

VOCATION

1 Vocation at its deepest level is not, 'Oh, boy, I get to go to this strange place where I have to learn a new way to live and where no one, including me, understands what I'm doing.' Vocation at its deepest level is, "This is something I can't not do, for reasons I'm unable to explain to anyone else and don't fully understand myself but that are nonetheless compelling. **Parker Palmer**

2 The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet. **Frederick Buechner**

3 I begin to realize that work is the lifelong process of personal sanctification that is satisfied only by saving the globe for others and saving others for the globe. I finally come to know that my work is God's work, unfinished by God because God meant it to be finished by me. **Joan Chittister**

4 For the truth is that in the end loyalty is never an attachment to something external so much as it is an allegiance to something inside yourself. That which commands you outwardly has first possessed you inwardly...There is no surer test than this: Your loyalty will always be to what you secretly love and serve. **A. Powell Davies**

5 Learning to manage your personal power means that you have to become aware of how you work with energy and whom you give it to. 'Those who overcome themselves are strong,' wrote Lao-tzu. It's also about how much you are willing to surrender to divine guidance, which comes to you in the guise of inner tuition. By finding your inner compass and acting on its promptings, you come into your full power and fulfill the life mission you were born to complete. I call this mission your Sacred Contract and it includes not just the daily work you do, but every relationship you have and every person you meet, everyone you help and everyone who helps you."

— **Carolyn Myss**, *Invisible Acts of Power: Personal Choices That Create Miracles*

6 Who are the persons in your life who have shown exquisite compassion, calm, patience, simplicity, kindness, generosity? These persons are a profound gift, for they not only show something beautiful about being human, they show something beautiful about you, some key stream of your being, too, the evidence of which is the resonance you feel in the presence of your friend. To honor them is to also honor you. To cultivate

the qualities that resonate from our friends cultivates our humanity and fulfills our vocation, for the only vocation we really have is the vocation of being human.

— **Thomas A. Forsthoefel**, Soulsong

7 Listening for God's Calls Throughout Our Lives

Vocation is lived in a wide variety of ways; there are many different pathways even in one faithful life. Yet you know how easy it is to settle into life, to stop listening for that still small voice. The busy-ness of your daily activities consumes your time and attention. You run from one serious responsibility to another, one important event to another. Your mind is full of plans and concerns. You live with 'surround-sound' and unrelenting instantaneous communication.

Stop. Create the space to listen. Allow yourself the time to hear what God is saying in your life. Be still enough to see, really see, what is going on in the world and to ask how you might respond, how you might participate in the healing of the world, and thereby your own healing.

Believe that yours is a call to the fullness of life. Allow that reality to infuse every corner of your being: your spirituality, your values, what you care about, how you use your time and resources, your relationships, your work.

No matter where you are or what your calling, try to deepen your reflections on your vocation. Pray for the guidance of the Spirit. . . .

Remember that you can discover a new vocation at any time of your life. You can respond to more than one call at a time. Vocation is about the totality of how we live the gospel in these times.

Think of all the places where you might hear God's voice more clearly and make sure you go there regularly. Our God is full of surprises. Over and over again, she invites us to follow in ways that we don't expect or understand into places we had not planned to go. We have many opportunities to catch the cadence of her voice.

--**Marie Dennis**, Diversity of Vocations

8 Vocation

For six months I dealt Baccarat in a casino.

For six months I played Brahms in a mall.

For six months I arranged museum dioramas;

my hands were too small for the Paleolithic
and when they reassigned me to lichens, I quit.
I type ninety-one words per minute, all of them
Help. Yes, I speak Dewey Decimal.
I speak Russian, Latin, a smattering of Tlingit.
I can balance seven dinner plates on my arm.
All I want to do is sit on a veranda while
a hard rain falls around me. I'll file your 1099s.
I'll make love to strangers of your choice.
I'll do whatever you want, as long as I can do it
on that veranda. If it calls you, it's your calling,
right? Once I asked a broker what he loved
about his job, and he said Making a killing.
Once I asked a serial killer what made him
get up in the morning, and he said The people.

--**Sandra Beasley**, *I Was the Jukebox*, W.W. Norton, 2010

9 Your Vocation Is Not About You

Consciously or not, we sometimes expect a vocation to solve all of our problems, answer all of our questions, and satisfy all of our desires. . . . Your vocation will not live up to these unrealistic hopes. Nothing in this world will answer all your questions, solve all your problems, or satisfy all your desires. These are impossible, immature ambitions, and the spiritual life consists largely in realizing that they are impossible and immature.

The purpose of life is the unitive devotional service of God, which includes the love of our neighbor (in whom God dwells). This is the real purpose of any vocation. Some forms of life, such as monasticism, are ordered directly to this end; other states of life are oriented toward it indirectly. But these are only different versions of the one human vocation: to love and serve God, and become one with him in Christ.

A vocation – any vocation – is a school of charity and a means of crucifixion. Your vocation is the means by which your self-serving ego will die in order to be resurrected as the servant and lover of God. This is all that we can expect; but this is everything – the meaning of life, all there really is.

My vocation is where I will learn to let go of my questions, carry the cross of my problems, and be mysteriously fulfilled even when I am not happy. We have some choice as to how we will undergo that process; we do not – so long as we abide in the

grace of God – get to choose whether we will undergo it.

This, it seems to me, is the attitude we should bring to discernment. I am not choosing between makes and models in a store, looking for the perfect fit or the best value. One is faced, rather, with the question: How I should lose my life, in order to save it? (Luke 9:24)

--**Benjamin Mann**, “Your Vocation Is Not About You,” writing for *The Catholic Exchange*

10 I think we can measure the distance we have fallen from the idea that work is a vocation to which we are called, by the extent to which we have come to substitute the word “employment” for “work.” We say we must solve the “problem of unemployment” — we reckon up how many “hands” are “employed”; our social statistics are seldom based upon the work itself — whether the right people are doing it, or whether the work is worth doing. **Dorothy Sayers**, *A Christian Basis for the Post-War World*

For Reflection and Discussion

1 How do you think about vocation? Do you have one or many? Is vocation an ongoing issue or has it been settled years ago? Have you struggled with vocation? Talk about your struggle.

2 Sandra Beasley writes “If it calls you, it’s your calling, right?” Have you been “called” and “called” and “called” in ways that caused you to question your discernment?

3 What do you think of Benjamin Mann’s suggestion that a vocation is the means by which your self-serving ego dies? Did you find the comparison between discerning vocation and choosing between makes and models in a store helpful or provocative?

4 The views expressed in quotes numbered 6 and 9 are distinctly different. Which do you find more compelling?

5 Does your participation at All Souls feed into your understanding of vocation? Does it relate to your experience of your vocation or vocations?

----Mary Beth Hatem for All Souls Covenant Groups