

# Lenten Study

## Discernment

### Finding Clarity in the Chaos

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## Lent 2020

### Session 5

#### Finding Our Purpose



**UNITED PARISH IN BROOKLINE**

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## Session 5: Finding Our Purpose (Week of March 29)

75 minutes

### **Purpose of this four-week study**

To expand our individual understanding of discernment as a “gift of the Spirit”  
To learn and share spiritual practices that support us in discernment  
To discover and experiment with how we may be most authentic with God.  
To appreciate that each of us has our own unique approach to discernment.

### **Purpose of this session**

To understand more of our God-given purpose and how we serve others,  
particularly in this moment of living during the pandemic of COVID-19

### **Check-in**

How are you staying spiritually centered in this time?

### **Opening Prayer** *as written or spontaneous*

Loving God, we come into your presence today with a spirit of discernment,  
a longing to find your deeper will in our lives,  
a willingness to explore together what that means.

Whatever resistance, whatever hesitancy, whatever fears we have today,  
we invite you to work through them, to speak through us,  
that our lives may magnify more clearly your presence in the world around us.

Be with us in our time together: in our speaking and our listening.

This we pray with grateful hearts and holy expectation. Amen.

**Scripture Reading: Scripture, Jeremiah 29:11-15**

Take turns reading the scripture two times, asking the following questions before and after each reading:

1. What word or phrase jumps out at you?
2. What word or phrase do you need right now?

*For thus says the Lord:*

*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord,*

*plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*

*Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.*

*When you search for me, you will find me;*

*if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord,*

*and I will restore your fortunes*

*and gather you from all the nations*

*and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord,*

*and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

**Questions for Further Reflection**

If you were to look back over your life thus far and say what God's plans have been, what would you come up with?

Have there been times when your plans didn't align with what God (or Life) gave you?

How did you respond in the moment?

How do you explain it now?

In retrospect, how do you think God was using you and your gifts in that moment?

## Finding Our Purpose

How do you define 'purpose'?

Who are people you've seen who have a clear sense of purpose?

How could you tell?

What did their lives and actions look like?

When have you felt a clear sense of purpose?

What made it clear?

What did it feel like in your heart and body when you were truly 'on purpose'?

How can you imagine God is calling you to purpose in this moment?

From Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here for?*

## **IT ALL STARTS WITH GOD**

*For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible,  
... everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.*

Colossians 1:16 (The Message Version)

*Unless you assume a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless.*

Bertrand Russell, Atheist

***It's not about you.***

*The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and/or his purpose.*

*The search for the purpose of life has puzzled people for thousands of years. That's because we typically begin at the wrong starting point - ourselves. We ask self-centered questions like What do I want to be? What should I do with my life? What are my goals, my ambitions, my dreams for my future? But focusing on ourselves will never reveal our life's purpose. The Bible says, "It is God who directs the lives of his creatures; everyone's life is in his power."*

## **Jesus and Purpose**

In John's Gospel (17:15-19), Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection and shares a breakfast with them on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

*When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter,  
    'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'  
He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.'  
Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'*

*A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'  
He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.'  
Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.'*

*He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'  
Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?'  
And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.'*

*Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.  
    Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger,  
        you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished.  
But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands,  
        and someone else will fasten a belt around you  
        and take you where you do not wish to go.'  
(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.)  
After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'*

## **Questions for further reflection**

What do you think Jesus meant by 'feed my sheep'? and 'feed my lambs'? Any difference between the two?

Why did he ask Peter three times?

Are there times when you feel God or someone has needed to ask you repeatedly to do something? How did that go?

Why do you think Jesus makes the distinction of how we act when we are younger vs. when we are older? What is he saying here?

What is the connection between Jesus saying 'feed my sheep' and 'follow me'?

### Looking Ahead

Next week - an additional Session 6 will be offered, to further explore discernment practices that the group would like to revisit.

### Exercise for the week ahead

We encourage you to return to one of the spiritual practices we have introduced in the previous weeks:

- the spiritual examen
- daily gratitudes
- lectio divina
- Clearness Committee
- Take the Purpose survey below

Consider writing in a prayer journal about your experiences with these practices.

**Closing Prayer** *invite participants to say their own prayers aloud as part of this prayer.*

God, be with us in the days ahead, in our journey toward Easter  
as we seek to find your kind of clarity in whatever chaos exists around us.  
Day by day, let us pause, listen, ask open and honest questions, breathe deeply,  
and listen for your voice.

Hear these prayers we offer here together (*participants can offer their own prayers*).

We entrust to you these prayers,  
both spoken aloud and those heard only in our hearts.

Give us the clarity and the strength to discover your inner peace  
and your undying love and share it freely wherever we go. Amen.

## Discerning Your Life Purpose questions

from Mark Scandrette's *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love* (InterVarsity Press, 2011), pp. 196-7.

Scandrette founded ReImagine, a Center for Integral Christian Practice in San Francisco ([reimagine.org](http://reimagine.org)) that serves like a Zen dojo, helping people learn to practice their faith in everyday ways. [markscandrette.com](http://markscandrette.com)

1. *What am I passionate about? When do I feel most alive, vital and energized?*  
Your answer to these questions can help you identify the unique way that you were made to be of use in this world.
  
2. *How would I describe my personality and temperament? Am I an introvert or extrovert? What core yearnings motivate my actions and decisions?*  
When you are reflecting on your vision and goals, it is important to consider the gifts and limits of your personality. You don't have to become someone else. Imagine scenarios that are realistic to who you were created to be.
  
3. *Who is calling out the best in me? What do people recognize and affirm about my best contribution to the world?* The feedback you receive from people who know you well can provide important clues about your destiny.
  
4. *In what areas do I long for greater wholeness in my personal life?*  
Each of us has wounds or struggles that we must face and surrender as we enter God's light more fully. Part of your journey as a person is discovering healing and finding ways to manage your weaknesses.



5. *Where do I sense the greatest need for justice and healing in our world?*  
The needs of suffering people in our world (both local and worldwide) can seem overwhelming. No one person can hold all that pain and struggle. Each of us has been given sensitivity to a certain frequency of needs. What is breaking your heart that breaks the heart of God?  
Is it the physical needs of heart those in poverty, the emotional needs of those who are displaced, lonely or abused, or something else?
  
6. *Who are the people in my life that are important for me to care for and journey with over my lifetime?* This question acknowledges the fact that we are not meant to live as isolated individuals. Who are the stakeholders in your life (e.g. family, friends, a particular place and people)?
  
7. *What are my strongest talents, passions and skills? Where can they be of greatest service to others?* You've been given skills, talents and expertise that can be leveraged for the good of world. One of our primary life tasks is discerning how to utilize these resources.
  
8. *How does the work I presently do contribute to the greater wholeness that God desires for all of humanity?* It can help to make a connection between what you are already skilled to do with how you hope to contribute in the future.
  
9. *As you have worked through this survey, what are two or three "ahas" that can help you get clarity on your particular path for enacting your purpose as an agent of God's healing?*