

## Discernment: Finding Clarity in the Chaos

### Week 5: Finding a Purpose

#### *Take-home questions*

These are some questions and ideas for you to reflect further on today's worship and to join us in our collective Lenten study of Discernment.

*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?

## Some suggested practices for the week ahead

These are some easy-to-try spiritual practices that can help you as you launch into a season of discernment. Feel free to pick and choose, experiment and see how they feel and then report back to us next week. You are welcome to join us in study groups after Sunday worship in Lent or other times. Check out the homepage link at the bottom of the page.

### Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina (literally divine reading) is a way of becoming immersed in the Scriptures very personally. It draws on the way Jews read the Haggadah, a text read during Passover that retells the Exodus story. Haggadah means “telling” and along with being a physical text, the word captures the practice of telling and retelling a story to find deeper meaning.

The Christian form of Lectio Divina was first introduced by St. Gregory of Nyssa (c 330- 395), and also encouraged by St. Benedict of Nursia (c 480-547), the founder of the Benedictine order. It’s a way of developing a closer relationship with God by reflecting prayerfully on God’s word in scripture. In Lectio Divina, the chosen spiritual text is read four times in total, giving an opportunity to think deeply about it and respond thoughtfully. When we practice Lectio Divina, we sometimes can imagine we’re actually involved in the events of Scripture.

Here’s how to get started:

#### *Prepare*

Light a candle and/or pray a prayer of invitation, saying something like, “God, let me/us hear from you,” and spend a few minutes sitting quietly so one’s mind is open to hearing from God.

#### *Lectio (Read)*

The first reading is an opportunity to get to know the Scripture passage. Listen carefully for any words or phrases that seem to jump out. Write down or share those words if you are doing this with someone. No need for lots of explanation, just share what caught your attention.

#### *Meditatio (Reflect)*

On the second reading of the same passage, listen for the deeper meaning God has infused in this scripture particularly for you in your life today. How does it make you feel? If there’s no immediate response, ask God to be more present with you.

#### *Oratio (Respond)*

After a third reading, what action could you take based on this message from God, that would keep up the conversation with God and deepen your connections to the Spirit.

#### *Contemplatio (Rest)*

After the final reading, spend around 5 minutes in silent contemplation. This doesn’t need to be a time of prayer or deep thought – just sit quietly and allow God to work. When the mind starts to wander and dart here and there, bring it gently back to stillness again.

## **Spiritual Examen**

A spiritual practice derived from St. Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish Basque Catholic priest and theologian, who gave up a life of nobility and co-founded the religious order called the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in the 16th century. The examen was developed in the 1500s as a core practice and is used to this day by Jesuits and other religious groups.

Find a quiet, comfortable place to spend about 10 minutes at the end of each day this week:

1. Give thanks for all God's gifts and benefits
2. Ask for light/God's presence
3. Review the day: thoughts, words, deeds, desires, consolations, desolations
4. Express gratitude, sorrow or purpose of amendment
5. Ask for the graces you desire for tomorrow

You can make it as long or short as you want. Try repeating the practice throughout the week.

## **Practicing Gratitude**

Another practice is to name and write down three *specific* things each day for which you are thankful. It could be anything: time with a loved one, a delicious meal, an unexpected break in your day, a kind exchange with a stranger, something in nature.

The point is to make it specific, and spend some time in your mind reliving the experience, savoring the feelings and thoughts they brought up in you.

This is a core practice that neuroscientists suggest in helping change some of our brain patterns from our predetermined negative, anxious bias to a cultivated, more positive, hopeful outlook.

## **Prayer Partners**

We welcome EVERYONE at United Parish to try having a prayer partner in Lent.

You may think that you are not that spiritual, or that you don't know how to pray, or even if you do, you don't want to share that with someone else, that it's private. That's OK. Just give it a try.

It's a holy experiment, basically committing to having a spiritual buddy in the congregation with whom you talk for 5-15 minutes each week from now through Easter (April 12).

You can sign up at [unitedparishbrookline.org/prayer-partners-during-lent](http://unitedparishbrookline.org/prayer-partners-during-lent)

## **An online "data-driven" daily discernment practice**

Methodist colleagues at the Harvard-Epworth Church in Cambridge have created a daily discernment opportunity, in which they email you a question each day to answer as part of your own private discernment practice. You can check it out and sign up at [40form.org/signup](http://40form.org/signup)

## **Scripture for your week ahead**

Ponder this verse from the Epistles (James 1:5) *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

Take a few minutes to read and reread it during the week, paying attention to how it lands with you at different times and in different situations. Are you able to trust God to provide wisdom when you ask for it? How is God calling you to listen and be receptive to divine wisdom?

Throughout your week, you may also want to re-read the verses from Psalm 42, that we chanted in worship today. For more information, check out [unitedparishbrookline.org/news/opportunities-during-lent](http://unitedparishbrookline.org/news/opportunities-during-lent).