

The path to self-discovery and new life

Many people think that 'vocation' is a word that only refers to priests, monks and nuns, whereas others think it simply equates with the following of a particular trade or profession in life. The monastery programme helps to highlight the reality that vocation is something which applies to all men and women; it cuts to the heart of their desires and who they are.

We are all called, we all have an individual vocation which encompasses our whole lives; the people we are, the choices we make, the lives we live. Each of us has a special path to follow in life. Christians, and many others, believe that through the ages, God has called people to co-operate with Him in His plans for the world in practical ways. Many of the stories in the part of the Bible called the Old Testament are about individuals who have been called, such as Abraham, Moses and the prophets.

In the first few lines of the Bible, in the Book of Genesis, God calls creation into existence by his Word — "Let there be light!" Throughout the Bible as a whole, God is continually inviting men and women to be his Chosen People. When Jesus Christ came down to the earth, he also called people to follow him and find their true identity and purpose in life.

The truth is that each and every person has been called into existence for a reason. We have all been created out of love and for a loving purpose. God has a special plan for each one of us.

One way we can reflect on this is by considering our vocation as a journey towards God, following his invitation. That journey is full of different experiences, and like on many journeys, we each have to read the signs and make choices about which way to go. These choices affect the outcome of our lives. God does not predetermine the journey we make; rather he gives us freewill – an ability to choose one way or another.

Whilst we have the freedom to make choices, we also need to understand that God doesn't just leave us on our own. He is present in our lives. He established the Church as a human family, as a community of those who have been called. This community, the Church, feeds each one of our spiritual lives through life-giving words, actions and prayers. This is very much a reality which lies at the heart of monastic life.

What is truly amazing is to consider that you are part of God's master plan. You have a role to play. You are called to become more truly the person that God wants you to be and to use the gifts and talents you have to achieve this goal.

Once you begin to think of your life in a vocational sense, and realise that you are called to be someone special and to do something unique, your life will change. Many questions will rise in your mind, not least what your own personal 'definite service' is to be. The challenge facing you then is to discern what specifically you are being called to be and do; become a husband or wife, teacher or even a monk! What is for sure is that this process involves spending time in prayer, reflection and discussion with a trusted person. It's a path of most wonderful discovery.

Are you ready to give it a try?

"God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission – I may never be told it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught."

Cardinal John Henry Newman



"Vocation is about discovering who you really are and what you should be doing."

*Br. Francis
The Monastery
BBC2 TV, 2005*



FINDING YOUR VOCATION - SOME SIMPLE MEDITATION EXERCISES

On this page you will find short Bible references which you can quietly and slowly use to reflect on your vocation and calling in life.

The Bible

Christians believe that the Bible is a sacred text. It is not only a book that records historical events but it is a spiritual text through which God speaks to men and women. The Bible is made up of both the Old and New Testaments. What these "testaments" or books show, is that God did not create humankind and just leave us be; instead he has continued to be involved with his creation over the ages.



In the Bible, at times we read about how God acted directly, on other occasions he used angels as his messengers, often he used (and still does use) human individuals as part of his plan. When he does this he doesn't use people like a puppet-master pulling the strings, but rather he invites them to actively co-operate with him. Whether all of the people whom he calls initially want to be part of those plans is a different matter! In the Bible you will see that God calls men and women to do different things and that they all respond in a unique way to this call.

You are invited to meditate on a few extracts. We recommend you use a copy of *THE NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE*.

Preparation

- 1) Find a quiet place free from distraction.
- 2) Sit with your limbs uncrossed and with a straight back placing the Bible on your lap.
- 3) Simply breathe at a regular speed, breathe deeply and relax.
- 4) Close your eyes for a moment and clear your head of the worries of the day.
- 5) In the silence ask God to speak to you through the Bible.
- 6) Open the Bible and read the passage to yourself slowly. Read it several times, with pauses, allowing words, scenes, people, to resonate with your own life.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

ABRAHAM (GENESIS CHAPTER 12 VERSES 1-5)

The first thing that God asks of Abraham is that he is to put aside everything that he has been used to and then he is to embark on a new way of life, which will bring great reward. It is God who takes the initiative and who also promises that Abraham will be great. Abraham will not be a self-made man; it is God who will accomplish the great work. What is Abraham's response to this? The story, as recorded in the book of Genesis, portrays Abraham as a man of faith who puts his trust in God despite the risks and sacrifice involved. The element of sacrifice in the story is important - it would be a huge step for Abraham to give up all the things that he was used to such as home, family, shelter and employment. As he set off to fulfil God's command he was embarking on a journey that he knew virtually nothing about, anything could have happened. Later on, Abraham is once again called to put his trust in God when the Lord asks him to sacrifice his son (Genesis chapter 22 verses 1-9).

SAMUEL (1 SAMUEL CHAPTER 3 VERSES 1-21)

Clearly at the time of his calling, Samuel was only a very young boy, and yet God still had a place for him in his work. Some may find it surprising that God chose someone so young and inexperienced in the ways of the world, but the fact remains that he was called. The story of Samuel reminds us that that God calls very different types of people for His special work. It is not really possible to put labels on them or to identify certain characteristics that are common to all whom he calls. Each has their strengths and weaknesses, as well as different temperaments and ideas. In Samuel's story the part played by Eli the priest is important. It is Eli who realises who it is that is really calling the boy and he helps him to respond to that call.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament tells of the life and work of Jesus Christ and goes on to relate the life of the early Christian communities. When Jesus exercised his ministry, he did not do so in isolation. Various people were called to co-operate with the work he was to accomplish. It's this work that Christians continue to this very day.

MARY (LUKE CHAPTER 1 VERSES 26-38)

The story of the Annunciation is probably well known to us. It is a story of faith and trust in God by a young girl whom he calls for a unique task - that of giving birth to Jesus, who enters into time and space as true God and true man. The first thing that we can learn from this story then is that it is a great privilege to be chosen by God to serve him in a special way. And what is Mary's response? Saint Luke tells us that she was disturbed by the angel's words and wonders why she has been chosen, but the angel reassures her that this is God's will and she has nothing to fear. "I am the handmaid of the Lord," replies Mary, "let what you have said be done to me." Despite the responsibilities, consequences and difficulties that will come her way as a result of saying "Yes" to God, Mary accepts what he has in mind for her because she knows that she is called to serve God in complete trust and selflessness.

PETER (LUKE CHAPTER 5 VERSES 1-11)

According to Saints Luke, Matthew and Mark, the first apostle to be called is Peter the fisherman. Peter is not a "professional" religious person, just an ordinary man with an ordinary job and yet he is chosen by God as leader of the apostles. If we look elsewhere in the New Testament we find that he is quite a character, with clear personality traits. In his favour, he is willing to try something new, he is a man who makes quick decisions, he is not afraid to speak his mind, but he can also be a very humble man. We must also consider the fact that he can be impetuous, scared, and at times, out of his depth. Perhaps if we were to look for a perfect model of an individual's response to God's call, Peter might not be at the top of the list. But Peter teaches us that there is nothing special about the people God calls, they are ordinary people from ordinary backgrounds, but who, with the help of the Lord, do extraordinary things.

For further information visit www.ukvocation.org
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