

Session 3

Called *as*We Are

#### Opening Prayer (2 mins)

Welcome everyone by name as they enter. You may wish to provide nametags or table tent name cards for your group members.

Open the session with this prayer, or another of your choosing.

*God of Love,  
You are with us in every transition and change.  
As we enter into a new era with excitement and even some anxiety,  
we recall your deep compassion, presence, and abounding love.  
We thank you for the gifts, talents and skills with which you have blessed us.  
We thank you for the experiences that have brought us to this moment.  
We thank you for the work of others that gives breadth and depth to our own work.  
Be with us as we move forward, rejoicing with you and supporting one another.  
We ask this in your Holy Name. Amen.*

Joseph P. Shadle

(<https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/morning-and-new-beginnings-prayers.php>)

#### Part 1. Introduction (10 mins)

Introduce the concept of *called from people, places, or situations* using this information from Kathleen Cahalan:

Have you ever had a calling *from* something, someone, or somewhere? A sense that God was calling you *from* but without a sense of where you might be going to? (p. 46)

To be called *from* entails moving away, an ending, before a new beginning is clear. Called *from* captures the times of transition when you may have more clarity about the *from* than the *to*. It requires you to trust that moving away is the right path, a calling, even though you do not know the destination. (p. 47)

Illustrate the concept of being *called from* using one or more Bible stories. Here are a few examples:

* Abraham called *from* his homeland to a new place (Genesis 12:1-9). *Note: the children are focusing on the story of Abraham for this session.*
* Moses called to lead the Israelites *from* slavery to the Promised Land (Exodus 3)
* Naomi is called *from* the place where her husband and sons have died (Ruth 1)
* Disciples are called *from* their jobs and homes to follow on the way (Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11, John 1:35-51)

Invite the group to reflect on and share what the biblical characters are being called *from* in the story you choose. How would you describe any sense of what they are being called *to* in these stories?

#### Part 2. Explore: Life Transitions and Calling (40 mins)

Introduce the concept of transitions:

Transitions are exciting, but can also be painful and difficult. They are beginnings and they are endings. Transitions begin with an ending, and often a sense of loss and even grief. Then we go through an “in-between” time, a time of searching and adjusting. Eventually we begin to reconstruct our lives and find a new sense of purpose and meaning. God’s callings are all along this pathway.   
(a brief summary of pp.48-59)

**Video (12 mins):**

Share the video of “Peg’s Story” with the group. The video is on the thumb drive in the DVD players in the classroom, or you may access it to stream at <http://bit.ly/PegsStory>.

**Peg’s Story**: When Peg retired from teaching, she struggled with identity loss. Find out how she put the pieces back together to find new meaning.

Reflect:

After the video, invite reflections using some of the following questions:

* **What did you notice about Peg’s story? What struck you as significant, beautiful or important?**
* **How does Peg’s story present the nature of transitions and their connection to calling and vocation?**

**Story sharing (28 mins):**

Engage the participants in a storytelling experience. Invite them to organize themselves in groups of three, or count them off to form groups. Explain the storytelling process. (You might want to write the questions on a whiteboard, a sheet of newsprint, or create a handout for the participants.)

Think of one transition in your own life (like a graduation, wedding, birth of the first child, retirement, a divorce, death of a loved one, loss of job, etc.) or in your family’s life (like a transition involving your parents, your children or grandchildren, your spouse, etc.).

After people have people have identified a story (no need to share it aloud at this point), ask them to reflect on their life transition using the following questions:

1. What were the emotions you were feeling—excitement, anticipation, pain, loss, grief?
2. Did you experience a sense of loss during this transition? What was the loss?
3. Did the transition involve forgiving and possibly reconciling with someone or forgiving yourself?
4. How do you integrate the transition into your life—addressing the loss and embracing a “new” time in your life?
5. How did you experience God in your transition? What was God calling you from? Where did this calling lead you?

Invite each person to share his or her story in their groups of three. Allow 12-15 minutes for this portion of the exercise. You may want to set a timer for 3-4 minutes to provide a 1 minute warning, and to give everyone an opportunity to share.

After the small group sharing concludes, invite the participants to share their personal insights about discovering their calling during times of transition.

#### Part 4. Conclusion (4 mins)

Conclude the session with your own reflections and/or the following information from Kathleen Cahalan:

The call from someone, someplace, or something is a strange call. It may not seem to you that the world “vocation” first these experiences. If we step back, we can see that the biblical tradition testifies to God’s presence in each aspect of loss: God *understands* the pain, *listens* to the story, *forgives* our sins and graces us to do the same for others, and *regenerates* our lives. God is calling us at each step of the journey.

God is continually calling us to new life, *from* our old ways, *from* our losses, *from* what has ended, into new ways, relationships, and beginnings. But in times of transition and grief we may discover something else about God: that our understanding of God, our “God,” has not been helpful. We can be angry at God, blame God, and lament that God does not deliver us from pain and sorrow. But God may be calling us not only from our grief but also from our narrow views of who God is and what God does in our lives. Perhaps God wants us to know that no matter how painful life is, God’s steadfast love endures forever. The biblical tradition is clear that God is “near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit (Ps. 34:18). (p. 58)

#### Closing Prayer (2 mins)

Close with this prayer from Thomas Merton, or another of your choosing.

**The Road Ahead**

*My Lord God,*

*I have no idea where I am going.*

*I do not see the road ahead of me.*

*I cannot know for certain where it will end.*

*Nor do I really know myself,*

*and the fact that I think that I am following*

*your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.*

*But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.*

*And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.*

*I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.*

*And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.*

*Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.   
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,*

*and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

*Amen.*

Thomas Merton

**Opening Prayer**

*Generous and loving God,  
Blow through us, that we might sense your presence.  
Wrestle with us, that we might discern your path.  
Love us that we might become who you call us to be.*

*Generous and loving God,  
help us to receive your call for us,  
help us to feel your presence with us,  
help us to discern the path you would have us follow.*

*Amen.*

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**Called *as* We Are**

*Lives Explored* Story: When Peg retired from teaching, she struggled with identity loss. See how she put the pieces back together to find new meaning.

God calls you as the person you are in the particularities of your life. You can only live out your vocation as the person you are; I can only become the person I am called to be in the context of my life. God’s call to you is not a generic calling, but is specific to your time in life and place in the history of the world. Vocation is God’s call to your life’s particularities as you know them, that which is a given in your life (gender, family, ethnicity, time in history) and what you can make of it (education, opportunities, relationships). Even your understanding of faith, vocation, and God arise from these contexts. You have been given this life, and you have to discover God’s call *as*you are.   
   
Vocation is about the whole of your life, your whole life long. God’s call relates to your development as youth, young adult, adult, and older adult. We develop in two ways.

First you become a person, with a sense of who you are, through relationships with others; through in-between-ness of relationships, you construct yourself. Making meaning is the central way in which you form a sense of self, identity, and purpose. The second way you develop is obvious: you change over time. You make transitions over the course of your development which require you to make new meaning from experience. Transitions disrupt your sense of self. Life is motion, and the motion of development requires you to make meaning with each new life phase. The way in which you negotiate each transition in the life span can determine how well or how poorly you live into the new situation.   
   
Vocation, then, is Christian meaning making. It refers to the ways we “take in,” construct, reconstruct, critique, and identify what is significant in relationship to God and others. God’s call comes to use from birth till the end of our days in multiple and varied ways. You experience God’s call anew through particular developmental tasks that emerge in each part of the life span.

From: *The Stories We Live: Finding God's calling All Around Us*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.

**Exploring the Chapters of Our Life**

God’s callings are multiple and varied in your life, emerging in different ways, given your age and the life tasks you task. Vocation is not static or linear, but dynamic, sometimes fluid and at other times more stable. It is complex and multifaceted and is not determined once and for all in your life. Across the life span, God calls us as infants to gaze and behold, as children to play, as youth to begin exploring identity, as young adults to ask big questions and dream big dreams, as adults to love and work, in later stages of adulthood to step back and then step back in, and in elder years to give and to let go.   
   
***Image your life as the chapters in a book that is still being written.***

Name the key chapters in your life that reflect stages—as a child, teenager, young adult, midlife adult, mature adult, older adult—and the transitions in your life—growing up, education and graduations, first job, changing career, first house/apartment, marriage, becoming a parent, raising children, becoming a grandparent, retirement, and more.   
   
Give each chapter a descriptive title that names your experience of calling at the stage or transition. For example: “Living into the call and challenges of being a parent” or “Embracing the joy of being a grandparent” or “Starting a new job.”

*Use the space below and/or blank page 4*.

Growing up Stressed: Call to cope with family illnesses and strife

Learning in a Catholic School: Call to Catholic faith formation

Dealing with Grief: Call to go on with my life after the death of my father

Preparing for the Priesthood: Call to learn Catholic theology and practice pastoral skills

Getting My First Job: Call to teach at Mother of Mercy High School

Getting Married: Call to have a wife and children

Raising Children: Call to grow in love

Moving Back Home: Call to live closer to our families

Caring for Family: Call to care for sick sister-in-law, father-in-law, brother, grandparents

Burying Family: Call to grieve sister, father, and mother-in-law, mother, grandparents

Working for the DOY: Call to develop professional skills and serve parish catechetical leaders

Starting a New Job: Call to use my gifts and talents at St. Joseph Parish

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**Reflecting on Today’s Calling**

*Star Trek* Story: A Senior Officer calls young Captain Kirk to enroll in Star Fleet Commander Training.

Now reflect on how you are experiencing God’s calling today.  Write below your reflections on how you are experiencing God’s calling today.

***How do you experience God’s callings at this age in your life?***  
   
Slow down

Enjoy life

Live more simply

Be myself

Love more selflessly

Downsize

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**Closing Prayer**

*As I adventure with you today  
be the compass that guides me,  
the light that shines on my path,  
the only one I follow.  
As I adventure with you today  
be the word that encourages,  
the hand that reaches out,  
each time I stumble  
As I adventure with you today  
let me glimpse our destination,  
and appreciate the places  
through which you lead me.   
As I adventure with you today,  
be the strength I need to follow,  
and as the day draws to a close  
let me rest in your embrace. Amen.*

Faith and Worship:  <http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Christian_calling.htm#ixzz5QbAbNlZn>   
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