Session 4

Called *from*

People, Places, Situations

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#### Prayer

*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>

#### Introduction

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?

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.

Listen to the story of Ruth and Naomi. Reflect on the following questions:

***From*** *what are Ruth and Naomi being called?*

***To*** *what are they being called?*

**Naomi in Moab.** Once back in the time of the judgesthere was a famine in the land; so a man from Bethlehem of Judah left home with his wife and two sons to reside on the plateau of Moab. The man was named Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his sons Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah. Some time after their arrival on the plateau of Moab, Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah, the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion died also, and the woman was left with neither her two boysnor her husband.

She and her daughters-in-law then prepared to go back from the plateau of Moab because word had reached her there that the Lord had seen to his people’s needsand given them food. She and her two daughters-in-law left the place where they had been living. On the road back to the land of Judah, Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you to your mother’s house. May the Lord show you the same kindness as you have shown to the deceased and to me. May the Lord guide each of you to find a husband and a home in which you will be at rest.” She kissed them good-bye, but they wept aloud, crying, “No! We will go back with you, to your people.” Naomi replied, “Go back, my daughters. Why come with me? Have I other sons in my womb who could become your husbands? Go, my daughters, for I am too old to marry again. Even if I had any such hope, or if tonight I had a husband and were to bear sons, would you wait for them and deprive yourselves of husbands until those sons grew up? No, my daughters, my lot is too bitter for you, because the Lord has extended his hand against me.” Again they wept aloud; then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.

“See now,” she said, “your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her god. Go back after your sister-in-law!” But Ruth said, “Do not press me to go back and abandon you!

Wherever you go I will go,
    wherever you lodge I will lodge.
Your people shall be my people
    and your God, my God.
Where you die I will die,
    and there be buried.

May the Lord do thus to me, and more, if even death separates me from you!” Naomi then ceased to urge her, for she saw she was determined to go with her.

**The Return to Bethlehem.** … Thus it was that Naomi came back with her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth, who accompanied her back from the plateau of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

#### Life Transitions and Calling

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.

**Jane’s Story**

Jane speaks about career changes and feeling called in new directions.

*What did you notice about Jane’s story? What struck you as significant, beautiful or important?*

*How does Janes’ story present the nature of transitions and their connection to calling and vocation?*

**Story Telling**

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.).

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?*

Share your story in a small group.

Share with the large group any insight you want about discovering your calling during a time of transition?

#### Conclusion

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).

*Have the transitions in your life effected your relationship with God? If so, how?*

#### Prayer

*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.*

*I will 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.*

*The Road Ahead,* Thomas Merton