

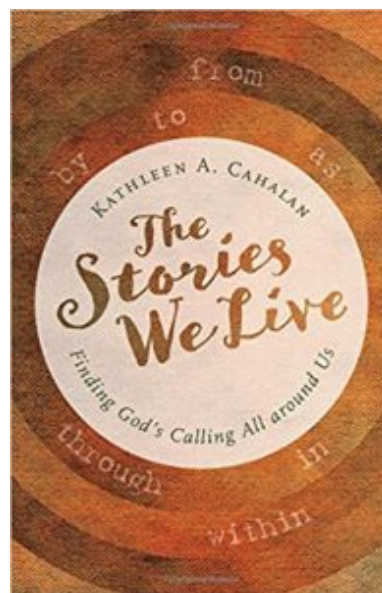


CREATING A CULTURE OF CALLING

Adult Faith Formation Program *Discovering Calling and Vocation*

This adult faith formation program uses the book, *The Stories Will Live*, as the primary content for the eight sessions. The sessions are designed for a large group gathering led by one or more facilitator(s) leading the sessions and using small groups for discussion. It is recommended that each person purchase a copy of *The Stories We live* by Kathleen Cahalan (Eerdmans, 2017).

- Session 1. Called by God in Multiple Ways
- Session 2. Called to Be Followers of Christ
- Session 3. Called as We Are
- Session 4. Called from People, Places, or Situation
- Session 5. Called for Service and Work
- Session 6. Called through Each Other
- Session 7. Called in Suffering
- Session 8. Called by the God Within



Guidelines for Small Group Discussion

Called to welcome others as Christ. According to the Rule of Saint Benedict, all people are to be “received like Christ.” We invite you to give and receive welcome by your words and actions towards others in the group.

Called to keep confidentiality. Vocation is a deeply personal topic, and we respect the sacredness of our stories: our fears and failures, sorrows and successes. The circle of the group provides a space that is open to share within, but closed from sharing outside.

Called to share and to keep silent. As we read in Ecclesiastes, there is “a time to be silent, and a time to speak.” No one is ever forced to respond to any question. We honor the right of each individual to decide when he or she feels called to share.

Called to honor each voice. We invite you to share from your own unique story. No individual speaks for an entire group or a whole profession. This is a space to set aside competition and to celebrate the different ways God works in each of our lives.

Called to listen with the “ear of your heart,” according to the Rule of Benedict. This is a space for listening and learning from each other, not for critiquing or offering advice. While the group may provide support, we are not here to “fix” or “save” each other. Offer questions instead of counsel.

Called to reserve judgment and turn to wonder. Whenever people interact, disagreements naturally arise. But we invite you to turn from judgmental attitudes which stifle communication, to an attitude of wonder which opens the heart: *“I wonder why this person feels this way. I wonder why I feel such a strong reaction. I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself.”*

Called to respect our differences. Our time together is a conversation, not a debate. We invite you to learn from others and from yourself, to tap the sources of wisdom in the group and in your own heart.

Called to be present to each other. We all lead busy lives; that is why our time together is so important. As much as possible, focus your attention and energies on being engaged with those around you.

Called to pray. When the group leaves from this space, we invite you to hold each other’s lives and stories in prayer until you meet again. Following the Benedictine rule of “ora et labora” (pray and work), we hope that your time together will enrich both your prayer and your work when you are apart.

(Guidelines adapted from “Circle of Trust ‘Touchstones’” from the Center for Courage and Renewal. To learn more about the Rule of Benedict, visit the Order of St. Benedict: www.osb.org/rb)

Scripture Passages on Calling and Vocation

Stories of How God Calls

- In silence (Elijah): 1 Kings 19:11-13
- In silence: Isaiah 41:1
- In dreams: Matthew 1:18-25
- Within ourselves: Luke 1:39-45
- In darkness: Job 4:12-16
- Through mysterious encounters: Luke 1:26-38
- In moments of blinding clarity: Acts 9:1-19
- In moments of internal revelation or insights: Galatians 1:11-17
- Through conversation with strangers: Genesis 18:1-15
- Through Scripture and through other people: Acts 8:26-40
- Through the activity of work: Jeremiah 18:1-6
- When we go out in search of God: Luke 19:1-10

Stories of How our Plans Are Embraced within God's Loving Plan

- Jeremiah describing the relationship between God and people: Jeremiah 29:11-14
- Jesus praying for God's will, not his, to be done: Matthew 26:36-46
- Zechariah and Elizabeth learning to trust in God's surprising call: Luke 1:5-24, 57-80
- Keeping confidence in God though you stumble: Proverbs 3:21-26
- Naomi and Ruth's journey together from despair to hope: Ruth 1-4
- Paul's perspective on his sufferings in light of Christ: 2 Corinthians 11:24-12:10

Stories about how God Calls Us in Multiple Ways

- Jesus feeding the 5000: Mark 6:30-43
- Jesus' encounter with Mary and Martha: Luke 10:38-42
- Paul's emphasis on the unity of our life's calling: Ephesians 4:1-6
- Lydia's call to conversion, leadership and hospitality: Acts 16:13-15
- The variety of gifts the Spirit gives for the common good: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and 12:27-31
- Abraham and Sarah receiving a new calling in old age: Genesis 18:1-15

Stories about how God Calls in Times of Struggle

- Hannah and her infertility: 1 Samuel 1:2-18
- How God meets us in our suffering: Psalm 107:1-32
- Moses' despair and God's call to continue leading his people: Exodus 17:1-7
- Jesus healing Simon's mother-in-law who then gets up to serve: Mark 1:29-31
- A prayer for help in times of pain and difficulty: Psalm 22
- Jesus' call to the crowd to take up their cross and follow him: Mark 8:31-35
- How God calls through and beyond our present suffering: Romans 8:18-39
- Jesus calling his followers into new relationships after his death: John 19:25-28

Stories of God Calling over Time

- For everything a season: Ecclesiastes 3:1-18
- Paul on how we mature in faith by growing up into Christ: Ephesians 4:11-16
- Patience in waiting and watching for God's vision to be revealed: Habakkuk 2:1-3
- God's faithfulness from youth through old age: Psalm 71
- Jeremiah called by God as a youth: Jeremiah 1:4-10
- Anna and Simeon experiencing a call fulfilled at the end of their lives: Luke 2:25-38
- Peter describing the evolution of his calling: Acts 10:34-48

Lives Explored Videos on Calling and Vocation

Collegeville Institute *Lives Explored* Video Program

<https://collegevilleinstitute.org/vocation-projects/resources-for-congregations/lives-explored>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCR5ELYhtrvW7rnThE8aBnYQ>

- Gaye's Story:** When Gaye's husband died, it was a shocking blow to her faith. See how she found God in surprising ways through her grief.
- Joyce's Story:** After domestic abuse and divorce, Joyce felt called by God from chaos to a new vocation. See how this surprising twist allowed her to serve others.
- Obey's Story:** As a young child, Obey felt a calling to serve. Watch how his community led him into new (and messy!) service he never expected.
- Monica's Story:** Monica is no stranger to hard questions—in corporate communications, she has wrestled with the meaning of her work. Hear what she discovered about the importance of storytelling and community.
- Sarah's Story:** In college, Sarah decided to step outside her comfort zone—even with the risk of failure. Discover how she brought her authentic self to her work in corporate America.
- Jane's Story:** Jane had just gotten her biggest break as a Hollywood actor. But when she walked onto Sunset Boulevard, she felt empty. See what happened when Jane made a surprising career change.
- Ken's Story:** Ken discovered his calling late one night whittling at his table. Watch how his dream of woodcarving led to inspiration from the strangest places.
- Sherice's Story:** Sherice doesn't feel her work is her calling. But she still feels called by God in her workplace. Listen to her song of giving her life away.
- 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.
- Francois' Story:** As a new immigrant in New York City, Francois found himself in crisis, wondering what God wanted from him. Discover how a career he never expected brought him deep joy.
- Angela's Story:** Angela struggled as a stay-at-home mom after a career in interior design. See how she learned to share her creativity in a new way.
- Lauren's Story:** Lauren struggled in her 20s with loss and uncertainty. Hear how work became her saving grace.
- Jean's Story:** As an accountant Jean prayed whenever she had to change jobs. See how surprising opportunities have showed up on her doorstep.
- Denise's Story:** Denise's husband said he couldn't hear any more stories from her work as a judge. Find out how Denise learned to be present in the courtroom but not carry work home with her.
- Mary Margaret and Ken's Story:** When Ken was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, his wife Mary Margaret struggled to pray—until a doctor helped her trust God again. Learn how this couple found a new calling to help others.
- Paul's Story:** As a health care expert, Paul has to manage the “default calendar” of his time. Check out five practical questions he uses to make decisions.
- Adam's Story:** Adam didn't like the way he was treated as a teenager. Watch how his work in theatre and therapy with teens challenges stereotypes today.

Vocation: How Does God Call Us to Live our Faith?

Four Visual Poems

Faith and Leadership (Duke Divinity)

<https://www.faithandleadership.com/vocation-how-does-god-call-us-live-our-faith>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/FaithandLeadership/videos>

Vocation as Worship: Ella Russell, the creator and owner of E-dub-a-licious Treats, sees each task of her work in the bakery as an opportunity to honor God. As God provides Ella with the resources and opportunities to do good work, Ella returns to God thanksgiving and praise and leads a community of people to delight in what God is doing in her life. Ella compels us to reflect on how our daily lives become an act of worship.

Vocation as Service: Entrepreneur and boot-maker Joshua Bingaman encourages us to reflect on how Christian vocation goes beyond service to the self and connects to the deep needs of the community. Joshua's story of healing and transformation in community is creatively retold through his work as a boot-maker. Joshua challenges us to humbly serve others in all that we do.

Vocation as Obligation: Jillian "JJ" Simmons invites us to consider how Jesus' love obligates us to live differently, reflecting Christ in the world. JJ's faith in Jesus compels her to go about her work as a radio personality, nonprofit leader and mother with a drive to bring change in the world. Her grateful obligation inspires a renewed courage to follow the call God places in our lives.

Vocation as Commission: Sculptor Anthony Suber challenges us to get to the work of telling the story of God's love in tangible ways, fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission. When we answer God's call and begin to see the imperfect parts of ourselves and others with new eyes—God's eyes of love—we are able to tell a different story about those imperfections. With God's eyes of love, we are commissioned to live differently.

Session 1. Called *by* God in Multiple Ways

Supplies Needed

- Leader: Chapter 1 in *The Stories We Live*
- Participants: *The Stories We Live*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.
- Prayer Resource: *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation*. Laura Kelly Fanucci (Wipf & Stock, 2017)
- 1 Set of Visual Faith Images: Calling and Vocation (purchase from www.VibrantFaith.org)

Opening Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Part 1. Introduction: Concept of Calling and Vocation

Introduce the concept of calling and vocation using this information from Kathleen Cahalan:

Vocation is a central part of the Christian life, encompassing:

- *who we are called to be*—the core of our identity, as created by God and baptized in Christ, and sent forth to serve by the power of the Holy Spirit;
- *how we are called to live*—our commitments of lifestyle and relationships, including marriage, parenting, or the single life;
- *what we are called to do*—the work, service and activities that fill our daily lives, including paid or professional work, volunteering, homemaking, raising children or caregiving.

As a theological concept, vocation has received renewed attention in recent years, expanding beyond traditional definitions of ordained ministry to include the diverse ways we are called:

- by the God who created us
- to particular kinds of work and relationships
- as the people we are, with our gifts, talents and resources
- in a variety of circumstances, whether joyful or difficult
- from difficult situations or times of transitions
- through the example, invitation or mentoring of other people
- for the service of others
- within the life of God who is love

We are called *by* God, who is the source of our callings. We are called *to* follow the way shown by Jesus and taken up by his disciples; this calling we share with each other. We are called *as* unique persons with a particular history and circumstance. We are called *from* the losses and grief we suffer over time, so that we can embrace life again. We are called *to* give our lives *for* others, not simply for our self-improvement or fulfillment. We are even called *in* our deepest suffering to carry out God's purposes in mysterious ways. We are called *through* the people in our lives, because vocation takes root in community. And, finally, we are called together to live *within* God's loving embrace, both

now and in the life to come. (From: *The Stories We Live: Finding God's calling All Around Us*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.)

Part 2. Explore: Calling and Vocation in Images

Use the visual faith process to help people name their experience of calling and vocation. Spread the “Calling Images” on the table for all to see. Organize people into groups of 4-6 people.

Ask people to select an image that reflects their experience of calling and vocation. Then ask them to share their story in small groups:

- How does this image capture your experience of calling and vocation?
- What emotions/feeling surface in you as you look at this image?
- What does this image tell you about your view of God and how is involved in your life and in your calling and vocation?

When all of the groups have concluded storytelling, invite people to share their insights about calling and vocation the emerged from their image experience.

Part 3. Presentation: Three Images of Vocation

Present the three images of vocation from Chapter 1 of *The Stories We Live*.

Is your calling more like an ACORN, PILGRIMAGE, or SURPISING DISCOVERY?

Vocation like an acorn: experiencing God’s call as a precise plan, or at least having a strong sense from children that God has called you to a particular role, relationship, or gift. Something has been given to people to do. A person’s life could only become one thing like an acorn becoming an oak tree.

Vocation as a pilgrimage: experiencing God’s call as a journey. Pilgrims experience a call to follow a particular way and trust that what they need will emerge as part of the journey. Pilgrims must walk to figure it out: to learn as they go, to struggle under difficulty, and even to fail at times. As a pilgrim, being called by God means trusting in God’s companionship no matter what happens along the way. Callings become a response that requires that we discern the path with God’s guidance.

Vocation as a surprising discovery: “Aha!” experiences can reveal a direction or purpose that people might not have seen or understood, even though it was right in front of them. People discover an ability or develop a passion; they are awakened to a gift, and they fall in love in way that never leaves them. Regardless of whether that gift becomes paid employment, many people find that callings are rooted in something they are given to do and love doing for others.

Each of these images—acorn, pilgrimage, and surprising discovery—is a key way to experience God’s call. The images tell us that vocation is something we make with God, who can be known and named as planner, walking companion, and gift giver. In these sense our experiences of God and

vocation are better understood on a continuum from the highly detailed to the less precise, with everything in between.

Some people experience callings as a choice they make, while others sense that they have no choice but are born into their vocation or given gifts they must use. When you hear God's call in your life and in the lives of those around you, remember to affirm that God has many ways, not just one way.

God does not create us *with* a vocation (one single plan that God has made), but with the capacity for vocations (that ability to engage in dialogue with God and others to create a plan for our life). Vocation becomes then, a creative act, something we create with God and others, unique to each of our lives.

Part 4. Reflection: How Do You See Your Calling and Vocation

Ask people to reflect on the following questions and share their responses in small groups:

- Consider your callings: Are you more like the acorn, the pilgrimage, or a surprising discovery? Share a story that illustrates why you chose your type of calling.
- What images of God and vocation come to mind from your callings?

Closing Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Session 2. Called *to* be Followers of Christ

Supplies Needed

- Handout: “Following Jesus Today”
- Leader: Chapter 2 in *The Stories We Live*
- Leader Reference: *Living Your Discipleship: Seven Ways to Express Your Deepest Calling*. Kathleen Cahalan and Laura Kelly Fanucci. Twenty Third Publications, 2015.
- Participants: *The Stories We Live*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.
- Prayer Resource: *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation*. Laura Kelly Fanucci (Wipf & Stock, 2017)

Opening Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Part 1. Introduction

Introduce the concept of *called to follow Jesus* using this information from Kathleen Cahalan:

Jesus called his disciples to follow him rather the disciples choosing to follow him. Jesus’s “way” was radical, requiring disciples to give up loyalty to job, family, friends, and nation in order to embrace Jesus’ way of life. As disciples of Jesus today, we are called in the following ways: to be a follower, a worshipper, a witness, a neighbor, a forgiver, a prophet, and a steward.

We have a common, shared calling as Christians. Discipleship is our most foundational and fundamental identity and vocation—we are called *together* to be a community of disciples.

Part 2. Explore: Called to Be a Follower

Read the story: “Jesus Calls the First Disciples” in Matthew 4:18-5:2:

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying. . . .

Share with the group:

The opening scene of Jesus' ministry after his baptism is all action—he walks, calls, teaches, proclaims, cures, hikes, sits down, and speaks. If you are going to follow, you have to get and get going even if you are in the middle of something. If you don't follow immediately, you are going to miss it: you won't hear his teaching or witness him cure the sick or see the great crowds coming or finally sit at his feet to listen.

Reflect:

Ask each person to take a few moments to reflect on the question below and share their responses in small groups.

How has Christ called you to follow him today? OR What does it mean for you to be a follower of Christ today?

Part 3. Explore: Six Ways of Following Jesus

Assign one of six ways we follow Jesus—worshipper, witness, neighbor, forgiver, prophet, and steward—to each group (if you have at least six groups) OR divide the large group into six groups of 4-6 people. For very large groups, you can have multiple small groups for each of the six ways. Keep group size to 4-6 people.

Using the handout as a resource, ask each group to reflect on the focusing question and commentary. They might also want to read the suggested Scripture passage (or another one of your choosing). Ask each prepare a brief summary of their reflections with the whole group.

After groups have finished their reflection time, ask each group to share their summary reflections with the whole group.

The commentary for each question is adapted from *Living Your Discipleship: Seven Ways to Express Your Deepest Calling* by Kathleen Cahalan and Laura Fanucci.

1. How do you follow Jesus as a **worshipper**—one whose heart is filled with adoration and love for the source of life, the One on whom we depend?
 - Suggested Scripture: Matthew 8:1-13

Traditionally, Christians have worshipped God through different types of prayer: praising God in adoration, seeking God's forgiveness through confession, thanking God for blessings, and petitioning God for our needs and those of others (ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).

2. How do you follow Jesus as a *witness* to what God has done for us?

- Suggested Scripture: Luke 24:36-49

To be a witness means to give testimony, to proclaim, or to announce a message. Witness is to give testimony to the truth about what God has done for us, in and through Jesus Christ.

When we live our callings, when we tell each other how God has called us, or when we admit how hard it can be to figure out what to do and what God wants—that is be a witness. It is tell a truth about our lives, about our certainties, and our doubts, our fears, and our joys.

3. How do you follow Jesus as a *neighbor* to those around you?

- Suggested Scripture: Luke 14:12-14, Luke 10:25-37

Jesus neighbor ethic is built on the Great Commandment that unites love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus expands his teaching on neighbor to the point of embracing love for one's enemies. Jesus tackles the question of who is the neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Neighbors are neighbors (people we know), strangers (whether near or far), and enemies (critics and opponents). By stretching our instincts past our comfort zone to include these widening circles of neighbors, strangers, and enemies, we enter into discipleship's view of "neighbor-hood" as a state of being in which all are drawn together in the household of God.

4. How do you follow Jesus as a *forgiver*—to forgive those who harm us and seek forgiveness when we harm others.

- Suggested Scripture: Luke 7:36-50,

Learning to be a forgiver begins with first recognizing that I am a sinner and that my actions hurt other people. I have to start with seeking forgiveness. When I am forgiven, then I know love and I can learn to practice forgiving others. Forgiving others for their sins against me requires great love.

5. How do you follow Jesus as a *prophet*—to declare what is wrong with our communities and world, and call people back to right relationship through justice and mercy.

- Suggested Scripture: Matthew 21:10-14

To be a prophet is to see what is wrong, broken, missing, or unjust in our society and to speak a word of truth that shines light on the situation. Prophets see the world as God sees the world and seek to share their vision with others.

Acting prophetically is at the heart of what it means to follow Christ. To be a prophet can be an uncomfortable part of the call to discipleship. But it is also what I cannot *not* do as a follower of Christ. What is unjust about our time and place? How are we complicit in systems that contribute to the oppression of others? Where do we need to help call people back to God's ways of mercy, forgiveness, justice, and peace?

6. How do you follow Jesus as a **steward**—caring for God’s creation and the goods of the household.
- Suggested Scripture: Matthew 25:14-29

The call to stewardship means receiving gifts gratefully, nurturing their growth, and sharing them with others. The call to stewardship is the call to take care—of people, of places, and of talents and skills we have been given to share. Like the stewards in Jesus’ parable, we have been entrusted with God’s gifts in the expectation that we will allow them to grow over time. So we are called to be steward with our whole lives: stewards of our work and of our world around us.

Part 4. Conclusion

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

We follow the One who follows in Abba’s way, for Jesus is the perfect disciple, the perfect follower. He teaches disciples what it means to embrace God’s mission with our whole lives when he accepted his death and placed his trust completely in God. In order to flow, we must come to him, sit at his feet, and learn how to do this. To be a follower means entering into a lifelong process of learning from Jesus, to come to know who and what Jesus is and what Jesus is claiming about God’s call to community and mission.

We live, then, in Christ because Christ lives in us. To be Christ’s follower is to embrace Christ as teacher, to seek wisdom and understanding for what the path and cost of discipleship entails, and to be schooled in the paschal mystery of death and new life. (*Living Your Discipleship*, 19-20)

Closing Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Following Jesus Today

How do you follow Jesus as a *worshipper*—one whose heart is filled with adoration and love for the source of life, the One on whom we depend?

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Learning to be a forgiver begins with first recognizing that I am a sinner and that my actions hurt other people. I have to start with seeking forgiveness. When I am forgiven, then I know love and I can learn to practice forgiving others. Forgiving others for their sins against me requires great love.

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To be a prophet is to see what is wrong, broken, missing, or unjust in our society and to speak a word of truth that shines light on the situation. Prophets see the world as God sees the world and seek to share their vision with others.

Acting prophetically is at the heart of what it means to follow Christ. To be a prophet can be an uncomfortable part of the call to discipleship. But it is also what I cannot *not* do as a follower of Christ. What is unjust about our time and place? How are we complicit in systems that contribute to the oppression of others? Where do we need to help call people back to God's ways of mercy, forgiveness, justice, and peace?

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The call to stewardship means receiving gifts gratefully, nurturing their growth, and sharing them with others. The call to stewardship is the call to take care—of people, of places, and of talents and skills we have been given to share. Like the stewards in Jesus' parable, we have been entrusted with God's gifts in the expectation that we will allow them to grow over time. So we are called to be steward with our whole lives: stewards of our work and of our world around us.

Session 3. Called *as We Are*

Supplies Needed

- Leader: Chapter 3 in *The Stories We Live*
- Participants: *The Stories We Live*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.
- Prayer Resource: *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation*. Laura Kelly Fanucci (Wipf & Stock, 2017)
- Paper and pens for the “Chapters of Life” activity

Opening Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Part 1. Introduction

Introduce the concept of *called as we are* using this information from Kathleen Cahalan:

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. How was God calling you as an infant or child? And now, how might God’s call relate 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.

Part 2. Explore: Chapters of Life

Introduce the activity by saying:

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.

Invite the participants to image their life as the chapters in a book that is still being written. Using the chapters imagery, ask them to name the key chapters in their life that reflect stages—as a child, teenager, young adult, midlife adult, mature adult, older adult—and the transitions in their 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.

Ask the participants to give each chapter a descriptive title that names their experience of calling and vocation 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.” Give them examples from your own life so they can see how the activity works in practice.

Give each person time to complete their “Chapters of Life” activity.

Part 3. Reflect: Callings Over Time

Ask people to reflect on how they experienced God’s calling in the different chapters of their life and how they have seen God’s callings and their vocation emerge at different stages of their life. Conclude their reflection with: *How do you experience God’s callings at this age in your life?*

In small groups have people share their insights how God’s callings and their vocation emerged at different stages of their life, and how they are experiencing God’s calling today.

Part 4. Conclusion

Invite people to share summary insights about what they learned about callings and vocation from their own life story.

Closing Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Session 4. Called *from* People, Places, or Situations

Supplies Needed

- Leader: Chapter 4 in *The Stories We Live*
- Participants: *The Stories We Live*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.
- Prayer Resource: *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation*. Laura Kelly Fanucci (Wipf & Stock, 2017)
- Equipment for viewing videos: laptop or tablet, projector, screen, speakers

Opening Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Part 1. Introduction

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

Have you every 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.

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)
- 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)

Part 2. Explore: Life Transitions and Calling

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.

Show the video of “Peg’s Story” to the group:

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.

- Go to YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_nljclJej0

Note: There are other video options from Lives Explored stories. Check the list before Session 1.

Invite the group to offer reflections on how Peg’s story presents the nature of transitions and their connection to calling and vocation.

Engage the participants in a storytelling experience. Invite them to organize themselves in groups of three. Explain the storytelling process. (You might want to write the questions on a sheet of newsprint or on a PowerPoint slide 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 identified a story, 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.

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

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).

Closing Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Session 5. Called *for* Service and Work

Supplies Needed

- Leader: Chapter 5 in *The Stories We Live*
- Participants: *The Stories We Live*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.
- Prayer Resource: *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation*. Laura Kelly Fanucci (Wipf & Stock, 2017)
- Equipment for viewing videos: laptop or tablet, projector, screen, speakers
- 1 Set of Visual Faith Images: Calling and Vocation (purchase from www.VibrantFaith.org)

Opening Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Part 1. Introduction: Work & Calling

Use the visual faith process to help people name their experience of work as a calling. Spread the images on the table for all to see. Organize people into groups of 4-6 people. Introduce the activity with these words:

How do you see your work as a calling from God? Work can be difficult and a blessing. For some of us work expresses our calling; for others it is simply a way of sustenance—a way to provide food, shelter and well-being for ourselves and our families.

Select an image that reflects how you see your work as a calling from God.

Share your story in small groups using the following questions:

- How does this image capture your experience of work?
- What emotions/feeling surface in you as you look at this image?
- What does this image tell you about your experience of work as a calling from God?

When all of the groups have concluded storytelling, invite people to share their insights about work and calling that emerged from their image experience.

Part 2. Reflect: God's Callings at Work

Show two video stories to engage the participants in reflecting on how people can experience God's calling at work.

Sherice's Story. Sherice doesn't feel her work is her calling. But she still feels called by God in her workplace. Listen to her song of giving her life away.

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3_vk2l6W48

Ella's Story. Ella Russell, the creator and owner of E-dub-a-licious Treats, sees each task of her work in the bakery as an opportunity to honor God. As God provides Ella with the resources and opportunities to do good work, Ella returns to God thanksgiving and praise and leads a community of people to delight in what God is doing in her life. Ella compels us to reflect on how our daily lives become an act of worship.

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=_NdEOJJ_QUI

In small groups ask the participants:

- How do these two different stories connect with your own experience? What do you find helpful or insightful or inspiring?
- How do these stories help us understand that work can be a calling from God?

Part 3. Explore: Called for Service

Introduce the concept of *called for service* using this information from Kathleen Cahalan:

Vocation is self-giving service for the sake of God's world. Vocation is deeply personal because it is other-focused. God's call is to you *for* love of neighbor and service *for* others. Jesus teaches, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39). The truth about who you are and what you are *for* is the service you are called to give *for* others, *for* God's world. Jesus gave his life *for* you, and discipleship entails giving it back. Vocation, then is self-giving service in community for the sake of God's world.

How do you know what your callings are *for*? In what ways are you called to serve? For whom is your service to be given? Can your employed work be a form of service?

Show one of the following videos to illustrate how work can be a form of service, and stimulate a discussion of work as a calling and as service.

Vocation as Service: Entrepreneur and boot-maker Joshua Bingaman encourages us to reflect on how Christian vocation goes beyond service to the self and connects to the deep needs of the community. Joshua's story of healing and transformation in community is creatively retold through his work as a boot-maker. Joshua challenges us to humbly serve others in all that we do.

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsnFtZqI4LY>

Vocation as Obligation: Jillian "JJ" Simmons invites us to consider how Jesus' love obligates us to live differently, reflecting Christ in the world. JJ's faith in Jesus compels her to go about her work as a radio personality, nonprofit leader and mother with a drive to bring change in the world. Her grateful obligation inspires a renewed courage to follow the call God places in our lives.

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hra-dkcTrw8>

Vocation as Commission: Sculptor Anthony Suber challenges us to get to the work of telling the story of God's love in tangible ways, fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission. When we answer God's call

and begin to see the imperfect parts of ourselves and others with new eyes—God’s eyes of love—we are able to tell a different story about those imperfections. With God’s eyes of love, we are commissioned to live differently. YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLM75AW5Ss8>

In small groups ask the participants to reflect on the video using the following questions:

- How can your employed work be a form of service?
- In what ways are you called to serve?
- For whom is your service to be given?

Invite reflections and insights on the questions from the participants. The conclude with these summary reflections, using insights from Kathleen Cahalan:

In calling you *for* a life of service the common good, God can call you to work and in your work.

The work that you do is inherently good when it aligns with God’s purposes, when your work is a service given for the common good. You may experience a deep resonance between who you are and what you are able to do. Your competence and excellence in your work is a sign of God’s work in you.

Your gifts and abilities, then, call you to do certain work, but it is also what you do in and on the job that constitutes your vocation. Any kind of work can be a Christian vocation—there is no higher or better job than another—you are called to love God and serve your neighbor.

Work has always been a means of sustenance, a way to provide good, shelter, and well-being for ourselves and our families, but work is not an end in itself. It is a means to a greater good, a good that is in service the larger community.

Part 4. Conclusion: Personal Reflection at Home

Invite people to spend time during the week reflecting on the call for service and work. The three questions are from Chapter 5 in *The Stories We Tell*. (You may to distribute copies of the questions.)

When discerning what you can give your life for consider the three questions:

1. ***Is what you are doing a source of joy?*** (“Do you get a kick out of it?”) [Joy – is not feeling good about what you are doing; rather it is an interior conviction that what one is doing is good even if it does not make one happy or content.]
2. ***Is it something that calls forth your gifts, engaging your abilities and talents, using them fully?*** (“Are you any good at it?”)
3. ***Is this role or work of genuine service to others and to the wider society?*** (“Does anyone want you to do it?”)

Closing Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Session 6. Called *through* Each Other

Supplies Needed

- Leader: Chapter 6 in *The Stories We Live*
- Participants: *The Stories We Live*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.
- Prayer Resource: *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation*. Laura Kelly Fanucci (Wipf & Stock, 2017)
- Paper and pens for the reflection activity

Opening Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Part 1. Introduction

Introduce the concept of *called through each other* using this information from Kathleen Cahalan:

God works *through* others to call us. Who has God worked through to call you?

Most people say that they first experience a sense of calling through another person. Family, friends, or mentors highly influence a person's choice in work. The discernment of your gifts and capacities for service begins when others around you notice and call them forth.

We are utterly dependent on each other to become who we are, to hear God's callings, and to respond. People closest to you are the most significant factors in the calls you follow and the choices you make. If you are struggling to figure out what God is calling you *to* or *for*, listen to God's call *through* the people around you.

Who comes into a person's life may be the single greatest factor of influence to what that life becomes. You are God's agent of vocation. If your call is to be *for* others, then you must become a person *through* whom God's call is heard and heeded.

Part 2. Explore: Experiencing a Sense of Calling through Others

Ask the participants to recall the "Chapters of Life" activity in Session 3 and reflect on who was instrumental in their life during each chapter. Have them use the following questions to reflect on their journey and the people who have been important in their life. Organize people in small groups to share their reflections.

- Who has been instrumental in each chapter of your life to help you discover God's calling for you? Who has been an agent of God's vocation for you? Identify the person(s) in each chapter of your life. (Think about family members, friends, colleagues, supervisors, the people we serve, and mentors.)
- What did the people in your life do for and with you to help you discover God's vocation?

- What is instrumental in your life right now? Who is currently an agent of God’s vocation for you? What are they doing for and with you to help you discover God’s vocation at this stage of your life?

After the small group time, invite people to share with the whole group highlights of the story of one person who was instrumental in their life, and what they did they mattered so much.

Part 3. Reflect: Being an Agent of God’s Vocation for Others

Explain that who comes into a person’s life may be the single greatest factor of influence to what that life becomes. Each of us are God’s agent of vocation. If our call is to be *for* others, then we must become a person *through* whom God’s call is heard and heeded.

Ask the participants to identify people that they have been influential in helping to discover God’s calling and vocation. Use the following questions. Then invite participants to share at least one example/story of a person they have influenced. After everyone has shared their story(s), ask them to share “How might others be called by God through them today?”

- For whom have you been an agent of God’s vocation? What did you do for and with these individuals? What was the experience life for you?
- How might others be called by God *through* you today?

After the small group time, invite people to share responses to the question: “How might others be called by God through them today?”

Closing Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Session 7. Called *in* Suffering

Supplies Needed

- Leader: Chapter 7 in *The Stories We Live*
- Participants: If this is a book study, then the participants need *The Stories We Live*.
- Prayer Resource: *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation*. Laura Kelly Fanucci (Wipf & Stock, 2017)
- Participant Handout: “Called in Suffering”
- Equipment for viewing videos: laptop or tablet, projector, screen, speakers

Bible Stories about how God Calls in Times of Struggle

- How God meets us in our suffering: Psalm 107:1-32
- Moses’ despair and God’s call to continue leading his people: Exodus 17:1-7
- Jesus healing Simon’s mother-in-law who then gets up to serve: Mark 1:29-31
- A prayer for help in times of pain and difficulty: Psalm 22
- Jesus’ call to the crowd to take up their cross and follow him: Mark 8:31-35
- How God calls through and beyond our present suffering: Romans 8:18-39
- Jesus calling his followers into new relationships after his death: John 19:25-28

Opening Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Part 1. Introduction

Introduce the concept of *called in suffering* using this information from Kathleen Cahalan:

The truth about vocation is that it does not always involve choice or movement. It is not always going *to* or *from*. Sometimes it is about figure out God’s call *in* the place that you are.

Sometimes being called *in* a situation are times when you have little choice. About the only choice you have is how to live out your calling *in* the situation. You can find yourself *in* situations that require patience and waiting or duty and obligation. Such situations can entail suffering and pain, not joy and peace, at least not initially. It may not be what you want, or where your gifts life, but it is in fact where you are. *In* that place, you ask: God, what are you calling me to *in* this circumstance?

Part 2. Explore: Called in Suffering

Use the following insights by Laura Kelly Fanucci to present an understanding of suffering and vocation. You can also give the handout: “Called to Suffering: to each participant. (Excerpts from *Called to Life Participant Guide* by Laura Kelly Fanucci. Colledgeville Institute, 2016. Pages 28-31)

When we look back at the three-fold definition of vocation, we see how our vocations can be affected in profound ways by suffering. Who we are, how we live, and what we do are each impacted by situations of stress or struggle.

The challenges we face in our own callings may be physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. We may struggle with our health: disabilities, disease, mental illness or addictions. We may struggle with our families: estranged relationships, abuse, or divorce. We may struggle with work: job burnout, ethical dilemmas, or financial difficulties. We may struggle with loss: of a loved one, an opportunity, an ability or a dream. We may struggle with our faith: where is God in this mess and chaos? Is this part of what God is calling me to?

As difficult as they can be to bear, times of darkness do not mean an absence of God's call. Sometimes if we reframe our understanding of how vocation relates to suffering, we gain a new perspective on how God has been calling us all along.

Consider how changing the preposition that is used with the verb of "calling" can transform its meaning:

We can be **called in** a difficult situation: to act in a certain way or to have a particular attitude. Even if we cannot change the circumstances, we can respond in ways that allow our vocation to flourish. For example, people suffering from serious illness sometimes surprise their families and caregivers with the positive perspective they are able to develop—virtues of compassion, patience, or gratitude.

We can be **called away** from a situation—whether an abusive relationship, a toxic workplace, or a negative environment. Though it can be painful to leave, God sometimes asks us to do the difficult work of closing a door and moving on.

We can be **called for** something, as we come to see a purpose greater than our own comfort or happiness. Perhaps we can become a companion or mentor for others grappling with the same difficulties, as people sometimes do after they have lived with depression, addictions or eating disorders. The fundamental Christian call to discipleship always beckons us towards those most in need of God's love and light.

We can be **called to** a new part of our vocation as a result of loss or difficulty, as our eyes are opened to a new possibility, opportunity or way of thinking. For example, a couple who has lived through years of infertility may find themselves called to adopt or foster a child. Experiences of pain or loss can bring a deeper sense of empathy with others or gratitude for other gifts we have received.

We can be **called by** God in the suffering we experience. We feel moved to respond by doing what we can to change the painful situation or to bring new life from an experience of loss. For example, a person may change careers or take on a new volunteer opportunity once they have experienced the loss of a loved one or witnessed first-hand the suffering that comes from extreme poverty. God can work through our anger, frustration or sadness to create something positive.

Invite the participants to pick one of these prepositions and share an example of a time when they felt called in suffering—in a difficult situation, away from a difficult situation, towards something new, or for a deeper purpose than you first thought.

- Share a story of a time that you felt called in a struggle, away from a difficult situation, towards something new, or for a deeper purpose than you first thought.
- What unexpected opportunities, deepened awareness, or surprising gifts did this painful experience ultimately hold for you?
- How did you hear God’s call?
- What did you learn about your callings in times of suffering?

Ask them to share their responses in a group of three.

Part 3. Stories of Being Called in Suffering

Select one or more videos from the Colledgeville Institute of how people found God and calling through suffering in their life (see below).

Introduce the video(s) with these insights by Laura Kelly Fanucci. (Excerpts from *Called to Life Participant Guide* by Laura Kelly Fanucci. Colledgeville Institute, 2016. Pages 28-31)

Sometimes it comforts us to see how God may be calling us through the difficulties with face. At other times we simply have to take on a challenging responsibility—like caring for an aging parent or staying in a difficult job—without having any sense of being called. And sometimes, in life’s most difficult experiences of loss, illness or death, our suffering often seems far too painful or unjust to be meaningful. Our struggle to understand why this is happening to us may lead us to wrestle with God or even lose faith.

These dark moments of questioning our vocation may change our understanding or image of God. For example, after a divorce, someone may wonder why or if God called them to marriage in the first place. When a child is stricken with a life-threatening illness, the parents question how a loving God could possibly allow this to happen. The events of our lives, as well as the sufferings caused by evil and injustice in the world, can pose deep challenges to our view of vocation and of God.

But the obstacles we meet through times of crisis may eventually be found to reveal God’s presence, too. The God who calls us remain the God who hears us.

Share with the group one or more of the following videos of how people found God and calling through suffering in their life.

“Joyce’s Story” – After domestic abuse and divorce, Joyce felt called by God from chaos to a new vocation. See how this surprising twist allowed her to serve others.

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=29&v=OL3BjOSeBa8

Mary Margaret & Ken’s Story – When Ken was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, his wife Mary Margaret struggled to pray—until a doctor helped her trust God again. Learn how this couple found a new calling to help others.

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CICRiTHa6Ao>

Gaye’s Story – When Gaye’s husband died, it was a shocking blow to her faith. See how she found God in surprising ways through her grief.

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3_vk2l6W48

In their small groups invite the participants to share their insights on the video(s):

- How did people find God and hear God’s call in suffering?
- What can you take from their life that can inform, inspire, or sustain your own calling?

Close the session by inviting people to share reflections on what they learn about being called in suffering.

Closing Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Called in Suffering

When we look back at the three-fold definition of vocation, we see how our vocations can be affected in profound ways by suffering. Who we are, how we live, and what we do are each impacted by situations of stress or struggle.

The challenges we face in our own callings may be physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. We may struggle with our health: disabilities, disease, mental illness or addictions. We may struggle with our families: estranged relationships, abuse, or divorce. We may struggle with work: job burnout, ethical dilemmas, or financial difficulties. We may struggle with loss: of a loved one, an opportunity, an ability or a dream. We may struggle with our faith: where is God in this mess and chaos? Is this part of what God is calling me to?

As difficult as they can be to bear, times of darkness do not mean an absence of God's call. Sometimes if we reframe our understanding of how vocation relates to suffering, we gain a new perspective on how God has been calling us all along.

Consider how changing the preposition that is used with the verb of "calling" can transform its meaning:

We can be **called in** a difficult situation: to act in a certain way or to have a particular attitude. Even if we cannot change the circumstances, we can respond in ways that allow our vocation to flourish. For example, people suffering from serious illness sometimes surprise their families and caregivers with the positive perspective they are able to develop—virtues of compassion, patience, or gratitude.

We can be **called away** from a situation—whether an abusive relationship, a toxic workplace, or a negative environment. Though it can be painful to leave, God sometimes asks us to do the difficult work of closing a door and moving on.

We can be **called for** something, as we come to see a purpose greater than our own comfort or happiness. Perhaps we can become a companion or mentor for others grappling with the same difficulties, as people sometimes do after they have lived with depression, addictions or eating disorders. The fundamental Christian call to discipleship always beckons us towards those most in need of God's love and light.

We can be **called to** a new part of our vocation as a result of loss or difficulty, as our eyes are opened to a new possibility, opportunity or way of thinking. For example, a couple who has lived through years of infertility may find themselves called to adopt or foster a child. Experiences of pain or loss can bring a deeper sense of empathy with others or gratitude for other gifts we have received.

We can be **called by** God in the suffering we experience. We feel moved to respond by doing what we can to change the painful situation or to bring new life from an experience of loss. For example, a person may change careers or take on a new volunteer opportunity once they have experienced the loss of a loved one or witnessed first-hand the suffering that comes from extreme poverty. God can work through our anger, frustration or sadness to create something positive.

Session 8. Called by the God *Within*

Supplies Needed

- Leader: Chapter 8 in *The Stories We Live*
- Participants: If this is a book study, then the participants need *The Stories We Live*.
- Prayer Resource: *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation*. Laura Kelly Fanucci (Wipf & Stock, 2017)
- Handout: “Paying Attention to God in Daily Life”
- Resource: “The Practice of Prayer” from *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life* (LifelongFaith Associates) – several of the prayer activities are from this book

Opening Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Part 1. Introduction

Introduce the concept of *called by the God within* using this information from Kathleen Cahalan:

God’s callings can come to you in many ways—through others, through recognizing your gifts in service and work that make a difference for others, in your sorrows and pain, and at times in your dreams. But the call *within* takes some effort on your part. You have to attend to and build your capacity to listen to the One who dwells *within* you.

God comes to dwell within our midst, abiding *within* us, and God calls each of us to abide *within* the One Holy Mystery. The call *within* is God’s sheer graced goodness, a gift of pure love, a boundless power that is source and destiny.

But how? The call *within* is often difficult to hear because of the many distractions that keep you from listening to this source. How do you cultivate your awareness of the divine presence within you? How do you pray and listen?

In this session you will experience several practices that can help you cultivate a sense of God’s calling within.

Part 2. Experience: Spiritual Life Practices to Cultivate and Sustain God’s Calling Within

- This session provides a variety of prayer and spiritual life experiences that you can incorporate in this session. Start with “Paying Attention to God in Daily Life,” and then select one or more additional experiences from the other activities. Many of these activities use “The Practice of Prayer” from *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life* (LifelongFaith Associates).

Activities

1. Paying Attention to God in Daily Life
2. One-Minute and Five-Minute Experiments in Prayer
3. Contemplative Center Prayer
4. Scriptural Prayer
5. Intercessory Prayer
6. Praise Prayer #1
7. Praise Prayer #2
8. Prayers of Thanksgiving
9. Praying the Psalms
10. Lectio Divina: Prayerful Bible Reflection

Part 3. Conclusion

Close the session by inviting people to share reflections on what they learn about cultivating and sustaining God's call within.

Conduct the program evaluation (this will be prepared by the C3 team).

Closing Prayer

Select a prayer from *To Bless Our Callings: Prayers, Poems, and Hymns to Celebrate Vocation* or a resource of your choosing.

Paying Attention to God in Daily Life

(Adapted from *The Art of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision-Making* by Elizabeth Liebert)

Introduce people to the Prayer of Examen and then lead them through the process as a group. Create a PowerPoint presentation or use the handout with the five elements of the Prayer of Examen. Play reflective music in the background during the prayer.

Introduce the Examen

The Prayer of Examen helps us look for traces of God's actions in our daily life, individually or as a household. It is usually done in the evening, looking back over the day, or it can be done as a household at the evening meal. Allow between five and fifteen minutes for this spiritual exercise. Eliminate distractions during this time: no TV, radio, phones, social media, etc. This is a time of quiet to spend alone or with each other in the presence of God.

Use the following information to guide people through the process.

Note the gifts God has given you today. Give thanks for all God's gifts and benefits.

Pause for reflection.

Ask God that this reflection be a time of special grace and revelation. You can use these words:

Be near us now Lord. Let us look together at the day.

Pause for reflection.

Review the day with God. Look at the stirrings of your heart, your thoughts, your choices as the day progressed. Which have been of God? Which not? What does God want to say to you about both?

Pause for reflection.

Give God thanks and ask for forgiveness for any failure or omission, and for healing from their effects. Use these or similar words:

Gracious God, everything is a gift from you.

I give you thanks and praise for the gifts of today, such as

I ask your forgiveness and mercy for

I ask your healing in

Pause for reflection.

Look forward to the next day, and plan concretely with God how to live it according to God's desire for your life. Ask for the graces you desire for tomorrow.

Lord God, continue to be present with me in my life each day.

Pause for reflection.

Additional Activities

One-Minute and Five-Minute Experiments in Prayer

(pages 11.10—11.11 in *Living Well*)

1. Conduct a demonstration of each of the “experiments in prayer” on pages 11.10—11.11 in *Living Well*.
2. Explain the One-Minute process and then provide a demonstration. Do the same for the Five-Minute process.
3. Give the participants examples of how they can integrate each prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use each of these prayer practices in their daily lives.

Contemplative Centering Prayer

(page 10.12 in *Living Well*)

1. Prepare an environment that is conducive to Contemplative Centering Prayer (instrumental music, dimming the lights).
2. Introduce Contemplative Centering Prayer using the description on page 10.12.
3. Share the two Scripture passages: Psalm 63:1-5 and Romans 8:26-27.
4. Explain the process and then guide people through an experience of Contemplative Centering Prayer.
 - Choose a quiet space where you can be comfortable and where you can be uninterrupted and uninhibited.
 - Once you are comfortable, light a candle, take a few deep breaths, and relax. Then set the timer or stop watch for twenty minutes.
 - Close your eyes and recall your desire to just be in God’s presence.
 - Choose a simple word, phrase or verse from Scripture that expresses your desire for God (e.g., love, peace, grace, Jesus, Good Shepherd).
 - When thoughts or feelings come into your mind, let them go. Do not give into them or allow them to take you away from God’s presence. Distractions will come; this is normal. Think of this kind of prayer as the prayer of “letting go.” Don’t be surprised if you spend the whole prayer period letting go of thoughts and feelings. Over time you will experience something happening in your life: a new sense of peace, a new awareness of God’s great love for you. Be patient! Prayer takes practice.
 - Rest in the center of God’s love. Trust that the Holy Spirit, who abides in the depths of your spirit, will connect you with God.
 - When your prayer has ended, slowly come back to the here and now.
5. Give the participants examples of how they can integrate a contemplative prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use this prayer practice in their daily lives.

Scriptural Prayer

(page 10.12—10.13 in *Living Well*)

1. Prepare an environment that is conducive to Scriptural Prayer. Light one or more candles.
2. Introduce Scriptural Prayer using the description on pages 10.12—10.13.
3. Share the two Scripture passages: Psalm 119:105-106 and Ephesians 5:19-20.

4. Explain the process and then guide people through an experience of Scriptural Prayer.
 - Choose a passage from Scripture, about five to ten verses in length. You might choose one of your favorite passages, a Scripture reading from the previous or coming Sunday, or use an index to help you locate a passage that seems to be appropriate for the time or occasion.
 - Choose a comfortable place where you can be uninterrupted and uninhibited.
 - Light a candle. Take a few moments to get your body in harmony with your spirit. Sometimes it helps to take a few deep breaths or stretch your body, then relax.
 - Acknowledge God's presence with you. Ask God to send the Spirit to be with you and guide you in this time of reflection.
 - Read the passage you have chosen slowly, out loud, listening carefully to it. You might want to pause after a sentence or phrase.
 - Say the words or phrases that struck you. Do not discuss them, just say them.
 - Read the passage a second time, slowly and prayerfully.
 - Consider the message the passage might have for you: a challenge, an affirmation, or an insight. If you are doing this with others, you could invite them to share what comes to mind.
 - Read the passage a third time, slowly and prayerfully.
 - Pause for about ten minutes of silence and allow the Spirit to speak to you. If no words or thoughts come, just sit in the silence. Sometimes God touches us in ways we cannot know.
 - Following your quiet time, consider how the passage calls you to action. Is there something you need to do to make the Scripture alive for you here and now?
 - Close with a brief prayer of thanksgiving or praise to God for the gift of the Spirit.
5. Give the participants examples of how they can integrate a scriptural prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use this prayer practice in their daily lives.

Intercessory Prayer

(page 10.13 in *Living Well*)

1. Prepare an environment that is conducive to prayer. Light one or more candles.
2. Introduce Intercessory Prayer using the description on page 10.13.
3. Share the two Scripture passages: Ephesians 6:18 and Philippians 4:4, 6-7.
4. Invite people to take several minutes to recall the needs and concerns they want to pray for. Provide the group with the following categories to guide their reflection:
 - the needs and concerns of your family/household and friends,
 - the needs and concerns of people in your local church and community,
 - the needs and concerns of people around the world.
5. Begin with an opening prayer and then ask people to offer their prayer intentions. The response to each prayer petition can be "Lord, hear us."
6. Close by praying the Our Father together as a group.
7. Give the participants examples of how they can integrate an intercessory prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use this prayer practice in their daily lives.

Praise Prayer #1

(page 10.14 in *Living Well*)

1. Prepare an environment that is conducive to prayer.
2. Introduce Praise Prayer using the description on page 10.14.
3. Share the Scripture passage: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7.
4. Invite people to take several minutes to compose one or more prayers of praise. Provide the group with the following examples:
 - “God, you are good and wonderful. We praise you.”
 - “God, we praise you for the mystery that is you.”
 - “God, we believe that you are holy and awesome.”
 - “We praise you for your majesty, O God.”
5. Begin with an opening prayer and then ask people to offer their prayers of praise.
6. Close by praying Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7. or other Psalm of praise.
7. Give the participants examples of how they can integrate a praise prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use this prayer practice in their daily lives.

Praise Prayer #2

(Everyone will need a Bible or a copy of Psalm 103.)

1. Introduce this prayer experience by saying: *Many of us pray when we want to ask God for something either for ourselves or someone else. Sometimes it is difficult to just give compliments to God. Prayers of praise give praise to God for being good, for the mystery and majesty of God. Prayers of praise can be a challenge for us to think about God in terms of someone who deserves our praise. It forces us to not take God for granted. Prayers of praise reflect our own attitude and ability to recognize others for their goodness, especially our ability to just praise God for being God.*
2. Explain to the group that they will be using Psalm 103 as a Prayer of Praise. Psalm 103 is one of those priceless treasures that becomes more precious as we spend time with it in reflection and contemplation. The Psalm has four main parts:
 - Personal blessings received from God (1-5)
 - National blessings received from God (6-14)
 - A reminder of our human frailty and utter dependence upon God (15-18)
 - A declaration that all creation praises God (19-22)
3. Pray the Psalm with the group. (You may want to reproduce the Psalm so that everyone can pray it together. You can also organize the participants into two groups. Ask group one to read verses 1-5 and 15-18; group two reads verses 6-14 and 19-22.)
4. Ask the participants to use Psalm 103 to write their own psalm of praise to God. Invite them to use the four-fold structure of Psalm 103 in their own prayer. Remind them that prayers of praise give praise to God for being good, for the mystery and majesty of God. Prayers of praise can be a challenge for us to think about God in terms of someone who deserves our praise. It forces us to not take God for granted. Prayers of praise reflect our own attitude and ability to recognize others for their goodness, especially our ability to just praise God for being God.
5. After the individuals have composed their prayer of praise to God, ask them to take a few moments to reflect (and perhaps talk) about how it felt to offer God praise.
6. Invite the participants to share their psalms of praise.

Prayers of Thanksgiving

(page 10.14 in *Living Well*)

- Prepare an environment that is conducive to prayer.
- Introduce Thanksgiving Prayer using the description on page 10.14.
- Share the Scripture passage: Psalm 92:1-4.
- Invite people to take several minutes to compose one or more prayers of thanksgiving. Families can work together to compose their prayers.
- Begin with an opening prayer and then ask people to offer their prayers of thanksgiving. Respond to each prayer of thanksgiving with: “We thank you, God” or “We are grateful for your goodness.”
- Close by praying Psalm 92:1-4 or other Psalm of thanksgiving.
- Give the participants examples of how they can integrate a thanksgiving prayer practice into their daily lives. Then give them a few minutes to consider how they can use this prayer practice in their daily lives.

Praying the Psalms

Select five to eight Psalm passages in advance. The passages can reflect a common theme, or they could be diverse. Participants should have Bibles or you will need to write the passages on a sheet of newsprint or provide copies of the Psalms on a handout. It is important to identify each passage with a brief excerpt from the Psalm so that the participants will have some basis on which to make a choice. Provide each person with a sheet of paper, and pen or pencil.

1. Select one of the Psalm passages that you feel most comfortable with. (Allow time for the participants to reflect on and respond to the passage.)
2. Read the Psalm passage you selected in quiet. Read every word, pausing when necessary in order to let every word present itself to you. Read the words as if you had never read or heard them before. Be open to new insights that may come. Read the words as if they were the words of your own prayer. Whenever you read “I,” “my,” “me,” etc., read it as if that meant *you*.
3. From the passage you have read, select a phrase, a verse or two verses to be the words you will use to begin your own prayer. Write those words down and then continue writing an additional sentence or two of your own continuing the thoughts and feelings begun by the words of the Psalmist.
4. Let us now spend a few minutes in prayer sharing the words of the Psalmist we selected and the words of prayer we have written. (Individuals read their prayers aloud as they feel motivated to share.) Potential Psalms to use:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Psalm 8:1-7 | “What is man, that you think of him?” |
| Psalm 11:1-7 | “I trust in the Lord for safety.” |
| Psalm 16:1-11 | “I am always aware of the Lord’s presence.” |
| Psalm 23:1-6 | “The Lord is my shepherd.” |
| Psalm 25:1-14 | “Keep your promise, Lord, and forgive my sins.” |
| Psalm 30:1-12 | “Lord...I will give you thanks forever.” |
| Psalm 32:1-11 | “Happy are those whose sins are forgiven.” |
| Psalm 62:1-12 | “God alone protects and saves me.” |
| Psalm 63:1-8 | “O God....My whole being desires you.” |
| Psalm 86:1-13a | “Teach me, Lord what you want me to do.” |

Psalm 103:1-14 “Praise the Lord, my soul!”

Psalm 121:1-8 Teach me, Lord, what you want me to do.”

Psalm 139:1-12 “Lord, you have examined me and you know me.”

Lectio Divina: Prayerful Bible Reflection

Use “Lectio Divina” in the handout to guide participants through an experience of Lectio Divina. Select an appropriate passage from the Bible for the experience.

Step 1. Lectio (Reading)

Read the Bible passage to the group. Read it a second time. Invite people to let the words really sink in deeply. Ask them to open their minds and hearts to the meaning of the words; and let the passage speak to them.

Step 2. Meditatio (Meditation)

Invite people to reflect on the Bible passage. Ask questions such as the following:

- What does this passage say to me?
- Who am I in this Scripture?
- What do I see and hear?
- What do I think?
- Which character do I most relate to?
- What do I need to learn from this passage?

Step 3. Oratio (Prayer)

Move into the heart of the matter. Consider the following questions to help people respond to God.

- What do you want to communicate to God?
- What do you most want in your relationship with God?
- What emotions do you want to express to God? joy? fear? gratitude? grief?

Step 4. Contemplatio (Contemplation)

Provide quiet time for people to rest in the presence of God. Play some quiet instrumental music.

Step 5. Action (Action)

Conclude by inviting people to decide on a course of action and make a commitment to follow through with their plan.

- How is God challenging me?
- Is there a good thing that God is calling me to do?:
- Is there a harmful thing that God wants me to stop doing?
- What is the next step I need to take?

Paying Attention to God in Daily Life

(Adapted from *The Art of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision-Making* by Elizabeth Liebert)

The Prayer of Examen helps us look for traces of God's actions in our daily life, individually or as a household. It is usually done in the evening, looking back over the day, or it can be done as a household at the evening meal. Allow between five and fifteen minutes for this spiritual exercise. Eliminate distractions during this time: no TV, radio, phones, social media, etc. This is a time of quiet to spend alone or with each other in the presence of God.

Note the gifts God has given you today. Give thanks for all God's gifts and benefits.

Pause for reflection.

Ask God that this reflection be a time of special grace and revelation. You can use these words:

Be near us now Lord. Let us look together at the day.

Pause for reflection.

Review the day with God. Look at the stirrings of your heart, your thoughts, your choices as the day progressed. Which have been of God? Which not? What does God want to say to you about both?

Pause for reflection.

Give God thanks and ask for forgiveness for any failure or omission, and for healing from their effects. Use these or similar words:

Gracious God, everything is a gift from you.

I give you thanks and praise for the gifts of today, such as

I ask your forgiveness and mercy for

I ask your healing in

Pause for reflection.

Look forward to the next day, and plan concretely with God how to live it according to God's desire for your life. Ask for the graces you desire for tomorrow.

Lord God, continue to be present with me in my life each day.

Pause for reflection.

10 Praying

Living

For prayer to bring strength when we need it, we must pray regularly, even when we think we don't need it at all. Prayer is a habit of life that leads us to reflection, to the consciousness of God, to the hope that is the lighthouse of the soul guiding us always through all the dark places of life.

(Joan Chittister)

How do we move from recognizing the importance of prayer in our life and in the life of our family or household, to the actual practice of prayer in our daily lives? How do we become more skilled at seeing God in all we do?

It is important to remember that prayer takes practice and gradually, we find the rhythm and pattern of prayer that works for us and/or our family. There are many ways to pray. Henri Nouwen reminds us “there are as many ways to pray as there are moments in life. Sometimes we seek out a quiet spot and want to be alone, sometimes we look for a friend and want to be together. Sometimes we like a book, sometimes we prefer music. Sometimes we want to sing out with hundreds, sometimes only whisper with a few. Sometimes we want to say it with words, sometimes with a deep silence.” (Henri Nouwen, *With Open Hands*)

Use the following guide to prepare for prayer and to experience a variety of prayer activities—alone or with your family or household. Try all of these activities so that gradually you will find the rhythm and pattern that works for you. Remember, this is only a start. There are dozens of additional ways to pray that you can learn as you grow in the practice of prayer. (For additional prayer activities, see the other chapters in *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life*.)

Preparing to Pray

Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place, where he prayed. But Simon and his companions went out searching for him, and when they found him, they said, “Everyone is looking for you.”

—Mark 1:35–37

The news about Jesus spread all the more widely, and crowds of people came to hear him and be healed from their diseases. But he would go away to lonely places, where he prayed.

—Luke 5:15–16

At that time Jesus went up a hill to pray and spent the whole night there praying to God. When day came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them.

—Luke 6:12–13

1. A Prayer Time

Set aside a time for daily prayer. This is the single most important thing you can do. When we establish a regular routine for prayer, we will make sure that our prayer life is not done “on the run.” Ten minutes a day is a good start; twenty minutes is better. Set aside a regular time: morning, noontime, before dinner, or before going to sleep at night.

■ When I will pray:

■ When our household will pray:



2. A Prayer Place

We can pray anywhere. We all find places that are special to us, that help us to pray. Jesus did give us wise advice, though, when he taught us to withdraw to our rooms to pray. A sacred space need not always be confined to inside the house or church.

Take advantage of outdoor settings, such as a labyrinth or prayer path at a local church. Walk in a park or on a hiking trail; even a corner of your own yard can be a regular place for prayer. Go for a walk at your lunch break. If you drive to work, leave early and spend time with God, quietly sitting in the parking lot before going in. If you spend a lot of time in your car, make every drive a unique time to meet with God by playing instrumental music as you pray. Personalize your prayer space—keep a Bible, a cross, an icon, a special picture, or a candle nearby.

■ Where I will pray:

■ When our household will pray:

Create a home altar for prayer and ritual. Find a place in your home (e.g., in the kitchen or family room) that you can set aside and decorate as your home altar or prayer space. Include items such as a Bible, candles, art, photographs, prayer books, and prayer petitions on your altar.

3. A Prayer Posture

If we can pray anywhere, we can also pray in any position. Sometimes we have to experiment to discover the prayer posture that works best for us: lying down, kneeling, sitting, or walking.

■ How I will position myself for prayer:

■ How we will position ourselves as a household for prayer:

10 Praying

4. A Prayer Mood

The Lord instructs us to “be still and know that I am God.” We cannot pray well unless we slow down and create the proper mental climate. We must first relax. Creating a relaxed mood for prayer is the last preparation for praying—after we have made time, found a place, and assumed a comfortable position for our prayer. Here are three popular methods for relaxing before prayer:

- *Awareness of our senses.* Sit on a straight chair. Assume a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath, hold it momentarily, and then let it go. Relax your body. Begin with your neck muscles, then your shoulders, your chest and back, your arms and legs. Feel the clothes on your shoulders and back, the press of your legs on the chair. Note your posture. Be aware of your legs, your feet, your hands. Feel the heat or coolness of the room. Repeat this pattern of awareness a second and third time. Feel the tension drain out of your body. Dwell on the part of your body that is most tense. Relax the forehead, the jaw, the neck. Let your arms and legs rest. Come to total stillness. Now you are ready to pray.
- *Breathing.* Take a relaxing position, seated or lying down. Let the tension drain from your body. Now focus on your breathing. Observe your breathing. Note how fast or slow it is. Notice the air as it comes in and goes out. Don't try to control your breathing. Just observe it for a few quiet, peaceful moments. Be aware of how it comes in to fill your lungs, and how it goes out of your nostrils. After a short time spent observing your breathing, begin to count your breaths silently. Count “one” as you inhale; “and” as you exhale. Count “two” as you breathe in again; “and” on the exhalation. Continue your count to 15 or 20.
- *Listening.* Take a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Relax the tension in your body. Feel the tightness drain from your face, your neck, your shoulders, your arms and legs. Feel the air on your skin. Be aware of each breath that you take in and let out. Block

your ears with your thumbs. Listen to each breath as you take it in and let it out. After ten breaths, let your hands rest on your lap. Now be attentive to all the sounds around you. Hear them all, the ones close to you and the ones in the background, the big sounds and the little noises. After a bit, listen to the sounds blend together. Let them penetrate you. Continue with this until you are at rest and ready to turn to prayer.

■ How I will relax myself for prayer:

■ How will we relax as a household for prayer:

A One-Minute Experiment in Prayer

There is a beautiful simplicity in learning to seize moments here and there to connect with God's presence. Even pausing to say the word “Jesus” on occasion, mulling over what he means to you for a few seconds, can have a great impact. This may not come completely naturally for you, though, so here are a few suggestions that can help you pursue the practice until it is woven into the fabric of your daily life.

- *Be intentional.* Start by considering times when you might pause to pray during your day; for example, at meals or at certain times, like 9 AM, noon, and 6 PM. You can also decide simply to think about God in small ways throughout the day whenever an opportunity presents itself.
- *Be God-centered.* One of the most important things we can do to is get to know God. It might be helpful to choose one of God's attributes—such as kindness, mercy, forgiveness, or love—on which to focus for a day or even a week. You could write out Scripture passages that speak of this attribute on cards and carry them with you.



- **Establish “triggers.”** Think of ways your everyday life can be a reminder to meet God in the moment. For example, you might tape a card with a Scripture verse on the steering wheel of your car and glance at it when you stop for a red light, or tape it to your bathroom mirror and pause to reflect on it each time you brush your teeth or comb your hair or wash your hands. You can also practice thinking of God while noticing the beauty of creation—a sunset, a fragrant flower, or a smiling child—when helping a person in need, or when faced with a difficult task or situation.
- **Welcome God’s presence.** God speaks to us often during the day. Take a few moments whenever you can to listen, be attentive to the divine presence, and open your heart to God. Present any issue or situation in which you seek God’s wisdom. Ask if God has something to reveal to you. Be grateful for God’s presence. You can do all of this in a minute’s time, and before long it will become a habit you won’t want to do without.

(Adapted from Tricia McGary Rhodes, *Sacred Chaos: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life You Have*)

Five-Minute Experiments in Prayer

One habit that takes minimal effort but can produce great results is to develop a discipline of taking time when we awaken and when we lay down to sleep, to connect and commune with God. While you may plan other five-minute spaces throughout the day, beginning and ending it in God’s presence lays a foundation and establishes a perspective that affects your entire day.

Upon Waking

- Plan to spend your first conscious moments in the presence of God. If you wake up before your alarm or if you don’t normally set one, quietly affirm that God is present with you as soon as you begin to stir, being grateful that God has been with you through night. (If you wake up to an alarm, quiet your mind first by taking a few deep breaths.)
- Spend a few moments acknowledging the beauty of Jesus, perhaps by focusing on one of his many names in Scripture. You may want to plan for this in advance by choosing one name to focus on for a week or more.
- Offer your day to God as you go about your waking-up routine. Listen for God’s voice, and be open to what God might be saying to you.
- Thank God for all that will happen during this day. Ask God to make his presence known in and through you as you interact with others.

Before Going to Sleep

- Praise God for the ways he has blessed you today. These can be anything from a good meal, a phone call from a friend, the solution to a difficult problem, or an answer to a specific prayer. Try to name at least five things.
- Reflect on your day. Ask God to show you how he has worked in and through you, and thank him for these gifts. Look inside yourself to see if there was an occasion of sin during this day. If so, ask God for forgiveness and healing.
- Speak to God about the people on your mind—your children, spouse, friends, parents, and others—and pray for them accordingly.
- Offer your sleep to God. Ask God to speak to you even as you rest, and enable you to awaken mindful of his presence.

(Adapted from Tricia McGary Rhodes, *Sacred Chaos: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life You Have*)

Ways to Pray

Contemplative Centering Prayer

*O God, you are my God,
and I long for you.
My whole being desires you;
like a dry, worn-out, and waterless land,
my soul is thirsty for you.
Let me see you in the sanctuary
let me see how mighty and glorious you are.
Your constant love is better than life itself,
and so I will praise you.
I will give you thanks as long as I live;
I will raise my hands to you in prayer.
My soul will feast and be satisfied,
and I will sing glad songs of praise to you.
—Psalm 63:1–5*

*In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Spirit is; because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people and in accordance with his will.
—Romans 8:26–27*

Centering prayer is a form of contemplative prayer where we seek to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in the still center of Christ's presence. In this prayer we open our minds and hearts to the presence of God within us. God calls us to friendship. In this kind of prayer we let go of the things that get in the way of our friendship with God. We wait for God as we would wait for a friend. It takes time to become intimate friends. Our relationship with God takes time, too.

In centering prayer we take time to just be with God, realizing that God is beyond all human thoughts, feelings and concepts. In this kind of prayer we do not use thoughts or words. Rather, we let go of any thoughts or feelings when they come to mind so we can make a space for God. The following steps will help you to pray in this way.

- Choose a quiet space where you can be comfortable and where you can be uninterrupted and uninhibited.
- Once you are comfortable, light a candle, take a few deep breaths, and relax. Then set the timer or stop watch for twenty minutes.
- Close your eyes and recall your desire to just be in God's presence.
- Choose a simple word, phrase or verse from Scripture that expresses your desire for God (e.g., love, peace, grace, Jesus, Good Shepherd).
- When thoughts or feelings come into your mind, let them go. Do not give into them or allow them to take you away from God's presence. Distractions will come; this is normal. Think of this kind of prayer as the prayer of "letting go." Don't be surprised if you spend the whole prayer period letting go of thoughts and feelings. Over time you will experience something happening in your life: a new sense of peace, a new awareness of God's great love for you. Be patient! Prayer takes practice.
- Rest in the center of God's love. Trust that the Holy Spirit, who abides in the depths of your spirit, will connect you with God.
- When your prayer has ended, slowly come back to the here and now.

Scriptural Prayer

*Your word is a lamp to guide me
and a light for my path.
I will keep my solemn promise
to obey your just instructions.
—Psalm 119:105–106*

*Speak to one another with the words of psalms,
hymns, and sacred songs; sing hymns and
psalms to the Lord with praise in your hearts. In
the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, always give
thanks for everything to God the Father.
—Ephesians 5:19–20*

As Christians, we believe that one of the ways God is manifested to us is through Scripture. When we prayerfully read the Scriptures, we open our minds and hearts to the Spirit of God. We can be both challenged and affirmed by the Word of God.

Praying with Scripture can be done alone or with others. When done with others, it can be a means of sharing more deeply the faith you attempt to live out day by day. The following steps will help you to use Scripture in prayer.

- Choose a passage from Scripture, about five to ten verses in length. You might choose one of your favorite passages, a Scripture reading from the previous or coming Sunday, or use an index to help you locate a passage that seems to be appropriate for the time or occasion.
- Choose a comfortable place where you can be uninterrupted and uninhibited.
- Light a candle. Take a few moments to get your body in harmony with your spirit. Sometimes it helps to take a few deep breaths or stretch your body, then relax.
- Acknowledge God's presence with you. Ask God to send the Spirit to be with you and guide you in this time of reflection.
- Read the passage you have chosen slowly, out loud, listening carefully to it. You might want to pause after a sentence or phrase.
- Say the words or phrases that struck you. Do not discuss them, just say them.
- Read the passage a second time, slowly and prayerfully.
- Consider the message the passage might have for you: a challenge, an affirmation, or an insight. If you are doing this with others, you could invite them to share what comes to mind.
- Read the passage a third time, slowly and prayerfully.
- Pause for about ten minutes of silence and allow the Spirit to speak to you. If no words or thoughts come, just sit in the silence. Sometimes God touches us in ways we cannot know.
- Following your quiet time, consider how the passage calls you to action. Is there something you need to do to make the Scripture alive for you here and now?
- Close with a brief prayer of thanksgiving or praise to God for the gift of the Spirit.



Intercessory Prayer

Do all this in prayer, asking for God's help. Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads. For this reason keep alert and never give up; pray always for all God's people.

—Ephesians 6:18

May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord, I say it again: rejoice! Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:4, 6–7

One of the time-honored types of prayer is that of intercession, or asking God for what we and others need. Intercessory prayer invites us into God's care and concern for us, our families and friends, and the entire world. No concern is too trivial for God to receive with loving attention. Intercessory prayer, however, is not a means of manipulating God into doing our will. Rather, it is a way we become aware of God's prayer for a person and join in that intercession.

Pray for

- the needs and concerns of your family/ household and friends,
- the needs and concerns of people in your local church and community,
- the needs and concerns of people around the world.

Respond "Lord, hear us" to each petition

Consider keeping a household prayer list on a wipe-off board and placing it where everyone will see it. Encourage everyone to write brief notes about problems or situations for which they would like the household to pray, as well as the names of people for whom they would like everyone to pray.

10 Praying

Praise Prayer

*Come, let us praise the Lord!
Let us sing for joy to God, who protects us!
Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and sing joyful songs of praise.*

*Come, let us bow down and worship him;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
He is our God;
we are the people he cares for,
the flock for which he provides.
—Psalm 95:1–2, 6–7*

We give praise to God for divine goodness, for the mystery and majesty of God. Prayers of praise can be a challenge for us to think about God in terms of someone who deserves our praise. It forces us to not take God for granted. Prayers of praise reflect our own attitude and ability to recognize others for their goodness, especially our ability to simply praise God for being God.

Offer prayers of praise:

“God, you are good and wonderful.
We praise you.”

“God, we praise you for the mystery
that is you.”

“God, we believe that you are holy
and awesome.”

“We praise you for your majesty, O God.”

Thanksgiving Prayer

*How good it is to give thanks to you O Lord,
to sing in your honor, O Most High God;
to proclaim your constant love every morning
and your faithfulness every night,
with the music of stringed instruments
and with melody on the harp.
Your mighty deeds, O Lord, make me glad;
because of what you have done, I sing for joy
—Psalm 92:1–4*

We are grateful to God for the many gifts God shares with us. It is good for us to reflect on the many good things that are ours, which we enjoy and sometimes take for granted, and give thanks to God for all we have and are. It can be

a challenge to thank God for what we need even before we have it, trusting that God will provide for our needs in ways that are best.

Offer thanks to God:

“We thank you, God.”

“We are grateful for your goodness.”

■ Prayer styles I will use:

■ Prayer styles our household will use:

Praying in Families with Children

Prayer needs to be modeled and taught in very simple ways at home. All of the prayer activities in this chapter can be used in a family over the course of a year with increasing intensity and depth. For example, one family joins hands every night before the evening meal. Their prayers are simple, acknowledging God’s presence during that day, giving gratitude for good grades, good weather, good food, good playtime; offering intercessions for those who are in need; and asking to recognize God’s will for each family member. Sometimes this prayer is preceded by a short reading from the Bible or other book of prayers, and is usually followed by a simple song.

Although prayer time takes only a few minutes, its daily repetition acknowledging God’s presence within the family is important and nurtures everyone. At bedtime one family member can lead a short prayer with each child and give a nighttime blessing. Sometimes children like to talk about their problems and concerns; the family can also ask for God’s assistance and for the strength to live as God wants us to.



Online Resources for Daily Prayer

Upper Room

Daily Reflections:
www.upperroom.org/DAILY

Daily Devotional:
www.upperroom.org/devotional

Prayer Resources:
www.upperroom.org/methodx/thelife

Taize

Daily Bible readings and meditation:
www.taize.fr/en_article1000.html

Prayer for Each Day:
www.taize.fr/en_article5806.html

Sacred Space

Daily Prayer Online: [/www.sacredspace.ie/](http://www.sacredspace.ie/)

Daily Lectionary Readings

Online: www.usccb.org/nab/today.shtml

Podcast: www.usccb.org/nab/nabpodcast.shtml

iTunes: "Daily readings from
 the New American Bible"

Pray-As-You-Go: Daily Prayer for Your MP3 Player

www.pray-as-you-go.org

Creighton University

Daily Bible Reading and Reflections:
www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/daily

Prayer is a way of connecting our lives with God's life and God's will for us. Here are several help suggestions for guiding your children in their prayer life:

- Pray as you can in the midst of your busy day.
- Call the child's name in prayer so they know they are important to you and to God.
- Establish patterns of prayer in family life that nurture the practices of prayer in your child from the earliest ages.
- Help children learn to pray by imitation—by watching you pray and imitating you.
- Remember that the repetition of prayers nurtures familiarity and security in children.
- Teach children to use their own words in prayer.
- Encourage children to pray anytime, anywhere, under any circumstance, and to say anything to God they want to say.
- Guide children in experiencing a variety of prayer forms—praise, thanksgiving, spontaneous, petition, and contribution.

Resources for Living the Christian Practice of Praying

Go to our project web site
www.lifelongfaith.com
 for exciting ideas, practical resources,
 and recommended books
 and web sites to help you live the
 Christian practice of Praying.

10 Praying

Praying

Prayer for the Journey

Dear God,
I do not know where you are leading me.
I do not even know what my next day,
my next week or my next year will look like.
As I try to keep my hands open,
I trust that you will put your hand in mine
and bring me home.
Thank you God for your love.
Thank you.
Amen.

(Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*)



A Contemporary Lord's Prayer

Abba in heaven,
your name is holy!
Your justice come,
your will be done,
on earth as in the heavens.
Fill us this day
with all that we need.
Teach us to heal
as you have healed us.
Bring us not to the test,
but deliver us always
from the power of evil.
You alone are God,
and all belongs to you!

(Edward F. Gabriele, *Gathered at the Table in Prayer and Song*)