

Vocation Reflections

November 2023



School Sisters of Notre Dame

Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, SSND Foundress, reminds us:
As God wills! When he calls, we say with Samuel, “Here I am, Lord!”
(Letter #1856: February 1855)

Responding to God’s Call: Uncertainty and Doubt

In the Book of the Prophet Samuel, we read of Samuel’s generous response to God’s call (1 Samuel 3: 10). It is important to recall what preceded this response. In the earlier verses, we learn of Samuel’s misunderstanding of God’s call. Samuel goes to Eli for clarity the first few times God calls him, uncertain that God was really calling him. But with patience, perseverance and guidance from Eli, Samuel recognizes that God indeed is calling him, and his response has been repeated throughout generations.

This biblical discernment process of Samuel is not unlike our own. In the article, “[Vocation’s Unbroken Chain: Biblical Call Stories and the Experience of Vocation](#)”¹, the author, Chris Keeton, highlights the three strands in understanding a vocational call. The third is entitled “Vocation and Certainty.”

“The third strand of thought toward understanding vocation is that certainty is not required. In many Biblical call stories, God consistently leaves in mystery even in the most particular calls. This section explores how uncertainty, and even doubt, play into the discovering and manifesting one’s vocation.”

Joseph and Uncertainty In Genesis 37, Joseph certainly knew that his vocation was tied to his ability to have and interpret prophetic dreams. At first this seems to be yet another example of a Biblical figure easily discovering his calling because of a miraculous message from the divine. But one must not read this story with the ending in mind, because Joseph’s dreams, which began his vocational journey, were not a direct message from God in the sense that Joseph is told explicitly what to do. Joseph is not told who the dream is from. Moreover, Joseph’s father and brothers interpreted the dreams, not Joseph (Gen. 37:8, 10). Joseph’s uncertainty surely grew as his journey continued. After being sold into slavery, he finds some measure of relief in the house of Potiphar but is soon betrayed by Potiphar’s deceitful wife. He is thrown in prison where he exercises his divine gift in the interpretation of dreams but is promptly forgotten. Having been rejected by his family and forgotten in prison, what could Joseph have been thinking at this point? He knows that God is with him and is providing a particular gift (Gen. 40:8), but these communications from God are not direct. God does not provide specific instructions about the future, or even the present. Joseph is forced to remain patient as his uncertain vocational journey unfolds.



Moses and Doubt In Exodus 2:11-14, Moses may have been certain about his desire to help his people, perhaps he even knew that relieving the burden of the Hebrews was his vocation, but certainty surely faded when he was rejected by those people. Many years later, after he gets a wife and becomes a shepherd, he meets God in the burning bush. God invites Moses to renew his desire for his people and return to Egypt. As discussed earlier, Moses refuses this call multiple times because of doubt, among other things. If Moses can doubt his vocation while speaking directly to God, then one may be forgiven for doubting her vocation when divine instruction is considerably more vague. This does not mean that doubt is an approved posture in vocational discernment. God’s extended conversation with Moses was about removing Moses’ doubt. In this way, doubt is similar to a mistake. As long as we remain faithful, God will be gracious and will bring about divine results even in spite of our errors. The point here is that doubt is often an uncomfortable reality in the vocational experience. If it can happen to Moses, then it can happen to anyone.”



Vocation Reflections is a monthly newsletter for those interested in learning more about discernment, prayer, and other topics related to the consecrated/vowed life. For questions, comments and subscription information, please contact sisters@ssnd.org.

¹ Keeton, Chris (2020) "[Vocation's Unbroken Chain: Biblical Call Stories and the Experience of Vocation.](#)" Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry: Vol. 6: Iss. 2, Article 2. pp.26-27.

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REFLECTION

Where have I heard God's call? How do I feel when I hear God's call? Am I uncertain? Confused? Enthusiastic? Doubtful? Who is the Eli in my life with whom I can share these feelings? Do I pray for patience, perseverance, and guidance?

Prayer of Discernment

by Joyce Rupp ([Out of the Ordinary](#), page 222)

Spirit of Guidance, I see before me numerous choices and a decision to be made. There is division in my heart. Sometimes I want none of what I find. Sometimes I want it all. Sometimes I want to give up making decisions and wish that the future would go away. I entrust my decision-making into your hands, ready to do my part but also knowing that I cannot do this without your help. Lead me through all the unsure, unclear, doubtful, hesitant, and questioning moments that are mine as I search to find the right way in which to go. Grant me the grace to choose freely, without being attached to the outcome. I trust that you will be with me as I make my decision prayerfully and with faith. Assure me that your peace will rest deep within me as I make the decision that seems best for me at this time. I may continue to experience feelings of turmoil and confusion, but deep within I know that I can return to that settled place in me where you always dwell.

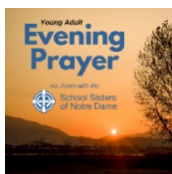
Guide and Director of my life, I place my life in your hands. Lead me to the path that will best deepen and strengthen my relationship with you. Amen.

This month's vocation resource:

Called as witnesses: <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/columns/importance-public-witness-age-decline>

Looking ahead

Click the event title to learn more



Online Evening Prayer

For young adults ages 18-45
November 28, 2023
December 19, 2023
8 p.m. ET / 7 p.m. CT

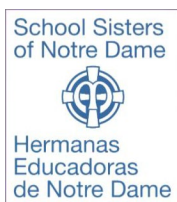


National Vocation Awareness Week

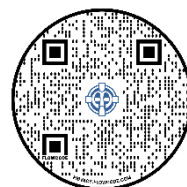
November 5-11, 2023
Take the [Meet Our Sisters Tour](#)

DID YOU KNOW?

Back issues of Vocation Reflections are available [online](#).
Stay up-to-date with SSND Vocations at flowpage.com/ssnd or scan the code below.



God's cause
is the *only* concern of
our hearts
Dios es el único
preocupación
de nuestros
corazones



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