



SESSION TWO :
WHAT IS DISCERNMENT?

LEADER GUIDE



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In this session we will discuss how God has called and gifted each of us for a definite mission. We are able to discern that mission in the classroom of silence—the exterior and interior place where we can be recollected in prayer. If we desire to be a good steward of the gifts and talents God has given us, we need to be willing to put those gifts and talents in the service of the kingdom of God, the Church.

SNAPSHOT

Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Gather necessary supplies and review video segments prior to your gathering. Use the time allotments in the session outline below as a guideline, as the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

| TIME | SECTION | SECTION OVERVIEW |
|--------|---------|---|
| 25 Min | CONNECT | Lead your group in two activities about personal influencers and discernment; then introduce the topic and open in prayer. |
| 45 Min | DISCUSS | Watch and discuss these video segments. Scene 1: Some Definite Service Scene 2: Called and Gifted Scene 3: The Classroom of Silence Scene 4: Disciplines of Discernment |
| 20 Min | COMMIT | Review together the key points, set personal goals, and close in prayer. |

SUPPLIES

- » MEDIA DEVICE TO SHOW VIDEO SEGMENTS
- » BIBLES
- » PARTICIPANT SHEETS

PREPARE

- » HAVE SNACKS READY.
- » CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT.

LEADER TIPS

- » We often include possible responses and material from the *Catechism* after the discussion questions to help you facilitate the conversation. It is best to let group members respond first and share the concepts in parentheses only as needed.
- » This study is about helping students understand what a vocation is and how to properly discern that vocation. Be careful not to appear that you are emphasizing or encouraging one vocation over another.
- » Many young men have been turned off to properly discerning the priesthood as a result of feeling pressured by others.

CONNECT**ACTIVITY****INFLUENCE ANALYSIS**

SAY» When it comes to making decisions, who influences you the most? As I read the following list, share with the group if it's your parents, friends, media, mentors, or your own ideas that most affect your choices in that area.

- Taste in clothing
- Educational interests
- What you do with your free time
- Career interests
- Music
- Favorite sports team
- Entertainment
- Politics
- Your moral values
- Spirituality

ACTIVITY

CRYSTAL BALL

SAY>> Now let's see what others might guess about our futures. We'll go around the circle several times, and when it's your turn I want you to select one person in the group who is most likely to be or do what I read.

- Have at least seven children
- Become a priest/religious
- Have a career in politics
- Run marathons
- Become an engineer
- Have a career in financial services
- Live simply (without a lot of possessions)
- Have a career in law enforcement
- Be an accomplished musician
- Become successful in sales
- Join the military
- Become a missionary
- Travel internationally for business
- Do the most public speaking
- Drive a pick-up truck
- Drive a hybrid vehicle
- Live in a small town
- Live downtown in a major city
- Own livestock
- Be the president of the Parish Council
- Become a Bishop/Mother Superior
- Sing in the choir

INTRO

SAY>> In this session we will discuss how to be discerning when it comes to the influences and decisions we make. And, as we discussed in our last session, the most important decision we have to make in life is our vocation..

SAY>> "Let's open our prayer with a verse from the prophet Jeremiah".

■ *Have someone read Jeremiah 1:5.*

OPENING PRAYER

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations."
—Jeremiah 29:11

PRAY» Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for the gift of our lives. We know that You have created us out of love and for a specific plan. Help us to see the many blessings You give us every day. Lord Jesus, we long to be Your faithful disciples. Forgive us for the times that we fall short and fail to trust in You. Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds so that we might know the will of God and have the desire to follow it.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

DISCUSS

WATCH 1

SAY» Let's watch the first scene of this session.

Watch the first video segment. The video will last about 4 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

Father Martin uses the example of a hammer to demonstrate how things are designed for a specific use, a purpose. To use it in other ways would be inefficient and frustrating.

» What does it mean that your vocation is something hard-wired into your very being?

(Jeremiah 1:5 emphasizes how God knew Jeremiah while he was in his mother's womb and had already consecrated and appointed him a prophet. From all of eternity God has known us and created us for a specific purpose. In that sense, our mission in life is built into us.)

» The Church teaches that Jesus Christ **“fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear”** (Gaudium et Spes, 22). How do you think Jesus reveals to you a deeper understanding of yourself and your mission in life?

(We come to know who God is and who we are in and through Jesus. We are baptized into Christ and become the sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. Galatians 3:27 says: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” In other words, what Jesus is in His nature—the beloved Son of God—we become by grace. Our relationship with God can and should look like Jesus' relationship with His Father. And, just as Jesus was on mission to fulfill the will of His Father, we are united with Christ and are also on mission to fulfill the will of our Father. The purpose of our lives is to be in relationship with the Blessed Trinity and to unite our prayers, works, joys, and sufferings with Jesus for the salvation of souls. Our identity and mission are discovered in Jesus..)

» Jesus says in John 14:12: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father.”** How is it possible for us to do greater works than Jesus?

(To begin, Jesus makes it clear that we have work to do. As John Henry Cardinal Newman wrote: “God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission—I may

WATCH
2

never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purposes...I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work." Secondly, the "greater works" Jesus is speaking about are the quantitative works of His followers, His body, throughout history. This is the reason He gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to His Church.)

SAY>> Let's continue with Scene 2.

Watch the second video segment. The video will last about 4 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

Stewardship is defined as "the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care."

» According to this definition, how was Archbishop Fulton Sheen a good steward?

(Fulton Sheen had many impressive qualities and talents. He was handsome, funny, intelligent, articulate, popular, driven, accomplished, and an excellent writer. We might imagine that he struggled to not use his talents in pursuing his own glory. This is a part of our human, fallen condition. But he was aware that his talents came from God and he surrendered them in the service of the Church. He was a good steward of the gifts God entrusted to him and he impacted many people as a result.)

Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote: "Far better it is for you to say: 'I am a sinner,' than to say: 'I have no need of religion.' The empty can be filled, but the self-intoxicated have no room for God."

» Why does discerning your vocation begin with "I am a sinner"?

(St. John writes: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" [1 John 1:8-9]. One thing God makes clear to us is that He wants us to be holy. St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" [1 Thessalonians 4:3]. Only God can forgive us of our sin and make us holy. God's plan to make us holy is through our vocation.)

» Archbishop Fulton Sheen said: "When somebody says they are Catholic BUT...it means they're really not Catholic!" What was he trying to say?

(When someone says this, you can bet that what follows is going to be a teaching of the Catholic Church that they disagree with. Catholics believe what the Church teaches because: 1) Jesus gave authority to His Apostles to continue His teaching; 2) Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to guide the Apostles in teaching the truth; 3) the Apostles passed on this authority and body of teaching to their successors, the popes and bishops of the Church. The Catechism teaches that "faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed. As personal adherence to God and assent to his truth, Christian faith differs from our faith in any human person. It is right and just to entrust oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely what he says" [150]. This confident assurance in the "fullness of truth" found in the Catholic Church allows us to faithfully discern our vocation.)

SAY» Let's continue with Scene 3.

Watch the third video segment. The video will last about 4 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

Father Martin recommends finding a “sanctuary,” a place of quiet, where you can retreat every day in order to grow in your prayer life.

- » When was the last time you were in a place where it was absolutely quiet?
- » How would you describe your experience in that quiet place? Were you peaceful, or anxious, or bored? Were you aware of God's presence?
- » Father Martin promises that if you commit to making a daily visit to your exterior sanctuary, you will eventually discover an interior sanctuary. What is an interior sanctuary?

(The interior sanctuary is where the soul is alone with God. The Church calls this “recollection.” It includes withdrawing your mind from external and earthly affairs in order to become aware of God's presence. Silence and solitude are a great help to recollection, but it can also be achieved in the midst of your daily activity. The goal of recollection is union with God, and it is necessary for all who wish to attain Christian perfection.)

St. Ignatius of Loyola lived in the 16th century. He developed Spiritual Exercises and Rules for Discernment that are widespread among spiritual directors and the faithful today. While he was recovering from an injury from battle, he became keenly aware of the interior movements of his heart and recognized some of them brought him consolation while others brought him desolation. Consolation was experienced as an enthusiastic love and appreciation for the things of God, while desolation was experienced as doubt, heaviness of heart, and anxiousness. For example, when he was reading books about Jesus or the saints and was recollected in prayer, his heart was on fire to praise and serve God. The Holy Spirit gave him consolation. At the same time, he recognized that when he was trying to live a life pleasing to God, evil spirits would try to discourage him with desolation. (On the other hand, for the soul moving away from God, the Holy Spirit does not give consolation in order to bring that soul back to God.)

- » St. Ignatius taught to never make a decision or change a course of action when in desolation. Why is this good advice?

(Desolation is a sign of the evil spirit at work. God may permit it but He never causes it. When we are discouraged, angry, or afraid, we are not in a good position to make a decision. This is not to suggest that our decisions should be easy. Decisions can be difficult, but we know they are right when we have peace. It is important to be discerning and to grow in awareness of the source of the desolation we are experiencing. Only then can we be in a better place to make decisions.)

- » St. Ignatius also taught that consolation should be tested to be sure it is from God. Why is this good advice?

(The joy and enthusiasm we may feel about a particular course of action or decision does not always mean that it is the right thing to do. There are times that our desires can be confused or our motives misguided. For example, it is common for people to

become overcommitted in doing many “good things” because they failed to discern the “right things” to do. St. Ignatius teaches us to test consolation by evaluating our motives, taking them to prayer, and determining if they are committed solely to doing the will of God.)

» What do you think it means if you feel nothing in prayer?

(We are often tempted to stop praying when we experience dryness in prayer. The lie in this temptation is to think that God is not present. He is always present and always listening. He will often use these “dry times” to strengthen our faith in Him and purify our prayer. Dryness in prayer is an opportunity to evaluate how we are praying. Am I truly being transparent with God? Am I eliminating distractions? Do I love God for Who He is and not how He makes me feel? Am I totally open to His will for my life?)

WATCH 4

SAY» Let's continue with Scene 4.

Watch the fourth video segment. The video will last about 5½ minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

Father Martin explains how to pray like a pirate in order to grow in an intimate relationship with God. ARRR! Acknowledge, Relate, Receive, and Respond. We are going to read a story from Luke 24:13-35. While this post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to two of His followers on the road to Emmaus is probably familiar to you, we are going to see how this prayer method of ARRR is hidden in the story.

ACTIVITY

LUKE 24:13-35

Read through Luke 24:13-35 together; then ask the following questions.

» Verse 16 says, **“But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”** Why do you think Cleopas and his companion did not recognize Jesus?

(For one, Jesus had risen from the dead and was in His glorified humanity. He evidently looked different to them. Secondly, having seen Jesus crucified and laid in a tomb, and troubled by the whole experience, it was not within their realm of possibility of seeing Jesus on the road to Emmaus. We also do not recognize Jesus in our midst when we fail to be recollected in our daily lives.)

» In verse 19, Jesus asks: **“What things?”** Why do you think Jesus asked this question when He knew the things that happened to Him in Jerusalem?

(Jesus knew these “things” were troubling their hearts and He did not want them to be troubled. He is the **“wonderful counselor”** that Isaiah prophesied [Isaiah 9:6] and can give peace to our troubled hearts. **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid”** [John 14:27]. Jesus was giving them the opportunity to acknowledge what was going on in their hearts and relate those things to Him so that He could give them counsel and peace.)

» In verses 19-24, Cleopas and his companion explain the events that happened in Jerusalem. What emotions can you identify in the text that they are relating to Jesus?

(In verses 19-20 they relate their sorrow, maybe even anger, about how the chief priests and rulers delivered Jesus up to death, as they believed Him to be a mighty prophet for all people. In verse 21 they say, “We had hoped,” demonstrating their discouragement. In verse 22 they relate their amazement and confusion, possibly concern and fear also, about the women not finding Jesus’ body in the tomb. And finally, in verses 23-24 we sense their bewilderment over the angels’ announcement that Jesus was alive but no one had seen Him.)

» Having acknowledged and related the things that troubled their hearts, what did Cleopas and his companion receive from Jesus?

(In verse 27 Jesus gives them counsel from the Scriptures concerning Himself. In verse 30, “He took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.” In verse 31, He opened their eyes so they would recognize Him. In verse 32, they share the “burning” or consolation they felt in their hearts as Jesus spoke to them. They were changed through their encounter with Jesus.)

» Cleopas and his companion were clearly changed from their encounter with Jesus. After having acknowledged, related, and received, how did they respond?

(Verse 33 says, “And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them.” Cleopas and his companion went from being sad, troubled, confused, scared, and discouraged to having their hearts set on fire to share the good news of their risen Lord. This is the peace, joy, and hope that Jesus wants to give us in prayer.)

COMMIT

ACTIVITY

TAKE-AWAY

SAY» I am going to go around the circle, starting with the person on my right, and I’d like each of us to share something we remember that this person said tonight.

Take a minute and go around the group, asking everyone to share briefly. Then continue.

Now I want to go around the circle again, this time starting with the person on my left, and I’d like each of us to share one take-away from tonight. In other words, share something that resonates in your heart as a truth to live by.

Give everyone time to share. Then follow up on last week’s commitments before discussing the new commitment.

Father Martin expressed the importance of Scripture, sacraments, friendship, service, retreats, and counsel in order to grow in your relationship with Jesus and discern the vocation He is calling you to. Let's set some personal goals and accountability for each of these areas. I will read each one and ask you to make some notes on your Participant Sheet about what you are willing to commit to.

- » What is a reasonable goal for reading and praying with Scripture? For example, can you commit to 10 minutes a day?
- » What is a reasonable goal for going to daily Mass? Once a week? Twice a week? Daily?
- » What is a reasonable goal for going to Confession in the near future, and how frequently? Will you have a regular confessor?
- » Who is a friend (or two) you are willing to meet with for accountability to these goals, and how often can you commit to meeting? Weekly?
- » What is a reasonable goal for service in the near future, and how frequently? This week? Next week? Once a month? Once every three months?
- » What is a reasonable goal for a retreat in the near future, and how frequently? This month? Next month? Once a year? Twice a year?
- » Are you at a place in your discernment in which it would be helpful to speak with the Vocation Director for the Diocese?
- » Are you at a place in your discernment in which it would be helpful to get a Spiritual Director? If so, who do you have in mind?

CLOSING PRAYER

SAY» Let's close in prayer.

PRAY» Heavenly Father, You have promised us in Your Word: **“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations”** (Jeremiah 1:5). We ask for an increase in faith so that we might trust Your promises without reservation and have confidence that You have a definite mission in mind for each of us. We ask that You would make clear to us in the desires of our hearts the vocations that You are calling us to. And we ask these things through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.