



SESSION ONE :  
**WHAT IS A VOCATION?**

LEADER GUIDE



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God has created each of us with a specific mission in mind. As the prophet Jeremiah affirms: **“For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”** (Jeremiah 29:11). In this session we will define *vocation* in terms of personal identity and mission. In addition, we will discuss how to discern our vocation by beginning with the desires of our hearts and offering those desires in trustful surrender to the will of God.

## 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 to explore values and perspectives; then introduce the topic and open in prayer.
45 Min	DISCUSS	Watch and discuss these video segments. Scene 1: The Author of Our Desires Scene 2: A Future Full of Hope Scene 3: Vocation: To Be Called Scene 4: Trusting God with the Desires of Our Hearts
20 Min	COMMIT	Participants review the key points and commit to courageous daily prayer. Then close in prayer.

## SUPPLIES

- » MEDIA DEVICE TO SHOW VIDEO SEGMENTS
- » BIBLES
- » PARTICIPANT GUIDES
- » PENS OR PENCILS

## 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; share the concepts in parentheses as needed.
- » This study is about helping students understand what a vocation is and how to properly discern their 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****ALADDIN'S LAMP**

**SAY»»** Let's say you have found Aladdin's magic lamp. As you rub it, a genie appears and grants you three wishes—under one condition! They have to come from the following list.

1. A high-paying job
2. One best friend for your lifetime
3. Abiding peace, where the worries and struggles of life never bother you
4. An all-expenses-paid, one-year vacation around the world
5. A large, loving family
6. Peak physical fitness and health
7. National recognition as an expert in your field
8. Inheriting a vast fortune to spend any way that you want to
9. Receiving the Nobel Prize for a significant contribution to humanity
10. Knowing for certain what you are supposed to do with the rest of your life

I am going to read the list again, slowly. When I read a wish you want to pick, make a note of it on your paper. We will then go around the circle and share what we would pick and why.

*Hand out paper and pens, and complete the activity. Set the pace by responding first, and keep an eye on time.*

## ACTIVITY

## LOOKING BACK

Let participants use the same papers for this next activity, but write on the opposite side.

**SAY>>** Now fold your sheet of paper in half. On the left side of the paper, write the number of years for the first half of your life; for example, “1–9” if you are 18. On the right side of the paper, write the number of years for the second half of your life; for example, “10–18” if you are 18. Write them as headers for each side of the paper. I want you to answer three questions in each half of your life.

1. What is the most significant event, either positive or negative, that happened during these years?
2. What was one dream or goal you had for your future?
3. What was your view of God during these years of your life?

Allow time and repeat the questions as necessary.  
After a few minutes, continue with the Introduction.

## INTRO

**SAY>>** If we were to take the time to dig deeply into our experiences, desires, and perceptions of God, we would likely discover important connections between them. For example, if we have experienced unconditional love from our parents, it is more likely that we will have a hopeful outlook on the future and a positive view of God’s love and providence. Likewise, painful experiences in our past can affect our view of ourselves, our outlook on life, and our perceptions of God.

As we begin this study on discerning the vocation that God has for each of us, we want to be sure our thoughts about ourselves and about God are rooted in the truth He has revealed to us. The beginning of discernment is to invite God into our thoughts, feelings, and desires.

## OPENING PRAYER

**SAY>>** Let’s open our prayer with a verse from the prophet Jeremiah.

“For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”  
—Jeremiah 29:11

Have someone read 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 2 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.*

Father Traynor mentions that God is the author of the good, generous, and noble desires of our hearts. I want to give everyone the opportunity to answer this question. So, starting with the person on my left:

» What good, generous, and noble desires are in your heart?

*(Developmental psychologists have determined that when young people find nothing to dedicate themselves to when growing up, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to acquire a motivating belief system later in life. This commonly results in low self-esteem, depression, and a host of self-destructive behaviors.)*

» Why do you think a sense of purpose in life leads to a stronger self-esteem and positive behavior?

*(Self-respect is having confidence in oneself. It is defined as "a feeling that one is behaving with honor and dignity." Honor and dignity are acquired when there is integrity with one's beliefs and actions. Faith gives a sense of purpose and meaning in life that inspires someone to grow. If life is meaningless, there is no great cause to draw someone out of his or her own selfish interests.)*

### WATCH 2

**SAY»** Let's continue with Scene 2.

*Watch the second video segment. The video will last about 4½ minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss the following questions.*

Father Traynor had the intelligence, talents, and discipline to succeed in Navy ROTC and pursue his dream of being a fighter pilot. However, he had doubts if he would truly be happy in this occupation and began to question the motives underlying his desire. He gained greater clarity around his desires when he decided to pursue a relationship with Jesus.



Some worldviews, like Buddhism, teach that personal fulfillment is found in eliminating your desires to the point of wanting nothing. Other worldviews, like hedonism, teach that personal fulfillment is found in indulging your desires in order to maximize pleasure.

»» What did Jesus teach us about desire?

*(Jesus taught that the things of this world are ultimately unfulfilling. He says in Matthew 6:19-20: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.” That being said, Jesus did not teach that all desire is bad and should be eliminated. After all, God has made us to have desires. Jesus wants us to desire the treasures of heaven, which can only be found in Him, and therefore invites us to direct the desires of our hearts to Him. The purpose of detachment from the things of this world is to achieve deeper union with God. Psalm 37:4 says: “Take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”)*

»» What does this saying mean to you? “No Jesus, no peace! Know Jesus, know peace!”

*(Jesus promises in John 14:27: “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.” If our relationship with Jesus is the first priority of our lives, then we will have the peace and confidence to face anything in life, including our future.)*

Katharine Drexel was born in 1858, became Sister Katharine Drexel in 1891, and was canonized St. Katharine Drexel in 2000. As an heiress to a fortune, Katharine Drexel could have had a comfortable, luxurious lifestyle. Instead, she used her personal fortune to start schools for Native Americans and African Americans and founded a religious community to serve them. She wrote: “If we wish to serve God and love our neighbor well, we must manifest our joy in the service we render to Him and them. Let us open wide our hearts. It is joy which invites us. Press forward and fear nothing.”

»» St. Katharine Drexel demonstrates that life is not about what you have but what you give. Why do you think joy is found in service to God and others?

*(Jesus says in John 15:11: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” Service to God and others puts our own preferences second. Selflessness brings great freedom, peace, and joy. Selflessness allows God’s love to more easily flow through us.)*

WATCH  
3

SAY»» Let’s continue with Scene 3.

*Watch the third video segment. The video will last about 5 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.*

Vocation comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which means to **be called to something**. To be called means that someone is calling you. Before anything else, God is calling you to be in relationship with Him. It is in that relationship that God invites you to make a difference in the world through a particular state of life.

- » Father Traynor makes a distinction between the jobs he does as a priest and his vocation as a priest. Why is this distinction important?

*(Our vocation is about finding our true identity in God. Our identity is based upon who we are and not what we do. Jobs come and go, but our vocation is forever. God, in His eternal love and wisdom, created Father Traynor to be a priest. God knew that Father Traynor could be most closely configured to Jesus Christ in the vocation of the priesthood. And that is the goal of our vocation – to become like Jesus.)*

- » According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average worker today stays at one job for 4.4 years. For younger workers, it is even less. Why do you think so many workers are changing jobs so frequently?

*(Unlike the Baby Boomer generation, who started jobs with the goal of gaining stability, raising a family, and “settling down,” those in the Millennial generation are more concerned with finding happiness and fulfillment in their work [Net Impact Research: What Workers Want in 2012]). Happiness and fulfillment are the reasons vocation has a higher priority than occupation.)*

- » Jesus says: **“My Father is at work until now, so I am at work... Amen, amen, I say to you, a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his Father doing; for what he does, his son will do also”** (John 5:17, 19). What is the work of the Father that Jesus is speaking of, and what does this have to do with our vocation?

*(The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “God is love: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God freely wills to communicate the glory of his blessed life. Such is the ‘plan of his loving kindness,’ conceived by the Father before the foundation of the world, in his beloved Son: ‘He destined us in love to be his sons’ and ‘to be conformed to the image of his Son,’ through ‘the spirit of sonship.’” [CCC 257]. The work of the Father is the salvation of the world through His Son and in the Holy Spirit. The vocation God has for us is an invitation to participate in this work. Our lives could have no greater purpose than that!)*

## WATCH 4

**SAY»** Let's continue with Scene 4.

*Watch the fourth video segment. The video will last about 5 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.*

On the one hand, Father Traynor desired that God would raise up strong, holy priests for the Church. On the other hand, he had no desire to be one of those strong, holy priests. So he prayed a very courageous prayer: “Father, if you want me to be a priest, I need You to give me the desire to be a priest!”

- » Why is this a courageous prayer?

*(It took courage for Peter to respond to Jesus' beckoning by stepping out of the boat and attempting to walk on water. Peter had to trust Jesus. Faith is trustful surrender. Father Traynor's prayer was submitting his will to the will of God, which is a courageous act of faith. He trusted that God's will would make him most happy, and he trusted that God would reveal His will to him.)*



Pope Francis told the pilgrims at World Youth Day Rio 2013: “God calls you to make definitive choices, and He has a plan for each of you: to discover that plan and to respond to your vocation is to move toward personal fulfillment.”

- » What do you think would be personally fulfilling about the priesthood? What do you think would be personally fulfilling about consecrated life? What do you think would be personally fulfilling about married life?

*(God’s plan for you is a plan of love. He desires that you would be perfected in love. The Church calls this “perfection of love” holiness. The vocation God has for you is uniquely designed for your holiness. We were created to be personally fulfilled in holiness.)*

## COMMIT

### 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.

This week’s commitment is to pray daily as Father Traynor recommended. First, be attentive to the desires of your heart. Second, tell God those desires. And third, ask God to build up and make strong the desires that are from Him and to take away those desires in your heart that are not from Him.

As we close in prayer, I want to read to you an excerpt from a homily by Pope Benedict at the inaugural Mass for his pontificate. While this message was for everyone, he was especially directing it to young people.

## CLOSING PRAYER

“Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to Him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and He gives you everything. When we give ourselves to Him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ—and you will find true life. Amen.”

—Pope Benedict XVI

**PRAY >>** Heavenly Father, You have promised us in Your Word: **“For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”** (Jeremiah 29:11). We ask for an increase in faith so that we might trust Your promises without reservation. We ask that You would make clear to us in the desires of our hearts the vocation that You are calling us to. And we ask these things through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.