



**W**elcome to this resource on discernment. This is designed with young adults and college students in mind, although the hope is that it might serve any individual or group looking to tend to the holy work of listening for God's call(s). The goal is to provoke curiosity, wonder, learning, exploration, listening, and action.

Discernment is often much more about asking a good question than finding an answer. You'll notice there are many questions woven throughout these pages. You don't have to use or ask all the questions. Choose which ones fit best with your particular community and context or the ones that feel Spirit-led in this particular time. Questions are also listed in the journal so individuals can use them for reflection at any time.

However you respond to God's call, it will be within a community and context. Though the material can be engaged individually, there is value in discerning in community and through the important relationships in your life. If you are working through these sessions individually, definitely spend time journaling as you reflect and reach out to trusted discussion partners along the way for deeper engagement. As wise folks have said of vocational discernment, "this is solitary work that you can't do alone."

Within this resource (and in the accompanying journal) are short reflections from seminary students, candidates, and ministry leaders, along with reflective questions. The hope is that their

words might resonate with your group's experiences and/or stir new questions or insights for discernment. In a small group you might read them aloud and see what response it sparks among participants.

**The Goal is to provoke curiosity, wonder, exploration, listening, and action.**

### **Group Facilitators:**

If you are facilitating a group, **thank you.** It is a holy gift to be able to hold space for things that matter and to accompany a group in exploring together and listening for God's call. This might also be a great opportunity to have a young adult as a facilitator or co-facilitator to design and lead your group experience.

**Choose the questions that feel Spirit-led.**

In the midst of much ecological, political, personal uncertainty and overwhelm, vocational discernment can be an antidote to hopelessness and despair. This matters. And it can make a difference. You may want to begin by setting some guidelines or covenants. If you are already an established group, you probably already have your process and norms. Still, it might be valuable to mark this space and these engagements as unique. The [Circle of Trust Touchstones](#)<sup>1</sup> from the Center for Courage and Renewal and the [Covenants of Presence](#)<sup>2</sup> from the Forum for Theological Exploration are both helpful resources. When we don't explicitly state the intentions and guidelines for a group, there is a tendency to default to dominant cultural norms, which can be exclusionary and/or confusing. You can **help create brave space** by being intentional about holding this space as unique. Discernment requires courage and vulnerability and spending time up front establishing norms for your group discussions will be valuable in creating opportunities for sacred time together.

create brave  
space by being  
intentional  
about holding  
discernment as  
unique space

**For further reading on Brave Space:** [From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces](#),<sup>3</sup> [The 6 Pillars of Brave Space](#).<sup>4</sup>

**The appendix** includes several spiritual practices that can be engaged within a group setting, along with a collection of poems, prayers, and blessings that include themes of discernment and vocational reflection.

Depending on how you are engaging the material, length of sessions, etc, you may want to pull from these resources to enrich your time together.

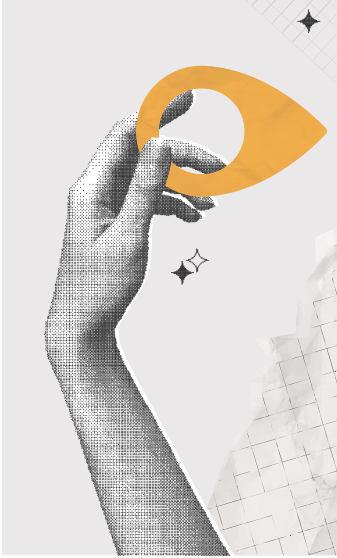
Whether exploring discernment as a group, or as an individual, it is worthwhile to encourage individuals to keep a journal and to take time to reflect individually. Reflection requires space and time. Journaling can also help individuals pay attention to themes, to what is stirring in these conversations, and as a way to reflect on spiritual practices they may be engaging with between sessions. This can become valuable for one's own processing. Try not to over-do content, but leave space for the Spirit to move and guide.

Group participants may want to start this process by sharing where they are currently in their discernment process. Do they have a specific question they are trying to engage? Are they wanting to explore options? Are they curious about how to listen for God's call or what God's call even means? Remind folks that discernment is lifelong work, so their questions and intentions might change over time.

**Finally**, there are lots of options throughout this resource. It is not meant to be an entirely linear document. We've tried to design this so that it can be as flexible as possible, molding to your needs wherever possible. You know your context best. Depending on your community, how much time you have, particular interests in the group, and/or your own energy and enthusiasm, we hope you will choose what works, add your own perspectives and resources, and adapt as needed. There are suggestions and ideas for how you might adapt sprinkled throughout. Please create in concert with what is provided here.

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# Definitions

Before we get into the substance of this resource, a few definitions might be helpful.

## Vocation

Comes from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning “to call.” Dorothy Bass says “vocation” is the Christian answer to the question, “What shall I do with my life?”<sup>5</sup>

Another ELCA resource says it this way: “To have a vocation means to be in relationship with someone whose voice summons our response and calls us to action.”<sup>6</sup>

Pacific Lutheran University (one of our ELCA Colleges & Universities) articulates that, “vocation is being called into relationships to promote human and ecological flourishing.”<sup>7</sup>

The authors of *Another Way: Living & Leading Change on Purpose* describe vocation this way: “the long arc of a life spent searching for purpose and acting out a call.” They define purpose as “the telos or end to which a life aims” and call as “the episodic, time-bound expression of purpose, as it bubbles up over the course of a lifetime.”<sup>8</sup>

Vocation is often used interchangeably with calling. Vocation may include one’s job or career, but they are not synonymous. Vocation is much more expansive.

## Ministry

Service to God, others, and the earth. This can look a lot of different ways, but in the ELCA we claim that all of us are ministers. Some individuals might specifically be called to professional ministry as a minister of word and sacrament (pastor) or minister of word and service (deacon), but all engage in ministry. The New Testament uses the Greek word *diakonos* to describe the act of serving or ministering.

Now is the time to know  
That all that you do is sacred.

Now, why not consider  
A lasting truce with yourself and God.

Now is the time to understand  
That all your ideas of right and wrong  
Were just a child's training wheels  
To be laid aside  
When you finally live  
With veracity  
And love.

Hafiz is a divine envoy  
Whom the Beloved  
Has written a holy message upon.

My dear, please tell me,  
Why do you still  
Throw sticks at your heart  
And God?

What is it in that sweet voice inside  
That incites you to fear?

Now is the time for the world to know  
That every thought and action is sacred.

This is the time  
For you to compute the impossibility  
That there is anything  
But Grace.

Now is the season to know  
That everything you do  
Is sacred.



## Discernment Questions

Here are a few thoughtful questions you might have at the ready to begin a group, for conversation as people are arriving, or anytime the Spirit nudges.

Whether you use these or other questions, a helpful question to dig deeper is to follow up with Why? (You'll notice many of these include a Why?). This invites deeper, more vulnerable, and more courageous reflection. These questions could also be used as journal prompts for individual reflection in between group discussions.



The following questions have been collected from sources including [NetVUE](#), [Conversation Cards](#),<sup>9</sup> and [Practicing the Way](#).<sup>10</sup>

1. How would you title this chapter in your life journey? Why?
2. What's something you regret quitting when you did, or something that you wish you had quit sooner? Why?
3. If you were asked to give a 15 minute presentation on anything, without any prep, what would you talk about? Why?
4. What is a current injustice that you feel strongly about? Why?
5. What are you currently curious about? Why?
6. What is a memorable piece of advice you received (was it helpful or terrible)? Why?
7. If you could have God respond to one question today, what would it be? Why?
8. What conditions seem to bring out your best self? Your worst self? Why?
9. What are you currently learning about yourself?
10. What was the last encouragement someone shared with you that had a meaningful impact? How?
11. If your future self could give you advice for this current season of your life, what might they say? Why?
12. Humans, too, are creatures of the Earth. How does the reminder that you are part of Earth's ecosystems shape your sense of identity and purpose?
13. What is happening in the wider world, and how are those events shaping your sense of purpose?
14. Where do you seek wisdom when things do not unfold as planned?
15. What is something you are being invited to pay attention to by someone or something outside yourself (God, the universe, other people)?
16. What is the difference between "making a living" and "making a life"? Do your needs for making a living impact your ability to make a life—or vice versa?
17. What gives you courage to step into an unknown future?
18. What quirk of your personality could help you make a meaningful contribution to God's world?
19. What was a difficult decision you have had to make? How did you decide what to do in that situation?
20. How does your background (such as your socioeconomic status or religious commitments) affect your decision-making?



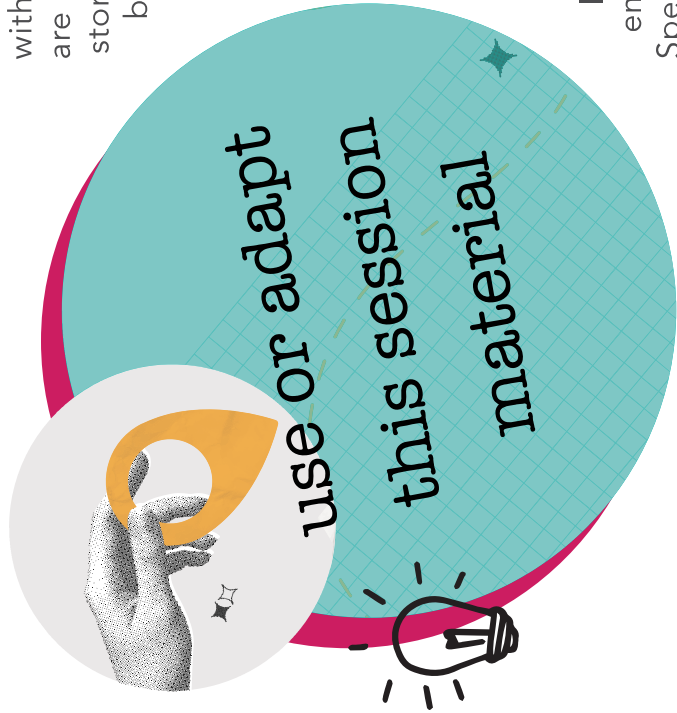
# I Scripture: Calling In & Through The Bible

**God communicates and calls in many ways,**

including through creation, in prayer and spiritual practices, as well as with and to individuals and communities. Some of these experiences of God calling are found in the Bible and for many this is an important source through which they receive a sense of their own calling. In this session we will focus on how the Bible might aid in discernment by reading and reflecting on biblical stories of call and by asking questions of our own lives in connection to these sacred stories.

**Our Goals:**

- 📖 provide some foundations for how Lutherans have traditionally read the Bible
- 🗨️ introduce the concept of a shared Christian vocation
- 🗨️ explore several call stories in the Bible, and identify some shared themes
- 🙏 share the spiritual practices of lectio divina and Centering Prayer as practices that support discernment



with the group the connections they are making between one of the biblical stories and their own lives. This could be informal in a discussion group, or a more formal part of worship (i.e a sermon reflection).

See the appendix (pg. 60) for an example of a Bible Study format.

### Lectio Divina Series

In each session choose a text and engage with it through Lectio Divina. Spend time in discussion and journaling specifically connected to discernment. Perhaps provide a few of the prompts from the appendix ("reflection after spiritual practice") following each practice. See sample format for Lectio Divina with a specific text in the appendix.

### Sermon Series or Bible Study Series

Choose a different call story each week to reflect on, coming back to common themes and relating to your particular community context as well as individual participants' life experiences.

**It is helpful to...** get specific and concrete to connect more fully with your participants, rather than speaking in generalities about calling.

This might also be an opportunity for young people in your group to provide some leadership for one of the sessions by preparing in advance and sharing

A voice said,

"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"  
—Luke 9:35

The command is not to believe, or even to remember, but to listen.

In stillness, apart from the screaming news, listen.

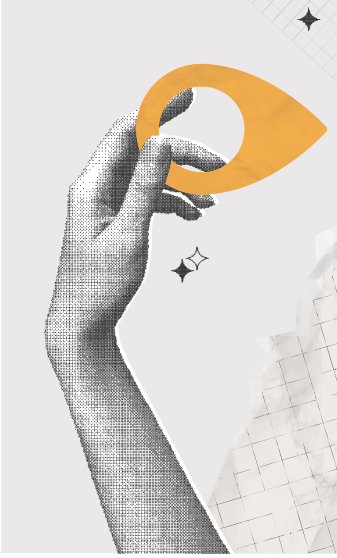
Let your fears and opinions sit quietly in the corner and talk amongst themselves; let them go; ignore them.

In silence, listen even if only to the sound of your own breathing, listen for the silence that is God, the cloud that is unknowing, the presence you can trust without feeling.

And if nothing comes to you, keep the silence. Honor the cloud. Keep listening.

Listen | Steve Gamaas Holmes





## Background

### How Lutherans Read the Bible

Christians read scripture in a lot of different ways. It may be helpful to begin with some exploration of how Lutherans have traditionally read the Bible. In addition to your own knowledge and ways you have talked about this in your ministry, this short article is a good introduction: [Scripture Study, Lutheran Style](#).<sup>11</sup> Here are a few highlights from the article that may be helpful for foundation setting:

Examples of how Luther approached scripture:

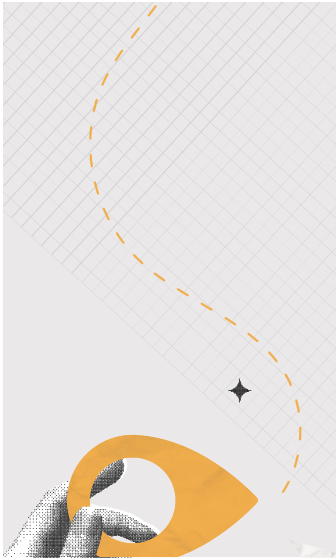
- He questioned scriptural authorship claims, identified perceived errors and admitted confusion.
- He challenged interpretations that were harmful to real people.
- He refused rigid rules of interpretation because of Scripture's complexity.
- He acknowledged that some Scripture passages conveyed Christ better than others.
- He quoted, recited, studied and revered Scripture to his dying day.

Recognizing that some in your group may have experienced harm from the ways the Bible has been misused, it might be important to explicitly name that reality



**“Unfortunately, Scripture has indeed been used to harm, enslave and condemn. But evil uses of a good thing do not make it evil. Social reformer Frederick Douglass understood this. Eyeing interpretations condoning slavery, he asked: ‘What do we do in such a case? ... Do you go and throw your Bible into the fire? ... Do you sing out, ‘No union with the Bible!’ Do you declare that a thing is bad because it has been misused, abused, and made bad use of? ... No! You press it to your bosom all the more closely; you read it all the more diligently; and prove from its pages that it is on the side of liberty—and not on the side of slavery’ “**

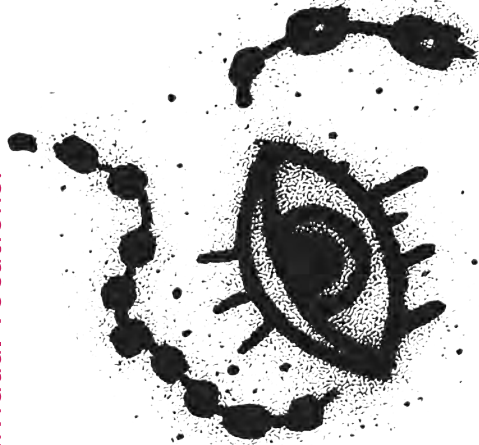
The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, Vol. 3 1855-63; ed. John Blasingame; Yale University Press, 1985



# Shared Vocation

## Shared Christian Vocation

All Christians share a vocation and each of us has unique, individual vocations.



Have you thought about a sense of shared vocation before?

What might be the value of having a collective, shared calling?



Throughout scripture, in both the Hebrew scriptures and New Testament, is the recurring declaration that the greatest commandments are to love God (with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength), and to love your neighbor (including our more than human neighbors) as you love yourself. Another way of saying this might be that God expects us to love our neighbor (especially the stranger, outcast, immigrant, refugee, enemy) as God loves them. This is our shared Christian vocation.

Paul talks about the body of Christ and the value and importance of each of the members (1 Corinthians 12:1-30). This is how our shared vocation is embodied, by each member of the body contributing to the whole.

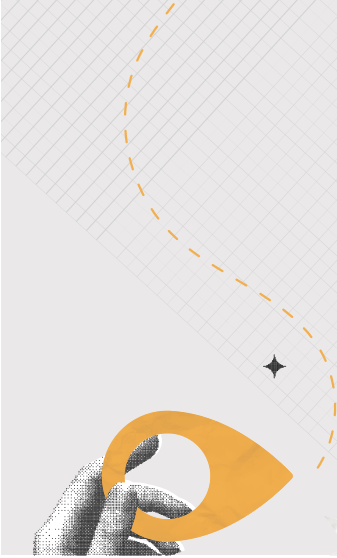


*“Many people mistake our work for our vocation. Our vocation is the love of Jesus.”  
— Mother Teresa*

In what specific ways do you feel like you contribute to the body of Christ?

What might be the value in recognizing your specific contribution?





# Shared Vocation

## Opening Practice: Lectio Divina

Mark 12:28-34

or part of 1 Corinthians 12:1-30

 see pg. 64 for a step by step Lectio Divina guide

Are there other scripture passages that you would call to mind as a way to talk about our shared Christian vocation?

For example:

**Micah 6:8**



What is the shared vocation of your congregation/campus ministry/group?  
**In other words**, how does this group/community love God, love neighbor, love self in your specific context?

What role in the body of Christ does your group or community play?



### FACILITATOR SUGGESTION:

If you are leading multiple discussions on calling in the Bible, invite someone in the group to share a Bible passage that is foundational to their faith and use Lectio Divina with that text in future sessions.



# Shared Vocation

## **You Can't Do It All**

But you are called to do something!

Christians share a vocation: to love God, neighbor (including Creation) and self. And, we each have individual and unique callings. Sometimes discerning God's call can be overwhelming as we feel like we have to solve all the problems and serve all the people and creatures. And graciously, we are limited human beings who can't do it all (by design!). This is part of why we need community in order to join God in the work of justice, peace, and the in-breaking of the reign of God.

Because we belong to a shared vocation, each individual contributes to the greater whole (the body) with their unique callings. Each individual discerning and following God's call is a piece of the communal calling.

We also are part of a shared vocational community with those who have gone before us, our ancestors in the faith. We learn and grow from their wisdom, mistakes, both faithfulness and faithlessness, and questions. And, we are part of a shared vocational community with those who will come after us, our descendants (whether biological or not). We enter into a vocational story that began long before us and will continue long after us, and that is even bigger than humanity. Our faith helps give us a longer perspective on God's ancient and vast story and keeps us from the distorted beliefs that it's singularly up to us to fulfill God's call on the world OR that we have nothing to contribute in response to God's call on the world. Bishop Ken Untener's prayer *A Step Along The Way* (often associated with Oscar Romero) is a lovely connection to this sense of shared vocation.

Stories from the Bible serve as one way we can connect with our ancestors in the faith who in their time and place sought to follow God's call on their lives. While certainly our contexts are quite different and we likely have valid critiques, the invitation to encounter their stories as gifts might help shape our own questions and our own discernment.

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.  
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,  
it is even beyond our vision.  
We accomplish in our lifetime only  
a tiny fraction of the magnificent  
enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of  
saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.  
No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted,

knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces

far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything,

and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,

a step along the way, an

opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter

and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,

but that is the difference between the master builder

and the worker.

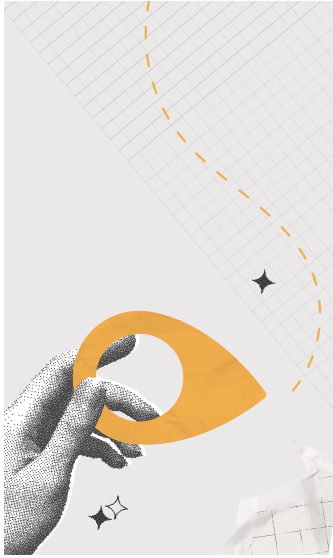
We are workers, not master builders;

ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

A Step Along The Way | Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw

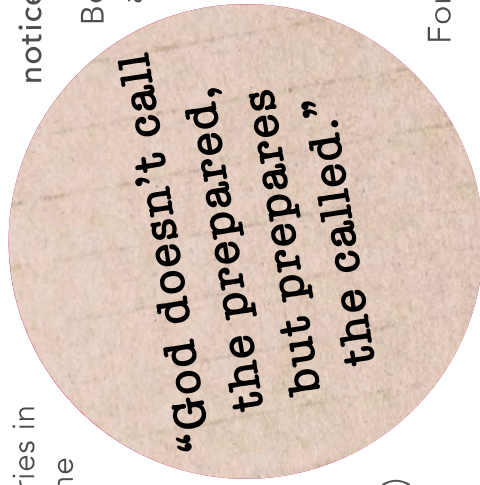




# Call Stories

As you explore call stories in scripture, there are some recurring themes you might notice:

- A sense of feeling unworthy/beyond capacity (could be a feeling in oneself or one projected by others)
- Callings are contextual - they take place within a particular time, place, and community
- Listening and attention are key factors
- God provides what is needed (a helper, the words, etc. You've probably heard the phrase: "God doesn't call the prepared, but prepares the called.")
- The calling requires response/consent



Before reading the story aloud, invite participants to think about (and write down in their journal) at least 1 "I notice" (observations) and 1 "I wonder" (questions about the text and/or one's response to it).

For example:

I notice that first Moses turns to look at the bush and then God speaks.

I wonder why Saul was so against "any who belonged to the Way."

I notice that I feel solidarity with the women whose words were deemed "an idle tale."

I notice that 1 Samuel's description of "the times" feels similar today - "the word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread."

I wonder what the symbolism of the earthquake is in Matthew 28.

## Call Stories:

### A Discernment Practice

Hopefully this practice provides a starting point and pathway into encountering the following stories as wisdom for discernment. Note that this is not an exhaustive collection of scriptural call stories. You may have other stories you want to explore.

One way to enter into call stories in scripture is a **practice** of "I notice" and "I wonder."



I Notice...

I Wonder...

1. Read the story aloud.

2. Have the group share "I notice" and "I wonder" observations.

You can either open up discussion and go with the flow, or invite each person to share (without too much commentary at first) their noticings and wonderings and then have a deeper discussion following the energy and interest of the group.



### FACILITATOR SUGGESTION:

you might print this page and share these call story themes asking participants to name where they see them along the way, or ask the group what themes they notice **after** reading a few stories together.

# Call Stories

## Questions, Questions, Everywhere

Here are some general reflective questions to ask, whether individually, or in a group setting.

💡 Where do you see evidence of our shared vocation (to love God, love neighbor and creation, love self) in this call story?

👉 What surprises you in this story? Why?

🌀 Where do you experience resonance and/or resistance (in your own self) in connection to this story? Why?

👉 Have you had an experience that feels in any way similar to this story? Share about it.

👉 What is stirring in you about your own calling after reading this story? What wisdom or learning might you glean from this ancestor in the faith?

👉 What questions are you left with?

## The Stories

The following pages contain stories to explore in two formats for printing.

The first is a condensed list of stories with their questions, intended to conserve paper (pg. 14-17).

The second, you'll find each story listed on individual pages with related questions and white-space for notes, doodling, or various "I notice" and "I wonder" thoughts.

Use the format that makes the most sense for your context.

### 💡 Facilitator Suggestion:

If you would like a practice other than "I notice, I wonder," as described on pg. 12, go to pg. 60 for a simple Bible Study format.

# Call Stories

(the condensed list version)

## Reflective Questions

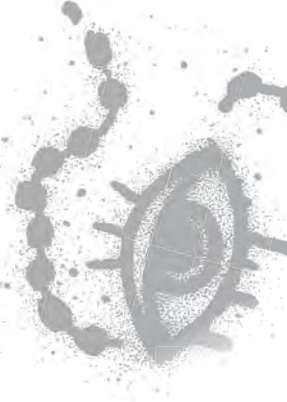
Some questions you might ask the group or journal about as an individual:

- 🔦 Where do you see evidence of our shared vocation (to love God, love neighbor and creation, love self) in this call story?
- 👁️ What surprises you in this story? Why?
- 👂 Where do you experience resonance and/or resistance (in your own self) in connection to this story? Why?
- 🗣️ Have you had an experience that feels in any way similar to this story? Share about it.
- 🌀 What is stirring in you about your own calling after reading this story? What wisdom or learning might you glean from this ancestor in the faith?
- 🗨️ What questions are you left with?

## 1 Samuel 3:1-10

(the calling of Samuel)

- Mentors can help us listen. Who is (or could be) a mentor in your life that can help you listen to God? Why might this be useful? What has a mentor helped you hear?
- What Samuel hears in this call is difficult and he knows it will hurt his mentor (more details on that further in the passage). Samuel responds faithfully (encouraged by Eli) and speaks the truth. Where have you been called to speak the truth? How did you discern that it was worth taking the risk?
- What voices (however you understand that) have been most influential in your life so far?
- Which of the common themes noted above do you notice in this text?
- Optional activity: See pg. XX for a Mentor Exercise (adapted from Karen Walrond in *The Lightmaker's Manifesto*)



## Exodus 3:1-12

(Moses and the burning bush)

- Moses is curious and his curiosity leads him to wonder about and then go to investigate this bush. What role do you think curiosity plays in discernment? What's a current curiosity you have about your own calling? How might you explore that further?
- Moses first turns his attention to the bush and then God speaks. I've often recalled this story as Moses turning to look at the bush because he hears God's voice. But in the story God's voice comes after Moses turns to look. What is the role of attention in discerning and listening to God? Are there ways you practice this kind of attention? Are there places you currently give your attention that don't feel useful or life-giving? How might you practice intentional attention to God?
- Moses expresses fear and doubt ("Who am I?"). How does God respond? Have you ever felt called to do something you felt totally unequipped for? What was your experience? What did you learn?
- Moses is given a big calling - liberate God's people. And, it was also very specific - liberate God's people the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. Often people articulate a sense of calling as "I want to help people" or "I want to make

a difference." If calling is to a specific context (time, place, people), how might this help you focus your sense of calling? Is there a context (time, place, people) that calls to you now?

- Which of the common themes noted above do you notice in this text?

### **Jeremiah 1:4-10** (the calling of Jeremiah)

- Jeremiah expresses doubt in this calling: "I am only a boy." When have you felt too young for what you were asked to do? Or, when have you felt dismissed in your calling because of your age? In what ways do you think being young is an asset to responding to God's call?
- God gives Jeremiah the promise of God's presence and even says "now I have put my words in your mouth." Have you ever had the experience of feeling like you were given the words (by God) in a particularly challenging situation?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

### **Jeremiah 29:4-14**

(message to a community calling in exile)

- It's not just individuals that have callings, but communities can be called, too. This passage from Jeremiah is addressed to a community in exile and they are given a vocation.
- How would you describe the calling for this community?
- How do you think it felt to hear this calling in the midst of exile?
- "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jer 29:7). How do you understand or experience the interdependence of our individual and communal welfare in our current context?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

### **Exodus 1:8-22**

(the Hebrew midwives called to disobey power)

- Shiphrah and Puah are two of only a handful of named women in scripture, serving as midwives to the Hebrew people. They are commanded by the king to murder Hebrew boys, but they disobey this order.
- In this story there is not a direct call from God (at least one that is recorded). Where do you think Shiphrah and Puah's sense of calling to disobey the king of Egypt came from?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

### **Jonah**

(turning away from a calling, at least initially)

- In this fictional story (that still contains a lot of truth), Jonah is a reluctant prophet. When God calls to him, he goes the other way (Jonah 1:1-3). Have you had the experience of going the other way when you felt a call from God? What did that look like? Why do you think you had that reaction?
- After Jonah flees, God calls to him a second time (Jonah 3:1-5). This time Jonah listens and follows God's



instructions (perhaps half-heartedly). What do you make of God's persistence? Does that bring your comfort, fear, or something else? Why?

- Jonah doesn't feel good about his success in following God's call to the people of Nineveh, who immediately believe him and repent. Who can you imagine feeling similarly about? Who's your "Nineveh"? Could/would you follow a calling you didn't agree with?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

### **Luke 1:26-38** (the call of Mary)

- Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel and her initial responses include being much perplexed and pondering (vs. 29). How have you experienced being perplexed and/or pondering in response to a possible calling from God? What do you think the role of being perplexed and pondering might be in your own reflection and discernment?
- Mary had a few questions (vs. 34 - "How can this be, since I am a virgin?") and questions are often critical for discernment. What questions have/might you ask in response to sensing/hearing a calling from God?

- Mary's response ultimately is "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (vs. 38). What do you think is the role of consent in responding to a calling?

- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

### **Matthew 3:13-17** (Jesus' baptism)

- In this story John is called to baptize Jesus (and feels very inadequate!), but consents. In what ways can you relate to these feelings of inadequacy to support God's mission in the world?
- When Jesus is baptized, the voice from heaven says, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (vs. 17). More than even being called to do something, a calling from God starts with affirmation of who we are. What do you make of this voice's words, before Jesus does anything of note? What might that mean for us?

- Immediately after his baptism, Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Spirit (the gospel of Mark says the Spirit "drove" him into the wilderness). Here he is tempted by the devil and seems to experience a clarifying sense of call as he responds to false promises/calls

from the devil. Sometimes hardship or challenge can have a clarifying effect on our sense of call. Have you experienced a hardship or challenge as an experience of clarifying? How so?

- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

### **Matthew 10:1-23** (Jesus' sending of the 12)

- Here Jesus calls and sends the 12. They are given authority and a mission/message. In what ways does this mission/message connect with how you feel called to serve God? In what ways does it feel quite different?
- The 12 are told not to take much with them on this journey. The Message translation says, "You don't need a lot of equipment. You are the equipment..." What do you feel like you need before being able to respond to a calling from God? What might be provided along the way?

- Jesus tells them that they are not always going to be received well and will even be persecuted (vs. 16-23). When have you had a message/mission you felt called to that was not well received? Why do you think that was?

- When they are handed over to the authorities, Jesus assures them “Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say,” that what they need to say will be given to them, and that “it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (vs. 19-20). Have you ever felt like you have been given words to speak in a difficult situation that came from beyond you? What did you say? How was it received?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

### Matthew 28:1-19

(Mary Magdalene and Mary at the tomb)

- The women are the only ones who show up to the tomb, the place of death and grief. Why do you think that is? When have you been called to show up in hard places?
- The angels give the women a message and they leave the tomb to go tell the disciples. The text says they left “with fear and great joy.” What do you make of that mix of emotion—fear and great joy? When’s a time you felt both fear and joy at the same time? How might that be significant?

- On the way the women encounter Jesus and he sends them again. Why do you think Jesus appears to deliver the same message as the angels? Have you experienced a calling that came from multiple people/places?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

### Luke 24:1-12

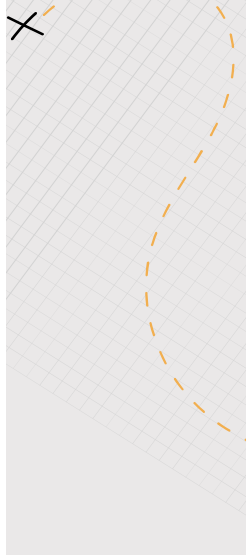
(“an idle tale”)

- As in all the gospels, it’s the women who go to the tomb after Jesus’ crucifixion. In Luke’s account they encounter two men in dazzling clothes who give them a message (or remind them of a message they had already heard from Jesus). Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women share what they have seen and heard with the apostles. “But these words seemed to them [the apostles] an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (vs. 11). When have you been discounted or belittled while trying to pursue a calling? Was it because of an identity you hold? How have you handled this discrimination? Have you ever discounted a message because of the messenger? (Surely we all have!)
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

### Acts 9:1-22

(Saul’s transformation, and the calling of Ananias)

- Saul was a persecutor of those “belonging to the Way.” After an encounter with a voice (later identified as Jesus) he moves through a process of transformation, doing a 180-degree turn from his previous ways. Have you ever been called to do a total turn around from a direction or belief? What prompted the change in direction (transformation)?
- Ananias is also called in this story. In a vision, God calls him to help Saul. Ananias is reluctant and likely afraid (Saul is known for “breathing threats and murder”), but accepts the call and follows the instructions. Why do you think Ananias took this risk? What risks have you taken based on what you felt called to do? How did you decide to do it anyway?
- “Is this not the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name?” (vs. 21). Saul changed, but unsurprisingly, not everyone was convinced. It can be hard to change when people have already decided who you are. Have you had the experience of undergoing a drastic change that was hard for others to accept or understand?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?



# Call Stories

## 1 Samuel 3:1-10

### The calling of Samuel

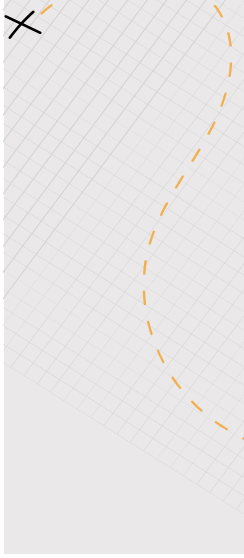


- Mentors can help us listen. Who is (or could be) a mentor in your life that can help you listen to God? Why might this be useful? What has a mentor helped you hear?
- What Samuel hears in this call is difficult and he knows it will hurt his mentor (more details on that further in the passage). Samuel responds faithfully and speaks the truth. Where have you been called to speak the truth? How did you discern that it was worth taking the risk?
- What voices have been most influential in your life so far?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. XX above do you notice in this text?
- Optional activity: See pg. XX for a Mentor Exercise (adapted from Karen Walrond in The Lightmaker's Manifesto)



I Notice...

I Wonder...



# Call Stories

## Exodus 3:1-12

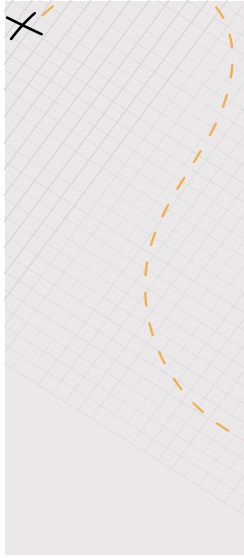
### Moses and the burning bush

- Moses' curiosity leads him to go investigate this burning bush. What role do you think curiosity plays in discernment? What's a current curiosity you have about your own calling? How might you explore that?
- Moses turns his attention to the burning bush and then God speaks. What is the role of attention in discerning and listening to God? Are there ways you practice this kind of attention? Are there places you currently give your attention that don't feel useful or life-giving? How might you practice intentional attention to God?
- Moses expresses fear and doubt. How does God respond? Have you ever felt called to do something you felt totally unequipped for? What was your experience? What did you learn?
- Moses is given a big and specific calling: liberate God's people (the Hebrews) from slavery in Egypt. Often people articulate a general sense of calling like "I want to help people," or "I want to make a difference." If God calls people to a specific context (time, place, people), how might this help you focus your sense of calling? Is there a context that calls to you now?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. XX do you notice in this text?

I Notice...

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# Call Stories

## Jeremiah 1:4-10

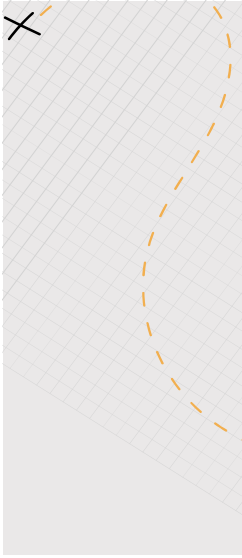
The calling of Jeremiah

- Jeremiah expresses doubt in this calling: "I am only a boy." When have you felt too young for what you were asked to do? Or, when have you felt dismissed in your calling because of your age? In what ways do you think being young is an asset to responding to God's call?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?



I Notice...

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# Call Stories

## Jeremiah 29:4-14

Message to a community calling in exile

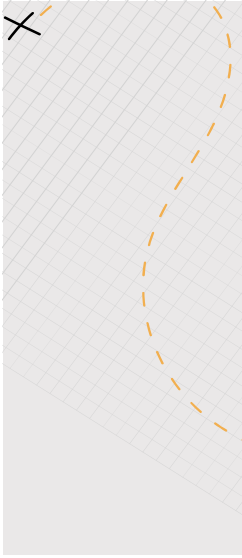
- It's not just individuals that have callings, but communities can be called, too. This passage from Jeremiah is addressed to a community in exile and they are given a vocation.
- How would you describe the calling for this community?
- How do you think it felt to hear this calling in the midst of exile?
- "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jer. 29:7). How do you understand or experience the interdependence of our individual and communal welfare in our current context?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?



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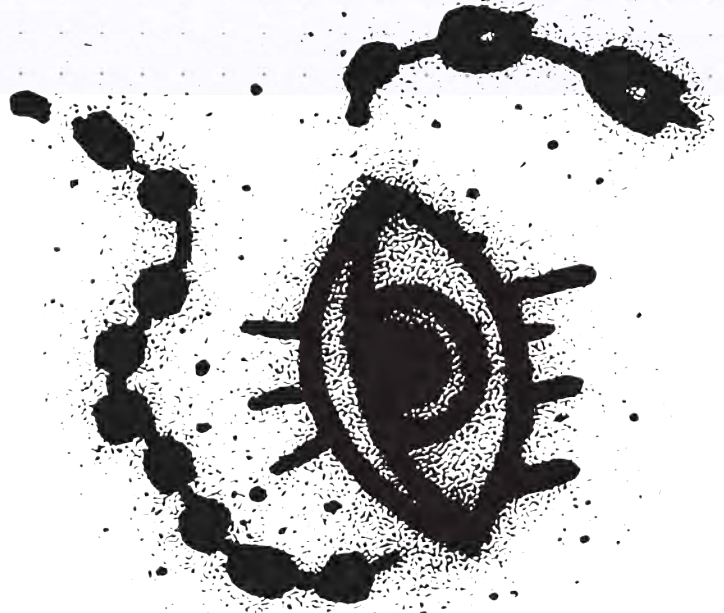


# Call Stories

## Exodus 1:8-22

The Hebrew midwives called to disobey power

- Shiphrah and Puah are two of only a handful of named women in scripture, serving as midwives to the Hebrew people. They are commanded by the king to murder Hebrew boys, but they disobey this order.
- In this story there is not a direct call from God (at least one that is recorded). Where do you think Shiphrah and Puah's sense of calling to disobey the king of Egypt came from?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

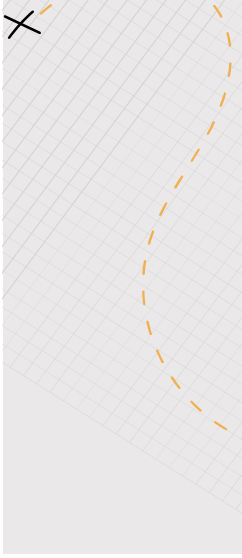


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# Call Stories

## Jonah

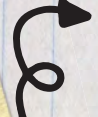
Turning away from a calling, at least initially...

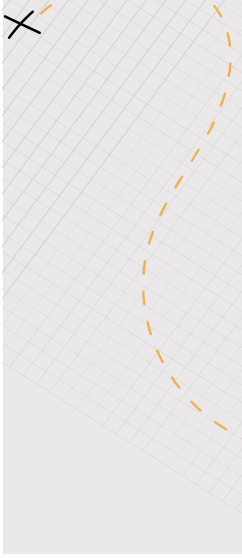
- In this fictional story (that still contains a lot of truth) Jonah is a reluctant prophet. When God calls to him, he goes the other way. (Jon. 1:1-3). Have you had the experience of going the other way when you felt a call from God? What did that look like? Why do you think you had that reaction?
- After Jonah flees, God calls to him a second time. (Jon. 3:1-5) This time Jonah listens and follows God's instructions (perhaps halfheartedly). What do you make of God's persistence? Does that bring you comfort, fear, or something else? Why?
- Jonah doesn't feel good about his success in following God's call to the people of Nineveh, who immediately believe him and repent. Who can you imagine feeling similarly about? Who's your Nineveh? Could you follow a calling you didn't agree with?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?



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# Call Stories

## Luke 1:26-38

The call of Mary

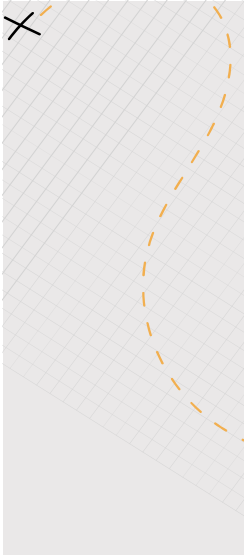
- Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel and her initial responses include being much perplexed and pondering. (Lk. 1:29) How have you experienced being perplexed and/or pondering in response to a possible calling from God? What do you think the role of being perplexed and pondering might be in your own reflection and discernment?
- Mary's response ultimately is "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Lk. 1:38). What do you think is the role of consent in responding to a calling?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?



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# Call Stories

## Matthew 3:13-17 Jesus' baptism

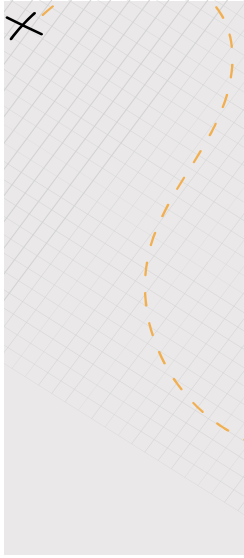
- In this story John is called to baptize Jesus (and feels very inadequate!) but consents. In what ways can you relate to these feelings of inadequacy to support God's mission in the world?
- When Jesus is baptized, the voice from heaven says, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:17) More than even being called to do something, a calling from God starts with affirmation of who we are. What do you make of this voice's words, before Jesus does anything of note? What might that mean for us?
- Immediately after his baptism, Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Spirit (the gospel of Mark says the Spirit drove him into the wilderness). Here he is tempted by the devil and seems to experience a clarifying sense of call as he responds to false promises/calls from the devil. Sometimes hardship or challenge can have a clarifying effect on our sense of call. Have you experienced a hardship or challenge as an experience of clarifying? How so?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?



I Notice...

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# Call Stories

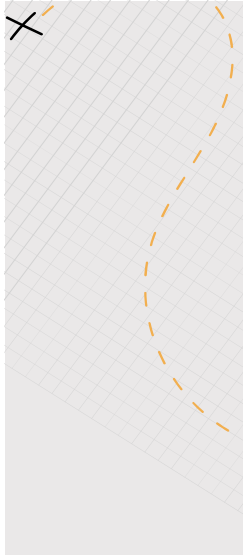
## Matthew 10:1-23 Jesus' sending of the 12

- Here Jesus calls and sends the 12. They are given authority and a mission/message. In what ways does this mission/message connect with how you feel called to serve God? In what ways does it feel quite different?
- The 12 are told not to take much with them on this journey. The Message translation says, "You don't need a lot of equipment. You are the equipment..." What do you feel like you need before being able to respond to a calling from God? What might be provided along the way?
- Jesus tells them that they are not always going to be received well and will even be persecuted. (Matt. 10: 16-23) When have you had a message/mission you felt called to that was not well received? Why do you think that was?
- When they are handed over to the authorities, Jesus assures them "Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say," that what they need to say will be given to them, and that "it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (vs. 19-20). Have you ever felt like you have been given words to speak in a difficult situation that came from beyond you? What did you say? How was it received?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

I Notice...

I Wonder...





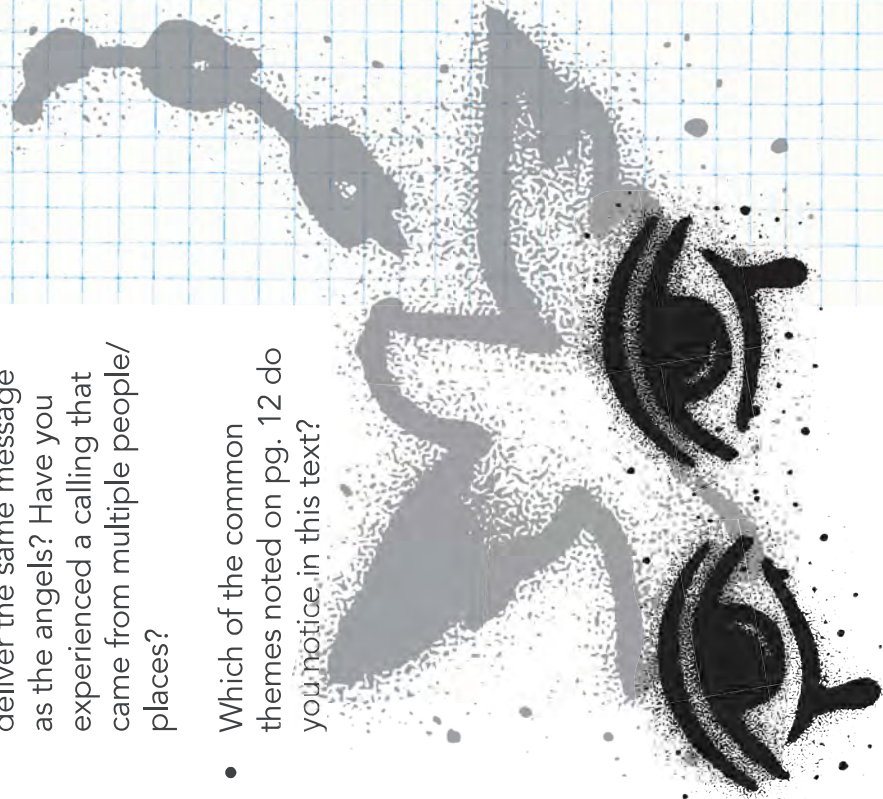
# Call Stories

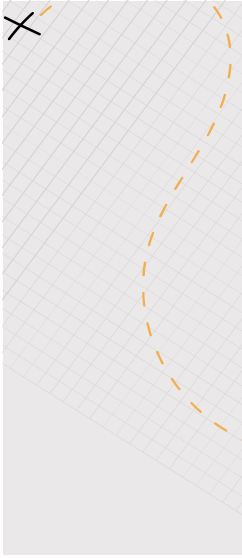
**Matthew 28:1-19**  
Mary Magdalene  
and Mary at the tomb

- The women are the only ones who show up to the tomb, the place of death and grief. Why do you think that is? When have you been called to show up in hard places?
- The angels give the women a message and they leave the tomb to go tell the disciples. The text says they left “with fear and great joy.” What do you make of that mix of emotion—fear and great joy? When’s a time you felt both fear and joy at the same time? How might that be significant?
- On the way the women encounter Jesus and he sends them again. Why do you think Jesus appears to deliver the same message as the angels? Have you experienced a calling that came from multiple people/ places?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?

I Notice...

I Wonder...





# Call Stories

## Luke 24:1-12 "An idle tale"

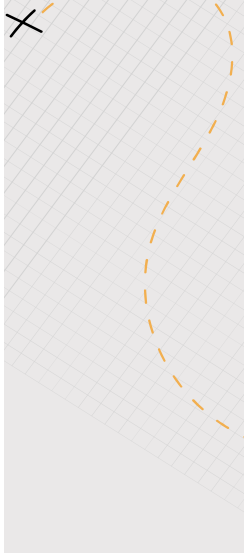
- As in all the gospels, it's the women who go to the tomb after Jesus' crucifixion. In Luke's account they encounter two men in dazzling clothes who give them a message (or remind them of a message they had already heard from Jesus). Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women share what they have seen and heard with the apostles. "But these words seemed to them [the apostles] an idle tale, and they did not believe them." (Lk. 24:11) When have you been discounted or belittled while trying to pursue a calling? Was it because of an identity you hold?
- How have you handled this discrimination? Have you ever discounted a message because of the messenger? (Surely we all have!)
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?



I Notice...

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# Call Stories

## Acts 9:1-22

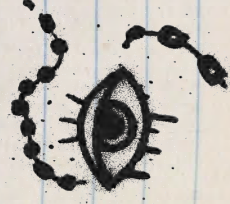
Saul's transformation,  
and the calling of Ananias

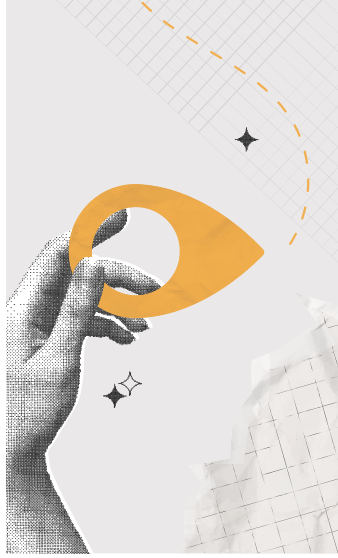
- Saul was a persecutor of those "belonging to The Way." After an encounter with a voice (later identified as Jesus) he moves through a process of transformation, doing a 180-degree turn from his previous ways. Have you ever been called to do a total turn around from a direction or belief? What prompted the change?
- Ananias is also called in this story. In a vision, God calls him to help Saul. Ananias is reluctant and likely afraid (Saul is known for "breathing threats and murder"), but accepts the call and follows the instructions.
- "Is this not the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name?" (Acts 9:21) Saul changed, but unsurprisingly, not everyone was convinced. It can be hard to change when people have already decided who you are. Have you had the experience of undergoing a drastic change that was hard for others to accept or understand?
- Which of the common themes noted on pg. 12 do you notice in this text?



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## Closing Session

### 2

#### Centering Prayer

There are often a lot of words when engaging scripture: ancient words and our own. As we close, this is a time to let those words go. Centering Prayer is sometimes called the prayer of consent. In this practice you consent to opening yourself up to God's presence and action.

See pg. 61 for a simple Centering Prayer guide.

### 1

Have each participant share 1 thing that will stick with them from today's discussion or 1 thing they want to keep thinking about more from today, and Why? Have them write their reflections in their journal.

Option: circle back to this at the beginning of the next session as a check in.

### 3

Here are some additional prompts that can be used for individual journaling and/or group discussion following Centering Prayer (or any of the spiritual practices):

- What was this process like for you? How did it feel to experience this practice?
- Where did you feel this practice in your body?
- What felt significant to you during the spiritual practice?
- What did you experience God communicating with you?
- Where is there an invitation for you today in this practice? How will you respond to this invitation?

#### Pray Together:

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### FACILITATOR SUGGESTION:

If participants are interested in exploring this practice further, there is an excellent free app called Centering Prayer (from Contemplative Outreach) that guides you through a practice. If you are doing multiple weeks engaging the topic of calling in scripture, have participants try out this practice for a week and share their experience with Centering Prayer when you gather together again.





## Pastor Jen Rude

currently serves as the University Pastor at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, WA, where she finds joy and meaningful challenge in accompanying students, faculty, and staff in learning and discovery, engaging big enough questions, and listening together for God's call to imagine and practice ways of living that are more rooted in compassion, justice, meaning and purpose. Her other calls have included serving as the program director for Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries and as an Outreach Minister with The Night Ministry in Chicago. In 2007, Jen was extraordinarily ordained at Resurrection Lutheran Church in Chicago and served there as Associate Pastor. After policy change at the national level removed barriers for partnered LGBTQ clergy, Jen was received onto the ELCA roster in 2011. Jen has a Masters of Divinity from Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, CA and a B.A. from Augustana University in Sioux Falls, SD. Outside of work, Jen enjoys walking and running in the neighborhood, podcasts and reading, decluttering, meals with friends, and living in beautiful Tacoma with her spouse Deb Derylak. | [author](#)



## Rev. Sam LaDue

serves in a call which combines campus ministry at Stanford University, where she pastors the only queer-affirming progressive Christian community on campus (affectionately known as the "Gay Jesus Group"), with year-round pastoral ministry at University Lutheran Church in Palo Alto, CA. She is a self-proclaimed "joy junkie," finding energy and beauty in creativity and communion. Prior to rostered ministry, Sam served as Director of Communications for San Francisco Night Ministry and as a communications and leadership development professional within a specialized sector of the hospitality industry. Her ministry background includes extensive work in liturgy and music direction in both Roman Catholic and Lutheran contexts. Sam received an MDiv from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and an MA in Practical Theology from the GTU, both in Berkeley, CA. She recently had the honor of serving as Artist-in-Residence and liturgist at Holden Village for Queer Renewal: Wilderness & Homecoming. When not pondering the universe and its complexities through mediums such as photography, glitter, and paint, Sam enjoys cycling, hiking, and life with her dog, Crispy. | [www.samrladue.com](http://www.samrladue.com) | [design](#)