

Should you hire a spiritual director to find your purpose?

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If you feel like you haven't found your vocation yet, Mary Sharon Moore, a spiritual director and author, has five questions for you.



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For many people, a spiritual direction relationship often begins as an attempt to understand their vocation, which goes beyond career and relates to your life purpose. [Mary Sharon Moore](#), a spiritual director and author in Oregon, frequently walks through this discernment process with her directees. Often, the first step is to simply be still.

“[Spiritual direction is] definitely a form of conversation that is very different from the kind of conversations that we typically engage in, in an electronic, social media saturated culture,” says Moore. “It’s a conversation with a trusted other that is woven together by the silences as much as by the words. And it offers a person the opportunity to actually encounter God’s love for them. The dialogue is about what they’re experiencing, what they’re not experiencing, and at some point in the conversation they realize: ‘God is caring about what I care about,’ and it becomes holy conversation, and in fact, that’s how I describe it: holy conversation.”

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Moore has been a spiritual director since 2002, but in reality, she can trace her path much further back than that. “When I look back at my life, even in my 30s, which was 35 years ago, people would come to me and talk, sometimes just really fall apart, as they were telling their story. I didn’t have a name for it, and I didn’t know what I was doing, but I did not feel inconvenienced by these encounters. I felt okay simply receiving their story, and maybe just saying: ‘I am so sorry. I am with you, I am so sorry.’ I was doing that naturally for decades, not knowing that the work I was doing was that of a spiritual director.” In a sense, each conversation was helping her to find her vocation, and those experiences are part of what makes her able to accompany others on their journey now.

Often people struggle to find a deeper calling because of how easy it is to conflate career with vocation, or fail to recognize a vocation already present in your life. “Vocation may or may not have anything to do with a job; it has everything to do with joy,” says Moore. She often asks her directees what they are already doing on a regular basis (job or hobby), and what they enjoy most about it.

Sometimes it’s hard to recognize that joy, because it cannot be simplified to be mere happiness. “It may be a very deep sober joy. Let’s say it’s working with people in their final days, or those in the throes of addiction. Both are noble pursuits where you aren’t coming home at night and saying ‘Yippee Skippy, I just had the greatest day of my life!’ But there is a deep grounded knowing that ‘Yes, God is alive in my experience as I do this.’”

“*People often tell me, “My job is killing me.’ My first comment to them is, ‘pay attention to what your language is telling you.’”*

But what if that joy isn’t present? How can we suss out our vocation, then? “I work with a number of people, and have worked with a number of people over time, who are in jobs, careers, that are killing them. And they will say it themselves: ‘My job is killing me.’ My first comment to them is, ‘pay attention to what your language is telling you.’” Because recognizing what isn’t your calling can be just as important as finding what is.

For many of Moore’s directees, the process takes years. The investment and risk in pursuing something new can be daunting, even terrifying. But Moore says it’s one worth seizing. “As baptized men and women of God, we are given one life, which is the opportunity to touch life, not to touch death. And our lives must be made up of those things that give us life. Because that’s the only thing we have to pass on to anyone else.”

To help people along, Moore invites her directees to use their imagination (which she calls “the sandbox of the Holy Spirit”). This often looks like open-ended questions and daydreams that help people learn to listen to the Holy Spirit, and tease out the first inklings of a vocation. Then they discuss what steps might be needed to make that life path idea a reality.

When someone approaches Moore wishing for spiritual direction, she offers five questions for contemplation before having an initial conversation. These questions are intended to encourage the potential directee to begin listening to their own inner self, in concert with the Holy Spirit.

Moore's 5 questions:

What gives me joy?

What robs me of joy?

What breaks my heart? (Moore says this is an opportunity to align ourselves with what breaks God's heart.)

What am I resisting?

What am I accepting?

She believes answering these questions lays the foundation for a lifelong journey of listening, both with a spiritual director, and alone. Take some time and sit with these questions for a while. If you're feeling stuck about your vocation, want to go deeper spiritually, or wondering if there's something more for you, it can't hurt to listen, alone or in the company of another. You never know what you might hear.

INTERESTED IN SPEAKING WITH A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR?

Start with your local church community. Often, churches have relationships with spiritual directors, or might be able to point you in the right direction. Members of local religious communities may offer this service as well.

You might also want to check out this [spiritual director finder](#) (a resource of Spiritual Directors International) to find a list of spiritual directors in your area.

Remember, finding your vocation and strengthening your relationship with God can come in all shapes and sizes, from clergy members and professional directors to faithful friends and loved ones. The process of entering into a spiritual direction relationship is one of mutual discernment. It's worth it to wait for the right timing and the right person.

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