

Discover Your Mission In Life



Christopher News Notes

EVERYONE STRIVES TO FIND PURPOSE AND MEANING IN LIFE, BUT WHAT ABOUT YOUR PARTICULAR MISSION? As Christians and children of God, we believe that "God made us to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next," states the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. But how does that apply to our earthly mission? And can our mission change as life's circumstances change?

Discerning Your Mission

Discernment is an important part of finding one's vocation, which is tied closely to mission. During our youth, we learn from teachers, parents, coaches, and role models. In doing so, we learn about ourselves—our strengths and weaknesses—and what it is that attracts us. The quiet voice of God can speak to us in those vocational attractions. Perhaps we enjoy working with our hands more than conversing, or maybe the opposite is true. These early experiences can help us uncover the talents that God has given us, and like the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, we are expected to return our gifts with greater abundance than what we were given.

Doctor Tom Catena, a native of Amsterdam, NY, has spent the past decade in Sudan's Nuba Mountains, in the midst of a violent civil war. In 2015, he told Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times* that he is the only doctor permanently based at the Mother of Mercy Hospital, serving a population of nearly half a million people. Amid the bombings, he works without electricity, running water, or any kind of modern medical equipment. The reason? He is driven by his Catholic faith.

"I've been given benefits from the day I was born," Dr. Tom said. "A loving family. A great education. So I see it as an obligation, as a Christian and as a human being, to help." In speaking with *The Daily Gazette*, he added, "The need in Nuba is great and Jesus gave us some very simple instructions—'take care of these least of My brothers and sisters' and 'sell all you have, give it to the poor and come follow Me.' Perhaps I take things too literally, but these are words for me to live by."

What we enjoy doing can be a good starting point for discernment. If we discover where our talents and happiness are best used for the glory of God and the good of our fellow man, we are likely to be on the right track.

Kathy Izard of North Carolina found her mission in life through the experience of seeing her mother

Find Your Mission in Times of Spiritual Dryness

Periods of spiritual dryness can be especially challenging. During these times, when we struggle to figure out what it is we ought to be doing, Archbishop Fulton Sheen offered excellent advice to break out of negative patterns and get back on track. He points out that we cannot simply think our way into finding our purpose. We have to get out there and live it.

"The solution is to love people whom you see," Bishop Sheen said in a 1950 broadcast of *Life is Worth Living*. "Visit the sick. Be kind to the poor. Find your neighbor, and your neighbor is someone in need. Once you do this you'll begin to break out of the shell [of egotism] and discover that your neighbor... is a creature of God. I am suggesting that you will not just *reason* yourself into the meaning and purpose of life, you will *act* yourself into the meaning and purpose of life by breaking the shell of egotism and selfishness...If we do not love those whom we see, how can we love God, whom we do not see?"

struggle with mental illness. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she described the difficulties in getting a proper diagnosis for her mom, as well as the heroic love she saw her father display in his many years of caring for his wife. Through this example, she was drawn to non-profit work, first as a volunteer and later as a full-time employee. Izard met people who challenged her to help the homeless. After a revival of her personal faith, she became committed to helping homeless people with mental illness through *Hope Way*, a residence and treatment center in Charlotte.

Challenges and failures can teach us much about our mission and the love that God has for each of us. And through difficulties, no matter how dark the night may be, God can bring goodness and purpose to our lives.

Mary Monnat, the CEO of LifeWorks Northwest, spoke to *The Catholic Sentinel* about her struggle with—and recovery from—alcoholism. Though she originally intended to become a lawyer, Monnat's experiences led her into a career of chemical dependency counseling, helping others recover from addiction. She connects with patients in a profound way because she speaks with the authority of experience. "My intervention found my career, my passion," she said. Today she leads an organization that helps 21,000 people each year.

Times of Change and Challenge

No matter what our chosen profession, job, or vocation, as Christians we are called to be living examples of Christ's love in the world. Our call is for all times and circumstances, and in this we can take great solace. The loss of a job, or an unexpected life change, may shake our confidence—perhaps even lead us to despair that we've lost or failed our mission. But our hope in Jesus and the Gospels has much to say to us. For our mission is not so much a *task* but a *way* of living.

In an interview with The Christophers, award-winning singer-songwriter Audrey Assad reflected on her changing mission in life as she became a parent to young children. Rather than feel like she was losing her old mission as an evangelist to thousands through her music, she focused on her calling to do small things with great care.

"Everybody, from your plumber to your pastor, has a God-given call to be who they are and to do what they're doing," said Assad. "For me, particularly as a mother who is at home a lot right now doing invisible things all day, I take refuge in the idea that me sucking the snot out of my daughter's nose is ministry. A lot of us are living in a reality where we don't feel like the things we're doing lend us any significance whatsoever in the eyes of other people or in our own eyes. The beauty of being fearfully and wonderfully made by God is

that all of our actions, done out of love, are fragrant to God.”

Difficulties will no doubt be present. They are a part of life, and can come more frequently the deeper one gets into a job or vocation. But these are not signs of God’s abandonment. Challenges and changes can be God’s way of calling us further into our mission, through letting go of our visions of success in exchange for a deeper, more trusting relationship with Him.

By the time André Bessette came to the Congregation of the Holy Cross, an order of religious brothers in Canada, he had already had a difficult life. Orphaned at age 12, he was a sickly child who had failed at numerous attempts to earn a living: as a farmhand, shoemaker, baker, blacksmith, and finally as a factory worker. When he arrived at the Congregation in 1870, he was 25, ill and illiterate—not a promising start for a life with a teaching order. It was only on the bishop’s recommendation that he was taken in.

Bessette was given the humble job of doorkeeper at Notre Dame College in Montreal, with additional duties as sacristan, laundry worker and messenger. “When I joined this community, the superiors showed me the door, and I remained 40 years,” he said.

In that small room by the entrance, Brother André met with many visitors. He was always compassionate and offered what spiritual guidance and material help he could provide. He consoled the

sick, and prayed for healing for them—blessing them with a special oil that burned in a lamp in the chapel. Word of his healing success spread, which until his death in 1937 he always attributed to the prayers of St. Joseph and never to himself. Today, St. André Bessette is known for his humble and persistent faith that founded the St. Joseph Oratory on Mount Royal.

As we age, relationships become more important and begin to overshadow our professional accomplishments when we think about our mission in life. That’s what journalist John Leland learned as he spent a year getting to know several people over the age of 80 for a book he was writing. That book, *Happiness is a Choice You Make*, showcases the wisdom and experiences of those seniors.

During an interview with the *Albany Times Union*, Leland noted that none of the people he spent time with spoke of their professional successes or business accomplishments. What they enjoyed talking about most were their relationships with friends and family members. The author writes, “What I called happiness was a perspective of my age. I was still making my place in the world, looking to the future; Fred Jones (one of the subjects) described instead a view from old age of taking satisfaction in what was available right now.”

The Universal Call

God is calling each one of us to find our mission in life right now, no matter our past successes or failures. It may be a radical change, or it may be to serve those around us in a deeper way. It will almost certainly call upon both our strengths and our weaknesses. To try and love more perfectly, more patiently, and with greater tenderness is a mission we’re all called to each day. No matter what our vocational call or personal mission, this is a universal call that exists for every Christian, so that the hope of Christ can be made real in the world.


**“It’s better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness.”**

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“Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.”

—St. Catherine of Siena