

God's Longing for Us Fulfilled in Discernment

Scripture makes it clear our lives are not accidental; rather, we are loved into being by the Creator, and for a purpose: "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" (Jer 29:11, RSV).



Elizabeth Scalia is a Benedictine oblate and the managing editor of the Catholic Portal at Patheos.com, where she also blogs as The anchoress. She is also a weekly columnist at First Things and a regular panelist on the Brooklyn-diocese-produced current events program, In the Arena, seen at NETNY.net. Contact Elizabeth at theanchoress@gmail.com.

In his interview with Matthew Bunson, Archbishop Timothy Dolan reinforces that reassuring verse by speaking of generic and specific notions of vocation, how they relate to God's plan for us, and how they fit into our own instinctive drive to be happy. "We are born wanting to be happy. . . . God longs for our happiness and has told us the way to be happy. So in following His plan, in discerning His will, in obeying His law, we will arrive at happiness in this life and in the next."

The first part of fulfilling God's plan for us, which will result in our inevitable happiness, is discernment, which is as fundamental to the life of faith as prayer. Before we can perceive our calling — that path toward which God is drawing us for the fulfillment of his plans and, yes, our happiness — we must openly and gratefully discern those gifts he has truly bestowed upon us, as distinguished from those we might desire. If we do not know our gifts, we cannot possibly understand our calling. We have all seen reality programs where hopeful contestants announce that they are "the next big recording star" and then proceed to torture our ears and frighten our pets with dreadful caterwauling. When rejected they often seem dazed, arguing that they must be great singers, because "everyone" tells them they are.

All of our hearts want to believe that we are singularly, spectacularly gifted. In fact, we are singularly gifted as the psalmist expresses in Psalm 139: "Truly you have formed my inmost being," and "I am fearfully, wonderfully made" (see vv. 13-14). The whispers of the serpent, who constantly assaults us through our brokenness, can partly be blamed for our delusions; the evil one wants to draw us apart from God, and

one effective tactic is to keep us clinging to unrealistic dreams, and ignorant of our truest selves. If our gifts are meant to lead us to our calling (and eventually to our vocation) in service to God's will, then keeping us confused on this very fundamental level is a sure way to keep us from God, and the happiness God wants for us.

Discerning one's gift can sometimes seem difficult, particularly if one can do many things well. But as we live and learn, we inevitably encounter something that takes us outside of ourselves — an activity that so engages and satisfies us that hours of effort fly by, and we feel a supernatural spark as we graze against eternity. Of course, what is supernatural is not always of God, and this is where discernment deepens.

We must ask: Does this soul-delighting activity only turn us inward? Does it ultimately lead us to a feeling of emptiness, or does it make us want to empty ourselves?

Having identified our gifts, the practice of discernment takes us further: In what state of life are we meant to perfect and share these gifts in service to the will of God? Again, it is in the company of others, and with ourselves, that we will come to understand where we flourish.

These questions are urgently important, yet they often go unasked. Discernment requires mindfulness — of our abilities and weaknesses, of eternity in our midst, and even of those "gut instincts" by which our angels so often guide us, if we are listening. It also requires a willingness to step apart from the noise of the world in order to hear that still, small voice of the Lord, who will always tell us what He wants us to do, if only we dare to ask. [TCA](#)

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