

# 11th Grade: Discernment

## OPENING SCRIPTURE

5-7 min

Begin with a short prayer and/or lead a meditation based on the lesson's scripture.

*There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because he first loved us.*

- 1 JOHN 4:16-19 <sup>[1]</sup>

## REVIEW OPTION

8-10 min

Tie today's class to the previous vocation lesson or other classes you have been working on.

## CLASS DISCUSSION: YOUR STATE AND THE SINGLE STATE-IN-LIFE

5-10 min

### GOALS:

Students should:

- better understand what the single state is;
- realize that they are in a special circumstance, not being committed to a particular vocation yet, having the freedom to learn and prepare for whatever their vocation may be;
- understand how to serve God best as a single person;
- learn to use their single state to come to know what God has planned for their lives.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

The following reading ("Know Yourself") can be read together or quietly during class. After the reading, begin a short lecture or discussion using the following discussion points.

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. The Overall Vocation of Lay People:  
"It belongs to the laity to seek the

[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>

# DISCERNMENT

*"There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because he first loved us." - 1 JOHN 4:16-19 <sup>[1]</sup>*

## CLASS DISCUSSION: YOUR STATE AND THE SINGLE STATE-IN-LIFE

### KNOW YOURSELF

"The unexamined life is not worth living." Socrates famously said. He really meant it, too, as he also said that a man must "interrogate his own nature" and "work precisely" or else he will "miss what is good and become involved in what is bad."

Every Christian should regularly ask himself, "What kind of person am I? What are my strengths and weaknesses?" That sounds like a pretty serious exercise, and it is, but it can also be very satisfying. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote about the thrill of discovering "the dearest freshness deep down things;" but discovery doesn't happen without work.

Discerning your vocation, at base level, is discovering the deepest truth about yourself. It is the journey of self-knowledge par excellence. It is glimpsing the built-in purpose given to you by the Creator of the universe, aeons before you existed.



*How could that discovery not be thrilling?*

Self-knowledge is a life-long work, and it involves many different aspects of your emotional, spiritual, and psychological make-up. You could spend a lot of time in prayer, for instance, just evaluating your own virtue of patience (or lack thereof).

Your purpose at this time in your life is to examine yourself, paying attention to signs that might indicate to what vocation God is calling you. Of course, anyone discerning a vocation will need to gather good information, seek advice from trusted adults, and be committed to prayer.

Self-knowledge can also be a little frightening. Many people avoid it simply because they do not want to reveal and confront the weaknesses, injuries, et cetera, which may be lurking under the surface of their lives. But there's no reason to be afraid, for two reasons: first, we can trust that God will give us the grace to overcome all things when we trust Him to do so; and, second, once a dark spot of one's personality is confronted, it is no longer a threat to his happiness and well-being.

With a little effort, courage, and trust in God, deeply examining your life will help to prepare you for whatever great things God has planned for your life!

[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>



kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will" (CCC 898). The Catechism describes three basic aspects of the vocation of all the people of God, including the laity. Single people have a special freedom to embrace these:

- A. As participants in the priesthood of Christ, lay people can devote themselves to works, prayers, apostolic undertakings, relaxation, hardships "offering worship by the holiness of their lives" (CCC 901).
- B. As participants in the prophetic role of Christ, laypeople can evangelize in word and deed, and catechize (CCC 905-906).
- C. As participants in the kingship of Christ, laypeople can fill "culture and human works with a moral value" (CCC 909).



## CLASS DISCUSSION:

### YOUR STATE AND THE SINGLE STATE-IN-LIFE *cont.*

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#### 2. **The Single Life.** There are two types of single lay people:

- A. **Consecrated Lay Single** – Lay consecrated celibacy (CCC 922-924) is a state-in-life in which one makes an official profession and promise to be celibate while living in the world and devoting oneself to apostolic works under the direction of the bishop. There is a special liturgy associated with this.
  - B. **Single by Circumstance** — many people, for varying periods of life, or even their whole lives, are “single.” Some are too young to have chosen a vocation. Some are widows and widowers, or living celibately after their marriage has failed. Some simply feel no call to the priesthood, religious life, or marriage. Some feel a call, but circumstances fail to work out. Whatever the reason, a “single person” should know that God has charge of every human life and a purpose behind every circumstance. As a layperson, someone who is single does have an overall vocation, and should see the freedom of being single as a tremendous opportunity to play a role in the church that is extremely needed and extremely hard to carry out.
- #### 3. **Using One’s Time Well.** Single people can have a freedom and flexibility that no other state-in-life affords. The lack of limitations means single people can be the glue and the foundation for numerous important works.
- A. Where priests, religious, and married people are limited by schedules other people make for them, or unexpected emergencies—like sick calls or children’s illnesses—a single person can continue to keep projects and institutions going.
  - B. Whereas priests, religious, and married may have all their time completely devoted to caring for an immediate circle, a single person can have time to care for those people who have no one else to care for them.
  - C. When priests, religious, and married may sometimes feel overwhelmed and unable to cope, a single person can have the energy, time, and freedom to step in and help them.
  - D. The single person should use his/her time well and seize the enormous opportunities for prayer, occasions to learn and study, and possibilities for creative service.
  - E. This is true for a student or young person still living at home—there are ways you can help and roles you can play that no one else is free to do. While most other people have to squeeze in learning and developing skills, you can use every minute of school, sports, activities, chores, etc. to fill your stock of knowledge and practice skills for later.

#### 4. **A Plan of Life.** Anyone who is single can make good use of time by drawing up a plan of life which tries to incorporate the following:

- A. *Precepts of the Church* – weekly Mass on Sunday and abstaining from regular intense work on Sunday; confession at least yearly and receiving Communion at least once a year during the Easter season if not more; fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and abstaining from meat Fridays in Lent; providing for the needs of the Church, each according to his/her abilities (CCC2041-2043).
- B. *Daily prayer* – some silent mental conversation with God incorporating sorrow for sin, gratitude, petition and praise, as well as other devotions—perhaps some combination of mass on some/all weekdays, frequent rosary, prayers at meals, frequent reading of scripture and other spiritual works, regular examination of conscience; picking out virtues to work on and making practical plans for working on them.
- C. *Other recommendations*
  - i. Frequent confession, maybe once a month or bi-weekly;
  - ii. A retreat or day of recollection, possibly annually;
  - iii. Some penance or sacrifices (get advice and permission from a spiritual director before committing to any serious penances);
  - iv. Frequent service and works of mercy.
- D. *Other tips for discernment* – these suggestions will help you live your current state-in-life better as well as prepare you to discover your vocation. If God made you to be happiest and most creative in the single-state-in-life, these suggestions will have prepared you to embrace that life, too.
  - i. Go on discernment retreats and visit religious orders or seminaries. Interact with other families, older family members, and parishioners. The more real-life examples you meet of the different vocations, the more information you will have to help with your discernment.
  - ii. Say three Hail Marys every day for your vocation. Pray to St. Joseph, a model of chastity, but also a father; pray to St. Raphael the Archangel who led Tobias to his bride Sarah; pray to St. John the Evangelist who from his youth gave his whole life to Christ; pray to St. Therese of Lisieux, whose parents were heroically virtuous, and who was a religious and is a special patron for priests.
  - iii. Attend a priestly ordination, a religious profession, and a Catholic wedding and take special note of the readings, prayers, and rituals. These will help you to understand what is being undertaken in these lives.

**CLASS DISCUSSION:**  
**YOUR STATE AND THE SINGLE STATE-IN-LIFE** *cont.*

- iv. Find good friends who love God and are trying to be virtuous. It is hard to be what you need to be to hear the Lord’s call and accept it, when your time is spent in an environment which makes you think or asks you to act in a completely different way.
  - v. Become actively involved in your parish and learn to love the Sacraments.
  - vi. Pray regularly before the Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.
  - vii. Serve the poor.
- E. All these activities are good in themselves. They also train the soul to be open to God’s will and to be sensitive to the needs of our neighbor.

*Youth is a time of an especially intensive discovery of a “self” and “a choice of life.” It is a time for growth which ought to progress “in wisdom, age and grace before God and people” (Lk 2:52).*

– JOHN PAUL II,  
 CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI, 46.

**ACTIVITY: DEBATE**

30 min

For the next two activities, budget time accordingly. You may run one or both of the following – **these can be as short as 10-15 minutes, or depending on the depth of conversation and number of participants, each could take the entire period or more.** It is recommended to spend the full 30 minutes or more on each to gain maximum effect.

**GOALS:**

- To give students an opportunity to synthesize what they have been learning about the vocations;
- To exercise critical thinking skills by examining a case history of a real-life person who was discerning and debating about it.

**LESSON PREPARATION:**

Review rules, worksheet, and teacher/student handouts. Obtain scrap paper, pencils, and stopwatch. A podium is professional and official looking for the students to stand at when presenting arguments. Decide on how much time you can budget for the debate and divide the debate phases accordingly.

*Consider assigning roles and debate preparation ahead of time as a homework assignment so more class time can be devoted to the debate.*

**DEBATE TIMELINE AND WORKSHEET**

Period	Min	Goals
Affirmative offers arguments	3	Definitions  Basic claim  Arguments: I. A. B. II. A. B.
N cross-examines	1.5	Ask questions and makes sure he understands what A said
N: 1st Break	1.5	Consults with team to plan how to respond
1st Negative Rebuttal Win by making your own arguments or, if not, by disproving that A’s arguments really work	3.5	Restates A’s arguments in order; deals with them in order.  Definitions  Claim  Arguments: I. A. B. II. A. B.
A cross-examines N	1.5	
A: 1st Break	1.5	
1st Affirmative Rebuttal	2	Responds to N’s attacks on A’s arguments; points out any arguments that N was unable to fault.  Attacks N’s arguments.
N: Last Break	30 sec	
2nd Negative Rebuttal	3	Explains how N’s original attacks on A still stand; points out which of N’s arguments A was unable to attack.  Offers no new arguments; just rebuilds case in light of A’s attacks, then summarizes position and offers 2-3 final reasons (from everything already stated) that support N’s position.
A: Last Break	30 sec	
2nd Affirmative Rebuttal	1.5	Summarizes position, deals with remaining N’s arguments, and offers 2-3 final reasons (from everything already stated) that support A’s position.



## ACTIVITY: DEBATE *continued*

RULES FOR THE DEBATE (this is not a formal debate, merely inspired by formal debates). See worksheet for help in running the debate. Debates really help students to think deeply and work together... and they are enormous fun!

1. A traditional debate has the following roles which you can assign to individuals or groups.
  - A. Affirmative (one person) The affirmative position argues that the proposed claim is true.
  - B. Negative (one person) The negative position argues that the proposed claim is false.
  - C. Affirmative Rebuttal (second team member). This person helps the affirmative side by arguing against the negative and defending the affirmative arguments.
  - D. Negative Rebuttal (second team member). This person helps the negative by arguing against the affirmative and defending the negative's arguments.
2. A debate is usually timed. The worksheet is set up for a 20 minute debate, but can be lengthened/shortened any number of ways.
3. Teams are given the "proposed claim" and a set time to prepare. They then read through the data, use what they have learned or research, and make their arguments according to the side they have been assigned.
4. The Debate takes place. You may award a prize for best arguments, even to the side that turns out to be wrong.
5. Once finished, solicit the opinion of each student about the truth or falsity of the proposed claim. Then reveal the "answer." After this, it is good to talk about how the debate went, what people wished they had said or thought of later, strong and weak points of both sides, and, most importantly, what key evidence in the person's life pointed to a particular vocation.

### DEBATE TOPICS:

*IMPORTANT: The students will not know the identity of this person until after the debate.*

#### I. **Proposed:** The following person was called to religious life.

**Data:** From the time she was young this woman developed a strong prayer life and love of God. Her parents were prayerful and lived modestly, contributing extra money to the missions. She always admired missionaries. As an adolescent and young adult, she worked with other young people to serve the poor and elderly. She loved fashion, to paint, the opera and the symphony. Although her health was not the best, she loved mountain-climbing and skiing. She was a hard worker and intelligent, earning several degrees in the field of medicine and opening a clinic with help available to those unable to pay. Her brother was a missionary and after much prayer, she decided to join him. However, joining her brother involved obtaining permission from his organization

and numerous application steps which did not go quickly. Also she could not find anyone to replace her at the clinic, and her spiritual advisor told her to wait. She had once said to some others, "To be called to family life does not mean getting engaged at the age of 14.... Now is the time to begin to prepare yourself for family life. You cannot follow this path if you do not know how to love. To love means to want to perfect yourself and your beloved, to overcome your egoism, and give yourself completely." She was attracted to men and had many male friends as well as women friends. But her desire to join the missions was strong.

**She wrote:** "Everything has a particular end and obeys a law. Everything develops toward a predestined end. God has traced a way for each one of us, our vocation and a life of grace together with our physical life. The day will come when we will become aware of others around us, and when this happens we will become new persons. It is a sacred and also a tragic moment in the passage from childhood to adolescence. The problem of our future is posed at this moment... not that we must resolve this problem at fifteen years of age, but at least we are able to orient ourselves along the path to which the Lord is calling us. Both our earthly and eternal happiness depends on following our vocation very carefully."

**"What is a vocation?"** It is a gift from God and therefore comes from God. If then it is a gift from God, it is up to us to do all in our power to know God's will. We must go along that way, if God wills it, not forcing the door; when God wills it, how God wills it."

In the end, she decided to make a pilgrimage to Lourdes in order to know God's will once and for all.

**Answer:** This person was St. Gianna Beretta Molla who eventually discerned she was called to marriage and made a heroic life out of it.

After a tender courtship, Gianna Beretta married Pietro Molla and had four children, all the while continuing to offer medical care to families and the poor. They had a beautiful and rich family life. When Gianna was 39 and pregnant, she was diagnosed with a tumor in her uterus. Gianna opted for the least invasive treatment—the treatment least risky for her child, but most risky for her. The child was born healthy but complications in Gianna's body and the pregnancy in the end led to Gianna's death. The Church would have permitted her to choose a treatment which would not directly harm the child but be slightly riskier for the child and less risky for her. But Gianna told her husband and repeated in different ways: "If you have to decide between me and the child, do not hesitate; I demand it, the child, save it." She knew her death was a possibility and chose her child's life over her own, while preparing her husband and children to work with her for the good of their family. For a life and death of heroic virtue, she was canonized in 2004.

*More information available:* <http://saintgianna.org/vocsearch.htm> and <http://www.pastoralcentre.pl/saint-gianna-beretta-molla/>

II. **Proposed:** The following person was called to religious life.

**Data:** Born to a family of thirteen children, this man was the most outgoing and lively of his siblings, very cheerful and sympathetic. At the same time, from an early age he showed disobedience, a strong temper, and a very up-and-down personality—angry one minute, sorry the next. He loved sweets, was a little vain of his appearance, but he loved to share. From the time he was young he was very devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary and imitated his father's love for the poor, sometimes giving away his lunch or bringing things from home to poor people he met on the way. He was an excellent student with an amazing memory, invited to give the opening address when he graduated. He was a good horseman, an excellent shot with a gun. He loved parties, theater, and music. He was extremely popular, with some tendency to try to set trends and be extravagant or wasteful. He had several very dangerous illnesses—poor health overall. Desiring to be cured, he twice promised to enter religious life on condition of a cure. But when he became healthy again, he did not pursue this promise. He was engaged twice, but these relationships did not work out. He also could not seem to settle down and pick a religious or priestly vocation. People noted that he did keep going to mass everyday and saying the rosary daily. One friend noted: "How many times do I remember seeing him during his thanksgiving after Communion, his head bowed in deepest reverence, his hands clasped, his eyes moist with silent tears, as if he were pondering over some great thought, and maturing with God some great design?"



## DISCERNMENT

### OPTIONAL READING

#### SIMONE WEIL

Simone Weil (1909-1943) was a French philosopher and writer. Born to a Jewish agnostic family, she was politically active in her youth and supportive of Marxist ideas, but began to be drawn more and more to Christianity through experiences beginning when she was 27. Some experiences included hearing Catholics singing near a church in Portugal and an experience of prayer while visiting the tiny Portiuncula chapel where St. Francis of Assisi prayed. Torn over the decision whether to become Catholic, she wrote numerous essays about God and the spiritual life under the direction of a Dominican priest, Father Joseph-Marie Perrin. She did not enter the Church before dying at the young age of 34.



Weil was single her whole life and wrote this essay on Waiting for God on using the time we have well.

*Excerpt from "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God."*

*The key to a Christian conception of studies is the realization that prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of prayer. Warmth of heart cannot make up for it....*

*Never in any case whatever is a genuine effort of the attention wasted.... If we concentrate our attention on trying to solve a problem of geometry, and if at the end of an hour we are no nearer to doing so than at the beginning, we have nevertheless been making progress each minute of that hour in another more mysterious dimension. Without our knowing or feeling it, this apparently barren effort has brought more light into the soul. The result will one day be discovered in prayer....*

*Every time that a human being succeeds in making an effort of attention with the sole idea of increasing his grasp of the truth, he acquires a greater aptitude for grasping it, even if his effort produces no visible fruit.... The useless efforts made by the Curé d'Ars, for long and painful years, in his attempt to learn Latin bore fruit in the marvelous discernment that enabled him to see the very soul of his penitents.... Not only does the love of God have attention for its substance; the love of our neighbor, which we know to be the same love, is made of this same substance. Those who are unhappy have no need of anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention. The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle.... this way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only he who is capable of attention can do this. So it comes about that, paradoxical as it may seem, a Latin prose or a geometry problem, even though they are done wrong, may be of great service one day, provided we devote the right kind of effort to them. Should the occasion arise, they can one day make us better able to give someone in affliction exactly the help required to save him, at the supreme moment of his need.*

Finally, one day during a procession, he caught sight of a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and suddenly knew exactly what life he was called to.

**Answer:** The following story gives information about St. Gabriel Possenti who eventually discerned to the religious life and priesthood as a Passionist and made a heroic life out of it. He died at the young age of 24 of tuberculosis, a year before he was supposed to be ordained to the priesthood. He is famous for defending a young girl from a group of robbers by pulling a gun from beneath his cassock and hitting a faraway target dead-on. Then Friar Possenti asked who wanted the next bullet. The robbers who had at first laughed at him, suddenly took to their heels.

*More information available: Fr. Hyacinth Hage, The Life of Ven. Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows, <http://archive.org/stream/lifeofvengabriel00hage#page/30/mode/2up> or <http://www.ewtn.com/library/mary/gabposs.htm>.*

## OPTIONAL READING

### GOAL:

- To communicate an understanding that right now students can embrace their state-in-life and use the time well to prepare for whatever God wills for them.

### PREPARATION:

Read Weil essay. Look up unfamiliar words. Underline interesting parts. Choose 2-3 parts to discuss with students.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

### HOMEWORK

5 min

Assign homework, and end with prayer. Possible homework:

- Write about the following: compare and contrast one's personal test scores for the Checklists (Marriage, Priesthood and Religious Life checklists). Note common strengths and weaknesses. Express gratitude to God for strengths; consider practical ways to work on weaknesses. Never give up on yourself, because God never will.
- Read Weil essay and list all areas in one's own life "most boring" and most conducive to practicing attention; write a reflection on ways to practice attention.



## DISCERNMENT

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