

Discerning your “YES”

A discernment guide
for those considering starting
a shelter-care program
for victims of
sexual exploitation

Preface

It's one thing to feel compelled to action on behalf of victims of sexual exploitation, but quite another to commit to the work of restorative care. It's messy and complicated; it takes a long-term commitment; sacrifices are many and rewards are few. You will never feel ready for it, and you will inevitably meet with failure to some degree. And yet, for those that have heard the call and discerned their 'yes,' there is deep-seated joy and contentment in the work.

How do you move from a simple stirring of the Spirit to the firm 'yes' that is required to commit to this work? Based on what we've learned from those who have come before, we've designed this simple 5-step path to help you on your way from “call” to confirmation.

1. Hear the Call
2. Discern Your Response
3. Count the Cost
4. Discover a Life of Service
5. Confirm your “Yes”

We invite you to pray and work through the questions and prompts offered here. You may record your responses here, or you may keep a private journal. Whatever you decide, we recommend that you hang onto your responses because if you do move forward in this work, one day you're going to need to revisit your calling and remind yourself of this time.

Hear the Call

Ask anyone who has gone into ministry, missions, or human services, and they'll likely be able to tell you about the first time they felt they were “called” to the work. Perhaps you heard someone speak about human trafficking, watched a documentary, or read a news article about the topic that touched you in a particular way. Maybe you met someone who was directly affected by this crime. Regardless of how you were first confronted by the issue, the way that God called you into the work that he is already doing is worth remembering.

1. Describe when you first felt called to the work of serving survivors of domestic sex trafficking.

2. What confirmation was there for your call?

3. What experiences in your life do you find yourself drawing on when you consider this work?

4. What Scripture, quotes, or words of conviction played a role in your call?

Once confronted with God’s call on our life to do something incredible, we can begin to consider it a “God-sized dream.” In her book dedicated to this concept, *You’re Made for a God-sized Dream*, Holley Gerth* describes a series of filters through which to put your dream to determine if it really is from God. Read through each one and respond to the provided journal prompts and questions.

You might have God-sized Dream if...

...it fits with your strengths.

Have you ever taken a strengths assessment? Here is an online test to help you get started <https://high5test.com/>. Write down three of your strengths and how they might be suited to starting a shelter to care for survivors.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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... your skills and experiences have prepared you for it.

What experiences in your life do you find yourself drawing on when you consider this work? Write down one or more experiences you think might be relevant or helpful:

... you can't think about anything else.

Keep in mind that God calls you to Himself first. The calling He has placed in you is not about the destination, it's about a relationship with Him. What keeps pulling you back to God's call, even when you would rather avoid it? For inspiration, read the story in Jonah chapter one.

... you're scared silly.

Anytime we decide to take a risk, we will always feel fear. But, fear does not mean that your dream isn't from God. "I would even take it a step further and say that if you don't feel fear at all, then it's probably not a God-sized dream. Our God is big, wild, and far beyond our understanding and limits. He tells us, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways' (Isa. 55:8). That means whenever he asks us to do something, it is almost always out of our comfort zones."

What makes you afraid?

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What encourages you to decide to fear God more than fear itself?

... people think you're crazy.

Not everyone will understand your call to serve survivors of sex-trafficking like you do. But, that's why God entrusted this dream to you. You don't need everyone's approval to know you have been called to this work, and it's likely that some opposition means you're following a call from God and not the world. However, you do need some people to be completely on board to help you with your dream. Make a (very small) list of these people and then carefully and intentionally communicate your calling to them. These could just be your spouse, family, and close friends for now. Gauge their response and record it next to their name, then go ahead and let everyone else think you're crazy.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

... it's bigger than you are.

As Rick Warren shares in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, "It's not about you." God's call is not about your personal fulfillment, making you happy, or filling the empty spaces in your soul. With that, it's important to ask yourself some important questions:

Are you seeking this dream because it allows you to escape your current situation? Are you motivated more by push factors than pull factors?

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Do you need this work more than the work needs you?

... it aligns with God's purposes.

One easy way to determine if the call you sense is from God is that it will align with God's work in scripture, 100% of the time.

What biblical references further confirm what God is calling you to do?

How does the call you sense fall within the boundaries God has set?

... it leads to joy.

As you pursue God’s calling, you’ll encounter joy even amidst the strife, struggle, and suffering. Why? Because you’ll meet with God and his promises along the way. Holley Gerth explains it this way:

*If you don’t ever feel joy when pursuing your dream, then it may be that another motivation is prompting you to move forward. When we try to use our dreams to get rid of our insecurity, to earn love, or to meet needs in a way God never intended, then we don’t feel joy – we feel desperation, hopelessness, and endless frustration. God will not let us be satisfied with anything but him. If there’s no joy in your dream, ask him what your heart is really looking for instead. ***

What joy do you hope comes from doing this work?

* Holley Gerth, You’re Made for a God-sized Dream: Opening the Door to All God Has for You (Grand Rapids: Revel, 2013).

** Holley Gerth, You’re Made for a God-sized Dream: Opening the Door to All God Has for You (Grand Rapids: Revel, 2013), 46.

Discern your Response: the “Interior Movements” of the Soul

In the Ignatian tradition, discernment is what describes the process of “sifting our moods and feelings” or “learning to read the body’s signals” (Gerard W. Hughs). We must discern between a multitude of goods rather than between good and bad. As such, it involves prayer, reflection, and consultation in order to weigh the pros and cons of a decision as well as one’s feelings, emotions, and desires.

Ask yourself, “Where is my motivation to do this coming from?”

1. _____

What if after this discerning process, you find that God is not calling you to this after all? How does that make you feel? Embarrassed, sad, let down? Would you be willing to walk away from this call if God asked it of you?

2. _____

As we learned in section one, God’s purpose for inviting us into His work is to draw us closer to Him. It’s not about what we do, it’s about who we are.

How do you hope to draw closer in relationship with God through this work?

3. _____

How do you see God shaping your character through this work?

4. _____

Count the Cost

There are many things that you may be asked to surrender to God for this work. However, there is something powerful about seeing the reality of what you'll be asked to sacrifice, being honest with yourself about what that means to you, and still being able to say 'yes'. Here is a list of areas in your life where you may be called to make sacrifices.

1. Write down how you might feel about making radical changes or completely giving these things over to God:

Family _____

Marriage _____

Reputation _____

Time _____

Community _____

Finances _____

Social Circle _____

Sex _____

Health _____

Sometimes we fear that our efforts will come up fruitless, and in light of the sacrifice, this just isn't acceptable. As if you were negotiating with God, what is one thing you would ask Him to do if you are to say 'yes' to his call? (e.g. "Make sure my family is taken care of," or, "If just one woman receives hope and healing, the cost will be worth it." Write your "If just..." statement below:

"If just..."

Write what you expect it means to say 'yes' to God's call to serve the sexually exploited. Be as objective as you can, listing your most realistic expectations (e.g. I expect to feel alone; I expect to be underappreciated). Include some expectations of faith, such as: "I expect God to be faithful in his promises"

I expect.... _____

I expect.... _____

I expect.... _____

I expect.... _____

Discover a Life of Service

At some point amid any discernment process, you find yourself wondering two things: 1) What would it look like to deal with this on a daily basis, and 2) What would my day-to-day life actually look like? While the answers to these questions may not be enough to sway your decision to respond to God’s call, knowing well what you’re getting yourself into helps to fend off doubts along the way. The following are lessons learned from Diane Langberg, Ph.D, from over 40 years as a practicing psychologist working with trauma survivors and clergy as expressed in her book, *In Our Lives First: Meditations for Counselors*.

The Crucible of Counseling Survivors

The word crucible has two meanings: 1) a metal vessel used to heat substances to incredibly high temperatures, and 2) a severe test or challenge that produces change or refinement in an individual. Both meanings apply to working with survivors of sexual exploitation. There is no doubt that this work will challenge you, exposing you to the highest of temperatures and likely revealing your own sinful nature more than you would like. While the focus should always be on the ones you serve, be prepared that in the process you will be challenged and refined by God in your own way.

Are you prepared for God’s primary purpose in all of this to be exposing the struggles in your own heart and to change you?
Write down your thoughts.

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11

Understanding Trauma Survivors

Walking alongside a victim of sexual trauma is no easy thing. It requires you to understand a perspective, an experience, and a life that you would not wish on anyone. And yet, in order to walk with her, you must take on some of those burdens. Dr. Langberg offers the example of counseling a 30 year old women who tells you that she had been sexually abused by her father for 15 years of her life. Are you prepared to walk into this experience with her enough to understand how she thinks of life, God, relationships, and herself?

Reflect on Hebrews 13:3 “Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” Write down your thoughts/fears about confronting this type of darkness daily.

Responding to Institutional Sin

In addition to confronting the suffering of individual survivors, those who work in this field must confront sin on the societal and institutional level. As someone working to combat sexual exploitation, you will “encounter systems that fight exposure and work hard to preserve the status quo regardless of the cost to the individual within it.” You will find yourself addressing issues that many would rather avoid, or directly try to hide. Are you ready to be a voice against something so great as institutional sin?

Do you feel equipped to speak the truth about yourself and the institutions you are a part of, even if it is unpopular? Are you prepared for possible backlash?

*Diane Mandt Langberg, PhD, In Our Lives First: Meditations for Counselors (Jenkintown: Diane Langberg PhD & Associates, 2014).

Confirm your “Yes”

Ultimately, this tool may not steer you toward one decision or another. But, our hope is that once you’ve gone through this process of self-discovery and discernment, you’ll be confident in your decision no matter which way you have chosen.

In reflection, record the thoughts and feelings you’ll carry forward from each section we’ve addressed together.

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Discern your Yes

Count the Cost

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Confirm your “Yes”
