

THE SOUL OF TRANSFORMATION:

Exploring Vocations
in Social Justice

THE SOUL OF SOCIAL JUSTICE



with DeWayne Davis



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GETTING STARTED

- Listen to the Episode of the Soul of Transformation featuring Dr. DeWayne Davis.
- Before serving as Lead Pastor for Plymouth Congregational, Davis worked as a policy analyst in the Office of Governmental Relations for the Episcopal Church, as a lobbyist for Sallie Mae, and for a decade as a Senior Legislative Assistant for three members of the U.S. Congress. He is married to Kareem Murphy, director of Government Relations for Hennepin County.

DISCERNMENT

The process of discernment is inherently mysterious—perhaps even volatile.

Think of a labyrinth, where the path twists and turns, sometimes leading you back to places you've already visited. It's something you do alone. It's something you do in community. **It's something you will do throughout your entire life.**

It can be a spiritual practice or one that's completely secular. The point is: you are *thinking* and *experimenting* and *discovering* around vocation—*discerning* the gifts you bring to the world and to the workforce.

"What if society facilitated actual vocation versus what we do to make money?"

DISCOVERY

- Davis speaks about the possibility of a “different world”—what passions do you have that might help usher in a new or different world?
- What sort of work might best suit your passions and skills? How can you fine tune these to get closer to this sort of work?
- How might your work help people heal internally as well as combating external forces that create suffering?

CONNECTION

“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” - Howard Thurman

- Davis mentions Howard Thurman in the podcast a few times. How does this quote help you understand the idea of transformation? Vocation?
- What does it mean to “come alive?”
- What does your community/world need?

ACTION

- **Read:** Howard Thurman is a theologian and author of numerous books, including *Jesus and the Disinherited*.
- **Think:** Over the next week, make a running list of skills, passions, and gifts you bring to the world. How might these benefit the world?
- **Act:** Write down your “dream” job description. What would you do? Where would you live? What organization would you be a part of? Who would you serve?

THE GROUND WE STAND ON



with Jim Bear Jacobs



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GETTING STARTED

- Listen to the Episode of the Soul of Transformation featuring Jim Bear Jacobs.
- Jacobs is a member of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation, an American Indian tribe located in central Wisconsin. He is Program Director for Racial Justice for the Minnesota Council of Churches and is founder of “Healing Minnesota Stories,” an initiative dedicated to creating events of dialogue, education, and healing, particularly within faith communities.

DISCERNMENT

The process of discernment is inherently mysterious—something we spend our entire lives circling.

Discernment, inherently, is growth. **It requires you to *think about your life as something more than static, something that is constantly growing and changing.*** It requires you to *experiment* with your gifts, acknowledging that finding and building vocation is something of a process.

It can be spiritual, secular, or a strange mix of the two. But the importance of the work does not change. The work of discernment is meant to bring your gifts into alignment with the world’s needs.

How might your gifts change the world?

“My decisions must be good for the next seven
generations.”

DISCOVERY

- In the episode, Jim Bear Jacobs suggests that our actions must help the following seven generations. How does that affect your thoughts on vocation?
- If we are all bound together, what sort of work might best suit that sort of commitment to past and future generations?
- What might a vocation serving other people, as opposed to amassing wealth, look like?

CONNECTION

"We live in a predatory capitalist society in which everything is for sale. Everybody is for sale, so there is ubiquitous commodification— be it of music, food, people, or parking meters."

- Dr. Cornel West

- Jacobs says that people know another world is possible and that's something that can't be stopped by corporations. Can you ethically work for a corporation? Does your vocation have to be your job? What does this tell you about your own vocational discernment?
- What does it mean to live in abundance? Scarcity?
- How does your identity drive your vocation? What communities do you want to serve?

ACTION

- **Read:** Toni Morrison's collection of nonfiction *Mouth Full of Blood* is a collection of Morrison's writing over four decades. It's a challenge to interrogate the world around us—to see what is possible.
- **Think:** Does our vocation have to be our job? This week, reflect on the good you might do as an employee of an organization. Then consider how working as a volunteer might challenge or benefit the work you want to do. What are the benefits? The obstacles?
- **Act:** Find somebody in your community and invite them to coffee. Interview them about what led them to their work, how they sustain themselves, and what their vocational discernment looked like.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR A REVOLUTION



with Kelly Sherman-Conroy



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GETTING STARTED

- Listen to the Episode of the Soul of Transformation featuring Kelly Sherman-Conroy
- Kelly Sherman-Conroy is a proud member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. A Native American theologian, activist, and storyteller, she walks with people of all cultures and dedicates her time exploring the intersections of identity, personal narratives, faith, and healing through an Indigenous lens.

DISCERNMENT

Discernment is inherently messy. You could say that it's dangerous, even.

Are you ready to give up your life? While that might sound dramatic—and, let's be honest, it kind of is—it's also deeply important to realize that a life of working for justice, for equality and wholeness.

Discernment can push you into new spaces, with different people, than you ever expected.

It's work that never really ends. It's work that changes us and asks us to think about what we can bring into the world—to think about our vocations as something that ultimately helps transform reality.

"I don't think I've ever been in a space where I could be fully me...until recently. Because of that I chose to be a mentor for youth and children. I did that because...I could count on one hand the mentors who were there for me when I needed them the most. And I wanted to be that for others."

DISCOVERY

- In the episode, Kelly Sherman-Controy discusses mentoring. Do you have a mentor? Have you ever mentored anyone? What does that relationship mean to you?
- Sherman-Conroy also talks about self-care and how we take care of our bodies. What does that mean to you? How can you practice self care as you undertake your vocational discernment?
- Does the work of “spiritual” practice speak to you? Why or why not?

CONNECTION

“Liberation Theology needs to be understood as a continuing process of

re-contextualization, a permanent exercise of serious doubting...” - Marcella Althaus-Reid

- Part of the work of vocational discernment is evaluating your beliefs, your values, and the way that you show up in the world. How can you better undertake that work? What are potential obstacles?
- What does it look like to lead? Do you have to be “in charge” to lead in a job or volunteer role? When have you experienced good leadership?
- How might vocation be a continuing process in your life? What does that look like?

ACTION

- **Read:** Marcella Althaus-Reid was a feminist, queer liberation theologian. Two of her books, *Indecent Theology* and *The Queer God*, are challenges to how we think—theologically and secularly.
- **Think:** When was the last time you changed your mind? Make a list of 3-5 opinions (Deeply held? Shallow beliefs? Anything!) Once you’ve done that, ask yourself: what would it take to have my mind changed? Where am I still growing? Where am I inflexible? Is that good or bad?
- **Act:** Go outside and take a walk. Sometimes the work of vocation can be tough and all-encompassing. However, movement—getting out of your own headspace—can help jostle forth new thoughts and ideas.

WHAT'S MY PART?



with Jamil Stamschror-Lott



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GETTING STARTED

- Listen to the Episode of the Soul of Transformation featuring Jamil Stamschror-Lott.
- Jamil Stamschror-Lott and his wife are the founders of Creative Kuponya, a mental health practice in Minneapolis. In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, mental health experts have seen a rise in Black people seeking therapy and Creative Kuponya looks to create a place for Black people to connect with Black therapists. His work has been featured in the *New York Times*.

DISCERNMENT

The process of discernment can keep you awake at night.

It stalks your waking moments too, an itch that never really goes away. Something that is asking you to think deeply about who you are, what you want, and how that can be transformational to the world.

Discernment is done alone. It's done in community. **Discernment can happen when you least expect it.**

Mostly, however, discernment is an opportunity for you to think about your life being more than just a job, but instead a calling—another word for vocation—where the work you do comes from a place of deep commitment, deep conviction, and yes, deep discernment.

What does that look like for you? How might you do that work today?

"Representation is critical. A big part of that is centering on the margins. There's a different experience for people who have been pushed to the margins. Our society is often structured to [tell the marginalized], 'It's you.'"

DISCOVERY

- In the episode, Jamil Stamschror-Lott discusses representation. What does that mean to you? How has that affected (or not affected) you in your life?
- What does it look like to center the margins? How does that challenge or compliment the work you might want to do?
- What does restorative (or redemptive) work look like?

CONNECTION

"We have an obsession with treating the margins of this country as if they are joyless places to be pitied and scorned, bereft of anything resembling love or God. But the truth is, it is in the broken, shadow places, those cracks in between society where most of my generation fell, where the music welled and the lost, forsaken, and disposed lived—it is there that I experienced the God that I know today."

- Rev. Lenny Duncan

- Stamschror-Lott says that his process to his current vocation was a journey. What does that mean to you? How has your vocational discernment been a journey so far?
- How can you pause, reflect, and be critical of your journey? Where have you connected with people on the margins? Where have you avoided them?
- What is your community? How could you serve them?

ACTION

- **Read:** Lenny Duncan is a Black, Queer pastor and PhD candidate. His book, *United States of Grace: A Memoir of Homelessness, Addiction, Incarceration, and Hope* is an indictment and a love letter to the United States—asking how centering the margins might save this country.
- **Think:** How do you deal with personal or implicit bias? How might that bias inform or disrupt the work that you hope to do? How does internal work feed our external work in the world?
- **Act:** Consider doing some anti-bias work, including (but not limited to) the Intercultural Development Inventory, which assesses and develops intercultural competence.

NOW WHAT?



with Molly Marshall



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GETTING STARTED

- Listen to the Episode of the Soul of Transformation featuring Dr. Molly Marshall
- Rev. Dr. Molly T. Marshall has served in theological education for nearly forty years. Marshall believes she was put on the earth to love students, teach theology, guide spiritual formation, and challenge patriarchal structures that would hinder women from full acceptance in all forms of ministry. She has worked as a youth minister, campus minister, pastor, scholar, and theological educator, seeking to dismantle all forms of oppression.

DISCERNMENT

Discernment requires deep listening. To ourselves. To the world.

If you're lucky, you'll continue to listen throughout your entire life.

When we listen, we learn. We grow. We slowly form words and actions in response. This, naturally, is not a quick process. Does that mean discernment can happen fast? Of course. But intrinsically, discernment is a long game—something we return to again and again.

Groundwater for our souls and our vocations.

What is welling up inside you? How might you help transform the world?

**"Vocation comes from a deep listening to the groaning
need of the world."**

DISCOVERY

- In the episode, Marshall describes herself as a Christian theologian who is “very respectful of many journeys and faith toward a life of significance.” What does that mean to you? How does spirituality factor into your vocation? If it doesn’t, what guides you?
- What does a life of significance mean to you? How might you construct a life of significance?
- What is the “groaning need” in your world?

CONNECTION

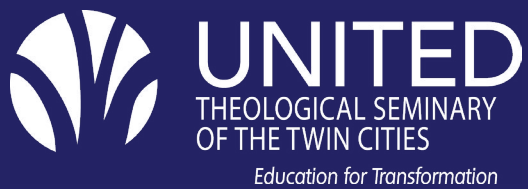
“[A] Womanist understanding of vocation is the lived experience of faith embodied in people, found in the concrete contexts in which people live out their faith grounded in the context of struggling for faith and justice. it takes on antagonistic dualisms as unhealthy in many places in our faith journeys. it is an ongoing faith-filled process—a ripening and ripening into wholeness, living out vocation—integrating faith and life—means that we recognize that we are made in God’s image. God’s presence is the very fabric of our existence, immanent & transcendent, close as our breathing.” - Dr. emilie m. townes

- Marshall says, “Vocation is personal, but never private.” What does that mean to you? How can you make your vocation more public?
- What are the “concrete contexts” of your life? How might those shape your vocation? How can you expand beyond your own context?
- How does your lived experience shape your vocation? Do you think the continued experience of your life will continue to shape your vocation? Why or why not?

ACTION

- **Read:** Dr. emilie m. townes is an American Christian social ethicist and theologian, currently Dean and E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of Womanist Ethics and Society at the Vanderbilt University Divinity School. Dive into *Womanist Theology with Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, of which townes is a editor.
- **Think:** How can your experience and the experience of your friends, family, and ancestors, contribute to your self identity? How might these connections help shape your vocational calling?
- **Act:** Take a piece of paper and set a timer for 60 seconds. When you hit “start” write down as many words to describe what you know or hope about your vocation. Don’t self-edit! When you’re finished, turn the piece of paper over, set another timer for 30 seconds, and repeat the exercise. When you’re finished, fold the piece of paper and put it in an envelope. Return to it in two to four weeks and see where you find energy or are surprised.

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