

“Our Desires and God’s Desires,” from *A Sacred Voice is Calling* (by John Neafsey)

Vocational self-discovery is closely bound up with discovering what we really want. The secret of vocation, according to Michael Himes, is to “discover what it is you most truly and deeply want when you are most really and truly you.” Holy desires that orient us in the direction of our true calling originate in our true self or “best self.” “When you are at your best,” Himes asks, “what is it that you most truly desire?”

Although the scriptures remind us that “God is greater than our hearts,” there is a way in which God uses the desires of our hearts to lead us to our destiny. From a spiritual perspective, it is possible to see our own deepest and most authentic desires as God’s desires *in us* or *for us*. James Fowler puts it well: “What God wants for us and from us has something central to do with what we most deeply and truly want for ourselves.” There is a mysterious connection, it seems, between the will of God and our own heart’s desires.

In an essay on the central place of “great” or “holy” desires in the spirituality of Saint Ignatius Loyola, E. Edward Kinerk observes that some of our desires seem to orient us more reliably toward God than others. Careful consideration and evaluation of the depth, authenticity, and generosity of our desires are at the heart of discernment in the Ignatian spiritual tradition, which basically centers around the task of making subtle differentiations between different kinds of desires. The challenge lies in recognizing the difference between the superficial, inauthentic, self-centered desires of the ego and the deep, authentic, loving desires of the inmost self. The basic idea is that the latter are more likely to be in line with our true calling, with God’s purpose or will or design for our lives. In a nutshell, if our desires are leading us in the direction of increasing superficiality, phoniness, or selfishness, our desires are inclining us in the direction of increased personal depth, authenticity, and generosity, we can be fairly sure that we are on the right track...”