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Self-Help

The Messy Quest for Meaning: Five Catholic Practices for Finding Your Vocation
Stephen Martin
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Throughout the centuries people have struggled with one universal question: What am I supposed to do with my life? Finding one's vocation or calling can seem frustratingly elusive. But according to Stephen Martin, "Vocation is a lifelong process, and we should pace ourselves accordingly, accepting that this journey will be characterized by a great deal of drudgery that is lightened at unpredictable moments by penetrating insights and a powerful sense of rightness."

In *The Messy Quest for Meaning*, Martin explores five practices that provide encouragement and wisdom to those seeking clarity in determining and embracing their vocation. He details the steps of naming our desires, developing a strong sense of focus, learning the value of humility, cultivating an understanding and appreciation for community, and exploring the margins of our internal and external lives. Drawing heavily from the monastic environment and lifestyle, Martin explains how the monks' devotion to their vocation and the five practices provides a compelling example of the large amount of perseverance and commitment needed to accept and fulfill a calling. "Indeed, an ability to maintain the long view counts among the greatest strengths of monks."

Martin excels at presenting an evenhanded perspective of each step of the process. He acknowledges the stress and conflict of being uncertain of one's calling, but he offers many practical and encouraging insights to make the process more manageable and attainable. His use of his personal doubts and experiences concerning his own quest to find his vocation are easily relatable and give the reader a feeling that Martin is simply a fellow pilgrim wanting to help another traveler along the path. Although he relates several Catholic examples, he never tries to make his points through a strong-fisted religious approach, instead preferring to use a casual, I've-been-there-and-want-to-help style.

The Messy Quest for Meaning will be very beneficial to people who are looking for help in determining their professional vocation or their calling in any area of life. Although Martin

bases his points on Catholic practices, he masterfully explains the five steps in a way that non-Catholics can also apply them. Trying to understand one's vocation or calling is not unique to any particular belief system, and Martin's information will be valuable to anyone searching for guidance and encouragement in his or her own messy quest. ?

Jeff Friend