

Called to Be Disciples

What it means to follow Jesus

by Leisa Anslinger



What does it mean to be a disciple?

In Jesus' time it was not unusual for a person to seek out a master teacher from whom one could learn the ways of life and faith. Many expected that one of these teachers would be the Messiah, God's Anointed One, who would establish God's reign on earth.

Perhaps it isn't so different in our time. Hundreds of political, business, or self-help leaders present themselves as having the answers people need. If we're honest with ourselves, many of us hope one of these individuals will have what we're looking for.

In baptism, we begin a lifelong process of learning to live as Jesus teaches, and of bringing Christ's presence to others.

Our faith tells us that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Teacher who has the answers we need for our lives. Learning Jesus' ways is what discipleship is all about. Following Jesus is the work of our lifetime.

What does discipleship have to do with our lives? In baptism, we have been drawn into a living relationship with Christ and the Christian community. Baptism is the beginning of discipleship. In baptism, we begin a lifelong process of learning to live as Jesus teaches, and of bringing Christ's presence to others.

Living as a disciple is a way of life that holds as its foundation and model Jesus Christ. "Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step forward, one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God's will. Being a disciple is not just something else to do, alongside many other things suitable for Christians; it is a total way of life and requires continuing conversion." (SDR, 15)

What does Jesus teach us? Think of the many Gospel stories you have heard or read over the years. Jesus' message is pretty straightforward when we get right down to it:

- Love God before all others;
- Love our neighbor as ourselves;
- Serve and love as Jesus serves and loves;
- Reach out to the poor, sick, oppressed, lonely, and imprisoned;

- Be part of Christ's mission to bring about the fullness of God's reign.

The challenge: As straightforward as Jesus' path of life is, it is easy to see the challenge in embracing Jesus' way as our way. Every step of this path will call us beyond ourselves, beyond what is comfortable, and beyond what may seem "normal" for many in our world. The way of the disciple is love, compassion (which means to suffer with), forgiveness and peace. Jesus teaches his disciples that caring for the needs of the poor is to serve Christ himself.

Let's get practical. In embracing discipleship as our way of life, there will be many little things, and some big ones we will need to do. We will consider practical steps toward discipleship on the reverse of this sheet.



Let's be spiritual. This is not something we do alone! We will find strength and guidance through the Holy Spirit and the community of faith as we commit ourselves to learning and following Jesus' way.



The Stewardship Project
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"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. ...By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:34a-35)



Practical Ways to Grow as Good Disciples

Think of discipleship as living in love

As we read the gospels, we realize that Jesus' call is to love as God loves. Practically speaking, this will change the way we live. Here are some practical steps for living discipleship:

Love God: Putting God first does not come easily to many of us. Doing so will call us to prioritize our time and action: Pray each day; make Sunday Mass our first priority; read the Bible regularly; participate in a small faith community, Bible study, or faith formation process; be open to a living relationship with our Lord.

Love Others: Jesus tells us we must love others as we love ourselves. For some, this means we have to accept ourselves as we are in order to love others well; for some, we need to focus on others as deserving of our love, even those we do not know and those we consider less important (God doesn't see them that way!).

Love Sacrificially: Jesus gave his very life for us. Taking up Jesus' way with our lives will call us to take up our cross -- in other words, to accept the difficult

things in life, knowing that Christ's resurrection gives us great hope, and to give beyond what seems reasonable; that is the way God loves, and we are called to do so as well.

Love Lavishly: Jesus' very life is witness and testimony to the lavish love God has for humanity. Learning to live as a disciple calls us to love and give generously. "In Jesus' teaching and life self-emptying is fundamental. Now, it might seem that self-emptying has little to do with stewardship, but in Jesus' case that is not so. His self-emptying is not sterile self-denial for its own sake; rather, in setting aside self, he is filled with the Father's will, and he is fulfilled in just this way: 'My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work.'" (Jn 4:34 in SDR, 19)

Love Actively: It isn't enough to say we love God and others, we must show our love by acting on it; serve regularly in a parish ministry, soup kitchen, food pantry, homeless shelter, hospital, assisted living facility, with a family member or neighbor who is ill or elderly, or with children. As Blessed Mother Teresa reminded us, we can do small things with great love!



"Jesus' call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow him at some time in the future but here and now -- at *this* moment, in *these* circumstances. There can be no delay. 'Go and proclaim the kingdom of God...No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

(Lk 9:60, 62 in SDR, 14)

How Are You Already Living as a Disciple?

Living as a disciple is a conscious commitment to following Jesus with our lives. We will always have ways to grow as disciples. How are you already living as a disciple? What areas of your life need attention in order to grow as a disciple in the coming year? Use this space to record your thoughts and your commitment for the future:



After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord -- and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (Jn 13:12-14)