

## The Essentials of Being a Disciple

In three significant ways, a Christian disciple's relationship with Jesus is radically different from the relationship a first-century Jewish male would have had with a rabbi.



Msgr. Steven Callahan

First, it was always the other person who sought out the rabbi; with Jesus, He is the one who takes the initiative in seeking out disciples. Second, the focus of the relationship with a rabbi was content, a body of teaching; with Jesus, the focus is the person of Jesus Himself. Third, once someone had learned everything he could from a rabbi, the two would go their separate ways; with Jesus, a disciple is called into a lifelong relationship, and the learning is never completed.

We use the word "disciple" frequently in conversation, but do we really understand what it entails?

Being a follower of Jesus is a dynamic, fluid experience. It is something that we never quite live perfectly or in its fullness. Even within a given day, sometimes we think and act like a follower of Jesus, and sometimes we don't. Being a disciple is a vision to which we commit ourselves at the beginning of each day, and it can serve as an examination of conscience for our prayerful reflection at the end of each day.

A disciple is a lifelong student, a learner on a journey rooted in a relationship with Jesus. We receive the call to be a disciple at our baptism, but at what point in our lives do

we respond to it?

A disciple has fallen in love with Jesus and is a follower of Jesus, regardless of the cost. Can we identify the moment or period of time in our lives when we fell in love with Jesus? Has it happened yet?

A disciple seeks to imitate Jesus more and more in Jesus' way of thinking and acting. Jesus calls us not just to admire His way of living, but to embrace it as our own. This will always involve conversion and transformation if we continually challenge ourselves with the question: What ways of my own thinking and acting are not like those of Jesus?

A disciple is a living sign of Jesus' presence in the world today. In the words of St. Teresa of Avila, we are to be His eyes and ears, His voice, His hands and feet.

A disciple allows the Lord to lead him/her in the way he/she lives. This becomes a critical turning point in our lives as disciples, when we no longer decide what to do and ask the Lord to bless it. Instead, we listen for the Lord at work, taking the initiative and seeking to lead us in what He wants us to do.

A disciple comes to a growing awareness of his/her charisms or gifts received from the Lord and seeks to use them in service of others. These gifts and charisms can change over the course of one's lifetime. In the language of stewardship, a disciple recognizes all that one has as gifts from God and uses his/her time, talent and treasure in loving service.

A disciple lives with a conscious sense of meaning and purpose, of being sent on mission by the Lord. Every disciple has a unique mission entrusted to him/her.

A disciple knows him/herself as a beloved child of God

and strives to see all other human beings as beloved children of God. At what point in our lives do we come to this awareness, not just in our heads but also in our hearts, in the depths of our being?

A disciple reflects regularly on the Word of God. This is essential. How else do we come to know the One who calls us into relationship with Him? As St. Jerome said, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."

A disciple participates regularly in a faith community, knowing "me and Jesus" is not enough. The Gospels reveal to us that Jesus did not call disciples into individual, one-on-one relationships with Him. He called disciples together into relationship with Him and one another.

A disciple has a rule and rhythm of life. In *The Holy Longing*, Father Ronald Rolheiser categorizes this in terms of four non-negotiables: personal prayer and personal morality; social justice — concern for the poor, weak, vulnerable, marginalized; mellowness of heart and spirit — grateful, joyful, compassionate; and being active in a community of faith.

A disciple makes disciples, wanting others to share in the joy of a love relationship with Jesus. To be blunt, you are not really a disciple unless you are inviting and encouraging others to be disciples. This is not so much a duty or obligation as it is the fruit of a love relationship with Jesus. Love always flows outward to share its joy with others.

*The Southern Cross*

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## Suicidal Thoughts

When you have a little time, please visit my Web site, *JohnCatoir.com*, and scroll down past the white cross and the "Special Blessing," then click on the left side under my portrait and view my video interview on the topic of spiritual joy. It has a section on suicidal thoughts, that has helped a lot of people.



Father John Catoir

One lady who was overwhelmed with despair at first didn't want to have anything to do with a priest. She was lost at the bottom of a pit and saw no way out. Nevertheless, there was a way out. She found out slowly that safety, freedom and happiness were all waiting for her as soon as she discovered the escape hatch. A new life and a new love was just around the corner. She prayed and received the grace to reverse her thinking. In time, she lived to discover great peace and happiness.

Once she decided to spend a little time with this video of mine, she gradually came to understand that all the good things of life can be regained, once you open your eyes to the love of God, and exercise a little patience.

I explain how to clear your mind of self-sabotage. If you've read my columns over the years, you'll recognize my line of reasoning. First, I lay the groundwork for joy to begin the liberation process. Slowly, the suicidal thoughts begin to lose their power. Remember, I ran a drug and alcohol rehab for a few years, and I know what I'm talking about.

This two-pronged strategy begins with the pursuit of spiritual joy, and proceeds with the rejection of deadly, self-destructive thoughts. One of the first things you need to grasp is the fact that you are not your thoughts. You are the observer of your thoughts. More precisely, you can reject the phony belief that you have no choice. You really want liberation, not death. Suicide is permanent and it has eternal consequences. You have been deceived. It's no solution; only a knee-jerk reaction. Delete suicide from your mind.

You are destined for happiness, here and hereafter. With God's help, happiness can be yours once again. It takes an act of the will to persevere in praying for God's grace to enable you to change your direction. Millions of desperate souls have done it successfully over the centuries, and so can you.

I explain the process of renewal in my video. I promise it will lead you to a happier life. Keep in mind, if you do decide to take your life, you'll be putting a blight on the conscience of everyone who ever cared about you, especially your parents and relatives living and dead. Also, you'll be setting a terrible example for your children and grandchildren. Let your final act be one of heroism, not despair.

"Don't be afraid," said the Lord. Those words appear 365 times in the Bible. It means that you have the power to banish needless anxiety. Jesus would never have promised to be your strength and your joy if He didn't intend to follow through. You have the power to imagine yourself as a hero or heroine.

You can choose to be Joan of Arc or the Angel Gabriel. Be a winner for all eternity. Just around the corner of the dark tunnel

you might be in, there's an underground railway ready to whisk you away to freedom, refreshment and healing. Believe the Lord Jesus who said, "Fear is useless, what you need is trust" (Luke 8:50).

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## IN LOVING Memory

INTO THY HANDS, O Lord, we commend the spirits of these beloved ones who are gone before us into the realm of thy eternal happiness and peace. AMEN

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