

Lesson 21

Discipleship and Mission



In the “**Great Commission**,” Jesus informs his disciples about their mission (*which is also the Mission of the Church*). The Great Commission is highlighted below:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:19-20)

After the Holy Spirit appeared to Peter and the apostles, they formed the early Church. Today, the Church is still the sign and instrument of God’s communion with all humanity. The Church unites people from around the world. We do not have to travel alone on our journey to God. The Church (*the people of God*) walks with us, teaching the truth and communicating faith. The Great Commission is Christ’s mission for his Church; it is a mission of mercy, unity, and love.

Besides the Church’s mission, each disciple (*including you*) is given a specific mission from God. God blesses each of us with the gifts and talents needed to fulfill our particular mission. Our mission from God gives us purpose. In short, you have been designed by God with a purpose; you were made for mission. God has the ultimate plan for your life. All you need to do is follow it. You have been designed by God with a purpose. Ignore how God has designed you and you will be inviting every type of misery into your life. Embrace how God has designed you and you will experience unimaginable joy, even when things don’t go your way.

The main concern in fulfilling our mission is to align ourselves with God and His plan for us. The more we align with God, the less mess, heartache, and suffering we cause. God knows you better than anyone else. He knows you better than you know yourself. God designed you and He designed you with a specific mission in mind; therefore, you were designed on purpose and for a purpose.

If you want to discover your mission, then you need to speak to the person who gave it to you: God. This is why prayer is such an important part of our spiritual life. God speaks to us in a variety of ways; however, there are three ordinary voices He uses to communicate with us, with regards to our mission: Legitimate Needs, Talents and Abilities, and Deepest Desire.

The first ordinary voice of God is legitimate needs. We are created with legitimate needs which are physical (*eat, air, water, sleep, clothing, etc.*), emotional (*opportunities to love and be loved*), intellectual (*education and learning*), and spiritual (*silence, prayer, sacraments, and Scriptures*). God gives us these legitimate needs to allow us to live life to the fullest. It is in our need that we experience our dependence on God. This also helps us to relate to the needs of others, especially those who are less fortunate.

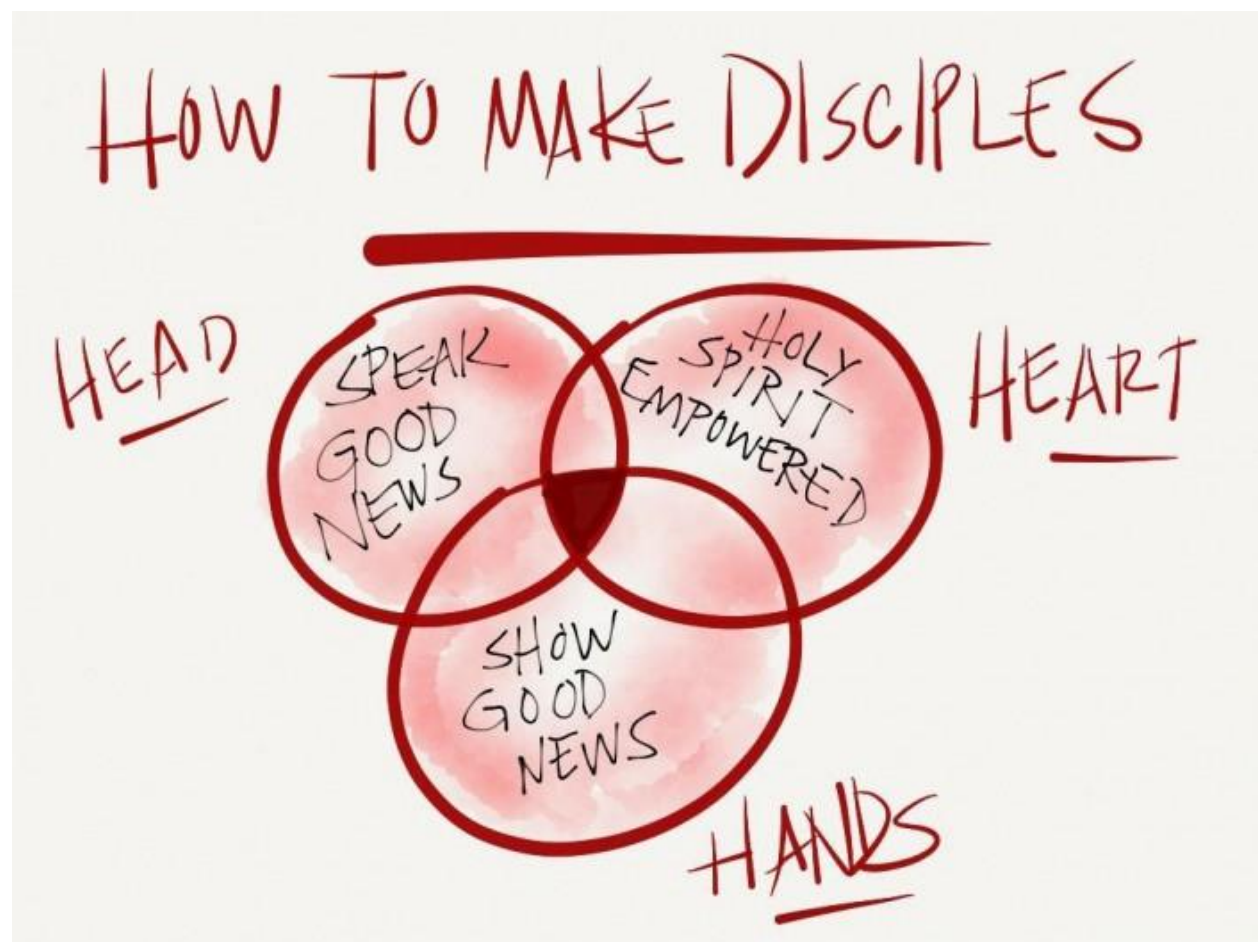
The second ordinary voice of God is talents and abilities. God gives us whatever talents and abilities that we need to fulfill His mission for us. There are two types of talents: universal and unique. Universal talents are those that we all possess, such as the ability to make a difference in the lives of others. Unique talents are those that everyone does not have, such as the ability to sing, speak foreign languages, or play sports. The world tends to distort the importance of unique talents by assigning greater importance to certain gifts. Remember, the world takes the trivial and makes it important, and takes the important and makes it trivial. God gives each of us the gifts that we need for our mission. God wants us to use our gifts and talents freely and generously for the benefit of all.

The third ordinary voice of God is deepest desire. Deep in your heart you have desires for good things, and God has placed those desires in your heart to guide you to the life He has envisioned for you. Trust in God and His plan for you and you will have all of your heart's desires. When we embrace God and His way of life, He reveals many dimensions of everyday life that we have never seen or thought about before. God is speaking to you through your deepest desires. Seek out your deepest desires for good things and have the courage to pursue them. This is how we become better disciples of Christ.



We are called to be modern day disciples of Jesus Christ. A disciple is one who is sent. Christ sends us out into the world to continue his mission of love: to spread the Good News. We become the eyes, the ears, the mouth, the voice, the hands, and the feet of Christ. By opening ourselves up to Christ, we allow the glory of God to radiate through our actions. That is what a good disciple does.

To be the eyes, ears, mouth, voice, hands, and feet of our Lord is a very privileged and important mission. How do we fulfill this call of discipleship? With our head, heart, and hands. We use our “head” to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. We use our “heart” to listen to and be motivated by the Holy Spirit. And we use our “hands” to perform labors of love that display the love of God in action. The following diagram puts this concept into a visual format:



Another term for discipleship in today's world is "Stewardship." Stewardship is our responsibility to use all the things that God has given to us for the betterment of the Church and others. Stewardship is a complete lifestyle, a life of total accountability and responsibility acknowledging God as Creator and Owner of all. It is living out a commitment to be Christ-centered rather than self-centered. Stewardship encompasses the "Three T's": Time, Talent, and Treasure. God blesses each of us with these Three T's and He expects us to use them to fulfill the mission that He gives us.

Stewardship is an action of gratitude, thanking God for His abundant blessings with the responsible management of His gifts to us by using them for the benefit of others. Stewardship is about putting God first and trusting in His love and grace. We are called to give “the first and best of our fruits” to God. This means that we should give back to God (*with the very best that we have to offer*) before we think of our own needs and wants.



Four Principles of Biblical Stewardship

1. The principle of ownership.

Psalm 24 begins with: *“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”* In the beginning of Genesis, God creates everything and puts Adam in the Garden to work and to take care of it. It is clear that man was created to work and that work is the stewardship of all of the creation that God has given him. This is the fundamental principle of biblical stewardship. God owns everything and we are simply managers acting on His behalf. Stewardship is the commitment of one’s self and possessions to God’s service, recognizing that we do not have the right of control over our property or ourselves.

2. The principle of responsibility.

Although God gives us “all things richly to enjoy,” nothing is ours. Nothing really belongs to us. God owns everything; we’re responsible for how we treat it and what we do with it.

The question is: What about your responsibilities? Owners have rights; stewards have responsibilities. We are called as God's stewards to manage that which belongs to God. While God has graciously entrusted us with the care, development, and enjoyment of everything He owns as His stewards, we are responsible to manage His holdings well and according to His purposes.

3. The principle of accountability.

A steward is one who manages the possessions of another. We are all stewards of the resources, abilities, and opportunities that God has entrusted to our care, and one day each one of us will be called to give an account for how we have managed what the Master has given us. We will be called to give an account of how we have administered everything we have been given. This is why it is important to take spiritual inventory of the gifts we have and how well we utilizing them for the greater Glory of God.

4. The principle of reward.

The fullness of stewardship's reward is not in this world; but it is guaranteed in heaven. Saint Paul writes: *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving"* (Colossians 3:23-24). In short, everything we do should be done for the love of God so that our actions will bear good fruit that will bring the joy of Jesus to others.

The ultimate reward and goal of our stewardship is to hear God say to us: *"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's joy!"* (Matthew 25:21).



Three quick ways to view the concept of Stewardship:

1. Stewardship is what we do after we say, "*I believe.*" In other words, stewardship is our faith in action.
2. Stewardship is based on the individual's need to give out of gratitude, rather than the Church's need to receive. Stewardship is a spiritual way of life...a conversion process that changes lives.
3. Stewardship is Intentional, Planned, and Proportionate giving.



Works of Mercy

The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy are another aspect of discipleship and mission. As Catholics, we bring the love and mercy of God to others by performing these works. These labors of love truly bring God's love and mercy to other people. There are seven Corporal and seven Spiritual Works of Mercy. The Corporal Works of Mercy are concerned with the material (*or physical*) needs of others; whereas, the Spiritual Works of Mercy are concerned with the spiritual needs of others. The following chart lists each of the different Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

THE WORKS OF MERCY

CORPORAL & SPIRITUAL

FEED THE HUNGRY 	 INSTRUCT THE IGNORANT
GIVE DRINK TO THE THIRSTY 	 COUNSEL THE DOUBTFUL
SHELTER THE HOMELESS 	 ADMONISH SINNERS
CLOTHE THE NAKED 	 FORGIVE OFFENSES
VISIT THE SICK 	 COMFORT THE AFFLICTED
VISIT THE IMPRISONED 	 BEAR WRONGS PATIENTLY
BURY THE DEAD 	 PRAY FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

"A BIT OF MERCY MAKES THE WORLD LESS COLD AND MORE JUST" (POPE FRANCIS) 

Imagine just how different the world would be if everyone practiced just one work of mercy each day. How would the world be different if these works of mercy defined the way we live our lives? If you want to change the world, then you have to start by changing yourself. The works of mercy help us to change and grow; they are essential for our mission as modern day disciples of Christ.

Conscience

One of the best tools that God has given us to complete our mission and to be good disciples is the gift of conscience. The conscience is the inner voice in a person that moves one to do good under any circumstances and to avoid evil by all means. In the conscience, God speaks to man. Conscience is the inner voice in which God manifests (*makes Himself known*) in a man. God is the one who becomes apparent in the conscience.

Each of us must form our conscience. The conscience, which is innate to every person, can be misled and deadened. That is why it must be formed into an increasingly fine-tuned instrument for acting rightly. The more we allow sin to take hold in our life, the more we become comfortable in it; this is what deadens our conscience. In other words, the more we repeat a sin, the more it becomes a habit. When this occurs, the sin will turn into part of one's lifestyle. The more comfortable we are with sin, the softer the voice of our conscience will become. The danger becomes if the voice of our conscience can no longer be heard; hence, our conscience is deadened.



One area of conscience is self-criticism. We have the tendency to judge things to our own advantage. We must constantly turn to the Holy Spirit for His assistance in distinguishing our voice (*or the world's voice*) for God's voice. Only by following God's voice will we become effective disciples in the world.

Another area of conscience is orientation to the good actions of others. The correct formation of conscience leads a person into the freedom to do what has been correctly identified as good. With the help of the Holy Spirit and Scripture, the Church over her long history has accumulated a vast knowledge about right action; it is part of her mission to instruct people and also to give them directions. Thus, the wisdom of the Church helps to form our conscience. A good conscience allows us to use our freewill wisely by choosing to do right.

The Cost of Discipleship



Jesus gives us a summation of what the cost of discipleship is in Luke 9:23. The price that we must pay to be true disciples of our Lord is sacrifice. We must put aside our wants and desires to do what God wants us to do. This self-sacrifice will bring us the maximum amount of joy in this world. It is challenging to put our wants aside and do the will of the Father; however, we must remember that God knows what is best for us. We simply need to trust Him. Jesus outlines discipleship in three steps: (1) deny yourself, (2) take up your cross, and (3) follow him.

The cost of discipleship allows us to enter more fully into the Paschal Mystery (*the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ*). For when we embrace the cross (*suffering and sacrifice*), we embrace Christ (*the source of Eternal Love*). Are you willing to pay the cost of discipleship?

