

# HomeWord

Vol. 4, No. 5 A newsletter dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## In This Issue

We explore the meaning of Christian discipleship from a family perspective. Discipleship is not a set of tasks or a job description for how to behave. It goes deeper. It is an identity that permeates all that one does.

The lead article in this issue offers eight characteristics of discipleship for believing families. Few, if any, families succeed with them all, but they are certainly worth striving for. The second article offers a powerful reflection on the words of Jesus found in Luke's Gospel, "Anyone who does not take up the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (14:27). We welcome Sr. Phyllis Jaskowiak, SNJM, as a new *HomeWord* author. We know you will be challenged by this *HomeWord* issue; we also hope you enjoy it.

**Prayer, ritual, and worship.** As his disciples, we seek to connect with Jesus. We pray together at home; we pray for one another in our solitude; we ritualize the key moments of change in our family life; and we worship regularly with the larger community of believers.

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## Family Discipleship

by Leif Kehrwald

Have you ever noticed the similarity between the words *discipline* and *disciple*? They come from the same root. Being a disciple requires discipline, and exercising discipline, with your children for example requires discipleship.

What is a disciple anyway? Sure, we know who Jesus' original disciples were: Peter, James, John, Nathaniel, and the others. You can also add Martha, Mary, Mary Magdalene, and all those who, while not among the twelve Apostles, were original followers and believers in Jesus. A disciple is one who dedicates himself or herself to the teachings and message of the teacher, and deliberately shapes his or her daily life accordingly.

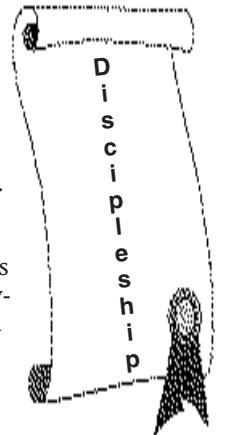
How does a believing family exercise discipleship? How do we live the ordinary and extraordinary events of our lives in a way that reflects our beliefs in Jesus? At the risk of coming across as too "preachy," I invite you to reflect on and discuss the following eight characteristics of family discipleship. Read them aloud and adopt them as your own.

**Call.** As a family, we not only sense God's presence in our life but also desire to place ourselves at God's disposal in some way, however minor or major.

**Commitment.** We make a promise of faithfulness to God and one another. We pledge to support one another when individual commitment wanes.

**Practice.** Like apprentices learning a lifelong trade, as a believing family, we practice our faith. We express our beliefs without apology or embarrassment, yet we are not condescending and never flaunt our beliefs.

**Discipline.** We stay the course of our beliefs even when the "feel good" times seem to have abandoned us. God is more than a feeling or an urge to be satisfied. We seek to live our faith, even when we would prefer to do otherwise.



## The Cost of Discipleship

by Phyllis Jaskowiak, SNJM

"Anyone who does not take up the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). This is one of Jesus' most notable and inspiring sayings . . . at least from a distance. Sure, I'll take up the cross. I'm a believer. Just show me.

Okay, you asked for it.

There is a family in Gresham, Oregon, who had six children, two of whom had cystic fibrosis. Through heroic love and care from their family, the two lived to be twelve years old, about double the usual life expectancy of children with this disease.

Take up your cross and follow me.

There was an archbishop in El Salvador who stood with the outcast, preached against violence to the poor, and held firm to his faith in the face of grave danger. He was killed while saying mass.

Take up your cross and follow me.

There is a mother with two children who finally divorced her alcoholic husband because the children were tormented by their parents' strife and inability to reconcile. She now treads lightly between being truthful about their father but not turning her children against him.

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In their pastoral message to families, *Follow the Way of Love*, the U.S. Bishops offer some very practical insights for family discipleship.

“You carry out the mission of the church of the home in ordinary ways when:

- You **love** and never give up believing in the value of another person.
- You **foster intimacy**, beginning with the physical and spiritual union of the spouses and extending in appropriate ways to the whole family.
- You **pray together**, thanking God for blessings, reaching for strength, and asking for guidance in crisis and doubt.
- You **serve one another**, often sacrificing your own wants, for the other’s good.
- You **forgive and seek reconciliation**. Over and over, you let go of old hurts and grudges to make peace with one another.
- You **celebrate life** and you **affirm life** as a precious gift from God.
- You welcome the stranger, the lonely one, the grieving person into your home.
- You act justly in your community when you treat others with respect.”

*Follow the Way of Love: The U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Message to Families* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), pp. 9-10.

(“Family Discipleship,” continued from page 1)

**Service, compassion, and generosity toward others.** We never forget that no matter how trying times may be, there are always others who are less fortunate than ourselves. Discipleship calls us out of our own woes into works of mercy and justice for others. Ironically, these works often have great healing power in our own family.

**Communion.** We recognize that discipleship is not a solitary journey, and so we seek to connect with others who share our convictions. Christianity is a communal faith. Each one of us holds pearls of grace that must be shared with all.

**Reflection.** We take moments to look back on our day, our week, our year, our key events to see if we can discern God’s gracious activity in our lives. There is no question that God is present among us, but we must set aside time to reflect on God’s presence.

Discipleship is a combination of identity and behavior. This reveals a paradox: we are a discipleship family (have that identity), but our behavior doesn’t always reflect it. Herein lies the rub that challenges and inspires us to, in the words of John Paul II, “become who you are” as a Christian family.

Your family, like mine, regularly comes up short of total discipleship, yet because you are believers, and you seek God’s redemptive activity in your lives, you are indeed God’s disciples.

The U.S. Bishops say it quite clearly in their 1994 pastoral message to families *Follow the Way of Love*, “As Christian families, you not only belong to the church, but your daily life is a true expression of church” (p. 8).

(“The Cost of Discipleship,” continued from page 1)

Take up your cross and follow me.

There is a couple in Wisconsin whose only child had Down’s syndrome. They cared for her at home as long as they could, but finally had to place her in an institution. They then lobbied their state legislature and succeeded in obtaining more services for disabled children.

Take up your cross and follow me.

There is a woman, actually more than one, who has the gifts of ordained ministry, but as a Catholic, cannot pursue that call. She serves in other capacities and brings people to faith with joy and compassion while her desires for ordination go unfulfilled.

Take up your cross and follow me.

There was a man who preached against racism and violence. He was jailed several times for speaking the truth about bigotry in the United States. He was killed for his beliefs in Selma, Alabama.

Take up your cross and follow me.

There is a teenager who is ridiculed by many of his peers for refusing to smoke or drink. He bears them no hate, even though the put-downs are hard to take.

Take up your cross and follow me.

There is a parish community in Portland, Oregon, who feeds the homeless. Some neighbors want to close the dining hall because they don’t want those people in their neighborhood. Yet the parish knows it must reach out to those who are hungry and poor.

Take up your cross and follow me.

Pause. Think. Who do you know who takes up the cross to be a disciple of Jesus? What is your cross?

Some people take what little life gives and find a way to live it to the fullest.

Others, facing similar situations, fill their lives with anger and despair. Some seek escape from pain through alcohol, drugs, TV, money, work, sex, or isolation. Even those of us who claim to be disciples have at times slipped into despair.

Being a disciple is not easy or romantic, but Jesus reassures us that his “yoke is easy and the burden light.” Notice the inner joy of those who shoulder their cross through life. They may not be happy every moment, but you can sense the profound joy and peace that sustain them.

When the crosses in our lives seem too much to bear, the only thing that saves us is our personal relationship with God. Discipleship is an all-consuming vocation. It must be accepted with mature deliberation, for there will surely be dark times. In fact, that’s the paradox of faith: the dark times can turn out to be some of the best times.

We believe, with Isaiah, that God gives us the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, for which each of us can know the mind of God.

