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THE ACTIVATED
DISCIPLE
CHALLENGE



ASCENSION

West Chester, Pennsylvania

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INTRODUCTION

Every day is a new opportunity to walk with Jesus and discover aspects of him and yourself that you would not otherwise come to know. Fully participating in your relationship with Jesus will truly make a difference in your life, assuring both growth and fruitfulness.

This guide is a tool to keep you focused for forty days on the One who will bring about the transformation you really desire. Change in your life, whether it be growing in virtue, stopping bad habits from flourishing, or gaining wisdom for life's many decisions, comes from repeatedly meeting Christ, the source of infinite love, wisdom, and protection.

The goal of this forty-day challenge to walk with Jesus is to ultimately make walking with him a habit, a part of who you are. In the end, I hope you say, "I can't live without it and didn't know what I was missing." I have heard many people say that they need to spend more time in praying, reading the Bible, and looking for opportunities to be a witness for Christ. Unfortunately, the expressed desire to do more is not met with a structure that lends itself to a habit-forming exercise. My hope is that *The Activated Disciple Challenge* guide will help you make meeting Jesus multiple times a day a new habit in your life.

If you haven't read *The Activated Disciple: Taking Your Faith to the Next Level*, I would strongly suggest you take the time

to do so as much of what you will be doing in these next forty days flows from the pages of that book. Of special note is the chapter on *lectio divina*, where I explain how to spend a few minutes each day talking with God. *Lectio divina* is a very important part of this forty-day challenge. What you gain in your prayer time with the Lord will color your day.

Before I explain the flow of each day of this challenge, I would like to make a couple of key points that will correctly orient you as a disciple to the Lord:

- It is important to remind yourself every day during this journey that you are responding to an invitation from the Lord to become his disciple. He chose you and has invited you to follow him and become like him. This exercise is not another invitation to simply learn more but is an invitation to become, to change, to be transformed by knowing Christ's mind, heart, and plans. As you come to understand the mind of Christ and have a grasp of his plan for humanity, you will then be compelled to continue his mission by actively looking for opportunities to express it publicly with friends and family.
- With this in mind, I would encourage you to come up with daily signposts that will remind you that you are actively following, all throughout the day, the second Person of the Trinity. By signposts, I mean things like every time you hear a certain alert on your smartphone, or see a particular color of car, that you pause and remind yourself that you are on a journey with Jesus, twenty-four seven. Give yourself every

advantage to be deliberate about your responsibilities as a disciple.

- Pray that your walk with Christ will always be in your thoughts and every encounter would be influenced by the one you are walking with: Jesus.

While *The Activated Disciple* book is more comprehensive in describing the life of a disciple, this forty-day challenge is designed to both craft a lifestyle that looks like the life of a disciple and to focus on eight virtues that will be the subjects of change in your heart. These eight virtues are:

1. Love
2. Forgiveness
3. Humility
4. Patience
5. Selflessness
6. Kindness
7. Attentiveness
8. Contrition

You will marinate your heart and mind in these virtues (for five days each) with the hopes that you will grow and become more like Jesus. Each virtue of a disciple is split into two parts, and each part begins with a video. You will watch the video for the first part of each topic, complete the first two days of the challenge, check in with me in the video for the second part, then complete the last three days of the topic.

Each day of the challenge is structured into three parts: (1)

A Word with God, (2) Check In, and (3) Review the Day. Note that participating in Mass regularly, going to confession, praying the Rosary, and being involved in Bible study are all basic disciplines of the disciple, so adding these to your days is also encouraged.

A WORD WITH GOD (*Lectio Divina*)

Each and every day, the activated disciple must spend time with the Lord in prayer. This is the foundation of your relationship and must be given prime time and attention. I would suggest meeting with the Lord for fifteen to twenty minutes each morning to do *lectio divina* with the given text in this guide for that day. If you can't meet in the morning, figure out a good time to regularly meet with the Lord. Remember, consistency in time and place will better assure your success in developing a habit.

In your time of *lectio*, you are listening to what the Lord is saying to you that day. You will have the opportunity to talk to the Lord and bring your concerns to him, and he will be able to point out to you what he wants you to focus on that day. Make sure to write down your thoughts and what you believe God is pointing out to you. Taking what God reveals to you in prayer into your day will be very helpful in your growth and may become just what your friends and family needed to hear from you.

CHECK IN

Look for opportunities to not only grow in these virtues but to also express them in your encounters throughout each day. As you go about your day, be aware of opportunities for you to apply what you gained in your prayer time with the Lord. I have always been amazed at how many times the nuggets of truth the Lord has revealed to me in prayer become vital throughout the day.

Be vigilant, awake, and conscious of the fact that you are a representative of the Lord and will have opportunities to continue his mission. At some time during the day, take a few moments to write down your observations, conversations, or anything else that you feel was important and came from your time of prayer. The more you do this, the more you will see what God is revealing to you.

It is during your day that you can bring in other types of devotions, such as the Divine Mercy Chaplet, Bible study, or the Rosary. Begin to develop a pattern—a rhythm to your life that continually draws you close to the Lord.

REVIEW THE DAY

Throughout your day, you will have experienced many situations, persons, problems, and opportunities. Each day of this challenge will end with an Examen prayer (from St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises). This short time you will spend before going to sleep is a time of reviewing and evaluating how your day went. Were you aware throughout the day of

what God revealed to you in prayer? If not, why? What do you need to change tomorrow to help build this habit of a disciple?

The purpose of this time with the Lord is to contemplate those things you did well, the victories and the areas that need correction in your life. This is the time in the life of a disciple when you can rejoice in the great things the Lord is accomplishing in your life and a time to notice negative patterns that are beginning to develop. Dealing with patterns that could pose a problem in your walk with the Lord is very important, and keeping to your set schedule will help in doing this.

At the end of the day, you can write down any great points of growth and those things that you want to focus on tomorrow. Remember, you are in the process of growth, so don't be too hard on yourself. Becoming like Jesus is a process, but one worth the effort.

YOU ARE PART OF A MOVEMENT

The Activated Disciple Challenge is not just an individual endeavor. Thousands of others are making this walk with you. Many parishes are taking the challenge together and are meeting to compare notes and share stories. I encourage you to keep in close contact with ascensionpress.com as we will be developing more challenges around other important topics. Ascension will also be the hub to join groups from around the world and share your stories.

Thank you for taking this challenge! Becoming an activated disciple will not only change your life, it will change the

world. We are not going to change the world by just teaching the Faith; we must put it into practice, and each person must see themselves as a representative bringing all that Christ taught and did into the world. Continue to walk in the power of your confirmation and the graces you received at baptism.

Not for Duplication

PRE-CHALLENGE CHECK-IN

Watch the Introductory Video

Not for Duplication

Measuring your growth as a disciple is important. Before beginning this forty-day challenge, take a moment to contemplate the following questions.

1. How would you describe your life as a disciple?
Use the space below to honestly reflect on your
current relationship with Jesus.

Not for Duplication

2. After completing this challenge, where do you hope to be as a disciple?

Not for Duplication

4. Schedule a daily time for each of these steps and include ways to remind yourself to adhere to them: (use a calendar, alarm on phone or watch, call a partner, etc.)

- A Word with God (*Lectio Divina*):

- Check In (Activate and Collaborate):

- Day in Review (The Examen Prayer):

SAMPLE OF A "DAILY ACTIVATION"

A Word with God

Lectio Divina

You will start each day of the challenge with lectio divina (divine reading). Specific verses pertaining to each characteristic of being an activated disciple have been chosen for you to read, meditate on, pray about, contemplate, and act on.

Spend a few moments in a quiet place preparing your heart and asking God to meet you in his Word.

Follow these steps to pray the scripture verse(s):

READ

Slowly read the selected verse(s), looking for details. Notice key words; verbs and nouns; and anything repeated, compared, or contrasted. What does it say?

MEDITATE

Mentally “chew” on the passage’s key words or images to extract their meaning. Let the words sink in and take hold. What words catch and hold your attention?

PRAY

Pay attention to the way your meditation connects with your life and respond to what you find. Here, you are “having a word” with God through his Word! Talk with him (not at him) about this.

CONTEMPLATE

Savor being in God’s presence. Enjoy what God has given you.

IMITATE

Resolve to act on what God has revealed to you in *lectio divina*. What specific attitude or action will you imitate regarding the characteristic of a disciple at the focus of the day’s Scripture verse(s)?

Example: I will go out of my way to be patient with other commuters and pray for those who tested my patience instead of acting out in frustration.

Check In

ACTIVATE

Note circumstances during your day that gave you the opportunity to exercise the characteristic of a disciple God revealed to you in your time with him.

Examples:

Even though I was in a hurry to get to work, I assisted someone who stopped me for directions.

I didn't make a negative comment when a coworker challenged my ideas in the meeting.

COLLABORATE

Did you check in with your crew? (Check in with your accountability partner once a week, and cultivate your ongoing relationship with your crew periodically throughout the day. Pray to the saints and the Blessed Mother.)

Examples:

I asked St. Monica to pray for me during my meeting.

I texted Stephanie when I felt my temper coming on, and she sent me the perfect scripture verse to calm me down. Praise God!

Day in Review

DELIBERATE

Take time to “pray on your day” using the Examen prayer (from St. Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises).¹

1. **Express Gratitude:** Give thanks to God for the gifts he has given you today.
2. **Seek Grace:** Ask God for the insight to see what he’s been trying to reveal to you throughout the day, and for guidance in recognizing the hurdles you faced in trying to do his will.
3. **Roll the Tape:** Review the day you just lived like a film in your head, paying close attention to moments you felt close to God, those in which you did not, and how you chose to respond in these moments.
4. **Ask for Forgiveness:** Admit any mistakes you made today and ask God to heal your heart.²
5. **Focus Forward:** Take the insights God has given you today and ask him where he is leading you. What does he want from you tomorrow? Together, in relationship with him and through his grace, prepare yourself to take on the next day.

¹ See Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today* (New York: Crossroad, 2006).

² If the mistake was a sin, go to confession.

Before beginning this part of the challenge,
view the video *Love: Part One*

LOVE: Part One

Love

If your family or friends were asked how they knew that you were a disciple of Jesus, what would they say?

After the Lord called twelve men to become his disciples, he trained them and sent them out to do the work of his kingdom. But how did others know that these men were disciples of Jesus? Was it evident in the way they spoke, by what they wore? Did their political views or those with whom they associated reveal who they were following?

There are many ways the public could identify these men as followers of Jesus, but he established one criterion by which all could identify his followers. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Every day we are given opportunities to show the world who God is by loving others. This great opportunity demands that we respond to relationships differently than the world does. Love is not merely an emotional feeling of affection but a power that heals wounds, overcomes prejudices, and renews relationships. Love is a profound and life-changing power that comes from God to the world through the heart of a disciple. What is distinct about the love of God is that it is not initiated and executed by mere emotions. The Greek verb *phileo* speaks of friendship or affection for someone. This kind of love may bring people together in a shared activity that results in a bond. *Phileo* is based on feelings and often prompted by emotions.

The Greek verb *agape* is different from *phileo* in that it is unselfish and unconditional love that wills the good of another. *Agape* is often described as the kind of love God demonstrates. The concept of *agape* is used to describe the attitude of God toward his Son (John 17:26), the human race (John 3:16), and those who obey Jesus (John 14:21).

The clear distinction between the two concepts of love is seen in the daily application. Since love as an emotion is prompted by feelings, it cannot be commanded; *phileo* cannot be forced and may not be used in a command to love.

In contrast, *agape* love, which is the most self-sacrificing love there is, may be commanded; hence, Jesus commanded his disciples to “love [*agape*] your enemies” (Matthew 5:44).

The mandate for Christians to “love their enemies” stretches our natural capacity to love to a supernatural capacity that changes the world. God bestows his love and mercy on those

who are undeserving of it, and we, in turn, extend God's love toward others. It is the love of God flowing through you that will penetrate hardened hearts and attract others to God. This week, look for opportunities to freely give of yourself, keeping in mind the eternal good of others.

QUICK TIPS

- Make the choice to love someone. Look for opportunities to love from your will rather than from emotion.
- Take opportunities to love where you will not necessarily be repaid.
- Notice others who are loving you. Take a moment to thank them.



DAY ONE: **LOVE**

(date)

A Word with God

Lectio Divina

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-13

Slowly read the selected verse(s), looking for details. Notice key words; verbs and nouns; and anything repeated, compared, or contrasted. What does it say?

MEDITATE

Mentally “chew” on the passage’s key words or images to extract their meaning. Let the words sink in and take hold. What words catch and hold your attention?

PRAY

Pay attention to the way your meditation connects with your life and respond to what you find. Here, you are “having a word” with God through his Word! Talk with him (not at him) about this.

CONTEMPLATE

Savor being in God’s presence. Enjoy what God has given you.

IMITATE

Resolve to act on what God has revealed to you in *lectio divina*. What specific attitude or action will you imitate regarding the characteristic of a disciple at the focus of the day’s Scripture verse(s)?

Check In

ACTIVATE

Note circumstances during your day that gave you the opportunity to exercise the characteristic of a disciple God revealed to you in your time with him.

Not for Duplication

COLLABORATE

Did you check in with your crew? (Check in with your accountability partner once a week, and cultivate your ongoing relationship with your crew periodically throughout the day. Pray to the saints and the Blessed Mother.)

Day in Review

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4. **Ask for Forgiveness:** Admit any mistakes you made today and ask God to heal your heart.
5. **Focus Forward:** Take the insights God has given you today and ask him where he is leading you. What does he want from you tomorrow? Together, in relationship with him and through his grace, prepare yourself to take on the next day.



DAY TWO: **LOVE**

(date)

A Word with God

Lectio Divina

READ: 1 JOHN 4:7-12

Slowly read the selected verse(s), looking for details. Notice key words; verbs and nouns; and anything repeated, compared, or contrasted. What does it say?

MEDITATE

Mentally “chew” on the passage’s key words or images to extract their meaning. Let the words sink in and take hold. What words catch and hold your attention?

PRAY

Pay attention to the way your meditation connects with your life and respond to what you find. Here, you are “having a word” with God through his Word! Talk with him (not at him) about this.

CONTEMPLATE

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5. **Focus Forward:** Take the insights God has given you today and ask him where he is leading you. What does he want from you tomorrow? Together, in relationship with him and through his grace, prepare yourself to take on the next day.

Before beginning this part of the challenge,
view the video *Love: Part Two*

Use this space to jot down anything that resonates with you, or to journal in.

Not for Duplication