

Mass Readings: September 10, 2028 - Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time.

First Reading - Wisdom 9:13-9:18b

For who can learn the counsel of God? Or who can discern what the Lord wills? For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail; for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind. We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labor; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high? And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and people were taught what pleases you, and were saved by wisdom.”

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 90:3-90:4, 90:5-90:6, 90:12-90:13, 90:14, 90:17

Second Reading - Philemon 1:9-1:10, 1:12-1:17

yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

Gospel - Luke 14:25-14:33

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Jesus is making two things clear to us today. He is teaching us that following him involves more than feelings and vague inspirations. Yes, as Jesus makes clear from the examples of the builder and the King he uses in today's Gospel reading, we ought to use our minds, put our creativity and intelligence to work. Secondly, the first verse of the Gospel should not lead anyone to think of Scripture contradictions, rather it ought to be understood as hyperbole, since the whole of Scripture loudly and consistently speaks to the importance of healthy human relationships and especially within the family. Unfortunately, it's moments like this, when Scripture is particularly challenging to us, that seekers, religious tourists, and consumer Christians find it difficult to become the followers of Jesus he is looking for: missionary disciples of the first order.

Jesus speaks into the challenges of life, particularly those that have to do with the choices we face, the allegiances we form, and the priorities we develop. All of these have to do with what, who, and the way we choose to love. Everyone wants to love and be loved, God made us this way, but God also made us to love as God loves; ordered, faithful and fruitful. Jesus is challenging our understanding of love and teaching us how our love is intended to be, in accord with our nature, as beings created in Gods' image and likeness, and finally in accord with our supernature after having been baptized. Both natural and supernatural love often arises amidst intense emotions, but then it must necessarily mature through effort, intention, commitment, and suffering, which can only be endured with the aid of the intellect¹ and will² – when aided by Grace and reliant upon both the theological and cardinal virtues³. The human person will never have integrity⁴, and the life of faith will never be authentic unless and to the degree that we recognize that it is Grace that builds on nature⁵, not the other way around. As the First Reading pointed out, though we want to know everything and we desire to understand, we are frustrated in our efforts by our human limitations, the vastness of the universe, and the complexity of the human person: we need the light of faith – the 'wisdom' of God, the Holy Spirit.

The clear message is that relationship with and faithfulness to God must come first. As we all know, even for someone with vibrant faith and faithful practice who desires the holiness to which they are called, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We struggle with faith and belief when it isn't easy or seems to demand what we don't want to give. When Jesus tells us that he wants us to be 'all in', that he wants to be first in our affections, and that everything else ought to be defined and chosen by our identity as children of God... he also knows how difficult that will be for us. There are so many moments in our lives when we must make this choice over and over again. No shortage of young people throughout history have had to face similar types of questions, whether they are persons of faith or no faith. For those who are faced with choices between two apparent goods, I think of the exodus as it affected families, as an example. You love your family, you love your parents and you're a faithful Hebrew person. When Moses declares that the departure of the Hebrews from Egypt is immanent and explains what must be done to prepare, the young person might have fully expected that his parents would listen and act. But he realizes that they have no intention of leaving Egypt. Life may not be good, but what Moses presents is too risky. They oppose him. Suddenly, the young guy doesn't know what to do. He doesn't want to act against his parents and oppose their authority, but neither does he want to disobey God's messenger. Will he deny his parents? Will he deny himself? Will he deny God? Is he willing to pay the cost of following God's will?

The life of a missionary disciple who faithfully prioritizes God, will not resemble the ever so popular prosperity theology⁶. The 'gospel of success and plenty' which emphasizes the power of positive thinking,

¹ <https://www.thomasaquinas.edu/a-liberating-education/about/seminal-documents/formation-catholic-mind>

² <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=9601>

³ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/summacatholic/2022/08/the-theological-and-cardinal-virtues/>

⁴ <https://catholiceducation.org/en/culture/the-virtue-of-integrity.html>

⁵ <https://youtu.be/j7a7MFs0cQc?si=ViiEqdGWddXh0HBU>

⁶ <https://youtu.be/1ip4Jx92F94?si=cSaCrtli-slP2vyYU>

strength of human faith, and philanthropy as opposed to alms, to attract divine favor and achieve an abundant life. For the Christian who subscribes to this theology, they will eventually have to face the realities of life that force them to admit or reject the truth that *“true discipleship is not a matter of convenience but of strong conviction in, and commitment to, the person of Jesus Christ. It will require great sacrifice to faithfully persevere to the end with Jesus. Many will not be able to endure the trials and tests that will inevitably occur because they will be unprepared to make the necessary sacrifices so that Jesus can always be the highest priority of their lives.”*⁷

In the past 2000 years, if we only consider the lives of so many saints, we see that many of them were also faced with the choice presented by Jesus in the Gospel. The choices we face in life are often choices between God first or something / someone else. The choice for God first is often accompanied by a cost, sometimes a great cost. Being an authentic disciple can seem appealing and easy at first to those who are looking for meaning, purpose, healing, and love... which it is of course, but it also means there will come a time when they will face the challenges of discipleship which will require commitment and sacrifice.⁸ *“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”*

The prosperity gospel is an obstacle to becoming a follower of Christ who abandons⁹ himself to God, completely. Since it is rooted in human power resulting from a supposedly constant positive mindset: it reinforces a semi Pelagian¹⁰ mind set, that a positive self-image and optimistic outlook are essential for success and that a scarcity mentality is the work of the enemy. This heresy says a person must cultivate a mentality of abundance to overcome self-limiting beliefs and thinking. This means that by "declaring" or "claiming" blessings like health, favor, and prosperity, a person can bring them into existence since such a life is God's will for those who are saved. In conjunction with this positive thinking approach, you are encouraged to give philanthropically of your riches so that God will reciprocate by giving you even more riches, even to a hundred-fold. This theology downplays suffering and the Scripturally emphasized practices of sacrificial love and eternal rewards.

Clearly, although this approach to Christian living is appealing and tempting, there's no doubt that the focus on material blessings creates a "false idol" where people serve God for personal gain rather than for who God is. The emphasis is on "me" rather than on God. It ignores the reality of suffering, persecution, and poverty that Jesus and the apostles endured and taught about. The "feel-good" message offers little comfort to those in poverty or experiencing hardship. In fact, for them, it has the effect of making them feel guilty. Don't I love God enough? Doesn't God love me? What am I doing wrong? Most importantly, this gospel is unscriptural, often ignoring the context and taking verses out of their original meaning. Jesus' clear message of self-denial is in direct contrast and opposition to the prosperity gospel.

Following Christ is more than following the current personality that captures me, or the latest promise of human wholeness and happiness; it is a long-term relationship that demands and engages the whole person. Following Christ might begin with shallow types of self-serving attractions, or even with the deeper excitement that can result from a retreat or a pilgrimage, or a special grace-filled encounter with the Lord.

⁷ Daniel H. Mueggenborg, [Come Follow Me: Discipleship Reflections on the Sunday Gospel Readings for Liturgical Year C](#), Second edition (Herefordshire, United Kingdom: Gracewing, 2020), 327.

⁸ Daniel H. Mueggenborg, [Come Follow Me: Discipleship Reflections on the Sunday Gospel Readings for Liturgical Year C](#), Second edition (Herefordshire, United Kingdom: Gracewing, 2020), 327.

⁹ <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/abandonment>

¹⁰ The Prosperity Gospel and Pelagianism are two heresies separated by centuries, with a shared emphasis on human effort and material gain which undermines the core message of grace central to the Christian faith. The **Prosperity Gospel** teaches that faith guarantees wealth, health, and success, placing an overemphasis on material blessings. **Pelagianism** denied original sin and taught that humans could achieve salvation through their own efforts without the need for grace. Both heresies overestimate human ability, downplay God's grace, and distort the Christian understanding of suffering, humility, and divine provision. Both deny, or fail to grasp the depth of human sinfulness and the necessity of God's grace.

But even those are in many ways a fleeting beauty, a momentary consoling gift that can and does set our souls and our minds ablaze in amazing, consoling, healing ways - but this work of the Holy Spirit then becomes integrated into our being as we persevere patiently in daily life, following an intelligent plan of spiritual and apostolic work in cooperation with what the Holy Spirit is working and transforming in us.

Our growth in holiness is one area where we often fail to utilize our reason and creativity. Unlike Doctors who are always reading up on the latest medical research; or athletes who are constantly striving to maximize their performance; and Professors who never tire of refining their expertise, we do not strive in the same way to be more like Christ. Too many of us, unfortunately, are satisfied with what we believe we have already achieved in holiness. But Christ has so much more for us to discover and become!

He won't bring us home without our cooperation. He needs us to do our part, and that includes using our intelligence and creativity to identify the habits of mind, heart, and body that are inhibiting our spiritual growth, and to work on replacing them with habits that will spur our spiritual growth. One tool for doing this that spiritual writers and directors have developed over the centuries is called the 'program of life'.¹¹ It's like having a customized game plan for spiritual growth. It has three parts. First, we identify the root of most of our sins and failings. Usually this is one of the seven capital sins. Second, we identify the most common manifestations of that root sin in our daily lives. Third, we choose habits to form that will reverse those manifestations and gradually loosen our root sin's grip.

The 'program of life' is not a shortcut, there are no shortcuts. It is one tool among others we can use to help our spiritual lives become more stable and robust. Another simple thing we can do to grow in our spiritual maturity is to follow through on our spiritual commitments. At some point or another, we have all made some of these. But then the demands and distractions of daily life, or our tendency to laziness gradually crowd out our enthusiasm, and the commitments fade away. Of course, that's not necessarily the 'end of the world', until our dying breath it's not too late to start again. Developing discipline, especially regarding our spiritual commitments, is a way to move beyond emotions based spirituality . And it's also a way to tell Christ how grateful we are for all he has done in our lives, and how eager we are for him to do more. And if you can't remember a past commitment or need a fresh one, maybe you could start by renewing your confidence in Christ's love through the First Friday devotion¹². It was suggested by our Lord himself to St Margaret Mary¹³ and consists of receiving Holy Communion in a spirit of gratitude on nine consecutive First Fridays of the month. It's small, but substantial, and it's a sure way to move beyond fuzzy feelings, since fuzzy feelings rarely last for nine straight months.

Of all the Gospels, Luke's presents the following of Jesus in the most radical terms. In following Jesus, we must go with him the whole way. We must totally accept his way of seeing life and then put that into practice in the way we live. We must strive to reduce and eliminate the periods in life when we are kind of wishy-washy, willing to compromise, trying to have our cake and eat it. Our lives are not to be determined and manipulated by attachments, desires, ambitions or fears and anxieties which can become very much part of ourselves. We are to live in total freedom: *"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple"*.

"To carry the cross means much more than patiently accepting a general human condition of weakness, illness, suffering, and so forth. It really means to voluntarily accept a difficulty as a direct consequence of our commitment to Jesus. Those difficulties may include deliberate sacrifice, exposure to risk, and openness to ridicule. The cross Jesus speaks of is the suffering we knowingly accept as the consequence

¹¹ <https://www.regnumchristi.com/en/wp-content/uploads/PROGRAM-OF-LIFE.pdf>

¹² <https://focus.org/posts/what-is-first-fridays-devotion/>

¹³ <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-margaret-mary-alacoque/>

*of our decision of faithful discipleship. If we are not willing to accept the consequences of discipleship, then we will not be able to remain faithful in times of difficulty”.*¹⁴

St. Ignatius of Loyola¹⁵ and his ‘Spiritual Exercises’¹⁶ have been an enormous help to Catholics striving to be authentic followers of Christ. For 500 years his teachings on the ‘Discernment of Spirits’¹⁷, the ‘Daily Examen’¹⁸, and the ‘Exercises in Daily Life’¹⁹ have all helped people become saints. His is a way for all, not just the Monk or Contemplative in Action Religious. Every one of us can and must develop the ability to contemplate and to reorder priorities.²⁰ In fact, this is a necessary part of maturing in faith that enables us to understand and desire to respond to the call of Christ that says, *“Unless you relinquish all your possessions, you cannot be my disciple.”* This is not a rejection of the blessings of God but is rather an admission that they are given by God, and we offer them back to God. We do not try to grasp them, to horde them, or to fool ourselves into thinking they are our precious possessions. *“Our challenge is to be good stewards who are willing to freely and wisely use our material resources for the mission of the Gospel in accordance with God’s will. As disciples, we must consider this teaching and ask ourselves whether our possessions control us or whether we control them.”*²¹ It is the ability to let go, even of health and life itself. Any aspect of a person or anything that lessens that freedom to follow truth and love is to be ‘hated’ and transcended.

If we try to walk on the Way with Jesus without being aware of what is involved, we will miss the joy and happiness of a totally fulfilled life that Jesus—despite the apparently negative language of today’s Gospel—is holding out to us.

¹⁴ Daniel H. Mueggenborg, [Come Follow Me: Discipleship Reflections on the Sunday Gospel Readings for Liturgical Year C](#), Second edition (Herefordshire, United Kingdom: Gracewing, 2020), 329-330

¹⁵ <https://www.jesuits.org/stories/the-life-of-st-ignatius-of-loyola/>

¹⁶ <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/>

¹⁷ <https://fathersofmercy.com/norms-for-the-discernment-of-spirits/>

¹⁸ <https://files.ecatholic.com/5439/documents/2025/2/A%20Daily%20Examen.pdf?t=1740147635000>

¹⁹ <https://www.jesuitseastois.org/news-feed/the-19th-annotation-of-the-spiritual-exercises>

²⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, a Theological Aesthetics V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Oliver Davies et al. (San Francisco; New York: Ignatius Press; Crossroads Publications, 1991), 105–106.

²¹ Daniel H. Mueggenborg, [Come Follow Me: Discipleship Reflections on the Sunday Gospel Readings for Liturgical Year C](#), Second edition (Herefordshire, United Kingdom: Gracewing, 2020), 330–331.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Hyperbole:** Exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally, used in Scripture to emphasize a point without contradicting other teachings (e.g., "hate" family to love God more).
- **Missionary Disciples of the First Order:** Dedicated followers of Jesus who actively spread the Gospel and embody his teachings, characterized by deep commitment rather than superficial engagement.
- **Ordered, Faithful, and Fruitful Love:** The ideal nature of love as designed by God, implying a love that is rightly prioritized, steadfast, and generative of good.
- **Grace Builds on Nature:** A theological principle stating that divine grace does not destroy or replace human nature, but rather perfects, elevates, and strengthens it.
- **Intellect:** The faculty of reason and understanding, emphasized in the text as crucial for mature love and spiritual growth.
- **Will:** The faculty by which a person decides on and initiates action, essential for sustained effort, intention, and commitment in discipleship.
- **Theological Virtues:** Faith, Hope, and Charity (Love), which are infused by God and direct a person towards God.
- **Cardinal Virtues:** Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance, which are moral virtues that govern actions and passions, attainable by human effort and perfected by grace.
- **Integrity:** The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness. In the context, it signifies wholeness and authenticity in faith.
- **Light of Faith (Wisdom of God/Holy Spirit):** Divine revelation and guidance necessary to overcome human limitations in understanding the vastness and complexity of existence, leading to true wisdom.
- **Prosperity Theology (Prosperity Gospel):** A controversial Christian belief that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for them and that faith, positive speech, and donations will increase one's material wealth.
- **Semi-Pelagianism:** A theological error that overestimates human ability in achieving salvation or spiritual growth, suggesting that humans can initiate faith or good works without God's prior grace, thus downplaying the necessity of divine intervention.
- **Sacrificial Love:** Love that involves giving up something of value, often for the benefit of others or in faithful obedience to God, contrasting with self-serving love.
- **Self-Denial:** The act of giving up one's own desires or interests for the sake of a higher principle or another person, a core aspect of Jesus' teaching on discipleship.
- **Program of Life:** A personalized spiritual tool involving three steps: identifying root sins, observing their manifestations, and forming new habits to counteract them for spiritual growth.
- **First Friday Devotion:** A specific Catholic devotion consisting of receiving Holy Communion on nine consecutive First Fridays of the month in gratitude, suggested as a way to cultivate discipline and move beyond emotion-based spirituality.
- **Carrying the Cross:** Voluntarily accepting difficulties, suffering, risks, and ridicule as a direct consequence of one's commitment to Jesus and faithful discipleship, rather than merely enduring general human suffering.
- **St. Ignatius of Loyola:** Founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), known for his spiritual teachings and methods, including the Spiritual Exercises.
- **Spiritual Exercises:** A set of Christian meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola to help people discern God's will and deepen their spiritual lives.

- **Discernment of Spirits:** A process, particularly in Ignatian spirituality, of understanding and interpreting one's thoughts, feelings, and impulses to determine their origin (divine, good, or evil) and guide spiritual choices.
- **Daily Examen:** A prayer practice, taught by St. Ignatius, involving a daily review of one's day to recognize God's presence, reflect on actions, and seek growth.
- **Stewardship:** The responsible oversight and protection of something considered worth caring for and preserving. In the context, it refers to managing God-given resources (material and otherwise) for the Gospel mission.

Briefly: The Choices We Face - Understanding Authentic Discipleship

This briefing document summarizes the key themes and essential points of the homily, focusing on the nature of authentic discipleship, the challenges involved, and practical approaches to spiritual growth.

I. The Nature of Authentic Discipleship

The core message emphasizes that following Jesus is a profound and active commitment, far exceeding superficial emotional responses or casual interest.

A. Beyond Feelings and Vague Inspirations

Authentic discipleship requires intellectual engagement and intentional effort, not just "feelings and vague inspirations." Jesus's parables of the builder and the king illustrate the need to "use our minds, put our creativity and intelligence to work."

B. Prioritizing God Above All Else

The primary and most challenging aspect of discipleship is placing "relationship with and faithfulness to God... first." This means all other aspects of life – "the choices we face, the allegiances we form, and the priorities we develop" – must be defined and chosen by our identity as children of God.

C. Love as God Loves: Ordered, Faithful, and Fruitful

Our understanding of love is challenged and refined. God made us to love as He loves: "ordered, faithful and fruitful." This love, while potentially arising amidst intense emotions, must mature through "effort, intention, commitment, and suffering," supported by intellect, will, grace, and virtues.

D. Grace Builds on Nature

A fundamental principle is that "Grace builds on nature, not the other way around." This acknowledges human limitations and the vastness of the universe, highlighting the necessity of "the light of faith – the 'wisdom' of God, the Holy Spirit" to truly understand and grow.

E. "All In" Commitment

Jesus demands an "all in" commitment, wanting to be "first in our affections." This is a difficult choice that must be made "over and over again" throughout life, often requiring choosing God over other apparent goods, even family, as illustrated by the example of the Exodus.

II. Challenges to Authentic Discipleship

The path of discipleship is not without obstacles, particularly in a world that often promotes contradictory values.

A. The Obstacle of Prosperity Theology

The "prosperity theology" or "gospel of success and plenty" is identified as a significant "obstacle to becoming a follower of Christ who abandons himself to God, completely."

- **False Promises:** It emphasizes "the power of positive thinking, strength of human faith, and philanthropy as opposed to alms, to attract divine favor and achieve an abundant life." This creates a "false idol" where people serve God for personal gain.
- **Downplays Suffering and Sacrifice:** This theology "downplays suffering and the Scripturally emphasized practices of sacrificial love and eternal rewards." It presents a "feel-good" message that can make those experiencing hardship feel guilty.

- **Unscriptural and Pelagian:** It is criticized as "unscriptural," often taking verses out of context, and reinforces a "semi Pelagian mind set" by overemphasizing human effort and positive thinking while neglecting the necessity of God's grace and the reality of human sinfulness.
- **Direct Contrast to Jesus's Message:** "Jesus' clear message of self-denial is in direct contrast and opposition to the prosperity gospel."

B. The Reality of Sacrifice and the Cross

True discipleship "is not a matter of convenience but of strong conviction in, and commitment to, the person of Jesus Christ. It will require great sacrifice to faithfully persevere to the end with Jesus."

- **Carrying the Cross:** "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot by my disciple." This means "voluntarily accept[ing] a difficulty as a direct consequence of our commitment to Jesus," which can include "deliberate sacrifice, exposure to risk, and openness to ridicule."
- **Cost of Discipleship:** The choice for God "is often accompanied by a cost, sometimes a great cost." Many historical saints faced such challenging choices.

C. Human Limitations and Weakness

Even for those with vibrant faith, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." We struggle when faith is difficult or demands what we don't want to give. This highlights the need for consistent effort and grace.

III. Cultivating Spiritual Growth and Perseverance

The document offers practical guidance and tools for maturing in faith and maintaining a "long-term relationship that demands and engages the whole person."

A. Engaging Reason and Creativity in Holiness

Just as professionals strive for excellence, we are called to actively "strive in the same way to be more like Christ," utilizing "our reason and creativity" to identify and replace habits inhibiting spiritual growth.

B. The "Program of Life"

A structured tool for spiritual growth, the "program of life" has three parts:

1. **Identify Root Sin:** Pinpoint the primary capital sin causing most failings.
2. **Manifestations:** Recognize how this root sin appears in daily life.
3. **Form Counter-Habits:** Choose habits to reverse manifestations and loosen the root sin's grip.

C. Following Through on Spiritual Commitments

Developing discipline in spiritual commitments helps move "beyond emotions based spirituality" and demonstrates gratitude and eagerness for Christ to do more. The First Friday devotion is suggested as a "small, but substantial" commitment to renew confidence in Christ's love.

D. Total Acceptance and Freedom from Attachments

Following Jesus means "totally accept[ing] his way of seeing life and then put[ting] that into practice." This requires living in "total freedom," reducing and eliminating "wishy-washy" periods and not being "determined and manipulated by attachments, desires, ambitions or fears and anxieties."

E. Stewardship and Detachment from Possessions

The call to "relinquish all your possessions" is not a rejection of God's blessings but an acknowledgment that they are gifts to be offered back to God. Disciples must be "good stewards who are willing to freely and wisely use our material resources for the mission of the Gospel," ensuring possessions do not control us.

F. Ignatian Spirituality as a Guide

St. Ignatius of Loyola's "Spiritual Exercises," "Discernment of Spirits," and "Daily Examen" are highlighted as "enormous help to Catholics striving to be authentic followers of Christ" over 500 years. These tools are for everyone, helping to "contemplate and to reorder priorities."

Conclusion

Authentic discipleship is a challenging yet ultimately joyful path that demands a radical, "all-in" commitment to God above all else. It requires intellectual engagement, intentional effort, and a willingness to embrace sacrifice, contrasting sharply with the "feel-good" promises of prosperity theology. By actively cultivating spiritual disciplines, detaching from worldly attachments, and utilizing practical tools like the "program of life" and Ignatian exercises, individuals can mature in faith and experience "the joy and happiness of a totally fulfilled life that Jesus...is holding out to us."