

Mary as a Model Disciple

**"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.
May it be done to me according to your word."**

Mary is called the first disciple because she was the first to say "Yes" to Christ. Was Mary a likely candidate for the most important job in history that a human could have? In this session we examine 1) What characteristics of Mary made her perfect to be the first disciple and a model for us, and 2) How Mary carried out her discipleship and what we can learn from Mary's model of discipleship.

PART I:

What kind of person did God call to do the most important work any human has been asked to do?

Mary was unknown.

She was not powerful or from an important, influential family.

She was humble and simple.

She was poor.

She was young and inexperienced.

She had no experience or expertise in the role call was calling her to play.

She was devout and contemplative.

The Bible does not state that she was particularly beautiful or even mention her physical appearance. That appears to have been irrelevant to her mission and role.

She had been raised as a faithful Jew and would have been trained in her faith. This is evident in her ability to believe in and trust what the Angel Gabriel told her, to trust and believe in the one true God, and her familiarity with scripture as reflected in the Magnificat.

She had a remarkable love for God.

She was obedient.

She surrendered herself to God's will and relinquished her own.

She was open to receive the Spirit.

She gave an unqualified "Yes" to God.

Who does God choose to do his work here on earth? If God chose Mary with those qualifications, do you think he might choose you to be a disciple too?

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Topic 1: Have you ever felt strongly that there was a problem that you wanted to solve, but that the problem was just too big or complex for you to do anything about it? Do you feel passionately about some task that seems insurmountable?

Make sure no child in America is hungry?

Make neighborhoods safe?

Stop drunk drivers?
Make sure all people who need medicine and medical care get it?
Assure affordable housing for all and eliminate homelessness.
End war and violence.

What would you like to accomplish and what keeps you from accomplishing it or even trying to accomplish it?

What does God's choice of Mary for this important task tell you about what God might ask you to do?

Topic 2: Gabriel appeared to Mary out of the blue on an ordinary day as she was going about her tasks. If tonight an angel appears to you and tells you that you have been chosen by God to solve the problem you identified above, how will you respond?

He tells you that you will be considered blessed for doing this, but he does not give you any assurances that it will be easy. He does not say that you will not suffer or even die in the attempt. He does not give you any details about how you will accomplish this, but he tells you not to fear that God will be with you.

Will you say "Yes!" How do we respond to God every day?
Do you give God an unqualified "Yes?"
Do you question God? (nothing wrong with that as we see from Mary's example.)
Do you try to debate with God?
Do you try to bargain with God?
If you foresee negative consequences of doing God's will, do you proceed full force trusting that God will take care of the details or do you try to talk God into a different plan?
Do you ask God for assurances that before you take risks or extend yourself beyond your comfort zone?
Can you be patient and let God's plan develop, pondering, guarding things in your heart?
Can you trust in God to use you in the way He sees fit?
Identify ways we say "Yes" to God in every day and ways we say "No" to God.

Topic 3: This event was a turning point in Mary's life. After this day, her life was altered completely and forever. We all have turning points in our life: loss of a job, death of a loved one, some unexpected bonus, a clear sign that a long-time dream or plan was not meant to be. Have you ever experienced an event which changed your life radically or faced a circumstance you felt was unfair?

How did you handle your "turning point"?
Did you know God well enough to place your trust in Him?
Did you allow God to lead you through the situation?
Did you humbly ask for God's help?

Did the event make you question the nature of God?
Were you able to discern what God's will was for you at that time? Today?
Did you accept the fact that, like Mary, you might not understand the "whys" and "hows" of what happened or even understand what His plan is for you?

Topic 4: When we are considering who we want to help us while we are doing God's work, do we look at the young, the weak, the aged, and the poor to see how their talents and gifts can contribute to that work? Do we take time to find creative ways to use their talents and incorporate them into the community of faith?

Question for silent reflection: Not everyone will be called to end wars or eliminate poverty. Yet we each have personal challenges in our lives that seem insurmountable, but yet challenges that God seems to be calling us to meet. Do you feel you are being called to do something by God? What will keep you from saying "Yes" to God when you leave here today? Remember that with God, all is possible.

PART II.

What can we learn about Mary's model of discipleship?

How did Mary carry out her discipleship?

- 1 Mary was prayerful.
- 2 She had a relationship with God.
- 3 She gave birth to the Word.
- 4 Mary took God to the people.
- 5 Mary followed.
- 6 She trusted God completely and surrendered herself to Him.
- 7 Mary considered herself a servant (handmaid) of God. She was humble.

1. Mary was prayerful:

Mary has been referred to as a "contemplative" due in great part to her responses to different situations in the Bible. When the Angel Gabriel visited her and announced that she was to have a child, what was her reaction? "She was greatly troubled at what was said and *pondered* what sort of greeting this might be." After the experience with Jesus in the temple, Luke tells us that "his mother kept all these things in her heart." She was obviously a woman used to spending quiet time in reflection. At Pentecost, we find Mary with the disciples in the upper room. She, with the disciples, devoted themselves with one accord to prayer. (Acts 1:13-14). Prayer is nothing but our conversation with God. If we do not talk to someone, can we really expect to have a relationship with that person? Do you talk to God? How often? When? Do you share everything with God—your love, your joys, your doubts, your struggles, your failings, your needs—or do your prayers consist primarily of petitions for assistance? Shouldn't God be a part of your whole life? Do you pray as if talking to your most intimate friend?

2. Mary had a relationship with God:

Mary had a relationship with God from a very young age, and it was because of her relationship with God that she was able to accept what the Angel Gabriel told her. It was because of her relationship with God that she was able to accept the suffering that was to come. It was because of the relationship with God that she could trust God with her life. No one trusts a stranger. Do we have a relationship with God that allows us to trust Him the way she did? If not, what do we need to do to have such a relationship?

3. Mary Gave Birth to the Word :

When Mary said “Yes” to the Angel Gabriel, a seed was planted within her. The seed was the Word. The Word is Jesus. She nurtured it with her body and it grew within her. Mary then gave birth to the Word so that the Word could be shared by all on earth. The Word has been planted within each of us. Are we nurturing that seed? Is it growing within us or is it still waiting to germinate? Do we give birth to the Word so that it can be shared with those around us or does it stay within us suffocated, never realizing its full potential?

4. Mary took God to the people:

We see Mary often in the position of presenting Jesus to the people and bringing him to center stage, while she takes a back seat. When the Magi come to honor the baby, Mary is there in her role as presenter, but she stays in the background. When Jesus is twelve, she and Joseph take him to the temple as is the custom. Again, Jesus takes center stage and the people are amazed with him. In Cana, it is Mary who brings Jesus to center stage when she announces that the wine has run out. It is she who sets the stage for him to perform his first public miracle. She did not try to orchestrate the scene. Rather, after calling him to center stage, she stepped back and let Jesus work as He saw fit. She only told the servants to do as Jesus told him. She did not decide how Jesus would work the miracle. She brought Jesus to them and let him work in their lives.

As a disciple, do we take Christ with us wherever we go so that others may come to know Him and love Him? Do we consider our faith as a “personal faith,” or something private that should not be shared in public? Do we talk about our faith with our families, in the work place and in social settings? Do we stick to the rule that one should never discuss politics or religion in a social setting?

As disciples, we should be bringing Jesus to center stage. Will we allow him to work in the lives of others as he sees fit or will we try to engineer the miracle for others? Can we be patient and let him do his Work? Will we be able to remember that we cannot save others? Only Jesus can do that. We can and should, however, bring Jesus to the people.

5. Mary followed:

Mary understood how to follow. When she said “Yes” to the Angel Gabriel, she began a journey that she could have never imagined. At times she was told that danger was ahead. She listened for instructions from God on what to do and how to meet the challenges that faced her. She continued to follow. She was told she would suffer. That did not deter her. She suffered the worst kind of pain a mother could suffer, yet we see her in the upper room with the disciples after the resurrection, still following and waiting for further guidance. It came.

"Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:1-5) This was Mary's command to the servants at Cana. It is still a good command to his servants today. Mary was privileged to be the only person who was with Jesus from the moment of his conception to his death at the cross. Imagine the conversations and intimate joys she enjoyed all the years while he was growing up and before he began his public ministry. Yet Mary does not presume to take a dominant or leadership role in his ministry. She is portrayed as one of the disciples. After Jesus died on the cross, we see no attempt by Mary to take a leadership role claiming special insight and knowledge gained from the many years she spent with Jesus. She was one of the community of believers. Sometimes following means being called to lead, but sometimes it is just being asked to do what some might consider a menial task. We have to listen to what WE are being called to do and how we are called to do it. Can we be happy to follow, whatever the task we are asked to do? Can we allow ourselves to be insignificant in the eyes of man?

6. Mary trusted God and surrendered herself totally to Him:

Mary said yes to the angel Gabriel and to God. She did have one question: how can this be since she had not known man? Does God expect us not to have questions? I don't think so. Does he expect us to trust Him? I think so. Do you surrender your will to His? What keeps you from doing His will?

7. Mary considered herself a servant of God; she was humble:

Mary considered herself to be the “handmaid” of the Lord, someone who sits and waits for a signal from the Master's hand as to what he wants done. Despite the fact that she was told that she would be blessed, we never see Mary complaining about her suffering or the hardships that she faced on her journey to holiness. She is always seen as the quiet, spirit of love and concern for her child. We never see her demanding that she be given special treatment or that the people should give her special favors because of her role. We do not see her being concerned for her own comfort as she is told they have to flee to Egypt a few days after childbirth to protect the child. The Bible authors did not hesitate to paint women unfavorably and to use them as a lesson for others. There are many lessons we learn from Mary and humility is among the greatest. She stood at the foot of the cross, a suffering servant. As a reminder to us of His great love, from the cross, in his greatest moment of suffering, Jesus looked down and made sure that His

handmaid was cared for. It is a reminder to all of us, that God will not forsake those who serve him humbly.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Topic I: Are there other ways that Mary is an example to us as a disciple?

Topic II: Of the ways Mary carried out her discipleship, which of those do you find to be hardest for you as a disciple? Why? Which are easiest?

Topic III: How can Mary's role of discipleship help you be a better disciple?

Topic IV: How can you help others be a better disciple?

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