

INTRODUCTION

I'll always remember the moment I said yes. I was twenty-three years old. I knew what God was calling me to do, but I was scared to do it.

Let me help you understand this moment a little bit better. My wife, Lisa, and I were going through the most difficult year of our lives. I was a full-time graduate student in my second year studying scripture and had two part-time jobs. In my spare time, I was cramming for the GRE and applying to PhD programs. Lisa worked full-time for the brand-new graduate school that I was attending. She was the only full-time employee besides the professors and was responsible for any administrative work—from hosting donor events to producing report cards (including my own!) to any other possible task that was needed to get this fledgling school off the ground.

Oh, and did I mention that we had just had a baby? The summer after our senior year of college, Lisa and I got married, and twelve months later we had a beautiful baby girl. We were first-time parents living in a city without any help, and our daughter was not a good sleeper. We loved her dearly, but for a long time we wondered why God gave us a baby who didn't sleep well in the midst of all the important things we had to do. But now I realize that we were two parents who didn't know a thing about helping a baby sleep! Between sleep deprivation, our very full lives, and the intensity of deadlines at work and school, we were exhausted.

After I had spent almost two years in graduate school, my friend Thomas approached me with a job opportunity. He asked

if I had ever considered being a missionary with FOCUS (the Fellowship of Catholic University Students). At the time, FOCUS was just starting to hire married people, and they were enthusiastic about me being a missionary on campus.

On the surface, it seemed like the exact opposite of our desires: our plan was for me to complete a doctoral degree so that I could become a college professor. A job with FOCUS didn't lead me in that direction, and in fact, I could have taken this job directly out of undergraduate school. All the time, energy, and suffering that Lisa and I had invested during the two years of my master's program would, it seemed, go to waste.

And there was this whole thing about fundraising a salary. Each FOCUS missionary fundraises their salary to cover all their expenses—food, shelter, insurance, everything. FOCUS missionaries reach out to their family, friends, and parish community and ask them to join in their mission through financial support. We had friends who had joined FOCUS and fundraised their salaries. It wasn't easy, and it could be downright frightening. For us, there would also be some shame that I wasn't obtaining a doctorate as I wanted. Now, I would have to go to our family and friends and tell each one personally about that decision. On top of that, I'd ask them for support in the form of an ongoing donation to help us. Sounds like fun, doesn't it?

When Thomas offered me the job with FOCUS, all these thoughts were on my mind. There was just one problem: I felt immediately called to be a FOCUS missionary. I haven't had this experience very often in my life, but my heart immediately said yes, and there was a deep conviction inside that it was the right thing to do.

Now came the hard part. I knew that it was the right thing to do, but I needed to convince my wife as well. And if you know my wife, she's no easy sell! Let's just say it was a heated conversation. I'll spare you the details, but many of the hesitations and

fears that I mentioned above came out in our talks over the next few days.

Not only was my wife not enthused about the job, but I knew my parents wouldn't be too happy either. From past experience, I knew that they didn't like the idea of people fundraising their salaries and would wonder where my life and career were headed, especially because I wasn't just a midtwenties kid trying to figure things out but a husband and father who needed to provide for my family.

I also remember a chilling conversation with a seminarian, now a priest, during this time of discernment. Our graduate-school classes were held in the same building as the local seminary, and I had built relationships with these men over the previous two years. I told him that I was considering becoming a FOCUS missionary. He couldn't believe that someone like me who was a husband, a father, and would soon hold a master's degree would consider such a thing. He thought it was a stupid idea!

This seminarian was a former FOCUS missionary.

While not all of my conversations during this time were so disheartening, and while my wife and parents eventually came to support the decision, it was a rough process. After graduation, we joined FOCUS kicking and screaming. Lisa did most of the kicking, and as a result, I did the screaming!

We were FOCUS missionaries for more than a decade, but that doesn't mean that we forgot just how hard it can be to answer God's call. It's definitely easier said than done.

WHY DID I WRITE THIS BOOK?

Making the decision to live for Jesus Christ and his Church is hard in our post-Christian age. Whether you're called to be a full-time missionary or not, I believe we are all called to be everyday disciples—men and woman who authentically live

out Jesus' call to evangelize the world in practical ways in the context of everyday life. We are called to follow him with all of our hearts and to be missionaries who seek to love, serve, and bring good news to the lost.

That is what this book is all about.

I want to convince you that being an everyday disciple is not just something you should do out of obligation but something you are made for—something you do not because you have to but because *love compels you*.

I shared my story to show just how difficult this can be in the real world. But it is also worth pointing out that I know I was only able to make this decision because of the countless examples of those who made courageous decisions for Christ (many of whom are in the dedication of this book). This book is filled with dozens of examples to help you do the same. I hope that you have other people in your life that model discipleship for you as well.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

Maybe some of you are just starting your walk with Jesus. You've begun to commit your life to him and want to learn more about how to follow him as a disciple. This book will expand your vision on how to be like Jesus.

Perhaps you are already living as an everyday disciple on a mission, but you want to go deeper. This book will inspire and equip you to reach others for him.

Or maybe you're someone who is leading others to Jesus and building them up to reach the world with the Gospel. This book will give you additional confidence and motivation to encourage and prepare others.

WHAT WILL WE COVER?

This book will take you on a five-week journey into the heart of Jesus' mission, which is to proclaim the Gospel and to inspire others to do the same. Drawing on my fifteen years of mission work on college campuses, in parishes, and in discussions with Catholic leaders, I've created this guide to introduce you to the fundamentals of Christian discipleship, particularly as they apply to our postmodern culture and your relationship with Christ.

During my time in FOCUS, I learned a lot about their WIN-BUILD-SEND model, which is modeled off of Jesus' own ministry.

Before someone is sent out as a disciple, it's important that they encounter and commit to a relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church (WIN). Then they need to be formed in the faith (BUILD), and finally, they need to be mentored as a leader so that they can share the faith with others (SEND).

In the first week, we look at WIN as we encounter Jesus in our hearts. Specifically, we examine how Jesus called his first disciples. Understanding what discipleship was in the ancient Jewish world, and how his disciples first encountered him, will help us encounter or reencounter the person of Jesus today.

In the second week, we look at BUILD and what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. What basic ways of thinking and habits allow us to be followers of the one we are called to imitate?

Our last three weeks are all centered on SEND.

In the third week we look at a vision for evangelization. We explore questions such as, Why should we evangelize? What was Jesus' mission? How did the people in his time react to this mission, and what does this say about our world today?

In the fourth week, we consider how to equip ourselves to reach a postmodern culture that continues to move further from the faith. What can we learn from Jesus and the saints about how to share the faith with others?

In the fifth week, we examine the concept of disciple-making. How do we answer Jesus' call to "make disciples of all nations"? What other models of discipleship in the New Testament and the lives of the saints can we learn from? How can all of this relate to our own personal work as well as work within a parish?

While the book takes you through the process of WIN-BUILD-SEND, it's important to note that these stages don't have to occur sequentially. As South America Bishops' document *Aparecia* states, "Mission is inseparable from discipleship, and hence it must not be understood as a stage subsequent to formation."¹ You will see mission connected with each stage as you progress through this book.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is designed to be read daily. The chapters are short and compact to allow you to get through them quickly each day while still learning something meaningful and applicable to following Jesus and making followers of him. If you already pray each day, these chapters can be worked into your daily meditation.

If you miss a day, don't worry about it. Just pick back up where you left off and keep going.

If you can, read this book with someone else. Discipleship isn't a solo activity; it is one that requires us to discuss and practice it with others, just as Jesus did. Find a mentor who can read it with you, or grab a friend to join you.

In the end, this book is a journey, and the most important next step is to start. Let's begin with the theme of encounter.

WEEK 1—ENCOUNTER

DAY 1—ANTHONY

In the third century, an eighteen-year-old man named Anthony lost his parents. After their death, he continued to take care of his little sister, but he had a desire to live for the Lord. On the way to church one day, he was thinking about how the apostles had rejected everything to follow the Lord. When he arrived at Mass, he heard what Jesus said to the rich young man: “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Mt 19:21).

Upon having this encounter, Anthony decided to sell all that he had. He gave some of the money to provide for his sister and the rest to the poor. He then went off into the desert to live a life dedicated entirely to the Lord. His faithfulness to Jesus became so powerful that people traveled from miles around just to talk with him. He performed miracles and healings, and his visitors went on to tell others about the man whom they met and the amazing works of God that he did. People began to chronicle his life in books, and the story of his life spread throughout the Roman Empire. He was eventually known as St. Anthony of the Desert, and his story would affect the lives of millions of people.

PONTICIANUS

About one hundred years later, four officials who worked for the emperor in Rome were on a break. They split off into pairs and took a walk around the city. Two of the men stumbled into a house belonging to poor Christians, and there they read a biography of St. Anthony of the Desert. His story moved them

so much that one said to the other something along the lines of, “Why do we try everything to become friends with the emperor when we can be friends with God right here and now?”¹ They had an instant conversion to Christianity and decided to be like Anthony—giving up all of their possessions and serving the Lord as monks. In fact, at the time of their conversion, they were both engaged to be married, so they had to break it to their fiancées that they were becoming monks. How did their fiancées react? They were both so moved by the account that they decided to convert to Christianity as well and dedicated their virginity to the Lord.

When these two men returned to meet the other pair of officials, they described what had happened to them. They warned their friends not to stand in the way of their conversion. One of these friends, Ponticianus, was so struck by their story that he converted to Christianity as well.

How do we know this story about the Roman officials, their fiancées, and Ponticianus? Years later, Ponticianus recounted this tale to Augustine of Hippo. Except when he told Augustine, Augustine wasn’t a Christian yet. Have you ever heard that famous St. Augustine quote, “Lord, give me chastity, but not yet”? That statement epitomizes St. Augustine’s state of mind at this time in his life. He knew what he needed to do, but he wasn’t willing to accept it in his heart. It was at this point that Augustine met Ponticianus. Ponticianus saw that Augustine had a copy of St. Paul’s epistles, so he told him this entire story about St. Anthony and his coworkers and his conversion. While he was speaking, Augustine began to feel ashamed. Ponticianus’s stories reminded Augustine of who he was supposed to be.

When they finished their conversation, Augustine went into his garden and wept. He heard a voice like a child repeatedly singing a Latin phrase, *Tolle lege, tolle lege* (“Take and read, take and read”). Taking it to be from God, Augustine recalled that Anthony’s decision to go into the desert occurred when he heard

the Gospel at Mass. He believed the voice was a divine command to pick up his book of St. Paul's epistles and read the first passage that he found. (Perhaps the first instance of Bible roulette.)

Augustine read, "Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom 13:13–14). Augustine now had the answer he needed to break the bonds of lust in his life. At this moment, everything changed. Augustine went on to be one of the greatest saints and theologians that the Church has ever known. His autobiography is one of the most read books in the history of mankind. And his journey with Jesus and the Church all began with one man sharing his encounter with the Lord.

ENCOUNTER

The stories of Jesus, the rich young man, Anthony, Ponticianus, and Augustine are a great intro into this week and into this book. These stories speak to the rich tradition of how encountering Jesus can change everything. These encounters can cause us to decide to follow after Jesus and to share this encounter with others. If we seek to evangelize, then we must live out of an encounter with Jesus.

I know this has been true in my own life. My own intense encounter with Jesus just before high school caused me to make radical life changes, and I naturally began to tell others about my relationship with Jesus.

So often in FOCUS's work, students become missionaries because of an encounter they had with Jesus at a conference or in a Bible study that dramatically changed their life. On the flip side, so often when missionaries or others in ministry burn out, it is because they have stopped encountering Jesus. These experiences speak to a timeless principle—we can't give what we

don't have. If we are receiving God's mercy, we are in a better place to give it to those who need it most.

That's what the first week of this book is all about. Jesus is calling you to follow him, but first we need an encounter with him for it all to make sense. During this week, we will consider Jesus' first encounters with his disciples and what they can mean for our encounters with Jesus today.

REFLECTION

When have you encountered Jesus? What did you do to continue to encounter him? How did these encounters change your life? Did it change how you talk about Jesus with others? How have other people's encounters shaped your own life?