

Becoming a Christian, More than Being Nice?

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Q: I really want God to be able to use me, but I don't know how to go about it. I mean, I want to be a disciple of Jesus and not simply a "nice person who goes to church." But I don't know how to make a difference.

A: First, praise God for the fact that He placed that desire in your heart! Too many of us are content with the idea of "show up on Sunday, put something in the basket, and you're good". I think that that might have been the vision of Catholicism that certain people might have had in the past, but this was never an authentic perspective of what it means to be a Christian.

A Christian is one who is brought into a very particular relationship with God in Jesus Christ. A Christian is one who has been made into a child of God the Father by the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit. A Christian is a friend of God. A Christian is someone who has surrendered their will, their mind, their heart, and their entire life to Jesus Christ.

Now, of course being a Christian is also essentially about being made into a member of His Body, the Church. The Church is absolutely necessary. But it has been my experience that, when we talk about the Church, too many of us default into imagining being part of a “club” rather than recognizing that we are brought into the Church for our own sake, but also for the sake of being Christ in the world.

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Okay, all that being said, there is one more thing that is necessary for the Lord to make a difference through you. This “thing” is not great skills or great giftedness. You will not need to be perfect or flawless. You will not need an advanced degree in theology or to be employed by the Church. You will not need anyone’s “permission” for this.

The only thing required? Being available.

I know that this might sound a little anticlimactic, but there is virtually nothing more valuable than being available. Think of it, it is likely that there is someone who has made a profound difference in your life. What was it that “qualified” them to make that difference? I imagine that they had something to offer (coaching, teaching, parenting, being a friend, etc...), but the most likely scenario is that they were simply available to you.

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This is the secret of being a great parent, coach, friend, pastor...or Christian. And by “great”, I simply mean someone who has made a positive difference in the life of someone else. Our culture tends to measure something like “greatness” in terms of “fame”. But this has never been a reliable criterion for true greatness or excellence. There are many famous people who are not excellent. People who might be recognized on the street, but excellence can go unnoticed. The kind of excellence that you want is not always recognized...even when it is there. When someone has fame, they can be recognized...even if there is no excellence in them.

People who are available are generous. They are generous with their time. They are generous with their attention. They are generous with their heart. In fact, the technical term for this might be “magnanimity”. Magnanimity means “greatness of soul”. Great people have greatness of soul (or heart). They have the perspective of abundance; there is always more, not less. Some people operate with an attitude of scarcity; there is never enough. Those people who walk around with this attitude of scarcity never have enough time, attention, or love to share.

But the Christian is called to live like Christ. And Jesus was certainly great. Jesus was most definitely magnanimous. This isn’t to say that he never got tired or burned out. But it is to say that he approached people with the attitude of “how can I give?” Please keep in mind

that Jesus didn't invest deeply in every person he met. He loved and gave to all those who would receive, but he was radically available to only a few. The same might be true for you. When you follow Christ and live with an attitude of abundance and magnanimity, you may only be able to be available to a few. That is okay. You are not greater than Jesus.

But this is the key: availability. Begin each day (or each week) asking God to guide you towards those whom He is calling you to be available. Give God permission to interrupt your day with these people. Begin to see these "interruptions" as "Divine appointments". That is, see them not as distractions that take you away from what you should be doing at any given moment, but to recognize them for what they truly are: opportunities to be available to God at any and every moment of the day for the purpose of His will.