

## Understanding Christian Discipleship in Five Steps -- Published in *Religion Teacher's Journal*, October 2008

What if your goal were to build an international movement in three years with no budget and a team of twelve inexperienced interns? You'd have to be Jesus to pull it off!

Well, that's exactly what he did! Research from business, education, and ministry tells us that if we follow his methods of discipleship, we'll have "Spirited" results.

**#1. Share leadership, top and bottom.** Jesus often said, "The last shall be first," and he showed it when he washed his disciples' feet (John 13: 12-15). **If you want to be a leader, you need to share the influence of leadership.** Give it away, and people give it back to you. Claim it all for yourself, and you lose all authority. So ask your students for input; let them help you craft the "rules" of your classroom.

**#2. Know that diversity brings creativity.**

Paul said it best with the analogy of the body (1 Corinth 12:14-17). We need diversity to live well. We need the eyes, ears, feet, and hands.

**We need to recognize the gifts and talents in those who are different from us.** So be sure that all the diverse opinions and ideas of your class are invited and affirmed; let your group think out of the box and surprise you and each other.

**#3. Share the same goal; Go toward the same direction.**

Jesus gave us our "mission statement" at the end of Matthew's gospel (Matt 28:19-20). We are to go forth and spread the good news to all ends of the earth. We do that best by living the good news. Encourage your class to always imagine Jesus as a friend. What would he say, do, wear? **How would Jesus act?** "WWJD" bracelets may be a "fashion has-been," but the philosophy has had a successful history for 2000+ years.

**#4. Give emotional and physical support.**

The multiplication of loaves, told in all gospels (including Mark 6:30-44), demonstrates how **Jesus fed his followers spiritually and physically.** Find out what your students worry about, and unite your class with shared prayer.

If possible, create a physically comfortable environment with colors, pictures, and Scriptures on the walls. Have ample resources and supplies for every project you begin. Find out which families don't have Bibles and other religious books at home, and see if your parish can provide them.

**#5. Walk the talk together.**

It's not enough to *talk* the talk; children and youth look at how we live. We need to *walk* the talk. **We need to be transparent; we must be willing to hold each other accountable.** For example, if you want to be able to challenge your class for disrespectful behavior, then expect them to challenge you for it. Don't always choose an embarrassing public correction in front of the class; when possible, start out in private (as Matt 18: 15-16 directs).

These five steps will help you form Christian disciples who live the teachings of Jesus. They'll also help you develop a better business team, faculty, or ministry staff.

-- Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart, Ed.D.

Comparing the research from business, education and ministry: Jesus' method for discipleship brings results in and out of church.

Christian Scriptures	Business Research	Education Research	Ministry Research
Washing of the Feet (Jn 13:12-15)	Enable Others to Act	Supportive and Shared Leadership	Shared Leadership, Top and Bottom
Analogy of the Body (1 Cor 12:14-17)	Challenge the Process	Creative Collectivity	Diversity brings Creativity
Great Commissioning (Mt 28:19-20)	Inspire a Shared Vision	Shared Vision and Values	Same Goal, Same Direction
Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mk 6:30-44)	Encourage the Heart	Supportive Conditions	Physical and Emotional Support
When a Brother or Sister sins (Mt 18: 15-16)	Model the Way	Shared Personal Practice	Walk the Talk, Together

Business Research: Kouzes, J. & Posner, B. (1995). *The Leadership Challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Education Research: Shirley Hord on learning communities: <http://www.seidl.org/pubs/catalog/items/cha34.html>; <http://www.seidl.org/pubs/change34/4.html>

Ministry Research: Calderone-Stewart, L. (2004). *Changing Lives: Transformational Ministry and Today's Teens*. Dayton, OH: Pflaum. [www.tomorrowspresent.org](http://www.tomorrowspresent.org) or 414-545-6006.

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