

Theory is one thing, practice another. While sketching out Pope Francis's hope and dream that we all become missionary disciples, Deacon John Lozano describes the ways and means of doing this in a practical, pastoral, and challenging fashion. A revolutionary guidebook here! → **BISHOP ROBERT F. MORNEAU**, *Green Bay, Wisconsin*

---

Most Catholics don't really think of themselves as disciples—but that is just what Jesus calls us to be. Deacon John Lozano's fine book reminds us all how deeply Jesus loves us and desires us to experience how this love can transform our lives. Engaging stories from his pastoral ministry are full of practical wisdom for developing a deeper, more nourishing prayer life, and for growing in a real, adult relationship of love and service with Christ.

→ **FR. JOHN RANDALL SACHS, SJ**, *Associate Professor, Boston College School of Theology & Ministry, author of *The Christian Vision of Humanity**

---

This is one of those rare books that is both inspired and accessible. *Becoming a Fervent Disciple* is a true gift for anyone looking to grow their relationship with God and help others in their community to do the same. → **MATTHEW F. MANION**, *Faculty Director, Villanova University School of Business Center for Church Management, Former President and CEO, Catholic Leadership Institute*

---

We live in an age of distraction and discontent. John Lozano's *Becoming a Fervent Disciple* is a summons to turn our hearts to the "one thing necessary." Writing with honesty and wisdom, Lozano offers a practical path to stir into flame our hearts' true desire. The future of the church will be shaped by the intentional choices of fervent disciples. John Lozano equips us for that future.

→ **KEVIN L. HUGHES**, *author and Chair of the Humanities Department and Associate Professor of Theology/Religious Studies, Villanova University*

# FERVENT DISCIPLE

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR DEVELOPING  
A DEEPER, DAILY RELATIONSHIP  
WITH JESUS

JOHN P. LOZANO



**TWENTY-THIRD  
PUBLICATIONS**

[twentythirdpublications.com](http://twentythirdpublications.com)

*For my children:  
Hope Marie, John Francis,  
and Michael.*

*For the grace and joy  
I knew not possible.*



TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS  
One Montauk Avenue, Suite 200  
New London, CT 06320  
(860) 437-3012 or (800) 321-0411  
[www.twentythirdpublications.com](http://www.twentythirdpublications.com)

Copyright ©2018 John P. Lozano. All rights reserved.  
No part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner  
without prior written permission of the publisher.  
Write to the Permissions Editor.

Cover photo: © Shutterstock.com / Michaelstockfoto

ISBN: 978-1-62785-341-5  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2017958807  
Printed in the U.S.A.



A division of Bayard, Inc.

# Contents

INTRODUCTION	What is a “fervent disciple”?	1
CHAPTER ONE	Good is not great	2
CHAPTER TWO	Boring?	5
CHAPTER THREE	Fervency	12
CHAPTER FOUR	Loving Jesus	22
CHAPTER FIVE	A personal encounter with Jesus	33
CHAPTER SIX	Having a plan to encounter Jesus	41
CHAPTER SEVEN	Prayer	46
CHAPTER EIGHT	Prayer: A practical guide	60
CHAPTER NINE	How do we hear God?	66
CHAPTER TEN	A practical guide to hearing God	71
CHAPTER ELEVEN	Prayer: Love and presence	92
CHAPTER TWELVE	Service	105
CHAPTER THIRTEEN	Community	113
CHAPTER FOURTEEN	Mission	124
CONCLUSION	The fire of our faith	130



**WE ARE REVOLUTIONARIES**

and, what is more, revolutionaries of this revolution. For we have taken this road of the greatest metamorphosis in humanity's history. In this day and age, unless Christians are revolutionaries, they are not Christians.

They must be revolutionaries through Grace!

Grace itself. POPE FRANCIS, *The Church of Mercy*

## INTRODUCTION

### *What is a “fervent disciple”?*

We often hear phrases like “fervent disciples,” “encountering Jesus,” and “fervent discipleship” when talking about our commitment to put the words of the gospel into action in our lives. The problem is: What do these phrases really mean? Pope Francis is not bashful with these words. The first sentence of his first apostolic exhortation begins: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.”

The focus of this book is to help people of faith identify, understand, and connect their faith experience with these central gospel words and to bring them into their lives as the guiding principle, direction, and goal. Many of us have heard the call to personally encounter Jesus and to develop a personal relationship with God, but very little has been offered on how to make this happen.

This book is an invitation to discover practical ways to make this connection in your life each day, offering suggestions to help you begin a journey of reflection on your life experience and to consider a path that incorporates tools to move all of us toward a dynamic, sustainable, and ever-growing encounter with Jesus and the life of fervent discipleship. This journey and discovery of these tools is for every one of us. In the words of Pope Francis: “No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.’”

# GOOD IS NOT GREAT

*Those who are on fire cannot sit in a chair.*

I love to watch my son, an experienced camper, build a fire in the woods. He carefully selects certain types of wood that are more ignitable than others and best for the early burning rather than latter fuel for an already blazing fire. He chooses various sizes of wood that he positions with each aligned to the other, forming a strategic structure to create maximum air flow. Most impressively, he is able to ignite the fire with a single match. It is the same in our lives of faith. Once the right pieces are gathered and the pattern is set we are disposed for that single flame of divine love to catch us on fire. Faith has always been about fire.

Did anything so great ever happen before? Was it ever heard of? Did a people ever hear the voice of God speaking from the midst of fire, as you did, and live? **DEUTERONOMY 4:32-33**

It is the fire of God's love that sent his Son among us, a revelation of the very heart of God like nothing else in the history of humanity. There is nothing tame, domesticated, or dull in this story; it is a story of fire, and his name is Jesus.

Likewise, there is nothing tame in the life and the words of John the Baptist. "Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees" (Matthew 3:10). "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). And there is nothing tame in the life and the words of Jesus himself:

"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." **MARK 1:15**

"I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!" **LUKE 12:49**

These are not the words of a domesticated, provincial Christianity. *These are words of revolution.*

The revolution in these words is unique in that it is not a change of economics or politics but more simply, and more significantly, a change of the human heart. Only God's love can do this, and God accomplishes this through those of us who are fervent followers of the risen Jesus.

Christianity has only one message: that all of humanity come to know and experience the risen Jesus in their lives. From this encounter the human heart is transformed and the gift of eternal life begins.

In the book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins reveals the results of research to answer a fundamental question about business: Why are some companies just "good," while others make the leap to being "great"? He summarizes his findings:



Good is the enemy of the best. And that is the key reason why we have so little that becomes great. We don't have great schools, principally because we have good schools.... Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life. The vast majority of companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good—and that is their main problem.

When reading these words, I could not help but think about the Christian church. Most churches are good and the faith lives for the vast majority of the followers of Jesus are good, or at least good enough. As a result, we don't strive for the great. Satisfied with being good, our churches play it safe, keeping everything under control and not rocking the boat. We become complacent, more interested in maintenance than we are in mission, because what we currently have is good. When things are good, we just keep going along; we settle; we are tame.

As Jim Collins asks: "Is the disease of 'just being good' incurable?" Jim's answer, and the gospel's answer, is a resounding "NO!" The gospel calls us to be "*on fire*" and members of a revolution. The gospel reveals how this happens: *by personally encountering the risen Jesus and becoming fervent disciples.*



#### PERSONAL REFLECTION

*How does Collins' observation that "Good is the enemy of the best" speak to your life?*

# BORING?

*“Nobody ever yawns in the presence of Christ.”*

**SHERRY WEDDELL, FORMING INTENTIONAL DISCIPLES**

Compared to popular culture and its need to grab our attention at every possible moment, many people might say that Christianity is boring, or at least dull and irrelevant to daily life. And based on the typical experience of church for most people, they’re right!

How can this be? While Christianity is not entertainment or about making us feel good about ourselves, the basic message of the Christian faith—how the divine, saving love of the God of the cosmos is given to all humanity in and through his Son, Jesus—is so extraordinary that anyone who hears this message in its fullness with an open mind would be hard pressed to call it dull or irrelevant. Some might question whether or not it is true, but they certainly couldn’t call it boring.

It is not the Christian message itself that is the problem but the contemporary experience of Christianity. If this were not the case then Christianity would be thriving when in fact it is not.

TOTAL U.S. CHURCHES	325,000
GROWING U.S. CHURCHES	15,000
% OF GROWING U.S. CHURCHES	5%

For every one person who enters the Catholic Church, more than six Catholics leave.

Anyone passionate about the good news of Jesus Christ should be deeply concerned about this, just as any CEO would be if their company started losing customers at the same rate. I can imagine that CEO calling an emergency meeting of all senior staff to discover the cause of such a dramatic decline and to create ways to reverse it. I can imagine the CEO saying to his senior staff, “We are not leaving this room ’til we figure out how to reverse this trend!” But the most alarming aspect of this decline in the church is that there is no “alarm.” If the leaders are not visibly alarmed, then it follows that individual Christians are not alarmed either.

Jesus, the saints, and all passionate followers of Christ through the ages got what was at stake. They got the extraordinary good news of the gospel message of Jesus. In Mark’s gospel, the earliest written gospel, the very first words of Jesus illustrate his concern: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (1:15). The “time” Jesus speaks of is the Greek word *kairos*, which means the time filled with meaning and of supreme importance, a time not to be missed. The kingdom of God is now at hand; not just very close or nearby, but here. There is an exigency, an immediacy in Jesus’ cry. Often our image of Jesus has been one of him sitting in the field with sheep, calm and collected, not in any hurry, almost without emotion. That is not the Jesus of the Bible.

I think Pope Francis has this same urgency and passion of Jesus when he writes on the very first page of *The Joy of the Gospel*:

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.” The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace.

The words Pope Francis uses here are reminiscent of those first words of Jesus in Mark’s gospel. The pope has a clear sense that Christians are just not “getting it.” They are not living in a daily personal encounter with the merciful love of God that is transformative and brings us divine joy. This redeeming embrace the pope speaks of is the kingdom of God that Jesus said is “at hand,” an intimate encounter with the love of Jesus’ Father in and through an encounter with Jesus himself in a personal and life-changing way. This is not a one-time event but a daily encounter that is meant for us all, with no one excluded. To miss this is to miss everything!

*Is it the message of Jesus Christ that is boring  
or is it the messengers?*

I went to a Catholic, all boys' high school run by a Franciscan order of priests and brothers. One day we had a "vocations awareness" day. A Franciscan priest came to talk to us about considering the vocation of becoming a religious priest or brother, preferably Franciscan, of course. The priest that came to our school that day gave us a vocations presentation during which he never smiled. In fact, his face looked a bit sour and slightly depressed. Even at eighteen years old I could see something wrong with this picture. I thought to myself, "Here is this priest asking us to consider becoming a religious priest or brother, to embrace poverty, chastity (no small thing when you are an eighteen-year-old male), and obedience, and he is not even smiling?" Being the audacious young adolescent that I was at the time, I went up to this priest after his presentation and said to him. "Father, you never smiled during your presentation to us." The priest replied; "I don't have a good smile." Even at eighteen I knew that was not the reason!

*Dullness, not doubt, is the greatest enemy of faith*

Skepticism and the questioning of religious faith in general, and Christianity in particular, have always been with us. Doubt in and of itself is not the problem; in fact, doubt is part of every believer's life and can spur on a search and quest for God that deepens our faith. The true problem is a growing lack of fervency within Christianity itself. It has been said Christian faith is "caught" more than it is "taught." The inspiration to live a Christian life comes most often from an encounter with people of faith, a vibrant faith in which the seeking person perceives something new, different,

and attractive in the life of the believer. This has been my own experience as well.

I attended church every Sunday until my teens, and then less frequently. I was not engaged with my faith at all. I still had faith, but God, church, and prayer were on the outskirts of my life. A few months after I turned sixteen, my father died. It was the turning point of my life. What was on the outskirts of my life was suddenly at the center. I found myself asking questions of faith with a seriousness and passion that most sixteen-year-olds do not possess. At my father's funeral, I prayed with an intensity I had never before experienced. I was scared. I prayed for help. All I can say is that day I experienced a presence with me in that church that was real and almost tangible. I had the inner sense that everything would be okay and that I could trust God with my life. Faith began to stir within me that day, and I grew in prayer, trust, and faith in God.

About a year later I was invited to attend a prayer meeting. "A what?" I thought to myself. Then I said, "Whatever! I want to grow closer to God, so I'll check it out." Still a skeptic, I remember going to the prayer meeting and thinking to myself: "It's Friday night. What are these people doing in a church on Friday? It isn't even Sunday!" I noticed that the age range of the people gathered was sixteen to sixty-five. Again I wondered: "Why are all these people of different ages coming together? This is odd." At the same time, I was greeted with a sincere warmth and joy by these people. As I looked into their eyes I saw something. It is hard to describe what that was, but it was something very attractive and compelling. I remember saying to myself, "I don't know what that is they have, but whatever it is, I want it." As the prayer began I did something very simple. I sat down and prayed. Silently, I prayed

to God and asked for “whatever *that* is.” I remember my time of prayer became filled with what I later discovered are called the fruits of the Holy Spirit: God’s love, joy, and peace. It was a compelling and transformative experience.

*Fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22)*

Love | Joy | Peace | Patience | Kindness | Generosity  
Faithfulness | Gentleness | Self-Control

When I look back on my own conversion and faith development, I see that the two elements that disposed me to faith are the two most common experiences in people’s lives that prepare them for Christian faith: human suffering and the encounter with people who have vibrant faith. The former is probably the most common for people, and the suffering and deep struggle I experienced at my father’s death were the catalyst that brought me to a new openness to God and God’s living presence in my life. However, the second trigger for my faith development was equally important and is often overlooked as a primary way that God reaches out to us. It was this encounter with people of vibrant faith that drew me, lured me, and caught my attention to consider in a profoundly new dimension this risen Jesus and the person of the Holy Spirit.

The grace that comes to us through people of vibrant faith is more common than we may realize. It is obvious when we encounter the charismatic preacher, teacher, writer, and social activist. All too often, however, we don’t recognize how common the presence of God’s grace is among so-called ordinary people. For over forty years I have asked people what they identify as the source of their Christian faith. Often the reply is the influence of

a relative like a grandmother or grandfather whose quiet, unassuming life of faith spoke volumes. Or they might mention the experience of accompanying someone through a particularly difficult period of their life, such as a serious illness or crisis, who is able to face that hardship with resilience, peace, and trust in God. We should never sell short the power of Christian witness even when that witness is almost unintentional. This is the power of the person of vibrant faith—what Paul calls a “perfume.” What a beautiful image, a scent that draws, lures, captures the attention of the other.



#### PERSONAL REFLECTION

*How have suffering and struggle helped  
you become more disposed to faith?*

.....

*How has the witness of people of vibrant faith  
helped you become more disposed to faith?*