

**Basic Training  
Discipleship  
Follow-Ups**

**FOCUS**  
*Vision for Life*

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# FOCUS

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## **Vision Statement:**

FOCUS, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, is a national collegiate outreach that meets college students where they are and invites them to examine the meaning and purpose of their lives.

Through large group outreach, Bible studies and one on one mentoring, FOCUS missionaries are equipped to introduce college students to the Person of Jesus Christ and the Catholic faith, empowering them to share His love with the world.

Note: This material is a work in progress. We submit all information in good faith to the teachings of the Catholic Church and the ordinary magisterial authority. If anything is found to be in doctrinal error, we humbly retract. If you have any comment about this work, please contact FOCUS at [info@focusonline.org](mailto:info@focusonline.org).

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## Follow-up 1: Repent and Believe

Take some time to read Luke 15:11-32. Jesus shares with us the parable of the Prodigal Son. In the parable the father has two sons. The first is a rebel who rejects his father and leaves home to squander his inheritance. The second acts like a slave, who, while never rejecting his father, serves him without a sense of love and feels himself to be the slave of a master rather than the beloved child of a gracious and loving father. Each person is tempted to relate to the Heavenly Father as either a slave or a rebel, and thus, they fail to trust Him.

If we are like the first son, we have either ignored or rejected what we know to be God's will. If this is so, then we must repent and begin to follow and to trust. Just as the first son came home, we too can come to God, trusting in His forgiveness. Or, like the second son, we may have been a "good kid," and "played by the rules," but for the wrong reasons. We may simply have wanted to avoid being punished instead of trusting that what God desires is our lasting joy. We may have avoided some of the bigger sins, but only because we were afraid of going to Hell. We missed the heart of the matter: God wants to love us and to be loved by us. In either case, we must turn to Jesus and ask Him to forgive us and bring us into right relationship with His Father.

**I'm certain of this—that if my conscience were burdened with all the sins it's possible to commit, I would still go and throw myself into our Lord's arms, my heart all broken up with contrition; I know what tenderness He has for any prodigal son of His who comes back to Him.**

*~St. Therese of Lisieux*

### Turn Around!

According to the Scriptures, the first word from the public ministry of both Jesus Christ and John the Baptist is the same: "Repent!" (Matthew 3:1 and 4:17). In its simplest sense, to repent means to "turn back".<sup>1</sup> Belief and trust in Jesus allow us to receive the grace to turn away from sin and attain our ultimate purpose. While "we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6), Jesus, the Good Shepherd, pursues us and ushers us back into the fold.

In the Gospel of St. John, we see His tender commitment to His flock:

<sup>1</sup> Kittle, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p.640.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand (John 10:27-29).

The ultimate expression of the Good Shepherd's love for His sheep is another sign of seeming contradiction: His total self-gift on the cross.

"The revelation of divine love in Christ manifested at the same time the extent of evil and the superabundance of grace" (CCC 385). The light of Christ shines forth on our brokenness, and we see the truth of the human condition; the Divine Physician prescribes His own death as the cure for the illness of sin. At the same time, God's love and grace bring the healing we so desperately need. His condemnation, His utter rejection of our sinfulness, is also His mercy.

### **The Truth Will Make you Free**

Repentance is a matter of not just the head, but it is also a movement of the heart:

Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end to sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of His grace (CCC 1431).

Jesus challenges us to think about things in a different light. He calls us to a life of love. As we have seen in the Prodigal Son, disobedience breaks our relationship with our Heavenly Father. However, God seeks more than obedience, He seeks our loving trust. God wants us to come to Him as children come to their loving father.

Once committed to conversion, the heart learns to pray in faith. Faith is a filial (child-like) adherence to God beyond what we feel and understand. It is possible because the beloved Son gives us access to the Father. He can ask us to "seek" and to "knock," since he himself is the door and the way (CCC 2609).

By yielding our lives to God, we are set free. This may at first seem like a contradiction. "How can I be free if I submit to someone else's will?"

Imagine, if you will, a patch of sunflowers. As you may know, the sunflower is a heliotrope - it turns so that its leaves face the sun throughout the day. Now imagine a sunflower who decided not to follow the sun's path across the sky, but faced in exactly the opposite direction. Naturally, such a flower would wither and die. In this way, the sunflower is not unlike the human soul. The obstinate flower in the above illustration would not be killed by the sun anymore than an unrepentant sinner is destroyed by God - rather, the unrepentant sinner is destroyed by sin, by refusing the gift of life.

More than anything else, God's desire is for our happiness. When we make the decision to follow Jesus, trusting Him and His commandments, we will experience deep peace and lasting joy. He tells us, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). His will does not interfere with our freedom, but allows us to experience total fulfillment, to flourish.

True repentance entails changing our attitude about freedom and trusting that God has a plan for our ultimate happiness. As we have seen, it is possible to obey without love, but God seeks our loving obedience, expressed in trust. As we grow in our loving trust of God, we will begin to experience the freedom and joy He wants for us: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

## For Discussion

**1. Is there any one theme in this Follow-up that you find most applicable to your life?**

**2. In light of the parable of the Prodigal Son, how would you describe your relationship with your Heavenly Father?**

**3. Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sin. What He asks in return is that you turn your heart to Him, trusting Him as your Lord and Savior. Have you repented and made Jesus Christ the Lord of your life? (If you want to, you can begin your journey with Him right now.)**

**4. What are some areas in your life of which you need to repent and entrust to Jesus Christ?**

**5. What practical step(s) can you take to improve your relationship with God and allow Jesus to be the Lord of all your life?**

**6. Read CCC 1431. According to this passage, the four aspects of repentance are as follows:**

- 1. A conversion to God with your whole heart**
- 2. An end to sin and a turning away from evil, i.e. choosing to lead a Christ-centered life**
- 3. A desire to change one's life and hope in God's mercy and trust in His help**
- 4. Salutary pain and sadness**

**How are these aspects being recognized in your life right now?**

**7. We are never alone in the Christian life. In fact, the key to a Christ-centered life is allowing Christ to forgive you and to strengthen you.**

**According to Acts 2:37-38, what also is necessary besides repentance?**

## Transfer Point

There are two key points to pass on from this Follow-up:

1. Each of us needs to turn to God and to give his entire life to Jesus Christ as Lord. True faith in Jesus Christ requires us to follow Him as Lord and Savior.
2. We need to see that our Heavenly Father desires to heal us, restore us, and elevate us for our new life in Christ as adopted sons and daughters of God.

These themes will be fleshed out further in the subsequent Follow-ups. As you share your own experience of these truths with others, be sure to move from the over-arching principle (“We all are sinners...” etc.) to your concrete experience (“I was really stressed and afraid about X and Y all the time, and I sought freedom in such-and-such misguided ways. I’ve experienced a new joy and hope in Z fashion since striving to offer these things to Christ.”).

Remember that Our Lord is the Living Word - His instructions are life. As you share your heart with others and reveal how you have allowed Christ to shape your life, they will see more clearly the truth of the Gospel. This is the essence of being a witness for Him.