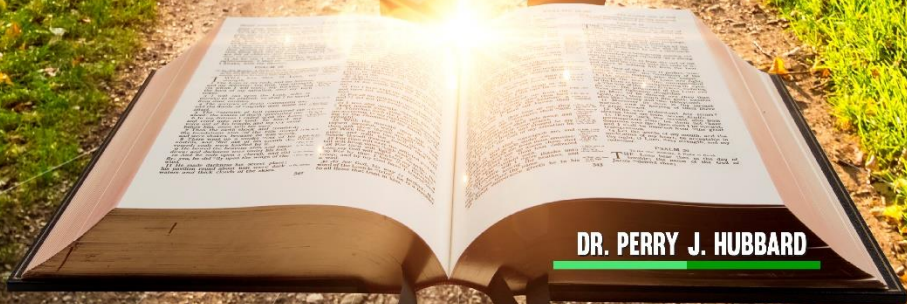


Journal of a Disciple Maker



DR. PERRY J. HUBBARD

Journal of a Disciple Maker

Dr. Perry J Hubbard

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A Disciple maker's Journal

I have been thinking a lot about what is involved in discipleship lately. As I thought about this, I returned to Matthew 28:18-20 and its statement of “Go and Make Disciples.”

In this passage Jesus starts out stating that he has all the authority on heaven and earth. That is significant because without that authority, then the commands he is about to give us become empty and powerless. What I found interesting is the next statement. He told those present to go and make disciples. He did not tell them to preach, teach, or announce or any other message-based concept. He told them to go and make disciples. This would naturally include the need to repent, confess, and be forgiven, but it would be much much more than just this message.

Here is where things have broken down. We have developed all kinds of programs, plans, and methods to accomplish the first part of that phrase, the going, but we have been woefully lacking in the second part of making them disciples. We are focused on getting them to confess, come to church, and be good people, but we have not followed that up with helping them become disciples of Jesus. One friend said it this way: we have a lot of Christians, but we do not have a lot of Jesus' followers (disciples).

This realization led me to think about doing research on the topic. This involved doing word studies, Greek language analysis, and exegesis in the hopes of learning more about what the concept of discipling meant. And so, I started researching words like teaching, student, and disciple, only to realize that this was not providing me with what I needed. As a result, I then began from a different starting point. I found

key verses and then started doing chain references, hoping to find information that would give me a handle on the process. This did help to some extent and I will continue to follow that process.

But I found that even with this process there was still something missing. That left another approach, which would be to read all the books and materials on discipleship. As I thought about that, one other possibility came to mind and that would be to read through the gospels, in this case Matthew, from the perspective of a person wanting to gain insight into discipleship. The gospels were written to help key groups of people hear the message, respond, and then grow in their newfound faith and relationship, become disciples (the last phrase of the commands, ‘teach them everything’).

With that in mind, I thought about doing a journal type study. Read a portion and then reflect on what that told me about the process of discipling a person. And so that is what this material is, a journal of what I have learned by reading through the gospel of Matthew about those who disciplined others and were initially disciplined by Jesus. I pray it will both encourage you to become involved in discipling others and give insights that will be useful as you begin the journey of making disciples.

Author’s Note

As you read this journal please keep in mind, I did not intend this to be an exegetical document. It is designed to draw out principles and concepts to understand what was being

presented and how that relates to the work of disciple making, being involved in disciple making, and being a better disciplemaker.

The Journal

Entry 1 - Matthew 1:1-17 – Genealogy

Matthew is quite concerned about the genealogy of Jesus. This seems a valid concern when dealing with the rights of a person. When dealing with royalty and other kinds of rights, it is important to know that a person is in fact a descendent and has the rights they are claiming. Inheritance issues follow this same line of reasoning. Normally we expect the inheritance to go to the descendants of the deceased person. So, genealogy is a factor in connecting a person to their rights, status, and certain types of possessions.

So how does that relate to the concept of discipleship? Do we know the history or genealogy of how the gospel message came to us, and do I see myself as a descendant of the person who made it possible for me to choose to follow Christ?

I know a fair bit of my family history and have done some research into my genealogy. I can trace my mother's family back for about 10 generations and my father's family for a few more. I know that on my father's side, great-grandfather was a preacher, and my grandfather was a lay pastor. My father went to a bible college hoping to be a missionary. I know that my mother's grandparents helped establish a church in the town where they settled. I know that her parents, my grandparents, were active Christians. My step-grandfather became a Christian because of her witness, and he served as a Sunday school superintendent in that church for decades.

I have learned that many aunts and uncles, great aunts and uncles as well as cousins, have faithfully lived as Christians and some as pastors and missionaries. I have a "great cloud of witnesses" who have known and served the Lord, and so have become a source of what I have received.

That deals with those I know who were Christians, but what about the others? As in Jesus' genealogy, not all those who are listed

served God. Many were wicked people. Some were wicked and made a choice to change and follow God. Others did not. What about the impact of these “others” in my life?

They are part of my history. How they influence me is a choice I will have to make. As is true of any genealogy, being part of a family tree does not guarantee which type of person you will be. Nor does my choice determine what my descendants will choose.

But what about my spiritual genealogy? How does that affect who I am and what I do?

This is a more interesting structure. It is not always limited to my genetic lineage. It is actually composed of many different lines and people. It is about people being grafted into my lineage and can include so many more. It also allows someone with no spiritual lineage to be grafted into the line and to benefit from the life and resources of the main trunk.

As I look at Jesus' genealogy, I see this with the inclusion of Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. None of these women were from acceptable family trees, and yet they were brought into the family line of Jesus. If this is possible here, how would this appear or function in my spiritual genealogy?

So how important is a spiritual genealogy? What would that look like? Who would it include? The Bible talks about a “cloud of witnesses” in Hebrews 11. Are these the people who have been part of making it possible for me to hear the gospel? Paul talks about our being grafted into the family of God. How does that fit into my spiritual genealogy?

I imagine this family tree would look much different from the one based on genetic links. It is not solely based on marriage and family ties. It is about the process of grafting others into the central stem and connecting it to the root system (resources) of that tree. This tree and its root system that represents all the people who made it possible through contact and influence to allow me to

hear and respond to the gospel and to grow as a result of their presence.

And in turn, I become part of their world by helping them to grow and develop.

This is getting to be a complicated image. It is one with a vast root system, interconnected with a vast number of shoots, who are then interconnected so that all help each other grow. I think this would be like one family giving birth to a child, and everyone in the community helps to raise that child. The child is able to draw on the resources of the entire community, and yet remains the child of the family into which it was born. They have the greater responsibility in raising the child, but the whole community is part of the process. And if a child is adopted into a family, that child is given the same benefits as that of a natural born child.

Discipleship should look like this. We have a heritage on which we draw, but others are allowed to be grafted in (like Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth). The one who gives birth to us (leads us to salvation) becomes primarily responsible for our growth, but each member of the family has a part in that process.

Do we do discipleship this way? Do we think in terms of parenting and how we care for each other? It seems like we should. Paul talks about being the spiritual father of the Corinthians in 1 Co 4:15. When we lead someone to Christ, do we think this way and then disciple them, as if they were our child, part of our family? Or do we treat them as personnel to be trained by others?

Do we treat people as part of the family? Part of our genealogy? And so, someone we should care for?

Entry 2 - Mt 1:18-24 – Choices

Joseph and Mary had some critical choices to make. The focus here is on Joseph. He represents the response of many husbands. Why do I say that?

First, I find it interesting how many stories, TV shows, and the like, present this situation. The wife becomes aware that she may be pregnant. She has missed a period, and this causes her to wonder if she may be pregnant. The next steps vary, depending on the accessibility of various resources. If there are none, somewhere around three months, things become obvious. In other places it involves a visit to a doctor, a test, and an exam. In many places, the wife can buy a home test and find out within a very short time if she is pregnant.

The next step is where it gets interesting. Often when the wife tells her husband the news, there is a long pause before he responds. Sometimes long enough to cause her to wonder if he is happy that she is pregnant. Why does this happen? Perhaps they have not actively been trying for her to become pregnant, and it is a surprise. A surprise that he has not been planning for or anticipating. His first thoughts are not about the wonderful thing that is happening, but about other things...changes in plans, loss of freedom, and other related items.

It could be about how she presented the news. Was she happy, uncertain, or hoping for affirmation that it is okay to be pregnant? This creates an awkward moment and then, if in fact they do want children, it passes. If they don't, or one of them doesn't, then it gets complicated.

So now we have Joseph and Mary, and she is pregnant. We don't know how long she has been aware of this reality before she tells Joseph. Does she tell him as soon as she has heard from the angel? Does she wait until she is certain? Does it matter when? Probably not. You get the same result, don't you? He is a man, not expecting this information when it happens, and now he must decide how to respond.

His first choice is not to get involved. He is not willing to be the father, so to speak, of this child. He is not comfortable with some aspect of it. We don't know if he believes her. Maybe he does. Yet he is not willing to accept the role of father at this point. He even

decides to go a step further, to divorce her and give someone else the responsibility of raising the child. It is not until God steps in that he is willing to assume the responsibility of being the father as well as husband.

How often do we do this to those we have helped to find the Lord? Actually, there are two things happening here.

1. One person has become parent to the child. They cannot avoid the responsibility but do not want to “go it alone,” so to speak.
2. The other person has to choose how to respond, and whether or not to accept their responsibility to be a parent to the child who will be born.

How often do we decide we cannot do it alone? Actually, this is not a bad attitude. It is always wise to seek the help of others in all aspects of our life. This is not about abandoning responsibility but rather a mature awareness that we need help in raising a child.

The problem is with the second attitude. It is not as uncommon as we think. Many a parent decides to lay all the work and responsibility on the other parent. They sort of abdicate their role or shift as much responsibility to someone else as possible.

Now, how does this relate to discipleship?

The relationship is not hard to see. So often we don't want to deal with the care and development of a new Christian. We may have been directly involved somehow in helping them make the decision, but we quickly try to find a way to reduce, limit, or even avoid our responsibility to help them grow. We try to get others to take over that responsibility.

In a sense we have put them up for adoption and they will always wonder about why we were not more involved in their growth and development as a follower of God. In fact, many will hand a prospective convert over as soon as it looks like there may be a

rebirth. We say things like, you should talk to the pastor or to someone we think is better qualified. Or if we do lead them to that point, then we quickly hand them over to someone we think is better qualified to raise them.

We, in a sense, put them up for adoption and so choose not to be responsible for what comes next. Why do we do this? How does this affect the proper growth and development of a new believer? Would this not create or open the way for some serious spiritual and emotional issues down the road? Could it affect their ability to help others as well?

It seems that the best place for a new child to grow and develop is with those who gave birth to that child. In the same way it would seem that the best place for healthy development of a new believer is with those who helped them find their way to Jesus.

Is this how we see discipleship, as based in relationship? Or do we see it as a program through which we send them to experts who can do the work? Programs may be useful, but they are weak. They are programs, which do not occur in real time or real life, as compared to being in a close relationship.

Entry 3 - Mt 1:18-24 – unknown

As I closed the last entry, I realized there was another aspect of this process of announcing a pregnancy. Up until quite recently, and especially for Joseph, there was no way of knowing anything about the baby. Its gender, its size, its intelligence, its health, and so on. These are things that remained in the realm of the unknown. And some of them are still unknown at first.

And even today, while we can determine many things, gender, and general state of health, there remains much we cannot know. This means that any decision made, relating to the arrival and care of the baby, is made in the dark. It is a decision filled with unknowns, and yet it must be made, and over and over the future parents do just that.

They may hope for more, but they will not be able to control many factors. This can be dangerous. It can create unreal expectations. It can create stress points if what is desired does not occur and will affect the healthy development of the child, especially in its emotional stability.

Joseph had an advantage that most do not have. He was told that it would be a son and that it would be a child created by God through the act of the Holy Spirit. In other words, a special child, dare I say, a gifted child. Now ask any parent of a gifted child, if that is in fact a blessing or not. It all depends on the parents and their attitude. I wonder what Joseph thought as he heard the confirmation of Mary's announcement, that it was a child given by God, the Messiah, and a boy?

Is discipleship like this? And is that why people are reluctant to raise up a new believer? They don't know what they are getting. They may have some information, much like parents do today, but there is so much that is unknown. And unlike raising a child from birth, where you have much more control over input and activity, discipling a person is not like that. They come with a back story or history, and you will have to deal with all of that, as well as help them to develop in a healthy manner.

In either case, there is much that is unknown. There are many risks involved, which can be scary because they will reveal our limitations and our fears. Something we don't like to do.

So again, is this why we are so reluctant to accept the responsibility of someone not born into our physical family? Why we are so willing to 'pass the buck' and let someone else deal with the dirty diapers of their life? Even when we are the ones who, in a sense, helped them be born into the family of God.

I see the evidence of this in Barnabas and Saul. Saul had trouble dealing with Mark and refused to be his mentor. Barnabas did not. Instead, he saw the potential that existed and did the hard work of changing the diapers and being there through the struggles. Did

Paul perhaps see this in Barnabas, so he began to disciple others, like Timothy and Titus? No way to know. What we do know is that Timothy had already been discipled by his mother and grandmother and was ready for further training under Paul.

That suggests that we need more people to be willing to do the initial work of discipleship, when everything is unknown and uncertain. So why is this not happening? Why are people not willing to take the risk and disciple another person?

Entry 4 - Mt 2:1-12 – roles

So far, I have been a bit distant in my approach to this topic. I see I am using the terms “we” and “they” a lot. Now I need to begin looking more at the ‘me’ in relation to this topic. I say that, because this passage deals with several groups of people and how they responded to the possibility of knowing more and being involved in what happens next.

There are several ways to deal with my responsibility in the development or discipleship of others. The key one is that of a parent, or one directly responsible to supervise the growth and development of a person. This has been the focus and will continue to be the main focus of my reflections. But here in this passage, I see that there are others who can have input and can help this person.

Which one of these will I be?

First, I see from other records that there were shepherds, or observers. They watch what is happening but don’t get involved. They rejoice in the fact that God has given new life to someone and celebrate this fact, but in the end, do nothing. Well, maybe I shouldn’t say “nothing.” They have in fact provided positive reinforcement to those directly responsible. Encouragement and approval are powerful gifts.

So, am I providing this kind of encouragement and approval to those who are discipling others?

Second, there are the Magi. They know something special is taking place and are willing to provide critical items from their resources to help the ones directly responsible. Here they bring unique gifts to be made available as needed. For me, this could be my time, my counsel, my skills, or any other resource that I have, that I willingly make available as needed to the one in charge of discipling a person.

Do I know what resources I have that could be of help to someone involved in discipling others? Do I in fact make them available?

Third are the priests and teachers. They have a great deal of knowledge about what is happening. They could provide a great deal of insight and counsel to those directly involved. Instead, they choose not to commit themselves. They are more concerned about their world and what they are doing. They have no interest in helping others, or even considering the possibility that they are not the ones in charge. In biblical history, they knew the truth but chose not to respond. In fact, they avoided making any commitment.

Do I have insight and knowledge that could help others? Do I willingly share what I know? Or do I limit access to that information because it may affect me?

Fourth are the Herods. These are people who can negatively affect the process. They don't want others to grow or benefit in a way that they could possibly overshadow who they are. They do this out of jealousy, fear of losing status or power, and greed. They don't want others to grow or develop and become a threat to their world.

Do I have this attitude? An attitude that is about me first, above all else? Do I do things that actually prevent others from growing, that prevent others from helping people become discipled?

Even as I reflect on these, I realize there is a flip side to this. If I am the one doing the discipling, I can behave like any one of those people and so harm the process. I can choose not to be encouraging. I can choose not to share resources. I can choose not to allow access to my insight and knowledge. I can choose to prevent them from growing and developing and thus prevent them from becoming strong and healthy. I can make them dependent on me and not on the Lord.

In effect, if I am not careful, I can make them weak and fearful.

So, do I really want people to be disciplined whether by myself or others? The answer will become evident, based on with whom I allow them to have contact, how I manage those contacts, and how I behave as well.

I see how I could become a barrier to others who want to or even are willing to disciple someone, based on what they see in me and my attitudes. Truthfully, it seems like more people are a source of discouragement than of encouragement in being open to the role of disciple maker.

So, am I helping or hurting the process of everyone becoming a disciple maker?

Entry 5 – Mt 2:13-14 – Messages

Twice, a message comes about danger. Twice, the people obey the message and protect themselves and those for whom they are responsible. Am I listening to what God wants? Do I understand the consequences of not listening both to myself and to others?

I wonder what would have happened if the Magi had not taken the message seriously and had returned to Herod. Did their action make it possible for Joseph and family to successfully escape and so disappear from Herod's radar?

What would have happened if Joseph had been slow to respond? What if he had not listened and left immediately? How would that have affected his responsibility to raise their child?

Do I really understand what God is telling me to do in relationship to discipling others? Do I hear His voice warning me about the dangers of not doing this?

So, here I am thinking about whether I am listening and how God is communicating His instructions to me. God doesn't always communicate through dreams. If He did, then it would be a lot easier to know what to do. But wishing for that is not going to help me. However, He has used dreams to guide me. Dreams and visions and the examples of others, who were told to teach others to disciple.

When I think about it, I begin to realize that anyone who is obeying God, and doing what He has asked them to do, are a message to me. Especially as I review what has been recorded by these people in the Bible. There are a number of examples of discipling:

1. Moses and Joshua
2. Caleb and Othniel
3. Elijah and Elisha
4. Jesus and the twelve
5. Barnabas and Paul and Mark
6. Paul and Timothy, Titus and many others
7. Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos

So, am I listening to what they reveal to me through their words and actions? Do I even want to listen and learn? Do I look at this list and then think, well I am not a Moses or some other person, so I can't teach anyone? But is this really true?

I spend time teaching my children. I spend time discussing ideas with my wife. I share my thoughts and ideas with my friends. Is not each of these a form of discipling?

Two things become clear, as I look at the Magi and Joseph. One, my actions can either help or harm those who are discipling others. If I don't listen to what God is saying and create the space for this to happen, then I may actually prevent God from working through others. In fact, I may be responsible for hurting the development of another.

The other is that, if I am not listening, then I will fail to help and protect the one for which I am responsible. I don't get them to a place where they can grow. A place of safety and freedom. Which then makes me wonder if where I am is critical to helping someone grow, for creating a place of peace for the learning to occur.

In this story, relocating physically was critical at that point. But I can see where it is not just about a physical location. It can be about creating an emotional place where the person can come and receive the help they need. A place where the struggles of the world can be set aside, and they can learn in peace. This means that I need to be in the place where God wants me to be, so that I can help create this place for another person.

So maybe I need to move, so God can use me where I am needed. Maybe I need to refocus, so I become the place where discipleship can occur, where growth occurs without being threatened, where life can be lived knowing that God is there. Maybe the issue is that I need to move myself closer to God, so he can lead me to where I need to be, so I in turn can lead/disciple another.

So, am I listening to God? Am I where God wants me to be, so I can guide another person?

[Entry 6 - Mt 2:13-21 - Choices](#)

I have had to return to this passage to reconsider an idea. A lot of choices were being made. Choices that would affect the development of key people. Negative choices that resulted in the

oppression of truth, Herod. Negative choices that resulted in hiding the truth, religious leaders. Careful choices that resulted in the protection of others, the magi. And the choices of Joseph and Mary about where they would live. A choice that would affect many more decisions and the raising of the boy Jesus.

As I think about this, I wonder how my choices affect my ability to influence others. Do my choices encourage or discourage their growth? Am I opening the doors to discipleship or closing them?

Choices about where I live, the work I do, the friends I make, and so much more. Joseph knew from the warning of the Lord that he needed to flee, in order to save the life of the baby. Do I know what to flee from, so that those I am responsible for can grow and learn about God?

This is not an easy question. Sometimes I think I have little choice in this area. I think that I am stuck, and so I limit the possibilities of touching the lives of others. Do I understand what I am saying? I let the choice of where I am create walls and barriers to seeing how I can grow and help others to grow. I don't see the possibility of discipling someone else, because I doubt I'm able to grow where I am and because of the choices I make.

Joseph was told where to go. Egypt was not where they wanted to be. Egypt was far from all that was familiar and comfortable. Far from family and friends. Then the return home, and the decision not to go back to Bethlehem but to Nazareth, brought them to another foreign place. Not where they wanted to be.

I wish I knew what was going through the mind of Joseph and Mary, as they made these choices and how the choices affected the process of raising Jesus. Did they make it easier or harder? Did they explain all that had happened to Jesus and help him understand his identity in relationship to God? Truthfully, the choice of place did not matter. The more important choice was to do their best in raising their child, no matter where they were.

So, do I make excuses, because of where my choices have taken me? Or do I see the need to teach/disciple others and share what I know about my relationship with God? Do I help them see the impact of what God is doing in my life, in the choices I make, not about where I am, but about how God is with me?

These choices sometimes are not under my control. I may not have the freedom I wish in selecting where I will live and other factors. But I always have the ability to choose how I will use those realities in the training of others. But do I realize how I can use this reality in helping another person to grow? It didn't matter where Joseph and Mary ended up living. They still had the responsibility to raise their child in the best way possible.

Whatever my choices may be or may take me, this reality does not change. Wherever Joseph and Mary went, they still had the responsibility to disciple their child. Do I realize that wherever God places me, I need to be involved in the discipling of others, others who are also the children of God?

Entry 7 – multiple passages in Mt 1-2 - Vision

Joseph's four dreams

1. Marry Mary – angel of the Lord Mt 1:20-21
2. Flee to Egypt – angel of the Lord Mt 2:13
3. Return home – angel of the Lord Mt 2:19
4. Go to Nazareth, not Judea – Mt 2:22 unknown

Am I tuned in – where does my wisdom come from?

These visions fascinate me. Each gives a specific direction, and the last is clearly a response based on previous experience. All of them relate to accepting responsibility for a person. In the first one, the responsibility is to accept Mary as his wife and as a result to care for the child.

The second two relate to where he will do this. The last appears to be a personal decision, but it follows in many ways the prior visions and actions. He is to decide to care for Mary and Jesus and do so in a variety of locations and environments.

What is of more interest is that he is to do this without concern for his plans or whether the choice will be a convenient one.

Obviously, none of these will make his life easier. He is to marry a person betrothed to him, pregnant, but not by him. He is to flee a serious threat and live in a foreign country. He is to return home with little knowledge of the real state of things. He makes a decision to move to a place foreign to them and without the usual connections to family and friends.

He is to accept the responsibility of caring for, leading, raising, and providing for two people without considering if it will be convenient or easy.

It makes me wonder about how I decide to be involved in the life of another person. I am more than willing to let someone else care for and guide a person who was not part of my plan or desire to provide for.

Joseph wanted to marry Mary, but not under the conditions that had become the reality. This was not how he planned to start married life, as husband to the unknown. He probably wanted to have children and would accept the responsibility of caring for his children, but Jesus was not his child.

Do I think like this when I am confronted with the need to raise and care for a new believer? A child not my own? Do I resist, as Joseph did at first, and decide to quietly pass the responsibility on to another without shaming them in the process? At least in a way so that no shame would fall on me.

Such an action is designed to protect myself and to avoid being responsible for another person. Especially a child/new believer that is not a direct result of my activity or ministry. What will it take for me to be willing to assume such a responsibility? Will it

take a vision, a clear message from God? Or has He already revealed this need, but I am not listening, or worse, I don't want to listen?

Entry 8 – Mt 3:1-12 - Pre-preparation

This is where dreams, reality, and responsibility meet. The reality of any new couple is to dream about having children. This dream will at some point begin to affect their thinking and planning.

God knew that the time had come to prepare the world to receive the Messiah. So, He sent John to prepare the people for what was about to happen. John did the work of pre-discipleship, if I can use such a phrase. In fact, the prophecies had said this is what he would do. He would prepare the road, smooth things out, so that when Jesus came, it would be easy to follow Jesus, not John.

I think this is how I should live my life. In a pre-discipleship mode. I should be living, speaking, and acting in a way that prepares the people around me to learn about Jesus and allow me to point them to Jesus.

As I reflect on this, I see this pattern in couples who dream about having children or are in the process of giving birth to a child. They do all kinds of things to announce what is happening...special events, announcing the gender of the baby (a new activity), preparing a room for the baby...and they involve others in this process of preparing to have and raise a child.

In all of this, there is no attempt to hide the fact that they are having a baby. There is no attempt to deny or avoid responsibility. In fact, a lot of effort is invested in a number of activities, such as selecting the baby's name, taking classes on giving birth, and more classes on how to care for a baby, to name a few.

John's focus was precisely this: preparation of the people to receive the baby, the Messiah. Well, by now He is no longer a baby, but to everyone around Him, He is new, different, someone

they needed to prepare for. And here is the interesting fact, John was not preparing his own children, he was preparing people for which God had made him responsible. John had to decide to accept this call, to pre-disciple and disciple people, so they would know who was coming and know how to respond in order to receive God's Messiah.

So, what am I doing to prepare myself to pre-disciple/disciple others? Am I letting people know that I am open to telling them about Jesus? Am I helping them to see the path, even before they believe? And for those interested, am I available to speak Truth into their life?

Parents do all of this. They announce it to others. They prepare themselves and others. They even talk to the baby before it is born.

So why do I not do the same for the people I encounter in my daily life? Why am I not like John, who was willing to announce the Truth, prepare others for the Truth, and lead them in knowing the Truth?

Entry 9 – Mt 3:7-12 - Vipers

John was not kind to the group of Pharisees and Sadducees who came to observe. He considered them false teachers, who produced the wrong kind of fruit. Dangerous, because they worked hard to convince people of their good status and used the fact that they were children of Abraham, physical descendants, to support their claims to lead and teach.

This makes me wonder how different am I from them, when I refuse to let God use me to teach and disciple others? Do I appear to be depending on my heritage and history to define who I am, rather than depending on my relationship with Christ?

Vipers! Why this word? Vipers are dangerous, actually deadly, and to follow their example and lifestyle means being very dangerous to others, even deadly. I can look at this in two ways. I

can use what I know to create a shield around me. This is based on fear and distrust. I act in ways that lead people not to want me around. Or I can use this shield to attack others, in an attempt to eliminate those who differ from me.

Neither way is effective for discipleship. The question I have is, are my attitude and behavior like that of a viper, which keeps people at a distance so that I do not have to be concerned with discipling them? I don't have to risk their seeing the real me in all its struggles and weaknesses. That also means they will never see how I have learned to depend on God in times of struggle and need.

So many act in this way. They think of themselves almost as poisonous and destructive to others. As if they would only damage and harm anyone they might try to help. But who of us is truly perfect? It is only as we depend on God, and not ourselves, that we can change from a viper to a source of growth and blessing.

There is one other concept here that I hadn't thought of until just now. I could be trying to give the appearance that I am a viper. Someone to be avoided. Someone who cannot help and would only harm others in their growth as a Christian. This may not be true, but if I believe it to be so, then taking on the characteristics of a viper would keep others away and allow me to avoid any responsibility I might have in their growth. I hide away like a viper; I behave like a viper, and I do my best to suggest that any counsel I have could be counterproductive, even damaging.

John's words are strong. Too many of us are like vipers, willing to avoid others, willing to suggest they shouldn't come near us, and willing to attack those who suggest we should be involved in discipling others in Truth. As a result, we create a false truth that only a few are able to disciple others.

Just reviewed this, and I am still missing something. I think I know what it is.

While what I have written has some truth in it and is something to be aware of, there is another issue that is even more significant. It relates to those who are negative about the ability of anyone who is not a leader (based on their concept of leader in the church) and therefore is not qualified to teach or lead or disciple another person.

These people don't like it when they lack control over what is happening. They belittle and undervalue what others can do, because they don't have the training, they don't have the experience, etc. And there is some truth in that, but if I consider what John and Jesus did, I must realize they did not receive the standard training or follow the normal procedures, to get the approved experience to be qualified and accepted.

This doesn't mean they were not trained, or they didn't have experience. They simply got their training from life and the same for their experience in leading. They were sent, and so they went.

Do I base my decision to participate in and help train (disciple) another person on the comments of the vipers? Do I believe that there are other ways to help people, based on what I know about God and what he wants me to do? Do I believe God can use me, even though I seem like an unorthodox option? Both John and Jesus were anything but orthodox. They were real people, doing the real work of God. So, is that what discipleship is...real people helping other real people grow and know God?

Entry 10 – Mt 3:13-14 - Unworthy

How many parents begin to wonder if they are worthy of the life that is about to arrive? How many, once holding that new life in their arms, are overwhelmed by the responsibility they have accepted? They feel the weight of the miracle and sense how unworthy they are to have received such a gift. They realize they have done nothing that even comes close to warranting such an honor.

But do they refuse? Actually, some do. They refuse to accept that they are a parent. They push the responsibility off on the other spouse and on others. They feel not only inadequate, but they do their best to prove this to everyone, either subtly or overtly.

Here comes Jesus. This is another birthing moment. It is the moment of birth for all that follows. All of Jesus' ministry and purpose for coming begins now. John tries to sidestep this moment. His reasoning makes sense, for in the scope of eternity, he is, in fact, unworthy. This is God standing before him. This is **THE MESSIAH**.

John could see this and is not sure that he is qualified, no he is certain he is not qualified to be the one to baptize Jesus. The one who declares for all to see, this Man is the one we have been waiting for. If he does this, accepts his responsibility to proclaim this fact and leads others to this Man, then everyone will point to him and say, "You told us He was the Messiah."

If Jesus does not become everything John hopes for, then John will be judged. If Jesus does everything expected of Him as proclaimed by John, then John's position and honor will increase. John sees neither of these possibilities. He sees one thing in the end, his responsibility to do what God has called him to do, prepare the way and lead everyone to this person.

Now I need to look at why I am reluctant to disciple others. Am I unworthy? Of course I am. No honest person can ever say they are truly worthy of such a responsibility. Much like there is no parent who, if they are honest, says they are worthy of the child they have birthed. Much like John declares for all to hear, he is not worthy to do what Jesus asks.

So, I am not worthy. But that does not mean I now have a means of escape. Parents are parents, no matter what they do next. They will not be perfect in carrying out their role as parent. But they cannot deny the reality of the situation.

So, I am not worthy. But just like John, God expects me to fulfill all righteousness. That means doing what God expects, doing what is right. John did what was needed and from then on helped others to know the Person he baptized.

So, I am not worthy. But I cannot walk away. I am a child of God and expected to care for others as if they were my family, my brothers and sisters, even, dare I say, my children, my responsibility. I am one sent by God to live in the world of others. I am expected to be there when needed, to provide clarity and fulfillment for those seeking to follow God's path. I am expected to be there to help them find and stay on the path that will allow them to follow Jesus.

I am unworthy, but God has placed much that is of value and worth in me, so that I can help others grow as a parent does and help them stay on the right path as John did.

Entry 11– Mt 3:16-17 – Inevitability

What is the sound that every parent wants to hear?

No, it is not the groans of the mother in labor. No, it is not the doctors and nurses or others saying, “any minute now.”

It is that moment when you hear the baby cry, and they announce it is a.... (Well, it used to be like this, but ultrasound has changed some of the mystery of the moment...well the mystery is still there, but we get the news much sooner. And now it is when the something comes out and it is either blue or pink. Just not the same as it used to be!).

All the prep, all the waiting, all the worry is lost and forgotten in that moment when you hear that first sound, and what is that first sound? It is a cry. Does that sound right? A cry. A moment of awakening, a sound that denotes, pain? A moment that lets everyone know: I have arrived, and I am helpless.

And yet...

That moment also opens the door for access to unimaginable resources for that new life. All the resources it will need to grow, develop, and mature. All the resources that will allow it, in time, to do so many wonderful and amazing things.

That is exactly what happened at Jesus' baptism. But in this case, it was not Jesus crying. It was God shouting that this was His Son and then making available both a symbol of this Truth and the first deposit, and the final deposit of all the resources Jesus would need to live the life before Him.

I just realized that it is not just the baby who cries. Well, makes noise. The parents and those nearby make all manner of noises, oohs, and aahs. Sounds of crying (tears of joy and release), laughing (relief), and many words of congratulation and appreciation for a number of things. And the parents bestow on the baby its name and confirm they are the parents, ready to commit their lives and resources to this child.

Do I respond the same way? Do I celebrate a new birth into the Kingdom, into the family of God? Do I commit myself and my resources to their growth and development? Do I ooh and aah, cry, laugh and declare my...? Sadly, I and way too many others don't. I say, "how nice." I say, "it is wonderful." I say all kinds of things, but I am reluctant to commit myself to do anything more.

I could say that it was not me who led them to the Lord. I could say it is the church's responsibility. But am I not the church? I could say so many things, but why do I avoid this step? Was I not in some way part of their birth? If I am praying for people to hear and respond, then yes, I am part of their birth. If I give to make it possible for them to hear, then yes, I am part of their birth. So why will I not make the next level of commitment and be a disciplemaker, a spiritual parent?

Entry 12 – Mt 4:1-11 – Wilderness

This is where life gets scary. It is possible that discipling others is in many ways a wilderness that must be experienced to be understood. And the three tests of Jesus help me understand what it will cost to be willing to care about another person.

Those new parents, who were just a few hours ago so excited about the miracle gift they have just received, are just as suddenly thrown into a whirlwind of testing and trials. There will be sleepless nights, the seemingly unending crying of the babe for help, and the lack of certainty about anything related to how the babe is doing physically. All the knowledge needed to survive and thrive cannot be found in a book, cannot be found in the counsel of others. They must be learned in the heat of the trial.

I wonder if that was part of why Jesus was tested. Before anything else occurred, He needed to have a clear understanding of the issues that lay ahead. Those three tests were the foundation for all that came later, and the successful transit of them provided the knowledge and experience to handle what was to come.

Think about it:

1. Daily provision – learning how to live correctly in this new reality. If these early lessons are learned well, then the future will be easier to manage.
2. Power and ability – learning about who is really in control is critical. Only a foolish parent says they are in control. They clearly see that the baby and its needs are in control, and there is no option if they are to develop properly.
3. Safety and strength to live – it is important to learn boundaries, to learn what is risky and what is beneficial, and in that learning to identify my responsibility to provide and define them for the one I care for. One does not test the brakes of a car by walking out in front of the

car and hoping it will stop. That is foolish. We need to learn the same in relation to caring for another.

Parents go through this trial by fire each time a child is born. And the wise parent learns not to expect every new baby to behave like the one before. Each is unique. The lessons are the same but must be applied to each one in their context.

So, what does all this have to do with discipleship?

Think about it. I don't want to go through the months of trial, where I am learning how this new babe in Christ will grow and adapt. I don't want to deal with sleepless nights and worry. I don't want to have to deal with feeding when it is demanded (yes, newborns have their own schedule for feeding). I don't want to have to care for them when it is their time. I want to set my schedule and tell them when they can create dirty diapers, when they can cry, when they can sleep. They need to follow my schedule, but they don't, won't, can't. That is not how life is, on demand based on my schedule.

So, will I enter the cauldron and be there to help a newborn Christian grow, much like a parent commits to all of the struggles of their newborn? Will I sacrifice my life and schedule willingly, so the new Christian will have what they need, when it is needed? Will I assert my control, or let life happen?

Sadly, so many do not take this risk. They leave it to others to do. It is no wonder we have so many underdeveloped Christians, who were orphaned by those who could have helped, and end up in the equivalent of an orphanage for abandoned baby Christians.

Am I being harsh? I wish I were, but looking at how weak the church is today, I think I am actually being kind. But the key question is: will I see the truth and head for the wilderness and the cauldron of testing to help one grow and become mature? A good disciplinemaker will.

Entry 13– Mt 4:1-17 – Relocated

Jesus comes back from the wilderness and is not able to stay where he has been, near John. Wouldn't that be a great place to be? But John is in prison, and so Jesus heads back to Galilee but not back to his home. He needs to be more accessible, if he is to do the work that lies ahead, and Nazareth is not that place.

The key word is accessible. Do I move myself to a place where I am accessible to those who need my help? Am I willing to relocate to be more available?

In the case of Jesus, he needed to make a physical move, so that he would be nearer those who needed to hear his message. I don't think that it is always about a physical location but more likely a change in mental and emotional location.

Mentally, because my thinking needs to shift to allow people more access to me. I need to change how I think about my time, my space, my desires. This is a key shift or relocation if people are going to be able to find me and, more important, feel comfortable about coming to me where I am. It also means that I am now moving myself closer to them, so they can sense my presence and willingness to connect.

Emotionally, because we tie all kinds of issues to where we are and subsequently the value of that location, we can become so emotionally tied to a place, even an emotional place, that there is no door for others to enter. Even more so, no door for us to come out where we can be seen.

Instead, I shutter the windows so I can't see them, and they don't know if I am even home. I bar the doors, so I will be reminded that what is outside is dangerous to my way of life, so if they do come, they will be discouraged from trying to enter. A unique aspect of these bars is that they are visible both to those on the inside and the outside.

And while the message is “repent, the kingdom of heaven is near” and there is a great light to help us see, I am not a source of the message or evidence of the existence, even the reality of the light. My behavior calls all that into question.

Wait, is that really what could happen if I hide away? I could, by my actions, actually convince those who have heard and seen to question what they have seen and heard? I wonder how many new believers fall by the way, lose interest, and give up because of those who refuse to relocate, so they can help disciple them?

That is a sad thought. What do I need to do, to be sure I am relocating myself emotionally, mentally, and physically, if needed, so that people will be disciplined as a result?

Entry 14 - Mt 4:18-25 - Ready

How do I know if I am ready, and who is ready to be disciplined?

Jesus comes back from the wilderness setting with a clear understanding of His purpose. He begins proclaiming the coming of the kingdom and goes in search of people to disciple. His choices seem like unlikely candidates for this process. Four rough and hard fishermen. Yet they willingly leave everything to follow Jesus.

Here is the issue for me. I have accepted Jesus as my LORD and Savior. I place a strong emphasis on the word Lord. I have chosen to hear His voice and follow Him. Now comes the key. If this is true, then I should be involved in proclaiming the gospel. If that is true, then I will encounter people who will be willing to be disciplined, people willing to give up time and space in their lives to learn more.

The problem is more one of clarity. And more about, will I let God clarify His call in my life?

So, just to clarify this for myself:

1. I have confessed my sin and been forgiven.
2. I have made the decision to confirm this publicly by baptism.
3. I have consciously committed myself to the study of God's Word and teaching.
4. I have chosen to be a disciple and am learning to commit my life to God.

All this happened to Jesus, except the first item, since He had no sin. And still in clear ways He confessed the lordship of God over His life through the tests in the wilderness.

That leaves one step that is clearly presented in this passage:

5. To choose to disciple others in what I have learned.

It is not about if there are people who want to be discipled. It is a matter of looking for them and going to where they are, to meet them and invite them into the process of discipleship.

It is also not just a matter of being ready. Jesus began almost from the beginning of His ministry to disciple others. Granted, He already knew God and much more. Still, the example remains. From the beginning of His commitment to following God's path, He sought people to disciple.

We know about the 12, because they are specifically mentioned, but at one time there were 70 followers and also a band of women, who were committed to learning and growing in their knowledge of being a disciple.

It is not about how many I disciple; it is about fulfilling this responsibility as a person committed to living as a Christ follower...one who seeks to reflect the image of Christ for others to see.

So, it is not about whether I feel ready. If I have fulfilled the first four steps, then I am ready to share what I know with another.

Entry 15 - Mt 5:1-12 - Blessing

Disciplemaker Beatitudes

Blessed is the D who knows he doesn't have it all together,

For his are the resources of heaven.

Blessed is the D who cries for those he disciples,

For they will be encouraged by the Lord for his expression of love.

Blessed is the D who is not proud,

For they will see what God has prepared for him.

Blessed is the D who is understanding and forgiving,

For they will be healed and restored when hurt.

Blessed is the D whose motives are pure,

For they will know God's presence in all they do.

Blessed is the D whose goal is peace,

For they will reveal God to all.

Blessed is the D who is belittled and undervalued by others,

For they will have a special place in the Kingdom.

Blessed is the D who must deal with the insults and false treatment because they are discipling others,

For they will have a great reward from God.

Entry 16 - Mt 5:13-16 – Revelator

We talk a lot about being light and salt. But do we talk about who has control of the salt? Who is it that is putting a lid on the saltshaker?

So here is the underlying reality. My life is supposed to bring flavor into the lives of others. In this case, as a disciplinemaker, the salt of God's presence and work in my life. The point being that if I hide or avoid others, then they will never get a chance to taste/experience what that flavor is from me.

Do we consider who has control of the light switch? (modern version of lamp) This is the light of God's presence shining, so that others can see and learn about what having God in a person's heart and life means. The point is that if I turn off the switch or close the door, then they will not have that opportunity.

Why would I refuse to let others... "taste and see that the Lord is good?" Why would I refuse to let the light of God shine through me, so they can see the Truth?

If I am so afraid or so selfish to keep the salt to myself and surround myself in darkness, then I am saying that I don't want others to know God and what He can do. The very fact that I am a child of God and serving Him, means that I will touch others and reveal God to them.

This means that I already have two key elements needed to disciple others, God's presence which flavors all I do, and God's power which lets me do the good work He expects me to do.

Discipling others should be just that simple. Touching their lives so that they experience what I have experienced and revealing the reality of what God can and will do in the life of one who is truly a follower. Being one who knows they must help others, so the salt will not lose its saltiness and there will not be darkness, a blindness to God's presence.

Entry 17 - Mt 5:17-43 - Lawishness

This passage covers a number of laws. But how do these laws affect or inform what it means to be a good disciplemaker?

To start off, no matter how I respond to these laws and the guidelines given, the law itself is not altered. The problem is that, by not following them and helping others to understand them, I risk altering their meaning for others. My lack of action could suggest that they are not important or that what is being said is no longer applicable. There could be other consequences.

If I think through them, I can see how to apply them to the importance of being a disciplemaker.

Murder – this is about what happens when I refuse to disciple others. I am in effect destroying the beauty of God. I am limiting or preventing the possibility of growth and production of fruit by others. I am helping them to die on the vine and am putting them and myself at risk of being removed and thrown on the fire.

I can actively choose not to disciple and so become responsible for their spiritual death. The sad thing is that the same outcome is accomplished through apathy.

Adultery – this is about not desiring God’s beauty to shine in others. I keep it for myself. Isn’t that at the core of adultery, focusing on satisfying my desires at the expense of others? I get what I want and have no concern for the damage I am doing. I pluck the flower and so damage it and prevent others from enjoying it.

Divorce – when I refuse to place God first. I am divorcing myself from God and replacing God with something else. This idea or theme is covered over and over in the Old Testament. The people of God replacing God with their own preferences. So, I prefer my ideas and my plans over obeying God and discipling others.

Oaths – fine sounding words don’t make something true or real. I talk fine but never do anything. The best oath is my action of

obedience, not a promise that I will someday follow through on what I should already be doing. No amount of swearing, oath taking, and promises will make it true. I should not have to promise anything, because I am doing what must be done.

Eye for an eye, Tooth for a tooth – they deserve what they get. I should not get in the way of their overcoming the consequences of their actions. And I definitely don't want them to abuse me, so I will not risk helping them, lest I end up paying as well by association.

If I stop and think this through, these all deal with what others need to move forward and grow and not what I think I want and need. Do I see how my attitudes about discipleship could result in the negative side of each of the above areas?

Entry 18 - Mt 5:44-48 – Opponents

Jesus reminds me that in God's kingdom I am to love my enemies. The fact is that all of us are the enemies of God because of our sin. And if I am a disciple of God, then everyone who is not a disciple is an enemy.

This boils down to a few critical things. Since I started as God's enemy and received His blessings, then in the same way I should make those blessings available to all. That means I need to treat others the way God treated me. If I withhold those blessings, that means I hate them, and I want God to treat me as His enemy because I am behaving like they do.

So, how often am I guilty of failing these laws, especially this one about loving my enemies? How often do I think that by turning my responsibility over to others I am not violating any laws, when in fact, I am. How often do I abolish from my life these essential patterns of a good disciplinemaker to make myself comfortable? When instead, I should be learning all I can learn, so that the Truth is not altered or lost because I am unwilling to be a disciplinemaker.

I should be teaching, guiding, and helping others, so they can grow and become fully mature.

It seems like so many challenges and so much that is hidden. No, that is not correct. There is so much that I want to hide away, and hide from, and keep hidden.

The reality is that my words will have no meaning if they do not match my actions. If I say I care but then I How quick am I to settle for isolating myself, giving in to my fears, excusing my behavior and so damage the knowledge God has given for healthy growth?

It would be so much easier for someone else to deal with all of this.

- Murder – allowing the loss of what should stay
- Adultery – using what has been given to satisfy myself
- Divorce – misuse of the blessing of others and then casting them away, when I am tired of them
- Enemy – behaving in a self-centered manner with no regard for how I am hurting others

The law presented here has real-time application to my attitudes about being a disciplemaker. It is my choice as to what I do, but there will be consequences, and my unwillingness to enter into the lives of others will create problems, a belief that the law has no value, or that it can be altered to suit my preferences.

Entry 19 - Mt 6:1-8 – Visibility

There is a flip side to the fear of being afraid to help and disciple others. It is the desire to do so for the attention I will receive. I am a disciplemaker, because I am afraid no one will notice me or believe I have value and have something worth investing into the lives of others. As a result of this need, I declare for all to know exactly who and how many I am discipling. I let people know which leaders I have helped along the way.

Some people pray, fast, and give in a way that makes what they are doing visible and apparent to all. As a result, their reward is in the recognition and approval they receive. If I disciple others for the recognition it brings and to have people dependent on me, then I am no different. If I do it so they will proclaim how much they are grateful for my life and input, then I have earned the reward appropriate to the motive for my desire to be a disciplemaker.

There is a further danger in this, and that is my lack of concern for them. If I follow this route and constantly remind people of what they have received from me, I may become an embarrassment to them, and I could risk having them reject what they have learned, because it was based on my selfish desire for recognition, not on a truly humble relationship with God. As a result, they could become antagonistic towards God and even choose to denounce God because of my behavior. They did not encounter God but a selfish egotistical person acting like a personal savior.

The focus is on getting credit for myself and not in giving glory to God. This is as dangerous as not being willing to disciple. Both open the door for distortion of what it means to have a true relationship with God. The secret to avoiding both pitfalls is humility. Something worth thinking about.

Entry 20 - Mt 6:9-12 – Entreaty

What is it that I should seek from God in prayer? How does the Lord's Prayer provide guidance for me?

Here is what I think I should be focused on as I pray:

God's name – Help me to be sure my actions and behavior in discipling bring honor to You, Lord and exalt your name.

Kingdom – Help me reveal to those I disciple how to live in Your kingdom here and now. Help me to make Your kingdom a reality that can be seen and experienced in this life and also as preparation for when we join You in eternity.

Will – Help me to be an example of what it means to do your Will as your disciple. Help me to guide them in understanding all You have given in your Word to guide us in this process, and to live in a way that helps others to desire to do your Will as well.

Daily bread – My Father, please provide me each day with the tools, resources, strength, understanding, and faith I need to be a disciplemaker, who blesses and helps those in my care to grow emotionally and spiritually. Help me reveal that You are the true source of all that is needed each day to live for You.

Forgive – Father, I have failed often, and You have forgiven me. Help me to forgive those whom I disciple when they fail...and they will. Help me to be sensitive to their need for space to make mistakes and know that they are loved at all times.

Lead me – Lord, there are so many pitfalls, traps, and temptations waiting to encourage me to disobey You and ignore my responsibility to disciple. Help me to keep my eyes on You. Deliver me from the evil of disobedience, for many will suffer if I am disobedient and unwilling to be a disciplemaker, one who is a true follower of Jesus, who called us to go and make disciples.

Entry 21 - Mt 6:16-18 - Sequester

I have seen the comments of Jesus about fasting and have been wondering about the role of fasting in the process of being a good disciplemaker.

There is the clearly negative aspect. I fast so people will think that I am a spiritual person. There is little value in this type of fasting, since it has little to do with coming before God. It seems to be more about performing rituals to gain God's attention and to influence His actions. This is the basis for the rituals of most pagan beliefs, and its focus is to be approved by others. It matters little what I really believe. The performance gives me influence and could allow me to shape events to my liking.

The next one is about influencing God. It too is about performance, correct performance that will gain what is desired from God. When people call for this type of fasting, there is usually an agenda, something that we should all desire for God to do or control. I question the validity of such a concept, thinking that somehow we can control or influence God to do what we want. Again, this is a public display. We all agree to fast and declare this fact in a number of ways.

The last one is about fasting so that God can speak to me and show me what He wants. This type of fasting is best done in private. I am concerned that I am listening to God and not to others. The express purpose is to ask God to reveal to me areas where I need to confess, need to grow, and need to see His vision for my life.

In being a good disciplemaker, this is the best focus for fasting. I seek out God so that He will change me, guide me, and provide what He sees that I need, so that I can do the work He has called me to do, help another believer learn to seek and know God.

In this fasting there is little that is about me, other than asking God to teach me humility, dependence, and faith. These are the lessons I need to learn in order to be a faithful disciplemaker in the Kingdom of God. I fast so that God will be able to change me, so that I will know what He desires, and be able to hear His voice, not mine.

Entry 22 - Mt 6:19-34 - Authentic

Those I disciple need to see one thing in me. This is the most important aspect of being a disciple, my trust in God. That and my ability to help them learn to trust God as well. Not as spectators, but as participants.

Two things reveal this more than any other action or teaching. What I treasure and define as a treasure, and the nature and level of my worry.

So, what is my treasure? Is it my job and status? Is it the toys I have? Is it the influence I have in the world? Or, is my treasure my relationship to God? Is it the people who are part of my life? Is it the people around me who need to know God? Are these what I value?

I need to reflect on this idea. True treasure is not about what I possess, but who possesses me. Does God have my complete commitment and, as a result, control over my life? Does He have the freedom to fill me with what has eternal value and can be given without limit to others? Are the people around me treasures of God or possessions that I make my treasures?

The other is the idea of worry. What is the focus of my worry, my concern related to my life? Is it the things that provide me with physical life, like food and shelter? Do I worry about these and how I will get what I think I need, when it is more about what I want? Is the focus of my worry the opinion of others? Do they see me the way I want them to see me? Is the focus of my worry making sure that I have the status and recognition I need from the world?

Or, is the focus of my worry like that of God? I am concerned about providing for the needs of those I disciple. I focus on learning how God cares for me, so I can help them receive the same knowledge and care. I worry and pray that they will grow and connect with God instead of me or the treasures of this world.

Are the purposes of my treasures and worry focused on helping others receive what they need from God? God cares for me (worries). This opens the door to His unlimited riches, and the resources needed to disciple others. Do I understand this?

Understanding these truths is the difference between being false and authentic.

Entry 23 - Mt 7:1-6 - Piggish

I have received so much blessing, but I can be so wasteful in its use.

The issue behind this is one of motivation. What motivates me to avoid or engage in discipling? The motives for avoiding clearly create waste. But there are also wrong motives for engaging in discipling, which can also cause waste.

Behind both is the concept that my motive is designed to preserve myself, to place me and my needs ahead of others. This action results in wastefulness. Both involve caring for myself first, and whatever is leftover is lost or in a sense thrown away. Or it is used in such a way that it becomes useless or spoiled? God gives me resources that are intentionally more than I need, so that I can share them with others.

The problem is that if my motives are wrong, instead of sharing with those in need I, in a sense, feed it to the dogs, those who are not the intended recipients or worse, it ends up in the garbage where it rots and is fit to be fed only to pigs.

Dogs are always ready to receive what is given to them. Pigs are willing to receive anything, even slop. That is what we called everything thrown into a specific pail that was not fit for any other animal. Pigs will eat almost anything. Dogs and pigs eat to satisfy their hunger. There is no thought about growing or any other benefit only to satisfy their hunger.

What happens is that I misuse and waste what I have been given, until it becomes unfit or worthless to others who could have received it from me.

Here is another aspect of wastefulness. If I finally open my eyes and realize this, I cannot even try to recover what I have wasted. For example, just try to recover food from a hungry dog. It is a dangerous act; they may attack and bite the hand that fed them. It is even more dangerous to attempt this with pigs. One never enters

a pigpen when pigs are feeding. It is guaranteed that you will regret that action.

A further thought is that if I have misused the good gifts God has given me, then what would cause Him to risk giving me additional access to further resources? A true disciplemaker evaluates their motives, so there is no wastefulness of the resources received.

Entry 24 - Mt 7:7-12 - Access

So, what do I need access to, and how will that affect my ability to be a disciplemaker?

The questions presented to me are important ones to be considered. My understanding of them will affect what I have access to and through me, and what others will learn about how and what God provides. Properly used, I then become a point of access for others.

So here are the questions in this context.

What is it that I need and should be asking for, in order to disciple others?

What should I be seeking, committing my life to, so that I will properly use what I receive?

What door do I need to enter? Some focus on me and my personal needs, others focus on being able to help others. Both are needed, but not for the same reasons. Which door will lead me to a deeper relationship with my Lord and as a result help me lead others?

As a disciple maker, these are critical heart-searching questions. Consider these thoughts.

If my focus is on avoiding my responsibility, then what happens? Most likely I will think only of myself, and truthfully, I will become weaker and unreliable. If my focus is on obeying and being a disciplemaker, this changes everything.

This helps me understand the point of the two comparisons Jesus makes by using the bread/stone and fish/serpent examples. If my focus is on me, then I will not be able to offer what is good, bread/fish. Instead, I will produce food, spiritual food, that avoids the effect of giving a stone (no nourishment) or worse, a serpent (deadly to spiritual growth).

Or one can look at it this way. When I am not doing what God wants in the way of discipling others, then whatever I receive from Him becomes a stone having no ability to nourish others. Whatever I try to give, based on that, becomes dangerous both to me and to those around me.

The question to consider is this, do I really want to be lacking in nourishment for others? Do I really want to poison their relationship with God? How can God give me what is good, if I don't want to be a source of good? If I am asking for the wrong things?

How can I get what I need, find what I seek, and enter the right door if it is all about me? The result of this is that I will not do for others what I have had others do for me. They discipled me, helped me grow as a person and follower of Christ. Others need the same from me.

So, Lord, help me learn to ask for the right things, seek the right knowledge, and knock at the correct door.

Entry 25 - Mt 7:1-28 - Flipped

There are some interesting contrasts regarding the error of giving what is good to dogs and pigs.

- Narrow – Wide The two paths which lead to God or to destruction
- True – False Knowledge or deception

- Wise – Foolish The manner in which we build
- Speck – plank The way in which we judge

Each of these pairs helps me see the importance of correctly using what God has given me to disciple others.

Properly used, they help reveal the true path to God. Properly used, they help me know the difference between knowledge that comes from God and the deceptions promoted by man. Properly used, they help me know the correct way to proceed in the work, the correct way to build and guide those I disciple. Properly used, they help me deal with my own problems, so that I will be able to help others learn how to deal with issues in their lives.

Properly used, the resources of God make each of these possible and, as a result, help me become a better disciplemaker.

Entry 26 - Mt 7:13-20 - Pathway

Again, there are pairs of words that are instructive; narrow/wide and true/false.

How will my decisions about discipling affect the choices and information needed for arriving at the right conclusions? Does my indifference to the importance of discipling encourage them to think that the pathway to Jesus is wide and flexible? Should I not be actively involved in helping others sort through all the false and misleading information they will encounter?

If I leave them to their own devices and ideas, anything can happen, and based on my personal observations, it is sure to happen. New believers, even older believers, who are not being disciplined can and will follow many false paths.

The entrance to Truth is clear. This is the cross and Jesus' sacrifice. What happens after that is not as simple. I say this, because in the world there are numerous paths being

recommended as the correct way to follow Jesus. These are presented as doctrinal, denominational, and independent structures to be followed, if one is to be a true member of the church.

The reason for discipling is to help people see clearly what is anchored in the teaching given to us by God and what is merely human preference or interpretation. The danger is in being too easily swayed by those who seek honor and power, creating their own interpretations. We are warned over and over about this pitfall.

But what if I do not do what is right? Might I make mistakes as well and create misunderstandings and false paths? Maybe. But if I am already concerned about this, then I will likely be more open to God's leading and correction than those who intentionally create the false pathways.

In fact, the greater danger is in doing nothing. By not doing something, I abandon those I could be discipling into the clutches of false teachers. I, in fact, am contributing to the danger and confusion that will come. In a sense, by not being a voice for reason and an investigator of Truth, I am pushing them to find a voice, any voice, who will help them manage their confusion and need for direction.

By accepting my responsibility, together we can study the truth, explore God's Word, and learn how to find the narrow path based on the clear Truth given by God, not by others. I see this reality in the letters of Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and John. They accepted this responsibility and became check points for each other. They and the multitude of people who heard Jesus' words and could verify what was being taught.

I, too, am part of this cloud of witnesses, as the Hebrew writer describes it. I am not alone. It is possible to lead people to find both the narrow path and the Truth, which will help us to keep from straying. I am part of a great multitude who have gone this way and have helped others do the same.

The greatest danger is in **not** helping. That increases the possibility for those around me to lose their way. True discipling is not about being perfect. I cannot be perfect. It is about one person who believes and trusts in Jesus, the source of Truth, helping another to do the same.

Entry 27 - Mt 7:21-28 – Construe

Here is where I find help to avoid making mistakes, which could lead people down false paths and perhaps result in becoming a false teacher.

Clearly there are true and false disciples. This passage is a little scary. There are those, who, in the name of Jesus, make disciples. They do great and wonderful things, but not in obedience to honor Jesus but for something else. Here is where it gets scary. These people will stand before Jesus and act like they are best friends, false pride. And Jesus will look at them and say, I don't know you. Very scary.

So how do I avoid being a false disciple and possibly causing harm to many others? Just thinking about this makes me afraid to disciple others and risk my being rejected for doing a poor job, albeit in the name of Jesus, and potentially dragging others down with me.

Yet, Jesus did not leave me without hope. He then talks about the steps needed to avoid this danger. I must hear, really listen, and really explore the words of Jesus. Not just that I must put them into practice. That makes sense. If I really listen to my parents, teacher, or boss, then I will do what I hear them tell me to do.

There is another part of this. Jesus died to bring others into the Kingdom. He died to self and personal desires, and of course He died, sacrificed himself, to make it possible for others to hear. Will I do the same? Will I die to myself and personal desires, sacrifice so that others can hear?

The example of the two houses helps me see how this is possible. I see the truth of what is happening, when He talks about the two people who build houses. One made foolish decisions, the other wise decisions. But behind these choices is the reality of learning to hear and practicing what Jesus teaches.

A good builder is one who has studied his craft. Usually, he learns by working with a master builder, who can teach them what must be done and what must be avoided in order to build a house that can provide shelter and withstand the storms that will come. Building a shelter when all is peaceful and building a shelter that will also survive the storms of life is quite different.

A key piece of this is in the choices being made. The wise apprentice looks for approved masters to study under. I saw the importance of this in Africa. I knew three carpenters. One was a master, the second was an apprentice of that master, and the third was, well, definitely neither of the other two. If I wanted work that was just adequate, I would hire the last one. If I wanted quality work, then I hired the master or his apprentice. I also realized that the only time I chose to hire the third builder was when the other two were not available, and I was not overly concerned about the quality of the work.

To be a good disciplemaker I need to be a student of the Master. I need to be a student of Jesus and those He has approved. There are two reasons for this: 1. So that I will be approved by Jesus, and 2. So that I will become the best person possible in discipling others. This is like the master and apprentice above. Jesus is the Master, and I clearly need to be His disciple, one that others will then approve.

Entry 28 - - Mt 7:21-28 Sandcastle

I feel like there is much more that can be said about discipling as compared to being a builder.

A foolish builder is one who has not made the commitment to learn and study. Also, they are not willing to be critiqued or evaluated by others. So, if they become teachers of others, then they will produce poor students. People who do not have the critical information so necessary to do good and lasting work.

In the area of discipling, this means that I must always be a learner as well as a teacher. I have seen this truth in life. The true master is always a student, always desiring to learn more. To be a good disciplemaker is to be a person who is willing to learn and grow as well.

Therefore, to become a master means a long term, no, a lifelong commitment to learning. A well-trained person is both ready to teach others and also to be taught. Life is in constant movement. This means there is a constant need to learn, because the next person I disciple may have questions I have never heard nor been asked. That person may have experiences I have never dealt with. But if I am a lifelong student, then I will know how to find answers and be able to grow because of what they bring to the equation.

So, will I be satisfied with the tools that can build only sandcastles, or will I be a master student who knows there will be challenges and is capable of using what I know to work towards building on a solid foundation? Each building/person is unique, and therein lies the joy of true disciplmaking. Building correctly and with a key focus, so that what is built will honor God above all.

Entry 29 - Mt 8:1-4 - Willing

This is an interesting question. The man believes that Jesus can heal, and yet he asks if Jesus is willing to heal him?

How does this idea relate to being a disciplemaker?

As a follower of Jesus, a disciple, there are a series of questions to be considered in finding the answer:

1. Do people see me as capable of discipling them? My life should be such that people see me as a true disciple and one who can help them grow in their walk as a disciple.
2. Do they know that I should be able to do this? People saw Jesus healing those who were sick. My life should have evidence that I am willing and able to help others. They see it in my relationship with my family and my friends.
3. Are they ready to ask me if I am willing? My life should be such that people are not afraid to ask me for help, not afraid to ask what I think, not afraid that I won't share what I have learned.
4. Do I allow them to come to me to learn? This may seem the same as number three, but there is a difference. The issue is why do they feel they need permission to come to me? Is there something in my life that hinders people from coming? I think for Jesus there was a concern to not bother the teacher. A very common situation for a high-profile person. Very busy, very involved, not a lot of free time and so on. Do I try to create this kind of appearance and so limit how many people may feel free to ask?
5. Why would I not be willing? While it seems strange that anyone would think that Jesus was not willing, there is a possible explanation. The experience of the people with the Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, and scribes suggested that anyone in authority, any teacher, would be almost inaccessible. So how many pastors and leaders do the same and create such a feeling among those they serve?

So, it is clear that if I am a true disciple of Jesus, then I should be willing. People should believe that I will behave like my master and be available. The problem is not with their asking if I am willing, but my answer should be yes, I am willing.

I must also be honest, I cannot help everyone, but I should be able to connect people to people. But that is another topic.

Entry 30 - Mt 8:5-13 - Commit

If I finally ask Jesus to help me be a disciplemaker, how will I respond?

Too often, I fear His response. I see this as incredibly costly, even too costly in the amount of time, energy and resources that it will involve. I see it as being too much. It is more than believing I can meet the challenges, based on who I am. It is too uncertain. I cannot predict the results, and that leaves me a bit nervous about risking the possibility of failure.

If I do ask, how do I expect Jesus to respond? Do I expect him to hold my hand, be constantly at my side, or at least at my beck and call?

All this is a sad commentary on my faith and commitment. It begs the question of when will I learn that it does not depend on me, nor does it require that Jesus hold my hand. It is about the fact that Jesus has the authority, and I can act as His representative.

That is what is happening here. The key player has a need, he knows the answer, but he also knows that the solution will not require Jesus to actually come and do what is needed. Jesus need only speak, and all will be resolved.

That is the basis of being a true disciplemaker. Jesus is the source of the power, but He is ready to act in and through me, if I have the faith to let him command me to go. Will I have faith like that of the centurion and do what I have been authorized to do? Will I believe that Jesus can work through me? Will I be a good soldier and do what I have been commanded to do, and then, in faith, do it?

Entry 31 - Mt 8:14-22 - Infirmary

I want only those who are healthy around me. I want only those who are mature and ready to follow through with what they have been taught.

I want a comfortable place that is calm and peaceful. And here is Jesus' response to all of this.

He took up their infirmities and carried their diseases. The danger is that we may limit the meaning of this to only physical issues and some spiritual issues. For example, healing Peter's mother-in-law, and driving out demons. And taken at surface level, only these seem legitimate reasons for shying from the work and seeking something more comfortable and less stressful.

But there is so much more.

The storm reveals one issue. Life is not peaceful and predictable. Storms can come at any moment. Emotional storms, storms of fear and doubt, storms of inadequacy and lack of preparation. I could probably create more storms, but each of us has our private storms that must be faced and dealt with.

The foxes have dens, but I have no pillow, is another. Life is not secure and does not always provide what I want. It takes work and effort. It takes focus and planning. More importantly, it takes a kind of planning that lets me take risks I would not otherwise be willing to take.

The need to care for parents is the last in this list. This is the idea that we cannot do more than one thing at a time. It is as if I cannot think about tomorrow, until I have dealt with certain things from the past. It suggests that I cannot truly follow Jesus and stay where I am. But why can't caring for my parents also allow me to provide and serve? In this illustration, the person makes it sound as if there is only one possibility, and that is to follow Jesus when it is convenient.

But so many people in scripture did not abandon their family or their life. They simply placed following Jesus first and let that guide them in how to deal with their other responsibilities. It is not about loving them less; it is about loving Jesus more.

This is the real infirmity. The sickness of putting other issues ahead of all other concerns. If I put Jesus first, that action will give me the resources and ability to face the storms, the uncertainties, and correctly sort out my priorities, so that I can be a disciple and also a disciplemaker.

Entry 32 - Mt 8:23-27 - Stormy

There is a storm coming. This is why I can't disciple. I will panic when anything, anything goes wrong. And I know that something will go wrong, it always does. Once I start dealing with people, it is inevitable.

In that moment, I will forget who has the real power and crumble in despair. I am a recipe for disaster. So Lord, why risk such a catastrophe? Why risk letting me into the boat and inviting disaster, because I will fail, I just know it.

The answer is simple, because the Master is there. The master got in the boat and, though He knew a storm was possible, even likely, He simply went to sleep. And when the storm came, He rebuked it.

So, will I get into the boat in spite of the danger of the storms that will come? If I am a true disciple, I will, and I will learn that when the storm comes, I can call on Him, not me, to calm the storm. I can call on Him to calm my panic, which is the more dangerous storm. If I am calm, then whatever storm the other person may bring, I already have the strength needed to help calm their storm.

That is what disciplmaking is all about. Learning who is the Master of all the storms and helping others to get in the boat and learn this truth.

Entry 33 - Mt 8:28-34 - Possession

This story reveals to me two kinds of possession. The one is obvious, because it is the story of a man possessed by a legion of demons and his release. What is most important is that the demons recognized Jesus and what He possessed.

This is the second possession. The Messiah possessed God's message and power. And it is this message and power that displaced the demons, or should I say replaced them in the man.

This message brought calm and peace to this man, who had been tormented.

I may not have demons in my life, but I do have my demons, the things I allow to control my life. These are my desires, my habits, and my weaknesses that I use, or rather allow to control my life, and so prevent Jesus from working in and through me. Jesus can drive these out and place in me His message and power.

In the other version of this story, the man asked Jesus to be allowed to stay with Him and follow Him. Jesus denied the request, telling the man to return to his people and to tell them what has happened. To tell them how God's power and message have freed him and given him a new life.

Is this not the heart of discipleship? To have God release me from whatever I allow to control me and prevent me from knowing the peace of God and sharing that knowledge with others?

I am to tell others what God has done in me and then together live out and explore what this means in the context of life.

Entry 34 - Mt 9:1-8 - Paralyzed

How often am I the one on the mat who is paralyzed?

How often when I am asked to disciple another, I become paralyzed and unable to obey?

My fears of failing, of being exposed, of allowing someone else to have the right to direct my life, come to the forefront, and I stammer and stutter, and am paralyzed.

The real problem is not what I fear, but my unwillingness to obey. This is the heart of all failure, the sin of disobedience. The form it takes will be different in each of us. The form it takes matters little, because behind them all is this, I have sinned, I have disobeyed God.

Until I confess this and am forgiven, I will never be able to walk. I will be spiritually lame all my life, completely dependent on others for my care and sustenance. It is not some debility or action that has paralyzed me, it is my disobedience.

If I will confess this truth, then Jesus will reveal His power, and I will be healed so that I can care for myself and others.

Entry 35 - Mt 9:9-13 - Perfection

Jesus is in the house of a sinner eating a meal with sinners, and the perfectionists are upset.

But am I so much different from them?

Think about this. I think I need to be perfect in order to be a disciplemaker. I think that I must be the best version of me and have all the right tools and training to disciple others. This is all too common a thought, and it is perpetuated by all the guidelines for becoming a pastor, teacher, or leader.

I have to have all the right courses completed, and I need to have at least this level of proficiency and experience.

Then, once I have attained all those goals, believe that only people who have reached a certain level in their faith are capable of being

discipled. And I think that there is nothing wrong with this. There is nothing wrong with being trained, there is nothing wrong with picking the best for training.

Until I read this passage.

Jesus picked Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector; one, who according to everyone else, had betrayed his own people to serve the enemy. More than that; he was a liar, cheat, thief, traitor, wasteful, insensitive, unjust, and an antagonist to all who came into his sphere of influence and authority.

Then this miscreant is used by Jesus to teach others. Matthew has barely come under the influence and teaching of Jesus, when he hosts a group of his friends, all miscreants like him, so they can be taught by Jesus. Dare I say discipled?

Oh, the cry of the perfectionists. How could you deal with such filth, such corruption? The reply silences them and should silence any objection I have about being perfectly prepared to work with those who have shown they are worthy to be discipled.

I have come to heal the sick. Ouch. The sad truth is that the perfectionists were, in reality, sicker than the ones they claimed were sinners. Ouch. The more I think I must be perfect to help those who are worthy, the sicker I am, and the more I am in need of the Great Physician.

Lord, help me see this truth. We are all in need of health, and those who see this truth are the ones you can use to help those in greatest need.

Entry 36 - Mt 9:14-16 - Adapt

Jesus loves pairing ideas to help me see a truth. Here he pairs the following: fasting/feasting, old/new patch, and old/new wineskin. Each pairing deals with failure and loss and the need to adapt to new conditions and settings.

- I feast because of what I have. I fast to remember and restore what is gone. It is never enough to do this, but it does help me to keep that past alive in the present and allow me to use it to live in the present.
- I patch things because they are useful, but choosing the correct patch is important. The wrong patch will cause more damage and render useless what was potentially still useful.
- I need new wineskins, because the reality is that the past cannot fully contain all that will happen in the future. Old forms will break down and create greater problems.

If I am not careful, I may choose to reject all that was learned in the past as being ineffective in dealing with the future. That is not quite correct.

Fasting is for the purpose of remembering the past and bringing it into the present, so that I don't forget what I had and then will allow for it to impact where I am now.

Patching is about keeping the good of the past and allowing it to continue to be useful in the future.

The wineskins example is even more powerful. The truth does not change. I get wine by putting it into a wineskin. New wineskins are needed, because the context in which this process occurs is different.

These three elements are all part of the discipleship process. I bring past knowledge into the present for others to know and enjoy. I use the knowledge and context of the past to create a place where I am comfortable and can grow. I then allow all of this to do its work in developing a new person.

Am I understanding this? I must adapt, not the truth but the methods of sharing the truth, into the context of a new person. Bringing into their life what is appropriate, in a way that allows them to become what God intends them to be.

Entry 37 - Mt 9:18-34 - Aware

Not everyone is aware of what they need. These three stories help me see this. In fact, even those near to me may not know what is needed for themselves or for those dear to them.

The girl is sick, dying. She may be in a coma and has no capacity to articulate what she wants or needs. Her parents are desperate. Before Jesus can respond, however, the message comes that the girl has died. They are now more overcome with hopelessness than before. But Jesus tells them to have faith. Their desires and the girl's needs are to be met.

I will deal with people so lost they cannot clearly articulate their need. They just know they are desperately in need of help and guidance.

The woman has been sick. She knows what is wrong, and she has exhausted all her resources trying to find a solution. Finally, she senses there is one more possibility, and that is to touch Jesus. It works, and she is healed ... but she is found out. Here is the key, she finally abandons all her efforts to put her faith in Jesus.

I will deal with people who are also wrapped up in finding their own solutions. They will try this program, that plan, or follow the teaching of a specific person (someone famous, like a bishop, or apostle, or prophet – so sad). Finally, they will cry out and be ready to come to God.

The blind men knew they were blind. They hear that Jesus is coming, and they cry out. They know what they need and will not be deterred from receiving it. They know they are blind, and that Jesus can take away their blindness.

I will deal with those who know they need help. They will pursue me until I relent and help them find their way. Oh, that more people were like this.

The mute man was doubly troubled. He was also possessed. The demon had to be removed before he could speak. But for this to happen, others had to speak for him and bring him to Jesus.

I will deal with people so trapped in their world that they have no clue to the danger they are in. It is only with the help and faith of others that they will find release from their trap and find guidance to the help they need.

I will deal with those I cannot help by myself. I will need to partner with others to help them find release from what controls them and regain the ability to communicate in a sane manner. A manner that will open the way for them to be disciplined.

Have I taken too much liberty with these stories? Maybe, but they illustrate for me a key concern. Do I create criteria for people, before I will be willing to help them? Before I will enter their world to help them?

Do I expect them to know what they need, to have the faith they need, to be willing to seek me out, and finally communicate exactly what they need from me? Or, is discipleship about meeting people where they are and leading them forward?

Do I pick them or do I allow God to choose and bring them into my world, via various paths and means?

Entry 38 - Mt 9:35-38 - Ready

There are two things happening here.

First there is the harvest and the need for workers, all kinds of workers. It is an image that defines the second event in the background, the preparation of those people needed for the work.

There are also two critical issues which are often lost in the concept of harvest and preparation for the harvest. The first is that there is only one kind of worker needed. The second is that all

preparation must focus on that one kind of worker...the worker being the one doing the harvesting.

But there are actually many people involved and a variety of necessary skills. I need to keep this fact in mind when discipling followers of God. The harvest requires people skilled in making tools, cooking food to feed workers, people who understand how to gather, transport, and store the harvest, and people who know how to coordinate the activity of everyone involved.

When I am discipling a person, I need to keep this in mind. I need to be sure that I am not trying to fit them into a specific role or mold, but instead help them develop their skill set, which will help them fulfill their role in the harvest.

There is another factor in this process. There are many kinds of harvests and different locations for the work of harvesting. I must also be aware of where a person will be called to work and how to help them gain the skills needed for harvesting in the field where they will be sent.

I need to listen to the person I am discipling and observe the gifts and skills God has given them for the work of harvesting. If I cannot or do not do this, then I will severely limit their effectiveness in carrying out their role in the harvest.

There is a hidden danger that is an issue of ego. Often, I want to duplicate myself. It is easier to do this, since I already know about myself and my skills. Or, I will seek out only those who are like me, in order to be more comfortable in the process. It is always easier to teach a skill I already know, but I do not see this happening in scripture. Jesus disciplined all kinds of people and helped them grow into who they were and used the skills they had.

Paul even tells Timothy this. He tells Timothy to develop the gifts God has given him. He does not try to create in Timothy a duplicate of himself. Paul was willing to help all grow and be used by God, wherever they were.

This is what I must learn to do, to help people know God and develop what God has given them in the way of gifts and skills. If I can do this, I will also grow in ways that I may not expect.

Entry 39 - Mt10:1-8 - Untested

There is a question that will always exist in my mind, and I must identify it each time I am involved in discipling a person. That is, when will they be ready to serve?

Here, I think I have found my answer. And it is often before they think they are ready.

I doubt the disciples thought they were ready to be sent out. In fact, today I expect people to go through a great deal of preparation before I will approve them as being ready to serve on their own. I act like I'm not afraid to mentor them and watch over them, when it is really that I don't want to risk sending them out, until I think they are ready.

That is not my job. My job is to prepare them, so they will know when God wants to send them, and they'll be willing to go.

Entry 40 - Mt 10:9-15 - Deserving

Disciple making is not about me and what I get, how it will affect me, or what it will cost me. This is not about me; it is about what Jesus has done and how I will respond. I have received an incredible gift, and it has many wonderful and amazing facets. So how can I become stingy, even greedy, with something I did not earn nor deserve?

When I refuse to disciple others, that is what I am doing. I am making it about me and my personal world and benefits. It's as if I am telling them they do not deserve to receive from me what I have received from Jesus and through others, who helped me understand and enjoy the gift that has been given.

Discipling is not about what I get. It is not about what they can give me. And what they can give me may not be in the form of money or other financial benefits. It may take the form of expecting them to help me with my projects and plans. It may be about then providing what I want in the way of friendship and fellowship. I can find so many ways to extract from them payment or reimbursement for my time and knowledge.

Again, the word is free. What I have was given to me freely, and that is how it should be given to those seeking my aid and encouragement. I am expected to do more than just respond to them. I am expected to seek them out and offer my services. I am expected to go out of my way to meet them where they are. They don't know where to go, who to find, and what is needed. They are waiting for someone to come and respond to them.

I am being sent so that others will know and grow. I am told to give my life freely in this process. I am told to allow them to provide what is needed for the time we are together. The focus is on what is needed, not on more, or extra, or other benefits...just what is needed so they can hear and learn.

The choice is not mine. The choice is theirs. But if I do not go, then they will not have the opportunity to choose to hear, learn, and grow. They probably don't know what they need, but I do. So I must find them in order to help them find out what God has for them and to have someone help them along the way. If they refuse, then that is their decision, but they deserve an opportunity to choose, and I must make that possible.

Entry 41 - Mt 10:16-25 - Threat

I do not like this passage. I do not like the idea of being threatened, confused, or to appear in some way as being naïve or defenseless. This passage talks about being attacked, beaten, arrested, and suggests the possibility of even worse treatment because of my desire to help others grow in Christ.

I am not sure what it means to stand firm until the end. The end of what? Of my life, of a specific period? So much uncertainty. And yet it is clear that it doesn't matter what may happen, how long it will last, or how severe the situation may become. I am to be willing to put myself in harm's way, in order to help others know Christ and become disciples.

It is scary to realize that even with the best intentions, the most careful wording, and greatest concern for a person, they can and will twist what I say and do, if it suits them. Not everyone will react this way, but there are enough people who will, so that eventually I may find myself in harm's way or in some kind of trouble because of the actions and words of the person I am discipling.

This is not to mean that I should be careless and not observant. When one is warned, then one can prepare for what could happen. We are told to be shrewd, wise, and innocent. These are things that I will need to learn and develop in my life. People are, well they are human, and that means they are capable of abusing and using others, if it suits them or if they have not truly been changed by their contact with God.

I want to run away from threats. Instead, I need to learn what the threats are, how to deal with them, and to be selective and appropriate in what I do and share with those I am discipling. At the same time, I must never misuse the information and knowledge I gain about a person to harm them or advance myself in some way.

I must get involved. Without risk, nothing will change. But at the same time, I must and can be prepared for betrayal. How I handle that can result in greater growth in me and in others. Jesus dealt with all of this and more, and He overcame all the attacks that came his way. With His help I can do the same.

What a great opportunity to demonstrate what true love means!

Entry 42 - Mt 10:26-36 - Fearless

Well, I have just talked about what frightens me and how I need to respond. Now I have the opportunity to review what is involved in this response.

Jesus says I should not fear them. In fact, they are the ones who are in greater danger than I am. He says that what they do and say will be exposed for all to see. Betrayal of others is like that. Abuse and twisting the truth usually comes to light, and the one doing the betraying pays a deeper price than the one they betrayed. The one being maltreated often fares better in the end than the one who mistreated them. This may not happen immediately, but in time the truth comes out, and those who have hidden the truth will be revealed.

The price they pay will be incredibly steep. I may suffer now, but my soul will rejoice in eternity. They may enjoy a moment of glory now, but will pay for it with their soul. They may think they have power and control, being able to care for themselves, but that power and control is limited and short-lived. I have the care of my Heavenly Father, which has no bounds or limits. I am called a child and heir of God. They have nothing beyond what they possess in this moment, which can be lost at any moment and will be lost finally at death. The phrase, "you can't take it with you," is more true than they will admit or realize.

But that is the point of why I must be fearless in my desire to disciple. The stakes are so high, too high. If I am not fearless in facing the danger, the risk that they will lose their soul is very real. It is scary.

Being fearless means I will have to declare the truth. Sin is sin. There is no escaping this truth. They need to hear this from me. Those I disciple must have a clear understanding of the reality of sin and their condition, as well as the provision that has been made for them.

I have to know my value. This is at several levels. I must know my value to God. He will not allow my soul to be lost, no matter what may happen to my body. I must know my value to me. I have an important role, and it gives me great value when I fulfill it in the discipling of another. I must know my value to another person. I have knowledge they need. I have a relationship with God that they need to see and experience. I have experience they can use to help them walk the path of being a follower of God.

The truth is, I cannot escape my responsibility, nor the consequences of disobedience when it comes to discipling others. Which means I need to be fearless, not because I am so courageous, but because I serve the One who controls the universe, and He tells me I matter to Him.

Entry 43 - Mt 10:37-42 - Cross

So often when I think of the concept of cross, the image that immediately comes to mind is the cross that Jesus bore for me and all the suffering and pain that was part of that process.

Then Jesus tells me I should bear my cross and follow Him. I have heard many sermons about this, and most often they focus on my responsibility to carry my burdens and deal with the cost of following Jesus. The image is carrying my cross, and when I reach the chasm caused by sin, I use it as a bridge to crossover.

There is something seriously wrong with that image. There is nothing I can do that will allow me to bridge the chasm. That is the purpose of Jesus' cross. So now, what is the nature of this cross that I am supposed to carry?

Just before He makes this statement, Jesus talks about loving no one more than Him. Father, mother, brother, and so on. The idea is that Christ comes before anything and anyone. But how does that help me define the cross I am to bear?

I think I am beginning to understand. If I am to love Jesus more than anyone, even family, this means that everything I am will point them to Jesus. If Jesus is the center of my life and I love Him above all else, then this fact will become evident. I will sacrifice what is important to me so that others will see that Christ is what is truly important.

My cross then, is the work I do to point others to Jesus. My cross is the sacrifices I make so that they will find Jesus and true life. My cross is setting aside who I am, so Christ can be seen in and through me. My cross represents what I do, so others will know and meet Jesus.

This will result in a prophet's reward, which is the privilege of doing what is needed so people can find the way. The reward can be as simple as receiving a cup of water from one I serve. It can be as wonderful as having the privilege given to me of discipling another. I receive the cup and the opportunity, because people see clearly what my focus is.

This means that I attract others. They see my relationship with Jesus and want me to be part of their world. They know I will make sacrifices that will help them grow. They see in me the love of Christ, one who desires to serve others and seek their good.

My task, as I carry this cross, is to become attractive and not repulsive to them. My focus should be to desire this cross and not avoid it. By carrying this cross, then others will see that I am a true follower of Jesus and will see Jesus in all that I do.

Lord, help me take up the cross of serving others first, so they can know You.

Entry 44 - Mt 11:1-15 - Doubts

Everyone has doubts. Those moments when events conspire to challenge a person's beliefs and faith. As an older Christian, I know about these and what they stem from. I have learned,

through personal study and from those around me, what they are. I have examples of how they have been dealt with by those in scripture and in my life.

But what happens to a new Christian, young Christian, or immature Christian when things spiral out of control? At least out of their control. What they have yet to learn and experience sufficiently is this; no matter what is happening at their level has no relationship to what God is doing. For God, nothing is ever out of control. He knows exactly what is happening, what the results will be, and why we need to go through the process of dealing with doubt.

But where will they gain that knowledge? They will struggle to learn, unless one who has been down that path and knows Christ can help them get the guidance they need to find the answers they are searching for. At least, the answers they need to find in order to grow in their faith and relationship with God.

Now here is the crunch issue. So often, I opt out of this responsibility thinking that it would be better for them to find a great authority and listen to them. So I make excuses about my abilities and limits and encourage them to read this, listen to that, and so on. But I forget how I learned about this and that, the materials to read and listen to. I forget that someone else pointed me in the right direction and often walked with me to answer my questions and pose more questions to help me find answers for myself.

The flip side of this is that Jesus said that even the least in the kingdom is the greatest. There is no great authority to which we need to send them. I am that person, because I am walking the same path with them. That great authority may have answers, but is not walking alongside the person asking questions and is not available to respond directly to their comments, thoughts, and questions. I am. So that makes me as valuable or maybe a little more so.

Now think about it like this. It is not about age, years of experience, or amount of training that makes one able to disciple. In fact, it is more about one who is daily walking with Jesus and in the process of growing, learning and being trained that is critical. A teachable person is the key.

So think about this as well. If this is true, then children can disciple, old people can disciple. New believers can disciple. Anyone can disciple as long as they are honest about themselves and where they are in their journey of faith. That is what people really need, a partner in the journey.

Entry 45 - Mt 11:16-24 - Contrast

Is there a right way to do discipling? Is there a right way to teach people God's Word and plan?

This passage suggests that there isn't. And yet when I don't follow a specific plan, then people can get a little bent out of shape. They want everyone to follow their idea or plan. This is true of both the world and of those in the church.

I see this reality in Jesus' comments here. People complained about John and his ascetic approach to teaching and discipling. It was too strict or too different. And it was critical of the patterns and materials in use by the key groups of Pharisees and Sadducees.

That is a real issue I may have to deal with. It may not matter what pattern or material I use. If people want to be disciplined, it will mean changes in what has been their normal schedule, and this will create contrasts between the past, present, and future...with what has been and now is no longer.

Jesus was attacked as being too open, too flexible, too ready to adjust to the needs and life of those He sought to teach and disciple. Yes, I know the discipling of the 12 was more planned and organized, or was it? Jesus was constantly adapting His

approach and material to what was happening in the moment. He may have had an overall plan, but you wouldn't know it from what I see happening.

In the minds of the leaders, He was out of control, because there was no apparent plan and no apparent requirements for entry into the process of being taught and disciplined. It was about anyone who was willing. In fact, the same was true of John. It was more about the willingness of the person to receive what was being given, than in having a specific plan or structure for what would be taught.

As I review John's teaching, I see this. He adapted his teaching to the life and person who was seeking answers.

That is the key to discipling. A plan and program is alright, if I need some help to get started and need a base to work from. But good discipling is based on adapting to the people and where they are. This is the contrast that was being revealed.

The schools of the day had very clear structures to guide both the teacher and the student. They came and lived with the teacher in a specific place and covered a set curriculum. I often do the same thing, and that is where the contrast comes.

Truthfully, it doesn't matter how the discipling is done. There will always be people who find fault. What matters is that it matches the person and their needs and flows from the skills and ability of the one discipling them. It is about seeing the real need and responding to it.

So, will I follow the pattern and structure and force them into it, or will I let the one I disciple guide me in setting up the plan for discipling them?

Entry 46 - Mt 11:16-24 - Gomorrah

I am learning a painful truth from this passage. I see it around me, and it affects me as well. I want to see the incredible happen as I

disciple. I want to see the development of a prodigy. I want to show the power I have and see it duplicated in another, and that is not the real need or issue of being a disciplemaker.

The problem is that I must be careful in defining what the real need is. If I make a mistake in this area, then I end up where this passage ends, in judgement. I end up focusing on the unnecessary and seeking proofs that are invalid.

The cities and people of Chorazon, Bethsaida, and Capernaum received so much. They had so many needs cared for. They were fed, they were healed, and demons were driven out. On the surface it looked like they were being taught great lessons, but that is not what happened. Instead of looking beyond the physical blessings to learn the spiritual lessons, all they could see was Jesus, the miracle worker; the one who could feed them and heal them with a word. They did not see their need to go beyond this point and to grow until they saw how Jesus could change them and their relationship with God. They only wanted signs and wonders, not relationship.

They didn't want to be disciples and have to work and struggle to grow. They wanted to be citizens who could have their needs met by others, and in this case, Jesus. They didn't want to deal with the sin in their lives and their need to repent. They wanted Jesus to drive out the Romans and to make life ideal without caring for the root cause of the real problem, enslavement to sin.

And this leads me to see how discipling functions. Discipling is not about signs and wonders. It is not about my doing marvelous and wondrous things. It is not about someone providing all the answers and the power to make it happen. Instead, it is about bringing about change in a person. It is about helping a person struggle to find the answers they need, by developing their relationship to God. It is about real change within, which will bring change without. Change without never really brings change within.

So back to the point. Whose song and dance do we want to follow? That of the world, that of religion, or those who want everything provided for them? Instead, are we willing to learn God's music, which rises out of living life in real time?

So back to my responsibility. I am called to disciple people, individuals, not robots or puppets. The one can be controlled and is empty of life. The other will challenge us in so many ways and seem out of control, but they will be filled with life.

The marks of true discipleship are change from within, singing the tune God gives the person, and learning to live according to God's rhythm and timing. That is what I am called to do.

That is the Gomorrah issue. No change within, means no change without, and judgment. They were warned and refused to listen. They had a righteous witness in Lot, and they refused to see it. But worse than that was the judgment on Bethsaida. They had it all, including the signs and wonders to back it up, and they still refused to listen. They had the most righteous witness of all creation, and they refused to see.

Would Gomorrah have responded with all the signs and wonders of Jesus? Maybe, but that is not the point. The point is that we all start at Gomorrah and need to be nurtured to see truth. That is the job of a disciplemaker...to be the righteous witness and provide guidance for them to see God from God's perspective. Miracles and wonders are not enough. They cannot save or change a person. What can save and cause change is a real relationship with God and contact with a real believer, someone like me, who will be helpful in that process.

[Entry 47 - Mt 11:25-28 - Yoke](#)

So do I know if I am creating unbearable burdens or a partnership to help them bear burdens? Am I lessening the load or creating heavier, unbearable burdens?

Jesus says, ‘come to me; my yoke makes life bearable.’ He does not say it will be easier. What he does say is that “my yoke,” the joining of your life to mine, will make whatever lies ahead possible, because we will do the work together.

What is so fascinating is the simplicity of this truth. What is also fascinating is how quickly I can mess this up and create unbearable structures and burdens for those I disciple. I don’t share in the load. Instead, I heap more and more on their backs. It is little wonder so many collapse in the process. I don’t match the load to the person.

Weightlifting is like that. I don’t give someone 500 pounds to lift, if they can hardly lift 100. Instead, I help them build their strength by teaching them and training them step by step until they can. And a good trainer is there helping, guiding, protecting, and measuring progress so that development goes forward safely and in a healthy manner.

Jesus knew this truth. His yoke would be easy. That didn’t mean it would not involve real work and effort. He promised to share in all that would happen every step of the way. He would share in the process of growing and becoming strong in their faith in Him.

That is what a yoke does, it spreads the load so it can be carried or pulled. And a properly designed yoke means that both partners have to pull equally, or one will suffer. The stronger one must match his effort to the weaker, or both will be harmed. Of course, Jesus knows exactly how this works. My task as a disciplinemaker is to follow the pattern I have learned while going through this same process.

Those who think they are smart often expect others to do exactly as they do. They get caught up in their own pride, and truth is ignored. I think this happens because they don’t want to walk alongside those they’re teaching to share the burden of growing. They want to be followed, and for each person to carry their own burden. However, that unshared burden grows heavier, while the

ability to carry it diminishes. Why? Because there is no consciousness of what a person can or cannot bear. Since the learner walks behind, not beside, the self-absorbed teacher does not see what is happening, and their smartness becomes destructive, not constructive.

And so Jesus says the children will be the ones who see and do the work. Not necessarily because of their age but because of how the “smart” people treat those who do not listen to them. To them we are children.

Well, so be it. I would rather be a child in the Kingdom and see people truly grow by sharing in their life, than to be a smart person and crush them under unbearable burdens.

So Lord, help me be a good yoke partner, so they can grow and work in your Kingdom.

Entry 48 - Mt 12:1-14 - Dilemma

Yes, someday, I will violate somebody’s rules. They will say what I do is unlawful, unacceptable. But by whose rules? Who decides what is lawful, acceptable or the reverse of that?

Now I know that I will need to be very careful in how I answer this question and issue. I am not Jesus the Creator, part of the Trinity who set up the rules and guidelines. I am not free to choose what I think is acceptable or unacceptable. I do not have the right to decide what is lawful and unlawful. More than that, I am not free to decide what actions constitute a true violation of law and what actions represent an understanding of a greater law.

It may appear obvious. Like Jesus' example of rescuing a sheep on the Sabbath or healing a person bound by illness on the Sabbath. The difference between picking a few grains of wheat to satisfy my hunger in the moment and harvesting a whole field. The first makes sense, the second even more obvious.

But do I understand these truths and the values they represent? Do I understand the difference between mercy and sacrifice? And how do I apply them to being a disciplemaker?

There is a lot to learn here. It is about learning the values of the Kingdom of God and not the interpretation of those values from the world's perspective. It is about understanding what is acceptable and merely cultural or tradition, or perhaps norms that I have established to make myself comfortable.

I am learning this is not a topic for the fainthearted. Because every time I think I have it settled, one of those I am discipling can, and will, question why it is true; why it is a value to be learned; why it is a tradition that can be useful.

New believers do not know the why behind any of the culture, tradition, and norms that I live by. And they will question me. The issue is not how I answer them, but will I be open enough to let them question any value, custom, norm or tradition they encounter?

Will I be merciful and not sacrifice them on the altar of my structure? Ah, that is the issue. Will I forgive their lack of knowledge? Or will I simply cast them aside as a sacrifice, in order to say to all that I know what is right and will not deal with the questions and doubts of others. I do this so easily. Instead of going through the struggle and the risk of discovering that maybe the traditions and patterns of the past may no longer be relevant.

Ouch! But if I am to be a disciplemaker of the Kingdom, then that is exactly what I must deal with. Especially when working with people of different backgrounds, history, and culture than I am.

In the end, nothing may change, but it is just as likely that a needed change may be seen. Disciplmaking is not for the faint-hearted or those stuck in their traditions and legalese.

Entry 49 - Mt 12:15-32 - Jealousy

How do I handle jealousy? I need to be very clear about this. I need to deal with this, so I don't get into a competition with others and become jealous of what they are doing.

So much emphasis is placed on being chosen or gifted for this work. So much emphasis is placed on getting the right training and preparation. Almost as if that will guarantee success and the ability to disciple many people. But is that really what it is all about?

If what I believe about discipleship is true, that everyone already knows how to do it, then what does that mean?

I have a friend who is not a scholar. He was an average student, and his wife was about the same. But as I have followed their life and ministry...a ministry that has been in some of the more lonely, isolated places of our country, very rural...they have been incredibly successful in discipling people. I am not talking about the number of people. When you work in a rural setting, you do not have a large church population to work with. I am talking about people whom they help to become securely grounded in their faith.

They have been able to help dying rural churches come back to life and envision the possibility of a future ministry in their communities.

They have loved and shared life with these people, believing that everyone should be discipled and shown how to live as a follower of Jesus. They have been an incredible team, and I saw that reality again when I recently visited them. It was not about how many, but how well they could guide a person into a deep and fulfilling relationship with Jesus.

I could easily be jealous of them. They are good at what they do, not because they were incredibly gifted, or so highly trained, but

because they take seriously the work of investing in the lives of others.

The flip side of this is another friend, who pastors a very large church and has chosen to limit the number of people he is actively discipling. He does this, so they will learn to replicate what he does, in order to increase those available to disciple others. Again, as I listen to him speak, I do see a gifted person, a person well trained, but those are not the key elements in what is happening. He is doing exactly what my other friends are doing, taking seriously the need to invest in the lives of others, so they will become followers of Jesus and not just church attenders.

Jealousy would have me look at myself and use others to measure my success. Am I producing priests or followers? That was the concern of Jesus' time. The priests, pharisees, and teachers were trying to duplicate themselves and use their success as the standard. Jesus rejected this and the jealousy it can create. Jesus said this attitude is destructive and dangerous. Jealousy promotes me, my program, and my success.

True discipleship will ask me to fade into the background. If I do my work correctly, it is not about how many I disciple but how many generations are affected. If I reach and teach one, that may result in greater success than those who teach hundreds superficially.

Entry 50 - Mt 12:33-37 - Roots

How will I produce good fruit and not bad fruit? The answer lies in the roots.

I need to learn a lesson or two from the farmers and those in charge of orchards. They spend a lot of time making sure the roots have what they need. They also work hard to protect the plant and what it produces.

They invest money in fertilizer, time in cultivation (weeding), more money in pesticides and herbicides, all so that the plant will have everything it needs to produce good fruit. That is a lot of work and investment. I am tired and worn out just thinking about it. And I am stressed over all the things that could go wrong, if I don't do what is right.

But at the heart of all of this are the roots. If the plant does not have good roots with access to good nutrients, then all the other work will be in vain. It is about knowing what the land has and planting the right crop. It is about knowing what the crop needs and making sure the roots have enough of those nutrients. And knowing that every environment and plant will require different care, so they can be strong and grow well.

It also means taking care of the competition. The weeds. The old way was to go out to the field and, one by one, pull them up. They use herbicides for this today. But when dealing with discipleship, there is no shortcut to this issue. There is no magic formula, action, or plan that takes care of weeds like the herbicides do. You have to identify them and deal with each of them personally.

Discipleship is much the same. Knowing the nature of the plant, its root system, and how to properly nourish it. It is about knowing what form the weeds may take and so being ready at the right time to cultivate or pull them up. All of this requires that I be well-informed and well-prepared.

What do I need to do? That is my question.

Like a good farmer, I need to study the manual. I need to be a student of what I am doing. I have no hope of discipling someone if I don't know the Word of God. It is there that I will find what I need to properly feed and nourish the person I am discipling. And like crops, what is needed will vary with each person. Am I repeating what I have touched on before? Of course I am. I need to remind myself constantly of my need to be prepared, if I hope to help another person produce good fruit.

I need to be sure my roots are deep in the soil of God's Word and have a strong relationship with Him, so that I will have the resources and knowledge to help another person produce good fruit.

I am responsible both to tap into what is good and to share that knowledge with them, while helping them do the same. We both need a good root system.

Entry 51 - Mt 12:38-43 - Signs

"Give me a sign." Said with a whine in the voice, much like a child who is crying for a treat or some other thing. They say it in such a way as to grate on the nerves of the parent and keep on saying it until the parent gets mad, upset, acts in a negative way, or relents and gives the child what it wants.

Is this true of me? Do I want signs and visions to confirm what I am doing, to choose who to disciple, and then want the same from them to confirm what I am doing? Wow, that's a lot of signs and visions and quite a scope of issues.

First, is the issue of confirming what I am doing and that I should be a disciplemaker. I want to know. No, it is more than that. I want proof that God wants me to disciple. Not just any proof, but something very specific related to me. A special vision, a special word, a special scripture that jumps out and says you... name inserted... are to disciple others.

But why do I need these things to convince me that it is the right thing to do? Why do I need more?

It almost looks as if I am not reading God's Word, not listening to what He has already told me. I am like a spoiled child who always wants something more. The problem is, like the spoiled child, if I get what I want once, then I will want it over and over and over and over. That is how whining works.

That kind of demanding and whining will leave me empty, wondering if God is responding because He wants to, or He just wants me to stop whining. Of course, God never responds to whining. Sincere doubt and need, yes. But whining, no.

I have been told to disciple others, and that should be enough.

Then, I want proof of who I should disciple. There are ten people who need to be disciplined. Lord, which one should I choose? Lord, give me a sign, a vision, some word that will help me know. More whining.

Jesus had a lot more to deal with than I will ever have. He had a group of people following him. A number that often exceeded 70 people, plus all the others who were there to help with cooking and laundry. Out of this group, He selected 12 and out of that group 3. Do I see a pattern here?

I am responsible to provide some kind of help to all who are part of my circle of relationships. From this, there will be a smaller group who will be given more attention, and often a still smaller group will be my focus group. No one is really excluded. And it looks like those who need, or should receive, more attention will be revealed.

There is also the fact that as I disciple, those I disciple should begin to help disciple others around us. I don't need a special sign. I just need to get started and let things flow. God will guide the process, not from outside like a vision, but from within through relationship.

Last of all, are the signs that I am doing a good job. Signs in the life of the disciple that God is working. I am not talking about the slow progress that is normal, but looking for miracle changes. Signs that make me want to say, "Yes, I am a good discipler." That is a dangerous rabbit hole to descend into. It will result in some dangerous issues down the road. Egotism, preferential treatment of those getting the miracles, and so on.

No, signs just get in the way. They may be effective in waking people up, but they do not result in the kind of mature long-term growth and service that true discipleship provides. Signs can make one dependent on receiving signs and so develop a weak and ineffective faith.

I need to be very careful about why I want signs and visions. I need to let the Lord choose what and when and not become a whining spoiled brat, because I want a sign, I want a vision, I want a sign...

I definitely don't want to develop into that kind of person. Nor do I want that behavior to be duplicated in those around me.

Entry 52 - Mt 12:46-50 - Family

I don't like this passage. I don't like what it can imply. I don't like the idea of putting others before my family. How am I to reconcile this with the responsibility that I have as husband, father, child, and relative with my responsibility to those who are my brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is not an easy issue, and if I am not careful, I may harm, even destroy, those closest to me for the sake of the other. Or, by focusing on my blood family, create disciples who look after themselves before caring for others.

There must be more to this than what lies at the surface. I think there is.

When my family prevents me from being part of my family in God, then my focus may shift. Not that I will abandon them, or not care for them. They need me, but I don't need them. At least not in relation to my spiritual growth. And that may be the key.

My focus is to be on helping those in my world to grow in their relationship with God. So I have, in a sense, two groups who need me to disciple them or help them in the process of becoming disciples. My physical family and my spiritual family. If my physical family is part of this process, then it should not limit my

involvement with my spiritual family. The truth is, it is likely to expand my ability to disciple others, because my physical family will be there to encourage and support the process. Also, my spiritual family will care about how I am doing in nurturing my physical family. Of course, this is the ideal.

The problem is that it is not always an ideal situation, and that is where things can get sticky.

I will have to evaluate how each one helps or hinders my ability to grow and know God better. That will lead to evaluating how my activity keeps me in the center of God's will and obeying His commands, as related to caring for my physical family and spiritual family.

The better I do at caring for my physical family, the fewer problems there will be with its impact on my life and ministry in the larger family of God. But sometimes I will have to make hard decisions.

That is why I don't like this passage. I want a perfect situation, but we rarely get that.

Truthfully, what I need is a physical family who helps me grow and know God. One that I can help to grow and know God and will also help me do the same for others. The wrong type of family creates demands. The correct type opens doors to service.

So which family comes first? That is obvious, the family of God. So which family needs me the most? That, too, is obviously my physical family. Which family do I need to serve? Again, obvious. Both. Oh, my head is hurting now. God, help me know how to manage this so that both will grow in You, because I have been faithful to You first.

Entry 53 - Mt 13:1-23 - Success

How do I measure success? A farmer would do so in several ways, depending on where he is in the process. At first, it is how many seeds actually develop. The next would be in how well they grow. Another would be how well he is controlling the impact of weeds and insects. And another would be how well the plant grows. The last is how productive it is.

While I do understand how this works, I often jump to the end to count the results and don't realize what was involved in getting there. I don't think about the fact that no matter how well the farmer does at sowing, some seed will be lost along the way. Not every seed planted will produce a harvest.

I don't like the idea of investing so much energy in sowing, planting, caring, protecting, and more to then see the seed/plant fail. Let me explain something.

The wise farmer knows that some of what he planted will not make it to the final stage of producing a harvest. He knows some will be lost to birds, some will never bloom, some will wither, and some will be overcome by weeds. He knows all of this and still does the work of clearing the land, plowing, cultivating, and sowing. Then he keeps on working to remove the rocks, get rid of the weeds, and fight the insects. He does all of this with the hope that, in the end, more will survive than are lost, and the harvest will be greater than the seed invested.

So, how do I measure success as a disciplemaker? Do I expect everyone I work with to become mature and productive? If I do, then I am headed for a train wreck, mental breakdown, depression, frustration, and more emotional anguish than is realistic to believe I will survive.

No, I must realize that not everyone will listen and mature. I must realize that not everyone will make the right decisions and abandon unhealthy habits. I must realize that not everyone will be

willing and ready to commit themselves sufficiently to being disciplined.

More important, I must realize that if I am faithful, then many will do all that is needed, will respond in the correct way, and will allow themselves to be guided until they are able to reproduce what they have learned in others.

If I think that I must plant only in fertile ground, then I am doomed to failure. That is not how life works. You do not know which seed will be lost, wither and die, or be choked out. This knowledge comes only after the work has been done to prepare for them. Only after the investments have been made.

That is not my concern. My role is to be ready, to sow the seed, and to provide an opportunity to grow. My role is to do everything I can to make it possible for them to succeed. What happens next is not my worry. My job is to disciple.

Entry 54 - Mt 13:10-17 - Obtuse

So often, I focus on the wrong things. This can result in not seeing the issues that affect the work I am doing.

So I teach, disciple, mentor, instruct, and they don't respond. They seem like the blind and deaf that Jesus is talking about. They are obtuse. I like that word. It sounds so much better than simple-minded, dull, stupid, and thickheaded. That word makes it sound as if they can't understand, because things are so complicated.

But that is not the reality. The reality is, I have chosen to be this way. Chosen by the way I think, who I listen to, the habits and traditions I accept and follow, and other conscious choices that make it hard for me to see the truth.

I have thought about this and made my own list of ideas that affect people to make them obtuse.

Blind spots – these are intentional. An example is what a driver of a horse-drawn carriage in a city will do. He will put blinders at the side of the horses' eyes to keep them focused on what is ahead. That is a good thing to do, but too often I put blinders in the wrong place. The result is that I see only what I want to see, not the dangers and issues that are critical to life in the kingdom.

Callouses – these are a result of constant repetition. They can be beneficial, especially to the man working with hand tools. His hands need callouses. Or the lady on her knees scrubbing floors. There are more examples, but you get the point. The problem is that these callouses desensitize that area. As a result, the person cannot sense or feel delicate, fine differences in texture. If I create spiritual callouses, then what will happen?

Lest you think all callouses are wrong, think of a violin player, a guitar player. Those callouses on the fingers are important to their ability to play the instrument. Callouses in the right places need to be developed and for the right reason. But I must also be aware that they do limit my ability to sense subtle differences, if I am not careful.

Noise – too much noise, and I can't hear. The reality is that the world around us is filled with noise. In fact, I am good at creating noise and gladly contribute my noise to the noises around me. This is not about music, which can help me sense a deeper level of ideas and concepts. This is noise that distracts and blocks out the possibility of hearing the music.

Each of us creates such noise, and I do it as well. I do it to isolate myself. I do it to protect myself. I make noise so I don't have to hear truth and correction. I don't want to hear, because I want to believe I am right and don't need to hear anything that might make me realize I am wrong.

Immaturity – Ah, the core of all the rest. I just don't grow up or don't even want to grow up to take responsibility for myself and my actions. There is really no good aspect to this. I may correctly

use it regarding a child who is just learning. But immaturity is balanced by the goal of learning. If I grow, then while I may have acted immaturely, I am not truly immature, since I use the event to grow and mature.

All of these can be overcome. That is why I pick up the rocks in a rocky field, pull the weeds, and set up scarecrows to protect the seeds from being stolen away.

My job, then, is to sow and do everything I can to help them overcome the blind spots, the callouses, the noise, and the immaturity. I am not responsible for the results, because, unlike a field, people can choose not to respond. My responsibility is to give them every opportunity to respond and help them see how their blind spots, noise, callouses, and immaturity are preventing them from growing.

Entry 55 - Mt 13:24-43 - Sowing

I can't get away from this topic and more teaching regarding it. Now I have mustard seeds and weeds and yeast. Yeah, I know yeast is not a part of sowing, but it is related.

My job is to sow seeds. That is clear. So I need to disciple. And while the main focus of the parable is on sowing the Good News, it does have application to being a disciplinemaker. So what do these things mean...mustard seed, weeds, and yeast?

I think I see where they fit.

I cannot determine what will actually produce the greatest results. Too often, I think that by greater effort and more work I will get greater results. That is probably a dangerous concept. Depends too much on me, what I know, and what I can do.

The reality is, when dealing with people, it may not matter how much I do. The more important thing may be touching the person's emotion in the right place, without even knowing what

that right place is. All I know is that I have to keep connecting with the person and responding. A small thing done at the right time can have a powerful impact in the growth of the one I am discipling.

The weeds will be there, and I may not know what aspect of a person's life is, in fact weeds, rather than productive plants. Again, I am not the one responsible for sorting this out. That is God's job, and at the right time He will open their eyes to this reality. I cannot force them to see what I may not be able to see. And even if I might see it, forcing the issue could end up being counterproductive.

Now regarding the last one, yeast. Not a sowing or planting or harvesting concept, and yet it is a vital concept to keep in mind. It is by faithful work that the truth will come to permeate the whole life of a person. Just like kneading the dough allows the yeast to permeate the whole and do its work, so I must disciple a person in the same manner. Working the truth into their life so that it can touch every corner and do its work. The yeast being God's Word.

Entry 56 - Mt 13:44-51 - Treasure

Do I really understand the value of the treasure I possess? Do I understand the cost of having and keeping this treasure?

I wonder. I have heard many sermons about this treasure. But they seem to focus on what I do to gain access to God's forgiveness. It is about my commitment, my repentance, and so on. These are correct and have their place, but what about the other side of this topic?

Actually, there are many other passages that help us focus on this. Yet it is good to make the connection. It is good to realize that Jesus is the one who found the treasure, well He knew about it all along. Jesus is the one who sold everything to obtain this treasure.

He left heaven. He became like us. He lived life with us. Then He suffered for us so that we could be forgiven and restored.

The treasure He sought and paid for was me. He saw the value, the pearl buried within and willingly sold everything, figuratively, to obtain me.

It is now my turn to see the treasures that are around me. This is related to bearing the cross and helping to focus on the joy and wonder that such an act will bring. It is my opportunity to do for others what Jesus did for me and give what is needed so they, too, can be forgiven and restored.

The next step is discipling them to do the same for others. The question is, will they see in me what I have learned and done? Will those I disciple make the same commitment to do what is necessary to find the treasure that is a lost soul and commit themselves to paying the price for their rescue?

It is a good time to reflect on this. First is the fact that I have found the treasure that is Christ. In finding that treasure, it will be well to reflect on what that cost and why I paid the price involved. Second is the treasure that is me. Yes, I am a treasure. But that treasure will not be realized if I will not invest in the process for it to be developed and revealed, so I too see what Jesus saw. Third is the treasure of another person. It is good to reflect on what I will pay to help recover that treasure. What will I do to help them see Jesus, see their value, and grow into the treasure God intended them to be?

The last concept is the treasure of seeing that process repeated. To see the one I disciple do the same for another.

On a sad note, I will not see this happen with everyone I invest in. That is the point of the net and sorting the fish. Some people just don't understand the value of the treasure they are in God's eyes. They just don't understand or don't want to deal with the price involved in recovering what was lost and can be found. Too often

they are satisfied with just knowing it is there or simply being able to see a reflection of it. So sad.

But that is not my concern. My concern is to cast the net. Help all those who are willing to be helped. God will sort out the rest in His appointed time. My concern is not to worry, but to keep on working. To keep on searching for the treasure in the people around me and helping them see it, reclaim it, and then rejoice with them as they are reunited with their Creator.

Entry 57 – Mt 13:52-58 - Storage

I am learning to love this passage more and more, as I study it and read it anew. There is so much truth here. But for a long time it did not make sense. I mean, how does one bring new things out of old stuff?

Well, for one thing, it depends on what I put in the storeroom. I have many options related to this.

1. I can put relics in there. My things from the past that no longer function, but I keep them for what they represent. And even if they do work, they have little purpose now, since something better is available and has replaced them. They are relics of the past.
2. I can put current tools in there. These are good. They can be useful and will be used. The issue here is that they serve specific functions and fill specific needs. That is fine, as long as what is happening allows me to make use of them. Also, they will function only as long as they last and then will need to be replaced. They are relics of the present.
3. I can put resources in there. These can be anything to be used for whatever is needed at the time. They are also easily replaced. I may not know exactly how they will be used, but I am certain that I will be able to use them in

multiple ways to meet multiple needs. These are not relics but treasures that allow me to bring new from the old.

I finally found an example to help me better understand this. It is wood. Wood and the tools to work with would help me see the place of each of these. I can make many things from wood. When a need is identified, I go to my storeroom and get the wood I need to make what is needed. I also go to my storeroom for the tools I need. Then I take the wood and make what is needed.

The wonder of this is that the store of wood really doesn't change. I can restock it with the same old supply, but I can be constantly using that wood in a myriad of ways to meet my needs and the needs of others. I can make a table for this need, a shelf for someone else, a bed for another, and on the list goes. So many options and possibilities, applications for the same old thing, which can be used and applied to an almost unlimited number of possibilities and needs.

The issue is in what I will put in my storehouse that will allow me to do the same. I can put in:

1. My stories and experiences – these are good but have limited application
2. My relationships – same thing, they have value but cannot be accessed for every need.
3. My knowledge of God's Word – this is unlimited and always supplies what is needed for any and every situation.
4. My relationship with God – need I say more? The more I develop this, the more I will be able to respond to others.

The key is to keep my heart and mind open to what is possible. Too many see only what goes in and not what can come out. They see a jar of food, but only how it can feed themselves and not how it can be used to nourish others.

Worse is if I put the wrong thing in the storeroom and prevent any possible use of the resource, because it cannot be used creatively, or at best only once. There is no possibility of being able to constantly bring out new from the old. If I invest in the study of God's Word and my relationship with God, then I will always be able to bring new out of the old. The Word of God is old, God is beyond old and they are always fresh, providing a constant supply of what is needed for each situation, the new.

Entry 58 - Mt 14:1-12 - Daring

This is the ultimate price that may be asked of me, my life. When I desire to help others find the treasure God has for them, it may cost me more than my time, my resources, and other aspects of my life. It may cost me my life.

I may have to give up my way of life to serve those who need to be discipled. I understand this from serving as a missionary. That is the more extreme form of giving up life for others. Yet in many ways, I need to do this all the time. Give up life as I know it, so others will find the treasure and learn how to use it and share it with others.

I may have to give up my life. Be willing to die. John the Baptist did this. Stephen did this, and they were just the first in a long line of what we now call martyrs, people who willingly sacrificed their lives so others could hear the truth, find the treasure, and become disciples, true followers of Jesus.

It is a question I must deal with constantly. Discipling involves speaking the truth, and there will always be those who do not want to hear the truth. They do not want others to hear the truth, because then they might be confronted by the truth through them as well. Such daring can result in death.

There is one other way my life can be at risk. There are some places that are just dangerous. Disease, war, and human evil are

present, and my life can be lost for daring to live and serve in a dangerous place.

The question I must always ask is, what is more important, my life or their future?

Entry 59 - Mt 14:13-20 - Abundance

Now for a contrast, an extreme contrast.

Too often I get caught up in how limited I am. I am one person. I have a limited amount of time. I have a limited amount of ability. I have a limited amount of...and on my list goes...of what I lack. .

The reality is that all of these are true. I am a limited being. The danger is in letting this train of thought and its reality limit what God can do.

Jesus saw the need and knew He could not supply it, but He also knew his Father could. The disciples objected when He told them to feed the multitude. They did not understand the resources they had.

In God, what kind of resources do I truly have? Do I realize just how unlimited my resources really are?

What messes me up is when I begin to focus on my time, my finances, my skills, and so on. When I do this, I lose sight of what God can do with five minutes of my life invested in another. I lose sight of what God can do with five minutes of prayer invested in behalf of another. I lose sight of what God can do with a meal invested in behalf of another.

It is not about how much. It is about giving what God asks, so that He can multiply. It is about giving freely from what God has given. It is in this act that abundance lives and can be experienced.

Disciple making is not about the quantity but about the willingness to give freely what I do have, so that God can reveal the abundance that exists in it and multiply what was given.

Do I give freely from what I have? Do the ones I disciple see generosity or selfishness?

Entry 60 - Mt 14:22-34 - Impossible

The word impossible is too much a part of my vocabulary. Too many things appear impossible, and so I treat them as impossible. This is because I focus on the difficulties, the limitations, and the past and present of the person I am discipling.

I get so focused on this that any small glitch, error, minor failure, or even that nothing is happening convince me that what I am trying to do is impossible. And that is the point. It is about what *I* am trying to do and not on what *God* can do.

I get caught up in seeing only what is visible, only what I think I see and hear. Shame on me. How quickly I forget what God has done in my life. How many times I had to learn to walk on water, so to speak. To do what I thought I could not do, only to have God prove me wrong.

I am only beginning to realize that what God is trying to do in my life, and then using me to do the same in the life of another through discipling, is just that...walking on water. Believing God can fulfill His promises, I walk on water. The key is keeping my eyes on God and letting Him take care of the laws of nature, and the laws of human nature.

Disciple making is just that. Letting God deal with the laws of human nature and doing my job to help those I disciple to keep their eyes on Him. That is what disciple making is at its core, walking on water.

Entry 61 - Mt 15:1-20 - Lip service

Lip service is the act of telling someone what I am doing, without really doing it. It is the act of saying something has value but never committing myself to actually use or do what I support. I talk a good game, but put me in the game and then see what happens.

I am reflecting on many of the sports announcers. They seem really intelligent and seem to know a lot about the games they announce. Then I learned that many of them depend on others to provide the facts they spout out. Someone else is really the brains behind what they do. What they are really good at is giving out information and doing it in a way that will interest people.

There is another aspect of this reality. Even if they do know so much, I would not want them on the field actually playing the game. It is one thing to know something; it is totally different to actually do it.

And there is the idea that I need to look and sound as if I know what I am doing. I do this because people expect it, and I want to fulfill their expectations. Here again, it is not hard to gain the information, but that does not mean I can actually do what I discuss so easily. They call this type of person an “armchair quarterback.” They evaluate, based on a view the actual quarterback doesn’t have, and often with the benefit of hindsight. Neither of which is of any use in the actual doing.

So am I one of these people? I look good on paper but am useless when it comes time to actually disciple someone. Do I know all the right stuff but have no knowledge of how to use it, because I have never actually used it? Do I act as if having the right information, based on what one expert says, is enough to succeed? (that never works because every game is different...New sets of conditions, new environment, new opponents, new struggles in my life.)

If I try to do this, act like an expert without really getting in the game, then all I do will be tainted.

Nothing ever follows exactly what is taught. Life is very fluid. No expert who has not actually been in the game, actually disciplined, can provide what I need. They can give me some guidelines, but until I actually get involved and disciple someone, I will never understand. And interestingly, at that point, all the statistics and patterns become unessential, even irrelevant to the reality of actually being involved.

Put it this way. It doesn't matter what the batter's average may be. The moment he steps to the plate he is 0 for 0 with a batting average of 0. What matters is all the experience he can bring to bear on that moment to go beyond that moment and change the numbers. If he fails, it is not a defeat but a lesson to be used for the next time at the plate. The better he learns the lessons, then the better he will do each time.

I need to regard each person, not as a number or a statistic to add to my database. They need to become real people in real situations who must be treated as such. I am not gathering statistics. I am guiding people to God. Talking a good game is not the same as playing the game.

Sounding good is not good enough. I need to get into the life of each person and learn who they are. I must not become the hypocrite who is a bag of wind and critical of those who do not perform correctly based on what they know, which is nothing, when it comes to really being involved.

Am I listening to what I have just said? Am I treating people as statistics, numbers to add to my database? Or are they real people who generally don't fit the molds created by such hypothetical and hypocritical behavior?

Entry 62 - Mt 15:21-28 - Testing

This is not an easy passage for me to process. It goes against what I have been taught and think about discipling, teaching, and helping people in general. And yet it makes so much sense.

I was in town the other day, and a man in a reasonably nice car drove up to me and asked for money, because he was now homeless. That seemed to go against what I would normally expect of a homeless person. You don't expect them to have a car and be driving around looking for help. That scenario creates questions about how does one verify there is, in fact, a real need, or are they just taking advantage of me and the current situation?

Jesus was, well, He didn't appear to be treating this woman gently, but that may be just how I read the text and put in my interpretation. That is because the words seem harsh. What I can't hear is the actual tone Jesus used, nor see the expression on his face. He may have been very gentle and looking at her with sincerity to explore the truth of her need. He wanted to hear what was in her heart, not just the words she spoke.

As I work at seeking out people to disciple, there will be those who come and will cause me to question the sincerity of their desire. Do I know how to test this issue? Do I know how to find out if they are just trying to be fashionable and acceptable to their friends, peers, and other significant people in their life?

Do I know what to look for and hear, so I know they truly want to grow and will not be denied the opportunity to do so.? Do I know the difference and how to respond to each?

I sense a shift from my early thoughts, where I was once trying to convince myself that it is my responsibility to disciple, to a place where I am now assuming I will do this and must be sure I do it correctly. I will need to know how to respond correctly to those asking to be disciplined.

Wow!

Entry 63 - Mt 15:29-38 - Something

In a way, this makes no sense. On the one hand, I can see why the people stayed and wanted to be where Jesus was. I mean, I would too. I would want to be healed, and I would want to see it happen over and over. There is no end to the need to satisfy my curiosity and to see the incredible again and again. Today, I would hope someone got it on tape, got a picture, or a sound bite so I could watch and listen over and over.

This is evident by the number of hits for videos, etc. I want to see more. My appetite is almost insatiable. And then comes the extra. It makes sense, but no sense. After three days, to give them a meal, all of them! A miracle for everyone to see and experience.

It was, of course, a grand gesture. The people were hungry. If they had brought any food, it would have probably been gone after three days. So, one meal, then send them on their way. But was this wise? The last time Jesus did this they tried to make Him king and force Him to stay, so they could be fed and healed for... well, we don't know for how long. What I do know is that He refused. So why open up that door again?

And how does this relate to being a disciple maker?

I think I am beginning to see just a little. It is like this. People come to church, they listen to sermons, attend Sunday school and all manner of things just to be there and to see what is happening. They don't really think about learning to feed themselves. They want to depend on someone else.

I am in the midst of all of this and watching. Will I be willing to give one more piece of information, one more contact with the truth? Or will I just dismiss them, send them on their way, because I am tired of the constant demand I see, with little or no change and growth?

Discipleship is like this. A lot can be invested. A time will come when it is time to move on, to send them on their way. If they have learned, then it will be a happy moment. If they have not learned, then I must at least give them one more bit of food, teaching.

I don't know if they will finally understand. I am sure Jesus was hoping that they would finally see. He hoped they would connect the dots and so, just in case it hadn't happened, He gave them all, yes all, even those who came only to watch, one more point of contact. What they did with that would be up to them.

So, even when I think the ones I work with may not understand, I still have to try once more. I have to have unlimited compassion and patience with those who come to me to learn, even when, yes, especially when it seems more like a sideshow, and I am the performer. Maybe that one more contact will finally open their hearts and minds to what is really happening.

Entry 64 - Mt 16:1-12 - Yeast

How often do I get caught up in looking for the wrong thing? The wrong sign or indication of what I think should be happening? How often do I want a sign to confirm that I am succeeding when none is apparent?

That is the first issue in this passage, and I will have to learn that there is no sign that is consistent for all situations and people. Why is that? I need to remember that there was an incredible sign at Jesus' birth which, for the most part, was ignored by most or used by others to try and shift the direction of God's plan, even end it.

Then I need to reflect on the literally thousands of signs Jesus had already performed, that in actuality had little or no effect at all. That is evident by the fact that people were asking for more signs, more wonders. Weren't thousands of healings and liberating from the demonic enough?

And that leads me to wonder about the topic of yeast.

In my experience there is only one kind of yeast, but this passage suggests something else. In baking bread there may be a couple of ways to get bread to rise, but they all have the same purpose, creating one positive effect.

Yet in this passage, the yeast has the possibility of being either good or bad. Good teaching or false teaching. Both act and work in the same way, in the nature of yeast. They both are introduced and then proceed to enter and spread, affecting all that they touch.

This is how teaching works. Both good and bad. Once introduced, the teaching will spread and impact all aspects of a person's life.

So do I realize this as I disciple someone? Do I realize that even my flaws and errors are entering their life and will have an impact on how they develop? This is a sobering fact. That and the realization that I may be wanting more signs of what is happening and may miss what is already evident, because I am looking for the wrong thing or blinding myself to signs that are there, because I don't want to see them.

I am the yeast. I need to be very sure that what I give will produce the right results. I need to give them God's Word, not my personal interpretation. I can share my experience, but I must make sure they see the difference, so there is no confusion. My work as a disciple maker needs to be tempered with this clarification, so that what I give them provides what is true and good.

[Entry 65 - Mt 16:13-23 - Who](#)

This seems like a strange time to be asking the question: who is Jesus? And yet, it is always a good time for this question. But the question for me, personally, to ask may be a little different.

Who do you think I am? I need to ask the person I'm discipling that question alongside the main question of who they think Jesus is. Why do I say this? Easy. It is because there is always a need to be sure they see Jesus, not me, in what is being done. I also need

to be sure they are getting a clear picture of who Jesus is in their life and in mine, as well.

There is a grave danger in this world to replace Christ with me. The danger of making those I disciple dependent on me instead of, or more than, on Jesus. There will always be a level of dependence by the person being disciplined onto the one discipling them. This is normal. However, when the focus becomes more me than Jesus, is when the focus on me is preventing them from shifting to Jesus.

I see this all around me at multiple levels. People who will listen only to the teaching of one or a select few pastors, expositors, professors, and others. This is how we get into cults. Because some of those people being followed are unscrupulous and will use their popularity to bind people to them and their teaching.

Getting this right gives me the keys to the kingdom and the ability to open the door for others. It means I am authorized to disciple and have the power needed to help them, as they grow and learn to follow Jesus.

But first, I have to answer the question myself. Who is Jesus to me?

The answer to that question will give me the power to bind myself to Jesus and loose the power and authority that is inherent in that relationship. And that means I will have the power and authority to disciple those who enter my life.

Without this, I will create failure, and the people I will meet will always be looking for something more, something better, and too often may end up believing something false.

Entry 66 - Mt 16:24-28 - Cross

I am back to the cross thing again, but this time it is a little different. The focus is on what is gained in the process.

First, I must deny myself. This goes counter to all I am taught in my country. I am taught to focus on me, promote me, do the best possible for me, and not depend on anyone else. Taking up the cross fits this concept. But the idea of doing this to deny myself is counterculture for me.

I take it up to face my life, follow my path and so on. I don't do this so I can follow someone else. But that is exactly what is involved. I am to give up what I think I know to follow Christ and let him redefine what has value. It is not about me, it is about Thee, if I can use some old English here.

The next creates the same dilemma. If I want to save myself, then I have to lose myself. Denying my rights is feasible but to lose my identity, what I have worked so hard to create and promote, is again difficult. I don't do well at letting others see past me to someone else. But that is the idea, to get out of the way. To stop being a wall or even a mirror. Instead, to become transparent so that my identity is lost in Jesus, and that is what they see. That was the goal of the early church, and that is what the word Christian means, Christlike.

And that is why I have avoided discipling and why I have avoided fully committing myself to the process. I want to be me. I don't want to deal with the burdens and problems of others. I don't want to give up my desires and goals and my life. And that is the problem, because if I really think it is my life, then I am the bigger fool.

If I understand all of this correctly, it is as I bear the cross of others that I will be able to truly follow Jesus. It is as I deny myself that I will find the real, true me by revealing Jesus to others. Jesus doesn't want to obliterate or erase me. He wants the real me, the intended me of creation, to be revealed. He doesn't want me to not have desires but wants them to be defined by what is eternal and not temporal.

I really need to rethink this idea of being me and being left alone. I might get my wish and more than I really wanted, alone in eternity. I will not only lose a closer fellowship with God and those He brings to my world, but I will lose my future. I will not be with God and those others tomorrow and on into the future, just because I didn't care about others, wanted to save myself, and avoid following.

Taking up the cross is not the burden I thought it was but the opportunity to enjoy real life.

Entry 67 - Mt 17:1-9 - Mountaintop

Would I like to have a vision and encounter with God? Of course I would. Who wouldn't?

That is not the issue. In fact, God promises that people will have dreams and visions. It was part of Peter's message at Pentecost based on the prophecy of Joel.

Wanting them and having them is not the issue. The issue is why and then what we do with the vision after we have received it.

First, there is an issue with having a vision or encounter. It creates an emotional high and euphoria. I see that reality with Peter's response. He wanted to build a house and just live on the mountain, enjoying the vision day after day. In a sense, he wanted to leave all the struggles behind, abandon the work, and enjoy a life of ease and blessing.

Second is the issue of dependency. Yes, I can become dependent on having visions and confirmation of what I am doing. This will create a weak faith and inability to live in the reality that is the world. I will be, in a sense, frozen, unable to make even simple decisions without some kind of input, dream, or vision. Instead of growing in my relationship with God, I become a brat. Harsh, but true. I need to think about it some more.

Third is the impact of visions on our relationship with others. If I am constantly talking about a vision God gave me, or a dream I had, then how will they respond to me? One of two ways, jealousy, for not enjoying what I am enjoying, and contempt because I make them look bad. It makes me look proud or worse.

But God wants me to know and see what He is doing. Otherwise, why promise me that I will have visions and dreams? He wants me to enjoy times of joy and peace. Otherwise, why make His Presence known to me in such a special way?

The issue is not with having visions. It is how I respond to them and what I make of them. Notice that as soon as Peter spoke, a cloud blocked out the vision and suddenly it was over. Also notice that, of the 12, only three were selected for this event, and then they were told not to tell anyone about it until after Jesus has been resurrected.

So God wants me to see, but is also aware that visions can cause problems. They can be used to impress others and attract them to me, because people may believe I can provide them with more than I really can. A vision can create unrealistic expectations.

God wants me to see and know so that when the vision is fulfilled, I will become stronger. That means I must trust what has been revealed and live accordingly. That strengthens my faith, and in the process I can learn how to help others grow in their faith.

It is so easy to be walking on the mountaintop and think that if others would just follow me, they would find God. That is not what mountaintops are about. It is about my growing and living in such a way that it points them to God, not to emotions.

I have had a vision, so you should listen to me. So wrong. It is better to be able to look back and be able to see how God fulfilled the vision given. To see how people respond to your acts of faith, not to the fact that you had a vision.

I am to enjoy the moment. I am to let it give me strength and direction. I am to enjoy it and use it to learn to grow in my confidence in what God is doing in and through me.

Visions are not for my gaining control but to let God gain control. If I do that, then I will be a better disciplinarian.

Entry 68 – Mt 17:10-13 - Voice

There is a show that has become really popular. It is called The Voice. It followed soon after another talent show began to lose popularity. The first had an aspect that I did not like. They displayed, for all to see, people without talent. Sometimes the contestants took it well, and other times they were greatly offended by both the public rejection and humiliation involved.

The Voice is very different. They screen contestants to find those who do have talent and then add one more twist. The judges are not allowed to see the person and must decide if they like them or not solely on the basis of their voice. They have chosen to take appearances out of the equation.

That is because appearances can deceive. My appearance can deceive those who I should be disciplining. They will not see who I am, because of what they see. Their appearance can also deceive me in the same way. But also, at another level. I will not see the possibility of what can be. So appearances prevent us from believing in each other.

I could wish that I had no knowledge of a person prior to my first meeting. I could wish I were blind and could not see if they too were blind, handicapped, or deformed in some way (beauty, our definition, can make us believe someone is deformed and therefore unacceptable).

If this happens, we are both going to suffer. I will suffer their anger and frustration and anguish for not hearing them and seeing what God can do. They will suffer, because they are denied access

to what they need, a heart and soul ready and willing to hear them and see what God sees.

Okay, now I need to back up. In this passage, the voice is that of God. But sometimes I let what I think I see or want to see interfere with what God is really saying. It is interesting that God did not speak until they could no longer see. There would be no possibility of confusing the vision of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah with God's words.

So am I trapped into seeing what I want to see or letting God close my eyes, so I can see what I should see in me and in the one I am discipling?

Entry 69 - Mt 17:14-22 - Failure (mustard)

This story is helping me see a truth that I have missed so many times. It helps me see an error so many make in dealing with failure or a desire to overcome challenges, but from a mistaken point of view. Here is the nutshell version:

I make a mistake when dealing with failure

I think the opponent is too strong

When in truth, I am too weak.

Or I think the discipline is too hard

The problem is I have allowed myself to be weak.

This is not about muscle-building type of strength. It is about wisdom and the ability to effectively use what I have. It is about learning who I am and how to grow. Growing more muscle does not mean you are more capable. A strong person can lift a great weight because it is stable and is standing on stable ground. But when put in a place where the shape of the weight is not consistent or the terrain unstable, the strong person may actually lose to a

smaller weaker person, who knows how to use the entire environment to move the object.

How does all of this relate to the topic at hand?

I sometimes think that the focus of the prayer and fasting was to get God's attention and in a sense force him to act or at least influence him to act. I think it is about finding a way to call on God or convince God to respond to the petition at hand.

Jesus shifted all this when He followed it up with the comment, "you have so little faith."

The point of prayer and fasting is not to move God but to move me. It is about calling on God to work in me and to make me stronger, to increase my faith. The problem was not the power of the demon but the weakness of the faith of the one acting. I need to think about this and remind myself of this fact. Jesus never did more than speak, often quite softly, and the demons fled.

You have so little faith. It is less than a tiny mustard seed. That is humiliating and humbling.

So if I fail to disciple, it is not a problem with the person being disciplined or God not acting. It is about my not believing God can work.

Ok. I do need to keep in mind that two wills are at work here. But if the issue is not in the willingness of the one being disciplined, then the issue is in my lack of faith in what God can do. This lack of faith creates a lack of confidence, which will have an impact on the one being disciplined.

Do I understand that my need is to seek out God to change me, so that I will be able to disciple and be effective?

Entry 70 - Mt 17:22-27 - Tax

When will I get this clear in my head?

Tax, tithe, sacrifice, gift. So many words can define what I do.

Is discipling a requirement, an expectation, a price to pay, or a joy? I can hear the answer in my sigh. In my hesitation to respond. In my lack of focus.

I am not talking about what is involved in getting started in discipling others. This is about what happens after I have been doing it for a while. Does it remain the joy it should be, or is it becoming a requirement of a leader, an expectation of those who know me, a price I pay to maintain my status, or do I still find the joy in this?

There is truth for me to consider in each of these.

If it is a tax. I have been given something, and I should give a portion of that to those around me.

If it is an expectation. I have become part of a fellowship, and it is expected that those who are part of the fellowship fulfill certain obligations.

If it is a sacrifice. I will need to let go of something in my life so that I can carry out the work of discipling others.

BUT IT SHOULD ALWAYS BRING JOY to my world. In the midst of the tax, tithe, and sacrifice there should be joy.

And I see something in this story to help me get there. Jesus was asked if He paid the temple tax. Now as the king of kings, He would not be required to do so. Even the earthly kings and their family were exempt from this requirement. But Jesus chose to pay this tax, not because of the law, but because of the benefit it would bring to others.

That is where the joy comes in. Set aside the requirement, the expectation, and the sacrifice. Without the joy to be had in discipling, then the others will be empty. I pay taxes so all can benefit. I fulfill the expectations of others so the group will grow and be encouraged. I make the sacrifices because I have learned

that when they are done properly, I gain more than I have sacrificed. And I enjoy the work because of the joy it brings to others and so to me

Oops, do I see what just happened? Each of these will bring joy, if I understand them properly within the proper context.

Discipling, then, should always bring joy, if I see these truths.

Entry 71 - Mt 18:1-11 - Childishness

This does not make me comfortable. Become like a child in my thinking. That is counterculture to what it means to be an adult, but it shouldn't be.

I should always enjoy the wonders of life and creation. I need the eyes of a child to let myself be amazed and awed.

I should never lead others into doing what is wrong. I need the heart of a child who just knows when something is not right and makes faces about it. Not the face that says "I don't like that food," but the face that questions the rightness of something. I have seen that face. I need that sensitivity back.

I should always trust like a child. I need that attitude which allows people to be who they are without judgement. Children are so ready to trust, unless they see something that is not right. You know, that face I mentioned above.

I should always respect people like a child would. They have an ability to listen and respond to authority. Yes, a child learns too quickly to say "no" and to dislike being told "no;" but if I pause, I will see the gears working on what is right. They may say "no" and resist the word "no," but they wait for it, and you will see the respect they have for those in authority over them. Unfortunately, this ability is damaged too easily.

I should always say the truth like a child. It has been said that sometimes children can be brutally honest. That is a

misconception. They are not trying to hurt anyone. They just say it like it is, and what is so wonderful about this is that people do not easily reject truth that is spoken by a child, no matter how hard it may be to accept it. It is about being a child.

Now to flip it. Do I let those I disciple become children again? Do I let them feel free to enjoy the world, see what is right, know how to guide others? Do I help them learn again how to respect others and speak the truth in a way that can be accepted?

This will happen only as I once again become the child I was, one that they need to see.

Entry 72 - Mt 18:12-20 – Sheep herding

I am part of a wonderful process. It is about sheep herding. Shepherding is about who I am. Sheep herding is about the action. Okay, I am just playing with the spelling, and yet the one is more about my character and the other is about my actions.

Jesus uses three brief examples that I believe are related to this, even though only one of them actually uses the word ‘sheep.’ He talks about finding the lost sheep, then talks about restoring one that is found, and finally the need to bind. (There is also the idea of loose, but I am going to treat that as a form of binding...a way to bind us and God to a particular decision to lose something.) (word games, maybe?)

As a disciplemaker, I have the task of finding those who are lost. That is pretty obvious, because we are all lost, or were at some point. That is, until someone found us and helped us return home. This is the obvious step one.

Now comes the next steps in the complete process of disciplemaking. And I need to keep in mind that this involves others. I am not to disciple others in a vacuum, alone, so to speak.

As a disciplemaker, I have the task of restoring. A person wanders away for a reason. Not everyone is trapped by the same sin and circumstances. I, along with others, have the task of helping my brother understand and be restored. I don't think that when I do this alone, I am truly alone. If my words are correct, then the one being restored is aware of all those who would confirm what I have said. Restoration never occurs in a vacuum without being affected by others. If they refuse this reality, then it may be necessary to proceed to the next two steps. But the reality is that the person being restored already knows about these levels and is in denial.

As a disciplemaker I have the task of binding the one who was lost and is now found, who was separated and is now being restored to the body of Christ. I both bind them and loose the power of God to make this possible. Again, this is not done in isolation. Both the one lost and in restoration and I will agree, and that is when God is present and will work.

As a disciplemaker involved in finding, restoring and binding, God will never deny my prayers for strength, guidance, and power in these activities.

Entry 73 - Mt 18:21-35 - Long-haul

I need to remember that for me to have arrived where I am now did not happen overnight. It took a lot of time, patience and perseverance for me and those committed to helping me, to believe that my life would change as I allowed Jesus to work.

Habits are hard to break. Sin is not easy to overcome. Change is hard to make. The proof of this is seen in the world around us in groups like AA. I need support for the long-haul and the knowledge that there is forgiveness and help when I fail.

Even more, is the struggle to deal with the impact of my failure. What I have done has hurt others, and so often they need just as

much time, or more, to recover from the impact of my sin in their life. Sadly, this may not happen, but I must think long-haul and not quick fix.

I tend to want the quick fix, the rapid, easy solution. And I may get it, but may not find the forgiveness of others so easy to obtain.

That is one aspect. I must also remember how many times I've said I was sorry to God, and He has forgiven me. He has been the target of my sin since my birth. In truth, every time I say I am sorry to someone and ask forgiveness, I must do the same with Him. This is amazing. And I thought 70x7 was a large number!

If this is true of me, then it will be true of those I disciple.

Here is the kicker or key. As I disciple, I must keep in mind that I am still in this process of seeking forgiveness. I must not treat them in isolation from this reality. I must apply to them the same patience that God applies to my life.

If I can do this, then I can support them in the process, for however long is necessary. That is the long-haul. At times this will be easy and at other times almost impossible. But it is always easier if done with the help of one who is on the same path, though maybe a bit further along.

As a disciplemaker who understands this, I become the aid they need to deal with addiction, bad habits, grief, conflict, uncontrolled emotions, poor relationships....

Bottom line is, if I don't do this for them then why should I expect others, or God, to do the same for me?

Entry 74 - Mt 19:1-12 - Tricky

While this passage does not seem to give me specific insight into an area of disciplmaking, it does contain a warning.

People will ask difficult questions that will be hard to answer. Why they do this can vary from an honest interest in understanding why, to just wanting to see if they can trick me, trip me up.

I must be ready for this. Being ready does not mean being such a knowledgeable person that I can answer any question. That is not possible. Even computers can be stymied by ethical, moral, and relational questions. I must be ready in the sense that I know the difference between an honest question and one designed to create trouble.

I must also be ready in the sense that I am not afraid to say, “I don’t know.” To be able to say, “Let’s investigate what the Bible may have to say.” Even to say, “I don’t know, but I will think about it and take time to study it.” And finally, to be able to say, “I don’t know, and I have not been able to find an answer.”

Now you open the door for an honest discussion of whatever the issue is. This is important, because honest questions that are tricky usually have a cause and thus a need to be dealt with.

Entry 75 - Mt 19:13-14 - Infants

The parents bring the children to Jesus. This is a happy moment that the disciples almost ruin. Not sure why they thought it was inappropriate for the Master to be surrounded by children, but they objected and were rebuked.

But there are truths here to guide me. Parents know their children need more than they can give. A wise pastor knows he, too, cannot do enough to help all those in need. And yet too often I, we, get in the way and prevent those in need from coming.

Do I know what I am saying? Jesus wanted the children to come, but the leaders didn’t want to allow it, and by this action were saying they had no interest as well. It was like saying the leader is

only to care for the mature. And to enforce this, even those helping the leader got in the way of those in greatest need to have access.

So, do I want the young believers to come, or do I put barriers in their path? Barriers of pride that say, "I am too important and too busy." I need to focus only on those who are mature and can pay attention to what I say.

Is this how I handle the babes in faith? I shuttle them to the side, until I think they are ready and only then let them come to be taught, to be trained. This is too sad. So wrong.

How am I treating those who are babes in faith? Am I, by my attitude, pushing them away from coming to the Master or coming to those who can help them?

Am I like the disciples, who got in the way and also felt they were too important to allow children to take up the time of their Master? Such an incredible error.

Lord, help me to never make this error, so that because of my attitude those who are babes in faith are afraid to come for help or prevented from coming. If I am honest, I am but a child and need exactly what they need, access to those who can help me.

Entry 76 - Mt 19:16-30 - Good

So here are two things to consider: the idea of good in describing what I seek, and the idea of good in describing what I do.

I am good. That is the phrase. I am good, and so I am able to get what I want. I have skills and abilities, and so I am good at what I do, and so on. I am good. This is another phrase. I do what is right, and I don't make mistakes. I have the right focus, and so on.

So here comes a man who calls Jesus "good." That doesn't fit either of the first two definitions. Jesus says no one is good except God. I remember studying this concept as part of another time of

devotion and research. It took me back to creation and a concept I had not considered.

Good is not about my skills and abilities. Good is not a description of whether I do what is right. Good *is* about whether I fulfill what is expected of me as God's creation. God is good, because He does everything according to what it means to be God. Creation was good, because it functioned the way God intended it to. Man was good, until he sinned, because he was and did what God created him to be and do.

This man comes calling Jesus "good," but he is stuck on the first two. He is wealthy, and so he is good at carrying out a specific set of skills that provided him with material goods. This gave the impression that he was good at another level. He was good, and so God blessed.

Jesus challenged the first. He asks the man if he kept the law. The man responds with an affirmative listing of the laws he keeps.

Now is when it gets interesting. Jesus challenges him with his ability to keep the rest of the law, that part which requires a person to put God before everything else. A challenge to be what God created a person to be and to depend on their relationship with God, not on what they do or how they act.

So now it is my turn. How am I doing regarding being good as a disciplemaker?

Do I do it because of the benefits I will receive, the blessing of having people appreciate me and consider me a special person? Do I do it because I know it is the right thing to do? I have been commanded to disciple. Or, do I do it because that is how God created me? When I am discipling others is when I am truly good. It is not about my ability, nor my sense of what is right. It is about being what God created me to be, a being created for relationships.

And that is what disciplmaking is, being in relationship.

Entry 77 Fair Mt 20:1-16

I am not sure I like the idea of one pay scale for everybody. One that is not based on how long a person has worked or served.

I would prefer that I get reimbursed at the end of the day based on the work I actually do. So if I disciple 5 and the other person only 2, then I get a little more. But is that how the kingdom works? Am I missing something?

So I read it again and begin to realize something. There are actually two types of payment happening here. One is the end-of-the-day stuff, the promise of eternal life. That has little to do with what I do or how long I have been a Christian. Everyone is promised this benefit. That is the one denarii or daily wage. And the length of the day has nothing to do with this benefit.

People cannot get a half-day's-worth of salvation or two hours' worth of forgiveness. It is all or nothing.

But there is another wage, and that is the joy of having work to do and knowing that I am in the company of others who are serving. I have the joy of knowing I am being productive and knowing I will have what I need when all is said and done.

So, the sooner I get involved, the longer I will be able to enjoy this blessing. The more opportunities I will have to help others get involved and learn the work to be done. That is a special wage which those who arrive later will not be able to enjoy. But I can either enjoy this benefit, or I can complain and grumble.

As a disciplemaker, am I watching for people to disciple no matter their age or ability? Do I see their need to receive the full blessing involved in being a follower and not just seeking the final wage?

Everyone needs to be trained, and if I am willing to do this, then I will enjoy the work, and it will lighten the burden for all involved.

I need to help them understand the true concept of wages in the kingdom and how it relates to the work being done. I need to see that every day gives another opportunity to draw another person into the process, so we can all rejoice. This means helping them see that the final payment has already been guaranteed, just because they came to work. And that the longer they are involved in the Master's work, the more they will understand the wages being offered above and beyond the final pay.

It also means that no matter where I am on this journey, whether it has been for a lifetime or only a few years, I have the same opportunity. I can have the joy that comes from discipling others.

Entry 78 - Mt 20:17-24 - Status

This topic keeps coming back. What do I hope to gain from serving, from discipling others? Do I hope to gain recognition, to be viewed more highly, or rewarded in some special way? Not to say that I don't enjoy the accolades, the plaques given in honor of my service, and the respect I may receive.

The problem is one of perspective, and I need to keep a few things clear, so that my attitude will not be overcome with pride and my vision filled with a view of me.

1. I tend to think of things as competition – God thinks in terms of competence. This is what He is searching for. It is not about how many, how fast, or any other measure I might use when competing with others. God is looking for how well I do, how concerned I am, how faithful I am in following His Word.
2. I tend to think of winning. As if I had to defeat others. But God is looking for finishers. Those who commit and persevere. I realize Paul said, compete to win the prize, but I think that the prize is not about defeating others. It is about finishing. It is like setting a goal and achieving that

goal and being recognized for that. I may be wrong, but it makes sense.

So this competing and winning is not about defeating others, it is about successfully doing what God has called me to do. I disciple others so that I can see them reach the goal of becoming like Christ, of gaining the knowledge and faith of serving, and being able to do the same for others.

I am both coach and team member. When one wins, we all win. That is the best prize. The best way to define my status.

Entry 79 - Mt 20:29-34 - Sight

The need is so great. So many crying for sight. Even more, so blind they are deaf as well. And they are both in the story. The blind are clearly defined. They know what they need and want. The other group are the ones who are so blind they don't hear the need of others, and are even blind to their own need.

These are the ones who pass them by. The doubly blind.

I could ask, who is the one that is truly blind? But didn't I just answer that? If you know you are blind, then you have more sight and insight than the one who tries to prevent you from accessing the resource that could end your blindness.

Do I clearly understand the image here? Around me are people who know they need help. They know they need to be taught, and they are crying out and expressing their desire. Around them are two groups of people, the ones who see and hear them, and the ones who try to drown out their voice.

Why would they do that? Why would I do such a thing?

Is it because I believe they should figure out how to solve their own problems? Is this how I want to be treated? Is it because I want to take care of me first and so don't want them to get in my way? Is this how I want to be treated?

When I refuse to disciple, I am the one who is truly blind. Even worse, I am deaf and blind. Even worse, I am blocking people from meeting Jesus and growing in their faith.

Entry 80 - Mt 21:1-17 - Expectations

I cannot imagine this scene, and yet here it is.

The King, the Creator of the universe, arrives in a Pinto, not a Rolls Royce (updated version of donkey and horse). The world is laughing; they are belly laughing; they are drop-dead on the ground rolling in laughter. Well, maybe that is a bit extreme. But they are not taking things seriously.

The King, the Creator of the universe, is dressed in everyday work clothes and not a highly fashionable three-piece suit. The world can't see Him, because He is indistinguishable from everyone else. The laughter now becomes derision, filled with ridicule and contempt. Does that sound extreme as well? But how can you take a person seriously who does not dress properly for the occasion?

The King, the Creator of the universe, is from Basehor, not New York City or Paris or some other famous location. He is not from Hollywood. Nobody really knows Him and so the leaders, the important people, are a no-show, and there is no red carpet. As a result, it is the children who take up the chant. It is the people who create a makeshift road of honor out of leaves and common threadbare cloaks. No honor, no respect, no fanfare.

And this is the one I am to serve and teach others to serve.

But while the important people are doing their best to ignore and humiliate this Man, the children get it right. Here is the Son of David, the Messiah, the promised one of God. The children get it right, and it is counter to what every one of those proud, arrogant people expect and want.

So do I get it? I am most important when I am serving God and not the expectations of man. I am most effective as a servant of God while doing the most profound work there is, directing people to the one not bound by people's expectations, but who follows God's plan.

Entry 81 - Mt 21:12-17 - Thief

Den of thieves. The temple of God, a den of thieves. What does this mean? If the house of God can be turned into a den of thieves, then....

What is the warning for me as I disciple? The leaders were to help people come before God but....

This is clearly about focus and how it affects what I do as a disciplinemaker. They are disciples of Jesus, not of me. If in any way this becomes about me, then I am a thief.

If the time together is about fulfilling my emotional needs, then I risk becoming a thief. My needs are important, but to go too far is to steal from another to satisfy myself.

If I turn our time together into a social time with only a small space left for God, I am a thief. While it may have value to socialize, that should not be allowed to dominate and limit our time with God.

If my goal is to have fun and be fulfilled, then I may be a thief. Discipling is about dealing with life, and avoiding such topics, the hard stuff, means I am stealing from them the opportunity to meet God, deal with the difficult parts of their life and to grow. I am not only stealing but stunting their growth. I am a thief, and they may become dependent on me; one who cannot really help them with those issues.

If our time together does not bring us closer to God, then I am not a disciple-maker. I am a thief.

So how am I doing?

Entry 82 - Mt 21:18-22 - Blasted

This is another scary-type passage. It is uncomfortable to think about acting in such a way as to bring destruction. I do not like confrontation. I do not like risking the appearance of failure. I do not like telling it like it is.

And yet, here is Jesus blasting the tree. And He is not subtle or soft or cautious. He looks for evidence of life and growth, and when He doesn't see it, He calls a spade a spade, calls it like it is. There is no beating around the bush, no walking on tiptoes, no walking on glass. He declares His expectation and what is lacking, and then pronounces His judgment.

This is not something I want to do with those I disciple. But I am going to have to learn to distinguish those who are fakes, those who are making a show of doing what is right, those who are using me to advance themselves, and those who don't want to change but want to do something, enough so people will leave them alone.

They are trying to "run a scam" on me, and I need to be able to identify this fact and deal with it correctly, even if that means responding severely.

This is a hard but necessary aspect of discipling. Sometimes I will have to separate the seed from the chaff. O Lord, give me wisdom when there is a need for this action.

Entry 83 - Mt 21:23-27 - Permission

Not everyone will be pleased with my choice to disciple. Many will question if I have permission or am qualified. They will say, "Who is your authority?" And we bow to this convention of being authorized. We license people; we ordain people, and we certify people for the work.

So what is my certification, authorization to do the work of discipling? I can choose from several options.

1. The leaders or structures
2. The call of God to disciple
3. Or a mixture of both

Each is in fact valid. Does that surprise me? It shouldn't. Everyone in the Bible was in one way or another approved for the work they did. The approval may have come early on or later. It may have been easy to obtain or difficult. It all depended on factors that were similar to the following.

- Right life – one who clearly followed God's Word and Jesus.
- Right doctrine – one who clearly knew and could share the Truth of God, the Bible
- Right relationship – one who clearly was known by and knew God

I always need the call or authorization of God for this work. Sometimes I will need the authorization of key people or an organization. That is not wrong. Paul and Barnabas selected leaders to guide the churches they founded.

One thing is behind all of this and if it is not there, then we have no permission. The authorization of God. If people cannot see this, then either I am not clearly serving God, a real possibility, or they are blind to what God is doing, another real possibility. In both cases, I need to make sure that God, not just myself, is guiding me.

And once that is clear, then do the work of discipling in every place God puts me.

[Entry 84 - Mt 21:28-31 - Agreeable](#)

I would prefer to work with people who are agreeable. They would be easy to work with. I tell them what to do, and they do it. They

don't challenge my authority, my methods, or direction. They don't question anything or resist. And best of all, they make me look good to others, at least that is how it looks to me.

Is this a good thing? To look good and to have an easy time of discipling? To have no bumps in the road, no detours, and no interruption?

This may look good on the surface, but if I take time to dig deeper, I may discover all that agreeableness is a coverup. As a result, we never get to the real issues and real growth. Their agreeableness is a smokescreen to hide their lack of commitment, their poor results, and failure to grow. And I let them do it. Why? Because I like agreeable. I don't want to be frustrated and stressed by reality and deep issues, emotional, spiritual, and the like.

It lets me slide by as well. If they don't grow, I am safe because I tried. The problem is the fact that they didn't follow through. I can say I don't know what happened, because I finished the plan, program, or time frame.

If I want real results, then I should be prepared to look for the "pain in the neck." The one who challenges everything. Well, maybe not everything but is at least not afraid to challenge what is being said, taught, and done. This one has questions that are not always easy to answer. This one struggles with what needs to be done, but does it anyway.

If this kind of person makes a commitment, then they give themselves wholeheartedly to doing their best. They are always seeking to know more and to improve. They allow themselves to be stretched and challenged.

Do I want agreeable, or do I want a real person with all their challenges and needs?

If I am honest, I will remember that I was not agreeable and constantly challenged those trying to disciple me. I also realize that if I review the 12 Jesus chose, they were not an agreeable lot

either. They questioned and complained like everyone else. In fact, it would appear that those who truly committed themselves to following Jesus were not agreeable.

I need to learn not to fear them, but to see them as Jesus would see them, as disciples.

Entry 85 - Mt 21:32-46 - Tenants

If I am to be honest, I am one of the tenants in Jesus' parable. I am just as likely to behave like them as not. I too have been given the task of managing the vineyard of God in the form of those I have been asked to disciple. A vineyard, people that God wants me to help become fruitful. And to bear fruit that will honor the One who planted them in the vineyard in the beginning.

Now I have choices to make. And those choices will define what happens when God comes to review my work and to receive what is His.

The problem is, there are so many ways to fail and only one way to succeed.

Failure one – I can sit back and thank my lucky stars at the wonderful position I have been given. I have all I need and can live comfortably. This is a great place to be and even better, people see what I have and are envious. I enjoy the benefits, but I don't do any work. The result is, over time, the wall surrounding the vineyard may look good, because I am good at keeping up appearances. But inside is a disaster, and I am not thinking about what could happen when the owner returns. In my mind, I will figure that out or hope to leave before that happens.

Failure two – I can do just enough work to keep the vineyard in good condition and provide something for the owner. I do this believing that if it looks good, he will be satisfied. That way I can continue to enjoy all the benefits by doing only enough to let me stay. I believe, falsely, that he wouldn't evict me.

Failure three – now that I am here and have the vineyard in my care, then I deserve the credit for whatever I produce. I too easily forget who built the walls and buildings and supplied the tools, from which I benefit. I can see only that without me there would be no profit. So I should get the credit for all that is happening, and maybe I will give the owner something, at least enough to keep him away. He will never know the real profit that I am enjoying.

Failure four – I have worked hard and should be in charge. Yes, he built stuff and planted things, but without me there would be nothing. He left it all in my hands, so why shouldn't I just make it mine? They say ownership is nine-tenths of the law. Or something like that. So, if and when he comes, I will just drive him off. He should never have left.

I see how I can do the same thing with discipleship.

One – enjoy the honor and respect of having people who look to me. As long as they call me teacher, then that is enough, I am content.

Two – enjoy the honor of having a few people thank me for my help. It feels good to have a little attention but not too much.

Three – I deserve all the respect and honor that I receive. I am investing a lot of my time and energy, and so it is only right that I enjoy the blessing of having people available to do what I want to elevate my status.

Four – I have done all the work, and there is no reason for me to give up anything and humbly turn over all the results to him. These are my disciples. I have taught them. They need to provide for my needs.

But...I am just the tenant. I did not plant them (provide for their life: God). I did not provide for their protection and security (provide salvation and membership in God's family: Jesus). I did not provide the rain and nutrients they needed to grow and flourish

(the work of the Holy Spirit). Those were created and stored up for me to use by the master. I did not make the harvest possible. I have no ability to create the miracle of life, all I can do is care for it.

I am the tenant, and God has chosen to trust me with this incredible and wonderful task, to help care for His vineyard, those who seek to be His disciples.

If I am wise, I will understand this and accept my responsibility humbly and do the work to the best of my ability, so that those I disciple will honor and thank Him for all they receive.

Entry 86 - Mt 22:1-14 - Rags

Do I understand that I am the citizen of a royal Kingdom? Do I understand clearly my duties, my role, and my relationship to the King of this Kingdom? Or do I lose sight of that and put my business and plans ahead of His?

To answer this, I need to reflect on my priorities.

Whose business is more important? Whose activities take precedence? Mine or the plans of the King? If mine, then no matter what the King plans, my plans come first.

Whose control and authority is central? Who should I be obeying? Mine or those sent to give me direction? If mine, then I will be surly, even abusive, to those sent to tell me what the king expects of me.

These thoughts suggest something that cannot be, and yet how often do I do just this?

And if I am willing to do and act in such a manner, it means that I think I am special and have the right to ignore the King and His plans. Truthfully, such an attitude can only go from good to bad. No king will tolerate such behavior, and I will be replaced, evicted, and worse banned from the kingdom.

Even those who try to hide their behavior, by at least attending, will fail. An intelligent king knows who is hiding behind false appearances and lies.

The King will call everyone to participate in the banquet, which in this case is the disciplining of others. But He will know which ones to choose to actually participate in the joy of carrying out the work. And I imagine that I will be surprised by the ones who will actually be honored. Those who put fame, power, prestige, and prosperity for themselves first will be omitted. Those who served with little concern for any of that being satisfied will be permitted to serve in any capacity.

Can I think of disciplining as a banquet? A banquet that I cannot enjoy until I actually do the work or come to the place where the work is being done. Helping others is, in fact, a celebration that cannot be experienced unless I come to the place where it is occurring, by helping the one who desires to be a follower.

Now, is my business so important that I can ignore the King's plans? Is taking care of my needs so important that I can refuse to help others and enjoy the blessing that comes with that action? Are my plans so important that I undervalue, no devalue, the King's?

Sadly, there are those who are too proud to listen and come when the King calls. Lord, help me not to be one of them. Sadly, there are those whose world is more important than that of the King, so they exclude the possibility of being with others. If I choose not to come or come but not wear the right clothes (disrespectful), then I should suffer the consequences.

The truth is that anything I have to wear is but rags by comparison.

Help me, Lord, to hear my own thoughts here, to listen to your call and come to the banquet, where I can share with others the joy I know as a member of your Kingdom, of your Family.

Entry 87 - Mt 22:15-22 - Caesar

Another key question to resolve is my understanding of God's rule and man's rule. Are they exclusive of each other? Can I serve God while living in the world and dealing with its rules?

I am concerned about an issue that can and does create problems. It is about the role of man's structures and programs in relation to disciple-making. If man seeks to control and define the process, thereby limiting what God desires, then discipleship creates mannequins or robots at best. People who mimic what they are taught or appear to be what is right but are lifeless within, because everything is based on the programming they are given and not on life from the Spirit.

And this is the problem. Is my goal to duplicate myself or some other pattern? Should I help the person to allow God and His spirit to create in them a unique disciple, who functions independently but within the structures that have been created?

I am aware that we need structures. I am a social being not made for isolation or robotic behavior. I have a unique identity, and if I am not allowed to explore and express this uniqueness, I will find myself trapped in the world of Caesar, unable to know God except in a rote way. Or, I will become isolated in the world of man's interpretation of spiritual life and lose the ability to help others find their way to God and grow in a relationship with God.

This was the problem of the Pharisees. They wanted a robotic world. All things equal and controllable. I live in a real world and must deal constantly with its reality. God does not want robots. He wants people who are unequal/equal, because they are unique but able to be part of all He has created. He also wants them to function in the world and to bring others into that unique reality, called the Kingdom of God.

There is nothing simple about belonging to God and living with Caesar. Disciple-making is about learning to help others live in

this reality. It is about knowing how living with Caesar will provide opportunities to draw others to God.

Will I accept the challenge and help those I disciple to work this out... become robots or become lost in the world? To be in the world, but not of the world?

Entry 88 - Mt 22:23-40 - Rabbit Hole

I will be asked questions by those I disciple. Some questions will be simple, others profound, and others, well, they are questions with no purpose or unprofitable. The challenge is to know which is which, depending on the person asking. The same question from a different person can be a powerful question, but for the other, just a rabbit hole that leads nowhere.

There are questions having no value that simply distract or sidetrack me from the real issues. Sometimes they're asked intentionally, because I am getting too close to a sensitive issue or area. At other times, well, there is no sense for asking it.

In this passage, we have one of those questions. It wasn't important. Really, why worry about this issue? If they all walked with God, they are with God, and whose is whose is irrelevant. Jesus saw that. And the more important issue is knowing what is needed to be sure they themselves get to heaven. In some places I call this nitpicking. Doing something of no value for the sake of nothing. Looking at miniscule nonsense at the cost of losing sight of the bigger picture.

The next question about the greatest commandment brings it all into focus. This is a good question and takes us down a path that will open one's heart to more truth and growth. The first is a dead end.

I have this responsibility to sort through all the questions that will be asked. Some are rabbit holes, will waste my time, and not help the disciple. Some are neutral. They provide knowledge that may

lead to more constructive questions. They may help the person fill in the gaps, so to speak. Then there are those that create incredible opportunities for growth and stretching.

Lord, help me to know the difference and to treat them correctly, even the rabbit holes. A respectful response can save us both from getting lost and provide the basis for helping them decide not to go there in the future.

Entry 89 - Mt 22:41-46 - Moebius

I am back here at the topic of questions. Jesus asked a question that seems to have the answer in it. The best questions actually lead to other questions, which bring you back to the original question and its answer.

This may not make sense. But a good question actually has what is needed in it to open the way for the answer. This is what a Moebius strip is. If you start on one side of the strip and follow it, it will bring you back to the same point on the same side without ever leaving the strip while letting you touch both sides of the strip.

A good question folds back on itself and forces, encourages is a better term, a person to re-look at the point of the question again. The idea is that they already have the answer, because they were able to formulate the question.

My job is not in trying to answer every question but letting their questions be their own teacher. People ask certain questions for a reason, and my task as a good disciple-maker is to help them see this and realize they already have the answer. It just may take some time and patience for them to realize this and then see what they already knew.

It is not my task to answer every question. A more important task is to help them answer their own questions.

Entry 90 - Mt 23:1-12 - Showdown

There are a series of dangers I must face and deal with. The fact is that it is easy to tell someone what to do and not be willing to follow my own instructions. I do not practice what I preach. If I hide that truth, then I am open to the woes Jesus identifies here.

This type of deception is unacceptable. It is not wrong to suggest something I may not be doing, but I must also admit the fact that I am not doing what I am suggesting to them. To not do so is to imply that I am more than I am. This will eventually result in a showdown between who I really am and who I claim to be, and I will lose.

Sadly, they will lose much more, because they will duplicate my lie believing it to be truth and then affect and infect others with my disease.

Entry 91 - Mt 23:13-14 - Woe 1 Cost

I keep raising the stakes and changing the cost to be paid for being my disciple. I make it harder and harder for them, under the false concept that I am helping them to become stronger. I tell myself I am doing this so that I will find the best of the best and continue to up the ante again and again. I say only those who are truly strong should be allowed to be disciples.

But the truth is that I do this just to maintain control. And in doing so, I actually prevent myself from being approved as a true disciple.

Entry 92 - Mt: 23:15 - Woe 2 Hoops

I create so many rules, so many hoops to jump through, that they are guaranteed to fail or be at fault in some way. I am searching

for those who will jump at my command and not question why they need to do what I ask.

They become so well-trained at jumping through the hoops on command, that they become worse than I am at creating more rules and treating everyone in the same way, and worse. Once you start this process, each generation has to add to the hoop-jumping so they will actually feel like they have control. Jumping through someone else's hoops is not the same as having them jump through my hoops.

I need to be so careful here that I truly follow God's Word and not my interpretation of it.

Entry 93 - Mt 23:16-22 - Woe 3 Swear

How do I know if people will do what they promise to do? How do they know I will keep my word?

At this point, I may begin to create formulas to convince people that I am reliable, even when I am not.

I say things like:

- You can trust me, because I am consistent in my attendance at church
- You can trust me, because you see how often I pray
- You can trust me, because of how often I fast
- You can trust me, because of the authors I have studied

I can't use the temple or the altar because they don't exist, but I will create my own version of this and then follow it with phrases like "have I ever failed you?" knowing that I have never made a commitment where I would even risk such a thing as a serious failure.

I do not talk about knowing God, but about knowing how to act and swear by that. In the end, I convince them to trust in me and

even worse begin to trust only in themselves, because this stuff can result in a person thinking they are infallible. A very dangerous path to follow. An image that cannot be maintained, and when failure comes, and it will, the fallout could be the loss of a soul to the enemy.

Entry 94 - Mt 23:23-24 - Woe 4 Spiced

Here is a truth that I must always keep before me. I am not God, and I don't know how everything works nor what everything means.

The danger is that I may begin to spice up my teaching with my own thoughts and ideas.

As I think about this, I discover an interesting concept. Spices have no function if there is no food to spice. They will not bring out flavor if there is nothing to be flavored.

The other side of this is, if something tastes bad, I will add more spice to try and cover the taste. So if my teaching is bad, then I will have to add more to it from my own thoughts, hoping I can cover for the lack of flavor.

But if the teaching is from God, then it will have all the flavor it needs.

This is because without Christ my teaching has no substance and is about something other than Christ. Which means even the good spices of Bible reading, church attendance, prayer, and any good thing we do will in effect be tasteless or even poisonous to the one I disciple in developing the relationship with Christ.

All look good, but without the substance of a relationship with Christ they give no benefit, no flavor to what is being done. So what good is tithing even the spices, if there is nothing given to God that represents my love for Him?

Entry 95 - Mt 23:23-26 - Woe 5 Unclear

I like to think I am honest when I say, “what you see is what you get.” The problem with that is that I don’t really let people see what they are getting. I don’t want to let them see all the messiness behind the curtain. I don’t want them to lift the carpet and see all the dirt hidden below its beauty.

Dishonesty is the *modus operandi* of my life, because too often I cannot back up what I say or act like I can and will make all kinds of protestations if a person should challenge me.

I ask, “don’t you trust me?” so they will be afraid to confront me. Then I will have them trapped, as well, in this shady gray area of dishonesty where nothing is clear.

To be honest means I will risk your turning against me, because I am not everything you need me to be. When in fact that is exactly what both of us need. But instead, we both make sure that everything remains unclear. That allows me to relax and believe I have rescued myself from the danger of being exposed as inadequate.

Unfortunately, I will never truly be able to help the one I disciple to grow and overcome their weakness, and it may result in their being bound even more tightly to a need to be dishonest about themselves.

Entry 96 - Mt 23:27-28 - Tomb

This process of deception and dishonesty is a coverup for the emptiness that lies within. If I am good at the coverup, then I am a great trickster, and as a result I am no longer following God but the great deceiver himself.

It means that what I give you will not help. It is empty of life. The strength I draw from is not God but me, and in the end will drain

those I work with and disciple. This is because, to maintain my strength, I need to steal life from another person.

I no longer go to God, because I no longer yearn to be in His Word and spend time with Him. I am a tomb that is empty of life. What they see may look good, but all it contains is death, emptiness, and futility.

Entry 97 - Mt 23:27-28 - Woe 7 Coverup

And here is where it all ends up. The coverup. The things I will do to impress those I disciple, to make them see something other than me.

I will quote all manner of authors. I do this because I don't know God's Word and am afraid to spend time there, lest I get exposed. It is safer to talk about what others have learned.

I talk about the teachers I have studied under, because I have not studied under the Master Teacher, Jesus. This is all about hiding my weakness and failure. I use my knowledge of others to cover up myself and appear to look as good as they do.

Yet it is false. Honestly, I am just hiding. In the end, I become the source of ruining truth for those I disciple. I will even begin to ruin, alter the truth to protect my coverup, and so I destroy rather than help my disciple.

This has been a hard series of entries. I do not enjoy thinking about how I can be the source of such damage to others. And yet, if I am not careful, I can fall into any of these traps. And if I think that by avoiding discipling others, I can avoid harming them, that too is false.

I can do the same damage from afar or remotely. They are still watching me, which means I can do the same things and so create the same damage.

The best option is to become brutally honest with myself. Jesus, help me face the truth. It is only by doing this that I will realize how much I need those I disciple. They will help me stay humble and honest, and in that process, I will be able to do the same for them.

Entry 98 - Mt 24:1-31 - Endgame

What am I preparing those I disciple to face? What will they need to help them respond to the challenges and inevitable changes? Change is inevitable and can be so painful. So often when a person changes to follow Christ, the response can be hard to handle.

And to face this I will have to help them see what is permanent and reliable. God's truth and not man's structures. I will need to help them deal with the pain and struggle involved. To see that God can deal with it and will bring peace.

Difficult times lie ahead. It is a fact of life which cannot be avoided. And becoming a follower of Christ will add other kinds of difficulty to life.

I must prepare them for what lies ahead. They need to be able to look beyond the present moment, to not be deceived and lost to what the world offers, which will not last.

My job is to prepare survivors. Not the kind who manages to escape. Who by a twist of fate or luck happen to be in the right place and escape unscathed. But the kind who, by their choice, are in harm's way and have the skills to survive what happens.

I also need to help them look beyond saving their body. It may escape disaster for a while, but in the end it will die. This is about the survival of their soul and their relationship with God. It survives not just barely but with vibrancy.

The angels are coming to find the survivors and carry them home. Those whose relationship with God allows them to stand firm and tall for all to see. It is my job to help them become more than conquerors in Jesus.

Entry 99 - Mt 23:30-44 - Orienteering

Do I know what I am doing? Do I know what is going to happen? Can I reveal the unknown? The answer is no to all of these. Life is filled with the unknown, and what is known is constantly shifting so that I know so little. It is easy for me and others to get lost and confused.

Can I read a map? This used to be an important skill. Now it is replaced by apps that show you the way just by adding the address and then it tells you what to do. Unfortunately, the map of life is not so helpful. In fact, just when you think you know how to get to where you are headed something changes. But as long as you know how to read the map, you can find your way.

That is what discipleship is all about. It is about teaching people the skills to read the map of life and see where God is leading them.

Poor map reading can get me lost and result in unnecessary delay. A good map reader can help those they are leading to avoid this.

That is my work, to teach those I disciple how to read God's map, His Word. So they will arrive where He wants them on time, without delay.

Entry 100 - Mt 24:45-51 - Vigilance

I have been placed in charge, and I have work to do. One day my Master will return. What will He find when he does?

Being in charge means that I know what resources are available and I know how to manage them, so they are not wasted, misused, or lost in some way. It also means that those who need access to those resources get what they need, when it is needed. It also means that I know how to keep those resources secure and in a good state, inaccessible to a thief.

But all this means I will need to be vigilant. Someday the One who put me in charge will return.

And what will He find?

Hopefully, He will find evidence of vigilance and wise use of the resources entrusted to me. I pray that I am not careless and abuse what I have been given or place it at risk of being stolen. This is a lot of responsibility. Will I accept it willingly and honor the One who asks me to be a steward of His house and care for those who are part of His family?

To do so means I need to be vigilant.

[Entry 101 - Mt 25:1-13 - Lamp Oil](#)

I am learning something more about the impact of my work. I am like lamp oil and the lamp it is put into. I am both a light they can see and a source of the fuel for lighting the lamp.

So if that is true, they are also lamps and need oil so they can shine. Even more important is that they have enough light to shine as long as necessary. Enough oil to deal with all that happens in their life.

I can do this, not because I have so much oil, but because I have access to an unlimited supply of oil. I know the Supplier and He has promised me that He will replace anything I use or share with others.

Discipling is just that, drawing from the Supplier of Life and His word and supplying it to others. If I do a poor job, then I will teach those I disciple to be careless and believe they don't need to have plenty of oil. That means not spending enough time with God and in His Word so they will have what they need.

Even if I do a good job, those I teach may not take the instruction seriously and work on storing up what they have learned, so they can face any challenge that comes.

So I have two groups. One who has planned well and is well supplied. Another who is careless and has a limited supply. When the challenges come, the one is ready, the other is not. The one gets to enjoy the benefits of being prepared, the other must go find a way to make up for what they failed to do.

I cannot make them learn, but I must make sure they have access to all that needs to be learned.

Entry 102 - Mt 25:14-30 - Invest

I can see how this story can be misunderstood by focusing on how much each person was given. I can get caught in this trap of evaluating my work based on the wrong criteria. I can become focused on how much I get and not what I am supposed to do with what I get.

In the end it is not how much I am given or how many I am to disciple, but how well I do my job of discipling. Having five looks good, having two does as well. But having only one looks like I am undervalued.

Stop and think about this. Having lots of people may mean I cannot do my best for all of them. I may only be able to help them duplicate. But if I have one and do well, that one may out-produce them all. This is often the reality.

So what is my focus, quantity or quality? Man often judges by the first, but according to this passage, God is concerned with the latter. It is about how well I invest what I have been given. I am called to invest what God has given me, myself, in those God brings to me. That is the task, nothing more and nothing less.

I need to be very careful of wanting more than I can handle and of not doing my best with what I have been given.

Entry 103 - Mt 25:31-46 - Surprise

I am human, and I feel the need to be recognized by those whom I think are the greatest and wisest. I seek contact with them and feel like they are the ones I should serve. I should help them, because they can do so much.

The truth is, they are often so busy they don't have time for the hidden and unseen people outside of their range of view. I think helping them has such incredible value. I think being on their team and part of their world will make it possible for me to shine and make a difference...

And then...

I get to the sheep and goats, and my world is shattered. It is not the great ones who are honored. The ones who can only function because they need others to serve them, and they have no time to serve others. They spend so much time in the limelight that they never find their way to the true Light.

What I think of as great becomes nothing, when it excludes the least. Those who need a cup of water, a piece of clothing, and someone just to take notice and listen to them. And I am learning that this attitude is the real foundation of disciple-making, my giving what I have to the one who does not have.

The great ones do not need me. They already have enough. Too often they are not grateful for what they have and what is being given to them. They don't know what they need. And often don't know what they should be giving.

Let me be the least, so I can see those in need. Let me be dependent, so I can give what I have to the one in need. Let me not be concerned about who sees, but about the smile of thanks on the face of one I am able to help. Let me make this the basis of my disciple-making.

Entry 104 - Mt 26:1-13 - Extravagant

Just how extravagant am I with my gifts?

It is clear that to be a disciple-maker involves making sacrifices. But do I know how to be extravagant in my sacrifice? Do I even know if I have anything that, if I gave it, would actually be seen as an extravagant action on my part?

I am beginning to understand two things. When I am extravagant in my giving, it prepares me for a different level of activity. It also prepares those who receive in a unique way that I may not see or understand.

The truth is that it may take years for me to realize what, of all I may have given, is seen as an extravagant act of giving. And that is the key to extravagant giving. It is not how I perceive it, but how it impacts others. Which means it is not about what was given or sacrificed, but the why behind the act.

True disciple-making is built on this kind of giving. Giving that is given now but will have an eternal impact in the lives of others. Giving that comes not out of the concept of “I am making a sacrifice,” but out of a true and deep understanding of the need. That means anything given in this manner can become extravagant.

It is not for me to decide what this is. I am simply to give freely and sacrificially out of love. Those who receive will decide how extravagant it is.

Entry 105 - Mt 26:14-25 - Savvy

Usually when I think of this passage, all I can see is the idea of betrayal. And I must admit it is a clear issue and is a significant part of what transpires.

But today I am seeing something else. I see the idea of savvy. These things did not blind-side Jesus. He knew the person; he had

watched the person and seen what was happening. He knew what was going on in the mind of Judas. And with that knowledge, I am sure he had conversations with Judas and included teaching that would potentially help Judas. Sadly, that didn't happen, but it still doesn't change the savvy nature of Jesus and his ability to know what was happening.

As a disciple-maker, I must learn to pay attention and learn to hear the backstory of those I disciple. I need to gain insight into what motivates them. This is especially important when the motivation may be skewed or self-centered.

I need to do this without the goal of evicting those with wrong motives or being harsh with them. I might do this to protect myself from being criticized by others for choosing the wrong person, or to avoid being seen as a pushover or mollycoddling the person.

As I consider this further, I begin to realize that Jesus knew the inner thoughts of those He met and especially of the ones closest to Him. His choice of teaching, His directness in dealing with issues, and His tenderness in helping them see their faults reveals this fact. He was savvy; He knew what was going on and knew how to deal with those issues.

So two things are important for me to realize if I am going to develop this savviness in my life. The first is being savvy about myself. I, like many others, hide the real me and become flabbergasted when it comes out and is visible to others. I need to stop this and know myself and how to deal with me. Second, I need to be savvy in creating the space to know those I am responsible for. This is important if I really want them to grow and deal with their hidden self as well.

I must learn to be savvy.

[Entry 106 – Mt 26:26-30 - Click](#)

I love when this happens. When everyone is on the same page. When everyone is connecting. When everyone understands and

then *Click*. The lights go on and the eyes open in wonder and joy as they connect with some truth about God and their life.

This does not happen if I lecture them and give them study sheets. It is not about their listening to me and repeating, regurgitating, what I have said. It happens as we explore what something means, and they wrestle with applying it to their life. I am a catalyst and not an agent. I am there to allow it to happen. It is my task to help create the environment, help them see the barriers, and remove them so that *Click*, the lights go on, and what was dim and dark becomes bright and clear.

I cannot predict when this will happen nor how often it may happen. I cannot make it happen or even provide what is needed. What I can do is open the door and smooth the way. This is my task, because the goal is not to connect with me, but with the Lord. I am the catalyst searching for the right combination of information, experience, and growth for the *Click*.

Entry 107 - Mt 26:31-35 - Brash

And then there is the flip side of click, and that is brash. It happens almost all the time. The person being disciplined is making progress and then boldly decides they have learned enough and no longer need help in growing. As a result, they try to do more than they are capable of and get into trouble.

It can start with a word like, “I can handle it,” or “I would never make that mistake,” or “you can trust me, I won’t fail.” And they can’t handle it, they do make the mistake, and they do fail.

Before I respond, I need to take a step back and remember when I did the same thing and how the people around me responded, especially those who loved me, and the Lord. Those who understood continued to love me, they continued to be encouraging, their words were words of understanding and remembering their own brashness. And the Lord, well, to

remember the firmness of the correction and the love with which it was given.

So I have choices to make when this happens, and they are all correct when applied appropriately to each situation and each individual. There are times when I may need to:

- Correct them and let them fail
- Warn them and let them fail
- Protect them and let them fail

Seems somehow wrong, yet it is right. I must learn I cannot control them, but I can soften the fall and hasten the recovery. Done correctly, they will listen better the next time and be less brash in their words and actions.

The danger is in shaming them. They are already embarrassed, and I must be careful of being overly critical or withholding forgiveness and restoration.

I was brash once and need to let this guide me in helping them deal with the fallout of brash words and actions.

Entry 108 - Mt 26:36-46 - Vulnerable

I wonder what it was like to hear Jesus say that He was struggling and overwhelmed by sorrow? And then He asked them to spend some time in prayer with Him. I wonder what it was like for the few who heard His prayer and the anguish in it? Would I have stayed awake and listened? Someone did, and so I can hear the word recorded here and also in John. Or would I have been like many of the others who fell asleep?

That is an interesting question, but not as important as whether I would be willing to be vulnerable, as Jesus was in this moment, and share my own struggles and weaknesses with those I am discipling. Will I allow them to hear my struggles? Will I let them

into my world? Or do I think I need to create an appearance of strength and victory?

Will they see and hear me crying to God for strength and understanding, when I am confused and uncertain about what lies ahead? Will they see that I go to God for help in discipling them and don't just trust in myself?

Do I ask them to pray for and with me? Do they know that I am praying for them and paying attention to what is happening in their world? Do they know by the content of my prayers that I really care about them and their relationship with God?

Vulnerability is such a risky position to allow yourself to be in, but it is so powerful. It allows the barriers and guards to come down and to reveal real people with real struggles, who have learned to go before God for the answers and directions needed for each day.

And do I see the obvious truth here? God desires it. He wants us to be vulnerable because that is when he can do his best work in and through us.

Entry 109 - Mt 26:47-57 - Sword

As people grow in their relationship with Jesus and their decision to be a follower becomes more obvious to those around them, they may face some strong emotions from family and friends. They may find themselves faced with anger and fear. They may deal with rejection and misunderstanding. This is not unusual, and I need to prepare them for this possibility.

To be honest, when a person chooses to commit their life to God, it will make others uncomfortable. It can be as mild as a comment like "well if that is what you want fine, but leave me alone." To as serious as what happens in Muslim countries where such a choice could result in physical attack, banishment, and even death, because of the shame the family may feel when a member makes such a choice.

And in the same way, I can either lash out and attack them for shutting me out or rejecting my choice and disrespecting me. Or I can simply run away and avoid any contact with them. Those are the extreme reactions, but any form of criticism, belittling, avoidance, and exclusion of those who react this way will have that effect. It will appear as an attack on them or a judgement of them, which usually suggests I don't want them in my life either.

I have power to deal with these things. I can identify what is happening and react to how others are treating them and how they are responding. I have the power, or the sword, and can go on the attack or provide a defense.

Wait, can I really do this? Do I have a sword big enough to provide 24/7 protection? Do I have the authority to tell them what to do, as if I were a powerful dictator and had absolute control?

Maybe I do in a way, but that will not resolve the issue, nor will it help the one I disciple to face what is happening and do what needs to be done. I cannot give answers to keep them in line or in tow, believing that if I do so that will solve the issue. It will not.

They will have to face it and deal with it. It will be painful. It will be hard to control one's responses. So hard.

What I must realize is that there is no simple solution, but I must not run away and hide from them either. I imagine Jesus felt pretty lonely when, after such a brave and insane action as that of Peter with the sword in an attempt to protect Him, and then they all chose the next option and ran away. They abandoned Jesus.

Lord, help me not to be unwise in my response. I cannot defend or protect them. I may be able to provide some level of shielding and that may give them time to process what is happening and not run away or hate those who have attacked and threatened them. Also help me not to abandon them in their hour of trial. Help them know I am there like You are there, ready to hold them, cry with them, and help them find the peace you promise that overcomes all hate and fear. Help to lead them to You and Your strength that is

sufficient for everything that happens and is able to deal with any threat and fear.

Entry 110 - Mt 26:58-75 - Pressure

I so badly want to belong. I so badly want to avoid being excluded and even attacked by the group. I want this so badly that I am willing to succumb to the pressure to deny who I am, to avoid being cast out and attacked.

I am no different from the ones I disciple. I want to belong, and I want to belong to groups that include my peers. As a result, there is a lot of pressure to deny who I am, what I believe, and what I prefer in order to belong. As a result, I lie to protect my position and to make sure I am allowed to remain and accepted by those who are in the group. I do this because I know I am not like them; I see this, and they see it too. So they challenge me to make sure I understand what is acceptable and what is not, which means I have to hide me.

I will be honest. I don't like admitting this.

But if I don't, then I will not be able to help the one I am discipling, and they will fall to the pressures of being acceptable to me and acceptable to their friends and family or those who are not seeking to be followers of Jesus. Whoever the group is that they do not want to be excluded from.

I need to be alert to the signs that this is happening. And the answer is not as simple as saying you are part of my group. That may be true, but that does not deal with the pressure to belong to the groups they want to belong to. And if I press too hard, the need to let go, then I am doing the same thing... creating pressure to conform in order to be part of my group, and so we are back to lying.

I may think that it can be avoided. I will simply provide a place that is safe and without pressure. But that is flawed thinking. If I

am truly doing my work properly, a time will come when the person I disciple will be caught between the two worlds of where they have been and where they are going, and they will feel the pressure to conform to one of them. The struggle then comes, because they are no longer like the world of their past as they move closer to God.

I cannot hide this, and I need to help them see it and know how to deal with it. They need to learn how to deal with the pressure to conform. Paul put it so well...how to be **in** the world, but not **of** the world. But I will also need to review my own life to be sure I am not caught in this same dilemma and unable to help them. To avoid becoming a hypocrite by telling them to do something that I am not doing myself.

Entry 111 - Mt 27:1-10 - Set-up

It seems like I have been dealing with critical issues that I must understand and reflect on. Things I must resolve in my life and be honest about how I am doing, if I am to disciple another person. Alongside of that, I must be careful, lest I deceive myself and find myself using another person to satisfy my needs and wants.

This is what happened to Judas. At least some of what happened. And I am trying to be generous in my assessment. If I think that Judas was acting on impulse and selfishly, then he might not have seen the possible and most likely consequences of his actions. He might not have seen clearly the motives of the priests and leaders. He might have only thought that he would get what he wanted.

This is a danger in discipling others. The person being disciplined may think they will get more than I actually give, and when they express that, then I get upset and say it is not my problem. I am doing my job and am happy with what I am doing.

It is a set-up. The leaders did not tell Judas the real plan. And when he found out, his attempt to say it was wrong was rejected.

His chagrin was so significant that he threw the money back at them in the temple. But even that act of desperation did not get the results he hoped for. They simply ignored him and said it was not their concern that he had done such a horrible act. They had what they wanted. And so Judas went and hanged himself.

Here is the point. I disciple others to get what I want. I know this, but I don't tell them. If they figure it out, that is not my problem. If they threaten me or try to throw it back in my face, it has no effect. I am the leader and my position is secure. I disciple others for my benefit.

I now realize I have touched on this topic before. But there are several levels to consider. This is the worst. I set the person up knowing why I am using them and that I will cast them off when it suits me and I have gained what I want.

They don't come to me like Judas, intent on betraying someone or getting something they want, but maybe they do. Doesn't matter. They lose twice over, since their motives were wrong as well. I see that and let it happen, knowing in the end they will do nothing, because they are as wrong as I am.

This is not a pleasant line of thought. And yet, how often does it happen? How close do I come to being like this in what I do? And how often am I willing to sacrifice them to protect myself; instead of seeing myself, seeing them, and doing something about it?

If I am not careful and in submission to the Lord....

Entry 112 - Mt 27:11-20 - Appease

This is another dangerous word and a path that, if followed, will cause ruin in the life of the one I disciple and those who have contact with that person.

There is so much of this happening in this story. Pilate appeases the leaders. He gives them Barabbas and whips Jesus. Pilate

appeases the crowd and orders the crucifixion of Jesus. The crowd appeases the leaders, because that is what they want, to have Jesus dead and out of the way.

I can do the same. I can make the discipleship process easy. Here are the five steps, 8 studies, or 6 weeks of reflection. Just bring your lessons in, and I will review them. I fulfill my role by doing just enough to appease their desire to be disciplined.

I present my plan, they agree. I lead them step by step from beginning to end, they submit. I say they have finished, they are appeased. They have what they want, a certificate of completion, and I have made another disciple, fulfilling my role and responsibility.

No muss, no fuss, but what has been produced will not pass muster nor the tests of time and reality.

Real discipling is not about appeasing anyone. It is about pleasing God. That does not happen in five steps or eight lessons. That only happens with blood, sweat, and tears, which lead to joy anchored in God. It only happens by living and learning in and amongst the messiness of life.

I need to be alert that what I do as a discipler is not about appeasing anyone. That it is not about letting anyone other than God set the guidelines and steps required for each person as they become disciples of the king.

Entry 113 - Mt 27:21-31- Crime

What set the stage for what is happening? It was my crime that was a source, the source behind all that had to happen on this day in time.

It doesn't matter that my contribution came after the fact. It is the reality that my crime existed in time for all to see. It was my crime that made it necessary for Jesus to be in this place and to die for

me. And that same action and crime is the basis for my being a valid source of help for others as they come to realize the crime and their part in the cost involved and what was done to deal with it.

Without an admission of my crime, I cannot hope to be restored. Without facing my crime and calling it what it is, I will never be able to help another do the same. Without my confession, and the forgiveness that is made possible for my crime, I cannot be a tool that God can use to help others.

That person is guilty like me. They need to know what God can do to deal with the guilt and its debt, and that is what discipling is.

So, do I further add to the guilt of the person by rejecting them as not being worthy of my time to be discipled? And thus add to my crime.

The crime of not being in fellowship with God and then reflecting God to others.

Entry 114 - Mt 27:32-53 - Breakthrough

I see here a number of issues that at some point will have to be dealt with, when involved in discipling others. I am amazed at how much information is packed into this one event, and how much I am still learning as I continue to read and reread.

These deal with how I and others react as we enter into the process of discipleship. Some of what happened identifies key issues that unsettle me and will unsettle them or maybe have already impacted their new life and so must be touched on. And how that is done must be done with care so as not to plunge them deeper into a hole of despair and isolation or triggering a flight response, and they want to run away instead of facing what is before them.

I will need to remember how I responded, as well, and where I am at in the process of facing them in my own growth.

So here are some of the issues that I see, as I read this passage.

1. Gall – they offered Jesus a drink. A drink designed to dull one’s senses and ease the pain. I along with everyone else seek relief from the pain and struggle of life. It is tempting to find something that allows us to avoid and escape the reality of one’s life. Jesus refused this. He knew he needed to be alert to deal with all that was about to happen. Do I have something that is like gall in my life, that I use to avoid facing the pain of my life? If I do and don’t deal with it, how can I help those I disciple to see what they use to avoid what lies before them?
2. Lots – they cast lots for Jesus’ clothes. I want what others have, and all too often I will take shortcuts to get there, even if will be at the expense of others. I need to avoid searching for shortcuts, because in real growth there are none. It is not possible to use someone else’s life and experience as a quick way to a solution. It may help as a guide, but I and they have to “pay the piper” so to speak, if I want to grow and help them grow in a healthy way.
3. Insults – I don’t like to hear the truth about myself. I will use sarcasm, misdirection, and even insults to keep people from speaking truth and to be sure I don’t hear it. I also need to be very careful in not doing the same to those I am discipling. They don’t deserve my sarcasm, insults, and falseness any more than I do. And I need to be ready to deal with those same things in their life as we touch on the truth they are trying to hide.
4. Derision – This is what happens when I fail, and I expect perfection from those I believe in and they fail. I mock them, belittle them in order to cover over my failure. To make mine look somehow less significant and less serious. I will also do this to those who don’t meet my expectations. I need to be watchful of how my words of

evaluation, criticism, and encouragement may sound. If I am not careful, they could sound like derision and destroy any faith and hope that has been growing in their life.

5. Death – this sums up all of the rest. I, and pretty much everyone else, do whatever we can to avoid death. And this is not just about physical death. It can be the death to my past, which I treat as essential to my present. It can be death to the expectations of others, which is what I use to define myself and my value. And of course the fear of death and what happens next. Only a dishonest person denies they have any fear of death. I know I do, because I don't know what is on the other side of that moment. And that is what I fear in any form of death I may face. I don't know what happens next. I need to understand this, as I help those in my care to face this reality by taking the steps of faith needed to pass through to the other side and to learn that God is on both sides, and in between!
6. Freedom – I need to be freed from all of the above. That is what I need and what I need to help those I disciple find.

This is what discipleship helps us face and gain. This is what I want and what I want to have others receive as well.

Entry 115 - Mt 27:55 - Truth

An earthquake and terror. It is an incredible moment. And then there is light. The executioner realizes that this was no ordinary man. He declares for all to hear, “surely he was the Son of God.”

This is the defining purpose of discipleship: that each person, no matter what is happening in their world, no matter what is terrifying or tormenting them, will come to this moment and be able to declare it loud enough, so they and those around them can hear the truth. That they will see beyond all that is happening and realize that the one they seek to follow is The Son of God.

I cannot make this happen. Nobody can make this happen. I can help set the stage for it to happen, but in the end, they are the ones who must see it for themselves. They have to choose to let God reveal Himself and then open their eyes to see. They have to commit to having their hearts and eyes opened to Truth.

But I must make sure I don't get in the way of having this happen by trying to control or create this event.

Entry 116 - Mt 27:55-65 - Catharsis

There have been a lot of emotions on this day. Hate, anger, fear, dismay, anguish, and on the list goes. All of them negative and strong, oh so strong. If there is no release, then even the strong will break.

Now come the attempts at catharsis, the attempts to release some of those emotions.

1. A couple of men obtain permission to care for the body. No time for a funeral, just a burial. But they do so to deal with all the emotions and failure they had experienced. They decide that at least in death they will finally admit what they have hidden in order to release all that has built up in their efforts to be secret followers.
2. The women weep. They release all the loss they are experiencing in this outpouring, this declaration that they are in pain for what has been taken from them. They are also prepared to risk harm to return and care for the body.
3. Seal it away. This is the response of the leaders. This is how they decide to face what they have done. Place a guard on it, and make sure no one can do anything to add to the pain and burden they already bear.

As a human being I have these two options, find a release for those emotions or attempt to seal them away. The first will allow me to

deal with my loss and failure. The latter will bring harm to me and others.

Have I done either of these? Honestly, yes. And I know the benefit of properly releasing emotions and also the danger of trying to seal them away. The one takes me through the pain and makes it possible to live again. The other will slowly kill my life and poison others.

I am tasked with helping those I disciple to find ways to deal with their pain, their sin, and their loss in ways that will bring restoration. Maybe not in the moment, but will open the way to its happening at the right time and in the right way.

Entry 117 - Mt 28:1-10 - Encounter

They went to the garden but did not expect to see Jesus.

The soldiers went, and the experience paralyzed them with fear. They had no plan, no desire to meet God on this day. In fact, they had no belief in even the possibility of it happening. Further, they had no relationship, no foundation with which to guide them when it did happen. As a result, they were paralyzed with fear and then fled in fear of their lives.

The ladies went, and the experience created fear, but not a paralyzing fear. Instead, it was liberating. It brought them joy, and they rushed back to tell the others. They were paralyzed, but it resulted from awe before God. They too ran away, but in joy, so they could tell others.

I need to go to the garden with the desire to see Jesus. With a desire to know joy. With an understanding that God has been waiting for me to come so He could meet me.

Do those I disciple see that I have been to the garden and have met Jesus? Do they know that I have heard His voice? Do they sense from me that they too can come to the garden and that they don't

have to be afraid like the soldiers? That they can experience the same awe of the ladies?

Oh Lord, help me lead them to the garden. Help me prepare them to encounter You. Help me to open their eyes so they can enjoy the wonder and be able to share it with others.

Entry 118 - Mt 28:11-15 - Bold

Everything in me tells me to hide away, not to tell others, to do something to protect who I am and what I want in life.

This was the focus of the chief priests and elders. They wanted the truth hidden away and were willing to bribe others in order to keep the events secret. That is amazing. The very proof they asked for had just been given to them, and they chose to hide. Why? Because that is how man is.

Let me be honest. I am no different. When something happens to prove me wrong or reveals my sin, that is just what I want to do, hide, and bribe/threaten others so they will help me hide.

Think about this. Without the help of the priests and leaders, the soldiers would have been executed, because of what their officers would call dereliction of duty. They failed to prevent the removal of the body, a failure punishable by execution. So they were more than happy to accept a bribe, if it meant escaping execution.

The leaders were more than willing to pay the bribe in order to hide their failure to listen to the Messiah. To admit this meant the loss of everything, in their minds.

I am guilty of this as well. But in the midst of this, there were those who were bold, the women. They went and told the disciples. And they probably began to spread the word to others, even before the disciples met Jesus themselves.

So will I be bold, or will I hide? Will I be bold in declaring my relationship to the risen Lord to those I disciple? Or will I allow

myself to be bribed, so that I can escape the ridicule and attacks of those who do not believe?

If I hide, I will not be a disciple-maker. Being a disciple-maker is an impossibility when one is hiding their relationship with Christ from others. And further, if I continue to claim I am a follower, then I am lying to myself and everyone else.

If I am bold, then I must accept the fact that I cannot avoid that being a disciple-maker is simply part of, or grows out of, being bold about my relationship with Christ. I can do no less.

Entry 119 - Mt 28:16-20 - Authorized

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

I have been authorized to go and make disciples.

Entry 120 - Full Circle

I am called to be a disciple-maker. I have the blessing to be part of a long line of disciple-makers. Matthew started with the genealogy of Jesus, so I would understand the importance of genealogy. I am here because I have a genealogy. Generation after generation of believers have discipled others, until one came who discipled me. Each one helped produce the next generation of followers of Jesus.

Now it is my turn to help raise up the next generation of followers of Jesus, those who teach the next generation everything that Jesus has taught us, the gospel of Jesus.