

Radical Discipleship

The Adventure of Change

Martin Dunkley



Salt & Light Ministries

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Introduction

Church and Christianity had never been a part of our family life. I'd had to attend harvest festival with the school, but those visits only ever confirmed what I'd thought and had been told – church was boring, irrelevant and primarily for older ladies in hats. I'd had to study Religious Education up to O-level, which back in the mid-70s was entirely Christianity-based. I managed to get a grade A, which might suggest a glimmer of interest in the subject – but absolutely not! It simply reflected a driving ambition to be the best at every challenge presented to me.

My childhood was happy and content. My teenage years saw me successful academically, popular socially, and pushing with calculated precision every boundary I could. I always had a taste for risk and adventure, and it showed. From the age of 16 I pushed the boundaries with alcohol, drugs, relationships, and the law. My most risky event was the 4.2 litre Jaguar belonging to my dad's friend and taking it from London to Portsmouth and back within the day. I was 16 at the time. I had an extremely aggressive side to my character, with an uncontrollable temper. I was at times aggressive both at home and outside and prided myself in never backing down from a confrontation. One memorable night I walked into my home in the early hours of the morning covered in blood from yet another fight only to receive, without any

conversation between us, a further beating from my father, which he later told me was based on his assumption that I had started the fight (and in this particular case, I hadn't!).

As I look back on those days, I think two things. First, how disappointed I would be if my children or grandchildren did the things I did during those years. Second, if God hadn't intervened in my life, where would I be now? Many things were simply a reflection of immaturity and a lack of consequential thinking as a teenager, much of which I would have simply grown out of. But other aspects of my character were far more ominous, carrying the potential to damage the future, both for myself and others around me.

In 1979 at the age of 18 I left London and moved to Manchester to study medicine. This was an opportunity to spread my wings even further, which is exactly what I did. I worked hard and partied hard. Life was good and it was an adventure.

In the second year of university I moved into a house with 4 other students – 3 medics and a chemist. Unfortunately for me, the chemist was a Christian. I didn't tolerate Christians very well, and never had done. They made me feel uncomfortable with my lifestyle, and my response to that was always to make life difficult for them – which is exactly what I did to Graham Blower. In the first two or three months of living together I made it my mission to make life so difficult for him that he would be forced to move out and leave us 'normal people' to get on with life and with partying. I made him the butt of every joke, tried to turn everyone in the house against him and his faith, and even turned the kids in the street

against him, supplying them with water bombs to soak him as he came back down the street.

Life in the house got so difficult for Graham that he decided to move out. However before doing so, he visited his home church, Sutton Coldfield Baptist. He explained to his pastor that he needed to move out and get away from this 'Martin' if his faith was going to survive. The pastor advised him, "Don't move out. God's got you there for a reason; he wants you to be there as salt and light." The promise to Graham as he came back was, "We'll pray this Martin becomes a Christian."

Two weeks after he returned, I asked him if I could visit church with him on Sunday morning. Was this a sudden change of mind on my part? It was not so much a change of mind as a surfacing of the realities that had been going on behind the scenes for many months prior to this point, realities I had made sure no-one around me would spot – especially Graham Blower.

The behind-the-scenes reality was that I wasn't as content and fulfilled as I appeared. There were two nagging issues that constantly bothered me. The first was that I couldn't really believe that everything around us was there simply by chance, simply an 'accident'. I couldn't believe what I was being taught at medical school that our lives could be entirely explained chemically, simply as a group of chemicals (mostly water) that had somehow found their way together. For me life could not be accounted for simply in chemical terms. The second issue was that I didn't like the person I was, I didn't like the things I did, and in particular I didn't like the selfishness that seemed to permeate so many decisions I made and so many actions I took.

On a Sunday morning in early November 1980 I went with Graham to Sale Baptist Church in Manchester (later to become South Manchester Christian Fellowship and more recently Life Church Manchester). The minister at the time was the Reverend Mike Beaumont. The church was full of people who, like Graham, carried a quality of life that I had never come across before. Within a short space of time I was challenged by Mike about whether I wanted a personal relationship with God and encouraged to ask God to show himself to me.

On November 23rd 1980 at 1.30am I prayed, for the first time in my life, that if God was there he would show himself to me. I also made a commitment that if he was there, I would give the whole of my life over in service to him. An hour later I had a most remarkable, supernatural and intimate encounter with God that changed my life forever. It left me in no doubt that God was there, that he was my Father, and that Christ was my brother. It was an encounter that turned everything around 180 degrees and put service of him at the centre of every aspect of my life, including my desires and aspirations, my career and my finances, my time and my family. Several weeks later I was baptised in the Holy Spirit and in water and so my journey began.

In December at the end of term I had to go home to London. This was a challenge in terms of explaining things to my family. It was also a challenge in so far as I knew no Christians in my home area. In the provision of God, Mike Beaumont had shared a room at London Bible College (now London School of Theology) with a pastor called Dave Holden who was leading a church in my home area linked with Terry Virgo and his network. I

remember vividly the first day we met at my house because my younger brother came out through the door covered in blood as Dave came in. He'd been hit over the head with a brick from my middle brother. Dave raised an eyebrow as he came in as if he was doing a quick health and safety assessment on the situation and the risks of coming in. As I told Dave the story of what God had begun in my life he said something to me that I have never forgotten because it proved as true as anything I have ever heard in my life. He said, "You are just about to begin the most exciting adventure that it's possible for anyone in life to go on."

So what was that adventure? What was the most exciting thing it's possible to go on in life?

Nearly 30 years later I can say with resounding enthusiasm, passion, and conviction that the adventure is in *discipleship*. It's in obedience to Christ, and in following Christ. It's in following him into the ministry, into the harvest, and into the supernatural. It's in growing in his love for the church and for the lost. It's in having our character shaped so we look more like him. It's in being his ambassadors, his representatives. It's in carrying his treasure in these earthen vessels. That's what it means to be a disciple. That's what it means to be a 'follower' of Christ. And that is where the life and adventure is!

My own life and ministry have been impacted and shaped again and again, over the years, by those with an understanding and vision for discipleship; by those who are themselves disciples and by those who have been prepared to engage in discipling me. It would be wrong of me not to acknowledge and give thanks in this

introduction to those that I am grateful to God for, who helped to bring my life into shape as a follower of Christ. I particularly want to thank God for my parents (not yet saved but used by God to put many godly principles into my life), to Graham Blower for being a disciple willing to tough it out with me in that house, to Mike Beaumont (for my first 12 years of discipleship), to Steve Thomas (for the last 16 years), and to Barney Coombs for setting a culture of discipleship in the Salt and Light family to which I am so grateful to God to belong. Last but not least, I thank God for my wife Lynda who has shown remarkable patience and endurance over 28 years as she has had to bear with 'a work in progress'. She has on many occasions been a loving source of God's grace, help and wisdom and at other times she's been a very direct source of God's reshaping of my life and character... 'Ouch!'

On November 23rd 1980 the door opened for me to be reconciled to God, to know God, to have my sins forgiven, and to fellowship with the Father and the Son through being filled with the Holy Spirit. Since then every single day has involved a decision – the decision to follow or not to follow, to be obedient or not to be obedient, to walk close to Christ or to hang back from him. I'd like to say I've always got it right, but I haven't, and at times far from it. I have had to repent and be forgiven for 'hanging back' and even for walking in a different direction more times than it would be possible to number or I would like to publicly confess. However over these last 30 years I have genuinely and sincerely looked to walk as a disciple of Christ – as a husband, a father, a grandfather, a

church leader and most importantly, as a son of my heavenly Father.

Peter said to Jesus in John 6:68, “*You have the words of eternal life.*” My Bible tells me, and my life experience has shown me, that eternal words of life come from listening to Christ, and eternal life is experienced through putting those words into practice. There is no other worthwhile way to live life or to do life. The life, the adventure and the glory of God are found, experienced and shared in being a follower of Christ – in being a disciple.

My prayer as I write this small book is simple – that you would be inspired and encouraged to be a disciple and inspired and encouraged to go and make disciples yourself.

Questions For Further Thought

1. What is your own salvation story? Can you recount it concisely in a way that would encourage other Christians and speak to non-Christians?
2. Who have been the influential people in your life and for what reason?
3. What is your own experience, so far, of the adventure of discipleship?
4. In what areas would you like to grow as a disciple? What could you do to further this?

Chapter 1

Discipleship – The Heart of the Gospel

Matthew 28:18-20 is often entitled 'The Great Commission'. It is an important passage of Scripture for us as New Testament believers in a 21st Century world. First, because it's a record of Christ's last words and commands to the Church before returning to his Father in heaven. Second, it puts back into the hands of the church the original mandate given to Adam in Genesis 1:27-28, to fill the earth with the glory and rule of God through godly offspring, through those created and made in the image of God. This was God's original purpose and through Christ, through the gospel, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and through you and me, that original purpose has been restored. Temporarily it fell into the hands of the devil, but now it's back with Christ and with his church. The heart of the gospel has always been about the glory of God. The means of that glory covering the earth as the waters cover the sea is a Holy-Spirit-filled church full of Holy-Spirit-filled sons and daughters, otherwise known as disciples.

Lynda and I have 3 children, Hannah, Josh, and Abigail. If there's one thing that doesn't seem to inspire them it's when someone says, "You look like your dad."

Inevitably I think this is a great compliment, but somehow it doesn't seem to land that way for them! However I am becoming a bit more sympathetic as someone recently said the same to me, "You look like your dad – with hair." I immediately went to the bathroom with fear and trepidation, took a look in the mirror straight on, then side on, and finally with hair swept back and a couple of hands on top to simulate baldness. "They're right, it's happening – the father's likeness is coming upon me!"

Of course it's not just physical characteristics that reflect the family likeness. Behaviour, mannerisms, phrases, and even perspectives and values can reflect whose family we are from, who we've been fathered or mothered by.

To be a son or daughter of God is to carry the family likeness. To be a disciple is to carry the family likeness. To make disciples is to see the family likeness formed in others. That family likeness is found only in Christ. He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). He is the exact representation of his being (Hebrews 1:3). He is the one whose likeness we are transformed into with ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). He's the one and his is the glory that with unveiled faces we are called to reflect (2 Corinthians 3:18). To think like Christ, to love like Christ, to speak like Christ, to respond like Christ, to act like Christ, and to do the works of Christ – this is what it means to be a disciple carrying the family likeness.

Right at the heart of the gospel and right at the heart of discipleship is the nature, the image, and the glory of Christ. We are granted the opportunity to participate in

that divine nature (2 Peter 1:4); the opportunity to share in that divine glory (2 Thessalonians 2:14); the opportunity to be transformed into the likeness of Christ and to reflect that likeness to others (2 Corinthians 3:18); the opportunity to trade in our old nature and image for his nature and image.

From time to time my father or brothers, who are not believers, talk about what I was like before I became a Christian. They also predict what I would be like if, as they put it, I hadn't 'gone religious'. Every time they talk I think to myself, they're lying or exaggerating. But by the end of the conversation I always conclude they aren't lying or exaggerating, but that I simply don't recognise the person they're talking about. This isn't because I have a poor memory; it's simply because that person has been dead and gone for many years. At this point I find myself inwardly giving thanks to God for the remarkable work of discipleship and transformation that the gospel, the Holy Spirit, and those who have discipled me have brought about in my life. What a privilege, what an opportunity - to exchange my old nature, my old image, for the family likeness of Christ! This is the process of discipleship.

Recently at a European Leaders' Conference Brother Andrew was a guest speaker. He spoke of his work amongst Muslims. One thing he continually challenges the Muslims with is this question: "What does your book do in people's lives? My book (the Bible) works. It does what it says it will do. It changes people's lives." Nothing changes a life like the gospel and no one changes a life like the Holy Spirit. When someone gives themselves to the process of discipleship, to the process of following

Christ and putting his words into practice, unparalleled changes and transformations take place.

In Matthew 28 Jesus is clear: the plan is to go and make disciples. Not simply to get decisions for Christ, not simply to get a response to Christ, but to make disciples of Christ and teach them to obey everything Christ commanded. Being a disciple isn't an optional extra to the Christian faith; it is the Christian faith, being outworked. It's not a request from Christ, it's a command from him. The command is to be a disciple and to make disciples.

One of the challenges in the 21st Century is that we increasingly live in a consumer society. This attitude is endemic in the Western Church and increasingly shapes our presentation of the gospel and the nature of the church. This in turn leads to an increasing unwillingness on the part of church leaders to be clear about the nature of discipleship. Establishing and maintaining a culture of discipleship within a church isn't easy. It takes courage, conviction, and perseverance on the part of church leaders to keep the bar where it should be. It brings you into direct conflict and battle with consumerism and other aspects of this world's culture. Like Jesus (in John 6) we'll find many will leave because of this issue – willing and happy to embrace what Christ can do for them, but unwilling to embrace the cost that goes along with discipleship.

There is increasingly a temptation to present the gospel cheaply; to present a gospel that is simply about what Christ will 'do' for people, a Christ that simply meets people's needs. The danger of this is that it can get a shallow response. "Yes, I'll have Jesus if he does good

things for me.” While the heart of Christ is always to meet people at their point of need, the gospel is not completely presented without a call to repentance, without a call to change direction and follow Christ, which is essentially a call to be a disciple. In my experience people all too often come to Christ on the basis of met needs and a better quality of life, but leave disappointed because that promise of life never lived up to their expectation. The problem is that the life of the Kingdom is only found in discipleship, in following Christ and in obedience to him. Discipleship is an amazing privilege and opportunity but it’s also a costly process because the cross (as we will see in the next chapter) lies right at the centre and heart of discipleship. To live effectively for Christ and to experience the life of Christ we must embrace a gospel that understands that repentance is essential to entering the kingdom and discipleship is the only way to walk within that kingdom.

Questions For Further Thought

1. What traits from your earthly family do you recognise in yourself?
2. In what way have you changed to carry the family likeness of Christ?
3. How do you see consumerism affecting both the church and your own life?
4. How strong is the culture of discipleship in your church, and how strongly is discipleship presented within the gospel in it?

Chapter 2

The Cross – The Heart of Discipleship

Philippians 2:5 is very direct and clear: our attitude in life should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. It doesn't suggest it should be 'similar' to Christ or as 'close as possible' to Christ; it says 'the same' as Christ's.

One of the things I have noticed over the years is the tendency of those that are discipled to imitate the attitude of those that disciple them. Our children, while each having their individual and unique personalities, gifts, and approaches to life, carry very similar values, principles, and passions as far as the Kingdom is concerned. Likewise I find myself similar in outlook and attitude to those that have had significant input into my life. Similarly those that have spent many years around me have had their attitude influenced by being around me.

In 29 years of being discipled within the Salt and Light family the sound I've always heard is a constant call and encouragement to imitate the attitude of Christ. For me, imitating this attitude is at the heart of the kingdom and discipleship. To have had godly men inspiring me, provoking me, and setting me an example of Christ-like attitude in action has been a most precious gift from the

Holy Spirit for which I will be forever grateful. (See also 1 Corinthians 4:15-17; Hebrew 6:12 and Hebrews 13:7).

To be a disciple is therefore to imitate and embrace the nature and attitude of Christ. Philippians 2:5-8 makes this attitude and path that Christ took very clear. He didn't grasp for equality but made himself nothing; he took the nature of a servant and humbled himself and ultimately became obedient to death by embracing the lowest form of death it was possible for a Jew to embrace – death on a cross. The attitude of Christ led him to embrace the cross, the centrepiece of God's redemptive, restorative, life-giving plan. The cross remains today the centre-piece of God's life-bringing plan. It is the ultimate demonstration of Christ's sacrificial attitude and obedience to the Father. It remains at the centre of what it means to be a disciple, to follow Christ, and to carry his nature and attitude.

Jesus' teaching was very clear. *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it"* (Luke 9:23-24). There is no hidden, cryptic meaning in these words of Jesus; they simply mean what they say. If we want to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus, there is no other way to live. We have to deny ourselves (that is, put God and others before ourselves), and we have to embrace death (death to selfish fleshly desires and ambitions). Unfortunately, neither of these processes is a 'one-off' event. Jesus saw them as a daily event, a daily taking up of the cross, and a model he himself followed (Philippians 2:5-8). In other words being a disciple involves embracing servant-hood, humility, and daily denial and death just like Jesus did.

These attitudes lie at the heart of being a disciple. An unwillingness to take these attitudes seriously and embrace them in our daily lifestyle makes it, Jesus said, impossible for us to be a disciple.

This call of Christ to embrace the cross daily also brings with it a promise that we will share in his resurrection life. Jesus put it this way in Luke 9:23-24, (author's paraphrase): "If you try to keep hold of your life (for yourself) you will lose it, but if you are willing to lose your life (by giving it away to Christ and by sacrificially embracing the cross), you will save it." The heart of discipleship is twofold, to share in the sufferings of Christ on the cross, and to share in the glory of Christ through the resurrection (Romans 6:5; Romans 8:17). Denying ourselves and embracing the cross daily will lead to an experience of daily resurrection life and power. Time and time again I've witnessed this teaching and example that Christ left us working; it works in my own life and it works in the lives of others. Being a disciple with the cross at the centre of our lives works. Those who grasp to keep hold of their lives will lose life, and those who give their lives away for Christ will gain life, both in the present and the hereafter.

When I first got saved on November 23rd 1980 I was more excited than words could ever express. I immediately changed much of my behaviour. I told everyone that I loved Jesus and would be walking differently from now on. I experienced a huge amount of ridicule from friends and fellow university students for this decision but I wasn't worried or intimidated in the slightest. I had understood the cross and the sacrificial price Christ had paid for me and it was now a call on my

life to walk as Jesus did, to embrace the cross. Anyway this pain and sacrifice was as nothing compared with what Jesus had been through for me. Many of the ‘pleasures’ that I had regularly indulged in I immediately stopped. I instinctively knew they were not pleasing to God and didn’t want to do them. Friends around me couldn’t believe I was making such ‘sacrifices’ because I’d found Christ (or more correctly he’d found me). I was sacrificing my reputation, many friendships, and many of life’s pleasures; yet ironically I was full of more life, joy, and excitement than I had ever previously known.

Following Christ and embracing the cross has led me into financial sacrifices, career sacrifices, time sacrifices, relational sacrifices, and family sacrifices. Lynda and I have expended large amounts of emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual energy serving Christ’s body. There have at times been huge disappointments for people and huge disappointments with people, and of course many disappointments in myself. I don’t say any of this to draw attention to my sacrifices for Christ – they are insignificant compared with what many others willingly give or have given. I simply state these minor sacrifices to bear testimony to the truth of Christ and the cross. Wherever Lynda and I have laid down our lives, we have gained life in abundance back from God. This doesn’t mean everything has always been easy and ‘worked out’ the way I would have liked it to. But we have lived our lives with a very real sense of being overwhelmingly rich in Christ. Our testimony would be that we’ve never felt short-changed by God. God has always worked in something of his resurrection life and power whenever we’ve denied ourselves and embraced the cross.

Several years ago we walked through a difficult time as a leadership team and as a Church at Tees Valley Community Church. The long and short of it was that a number of leaders left us and I found my own leadership and style at the centre of a significant amount of criticism from those that left. Like many of these situations, there are usually a number of issues going on simultaneously and this situation was no different. One of the things that was clear during this time was that I needed to embrace the reflections and observations of others regarding my leadership style and discern what God wanted me to learn and adjust through the process. This isn't an easy process even at the best of times when everything is going well. It's even more difficult if things aren't going well and one is feeling extremely insecure, as I was at the time.

The process of evaluating my leadership was undertaken by Steve Thomas, Mark Mumford and my existing eldership team, all of whom I knew loved me, wanted me to be the best leader I could be, wanted the best for the church, and would not spare me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth! I remember them sharing where they thought I had gone wrong, what wasn't good in my leadership style, and how I needed to adjust. It was balanced with a lot of encouragement and affirmation. However, as you may guess, I didn't really see that. When I looked at the written report of what they were saying, which they gave me so I had something accurate to reflect back on, I felt a great desire to run away and find a job back in medicine. I knew at that point I had a choice: to deny and refuse what was being brought to me, or to embrace it and the

change that went with it. One route was self-preservation; the other was embracing the cross and death to my flesh. These moments and points aren't easy, and this one certainly wasn't. There was a decision that had to be made and there is no better place to make that decision than at the foot of the cross because that is where we behold the one that inspires us to sacrificially follow after him. At the foot of the cross is where our own sacrifice finds perspective and we remember the promise of life beyond the grave!

Over the next months I embraced a process of adjustment and change that wasn't easy but was necessary. I have to say it was one of the more difficult times I have had to walk through, but at the same time was one of the most life-giving times. Several years later I live in the benefit of those adjustments at a personal level, a leadership level, and a church level. I've delegated much more; I'm focused on doing the things I'm called to do and not the things I'm not; I have more time for prayer and reflection; I have a great leadership team and the church is enjoying by God's grace a significant time of favour and increase.

I often thank God for that time and his wisdom and sovereignty that turned my weaknesses and failings into his opportunities. I marvel at his grace and kindness and I thank him for the process of discipleship, for brothers willing to speak the truth in love, for the inspiration of Christ, for the help of the Holy Spirit and for the cross, the centrepiece of God's plan to turn the embracing of death into a release of life.

The cross is at the heart of being a disciple. Being a disciple is simply a series of choices, daily choices, which

present themselves to us. Some of those choices are small decisions, some are large decisions. The disciple is one who, with the power and help of the Holy Spirit, chooses in each decision to embrace the cross and follow Christ and in so doing finds themselves living in God's resurrection life and power.

Questions For Further Thought

1. What part does the cross play in your daily life, in reality and not just at the level of theology?
2. What key areas have you made sacrifices in and experienced the resurrection life and power of God as a result?
3. What is your experience of God taking your weaknesses and failings and turning them into his opportunities?
4. What areas might be particularly hard for you to receive adjustment in and why would it be difficult?

Chapter 3

The Holy Spirit – The Ultimate Motivator and Enabler of Change

My favourite Sunday mornings are the first Sunday of every month. These are our baptismal services. They're my favourite for one simple reason: I always come out of them in absolute awe and wonder of God, as people recount their stories of how they have met Christ and how through the power of the Holy Spirit they've been changed. Every story is highly personal and uniquely different but each one resonates with the same profound underlying theme: 'Christ is not dead, he is alive.'

Two weeks ago I went to watch an amateur boxing competition where one of our young men, Ben, who had been baptised three years ago, was representing North-East England. As he came into the ring, I saw him wearing the shorts that he has become famous for in the amateur boxing world and that are always a source of comment and conversation. On his shorts, for hundreds of people to see, were the words 'Jesus Saves', 'blessed', and a large crucifix just beneath his name, Ben.

Five years previously one of our church members called Tony had a dream of being in a boxing club and

seeing a young 17 year-old appear who wanted to meet Jesus. The lad's face in the dream was clear and the impression Tony felt from this dream was strong enough for him to stay at that club, training and engaging with young lads from the local area (a deprived area of Middlesbrough) for the next few years, waiting for the young man to appear. Two years later the 17 year-old that Tony had seen in his dream walked into the club. He was a young man from a difficult background, with drug and alcohol problems and without any sense of life, hope, or future. That lad's name was Ben and just as the dream had foretold, he was hungry for God. Within a short space of time Tony brought Ben to the church where he had a remarkable life- changing encounter with the Holy Spirit.

At his baptism Ben testified to the remarkable changes that had occurred in his lifestyle, behaviour, motivation, and direction in life through meeting Christ. Hope had replaced hopelessness and selfishness had given way to godliness. Several years later Ben is a qualified plumber, a very successful amateur boxer, and works part-time for Sowing Seeds Ministries, which takes Christ into prisons. If you talk to Ben, his one great desire is to serve others and live for the glory of Christ. He is a remarkable trophy of God's grace and a remarkable example of the ability of the Holy Spirit to take a shipwrecked life and create a disciple who is motivated and empowered to live like Christ for the glory of God.

The medical profession, in which I have practiced for many years, uses all sorts of drugs, therapies, and counselling methods to try to help people change their

lives, personalities, habits, and behaviours and does so with varying amounts of success. My testimony and experience as a medical doctor involved with thousands of people's lives over the years is very simple: there isn't anything on the face of the planet that transforms so radically and dramatically a person's life for the better than an encounter with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Six hundred years before Christ was born, Ezekiel prophesied what we see on the first Sunday morning of every month at TVCC when people get baptised. He prophesied that a day was coming when God would take people from every tribe, tongue, language, and nation, from every walk and background in life and would do a divine surgical miracle – a heart transplant. Ezekiel 11:19-20 says:

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

When I encountered Christ through the Holy Spirit on November 23rd 1980 at 1:30 a.m. I was dramatically changed. No-one told me to stop using bad language, to stop getting drunk, to stop being promiscuous, or to stop living selfishly. No one told me to start walking a holy life and start living each moment of every day to please God. The moment I came face to face with Christ a great exchange took place. I gave him my heart of stone (selfish and insensitive to God) and he gave me a heart of flesh (undivided and soft to God). I gave him my sins and he gave me a new spirit, his Holy Spirit to live and dwell

within me. I found myself motivated, enabled, and empowered to live for God. This was not a work of any man in my life and it certainly wasn't a result of my own desires or effort. This was the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of the great motivator and enabler of Christ-like change in the lives of those God calls to follow him and be his disciples. It's a work that has continued and gone deeper in my life for the last 30 years.

Jesus said this, referring to the Holy Spirit: *"He will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you"* (John 14:26); *"He will testify about me"* (John 15:26); *"He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears and he will tell you what is yet to come"* (John 16:13); *"He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you"* (John 16:14); *"You will receive power when he comes on you"* (Acts 1:8); *"You will be my witnesses when he comes on you"* (Acts 1:8). Paul also calls the character traits of Christ in us *"fruit of the Holy Spirit"* (Galatians 5:22) and the gifts Christ gives us *"gifts of the Holy Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:4,7).

I believe with great conviction in the process of discipleship and the structures and relationships that serve and promote all this within local church. However, I am biblically and experientially founded on the unassailable truth that Christ is the goal, Christ is the image of the invisible God, his is the nature, character and works that we want to see replicated in people's lives and ministries, and only the Holy Spirit can bring about this change. Only the Holy Spirit can earth the divine nature and works of Christ in and through his people. He is the source of revelation; he teaches God's ways; he is the motivator for change; he empowers for change; he

empowers for ministry and works; he enables the supernatural; and only he can deliver the great exchange of a heart of stone for a heart of flesh. He is the new Spirit that God promised through Ezekiel, and he always ensures the ultimate goal – that all the glory goes to the Father and the Son.

While men and women are clearly instruments in God's hand in the discipleship process (see next chapter), it is imperative we understand, as both those that are being discipled and those that are discipling others, that discipleship is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit. Godly discipleship directs people into God and prayerfully trusts the Holy Spirit as the ultimate agent and deliverer of divine works and change.

I learnt this lesson early on as a Christian. We went on holiday to the Lake District in England with a couple who were close friends. During the holiday it became clear they had decided to change churches, a move that for a variety of reasons was not going to be helpful for them. God spoke to me one morning and told me to tell them that the move they were intending to make was wrong. Although we had a good friendship, this was an extremely delicate situation because it involved moving to a church led by their parents. To speak against this move would be to speak against a very strong family connection. But God was clear with me and I needed to speak it. I appealed to God for some help and clearly felt I should wait for the Holy Spirit to open the door and follow his lead. Later that day the husband, a very calm, well-balanced man, not in any way given to emotional dramatic responses, suggested that he and I go for a walk. At a certain point we stopped for a rest and to look

over the scenery. Suddenly, for absolutely no reason, he fell to the floor screaming, clutching his stomach and rolling around. I didn't know what to do and shouted exactly that. "What can I do?" "Have you got a word from God for me?" he cried. Inevitably I didn't hesitate and I told him exactly what God had said. The moment I had finished delivering the word his pain ceased and he stood up shaken but relieved of his discomfort. He looked at me astonished and said to me, "I would have immediately dismissed what you were saying to me if you had brought it up in any other context than the one that just occurred." I knew at that moment that God, not I, had got his attention.

I also learnt a valuable lesson, a lesson I have learnt and seen over and over again in the context of discipleship. No one does the work of God better than the Holy Spirit! Psalm 127:1 puts it this way: "*Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain.*" The Holy Spirit is the great motivator and enabler when it comes to God's building work. The work of discipleship is a building work of God in the lives of his people aimed at reflecting his nature and delivering his works. Ours is the privilege and the joy of being on the receiving end of that work and co-working with him to deliver it into the lives of others.

Praise God he has not left us alone in the discipleship journey but has seen fit to send to us the Holy Spirit, the great motivator and enabler of godly change.

Questions For Further Thought

1. What is your own experience of seeing the Holy Spirit supernaturally changing people?
2. What is your personal experience of being supernaturally used by God in the lives of others?
3. In what areas have you felt supernaturally motivated and empowered to change?
4. Are there areas you would like to experience more motivation and empowerment from the Holy Spirit? What could you do about this?

Chapter 4

People – An Instrument in God’s Hand

We saw in the previous chapter that the Holy Spirit is always the ultimate deliverer of the nature and works of Christ within the discipleship process. There is however no doubt, biblically and experientially, that there are two great instruments that the Holy Spirit chooses to use within this process. The first is people, and the second is circumstances, and sometimes the two come together. Understanding how the Holy Spirit uses these instruments is essential if we are to be effectively discipled and effectively disciple others. The first of these we will look at in this chapter and the second in the following chapter.

Throughout Scripture God has used people, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to deliver his word, his judgement, his mercy, his love, and his purposes into the lives of individuals, kings, and even nations. He has used people to inspire, encourage, affirm, challenge, teach, equip, and train others in godliness and godly service. Moses was used in such a way with Joshua, Elijah with Elisha, Paul with Timothy and Titus, and of course Jesus with the Twelve. Each of these was used as instruments in the hand of the Holy Spirit to prepare others to

demonstrate the nature and works of Christ. They were used by the Holy Spirit to disciple and prepare others for the call of God on their lives. To learn how to receive people as an instrument of the Holy Spirit into our lives is therefore imperative if we are to be discipled and prepared for the call of God on our lives. It was for Joshua, it was for Elijah, it was for Timothy and Titus, it was for the Twelve, and it still is for us today.

Over the years I have been shaped and impacted by Christ through a whole variety of people. Some of those are very close to me, others not so close. Indeed some of those who have imparted Christ to me have done so through their books or teaching and wouldn't even know who I am. Of course those who have had greatest impact on my life are those God has brought into my life relationally. My wife has been a great source of inspiration and encouragement into the nature and works of Christ. My children also have taught me a huge amount about the heart and nature of the Father. Many friends, fellow ministries, fellow elders, and many members of my congregation have been a source of inspiration, encouragement, affirmation, challenge, training, and adjustment in my life and ministry. I am indebted to them all for being instruments in God's hand, instruments in God's discipleship process within my life.

Although a multitude of people have been used by the Holy Spirit to impact and shape my life, the model of personal discipleship, exemplified by Jesus with his disciples and by the other Biblical relationships mentioned above, has been a great foundation stone for Christ's discipleship process in my own life. While it has by no means been an exclusive route through which the

Holy Spirit has shaped my life and ministry it has been one of the most significant routes.

Two men in particular have played a significant role in personally discipling me over the last 30 years: Mike Beaumont for the first 12 years, and Steve Thomas for the last 18 years. For me the personal discipling relationships I’ve enjoyed with them have been extremely significant expressions of the Holy Spirit’s care into my life and significant sources of growth in my journey as a disciple of Christ. They’ve been a great source of inspiration for me, a point of accountability, and a place for me to be open and honest with the realities of my life and ministry. They’ve seen the good, the bad, and the ugly in my life. They’ve encouraged me, affirmed me, believed in me, challenged me, adjusted me, and they’ve never let me off the hook that God has had me on. At times it’s been comforting, at other times it’s been positively uncomfortable. But the fruit has always been good and it’s always been godly. For me they have walked with me as Paul walked with Timothy; they’ve always wanted the best for me and they’ve always pushed me into God. While they have always been a clear point of godly authority and accountability for my life and ministry, I have only ever felt served by them. I have always received personal discipleship and accountability into my life as a gift from God and that’s exactly what it has been for the past 30 years – a wonderful and generous gift from the Holy Spirit into my life and ministry for which I will be forever grateful.

In my experience I have found nothing more effective at maturing Christians and raising up leaders and ministries than personal discipleship. Inevitably these

relationships only work well if there's faith, friendship, and the right attitudes within them (see chapter 5). But when these ingredients are right and Christ is the goal this biblical model is, in my experience, a must for everyone serious about growth.

Many Christians today miss out on personal discipleship and one to one mentoring. It appears to me to be less and less in the culture and DNA of church life, though ironically Business is increasingly seeing this type of mentoring as essential in preparing people for the future of their company. In the West we live in a culture where people guard with increasing passion their personal choices and freedom. The concepts of submission, accountability, commitment, and learning from others are not always fashionable concepts. A strong egalitarian spirit means everyone and everything has to be viewed on the same level and a consumer mentality means that if we don't like what is said then we'll go elsewhere. It's all too easy for church leaders to be intimidated by this attitude and culture which increasingly dominates the church, all too easy for them to abandon the concept and practice of personal one-to-one discipleship, relying instead on the scattering of seed through Sunday morning preaching and hoping that the Holy Spirit will just do the job of discipleship without the need to resort to a biblical framework and model. Jesus operated in personal discipleship with the Twelve, Moses did with Joshua, Elijah did with Elisha and Paul did with Timothy and Titus. The Holy Spirit still uses people today to serve him in the process of making people more Christ-like and preparing people for works of service. The question is simply, will people recognise that and

embrace it and will church leaders set it as a culture within local church?

I’m grateful to be part of a regional team and local church leadership team that has a corporate understanding and vision for personal discipleship. I’m also pleased to work with cell group leaders that have a vision to receive this into their own lives and deliver it to those in their groups. I also find the hunger of our young people to grow and their eagerness to receive personal discipleship a constant source of inspiration. I do believe by faith and by the grace of God this attitude and culture within leadership teams and within our congregations will bring forth many male and female Joshua’s, Elijah’s and Timothy’s – disciples who carry the family likeness and are ready to undertake Christ’s works of service.

Questions For Further Thought

1. Who has been, and who currently is, a source of discipleship into your life and in what way?
2. What is your experience and view of personal discipling?
3. By what means does your Church deliver discipleship to its members, and is this approach effective?
4. What would improve the effectiveness of the discipleship process in your life, your small group, and your Church?

Chapter 5

Circumstances – An Instrument in God’s hand

In 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 Paul writes this to the Corinthian church:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

One cannot read the Scriptures without understanding that God uses situations and circumstances to teach, shape, and prepare us in his character and for his service and glory. We look at Abraham and see the challenge he faced in older age, with his barren wife Sarah, to have a child. Yet through those circumstances God was shaping and establishing a Father of Faith. We look at Joseph and

the challenging 13 years he faced as a slave and prisoner in Egypt, and yet through it all God is preparing a faithful, godly steward who will make great provision for the Jewish nation in a time of severe famine. We look at Jacob and all the painful challenges he faced as he fled from home, dealt with Laban, faced Esau, and appeared to lose his precious son Joseph, and yet again, through it all, God was taking him and making him into the Father of a nation.

Ultimately of course we look at Christ and the challenge of the cross and see that through it all God was bringing forth the resurrection and the life, the author and perfecter of our faith and establishing Christ as the name that is above every other name. Circumstances are, along with people, one of the main instruments used by the Holy Spirit to teach and disciple us. As I read the Bible I see no Biblical character that successfully represented and served God who didn't experience significant trials and challenges; and I see no trial or challenge that didn't ultimately have Kingdom purpose within it.

We find a similar understanding from Paul in these verses. He was obviously in very challenging circumstances in Asia and under great pressure. In fact it was so severe that he says it was *"beyond our ability to endure."* He continues in his description and says, *"We despaired even of life. Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death."* For Paul, normally so indomitable, to be feeling these things and expressing them suggests challenges of considerable magnitude which I suspect involved a very real threat to his life. Yet in the midst of these challenges, he sees a godly purpose, a discipleship

purpose, and an opportunity to grow in faith. He says in verse 9, *"But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."* His perception, and therefore the way he received and responded to these challenges, was simple: it was an opportunity to rely less on himself and his own resources and more on God. And our God, he reminds us, is one who can raise the dead.

Biblical character studies and Scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 have inspired me again and again over the years to see challenges and difficulties as an opportunity to let the Holy Spirit teach and disciple me. I have prayed the same prayer to God many times when facing challenges. It goes something like this: "Father, please help me during this time to put my faith and trust in you, to draw close to you, not to pull away from you. Help me to learn all the lessons you want me to learn at this time, to make all the adjustments I need to make and to bring glory to your name. Help me to come through this looking more like you and better placed to serve you. Help me to remember where you are seated and that you are the God who raises the dead and for whom nothing is impossible. I put my trust in you to keep me and deliver me within this situation." I also remember and quote 1 Corinthians 10:13, *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."* This is always a simple and timely reminder to me that the grace is there for me for whatever I am facing; the challenge is simply through faith and prayer to appropriate it.

I remember when I first qualified as a medical doctor in 1985 my first job was in a busy Manchester casualty department. Back then there was no significant senior cover, and you were very much on your own. Anything could come through the door at any time, and most worryingly you were the least experienced person in the hospital to deal with it. My first shift was a Friday, Saturday and Sunday night, running Casualty by myself without any help whatsoever. I remember it vividly because I remember how physically sick I felt before each shift. I got on my knees each night before I went in and read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 and prayed the prayer I usually prayed under pressure. I declared that my confidence was not in myself but in God who raises the dead. I figured that God was a significantly better hope for saving lives that weekend than a young, highly inexperienced, and terrified doctor. I went into the casualty department over those nights first as a disciple of Christ and second as a doctor. And God was good. With the help of some wonderful experienced nurses, whom I quickly humbled myself before, I found myself confident, peaceful, and capable beyond my ability over that weekend. I grew more over the 6 months of that Casualty job, within which I faced a multitude of challenges, than I would ever have believed possible. I didn't grow first and foremost as a doctor, I grew first and foremost as a disciple who had been put in the classroom of challenging circumstances and disciplined by the Holy Spirit into less self-reliance and more God-reliance.

Like many others who walk with Christ, we have faced health challenges, financial challenges, family

challenges; we’ve faced time pressures, job pressures, and people pressures; we’ve lost people we’ve loved; we’ve faced disappointments; we’ve faced times of insecurity and the daily pressures that go with caring for and leading the church. While I would often have chosen to have avoided many, if not all, of these pressures and challenges, there is no doubt that the classroom of life is one of the most significant contexts within which we can let the Holy Spirit disciple us. The most life-changing lessons have generally for me been learnt in the difficult times, not the easy times.

When our youngest daughter was 20 months old I went to her cot one night and found her fitting. I immediately threw her in the back of the car and rushed her to Casualty. I expected it to be a febrile convulsion. She had a slight temperature and had been a bit unwell, and this type of convulsion is reasonably common in young children. When I got her to Casualty she was still unconscious and fitting. It quickly became clear that this was not a febrile convulsion but something more sinister. She was not diabetic, but her blood sugar kept dropping and as it did so she went in and out of consciousness. For the next two weeks she remained in hospital quite unwell and unable to come off a glucose drip despite the fact she was eating and drinking. They started to send off specialist tests to different parts of the country to look for unusual metabolic diseases, most of which had ominous implications. While this was a very stressful time for us as parents, we decided again to see God’s sovereign hand over it and get hold of what he wanted to work in our lives through it. We felt drawn back to the prophetic words at her dedication, which at the time

seemed unusual and out of context. In particular there were two words given separately and independently. One said she would be like a 'boil in the bag fish' and another that she would be like a 'foil-covered chicken in the oven'. Both suggested she would go through a fire-like ordeal but would remain protected. We were also given Isaiah 43:2 over her life: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

At the time none of these words made much sense, but we've learnt over the years not to simply dismiss what we don't understand at the time. So we had faithfully recorded them and written them down. Over those two weeks we fought the good fight of faith for our daughter through standing firmly on the prophetic words God had spoken over her. Despite the fact that the consultant was baffled and said he hadn't seen anything like it before, despite the lack of progress and successful treatment over those two weeks and the threat of a significant metabolic disease, we stood firmly on what God had said and claimed that not even the "smell of smoke" would be left on her.

Several weeks later we took her home, and many months after that they finally discharged her without a diagnosis, and she has remained well ever since. The consultant at the time was considering writing her case up for a medical journal because it was so unusual.

We learnt a number of lessons at that time: to make sure one never dismisses the prophetic words that don't always make sense at the time; to rely on God who raises

the dead; and to fight the good fight of faith through standing firmly on the prophetic and Scriptural word of God. A thousand good sermons could not have disciplined us and shaped us in our faith like the Holy Spirit did through the challenging circumstances that began the night I discovered our daughter fitting in her cot.

Many of the challenges each of us face involve a whole host of factors. Some involve difficult circumstances that appear to be nobody's fault, others difficult circumstances that seem like they are definitely somebody's fault. We have to deal with difficult and unreasonable personalities; being treated unfairly and unreasonably; being let down; being forgotten; being overlooked; and a whole host of other challenges. And of course we shouldn't miss out the principalities and powers of darkness that are usually looking for an opportunity to destroy and ruin those who live for Christ. Whatever the nature and source of what we are facing, it's always good to know we are not alone; it's always good to know the Counsellor, the Teacher of Truth, the Comforter, the Helper and the Great Discippler is on hand to give us grace, help us stand, help us overcome, and help us grow in our faith. And it's good to know that the Father and Son in heaven sit sovereignly over every situation with the ability and promise to work everything together for the good of those who love them.

Many, unfortunately, see all the wrong things at these times of pressure and challenge. All too often people see personalities and wrong-doing by people which leads them not into growth but into bitterness and resentment. They become defeated by circumstances and

discouraged in their faith to the point where many give up and turn back.

Those who embrace the process of discipleship will embrace with faith the challenges that come their way through circumstances, finding God, depending on God and being willing to be shaped and crafted for his glory.

Questions For Further Thought

1. What is your experience of God using challenging circumstances to help you grow as a disciple?
2. Are you vulnerable to seeing only personalities and events during these difficult times?
3. How might you more effectively see God's sovereignty during these challenging moments?
4. How effectively do you use God's Word during these times of challenge and how might you improve in this?

Chapter 6

Nine Essential Principles of Effective Discipleship

While I believe strongly in the Biblical model of personal discipleship, it is essential that the right understanding, basis, and attitudes are carried within this relationship. The following principles lead to these relationships being effective and serving the Holy Spirit's discipleship agenda.

1. A strong relational basis

Hebrews 2:11 says, *“Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”* Galatians 4:6 says, *“God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba Father’”*. And Jesus said to his disciples in John 15:15, *“I no longer call you servants ... instead I call you friends.”* All this underlines that the nature of the body of Christ is relational. God is our Father, Jesus is our brother, and we are all of the same family, brothers and sisters with one another, and friends of Christ.

The Christian walk and the body of Christ are primarily relational in nature. If what we have with one another and as a church isn't first and foremost a sense of family and friendship then we aren't really carrying

the heart of the Holy Spirit. This is particularly true within the discipleship relationship. Models and structures are important, but relationships should not serve them; the structures should serve relationships. As a church we continually look to encourage and establish people in personal discipling relationships. We don't first approach this structurally; rather we approach it by identifying the friendships and spiritual joinings that the Holy Spirit is already initiating. Whenever someone approaches us as a leadership team about being personally discipled, our first question is always the same: "Where are your friendships and where do you find a flow of spiritual life coming from?"

The reason I have enjoyed effective personal discipling relationships over the last 30 years is simple: those I've been involved with have been my friends. Those who have discipled me have loved me, cared for me, supported me, prayed for me, and been there for me because they are friends. We've laughed together, battled together, stood together, and cried together. That's friendship, and it's the only basis on which personal discipleship works effectively as a tool in serving the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has an agenda; it's to build a family for the Father. If we don't think and build as friends of God and friends with one another, then whatever we have won't be family.

2. A sense of Faith and Vision

One of the most energising things I learnt as a young Christian was firstly that God loved me and secondly that he had a plan for my life. He wanted to use me in serving his divine purposes and glorifying his name. Despite all

my weaknesses and failings (of which there are still many), it was staggering to feel ‘believed in’ by the Holy Spirit.

I always feel inspired by Jesus’ attitude to and belief in Peter. Despite all that Peter had failed in, Jesus still looked at him and believed in him; he saw what he could be – a rock, an apostle, a great leader, and a great preacher. Peter felt loved by Christ, but he also felt Christ’s vision and faith for him. This was part of what made their relationship so effective and productive for the Kingdom.

Over the years I’ve messed up and let God down on multiple occasions; through sin, disobedience, mishandling people or situations, a lack of faithfulness or diligence, through pride and arrogance, and sometimes just through plain ignorance. But I’ve always sought to walk openly with my wife, my fellow elders, and particularly with those who personally disciple me. One of the things I have deeply appreciated over the years is that I’ve been firmly and significantly challenged when necessary but I’ve always been believed in. Those who have personally disciplined me have always looked me in the eye with faith and vision for me. In fact they’ve believed in Christ’s work in me and through me even when I’ve virtually given up on myself. I remember at one stage being so low about the short-comings in my leadership that I had seriously considered going back into full-time medicine. I had an application form on my desk for months complete with CV and references that I was within a hair’s-breadth of handing in. The only reason I didn’t was that I was looked in the eye with faith and vision by Steve Thomas and other leaders, who were

fully aware of all my short-comings and weaknesses, and told that God's call was still on my life as a leader.

The Holy Spirit has faith and vision for those the Father has called to himself. Discipling relationships must carry the Holy Spirit's faith, vision and perspective for those under their care.

3. Honesty and Accountability

One of the issues Jesus had with the Pharisees was a discrepancy between the inside and outside of the cup (Matthew 23:25). In other words, there was a difference between the public presentation and the internal realities of their life. This is a huge vulnerability for all of us. It is all too easy to hide and diminish sin, to hide our insecurities, fears, mistakes, and temptations. It can be easier to keep people away from seeing into our marriages, our families, and the realities of our 'behind the scenes' behaviour. It is all too easy to say we are accountable to God but simply to be accountable to ourselves. I believe strongly in the vertical and horizontal principle of spiritual life. We can measure the reality of what we really carry towards God by looking at what we have with people. John says in 1 John 4:20, "*If anyone says, 'I love God', yet hates his brother, he is a liar.*" Our love for God is reflected by our love for people. This relationship between the horizontal and vertical carries into many aspects of our spiritual life. Accountability to God is reflected by how willing we are to be accountable to others. Our submission to God likewise is measured by our willingness to submit to those God has placed in authority over us. Honesty, openness, vulnerability, confession of sin, submission, and accountability to God

has to be 'earthed' with those God has put over us and alongside us. It helps ensure that the inside of the cup and the outside presentation remain consistent.

I can remember many points at which I have been tempted to keep my sin between me and God. "I've sorted it now, I've talked to God about it, it's not going to be a problem anymore, no-one else needs to know." But James 5:16 says, "*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*" Walking openly, accountably and honestly in every aspect of my life has at times made me feel delicate and vulnerable; after all nobody wants even good friends to know all the bad parts. However, for me this openness and confession which the Scripture tells us to have has always been 'unto the Lord' and reflected my desire to walk humbly before him. I have only ever found acceptance and support from those who have disciplined me and every time I open the door for people to see in, I've felt the grace and power of God extravagantly released to me. Over the years I've walked with brothers and friends who have lived in a similar openness and accountability towards me and they, like me, have found a provision of power and grace accompanying this obedience to Scripture. Above all else, it has drawn us closer together as friends on our journey with Christ.

4. Christ-Centredness

The goal of any discipling relationship must be Christ. Discipleship that does not direct people into Christ is vulnerable to becoming man-centred. One of the things that I've appreciated about being disciplined by Steve Thomas is that I've always felt directed towards Christ.

I've never found him suggesting to me that he is the answer. I've always found that he provokes me to seeing that Christ is the answer. I've never come under a sense of 'do what I say.' I've always come under a provocation to 'do what Christ is saying'. Inevitably, when I was a younger Christian, I needed to feed more on milk than on meat and as a result I needed more directive discipling, which Mike Beaumont delivered. But again it directed me towards Christ, pushed me into reading the Scriptures, into developing my understanding of God's Kingdom and into going deeper relationally with God. The needs and expression of discipleship change with time and maturity but one thing must never change: every discipling relationship must promote Christ-centeredness not man-centeredness.

Over the years, as we have sought in TVCC to exercise Christ-centred discipleship, we have seen people grow enormously in their love for God, his Word, his ways, and their desire to please and serve him. Without a doubt we would not have the quality of people and quantity of leaders that we have without embracing a Christ centred discipling process.

5. Treasure in Clay Vessels

2 Corinthians 4:7 says, "*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*" It is important to understand that the life and treasure of God we contain is carried in a clay vessel. This understanding ensures that we who disciple others remain clear that we are just ordinary, earthen, imperfect vessels. Christ is the treasure and therefore Christ (not us) is what we want to see imparted to people.

Many of those I personally disciple have known me for many years. Inevitably when people have known you for that long they discover that you aren't perfect – far from it. Over the years they've seen my strengths and my weaknesses. What I have appreciated is that they have never despised me for those weaknesses; they have never dismissed me or what I've said to them, even though some of my failings and lacks could have led them to do so. They've always understood that I'm a clay vessel but have always sought to draw on the treasure of Christ within me.

Genesis 9:18-27 is an account of the three sons of Noah. All three knew their father was naked and drunk. Ham despised his father's weakness and mistake; he looked upon it and spoke openly and disparagingly about it to others. Shem and Japheth, however, had a very different attitude. Despite the opportunity to look upon their father's nakedness and weakness they chose to honour him in their heart, attitude, and approach. They backed into his tent so as not to focus on his nakedness and covered him with a blanket and chose never to speak to others about what they had seen. Noah had made a mistake, but the approach and attitude of the sons was very different. Ham was prepared to focus on it, despise and expose it; Shem and Japheth still chose to honour the godliness and fatherhood that he carried. Shem and Japheth were blessed for their godly response, while Ham was cursed for his ungodly response.

I have always found this Scripture most sobering when it comes to viewing those God has put over me in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:12). While no-one is suggesting covering up wrong behaviour or hiding sin, I

believe it is of paramount importance to honour the treasure and not despise the clay. One attitude brings the blessing of God; the other doesn't bring such blessing.

6. Relationship and Character before Ministry and Service

I will say more about this in the coming chapters, but suffice to say that discipleship needs the right focus. One of the things I've learnt over the years is to take little for granted when you are discipling people. I will always ask them how they are doing in their relationships, their relationship with God, with their spouse, their children, their family and their brothers and sisters in Christ. As well as this I will ask them about relationships at work and with neighbours and friends. Are they getting time with God, reading their Bible regularly, praying regularly, getting time with their spouse and children? Are they handling and responding to God, to life and to people with a Christ-like attitude? What are the behind-the-scenes realities? Are they handling their money with faithfulness towards God? What is God saying to them at the moment? Are they responding in faith? What stresses, strains and challenges are they facing at the moment and how are they handling them?

Of course a relationship such as this is not a series of questions every time we meet. But for me discipleship has a focus first on relationships and character. Secondly it should have a focus on ministry and service. How are they doing with the things God has called them to serve him in? Are they exercising and growing in their spiritual gifts? Are they fulfilling God's call on their life?

Are they stepping out in faith in those things God has entrusted to them? Are they burying their talents or putting them to good use? Are they engaging with unbelievers? Are they carrying the Father's heart for the lost? Are they looking and praying for opportunities to share the gospel? Are they looking and praying for opportunities to share the love and care of Christ with others?

Discipleship should demonstrate love, care, and support, but it should also be proactive and focus on helping people to grow in their relationships, character, ministries, gifts, and service of Christ.

7. Prayerfully-fuelled and Holy Spirit-led

Jesus prayed for his disciples and asked them to pray for him. That's what friends do: they pray for one another because they know prayer makes a difference. Prayer accesses God's provision and grace. If we disciple people, it should be fuelled by prayer not just with words, advice, and provocation. Prayer first, words second.

It should also be Holy Spirit-led. One of the most important things in discipleship is not simply to jump in with answers all the time (if you do this, you'll soon run out anyway). The key issue is to do only what you see the Holy Spirit doing. Plenty of times I've wanted to rescue people or come up with a solution to whatever they are going through. At other times people have come to me and wanted me to give them the answer or even tell them what to do. Listening to the Holy Spirit and doing only what he wants done is crucial in discipling people.

About a year ago one of the leaders I work with was going through a pruning process and being stripped back

in terms of ministry. He had less and less to occupy him and was getting more and more devalued by this. It was clear that he was in a process with God; indeed God spoke that he was burning the current crop in his field in order to bring forth a new and different crop in a different field. Doors were closing all around him and it really looked as though he might have to go back to secular employment. He approached me and volunteered to go down this route. I can't tell you how desperately I desired to rescue him, to make it easier, to create a new field and create for him a new role. But I continually felt the Holy Spirit tell me not to rescue him but to leave him with God. I prayed regularly for him and simply encouraged him to find his value in God and have faith that God would open a new door. I dissuaded him from going back to secular employment because I felt he was a Kingdom man with a full-time call on his life. I had absolutely no idea where a new role was going to come from, but God had promised one and he needed to trust God and find peace in him. It was a time of being disciplined by the Holy Spirit through difficult circumstances. This process went on for about nine months. No-one outside of the eldership was particularly aware of what was going on or what God had said. Then one day out of the blue a senior pastor from another church came up to me and asked if it would be possible for me to release this leader to come and take on an existing church as the new senior pastor. I knew immediately this was the new field that God had spoken of. Nine months after being asked he was in place in the new church as senior leader and is doing an absolutely outstanding job – bringing forth a new crop in a brand new field.

I constantly thank God that he led us through that time and that we kept in step with the Holy Spirit and served his discipleship process. Ensuring our discipleship relationships are prayer-fuelled and Spirit-led is essential if Jesus is to get the crop and the harvest that he desires to have.

8. Challenge and Pruning

Every discipling relationship in the body of Christ should encourage, edify, strengthen, and comfort, but it should also prune and challenge. Jesus said of his Father in John 15:2, *“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”* If you want to see a branch more fruitful, then the Father’s pruning is an essential component in that growth.

I remember sitting with a fellow leader whom the Holy Spirit wanted to prune. He was a good and godly leader but there were some areas of insecurity that were coming up and affecting the way he was responding in certain situations. I remember sitting in my office with my wife and his wife and telling him we needed to prune some insecurities within him. I got a white board and drew a big circle in the centre with ‘my insecurities’ in the centre referring to him. I then drew a series of circles coming out of the central one to represent all the effects those insecurities had on his behaviour, responses and relationships. We ended up together identifying about a dozen circles. He had two ways he could react at that point; he could have walked out of the room and told me where to go, or he could open up his heart to the fact that the Holy Spirit might be trying to show him

something. He chose the latter. He opened up his heart as we discussed each one in turn and God spoke to him. He received revelation. He repented and we prayed through those areas and into the roots of the insecurities. He went out a changed man and has remained a changed man. I haven't seen those patterns of behaviour ever appear again. That night because of our willingness to prune and his willingness to humbly listen and receive, a good leader became a great leader.

There are two keys to pruning. Firstly no-one enjoys being pruned simply for the sake of it. People will embrace pruning best if there is a sense of purpose to it, if they can see it will lead to something better, to more fruitfulness and effectiveness for Christ. This comes back to the importance of those that are discipling and pruning having vision and faith for those they are working with and being able to communicate that.

The second key relates to relationship. People will receive pruning if they are convinced that you are for them, love them, and have their best interests at heart. This was the reason the leader I was pruning didn't walk out of the room. He knew there was no other agenda in my heart for him other than God's best. He felt loved by me and believed in by me, and that's why he was able to embrace it coming through me.

Discipleship relationships are generally 90% encouragement, support, care, affirmation, and prayer, but they are also 10% pruning. It is my experience that a huge number of people prefer to focus totally on the 90% and avoid the 10% because they prefer to avoid confrontation and uncomfortable situations. The result however is that people don't grow as they should.

Equally in the past people have tried to put in the 10% without having the 90% context. They've tried to prune without the relational bridge. We often call this driving a ten ton load over a two ton bridge. The result is breakage and collapse. To neglect the 90% or the 10% is equally disastrous – both lead to dysfunctional discipleship. But when the two work together in a balanced way, the result is maturity and growth that serves and glorifies God.

9. An Effective Church Practice

The practice within Tees Valley Community Church is simple: it may not be the practice of every church, but it is ours and it is a practice we have faith for and have seen work again and again. It is personal one-to-one discipleship. That discipleship begins at home. Husbands are called to disciple their wives and parents are called to disciple their children. Men disciple men, women disciple women and couples disciple couples. Many of the married women in our church also receive discipleship from other women, but this never undermines or replaces the husband's responsibility as head of his marriage and household. If people within our congregation don't want to embrace discipleship in this form, that's fine; discipling relationships are a gift, not a rule. We do however ensure that all our leaders, including cell leaders, are personally disciplined. For us this is a prerequisite of leadership simply because we don't believe you should be trying to impart to others what you yourself are not living in.

Whatever Biblical model and practice a church uses to earth the realities of discipleship, I believe the above

principles should be at work in the lives of those who follow Christ. My experience is that many churches are very 'hit and miss' in earthing discipleship amongst their leadership and congregation. My desire through this book is simply to provoke congregations and church leaders to think about what they are doing and to have a practice that is effective and works.

Questions For Further Thought

1. In your experience of discipleship what three principles are you strongest in and why?
2. In your experience of discipleship what three principles are you weakest in and why?
3. Do you appreciate receiving challenge and pruning, and who do you invite into your life to do that?
4. What is your church practice in this area and is it effective?

Chapter 7

Discipleship in Character, Works of Service, and Gifting

The following two chapters contain six areas of discipleship that are particularly worthy of focus within our lives and that of others. In this chapter we will look at character, works of service, and gifting. In the following chapter we will look at the supernatural, spiritual warfare, and engaging with the harvest. Meaningful discipleship must stimulate growth in all six areas. To look like Christ, to serve like Christ, to exercise our gifts for Christ, to live in the supernatural, to stand in faith, in prayer and on God's word against the enemy, and to be a witness to the lost, are all fundamental expressions of what it means to be a disciple.

There is a constant tendency for those who disciple to disciple strongly in their areas of strength, but to neglect areas they are personally weak in. We cannot afford to neglect any of the above areas if we are to produce mature and effective disciples. It is incumbent on all of us to grow in these six areas, for the gospels show Jesus constantly teaching and training his disciples in all of them. If we don't embrace and practice discipleship as

Jesus modelled it with his disciples, then the church will continue to limp along in partial effectiveness in its call and in its mission.

Character

As mentioned earlier, carrying the family likeness of the Father is fundamental to being a son or daughter of the Father. To carry the attitude and nature of Christ in all we do is the bedrock of what it means to be a disciple.

I was recently speaking with a young man in our church who is significantly gifted with a real heart of passion for Christ. We were discussing what the next step for his life should be. Having recently finished college, he was desperate to spread his wings and go on an adventure with Christ. I offered to help him with two equally valid options: a year of spreading his wings elsewhere or a year of staying with us and having his wings clipped (not the most inspiring advertisement for our home-run year team!). I encouraged him to go away and pray and said I would support him and help him in whatever he decided. Several weeks later he came back and said he'd opted for a year of having his wings clipped. His reason was that a year of clipping and shaping of his wings would actually prepare him to fly better for Christ in subsequent years.

I was thrilled at such a wise reply from such a young man. He was saying and embracing what we've always taught and known: the importance and priority of character. A year later the growth and maturity in his character has been remarkable and most significantly of course he is more effectively positioned for his future call and ministry.

Our daughter and son-in-law are currently in South Africa training at Hatfield School of Church planting. We also have our son in Winnipeg being mentored for six months by Ron Maclean. It has been an absolute thrill for me to hear back from all of them. They've been challenged and stretched in ministry, prayer, faith, the supernatural, service, and their gifting; but the priority in both settings has been character.

There are so many young men and women with so much potential for God who never make it because their character and choices let them down. There are so many significant ministries and moves of God that have ultimately fallen or stalled because of character flaws and bad choices. We've all read about those situations, we've all been disappointed by them, and we've all personally known people who started their race well but never finished it because their character let them down.

Whether we are being discipled or discipling others, let's make sure the character and nature of Christ within us remains of paramount importance. Let's constantly keep open to, and invite, character adjustment in our own lives and let's make sure we never avoid addressing character issues in the lives of those we have responsibility for.

Works of Service

When Christ came it was as a servant (Philippians 2:7), and Luke 17:7-10 reminds us that we too are servants. Servanthood should be the nature of all we are and do and consequently should be a significant focus of discipleship.

My son recently finished college and needed to earn some money to finance his six months in Winnipeg. Jobs are hard to come by and as a result he worked washing dishes in a restaurant. I remember one day he came home and said, with a smile on his face, how he felt like he was at 'the bottom of the food chain' in his position at work. I reminded him that he was called to be a servant for Christ and that he needed to continue with the job enthusiastically with an attitude of giving his best. I wanted to make it more pleasant for him, give him the very small amount of money he was getting to do some jobs for me instead. But I knew this was part of God's discipleship process for his life, teaching him to work faithfully and diligently at the mundane and the lowly.

I work with many good leaders, all of whom understand the call to serve others. One of my elders in particular personifies and exemplifies what it means to be a servant. Nothing is too much trouble for him, nothing is too low for him to get involved with, and I have never heard him moan about anything he has had to do. He leads powerfully from the platform with faith, vision, and enthusiasm, but is just as comfortable sweeping, cleaning, setting out chairs, cooking, washing up, and tidying up behind the scenes at church events. The first to arrive, the last to go, he and his wife are tireless in practical service and tireless in giving themselves pastorally to countless numbers of people. They excel as leaders and disciples of Christ and are an inspiration to many in works of service.

We look to invest each year into a number of younger people through our 'Daniel Challenge' programme. This is a full-time course which seeks to disciple young people

for God's call on their lives. The year is a great adventure, with many ministry opportunities, great mission opportunities, and many encounters with God, but is also a year of learning to serve in the 'small' things of life: helping to look after crèche children, helping to serve food, helping to tidy up after events, and many other such things. How they respond in these 'smaller' things is as important to us as their response to great mission and leadership opportunities they get within the year. We want to reproduce Christ-like servants willing to serve God in whatever he puts before them to do.

Jesus said in Luke 16:10, "Whoever can be trusted with little can also be trusted with much..." We teach and disciple those within our church to be faithful in service with every work, big or small, that Christ places before them, whether at home, in the workplace, at school, in college, in church, or within the community. We also teach them to be faithful with finances, to be faithful to tithe, and to give offerings because Jesus was clear that being faithful in handling worldly wealth is what qualifies us to handle true riches (Luke 16:11).

When we look to entrust more to people, we always look at how faithful they are being with what they already have. Faithfulness in small works of service will prepare you for being faithful in great works of service. This is an important area of focus for discipleship.

Gifting

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 says, "*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God*

works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

The Bible is clear that spiritual gifts are given to everyone, but not everyone has the same spiritual gifts. Prophets, evangelists, teachers, pastors, administrators, workers of miracles, encouragers, givers of mercy, bringing words of knowledge, discerning of spirits, bringing words of wisdom, and many others. Everyone has been given gifts by the Spirit to use for the common good.

Many of the world’s top athletes or musicians have been given amazing abilities and gifts; but none of them make it to the top without practice, training, and improvement of the gift they’ve been given. And this is true with gifts of the Holy Spirit. They need to be exercised, trained, and used with increasing skill if we are to be the best that we can be for Christ. People’s gifting in Christ needs to be a focus for discipleship.

My youngest daughter Abigail is a very gifted singer. I can affirm her in this, encourage her in it, and pray for her growth in it; but what I can’t do is train and improve her gifting. I haven’t got the voice, the gifting, or the knowledge to help her improve. If she wants her gift to be more effective then she needs to get alongside someone who is gifted in the same area.

The same is true with spiritual gifts. We can all encourage, affirm, give some direction, provocation, and prayerful support of someone’s gifting. However ultimately the gift is most effectively disciplined by the gift. For example, the best people to disciple the evangelistic gift are evangelists, and the same would be

true with prophets who need prophets, teachers who need teachers etc.

My main gift is leadership. Over the years I've seen that I not only have the gift of leadership, but that I can also spot the gift in others and instinctively know how to disciple and improve their leadership skills. While I do not directly personally disciple all the developing leaders in our church, I do make sure that I take a specific interest in their gift and make time to input and shape their leadership gift.

We've also found it helpful over the years to create contexts within which we gather the gifts together. Gathering evangelists together is great for mutual encouragement, edification, the exchange of stories, the raising of faith, and the sharpening and re-envisioning of the gift. The same is true with prophets, teachers, pastors, and other gifts.

The exercising of the gifts God has given us is crucial if the church is to do the works of Christ in the various arenas that God has positioned us in. We've been entrusted with these gifts, they are not to be neglected or half-heartedly used. We need to use them with the power, passion, and the skill God intended us to use them with. Whatever gifts God has given us, it is our responsibility to see that we are disciplined in using them. We need therefore to push into those who disciple us and request that we have help identifying our gifts and skills. We need to find and be directed into contexts within which we can exercise our gifts and we need to get input from others who carry the same gifting.

When we carry a gift, it comes with a responsibility to be disciplined in it and to exercise it. It doesn't however

end there; we also have a responsibility, in due course, to disciple others in the same gifting.

One of the joys for us over the last few years at TVCC has been the raising up and release of many excellent worship leaders. There is no doubt in my mind that this relates to the quality of those that have been in overall leadership of the worship team over the last 5-6 years, gifted leaders who have been prepared to disciple and coach people in their worship gift. This hasn't always been easy for them. They've had a few musicians who have not taken kindly to being adjusted in their gifting and have stormed off to other churches to play. The overall effect of discipleship in this area has been great for us as a church. The result is we enjoy Sunday by Sunday a consistent sense of God's presence in our praise and worship led by a variety of quality worship leaders.

Leaders who want to see the gifts of God released and growing in their churches need to understand this concept. They need to understand that the gift can spot the gift and is often best placed to disciple the gift. Leaders must be secure enough not only to let this happen but also to facilitate it happening.

Questions For Further Thought

1. How important do you see discipleship in character, works of service, and gifting? Why are these important to you?
2. What is your current desire and experience of being disciplined in these three areas?
3. What are your main giftings and how could you be more effectively disciplined in them?
4. What is your current experience of discipling others in these areas? How could you do more?

Chapter 8

Discipleship in Spiritual Warfare, the Supernatural, and into the Harvest

Spiritual Warfare

Ephesians 6:10-11 says, *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”* The passage continues with a call to buckle on the belt of truth, to put on the breastplate of righteousness, and to put on our feet the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. There’s a call to take up the shield of faith and to use it to extinguish the flaming arrows of the enemy, to put on the helmet of salvation and to take up the sword of the Spirit which is God’s word. The final exhortation is to *“pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”*

Any military commander will tell you that you can’t simply point a soldier to his military equipment and hope he will instinctively learn how to use it and how to fight effectively. An important part of any soldier’s career is training. Without adequate training a soldier becomes a soft target in battle, he quickly loses his

confidence especially under fire and is unlikely to mount an appropriate or effective response within battle. Well-trained soldiers can defend well and mount offensives on enemy territory.

Exactly the same is true spiritually. The Scripture is clear we are in a spiritual battle *“against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Ephesians 6:12). We are fighting the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12). We cannot leave soldiers of Christ untrained in this most important area. Discipleship must teach people how to put on the armour of God, how to use that armour, and how to stand and fight in it.

It is my experience that this is a most significant area of discipleship. All too often people are not adequately trained and prepared in this area. The result, time and time again, is unnecessary casualties. People fall into sin, pride, discouragement, bitterness, half-heartedness, resentment, wrong relationships, and a multitude of distractions. They don't keep their spiritual zeal serving the Lord and they lose their faith and trust in God. They are defeated in the good fight of faith, they are overcome by the enemy and become casualties of the spiritual battle rather than victorious through their faith in Christ. Over 25 years in leadership I have seen so many people defeated, so much potential wasted, and so many destinies in Christ squandered. Many of these occur in the first 12 months of following Christ, but all too many occur after that, and far too many have occurred amongst leaders and high profile ministries.

I thank God that through Mike Beaumont and Steve Thomas I have had men discipling me who have

themselves learnt how to put on and use the armour of God and know how to take their stand in the midst of battle. To learn by watching examples in action and to have their input, training and support during battle is the best form of discipleship in this area that it is possible to have.

Through what I have received via others and through my own experience of discipling people in this area I have developed certain principles of practice that I have generally found serve me and those around me well in spiritual warfare:

- Stay relationally close, so you are always aware of the day to day battles people are facing.
- Stay open and accountable in all areas of life at all times.
- Never be afraid to ask questions relating to sexual temptations, finances, marriage, and home life.
- Teach people how to walk in holiness, how to flee quickly from temptation – people never get away with flirting with sin.
- Teach people to know their weaknesses and keep well away from vulnerable areas.
- Identify spiritual strongholds in people's lives and see them set free.
- Teach people how to process disappointment, discouragement, failure, being let down, and being betrayed.
- Teach people how to identify the enemy's strategies. What is he trying to achieve through this situation? What is the temptation behind this assault?

- Teach people how to stand on the Scriptural and prophetic word of God
- Teach people how to have a faith response to all situations.
- Teach people how to have a prayerful response to all situations.
- Teach people how to see and speak positively.
- Teach people how to keep their eyes fixed on Christ and trust in God's sovereignty.

God has called us to be part of his family. He has also called us to be part of his army. We are engaged daily in a spiritual battle. If we are to be effective, and indeed survive, on the battlefield, we need to be trained and we need to train others. Spiritual warfare must be a focus of discipleship into our lives and also into the lives of those that we disciple.

The Supernatural

Jesus said to his disciples, *“As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons’”* (Matthew 10:7-8), and *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). Paul said to the Corinthians, *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power”* (1 Corinthians 4:20).

The supernatural was clearly part of Jesus' ministry, the disciples' ministry, and the early church's ministry. Jesus and the early church needed the miraculous to authenticate the message of the gospel and to set the

captives free. We surely still need that same power to authenticate the gospel and set today's captives free.

Jesus taught his disciples to move in the supernatural. He did this by teaching them God's Word and God's heart, demonstrating the supernatural to them, and giving them opportunities to move in it. When it worked, he encouraged them to give thanks to God and when it didn't, he taught them what was lacking. Jesus disciplined those he worked with into the supernatural.

This is still true today. We need to be taught and disciplined to move in the supernatural: to heal the sick, raise the dead, release the captives and oppressed, cast out demons, and cleanse the lepers. It's part of what it means to be a disciple.

This week I received a phone call from my son in Winnipeg, telling me some news. Ron Maclean had been preaching in Gateway Church on the Sunday morning from Mark 5 on the healing of the demon-possessed man. At the end Ron had challenged people to stand if they wanted an opportunity to cast out demons that week and Josh stood. Later that week he was prayer-walking and felt the Holy Spirit prompt him to go and speak to someone who had caught his attention. He soon got into conversation with this man about Christ and shared the gospel with him. He was quite clear that he needed setting free from demonic influences, so went back and reported to Ron who promptly proclaimed they needed to go back together and follow through the opportunity for the gospel and deliverance that God had opened up. I don't know the final outcome, but I do believe the Kingdom comes when people like Josh are disciplined by men of faith like Ron to move out into the supernatural.

My first experience of the supernatural was at a church weekend led by Steve Thomas and David Freeman back in 1981. I had only been a Christian a few months so my experience was fairly limited. There was a point over the weekend when one of the church members who felt he was controlled by a spirit of anger asked Steve and Dave to pray with him, which they did by taking him off privately to another room. Meanwhile we all went off for lunch in the dining room. In the middle of lunch, totally out of the blue, one of the drinking glasses being held by one of the teenagers spontaneously shattered into hundreds of pieces and then fused into a mass of hardened glass. The whole dining room stopped and looked, only to discover it was the eldest daughter of the man who was being delivered of the spirit of anger. It subsequently came to light that the glass had shattered at the exact time that Steve and Dave had cast out the demon from her father. Her father was delivered and set free and in the process so was the family.

Over the years I've seen many supernatural miracles, many people set free, many people cleansed, many delivered, and many physically healed. Of course I've also seen many disappointments as well. I'm grateful for the victories we've seen, but I'm hungry for more. If we are to see the Church accomplish all God has in his heart for it to do we will increasingly need to see more and more of the supernatural.

The area of the supernatural is always strongly contested by the enemy because it is so significant in seeing the Kingdom advanced. It is very important for us as disciples, and for those that disciple others, not to neglect this most important dimension of our spiritual

walk. Because it is an area so fiercely contested by the enemy, it is all too easily given up on by many Christians and churches.

I once heard Bill Johnson say that he sees more miracles simply because he prays for more miracles. We need to pray and disciple others into praying for more miracles. Keeping faith, expectation and determination in this area of praying for the supernatural is an important focus for the discipleship relationship. Jesus modelled moving in the supernatural, he drew the disciples alongside him to experience it, he helped them do it, and finally sent them out by themselves. Jesus illustrates how the discipleship relationship should be working in this arena.

Over the years Vic Gledhill has been an inspiration to many in the supernatural. Not only is it a central feature of his life and ministry, but he isn't slow to take people alongside him when he goes on mission trips. People that work with him soon find themselves watching him moving in faith and prayer towards the sick and demonised and very quickly find themselves having to do exactly the same. Vic instinctively disciples people into the supernatural. He disciples as Christ disciplined in signs, wonders, miracles and deliverance.

We need to be hungry in this arena to see more. This has to be a clear focus of growth for those that disciple as well as those that are disciplined. The more we expect, pray for, and reach for, the more we will see happening.

The Harvest

If I were to sum up why Jesus came to this earth, I would quote from Luke 19:10, *“For the Son of Man came to seek and*

save what was lost." The great commission entrusted to the church in Matthew 28 is essentially a continuation of that same job – to seek and save the lost. Jesus said in Matthew 9:37, *"The harvest is plentiful..."* In 2 Peter 3:9 we are told that God is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. The challenge is not the harvest, nor a lack of motivation or power on God's part. The problem, according to Jesus, is a worker problem. Hence his encouragement in Matthew 9:38, *"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

The harvest is not simply a job for evangelists. We are *all* called to be witnesses for Christ, to love the world that he loved, and to demonstrate that love in word and action. We are all planted strategically as "sons (and daughters) of the kingdom" to demonstrate and communicate Christ and the gospel in the field God has placed us in. That will involve sharing Christ with family, neighbours, work colleagues, school friends, college friends, and others that God has placed us amongst.

It is generally recognised that someone is most effective in reaching others with the love of God within the first two years of being saved. After that their circle of unsaved friends declines, as does their motivation to reach out to others, and they become similar to many others in the church, trapped in a place of insularity and comfort. Of course this is not always the case, but it is the case far too often in far too many of our churches.

Jesus led and trained his disciples to go into the harvest, to preach the good news and to demonstrate the love and the Kingdom of God to those that were lost. If we are not discipled into the harvest to do the same

thing, then something fundamental is adrift in the discipleship process. We can be discipled in character, spiritual gifts, works of service, spiritual warfare, and even the supernatural; but if we aren't sharing God's love with the lost in a meaningful way then our discipleship is inadequate.

I have found this area a most significant area personally over the years. When I was in secular employment, I found plenty of opportunities to witness; I was bold and confident and generally willing to move out in faith and share Christ's love. But since working for the church and getting extremely busy with the internal workings of church and leadership, I've had to make more of a conscious effort to get amongst unsaved people. I've kept a foot in medicine to help this, I've run student Alpha courses and Journeys courses, I've made sure we've built friendships with neighbours, kept sharing Christ with our unsaved family, and I've regularly preached the gospel at our guest services.

What is quite clear is that the more involved with unsaved people I am, the more faith and passion I have for them and, most significantly, the more faith, passion, and provocation I impart for the harvest to those I disciple.

I was asked recently what was top of my priorities for our church at this time. I didn't have to think long. I immediately replied that it was for our people to become more bold and confident in introducing people to Jesus. I consistently preach that the people around us have not rejected Christ; they simply don't know what he is like. Our job is simply to introduce them to Christ through how we love them, serve them, share the gospel with

them, and talk about our heavenly Father and his Son to them. We consistently find that virtually every unbeliever that comes to our baptismal and guest services on the first Sunday of every month has a positive experience and is in some way impacted by Christ. They may not get saved that morning but they are almost always moved positively towards Christ and the church in some way.

Every one of us is called to be a worker in the harvest. The challenge is that each of us might be mobilised with confidence and boldness to introduce people to Christ. If we solve the worker problem and the confidence problem we will see multitudes of people introduced to Christ and saved. Discipleship has a key role to play in getting workers into the harvest. It can only do this if the harvest becomes a key focus within the discipling relationship. Remember people ultimately won't do as we say, they will do as we do. Carrying a heart for the lost and being willing to go and seek them out is not taught, it is caught. We have to catch it and carry it if we are to impart it.

It has been encouraging over the last few years to see more of a focus on ministry in the workplace. Teaching people that demonstrating the Kingdom in their workplace is very significant because it puts them on the frontline of Kingdom advancement. It's also been encouraging to see the increase in social action and acts of kindness from the church; the rise of Alpha, marriage courses, parenting courses and many other initiatives. All of this has brought the church into more and more meaningful contact with the lost community, but there is still a long way to go.

Taking more ground from the enemy involves seeing more lives redeemed and saved. Spiritual warfare, the supernatural, and a willingness to get involved in the harvest all go together hand in glove. These are all important in bringing that harvest in for Christ and they are all important focuses within the discipling relationship. If discipleship simply focuses on character and ministry gifts to be used within the church, then we will be in danger of missing the heart of Jesus' mission which was, and still is, to seek and save the lost. The problem isn't the harvest, the problem isn't God; the problem is a lack of workers in the field. Discipleship should be producing an army of such people. Through discipleship Jesus produced workers for the harvest. Our discipleship should and must be doing the same. Without that understanding we will fail to faithfully fulfil the trust given us by Christ which is to seek and save that which is lost.

A Final Word

In summary, discipleship is the heart of the gospel and the cross is at the heart of discipleship. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate agent of discipleship, motivating and enabling change in a most supernatural and remarkable way. The Holy Spirit uses circumstances and challenges to disciple us and he also uses people as an instrument in his hand. Effective discipling relationships embrace biblical principles. Every church needs an effective, biblical model of practice. Discipleship should grow people in six areas – character, service, gifting, spiritual warfare, the supernatural and in reaching the lost.

The call to be a disciple of Christ is the greatest call that God could bestow upon us. My hope through this book is that you will have been provoked to respond to that call with renewed passion, enthusiasm, and a clearer sense of what effective discipleship looks like. The life and the adventure is in being a disciple and in making disciples. Let's not miss it. Let's seize the opportunity with both hands; let's co-work with the Holy Spirit to see our towns, cities, and nations filled with godly offspring who carry the family likeness which is Christ. Let's play our part in God's ultimate plan which is to see his glory covering the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Questions For Further Thought

1. How well-trained and disciplined are you in spiritual warfare? What would help you to be more effective in this area?
2. How effectively are you moving in the supernatural? How effectively are you being disciplined in this and discipling others?
3. How well do you engage with the harvest and introduce people to Christ?
4. Are you being disciplined into the harvest and are you discipling others into it? How could this be done better?

Small Group Resources

Small group resources to help unpack this and other **2020vision**> **Books** can be found on our website:

www.saltlight.org/2020vision