

# THE DISCIPLESHIP COVENANT

Because of our authentic love for Jesus, we sincerely partner with Him to care for and feed His lambs and sheep. Which ones? How many? How?

1. Ourselves
2. Our family – those with whom we live
3. A specific few of our church family
4. Specific, long term relationships with lost sheep (especially the under-privileged)

## CARING FOR AND FEEDING JESUS' SHEEP

So, because we DO truly love Jesus, and both He and we know it, Jesus invites us to care for and feed His sheep. Where do we start? Who are His sheep in our world? Right where we live?

Remember, we almost always need to care for Jesus' sheep **before** we can feed them. They do not care how much we know until they know how much we care. Jesus washed feet **before** He washed minds. Jesus was full of grace (first), and then truth. "Where are your accusers? Go, sin no more."<sup>1</sup>

The **FIRST** of His sheep in **my** world is ... surprise, surprise ... me. This could be, but need not be, a selfish consideration. It is JESUS' desire that I be cared for and fed, precisely because **HE** cares for me. When I see to it that He, Jesus, is discipling me, because that is what He wants, I am not primarily being selfish, I am choosing to do what **JESUS WANTS**.<sup>2</sup> Because He loves me, He deeply **WANTS** to disciple me ... to care for and feed me. Why? Jesus wants what is best for me and knows that being disciplined by Him is what is best for me. He knows my desperate need to be well-disciplined, and desires to meet that need. Because He loves me, He also wants me to receive benefits throughout eternity for caring for and feeding others, which I cannot do if I am inadequately cared for and fed. Of course, He cares equally for others, and because He wants them to also be cared for and fed, He delights in caring for me, knowing that will empower and equip me to better serve both Him and others He loves.

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<sup>1</sup> John 8:1-11

<sup>2</sup> To be sure, I win. Being disciplined by Jesus is in my best interests, both now and eternally. In this case, wanting what Jesus wants, and what is best for everyone involved, is logically and probably theologically the one circumstance when "living for self" is righteous and holy and God-ordained. Jesus wants us to be like Him (selfless), but when what we want is truly what He wants and truly godly, wanting what we want is probably holy.

Win for me, win for others, win for Him. Jesus is fully aware that if I am not being fed by Him, when I am with family, or church, or even lost people, instead of feeding them, I will be looking to them and saying, “Feed me. Feed me.” To the degree that I am cared for and fed by Him, I am helpful to Him in caring for and feeding others. Because I do love Jesus, I choose what He wants, which begins with letting Him disciple me for His purposes.

## **PRIORITY ONE: BE DISCIPLED BY JESUS**

So, because I love Jesus, I will see to it that His sheep are cared for and fed. I am one of His sheep. Of all of Jesus’ sheep on the planet, I am most responsible for this one ... me. Because of love for Jesus, and being responsible for my own actions, my first priority in serving Jesus is to put myself in a position to be disciplined (cared for and fed) by His Word, His Spirit, and His Body. “If you love Me, do what I want for you, which is to sit at My feet, which is the best thing for you,<sup>3</sup> letting Me disciple you. It will not only be best for you, but to the degree that I disciple you, you will be better able to do what I WANT for others, which is that you care for and feed them (disciple them). You serve Me, you serve others, and you serve yourself when you see to it that, as one of My sheep, you are cared for and fed by My Word, My Spirit, and My Body. Draw near to Me.”<sup>4</sup> Come to Me. Learn of Me. Let Me care for and feed you.<sup>5</sup>

So, after Jesus clarifies our love Him, He will normally ask this of us: “For My sake, and yours, and everyone’s sake, when and how will you let Me disciple you? How will you let Me disciple you through a mature discipler or a small cadre of My followers? How are you going to let Me disciple you – just the two of us – this week? This day?”

In the presence of Jesus and a few of His disciples, we all need to regularly answer that question.

## **PRIORITY TWO: DISCIPLE MY FAMILY**

“Do you love Me? Care for and feed your family with eternal food.”

Jesus disciplined twelve young men by inviting them into close and lengthy relationship with Him. They lived together like family. No, they were family. They ate, traveled, walked and talked as a family. They worked and played as family; they disagreed and misunderstood and resolved conflicts as family. Jesus saw to it that His disciples watched Him pray, work and relate. They heard Him interpret His work and words. He watched them. He gave them responsibilities. He coached them. He corrected and encouraged and inspired them. He did all this, just like wise parents do.

It is in the earliest years of life that the most important discipling occurs. Who will see to it that your child’s unenlightened dark heart, with all its self-reliant and self-centered ideas and desires, will be identified and exposed and given an alternative called “The LIGHT of the world?” Who will see to it that the most formative time of life – the wet cement years – will be more about Jesus than what comes through the internet, the television, their little friends, and their own mind-wandering conclusions?

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 10:38-42

<sup>4</sup> James 4:8

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 11:28-29

Who will help the little children come to Jesus<sup>6</sup> by listening to the perspectives they have come to that are not the perspectives of Jesus yet that shape how they interpret all other perspectives?

The greatest responsibility of the “provider” of any household is to provide FIRST<sup>7</sup> for the eternal well-being of each household member. Or ... are we duped into functionally believing that there really is no Creator or Savior or eternity and it’s all about eating and drinking and being merry?<sup>8</sup> Ten thousand years from now, what will matter to today’s four-year-old?

When Jesus meets with a little band of His contemporary disciples, having helped us clarify that we do love Him, He will then direct us to care for (first) and (then) feed a very specific little group of His sheep... our family.<sup>9</sup>

### **PRIORITY THREE: DISCIPLE ONE OR MORE IN MY CHURCH**

Jesus commands His followers to make disciples, which means that His followers are all to help baptized persons to be taught to obey **everything** He commanded.<sup>10</sup> For many reasons, being discipled to obey everything Jesus commanded is occurring in precious few western churches. Every Christ-follower is to be cared for and fed until he or she has matured in obeying everything Jesus commanded. This includes His command to make disciples. Each of us as Christ-followers must make holy resolve to secure the help we need until we are intentionally, relationally, and strategically caring for and feeding a few of Jesus’ sheep in our local church. In John 21, the lovers of Jesus are to care for and feed Jesus’ lambs and sheep, that is, disciple them. In Matthew 28, all of Jesus’ sheep are to be discipled until they are making disciples.

When Jesus meets with a little band of His contemporary disciples, having helped us clarify that we do love Him, He will then direct us to **care for** His lambs and sheep. This is grace. It looks like prayer, accepting, communicating value, finding good and encouraging, listening, serving, giving, etc.

He directs us to care. One of the necessary benefits of caring is that Jesus’ lambs will listen to those who care. We earn the right to be heard, to feed truth to lambs, by caring. Truth certainly includes proclaiming God’s mercy and grace to the full, but it also looks like asking caring questions about challenges and needed progress in following Jesus, about scripture, about relationships, about need to change, etc.

Reminder: the facilitator of a DBJ group is NOT to be the “heavy” who determines the hard truth about change or action that needs to be heard. The facilitator is to lead group attendees to Jesus to hear the truth regarding needed change and action from His Word and Spirit, or possibly other group attendees.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 19:14, mark 10:14, Luke 18:16

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 6:33

<sup>8</sup> Luke 12:19

<sup>9</sup> My book, “If Jesus Were A Parent,” describes discipling our children as much as possible like Jesus discipled His mostly teen-age disciples.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 28:20

As Jesus' disciples grow in caring for and feeding lambs and sheep informally, they are being prepared to formally disciple another very specific little group of His sheep... a few Christ-followers who are willing to be disciplined toward maturity and disciple-making.<sup>11</sup>

## PRIORITY FOUR: DISCIPLE ONE OR MORE LOST PERSONS

No one cares for lost sheep like Jesus does. With very few exceptions, every Christ-follower who is being disciplined by Jesus' Spirit, Word, and Body will be led to care for and feed lost sheep as Jesus did.

- *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the **world** through Him."* John 3:17
- *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was **lost**."* Luke 19:10
- *"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but **sinners**."* Matthew 9:13
- *"I lay down my life for the sheep. I have **other** sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd."* John 10:15-16

To be Jesus' disciple means to be a **friend of sinners**. It means to **care for** lost sheep. It means to leave the 99 and search for the one who is lost.<sup>12</sup> It means to listen to, to understand, to value, to honor Jesus' lost sheep as He does. Wisdom normally "washes feet" before trying to "wash minds."<sup>13</sup> Almost always, we are to be Jesus' eyes, ears, mind, and hands before we are His voice. And be His voice we must, else we leave lost sheep more comfortable, still very lost, and not as inclined to be found. To disciple a lost person means to fish for men. "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men."<sup>14</sup> Is it probable that if I am not fishing, I am not following?

- *"Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"* Matthew 9:11
- *"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners.'"* Matthew 11:19
- *"While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' were eating with Him and His disciples, for there were many who followed Him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw Him eating with the 'sinners' and tax collectors, they asked His disciples: 'Why does He eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"* Mark 2:15-16

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<sup>11</sup> My book, "Walk with Me," gives four chapters to explaining why we must disciple the church, and the remaining nine chapters to demonstrating how this can be done, based on Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>12</sup> Luke 15:4-7

<sup>13</sup> John 13:12-15

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 4:19

- *“But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This Man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Luke 15:2*

When Jesus meets with a little band of His contemporary disciples, having helped us clarify that we do love Him, He will then direct us to care for and feed another very specific little group of His sheep... one or two very loved but very lost sheep we call neighbors or friends or work associates ... or family.