

*THE PROCESS
OF
DISCIPLESHIP*

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A FRESH NEW APPROACH ABOUT
CONGREGATION! (PART 11)

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PROLOGUE

We have been busy with congregations for so many years now, but we are still having trouble defining the word congregation, never mind practicing and reproducing it! In actual fact this is the chapter that it is all about. The rest was only an introduction to orientate us from our confused, lost world. Church life has made our lives very occupied, complicated and confused. It is time to break away to a congregation life that is simple and that has no need to rely on people. It is now time to get to the answer and to activate that which we talked about. I encourage you to read this chapter several times, to meditate it before the Father and to make sure that you are able to understand the revelation in the model or the strategy.

This is not merely a new model and four new points. Let us clearly state that the solution for our congregation life is in principle no new model, but a living, dynamic and fresh Jesus Christ whose life is bubbling over in each believer, and whose love is not merely a spoken word but a lifestyle! The answer to everything in life is Jesus and Jesus only! But this Jesus wants to manifest Himself and reproduce. Unfortunately our congregational infrastructure is too structural with too little relationship, and that is why Jesus is not reaching the rest of the people out in the world. When we are speaking about a model it is only to establish a functioning, which will allow the Head to return to His congregation, take up His place and personally hand over the leadership. We have fallen into methods of functioning that are so focused on man's need and opinion that the Father has no more place to let His voice be heard! I dare you to take what is written here and try and apply it in practice with an open mind.

THE PROCESS OF DISCIPLESHIP

11.1) CHANGES AND DISCIPLESHIP

We have looked at all the principles in the Word with regard to the Father, the coming of Jesus, life, congregation life, discipleship and life change. If we put all these together it is only logic to know what to do next. Please understand, we are not merely looking for a new model because the old one is not working anymore. We are searching for the original model that has been in the Father's heart all these years. We are searching for that which will bring life and relationship and which will encourage, protect and multiply life and relationship! Our need is not to start a new ministry with a new leader and a new organization, but to allow the glory of the Father to spread over the whole earth! Everyone must see Him, become conscious of Him, and enter into a relationship with Him!

We have previously come to the conclusion that change only takes place when it is:

- Stimulated by the Word (Jesus Christ),
- Worked by the Holy Spirit,
- Revealed in the spirit of man,
- Obeyed in relationships and
- Shared with other people!

Our definition of discipleship was as follows: Discipleship is the process where in the *presence of other people*, we accompany someone on a tour through all *his relationships*, so that he may discover the *Father's will* for his life and start living in *obedience*.

If we divide discipleship into sections, it is the process whereby God:

- changes the hearts and relationships of people
(obedience in relationships)
- within a community of people
(atmosphere amongst people)
- by the working of the Word and the Holy Spirit
(Word)
- into a royal lifestyle
(witnessing)

11.2) FOUR PILLARS OF DISCIPLESHIP

In our journey of discovery so far, 4 matters have continually surfaced. In the practical application of discipleship, these 4 matters form the pillars on which discipleship is built according to the Word. You can read the literature about the church history and you will always find that whenever one or more of these principles were actively applied and lived out, it resulted in revival. I recently read an excellent book about the so-called house church movement in China and these four subjects stood out like pillars. They experienced problems when some of the leaders started deviating from these pillars and started making secondary matters of primary concern.

The 4 pillars of discipleship are as follows:

- The atmosphere of a group,
- The reading of the Word,
- Obedience in relationships and
- Witnessing towards other people!

These are definitely not the only four subjects concerned in discipleship, but they do form the pillars and framework around which everything else can be added. This is the

heart and primary values that have to be protected at all times, otherwise the secondary matters will take over and become the heart. I believe in the importance of theological clarity in the Word, but it must never be elevated above obedience to God in relationships. In our current, everyday congregation life we are often more concerned about the beliefs of believers instead of what they are living. The one is neither the opposite, nor more important than the other. There is a sequence in which things have to take place in the believer's life.

I took time to reflect on the past years of my ministry and came to the realization that every person that I worked with who needed ministry, lacked one or more of the 4 pillars in his life. These 4 pillars are not only the DNA of successful discipleship, but also the breeding ground for successful congregation life. The moment something else starts taking the place thereof, we see how people start deviating from it and become spiritually sick. If you listen to the messages of Angus Bachun and consider his life, you will see the same 4 pillars standing out as primary values. We have to start building from these four values and add everything else to it. In congregation life we may never allow anything else to replace these four values. This is the heart and core which brings life, protects and reproduces!

11.3) SUMMARY OF THE FOUR PHASES

These four phases are not only the summary of the 4 pillars which reproduces successful discipleship, but it also forms the process by which we practice discipleship. This process is the main program of congregation life and anything else must be built around it. Everyone applies it and the expectation is that everyone will lead a group in this way. The discipleship of the believers is in essence to build and lead a group in this process as quickly as

possible. Everyone who then starts a new group or congregation, receives direct mentoring from the leader of the congregation from which the new group was reproduced. This intensive mentoring takes approximately two years before the new congregation planter becomes a skilled, active planter.

In Afrikaans the four phases are as follows:

- Gebedsatmosfeer in GROEP
- Die WOORD
- GEHOORSAAMHEID in verhoudings
- GETUIENIS

Other people use the following terms for it:

Neil Cole (DNA)	English	David Watson
CONNECTION	PRAYER	REVIEW
DIVINE TRUTH	WORD	DISCOVER
NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS	OBEDIENCE IN RELATIONSHIPS	OBEY
APOSTOLIC OUTREACH	WITNESS	SHARE

Let us study the four phases and see how to implement them in a practical way. It is in actual fact a very simple process that can be applied by any believer. The heart of it is to facilitate people so that they can spend time in the presence of the Father in order to hear His voice. The Father wants to disciple His own children personally and the groupleader's sole task is to facilitate the presence of the Father. In all aspects the group leader is a facilitator who does not need to answer any questions or to give any lectures. He must only make sure that members of the group do not fall into theological discussions and arguments, because that will hinder the working of the Holy Spirit.

The group is about the Father and His children, which is why the group leader must make sure that everyone speaks from his heart and that nobody misleads the group or takes over. No gift may function in the group which will cause the group to become dependent on it so that it cannot function without it anymore. The Father remains the leader of the group on a deep level by means of the Word and the working of the Holy Spirit.

FASCILITATION OF THE GROUP

FOUR PHASES IN THE PROCESS:

1) ATMOSPHERE (PRAYER)

Introduction: SUMMARY/REVISION

- What are you grateful for this week?
- What problems or needs do you have at the moment?
- Is there anyone in this group who can fulfill this need?

Accountability:

- What was last week's lesson about?
- With whom did you share last week's session?
- Are you doing anything differently since our last meeting?
- Have you experienced God since the last time we came together?

2) DISCOVER (WORD)

Read the various sections aloud:

- What is happening in this scripture?
- What is it telling us about God?
- What is it telling us about people?

DO NOT give any teaching about the truths in the Scripture! Keep on asking questions until they have discovered the basic truths in the specific piece of Scripture.

Let them speak about the specific Scripture in front of them and not about other Scriptures.

Do not allow them to jump to books, sermons, doctrines or human opinions. Let them speak from their hearts!

When the group has discovered the truths in the Word, help them to discover what the Father says the steps of obedience in their lives should be.

3) OBEDIENCE (RELATIONSHIPS)

Ask questions that will help the individuals in the group to say how they will obey the Father. Help them to make specific commitment statements like: “I will...” or “We will...” (or the cultural equivalent thereof).

Encourage them to support one another to get to actual obedience.

Help them to move from a general statement like “I will love God” to a more specific statement like “I will love God by doing....”.

At the end you must ask them to write down the obedience statements. If they are willing, they can share it with the group. Ask them to pray for each other that they will allow God to carry out the plans which He gave them.

- What has to change in my relationship with God?

- What has to change in my relationship with other people?
- What will be difficult for me in the section about obedience?
- How can other followers of Christ help me to obey this section?
- Are there any other questions you have about this piece of Scripture?

4) SHARE (WITNESSING)

Activate in practice what you have learnt this week.
Share with other people what you have learnt this week.
Help to meet the needs of the group and the community.

- Do you know of any person with whom you can share this Scripture?
- Do you know of any person who needs help in anything? What can the group do to help these people?

11.4) INTERDEPENDENT WORKING

If the group consists of only unbelievers, we have to use more user friendly terms. You will not necessarily talk about praying, but rather suggest that each one say what he is grateful for to the others. Instead of asking what God is saying to you, ask what the Scripture is saying to you. The basic principles of the 4 pillars remain the same, but it has to be applied with wisdom depending on who is present.

It is of utmost importance to understand the interactive functioning of the 4 pillars on one another. The house

needs four pillars to support the roof, but if you take only 1 away, all the others will also fall apart. Together, the four pillars cause a dynamic that results in life being recreated, supported and reproduced. We have to practice this 4-point process until it becomes a life skill. You can apply it anywhere: at home, on trains, in parks and on any outreach. The two biggest problems in congregation life are to get people to the Lord and to keep them passionate. No human being can really do any of the two for any other person. We can simply start a process where people receive directly from the Father and our task is to support one another and be accountable to one another. Let us have a separate look at the importance of each phase to create life and to support it:

11.5) ATMOSPHERE OF PRAYER IN THE GROUP

Firstly, each person is expected to commit his life and path of discipleship to a group. Man is a being that operates best in a herd, because the Father is the head of the family and created communities. Nobody was created to live life on his own and a huge part of the success of your life depends on whether you are serving the Lord from within a community. The reason for this in the first place is that man is a being intended for relationship and relationship can only take place and be repaired within a relationship. You can only learn to swim inside a swimming pool, although you can also drown in a swimming pool. Any relationship is in principle a risk, but there are more positives than potential hurts in a relationship.

In the existence of a living organism, there are two important factors that will determine the health and future of the organism. These two factors are *atmosphere* and *nourishment*. A goldfish's atmosphere is the water and his

nourishment is the food that is put into the water. These must never be two opposing factors, but the one is more important than the other. A goldfish can survive for days without food, but only 15 minutes outside the water will cause his death. Therefore you can survive longer without nourishment than without atmosphere. Atmosphere is a more determining factor than food!

In our congregation life we have it the wrong way around. We feed and feed and overfeed each and every believer until they are obese, but we give no attention to their atmosphere! Also, the feeding of men is not to listen to sermons but to get firsthand information from the Father by sitting at His feet. A lot of preached Word is given through, but firsthand Word directly from the Father is very scarce. The atmosphere of the fish is the water and the atmosphere of the bird is the air, but the atmosphere of the human being is relationship. We are the product of relationship, born from relationship, we have to be brought up in relationship and we can only grow if we stand in relationship. The atmosphere of man is not offices, lecture rooms or auditoriums! The heart of man can only grow where it stands in relationship to other hearts. If you have no more friends with whom you can share your heart and life, you will become unhealthy in yourself and you will pine away spiritually.

What happens in the group which brings about such a determining dynamic in people's growth?

- The group takes away the feeling of loneliness.
- Each person has an atmosphere around him and the group is one big atmosphere.
- Life can only be preserved within a group. Where two or more shares and hands out the life of Jesus we have a congregation.

- Inside the group we get emotional support and nourishment if needed.
- In the group people love one another and practices the texts relating thereto.
- If you are at a low point in your life, the group carries you.
- In the group you will find other people with the same problems and we can learn from each other.
- There are people who have already learnt things that you do not even know about and you do not have to discover everything from scratch.
- People in the group give support and encouragement.
- In the group I learn to stop blameshifting and to take up my responsibilities.
- In the group I make commitments to study the Word together.
- Each person accounts to the group about his steps of obedience in his life.
- In the group you learn to be open and transparent and to talk from your heart
- In the group we learn to live more balanced and not to run away with over emphasis.
- In the group we learn to live life, obey God and to quit talking all day long about our problems and theologies.
- In the group we learn to lay down our lives for others and not to live only for ourselves.

After looking at this list, you do not have to wonder anymore why most believers' spiritual lives are stagnating. The group is definitely not the ultimate, but if you take it away you are going to struggle, for you will cut yourself off from people through whom the Father wants to work in you. People cannot give us life, but they are God's hands who can support us in difficult times and encourage us to go on. God alone is our source of life, but we are born from

people, we have to live amongst people and we will only be healthy if we lay down our lives for other people. Life is found in people and spread through people. I can have much life in myself, but I will not be able to spread it if I cannot learn to communicate with people in groups. Love was made to share and you can only give when you are in the presence of other people.

In South Africa the term 'Ubuntu' is often used. Read the following phrase about Ubuntu. "South Africans have always created in collaborative groups. 'Ubuntu' is most effectively encapsulated in the phrase: 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', which can be roughly translated as: *"a person is a person through other people"* or *"I am what I am because of you"*. This philosophy engenders itself in song, dance and music, where all individuals in the community participate in the creation process." This is what true congregation is, namely the involvement of everybody in the community under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Let us discover again the wealth which God has stored in each and every person on earth.

11.6) DISCOVER THE WORD

The second primary pillar of healthy congregation life is the Word. The Word is our source of life, without which every person will die spiritually. The Word which became flesh lives in us through the Holy Spirit, but we have to read and study the written Word in order to feed our spirits! Matthew 4:4 –

"Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Jesus is the Word, but even He lived from the words from the Father's mouth that flows from His heart. Each believer must personally sit at the feet of the Father to be fed by Him. Only direct revelation from the Father is true

nourishment and people's sermons stimulate us the moment we hear them, but they do not feed us in the longterm. The average believer does not even read one chapter of the Bible per day and then we wonder why our lives are not flourishing. John 8:31-32 - "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The first basic characteristic of a disciple is someone who knows the words of the Father and who lives his life within these words.

It is impossible for us to live holy lives without the Word. Heb.4:12 - "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The Word that became flesh, Jesus, lives in our spirit and can only live His life through us if He is stimulated and awakened by the written Word. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and He only works in the presence of the Word. Col.3:16 - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

1Joh.2:14 - "I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God lives in you and you have overcome the evil one." There is only one way to start living in victory and that is by getting strong in the Word. Many believers tell me that they do not feel like reading the Word. There is a natural desire in your spirit for the Word of God. If you do not experience it, it is probably because there is still sin in your life with which you have not dealt properly and that takes away your desire for spiritual things. Sometimes we first need to repent from evil in our lives before the hunger for the Lord will return from

within our spirits. Hosea10:12 – “Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until He comes and showers righteousness on you.”

The problem believers have is that nothing in their lives can fill up or become a lifestyle if there is no foundation of Word. You can build the most beautiful things into their lives, but it is all going to fall through and disappear if there is no Word foundation. The Holy Spirit works through the Word and the less Word you have in your life, the less opportunity there is for the Holy Spirit to speak to you. That is also why you have to get the unbelievers to start reading the Word. As unbeliever he does not have the Holy Spirit in him, but as soon as he reads the Word, the Father speaks to him. The Word releases the working of the Holy Spirit!

11.7) OBEDIENCE IN RELATIONSHIPS

When the Word is read the Father speaks to every person who reads or hears it. 1Tim.1:5 - “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” I always say 20% of any subject is contents and 80% is spirit and life. The main purpose of the Word was never to sort out our theology, but to transform our personal lives. When you are reading the Word, it will definitely expose lies in your life after which you will definitely have to renew your mind. We cannot just keep on believing anything, but there are people with perfect faith definitions who still do not live a godly life nor do they reproduce anything. It can all still be in the mind. Surely the Lord uses our minds, but the end purpose of the Word is simply changed and reproducing lives. Reproduction is the only measure of success. The revelation of the truth of my identity in Christ is definitely the

starting point of change, but without steps of obedience it will only remain a nice revelation.

Most believers sit and discuss principles, opinions and doctrines when they get together. I Cor.8:1 says that knowledge puffs up, but love builds! The Word is a love letter and not a theological handbook. It has to be read from your heart and not only with your mind. We get together in love to talk about the love of the Father. We were not called to get involved in theological discussions and arguments. 1Tim.6:3 - "If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in *controversies and quarrels* about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵and *constant friction* between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain." Distantiate yourselves from such people. The need in congregations is to speak honestly and straightforward from the heart about relationships. Our lives consist of relationships and happiness comes from living in victory in those relationships.

Because the average believer only keeps himself busy with sorting out doctrines, he also puts people in doctrinal boxes. The result is that those who disagree will be actively discussed and even criticized. My experience is that unbelievers are very sensitive to preaching and admonishing believers who are only correcting everyone around them and who can never stand in relationship to anyone who differ from them. How will you ever reach an unbeliever if you cannot love him unconditionally while he still has a chaotic theology and life? It is not our task to convince or change anyone, because this is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word! Our task is to love them and to expose them to the Word.

When the discipleship groups or congregations are functioning, the Scriptures will be read together and each person will get a chance to say what it speaks to his heart. Everyone talks from his heart and no theology. Nobody is allowed to react to what anyone else is saying, and especially not to correct him, not even with the Word! Nobody should quote from other books or sermons or jump to ten other Scriptures. It creates a very safe atmosphere for people to be honest about their experiences, even if it is wrong and sin. Sin has to be exposed to the light, so that the light can reprimand it. According to the Word we must learn to confess our sins to one another. Nobody can determine the percentage of wrongness or rightness each person has, that is why we leave it to the Lord. As long as people are reading the Word, the Word will correct you along the way. We remain with the text in front of us until we have heard the voice of the Father about what each of us has to do about it in our lives. Each one writes down his own steps of obedience and the group monitors one another with regard thereto. Most small groups are dead or dying because one person constantly teaches the others. There is no reproduction in that!

11.8) SHARING OR WITNESSING

There is nothing as deadly as just living for yourself. In the Western world we are so used to it that we think this death is life. This death is clearly visible in our children, our marriages and congregations. Everything revolves around ourselves! On the other hand there is nothing that creates so much life and maturity as giving out and taking up responsibility for others around you! Love was never meant to be gathered and stored, because love only comes to its right when it is acted out! God is love, but He is always on the move into people's lives. God is always on a

mission where He is involved with His family. On the day after his conversion Paul already shared with others that which he had received. We do not only start witnessing once we are mature, but we mature by witnessing!

Jesus came to witness to us with regard to the Father, so that we can again be witnesses to the unbelievers. John 1:7 - "He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. (8) - He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light." Joh.15:27 - "And *you also must testify*, for you have been with me from the beginning.

SUMMARY

- 1) No model brings about life, but it can make the existing life flow and reproduce.
- 2) The process of change determines the process of discipleship.
- 3) The 4 pillars of discipleship are as follows:
 - The atmosphere of a group,
 - The reading of the Word,
 - Obedience in relationships and
 - Witnessing to other people!
- 4) The 4 pillars of discipleship are the primary matters which stimulate a process of true discipleship.
- 5) The leaders of the groups are not preachers or ministers who have to supply answers. They are merely facilitating the presence of God so that He can speak to people.
- 6) People in the groups have to be taught to speak from their hearts and not from their minds. It is not about theology, but about relationships.
- 7) Accountability in the group towards one another is a very important factor of discipleship.
- 8) An atmosphere of relationships is more determining for growth than food!
- 9) Every person on earth must personally hear the Father through the Word.