

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

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*A FRESH NEW CONCEPT ABOUT
CONGREGATION! (PART 9)*

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PROLOGUE

We have now taken the big step of defining congregation. For the average person it may seem like a small step, but when you see the amount of discord and confusion amongst spiritual leaders you will realize that it is actually significant progress. People, the hour is late on earth and if you do not believe me, just watch the news for one hour on TV. All the signs of the end times are here and the solutions are still sitting in their chairs. They enjoy being entertained instead of going (and making disciples). Congregation still remains the Father's strategy to get the solution, namely Jesus, out to everybody. But it is now time for serious consideration whether what we are busy with are actually going to change the world.

I have no doubt about it that traditional congregations are definitely not able to carry out the Great Commission. We show growth, but at a rate that cannot even exceed the world's population growth. The amount of new believers is less than the amount of new births. We will have to be honest and stop having our heads buried in the sand like ostriches. We not only need an increase in converts, but a total explosion or exponential multiplication. There is undoubtedly only one way how this can happen, and that is if each believer gets involved so that the full working of the Word and the Holy Spirit can take place through them. Stop doing all the beautiful and wonderful things that are taking up all your time and let us get up like one man in this country and bring discipleship to its full realization. Stop doing things to gather people and start using your time to get those who are already in to go out as quickly as possible and to become active in the field. Can't we at least take out the 20% cream of our congregations and plant new congregations with them?

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

9.1) THE SCOPE OF DISCIPLESHIP!

It is very important that we realize the extent or scope of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. In the first place the order was not so much to reach all the nations, but to disciple all the nations. The success of the Gospel is not only dependent on people hearing the Gospel, but that they have to live disciplined lives! True disciples are people who live like Jesus and not those who are only members of a church! The further extent of the Great Commission was that a small group of about 120 people received the order to disciple the whole world! Each congregation has the potential to disciple the whole world and it is also the expectation Jesus has of us. Is the congregation where you are involved, geared, ready, motivated and equipped to disciple the whole world? We simply do not think this way, because we are definitely not convinced that it is possible. The whole way in which we are running our congregation and building our infrastructure, is definitely not according to a mental attitude that we are going to infiltrate the whole world. Everything is done in order to accommodate people and not to send them out as quickly as possible!

9.2) THE PRODUCT OF DISCIPLESHIP

Man was created in the image and likeness of God, and that which makes him stand out above other living creatures is his heart or spirit with which he can enter into the spirit world and by which he can also live a quality of life other living creatures cannot. Man was created for life and abundance in his relationships. True discipleship can only be to live the same life of abundance which Jesus lived on

earth. Remember, true success lies in reproduction and true discipleship has to be the reproduction of Jesus' life in every person on earth! The *purpose* of discipleship is therefore to take every person on a journey where he/she can discover God by getting to recognize His voice and then adapting his/her life in obedience to what the Word says.

This process of awakening and transfer of life must then be carried on to as many other people as possible. 2 Timothy 2:1-2 – “So you, my son be strong in the grace that is to be found only in Christ Jesus. And the instructions which you have heard from me along with many witnesses transmit and entrust to reliable and faithful men who will be competent and qualified to teach others also.” Discipleship is an exponential matter. The more people are doing it the more people will get involved and the quicker people will get disciplined.

9.3) KEY ELEMENTS IN DISCIPLESHIP

Let us look at a few scriptures that specifically make mention of discipleship:

- John 8:31-32: And Jesus said to those Jews who had believed in Him, if *you abide in My word*, you are truly my disciples, and *you will know the Truth*, and the Truth will set you free.
- Luke 14:26, 27 + 33: 26 If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother (in the sense of indifference to or relative disregard for them in comparison with his attitude toward God) and likewise his wife and children and brothers and sister – yes and even his own life also – he cannot be My disciple. (27) *Whoever does not persevere and carry his own cross and come after (follow) Me*

cannot be My disciple. (33) So then, any of you who *do not forsake all that he has* cannot be My disciple.

- John 13:34-35: I give you a new commandment: that *you should love one another*, just as I have loved you, so you too should love one another. *By this shall all (men) know that you are My disciples, if you love one another (if you keep on showing love among yourselves).*
- John 15:7-13 - (7): If you remain in me and *my words* remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. (8) This is to my Father's glory, that you *bear much fruit*, showing yourselves to be *my disciples*. (9) "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now *remain in my love*. (10) If you obey my commands; you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. (11) I have told you this so that *my joy may be in you* and that your joy may be complete. (12) My command is this: *Love each other* as I have loved you. (13) Greater love has no one than this, that he *lay down his life for his friends*.
- John 15:26-27 – "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. (27) *And you also must testify*, for you have been with me from the beginning.
- Acts 20:23-24 – (23): Except that the *Holy Spirit clearly and emphatically affirms to me in city after city* that imprisonment and suffering await me. (24) *But none of these things move me; neither do I esteem my life dear to myself*, if only I may finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have obtained from the Lord Jesus, *faithfully to attest to the good news (Gospel) of God's grace* (His unmerited favor, spiritual blessing, and mercy)."

Just from these verses we see essential concepts defining discipleship like: abiding in My Word/ loving God above all else/ carrying your cross/ follow Me/ forsaking all that you have/ loving one another/ bearing much fruit/ abiding in My love/ keeping My commandments/ My joy be in you/ laying down your life for your friends/ testifying/ having no worries/ not esteeming your life dear to yourself/ to attest to the good news of God's grace! All these words together create a powerful package from which we can distinguish four basic core elements:

- Accountable towards one another (group)
- Abiding in the WORD
- LOVE for one another
- ATTESTING towards others

9.4) REDEFINING OF DISCIPLESHIP:

9.4.1) Before conversion we need discipleship – we have to disciple towards conversion!

In our approach we had as a church we think of discipleship as something that is exclusive to believers. The believers are indeed coming to church to mature and grow! It is at this point that everything is turned inwards and we do not even reach out to unbelievers, let alone disciple unbelievers. There is only one commission and one program for the believers and that is the discipleship of the unbelievers. This is a foreign concept to us, but in practice we are already discipling our children long before they accept the Lord into their lives. If we understand the process of discipleship correctly, it will also be easier for us to understand that it is possible to disciple unbelievers.

9.4.2) Discipleship is about desire, willingness, discovery and discussion - not lectures in classrooms!

The willingness, receptivity, desire and openness of a person to be discipled, are the greatest factors which will determine whether it is going to be successful. You cannot disciple adults against their will in spiritual matters. A disciple is someone who willingly receives the discipline of the Holy Spirit's voice in his life and who lives in obedience thereto. Discipleship is about a will that willingly submits to another will; it is not about an amount of lectures in classrooms where only information is transferred. Discipleship is not a mere transfer of information, but the transformation of a life in every aspect thereof. In the process of discipleship there is indeed a factor of information or revelation of the truth, but it is the Father Himself who reveals it to the person. We have too many forms of discipleship where we preach to people and the Father gets no opportunity to speak to that person. Jesus said in John 8:31-32 that someone is a true disciple if he abides in His Word, because then he will know the Truth and the Truth will set him free! Discipleship starts with the desire to personally hear the Father's voice by reading the Word yourself! If you do not have this as foundation you only end up with human advice and laws!

9.4.3) Discipleship is about God's Spirit which the Word reveals to one personally – it is not about correcting doctrines

The only place of freedom in the universe is the voice of the Father! No human instruction, course, teaching or preaching can set you free. Freedom from any addiction is only possible if you personally hear the Father speaking to you about your problem! Preaching is secondhand revelation to the hearers thereof and it will only bring freedom if the hearer goes directly to the Father to hear if

that which was preached is indeed true. If mere preaching managed to set people free, the whole world would have been free long ago. It is only God's voice in the preaching that sets you free if you can hear it. The rest is only words, although it is firsthand revelation to the preacher. Preaching may bring about theological change in the mind, but it is one of the most ineffective means if your purpose is constant life change!

In churches doctrines are very important. That is the reason why there are so many denominations. Full-time leaders and preachers, who studied for 4 years and more, are appointed to ensure that members do not stray from the doctrines. The purpose of Jesus coming to earth was not in the first place to bring pure teaching, but to reveal the Father in pure living form as a person. It is not the task of leaders to constantly correct members. The Holy Spirit will lead everyone into the full Truth as long as they read the Word. Doctrine is not unimportant, but mere right teachings do not guarantee constant life change. Life change starts by the renewing of your mind, but this is only the start of the process – Romans 12:1-2. To obtain life change, you need your will, emotions and body to work together. It is an interesting fact that people are living their lives based more on their emotions (whether it is enjoyable) than on their intellect (whether it is right or wrong)! The mere activation of the will by the spirit can sort this out and get it under control.

9.4.4) Discipleship is a lifestyle without end – it is not about a series of courses

Discipleship is in essence about lifestyle. It is something you are going to work on for the rest of your life and there is never going to be a perfect end. The essence of a lifestyle is also not a matter of having said and done everything perfectly, but it originates from and is motivated by the

heart and depends on the attitude in the heart! Any life or cause is but 20% content and the rest is 80% spirit and attitude! Discipleship is far more about right attitudes than right words and deeds in the first place. The further problem is which measure you use when you determine spirit or attitude. Only the Father can do it through the Word and the Holy Spirit. There is also no course that can disciple you perfectly. No course or series of courses about discipleship is going to finally settle the matter, because the perfect course was already written long ago, namely the Word! The Word is alive and powerful and this alone can awaken and change life and then maintain it! To disciple a lifestyle we need real life situations and not courses or sermons!

9.4.5) The best way for discipleship to take place is in small groups, communities or families – not necessarily on a one-to-one basis or in huge masses!

Discipleship is an intimate, personal working in the lives of people and cannot take place in situations that are too big, too formal or too impersonal. People live according to values and values can only change if people live the true life in your presence. The power of example has always been the strongest. You can reason with someone's theology, but not with the lives people are living. The saying goes - "The man with experience is not at the mercy of the man with the argument." Our instruction is to love people and in this way to carry out the Great Commission. "People do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care." Each and every one of us needs groups, communities and families where we can learn from example. The poorest person is he who lives on his own and has to find answers to everything on his own! One-on-one discipleship is not wrong, but it will give you less experience to learn from. One-on-one mentoring also

takes a lot of time. We also have to learn that our problems are not so unique that no one else can associate with them! Each person needs to commit and lay down his life in a group that functions like a family in order to receive input and to be accountable to that group! In a large gathering we can all listen together to a sermon, but no personal edification takes place there.

9.4.6) Discipleship addresses every aspect of life – not just religious and spiritual matters!

God created man as body, soul and spirit and He made provision that we can live successfully in every aspect. Man is a being of uniformity and everything in his life has an influence on one another. In Western society everything has become institutionalized and delegated to institutions. The congregation takes care of the spiritual, the broker and bank manager takes care of the finances, the school takes over education, the doctor manages the medical, the psychologist manages your relationships, the nursery school brings up your children and the Sunday school takes care of the spiritual education! There may be several disciplines in life, but God lays claim to everything in our lives! He is the start of everyone's life and the solution to everything! The Word addresses everything in our lives and it is the starting point for everything! God is God of everything in our lives! Man is by nature a spiritual being and all solutions start in the spiritual world! Directly and indirectly the Word gives the principles for everything in our society. As believers we cannot hand over certain parts to people so that they can take control of these parts of our lives.

9.4.7) Discipleship is behaviour, relationship and life based – it is not about what you know, but what you live and how you obey God!

The tragedy today is that religious people are highly informed people with huge amounts of knowledge, but they do not necessarily live any of it! In the Western world leaders are appointed and paid according to the amount of years that they have studied – from 4 to even 10 years! The guideline by which to measure discipleship is not knowledge, but behaviour, relationship, life skills, character and attitude! These are matters that count in the Kingdom and nothing else. In the first place the Lord does not want to know how much you know and how many degrees and courses you have done, but how much of the Word you are living. If you do not know how much of the Word you are living, ask the simplest person you know and you will get a clear indication! Skill only comes by living life and by living it in strict obedience to the Lord. Things do not work out in our lives because we do not conscientiously obey the Lord anymore. We become consumers in congregation life and not followers of Christ who strive to live His fullness anymore!

9.4.8) Discipleship is about living who you are – you become a disciple by discipling others!

Discipleship is about identity. All people live according to the understanding of their identities. You do not solve problems by nagging at them, but by bringing people closer to the Father, so that they have a better understanding of their identity. You can only find your identity in the Word that brings you in the presence of the Father, and you can only establish your identity by living it in front of others and by helping them with their identities! In short: You can only become a disciple by discipling others! You can only learn to swim by jumping into a swimming pool and learning to swim within the atmosphere of water. You can only learn to manage relationships by having relationships with other people! People become true disciples by discipling others and walking through the process with them.

There is no other way and somewhere along the line we have to start being honest and bring everything that we do in a congregation in line with this. There has always been only ONE commission from the Lord and that is to disciple the nations. There is still only ONE commandment from God and that is love! Let us stay with this and stop trying to find ten other things pretending it would help the process of discipleship along the way. Believers only become good disciples by discipling other people. No course can equip you, except to go and do what we have been commissioned to do and leave all the other things behind! May the Father give us grace to become faithful to His Word and not to our church programs!

9.6) A DEFINITION OF DISCIPLESHIP

9.6.1) Discipleship is the process, in the presence of other people, to accompany someone on a tour through all his relationships, so that He can discover the Father's will for his life and become obedient to it.

9.6.2) Discipleship is the process through which God:

- changes the hearts and relationships of people
(obedience in relationships)
- in a community of people
(atmosphere amongst people)
- by the working of the Word and the Holy Spirit
(Word)
- to an outflow of a royal lifestyle
(Testifying)

*IF HE IS NOT LORD OF ALL, HE DOES NOT WANT TO BE LORD
AT ALL!*

SUMMARY

- 1) All the nations will only become discipled if all the believers start discipling the unbelievers!
- 2) Each group of believers or congregation has the potential to disciple all the nations. They just don't think like that about themselves!
- 3) The end product of discipleship is people who live like Jesus!
- 4) The key elements of discipleship are as follows:
 - Accountability towards one another (group)
 - Abiding in the WORD
 - LOVE for one another
 - WITNESSING towards others
- 5) The focus is to disciple unbelievers. Believers are only discipled by going out and discipling unbelievers!
- 6) Discipleship is not about the transfer of information, but about the transformation of lives. Discipleship has no meaning if people do not live what they talk!
- 7) Only willing people can be discipled! If it does not come from the heart, it is mere learned behaviour and not a lifestyle lived from your inner being.
- 8) True constant freedom is only found in the voice of the Father! Everyone has to personally go to the Father and no leader can be your representative with the Father.
- 9) All matters are 20% content and 80% attitude. The heart speaks louder than the mind!

10) Examples of other people's lives are critical and essential for the establishment of a new lifestyle!

11) The Word addresses all aspects of our lives and it is the solution for all aspects of our lives!

12) Everything in life is a Person: Jesus Christ! There is only one law in life and that is the law of Christ!

13) Life can only be practiced in real life! You can only gain experience in life by living!

14) Discipleship is not to try and become someone, but to learn how to be who you are! God does not ask from you anything that you are not and that He has not already provided for!

15) Discipleship is the process, in the presence of people, to accompany someone on a tour through all his relationships, so that he can discover the Father's will in his life and become obedient to it.