

# Forgotten Tutors in Discipling - March 1975

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With the needed re-emphasis recently on the role of matured men and women to disciple others, there has been a tendency in many places to overlook some of the means God uses of direct discipling of our lives. This can lead to much personal loss and at times confusion as we find ourselves incapable of understanding the reasons for some of the happenings in our lives. God impressed this on me recently as I considered some of the events of this past year. I don't know about yourself but some things that have happened for me have been 'stranger than fiction'. There had to be some reason for it all, to give meaning to it. The more I thought on what was happening, the more I realised God was using it to work something in me. I would like to share with you a few of the means God uses to train our lives.

## Discipled by a Promise

Often I have heard people say, 'Since I found Christ, I've found a purpose in life.' However, when I asked discreetly what purpose they had found I was met by a blank stare.

Thousands of Christians live day to day without a sense of direction and definite purpose in life. The way God brings a sense of purpose into our lives is by means of a promise. Of course there are the promises of the Bible that give us a sense of direction towards an ultimate goal: for instance, "When we see Him, we shall be like Him." However this is so distant for the majority that they are content to go on living sub-standard lives in a vague hope that in the end they will be made perfect. It is so distant .as a promise majority it does not alter, shape, or disciple their lives NOW.

God therefore gives promises that appear close at hand, promises that so grip, enthuse, and envision us that we begin to live our lives with purpose of achieving the promise. So our lives are now being radically shaped by the promise and its glorious goal.

Abraham left a whole life-style behind to become a pilgrim en-route to a promised land; all the time he journeyed he was looking beyond the dust, dirt, desert, quarrelling herdsmen, problem nephew, to a city whose builder and maker was God. The promise of a son to be heir of all his promises enabled him to rise over his set-backs and mistakes time and again. The promises of God governed his life.

There are promises locked in my heart God gave me years ago, but they are so alive and real that daily they cause me to live in their light; they affect my thinking, and my way of thinking shapes my life. These closer promises are so personal that often to share them would only cause misunderstanding or provoke unbelief or rebuke, yet they are God's word of faith in you. The redundant middle-aged man needing a job, the diligent but nervous student facing an exam, the couple whose marriage is shaking, the pastor facing difficult church problems, the evangelist breaking virgin soil, the person with a terminal

illness, it does not matter whatever our station in life, we are eligible for a promise from God, that will be personal, and powerful to disciple our lives.

## Disciplined by Silence

I find this one of the most trying things in my experience, the time that follows God having spoken a promise to you, in which nothing seems to be happening towards its fulfilment and God does not say anything more to you about it. This time of silence brings to the surface so much that was down inside us that we did not know was there. It enables me to see the real attitudes in the real me.

Shortly after our marriage God promised us a son. We rejoiced, and eagerly looked for this to be fulfilled. Two years went by and during this time my wife remained childless. As we entered our third year my wife was beginning to show evidence of strain, her desire for a child was so great, that many times I found her weeping into the pillow at night. We earnestly prayed, but from that time over two years before, when God had given us the promise, He remained silent about the matter.

One day as Edna was so up-tight, I suggested she pour her heart out alone with God as Hannah of old. She went aside for several hours in the bedroom; when she re-appeared later I could see the red-rimmed eyes giving their own story.

Quietly I said, 'Well, what did God say?' she looked at me and softly said, "John the Baptist." I sat up a little alarmed, she went on to relate to me the Biblical incident. When in prison, John couldn't understand why Jesus the Messiah, sent to set captives free, had not hurried to release him. So he sent his disciple to Jesus and they asked Him, 'Are you the one looked for, or is it someone else?' He sent them back to tell John of the miracles they had seen Him do, and how the poor had the gospel preached to them with this specific message for John, "Blessed are those who are not offended with me."

With that Edna looked at me and said, 'Even if what He promised and what we have expected does not happen, I will not be offended with Him.' Suddenly it over-whelmed us as we sat in silence that God had used the three years of silence to work a deep victory into our lives, we knelt together and told Him of our love for Him together we embraced His sovereign will joyfully.

That same month Edna conceived and our first son was born later, we now have four healthy children in the family. How we rejoice for the three years of silence that disciplined us in a new measure of the reality of commitment to His sovereignty.

## Disciplined through Setbacks

What happens inside you when things go wrong? When what you anticipate or hope for does not

work out? Our reactions to setbacks determine what results from them. Setbacks are sometimes due to personal failure or mistakes, due to impetuous action, wrong attitudes, inexperience, false assumptions, wrong counsel, and a lot of other reasons, but does that mean the end of everything? Does God write you off? My experience through setbacks is that the first and only person who threatens to write me off as a reject is MYSELF!! Consider these two verses.

'Abraham was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him". (Genesis 16 v.16)

'Now when Abraham was ninety-nine years of age the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to him...." (Genesis 17 v.1-3)

At eighty-six years of age Ishmael was born at ninety-nine years of age God spoke again to Abraham confirming His covenant. There were thirteen years of setback. I wonder what happened in that time?

It was obviously of so little account that God did not record this for us. We could go on tracing the mistakes of men through the scriptures but God is a God of mercy He does not write off a repentant heart. Reader don't you dare write off what God has not and that includes yourself. He will talk with you again, work with you again, and work through you again.

Some setbacks are for reasons Other than personal mistakes Paul expressed to the church at Thessalonica his desire to visit them, but spoke of this desire being thwarted and his coming being hindered by Satan. The enemy opposes the working of the will of God in us, and stirs up opposition against it. A host of evil spirits actively work against the purpose of God in a life.

However let us put it all in perspective. The most frustrated creature in the universe is the Devil, for, having done his worst, performed the most evil actions, conceived the most wickedly ingenious plot against the child of God, only discovers he has been, in the hand of God, an instrument for good, to disciple the Christian that loves the Lord.

See the cross as the ultimate work of evil, the culmination of a dastardly wicked plot by Satan to destroy the Son of God, or take another vantage point, as Peter at Pentecost preaching the cross to the people said, "This man delivered up by the PREDETERMINED PLAN and FOREKNOWLEDGE of God you nailed to a CROSS by the hands of godless men and put to death." (Acts ch.2 v.23)

Then there are the setbacks or hindering of the Holy Spirit. This is usually when we are On a course or direction that God wants to change in order that we will move in the flow of His purpose for us.

We develop an inner sensitivity to the working of the Spirit as our counsellor. This is a much better level of living rather than needing a sign or a seal or something else from the Lord to confirm a decision.

In Acts chapter 16 verse 6 it says concerning Paul and Timothy, "they passed through...and

were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia, after they came to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia but the Spirit suffered them not. (Acts ch.16 v.6-7) They were halted in their course and redirected into God's. The Holy Spirit will not stop your own direction and leave you in a vacuum, He will always direct you into God's purpose.

## Disciplined by Relationships

Life is not lived in isolation. It is not spiritual to be cloistered away from others. The more a person becomes a recluse, the less an opportunity for matured spiritual growth is possible. Jesus lived in the open world of people, relationships with others was part of His daily experience. God uses our families as the first line of influence in the development of our lives. Then our relationships with relatives, friends, work mates, neighbours, enemies all play their part unconsciously in the hand of God to disciple us.

Sometime ago I received a newsletter from a friend which concluded various thanks to individuals who had been a blessing the previous year, with these words, "Thanks also to all my enemies who have been such good instruments through which God could continue His work of perfecting me." When we approach things that way, nothing is to our detriment.

## Disciplined by Success

Success is a much misunderstood term amongst most Christians. In the society around us it has unfortunately taken on the implication of, 'achieving at any cost and by any means.' It has become a selfish motivation in politics, business, theatre, sport, and every other sphere. In the drive for success, many innocent and not so innocent people get trampled under-foot. However I am using the term 'success' here as the achievement of a goal, the receipt of the promises we have. In the Bible we have as many men who became the victims of success as we have those of failure.

Each of us can recall individuals who could not cope with the pressures of success. Someone once said, "If the Devil can't get you down, he'll puff you up." The Bible says concerning king Uzziah:

"And his fame spread far and he was marvellously helped, till he was strong, but when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction (2 Chronicles 26 v.15, 16).

There isn't anything more tragic than to meet the Christian who could endure hardship, pray, fast, believe God, and then to see such a person fall through success. While observing the independence of Guyana, South America in 1966 I watched the Venezuelan gun-boats fire their great guns in salute.

Alongside the gun-boat were the little skiffs of the local fishermen. I could not help thinking if one gun from the gun-boat was mounted on the skiff and then fired the recoil would have sunk that little boat. Why? The inner structure of the gun-boat had been built to withstand the recoil of the big guns, whereas the little skiff had no strong inner structure for such big guns. How often have Christians made the mistake of wanting to be one of God's big guns, when their inner life development isn't at the place of strength to take the recoil of success.

Some persist and press to be used, as Israel pressed God for their desire. It makes sad reading as a consequence, "He gave them.. .leanness of soul." May God find us willing and submissive to these and other forgotten tutors of God in His disciplining of us into His desire.