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TRAINING UNIT 40 (33.02 MINUTES)

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Training Unit 40

Discipleship group, community of faith, spiritual family

The Jesus Model

Review

- With this 40th training lesson we come to the fourth main part of the sending training.
- The first part dealt with the requirements for properly practicing the ministry of sending, especially the power of the Holy Spirit and the prayer for the harvest.
- In the second part, we looked at the first 9 of 10 commandments of sending.
- The third part addressed the 10th commandment of sending in a very practical way, the commandment to make disciples of all ethnic groups.

Preview

- This fourth part looks at the community of disciples.
- Our disciples should start a discipleship group themselves while we are discipling them. There are different words for such a group:
    - Discipleship group
    - Spiritual family
    - Community of faith
    - House church

Definitions

1. Discipleship group
This is a group of new believers who have been baptized in water and in the Holy Spirit. They are regularly discipled as a group. In the New Testament, these discipleship groups are not yet called a church.

2. Spiritual family, community of faith or house church
When a discipleship group makes a committed decision to live out Acts 2:42-47 together, we call them a spiritual family, a community of faith or a house church. The New Testament calls such a group a “church that meets at their house”.

1. Corinthians 16:19
Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

Colossians 4:15
Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

In our everyday lives, we would call this a (nuclear/core) family.

3. House church/networked house church
When a group of 3 to 5 house churches, communities of faith or spiritual families join together and have a leadership (elders and deacons), we call it a networked house church. In our everyday lives, one would call such related groups of core families a clan.

For this sending training, we strongly hold on to the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John:

John 20:21
As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

John 17:18
As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

- The Lord himself is the sent one.
- He is our role model in all steps of the sending.
- We should learn from him. We want to conduct our ministry just as he did.

The Jesus model

- In his ministry of sending, Jesus called 12 disciples, formed a community and shared his life with them.
- Sharing his life was the natural setting for discipleship.
- Jesus did not make a distinction between discipleship and community.

Jesus conducted his ministry of sending mainly in Galilee.

Matthew 4:13
Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali.

The starting point and place where Jesus and his disciples lived was Peter's house in Capernaum. Jesus' example is clear: he shared his life with his disciples and formed a purpose-built community with them; a discipleship group so to say.

With this community of disciples, he lived in different houses:

Matthew 8:14-15
When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him.

Luke 10:38-40
As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.

Together with the discipleship group, he also went on outreaches:

Matthew 11:1
After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

The goal of sending

The goal of the ministry of sending is not only to make disciples, but also to train disciples to live out their faith together within a community. The goal is to have a community of faith!

God himself is a family

- ⇨ God the Father
- ⇨ God the Son
- ⇨ God the Holy Spirit, who seals the bride

- The final and ultimate goal of God is to live as a spiritual family. It is the last goal that is described in the book of revelation.
- A divine-human family.
- At the end, when God makes a new heaven and a new earth and when we live on the new earth together with Christ, then the Father himself will come and live with us. We will be a family.
- God the Father, God the Son, who will be married to the bride (the church = daughter-in-law) and the Holy Spirit, who also will be sealed with the bride. We will be a divine family, a Family of Love.
- This, in a sense, is already beginning here and now as we form a spiritual family with the disciples. A family of love.
- Being a triune God, God himself is a family. That is why God loves family and created family.
- We could say that family is the goal of God.

Such a spiritual family is called a "house church" in the New Testament. Because these are churches that are formed like families, look like families, function like families and meet in houses, these discipleship communities are also called spiritual households in the New Testament.
Thus, the goal of the ministry of sending is not only to win and train individual disciples. The main aim is to call men and women to follow Jesus and train them in discipleship groups. These discipleship groups are the place where a big part of the discipleship happens. Iron sharpens iron.

Committed discipleship groups are also known as:

- ⇨ Communities of faith
- ⇨ Spiritual families
- ⇨ Church in a house

This reflects the model of Jesus precisely. This community of disciples meeting in houses and sharing their lives was the church for Jesus. To describe these spiritual families, Jesus and later also his disciples used words and names derived from family language:

- ⇨ One is born into a family.

John 3:3
Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

- ⇨ In a family, people are referred to as children, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. So did Jesus:

Matthew 12:47-50
Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

1 John 2:12-13
I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

Ephesians 2:19
Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,

During New Testament times, these committed house churches met in different houses like natural families. The groups met regularly to:

1. study the word of God
2. have fellowship with each other
3. to have meals together and celebrate the Lord's Supper
4. to pray

Groups that do this together in a committed way are described as churches that meet in houses.

The churches of the New Testament met in houses

Acts 2:46-47
Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 5:42
Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

1. Corinthians 16:19
The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

Colossians 4:15
Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

What is a New Testament church?

There are different illustrations of a church in the New Testament:

- The image of the church as a bride
- The image of the church as a flock
- The image of the church as a body
- The image of the church as a field of God
- The image of the church as a building
- The image of the church as a human body
- The image of the church as a light

All these images reflect different aspects of the nature and the tasks of the church. However, the central image is: the church as a family, a spiritual family, a family of love.

Definition
Church is a spiritual family that meets in houses (and in the temple, which was a public space).

The evolution of the church in the course of church history

1. Jesus lived in fellowship with his twelve disciples in a discipleship group.

2. After the birth of the church at Pentecost, and in the following decades, almost all churches in Jerusalem, Corinth, Ephesus and Rome were “churches in the house”. They were spiritual families, communities of faith. There were no buildings, no pulpits, no priests and no pastors.

3. About 300 years later, between 312 and 380 A.D., the Roman emperor Constantine and Theodosius made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. Now the appearance and the nature of the church changed. A new kind of church with buildings, church services and priests were introduced. From then on, church ceased to be primarily a spiritual family. The new center was the church service on Sunday morning. It was a holy meeting on a holy day with special activities lead by a holy, professional priest.

4. A new understanding evolved: church is no longer a spiritual family that meets in houses, but a holy meeting on Sunday. This new understanding was preserved through time until today and in most places on earth.

5. Now, with the rediscovery of the ministry of sending and the discipleship commandment, we also see a revival of the New Testament form of church as discipleship group, spiritual family or church in the house.

Church is a spiritual family

The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 5 that the marriage between husband and wife reflects in a mysterious way the intimate relationship between Christ and his bride, his church.

Ephesians 5:31-33
“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24) This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Concerning the family, there is also an inner analogy, a connection between how a natural and a spiritual family functions. There are reasons to assume that the Lord created the natural family, which we can experience, so that we could understand more easily how the spiritual family functions.

Comparison: natural and spiritual families

What are the five most important values and roles of the natural and the spiritual family?

Natural family: 5 core values	**Spiritual family: 5 core values**
1. Relationship characterized by love and trust	1. Relationship characterized by love and trust (fellowship)
2. Creating and training children	2. Creating and training children (evangelism and discipleship)
3. Eating together	3. Eating together and celebrating the Lord’s Supper
4. Sharing everything, supporting each other, serving each other	4. Sharing everything, supporting each other, serving each other
5. Adult children marry and start new families of their own	5. Adult children (disciples) marry and start a new family of their own (house church)

The core values of the natural family are like the core values of the spiritual family.

Which model shall we use?

How did Jesus live spiritual family and which church model should we use in the ministry of sending? There is no doubt that we should gather the disciples into a discipleship group, a spiritual family, a church that meets in houses.
It is very important that our disciples are at home in such a spiritual family. Only there, do some spiritual processes take place that are important for discipleship. Many values we have looked at often cannot be lived out in a big congregation and therefore also can't be "planted".

Spiritual processes and values that only take place in spiritual families

1. God himself is a real community. This part of the nature of God can only be expressed by a real, spiritual family.
2. "Love requires a you" (Martin Buber). Love requires a counterpart. Love should become practical. Love requires real fellowship to express itself, to be lived and recognized.
3. It is not possible to separate discipleship and fellowship. Some aspects of discipleship can only be lived and experienced in a spiritual family, because there is an atmosphere of trust and love. These aspects are:
    - The general character formation
    - Practicing to honor each other
    - Practicing to esteem others higher than oneself
    - Practicing conflict ability, forgiveness and reconciliation
    - Practicing to complement each other etc.

That is why it is important to not only make disciples, but also to bring forth whole spiritual families.

Part II: Application

a) Someone from the group summarizes this teaching in his own words. If anything is missing, the others can add to the summary.

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b) Group discussion

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c) Write down personal insights from the teaching

d) Share with the group who exactly you want to train in this lesson

e) Each group presents what they learned and the specific goals they want to pursue now: (outreach/group meeting).

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Part III: Outreach

From here on, we need to divide the time we use for the sending in a new way:
prayer (4 hours/week), going (4 hours/week), discipleship (4 hours/week), community of faith (3 hours/week).

1. PRAYING:

   A) Prayer walk with a partner or the team for 2 hours every week ❑

   B) From now on pray 1 hour for your disciples before every discipleship meeting ❑

   C) From now on, pray 1 hour before every community meeting ❑

2. GO: to the unreached you have a heart for ❑
3. Look for persons of peace ❑
4. PREACH: the gospel of the Kingdom of God ❑
5. EXPLAINING: the way of salvation ❑
6. Evangelistic Bible studies with interested people ❑
7. Share your personal testimony with five other people ❑
8. Call to repentance and to follow Jesus ❑
9. FAITH, REPENTANCE, BAPTISM AND RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT ❑
10. Pray for sick people during an outreach ❑
11. Raise a dead person if you are led to do so ❑
12. Seek to hear God's voice and the guidance of the Holy Spirit ❑
13. Pray for the 200 million persecuted Christians in the world, pray for your "persecutors" and bless those who are cursing you ❑
14. Continue to teach all 16 lessons to the discipleship group and coach them in it ❑
15. Discuss this lesson with your disciples and "officially" form a committed discipleship group with them and then meet regularly as discipleship group to…

1. **eat together and celebrate the Lord's Supper**
2. **share** what is going well and where there are difficulties
3. **read the Bible text** together
4. **pray** together ❑

BEsent is a training - without practice it is almost useless!