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Then we would like to thank our wives and our children. They enabled us to write by supporting us and giving us time.

We would also like to thank the many friends and spiritual children in Switzerland and in many other countries who have encouraged us to write as a group of authors.



# INTRODUCTION

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How did our journey to fatherhood and discipleship and to this new understanding of church begin?

My wife Susanne and I originally worked in various traditional churches and Christian organisations in Switzerland and other countries. Over a period of time, God again and again showed us new revelations which challenged us to adapt our lifestyle.

A decisive change happened around 10 years ago. Although Susanne had become a Christian in a house church, I had previously only considered the house church model to be relevant in countries where Christians suffer persecution. During a visit to Dick Scoggins (Rhode Island, USA) I learnt that this is not the case.

When I returned to Switzerland, Susanne and I started some home meetings. We experienced meaningful times that we spent with neighbours – eating together, worshipping, dancing, laughing, crying, studying the Bible etc. – and really enjoyed this new form of church, which from a Biblical point of view, of course, is not new at all. New house churches were started, but inwardly we still knew something was missing.

After two years we realised that it is Jesus who is building his church, and that our task is to train disciples (cf. Matthew 16:18; 20:28). Once again we changed our lifestyle. We began to call people to discipleship and gradually discovered that, ultimately, it's all about fatherhood and motherhood. People do not simply want to grow spiritually; they also want spiritual parents who will be there for them. They want to experience church as a family. Discipleship became the basic mission for each one of us. Through our travels, the Lord showed us what he was doing all over the world. We noticed how often there is a lack of deep, authentic relationship between the different generations.

Today there are various types of church known as "house church", "simple church", "organic church" etc. throughout the world. They all have one thing in common: the practice of new and

intimate styles of church. A new “river system” is developing: small rivers flow together and form new rivers, which flow in unity with older rivers. The Heavenly Father is doing what he has always been doing: he is creating a new thing.

How did this book originate? In the papers they wrote for their Master’s degree in theology from IGW in Zürich, Nathanael Bucher and Emanuel Sieber demonstrated the significance of the family and the formation of spiritual families. At their graduation ceremony, during a pleasant dinner together, their mentor for their specialist subject, Jens Kaldewey, said, “It is painful for me to admit, but I have to say it is true: this message must be spread and must reach the heart of the church!” One piece of a puzzle was added to another. This team of authors was formed and began to share views and experiences. Each person in the team wrote from their own perspective as a disciple maker. We received inspiration from the apostolic dimension. The basic mission of God has to do with sending and being sent. Jesus was sent and then became the sender. His messengers changed the world. It should all be simple and should be easy to multiply.

How is the book structured? First of all, Nathanael Bucher writes about how new spiritual life is created. This illustrates the importance of the family as the basis of every society and of the church. Using his own story, Emanuel Sieber leads the reader deeper into the topic of personal discipleship and the different stages of spiritual maturity. Markus Jerominski adds some thoughts on the structure of the Hebrew family. In my chapter, I discuss the dimension of fatherhood and apostolic mission and explain the results of discipleship relationships when they are clearly defined and filled with life. Urs Trüb adds a new colour to the spectrum by writing from his prophet’s heart with the aim of helping the reader to dream his own dreams.

We have not yet fully understood these subjects and will remain learners for the rest of our lives. The book is merely a draft; we are continually discovering new aspects of this subject.

Dr. Marco Gmür

# Spiritual Impotence

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Author: Nathanael Bucher

The secrets of ancient times – who knows them? Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jesus: four men – one mission. Their strategy was simple and their lifestyle powerful. They were fathers of nations and shaped the course of human history. But then this clear mission gradually retreated into the background. And as this happened, the ability to live it out also disappeared. Things that had been known from the beginning were almost forgotten. Something that had been so powerful was almost completely lost. And yet, God is still the same, yesterday, today and in all eternity.

With His help we can again live out this mission with simplicity and power. This chapter will help you to understand this mission. We want to show you what it can mean to live it out.

### *My life disintegrates*

Several years ago during my time as a youth pastor in a mid-sized church in the city of Zug, Switzerland, I had the following experience:

It is a warm summer night, and I am sitting on a hill not far from the city of Zug in Switzerland. A pleasant light breeze is blowing up from the nearby lake. The sun is just disappearing over the horizon and is colouring the roofs of the old city of Zug in subtle

shades of red. My gaze rests on the city that I have come to love so much in the past few years. I am lost in thought. As the last rays of sunshine fade, the people around me also go home. I remain here alone. Now the old city is in the shade of the hills that lie to the west. Straight ahead I can see the "Rigi", a mountain that we locals proudly call "the Queen of the mountains." High on its peak, where the southern slope falls steeply downwards to the lake, the setting sun illuminates the mountain so that it looks like a fiery pyramid.

Overwhelmed by this sight, I say thank you to God for my beautiful home. A deep feeling of security washes over me and, for a moment, dispels all other thoughts. In the dusk, a bird sings its evening song. I get up again. The questions that have preoccupied me so strongly in the past weeks are pressing for an answer. *What should I do with my life? Why was I born? What is God's plan for my life?* I walk to and fro at the little viewpoint, driven by my inner restlessness. Meanwhile it has got dark. I start to talk to God in a low voice.

Then something strange happens: I close my eyes and see all the lights in the city forming streaks of light that point towards me. My thoughts begin to move in circles. *These streaks of light are all people in this town. God wants to meet them in a very personal way. These people are on God's heart. God wants to save them. But why are these streaks of light pointing towards me? What does it have to do with me? Does Jesus mean me?*

I feel deep pain rising up in me, but I don't want to let it happen. I want to suppress these thoughts. I'd rather run away. It is all too much for me. But then I feel as if someone is touching me gently and I hear a voice saying, "Nathanael, will you let me share my pain with you?" *Jesus wants to share his pain with me? That is crazy! What is going on? Where are all the nice feelings I had a moment ago? Why do I not feel all the good feelings today that I usually have when I pray? Where is the overwhelming joy, the warm comforting stream of love and warmth?* But resistance is useless. This prayer time seems to be taking an unusual direction. Deep pain overwhelms me and flows with great force through me. In this night, I spend a long time weeping.

During the following weeks, I have more experiences of this

kind. I understand that Jesus is beginning to share his heart with me in a new and intimate way. It even happens in the middle of everyday life, when I am walking on the promenade along the lake or driving past a bus stop where many people are waiting. I see the people who do not yet know Jesus personally, feel the pain rising in me and begin to weep. The result of all these experiences is personal brokenness. My own desires, thoughts and ideas become less and less important, even to the point of being small and insignificant. More and more, my heart is filled with one burning desire. I want everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth. Increasingly, my prayer consists of the following words from the Bible that are constantly on my lips:

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20).*

*But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him (2 Cor 2:14).*

This brokenness resulted in an unbridled passion to reach lost people for Jesus. I encouraged the young people in the church to pray for their friends and to believe that Jesus would meet them in a real and personal way. With some friends I began to organise various events and outreaches for the people in the town. On the one hand, we were challenged to our limits and, on the other, we experienced the power of God. We saw many young people being touched by God in a very personal way. I even obtained special favour from the police. I was generously granted permits for public stands, concerts and film shows. Until that time we had not known that the response from the people in our town would be almost exclusively positive. They were totally open for a personal encounter with God. Many gave their hearts to God in a new way.

And then something incredible happened: I had a second crisis! Right in the middle of these beautiful experiences, I began to realise that we really have no idea of how to lead these people who were turning to God again step-by-step into his kingdom. Of course

we invited all these folk to take part in our internal discipleship programs or church services. But almost no one came.

It was at this time that I understood clearly that we should have cared for these people intensively and personally, immediately after the first encounter with them. It was not enough just to invite them to the next event. We should have committed ourselves to them in a much more personal way. But how would that have been possible? Not only the events themselves required much preparation time and exertion. We still had our usual commitments to the teams that prepared the church service and to our home meetings. As the youth pastor, I had additional commitments to internal programs and leaders' meetings. It wasn't that I didn't love these activities. No, on the contrary, I loved my church and was even proud of our cool range of programmes. But all these activities stole the time that we needed for the people who didn't know God.

When I began studying, one of my student friends used to ask me over and over again if we could do something together after classes. But usually I had already planned something, and thanks to my activities in the church I was often busy. I thought that the time that I spent with them during classes and breaks would be enough for my fellow students. But after a while he explained to me that a friend who only wanted to spend time with him during school was not a true friend. As a result, he quickly found other students who spent much of their leisure time with him. From one day to the next our friendship was over. This made me feel very ashamed, and I knew he was right. I began to realise that in spite of my devotion to Jesus and my passion for the church, something was just not right with my lifestyle.

However the idea of giving up church activities in order to have more time for people outside the church simply did not occur to me. It was obvious to me that I had to continue to pray for them and every now and again I would surprise them with an invitation to a cool church event.

Through this and many other experiences, I increasingly saw a reflection of my life as in a mirror. I noticed that normally I actually served people in an indirect manner and only by means of programmes. For instance, it was much easier for me to preach a passionate sermon in front of the entire church than to help someone

with their everyday problems on a personal level and over an extended period of time. So I increasingly started to question the very church activities that I had initiated. Many people around me could not understand what was happening to me. Some thought that I was simply suffering from burnout as a result of excessive activity. But the true reason for this looming crisis was that I was in the process of losing my hope and vision of reaching the town for Jesus through my beloved church. *Is it not this fixed rhythm of activities which actually prevents us from being truly approachable for people from outside the church?* Almost daily I asked myself to what extent this activity or another from my daily life as a youth pastor really served the people of the town. This went so far that I was questioning my tasks in the office and in the church on an hourly basis. *Why do I not just use all the time I have to have fellowship directly with people who do not yet know God? How would Jesus have used his time if he were in my position?*

Until that time I had been convinced that my ministry in the church would automatically lead to implementing the mission of Jesus. But I was questioning this more and more. Following Jesus' example, I simply wanted to spend lots of time with all the people who wanted to become acquainted with God. Naturally, our church also wanted us to serve people in a personal way. But this was not supposed to happen at the expense of church events. The compulsory participation in church life had priority over time spent personally with people the church had not reached. But when I spent time with my unbelieving friends, I noticed that I needed to reverse these priorities from the bottom of my heart and regarding my use of time. I could look at it from whatever angle I wanted, the point remained – true devotion to my friends was in conflict with my numerous church activities. The irony is that I was one who had been pushing many of these new programmes or intensifying them. This knowledge only made my inward brokenness all the more severe.

*Naturally, our church also wanted us to serve people in a personal way. But this was not supposed to happen at the expense of church events.*

## *Image of God*

“Describe God in just one word!” Several years later I proposed this task at the beginning of a talk I gave at conference in the Middle East. Which word would you choose? Most of the words chosen by the listeners were mercy, peace and love. Of course I was pleased with these descriptions. For, nonetheless, they suggested that many people seem to have a positive notion of God. As I was about to continue with the answer to my own question, a lady spoke up and called out, “Father! He is a father!” It seems that while she was listening to the others this lady had spent the whole time trying to summarise all the answers in one word. My facial expression probably showed that this was the answer I was waiting for.

I began to explain to my listeners how God reveals himself as a father, movingly and consistently, from the first to the last page of the Bible – a father who never gives up on his children and who strives to the very end to have his children with him for eternity. You cannot read any book of the Bible without discovering this strongly characteristic of the fatherhood of God. Even in a very schematic and dry family tree, for example as in Luke 3:23-37, God is unmistakably revealed as “the father” of mankind:

*Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph...the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Kenan, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.*

Although, as a doctor, Luke certainly knew that the “procreation” of Adam probably took place in a rather different way than that of all other human beings, his words make no difference at all with regard to God as Father. The creator of the universe is quite naturally placed at the beginning of human history as a father! Paul writes about him:

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name (Eph 3:14-15).*

Every fatherhood here on earth is from God, because he is the original and true father.

When Jesus spoke to his disciples about God, he frequently spoke of his father. But when he taught the disciples how to pray, it became clear that he did not only use this means of address for himself alone, but saw God as "our father". Yes, at this point he even requires that we address God as "Father" (cf. Matt 6:9).

God wants to be recognised as Father not only by a few individuals, but by everyone in this world. How difficult it is to be a father, when the children do not want to be sons or daughters, even though that is what they are!

Do you see and love God as your father? Do you see yourself as someone destined to be his son or his daughter?

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Gen 1:27).*

This clearly shows the position that people have. We are to be the image of the one true father, his sons and daughters!

### **"Just like Daddy"**

I remember well how friends reacted when they came to visit us after a long time. With amazement they commented on the development of our children and said, "Oh he's just like his Daddy," or, "She's just like her mummy!" Statements like this make us proud. How do you think the father in heaven would feel if we said to him, "Look Daddy, I did it just like you." I am sure he would give us a big hug and say, "My daughter, or my son, I am so proud of you!"

It is quite natural that our children resemble us in various ways. In the same way, it should also become apparent that we are God's children. In this case, we are not at risk of taking on negative characteristics, as may be the case with earthly parents. How often have I been unpleasantly surprised by the fact that my negative traits can be seen in my own children? I have passed them on. Earthly parenthood is always imperfect and can therefore cause wounds. The more someone dissociates himself from his predetermined destiny as a child of God, and thus from true fatherhood, the less he will be able to demonstrate the true and healthy fatherhood of the heavenly Father. That is why it is so important that each of us relates to the original heavenly Father, and thereby finds healing. In HIM we can experience true fatherhood. This prevents the insurmountable

accumulation of wounds, disappointment and false images of fathers and mothers throughout the generations. The apostle Paul briefly defined what happens when we turn back to this father:

*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed **into his likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).*

The spirit of God shows us the fatherhood of God. The more we discover and experience it, the more this wonderful fatherhood is reflected in our lives. In this way we become more like him and are made into his image (cf. Gen 1:26)!

To summarise, we could say: created as his daughter or his son, we are called from eternity to experience the fatherhood of God in all its depth and fullness, so that we ourselves may then grow into the godly task of fatherhood and motherhood. Every culture or society on this earth needs fathers and mothers who bring forth children, simply so that it can remain in existence. The more mothers and fathers exercise HIS fatherhood through their personal relationship to the father in heaven, the more the supreme power and love of God can be released in this world.

*But are these old words from the Bible about people being the image of God still true? Does each person not have a different destiny and calling? Has God not always given new commands and instructions throughout history? Join me on a journey through human history; I want to show you something!*

## *God's original assignment to mankind*

### **The assignment to Adam**

God gave man a clear mission:

*God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over..." (Gen 1:28).*

Can you again hear the father in these words from the Bible? He is talking about many children and grandchildren! Again it is clear that God views people in their creative role as mothers and fathers. In this way, an amazingly vital development should take place in

the family. The earth should be filled with parents and children, who, with a heart turned towards God, should always seek the purposes of the heavenly Father. Only this way could they demonstrate the original image of fatherhood, and not their own. So that the children also demonstrate the fatherhood of God in their turn, parents must ensure that they guide their children into this relationship of trust in God. That means that this mission to multiply already includes a clear mission for parents to disciple their own children. For God, the heavenly Father, never intended that the earth should be full of people whose hearts are turned away from him.

Of course, as a result of the fall it is more difficult to stand in this relationship of trust with God and to accompany children into this kind of relationship of trust. But in Genesis 4:25, we see Adam's desire for a son with a heart for God, as Abel's was. Abel was Adam's younger son. Unlike his older brother Cain, his heart was strongly devoted to God (cf. Heb 11:4). Unfortunately, Adam lost his younger son because Cain murdered him. When the parents had a new son, they gave him the name Seth (meaning replacement). Here we can sense the burning desire of mother and father: Seth was to be a son who, like Abel, lived in faith towards God (cf. Gen 4:25; 5:3)! Like his parents, Seth was intended to bring up his children in the fear of God. And indeed, among the descendants of Seth, we can find many people who glorified God (for example, Enoch, cf. Gen 5:22).

This family tree from Seth to Noah was, unfortunately, an exception among all the peoples of the world. For ten generations, God waited until he drew a conclusion:

*So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth" (Gen 6:13).*

### **The assignment to Noah**

With Noah, God started over again. Would God now give Noah and his descendants the same mission as Adam? Or would he alter this mission in view of the failure of the descendants of Adam? Did God still see people in their role as representatives of him and his king-

dom on the earth? This would have seemed to be a particularly favourable time to make a change, as there was now only one family on the earth. But God, who is the same yesterday, today and in all eternity, confirmed on the one hand to Noah and his sons the mission to multiply and rule:

*Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands" (Gen 9:1-2).*

On the other hand, he also confirmed the special position of mankind in representing him as his sons and daughters on the earth.

*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man (Gen 9:6).*

Now it became clear: God's creation had been perfect from the beginning. His thoughts and intentions for mankind had not changed. Through this story God has given us insight into his heart. Repeatedly, we sense the heartbeat of the father, who longs to continue a unique family history with mankind.

Do you share this desire with God? Do you believe that you have been created with one unique purpose, namely to bring forth your own children and to lead them into a personal and loving relationship with our father in heaven? Have you understood that you are not living as an image of God if you "only" have a reconciled relationship with the heavenly Father, but are not expressing this fatherhood or motherhood?

In almost all of Noah's descendants these qualities are missing. They reject God's fatherhood and therefore are not able to pass it on. All the nations of that time end up in a situation similar to that of Adam and Eve. What do you think God should have done? Should he have given up his wonderful plan with mankind? Was there no one in all of these nations with whom He could fulfil this plan? Was there someone who was willing not only to enjoy the relationship with him, but also to invest his whole life to be part of God's plan?

**The assignment to Abraham and the people of Israel**

Finally, God did find such a man! It was Abraham. God said about him (Gen 18:19):

*For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.*

God knew that Abraham would be faithful to tell his descendants about God. Abraham's heart was so strongly devoted to God's heart that God knew that Abraham was willing to pass on his fatherhood. So, one evening, in a wonderful way, God shared his dream with Abraham (Gen 15:5):

*He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."*

The people of Israel originated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This nation was now to be trained lovingly and strictly by God himself for the mission of making disciples for almost 2000 years. Blessing and curse were directly related to this mission of discipleship. If the Israelites were to neglect the mission to disciple their own children, then in the next generation there would, logically, be fewer Israelites through whom the blessing of God could be spread. In Psalm 78:5-9 we find a beautiful summary of the essence of the history of Israel:

*He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. They would not be like their forefathers – a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him. The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle.*

It was therefore Israel's primary task to produce descendants and to teach them to do the will of God. In Moses God formed a leader who repeatedly emphasised this point. He even gave specific instructions (for example, in Genesis 6:7-9) as to how parents could intensively disciple their children, that is, to make them disciples. The Israelites knew that a nation that does not have offspring could not rule, because it would die out! If the children who were born were not disciplined with dedication, God's blessing and his rule could not spread.

Are we still aware of these truths? We are quick to speak about revival when the anointing of God and supernatural miracles are increasing. But God will test our hearts every time with regard to the purpose for which we use his anointing and supernatural miracle powers. Do we need their impact in order to disciple people? Or do we need these heavenly blessings only so that we can create an oasis of Christian "wellness"?

If we, as God's people, do not start again to love God and his mission with all our strength, and to carry out this mission, the so-called revivals will always remain nothing more than waves which, after a few years, ebb away. For while we are busy enjoying these heavenly blessings, we are, at the same time, in danger of neglecting the much more important mission of making disciples.

Through his undivided heart, King David released many blessings over the people. He instructed his son Solomon in these things and impressed upon him to walk in God's ways in everything. In response, God began to bless the whole people under King Solomon in a measure hitherto unknown. At times, His presence was so strong that the priests were no longer able to do their work in the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). But this wonderful power and glory was, unfortunately, only of brief duration. Just one generation later, this powerful kingdom fell apart. Israel was full of foreign gods.

This is only one of many examples from the history of Israel that shows how dangerous it is when we enjoy God's blessings so much that we forget his primary mission, that of bringing forth children after the heart of God.

## *The mission of Jesus and his followers*

Among all the nations, Israel remained the only people which preserved its original destiny of bringing forth sons and daughters in God's image through continuous discipleship in its own families. What had to happen so that the existing godless nations could also be brought back into this original godly destiny? From this people (Israel), One was to arise who would be able to restore the godly family relationships between God and people.

It seems incomprehensible that this man appeared not to have truly understood in the mission to multiply given in Genesis 1:28. Even at the age of 30, the Jew Jesus was still not even thinking of starting his own family! What had gone wrong? Instead, he began to gather adult men around him. In the way that a Jewish father would teach his children, he taught these men about the kingdom of God. But his teaching was revolutionary:

*My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice (Luke 8:21b).*

This sentence became a turning point in the history of Israel: everyone who heard God's word and put it into practice could now belong to God's family! At one stroke, Jesus drew the whole family of nations back into God's original plan of salvation. From that time onwards, every person could be born into God's family. No longer did Jewish lineage decide whether one truly belonged to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but a living faith in the Messiah (cf. Gal. 3:9):

*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Jews and non-Jews from "all nations" were now to be born into one "eternal kingdom":

*I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Gen 12:3).*

*Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever (2 Sam 7:16).*

In this way Jesus formed a people with a renewed heart. In a new way, he fulfilled the original mission of his father to multiply and rule.

### **What Jesus accomplished**

By His example, Jesus showed His disciples how we can carry out this mission to multiply and rule by bringing forth spiritual sons. Just as God repeatedly impressed on the people of Israel that they should train up their children, Jesus carried out the fatherly responsibilities that are a matter of course in a Jewish family. He taught

*By His example, Jesus showed His disciples how we can also carry out this mission to multiply and rule by bringing forth spiritual sons.*

them, moulded them by his example, provided them with food, protected them at difficult moments and “brought them up” strictly and lovingly. So, we see that this mission to disciple should not only be carried out within a natural family, but it should go even further and bring forth spiritual sons and daughters. When we say spiritual sons and daughters, we mean mature and responsible people whose hearts are devoted to God who have experienced forgiveness from Jesus.

Have you ever wondered why before he died Jesus could say “*I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do*” (John 17:4b)? Was it not his principal

objective to restore the relationship between God and man through his death and resurrection? It seems there was another main task that had to be fulfilled. When we examine the context of this Bible verse more closely, it becomes apparent that this work refers to his twelve disciples. We often only consider the restoration of the relationship between God and man through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. In doing so, we forget that Jesus has also restored the original mission given in Genesis 1:28:

*God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

## **Restoration of the relationship with the father**

Thanks to this reconciliation with God, every person can now return to his or her godly calling to live as the "image" of God and thus fulfil the holy mission to multiply and to rule. This message must first of all become known. But wait! Who will be responsible for spreading this message of reconciliation in such a way that the following generations will also want to live this way? Only the Jews are suitably qualified. For it is not in vain that for almost 2000 years they have been taught by God to transmit godly truths to their children. Possibly for this very reason, God makes himself known as the God of Abraham (the grandfather), Isaac (the father) and Jacob (the son).

As a result, one characteristic of the first Jewish Christians was that they were already accustomed to living this lifestyle of discipleship in the natural family. They could therefore pass on this great asset of discipleship to their spiritual sons and daughters with relative ease. These Biblical-Jewish "family traditions", in which discipleship training had already been practiced throughout the centuries, seemed to favour the spread of the Gospel!

At last the destiny and mission of mankind according to Genesis 1:27-28 had been fully restored. The first Jews to believe in Jesus (Messianic Jews) could now demonstrate God's fatherhood in its full purity and power. They could again become the image of God according to the godly calling.

For our heavenly Father and his son, the dream they had dreamed together was finally coming true. For the first time since the fall, people who accepted the sacrifice of reconciliation from Jesus were once again able to love him deeply and fully.

Thanks to this closeness to the Father heart of God, a deep desire to become spiritual parents to those who did not yet know of the message of reconciliation was growing in these people. I can easily imagine how the father and son danced for joy as they saw the new spiritual families being filled with dynamic life (cf. Acts of the Apostles). They were deeply touched as they watched the spiritual parents begin to tell their fellow human beings of the wonderful life in reconciliation with God. Many of these people received the message with joy and experienced a spiritual second birth. The father of all fatherhood saw how these spiritual babies turned their

hearts to him and with their first words called out, "Abba, Daddy." He watched the spiritual children as they grew because they were being "raised" in love and faith by their parents and were being introduced to the basic spiritual virtues of their new life. Heaven rejoiced when the mature disciples were released with the blessing of their spiritual parents and with the firm intention of starting new spiritual and natural families!

### **An example**

After these rather dry considerations, I would like Kevin to tell his story. I had the privilege of experiencing how he turned his heart to God. For more than three years I was able to accompany him personally as a "spiritual father" or "disciple maker." This is what he says:

A few years ago a friend invited my wife and me (we were not married then) to an introductory course on the Christian faith. My wife, who had grown up in a Buddhist home, attended the seven evenings more or less because her friend had invited her. But it was something special for my wife to be able to attend every evening without having to take time off work, although she normally works shifts. I was brought up in the Protestant faith but had not understood very much about faith in Jesus Christ in my home. Right from the first evening I was fascinated and I knew immediately that we would attend all the rest of the evenings.

When the course was finished, I met with Chris, one of the other participants in the course, and Nathanael, one of the course leaders (and later our "disciple maker") for the purpose of intensive Bible study. At some point I had read and heard enough and I decided to follow Jesus Christ myself. That was when the adventure really began.

Some time later Nathanael asked if we were interested in committing ourselves to meet at least once a week over a period of three years. Naturally I agreed at once, as I was hungry (still) and was, of course, very pleased to have someone who would "bottle-feed" me, as I was a spiritual baby, and who would help me to grow. Together we experienced my deliverance from old bur-

dens, my baptism and later our wedding, at which Nathanael and Micha married us. More about that later.

After my decision to follow Jesus there were some difficult situations at home with my wife. On the one hand she was pleased at the positive change in me, and on the other, sometimes when I returned home from a discipleship meeting with Nathanael, full of the Holy Spirit, and euphorically told her everything we had been reading and learning, she said it had totally gone to my head. But God had a plan for both of us and kept us together. Nine months later my wife also decided to follow Jesus Christ.

She then went to be discipled by her friend who had prayed for her for eight years. I was convinced that it was good for us to be discipled separately so that we would have double the benefit. But looking back, I would not want to do it that way again. I missed being able to work at the same topic, growing and building together as a couple. It did work that way, of course, but it was more difficult, because usually one of us was not able to participate in the topics that the other was studying.

After a few months of being a believer I felt a longing to tell my friends how wonderful Jesus Christ is and how he had changed me. At this point, my wife had not made her decision, but she still supported me fully. So we invited all my friends and my brother to a "spaghetti meeting". After the meal I told them what had happened to me and then invited them all to spend a few evenings talking about faith. One couple and one friend wanted to know more, so Nathanael and I planned six evenings, each covering a different topic. Before the first evening took place my wife made her decision for Jesus. That gave our plans extra fervour.

During these evenings we had some ups and downs. But the grace of God was present there, and before the course was over, the woman had made her decision, which was followed a few months later by that of her partner. It became clear to me that if people were making a decision for Jesus in my house, then I would also look after them. After I had assisted them for some time, God impressed them both on my wife's heart as well and we offered them regular discipleship. We were also able to help them through their deliverance and baptised them. It was a spe-

cial honour for us to be able to marry them. We would never have been able to imagine that, but through Jesus everything is possible. We are all called to be a holy priesthood (cf. 1 Peter 2:9; Isaiah 61:6).

Now I will take another look at that time. During my discipleship, Nathanael never stopped talking to me about getting married. My wife and I had already been together for eight years. Nathanael explained God's covenant for men and women to me. And, of course, from time to time he asked me how things were and if I had already made a proposal. As we had our own plans in this matter, his constant questioning was most irritating. Of course, I know that Nathanael was not doing it in order to aggravate us, but because he knew about the power of the covenant, and it was his task to keep reminding us about it. I'm grateful for that.

But then one afternoon I was spending some time with a group of fellow Christians in the spirit. Our topic was unity and the strength that unity brings in difficult times, in the end times. During a prayer time that afternoon the Lord said to me, "If you want to have a strong unity with your wife, then you must make a covenant with her." It was as if my eyes had been opened, and I knew that I simply had to marry my wife. So that afternoon, I went to her place of work and proposed to her.

A few months later we were able to celebrate a wonderful wedding, and the blessing and the power of God through the covenant with him have been with us in their fullness since the very first day, and day by day these are increasing. Thank you, Jesus!

Now I would like to say a few words about my discipleship time. During this period God changed and trained me and I was able to find what my soul had always been longing for. Now I no longer needed to try to fill this hole inside me with godless things. I experienced deliverance through Jesus Christ and his endless love for me. I am very thankful that I was able to experience this in a small, family-style fellowship. There, I was challenged, received support and could not hide. I realised that this was exactly what Jesus had done and also that it is the task for every disciple of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). This gave me a great deal of faith and strength. For what could be more beauti-

ful than to know that I am standing and walking in the will and plan of God?

And yet everything that we learn and hear when being discipled does not go deeper or become truly alive until we pass it on to others.

We have experienced God's presence and strength so often – being saved from an avalanche, the deliverance of my wife from her Buddhist background and simply the everyday experience of God's grace and his guidance.

Jesus, we want to thank you with all our hearts for what we have already experienced with you!

Certainly one of the greatest miracles that we have experienced up to now is that these friends have also turned to Jesus. When we look back and can see how they have changed – God's amazing work, his grace in them – yes, that is a miracle! How often were we discouraged and didn't know how to continue discipling them, and then the Lord just came and opened a door through which his glory came and then we were able to continue? That is unbelievable.

Today Kevin, his wife and their disciples are part of a house church and are following Jesus. I hope that, like Kevin, you will also be able to open your heart more and more to the Father heart of God. For Kevin and his wife it was a challenge to pass on this invitation to God's kingdom to their best friends. On that evening when he told about eight of his friends what he had experienced, I was sitting beside him. I could feel how he was struggling inwardly, but he looked to Jesus and spoke boldly.

Could you become reconciled to the idea that the main reason you were created was to give life to natural and/or spiritual children? Or do you still believe that this task is reserved for a few people with the gift of evangelism? Don't forget – if you want to be the image of the Father of all fatherhood, then you need to be willing to become a father or a mother yourself! After only a short time as believers, Kevin and his wife were willing! From the beginning God has equipped us with this procreative fatherhood and motherhood. Only he can help our hearts to again accept this destiny as our original calling and to live in it.