

003 Family and Discipleship

Jack: Welcome to the Apprentice Approach Podcast episode 3, where the ripples far exceed the splash. This is Jack McQueeney; I'll be your host as we dive into the joys, challenges, and opportunities of discipleship. The state of discipleship is in disarray. People want to enjoy a meaningful, connected and fruitful life following Christ, but they're discouraged, unequipped, and don't know where to start. That's why we've poured our 85+ years of experience and learning into creating a dynamic, transferrable framework that will transform the way you view discipleship and ultimately the way you live. Our show is all about connecting you to authentic leaders who will share real truths about being a disciple, discipling, and life-on-life ministry that you can easily apply. Today we're concluding our three-part series with long-time Navigator, Jim Downing. This week's topic is family and discipleship, where I ask Jim to share some of his own personal experiences in discipleship in his time with Dawson Trotman. Let's listen in as we hear from this Jedi Master of discipleship. (Addressing Jim) You know, I thoroughly enjoyed your latest book and I was impressed with one of the aspects, which was God's faithfulness in your life over all those years in some pretty interesting situations. As you look back, are there a couple mountaintop experiences that you've identified that have caused you to want to continue in this ministry of not just being a witness, but building into the lives of others?

Jim: I think from my earlier orientation is that I know a parent's responsibility when they have children, and one of my good friends has recently had a daughter and I gave a little poem to her about the little tyrant had moved into her house and took total charge. Everything that was done was built around that little tyrant. So I recognize the importance of physical, spiritual nurture. Instinctively, I felt the same

responsibility to every baby in Christ that I encountered to help them reach maturity. It just became an instinct.

Jack: You know, you and Marina have been great examples to Shaunda and I over the years of what that looks like even in your family. Can you give us some tidbits of encouragement or some tools that would help our listeners out there to encourage them in their own relationships with their kids and their families?

Jim: Yes, I do some weddings occasionally and in a wedding ceremony I give both the bride and the groom their job description as newly-married. To the groom I say, "Your job description is to assure your wife every time it's necessary, maybe several times a day, 'You are still the most important person in my life.' She has a new security when she marries you; she's had to worry how she's going to make it. Mr. Universe comes along: 'I'll take care of that.' Her security depends on the fact that she knows she is still the most important person in your life." And to the bride, it is not acceptable in our culture, but 1 Peter 2-3 in the Amplified contains 12 adjectives about a wife's responsibility to her husband and if you had to summarize them in one word, it would be to affirm him. I've had far more share of accolades in my life than I deserve, but if my wife didn't approve it didn't mean a thing. Her approval is the only thing, so a husband needs approval. So as far as their relationship, I think that's the most important thing. And her affirmation, she may need to fudge it a little bit, but that's okay, to tell him how great he is. Now about the children, we never did set a curfew for them. We just told them what our expectations were. I taught every one of them to drive when they were sixteen and on their birthday, they were allowed to do so. So they knew we had confidence in them. One thing that we did, I taught them, "Now as long as God is holding me responsible for your conduct, I'll make the final decisions. The minute you can persuade me that he is holding you responsible, not me, then

you make your own decisions.” That was generally when they went to college. So we’ve had good relationships. I’ve mentioned though that life is about meaningful relationship with God, with family, and then with friends.

Jack: Boy, when you look back to those early days with Lyla and Dawson and Lorne and Lucy, what are some of the things that stood out to you in terms of your relationships as a couple with them, as it relates to building in the lives of other couples, especially younger couples?

Jim: Yes, we mostly did this separately, now she with the wife and me with the husband, and I think that we had both had the same experiences they all had and lived through them. So generally, we said when this problem came up with us, this is what we did. Mostly what we would pass along was just from our experience.

Jack: And how did that come down from Lyla and Dawson?

Jim: Well, they were a very unique couple. He told me things that I haven’t passed along. I’ll just share one of them. They didn’t have email those days, so he had to write a lot of letters; he traveled a lot. The way to write a letter, he said, now the first paragraph you tell her little things about how much you love her, the things a woman needs to hear before you start your letters. So that was a practice that he had kept secret; she didn’t know that it wasn’t spontaneous, it was just a duty that he had. But she was a good, “straight man” for him [to set up his jokes]. The last time I had a meal with him was in Richmond, Virginia during the Billy Graham Crusade and when the waitress brought the menu, he looked over at her and he said, “My mother will have this” and then he grabbed his ankle like it hurt and he said, “You didn’t have to do that you know” like she’d kicked him in the ankle there. Well, everybody around you know, he couldn’t stand a vacuum. And then when we left as we went through the line he picked up the ticket but he said, “Lyla open your purse.” So she opened

her purse, he looked in, and he told the cashier "I have trouble with her stealing the silverware and I just wanted to make sure she didn't do it." She enjoyed being a "straight man" for him, but they were genuinely in love and he learned this matter of [studying] the Bible before they'd go to sleep every night. So sometimes after he had traveled and was bringing her up to date, he'd be through listening before she was through talking and he had a little signal, he'd say "GWLW," that meant God's Word the Last Word, so she could talk as long as she wanted as long as she read Scripture to him.

Jack: Yeah, that's great. Talk to us about the importance of humor, joy, and a light spirit in the midst of discipleship.

Jim: Well I think humor is necessary for a healthy life, no matter what it is. I think I can back that up from what other people have said. We need to learn not to take ourselves too serious.

Jack: Yeah, that's good. Some of our listeners might be struggling with the idea, "you know God's called me to work and then this other thing called ministry, which takes time and energy and effort, I struggle with, because I get home when I'm tired." What would you say to them? Because within all of us there is an urge, a desire, to be a discipler, to engage in this ministry of reconciliation, to be engaged in the Great Commission. What would you say to them when they struggle with the tensions of life and they come home and there may be the kids climbing all over and the front door needs to be fixed; how do you move through life and still commit to the ministry?

Jim: I'm going to use something I learned from Peter Drucker, I think it was. He said, "a successful executive does his work during working hours." And then the people say, "Well I can't do that; I don't have enough help." "A successful executive gets his work done during working hours, that means he'll get the help." Then they said, "We don't have the money." "A

successful executive gets his work done during working hours; he'll raise the money to hire the people to help you so you can complete your work during working hours." So, I like that little word in there, that you figured out. Now this requires a lot of delegation and the person to whom you delegate will never do it as well as you would have done it. But you have to accept some sub-standard performance sometimes. But that's what I stick to, what I strive for. I'm not going to be overwhelmed; I'm going to find out the help I need to get my work done during working hours.

Jack: That's good. Talk to us, Jim, about the importance of the Word in our lives on a daily basis, especially as we try to build into the lives of others.

Jim: Well as we've said, we need to feed on the Word to be healthy Christians. I have a story I tell that probably isn't a true story. It came from my Grandfather and I think he told me things for entertainment, not meant to pass along truths. He talked about this family that had so many children, they never had organized meals. So in the morning the mother would be something on the stove; it might be mosh or maybe a soup and the kids each had their bowl and spoon and whenever they got hungry they went and dipped it out of there. But one of the girls looked to be kind of undernourished, so they watched to see what she did after she filled up her bowl. So she went out in the yard and sat down, and this is the part of the story that is hard to believe, a snake came up and he'd eat out of the bowl, and she would hit the snake over the head with the spoon, it still wouldn't go away, they wrestled until she spilled it on the ground. So, whether that's true or not, Satan, everyday tries to do something to keep you away from the Word. I think that he figures we would be less effective during the day if he could do that; just rob us of our food. So it's very important, like Spurgeon said, "No Bible, no breakfast." And I don't know where in the world Job got hold of the commandments he had, because the Bible hadn't been

written then, but he said, "I have esteemed the words of your mouth more than my necessary food." So that's just the way God made us, it seems to me, that the Bible is more important than breakfast.

Jack: That is tremendous. You know in these days, as you've traveled quite a bit, I've looked at your life and you guys have been heroes of ours for so many years. As you, on a daily basis, lift that one leg out of bed, what motivates you to get out of bed and to engage with people the way you do?

Jim: The week that Dawson Trotman drowned, up at Schroon Lake, I was there that week. Walden Scott gave one of the main messages, it was on availability; tremendous message. I think I decided after that message, that that will be my life; I'm available. So that's what drives me is that I've told the Lord that I'm available, "anything You want." I've found it's true in my life and in the lives of others, that God generally gives us a job about six months before we think we're ready, but if He says you're ready, well, you're ready to get up and do it.

Jack: And how have you tried to impart that on to the folks that you've ministered to?

Jim: Probably by example more than any other way. I've got people, like Brett and another woman over at Headquarters that help me, so they can worry about the things they worry about. So I tell them now when somebody calls and asks for time, don't ever refuse. You just say, "well we may need to reschedule this; if I'm already tied up, but I want to make time for anybody that wants to see me for any purpose."

Jack: Any other stories you think that you'd like to share that are relevant to this topic of discipleship, life-on-life?

Jim: I think, by this verse that we quoted here, that bringing people to maturity is what it's all about, because they will reproduce when they're mature, but they have to grow in

maturity.

Jack: Well it's clear that the family is a strategic focus in discipleship. So when we leave work, we leave work to be present with our family. Well that's convicting. We've heard a common thread from Jim's 80+ years of experience and the one truth he wanted us to take away was discipleship is about helping to bring people to maturity. Thank you, Jim, for your words of wisdom.

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