

Holly Tate:

Welcome to the Vanderbloemen Leadership podcast. I'm your host, Holly Tate, vice president of business development here at Vanderbloemen. In today's episode, our Content Coordinator, Karess Grant, talks with Pastor Obi, dean at Remnant Bible College and young adults pastor at His Tabernacle Family Church. In the wake of COVID-19 impacting our church gatherings in the US, Pastor Obi speaks wisdom into what discipleship looks like in the midst of a pandemic and what's important for the future of discipleship to thrive in believers. He shares tangible ways to balance discipleship in person and online and how to navigate loving and supporting others through isolation.

Holly Tate:

This conversation reminds us that while discipleship may not look the same right now, the end goal is still the same and our God is not changing. The mission and goals of Christianity don't change through physical separation. Tweet your takeaways from today's show using the hashtag Vandercast and check out today's show notes to join our Facebook group, where we post behind-the-scenes content. We'll even post today's behind-the-scenes video in that Facebook group. Without further ado, here's Karess' conversation with Pastor Obi.

Karess Grant:

Hi, I'm Karess with Vanderbloemen. I am the content coordinator and I'm here with Pastor Obi. He is the Dean at Remnant Bible college, as well as the young adults pastor with His tabernacle. We're going to talk about discipleship, what that looks like now, what that looks like in the future. Pastor Obie, give us overview of what you do and kind of what's going on your end.

Pastor Obi:

Awesome. Thank you so much for having me here. I'm really just so excited to be a part of this. As you guys know, my name is Pastor Obi. I am the Dean of Remnant Bible College located in Upstate New York. I'm also our church's young adults pastor, and now I also oversee L of our teaching at our church. I've been a full-time staff since 2014, but I've been with the church since 2009 and just a real honor to be here today. I look forward to our conversation.

Karess Grant:

Awesome. Thank you, Pastor Obi. We are definitely grateful to have you with us. Just jumping straight into it, talking about discipleship and what that looks like, balancing that in person and online. Have you found that there's been a huge shift? What kind of changes you've been implementing and what's been working for you?

Pastor Obi:

We had to go back to middle of March in terms of seeing a massive shift in how we are actually loving our people. But I think that the first thing is, can you still love people when technology is taken out of the way? Can you still love people when the church building is now taken away? Can you still love people when there's actual pandemic? And then there's also fear and work issues and child issues and family issues. Can we still love people through that?

Pastor Obi:

I think it was a great opportunity for the church to do a self temperature check and see, are we truly the body of Christ? I think that oftentimes we can get so wrapped up in all of the tools, the lights, the cameras, our great church buildings, and we sometimes lose focus on the fact that in Jesus' time, he didn't have any of that. All he had was his love for people and the power of God working through him, both of which are available to us. It was innocent to feel as if everything was just stripped away. And I would dare say that we still loved our people.

Pastor Obi:

I mean, there will be times in a virtual staff meeting, we'll get a list of people and just get on the phone and just say, "Hey, you are not just another face. We love you. We care about you and if you need to talk, we're here. If you need prayer, we are here. If you need food, we will get you on the list." And just been the hands and the feet of Christ. Why does that matter? Because it is impossible to disciple people if they do not feel that you genuinely care about them. I cannot speak to your future, if I'm unwilling to show that I care about where you are now.

Pastor Obi:

That was a very powerful thing for us to see that, as much as we do love the people in the now, do they know that? Did they know that? It was great that we would just spend hours on the phone, just letting people know that we love them. And then from that, we then began to pray to say, "God, what are some creative ways that we can continue to disciple people?" I do believe in a God that he is all knowing and he is all powerful and he is all seeing, which means that our pandemic in this year did not take God by shock. It may have shocked us, but it did not shock him.

Pastor Obi:

Then if the Bible says that God has a plan for every single thing, then I have to truly believe that God had a plan for this. If we are called to make disciples, that command in scripture does not shift just for what is happening in our world. It was great that we were able to get together as a team and begin to say, "What are some unique ways we can disciple people?" But none of that could have been possible if we first didn't ensure them that we truly did love them.

Karess Grant:

Wow. That is so incredible. I mean, going back to the beginning and making sure that you're being intentional about caring for people and making sure that they feel loved. Making sure that they know that we are here for you. We're all in this together. We're going to care for you through this. I think that's incredible because I feel like that's also something that is so easy to overlook. It's so easy to miss when we're talking about the online elements. We're talking about the lights and the production and things like that, and how are we going to go online with everything. I think that's incredible that you and your church are like, "You know what, we're going to love people through this. And we're going to make sure that they feel loved right here right now because we care." I think that's awesome with the church aspect. Have you seen shifts with the school aspect and the students that are within the school?

Pastor Obi:

With the school, if I'm being transparent, it was very challenging because our school, it is not just from a coursework standpoint. There is hands-on ministry training. There's about, a 50-50 split where you can take courses anywhere and everywhere, but when it comes to ministry training, either at our church, or if you are not taking courses at our home base, you can be doing ministry training at your church. And

that is our niche. That is our corner where we don't believe that you have to wait until you are hired by our church for you to start getting hands-on ministry training. You get that through Bible school.

Pastor Obi:

Either it'd be, walking somebody through the process, they were just saved, either be setting up our Sunday services, either be making sure our finances are in check, making sure credit card statements reconciled. Whatever it may be, all this stuff that you may not see that church staff do Monday through Friday, that's what we train our students in. So, when all this stuff went down, it was challenging because our students were forced to now just take online classes at home. Why they were here, felt like it was being taken away. That was very challenging for a lot of them. There were a few of them that felt as if maybe, they weren't called to do this anymore because that opportunity was taken from them. There were some that felt that their skillsets that they had been building, now that they were not going to be using it, it was all going to go to the wayside.

Pastor Obi:

There were some, which was probably my hardest group to deal with. They just got lazy. They were cool being in their pj's in their bed and just hanging out and chilling. So, then when were able to bring them back onto campus, it was an incredibly challenging transition back, incredibly challenging. As much as there is a character piece that we teach within schools, I had to be cognizant of the fact that they had eight weeks of being at home. They had eight weeks of Zoom classes. And Zoom classes get boring over time. I'll be the first to admit, they get boring over time. It was a really hard adjustment for that.

Pastor Obi:

What I had to do was, I began to meet with them one-on-one and then also began to meet with them as a group, and just began to show them that there are certain times within ministry in which your feelings and the environment are completely contradictory to your calling. You have to understand that at any given moment, I have to make a conscious decision that I'm chasing after my calling, I'm not chasing after a feeling. Because some of the rhetoric that we hear now is that, this doesn't feel like church. We have to wear a mask. We have to get our temperature checked. This doesn't feel like Bible college, this doesn't feel like my workplace, nothing feels normal. And all that might be true, but when you begin to back it up, it is not about what I feel is about what I am called to do and who I'm called to be.

Pastor Obi:

I think it's also very important that we begin to order ourselves in the way that God had ordered us. We see that in Genesis chapter one, that God has created man. But then Genesis chapter two, says that God has formed man. And then God then breathed the life into man. When we look at Genesis chapter one, it was not my flesh or my feelings or my soul that was created in Genesis chapter one. It was my spirit and my spirit was what was given power. It was my spirit that God wants me to rule, not my feelings. My feelings came in all the way in Genesis chapter two.

Pastor Obi:

Yes, they are important, but I don't let them rule me. That was just a really head to head councils that we had to have. That independent of how I feel as a minister of the Gospel, as an ambassador of Christ, that my feelings pale in comparison to my calling. It does not matter what situation comes around, my callings remain as paramount. And I told them, there's some days we wake up as people that work in the church and we don't feel like coming to work. [crosstalk 00:11:49], we don't feel like it. But at the end of

the day, it's not about what I feel, it's about what I am called to do and who I am called to be. And the more that we can get out of what we feel and who God has called me to be, it makes life so much easier. For the Bible says that, "I'm not doing this to please man, I'm doing this to please God."

Karess Grant:

Wow. That's so good. I mean, with the students who were let down with no longer having the hands-on training and things like that, looking into the new year, looking into the future and kind of what that may look like when it comes to hands-on training. Do you feel like there will be a shift with that? Do you feel like there may be, instead of all hands-on training, there's like also online training and how do you feel like that will look?

Pastor Obi:

Something that we have been doing is that, what is the creative way for us to ensure that we are still discipling people? We just came into a room for a few hours, got some snacks, got to ask us to translate. Let's just put every crazy, random idea on the board. And what began to happen was that we saw that pre COVID, the generation of people 40 and older were the ones that were forming our ideology on what discipleship is and how it should look. But then post COVID.

Pastor Obi:

It was a people that were 30 and down, they did not change what discipleship is. They began to give creative ideas on what it could look like and now we now have this battle between, well, I've always seen it look like this. And over here is. Well, that can't be anymore and can you still understand that it may not look the same in how it is being laid out. But that end goal is still the same. We went about four weeks and all we did was zoom lunch meetings. Like I would have five guys a week and no one every single day, Monday to Friday. I say, "Dude, you make lunch. I'll make lunch. You get on Zoom or FaceTime or WhatsApp whatever it is, we will FaceTime each other, eat our food there face-to-face and just talk and go through God's word, whatever it may be. And it was so interesting. People thought that was crazy, but they worked so well. And people, they love the fact that I could still be home and be safe. A pastor wants to have lunch with me and we can still talk and begin to grow.

Pastor Obi:

It was really great because being stuck at home. It is really contradicted to how God has built us. Now I would challenge anybody, go find a scripture, how many times Jesus was alone. He was only alone to pray. The scripture will show you that he lived life with people. The only time he was alone was when he was with his heavenly father. And the Bible tells us that, when we go to pray, shut the door behind you. So it makes sense to pray by yourself. But when it comes to living this Christian life, they should not be alone. People, they really appreciated that fact that we wanted to live life with them. Now I know just like small things like that, somebody may be at home and then the other person go into Walmart and they would then switch off, recall, grocery shopping for each other, just being on face. I'm feeling like you are actually going through there.

Pastor Obi:

Some people loved it, some people didn't, but at the end of the day, people did not feel alone. And that goes back to my first point, discipleship means nothing, if people are unwilling to meet you where you are now. We just were unwilling to sit back and say there is no hope. Instead we said that we serve a creative God, who saw this before the foundations of the earth. And he ensured that if we're called, we

are then equipped. If there is a vision, there will be tools for there. What are the tools around us that maybe we've never seen before? Maybe was always walked by them and let's begin to make those happen. So everything from Zoom calls, WhatsApp messages, it was just really awesome, all of the ideas that began to come through.

Pastor Obi:

One of the ones that we had the hardest time with was, what do we do with the people that get saved during an online service? Like that is our heart. Yes, you can type in on saved and you can do all this stuff, but what if you can then just log off and their life just keeps on happening. I don't know who you are. I don't see your face, I don't do any of that. We thought that it would be great that once they get saved, we would then give them a link. And once they click that link, they will come into a chat room just like this, and our team of pastors will be there and they would see us. We can then pray with them, and it was so amazing that every person that wanted to, they could see a pastor immediately from them getting saved.

Pastor Obi:

What was good about online service was that, most of the people watching were not from our church. It is one thing to be like, "well, you are in my backyard, come to my church." It's very different to say, "There is nothing you can give me. You don't live even in my state, all I care about is you running this race with God," and they absolutely loved it. It was so cool to see people on a platform like this, tears coming down their face, crying, laughing, smiling, bringing in their kids, praying for their kids all over Zoom. And there really is nothing greater while you can see that God is working through people in the midst of hell breaking loose, around their entire lives. Either be school or church, we just refuse to sit back and just say, "why always me?" Instead, we pressed in. And we said, what are those tools that are available out there for us to use? Because God's kingdom, it must still advance. If the enemy is busy, we have to be busier.

Karess Grant:

Yes. That is such a great truth. And I mean, just being able to create that authentic and intimate connection with those who are newly saved. I mean, it just speaks to the power in the online presence, but also the power that is in person and the fact that they both can co-exist, the fact that they're both needed and helpful. I mean, I'm sure once, you connect with your students, one-on-one, you can just see them grow. You can see, they want to dig deeper. They want to learn more, they're even hungrier I'm sure. So just being able to parallel those two and see the importance and the impacts of both is incredible. And I mean, do you see any kind of shift or difference in the new graduates, students that are graduating here soon? Do you feel like there's a difference after they've walked through something like COVID,?

Pastor Obi:

There is definitely a difference. I think that they do not take it for granted as much. Now, with our past students, they were graduating in a culture and in a climate where if they had a church away from here, they could go back to that church and just begin to serve or to lead or to get on their staff. If they were here, they could then get unplugged into a higher leadership role or some of them, even into a staff role. Some of them they may now, go back to work or now go back to school and they will be able to just keep ongoing on that natural path they would think. But this year's graduates, it's interesting to

graduate with not knowing what tomorrow is going to look like. It's interesting for you to say, "I have this piece of paper, I've put in the work, but does the world even care right now?"

Pastor Obi:

Because they're all focused on what is going on. Now you have to fight that identity crisis in which I'm equipped for this, but is it even needed? Because the way they always been shaped is that if you go to Bible college and then once you are out of it, you can then go work for a church. Or you can go on for more school or you're put into some leadership role. But now you're in a time, a place and a space where people are just scared. People don't know what tomorrow is going to look like. People are pointing the finger at other people. Streets are suture being filled. Social media is just like jam pack.

Pastor Obi:

There is chaos happening and you have to be so firm in your calling to truly understand that independent of what is going on, I am still called. To really believe that God can use me in the midst of a mess. I love coaches and counselors and people like that, they can help you on that path. But there is no head hunter is crushing it right now. That has gone out the window. I love that in a way, because the Bible declares, its not by my might, it's not by my power, but it's by my spirit says the Lord of hosts, which means that we now have to be focused so strongly on the spirit of God to say, I need to be spirit led not talent driven. I need to be spirit led and a skill driven. I'll be that, this is the time within the body of Christ, where those that are going to be spirit led, they're going to be propelled so much further and faster because this is a God thing.

Pastor Obi:

It is impossible for anybody with a certain skillset or talent to now get this by themselves. Because if they could, they would have the answer. But I believe that there's a certain secret that laid up in heaven that will only be released if we are chasing after the spirit of God. And I'm excited for my students this year, because they are being forced. They don't have any choice. They're being forced to ensure that God's spirit is what's going to be pushing them forward. And so, I'm really excited for where God is going to be taking them.

Karess Grant:

Yeah. I mean, like you said, they don't have a choice. It doesn't matter. They do not have a choice. And I mean, as you're walking alongside your students, as you are doing life with them and pouring into them, how do you teach them and reassure them that you must stand firm in your calling? How do you convey that?

Pastor Obi:

The greatest way to teach it is by living it. There is no greater way. I will sometimes invite groups of them to our home tyrannized home. They would just watch just how we live. Its one thing to see a pastor on a Sunday morning, is another thing to see them in their home with two kids running around, doing stuff and having to make sure you don't throw a wall or something. Like, they see the real you at your home. But they can also see that this is how he looks when he's not on stage. This is how she looks when she's on stage. This is how she even sounds when they are off stage.

Pastor Obi:

As they begin to see that it does two things. Number one, it begins to take the pastor off of a pedestal, because on forced to happens that, if a person of that stature begins to fall, it's one thing to say, this person fell, but when they are up here, well because it happened to well says, well, this entire office fell. And that's not the case. The office of the pastor didn't fall. The church didn't fall, it was one person. I think it allows them to see us in... That allows them to humanize us. And we want that, you not idolize a pastor.

Pastor Obi:

We are humanized. We just have more call with God on our life. That is different from yours. It's not better, it is just different. So they just see us live in it. They see us having to go to the store. They see us still having to pay bills. They see us having to still have arguments with friends. They see all of that and it is important for them to see that we are going through it as well.

Pastor Obi:

The Bible says that the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. It falls on if you are sitting in the pews or if you're preaching. We're all going through that same thing. And I think that they have seen that because we, number one, gave them access. And then number two, that we have not crumbled. They can do it as well. For those that had been struggling, we just spent a lot more time with them. We give them the space to be in your feelings for 20 minutes. And then we get out of that. Because there's something that they process things differently. But that's another thing that I've learned, people process different.

Pastor Obi:

And I can't say that the way that I process, must be the same way that you process. Remember I have been saved, you're saved, it is just different. Giving people that space for them to process, but the truth of the word that all remains the same. Just ensuring that we give them that space for them to process, then they see us actually living it out. There is no better way for them rather than for them to just see it. And that has helping. And I think that also humbles us as pastors. It lets us know that we're not above anything, we're not better than anyone. There are people that are watching and that's not a prideful thing. That's a very humbling thing, that "God you know my flaws. I mean, people see something on a Sunday morning, but God you know the real me," and these people will still want to follow me.

Pastor Obi:

They'll still want to submit under me. They'll still want to come to this church and hearing me, that is a very humbling thing. And I'm just excited and just so thankful that God has entrusted me the same with you. I mean, God, hasn't trusted you, your family, everything that you have done just think about that. It could have been anybody else. We are not the most talented. We're not the most skilled within our field where God has chosen us. He's given us a certain platform where we have influence with our words, with our voice, with the steps we take, even with every social media post we add. We had that much influence and it's not about us. It's always an opportunity to bring him glory. And that's just a very humbling thing.

Karess Grant:

Wow. That is incredible. I love that so much. And even just moving forward, I'm sure there are a lot of pastors and other Deans that are in similar situation as you, what are some lessons learned or some advice that you would give them?

Pastor Obi:

Number one is to pray. And I know that that sounds churchy, but I've prayed a lot in the past. I'd say the past three months, my prayers have gone on a different level and they've been differently. That's number one is, I've spoken less in my prayers and listen more in my prayer time, in which I will go on like on lap a five mile walk and maybe two of those miles I'll be praying. And three of those I'll just be hearing from God. I think that this is a season in which we all know, we don't have the answers. But if I know that God has them, why should I be talking more than listening to him? Number one, is just been really being intentional about hearing from God. Number two, is making my prayer time with him, not just number one, but making it that it is, what's the word? I treat it like a great valuable thing, locked away in a vault where you do not have any access to it.

Pastor Obi:

And that's important because, there's so many distractions around us where your time with the Lord cannot become, "I'll do it later," or "I'll get to it when I can." It became my number one priority. It already was, but I just put a greater value on it. And I'm just spending time with him, I knew that every answer would be in him. It's so easy to get on social media and read this article, or you listen to this podcast or you read this news article, or you hear this. And before you knew where, you were even more confused than when you first woke up. But if I could have a clear instruction from the Lord, the Bible says that, Man can make his plans, but God directs his steps."

Pastor Obi:

If I have a clear direction from the Lord, it does not matter what else may come around during that day. I know where I'm going with God. Either be over school, at work, a pastor, even as parents. My kids, they are living in this different world. I can't parent the way that I did, it has to be different, but I still go to God. I don't go to my feelings, I don't go to Facebook. I go to God. That has been the number one thing. Number two thing is, do not be so stuck in what used to work. One of the ways for any great thing to die is for the heads of those things to say, "well, this is how it has always worked." That is a killer thing, because God does not change.

Pastor Obi:

His spirit does not change, but the way that he flows does change. Great way is that Moses in the Bible, in one way, he was asked to strike a rock and for water to come out. And the same God spoke to him the next minute he said, "Don't strike the rock, speak to the rock." But instead Moses disobeyed and he was stuck in his old way of thinking. And because of that, he missed out on his covenant promise. How terrible is that? That the only downfall to his leadership was him being stuck in an old way of thinking and thinking that God being God could not move in a different way. The way that my school has been built from 2014, until now, I've had to sometimes sit down, pray, have a blank piece of legal sized paper and just write out God, what is the new way?

Pastor Obi:

And take a step back and say, "okay, I need to step away from this and pray because this is different and I'll figure it out." And in the last three months, I'm telling you, I feel like it's a completely different school. But it is the same God behind the school. It's the same leadership behind the school, but the spirit of God needs to move in a completely different way. And I cannot be stuck on what happened in the past five years. I thank God for that, but if I become stuck on that, that now becomes an idol in my life. And I

don't have the luxury of allowing some past accolade to become an idol that will hinder my school from it moving forward.

Pastor Obi:

I've been building up by two things. Number one is to pray. I mean, to truly seek God and not just vent to him about what was me. He wants to hear about all the year going on. Don't get me wrong, but you need to hear the instructions from him. And number two is, do not be afraid when God says, "I need you to shift it." He can still be God, he can be the same God yesterday, today, and forever. But the manifestation of his spirit on your job, business, ministry, school, whatever it might be, that itself it can change.

Karess Grant:

Absolutely. I love that you go straight back to the source. You're not going back to what you think, what you've done, what has worked before, but straight to the source that knows the end from the beginning, and getting your answers from there. And that's incredible. How would you empower other ministry leaders to walk alongside either their students or those in their ministry and just walking with them and discipling them? How would you kind of empower them?

Pastor Obi:

I think that one thing as I've said is, to not think too highly of ourselves. I've had more office hours now. I've had, in fact, I have changed the way that I dressed it to the office because they need to see that in this season, they can approach me. That I'm not just their Dean, I'm not just their pastor, am somebody that actually cares. And I have to create that atmosphere and where they can actually want to come to me. That is the number one thing. If they don't feel like they can come to you, then they're not going to come to you. Number two is that, when they are speaking, have to arrest yourself and just saying, "well, you are wrong," because we come from a time period in which we were taught to how to just work through the way that we felt or that we had to just push it off to the side.

Pastor Obi:

I mean, I was raised in Africa. Like we didn't have the space for feelings, right? But I can't translate that to now. The students, they need to be given that space to talk and to process. It does not change the word, it does not change the truth given in love. But so many of them do not have a voice, think about that. They are home and they're hearing all of these things. They are with their friends and they're hearing all of these things, or they're at home on their phones, hearing everybody else's voice. But how many people have generally asked them, how are you doing? And what do you think? Tell them, how are you doing and what do you think? I'm not saying that it's right. I'm not saying that your thoughts are right or that your mind processes is right. We can get to that later, but how are you doing and what do you think?

Pastor Obi:

And that has opened up some phenomenal conversations for me. Once that in turn blessed me more than it blessed them. And the third thing I would say is that, we cannot think that because we are in a leadership role above people that we cannot learn from them. I'm not just having students to come along me, for me to help them. My heart is open enough for them to help me. And again, that is a check to my pride. It does not matter what my title or what my role is. If God can use a donkey, he can use a

student. And my goal in this is, I want to be the best person possible for the kingdom, for my family and for God's church.

Pastor Obi:

I can not believe that will only happen within ways that makes sense to me. I'm okay with a 20 year old student being in my office, crying out tears and going through all that is happening with them, and they say one thing that changes my life. I am okay with that, but that does not happen if I don't create that space for them to come in. If I'm always talking over them, or if I'm telling them how they need to be processing their feelings. I give them the word, I need to give them that space to say, "How are you doing? And what do you think?"

Karess Grant:

That's so good. Oh my gosh, you have just blessed us so much today. And with that word, just going back to loving people, going back to caring for them, caring for their souls, their spirits, and acknowledging where they are and what their reality may be, but also helping them navigate through that. I think that's incredible. So thank you so much, Pastor Obi [crosstalk 00:37:54].

Pastor Obi:

I appreciate it so much. Thank you so much.

Karess Grant:

Absolutely. I'm sure this is going to bless so many people. So thank you. And we will talk to you soon.

Pastor Obi:

Amen, Thank you.

Karess Grant:

No problem.

Holly Tate:

Thanks for listening to the Vanderbloemen leadership podcast here at Vanderbloemen and our sister company, Christian Teams, we help Christian organizations build their best teams, your hiring, compensation and succession consulting services. Visit our website, vanderbloemen.com and christianteams.com to learn more. And subscribe to the Vanderbloemen leadership podcast, wherever you listen to podcasts, to stay updated on our new weekly episodes.