



Building a Culture of Discipleship



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



Building a Culture of Discipleship

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BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP**Leader's Guide**

How to use “*Building a Culture of **DISCIPLESHIP***” by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Resources at Christianity Today, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS is not just another program. Each theme contains materials on the topic you choose—no tedious program to follow. The materials work when you want, where you want, and the way you want them to. They're completely flexible and easy to use.

You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings with board members or with other committees or groups of leaders. BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS at the beginning of a board meeting or committee meeting:

1. Select a learning tool. In this theme of “Building a Culture of **DISCIPLESHIP**,” you'll find multiple types of handouts from which to choose:

- ◆ Bible study
- ◆ case study
- ◆ activities
- ◆ interview
- ◆ devotionals
- ◆ resources
- ◆ assessment tools
- ◆ how-to articles
- ◆ retreat plan

2. Select a handout. Suppose, for example, you want to evaluate your congregation's current level of spiritual knowledge. Select the assessment “What Every Christian Should Know” on page 7. Or if you wanted to explore the discipleship patters of the early church, see “A Biblical Call to Making Disciples,” by Greg Ogden, on pages 23–24.

3. Photocopy the handout. Let's say you selected “What Every Christian Should Know.” Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do *not* need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).

4. Prepare for the discussion. We recommend you read the Scripture passages and identify key discussion questions. How will you apply the principles to specific decisions your church is making?

5. Lead the discussion. Most handouts can be read within five minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions. Be ready to move the discussion to specific issues your church is facing.

Most BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS handouts can be discussed in 15 or 20 minutes (except the Bible study, which may take longer). Your board, committee, or team will still have plenty of time to discuss its agenda.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP**Ordinary Folks Make Great Disciples**

Here is a basic job description for disciples of Jesus Christ.

Mark 8:27–38

Some people think a disciple is a Christian put up a notch or two. Other people have the idea that a disciple is somebody who has come through a course where you get up at some unearthly hour in the morning and go talk with somebody over interminable cups of coffee. We've got the idea that *disciple* is a term you don't worry about if you just want to be a Christian. But if you get serious, then you get into a disciple course and come out disciplined. This thinking needs to be re-evaluated.

Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? A disciple is somebody who has a relationship with a teacher. That's the simplest definition. Are you sitting at his feet, hearing his Word? Are you discovering his truth? Are you identifying with him personally? Are you applying his principles? Are you gladly sharing these things and disseminating them?

Disciples Confront the Issues Jesus Raised

In Mark 8, the Lord Jesus outlines a basic job description for being a disciple. There are three things I want you to notice. First, Jesus' disciples were prepared to confront the issues he raised. For instance, in verse 35, Jesus says, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" The issue is this: What on earth are you doing with your life? It's hard to imagine a bigger issue than that.

Then he identifies two possibilities: You can invest your life, or you can waste your life. Jesus is basically saying, "What determines whether your life is wasted or invested is your attitude toward me. If you want to hang onto your life for yourself, you'll waste it. But if you want to hand over your life to me, you will invest it for eternity."

Disciples Confirm Christ's Claims

Second, disciples of Jesus Christ confirm the claims he made. Christianity does not stand or fall on whether the Spanish Inquisition was right, or the Reformation or the Crusades. Christianity stands or falls on whether Jesus Christ was who he said he was—or not. And disciples of Jesus Christ are ready to carefully evaluate the claims he made, and then confirm that those claims are true. If disciples of Jesus Christ can't do that—if they cannot build their lives on the absolute bedrock certainty that Jesus Christ is Lord—then it's only a matter of time until they'll collapse. Christianity stands or falls on the validity of Jesus Christ.

Talking to his disciples Jesus said, "Who do people say that I am?" They all had their answers ready. They'd been out polling the people at Jerusalem Airport. But what they didn't expect was the next question: "Now who do you say I am?" That's what disciples of Jesus Christ are ready for.

Disciples Conform to Christ's Pattern

There's a third thing about Jesus' disciples: they conform to the pattern he outlined. Let me read to you some challenging words: "Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'" There are four things here that will show whether a person is conforming to the pattern of discipleship that Christ outlined: they come after him, they deny themselves, they take up their cross, and they keep on following him.

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Some of you are going to go out tomorrow morning and say, “Look out! Here comes another disciple of Jesus Christ skillfully disguised as a stock broker.” And somebody else is going to say, “Look out, neighborhood. Here’s a busy disciple of Jesus Christ disguised as a homemaker.” If you’re disciples of Jesus Christ, that will be the predominant thought. So the question is, are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? You say, “I’m not sure about that. Why can’t I just be a good Christian?” The Lord Jesus came looking for disciples, and at the end of his ministry told the church to do one thing: make disciples.

—STUART BRISCOE; adapted from the sermon “Ordinary Folks Make Great Disciples” on www.PreachingToday.com, © 2008 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. How does discipleship occur in the “secular” world today? How is that process similar to Christian discipleship?
2. In what ways have I been discipled by Jesus Christ? In what ways have I been discipled by other Christians?
3. How can I help others in the church conform to Christ’s pattern of life? How can others help me?

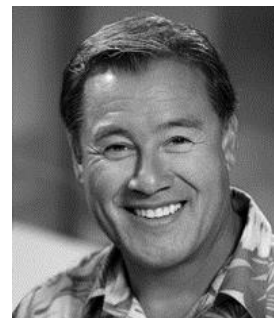
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Doing Church as a Team

An interview with New Hope Christian Fellowship pastor Wayne Cordeiro.

Ephesians 4:11–13

In 1994, Wayne Cordeiro founded New Hope Christian Fellowship with the un-extraordinary intention of people putting their natural gifts and passions to work for the kingdom of God. But the results have been extraordinary. Using the concept of “fractals,” Cordeiro has devised a radical yet simple model of discipleship—he calls it “doing church as a team.” Leadership journal editors Marshall Shelley and Ed Gilbreath spoke to Cordeiro about his vision for building churches and disciples.



Wayne Cordeiro

A core aspect of making disciples at New Hope is doing church as “fractal teams.” Where did that come from?

I had been to many seminars on organizing church leadership, and much of it was borrowed from the marketplace, which generally implies you work with organizations until they run like a machine. The only problem, I found, is that machines don’t grow; they operate. They require grease, but they don’t mature. I wanted to have a church that I could grow with, that would grow beyond me, and that I did not have to worry about, because it would be in order.

The Lord uses the body as a metaphor for the church. And if he chose that as a metaphor, I think it behooves us to study that carefully. It’s a brilliant metaphor. As I looked at human anatomy more closely, I noticed something: from brain cells down to your fingernails, the DNA structure is the same throughout your body. There are repeating patterns in certain cells that, if you look at them under a microscope, look like little triangular shapes or oblong rectangles that just continue to repeat again and again, up to infinity.

When I mentioned this to my friend Loren Cunningham, the founder of Youth with a Mission, he told me he had heard a speaker talk about something called fractal patterns. There’s actually a mathematical equation for these repeating patterns. It’s like a fern. You’ll notice a fern has a stem and then singular leaves off the side, left and right. Now, if you take one of those singular leaves off the left or right, you’ll notice there’s a major stem with singular leaves off each of them. You see the same pattern repeated over and over. Likewise, your body has major arteries and smaller arteries off of those. Everything repeats.

I wondered how I might apply this fractal pattern to leadership. So I organized our church in a repeating pattern, where growth is downward like roots from a plant. We started building teams in groupings of five (up to ten if team members are married).

How do fractals work in a church?

Well, let’s take children’s ministry as an example. In doing church as a team, my first step is not to jump in and start working with the children. Instead, it’s to build a team of four leaders, with whom I will serve. That gives us a team of five people with similar passions and gifts.

Each of these leaders will then do the same thing in whatever their specific area of children’s ministry is. So, for instance, the nursery leader finds a team of four people with whom she can serve. The first- and second-grade leader finds his team of four. And the pattern goes on and on. As each leader does this, it just keeps multiplying. The leader disciples downward, but he or she is also being disciplined from above. The growth continues, and it falls naturally into discipleship groups.

How has this changed your ministry?

Even now, at about 7,000 people, I have less stress overseeing that size of a church than I did when we were overseeing 300 and I was chaotically trying to control everything. Now we can grow. Everyone has a small group, and they’re serving and being served; discipling and being disciplined. And everybody has a place in

ministry and the same DNA. What I do with my four, they do with their four, and so on. The DNA keeps filtering down.

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Do you intentionally introduce specific content into the system? Or is what filters down generally intangible?

I will introduce intentional teaching in the area of discipleship and spiritual growth. But what's primarily inculcated are values—the core values that we hold as important to the church. You're going to have different tints and colorations of ministry, and you don't want to dictate or control that. That's just a natural part of what the Spirit is doing. But if you and I have the same core values, then you can have a whole different tint in your ministry, but the same DNA will be going through it.

Statistics show that most people think they're too busy. How do you get people who already feel overbooked and overcommitted to a point where they willingly offer their gifts to serve God's kingdom?

Yes, everyone is busy, even the kids. But you'll notice that if there's something that you really like to do—say, fishing—you make time for it. I play soccer. I still play in a Tuesday night league. I love soccer. I can be busy as can be, but I'm going to play soccer on Tuesday night.

So what we have to do as a church is increase the value of the kingdom in our people's hearts. And once an activity's value is increased, they'll make time for it.

How do you do that?

In the traditional way of doing church, it's "You just got to put in time" or "It's your duty." Well, in that model, church becomes one of the many responsibilities that I have to contend with every week. We can't do that anymore. That kind of leadership doesn't work in today's environment.

Instead, we have to find out how people are wired and then help them become what they want to be for the sake of the kingdom. Once you line up a person's gift with his or her ministry role, then you get people who love doing what they're doing. They'll want to make time for that.

Does this model translate to smaller churches?

It's really the same. We did it right out of the blocks when we were planting this church. We started with about 15, went to 30, and just kept people involved. You might not have the fractal pattern. That could come later on, but you can start with the same mindset of building leaders. You can do that with two people.

As it grows, you'll need more organizational structure, and that's when the fractal concept may be helpful. But before that, no matter how large or small the church is, it's the heart of the leader that says you are incredibly important to the kingdom of God and you've got gifts inside of you that need to be released.

So in a sense, the pastor is an interpreter of dreams, and a developer of teams that can fulfill those dreams.

That's it—for God's glory. Their dreams might be caged in through character flaws, insecurities, or maybe past wounds. But I've got to somehow untangle that web. That's why I'm called as a shepherd. That's my role—to untangle that mess so that their dreams and gifts can be released for the sake of the kingdom. And when people are moving in their area of giftedness, there's maximum effectiveness and minimum weariness.

—WAYNE CORDEIRO; excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2000 by Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. What is our church's discipleship structure? What are the strengths and weaknesses of that structure?
2. How does structuring ministry around people's passions contribute to a culture of discipleship? How would it impact discipleship in our church?
3. What would it take to begin using fractals in our church?

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What Every Christian Should Know

Christians need to know about their faith, and the church gets to teach them.

1 Timothy 4:15–16

Jo Lewis and Gordon Palmer lament the findings of a Gallup poll that concluded “many professing believers remain woefully ignorant about the basic facts of Christianity.” They set out categories—biblical and otherwise—in which Christians should have a basic knowledge. For each, rate how you believe the congregation of your church would score on a scale of 1 (our members are knowledgeable in this area) to 5 (our members have virtually no knowledge in the area).

	Knowledge in this area		No Knowledge in this area		
	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members have a basic knowledge of common biblical sayings. <i>(Example: They could complete the phrase “Am I my brother’s _____?”)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members have a basic knowledge of the books of the Bible. <i>(Example: They could list the books that constitute the Gospels.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members have a basic knowledge of biblical characters. <i>(Example: They could name the first king of Israel.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members have a basic knowledge of famous Christians. <i>(Example: They could tell you what John Wesley is known for.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members are familiar with Christian terms and phrases. <i>(Example: They could tell you what the phrase “I believe in God the Father Almighty” is the beginning of.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members have a basic knowledge of biblical geography. <i>(Example: They could find Bethlehem on a map of ancient Israel.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members are familiar with biblical proverbs and sayings. <i>(Example: They could complete the saying “A good name is better than _____)”</i>	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members could recite the Ten Commandments.	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members could list the Beatitudes.	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members could list Paul’s “fruits of the Spirit.”	1	2	3	4	5
➤ Members could list the seven last words of Christ.	1	2	3	4	5

—JO LEWIS AND GORDON PALMER; Copyright © 1989 Jo Lewis and Gordon Palmer. Adapted from *What Every Christian Should Know* (Victor Books, 1989). Used with permission.

Discuss

1. Based on our answers above, what is a good starting point for our church when it comes to discipling our members?
2. How can we model the importance of this type of knowledge to current and potential members of our church?
3. What are some ways we can incorporate this type of education into our discipling efforts?

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Are You Re-Parenting Your Disciples?

Evaluate how effective your church has been at changing lives.

2 Corinthians 5:17

To seize upon one of our Lord’s favorite metaphors, the “fish” business these days is not as simple as it once seemed. The human fish now come out of outrageously polluted cultural waters, and they bring all the effects of their pollutedness with them. So how do you develop leaders—productive disciples of Jesus—from such a population?

The word *re-parenting* comes to mind. It suggests an effort at conversion, discipleship, and leadership development—a thorough renovation of one’s life in line with Paul’s strong words: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” Not just a nicer person, but a new creation. Re-birthed! And if re-birthed, then also re-parented.

Use the assessment below to see if your church is actively re-parenting its disciples. Place an “x” on the scale below each principle of re-parenting to see in which areas you are strong, and in which you are weak.

Re-parenting is selective. You pick a specific group of people and tell them why you’ve picked them. You tell them that this is not a therapy group and that we are not going to be driven by problems, but rather by possibilities (“henceforth you will be fishing for men” is a biblical example).

We do not do this					We actively do this	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Re-parenting is structured. My wife, Gail, and I tell our potential disciples: “Don’t get involved unless you’re willing to be with us in our home for three hours every Wednesday night for a year. Don’t get involved unless you’re committed to being there on time, prepared, and able to stay for the duration of the evening.” Once the standards are set, almost no one ever misses. We’ve learned that good people like to be pushed hard to higher standards.

We do not do this					We actively do this	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Re-parenting is best done by a team. In our case, the team began with Gail and me. It provided everyone a chance to see a husband and wife working together week by week. Along the way we added to our team other couples (our age). They opened their lives to the younger people. How? By telling stories. By owning up to mistakes, aborted dreams, and the messiness of living. By disclosing the fruit of lessons learned, the principles that have proved their worth, the blessings of obedience and sacrifice.

We do not do this					We actively do this	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Re-parenting gives people a vocabulary. We began by looking for ways to help them understand themselves and others. We found the Myers-Briggs Temperament structure a useful tool. It equips people to describe themselves and discover where they need to grow. Daniel Goleman’s books on “Emotional Intelligence” were extremely helpful. Into these categories of thought and observation we were able to pour Christian perspective.

We do not do this					We actively do this	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Re-parenting teaches people how to think. The process accelerates as you have people read, analyze, and discuss with one another what they’re learning. Eventually, that means reading assigned books and articles on a regular basis. We found the world of biography essential here, biblical and extra-biblical. We put a great emphasis upon the discovery of character, and spent long hours discussing what we were all finding. We got each person to adopt a “hero” and learn everything possible about the character and spiritual orientation of that person. Then each learner taught the rest of us.

We taught them to talk with each other (the art of dialogue) and knew we had accomplished something when they started talking to each other and not directing their conversations toward us. And we knew something was happening when they started arriving at our home early and staying later and then standing outside under the street light (still talking) after we’d booted them out and gone to bed.

We do not do this					We actively do this	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Re-parenting means working together. We did projects together—learning to serve one another, to give sacrificially, and to stretch oneself to do the inconvenient or the unselfish.

We do not do this					We actively do this	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Re-parenting involves spiritual disciplines. We taught these disciplines and practiced them with one another. Learning to pray all over again; learning to value Scripture and put it to use; learning to hear God speak into life. We noticed that it took about three months of practice for our people to start volunteering to pray for one another and to support one another in the various issues they were facing during the rest of the week.

We do not do this					We actively do this	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Re-parenting means modeling. I invited each member of our group in turn to spend the better part of a weekend with Gail and me—following us around, eavesdropping on our conversations, listening to us pray for people, and responding to their questions. I showed them how I constructed talks, planned meetings, and edited my daily calendar. I might not have been the brightest or the most organized person they’d ever encountered, but I was among the first to invite them into the private sector of my life as a leader.

We do not do this					We actively do this	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Re-parenting means affirming—and rebuking. Only when there is clear candor can change happen.

We do not do this

We actively do this

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Let me be clear in saying that my discipleship group is not interested in manufacturing stamped-out cookie-cutter clones of its leaders. This can't happen if you are urging members to discover their uniqueness in temperament, spiritual gifting, and Christian character. And cloning won't happen if you make sure that they're being re-parented not by just one or two people, but by an entire spiritual "neighborhood."

Re-parenting is not a program; it's a way of ministry. I have slowly become convinced that one-on-one discipleship may be less effective than development in a group. Others have pointed out that, in the Gospels, Jesus is never seen working one-on-one with any of his disciples. Even the personal conversations with Simon Peter are carried out in the presence of other people. Such group discipling provides context to what the leader says and does.

—GORDON MACDONALD; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2001 by Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Have I experienced something similar to re-parenting? What were the benefits and lasting impressions of that experience?
2. Where is our church best when it comes to re-parenting? Where do we need improvement?
3. How can these principles be applied beyond a discipleship group to our church's whole community?

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP

The Joys of Personal Discipleship*One pastor's story of Bible study and prayer gone right.*

Philippians 1:3–6

The Case I'll never forget the day I stopped at a new convert's home to encourage him. A night-shift worker, he was fighting a hard battle with alcoholism. "He's down at the bar," his wife told me after I knocked at the door. "Been there since 6:30 this morning." Her son was on the way to bring him home. When he showed up, he was crooked, but friendly. He admitted everything, too. The whole family situation was killing him.

I was at my wits' end with this man. I had tried counseling him. I'd even written down what to do on three-by-five cards. We'd been praying for him in church. He was in a good Sunday school class. But still, here he was—smashed.

What Would You Do?

- ◆ What has helped you turn away from bad habits and poor choices in your life?
- ◆ How have you helped others become more like Christ?

What Happened I held my breath, then asked, "What about having us meet—you, me, and your wife—for devotions every morning after you get off work till we get you dry?" He and his wife agreed. So we met every weekday morning at 7:30 for no-frills devotions.

First, we memorized a new verse by repeating it together out loud. Then we reviewed old verses, talked about what they meant, and found some applications. Next, we read three to five chapters of the Bible using *The Daily Walk*. After reading silently, we'd discuss the passage and look for specific applications. Last, we prayed, writing our requests in a notebook and filling in the answers when they came.

The insights were fast, furious, and curious. I was amazed at this couple's enthusiasm. I was amazed at my enthusiasm! Most of all, we were amazed at the Lord's enthusiasm in sending so many prayer answers, insights, laughs, and tears. The husband stayed dry. We settled numerous problems that many would reserve for long-term counseling simply by talking things out on the basis of Scripture. Even their children, both non-Christian single adults, sat in occasionally. At Christmas they both presented me with beautiful gifts, telling me, "You deserve more than this for all you've done for Mom and Dad. They're getting it together." I went home and wept.

Obviously, it's hard to wake up at 5:30 day after day, drag myself out, and put on a devotional face. Sometimes I take *long* naps during the day. But one thing is for sure: when people say things like, "I never knew walking with God could be so good," I know I can't quit. Showing families how to meet God through his Word and prayer is just about the most practical thing a pastor or small-group leader can do.

—MARK LITTLETON; adapted from *Fresh Ideas for Discipleship and Nurture* (Word Publishing), © 1984 by Christianity Today.

- Discuss**
1. When have I seen discipleship lead to a changed life? How did it happen?
 2. What elements are necessary for a transformation discipleship experience (for example, reading Scripture, memorizing Scripture, accountability, and so on)?
 3. In what ways am I currently being discipled and discipling others? What steps can I take to deepen those relationships?

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP**Discipleship Through Organic Small Groups***How one church is attempting to reproduce a New Testament model of discipleship.*

Acts 2:42–47

The Case Harvest Community Christian Church began as a small group of 5 families (9 adults and 6 children) in 1999. Later in the start-up process, 6 more families made the commitment to come and form a core community of approximately 35 people.

The church was launched and structured around relationships, rather than a program-based or event-based focus. In many ways, Harvest functioned around a cell-church model where relationships and small groups were seen as the hub and focus of ministry life. In fact, the church originally met in a small-group format until the original group multiplied into two small groups. Shortly after, a Sunday worship service began as a time of teaching, celebration, worship, and reunion for the now multiplied small groups.

In many ways, Harvest leaders wanted the church to look like the 1st century church of Acts 2—where ordinary Christians had extraordinary roles in making disciples.

What Would You Do?

- ♦ If you wanted to initiate an “Acts 2” community in today’s culture, how would you go about it?
- ♦ What structure and programs would be necessary for discipleship? What would be your primary goals and desires? Where would you turn for leadership?

What Happened When the initial small group birthed a second group and a weekend worship service began, the original small group evolved into a leadership group that served in the role of elders and teachers. Also, this original small group became “vision casters” and “keepers” of the church’s core values.

None of the Harvest leadership had been formally trained in ministry, although many possessed ministry experience. No senior position was designated; rather, each Christ-follower at Harvest was called on to recognize their calling and was declared to be a servant minister. Traditional “pastoral” leadership and care came primarily from small-group leaders.

Group gatherings usually began with a meal—a time of sharing supper or dessert together. Afterwards there was a time of singing, and then an opening question or activity. This allowed the group to warm up and break the ice. Adults and children usually participated in these activities together.

Next came the Bible study, where the goal was to allow the truth of God’s Word to intersect with the truth about us and the things we share in our lives. Small groups typically concluded with prayer for each member of the group, and for those who need to experience the saving grace of Jesus.

Additionally, our Sunday morning gatherings came to have a small group emphasis. They included (and still include) a time of family worship where adults and children sing and share testimonies together. Children have a special time of teaching and activities on their own, while the adults have a teaching (sermon) time led by a member of the teaching team. Afterward, the adults gather together in small groups, and a table leader facilitates a discussion about the Scripture and thoughts shared during the teaching time. Communion is also shared each week around the tables as we remember and celebrate what Christ has done for us.

—DAN LENTZ; copyright © 2004 by the author and Christianity Today. Originally published on SmallGroups.com.

Discuss

1. What is my initial reaction to Harvest’s discipleship “program”? Why?
2. In what ways is Harvest’s program different than our discipleship ministries? In what ways is it similar?
3. What are the strengths of Harvest’s small-group method? Can those strengths be grafted into a more traditional church?

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP**An Experiment in Coffeeshop Discipleship**

What our favorite places can teach us about “doing church” and discipleship.

Mark 2:15

Read:

“While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him” (Mark 2:15).

Comprehend:

After working three years as a part-time barista, it’s not surprising that I’ve learned a lot about coffee. But what is somewhat surprising are the connections I’ve observed between the coffeeshop and the local church where I’m a pastor. Here are a few examples:

- **Spontaneity.** Our church is a highly structured and very busy suburban environment where spontaneous interaction with friends rarely happens. At the coffeeshop, however, I can count on bumping into someone who will be up for some conversation—from a Russian immigrant finishing up his computer-science degree to a stay-at-home dad looking for some adult contact.
- **Eclectic people.** Not only don’t I know who I’ll bump into at the coffeeshop, chances are, they won’t look like me. While many churches tend to attract people who are similar, the coffeeshop doesn’t have a target demographic. You don’t even have to like coffee; we welcome tea and smoothie people, too!
- **Space.** The building at our church has been planned efficiently. Our little independent coffeeshop does things differently. Frankly, we’re not efficient. We talk to our customers too much. We serve our coffee in mugs (unless they ask for it “to go”), which seems to keep folks around longer. And worst of all, we’ve cluttered the shop with comfortable sofas, armchairs, and coffee tables. It’s hard to get out. It suggests customers are supposed to linger, talk, and rest.

The Experiment

I was telling a friend at church about my desire to have a place to experiment with what I was observing at the coffeeshop. I wondered what would happen if we created an environment where folks could learn about the way of Jesus in a space that expected spontaneous relationships between eclectic people. This was partially motivated out of a desire to invite others into the kingdom of God, but also to fill my own longing for this type of coffeeshop discipleship.

My friend liked the idea and volunteered a large office over an industrial building he owns. Within a month, a few of us transformed that dingy office into what now looks like either a small coffeeshop or large living room. We call it “the loft.” On Sunday evenings you can find 15–20 of us gathering for coffee and conversation about what it means to follow Jesus.

While I’d like to think these folks are coming for our stimulating conversations about following Jesus, I realize that is only part of it. I know this because they show up early, grab one of our second-hand mugs for some coffee, and settle into a couch to catch up with someone they haven’t seen in a week. I know this because after we’ve wrapped up our discussion for the evening, the conversations continue. After a year and a half, our experiment is suggesting that much of the spiritual movement in people’s lives is due to the space created for significant relational contact within an eclectic group of people.

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Now I don't think our church is going to replace our sanctuary chairs with couches anytime soon. But then, that's not the point. Maybe the point is to create the type of environment that invites the Jesus-follower and the skeptic into conversation; the homeless and the CEO into relationship; the pastor and his neighbor into life together.

—DAVID SWANSON; excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2006 by Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. What is my favorite part of “going to church” or participating in a small group? Why?
2. What is my favorite place to be outside of church? What do I like about it?
3. What would it look like if those two places were combined?

Pray:

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to maximize your church experiences for outreach and transformation.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP**Reflections on Discipleship***Quotations to stir heart and mind.*

John 15:8

Read:*“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8).***Comprehend:***Read the following quotations to meditate on the cost, method, and value of becoming disciples of Jesus Christ.*

The form that discipleship takes is conditioned by the historic times in which one lives, as well as by the context of an individual’s life. But the underlying principle remains the same: each of us is called by love to love; called out of our narrow individualism and our small private world, to allow ourselves to be “turned around” by the allurements of God, and to live for him, as Jesus did.

—**Thelma Hall**, *Too Deep for Words*

To become a disciple means a decisive and irrevocable turning to both God and neighbor. What follows from there is a journey which...never ends in this life, a journey of continually discovering new dimensions of loving God and neighbor.

—**David J. Bosch**, *Transforming Mission*

The first and last word for a disciple of Jesus is “Obey!” I mean to say that today the word *believe* is not as important as, “You who believe, obey him whom you believe!” Of what use is believing if you cannot obey?

—**Johann Christoph Blumhardt** in *Thy Kingdom Come: A Blumhardt Reader*, Vernard Eller, ed.

All true knowledge of God is born out of obedience.

—**John Calvin**, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

What does it profit you to give God one thing if he asks of you another? Consider what it is God wants, and then do it. You will as a result better satisfy your heart than with that toward which you yourself are inclined.

—**St. John of the Cross**, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*

It is not our responsibility to make people “Christians” and get them baptized into a particular denomination, but rather to help people decide to follow Jesus and his radical message. Maybe this is why the New Testament writers only use “Christian” three times but “disciple” on 269 occasions!

—**Tom Getman**, World Vision International, personal correspondence

Evangelism is not selling Jesus, but showing Jesus; evangelism is not mere telling about Christ, but about being Christ.

—**Lee C. Camp**, *Mere Discipleship*

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It has become popular to preach a painless Christianity and automatic saintliness. It has become part of our “instant” culture. “Just pour a little water on it, stir mildly, pick up a gospel tract, and you are on your Christian way.”

—**A. W. Tozer**, *Jesus, Author of Our Faith*

Suffering is the true badge of discipleship. The disciple is not above his master.

—**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, *The Cost of Discipleship*

—Quotations compiled by RICHARD A. KAUFFMAN for our sister publication CHRISTIANITY TODAY, © 2004 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Which of the quotations above is the most meaningful to me? Why?
2. Which of the quotations above is the most surprising? Why?
3. Which of the quotations above is the most challenging? Why?

Pray:

Ask God to bless you with a vision of what it means to be his disciple, and with a vision to help others do the same.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP**Making Disciples: Four Churches, Four Plans**

How congregations from California to Iowa are effectively helping people grow to maturity in Christ.

Matthew 28:19

“Go and make disciples of all nations.” Jesus’ familiar charge in Matthew 28:19 is reinforced throughout the New Testament by Scriptures exhorting believers to build up one another in the faith. The most natural place for this kind of discipleship to take place is, of course, the local church.

“Christian discipleship is so much more than gaining knowledge,” says Bill Tibert, senior pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. “It is the life transference of the Master to the disciple. It is the intentional process of Christians mutually sharing their lives with each other on a regular basis so that they may be built up into maturity in Christ, and others might be reached with the love of Christ.”

Several churches across the country have been experimenting with intentional discipleship for years. The forms of their ministries may vary, but the purpose is the same: to provide a structure in which believers can be challenged, equipped, and supported as they grow to maturity in Christ. Below are four working examples.

Coming Alongside

Covenant Presbyterian Church started with a discipleship program called Side-by-Side, which was originally intended for Sunday school but quickly spread to other areas of the church, including the men’s and women’s ministries.

Through Side-by-Side, two people covenant to meet regularly to “touch base,” study the Bible, and pray. Side-by-side can be a traditional Paul/Timothy discipleship relationship between a mature and a new believer, or a pairing of any two believers, no matter where they are in their faith. The pairs work their way through *Thirty Discipleship Exercises*, by Charles Riggs.

One of the more appealing facets of the Side-by-Side program is its potential for accountability. “Being accountable is not only biblically sound, it is vital for healthy spiritual growth,” says Bruce Bridgeman, one of the program’s participants. “We take off our spiritual masks and give each other permission to ask the tough questions.”

Another benefit is meaningful relationships. Chris Hough, a military man, wasn’t a Christian when he first visited the church. Chris heard the gospel, responded to a salvation prayer after a sermon, and got involved in Sunday school. There he met Geoff Paddle, a seasoned Christian, and they began a Side-by-Side partnership. “Side-by-Side is fulfilling a need for Chris’s spiritual growth right now that would not be adequately addressed by any other program in our church,” says Geoff. “Chris can get his questions answered right on the spot. At the same time, I’m being reminded of the great truths of the gospel.”

Waging War in Los Angeles

In Los Angeles’s inner city, at the crossroads of three gang turfs, is Faithful Central Missionary Baptist Church—a church waging a spiritual battle in a community wrought with tension. “We have waves of attack,” says Kenneth Ulmer, head pastor of the three-thousand-plus African-American church. “Marriages falling apart, parents having problems with children...drugs, alcohol, teenage pregnancy. Issues crop up that Sunday morning was not designed to handle.”

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Helping parishioners stand firm in battle requires a preventative stance. “We asked, ‘How can we strengthen them before they get into a crisis?’” says Ulmer. That’s when Faithful Central became proactive about discipleship. “It’s rather difficult to improve on Jesus’ method,” he says. “So we set ourselves for the long haul and agreed discipling is a process—a slow but effective process that reaps a harvest in return.”

Ulmer launched Faithful Central’s first generation of discipleship several years ago with ten hand-picked men whom he could exhort as the apostle Paul did young Timothy. “Very early on we discovered the need to include our wives,” says Ulmer, whose wife, Togetta, became a crucial partner in this two-and-a-half-year discipleship adventure. The Ulmers instilled in the group the essentials of Christianity, the cost of discipleship, and the challenge to teach others. At the same time, “we prayed, cried, and went through crises together.” Many of the church’s present leaders participated in the group.

To help in training disciples, Ulmer brought in co-pastors of discipleship, Charles Brooks and Kuni Garrison, to help address the special needs of the church’s men and women respectively. Several months after launching the first discipleship group, Brooks and Garrison began discipling potential leaders they hand-picked from the church. For 6 months they grounded 15 people in the faith, using material from Campus Crusade for Christ.

Adds Brooks, “The vision of our disciple-making ministry is that everybody within our congregation would be in a small group where they’re receiving foundational training, accountability, fellowship, and moral support.” The co-pastors expect a host of discipleship groups will blossom from their intensive efforts, some in small-groups and some in one-on-one relationships.

Building Up, Sending Out

The leaders at Denton Bible Church in Northern Florida have found success using a small-group discipleship tool called 2:7 Groups, based on the Navigators’ 2:7 Series (the name is derived from Colossians 2:7). “The primary focus of our discipleship ministry is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry,” says Dino Roseland, Denton’s small-groups pastor. “Our whole purpose is to build into the life of each individual the basic disciplines of the Christian life so they can reproduce them in the lives of other individuals, no matter where they go.”

Springing from small groups, says Dino, “a lot of one-to-one and couple-to-couple discipleship takes place. But we concentrate on small-group discipleship because the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” He says most people who regularly attend Denton eventually get involved in a 2:7 discipleship group.

Pastor Dino illustrates the ministry’s bottom-line goal by pointing to an hourglass. “People enter at the top and filter down the middle, through the discipleship path,” he says. “Then they can do anything they want—as long as it’s not heresy. From this process we’ve seen ministries developed, churches planted, and effective ministry in other churches by people who’ve moved on.”

“This is the whole purpose of the Church,” adds Phil Smick, a 2:7 Group participant, “to disciple people so that they’re not merely hearers of the Word, but doers as well.”

A Disciple-Making Church

“Often discipleship is seen as just another ministry of the church,” says Kim Pagel, pastor of discipling ministries at New Covenant Bible Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. “But the T-Net training the leadership is receiving gives us a vision and philosophy that underpins every ministry of the church.” T-Net refers to the “Vision 2000 Training Network,” an intensive training system from the Navigator’s Church Discipleship Ministries division that is “committed to the development of disciple-making congregations.”

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T-Net leader Bill Hull describes the following four stages as central to the disciple-making process:

1. “Come and See”: An invitation to see what Christianity is all about and to commit one’s life to Christ.
2. “Come and Follow Me”: An invitation to become established in the essentials of the Christian faith.
3. “Come and Be with Me”: An invitation to minister.
4. “Remain in Me”: An invitation to a lifetime of devotion and service to Jesus Christ.

“These categories have given us a lens to view all of our ministries,” says Pastor Kim, “and to help new people see where they are and then plug in.” For example, the women’s ministries team recently evaluated the effectiveness of their program in light of the four discipleship tenets. MOPS is in the “Come and See” category, for instance, and beginning Bible studies are “Come and Follow Me” activities.

—DEAN RIDINGS; excerpted from the May/June 1994 issue of *Discipleship Journal*. Used by permission.

Discuss

1. What works best about our church’s current discipleship ministry?
2. What about our current disciple-making model needs to be improved?
3. Which of the models above seems like the best way to launch or improve a discipleship ministry at our church? Why?

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A Look at the Discipleship Cycle

The challenge for today's church is making whole disciples out of broken people.

1 Peter 2:21

Discipleship is rapidly taking on new textures in today's post-modern context. The modern church saw discipleship primarily as doctrinal training. A mature Christian was someone who knew his Bible. Good citizenship was expected of everyone. This was not an unreasonable paradigm, but it was a dangerous one.

Before post-modernism, the church enjoyed the positive influence of a culture shaped by the Christian faith. Life change became a lost art because most people appeared "together." As the society around us declined, so did the emotional health, relationships, morality, and overall well-being of everyone—inside and outside the church. We became functionally powerless to help those whose lives are devastated by the power of sin.

Restoring broken lives requires conviction, commitment, and community. Unfortunately, even when the church wants to help, often it assumes it doesn't have the power to heal. We profess that Jesus changes lives, but with broken people we tend to rely on psychotherapy. So how do we begin to reclaim the power of making fully functioning disciples out of seriously flawed people?

The Power of Ethos

For the last 20 years, those most committed to discipleship overwhelmingly moved toward intense, one-on-one relationships. While a great help to many, it hasn't captured the most significant ingredient of personal and systemic change—the power of ethos.

Webster's defines *ethos* as the fundamental character or spirit of a culture—the underlying sentiment that informs the beliefs, customs, or practices of a group. For example, remember when the seat belt law was first implemented? Most of us resented it. We knew it was good for us, but it was a hassle. We never saw not buckling up as immoral. Illegal, yes. But they took our freedom from us! Now, when people drive with their kids unbuckled, what do you think? Probably that the parent is negligent, putting the children in danger. We've come a long way from throwing eight kids into the back of a truck!

The law can inform your actions, but ethos informs your values. Ethos is more powerful than rules, methods, strategies, or even laws. Don't underestimate the spirit of a healthy community in shaping an individual into a disciple. Ethos, environment, culture—this is key to holistic life change.

After the culture of your community is moving in the right direction, the next step is intentional discipleship. And whether people start from brokenness or not, the steps of a disciple follow a well-marked path: gratitude, humility, wholeness, integrity, and leadership.

Gratitude

The first step on the pathway to wholeness is to develop gratitude. Selfishness and greed pull at all of us, but they find justification in our pain. For broken people, this first step is counterintuitive. Our natural inclination is to attempt continuously to meet the needs of hurting people. Normally this is a good thing—Christian faith means compassion. The danger comes when we find ourselves reinforcing an ungrateful spirit.

Helping someone grow in gratitude is relational art, requiring firm but gentle strokes of the brush. This is not a work for those who prefer hammers and nails. If a person is a believer, a good place to begin is the cross. Considering His sacrifice for us, how much more does Jesus need to do for us to be eternally grateful? Discipling begins with the fact that what we deserve is nothing.

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At Mosaic, where I serve as senior pastor, we have interns come out to work with us every year. For several weeks, every assignment feels thankless and beneath them. They are often educated, bright, and used to being lavished with public praise. But here, no public ministry is made available to them. Then we begin to promote the ones who respond with continued gratitude—not those of superior talent.

Humility

After we see hints of a grateful spirit, the next step toward integrity is humility. Humility is an elusive trait. How do we know we are humble? Doesn't that observation immediately make us proud? How do we walk in humility?

Note that God calls us not to pray for humility, but commands us to humble ourselves. When we leave it to him, it's called humiliation. Jesus humbled himself and became a servant. I think it's this simple: humility looks just like servanthood.

Wholeness

Don't confuse wholeness with perfection. My functional definition of wholeness is simply "giving more than you take." A person who is emotionally broken tends to see others only for the support they can provide. The greater the brokenness, the less a person contributes to the relationship and the more they demand. Emotional wholeness is seen in what you can contribute to others. The spiritually whole consider others more important than themselves.

And wholeness demonstrated over time leads to the next step along the disciple's path....

Integrity

Again, integrity does not mean perfection, but it is absolutely tangible. Can this person be trusted? Can you entrust other people to this person? Will their leadership lead others closer to Christ? Perhaps the ultimate statement of trust is entrusting your child to someone.

In ministry, the greatest enemies of integrity are usually selfish ambition and pride. It is not enough to be gifted to lead—you must have the moral compass to take people in the right direction.

The difficulty with integrity is that up front it can be so easily misdiagnosed. It can be confused with talent, savvy, attractiveness, or knowledge. We are well skilled at pretension and deception. We work harder at making the outside look good while leaving the inside untouched. All too often we do not discover the true nature of a person until after we have placed them in a position of power and influence.

We don't have attitude problems; we have pride problems. Humility is the only cure. It is the also the most significant qualifier for spiritual leadership. Jesus humbled Himself and gave His life on our behalf. Only those who humbly follow Christ should be trusted to lead. Integrity is seen most often by the willingness to humbly serve.

Leadership

Eric Bryant is our pastor to students. Even though he had a degree from Baylor, a master's degree from seminary, and church planting experience in cutting-edge Seattle, when he moved to L.A., he came to Mosaic to learn and to serve.

He got a job at a car rental place and began volunteering as a security guard on Sunday mornings. I kept seeing this young man serving. He was always there in the lot or street helping people find parking. One day I asked him why he was there so early.

"It's a great way to meet people!" he said, and told me how much he appreciated serving on the security team. A short time later, I asked Eric to become our youth pastor. I told him and his wife, Debbie, "I'm a sucker for servanthood."

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You can trust the heart of a person who isn't too good for any job. In fact, by the time someone is consistently demonstrating integrity and a willingness to serve, they are probably already taking responsibility for guiding others. Now they're ready for that leadership to be recognized.

—ERWIN MCMANUS; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2000 by Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Where am I at, personally, in the discipleship cycle?
2. Using the definition above, what is the ethos of our church? What do we want it to be?
3. What criteria do we use to promote people into areas of greater responsibility and leadership? How do our criteria compare to the five steps above?

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP**A Biblical Call to Making Disciples***What we can learn from the methods of Jesus and Paul.*

Colossians 1:28–29

When Jesus commanded his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), he spoke the mission statement for the church. Jesus told his disciples to do what he had done during his three years of ministry. Jesus made disciples by selecting a few into whom he poured his life.

Jesus’ Method of Disciple-Making

What was the strategic advantage of having 12 men who would “be with him” (Mark 3:14)? There are many reasons, but two seem most relevant:

- **Internalization.** By focusing on a few, Jesus was able to ensure the lasting nature of his mission. We might wonder why Jesus would risk others’ jealousy by publicly selecting 12 from a larger group of disciples (Luke 6:13). Why didn’t Jesus simply continue to expand his growing entourage and create a mass movement? The apostle John captures Jesus’ caution when people clamored to him because of the marvelous signs: “But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone” (John 2:24–25 NRSV).

Though Jesus ministered to the needs of the crowds, he knew they were fickle. The same ones who shouted “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday were shouting “Crucify him” five days later on Good Friday. Knowing the whims of the throng, Jesus built his ministry on a select few who would form the superstructure of his future kingdom. Disciples cannot be mass produced, but are the product of intimate and personal investment. A. B. Bruce summarizes this point: “The careful, painstaking education of the disciples secured that the Teacher’s influence on the world should be permanent, his Kingdom should be founded on deep indestructible convictions in the minds of few, not on the shifting sands of superficial impressions on the minds of many.”

- **Multiplication.** Just because Jesus focused much of his attention on a few does not mean that he did not want to reach the multitudes. Just the opposite. Eugene Peterson puts truth cleverly: “Jesus, it must be remembered, restricted nine-tenths of his ministry to 12 Jews, because it was the only way reach all Americans.”

Jesus had enough vision to think small. Focusing did not limit his influence—it expanded it. When Jesus ascended to the Father, he knew that there were at least 11 others who could minister under the authority of his name—an elevenfold multiplication of his ministry. Robert Coleman captures the heart of Jesus’ methodology when he writes, “[Jesus’] concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes but with men the multitudes would follow.”

Paul’s Approach to Disciple-Making

We see that the apostle Paul adopted the same goal and methodology in his ministry that Jesus modeled. Paul’s version of the Great Commission is his personal mission statement: “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:28–29). Paul is so passionate about making disciples that he compares his agony over the maturity of the flock to the labor pains of a woman giving birth: “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19).

Following Jesus’ method, Paul invested in individuals to make disciples. He too had his sights on the multitudes, but he knew that solid transmission of the faith would not occur as readily through speaking to an audience. Paul encouraged Timothy to use a personal style to link the gospel to future generations when he

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exhorted him, “What *you* have heard from *me* through many witnesses entrust to *faithful* people who will be able to *teach others* as well” (2 Timothy 2:2 NRSV, emphasis added). Paul envisioned an intergenerational chain of disciples linked together through personal investment. Contained in this verse are generations in the discipling network, creating the following path: Paul → Timothy → faithful people → teach others.

We know Paul lived out this admonition, for his letters are filled with the names of those to whom he gave himself. Paul replaced himself in the battle with soldiers like Timothy, Titus, Silas (Silvanus), Euodia, Syntyche, Epaphroditus, and Priscilla and Aquila. They accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys, were entrusted with ministry responsibility, and became co-laborers in the gospel. Paul attributed the change in their lives to the impact of the message of Christ in his life on them.

The Bible teaches us not only the message of our faith, but also the method by which that faith is to be passed on to future generations. We are called to do God’s work in God’s way. The manner in which the Lord works is incarnational: life rubs up against life. We pass on Christlikeness through intimate modeling. Paul said, “I urge you to imitate me” (1 Corinthians 4:16) and “You became imitators of us and of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

Disciple-Making Today

Disciple-making ensures that the gospel is embedded deeply in the lives of mature believers who serve as links to the future. Discipling, then, is a relationship where we intentionally walk alongside a growing disciple or disciples in order to encourage, correct, and challenge them in love to grow toward maturity in Christ.

There are three ingredients necessary to produce maturity in Christ. First, “relational vulnerability” means honest, self-disclosing and confessional relationships that give the Holy Spirit permission to remake us. Second, “the centrality of truth” is emphasized when people open their lives to one another around the truth of God’s Word, and the Lord begins to rebuild their lives from the inside out. And third, “mutual accountability” is authority given to others to hold us accountable to mutually agreeable standards—“iron sharpening iron.”

We will not make disciples through methods of mass production that attempt shortcuts to maturity. Robert Coleman clarifies the challenge: “One must decide where he wants his ministry to count—in the momentary applause of popular recognition or the reproduction of his life in a few chosen men who will carry on his work after he has gone.”

The irony is that focusing on a few takes a long-range view by multiplying the number of disciples, and therefore expands a church’s leadership base. Though adult education programs and small-group ministries are good tools to produce maturity, without the focus of small discipling units, a solid foundation is difficult to build.

—GREG OGDEN; taken from *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden, Expanded Edition © 2007. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL, 60515-1426.

Discuss

1. What were the strengths of Jesus’ and Paul’s disciple-making methods? What were the risks?
2. Is it realistic to expect New Testament methods of discipleship to be effective in today’s culture? Why or why not?
3. What steps will our church need to take in order to adopt a long-range discipleship program similar to Jesus’ and Paul’s?

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP**Mentoring that Produces Mentors**

From a handful of hungry men, we've developed several generations of leaders.

2 Timothy 2:2

Dave Roadcup invited six seniors at Ozark Bible College to join him in a year-long discipling endeavor. That was in 1978. I was one of the six. At that stage in my education, I had learned about how to preach and teach, but my year with Dave taught me how to love.

His classroom was everyday life. Dave took us with him when he spoke at churches and when he taught in the classroom. Dave also made sure we learned how a godly man lives. Dave, his wife, and their children made sure the door to their home was always open. We spent many evenings in their living room, talking and eating like family. In the process, we learned what a godly home looks like—without ever seeing a lesson plan.

Best of all, Dave took us with him—just him. He would say to one of us, “Let’s grab a Coke and catch up!” I’m sure I sampled every dessert served at the nearby restaurant that year. I distinctly recall one evening with a large peach shortcake in front of me, discussing, ironically, the spiritual value of fasting. We talked about the latest ideas on church and ministry often, but no topic was off limits, from studies to sex. Countless times I answered Dave’s most-asked question, “So, Rick, how are you *really* doing?”

Dave saw his time with us as the beginning of a process. “Men,” he said, “I hope our seventies and eighties are our most spiritually productive decades.” He was not only thinking only about our spiritual growth through college, but also planning for the impact we would have over the next 50 years.

The Grandfather Call

It’s been more than 20 years since Dave took on that first group, and he has never stopped discipling. Recently I asked him how many men he had disciplined over the years. He estimated 160.

Yet one of Dave’s greatest joys is hearing the news that another discipling group has been birthed by someone he disciplined. One of the men in that first group with me started a tradition: every time he birthed a new group, he called Dave to say, “Hi, Grandfather!” A few years later, he called again and said, “Hi, Great-grandfather!”

About ten years ago, when I became senior minister of the Town and Country Christian Church in Topeka, Kansas, I invited six men in that church of 200 to join me in a three-year discipling relationship. This time, I got to make the “Grandfather Call” to Dave.

Over time, we built the kind of group Dave had modeled for us during my college years. We prayed for each other, as a group, in pairs, and in various settings. One night we drove to the highest spot in our city, looked out over the lights, and spent an hour praying for the people we lived and worked with every day.

I learned from Dave the importance of “keeping it fresh—never doing it the same way twice.” One evening, without warning, I took the men to a tent revival at an inner-city black church. When we arrived, we stood out as the scared-stiff white guys; by the time we left, we were dancin’ with the rest of the crowd!

Each of our weekly meetings included Bible study, prayer, and sharing our lives. Dave used to say, “As we get started, let’s go around the horn.” Though I brought a map of each night’s lesson and activities, “going around the horn” often redirected us to seize the moment through the Spirit’s leading. We spent one evening praying for Tom, whose child was rebelling, another evening slowing down to address the heart questions of John, whose faith was in a vice that week.

As important as those weekly meetings were to growing our friendships, I also kept in mind the group’s long-term goals. I had prayed that each of those men would become elders in our congregation within ten years. And so each meeting I asked myself, “Does this move us closer to developing mature disciples, qualified to teach others?”

A three-phase, three-year process I developed through leading several discipleship groups helps me maintain focus upon the goal.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Year One

In our first year together, I focus on building community in the group. In the early weeks, I say to each man at our meetings, “Tell us your life history.” Then I take the first turn, modeling permission to admit both success and failure along the way. Sometimes we take additional time recounting our spiritual history. If we’re going to build a band of close friends who can trust each other as deeply as a discipleship group must, extended relationship building is essential.

Then I lead the group in a four-week introduction to discipling, including what discipling means and what they should expect to both give and receive from the group.

In that first year, we focus on the basics of a Christian walk: prayer, spiritual gifts, and studying the “one another” texts. We discuss challenging articles from Christian periodicals, and sometimes read a book together. I’ve found Bill Hybels’ *Too Busy Not to Pray* and Gordon MacDonald’s *Ordering Your Private World* good for the first-year discipleship group.

Year Two

The second year is a year of depth. By this time, we’ve grown to trust each other, allowing the possibility of accountability, in-depth study, and intimate prayer. This is the heart of discipleship, when a kind of deep growth occurs that may not be possible in the average small group.

We get close enough to care—a kind of caring I would not have known about if Dave had not modeled it for me years earlier. We walk beside each other through crises in our lives and families. We set spiritual goals and make ourselves accountable. We build great friendships in Christ. In fact, I still think of the men in that first group as my good friends.

This process begins to bloom early in that second year when we introduce prayer partners to the group. Even in the presence of friends who have grown to trust and love each other, some personal matters are hard to reveal in a group setting. So we pair off for part of each meeting, focused on more intense accountability.

The meetings with prayer partners are guided by personal spiritual goals. We commit these goals to writing at the beginning of the year and revisit them at least twice monthly, encouraging complete honesty. Kyle and Dwayne, for example, might agree to call each other early each morning, making sure the other is starting the day in prayer. Or Chris might call Randy on Wednesday to ask if Randy confronted the person he needed to at work.

Year Three

The third year is the year of outreach. We focus on how to multiply the discipleship group experience so others can get in on it. I don’t lead many meetings during the third year, but step back to allow these other men opportunities for leadership. I also expose the men to every type of small-group leadership—from planning, to discussion, to handling conflict.

For example, in my current group we have just finished a nine-week emphasis on prayer, during which each member led the group for a night. Then we applied what we learned by conducting a prayer walk through a local shopping mall. The additional step of planning applicable activities helps us think outside our comfortable little group and prepare us for multiplying new discipleship groups.

When we get to the fourth year, it’s time for the men to begin their own branches of the discipleship tree—to begin leading new groups themselves.

I’m now in my twenty-fourth year of discipling. I’m still amazed at the impact of carving out three to five hours of my week to invest in the long-term growth of a few hungry individuals.

—RICK LOWRY; excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2003 by Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit LeadershipJournal.net.

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Discuss

1. What has been my best experience as a mentor? As someone who was mentored? Why?
2. How does the above three-year plan compare with our church's method of mentoring? What can we learn or improve?
3. What steps does our church need to take in order to set up a mentoring program? What steps do I need to take in order to get involved?

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP**Five Fresh Ideas for Discipleship***Multiple ways to emulate those who have gone before us.*

Galatians 6:9–10

1. Happy Birthday, New Christian!

If the angels rejoice when a new person joins God’s family, how about the earthly brothers and sisters rejoicing, too? That’s exactly what happens at Highland Park Church of Christ, an inner-city congregation in Los Angeles. Every three weeks, “spiritual birthday parties” are held after a Sunday evening service to honor those who have recently come to Christ.

“We believe a disciple’s new birth is at least as important as physical birth,” says William Pile, one of the church’s three pastors. “So within a few days of one’s baptism, we throw a party. First, following the evening service (which we usually cut a little short), we interview the new Christians; this gives the whole group a window into their lives and personalities. Then we invite the older Christians to share Scriptural insights, favorite passages, poems, and personal wisdom that will aid the new believers in living up to their commitment to Jesus. Our people are really quite spontaneous at this. We ask everyone to address their comments directly to the new disciples. Then, we move to the fellowship area for cake, cookies, punch, and coffee. During this time, older Christians are urged to spend a few moments with each new Christian to make him or her feel welcome and loved.”

Such celebrations help weld the church’s various ethnic groups together. “The church is predominantly Latin, and we Anglos sometimes aren’t thought to be friendly,” Pile explains. “The spiritual birthday party really loosens everyone up to enjoy one another. It also reminds everyone of how often God is working in people’s lives, bringing them to salvation.”

2. Stated Expectations

Churches that practice believer’s baptism often ask people, before they’re immersed, to publicly declare their desire “to walk in newness of life.” But at First Assembly of God in Jamestown, North Dakota, the “fine print” of the new life is specifically stated.

“At the time of baptism, I ask each candidate to promise four things,” says Pastor Jack Glass:

- To regularly attend the services of the church.
- To live a consistent Christian life.
- To seek opportunities to share the faith with others.
- To support the church with tithes and offerings.

“The benefits have been outstanding,” says Glass. “As each candidate stands in the baptistry, his vows become a sermon to the entire congregation. And 99 percent of our new members begin immediately to tithe and give offerings.” He added, “This has certainly helped new believers come more quickly into maturity in their Christian walk.”

3. An Easy Way to Increase Sunday School Attendance

Sunday school has been part of the woodwork for so long that many churches forget to invite new people to join it. Not so for Central Baptist Church in Aurora, Colorado. When ushers there hand you a visitor’s card, it includes a separate box to check that reads, “Please enroll me in your Bible study program.” The next line asks for date of birth in order to determine class placement.

Does it bring any results? “Since using this card,” reports Pastor Danny Williams, “we are enrolling 10 percent of our morning worship visitors in Sunday school—which is 10 percent more than we were enrolling! Every time someone checks the box, we send a card that tells what time Sunday school begins, who the teacher will be, and what room to go to. And they show up.”

In other words, it never hurts to ask.

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4. Learning from the Pros

The more marriages break up, the more pastors seek for ways to teach survival tactics, especially to engaged couples. A few years ago, Dennis Kooy, minister of First Christian Church in Vale, Oregon, added some unique homework to his premarital counseling—an interview with someone who’s been married 50 years.

“I require each bride to talk to an elderly wife and each groom to talk to an elderly husband,” says Kooy, who provides the following questions:

- What has allowed your marriage to work?
- What have you personally done to help the marriage?
- How have you handled difficulties in your marriage?
- What have you done when the going got rough?
- As you look back over the last 50 years, what times were the hardest?
- What advice would you give to someone like me?

“Nearly every young couple is scared to death of this assignment,” reports Kooy. “They’ve never done an interview before. But when they come back, they’re invariably excited. For many of them, it’s the first time they’ve really studied a good pattern of marriage.” He added, “They end up asking a lot of questions about the everyday things, especially money. Older people have some excellent things to say on that subject. Some of my counselees have even gone back on their own for a second visit.”

Kooy insists on his requirement of 50 years or longer, even if it means sending the couple to a neighboring town. The elderly wife and the elderly husband do not necessarily have to be the spouses of each other, but both must still be married. And they enjoy the interview thoroughly. “Some have even called to thank me for the opportunity!” says Kooy.

“I’ve found that too many young couples searching for answers end up talking to other young couples just like themselves. This is a better way.”

5. Dinners for Six

About every five weeks, 80 to 85 percent of the adults in the Free Methodist Church of Lawrence, Kansas, have dinner together. One guest couple brings the salad and another brings the dessert; the host couple furnishes the entree. The dinners are scheduled for Friday or Saturday nights, alternately. Dates are posted for three dinners at a time, and members sign up either as hosts or guests. From these sheets, coordinator Darlene Atkinson makes the assignments in groupings of six.

“I keep a record and try to keep matching guests and hosts who have not been together at previous dinners,” she says. “I mix age groups and people with varied social, economic, and educational backgrounds. By rotating, married couples serve as hosts only every three months, and singles every six months.”

Almost all the regular single adults in the church participate, often in pairs. Currently about 15 to 20 University of Kansas students are involved. The church, which has an average Sunday morning attendance of 260, has had Dinners for Six for more than four years. Results have been powerful, according to Atkinson:

- People have learned to know each other on a more intimate level.
- The dinners have broken down age and educational barriers.
- They’ve established a background for more meaningful conversations at church.
- They’ve resulted in several close relationships.

—Adapted from *Fresh Ideas for Discipleship and Nurture* (Word Publishing), © 1984 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Which of the ideas above is most interesting to me?
2. What is the most creative program our church has used for discipleship? What factors contributed to its success, and how can they be duplicated?
3. Which of the ideas above has the most potential for implementation at our church? What steps would we need to take in order to make it happen?

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP**Further Exploration**

Websites and books to help your church build a culture of discipleship.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today.

- “Developing Leadership Gifts” Assessment Pack
- “Family-Friendly Small Groups” Building Small Groups
- “Leading a Great Small-Group Bible Study” Building Small Groups
- “Mentor” Orientation Guide
- “Finding Focus Through Spiritual Disciplines” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Soul Care” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Creating Community” Training Theme
- “Spiritual Formation” Training Theme

LeadershipJournal.net: This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Discipleship Essentials by *Greg Ogden*. Follow Jesus' example by gathering in intimate groups of two or three for study and encouragement (InterVarsity Press, 2007; ISBN 978-0830810871).

Growing True Disciples by *George Barna*. Despite a flood of church programs, is there a drought of disciples? Help your congregation become a true disciple-making body (Random House, 2001; ISBN 978-1578564231).

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction by *Eugene Peterson*. In the Songs of Ascent, Peterson discovers an old Hebrew songbook used by pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem. He seizes on these verses to teach lessons on discipleship and encouraging us to grow in joy, service, humility, and community (InterVarsity Press, 2000; ISBN 978-0830822577).

Transforming Discipleship by *Greg Ogden*. Arguing that disciple-making fuels the fire of healthy expansion, Ogden explores the few-at-a-time methods of Jesus and Paul as the best model for kindling the flame (InterVarsity Press, 2003; ISBN 978-0830823888).

BUILDING A CULTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Retreat Plan

How to create a weekend retreat on the theme of “Building a Culture of Discipleship”.

Building Church Leaders expands easily into a retreat format. Here is a sample retreat schedule you may follow for the “Building a Culture of Discipleship” theme. The purpose of this retreat is to help leaders determine the best ministries and programs to help church members develop over the long haul as followers of Christ.

Friday Evening

- ◆ 8–8:45 P.M. **Opening Session:** Hand out copies of “Doing Church as a Team,” the interview with Wayne Cordeiro on pages 4–5, and allow time for each person to read it. Then form groups of three or four. Have each group discuss the questions at the end of the interview. Reconvene for the last 20 minutes and have the groups share their comments and consider the implications of Cordeiro’s ideas for your church.
- ◆ 9–9:45 P.M. **Bible Study:** Close the evening with “Ordinary Folks Make Great Disciples,” the Bible study on page 3. Photocopy and pass out the study, or use the handout as your notes.

Saturday Morning

- ◆ 9–9:45 A.M. **Devotional:** Set the tone for the day by handing out “An Experiment in Coffeeshop Discipleship” (p. 12). Discuss the questions at the bottom of the page, and have a time of prayer, asking that God would help your team members think of new ways to help people grow spiritually.
- ◆ 10–10:45 A.M. **Assessment:** Use the assessment “What Every Christian Should Know” on page 6 to determine your congregation’s current level of biblical knowledge.
- ◆ 11 A.M.–12:00 P.M. **Activity:** Use the activity “Five Fresh Ideas for Discipleship” on pages 22–23. Have each person read through the ideas and think of their implications for your church (if your group is larger than eight people, break up into groups of three or four). Spend 45 minutes letting each team member share their observations with each other and respond to what they heard.
- ◆ NOON. **Lunch**

Saturday Afternoon

- ◆ 1–2 P.M. **Final Group Session:** Close the retreat with the how-to “A Biblical Call to Making Disciples” on pages 18–19. After everyone has read the article, discuss how the early-church principles can be applied today. Go on to the devotional “Reflections on Discipleship” on page 13. Then pray together, asking God to help your church leaders effectively provide discipleship opportunities for the congregation.

You can create similar retreat plans for any of the other BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS themes. Simply determine what you want to accomplish and select the handouts that support your objectives.