

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FIVE PRINCIPLES TO MAKE AND MULTIPLY DISCIPLES
THROUGH THE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROJECT

A Thesis Project Submitted to
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By

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Barboursville, West Virginia

November, 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In January of 2009, my Pastor, Dr. David Lemming began to realize the traditional Sunday school was no longer effective as a means of evangelism and discipleship. Consequently, Pastor Lemming asked me to investigate the small group model. Thank you Pastor for having the wisdom and fortitude to leave a traditional model in order to embrace a more effective means of making disciples. Thank you for entrusting me with this ministry.

Fortunately, that same year, I enrolled at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and eventually became a disciple of Dr. Dave Earley and Dr. Rodney Dempsey. I want to thank these two godly men for sending me on the most incredible journey of my life. Your time, training, and friendship have been invaluable and life changing.

I also want to thank my wife (soul mate) who also joined me in my mission. Thank you for being an incredible small group leader, disciple-maker and multiplier. You have the uncanny ability to see the big picture and the incredible potential of multiplication. It is a joy serving Jesus shoulder-to-shoulder with you.

I also want to thank my mentor, Dr. Charles Davidson and my reader, Dr. Rodney Dempsey. Your constant encouragement has inspired me to forge ahead during the difficult days of writing. I also greatly appreciate Turabian expert and my proofreader Morgan Cassady.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my wonderful children and their spouses (Matthew Timothy Yates and Allison Lee Holloman). You are a constant source of joy in my life, and I love you dearly. Thank you for giving us Abbie Kate, Adalynn Reese and Noah Timothy, the greatest small group in the entire world. Pops and Gran love you all.

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ABSTRACT

FIVE PRINCIPLES TO MAKE AND MULTIPLY DISCIPLES THROUGH THE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012

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The unchanging command of the Great Commission is to “make disciples” of all ethnic groups of the world. Unfortunately the church has struggled with her primary mission and has been grossly negligent in equipping church members to become Great Commission leaders. Therefore, this author will develop a small group training manual consisting of five principles to make and multiply disciples through the small group ministry. This manual will provide a laser focus on how to intentionally develop and deploy the common layman within the local church in order to reproduce disciples who reproduce disciples. As a small group pastor, this author will test and verify the five principles in the laboratory of Lewis Memorial Baptist Church in Barboursville, West Virginia.

120 words

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Statement of Limitations.....	9
Theoretical Basis.....	11
Methodology.....	17
Review of Literature	21
The Results.....	29
CHAPTER 2: THE PRINCIPLE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION	30
The Mandate	31
The Model.....	32
The Process	40
The Challenge	43
Champion the Cause	51
CHAPTER 3: THE PRINCIPLE OF MENTORING AN APPRENTICE	55
The Strategy	57
A Biblical Model.....	59
Choosing an Apprentice.....	63
Developing an Apprentice	69
CHAPTER 4: THE PRINCIPLE OF MULTIPLICATION	73
A Theology of Multiplication	74
Four Enemies of Multiplication	80
Celebrating Multiplication	87

CHAPTER 5: THE PRINCIPLE OF COMMUNITY	90
The Church.....	93
The Trinity	95
Relationships.....	97
CHAPTER 6: THE PRINCIPLE OF A STRONG COACHING SYSTEM	106
Key Leaders	107
The Job Description	113
APPENDIX A.....	124
APPENDIX B.....	125
APPENDIX C.....	126
APPENDIX D.....	127
APPENDIX E.....	128
APPENDIX F.....	129
APPENDIX G.....	130
APPENDIX H.....	131
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	132
VITA.....	141
IRB APPROVAL.....	142

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Prior to His ascension, the resurrected Lord gave His church some final instructions. In fact, the very last words He spoke on earth have been commonly known as “the Great Commission.”¹ This unchanging command is to “make disciples of all ethnic groups of the world” (Matt. 28:19-20). All four Gospels, along with the book of Acts, repeat the disciple-making mission entrusted to the church.² In fact, from a hermeneutical perspective, one must interpret the entire New Testament in light of the Great Commission and the redemptive work of Jesus. The salvific mission of Jesus remains the same and has been handed down to every believer. The follower of Christ must obediently pick up the baton and carry on the mission of Jesus.

On the other hand, the Great Commission has fallen on hard times and in reality has been re-defined as “the Great Omission.”³ Perhaps one’s conscience has been soothed by the fine art of “making church members” or helping the poor. Nevertheless, the haunting words of the Great Commission continue to echo from the pages of Scripture, “make disciples of all nations” not just casual followers. Far too often, Christians are content with leading people to say a prayer or sign a card in order to ease their guilty hearts. The bar of discipleship has been lowered, and Christians have accepted the fact that most church members will never be involved in the disciple-making mission of Jesus. In fact, low expectations have become the norm in everyday Christianity. The content of preaching continues to be “dumbed down,” and the ever-widening

¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *Matthew 24-28* in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 335.

² See Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21-23; and Acts 1:8.

³ For further reading see Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006).

gap between the professional clergy and the common layman continues to expand. As long as the offerings exceed the budget, leadership will accept the status quo. Nevertheless, the church remains oblivious to the mission of Jesus. Perhaps missiologist Ed Stetzer has correctly surmised the situation:

The greatest travesty in the contemporary church is we pile hundreds of Christians into our churches and stack them in on padded pews very similar to products stacked on shelves in the grocery store and we let them come and go and do absolutely nothing and we let them think they're okay. The greatest sin in most churches is that we have made it okay to do nothing and call ourselves a follower of Jesus.⁴

The contemporary church definitely needs a "Great Commission awakening" in order to refocus on the disciple-making mission of Jesus. This awakening must include a Spirit-led strategy, a renewed vision, and a biblical model to move believers toward the global mission of God. This awakening must include transferring the responsibility of the Great Commission to all believers within the local church and not just the clergy. Christian leaders must intentionally train, equip, and release the ordinary layman to do the work of ministry. This awakening must arouse biblical illumination where every believer understands their career provides missionary support in order to finance their primary mission of making disciples. Furthermore, this wakeup call must provide a laser focus that stimulates purpose and significance in the heart of every believer. In reality, the Great Commission and the redemptive mission of Jesus must be seen on every page of the Bible. Leaders must embrace and extol the lay movement of ordinary believers from within the book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles. The disciple-making movement must be transferred and transported from the pages of Scripture into the context of the local church setting. Making disciples who make disciples must become the norm. Reproducing reproducers who constantly reproduce must become a reality. Yet the obvious question becomes, "How does

⁴ Ed Stetzer, "Ed Stetzer: Missional Disciple-Making Movements." <http://www.vergenetwork.org/2010/10/02/ed-stetzer-missional-disciple-making-movements-video/> (accessed June 5, 2012).

one raised the bar and developed Great Commission leaders within the local church? Is there a biblical model for the local church to follow? Perhaps these questions and others need to be answered.

Statement of the Problem

Many individuals regard Robert Raikes as the father of the Sunday school movement. In 1780, Raikes reached out to the poor children of Gloucester, England. He developed a school that met on Sundays in order to teach children how to read the Bible. For years the traditional Evangelical church has embraced the British educational model of Sunday school.⁵ This model became so effective that it became the primary discipleship tool for many denominations. In fact, thousands have been saved, discipled, and educated through traditional Sunday school classes. However, in the past decade, Sunday school has been on life support and many contemporary churches have pulled the plug altogether. Assessing the demise of Sunday school, David Putman said, “The challenge to our traditional Sunday school was it became all about curriculum. The teacher would stand in the front behind a lectern and lecture. As kids we were forbidden to speak or ask questions, and we sat in rows of chairs where we had to look at the back of the heads of people sitting in front of us.”⁶ The old lecture model patterned after the public school system is not appealing to the contemporary follower of Christ. Furthermore, the media has portrayed Sunday school as something primarily for women and children which cuts at the very core of masculinity.

Unfortunately, Sunday school was dying a slow death at the Lewis Memorial Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia. Therefore, the Senior Pastor assigned this author the task

⁵ Ken Hemphill and Bill Taylor, *Best Practices: Ten Best Practices to Make your Sunday School Work* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2001), 5-6.

⁶ David Putman, *Breaking the Discipleship Code* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 81.

of investigating new discipleship methodologies. The inquiry led this student to Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary with hopes of learning new disciple-making strategies. Subsequently, this writer was introduced to the small group model by Professors Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey. Initially, the author was rather skeptical of the small group approach. Inwardly this student began to reflect, “Is there really an alternative model to the traditional Sunday school?” With careful suspicion, this writer began to investigate the radical model presented by Earley and Dempsey. This student began to read everything he could on the small group model. He learned from a 2007 Lily Endowment-Gallup Poll that some 15-20 million people met each month in some 800,000 Bible study groups that included mutual care. He discovered that “there are now more off-campus, church-related groups in North America than on-premise Sunday school classes.”⁷ Lewis Memorial began to slowly transition from the traditional Sunday school toward the small group model in 2009, and the journey has been incredible. Since then, Earley has made two trips to Lewis Memorial Baptist Church in order to conduct small group training, and Dempsey is scheduled to come in March 2013. In chapter 4, this student will share the incredible potential of multiplying small groups that multiply small groups. The secret to multiplication is training and mobilizing ordinary members to make and multiply disciples. Therefore, every leader of Lewis Memorial will be trained in *The Five Principles of Making and Multiplying Disciples through the Small Group Ministry* (training manual). However, in order to get a grasp on the model, some terms must first be defined.

First of all, one must define the expression *small group ministry*. Although the definition is quite lengthy, Rod Dempsey uses the simple acrostic, GROUP, to define small groups:

Guided by a Leader: A group leader is someone who leads the lesson/discussion and sees to it that the goals of the group are being met. The leader also trains apprentices and turns in reports.

⁷ Carl George, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership* (Taylors, SC: CDLM, 2007), 29.

Regular Meeting Times: Preferably weekly or twice a month. The goal here is that you meet often enough to get to know one another and recognize when someone is not connected or struggling.

Opens God's Word: When the group meets, time is set aside to examine, read and discuss God's Word either directly or through an approved curriculum.

United in Serving: Jesus said that He did not come to be served but to serve. Groups need to focus on serving inside the group and outside the group. Organize the group to involve as many people as possible. Match gifts with serving opportunities.

Prayer for One Another: Time is set aside for the taking of prayer requests and prayer for the burdens and concerns of the group members as well as praying for new people to come either to the church or your group.⁸

On the other hand, Jeffrey Arnold gives a much shorter missional definition: "A small group is intent on participating with Christ in building his ever-expanding kingdom in the hearts of individuals, in the life of the group and, through believers, into the world."⁹ This author will also occasionally use the phrase "cell group" synonymously with the term small group; therefore, both terms will be used interchangeably throughout the text.

The second term that must be defined is *the Great Commission*. Perhaps too many leaders take for granted that church members understand the mission of Jesus. However, to merely assume that members know the Great Commission is a huge mistake. One should not play the guessing game, which is like playing Russian Roulette with the spiritual formation of others. If a believer does not understand the Great Commission, they have in essence missed the will of God. Consequently, it is of the utmost importance for leadership to provide a laser focus when defining the Great Commission. If laypeople do not get this right they will wander aimlessly their entire life.

⁸ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *The Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group* (Houston, TX: TOUCH Publications, Inc., 2007), 29-32.

⁹ Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 23.

How, therefore, does Jesus define the Great Commission? In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus told the eleven, to go and make disciples of all ethnic groups of the world (Matt 28:19-20). Exegetically there is “one main imperative verb.” The believer is to “make disciples.” However the baptizing and teaching are “syntactically subordinate participles” linked to the main verb “make disciples.”¹⁰ In other words, while going, Christians must make disciples of all ethnic groups of the world. This mission is accomplished by baptizing and teaching them to obey all the things Jesus commanded. Therefore, the circular motion of the mission is to make disciples who in turn make disciples. Chapter 2 of this training manual will deal extensively with the Great Commission. Obviously, if Christians are to make disciples who make disciples, they must understand what a disciple looks like. There needs to be a good image of what to make. Fortunately, Jesus is the New Testament example of a disciple.

Third, the expression *disciple* must be defined. What does an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ look like? The word *mathetes* (disciple) is found 266 times in its various forms in the New Testament, and it simply means a learner, a pupil or a follower of Jesus Christ.¹¹ However, the nuance of the word involves surrender, sacrifice and complete devotion to the Lordship of Christ. In fact, the devoted follower of Jesus must be willing to pay the price to pursue Christ-likeness. The author will develop a New Testament theology of a Christ-like disciple who lives and loves like Jesus. This Christ-like model will build the character of Christ into the DNA of the disciple. The overall description of the disciple is one who attaches himself to Jesus and will progressively take on the traits of his teacher. Even Jesus told His followers, “A disciple is not

¹⁰ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, vol. 33B of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce Metzger (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 886.

¹¹ Rod Dempsey, “What Is God’s Will for My Life? Disciple!” in *Innovate Church*, ed. Jonathan Falwell (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2008), 90.

above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40, ESV). The goal of the finished product (disciple) is “to be like” the Savior. Therefore, this study will take a snapshot of the disciple model from the overall context of the New Testament and will point out the Christ-like features revealed in the model. Chapter 2 of the training manual will deal specifically with the Jesus-disciple model.

Fourth, the process of discipleship must be explained. While the words disciple and discipleship are intricately woven together, they are nonetheless different concepts. For instance, a disciple is a person, while discipleship is a process. A disciple is a passionate follower of Jesus Christ who is intimately involved in the mission of Christ. On the other hand, discipleship is the process of moving the disciple towards spiritual maturity and the mission of Christ. Being a disciple is God’s perfect will for every individual life; however, discipleship is God’s will for every individual church.¹² Thus, within the context of this training manual, the author will refer to discipleship as the process of moving a believer toward maturity and mission. The ultimate goal is to lead the disciple toward Christ-likeness and living out the Great Commission. Therefore, discipleship is the process of making disciples who make disciples for the glory of God.

Fifth, the word *apprentice* must be defined. It is the main task of the small group leader to mentor an apprentice. Bill Donahue says an apprentice is “one unlearned person studying the craft under an experienced journeyman.”¹³ In essence, the small group leader takes an apprentice under his wings and trains him to become a small group leader. The Apostle Paul explained the

¹² Rod Dempsey, “What Is God’s Will for My Church? Discipleship!” in *Innovate Church*, ed. Jonathan Falwell (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2008), 87-100 and Rod Dempsey, “What Is God’s Will for My Life? Disciple!” 101-116.

¹³ Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 117.

mentoring model to Timothy. Paul said, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2)

Mentoring an apprentice is on the job training and is a prerequisite of every small group leader.

To do otherwise is fatal to the multiplication process.

Sixth, the principle of multiplication needs to be defined. The small group environment is likened to a spiritual incubator where leaders are multiplied resulting in the multiplication of more groups. Multiplication happens when group leaders mentor an apprentice who in turn mentors an apprentice. In fact, the small group leader should be required to select an apprentice even before they launch a new group. Since Jesus sent the disciples out two-by-two, the wise small group leader will never do ministry alone. Developing leaders who develop leaders continues the cycle of multiplication. The biblical discipling (mentoring) process flows organically and eventually exponentially. In fact, the small group training manual will actually present the “wow” factor of multiplication in chapter 4 and clearly illustrate the incredible principle of multiplication.

Seventh, the principle of biblical community needs to be defined. For instance, the small group setting is a wonderful venue to enjoy authentic body life. Inside the atmosphere of the small group environment, a tight-knit group of believers practice the biblical “one another” principles. The New Testament provides a list of 59 one another commands that describe how believers are to relate to each another.¹⁴ For example, the Apostle Paul told the believers at Rome to “honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10). The core value of mutual care is built into the small group design. Therefore, the small group leader will function as a shepherd and the shepherding responsibilities will be distributed to one another in the group. The author will

¹⁴ For a list of the 59 “one another’s” listed in chronological order see Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2000), 129-131.

expand and develop a theology of biblical community in the training manual.

Finally, the last principle that needs to be defined is the coaching structure within the small group model. In reality, how important is the coaching structure to the small group plan? Joel Comiskey warns that without a good coaching system, “cell groups that were once healthy will begin to die a slow death.”¹⁵ Since a small group coach is so important, what does he do? The primary responsibility of a small group coach is to provide encouragement, supervision and accountability. Coaching is highly relational, developmental and supportive.¹⁶ For instance, a group coach can ideally oversee five group leaders. He will meet with each leader preferably two times per month for support, direction, and encouragement. A good coach is first and foremost an experienced multiplying small group leader. He understands the ups and downs of small group life and the importance of mentoring an apprentice. He is a Great Commission leader and communicates with pin-point precision the missional objective of group life. Like the proverbial broken record, a good coach will constantly articulate the disciple-making mission of Jesus. He not only provides “supervision,” he will cast a “super-vision.” Therefore, he understands the incredible principle of multiplication. Nevertheless, the faithful small group coach is only a phone call away and is always available to advise and encourage the group leader.

Statement of Limitations

The expression *small groups* can mean different things to different people. In reality, there are a plethora of specialty small groups. For instance, there are open groups and closed groups. Furthermore, there are cell groups, free market groups, neighborhood groups, purpose

¹⁵ Joel Comiskey, *How to be a Great Cell Group Coach* (Houston, TX: TOUCH Publications, 2003), 12.

¹⁶ Bill Donahue and Greg Bowman, *Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 11.

driven groups (also known as campaign groups), organic groups, serendipity groups, house church groups, hosts groups, and the sermon based groups.¹⁷ For the sake of this study, this author will limit this training manual to the hybrid life group model. The hybrid life group can meet on the church campus, in homes, the work place, or even a restaurant.

Second, when the training manual mentions small groups, it is specifically referring to “open groups.” Historically “closed groups” are more *koinonia* (fellowship) oriented and inward focused, whereas open groups are more outreach oriented. This manual will exclusively endorse open groups, and the principle of evangelism is built into the life group design. Although this training manual will not debate the tenets of Calvinism and Arminianism, this manual will however exclusively endorse the soteriological position of an unlimited atonement. Therefore, this writer radically claims that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the “whole world” (1 John 2:1-2). Consequently, when the author uses the expression “small groups,” he is explicitly referring to open groups which are outreach oriented.

Third, this training manual will not endorse a particular curriculum. Unfortunately, when most believers hear the expression “discipleship,” they immediately think “curriculum.” Historically and traditionally discipleship has been curriculum driven. Over the years, the market has been flooded with discipleship “materials.” As a result, discipleship has also been associated with knowing instead of doing. In essence, the process included curriculum in order that the disciple might “know” the fundamentals of the faith. However, in studying this manual and reading the term “discipleship,” one should try to think of relationships and “doing.” In other words, one should think “life-on-life mentoring” within the context of the small group in order to

¹⁷ See notes DSMN 997 *Small Group Intensive* led by Professor Rodney Dempsey, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, May 15-19, 2011.

learn and to do” the Great Commission.¹⁸ The purpose of this training manual is to equip the common layman to “know” and “do” the work of the ministry (make disciples).

Theoretical Basis

The small group ministry is undoubtedly the most biblical method for making disciples in the local church. First of all, the Lord Jesus Christ used a small group ministry to train the twelve disciples (Mark 3:13-14). For approximately three years, He invested His life in training a group of men to do ministry. He lovingly developed a deep relationship with each of these men and poured His heart into their lives. Comiskey said, “Jesus took a ragtag group of men and transformed them into highly motivated leaders.”¹⁹ Jesus would often leave the masses of people in order to spend quality time with the disciples (Mark 9:30-31). While Jesus did not ignore the multitudes, He focused His attention on training the twelve. For instance, of the 550 verses found in the Gospel of Mark, 282 verses explain how Jesus interacted with the public at large. However, the remaining 268 verses describe how Jesus developed the disciples.²⁰ Nevertheless, Jesus was crucified and the Christian movement was handed down to the disciples. What would happen to the Jesus movement post crucifixion? Would the movement die? On the contrary, the Jesus movement began to flourish.

Second, the small group movement continued to thrive in the early church. After Jesus arose from the dead and ascended to the Father, these same ordinary men (the twelve) continued His ministry strategy and “turned the world upside down” with the gospel (Acts 17:6). In fact, Luke provides a glimpse into “The Acts of the Apostles” and how they reproduced the ministry

²¹ Neil Cole, *Organic Leadership: Leading Naturally Right Where You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 233.

¹⁹ Joel Comiskey, *Leadership Explosions* (Houston, Texas: TOUCH Publications, 2008), 69.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

of Jesus through the church. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit exploded on the scene giving birth to the New Testament church. On this incredible day, over three thousand people were saved and baptized. Lives were dramatically changed and groups of people were being “added” to the church everyday (Acts 2:41, 47). The momentum shifted from addition to multiplication (Acts 6:1, 7; 7:17; 9:31; 12:24). Thousands were being saved and the sheer numerical growth made it impossible to meet in the Temple or in the synagogues for worship. Furthermore, there were no church buildings at this time. In fact, Elmer Towns claims, that “church buildings did not exist until the second or third century.”²¹ Nevertheless, small pockets of believers began to meet together in a variety of homes. Even when Saul began his vicious persecution of the church, he found small groups meeting in homes. Consequently, he removed these believers from the various “house churches” and put them into prison (Acts 8:3). The extreme persecution forced the church to meet in small groups in order to worship and fellowship (Acts 2:42-47). In fact, the persecution became so severe that the early church was not able to meet publicly. Most likely these small house fellowships became training centers for the early church.²² Even Mary, the mother of Mark, had a small group meeting at her house. When Herod arrested Peter, Mary’s group “prayed earnestly for him.” The text suggests that Peter was delivered from the hands of Herod and the Spirit of God led him to Mary’s house. Peter surprisingly arrived at Mary’s small group meeting as a visible answer to their prayers (Acts 12:1-12).

The early church undeniably met together in small groups to train and equip believers to do the work of ministry. The original eleven were undoubtedly successful multiplying small group leaders. With the enablement of the Holy Spirit, they continued, expanded, and multiplied

²¹ Elmer Towns, John N. Vaughn and David J. Seirfert, *The Complete Book of Church Growth* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1981), 257-258.

²² Jeffery Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 21.

the ministry of Jesus. In fact, the movement began in Jerusalem and literally spread to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The ministry training of Jesus focused on a few in order to transform many.²³

Third, during the era of Constantine, Christianity became the state religion. Suddenly the persecuted church became legal, and for the first time sacred places of worship were being built.²⁴ Consequently, this new freedom affected the house church movement in a rather adverse way. David Tan argues, “The house or community church remained the normative form of church life up until the time of Constantine....From that time on church buildings (e.g., basilicas, chapels) began to replace the community church.”²⁵ Nevertheless, from Constantine to the Protestant Reformation there were “hints” of small groups among the professional clergy and those involved in monastic life.²⁶ Furthermore, there were groups of dissenters like the Lollards (followers of Wycliffe), the Hussites (followers of John Huss), the Waldensians (followers of Peter Waldo), the Friendship Band, women groups and the Brethren for Common Life (Gerard Groote). These groups embraced the priesthood of the believer and the authority of the Scriptures.²⁷ On the other hand, Martin Luther seriously contemplated using small groups to further the cause of the Reformation. However, after a period of serious contemplation, Luther had a change of heart and never implemented the small group strategy.²⁸

²³ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *The Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group*, 13.

²⁴ Jim Plueddeman and Carol Plueddeman, *Pilgrims in Progress* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1990), 4.

²⁵ David Tan, “The Transition from a Program Based Design Church to a Cell Church” (DMin. Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1994), 43.

²⁶ An excellent source of small group history can be found in Joel Comiskey, “Cell-Based Ministry: A Positive Factor for Church Growth in Latin America” (PhD. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 40-42.

Fourth, while Luther neglected to implement the small group model, Martin Bucer of Strasbourg, a protégé of Luther felt the need to utilize small groups. Kenneth Latourette insists that Bucer sensed the compelling need to reform the church by the creation of small home-based communities.²⁹ Bucer was constantly drawn to the early church model in the book of Acts (both cell and celebration). While concerned about the carnality of the church in Strasbourg, Bucer believed that the use of small groups would make his church “more faithful to the primitive and ancient churches.” Comiskey claims that when Bucer launched his cell group strategy, he only permitted committed Christians to enlist and insisted every potential group member be interviewed by the pastor and elders before joining.³⁰

Fifth, after the Reformation, many groups such as the Pietists, Moravians, Puritans, Quakers, and Baptists used small groups to some degree. However, none matched the effectiveness of the Wesleyan model (John Wesley). Greatly influenced by the Moravians, Wesley was converted to Christ “at a Moravian group meeting on Aldersgate Street in London.”³¹ That evening Wesley wrote in his journal that the group was reading from Luther’s *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*. He claims around 8:45 P.M., “my heart felt strangely warm. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”³² After learning and experiencing instant conversion, Wesley decided to visit the Moravian settlements

²⁹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975), 709.

³⁰ Joel Comiskey, “Cell-Based Ministry: A Positive Factor for Church Growth in Latin America” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997), 43.

³¹ Michael D. Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley’s Class Meeting* (Anderson, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), 55.

³² *Ibid.*, 56.

in Saxony. He met the Moravian leader Count Zinzendorf. The ever-studious Wesley was fascinated with the Moravian uniqueness and spent countless hours making notes in his little pocket-size notebook. For three weeks, Wesley observed the Moravian model and how Zinzendorf arranged the community into cells or bands “for spiritual oversight and community administration.”³³ With meticulous notes in hand, the methodical Wesley returned to England and the world was transformed by his class meeting/small group model. D. Michael Henderson states the following:

The heart of this revolutionary system was a cell group of six to eight people which Wesley named ‘the class meeting.’ They met weekly to give an account of their personal spiritual growth, according to the rules and following the procedures which Wesley had carefully crafted. The class meeting proved to be such an effective tool for radical change that it can be acknowledged as the pivotal element of the Methodist movement, the vehicle of change, the medium which enabled the message to be internalized. The Methodist movement helped shape England’s moral and spiritual destiny, and its impact continues to be felt around the world....Many factors contributed to the powerful effect which Methodism had on eighteenth-century society, both in England and later in American, but the key element was the class meeting.³⁴

Wesley’s small group model multiplied because he mobilized the laity and he trained ordinary Christians to do the work of ministry. In fact, Wesley’s “ladders of leadership” are legendary as well as his philosophy to train “men in the ministry, not for the ministry.”³⁵ In other words, the best way to learn ministry is to do ministry. Fortunately, Wesley’s model was successful in mobilizing ordinary church members to minister and multiply.

Sixth, the name David Yonggi Cho is almost synonymous with the contemporary small group movement. As the Lead Pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, Cho developed a biblical cell model that would cross over ethnic and cultural boundaries. Due to

³³ Ibid., 59.

³⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

³⁵ Ibid., 149, 153.

constant fatigue and illness, Cho was forced to develop a model that was lay driven. As he wrestled with the paradigm, he claims, “I knew I needed to mobilize more people and get more lay members involved in the ministry of the church, but I didn’t know how.” In desperation, Cho was driven to prayer to find a solution for the mounting crisis. During his illness, Cho began to see the house-to-house movement in the book of Acts and as a result developed a training regime based on the Ephesians 4 model. He also embraced the Jethro principle and began to delegate responsibilities to those around him (Exodus 18:21-22).³⁶ In reality, Cho was overwhelmed with his inability to care for 2,400 church members. Therefore the ailing preacher divided the city of Seoul into twenty districts and the geographical cell movement began to flourish.³⁷ The physically broken pastor was forced to release the lay people to do ministry, and the Yoido Full Gospel Church has become the largest church in the world.³⁸ Undeniably, Cho championed the contemporary small group movement.

The past decade, mega-pastors like Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, and Andy Stanley have also championed the small group model. Even smaller to mid-size churches are moving toward the small group strategy. Why such a radical shift in strategy? Perhaps the appeal of the small group design is the fact it brings everything to the discipleship table. For instance, the home based small group removes the “stained glass” barrier and is conducive for evangelism. Furthermore, since people coexist in homogenous groups, it becomes a natural process for tracking people in the church. The group system cultivates community, spiritual growth, and leadership development. In fact, the process of multiplication is built into the group design. The

³⁶ David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1981), 13-20.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁸ Joel Comiskey, “Transitioning to Cell Church,” <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com> (accessed April 8, 2012). Comiskey claimed that before Cho retired, his church averaged 800,000 people per Sunday in November 2004.

group leader intentionally mentors an apprentice and releases him to birth another group. Mobilizing a mentor ensures continual multiplication. Therefore, the small group strategy is undoubtedly the most biblical method of making disciples and developing Great Commission leaders.

Methodology

The mandate to make disciples of all ethnic groups of the world remains unchanged (Matt. 28:19-20). Unfortunately, the church has been grossly negligent in training and equipping ordinary members to carry out the Great Commission. Nevertheless, the disciple-making mission is still the same and the believer's responsibility has not changed. In reality, it is time to step up or step down. It is time to stop playing church and step up to mission obligations. The mission responsibility belongs to every child of God and not just the clergy. In fact, the priesthood of the believer demands the participation of every Christian (1 Pet. 2:5-9). On the other hand, the primary role of the clergy is to equip the believer to carry out the Great Commission (Eph. 4:12). How can leadership mobilize members to make and multiply disciples for the glory of God? The church has struggled for centuries with her mission objective; therefore, this author has developed a small group training manual to equip the common layman in the local church. The manual will consist of five biblical principles for making and multiplying disciples through the small group ministry. Each principle will be developed into a full chapter.

For instance, the second chapter will deal with the principle of the Great Commission. Hermeneutically and exegetically, the author will deal exclusively with the biblical mandate to make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). Furthermore, this chapter will develop a working definition of a disciple that lives and loves like Jesus. It will thoroughly examine the Luke 14:25-33 passage juxtaposed with the *kenosis* (emptying) passage in Philippians 2:5-12. A comparison table of

these two passages will clearly demonstrate the similarities between a disciple and Jesus. The disciple-making mission involves developing Christ-like believers who are moving toward spiritual maturity and the mission of Jesus. Furthermore, this chapter will explain the biblical process of equipping and training every believer for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12). The chapter will conclude with an unyielding word of caution. The believer must develop a laser focus in order to champion the Great Commission. Unfortunately, every religious and social organization in the community wants to borrow the believer's influence. It seems everyone has an agenda. If not careful, the believer will be making republicans and not disciples. Therefore, this chapter will challenge the reader to stay on mission and champion the Great Commission.

The third chapter will deal with the principle of mentoring an apprentice. By the way, mentoring an apprentice is a non-negotiable in the small group process. In fact, tutoring a trainee is the key element of the small group design and is crucial for multiplication. The group leader must take an apprentice under his wings and train him to become a small group leader. One must keep in mind that leading a small group is only a secondary function; however, mentoring an apprentice is the primary function of every small group leader. In reality, the small group setting just happens to be the laboratory where on the job training takes place. Dave Earley contends that Satan will do everything he can to keep leaders from mentoring an apprentice because he sees the incredible potential to expand the kingdom of God. Earley goes on to argue that leaders get so busy “doing ministry [that they] fail to mentor leaders, the area of true importance.”³⁹ Therefore, training and coaching new leaders is not an option but rather a prerequisite. This chapter will also encourage every group leader to develop an inner circle. Even though Jesus specifically chose the twelve, He worked individually with Peter, James, and John. The principle

³⁹ Dave Earley, *Eight Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders* (Houston, TX: Cell Group Resources, 2001), 65.

of developing an inner circle is a Christ-like strategy to train people to do ministry. Therefore, the principle of mentoring an apprentice is a great way to make and multiply disciples for the glory of God.

The fourth chapter will deal with the principle of multiplication. This section will include the “wow factor.” First of all, a theology of multiplication will be developed from the book of Acts. Furthermore, this paper will look at the statistics of Lewis Memorial Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia. This church transitioned from the traditional Sunday school to the small group model in 2009. They intentionally developed and deployed small group leaders, and therefore the natural process of multiplication began to occur. Understanding the dynamics of multiplication is indeed staggering. Therefore, every leader must get a vision of multiplication. If only a few patient believers will begin doing what Jesus did and training others to do what Jesus did, over a period of time the principle of multiplication will occur. The goal is to intentionally produce leaders who organically reproduce leaders. The process of multiplication begins slow but grows exponentially. Leaders must be patient and realize that they cannot microwave maturity and mission. Far too often, they succumb to the need for instant gratification and numerical success. However the principle of multiplication begins small and becomes large. On the other hand, Dave Earley contends, “Most small groups and small group leaders are sleeping giants.” Only a Great Commission awakening can stir up these lethargic leaders. While the potential is staggering, Earley goes on to say, “Effective small groups are the untapped potential of the local church.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the disciple must methodically follow the biblical pattern in order to enjoy the fruits of multiplication.

The fifth chapter will deal with the principle of community. Most human beings suffer

⁴⁰ Ibid., 20.

from the disease of loneliness. In fact, connecting to authentic community is one of man's greatest needs. Even God exists in the community of the Trinity, and this same Trinitarian God created man to exist in community. This chapter will focus on our need for community and how to function within that community. Jesus claimed that the greatest commandment in the Bible is to love God and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 24:34-40). One must remember the small group community is a tight-knit group of believers who are committed to living out the Christian life together. As the very Body of Christ, believers are to enjoy a kinship of oneness. In John 17, Jesus prayed five times that all believers would experience the same oneness He experienced with the Father (John 17:11, 21, 22, 23). Furthermore, this section will focus on how important community is to the Christian life. Some of the nuts and bolts of community life will be discussed as well as living out the biblical one another's. This chapter will conclude with a word of caution. For example, so many times believers enjoy the bond of community they forget the cause (mission). The challenge for the small group leader is to strike a balance between community and cause. Great Commission leaders maintain a laser focus on the disciple-making mission of Jesus while enjoying the intimacy of community.

The final chapter concludes with the principle of a strong coaching system.⁴¹ In reality, a good coaching system adds several layers of mentoring to the small group model. For instance, in tier one, a small group leader mentors an apprentice within the group environment. In tier two, a small group coach mentors five small group leaders. In tier three, the pastoral staff coaches the multiplying small group coaches. In tier four, the Senior Pastor coaches the pastoral staff.

Therefore, the Senior Pastor must champion the Great Commission. While going backward in the coaching structure, one MUST connect the dots to the Great Commission. Great Commission

⁴¹ There are numerous coaching systems; however each local church should develop a coaching structure according to the number of small groups. Further reading can be found in Bill Donahue and Greg Bowman, *Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

accountability equals a clear disciple-making focus and a clear disciple-making focus equals multiplication. The goal of a strong coaching system is to connect all the dots to the Great Commission. The top tier (Senior Pastor) is the key. If the top is weak the entire coaching system will tumble. The trickle-down effect will cause a weakness and vice-versa. If the top layer is Great Commission focused, then the next layer of coaches will be Great Commission focused. The coaching system is only as strong as the layer above each tier. Therefore, a strong coaching system will connect the dots of the Great Commission through every layer or tier of the coaching design.

A Review of the Literature

Books

This writer is indebted to the numerous authors who have written on the small group ministry. First of all, Dave Earley's book on the *Eight Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders* is very helpful in training group leaders to become Great Commission focused. This text is an invaluable resource for the local church who is interested in training small group leaders.

Earley and Rod Dempsey also wrote an excellent volume entitled *The Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group*. The Pocket Guide includes 52 ways to help the leader grow his small group. Earley and Dempsey successfully tried and tested the principles of this book in the laboratory of the New Life Church in Gahanna, Ohio. This text provides coaching and advice concerning the challenges of small group life.

Small group guru Joel Comiskey has written several helpful books on cell groups and the principle of multiplication. For instance, *Leadership Explosion: Multiplying Small Group Leaders to Reap the Harvest* is a wonderful book on developing leaders to multiply.

Furthermore, Comiskey's book *The Church that Multiplies* proves the cell model also works in North America. Comiskey examines several North American cell churches and communicates with his readers how these healthy churches are multiplying through this model in both quality and quantity.

Steve Gladen, the Small Group Pastor at Saddleback Church wrote *Small Groups with Purpose*. Undoubtedly a spinoff of Rick Warren's Purpose Driven theme, Gladen explains the group process at Saddleback. At times the process seems complicated, however the section on "Sunday School or Small Groups: Understanding How Groups Fit into Your Church" is a good segment.

Another outstanding resource is *Successful Home Cell Groups* by David Yonggi Cho. Because of sickness and fatigue, Cho was driven to the Scriptures to discover a biblical model for reaching his Jerusalem. This classic tells the story of how Cho mobilized the members of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea. Cho implemented the geographic cell-structure that literally touched the world. This source explains the organizational structure and the visionary role of the Senior Pastor as the primary champion of the small group model.

Jeffrey Arnold's book on *Small Group Outreach: Turning Groups Inside Out* is a very helpful resource. Arnold's direct approach is to keep groups missional and outward focused. He encourages groups to go on short-term missions trips and to organize servant evangelism projects together.

An additional resource for this project is *Small Groups Big Impact: Connecting People to God and One Another in Thriving Groups* by Jim Egli and Dwight Marable. The focus of the text is growing a healthy group. In essence, the authors contend that prayer and simply caring for the needs of others will grow your group. Consequently, their simplified approach is refreshing yet

convicting.

Larry Stockstill's book *The Cell Church: Preparing Your Church for the Coming Harvest* is a good source. The visionary Stockstill is the Senior Pastor of Bethany World Prayer Center, one of America's largest cell churches. The principles in the book equip the average Christian to do the work of ministry rather than letting it fall on the Pastor's shoulders. He contends the key to multiplication is developing and deploying the layman.

Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture by Andy Stanley and Bill Willits is a priceless resource. Stanley and Willits tell the story how they created a culture of small groups in North Point Church. The goal of the small group community is to experience oneness with God and each other. They do a tremendous job of communicating the importance of connecting with authentic community.

Another wonderful resource is the *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership* by Carl George. The sections on coaching and developing an apprentice are very helpful. George has a way of helping the small group church to tap into the invisible layer of potential leadership in the church.

D. Michael Henderson's research on Wesley's class meeting or "little companies" in *A Model for Making Disciples* is an exceptional historical source. In fact, Henderson claims, "The evangelical revival that swept England in the mid-1700s rode on the tidal wave of small-group discipleship."⁴² The highly organized and methodical Wesley developed a discipleship movement that changed the world.

Dissertations/Theses

There are a couple of dissertations/theses that are very helpful. Dempsey's D. Min. thesis,

⁴² Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*, back cover.

“A Strategy to Transition a Traditional Church Educational System to a Small Group System,” was particularly helpful. Dempsey does a case study concerning his personal involvement in transitioning the New Life Church in Gahanna, Ohio from a traditional Sunday school model to a small group system. He points out the pitfalls to avoid and the necessary steps to take in order to make a smooth transition.

Comiskey’s Ph.D. dissertation “Cell-Based Ministry: A Positive Factor for Church Growth in Latin America” has been very helpful. The section of small group development through church history was very insightful. Comiskey shared helpful research and insight into David Yonggi Cho’s cell strategy in Korea as well as five other cell-based churches in Latin America. Comiskey meticulously researched the leadership patterns and the eventual process of cell multiplication.

Fellow-student Mark Huckaby’s D.Min. Thesis “Mentoring Men for the Master, International: The Unique Man, Ministry, and Model of Discipleship” is also a useful resource. Huckaby examines Dr. William L. Bennett’s mentoring model of discipleship. Bennett’s life on life approach can be transferred to the small group setting particularly in discipleship and coaching.

Scripture Review

The purpose of this training manual is to equip the common lay person to make and multiply disciples through the small group ministry. The manual will consist of five biblical principles to facilitate the discipleship process. The author will argue his case by developing a biblical theology for each chapter. Therefore, each of the principles are rooted in Scripture and anchored in the Word of God. This thesis will use The New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

The centerpiece of this entire manual is the Lord Jesus Christ and the Great Commission mandate in Matthew 28:16-20. The resurrected Savior firmly established His authority in heaven and on earth. Then He commissioned the eleven to “make disciples” of all the ethnic groups of the world. This process included baptizing and teaching the disciple all the things Jesus commanded. This training manual is merely a strategic plan to carry out the Great Commission through the small group ministry.

Mark 3:13-19 provides a list of the original twelve. Jesus called His disciples “that they might be with Him.” For three years, Jesus established a deep relationship with each of these men. They lived together, ate meals together and were trained together. In other words, they did life together. This group of twelve was a tight-knit group of disciples who faithfully followed Jesus.

Luke 14:25-33 will help establish a definition of an authentic disciple of Christ. Jesus explained to the crowd (Jews) a genuine disciple will love Him above all earthly relationships (v. 26). He further claimed a disciple will die to self and count the cost of following Him (v. 27-32). Then finally, Jesus told the crowd an authentic disciple is willing to abandon everything in order to follow Him. When Jesus began to share the sacrifices of discipleship the masses began to dwindle and the crowd seemed to slowly fade away.

Philippians 2:6-11 also known as the *kenosis* (self-emptying) passage is another key text defining a disciple. Jesus willfully left the Father (family) in order to obey the mission of God (vv. 6-7). Furthermore, Jesus died to self or emptied Himself in order to fulfill the mission of God. He willfully counted the cost and took up His cross to accomplish the sending mission of the Father (v. 8). In reality, Jesus abandoned everything and became a man/slave in order to die for the sins of the world (vv. 6-8). Jesus faithfully carried out the Great Commission of the

Father.

Luke 6:40 ties together the paradigm of a Christ-like disciple. Throughout the training manual, the author will develop the disciple definition of moving toward spiritual maturity and mission. In essence, spiritual maturity is doing mission, the Great Commission. When the Luke 14 passage is connected to the Philippians *kenosis* passage, a Christ-like follower of Jesus is developed. The disciple as a holistic person will look, live and love like Jesus. Luke 6:40 claims when a disciple is “fully trained” he will be “like his teacher” (Jesus). Since disciples are “made” the Scripture shapes the design to look like Jesus.

In Galatians 4:19, Paul continues to explain the development of a disciple. He likened the painful process to childbirth. He *odino* (labored in pain) until Christ was *morphoo* (formed) in them. Making a disciple that lives and loves like Jesus can be painful. Perhaps this is the reason so few people move toward maturity and mission.

Luke 23:40-43 illustrates the laser focus of Jesus on the cross. From His birth to His death, Jesus modeled Great Commission living. In spite of the shame and pain of the cross, Jesus kept His eye on the mission that was “set before him” (Heb. 12:2). He chose to ignore the agony of crucifixion and reached out to the depraved thief on the cross. Instead of focusing on the torment, Jesus focused on a thief. Always about the Father’s redemptive business, Jesus epitomized missional living (Luke 19:10).

Paul thoroughly explained the discipleship process to the church of Ephesus (Eph 4:11-16). He insisted God gave the body of Christ gifted individuals to *katartismos* (equip) the saints for the work of the ministry. He also claimed the work of the ministry belongs to every Christian (the saints). However, gifted leaders must train the saints (laypeople) to do ministry. Pastoral leadership must embrace their primary role as trainers and equippers while the members accept

their ministry responsibilities. The end results include edification, unification, and Christ-like members who look, live, and love like Jesus.

The priesthood of every believer is one of the fundamental tenets of the evangelical church (1 Peter 2:9). Unfortunately the contemporary church continues to promote the pre-Reformation concept that the work of the ministry belongs to the “professional clergy.” In fact, most Christians believe they pay the staff to minister and therefore they are off the hook from Great Commission responsibilities. On the other hand, the Scriptures are clear and the work of ministry belongs specifically to all the saints and not just a select few. Therefore, believers need to dust off the elementary concept of the priesthood of the believer and remind themselves of Great Commission obligations.

In Acts 1:8, Luke shares the Great Commission concept again. This strategic approach included the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and a geographical plan beginning in Jerusalem, reaching into Judea, extending to Samaria and then expanding to the ends of the earth. The primary participle *te kai* (both and) is an enclitic that connects Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth.⁴³ In other words, the synchronized connection is “both” locally and globally at the same time. As believers attempt to reach their Jerusalem, they must also reach Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth at the same time. In fact, the Acts 1:8 model forms a demographic summary for the entire book of Acts. For instance, chapters 1-7 took place in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Chapters 8-9 took place in the regions of Judea and Samaria. In chapters 10-23, the gospel was carried to the Gentile nations and extended to the ends of the earth.⁴⁴ Consequently, the mission obligation involves going, sending, and reaching the ends of

⁴³ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 32.

⁴⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1951), 71.

the earth. Therefore, believers need the Spirit's power, man power, and money power.

During the upper room discourse, Jesus explained the concept of a Christ-like model and the principle of multiplication. In John 14:12, Jesus told the twelve that Christ-like disciples will "do the works I do." In other words, they will make disciples. However, He also said that because of the Helper, they will do even "greater works." This involves the principle of multiplication which was accomplished in the book of Acts and continues through the church age.

Luke further developed the principle of multiplication in the book of Acts. For instance, on the Day of Pentecost, three thousand people were "added" to the church (Acts 2:41). Even in Acts 5:14 both men and women were "added to the Lord." However in Acts 6:7, the momentum changed to multiplication. As the Word of God *auxano* (spread), the number of "disciples" *plethuno*(multiplied) greatly in Jerusalem and even many priests were saved. Since disciples make disciples, "churches" were multiplied "throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria" (Acts 9:31). Also Acts 12:24 says the Word of God grew and multiplied. Therefore, the principle of multiplication is rooted in the Scriptures.

The above Scriptures plus many more will be used in each chapter of this training manual. Furthermore, each of the five principles will be biblically based and thoroughly argued from the context of Scripture. The five principles are arranged to build upon each other. For instance, the centerpiece is the principle of the Great Commission. The goal is to make disciples who look, live, and love like Jesus. This goal is accomplished through the principle of mentoring in the small group setting. When disciples are made and mentored, the principle of multiplication will be experienced. The goal is to develop and deploy leaders. As people continue to grow in grace, their relationships begin to look differently. The principle of community is experience and

believers begin to connect with fellow group members. Then finally, the principle of a strong coaching system keeps the small group process on mission. The circular movement and momentum of the Great Commission will flow naturally. Then again, the coaching system must be radically missional in order to champion the Great Commission. Consequently, everything revolves around Jesus and the principle of the Great Commission.

The Results

The Five Principles to Make and Multiply Disciples through the Small Group Ministry were developed and tested in the laboratory of Lewis Memorial Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia. Lewis Memorial is a non-affiliate Baptist Church and has grown consistently during the thirty year tenure of Dr. David Lemming. The worship services have enjoyed a steady increase, however in recent years the Sunday school was in decline. Thus, in 2009 Pastor Lemming led the church to transition from a traditional Sunday school model to the small group strategy. Fortunately, the Pastor handed off this assignment to this author. In August of 2009 the church hosted its first small group training seminar which included *The Five Principles* developed in this thesis. In September of 2009 the church launched a total of 19 small groups. After consistent (yearly) training in *The Five Principles* and hard work the groups have multiplied to approximately 80 as of October of 2012. Before the transition in 2009 Sunday school average approximately 300 to 350 people. As of October 2012 small group attendance has grown to over 1,050 attendees. The small group system at Lewis Memorial is lay driven and ordinary church members have been trained to make disciples, mentor an apprentice and multiply groups. May God help Lewis Memorial to continually develop and deploy regular church members to make and multiply disciples through the small group ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus gave the Great Commission to the disciples. The primary mission was to make disciples of all ethnic groups of the world. Obviously, the mission was not small by any imagination. On the other hand, just how important is the Great Commission? John MacArthur claims, “This passage is the climax and major focal point not only of the gospel but the entire New Testament....In its broadest sense, it is the focal point of all Scripture.”⁴⁵ In other words, the entire Bible should be interpreted in light of the Great Commission and the redemptive mission of Jesus. In reality, the Great Commission is the centerpiece of the New Testament and communicates the will of God to every believer. Ed Stetzer insists, “With that one command Jesus announced two thousand years of direction for the church, still in effect for the churches today---even your church.”⁴⁶ Jesus placed the disciple-making mission into the hands of the church. The charge is colossal and perhaps this is the reason the mission has been called the Great Commission. In fact, the church is God’s missionary to the world.⁴⁷

Fortunately the small group setting is a wonderful environment to carry out the Great Commission. In fact, the small group ministry brings everything to the discipleship table. The home based small group is a wonderful setting for evangelism, accountability, spiritual growth and living in biblical community. Therefore, the first and foremost principle of this small group training manual is the principle of the Great Commission. In fact, the very heart of this handbook is Jesus Christ and His mandate to make disciples. Then again, what does this mandate

⁴⁵ John MacArthur, Jr., *Matthew 24-28* in *The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 329.

⁴⁶ Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2006), 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

specifically involve?

The Mandate

Shortly after Jesus arose from the dead, He told the eleven disciples, “All authority has been given me in heaven and on earth.” Therefore, based on His universal *exousia* (authority) He commanded them to go and make disciples of all nations (vv. 18-19). In essence, Jesus handed down the disciple-making mission to the eleven. If they obeyed, He promised His perpetual presence until the mission was accomplished. Exegetically, Comiskey says, “The only command of Christ’s Great Commission was to make disciples. The rest of the verbs in Matthew 28:18-20 are not in the command form but in the participle form. Jesus literally said, ‘having gone, make disciples’ (Matt 28:19).”⁴⁸ Many well-intended preachers misinterpret the Great Commission by over emphasizing the call to “go.” Ed Glasscock says, “In reality, the commission is not to ‘go’ but to ‘make disciples.’ The word ‘go’ is translated from *poreuthentes* (aorist passive participle from *poreuamai*) and would be just as well translated having gone.”⁴⁹ Glasscock goes on to say, “the main verb is *matheteusate* (aorist imperfect imperative from *matheteuo*), ‘make disciples’ is the heart of the commission.”⁵⁰ In other words, the Great Commission is “to make disciples” not just casual followers of Christ. Unfortunately, the contemporary church is overpopulated with underdeveloped Christians who embrace the creed of convenience. Over the centuries, the image of a disciple has been skewed and sketchy at best. Nevertheless, the conscientious small group leader must be willing to ask, “What exactly is the church suppose to be making?” Since the ultimate goal for every believer is to make disciples, one must know precisely how to define a

⁴⁸ Joel Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2005), 53.

⁴⁹ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew in Moody Gospel Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1997), 553.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 554.

disciple. What does a disciple look like?

The Model

The Attachment Concept

The word disciple in its strictest form means a learner, a pupil, or a follower of Jesus Christ. However, the nuance of the word involves surrender, sacrifice, and complete devotion to the Lordship of Christ.⁵¹ Furthermore, the expression *mathetes* (disciple) always implies personal attachment and relational involvement with someone else.⁵² It also includes the pursuit of Christ-likeness. As the disciple moves toward spiritual maturity, he begins to take on the character and mission of Jesus. Paul insisted the believer is being *summorphos* (conformed) into the *eikon* (image) or likeness of Christ (Rom. 8:29). In fact, he begins to look, live, and love like Jesus. As the believer progressively moves toward Christ-likeness, the mission of Jesus becomes his priority. He begins to abide in the Word of God and the life of Jesus (DNA) begins to flow into his life. Once the believer gets into the Word and the Word gets into the believer, the mission of Jesus becomes paramount in his life. Metaphysically, the attachment between the Vine and the branch is life altering (Jn. 15:1-10). Jesus likewise attached Himself to the twelve and poured His life into the disciples for three years. They lived together, ate together, and ministered together. In fact, the connection was similar to a *talmidim* who attached himself to a rabbi.⁵³ Earley explains, “In the first century it was common for gifted students to approach a rabbi and asked, ‘May I follow you?’ in effect saying, ‘Do I have what it takes to be like you?’ The rabbi either accepted the student as a *talmid* (disciple) or sent him away to pursue a trade.

⁵¹ Rod Dempsey, “What Is God’s Will for My Life? Disciple!” 96-99.

⁵² Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming Revell, Baker Book, 1990), 18.

⁵³ Dave Earley and Ben Gutierrez, *Ministry isHow to Serve Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010), 43.

Yet Jesus, the Jewish rabbi broke this pattern when He chose His own *talmidim*⁵⁴ In other words, Jesus reversed the process when He handpicked the twelve. Unlike the traditional Jewish leaders who had been waiting for disciples, Jesus took the initiative and went searching for disciples. In fact, Jesus initiated the teacher/disciple relationship. This attachment relationship was not merely a casual association, however the relationship was close and tight-knit (Mark 3:13-19). The overall description of the disciple is one who attaches himself to Jesus and will progressively take on the traits of his teacher. Even Jesus told His followers, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40, ESV). The goal of the finished product (disciple) is “to be like” the Savior. Nevertheless, the attachment concept is crucial to understanding what a biblical disciple is all about. The dedicated small group leader needs to wrap his mind around the attachment concept. Then again, a disciple is also sacrificial follower of Christ.

The Sacrificial Concept

Perhaps Luke 14:25-33 best communicates the sacrificial element of being a disciple. Instead of being in recruit mode, Jesus included some very difficult conditions for being an authentic disciple. Jesus was rapidly growing in popularity and a huge entourage began to follow Him. It seemed almost everyone was ready to jump on the Jesus bandwagon. On the other hand, the phrase *kai strapheis* (and he turned) was dramatic act on the part of Jesus and a deliberate effort to check out the enthusiastic crowd who were following Him (v. 25). R.C.H. Lenski said that Jesus was traveling slowly toward Jerusalem for the Passover. Evidently a man who was traveling in this rather large caravan tried to connect himself to Jesus and His disciples. Concerning the phrase, “If anyone comes to me” in verse 26, Lenski says,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 43.

Judging from what Jesus tells them, some must have wanted to become his disciples. The imperfect pictures the great crowds as moving along with Jesus; he turns about, a general halt ensues, and he speaks as follows. The condition is one of reality, i.e., Jesus thinks and speaks of somebody who really wants to be a disciple of His. ‘Comes to me’ means with the desire to attach himself to me as disciples attach themselves to a master or rabbi.⁵⁵

Once again, the attachment concept is seen. However, Jesus told the thronging masses that they must choose to love Him more than any other earthly relationship. In fact, He told them that when they compared the love of an authentic disciple with Jesus and family, the love for family should look like hate. In other words, one’s love for Jesus should be so supreme, so great, and so deep when compared with all other earthly relationships. What an incredible challenge to this Jewish audience, especially considering how difficult it would be for the Jews to leave their family and accept Jesus as their Messiah. Perhaps this is the reason He told the emotional crowd to count the cost before they join team Jesus. One should not be mistaken; there is a sacrificial element to being a disciple. Jesus irrevocably said that if he is not loved more than all others, “you cannot be My disciple” (v. 26). In order to qualify for being a disciple, one must love Jesus more than all others. Then Jesus added another qualification for being a disciple. He claims that unless they bear their cross and pursue (come after) Him, they could not be His disciple (v. 27).

What does it mean to “bear his cross and come after me?” This was undoubtedly a shocking statement to the crowd. The masses were following Him to Jerusalem to crown Him King. They were thinking coronation; however, Jesus was thinking crucifixion. Undeniably, the cross was not very flattering in the first century mindset. It was a symbol of Roman oppression and cruelty. Even the Old Testament claimed those who hung on a tree were cursed (Gal. 3:13). How can the disciple bear “his cross?” The Apostle Paul said, “I am crucified with

⁵⁵ R.C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), 735.

Christ” (Gal. 2:20) and he also said, “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31). Furthermore, he claimed, “those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). In reality, the disciple must die to self and crucify selfish ambitions in order to take on the agenda of Jesus. The qualifications are clear; a genuine disciple must die to self or he “cannot not be My disciple” (v. 27). Jesus demanded death. This sacrificial element is a prerequisite for every follower of Christ. Nonetheless, Jesus told the potential disciples to sit down first and deliberately count the cost of such a radical decision (v. 28). Jesus did not want casual followers; He wanted committed finishers. In fact, He emphasized finishing the journey over starting the journey. Three times Jesus used the word “finish” (v. 28, 29). So many disciples enthusiastically begin the journey only to get distracted by the things of this life and in reality become a mockery to the cause of Christ (v. 29). Finally, Jesus gives the punch line to the sacrificial concept of being a fully devoted follower of Christ. He said, “Therefore, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (v. 33).

By this time, the crowd was beginning to dwindle. In their minds, the demands were too great. Jesus demanded sacrificial love (vv. 25-26). He required death to self so they could fully embrace the agenda (mission) of Jesus (v. 27). But now He insisted they *apotassomai* (forsake) or renounce everything they have or they “cannot be My disciple” (v. 33). The progression is clear. He began with family, demanded death to self, and now He wanted their possessions. Perhaps the crowd began to thin out when Jesus presented the various levels of sacrifice. By now, the only ones left standing with Jesus were the original twelve. Jesus wanted everything. The sacrificial lifestyle presented by Jesus does not match the consumer mentality of the 21st Century church. On the other hand, Jesus insisted the genuine disciple travel light. He understood the unnecessary baggage of materialism. In fact, a couple of chapters earlier, Jesus

warned the disciples to “take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). Jesus knew the magnetic pull of materialism and that egotistical man has a tendency to determine his self worth by his net worth.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, when Jesus gave the conditions for an authentic disciple He included a radical sacrificial element to the equation. He was not merely enlisting casual followers; He wanted sold-out “warriors.”⁵⁷ Carrying the gospel to all the ethnic groups of the world would take a herculean effort. Thus, He wanted committed men who would sacrifice everything to carry out the Great Commission. Obviously the sacrificial concept presented by Jesus was unpopular in the 1st Century and is even more unpopular in the 21st Century. Nevertheless, an authentic disciple of Christ must be willing to sacrifice everything in order to be on mission with God.

The small group leader must merely look at Jesus to have a healthy understanding of a disciple. In reality, a glimpse of the life of Jesus will flesh out a picture of a disciple. In fact, Jesus is the classic prototype of the sacrificial disciple portrayed in the Luke 14 passage. Lest the believer forget, Jesus abandoned the bliss of heaven to die on the cross. With laser-like focus Jesus invaded planet earth to fulfill the redemptive mission of God. Theologically, Jesus was sent by the Father as a missionary to the world (John 20:21). He sacrificed everything in order to model and fulfill the Great Commission. For three years, Jesus portrayed a sacrificial disciple who was focused on fulfilling the Great Commission. Therefore, the sagacious group leader must always remember the goal is to make sacrificial disciples who live and love like Jesus.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 29.

⁵⁷ Chuck Lawless, *Disciplined Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That Are Equipped for Spiritual Welfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002). Lawless uses the “warrior” concept for the disciple throughout his text.

⁵⁸ Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2006), 76. Stetzer says, “Making and multiplying disciples involves three things: (1) living like Jesus lived, (2) loving like Jesus loved, and (3) leaving behind what Jesus left behind.”

The Kenosis Concept

Perhaps no other passage in the New Testament gives a better snapshot of the mission of Jesus than the *kenosis* passage found in Philippians 2:6-11. This ancient hymn of the church celebrates the divinity, humanity (incarnation), and death of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this passage provides a glimpse into the mysterious hypostatic union of Christ and the downward descent of Jesus to planet earth.⁵⁹ The Christological implications of the text are indeed gigantic. On the other hand, this passage also gives the reader practical insight into the mission of Jesus and naturally portrays a Christ-like concept of an authentic disciple, especially as Paul explains the “supreme condescension” of Jesus.⁶⁰

First of all, the pre-incarnate Savior was sent by the Father as a missionary/disciple to the earth (vv. 6-7). Before the incarnation, Jesus existed solely in the *morphe* (form) of God. However, Jesus the Missionary did not cling to His equality with God, but willfully submitted to the mission of the Father. Undeniably, Jesus was all about mission. Nevertheless, His downward spiral continued when He *kenoo* (emptied Himself) and took on the *morphe* (form) of a slave (v. 7). While God cannot cease to be God, the Lord was made in the likeness of man and became a human slave. As a missional badge of courage, Jesus took on the limitations of man. The miraculous God of the universe was confined to a human body while equally maintaining His divinity. He now had to eat, drink, and sleep for the first time. In fact, He kept going lower and lower. Since the believer cannot comprehend the height of His glory it is impossible to fathom the depth of His descent. In reality, the distance between the glories of heaven to death on the cross is immeasurable. Paul insisted that Jesus *tapeinoo* (humbled Himself) and willfully died on

⁵⁹ For further reading see Phillip Comfort, “Philippians,” in vol. 16 of *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Phillip Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2008), 168-180.

⁶⁰ Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Philippians* Frank E. Gaebelien General Editor, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 123.

the cross as a common criminal (v. 8). He was beaten beyond recognition and suffered the humiliation of the cross. Jesus proverbially counted the cost and paid the price of obeying the Father (v. 8). In reality, Jesus abandoned the comfortable community of the Trinity to become flesh in order to die for sins of the world (v. 6-8). He was obviously on mission with the Father. Nevertheless, the *kenosis* passage undoubtedly provides a snapshot of the earthly ministry of Jesus and the missionary mindset of the Father.

The Christ-like Disciple Chart⁶¹

<p style="text-align: center;">Disciple Luke 14:26-33</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Christ Philippians 2:6-11</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Must be willing to forsake family (v. 26). 2. Must be willing to deny self (v. 26). 3. Must be willing to bear cross (v. 27). 4. Must be willing to count the cost (vv. 28-32). 5. Must be willing to forsake everything (v. 33). 6. Obeys the mission of Christ. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jesus left His Father (v. 6-7). 2. Jesus <i>kenosis</i> emptied Himself (v. 7). 3. Jesus willfully bore His cross (v. 8). 4. Jesus willfully counted the cost (v. 8). 5. Jesus abandoned everything (v. 6-8). God became a man in order to die for the sins of man. 6. Obeyed the mission of the Father.

On the other hand, when juxtaposing the sacrificial concept of the Luke 14:25-33 disciple model with the Philippians 2:6-11 *kenosis* passage, one can see an emerging picture of a Christ-like disciple. One must remember that the standard or the model is always Jesus. Far too often, it is forgotten that the church is to “make” Christ-like disciples who live and love like Jesus. This involves developing Christ-like character into the life of the believer. As the believer moves

⁶¹ The Christ-like Disciple Chart was developed by this author when he began to connect the dots of discipleship with the *kenosis* passage.

toward spiritual maturity, the mission of Jesus becomes priority. In fact, it is impossible to be spiritually mature and ignore the disciple-making mission of Jesus. Jesus told the disciples, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (Jn. 20:21). In the same way that Jesus was *apostello* (sent) by the Father to make disciples, the believer is likewise commissioned to make disciples of all nations. Yet many misinformed leaders continue to link spiritual maturity to biblical knowledge. Knowing “Bible Trivia” is certainly not spiritual maturity. Mission is maturity. The purpose of biblical knowledge is to form effective missionaries. Nevertheless, when comparing the sacrificial element of the Luke 14:25-33 passage with the Philippians *kenosis* passage, a missional Christ-like picture emerges. The small group leader must remember that Jesus is the model and mission is the goal. It must be remembered that the earthly ministry of Jesus was a physical illustration of Great Commission living. Robert Coleman said, “It shouldn’t seem strange that our Lord would place such a high priority on discipling. After all, Jesus was simply asking His followers to do what He had done with them.”⁶² Jesus modeled the disciple-making mission even before He gave the Great Commission. Jesus was indeed all about missional living.

The attachment concept, the sacrificial concept, and the *kenosis* concept all describe what a Christ-like disciple actually looks like. Therefore, a disciple is metaphysically attached to Jesus (the rabbi), and he is willing to make radical sacrifices to be on mission with God (Lk.14:25-33; Phil. 2:6-11).⁶³ For the disciple, Christ-likeness is the pattern and mission is the purpose. Nevertheless, when developing a biblical definition of an authentic disciple, a picture of Jesus seems to continually surface from the pages of Scripture. On the other hand, what is the difference between a disciple and discipleship?

⁶² Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1998), 9.

⁶³ Refer to the Christ-like disciple chart on page 38.

The Process

A disciple is a person; whereas, discipleship is a process. Being a Christ-like disciple is the will of God for every Christian; whereas, discipleship is the will of God for every church.⁶⁴

While many leaders have a skewed definition of a “disciple,” many also have a distorted definition of “discipleship.” Jeffrey Arnold correctly surmised when he said the following:

The word *discipleship* is a catch phrase in the church today, often without meaning. As a result some people think of discipleship when they think of Bible study workbooks or adult Sunday school. What they forget is that the process of discipleship is a dynamic relationship between fellow Christians and their Lord and that it is marked by continued progress.⁶⁵

While Arnold says the word discipleship is often without meaning in the church, he also argues that discipleship is a process or a relationship that is marked by continued progress. In other words, the discipleship process is movement toward spiritual maturity that can be measured. One should make no mistake. The Great Commission insists that believers “make disciples” of all ethnic groups of the world. But it must be remembered that a disciple is a person. On the other hand, the text further explains the process (discipleship) of making disciples by “baptizing them” and “teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Thus, a disciple is a person, but discipleship is a process. The *didasko* (teaching) process involves instruction and *tereo* (observe) modeling the commands of Scripture. In fact, the expression *tereo* (observe) can also be translated to watch or to keep. Consequently, discipleship is the process of moving the believer toward Christ-likeness through teaching and modeling the Word of God. The local church must develop an intentional plan for discipleship. How is the believer moved from idle membership to active ministry? Perhaps the Ephesians 4 model can provide a strategic plan.

⁶⁴ Rod Dempsey, “What Is God’s Will for My Life? Disciple!”, 96-99.

⁶⁵ Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 23.

In Ephesians 4, Paul claims that God gave gifted men to the church, “He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (v. 11). He further argues that God gave these gifted men to the church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (v. 12). In other words, training and equipping is the primary function of the pastor/teacher because the work of the ministry actually belongs to the saints. Bill Hull says the word *katartismos* (equipping) means to set a broken bone, to mend a frayed net, to furnish an empty house or to restore to mint condition. The medical process of setting a bone suggests putting people back together again. Mending a frayed net communicates the process of restoration. Furnishing a house implies equipping a believer for service. Restoring to mint condition could refer to helping people get well from spiritual injuries inflicted by the fall. Nonetheless, the nuance of the word communicates the restoration of God’s people to ministry.⁶⁶ MacArthur also claims that the word *katartismos* (equipping) means “to restore to its original condition or make complete.”⁶⁷

Gifted leaders like the Evangelist and the Pastor/Teacher are to equip or restore the saints to their original condition so they can do the work of ministry. This process is called discipleship. Discipleship is equipping and training laypeople (all believers) to “do” the work of ministry. Paul further claims when gifted leaders prepare members to “do” ministry the body will be *oikodome* (edified) or built up (v. 12). In other words, spiritual and numerical growth will take place in the body. Furthermore, as the discipling-equipping process continues, “serving” believers will mature in their faith and become more Christ-like (v. 13). In fact, they will no longer be spiritual infants tossed around by every popular teaching, but will spiritually *auxano*

⁶⁶ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 162-163.

⁶⁷ John MacArthur, Jr., *Ephesians in The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986), 152.

(grow up) “into Him in all things” (vv. 14-15). The text clearly demands the “the whole body” even “every joint” and “every part” should “do its share” (v. 16). The Ephesians 4 developmental model of discipleship provides a process of mobilization for the everyday common church member toward ministry preparation and spiritual maturity. The work of the ministry belongs to every member and every member must do their share. When every member does ministry, the body will grow and be edified. Nevertheless, pastoral leadership must embrace their primary role as trainers and equippers.

Unfortunately the contemporary church continues to promote the idea that the work of ministry belongs to the “professional clergy.” But Coleman reminds the reader that “we cannot define *clergy* and *laity* as mutually exclusive terms. In the bonds of Christ, all are laity (or the people of God) and equally share the responsibility to make disciples.”⁶⁸ Coleman also pointed out, “Radical distinction between the pulpit and the pew did not develop until well into the second century.”⁶⁹

Some believe the ceremonial ordination of professional preachers has driven even a greater wedge between member and minister. Perhaps the contemporary church needs a fresh look at the priesthood of all believers and reestablish a sense of ministry responsibility with all church members. Nevertheless, many Christians still believe the Senior Pastor or the Church Staff are the only ones fit to minister. Consequently, members sit idly by as mere spectators cheering on the “clergy” as they minister. While the applause can be deafening and the ego enlarged, the process of leadership development (discipleship) is severely retarded and the disciple-making mission of Jesus is greatly hindered. Regrettably, lukewarm members are

⁶⁸ Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 10.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

content to sit, soak, and eventually sour. Nonetheless, the obvious question becomes, “How do leaders mobilize members to ministry? Or how do trainers and equippers move members toward spiritual maturity and the mission of Jesus?” This is the ultimate challenge of the contemporary church.

The Challenge

On the other hand, the small group environment is a wonderful place to develop and deploy members for ministry. For example, on Saturday morning January 28, 2012, Dave Earley, the Chair of the Pastoral Department at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary did a small group leader’s seminar at Lewis Memorial Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia. The sessions began at 9:00 A.M. and concluded around noon. The seminar was life changing as Earley shared *The 8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*.⁷⁰ That afternoon, this author along with the Senior Pastor (David Lemming) took Earley out to a late lunch. This preacher asked Earley, “Why are you so passionate about the small group model.” With excitement in his voice Earley responded, “Because it is the most biblical and effective way to make disciples of Jesus Christ.” Is the small group model really the best way to make disciples? Small group guru Joel Comiskey claims, “Cells are simply the best vehicle for developing leaders---they’re leader breeders. Programs and tasks in the church, in contrast, don’t develop and release leaders.”⁷¹ But does the small group ministry develop Christ-like disciples? Moving toward Christ-likeness is a major element of discipleship. Comiskey goes on to say,

In a group of three to fifteen people who meet weekly outside the church building for the purpose of evangelism, community, and discipleship with the goal of multiplication, a person has the perfect atmosphere to become like Jesus Christ and to learn how to

⁷⁰ The training session was based on Dr. Earley’s book *The 8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*.

⁷¹ Joel Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies*, 93.

minister to others...I believe facilitating a cell group is part of the process of maturing and becoming more like Jesus.⁷²

The small group ministry is undoubtedly the best way to develop Christ-like disciples. However, even in the small group model the redemptive mission of Jesus can be neglected. Therefore, evangelism and outreach must be radically intentional within the small group design. In fact, one of the “most difficult challenges” for Great Commission leaders is to keep focus on reaching the lost in a disciple-making structure.⁷³ How does the small group leader stay focused on the principle of the Great Commission? This is a challenge for every small group leader.

Open Groups

What is the secret to a viral Great Commission influence within the small group setting?⁷⁴ A missional focus is undoubtedly the key to making disciples of all nations. Consequently, every group at Lewis Memorial Baptist Church is an open group. In other words, open groups are open to all members, new members, and non-members throughout the year. In fact, members encourage and invite others to attend our small groups. The goal is to connect every person to Christ and community through the small groups. On the other hand, the exclusion mindset of the closed group destroys mission and is diametrically opposed to the principle of the Great Commission. The mentality of “us four and no more” is cliquish and carnal at best. The small group is not a social club for members only. It is a mission agency reaching out to others with the message of Jesus Christ. Historically, closed groups seem to get stuck in maintenance mode while open groups remain in mission mode. As a general rule, closed groups are inward focused;

⁷² Ibid., 94.

⁷³ Rod Dempsey, *The Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group*, 118.

⁷⁴ Ed Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 97. Stetzer used the expression “viral gospel influence.”

however, the open group is more outward focused. Small group experts Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson list closed groups as one of the “deadly sins” of small group ministry. They claim, “Groups with a closed mind-set are guaranteed a short life span.”⁷⁵ In essence, the closed group mentality is a form of shutting the door to the lost.

The small group community should be a warm environment for the unsaved to patiently examine the claims of Christ. Unbelievers need a safe place of radical acceptance and love while they move toward a relationship with Jesus. Putman says, “Acceptance is the gateway to belonging---without it there is no belonging. When we accept others in love, they inch toward the gospel, which is why it is so important for us to reflect Jesus by opening our arms to others.” Putman goes on to say, “Unconditional acceptance of all people is a defining mark of a missional follower of Jesus.”⁷⁶ More often than not, believing (accepting Christ) takes time. The internet culture needs time to explore the Person of Christ. In reality, the passionate follower of Christ must be patient with unbelievers and not coerce them into making a premature decision. Forcing an unbeliever to make a hasty decision will often cause the seeker to flee from the group. Consequently, the small group setting should be a safe place of love and acceptance for the unbeliever to examine the claims of Christ. Gene Mims reminds the reader that, “Open groups exist to lead people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and to transform them into Christlikeness by engaging them in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship. Open groups are small kingdom communities designed to bring believers and unbelievers together in an

⁷⁵ Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry* (Grand Rapids, IL: Zondervan, 2002), 131.

⁷⁶ David Putman and Ed Stetzer, *Breaking the Missional Code* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2008), 75-76.

atmosphere of compassion to share the gospel.”⁷⁷ Fortunately, the open group mentality will help the small group members to stay focused on the principle of the Great Commission.

What are some other ways to help the group stay focused on the principle of the Great Commission? The “empty chair” and evangelistic praying can help keep mission in the Great Commission.

The Empty Chair

Every group should strategically position and keep an empty chair in the middle of the group circle. The empty chair serves as a visual reminder of those outside of the body of Christ and outside your small group community. The conscientious small group leader constantly reminds his group to envision an unsaved child, spouse, parent, or coworker in the empty chair. Then the entire group offers up specific (by name) evangelistic prayers for the unsaved people. In reality, this is Great Commission praying. Far too often small groups or Sunday school classes take prayer requests. Most of the time these prayer requests center around the physical needs of people. While the believer is exhorted to pray for health and healing, he must also pray for the salvation of the lost. Unfortunately, prayer time in most small groups seem to focus exclusively on the sick. In fact, most groups do very little praying for the lost. However, Paul told Timothy “that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men” even those “in authority” (1 Tim. 2:1-2). The reason Paul commanded the believer to pray for all men is because God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (v. 4). The evangelical church is mostly known for its evangelistic preaching; however, the Apostle Paul

⁷⁷ Gene Mims, *The Kingdom Focused Church: A Compelling Image of an Achievable Future* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 130.

gives a call to “evangelistic praying.”⁷⁸ Strategically positioning the empty chair in the middle of the group circle forces the group to pray missionally.

On the other hand, this author has added an extra element to the empty chair. For instance, a 3 x 5 card is handed out every week during the group meeting. Burdened group members write a single name of an unsaved family member or a friend on the card. During the prayer time, group members lay the 3 x 5 card on the empty chair. After a season of prayer, group members pick up their card and position it on the top of their cell phones either in their pockets (men) or in their purses (women). Each time the cell phone rings the group member pulls out the phone along with the 3 x 5 card. They hold the prayer card until they finish their conversation on the phone. Once they hang up the phone, they pray for the unsaved person listed on the card to get saved and to fill the empty chair in their group. This small group leader began this exercise 18 months ago. The old worn out 3 x 5 card went through several cycles in the wash machine and became wrinkled over the months. The ink (name) had faded on the card. The edges were frayed and thousands of creases had softened the card. Nonetheless, 3 people came to Christ and into the group through evangelistic praying.

Should members pray for the sick? Absolutely. On the other hand, one must intentionally prioritize evangelistic prayer in the small group meetings. Perhaps the old adage is true: “We have prayed more people out of heaven (sick) than we’ve prayed out of hell (unsaved).”⁷⁹ A world is dying and going to hell and believers need to pray for opportunities to reach the very people envisioned in the empty chair. Nonetheless, the empty chair is merely an evangelistic tool to help the group stay focused on the principle of the Great Commission. What else can the small

⁷⁸ John MacArthur, Jr., “1 Timothy” in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986), 61-75. MacArthur gives a list of “five benefits of evangelistic prayer.”

⁷⁹ This author has heard several preachers over the years quote this statement.

group leader do to stay focused on the principle of the Great Commission?

Open House

Every six weeks or so, each group can host an open house. Without question, everyone likes food, fun, and fellowship. Realistically, an open house is simply a group party. Group members intentionally invite their un-churched friends to the party. Members bring extra food and the leader can organize a few age-appropriate games. At the end of the party, the group leader has a mature Christian share their testimony. The testimony (story) should focus on how they came to Christ. The sagacious group leader will meet with the person giving the testimony before the party in order to coach him through the process. Historically, sharing a testimony is one of the most effective ways of sharing the gospel. But is hosting an open house really biblical? Is it okay for Christians to party?

Evidently Jesus attended a small group party (open house). After Matthew became a follower of Christ, he hosted a “sinner dinner” (Mk. 2:14-17).⁸⁰ This “taste and see” event took place in a Christian home, but the target audience was unbelievers. The text says that “many tax collectors and sinners sat together with Jesus and His disciples” (v. 15). While describing the dinner guests, Mark used the expression *polus* (many) two times. In other words, there were a great number of tax collectors and sinners hanging out with Jesus and the disciples (v.15). Nevertheless, the religious separatists (scribes and Pharisees) condemned Jesus for “eating with tax collectors and sinners” (v. 16). They scornfully asked the disciples, “Why does he eat with such scum” (v. 16)?⁸¹ With laser focus and pinpoint precision, Jesus shared His mission, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick? I did not come to call the

⁸⁰ This student has heard Dave Earley use this expression.

⁸¹ This passage is taken from *The New Living Translation*.

righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (v. 17). Why did Jesus come to planet earth? To invite *kaleo* (call) sinners to repentance. Small group leaders need to remember that the very world they often “separate from” is the same world that Jesus “sends” them into. In the Lord’s high priestly prayer, one is reminded that in the same way the Father “sent” Jesus into the world He also “sends” them into the world (Jn. 17:18). Make no mistake. The world is hostile territory for both Jesus and the believer. In the same way Jesus is from heaven, the believer’s citizenship is also in heaven (Phil. 3:20). In reality, Christ has rescued the believer from the dominion of darkness and has transferred them to the kingdom of His Son (Col. 1:13). In other words, citizenship has been transferred. Ed Stetzer says, “That word *transferred* refers to the removal of people from one residence to another, repositioned for the purpose of forming a new colony.” He further insists, “Paul’s use of that word describing salvation implies that we have not only been transferred into Christ’s kingdom but also commissioned to be a part of outposts of that kingdom wherever God leads us to go.”⁸²

The city that Christians live in is their outpost for God. Unfortunately many Christians withdraw and separate from the world. On the other hand, Jesus sent believers into the world as kingdom ambassadors and therefore they represent a new King with a new loyalty. Perhaps this was the approach of Matthew when he hosted the sinner dinner. As an ambassador of the King, Matthew went public with his faith. The text implies that “many” tax collectors and sinners were introduced to Jesus that night. Nevertheless, hosting an open house is a tangible way for the group to focus on Great Commission living.

People love parties. It may be a block party, open house party, or even a birthday party. The point is, the group should be led to host an outreach party. Can the unsaved really be reached

⁸² Ed Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom: Living as Agents of Gospel Transformation*, 18-19.

by hosting a party? Earley contends, “We learned we could easily *double* our regular small group attendance with unchurched friends if the group members invited them to a party.”⁸³ The potential for outreach and connecting with the unchurched is incredible. Perhaps the father of the prodigal son understood the principle of a party (Lk. 15:22-25). Once the prodigal returned home, the father threw a party. The text says they barbequed the “fatted calf,” there was rejoicing, as well as “music and dancing” (vv. 24-25). The father hosted a “sinner dinner” and they celebrated the return of the prodigal son. Unfortunately the prodigal’s brother refused to celebrate with his family (v. 28). Nevertheless, hosting an open house with a small group is a wonderful way to fulfill the principle of the Great Commission.

Servant Evangelism

One of the challenges to being a small group leader is keeping an outward focus. Consequently, leading one’s group to be involved in servant evangelism is a great way to keep mission in the Great Commission. Author and church planter Steve Sjogren has been a strong advocate for servant evangelism. Sjogren says, “You must communicate that the aim of your church is to produce disciples who do stuff, not just disciples who only know stuff. Servant evangelism is all about activating people into ministry.”⁸⁴ For instance, Lewis Memorial Church in Huntington, West Virginia, has an H2O ministry including a beautiful trailer. The trailer is built like a transferrable concession stand. Throughout the year, the attractive trailer is transported to the County Fair, the Pumpkin Festival, and a host of other community events. The trailer is manned by a small group, and they hand out free bottled water along with a connection card. The connection card briefly explains the give away with no strings attached. The card

⁸³ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *The Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group*, 163.

⁸⁴ Steve Sjogren and Rob Lewin, *Community of Kindness* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003), 27.

simply says, “We want to share the love of Christ in a tangible way.” Other groups meet once a month to feed the homeless at Harris Riverfront Park. One particular group is involved in helping freshmen move into their dorms each semester at Marshall University. Perhaps one of the most successful projects is the free car wash. There are literally hundreds of servant evangelism projects a group can do.⁸⁵ However, participation and outward focus is the key. Sadly, however, most church members never witness. Somehow the idea has been communicated that evangelism is “for experts only” and that if a person is not “all prayed up” and has the Romans Road memorized in two languages, they are unfit to witness for Christ. There needs to be a shift in the focus from “the dazzling sales pitch,” the hooks, and the tricks to the love and kindness of God revealed through people’s lives.⁸⁶ It takes a herculean effort to keep a group outwardly focused. But that is what leaders are supposed to do. In fact, leaders lead because they know what to do. Servant evangelism is a great way to stay focused on the principle of the Great Commission.

Champion the Cause

The most difficult challenge for any church is to keep a Great Commission focus. Nevertheless, the Senior Pastor of the church must champion the cause of the Great Commission. The trickle-down effect usually flows through the Senior Pastor to the membership. The Senior Pastor will insist the staff become Great Commission leaders too. As the primary trainers and equippers, the pastoral staff will pour the Great Commission into the hearts of each small group leader. In fact, the small group leader must develop a Great Commission shaped heart. On the other hand, the small group leaders must carry the principle of the Great Commission to the

⁸⁵ For further reading see Steve Sjogren, *101 Ways to Reach Your Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001).

⁸⁶ For further reading see Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping, and Doug Pollock, *Irresistible Evangelism* (Loveland, CO: Group Publications, 2004).

small group members. The vigilant Pastor must keep the disciple-making mission of Jesus strong as it passes through the chain of leadership. A weakness in the chain means a weakness in mission. Nevertheless, the most difficult task of a Senior Pastor is to champion the Great Commission. If the Senior Pastor is weak on the principle of the Great Commission the church will not be a Great Commission church.

In order to champion the Great Commission, the Senior Pastor must have laser focus. The savvy Pastor understands there are hundreds of social agendas that will pull him away from mission. In reality, those who lead the social agenda want the Senior Pastor to champion their cause. However, one must remain relentless and “doggedly focused” in their ministry mission.⁸⁷ Assuredly, pastors will be misunderstood, ridiculed and often deemed uncaring. However, they must determine, “The main thing will remain the main thing” and the main thing is the principle of the Great Commission. Jesus gave one Great Commission and the Bible must be interpreted in light of the disciple-making mission of Jesus. If the mission is right, everything else will fall in place. But if the mission is missed, everything else will be out of order. The struggle is to keep the Great Commission front and center.

Unfortunately, church members and social groups can hijack the Pastor’s vision. Some use subtle manipulation, while others brow beat with intimidation. This is just a fact of church life, so one must be prepared. Misguided people (members) will use just about any means to get the pastor to champion their cause. The tree hugger will want him to go green to the point of no longer buying bottled water. The health food junkie will give him literature on the evils of eating a hotdog. The liberal politician will slap a “save the whales” bumper sticker on his car, and if he

⁸⁷ Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of Reformission Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 53. Driscoll contends that missional leaders must “stay doggedly focused on mission.”

is not careful he will be making Republicans instead of making disciples. Every social group in the city will attempt to hijack his influence. In fact, the larger the church becomes the greater the temptation to follow the social/political crowd. Instead of being a Great Commission champion, he will become a breast cancer awareness champion, and the church bulletin will virtually become a list of advertisements for the multiple 5k runs every weekend. Outreach somehow gets put on the back burner and the new agenda becomes gay marriage, right to life, homosexuality, the TV ratings, teen pregnancy, racism, MADD, drugs abuse, aids, birth control, public education, sex education, gambling, the lottery, pornography, teen suicide, as well as a thousand other social problems. Consequently, the confused pastor becomes schizophrenic and loses his Great Commission edge. Unbeknownst to him, someone hijacked his vision and stole his influence.

Sadly, events like this actually happen all the time. For instance, in 1955 a 23 year old preacher named Greg Dixon went to Indiana to pastor the Indianapolis Baptist Temple. Over the years, the church saw thousands of people saved and membership peaked around 8,000 in the late seventies. In 1981, this author heard about this “soul-winning” church in Indianapolis. Subsequently, he drove from West Tennessee all the way to Indianapolis in order to visit Pastor Dixon and the growing church. Indeed, the ministry was absolutely phenomenal. This church was a Great Commission church and outreach was front and center. Nevertheless, in 1983, Dixon decided the church should “break all ties with the government and dissolved its legal corporate status and began operation as an unincorporated church. From that point forward, the church paid no taxes and filed no tax forms with the Internal Revenue Service.”⁸⁸ This included matching Social security taxes, Medicare taxes, and normal income taxes from the church and school

⁸⁸ Library Factfiles, “Baptist Temple Tax Dispute,” *Indianapolis Star*, http://www2.indystar.com/library/factfiles/religion/churches/baptist_temple/tax_dispute.html (accessed July 2, 2012).

employees. Several years later, “on April 13, 1998, the United States sued the Baptist Temple, Greg J. Dixon, and the church’s bank. The suit sought payment of what was then a \$5.1 million tax debt, or foreclosure on the church’s property. Judge Barker heard the case and ruled against the church on June 29, 1999.” On March 23, 2001, property belonging to the church, including furniture and books were auctioned off to the highest bidder at Baxton Auction Gallery.⁸⁹ Once a champion of the Great Commission, Pastor Dixon apparently lost focus and joined the cause against government tyranny. Lest one castigate Pastor Dixon, thousands of Senior Pastors in America have likewise abandoned the Great Commission in order to follow some other agenda.

There are definitely hundreds of rabbits to chase and political causes to join. Nevertheless, the Senior Pastor and church membership have no right to alter or change the mission. In fact, the principle of the Great Commission is unchanging and non-negotiable. Nevertheless, if the local church is to champion the Great Commission, it must begin with the Senior Pastor and trickle down through the chain of command to every member in the congregation. Perhaps then the church will fully embrace the principle of the Great Commission.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ See Appendix B research instrument, 123.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRINCIPLE OF MENTORING AN APPRENTICE

Carl George insists that, “Discipleship best occurs through the process of cultivating apprentices.”⁹¹ On the other hand, contemporary discipleship seems to be curriculum driven and knowledge (information) based. In fact, the religious market has been flooded with “boxed programs” that guarantee amazing results. Unfortunately, “discipleship in the box” is very similar to a “jack in the box.” They are both plastic and lifeless. Knowledge-based discipleship seems to produce casual followers of Jesus Christ. Christian leaders must remember the primary target of information discipleship is the head, while the primary target of apprenticeship discipleship (ministry based) is the heart. In reality, there is no such thing as discipleship in a box and there is no magical crank that can churn out disciples. Yet, discipleship is more than knowing theological truth and spewing out biblical data.⁹² Perhaps the local church should develop a discipleship strategy that balances knowing with doing (Eph. 4:11-16). Dempsey claims, “Discipleship based on information without transformation is a modern form of Gnosticism.”⁹³ However, discipling an apprentice within the small group setting cultivates life change. The apprentice must study the Bible lesson (knowledge) and shepherd (minister) the group.

Training an apprentice “to know and serve” Jesus within the small group setting is both

⁹¹ Carl George, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership*, 66.

⁹² Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 18-25. Concerning the Great Commission, Geiger says, “The end result of discipleship is not merely *knowledge* of all Jesus commanded but the *obedience* to all Jesus commanded.” Therefore, discipleship is not informational but transformational. The believer must “do” what Jesus commanded (see page 18).

⁹³ Rod Dempsey, “The Art of Developing Leaders” (lecture, CLED 974, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA, January 8-12, 2012).

intentional and measureable. Fortunately, the small group leader can evaluate the growth and development of the apprentice while actually doing ministry (the group meeting). Jesus demands fruitfulness from every child of God (Jn. 15:1-10). In fact, fruitfulness brings glory to God and is proof that the believer is an authentic disciple (v. 8). However, Jesus reminded the disciples that the key to fruitfulness was abiding in Him (vv. 4, 5, 6, 7). In other words, if the believer is going to do anything worthwhile for God, he must remain intimately connected to Christ. In contrast, Jesus told the disconnected disciple, “without me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). The text clearly communicates a life “without me” produces “nothing.” When the believer is disconnected from the Vine he *poieo ou* (does nothing) and doing nothing seems to define contemporary Christianity. Since leadership requires nothing, Christians actually do nothing. Regrettably, lay ministry has been reduced to “nothing.” For instance, to expect a layperson to actually do ministry and produce fruit is absolutely absurd in most Christian circles. Yet, the Lord Jesus Christ commanded the disciples to abide in Him, bear fruit and glorify God.⁹⁴ The church has been negligent in raising up fruit producing leaders. On the other hand, mentoring an apprentice within the small group setting is a strategic plan to develop fruit bearing believers.

There is obviously more to mentoring an apprentice than purchasing the latest book and asking the emerging leader to merely read it. Authentic mentoring is on the job training, life on life, training the believer to “do” the work of the ministry. Consequently, mentoring an apprentice is not about curriculum and trendy programs but developing a servant of God. However, the church must develop a model to train and deploy the average church member. Church leadership must realize any system that devalues and disempowers the ordinary member from making disciples is sinful and unhealthy at best. Therefore, the principle of mentoring an

⁹⁴ Earl Radmacher and Gary Derickson, *The Disciplemaker: What Matters Most to Jesus* (Salem, OR: Charis Press, 2001), 175-196, 332-335.

apprentice through the small group setting is an excellent strategy to develop ordinary laypeople to do ministry. The mentoring process is simple, yet very effective. Taking the hand of a potential group leader and training him inside the group setting is both practical and doable. Nevertheless, the faithful small group leader must ask, “How do you mentor an apprentice within the small group setting?”

The Strategy

The simple strategy requires every small group leader to mentor an apprentice.⁹⁵ Thus, the motto of every small group leader should be, “Never do ministry alone.”⁹⁶ The disciple should always be included in everything the leader does. For instance, when visiting group members, leaders should always take their apprentices. When planning small group activities, leaders should always include their trainees. When attending a small group training seminar, leaders should always take their apprentices. In fact, the principle of doing ministry two by two should be built into the DNA of the small group system. In fact, Jesus sent out the original twelve two by two (Mk. 6:7). Furthermore, he also sent out the seventy in pairs (Lk. 10:1). Since Jesus obviously used the team approach to ministry, mentoring an apprentice is a non-negotiable in the small group process. In fact, the very heart of disciple making is training one’s protégé to do ministry. Furthermore, the key to multiplying disciples and birthing new groups is mentoring an apprentice. Dave Earley insisted that Satan will do everything he can to keep leaders from mentoring an apprentice because he sees the incredible potential to expand the kingdom of God.

⁹⁵ The Uncommon Individual Foundation, an organization devoted to mentoring research and training, reports that “mentoring is the third most powerful relationship for influencing human behavior, after marriage and the extended family.” See Larry Kreider, *Authentic Spiritual Mentoring* (Ventura, CA: Published by Regal from Gospel Light, 2008), 12.

⁹⁶ Dave Earley, *Turning Members into Leaders: How to Raise Up Your Group Members to Lead New Groups* (Houston, TX: Cell Group Resources, 2003), 52.

Earley goes on to argue that leaders get so busy “doing ministry we fail to mentor leaders, the area of true importance.”⁹⁷ One must remember that leading a small group is only a secondary function; however mentoring an apprentice is the main function. New leaders must be raised who can train new leaders. Discipleship and leadership development is the key. Even Comiskey says, “The highest priority of the small group leader is to identify prospective interns and begin the mentoring process.” Comiskey goes on to say, “Small group leaders are not called primarily to form and sustain small groups; their primary job is to find, train, and release new leadership.”⁹⁸ One cannot lecture people into leadership; they need hands-on training. Using the cookie cutter approach (lecture model) is like painting by numbers or one-size-fits-all and it just does not work in the church environment. Carl George sarcastically says,

Many Christians have accepted an absolutely stupid notion: that a person can be lectured into leadership. Leader behaviors, by definition, require followers. Leadership formation cannot occur without on-the-job coaching by someone to whom the leadership trainee is willing to be responsible. Speeches on leader traits will never produce the harvest God wants to grant.⁹⁹

In contrast, mentoring a disciple-making apprentice within the small group setting is mentoring at its best. The power of observation and demonstration, with a heavy dose of application, will always bring transformation. In fact, Jesus told the disciples to train their followers “to observe” all the things he commanded them (Matt. 28:20). The nuance of the word *tereo* (observe) is to watch and obey. In essence, the leader (mentor) must model the life of Jesus for the apprentice. This includes obeying everything Jesus commanded, especially regarding disciple-making disciples. Then again, does the Bible provide a biblical model for training an apprentice?

⁹⁷ Dave Earley, *Eights Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 65.

⁹⁸ Joel Comiskey, *Leadership Explosion: Multiplying Small Group Leaders to Reap the Harvest* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 2008), 16.

⁹⁹ Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2000), 135.

A Biblical Model

Inner Circle Model

The small group leader should never underestimate the strategy of training an “inner circle” or a core group of three men. In fact, discipling an inner circle of three is an excellent way to develop Great Commission leaders. Even though Jesus chose a group of twelve men “to be with him,” He gave special attention to His inner circle (Mk. 3:13-14). In fact, He gave extra attention to Peter, James and John.¹⁰⁰

For example, Jesus “took Peter, James and John” to witness the transfiguration “by themselves” (Matt. 17:1-13). In other words, the other nine disciples did not have the privilege to see this glorious encounter with Christ, Moses, and Elijah. Furthermore, only the three witnessed the healing of Peter’s mother in law and the incredible power of God that shook the entire city of Capernaum (Mk. 1:29-34). Jesus only “allowed” Peter, James, and John to witness the miraculous healing of Jarius’ daughter (Mk. 1:29-34). The three were privy to certain things the other nine did not see. Initially, when Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane, He took all twelve disciples with Him, yet He intentionally made the nine remain on the outer edge of the garden while He exclusively took a sleepy Peter, James, and John with Him to witness the agony. Jesus even intimately shared with them His “sorrow” and the news of His impending death (Mk. 14:32-41).

Even though Jesus had a unique partnership with the other nine disciples, His mentoring relationship with the three was more intimate, intentional, and emotionally deeper. Perhaps this is the reason the three were so effective in ministry after Jesus ascended to the Father. In reality, the three were used in a tremendous way during the launch of the early church. The cowardly Peter became the passionate preacher on the day of Pentecost (Mk. 14:66-72; Acts 2:14-40). The

¹⁰⁰ Larry Kreider, *Authentic Spiritual Mentoring*, 112.

immature John was transformed from a “Son of Thunder” into “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Mk. 3:17; Jn. 21:7, 20). James, the lowly fisherman became a celebrated martyr of the early church (Acts 12:1-2). Strategically, the mentoring relationship between Jesus and the three radically changed their lives and prepared them for ministry. Likewise, the passionate small group leader should hand pick three key people from within the group to form his own inner circle. In the same way Jesus poured His life into a few to transform many, the effective small group leader will also focus on training his inner circle. Jesus understood the principle of mentoring an apprentice and working with a core group of three. Therefore, the inner circle model of leadership development is an excellent strategy to raise up new leaders in the contemporary church. On the other hand, some prefer to use the Barnabas model of mentoring.

The Barnabas Model

Barnabas, the encourager, mentored the Apostle Paul. Most likely after the conversion of Paul, no one invited him to their small group. In all probability, the leaders of the early church were not exactly lining up to take on this new believer as a small group apprentice. In fact, Paul had a rather ruthless reputation for persecuting Christians. He was the kind of guy people suspiciously keep their eyes on during the group prayer meeting lest they get snuffed out. In reality, the eerie atmosphere gave new meaning to the phrase “watch and pray” (Mk. 14:38). Obviously everyone was fearful and intimidated by his brutal past. Horror stories circulated from Tarsus to Damascus like wildfire concerning this one who *lumainomai* (ravaged) the church (Acts 8:3). As a new convert, Paul came to Jerusalem and made an attempt to *kollao* (join) the disciples, but they were afraid of him. So Barnabas took him by the hand and defended him before the Apostles (Acts 9:26-27). Nonetheless, Barnabas risked everything to disciple/mentor this new believer with a sordid past.

Barnabas invested an entire year training his apprentice to “do ministry” at the city of Antioch (Acts 11:25-30). They were clearly involved in evangelism since a large number of people were converted to Christ (Acts 11:24). Their discipleship ministry was so effective people began to call them “Christians” for the very first time (Acts 11:26). Paul’s leadership skills were being developed and would eventually surpass those of Barnabas. Sometimes the apprentice exceeds the mentor. In fact, early on in the mentoring relationship, the Scripture distinctively refers to them as “Barnabas and Paul” (Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:2, 7). However, as Paul began to grow, the roles reversed and the Scriptures now refer to them as “Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:43, 46, 50; 15:1, 2, 22, 35, 36).¹⁰¹ Perhaps no other person in the history of the New Testament church has accumulated more rewards in heaven than Barnabas.¹⁰² His mentoring ministry was multiplied in an incalculable way through the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. By the way, the encourager (Barnabas) also salvaged the ministry of John Mark (Acts 15:36-40). Nevertheless, many small group leaders place a high value on the Barnabas model of mentoring.

The Pauline Model

The Apostle Paul also embraced the mentoring model. Even though Timothy was not the biological son of Paul, he did nonetheless call his young protégé “my beloved son” in the Lord (1 Cor 4:17). The tender expression *teknon* (son) illustrates the spiritual reproductive nature of Paul’s mentoring relationship with Timothy. Paul used the same paternal analogy in Philippians 2:22. He compared his ministry relationship with Timothy “as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel” (Phil. 2:22). As a general rule, most scholars believe that Timothy was

¹⁰¹ Carl George, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership*, 45.

¹⁰² Joel Comiskey, *Leadership Explosions*, 77.

converted to Christ on Paul's first missionary journey to Lystra around A.D. 47.¹⁰³ Under the tutelage of his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, Timothy began to flourish spiritually and joined the ministry team of the Apostle Paul approximately two years later (Acts 16:1-2; 2 Tim. 1:5). To emphasize the reproductive nature of their relationship, Paul told the Ephesian church that Timothy was "his own son in the faith" (1Tim. 1:2). Timothy was Paul's spiritual progeny. Paul trained and disciplined Timothy within the ministry context, and Timothy became the chief associate of the Apostle. Paul continued to train Timothy to use the mentoring strategy. He encouraged his "son" in the ministry to take "the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:1-2). Paul told Timothy how to disciple the next generation of leaders. In fact, the text gives four different layers of leadership (2 Tim. 2:1-2):

Me: Paul
 You: Timothy
 Faithful men: Timothy's apprentices
 Others: The apprentices of Timothy's apprentices.¹⁰⁴

Paul told Timothy to continue to breed leaders and to train emerging leaders to breed leaders also. Obviously the spiritual process of birthing, breeding, and training leaders must continue for generations to come. Evidently, the Apostle understood the principle of mentoring an apprentice in the context of doing ministry.

The secret to Paul's leadership development was undoubtedly mentoring an apprentice. During an outbreak of anti-Semitism, the Jews were banished from Rome. Two Jews particularly affected by this persecution were Aquila and Priscilla. Perhaps already Christians and already

¹⁰³ Homer A. Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles: Studies in I and II Timothy and Titus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1958), 16.

¹⁰⁴ Dave Earley, *Eights Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 62.

settled in Corinth, they met the Apostle who was also a fellow tentmaker.¹⁰⁵ The couple not only gave Paul a job, they also let him stay in their home (Acts 18:1-4). Whether Aquila and Priscilla accepted Christ as their Messiah before or after they met Paul is unclear. If they were already saved, mostly likely they were new believers and Paul disciplined them for a year and a half. In fact, they became so mature in mission that they joined Paul's ministry team (Acts 18:5-28). Paul's prolific ministry began with one Jewish couple who disciplined the articulate Apollos and planted a church in their home (Acts 18:24-26; Rom 16:3-5). Paul even claimed that this loving and loyal couple "risked their lives for my sake" (Rom. 16:4). Apparently countless people were reached with the gospel through the process of mentoring.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps the contemporary church would be wise to restore the biblical principle of mentoring an apprentice within the context of ministry. Then again, how does one choose an apprentice?

Choosing an Apprentice

The small group leader's choice of an apprentice is obviously a huge decision and must not be taken lightly. First and foremost the apprentice should be someone in the leader's small group. For obvious reasons, male leaders should only mentor male apprentices and female leaders should only mentor female apprentices. In reality, the apprentice is someone the leader can take along their side and train to facilitate a small group. Thus, he or she should possess some leadership potential and be someone that the leader would enjoy spending quality time with. Since there is going to be a significant investment into someone's life, it is very important

¹⁰⁵ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1986), 356-357. Phillips believes Aquila and Priscilla were already converted to Christ before they met Paul. However, Neil Cole believes they were saved after Paul began to work with them as tentmakers and then became a part of Paul's ministry team. This would definitely strengthen Cole's "organic" argument. See Neil Cole, *Organic Leadership: Leading Naturally Right Where You Are* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Books 2009), 134.

¹⁰⁶ For further reading see Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts," in vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1981), 479-491.

your protégé is someone the leader enjoys working with. For instance, it would be futile to invest six months to a year in somebody's life if they have no interest in leading their own group. Someone should be chosen who has leadership potential in order to maximize the mentoring relationship. Also, eager participants should be found. For example, during the small group meeting, one could plan a servant evangelism project, organizing the event with every group member in mind. Assignments would then be thrown out as the leader watches to see who is eager to participate. Naturally, eager participants are like cream; they always seem to rise to the top. Therefore, eager participants seem to surface as potential small group apprentices. On the other hand, what else can the small group leader do to find an apprentice? Perhaps one should look for people of faith.

Look for Faith

The simple acronym for FAITH will help measure a potential small group leader. The first letter is "F" which stands for faithfulness.¹⁰⁷ The leader must look for faithful members to mentor. Paul told Timothy that God *tithemi* (appointed) him to leadership because he was considered faithful (1 Tim. 1:12). Paul was not necessarily appointed to leadership because he was talented. On the contrary, he was appointed to leadership because of faithfulness and dependability. Unfortunately, faithful men are in the minority. In fact, Solomon relates that faithful men are even hard to find (Prov. 20:6). Nevertheless, the wise small group leader looks for a faithful person to mentor as his apprentice (someone who is faithful to church and someone who is faithful to the small group meeting). Therefore, the astute small group leader is looking for faithful people to mentor and train.

Second in the FAITH acronym is the letter "A" which stands for availability. In other

¹⁰⁷ Dave Earley, *Eights Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 66-67.

words, leaders should keep their eyes on that emerging leader who seems to make himself available. The leaders should look for that budding leader in the congregation who has the potential to be an apprentice. Though most leaders are already busy and involved in ministry, the prudent small group leader, however, looks for people who are simply willing and available to serve. The showdown between David and Goliath serves as an example (1 Sam. 17:1-58). For forty consecutive days, Goliath threatened the nation of Israel. Both the King and people were intimidated by the giant. The text says, “And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid” (1 Sam 17:24). In other words, they ran because of fear. On the other hand, a young shepherd boy saw the need and made himself available. In reality, David became the hero simply because he offered himself to the Lord. By the way, availability is better than talent. As a trained and talented warrior, King Saul was expected to protect the nation of Israel. Yet certain people can have the best training and possess the greatest of skills, however if they do not make their skills available to the Lord they are practically useless. Countless thousands of people sit in the church pews week after week and waste their gifts. Nevertheless, the Lord used a little scrawny shepherd boy to defeat the giant simply because he made himself available. In searching for an apprentice, the leader needs keep his eye on the potential leader who simply makes himself available to serve.

The third letter in the FAITH acronym is “I” which stands for initiative. In searching for an apprentice, one should look for people who take initiative and want to help in the small group meeting. For instance, leaders should look for someone who is willing to set up chairs, serve as a greeter, or pass out the lesson. One should consistently look for those who are serious about their faith and commitment to the Lord. The leader needs to become spiritually attune with the people in his group and become aware of their spiritual needs. In addition, one must listen carefully to

those who participate in the group discussion. One's spiritual radar must be active, searching for the leaders who seem to surface each week. Nevertheless, one's eyes should be open and looking for those who take initiative. These individuals make good small group apprentices.

The fourth letter in the FAITH acronym is "T" which stands for a teachable spirit. Steve Gladen uses the sandpaper analogy. He insists that everyone has some rough edges, but God can use the small group leader to serve as "heavenly sandpaper." Gladen wisely suggests to the small group leader, "Look for people who are teachable, who are open to a little sanding here and there."¹⁰⁸ It is acceptable to look for an apprentice with rough edges, but one must ensure that they are open to some sanding. A teachable spirit is an undoubtedly an essential quality of a small group apprentice.

The final letter in the FAITH acronym is "H" which stands for heart. In the search for an apprentice, the leader should look for a person with a heart for God. The Scripture declares David as "a man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22). In other words, David had a heart for God. Even though David was a profoundly fallen man, he was nonetheless consumed with a passion for God. The savvy small group leader will keep his eye open for the person who has a heart for God. Those who have a heart for God make wonderful small group apprentices.

The FAITH acronym is undoubtedly a helpful tool to assist the small group leader choose an apprentice. Then again, choosing and mentoring an apprentice is definitely the most difficult task of the small group leader. Normally, if there is a breakdown in the small group system it is usually the failure of mentoring an apprentice. Mentoring an apprentice is difficult and therefore many small group leaders just do not get it. Assuredly, mentoring an apprentice is the most important responsibility of the small group leader, because mentoring an apprentice is making disciples. Concerning the power of mentoring, Larry Kreider says,

¹⁰⁸ Steve Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 158.

I believe that mentoring is a God-designed development that is connected to the Great Commission, and that we must embrace it to realize the full potential of the great harvest. I believe that mentoring is an important part of a discipleship formation strategy of Jesus, and the investment in others will pay off great dividends of a multiplied spiritual inheritance.¹⁰⁹

In essence, mentoring an apprentice is not only about making disciples, but mentoring an apprentice is also about multiplying disciples. Since the motion of the Great Commission is circular, one must make disciples who make disciples.

When a leader trains someone to do the work of ministry, the kingdom of darkness is threatened. Consequently, Satan will do almost anything to keep the leader from mentoring an apprentice.¹¹⁰ His number one tactic is spiritual blindness. Satan will pull the wool over the leader's eyes and thus the small group leader will not see the importance of mentoring and multiplying. Most leaders just do not get it because they cannot see it. They just cannot visualize or conceptualize and therefore they remain spiritually impaired (2 Pet. 1:9). All the same, the obedient small group leader must simply force himself to choose an apprentice. Nevertheless, the FAITH acronym is a very helpful tool in choosing an apprentice. What else can the small group leader do to find an apprentice?

Prayer

After going through the process of the FAITH acronym, perhaps prayer is the best place to find an apprentice. Prayer is undoubtedly the most powerful, yet neglected reproductive strategy for finding a small group apprentice. Unfortunately, intercessory prayer is difficult for the egocentric leader. Late night television is flooded with infomercials hosted by self-proclaimed experts who promote the latest "self-help" materials. Regrettably, such humanistic

¹⁰⁹ See Larry Kreider, *Authentic Spiritual Mentoring*, 27.

¹¹⁰ Dave Earley, *Eights Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 65.

fodder is repulsive to God. The misguided leader must turn from self dependency to God dependency. Even Jesus claims the key to unlocking the door to finding an apprentice is prayer. Prior to sending out the seventy, Jesus plainly told them, “The harvest is truly great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Lk. 10:2). Jesus clearly told the seventy that future leaders (apprentices) would come from the vast harvest. Therefore, He encouraged the disciples to first and foremost *deomai* (pray) for the Lord to send out more farmers to reap the harvest. Obviously, there is a labor shortage in the church, and Jesus is asking the believer to pray for more *ergates* (workers). In fact, John Nolland claims, “The present low numbers of workers and the verb here for ‘send out’ (ἐκβάλλη), which normally carries overtones of force, may suggest a reluctance on the part of the potential harvesters.”¹¹¹ In other words, prayers should forcefully compel others to see the importance of the mission. Leaders must pray the layman off the church pew and into the harvest field. Leadership must somehow recover the apostolic mentality of the early church and the missionary mandate handed down to every believer in the congregation. Somehow the number of workers must equal the harvest. Perhaps this is the reason Jesus used the expression *deomai* (pray) to describe these prayers. The nuance of the word means to beg unceasingly. Like little child begging for food, the small group leader must desperately beg the Father to give him an apprentice. The amount of work to be done is great, the fields that must be harvested are huge, and every apprentice must be “sent” into the field. Therefore, the wise small group leader will schedule “unhurried time” to beseech the heavenly Father to give him an apprentice.¹¹² Since

¹¹¹ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, vol. 35B of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Nashville, TN: Word Publishers, 1989), 551.

¹¹² Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Groups, 2011), 258. The Blackabys are fond of the expression “unhurried time” and use it several times throughout the book.

Jesus is the Lord of the harvest, He wants leaders to train and develop a small group apprentice to send into the mission field. Nevertheless, prevailing prayer is the key to finding an apprentice and developing Great Commission leaders. On the other hand, once God provides an apprentice, how is he developed?

Developing an Apprentice

Once an apprentice has been selected, the training process should begin immediately. In fact, leaders should begin to develop the disciple at the very next small group meeting. One should keep in mind that the mentoring process is highly relational as well as very practical (hands on). Therefore, the first step to mentoring an apprentice is prayer. Leaders should begin by praying with their apprentice every week before the small group meeting. They should pray that God will transform every member in the group as well as pray specifically about the needs of each group member and the heavy burdens they carry throughout the week. Hopefully the prayer time will transfer the leader's burden for group members to his apprentice. Although a heart-felt burden cannot be transferred through teaching or lecturing, one can nonetheless connect that burden with the disciple through prayer. It is the mission of the mentor to hand down his passion and burden for the group. Hopefully in the process the disciple will develop a special love for each group member.

Take Roll

Once the group meeting begins, the disciple (apprentice) should take roll. The trainee must learn the importance of keeping good records and how to organize the group system. Taking roll will help the disciple learn the names of each group member and will help him share in the group process. After the group meeting, the trainee should call the absentees sometime

during the week. The leader should review the roll with the disciple and write down the names of those who have missed two consecutive group meetings. Set aside a time to meet with your apprentice during the week and personally visit those who have missed two or more weeks in a row. In reality, the apprentice is being trained to shepherd the group. Carl George reminds the group leader to “view yourself as a leader maker and your group as a leader making laboratory.”¹¹³ The local congregation must shift from a spectator mentality to a membership-driven movement. Training the intern to take roll and shepherding the small group is a wonderful way to develop an apprentice.

Icebreaker

After taking roll, the understudy (apprentice) can open the group with an icebreaker. For instance, the apprentice can ask the group to describe how they met their spouse and where they went on their first date. Or group members can share their nickname and the story behind how they were given that particular name.¹¹⁴ The point is to get the group to open up and participate in the group process. A good icebreaker can lead the group to another level of intimacy. Nevertheless, one should teach the apprentice to have fun with the icebreaker and to build a spiritual bond with group members. One should always remember that the work is two levels deep. The leader needs the apprentice and the apprentice needs the leader. One should learn to train the apprentice to expand the level of care, remembering that the apprentice is being trained to lead his own group in the near future. Nevertheless, doing an ice breaker can play a significant role in the development of the apprentice.

¹¹³ Carl George, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership*, 45.

¹¹⁴ A sample list of good icebreakers can be found at <http://www.smallgroups.com>.

Facilitating the Discussion

Every three weeks or so, the apprentice should facilitate the group discussion. For instance, if the leader is facilitating a sermon-based group, the apprentice should have a copy of the notes early in the week. The leader should meet with his apprentice before the group meeting and review the discussion questions. He should be assured of the leader's presence and help through the process. During the meeting, the leader should evaluate the effectiveness of the disciple (apprentice), and after the group meeting, he should be debriefed. Undeniably, the fifth quarter is a very important time for coaching. The leader must encourage his apprentice and offer helpful hints. If the discussion gets off target, the apprentice must be trained to rein the group in and bring them back on subject.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, meeting together after the group session is a wonderful time to mold and develop the apprentice.

Outreach Event

The group leader must keep his group outwardly focused. Thus, he would be wise to schedule monthly servant evangelism projects. By the way, all of the group members should be involved with the project. In other words, the leaders should not do all the work themselves. To do so would cheat themselves as well as the group. The work should be shared and the group must be taught to understand that they too must be involved in the disciple-making mission of Jesus. They should learn to take group responsibility and ownership. However the process begins with the leader's apprentice. The apprentice must work closely with the leader on the outreach event. He should be given specific assignments and be allowed to prove himself. After three or four outreach events, the leader can then hand the reins over to his apprentice and let him lead

¹¹⁵ See Terry Powell, *How to Lead Quality Bible Discussions: Now That's a Good Question* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 2007). Should the apprentice have difficulty with the group discussion, the small group leader may want to work through this little booklet with the apprentice.

the outreach event. The leader should make sure to show him how to organize and do the hands-on stuff. One of the best ways to do this is to give him an outreach organizational work sheet that outlines responsibilities. After the outreach event is over, the leader should take his apprentice out to lunch or dinner and discuss (debrief) the nuts and bolts of the event. The leader should always be encouraging and helpful in coaching his apprentice.

Mentoring an apprentice is the most difficult task of the small group leader. Then again, mentoring an apprentice is the most rewarding responsibility of the small group leader. In fact, the principle of mentoring will make or break the small group design. Unfortunately, failure to mentor an apprentice is fatal to small group multiplication. On the other hand, mentoring an apprentice will guarantee small group multiplication. Therefore, the principle of mentoring an apprentice is a non-negotiable in the small group system. As a result, the Senior Pastor, the small group point man, and the small group coach must constantly follow the flow of leadership development. Furthermore, all levels of leadership must be held accountable to mentoring an apprentice. Elmer Towns said, “People don’t do what you expect, but what you inspect.”¹¹⁶ Mentoring an apprentice is an intentional plan to develop new leaders. The process of mentoring determines whether leaders reap the harvest for God or if they continue to make excuses for ministry failure. Nevertheless, training an apprentice is the key to the principle of multiplication.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ See [http://elmertowns.com/books/online/8LawsApp/8_Laws_of_Leadership_Appended\[ETowns\].pdf](http://elmertowns.com/books/online/8LawsApp/8_Laws_of_Leadership_Appended[ETowns].pdf), 33.

¹¹⁷ See Appendix D.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PRINCIPLE OF MULTIPLICATION

The principle of mentoring an apprentice is the real secret to the principle of multiplication. Once the key of mentoring is turned, the door of multiplication seems to open naturally. In fact, the law of sowing and reaping is triggered and exponential growth is experienced. For instance, Walter Henrichsen describes an exhibit at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago that featured a checkerboard with 1 grain of wheat on the first square, 2 on the second, 4 on the third, then 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, and so on. Somewhere down the board, there was so much grain of wheat that it was spilling over into the other squares. Above the exhibit was a question: “At this rate of doubling each square, how much grain would you have on the checkerboard by the time you reached the sixty-fourth square?” To find the answer to the question you simply pushed a button on the console and the answer flashed on a screen above the board, “Enough to cover the entire subcontinent of India, fifty feet deep.”¹¹⁸ Upon pondering the universal law of sowing of reaping, one can see that the Creator of the universe built this fundamental feature into the environmental system. While growing up on a farm, Larry Kreider discovered multiplication as a fact of nature. He said, “As a farm boy, I once counted the kernels on a healthy stalk of corn and found there were 1,200 kernels in the first generation.” He went on to explain, “If each of those kernels were planted, by the next generation there would be 1,440,000 kernels of corn.” In the same way, healthy cells multiply and grow the body. A living cell is in a constant state of reproduction.¹¹⁹ If one mentors (disciples) an apprentice to birth

¹¹⁸ Walter A. Henrichsen, *Disciples are Made-Not Born: Making Disciples out of Christians* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 143.

¹¹⁹ Larry Kreider, *Authentic Spiritual Mentoring*, 23.

another group, the group will multiply. Yet small group leaders have great difficulty wrapping their minds around the principle of multiplication. The key to multiplication is the intentional training of an apprentice to birth another group. Unfortunately multiplication only happens occasionally. But in reality, reproduction should be the normal process of the small group system. When the potential of the apprentice is unleashed, so is the power of multiplication. What would happen if each group leader would intentionally birth one healthy multiplying small group per calendar year for ten years? After the first year 1 would become 2. At the end of the second year, 2 would become 4. After the third year, 4 would become 8. Then 8 would become 16 and 16 becomes 32. The 32 would become 64 groups after six years of multiplication. However, the 64 would become 128 in year seven and the 128 would become 256 in year eight. The 256 would become 512 groups in year nine. Remarkably, the 512 groups would become 1,024 groups in year ten. Thus, it is possible to multiply 1,000 small groups within a ten year period of time.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the key is mentoring an apprentice. Developing and deploying new leaders is the secret to multiplication. Leaders must equip and empower the ordinary member to make and multiply disciples of Jesus Christ. Then again, is the principle of multiplication really biblical?

A Theology of Multiplication

The theme of multiplication was first introduced to the disciples the night before Jesus was crucified. He clearly told them not to be troubled by His impending death because He was going to the Father's house (Jn. 14:1-3). He further explained "another Helper" would come in His place called "the Spirit of truth" who would abide with them forever (vv. 16-17). He lovingly explained that He would not leave them as "orphans" even though they would not see Him for

¹²⁰ See Dave Earley, *Eight Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 20.

quite some time. However, He did promise they would be together again in the near future (vv. 18-19). In the meantime, He explained the unique work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. He claimed that the Spirit would help them do two things (v. 12). First of all, they would “do” what Jesus did, in other words, “make disciples.” That is what Jesus did during His earthly ministry. Second, He explained they would “do” even “greater works” than He did because He was going to the Father (v. 12). The prediction of greater works would be the incredible multiplication of the early church. On the other hand, how explosive was the growth of the early church?

The Early Church

In between the Resurrection and the Day of Pentecost, Jesus told the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they were *enduo* (endued) with power on high (Luke 24:49). He explained that John merely baptized them with water, but they would experience a baptism by the Holy Spirit in the near future. He further explained that Spirit baptism would involve incredible power to witness in Jerusalem, Judea, and literally to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:5-8). This forthcoming prophecy was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit gave birth to the New Testament church. After the powerful sermon of Peter, approximately 3,000 people were saved and baptized. The text clearly says, “there were added in that same day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). However, the obvious question becomes, “Who were they added to?” The 3,000 were obviously *prostithemi* (added) to the 120 disciples who were in the upper room (Acts 1:15). The text further suggests that new believers were being “added to the church” on a daily basis (Acts 2:47). The explosive growth continued as the disciples taught and preach the resurrection of Jesus. Many became believers and numerically some 5,000 “men” (distinct from women) accepted Jesus as their Messiah (Acts 4:4). Even after the deadly discipline of Ananias and Sapphira more believers were to “added to the Lord.” The word *mallon* (more or

increasingly) means to a greater degree. The text clearly points out that “multitudes of both men and women” were getting saved even to a greater degree than before the punishment of this dishonest couple (Acts 5:14).

Up to chapter 5, Luke describes the growth of the early church by using “addition.” However, by the time one gets to the sixth chapter, the growth of the early church went from addition to “multiplication.” In fact, disciples were multiplying so quickly the Apostles could not keep up with the widow ministry (Acts 6:1). In order to free up the Apostles, they chose seven godly men to specifically oversee the widows. This strategic move caused the Word of God to rapidly spread and the total number of disciples “multiplied greatly in Jerusalem” and even a large number of priests were converted to the faith (Acts 6:7). In other words, the gospel message began to go viral and the number of conversions could only be described as multiplication. Even the strategy of persecution backfired on the enemies of Christ. Instead of intimidating the church, the persecution seemed to ignite the church. After the martyrdom of Stephen, Philip was flushed out of Jerusalem to Samaria. When Philip preached in Samaria, “multitudes” of people were saved (Acts 8:5-6, 12). Furthermore, the growth in the churches of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was described as “multiplied” (Acts 9:31) and the entire cities of Lydda and Sharon “turned to the Lord” (Acts 9:35). The Jesus movement continued to thrive and multiply in spite of persecution. In fact, the persecution even pushed the preaching of the gospel to Cyprus, Cyrene, and Antioch. It was there that “a great number” of Hellenists (Greeks) were converted (Acts 11:21) and multitudes were saved after the visit of Barnabas (Acts 11:24). Even when Herod was struck down and eaten by worms, the Bible says, “the Word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:22-24). The rapid spread of the gospel also resulted in churches being planted throughout the regions. In fact, on Paul’s second missionary journey the text says that

“churches” (plural) were strengthened but also *perisseuo* (increased) “in number daily” (Acts 16:5). Everyday a large number of churches were being planted. They went throughout all the Mediterranean world making disciples who in turn made disciples until “all they that dwelt in Asia heard” the gospel (Acts 19:10, 26; 24:5).¹²¹ Even their enemies confessed the disciples “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Nonetheless, the Word of God grew and *ischuo* (mightily prevailed) throughout the known world (Acts 19:20). The missionary movement of the early church multiplied in spite of persecution, prejudice, and death. The movement crossed over national borders, ethnic barriers, and religious traditions. Coleman says, “Probably the Christian community within three decades had multiplied four hundred fold, which represents an annual increase of 22 percent for more than a generation, and the rate of growth continued remarkably high for three hundred years.” He went on to say, “By the beginning of the fourth century, when Constantine was converted to Christianity, the number of disciples may have reached ten or twelve million or roughly a tenth of the total population of the Roman Empire.”¹²² Nevertheless, multiplication was the norm for the early church. On the other hand, what is the state of multiplication in the contemporary church?

The Contemporary Church

The element of multiplication is virtually non-existent in the modern day church except for a few growing mega-churches. Perhaps outdated methods and lack of missional purpose defines the current condition. For instance, Russ Rankin of the Southern Baptist Convention reported an increase in the number of baptisms in 2011 but a decline in total membership. Rankin claims, “Southern Baptist churches baptized 333,341 in 2011, a 0.71 percent increase

¹²¹ Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 29.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 30.

from the 331,008 reported in the SBC Annual last year. Total membership in 2011, reported 15,978,112 represents a 0.98 percent drop from 16,136,044 reported the previous year and is the fifth straight year of decline.”¹²³ Lifeway president and CEO, Thom Rainer optimistically said, “An increase in baptisms is something to be celebrated. God’s Word is being proclaimed and God’s Spirit is continuing to move in the hearts of people, drawing them to repentance. This is something that should excite us as Christians who care about the Great Commission.”¹²⁴ On the other hand, the Southern Baptist Convention only increased by 37 churches this past year. Rainer noted “this is one of the smallest increases in the last 40 years.”¹²⁵ For comparison sake, in 2010 the number of Southern Baptist churches grew from 45,727 from 45,010 – an increase of 1.59 percent or 717 churches.¹²⁶ The decrease in total number of churches was huge. The overall condition of the contemporary church is stagnant and sluggish. Normally the expression “multiplication” is used to describe the early church and not the contemporary church.

On the other side of the coin there is a missional movement within some Evangelical Churches. For instance, Rainer and Stetzer of Lifeway recently introduced the Transformational Church concept in 2010.¹²⁷ The model places a heavy emphasis in training ordinary members to lead and minister. They contend that the New Testament pattern is for all believers to discover their spiritual gifts and serve the Body of Christ. In chapter 8 of their research, they share five

¹²³ Russ Rankin, “SBC Baptisms and Churches Increased in 2011, Membership Declined” <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/news-sbc-baptisms-churches-increased-in-2011-membership-declined> (accessed July 25, 2012).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Russ Rankin, “Southern Baptists Decline in Baptisms, Membership, Attendance” <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Southern-baptists-decline-in-baptisms-membership-attendance> (accessed July 25, 2012).

¹²⁷ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church* (Nashville, TN. B&H Publishing Group, 2010).

elements of the small group environment. The third element they share is a “multiplication mindset.” Stetzer says, “Groups must understand from day one that their purpose is to reproduce.”¹²⁸ The small group “multiplication mindset” involves five principles.

- We diminish the distinction between clergy and laity and encourage everyone to minister.
- Church members are expected to serve in a ministry at our church.
- We celebrate and highlight volunteers who serve.
- Our church helps people understand their spiritual gifts.
- Serving is considered normal behavior at our church.¹²⁹

Stetzer and Rainer’s transformational movement is big on small group multiplication. Stetzer says, “Multiplication can happen in the church through the leadership of a few members of the professional clergy. But that multiplication is dwarfed in comparison to a Transformational Church that has unleashed its members to lead and serve in the ministry of transforming a community.”¹³⁰ Stetzer continues his argument for lay-driven multiplying small groups through the rest of the chapter. The principle of multiplication is built into the DNA of the small group model. Each small group leader is required to train and develop a small group apprentice to birth another small group. Ordinary members are developed and deployed as small group leaders. God takes “ordinary men” and uses them in an “extraordinary way.” For instance, before Peter and John became disciples, they were uneducated commercial fisherman. However, during the multiplying movement of the early church, they were used in a mighty way. These Spirit-filled men taught the people and preached the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:1-2, 10). Afterward they were persecuted and arrested; however, 5,000 men accepted Jesus as their Messiah (vv. 3-4). After interrogating the dynamic duo, “The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see they were ordinary men who had no special

¹²⁸ Ibid., 193.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 194.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

training. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NLT). Peter and John did not have a seminary education. However, they “had been with Jesus” approximately three years, and He trained these “ordinary-uneducated” men in how to make disciples. The contemporary church must renounce its clergy dependence and rediscover a theology of lay leadership. Ordinary church members must be trained and released to make and multiply disciples through the small group ministry. Over the centuries, the principle of multiplication was somehow lost in denominational churches; nevertheless, the principle has been rediscovered through the small group model. Therefore, every small group leader must embrace the principle of mentoring an apprentice in order to unleash the principle of multiplication. In reality, the two principles cannot stand alone, but they are intricately dependent on each other. On the other hand, what are the enemies of small group multiplication?

Four Enemies of Multiplication

Neglect

The first enemy of multiplication is neglect. Leaders simply get so busy and involved in group life that they just neglect developing an apprentice. Obviously, it is easy to get focused on developing Bible studies, meeting the needs of group members and organizing outreach events. However, leaders must first and foremost make mentoring an apprentice their number one priority. They must intentionally choose an apprentice and intentionally do ministry together. They should develop the Bible study together, meet the needs of group members together and organize outreach events together. The key word is *together*. Even though the leader’s responsibilities are the same, someone else is just along on the journey. God never intended for the small group leader to do life alone. A good leader will always have followers and therefore will not be negligent in his mentoring role. For instance, John MacArthur says, “A true leader

inspires followers. Someone who has no followers can hardly be called a leader.”¹³¹ In reality, a spiritual leader will motivate and mobilize people toward God’s agenda for their lives. However, the number one agenda for the small group leader is to move his apprentice toward birthing another group. In fact, training an apprentice cannot be put on the back burner of group life. Since “everything rises or falls on leadership” mentors must mobilize their apprentice toward multiplication.¹³² In other words, leaders must take the lead. Leaders do the hard stuff, and the most difficult thing to do is to train an apprentice to multiply another group. But again that is what leaders do. Leaders use their influence in the life of the apprentice to advance the kingdom of God.¹³³ Consequently, spiritual leadership is using one’s God-given influence to motivate others to reach their full potential for Jesus Christ and to move them toward God’s agenda for their lives. Therefore, there must be movement toward making and multiplying disciples and that initial movement begins with mentoring an apprentice. Nevertheless the godly small group leader will confront the enemy of negligence and will move his apprentice toward birthing and multiplying a group. On the other hand, the lack of vision is also an enemy to multiplication.

Lack of Vision

The second enemy of multiplication is the lack of vision. An ancient Hebrew proverb says, “Without a vision the people perish” (Prov. 29:18). One pastor rephrased this proverb as, “Without a vision, the people will go to another parish.”¹³⁴ Perhaps both versions are equally

¹³¹ John MacArthur, *The Book on Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2004), 6.

¹³² James H. Wigton, *Lee Roberson, Always About His Father’s Business* (Xulon Press, Salem Communications, 2010), 24.

¹³³ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago, ILL: Moody Press, 1980), 31. Sanders insists that, “Leadership is influence, the ability of one person to influence others.”

¹³⁴ Source unknown. The author has heard this quote several times from various preachers.

true. Nevertheless, a good small group leader will transfer his vision of multiplication into the heart of his apprentice. But just how important is vision for the small group leader? John Maxwell says, “Vision is everything for a leader. It is utterly indispensable. Why? Because vision leads the leader. It paints the target and fuels the fire within.”¹³⁵ Comiskey claims that David Yonggi Cho is a man of passion and vision. Cho built the largest church in the history of the world. In 1997 when Comiskey visited Cho’s church, over 150,000 people attended the Sunday morning celebration service with another 100,000 attending 10 satellite churches around Seoul. They also had 25,000 small groups with a leader and a group apprentice. Cho had a passion and vision of training small group leaders and releasing them to do ministry throughout Korea. Comiskey claims, “Cho handed his ministry to laypeople, and the world has stood in awe ever since.”¹³⁶ Cho is a visionary leader who trained visionary small group leaders. Even Cho said, “When I was in the first stage of my pioneering work, God told me to dream. As I knelt to pray, the Spirit told me to dream: ‘dream the largest church in Korea.’ I was in a dilapidated tent church, but God said, ‘Dream’ From then on I learned to live in a visionary world.”¹³⁷

God removed the self-imposed limitations from the mind of Cho and his ministry began to multiply exponentially. Unfortunately, leaders are prone to limit God. But why do they limit God? Because God can only be as big as their faith will let Him become. In reality, the size of their faith is the size of their God. Therefore, leaders need a God-sized faith in order to have a God-sized vision. For instance, Matthew testifies that Jesus “did not do many mighty works” in

¹³⁵ John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson 1999), 150.

¹³⁶ Joel Comiskey, *Reap the Harvest, How a Small-Group System Can Grow Your Church* (Houston, Texas, TOUCH publications, 1999), 39-40.

¹³⁷ David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 164-165.

Nazareth because of “their unbelief” (Matt. 13:58).¹³⁸ While God is sovereign and can do anything He wants, His ministry was nonetheless limited in His home town because of their unbelief. God is undoubtedly moved by the size of a person’s faith, and the size of this faith will always determine the size of one’s vision. But does God really measure the size of a person’s faith? Four times Jesus gently rebuked the disciples because of their (*oligopistos*) “little faith” (Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). The size of their faith was described as being “little.” Even the Apostles prayed, Lord “increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). God is certainly always pleased with a visionary faith. Therefore, the small group leader must dream and envision multiplying his group for the glory of God. The visionary small group leader must constantly purge his heart of doubt, limitations, and faithlessness. Through the eye of faith, the leader must wrap his mind around the principle of multiplication. Then again, having a superstar mentality is an enemy to small group multiplication.

Superstar Mentality

Unfortunately some believe a small group leader must be a “highly trained superstar.”¹³⁹ This misconception is undoubtedly an enemy of small group multiplication. One must keep in mind that the sermon-based small group model is built around group discussion and not a seminary style type lecture. On the contrary, the goal is group participation with deep application that leads to transformation which will ultimately result in group multiplication. Raising the bar too high is counterproductive and discourages the development of future leaders.¹⁴⁰ Far too often people think small group leaders should be trained theologians who can grammatically exegete

¹³⁸ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publications, 1984), 335. Carson identifies “His own country” as Nazareth (Matt. 13:54).

¹³⁹ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 181.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

the Scriptures. This, however, is obviously a huge myth. However, if it continues to be communicated to potential small group leaders that “non-theologians need not apply,” they will undoubtedly feel unqualified and will be hesitant to step into a leadership role.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the “holy man myth” will also cripple small group multiplication.¹⁴²

The pre-reformation idea that the “professional clergy” (superstars) are the only ones fit to minister destroys the doctrine of the priesthood of every believer and is fatal to group multiplication. Nevertheless, the unhealthy superstar mentality is alive and well in the contemporary church. The American obsession with “Christian celebrities” is equal to rock star divas and Hollywood idols. The sickening superstar/celebrity mentality is an enemy of small group multiplication. Nevertheless, God wants to use common, ordinary, everyday Christians to make and multiply disciples of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, most Christians want to participate too. Comiskey sagaciously says, “The North American postmodern culture emphasizes equal access and participation. We live in an age of karaoke. Everyone wants to participate.”¹⁴³ The younger contemporary Christians are concerned about advancing “the common good” of humanity. In fact, they are inclined to balance the Great Commission with the Great Commandment. They believe “the beauty of the Gospel is found in both proclamation and demonstration.”¹⁴⁴ Although the church must shun the superstar mentality, it must nonetheless embrace the age of participation and train as many church members as possible to be involved in the disciple-making mission of Jesus. The mission belongs to every believer, and leaders must get every believer involved in the redemptive mission of Jesus. Nevertheless, the

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 49.

¹⁴³ Joel Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies*, 112.

¹⁴⁴ Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2010), 94.

superstar/celebrity mentality is an enemy to group multiplication. Then again, poor communications can be an enemy to small group multiplication.

Poor Communications

Poor communications and unclear terminology can be an enemy of small group multiplication. For instance, from the very beginning of the small group process, the leader must cast a vision of multiplication. In order for the leader to successfully communicate the vision, he must first understand the mission. Incidentally, good leaders understand the mission, but great leaders can communicate the mission. In fact, Rick Warren argues, “The #1 task of leadership is to continually clarify and communicate the purpose of the organization.”¹⁴⁵ The wise small group leader will strategically confront the group with the Great Commission. Once the group understands the Great Commission, the leader must mobilize the group toward obeying the mission. If the group leader is consumed with a passion for mission, the group will also become consumed with a passion for mission. Nevertheless, the group leader must lead his group toward the redemptive mission of Jesus. By the way, Jesus was all about mission. For instance, Jesus maintained a laser missional focus even while He suffered on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). Despite the excruciating pain of the crucifixion, Jesus modeled the Great Commission. Remarkably the writer of Hebrews explains that Jesus despised the shame and humiliation of the cross; however, He did nonetheless “joyfully endure the cross” (Heb. 12:2). The joy was a byproduct of completing the mission of the Father.¹⁴⁶ For thirty-three years, Jesus patiently ran the race set before Him. The completion of His mission required the propitiation for sin and His physical

¹⁴⁵ Rick Warren, *How to Build a Purpose Driven Church* (Saddleback Seminar Workbook, 1995), 10.

¹⁴⁶ Leon Morris, “Hebrews” in vol. 12 of *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Corporation, 1981), 134. Morris claims the preposition *anti* means “for the sake of.” In other words, “Jesus went to the cross because of the joy it would bring. He looked right through the Cross to the coming joy, the joy of bringing salvation to those he loves.” Jesus was undoubtedly focused on the redemptive mission of the Father.

resurrection on the third day. Nevertheless, when Jesus hung between the two thieves one encouraged Him to “save Yourself and us” (Luke 23:39). He was only interested in physical deliverance. However, the other thief said, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (v. 42). He wanted spiritual deliverance because Jesus said to him, “today you will be with Me in Paradise” (v. 43). Jesus, “the quintessential missionary” was always on mission. In fact, this one story summarizes and illustrates the entire ministry of Jesus. He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). As a small group leader-missionary, Jesus modeled the Great Commission before He verbally communicated the Great Commission to the disciples. Jesus understood the mission, He modeled the mission, and then He verbally communicated the mission. Jesus was undoubtedly the greatest communicator of all time. Likewise the small group leader must understand the mission, then He must model the mission and then finally He must communicate the mission to the small group members. To do otherwise is fatal to the process of multiplication; nevertheless, poor communication is an enemy to multiplication.

Second, unclear terminology is an enemy of small group multiplication. For instance, the multiplying group leader should never use expressions like “splitting the group.” The word *splitting* is not a good word in Christian circles. For the traditionalists, the word splitting triggers terrible memories of church splits. One must keep in mind that the goal is to communicate joyful multiplication not painful deterioration. Furthermore, the leader should not use the phrase “divide the group.” The word *division* is definitely not a good expression to communicate group multiplication. Furthermore, some misguided leaders use the phrase “breaking” the group. The use of negative terminology like splitting, dividing, and breaking should be not used in the vocabulary of the small group leader.¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, the reproducing small group leader will use expressions like “birthing” a new group to convey group multiplication. Some use the

¹⁴⁷ Dave Earley, *Eight Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 72.

expression “launching” a new group as a means to express group multiplication. Nevertheless the prudent small group leader will use clear terminology to communicate the multiplication process. Common sense indicates that poor communication is an enemy to small group multiplication. On the other hand, should the leader and the group celebrate multiplication? Celebrating multiplication is a great way to communicate that leadership will reward what they want repeated.

Celebrate Multiplication

The theme of celebration is woven throughout Scripture. For instance, there was a huge celebration when Nehemiah rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem. In fact, the text says there was a season of joyfulness, singing, and thanksgiving (Neh. 12:27). Rebuilding the wall in “52 days” was a huge accomplishment and therefore deserved great celebration (Neh. 6:15-19).¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, when the temple was finished, the children of Israel celebrated the dedication of the house of God with great joy (Ezra 6:15-16). Clearly, the citizens of ancient Israel were people of celebration and festivities. Likewise, believers should celebrate group multiplication. In fact, multiplication should be celebrated during the public worship service. Earley wisely suggests, “Always reward what you want repeated.”¹⁴⁹ The celebration should be huge. Most churches have a group multiplication celebration service in January and September. For instance, the Senior Pastor can ask the multiplying group to stand. As the group remains standing, the Pastor should invite the multiplying group leader to the platform. The Pastor should congratulate the group and the leader. He should give a short speech on the importance of making disciples and

¹⁴⁸ Gene A. Getz, “Nehemiah” in vol. 2 of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: ChariotVictor Publishings, 1985), 686.

¹⁴⁹ Dave Earley, EVAN 997 Intensive *Church and Culture* (May 14-18, 2012 Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, class lecture).

how multiplying groups is the way to develop leaders in the church. He should give the group leader a nice plaque, a gift card to Outback Steakhouse, and publicly share his appreciation. Then he should invite the apprentice to the platform in order to pray for the apprentice that he too will multiply his group. Experience proves that the Senior Pastor should be in charge of the celebration service and not the Small Group Pastor. If the Small Group Pastor leads this service, the people will not get the message of multiplication. However, people normally get what is important to the Senior Pastor (especially if he has had a long tenure at the church). When combining the visible message of multiplication with the Senior Pastor's endorsement, the members will get the message. If the church is going to be a church of small groups then the church must hear the vision from the lips of the Senior Pastor. He must reward and promote small group multiplication. Nevertheless, celebrating group multiplication is a wonderful way to communicate the vision of the church and way to reward what should be repeated.

The principle of small group multiplication is undoubtedly a fascinating truth. For the small group leader to take the hand of an apprentice and to train him to birth another small group is an awesome concept. In fact, the multiplication model is intentional, strategic, and biblical. The missional plan includes the everyday church member to be trained in the small group setting to "do" the work of ministry. Subsequently, the new group leader selects a small group apprentice in order to train him to birth another group. The circular motion of multiplication follows the trail of the Great Commission. Leaders are being constantly trained, disciples are being constantly made and new groups are being constantly formed. Nevertheless, the principle of multiplication will always revolve around the principle of mentoring an apprentice. In fact, the union between the two principles is inseparable. Therefore leaders must make, mentor and

multiply small groups for the glory of God.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ See Appendix E research instrument, 125.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRINCIPLE OF COMMUNITY

Fortunately, the principle of biblical community is built into the small group system. In reality, God intended for believers to live together in community. For instance, Julie Gorman wisely says, “Life-shaping occurs when we come to know and allow ourselves to be known. Chat rooms, texting, and even emails permit us to communicate in selective anonymity today. You can’t fax a handshake, mail a hug, or have a family reunion by email.”¹⁵¹ While some relationships can survive at a distance, real life-shaping occurs up close and personal. Then again, many people live in isolation and suffer from the disease of loneliness. In fact, George Gallup said, “Americans are among the loneliest people in the world.”¹⁵² Regrettably the North American culture is a culture of individualism, and loneliness is a way of life for many people. Henri Nouwen also said, “Loneliness is one of the most universal sources of human suffering today...Children, adolescents, adults and old people are in growing degree exposed to the contagious disease of loneliness.”¹⁵³ How can people be lonely when they are constantly around people? People are seen at work, school and even at church, but very few people really know who they are. The truth of the matter is most people are doing life alone even though they live in a crowded existence. One may be acquainted with many people but really know a few. People live in a vast sea of humanity, but they are nonetheless lonely and crave meaningful

¹⁵¹ Julie Gorman made these comments in the endorsement section of a book by Joel Comiskey, *The Relational Disciple* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2010).

¹⁵² George Gallup Jr. and Jim Castelli, *The People’s Religion* (New York, NY: MacMillian Publishing Company, 1989), 278.

¹⁵³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York, NY: Image, 1975).

relationships.¹⁵⁴ The mental health professional refers to this dilemma as “crowded loneliness.”¹⁵⁵ This unhealthy existence is detrimental to the believer’s spiritual life. On the other hand, how does God intend the believer to do life? Perhaps one should go back to the book of Genesis.

One of the first things learned about God is that He exists in community. For example, when God created man He spoke of Himself by using plural terminology. God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). The triune community of God created man in His own image with the need for community. Randy Frazee sagaciously says, “We were created with a connection requirement and if this requirement is not satisfied, we will eventually die.”¹⁵⁶ Man was undoubtedly created with a need for community. For instance, after observing the first six days of creation, God claimed “it was good” (Gen1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). But when God saw the loneliness of Adam, He said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Gen. 2:18). If an all-knowing God knew that Adam could not handle isolation, why did He wait to create Eve? Perhaps He was underscoring man’s need for community. Frazee continues, “If God had created Eve on the sixth day, along with Adam, we might have taken for granted the absolute importance of companionship and conversation. I think God delayed the creation of Eve to drive the point home that humans have not been created to be alone.”¹⁵⁷ In the same way human beings need oxygen to live, man also needs community to survive.

¹⁵⁴ Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community, 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* (New York, NY: Mulnomah Books, 2004), 24.

¹⁵⁵ Randy Frazee, *Making Room for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 33.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

On the other hand, the most striking reality about Adam's loneliness was the fact that it occurred before the fall of man. But how could Adam be lonely before the fall? Nothing separated Adam from God. There was no sin, disobedience, or rebellion. In fact, Adam enjoyed perfect intimacy with God in a flawless environment. Yet, the text says that Adam was alone and this loneliness was "not good." Historically, Christian leaders have advised church members not to expect too much from human relationships because inside every man is a God-shaped vacuum that no man can fill. Ironically, John Ortberg argues that "According to the writer of Genesis, God creates inside this man a kind of 'human-shaped-void' that God Himself will not fill."¹⁵⁸ Even though Adam was living in a sinless environment, he was in need of human relationship. Therefore, God specifically created Eve for Adam in order to provide human companionship, fellowship, and relationship. God undoubtedly knew that isolation would be toxic for Adam.

The need for deeper relationships and godly community is rooted within the heart of the believer. While some misguided leaders promote individualism, the members of the body of Christ are dependent on each other. For instance, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the renowned German theologian was eventually martyred by the Gestapo near the end of World War II. Prior to his death, he was arrested for his faith. After several days in solitary confinement, Bonhoeffer was put back into the general population with the other prisoners. He joyfully said, "It is grace, nothing but grace that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren."¹⁵⁹ Throughout the book, he reflects on the sustaining power of the underground community that existed behind the prison walls. While the conditions were deplorable, Bonhoeffer and the tight-knit group of believers ministered to each other during their imprisonment. Nevertheless,

¹⁵⁸ John Ortberg, *Everybody is Normal Till You Get to Know Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 31-32.

¹⁵⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York, NY: Harper Row, 1954), 20.

believers have ministered to one another within the Christian community since the birth of the New Testament Church. Then again, how do believers experience community in the church?

The Church

Theologically speaking, the church began on the day of Pentecost and will continue until the Rapture. In fact, the time between Pentecost and the Rapture is commonly known as the church age.¹⁶⁰ While the body of Christ consists of all believers throughout the church age (universal church), the local church is the visible expression of the body in various locations throughout the world. Nevertheless, every believer is a part of the universal church and therefore should be connected to a local church. For example, every believer should be united to a local church in order to carry out the Great Commission. This mission involves making disciples, baptizing all believers, and teaching them to obey all the commands of Jesus (Matt 28:19-20). Furthermore, since baptism is a local church ordinance and “a badge of discipleship,” every believer should be connected to a local church.¹⁶¹ In essence, the local church is the place to fulfill God’s mission with other Christians. In other words, the church is a community of faith where believers do life together, because God never intended for believers to do life alone. As a part of the body, every believer has something to contribute (1 Cor. 12:4-26). Gifted believers minister to gifted believers in order to benefit the body of Christ.¹⁶² Therefore, the local church is a tight-knit group of believers united together for worship, witness, and works of ministry while holding each other accountable in everyday life. On the hand, how does the Bible describe community in the early church?

¹⁶⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Colorado Springs, CO: ChariotVictor Publishing, 1986), 461-462.

¹⁶¹ Elmer L. Towns, *Concise Bible Doctrines* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2006), 328.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 329.

They Continued Together

On the day of Pentecost, approximately 3,000 people were saved and baptized (Acts 2:41). In fact, Luke actually shares a thesis statement concerning the condition of the early church in Jerusalem. He claims, “And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in breaking bread, and in prayers” (v. 42). The expression *proskartereo* (continued steadfastly) describes the commitment these new believers had to doctrine and to this new *koinonia* (fellowship) or community of believers. Furthermore, Luke says “all” the believers “were together,” and enjoyed commonality (v. 44). The expressions *togetherness* and *commonality* describe the interdependency of the early church. In addition, the local church has always been identified as a gathering body. The element of doing life “together” is an expression that defined the early church. They studied the Apostles’ doctrine together, broke bread together, and prayed together. The bond of fellowship and togetherness is a beautiful expression of the local church. Luke even claims they “sold their possessions” in order to meet the needs of others in the group (v. 45). In reality, meeting the needs of others is community life at its best.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, the words “continued” and “together” describe the cohesiveness of the early church community (vv. 42-44). Nevertheless, their togetherness went to the next level of intimacy. In fact, they experienced relational and missional unity.

They Continued in Unity

Luke further describes their community as “continuing daily with one accord” in the temple (v. 46). The believers in the early church were a people of oneness and unity. They enjoyed a level of relational intimacy around the person of Jesus Christ very few people ever experience. Even though they met at the temple during the infancy of the church, they were

¹⁶³ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1986), 62-63.

quickly driven into homes and met in smaller settings (Acts 4:1-3). Stetzer insists, “Smaller groups were the lifeblood of the early church.”¹⁶⁴ Luke even suggests they broke bread from house to house (v. 46). Nevertheless, they were an *agalliasis* (glad), extremely joyful people who followed God and enjoyed the gift of community with all believers (v. 46). Furthermore, they were unified around the mission of Jesus. The text says, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (v. 47). In other words, people were accepting Jesus as the Messiah on a daily basis. Having witnessed the gruesome death and the miraculous resurrection of Jesus, these believers were transformed into zealous missionaries. They began preaching in Jerusalem, reaching out to the regions of Judea, extending into Samaria, and eventually to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). They were on mission together. Bonhoeffer astutely says, “The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and His work become the one and only thing that is vital between us.”¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the community of the early church was one of unity and togetherness around the Person and cause of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this type of unity is also found in the Trinity.

The Trinity

Although God co-exists within the community of the Trinity, He nonetheless desires for every believer to experience authentic community in the local church. For instance, in John 17, Jesus prayed that all believers would experience the same oneness He experienced with the Father. Before Jesus invaded planet earth via the virgin birth, He lived in intimate community with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The mysterious oneness between the Trinity is

¹⁶⁴ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church*, 175.

¹⁶⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 26.

unfathomable. Nevertheless, Jesus prayed for believers to experience the same unity and the same community that the Trinity enjoys. In fact, Jesus prayed, “Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as *We are*” (Jn. 17:11). Can division exist within the Trinity? Absolutely not, the Godhead exists in perfect harmony and oneness. Likewise, the local expression of the body of Christ should experience the same unity. On the other hand, what is the purpose of this Trinitarian type of unity?

Why would Jesus pray for such incredible unity in the body? Was it for fellowship purpose alone? The redemptive mission of Jesus is undoubtedly the theme of the New Testament. In fact, Jesus never strayed from mission. In looking carefully at the text, one can see that Jesus not only prays for the original twelve disciples but also for the future disciples who will believe on Him because of the multiplying ministry of the twelve (v. 20). Nevertheless, He prays, “that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us.” Yet the very reason of this oneness is “that the world may believe that You sent Me” (v. 21). The underlying purpose of community oneness is world mission and world evangelism. In the same way the Trinity is united for world mission, the local community of believers should be united for world evangelism. Therefore, the local church should be a missionary community focused on bringing the message of the gospel to the world. The Trinitarian theme was so important to Jesus that He repeated it again in His prayer. Jesus continued to pray, “that they may be one just as *We are* one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one” (vv. 22-23). This *teleioo* (complete) Trinitarian oneness in the body of Christ is missional. Jesus continued to pray, “that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (v. 23). In essence, the pipeline of Trinity unity must flow through the church to the world in order that the world may know that Jesus loves them. Lost people will

actually know that God loves them when they see the body unified in mission. Lost people obviously matter to God and therefore should matter to the church.¹⁶⁶ The Father *apostello* (sent) Jesus as a Missionary to the world, but after the death of Jesus the Father *apostello* (sent) the church as a missionary to the world (v. 18). Obviously Jesus and the church have the same mission. In the same way the Trinity is united together to reach the world, Jesus prayed for the church to be united together to reach the world.¹⁶⁷ Consequently, church unity is all about mission. Nevertheless, the key to unity in the church involves healthy relationships.

Relationships

Fortunately, most believers can discover authentic community in their local church. Yet other believers find it difficult to connect with other people. For instance, how can the believer discover community in a larger church by merely attending the Sunday morning celebration? Perhaps the small group strategy can be a solution to the dilemma. In fact, the small group environment is a wonderful place for people to connect with Jesus, the church, and each other. Since most people normally gravitate to homogenous groups in the church, the small group setting is a wonderful atmosphere for believers to discover community and to do life together. Tight-knit relationships are built around a common faith in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the small group setting is a wonderful place for outreach and evangelism. In reality, the small group setting is a great place to develop relationships with believers and unbelievers alike. Nevertheless, the faithful small group leader must constantly remind group members to build authentic relationships with unbelievers.

¹⁶⁶ Bill Hybels and the Willow Creek Church made the following statement legendary, “lost people matter to God.” See <http://www.willowcreek.org/beliefs>.

¹⁶⁷ The purpose of community unity is obviously global evangelism.

Relationships with Unbelievers

Perhaps Oscar Thompson was right. Thompson a strong advocate of lifestyle/friendship evangelisms claims, “The most important word in the English language, apart from proper nouns, is relationship.”¹⁶⁸ He argues that the mature Christian should establish strong relationships with believers and unbelievers. The small group meeting is great place to develop deep relationships with the saved as well as the unsaved. For instance, the small group setting can become a safe zone for seekers to investigate the claims of Christ. By the way, belonging seems to always precede believing. Most unbelievers will establish a relationship with a believer in the group before they establish a relationship with Christ. However, the group member must patiently earn the trust of the unbeliever. When the unbeliever is ready to be converted, the believer can lead the unsaved person to Christ. Then again, the cautious witness must not twist the arm or coerce the unbeliever. The overzealous Christian must back off and let the small group meeting become a safe haven for the unsaved to explore the claims of Christ without being pushed into a premature decision. Nevertheless, Christians must learn how to develop strong relationships and friendships with non-Christians. But first, Christians must overcome their separatist mentality.

Unfortunately, the “separatist Christian” has preached the gospel to the unbeliever from a distance. In essence, the “soul-winner” has thrown the seed of the gospel across man-made boundaries for fear of worldly contamination. For the separatist, stepping over into “their world” is definitely not an option. Becoming personally involved in their lives would be considered extremely sinful. Thus, the separatist continues to embrace a form of monastic living and is isolated from secular society. Regrettably, most Christians do not even have unsaved friends. Gabe Lyons sarcastically said, “When I was growing up, separation could have been our family

¹⁶⁸ W. Oscar Thompson, *Concentric Circles of Concern* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1981), 13.

motto.”¹⁶⁹ Lyons went on to bemoan the fact there are Christian schools, Christian Little League, Christian youth camps, and Christian basketball leagues all in the name of biblical separation.¹⁷⁰

On the other hand, how can an unsaved world be influenced if Christians live in isolation from the world? In fact, the same world the separatist retreats from is the same world Jesus commanded us to infiltrate (Jn. 17:18). Jesus specifically prayed that we would not be taken “out of the world” but He specifically “sent” us into the world (Jn. 17:15-18). Nevertheless, the traditional separatist is still not convinced. Should the believer fully engage the world or flee the world? In Mark 16:15. Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 15:16). In essence, the Captain of salvation cried charge, not retreat. Christians must penetrate not isolate. Even Rainer’s research indicated that eight out of ten Pastors recognize the unchurched are reached along the line of relationships.¹⁷¹ Contrary to the separatist mindset, Christians should engage “every creature” and not just a select few. The small group community must reach out to the unsaved in order to develop authentic relationships. On the other hand, how did Jesus build relationships with unsaved people?

Friend of Sinners

Jesus invited unbelievers into His community. In fact, throughout the New Testament Jesus was condemned by the separatists for being friendly with unbelievers. Even the Pharisees accused Jesus of being “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34). The tax collector was perhaps the most notorious sinner on the face of the earth. Furthermore, MacArthur claimed the tax collector was a “social and moral outcast;” however, Jesus befriended the vilest

¹⁶⁹ Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians*, 38.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 165.

of sinners.¹⁷² The tax collector was so despicable he was always associated with whores, harlots, and sinners (Matt. 21:31-32). In reality, they were extortionists, traitors, and financially corrupt along the lines of the infamous Bernard Madoff.¹⁷³ But Jesus nonetheless reached out to these social rejects. When the Pharisees saw Jesus sit down and enjoy a meal with the tax collectors, they asked His disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus overheard them and responded, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” Jesus clearly reminded them, “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matt. 9:10-13). In other words, Jesus recited His mission statement to the Pharisees. In fact, he used the casual atmosphere of an evening meal to develop a sacred relationship with sinners. On one occasion, Jesus took five loaves and two small fishes and miraculously fed five thousand people. He then preached a sermon on “I am the bread of life. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever.” (John 6:48, 51).

The savvy small group leader will likewise follow the example of Jesus and utilize food as a community builder. A simple dessert can draw unbelieving neighbors into the group discussion. Since humans beings are social creatures, people like to gather around food. Breaking bread together tends to help people let down their “religious guard” and remove relational barriers. Therefore, the mere element of food is a wonderful means to reach out and invite unbelievers to the group meeting. People like to party and God’s people are a people of celebration. In fact, the Bible is a book full of food, festivals and celebrations. The Israelites were undoubtedly a festive group of people. Consequently, the sharp small group leader will

¹⁷² John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 8-15* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987), 262.

¹⁷³ Bernard Madoff is the former non-executive of the NASDAQ stock market who operated a Ponzi scheme that is considered to be the largest financial fraud in U. S. history. In March 2009, Madoff pleaded guilty to 11 felonies involving his Ponzi scheme.

incorporate food, fellowship and festivities into the small group meeting as a means to reach out to unbelievers.¹⁷⁴ But how should believers live together in community?

The Great Commandment

Jesus certainly understands the importance of earthly relationships. For instance, just like any other rabbi, Jesus taught and interpreted the Torah with His disciples. The rabbi's individual interpretation of the Torah was called his yoke. For instance, Jesus said to His disciples, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). While the followers of other rabbis were being crushed by man-made rules and outrageous regulations, the "yoke" of Jesus involved two liberating principles. In reality, Jesus simplified and "crystallized his interpretation of the Torah into a pair of blending principles."¹⁷⁵ Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40). Interestingly, the Lord's first principle to love God with all one's heart, soul and mind is a quote from the fifth book of the Torah (Deut. 6:5), while His second principle of people loving their neighbors as themselves is taken from the third book (Lev. 19:18). Steve Chalke said, "No other teacher before Him had ever fused these two great, but isolated, principles together in this way and then gone on to announce that, together, they formed the foundation of the Scriptures while all the rest was, effectively,

¹⁷⁴ For further reading see Dave Earley, *The Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group*. Chapter 34 is titled "Never Underestimate the Importance of a Good Party," 163-167.

¹⁷⁵ Steve Chalke, *Apprentice, Walking the Way of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 84-85.

commentary.”¹⁷⁶ Jesus was teaching His disciples that if “the entire Law and the Prophets” was boiled down, the core message would be to “Love God and love others the same way you love yourself.” In essence, Jesus reduced the complexity of the Christian life. For instance, the Pentateuch contained 613 separate laws, 248 affirmative laws, one for every part of the human body and 365 negative laws, one for each day of the year. The rabbis and scribes spent countless hours debating the merits, divisions, and rankings of the various laws.¹⁷⁷ But the condensed version of the Christian life centers on a relationship with Jesus and a relationship with others. Jesus identified this text as “the great commandment.” Perhaps this is the reason Jesus placed so great value on the principle of community. Then again, the entire New Testament describes how the believer is to live in community and relate to “one another.”

The One Another’s

Fortunately, the small group community is a tight-knit group of believers who are committed to living the Christian life together. In fact, the small group environment is a wonderful setting to live out the biblical one another commands. On the other hand, what does the expression “one another” mean to community life? Comiskey says the biblical term “one another is a reciprocal pronoun meaning mutual ministry.”¹⁷⁸ For instance, the New Testament commands the believer “to love one another.” The night before Jesus was crucified, He told the disciples that He was physically leaving this world (Jn. 13:1, 3, 33) and because of this sudden departure, they would need to take care of each other. Within this framework, Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 85.

¹⁷⁷ John MacArthur, Jr., *Matthew 16-23 in The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988), 337-338.

¹⁷⁸ Joel Comiskey, *The Relational Disciple*, 46.

one another” (Jn. 13:34). The command to love one another was not new; however, the standard and quality of this love was new. The new measure was to love each other as Christ loved them. Since God is love the Christian community should be a visible expression of the love of God (1 Jn. 4:7-8). Furthermore, Jesus told the twelve that when they demonstrated the love of God, the world would know they were his disciples (Jn. 13:35). In essence, a genuine Christ-follower is known by his authentic love for others. Even Christian Apologist Francis Schaffer insisted that observable love between true Christians is the “final apologetic.”¹⁷⁹ Loving one another in the context of biblical community or the small group setting is perhaps the greatest demonstration of authentic Christianity. As the small group begins to love one another, they begin to serve one another.

In Galatians 5, Paul juxtaposed the “works of the flesh” with the “fruit of the Spirit.” The innate works of the flesh “are” (plural),

Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

Unfortunately the natural man is controlled by selfishness, anger, and hate. Paul vividly compares the relationships of the carnal man with cannibalism. He claims they “bite and devour one another” and actually “consume one another” (v. 15). Metaphorically they chew each other up and spit each other out. This “dog-eat-dog” description is unflattering and sadistic. On the other side of the coin, Paul claims, “The fruit of the Spirit is [singular] love” then he further described the cluster of fruit that is produced from the Spirit-filled life (Gal. 5:22-23). “Love,” however, is the dominate fruit that actually gives birth to the other qualities listed. For instance,

¹⁷⁹ Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1984), 164-165.

in verse 14 of this same chapter, Paul reminded the Galatians that “all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” What is that *heis* (one) singular word? That one word is obviously “love.” When the small group community is controlled by the Spirit, they will “serve one another through love” (v. 13). Even the love chapter reminds the reader that one can speak like an angel, have the gift of prophecy, possess all knowledge and even die as a martyr, but without the gift of love, Paul says, “I am nothing” (1 Cor. 1:1-3). Group guru Carl George provides a chronological list of the one another commands in the New Testament. He claims there are fifty-nine one another commands, and the command to “love one another” is repeated twenty-one times.¹⁸⁰ If love is the overriding principle in people’s lives then they will forgive one another, honor one another, bear one another’s burdens, encourage one another, and pray one for another. In other words, all the other one another commands will spontaneously occur if people love one another in the small group community. Therefore, love must be the prevailing principle in the small group community.

Obviously, life groups are more than a glorified “social day care” in the local church.¹⁸¹ On the other hand, the small group is a tight-knit community of faith rooted in the Trinity, the local church, and the Great Commandment. Furthermore, the small group community is a place where believers do life together. Basically, they connect with God, other believers, and the mission of Jesus. It is also a place to use one’s spiritual gift to benefit the body of Christ. Furthermore, a small group is a place of loving accountability where believers can take off their masks and remove their halo while still being loved and fully accepted by fellow group members. It is also a place where believers are united together in the disciple-making mission of

¹⁸⁰ Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future*, 129-131.

¹⁸¹ Brad House, *Community, Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publications, 2011), 47.

Jesus. Furthermore, the small group community is a place where believers can love one another and live out the one another commands. The group environment is also a safe zone for unbelievers to examine the claims of Christ without fear of coercion or spiritual manipulation. The group setting is a place to study the Word of God, break bread together, and pray for unsaved loved ones. Then again, when should a new believer join a small group? Rainer claims, “New Christians who immediately became active in a small group are five times more likely to remain in the church five years later than those who were active in worship services alone.”¹⁸² Consequently, the small group community is a spiritual greenhouse for Christian growth and spiritual development. Therefore, every church member should be involved in a small group community. Nevertheless, the principle of community is build into the DNA of the small group design. On the other hand, how does one balance cause with community? This is certainly “the struggle” of group life. Perhaps the key is developing a strong coaching system.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Ibid., 156-157.

¹⁸³ See Appendix E research instrument, 126.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PRINCIPLE OF A STRONG COACHING SYSTEM

One of the most enjoyable aspects of group life is authentic community. The blessing of developing close relationships with other believers is a wonderful joy. In reality, everyone needs a place to belong and a place to do life with other believers. Nevertheless, developing community is only one aspect of the small group design. In fact, “the struggle” with the small group model is being able to strike a balance with “cause and community.”¹⁸⁴ The community side of group life seems to come so naturally. However, the cause aspect of group life must be intentionally approached. Therefore, the principle of a strong coaching system is one of the most important factors to sustaining multiplying small groups. In fact, a good coaching system will keep the small group model missional. For instance, it is easy for a group leader to get off mission.

Some leaders are prone to fall for the Mary and Martha syndrome. While Mary was preoccupied with listening to Jesus, Martha was engrossed in serving Jesus (Luke 10:38-42). Although Jesus commended Mary for choosing the “good part,” it was nonetheless only *meris* (part) and distinct from the whole (v. 42). The wholeness of the Christian life involves the discovery of balance. The believer must “listen to Jesus” in order to “serve Jesus.” For example, some group leaders become preoccupied with Bible study and tend to forget the element of mission. The small group community is a place to make holistic disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). The mature small group leader has the uncanny ability to connect hearing the Word of God with doing the Word of God (James 1:22-25). He leads the group discussion but also disciples an apprentice to birth a new group. So the primary purpose of the small group coach is to keep

¹⁸⁴ Rod Dempsey, DSMN 997 Intensive *Small Groups Ministries* (May 16-20), 2011 Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, class lecture).

group leaders accountable and on mission. Leaders must maintain a balance with community and cause. Assuredly, the goal is two-fold: to do life together while multiplying healthy small groups. The main job of the group coach is to help the leader prioritize mission and multiplication. Otherwise the group becomes inwardly focused, spiritually fat, and self absorbed while enjoying community life. So a good coach not only understands the mission, but is able to successfully communicate the mission with the small group leader. In fact, the group coach must disciple the disciplers in order to stay focused on mission. Therefore, the small group pastor must develop a system to sustain a multiplying mentality to keep leaders on mission. Thus the principle of a strong coaching system must be set in place. Nevertheless, the system must involve key leaders.

Key Leaders

The Senior Pastor must champion the Great Commission in the local church. He must first and foremost model the message of discipleship by intentionally training an apprentice to birth a small group. Furthermore, every Assistant Pastor must intentionally disciple an apprentice to birth a small group. As the primary trainer and equipper in the local church, the Pastor must model the message so that the membership will embrace the vision. The power of example will motivate the members to become a multiplying force. Albert Schweitzer wisely claims, “There are three ways to teach a person: the first is by example, the second is by example, and the third is... (you guessed it) by example.”¹⁸⁵ Once the membership embraces the disciple-making mission of Jesus, the principle of multiplication will become a dynamic force. Once ordinary members “live up” to ministry obligations, they will begin to “live out” the mission objective. The Senior Pastor and his staff must preach the priesthood of every believer and insist the disciple-making mission belongs to every member. In other words, the common member must be

¹⁸⁵ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *The Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group*, 18.

reminded of his or her responsibilities. Once the church begins moving together toward mission, the power of biblical unity will emerge. But who will lead the charge?

Senior Pastor

The Senior Pastor must become the Head Coach of the small group ministry. In fact, David Yonggi Cho claims that the Senior Pastor is the “key person” in the small group system, “if that system is to be used as tool of evangelism.” Without the Pastor, Cho claims, the system will not hold together.¹⁸⁶ The Senior Pastor is responsible to set the agenda and cast the vision. Even Cho claims that the Pastor cannot delegate the small group ministry to an associate. He must take the lead even though he may eventually hand off some of the organizational work to an associate. To hand off the visionary aspects of small group ministry to an associate “without a voice” is sheer frustration. It is impossible to cast vision “without a voice.” To use the ship analogy, it is like trying to turn a huge vessel without a steering wheel. One cannot turn a ship (church) with a handful of training sessions and discipling an apprentice one-on-one. The muzzled associate cannot steer the ship from the rear of the boat. The mute prophet has no voice. Far too often the Senior Pastor forgets the pulpit is the steering wheel of the church and the preaching of the Pastor will undoubtedly turn the church (ship). The Word of God must always set the agenda, and the preaching of the Word must communicate that agenda. To ask a voiceless associate to turn the ship from the back of the boat is like leading the church with a silent pulpit. Cho insists that if the Pastor is not “actively involved” in the small group system, the members will feel the cell groups are not important. He goes on to say, “If cell groups are to succeed, the pastor must become so convinced of their necessity in the church that he will see them as the key

¹⁸⁶ David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, 103.

to the life or death of the church. Once he becomes convinced, the program will move.”¹⁸⁷ By the way, the movement will always be toward mission. But how did Cho constantly train thousands of small group leaders? He did three things: first he prepared the Bible study lesson for all of the leaders. Second, he met with all of the small group leaders every Wednesday night for training and vision casting. Third, once the ministry became so big, Cho sent out a weekly training cassette to all small group leaders. Cho was hands on and chose to disciple the disciplers. He would constantly cast vision, sell the system, and stress evangelism.¹⁸⁸ Likewise, the leadership of Lewis Memorial Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia, is considering adding “The Coaches Corner” to the church’s website. Every Friday afternoon the Senior Pastor (David Lemming), can coach and cast vision during a fifteen minute training session from a link on the church’s website. This process will enable the Senior Pastor to lead the small group ministry and produce a multiplying impact on the church. In essence, he too can disciple the disciplers, keep evangelism on the forefront, and develop Christ-like leaders.

Clearly, the Senior Pastor has enough on his plate already. How can he manage yet another program? He must consolidate and prioritize. Adding layers of programs to the church menu only adds confusion. In order to unite the ministry and mission of the church, the Senior Pastor must remove the competition factor. He must ask himself if small groups are going to be just another program in the church or if small groups are going to be “the ministry” of the church. Nevertheless, he must make the choice and then lead the church in mission. Even Comiskey says, “In my research and experience in cell-based churches, I have discovered that the role of the senior pastor is crucial to the long-term success of the cell ministry. The direction

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 104-105.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 109.

of the cell ministry cannot be delegated to someone else.”¹⁸⁹ The Senior Pastor must lead the cell church. After years of studying the small group model, Comiskey concluded, “The active leadership of the head pastor in the direction of the cell ministry is a clear, distinguishing mark in the cell church.”¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the Senior Pastor must be the head coach of the small group system. Then the associates can oversee the various divisions.

Assistant Pastors

If the Senior Pastor is the head coach of the small group system, then what role do the Assistants play? Depending on the size of the church and the small group ministry, the Assistant Pastors play a significant role in the small group coaching system. First and foremost, the Assistant Pastors must be on board with the Senior Pastor in order to carry out his vision. If the Assistant Pastor and you are not on board with the mission of the Pastor, they need to resign and move on to another ministry. Hebrews 13 gives several “pastoral injunctions” (sanctions, orders, commands) or “catechetical precepts.”¹⁹¹ For instance, the author reminds the reader to, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the Word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Heb. 13:7). The injunctions include “remember” and “follow.” The word *mimeomai* (follow) means to imitate or mimic. In other words, Assistants are to follow or mimic the faith or the vision of the Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor needs the staff on board or the vision will be disrupted. It is a grave sin for an Assistant Pastor to hijack the vision of the Senior Pastor. It does not take a rocket scientist to understand the importance of synergy in the mission movement. If there is a rogue staff member going in

¹⁸⁹ Joel Comiskey, *Reap the Harvest: How a Small-Group System Can Grow Your Church* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 1999), 52.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ William Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*. vol. 47B of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 495-496.

another direction, it will undoubtedly disrupt the unity of the church. In order to drive home the point, verse 17 of the same chapter says, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). The injunctions are to *peitho* (obey) and *hupeiko* (submit). In other words, one should not “resist” the leadership of the Pastors because they lead and are attentive to one’s spiritual well-being. Leaders must be submissive to God’s chain of command and move together in mission. To rebel against God’s chain of command will cause discord and eventually chaos. Unfortunately some endorse the idea that disagreeing with the Senior Pastor is a sign of spiritual maturity. On the contrary, submission and obedience is a sign of spiritual maturity.

On the other hand, the Assistant Pastors must promote and whole heartedly follow the vision of the Senior Pastor. Using an athletic analogy, the assistant coaches must implement the game plan of the head coach. The defensive coordinator, the offensive coordinator, and the special teams coach must implement the game plan developed by the head coach. Likewise, the Assistant Pastors must implement the ministry vision of the Senior Pastor. Since the vision involves multiplication, the Assistant Pastors must be the first to reproduce in order to train others to reproduce. Therefore, every Assistant Pastor must be a multiplying small group leader. In other words, he must be actively involved in training an apprentice to birth another group. It is virtually impossible for an Assistant Pastor to coach small group leaders to birth a healthy small group unless they too are birthing healthy small groups. So the Assistants must actively model the reproducing process in order to gain the respect of the leaders they coach. The Assistants must earn the right to coach. So the first layer of coaching is the Senior Pastor and the second layer of coaching includes the Assistant Pastors. In fact, the multiplying Assistant Pastors

oversee the various small group divisions. For instance, an Assistant Pastor can oversee the student groups and coach the student group leaders. Furthermore, another Assistant Pastor can oversee and coach the young adult leaders. Another Assistant Pastor and his spouse can coach the women's group and coach the group leaders.¹⁹² Another Assistant Pastor can oversee the men's groups and coach the men leaders. And then another staff member can oversee the mixed groups and coach the mixed group leaders.¹⁹³ Subsequently, the second layer of coaches consists of multiplying Assistant Pastors who oversee and coach the various divisions of small groups. But underneath the Assistant Pastors, the next layer of coaches consists of undoubtedly successful multiplying small group leaders who are members within the congregation.

Multiplying Small Group Leaders

Thank God for the common, ordinary, everyday lay leader who is sold out to the multiplying mission of Jesus. This small group leader consistently trains an apprentice to birth another small group. Comiskey wisely says, "The best coaches are in the battle" and "the best coaches are those who have successfully led and multiplied a cell group."¹⁹⁴ They know the pain of birthing a new group, the joy of shepherding, and the struggles of outreach. Nevertheless, they use their experience and influence to coach other small group leaders. The influence of a small group coach is far reaching. When a leader discipless a disciple, he is coaching and the purpose of coaching is to keep group leaders on mission and multiplication. While the various layers of coaching are equally important, it is the responsibility of the Head Coach (Senior Pastor) to keep each layer strong (on mission). As the stream of coaching flows through the system, the filter

¹⁹² Men leaders coach men and women leaders coach women. Perhaps a wife of one of the Assistant Pastors can coach and oversee the women's groups.

¹⁹³ See Appendix G. For further reading on "homogenous groupings" see Joel Comiskey, *Reap the Harvest: How a Small-Group System Can Grow Your Church*, 135-137.

¹⁹⁴ Joel Comiskey, *How to be Great Cell Group Coach* (Houston, TX: Cell Group Resources, 2003), 15.

must not weaken the multiplying mindset. Therefore, the Senior Pastor must coach the Assistant Pastors, the Assistant Pastors must coach the multiplying group leaders, and the multiplying small group leaders can coach other group leaders.¹⁹⁵ The system is only as strong as the layer above it. Consequently, a theology of multiplication must continually flow through the system, beginning at the top and flowing through the coaching process. Nevertheless, what does a small group coach actually do?

The Job Description

Typically, American culture associates the concept of coaching with athletics. For instance, legendary coaches like the charismatic Knute Rockne or the old-school leadership of Vince Lombardi come to mind. Others think of the explosive temper of Bobby Knight or the classy demeanor of John Wooden. Others are mystified by the philosophical approach of Phil Jackson, yet others appreciate the toughness of Woody Hayes. Even the best leaders need a coach. For example, Tiger Woods has a golf instructor, the Williams sisters have a tennis coach, and Jeff Gordon has a team manager.¹⁹⁶ Likewise, every small group leader needs a small group coach to help him reach his God-given potential for Christ. On the other hand, what does a small group coach actually do?

A good group coach is interested in moving the small group leader toward Christ-likeness. This movement always includes spiritual maturity and mission. The small group leader undoubtedly needs both qualities. One cannot have maturity without mission and vice versa. Maturity and mission are like Siamese twins and are intricately woven together. Hence the small group coach is concerned about forming the small group leader into the image of Christ (Rom.

¹⁹⁵ See Appendix H.

¹⁹⁶ Bill Donahue and Greg Bowman, *Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Willow Creek Association, 2006), 17.

8:29). Therefore, the task of the small group coach is to develop (equip) fully devoted followers of Christ who are intimately involved in the disciple-making mission of Jesus. The coaching system involves spiritual maturity, a deeper missionary focus, spiritual encouragement, shepherding, and strategic planning. But first of all, the coaching system begins with spiritual maturity.

Maturity

The ultimate goal of the small group ministry is to develop Christ-like disciples who are on mission with God. So, every small group leader must continue the journey toward spiritual maturity. Consequently, the small group coach must have his hand on the pulse of the spiritual life of the leaders that he coaches. In other words, the group coach must be in tune with the spiritual needs of each leader. If the leader is spiritual unhealthy, the coach should move toward spiritual wholeness. There must be consistent movement toward maturity and mission (balance). For instance, the coach must focus on “knowing and doing.” To know without doing is a waste of knowledge. Even the Apostle Paul prayed that the believers at Colosse would be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col. 1:9). The small group leader must be filled with the knowledge of God’s revealed will (the Bible),¹⁹⁷ while simultaneously praying for “wisdom” and “spiritual understanding” concerning a plan of action. In other words, leaders need wisdom to do the revealed will of God. In the next verse, Paul continues to balance knowing with doing. He insists the believer “walk worthy” in order to “fully please Him” and be “fruitful in every good work” while “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). The dynamics of knowing and doing are further explained in the rest of the chapter. In verses 11-22, Paul shared a thorough theological explanation concerning the Person and work

¹⁹⁷ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Treasures of Wisdom: Studies in Colossians & Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1973), 40-41.

of Jesus Christ (knowledge). Then in verses 23-29, he concludes this section with a plan of action (evangelism). This plan of action included “preaching,” while “warning and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (v. 28). Paul balanced the importance of “knowing” the rich Christological implications of Jesus with “doing” evangelism. Likewise, the savvy small group coach must balance knowing with doing. The goal is to make holistic disciples of Jesus Christ who make holistic disciples of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the element of maturity must be balanced with mission. Nonetheless, the element of mission is very important.

Mission

The passionate small group coach has a deeper understanding of mission that leads to multiplication. In other words, he sees the big picture. A good coach understands the mission of discipling a discipler. He always connects Jesus and mission together. For instance, each month the small group coach should ask the leader, “How is your disciple/apprentice doing?” The coach must train the group leader in the area of developing an apprentice. For instance, the coach should insist the small group leader train his apprentice how to lead a person to Christ. The coach will explain to the leader how to make his apprentice soul conscious. During the weekly meeting, the small group leader should teach the apprentice to carry a 3 x 5 card in his pocket with the names of at least three unsaved people written on the card. The leader should train the apprentice to pull the card out during the day in order to pray for the salvation of those written on the card. Furthermore, the small group leader should take the apprentice to visit these individuals in order to share the gospel. This is on-the-job training at its best. The missional small group leader will train his apprentice how to share his testimony. Greg Laurie says, “One of the best ways to ‘build a bridge’ with a person who does not have a relationship with Christ is through your personal

testimony.”¹⁹⁸ Even the Apostle Paul shared his testimony three times in the book of Acts as a powerful form of witness (Acts 9, 22, 26). The wise small group leader should suggest the apprentice write out his testimony and practice sharing his testimony in front of a mirror.¹⁹⁹ When used properly, the power of story can be an incredible witnessing tool. Since every believer has a story, the prudent small group coach and leader should train his apprentice to use his testimony to tell others about Jesus. Furthermore, the group coach should always be an encouragement to his small group leaders.

Encouragement

During the weekly huddle, the small group coach should encourage the small group leader. Comiskey claims, “A coach who encourages can make the difference between success and failure, between the leader continuing—and eventually multiplying the cell—or just giving up.”²⁰⁰ So the face to face meetings and the weekly phone calls are very important to coaching small group leaders. It is so easy for leaders to fall into the comparison trap. The coach must caution the leader about the pitfalls of comparing himself with other leaders and other groups. Paul told the Corinthian believers that it is very “unwise” to “compare ourselves” with other Christians (2 Cor. 10:12). Nevertheless, highly motivated leaders like to measure up and even surpass the expectations of others. But if one does not measure up to the success of others, the demon of discouragement can be overwhelming. Therefore, the wise small group coach is looking for signs of discouragement in order to encourage the small group leader. Brett Eastman testified of the power of encouragement. He said, “Without a guy named John, I wouldn’t be

¹⁹⁸ Greg Laurie, *New Believer’s Guide to How to Share Your Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999), 45.

¹⁹⁹ See Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is...How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010), 245-251.

²⁰⁰ Joel Comiskey, *How to be a Great Cell Group Coach* (Houston, TX: Cell Group Resources, 2003), 42.

where I am today. He was my coach of the first small group I led. When my confidence was waning or I was tired of leading, he came alongside me and said, ‘I believe you can do it.’ That meant the world to me.’²⁰¹ Leading a small group can be difficult and discouraging. People often use flimsy excuses to miss the group meeting. Others come and go. Some stick and become productive disciples while others remain stagnant and barren. Consequently, encouragement is very important. Even the writer of Proverbs claims, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11). In other words, encouraging words can be a beautiful thing. Every small group leader needs someone to come along his side and encourage him. Paul told the Thessalonian believers that he sent Timothy “our fellow laborer in the gospel” to “establish and encourage you concerning your faith” (1 Thess. 3:2). Timothy’s mission was a mission of encouragement. The word *parakaleo* (encourage) means to address, speak, or exhort. Timothy spoke encouraging words to the Thessalonian believers.

Likewise, all small group leaders need a cheerleader to speak words of encouragement into their lives. Words are powerful, and encouraging words can make the difference between victory and defeat. For example, Joseph was an outstanding coach in the early church. He was so encouraging that the apostles nicknamed him “Barnabas” which means son of encouragement (Acts 4:36).²⁰² Later on at Antioch, Barnabas lived up to his nickname when he “encouraged them all” (Acts 11:23). Like oxygen to the soul, Barnabas breathed encouraging words of life into the hearts of “all” believers. The savvy group coach should constantly speak words of encouragement to the group leader. While the coach should encourage small group leaders, he

²⁰¹ Brett Eastman, *Coaching Life Together: Creating Healthy Small Group Leaders and Members* (RSM, CA: Coaching Lifetogether, 2011), 18.

²⁰² See the *English Standard Version* of Acts 4:36. The text reads, “Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus.”

must also shepherd the leaders.

Shepherding

Another responsibility of the small group coach includes the Christ-like role of shepherding. In fact, the role of loving shepherd is one of the most important functions of a small group coach. A good shepherd will know his sheep. For instance, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep” (Jn. 10:14). One of the most important responsibilities of a shepherd is to know the spiritual condition of his people. Blackaby wisely claims that, “True leaders never lose sight of their responsibility to care for their followers” and a loving shepherd is always concerned about the state of his sheep.²⁰³ A good coach will quiz the small group leader over the status of the people on the group roll. He will ask direct questions about particular members and make helpful suggestions. If the group leader needs help through a particular challenge, the coach will lead him through the process. Nonetheless, a good group coach will train the group leader to shepherd his group.

On the other hand, the coach will shepherd and care for the spiritual needs of the group leader. For example, the group coach must shepherd the group leader to cultivate healthy routines. Healthy routines will help establish priorities and ground the leader in godly habits. The group leader is just like any other Christian and is equally prone to get priorities out of order. Even David told the Israelites, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Ps. 37:23). The word *kuwn* (ordered) means to arrange, direct or firmly establish. In other words, the life of a good man is divinely directed by the Lord. Since the Christian life is a marathon, the passionate small group leader needs help to order his life and ministry. Therefore, the perceptive group coach will ask the group leader some tough questions.

²⁰³ Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 321.

First of all, the probing coach will ask the leader about his devotional life. He should ask tough questions like, “What passage in the Bible did you read this morning?” Furthermore the coach should ask, “What did God say to you.” A good group coach will hold the leader accountable. If the leader neglects his spiritual life, he will eventually burnout. The Psalmist claims the godly man will delight in the law of the Lord day and night. Because of his daily delight, he is compared to a tree planted by the rivers of water and his leaf will not wither (Ps. 1:1-3). The word *nabel* (wither) means to fade away or to fall away. The godly man is planted and rooted by the river of God’s Word. Regular nourishment from the Word brings cleansing and growth. Therefore, the godly man will not “wither” or fall away because he is constantly drinking from the water of God’s Word.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the group coach will ask the tough questions about healthy routines. If the group leader has a problem feeding himself, he will definitely have difficulty leading others. Consequently, the group leader needs a shepherd, someone to hold him accountable and ask the tough questions.

Second, the coach should inquire about the group leader’s prayer life. He should ask tough questions like, “Do you have your 3 x 5 prayer card in your pocket?” In other words, “Are you praying for your unsaved friends?” The group leader should be all about missional praying; however, if he does not have the 3 x 5 prayer card in his pocket, he is most likely ignoring missional praying. The shepherd/coach must help the leader develop some healthy spiritual routines, and prayer should be a priority in the daily life of a leader. After training and coaching small group leaders all over the world, Dave Earley insists that “Prayer is the common denominator of effective spiritual leadership.” If leaders are going to “lead well,” they must learn

²⁰⁴ John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms: The Expository Commentary*, vol. 1 of *The John Phillips Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal Publications, 1988), 19-20.

to “pray well.”²⁰⁵ Therefore, the coach must help the small group leader develop the habit of prayer. Nevertheless, the good shepherd/coach will ask the tough questions, even personal questions about family life.

Third, the small group coach should ask the leader about his family. The virtuous coach always remembers the small group leader is a “human being and not a ministry assembly line.”²⁰⁶ Everyone needs a friendly reminder that family comes first and sometimes we need to rearrange our priorities. While the principle of multiplication is built into the group design, a dysfunctional family life will destroy reproduction. Small group leaders are people and have family issues just like everyone else. So the loving shepherd will ask the group leader difficult questions about family life. For instance, he will ask, “Did you and your spouse have a date night this week?” Furthermore, he might ask, “How can I pray for you and your spouse?” The sensitive coach understands marriage is a priority. Therefore, he might ask probing questions concerning the depth of your relationship.

Furthermore, a good coach will ask questions about the leader’s children. For example, he might ask, “How long have your children been saved?” “Are they still in church?” Or if the children are small he might even ask, “How often do you play with your children?” Unfortunately, some ministry leaders ignore their children. Even evangelist Billy Graham candidly told how he neglected his children. Graham alleged that in 1949, he conducted an evangelistic campaign in Los Angeles. God was moving and masses of people were converted to Christ. As the marathon campaign entered its eighth week, Graham’s brother-in-law Don Montgomery and his wife Rosa (Ruth’s sister) came from New Mexico to attend the closing

²⁰⁵ Dave Earley, *Prayer: The Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2008), x, xiii.

²⁰⁶ Joel Comiskey, *How to be a Great Cell Group Coach*, 52.

week. Anne, Graham's daughter had been staying with Don and Rosa. Graham looked at the beautiful baby and said, "Whose baby is this?" Graham had been away from home so long he did not even recognize his own daughter in Rosa's arms. Graham sadly said that evening "the baby went to sleep crying for her aunt, not her mother."²⁰⁷ Whether you're Billy Graham or a small group leader God does not want you to neglect your children. Therefore, the godly coach will help the group leader to find a balance with family and ministry.

Strategic Planning

Then finally, a good group coach will help the small group leader with planning. For instance, many groups take the summer off and re-launch in the fall just after Labor Day. The group coach should remain in contact with his small group leaders during the summer and resume face to face meetings during the month of August. During the pre-launch meetings the group coach and the group leader should engage in some strategic planning. The pre-launch planning should include three items.

First of all, the coach and the small group leaders should strategically plan on developing ministry skills. For example, the coach should review and share a copy of all scheduled small group training sessions. He should insist every group leader attend the quarterly training in order to further develop ministry skills. Furthermore, the coach and the leaders can plan on reading two books together during the calendar year. They can meet together at a coffee shop and discuss one chapter per week.²⁰⁸ Throughout the year, the coach can email helpful articles for the leaders to read. The coach should make available helpful websites and resources for the small group

²⁰⁷ Billy Graham, *Just As I Am* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins and Zondervan, 1997), 156-157.

²⁰⁸ Depending on the need, this coach will read and discuss one chapter per week with his group leaders a couple of times per year. For example Dave Earley's book titled *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders* is a great book to read and discuss with group leaders.

leader.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the coach and the small group leaders should strategically and intentionally plan to develop ministry skills throughout the calendar year. Training and equipping is a priority in the small group model (Eph. 4:11-16).

Second, the group coach and the small group leaders should strategically plan on developing the group disciple/apprentice. Developing an apprentice and multiplying a group is very important for the health and overall growth of the church. Comiskey claims, “As I did research for my doctoral thesis on the largest cell churches in the world, I noticed something different. The cells in these churches were healthy, but their focus was on outreach that resulted in multiplication. The overall strategic goal was multiplying cell groups.”²¹⁰ By the way, leaders will not multiply groups unless they train a disciple/apprentice. Comiskey goes to say, “In researching cell groups around the world, I’ve discovered that cell groups are not the answer. Unless cell group members become cell group leaders, cell groups will stagnate and die.”²¹¹ Therefore, the key is developing an apprentice to birth a new group. The group coach must constantly inquire about the apprentices in each group he coaches.

Third, the coach must help the small group leader and apprentice to set a time table for multiplication or birthing another group. For instance, if the apprentice is two months away from birthing a new group, the coach and leader must prepare the new leader for launch. Pre-launch preparation includes weekly coaching during the two month period. The new leader should immediately look for an apprentice to help him launch the new group. Furthermore, the coach should insist the new leader have six core group members prior to the launch. Far too often, new leaders launch without having a core group. The result of such foolishness is failure and defeat.

²⁰⁹ For instance, there is a wealth of resources at <http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles>.

²¹⁰ Joel Comiskey, *How to be a Great Cell Group Coach*, 73.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

The coach and small group leader must set the apprentice up for a successful launch. Therefore, having a core group of six will greatly help the launch be successful.

The principle of a strong coaching system is one of the most important factors in sustaining the small group system. In fact, the group coach brings balance to the small group model. In order to have holistic small groups, there needs to be healthy small group leaders. Consequently, the purpose of the group coach is to develop and maintain healthy small group leaders: leaders who disciple the disciplers and leaders who train the trainers. Obviously, the influence of a group coach in the life of a small group leader is immeasurable. For instance, the goal of the group coach is to move the small group leader toward maturity and mission. He will be a constant source of encouragement while holding the leader accountable for his spiritual life and family life. Furthermore, the coach will ask the tough questions to keep priorities front and center. Additionally, the group coach will maintain a healthy focus on cell multiplication. Therefore, he will love and faithfully nurture the small group leader. Nevertheless, the principle of a strong coaching system is very important to the small group model.²¹²

²¹² See Appendix F.

APPENDIX A²¹³**Anonymous Survey of Small Group Leaders**

1. As a result of small group training, do you feel equipped to make disciples?

- Yes
 No

2. As a result of small group training, are you mentoring an apprentice?

- Yes
 No

3. As a result of small group training, are you prepared to multiply your group?

- Yes
 No

4. As a result of small group training, is your group experiencing authentic community?

- Yes
 No

5. As a result of small group training, do you believe our coaching system is adequate?

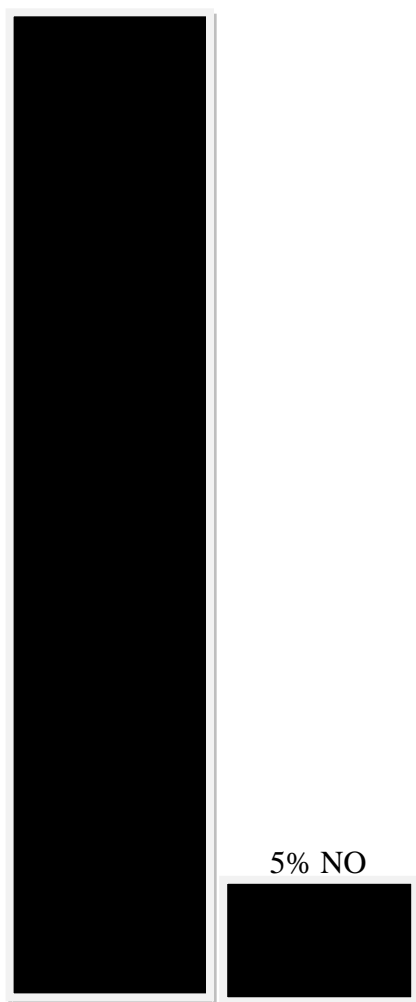
- Yes
 No

²¹³ Approximately 50 percent of the small group leaders at Lewis Memorial Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia, volunteered to participate in an anonymous survey on the *Five Principles of Making and Multiplying Disciples through the Small Group Ministry*. Appendices B, C, D, E, and F record the results. Approximately 40 leaders participated in this random survey immediately after the yearly small group training.

APPENDIX B²¹⁴**Survey of Small Group Leaders**

Question #1: As a result of small group training, do you feel equipped to make disciples?

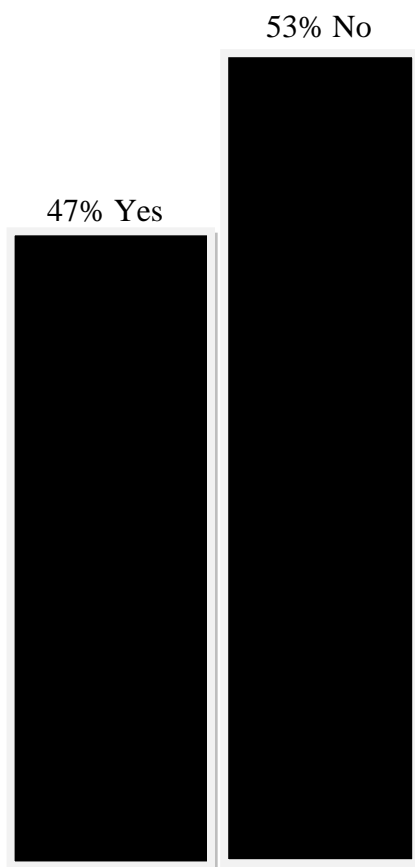
95% Yes



²¹⁴ After being trained in the *Five Principles to Make and Multiply Disciples through the Small Group Ministry*, approximately 40 small group leaders at Lewis Memorial Baptist Church were anonymously surveyed. The first question was “As a result of small group training do you feel equipped to make disciples?”

APPENDIX C²¹⁵**Survey of Small Group Leaders**

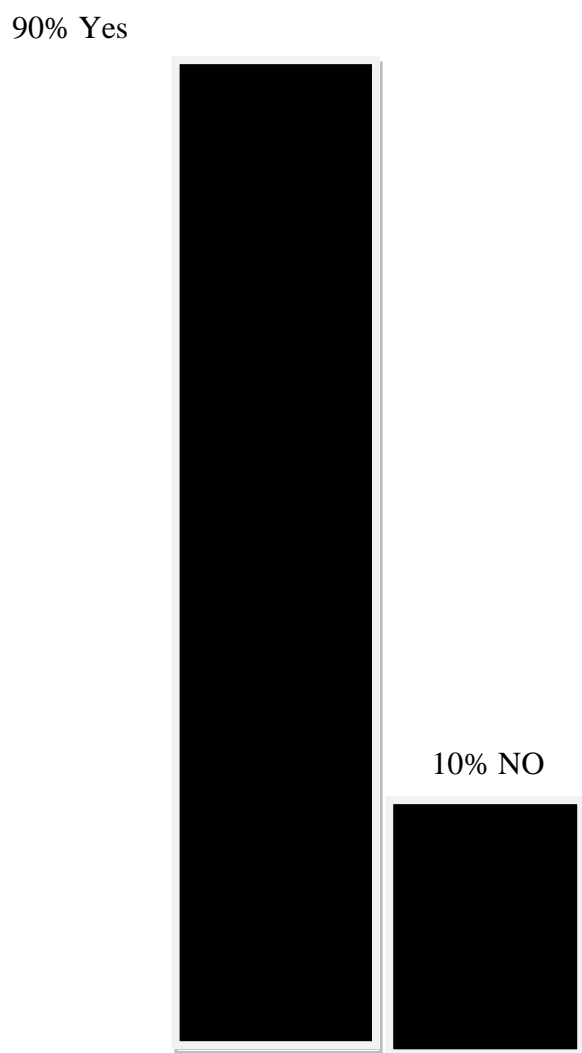
Question #2: As a result of small group training, are you mentoring an apprentice?



²¹⁵ After being trained in the *Five Principles to Make and Multiply Disciples through the Small Group Ministry*, approximately 40 small group leaders at Lewis Memorial Baptist Church were anonymously surveyed. The second question was “As a result of small group training are you mentoring an apprentice?”

APPENDIX D²¹⁶**Survey of Small Group Leaders**

Question #3: As a result of small group training, are you prepared to multiply your group?



²¹⁶ After being trained in the *Five Principles to Make and Multiply Disciples through the Small Group Ministry*, approximately 40 small group leaders at Lewis Memorial Baptist Church were anonymously surveyed. The third question was “As a result of small group training are you prepared to multiply your group?”

APPENDIX E²¹⁷**Survey of Small Group Leaders**

Question #4: As a result of small group training, is your group experiencing authentic community?

95% Yes

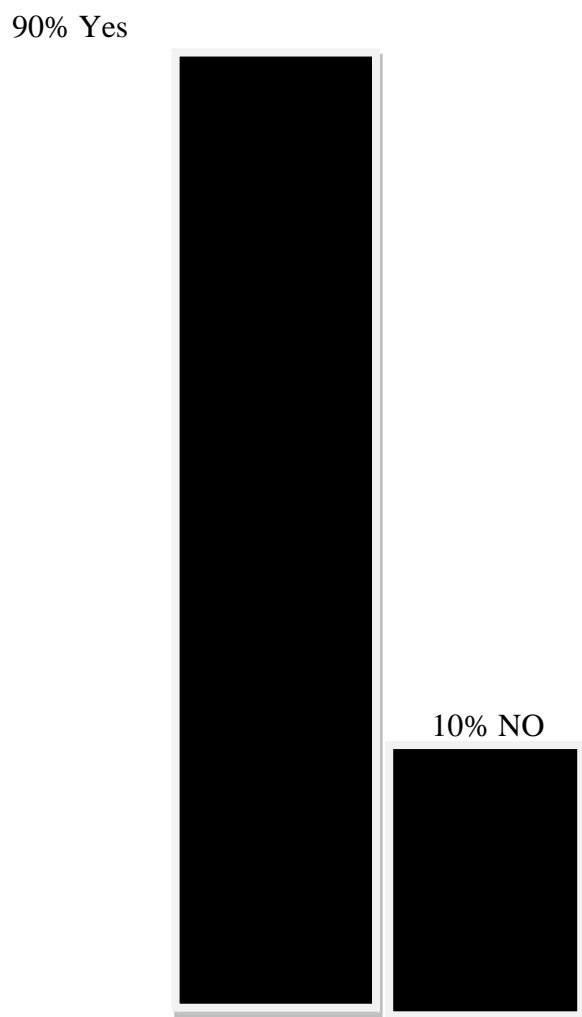


5% NO

²¹⁷ After being trained in the *Five Principles to Make and Multiply Disciples through the Small Group Ministry*, approximately 40 small group leaders at Lewis Memorial Baptist Church were anonymously surveyed. The fourth question was “As a result of small group training is your group experiencing authentic community?”

APPENDIX F²¹⁸**Survey of Small Group Leaders**

Question #5: As a result of small group training, do you believe our coaching system is adequate?



²¹⁸ After being trained in the *Five Principles to Make and Multiply Disciples through the Small Group Ministry*, approximately 40 small group leaders at Lewis Memorial Baptist Church were anonymously surveyed. The fifth question was “As a result of small group training do you believe our coaching system is adequate?”

APPENDIX G

Homogenous Groups

Men's Small Groups	Women's Small Groups	Couple's Small Groups	Student Small Groups	Children's Small Groups
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APPENDIX H

The Simple Coaching System

<p>Senior Pastor</p> <p>Oversees the Assistant Pastors</p>
<p>Assistant Pastors</p> <p>Oversee the Layers of Homogenous Groups and Coach the Multiplying Small Group Coaches</p>
<p>Multiplying Small Group Leader/Coach</p> <p>Coach Five Group Leaders in One Homogenous Section</p>

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Th.G., Tennessee Temple University, 1979.
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Senior Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church Jackson, Tennessee 1980-1987.
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June 25, 2012

Timothy Yates

IRB Exemption 1363.062512: Five Principles for Making and Multiplying Disciples through the Small Group Ministry

Dear Timothy,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
 - (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
 - (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

Professor, IRB Chair

Counseling

(434) 592-4054 Liberty University