THE FOUNDATION

OF A DISCIPLE MAKING CULTURE

*How to Develop a CORE Team
of Disciple Makers*

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To Kristen,
my amazing wife, whose love and
strength of character inspires me

and Kara,
our daughter whose time was short,
but whose impact was great

and Elise, Corinne, Renee, and Jared,
you are indescribable blessings to us.

May our family strive always
to love God and others like Jesus did.

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PREFACE

Now more than ever, information is cheap. The internet is a warehouse of information that we can have access to frequently and easily. When information is at our fingertips, we forget that "knowing" and "becoming" aren't synonyms. We don't have to look far to realize the distance between education and transformation is vast. It's far more convenient to open a book than it is to open your life. Allowing another person to really see you, weaknesses and all, is difficult—especially if you're a professional whose competence has been endorsed by an institute of higher education. Too often, books grant us the illusion of learning and growth. For many years, I read voraciously without making the effort to reflect on what the author of the book might say to me in my context. The result was a feeling of growth without any real growth. I was entertained by books but wasn't changed by them, because I never made the effort to reflect and apply what I had learned.

Using a book to learn any aspect of disciple making is a bit of an oxymoron, isn't it? Jesus' example of making disciples makes it clear that flesh is needed. Jesus' way was incarnational, face-to-face, and life-on-life. In disciple making, nothing can ever replace really *seeing* another

person. What disciple making takes is one individual, who has natural strengths and weaknesses and is willing to be seen and understood in the midst of their actual context, along with another individual, who is also willing to be seen, with the heart, vision, and skill necessary to assist in the holy process of transformation. No book, no matter how well written, can really see you or speak directly into your specific context.

So why write about this topic? And why do we need another book adding to the overwhelming reams of written word already out there?

Because it's still true that, "the laborers are few" (Matt. 9:37). If there were enough laborers, then you'd have someone with the heart, vision, skill, experience, and availability to walk alongside you as you learned how to make disciple makers. If you have someone like that, then press into that relationship and read this book as a supplement to what you'll learn through them. But if you don't have someone like that in your life, then this book is written specifically for you. What follows is especially aimed at pastors and church leaders. I admire your commitment to the local church and hope this book will help you develop a CORE team, which is the solid foundation from which to build a disciple making culture. Such a foundation will drive transformation both in yourself and in your church.[1]

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1. Disciple making stories are true throughout, but names have been fictionalized to preserve privacy.

Foundation Problems

Bonanno Pisano was a man of great vision. This twelfth-century sculptor called forth vivid images from stone and bronze. His genius went beyond just great vision. In his time, the work of a sculptor demanded widely diverse skills. Pisano combined physical strength with patience and big-picture vision with an intricate eye for detail. A man of such refined talent was always in demand. Leaders of cities across the region would invite him to complete projects that would bring status to their city and enhance their legacy. Time and again, Pisano delivered the highest quality craftsmanship with superior artistic perspective and detail. He was a remarkable sculptor.

What prompted the famous sculptor to try his hand at architecture is a mystery. Perhaps it was his ego or simply the inability to say no, but whatever the reason, on August 9, 1173, Pisano started building a tower that would become the defining project of his life. He began to build a tower, with funding from an opera-house widow. The tower was to be part of a great cathedral complex and would stand as a sign to the nations of *his*

hometown's grandeur. As the white building rose straight and true from the ground, the residents of Pisa watched with pride.

The first person to notice is a mystery too, but in 1178 someone noticed. It could have been a local laborer, a visiting professional, or perhaps even a child. But after nearly five years of steady progress, one observant soul stopped and noticed that the tower seemed to be leaning, ever so slightly, to the south.

The drama that ensued from one simple observation has been lost to history, but it's easy to imagine. That first person told another who told another until word reached Bonanno Pisano. Of course, he wouldn't have believed it at first. The very idea may have even offended him. After all, the now two-story tower had been straight as an arrow since he'd laid the foundation over four years prior. But an accusation that serious forced him to walk away from the tower and take a good long look to see for himself. The tower was indeed leaning.

> Pisano's "crooked tower-moment" did what it would do to most people, it devastated him.

Pisano's "crooked tower moment" did what it would do to most people, it devastated him. News of the lean traveled fast. Not only was he devastated but Pisano was embarrassed too. His city was trying to grow its reputation, but he'd built a leaning tower that would be mocked instead of admired. In spite of skill, clear vision, and commitment, he had missed something import-

ant. Instead of rising to the height of his expectations, the tower revealed the level of his training. The problem was the foundation, and it was too big for him to fix. He knew it, so he abandoned his work on the tower and hoped history wouldn't remember what he'd done.

How is it that such a critical problem had hidden itself from view for over four years? And what could be done about it? The leaders of Pisa would wrestle with those questions for the next 800 years. Today the Leaning Tower of Pisa is a world-famous landmark whose history holds many lessons for architects, engineers, and yes, even disciple making leaders.

A Solid Foundation for Disciple Making

The story of the Leaning Tower of Pisa is a textbook example of the impact of a foundation problem. While the leaning tower of Pisa is the most famous example, it's far from the only one. In Pisa alone, there are two other towers that lean. Outside of Pisa the world has dozens of unintentionally leaning towers, including London's Big Ben and San Francisco's Millennium Tower.

Architecture and church leadership may seem miles apart, but each one demands careful planning and execution in order to withstand the challenges that are sure to come. Just like Bonanno Pisano, disciple making pastors must understand how important it is to have a strong foundation.

As I mentioned in the preface, this book revolves around the simple idea that a disciple making culture

must have a disciple making foundation. Many pastors have learned the hard way that disciple making practices in a church can appear to thrive—for years even—and still ultimately fail to develop into a disciple making *culture*.

> **Disciple making practices in a church can appear to thrive—for years even—and still ultimately fail.**

Just consider this: for years the Leaning Tower of Pisa appeared to have a strong foundation, but the truth of its instability eventually emerged in a slight lean. Like buildings, disciple making cultures with faulty foundations eventually lean and crumble as the stress of weight and time grow. Instead of a physical lean, disciple making in the church reveals stress when there's emotion without action, education without transformation, growth without a goal, or action without reproduction. In other words, a church that makes only members and not disciples has a foundation problem that will eventually cause it to crumble.

The same terrible discovery made by architects about leaning towers has also been made by disciple making leaders, like Pastor Norm. Pastor Norm decided his church needed more intentional discipleship, even though he had been leading them faithfully for years. He found a resource he liked, started investing in a few men on Tuesday mornings for six months, then he asked them to go do the same. And they did it! The following year his church of 300 had over fifteen discipleship groups going. Pastor Norm and the elders were excited that their

dedication to disciple making had so quickly yielded such great numbers.

A few years later though, the number of discipleship groups began to decline. It was at that time, four years after the first group, that Pastor Norm had his leaning tower moment. For the first time, there were more discipleship groups ending than there were new groups forming. Something had gone terribly wrong. Their action was genuine and resulted in outward reproduction but there was no inner transformation. Instead of making disciples of Jesus, church members were simply making disciples *of the discipleship curriculum.* The lean had been discovered, but Pastor Norm didn't know what to do about it. Within a few short years, discipleship looked just as it did before Pastor Norm started his first group. Everyone meant well, but without the necessary foundation, the illusion of progress was actually just busyness.

What Is a Disciple Making Culture?

You may be familiar with the idea of a "disciple making culture," but if not let me orient you. This is such an important topic, yet confusion often exists around the words "culture" and "disciple making," so let me clarify what I mean by these terms. As Jim Putman has observed, a disciple is someone who follows Jesus, is being changed by Jesus, and is committed to the mission of Jesus.

Disciple making, then, is entering into relationships to intentionally help others follow Jesus, be changed by Jesus, and join the mission of Jesus. A disciple making

culture is defined by Discipleship.org as "the beliefs, habits, and narrative of a church constantly repeated with congruence and intentionality, that make it clear to almost everyone, all the time, including newcomers that disciple making is what everyone does in the church."[2] This definition captures the heart of it, and Brandon Guindon, author of *Disciple-Making Culture*, adds another helpful piece by saying a disciple making culture is, "The way a church naturally functions when they are not under pressure."[3] Taken together it's clear that a disciple making culture is a movement of people who are living as disciples of Jesus.

A disciple making culture is the goal within a local church because it was Jesus' goal. His aim wasn't to save a few and then protect them from the world. It wasn't to gather large crowds and thousands followers. Instead, his goal was to invest in some and then launch them into the world so as to build a movement of disciple makers. His goal was to develop a culture among the Twelve so deeply grounded that it would be a catalytic force strong enough to transform everything it touched. His goal was to change the world from then until eternity, and to the amazement of historians and social scientists, it worked! Jesus was committed to developing a team of disciple makers who would change everything.

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2. Discipleship.org "About Discipleship.org," accessed on February 8, 2020 https://discipleship.org/about-discipleship-org/

3. Brandon Guindon, *Disciple-Making Culture* (Nashville: HIM Publications, 2020) 17.

A healthy, disciple making culture progressively changes individuals just like the kingdom is described in Mark 4:27–29, "Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." The influence of culture happens automatically. It carries with it the power to impact people at all times.

Imagine the difference a disciple making culture could make in your church, women's group, or small group. Can you envision the impact such a culture could make? A disciple making culture is the goal not only because it's what Jesus modeled, but because it spins outward. A disciple making culture thrusts disciple makers into every crevice of society—neighborhoods, workplaces, associations, and yes, even the nations. If it remains healthy, it will impact a town, a region, a state, a country, and eventually the whole world. This isn't hyperbole. Jesus' disciples and many movements have proven it.

The CORE of the Disciple Making Foundation

Building such a culture isn't easy. It's a difficult process that's full of barriers and potential land mines. A healthy disciple making culture doesn't come cheaply, but it can be done. This book, born out of both training and experience, is for pastors and church leaders who intend to

build a disciple making culture. Unlike other books, my focus is on laying the foundation, not on the entire process. Time and again I've seen disciple making foundations rushed, neglected, or completely ignored. Like the Tower of Pisa, many churches see great momentum and "success" for the first few years but are soon doomed by a faulty foundation. I'm not saying that if you've already learned of your faulty foundation the hard way you can't recover, but simply that the process itself is difficult enough without also having to repair a foundation that's proven insufficient.

Let's take a moment to recognize the fact that when building anything in the kingdom there is only one foundation and that is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:10–11). Normally Scripture identifies Jesus as the foundation. Ephesians 2 specifically identifies him as the chief cornerstone, while the apostles and prophets form the rest of the foundation. The metaphor of Jesus as the foundation communicates the first principles upon which everything else is built. In our exploration of a disciple making culture I, too, use this metaphor to explain its beginning or first principles. It can get "linguistically sticky" to do so, but I want to acknowledge that no disciple making foundation can be laid without Jesus at the heart of it all. For the purposes of our exploration, Jesus is the very ground into which the disciple making foundation is laid. If it's built into anything else, it won't hold together. It's actually worse than that; Scripture tells us such a structure will be consumed by fire (1 Cor. 3:10–13).

Simply put, a disciple making foundation is a CORE team that's built and led by a disciple maker. For many pastors, the concept of a CORE team isn't new, but how to develop such a team isn't well practiced, illustrated, or understood. Disciple making books and resources tend to give an overview of the entire culture-building process. And as important as seeing the big picture is, books that cover the entire process aren't sufficient to guide a pastor as he begins to build the foundation. The result is most pastors laying a foundation with inferior materials that are unable to stand the test of time. And like Pisano, when a lean is discovered, the dream of building a disciple making culture is abandoned for the next great idea. So I've written this book to highlight the importance of a disciple making foundation, as well as to equip and encourage church leaders and disciple makers in building their disciple making foundation.

This book is intended to be a detailed resource for how to build a disciple making foundation. In the coming chapters, I will walk you through the four essential traits of a CORE team. The CORE team is the foundation of a disciple making culture

> A disciple making culture makes disciples who look and act like Jesus.

in which emotion leads to action, action leads to reproduction, and transformation is supported by education—not driven by it. In short, a disciple making culture makes disciples who look and act like Jesus. Your challenge, dear reader, is to slow down long enough to develop a deep

understanding of how to build a team that has **C**ommon vision, individual **O**wnership, **R**elational resilience, and **E**ndures to the end. Along the way, I'll help you understand the forces that commonly complicate or distract you from your mission, and therefore demand your consistent and determined maintenance. At the end of this book, I've also added reflection questions and prompts designed to help you as you seek to understand and apply the concepts of this book.

Disciple Maker as Lead Builder

A sculptor wouldn't have the knowledge of an architect. They wouldn't understand what architects do, namely that building a tower in Pisa was a very challenging task! The truth is that foundations are important everywhere, but of all places, this was especially true for building in Pisa, which literally means, "marshy land" in Greek. The soil below the city was known to be a soft mixture of sand, silt, and clay—much too unstable for a typical foundation to support a tower. Despite the challenges, though, experts have concluded that a different foundation would have eliminated the problem altogether.[4]

Bonnano Pisano didn't know better because he wasn't an architect. He couldn't really think like one. He thought like the artist and showman he was. How do I know? It took 800 years, but eventually archaeologists dug up a stone from the base of the tower. The stone reads, "I, who without doubt have erected this marvelous

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4. RamJack, "The Foundation of the Leaning Tower of Pisa," accessed February 4, 2020. https://www.ramjack.com/houston/about-ram-jack/blog/2015/september/the-foundation-of-the-leaning-tower-of-pisa/

work that is above all others, am the citizen of Pisa by the name of Bonanno."[5] Scholars believe that the stone sat at the foot of the tower as Pisano worked on it. Once the lean was discovered, feeling embarrassed and ashamed, he returned to the tower to bury the stone.[6] Instead of rising to the level of his vision, he fell to the level of his training. Pisano learned that only someone trained in laying foundations can lay an adequate and lasting foundation.

In the same way, only a disciple maker can lay an adequate and lasting disciple making foundation. It sounds obvious, doesn't it? Unfortunately, it's not. Every year, pastors who haven't yet made even one multiplying disciple believe they can build an entire culture of multiplying disciples. Their intentions are good, but the results they end up with are similar to Pisano's—a few years of apparent success followed by unforeseen problems they aren't sure how to solve. Whether it's a tower or a church, the results of such attempts often leave a culture worse off than it was before. After all, it's easier to build a foundation from scratch than it is to repair a faulty one. The point isn't to discourage those who have already tried and made mistakes but to focus us on what it takes to lay (or fix) a disciple making foundation.

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5. The Mall on Sunday & Metro Media Group, "Leaning Tower of Pisa's Architect is Revealed . . . ," accessed on February 11, 2020. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-7809335/Leaning-Tower-Pisas-architect-revealed-Bonanno-Pisano.html

6. Ibid.

Unlike Pisano, most pastors I know aren't motivated by their own glory. In fact, most of the pastors I know who begin building a disciple making culture do so in response to a lean they've discovered in their own church culture. Motivation matters. Simply put, *why* a pastor decides to build a disciple making culture determines *how* a pastor builds that culture. Pastors who lack a disciple making perspective

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are most often motivated to build a disciple making culture for one of four reasons.

Four Common Motivations for Building Culture

Before we look at these common motivations, I want to emphasize that my purpose isn't to critique the church models represented, but instead to highlight how your motivation to begin building a disciple making culture can impact how that culture ends up being built. My hope is that by identifying your core motivation you will be able to adjust and build more skillfully.

1. Survival. The first common motivation is survival. Churches all across America have found themselves in a slow decline in recent years. With each passing year, church doors are closing for good, and it's not just because of the 2020 global pandemic. This trend started long before that. More and more Americans are choos-

ing to avoid church altogether. The rate of decline in church involvement was 7 percent over the past decade and shows no sign of slowing.[7] Pastors of shrinking churches are desperate to find something to reverse the trend. Church experts have recommended small groups, community engagement, and discipleship programs to revitalize congregations. To many desperate pastors, a disciple making culture sounds like a combination of the three. Pastors fighting for their church's survival are eager to try disciple making in the hope that it will be just the thing to save their church.

A church leader who looks to disciple making as a means to survive faces a problem of *priority*. When the pursuit of a disciple making culture comes primarily as a response to the need and desire for more members, pastors and church leaders are in dangerous territory. The urgent need of finding members has taken priority over *truly* making disciples. That reality creates tension in disciple making because of the time it takes to develop disciple makers. Not only does the disciple making process become rushed for the sake of numbers but it's also oriented toward the organized church, rather than the individual. An organization-first approach often alienates the members directly involved and the potential members they engage. There's no need for a dichotomy here, but which takes primary importance—the indi-

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7. Pew Research Center. "In US Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace" Accessed December 18, 2019. https://www.pewforum. org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/

vidual or the organization—remains a crucial aspect of how the disciple making process unfolds. In order for disciple making to take root, individuals must know that the primary purpose is to help them grow to maturity in Christ—in every sense—not merely to help the church survive.

2. Attraction. The second common motivation is attraction. The root of this motivation is similar to the first—a need for more people. Attractional churches usually have a "back door" problem of once-engaged people leaving, so they are constantly looking for ways to get new people in the doors. But again, the landscape of church engagement in America makes it harder and harder to attract new individuals. So they constantly work to offer the best worship experience, the most engaging preaching, and new and interesting programming. Instead of being in danger of closing their doors, attractional churches are fighting to keep their staff and to stay in their building (which often has a large auditorium). Pastors of these churches are burdened to attract people in order to save jobs and engage more people. Building a disciple making culture becomes attractive because it appears to close the back door by growing people who are willing to be sent out in order to bring others in.

The struggle attractional churches discover when they begin developing a disciple making culture is one of *scale*. Most attractional churches are relatively large, so developing Jesus-style disciple making is a slow-to-unfold process that tests the patience of leadership. The years needed to

allow the yeast of disciple making to permeate a sizable percentage of the whole church is often more time than leaders are willing to devote. Instead, church leaders seek to speed up the process by educating and regulating disciple making. The result is a highly controlled form of disciple making that lacks vitality and the ability to impact generations of disciples.

3. Spiritual growth. A third common motivation pastors have in wanting a disciple making culture is to effectively grow spiritual leaders. Typically, these churches are stable and perhaps doing well externally, but most of the church's leaders are older. Because of this, the church has had trouble developing younger leaders, but the real problem is getting the older leaders to relationally invest in younger leaders. Pastors who need to develop spiritual leaders in their churches see a disciple making culture as a way to solve that problem on both sides.

The struggle that comes with this motivation takes time to discern, but it is one of *vision*. Encouraging spiritual leaders to invest in younger leaders as a way to develop future church leadership is often successful in the short-term. But unless the current leader's model encourages an outward ministry mindset, the result of this style of disciple making ends where it began—with new spiritual leaders and nothing more than that. A "spiritual leader" is not necessarily the same as a disciple-making leader. Jesus engaged the Twelve primarily as an act of obedience to God (John 5:19; 17:6) and secondarily to grow fishers of men, not to raise up religious leaders.

His way of training and development bears witness to the outward mindset. He came for those who were sick, not those who were healthy (Luke 5:31), he appointed them to be with him so that he could send them out to preach and to drive out demons (Mark 3:15), and he left them the mission of making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 1:8). At each step, their training pulsated outward not inward.

Pursuing a disciple making culture to develop spiritual leaders puts the cart where the horse belongs. The engine of a disciple making culture is its outward movement to the nations. Disciple making is for everyone, not just those with the spiritual gift of leadership. Churches who leverage disciple making to raise up spiritual leaders frequently end up with a caste problem within the church. This means that disciple making is seen as just for the super-star Christians, while the everyday disciples are left out. Disciple making *is* for the spiritual super stars, but it's also for everyday believers who are hungry for more. Jesus was on the lookout for the spiritually hungry. He then encouraged and grew them into disciple makers.

> The engine of a disciple making culture is its outward movement to the nations.

4. Missional. The fourth motivation is missional. As American culture continues to move away from both God and the church, many pastors realize the church needs to move toward the culture. The problem pastors see is church members who are focused on church social

activity and programs. Not only are they not reaching the skeptics and seekers around them, but they aren't even relationally connected to those people. Pastors of churches who are hungry for missional impact see a disciple making culture as a way to equip people to be sent out into missional initiatives.

The struggle of a missional motivation is a struggle to *love*. When disciple making is built solely around evangelistic mission, it narrows the gospel and distorts the church's responsibility to one another and to individuals within a person's relational network. Serving meals, sending hundreds of soldier care packages, running a church basketball league, and Operation Christmas Child are all examples of serving the lost as people without loving them *toward becoming disciples*. We don't see this sort of relationally disconnected serving in the Scriptures. They are all good things, but these examples of consumeristic "missional disciple making" depersonalizes both the served and the serving. Instead of inspiring young disciples to mature and helping the lost to embrace Christ, they create the illusion of Christ-like service without the sacrifice that loves demands. Disciple making requires people to love those they are serving and has a vision large enough to include sufferers, skeptics, and the saved.

Generational Motivation in Disciple Making

None of these motivations are sinful. In fact, each one springs from a genuine desire to do the best they can with the training they have received. Pastors want the church

to flourish as they shepherd the flock and steward the call God has placed on their life. Unfortunately, if a disciple making culture is being sought, these motivations will lead to a different result.

So what motivation provides fertile ground to grow a disciple making culture? Disciple making cultures are grown by disciple makers that carry within them both a Christological and a generational motivation. They want to see disciple making flourish in their life and in the church because they know that King Jesus has called them to follow his example in making disciples (Luke 6:40). Disciple makers with a Christological motivation want to follow Jesus in order to become just like Jesus. For such a disciple maker, it's not enough to make a couple of disciples. Instead, they want to do what Jesus did; they want to make a team of disciples who will have the faith to challenge and then change the world. A disciple maker wants to walk in the steps of Jesus. It's not enough to be moral, to faithfully shepherd a church, to raise a family, and to serve others. No, disciple makers are consumed with becoming just like Jesus. They are willing to lay down their lives to see Christ fill others. A disciple maker makes disciples because it's a part of who they are, not part of what they do. It's not their job; it's their calling. Their commitment to make disciples is not just because of who Jesus is and what he commanded (Matt. 28:18–20)

> A disciple maker makes disciples because it's a part of who they are, not part of what they do.

but also because it's their very life—their way of being in the world.

Their passion is also fueled by a generational motivation. They embrace the thin span of time that is their life and want to build the kingdom to the best of their ability. They desire to serve the purposes God has for them in this generation (Acts 13:36). They eagerly take hold of *the* promise (Gal. 3:29) that God gave Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to multiply their life as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5–6; 26:2–6; 28:13–15). This promise isn't for their glory but for God's. It was an invitation to follow and to work on something together that would hold meaning in this life and into eternity. A generational perspective allows a disciple maker to mine the Scriptures for promises made to others and to ask God to do the same in their own life. Here are a couple of examples of this:

- Isaiah 43:4: God says, "Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life."
- Isaiah 60:22, "The least of you will become a thousand, and the smallest a mighty nation. I am the LORD; in its time I will do this swiftly."

Disciple makers read passages like these and cry out, "God, would you use my life to do this?" A disciple maker recognizes they're a part of unfolding the grand story of

God as he builds a people for himself. God uses people just like you to do this. It's about recognizing your part in the story. As Christ's disciples we have a great heritage (2 Cor. 1:20; 2 Pet. 1:4) that should fuel our disciple making motivation. God wants to use every disciple to build the church by advancing the gospel and the kingdom. It's this white-hot

> God wants to use every disciple to build the church by advancing the gospel and the kingdom.

passion for becoming like Jesus and serving the purposes that God has for us in this generation that gives the sharp vision and the patient endurance necessary to build a disciple making foundation.

What's Your Motivation?

Pastors who practice disciple making are committed to building up the body of Christ—both by bringing the faithful to maturity and also by investing in skeptics to embrace the living Christ. Such commitment to Jesus-style living is costly. Disciple making pastors are often attacked by their own church leaders. For example, a pastor friend of mine was told by his leadership team that he needed to use his time talking about disciple making, but not doing it. They wanted him to focus on the business of the church and preaching. For them church progress was measured by numbers and exciting programs. Rather than compromise, he left. Disciple makers *make* disciples. It's more than a strategy; it's a way of being. It's more than a priority; it's *the* priority. No. Matter. What.

What's your motivation for building a disciple making culture? If you've already started building, how has your motivation impacted your action? Don't move on from the message of this chapter too quickly because if you aren't growing as a disciple maker, nothing I say in the rest of this book will enable you to build a disciple making foundation. If your pastor isn't a disciple maker, he is unable to lay a disciple making foundation, much less be the leader of a disciple making culture.

Regardless of how ambitious or committed to the cause a leader might be, only a disciple maker can lay a disciple making foundation. For some leaders that's a sobering reality. I've met many who have faithfully led churches for decades but have never made a reproducing disciple. It's not necessarily their fault. They did what they were trained to do. Though they realize the purpose of the church is to make disciples, they haven't been taught how to do it. Most people graduate seminary without a single class on how to make a disciple. Instead, they have been trained to guard sound doctrine, to faithfully preach the Word, and to shepherd people through the journey of life. These are good things, but they aren't sufficient—in and of themselves—to make healthy disciple makers.

If you are a disciple maker—even a young one or a lay person—then you are ready to learn how to create a disciple making culture, not just make disciples. You are ready to continue becoming more and more like Jesus.

You are ready to build a disciple making foundation that will support a disciple making movement.

Building such a movement always starts with one person. In Scripture, it was Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Paul, to name a few. Are you willing for God to use you to start the movement at your church? A movement always begins with one, but you can't do it alone. Powerful disciple making movements are born out of a passion for God and the gospel. Disciple makers are motivated by God's love for people and his passion for the nations. Such a vision can't be fulfilled apart from partnering with others. Partnership is important, but developing a team is the key to a foundation that will support generations of disciple makers. In the next chapter, let's look at the difference a CORE team makes in building a disciple making culture.

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The Difference a CORE Team Makes

Like Pisano's experience with the Tower, I had my own leaning tower moment in 2011. It shook my confidence to the marrow of my bones. I'd been teaching in Thailand for just under a year when the assistant principal summoned me to his office. It'd been one of the most difficult years of my life. My wife, eight-month-old daughter, and I had condensed our possessions down to a couple of suitcases, said goodbye to family and friends, and moved to Thailand as missionaries. For twelve long months, we'd worked hard to learn the language, acculturate, and find ways to love and serve those around us. I expected the meeting to be related to my contract, and I approached the office for a conversation that I'll never forget.

"Most of the teachers think that you are selfish."

Ouch. I was stunned, and my internal translation services briefly went offline. I wondered, "How could he say that I'm selfish?!" I had been diligent in learning Thai, regularly asked my co-teacher if she needed help with anything, spent down time relating with the other teach-

ers, and had good rapport with the students' parents. I thought everything was going well. Somehow I recovered enough Thai vocabulary to ask why—my question was met with a question.

"Well, have you asked the other teachers if they need help?"

"Yes, frequently," I replied.

"No, no, not just the teachers you teach with, but all the others?" I was so confused at this point. There were over sixty teachers in this large government school. I'd yet to remember most of their names, let alone ask if they needed my help.

As our conversation continued, my boss told me I needed to go to each and every teacher in the school to ask how I could help them! I left his office frustrated, discouraged, and confused. My Thai friends at the school did their best to cheer me up, and in time, gently revealed that the assistant principal was right. As I went around offering my help to the other teachers, I was afraid I'd be inundated with requests I couldn't fulfill. Instead not one took me up on my offer. Still each one appreciated my offer.

From all this, I learned that they saw me as selfish, not because I wasn't helping but because they didn't know they could count on me to help. To them, I wasn't part of the team.

The difference between being part of a group and being on their team was significant. I'd joined the faculty as an American joins a group. I had my own reasons for

being there and how I could serve others. That day in the principal's office, however, I learned that I hadn't merely joined a faculty of teachers. I'd joined something more cohesive and committed than that. I'd joined a team. To the casual observer a group and team may look the same, but there's a huge difference. People join *groups* to get something that aligns with their own agenda, but people join *teams* to contribute something toward a goal that can't be achieved alone. Then, members expect to benefit, but they also expect to sacrifice.

The Team as a Foundation

Most American adults struggle with being on a team. Outside of sports, and perhaps family, our culture doesn't think in terms of team. Our culture is individualistic. Our historical narratives glorify independence and individualism. We worship at the altar of self. We are a nation of do-it-yourselfers, who look out for number one. Sure, we use the word team at work or at church, but most of us find the comfort of relationally distant groups preferable to the demands and intimacy of a team.

A disciple making culture starts with one disciple maker, but from there, it needs to grow into what I call a "CORE team." Since the CORE team is the foundation of a disciple making culture, let's establish a common understanding of a CORE team:

A CORE team is two or more people who have banded together in pursuit of a common goal.

They have:

- *A **C**ommon vision*
- *Individual **O**wnership of that vision*
- ***R**elational resilience as a result of their connection to the mission and to one another and have coordinated their efforts to know who can be counted on for what*
- ***E**ndurance to weather both discouragement or hardship in order to reach their objectives*

The team becomes the foundation that, when skill-fully laid, supports the entire building. A team that never comes together will sink, crack, and crumble—just like the Tower of Pisa. I've repeatedly seen teams that faltered and swallowed up years of hard-fought disciple making momentum with a faulty founda-tion. If there's no CORE team to support disciple making in a church then no disciple making culture will emerge. It really is that simple.

> If there's no CORE team to support disciple making in a church then no disciple making culture will emerge.

Cultivating a CORE team is non-negotiable. It's always been that way. We can see both Jesus and Paul developing teams to lay a disciple making foundation.

Jesus invested in a few individuals for nearly a year before calling others to join them as a team. His vision for the team is clear in a couple passages, such as Mark 3:14–15: "He appointed twelve . . . that they might

be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons." And Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Paul's team changed over time, but in Thessalonica, he had just two teammates: Silas and Timothy. They lived together among the Thessalonians and modeled for them what life looked like when someone was empowered with the Holy Spirit. Upon that small, yet powerful, foundation some of the locals took notice and began to imitate them. As the number of disciples increased, others started to become like the disciples. As the spiritual generations flowed outward, they became a "model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:7). And soon after, "the Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere" (1 Thess. 1:8).

A close reading of the Pauline Epistles shows that teams led those early churches. Not only does Paul remind the Ephesians of their different leadership roles in the church but he also ends most of his letters by individually greeting those leaders. For Paul, church leadership was a "we" thing, not a "me" thing. Paul developed and identified CORE team leadership that served as the foundation of the disciple making culture in the church.

In a culture of consumerism, it's difficult to develop a team. Though small groups are touted as the main way churches make disciples, most small groups never make

even one disciple. Instead, groups give each person the opportunity to engage on their own terms. Most have a culture that supports comfort not connection. They faithfully follow the unwritten rule of leaving each other alone. As a result, group members are afraid to ask each other questions about what they have been reading in the Word or if they've taken the opportunity to share about Jesus lately. Such questions are off limits. We fear putting someone off, or worse yet, them asking us the same question back! Most small groups never set expectations or hold members accountable to those expectations. Imagine a soccer team like that! Players would sit down when tired, show up to practices only when it was convenient, and play whatever position fit their whims. Instead of being a team on mission, small groups are focused on developing what you know, not doing something with what you know. They exist to serve themselves. A CORE team is radically different.

Priorities in Developing a CORE Team

So how can we as disciple makers develop a CORE team in the midst of consumerism? First, we must align several individuals around Jesus' mission of reaching the lost (Luke 19:10) and our vision of reaching the nations (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). Then, as each person gains clarity on the **C**ommon vision, they must **O**wn it for themselves no matter what. Next, team members must be willing to make time to **R**elationally love others on the team—even those they don't really like. This step is

crucial in learning to love skeptics and seekers with whom they hold less in common. As they love one another, they'll find it necessary to work through hard-heartedness, relational difficulties, and their own inadequacies as a disciple. Finally, each person must **E**ndure in the mission even when they want to quit.

A CORE team is deeply committed to one another and to a common purpose. Their commitment to one another is defined by the mission, not by a calendar, not by a curriculum, and not by a covenant. The depth of a CORE team's commitment to the mission and to one another is what separates it from a group and enables it to support a disciple making culture.

> Their commitment to one another is defined by the mission, not by a calendar, not by a curriculum, and not by a covenant.

If you think it sounds impossible, you're right—except with God all things are possible. And if you pastor a church where you can't identify even one person like that, let alone a few, don't be discouraged. As we've already seen, the path to a disciple making team must start with you. Both research and experience show that the key to changing a church is not to change the programming, it's to change the people. You must help one person embrace the vision before two. And once you have one, you need to develop another, and then finally you must develop a team.

In summary, a disciple making culture is supported by a CORE team, and a CORE team begins with a disci-

ple maker and grows from there. If you've made a couple of reproducing disciples then you're ready to begin building a CORE team. As we dig deeper into each aspect of a CORE team, it's important to understand that each step must be focused on the team becoming what you hope it will reproduce.

Each step must be focused on the team becoming what you hope it will reproduce.

The first part of developing a CORE team is cultivating **C**ommon vision. Vision isn't new to churches, businesses, or other organizations. Many churches spend significant time developing statements that they hope will impact the behavior of the people. Typically, leaders are perplexed at the apathetic response from the people. The problem isn't one of hearing—it's one of seeing. Getting leaders to see something new is the first challenge a CORE team must face.

When a CORE team develops common vision then they can move forward in their mission. Because without a vision, a team will lack the direction and confidence to carry out what they have been called to do. To this we now turn.

Common Vision

Did you know that for over two hundred years people believed that California was an island?[8] It happened innocently enough. In 1539, explorer Hernan Cortez was sent from Spain to search for an idyllic island. After a long journey, supplies ran low and so he made an educated guess. Having sailed up the Gulf of Baja for hundreds of miles with land on both sides and a horizon of water ahead and behind, he turned back and excitedly told the king and queen that he'd found the island.

The belief was reinforced by later inadequately-equipped expeditions. Soon maps were printed, people were educated, and the physical map became the mental reality. Though expeditions as early as forty years afterwards found that it was in fact a peninsula, accepting what we know as California as "the island of California" was commonplace for 200 years.

When people reproduce an inadequate map, their actions cause a major obstacle for leaders. The obstacle manifests itself when leaders try to introduce a new map. The first reaction of those with the old map is to misun-

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8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Island_of_California.

derstand the new one. The misunderstanding is a result of not being able to see the new map (even if it's more accurate). The reason is simple: once a map is accepted, it becomes the lens through which all new data is interpreted. It becomes *the way*.

Maps of the Church

In the West, most believers have carried the same discipleship map for generations. Historically, maturity has been measured by attendance and the retention of knowledge. This explains why most church discipleship strategies revolve around classes and theological education. Those who show aptitude become teachers. This discipleship map is deeply etched into the mind of each church member.

So regardless of how clearly a new disciple making vision is articulated, it normally doesn't get through. Listeners interpret it through old ways of seeing things. Time and time again pastors have communicated the need to do better, to do more, and to grow. Listeners are used to it. They are used to nodding in agreement as the vision is articulated. They are used to the interesting exercise of thinking about the vision. They are used to talking about how the church can become more relational, more effective in its outreach, and more focused on helping believers grow.

With the old map, the result is often the same: more conversations, followed by little action, and even less accountability. This well-established pattern has implic-

itly trained church members that their part in disciple-ship is to learn and to passively support leadership. Many committed Christians struggle to accept their personal responsibility in disciple making. It's simply never been a part of their old map!

The new map is different. Jesus-style disciple making cannot be passive. Instead of employing a focus on educa-tion, it focuses on obedience-fueled transformation. Instead of focusing on knowledge, it focuses on becom-ing. In order to make a difference, this different under-standing must lead to different action. Leaders must take the time to confront the errors of the old map, define the terms, and model the actions expected of team members. This process is time consuming and sometimes painful. Remember, it takes time for people to let go of an old map—and to trust a new one.

The Challenge of Drawing a New Map

The CORE team leader must be prepared for friction when the old map is challenged with a new one. The stress is necessary. In order for team members to see the difference between them, the maps must be contrasted. Still, many team members react strongly to the idea that they are the ones expected to personally disciple others. Their reactions will vary widely from humble willingness to hostile defense.

CORE team leaders must meet negative reactions with humility and compassion while leaning into the relationship (more about that in Chapter 5). Remember,

Christians have already been on a journey, and now they are seeing that it's not going where they thought! Their negative reactions can be a challenge for pastors—especially if a team member gets defensive. Pastors must hold their ground on this and not compromise the new map by making it feel like the old one. Another mistake pastors often make is to grind the process to a withering pace so that team members grow weary and remove themselves from participation in order to avoid conflict . . . a socially safe way to avoid unmet expectations and hurt feelings.

The problem pastors face is similar to the one mapmakers faced with the "island of California." It took 200 years to change the map, because the longer a map is accepted as the truth, the harder it is to change. How long has your church operated off the old map? If you accept something long enough, it becomes *the* way, not *a* way. Clear vision depends on holding three things in common: a current location, a desired destination, and a plan (map) for how to get there.

> **If you accept something long enough, it becomes *the* way, not *a* way.**

The Journey to Drawing a New Map

In his book, *The Advantage*, Patrick Lencioni offers six essential questions for developing clarity around a team's destination and roadmap.[9] They are:

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9. Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publications, 2012), 77.

1. *Why do we exist?*
2. *How do we behave?*
3. *What do we do?*
4. *How will we succeed?*
5. *What is most important, right now?*
6. *Who must do what?*

CORE teams that effectively work through these questions establish common vision and purpose. Pastors don't have to find people who happen to already have a similar vision. They must *develop* the common vision with those who are a part of the CORE team—so that the CORE team can go and spread that vision to the rest of the church. Over time, a CORE team's answers to these questions will be something like the following.

1. *Why do we exist?* We exist to become, on a small scale, what we hope God will do on a larger scale with our church. We believe that a disciple making culture begins with a disciple making team. And we are that team. As God molds and shapes us as individuals and as a team, we will serve as an example to others of what the lifestyle of a disciple maker looks like.

2. *How do we behave?* We behave like broken people who are becoming like Jesus, not just in our morals but also in our priorities, values, and methods. We humbly seek him first. Together we are honest about our weaknesses without hiding behind them. We choose to love one another enough to care and to confront, knowing that we need grace.

3. *What do we do?* We love God first as we seek him and remain obedient to his leading in our life. We also love one another and make disciples who make other disciples. We trust him to birth a movement through us.

4. *How will we succeed?* Our success come from day-by-day surrender to Jesus and to one another. We cannot accomplish what God has called us to on our own. Our collective success is tied to our individual obedience. Our team's diversity—our age, gender, ethnicity, vocation, etcetera—helps each of us to individually impact different people. In that way, the fruitfulness of each individual impacts different networks. Together our obedience proclaims that everyone is called to make disciples and that every disciple can reproduce as they journey to maturity.

> Our collective success is tied to our individual obedience.

5. and 6. The last two questions—*What is most important, right now?* and *Who must do what?* changes depending on the circumstances, but they are important questions nonetheless. At the beginning of the CORE team building process, the most important priority is to get on the same page with regard to the common vision. This involves multiple conversations rooted in Scripture and encourages honest engagement from team members. As the team embraces the mission and begins to understand one another's gifts and calling, the role each member is called to serve will begin to emerge. Members will begin to naturally rely on one another. The encour-

agers naturally pick up those who are struggling, the prophets naturally challenge the team to new levels of obedience, and the teachers explore ways to communicate and implement best practices in disciple making.

As you can see from the above answers, a CORE team's common vision includes four major things: unified purpose of culture change centered on disciple making, love of God as a disciple, commitment to the team, and commitment to making disciple makers.

As the leader you must be careful not to rush the process. It takes lots time to develop an effective CORE team. Creating clarity around these questions is the product of frequently praying together, wrestling with biblical truth, and having vulnerable conversations. Though it's easy to acknowledge the truth of what we should do, it's much more difficult to do the internal work necessary to become a living embodiment of that truth. Even still, God is with us. The process of change happens best in the midst of relationship. It's a difficult process.

Change happens best in the midst of relationship.

No one likes to hear that their map shows an island that's really a peninsula. Any team that is not unified has no chance of healthy reproduction. However, a team with a common vision carries with them a pocket map that will guide them as they encounter road blocks, detours, and unexpected challenges. When the destination is clear and the boundaries are defined, the trials shrink from insurmountable to manageable.

Developing clarity around the destination and having a map isn't enough, however. Even after we gain clarity, don't mistake clarity for a guarantee of success. Success requires more than just clearly defining the mission and ways to achieve it; success requires a depth of ownership of disciple making to which most church members are unaccustomed. The goal of individual ownership shapes how leaders must lead. Leaders must be relationally connected to each team member enough to lovingly confront them. The change that individual ownership will bring goes well beyond ministry. It transforms their entire lives!

Owned Individually

Most disciple making leaders believe that if they develop clarity around the destination and the map, then people will move with them. No matter how much we wish that were the case, it's just not true.

As counter-intuitive as it may seem, our culture is full of examples of people who clearly see but don't move. Consider the sedentary person who knows all the risk-factors associated with being out of shape yet still chooses not to regularly exercise. Consider the workaholic who sees the impact it's having on their family yet continues to choose productivity over presence. Consider the pastor who knows he should practice the Christian Sabbath, but habitually answers non-emergency calls on his off-day.

In fact, instead of moving someone to act, clarity has the potential to solidify a person's commitment to the status quo. How can this be? Didn't we just talk about the importance of common vision as we build a CORE team? If individuals don't respond with action, how can the team's vision be accomplished?

Creating Individual Ownership

Of course, without action neither the team's vision or the individual's purpose can be accomplished. However, keep in mind that the connection between vision and action shouldn't be assumed. Often, seeing clearly doesn't lead to action. Why? Because people are intelligent, emotional, and committed to comfort. Consider the following real-life examples of people who clearly see and believe in the mission, yet still refuse to move.

1. *Jonathan* is a 38-year-old father of three, who is living his life at capacity. He has eagerly accepted an invitation to be a part of his church's CORE team. As the team has met, he's become convinced that the current way of doing church isn't working. He's listened to the arguments that the CORE team ought to be a disciple making foundation but remains unconvinced. Deep down Jonathan still believes that lasting change must ultimately come from church leadership.

Jonathan is convinced of the problem but not of the solution. As a result, he's not going to move. He does affirm the direction, though, and continues to engage with the team as he looks for opportunities to propose staff-centric solutions.

2. *Rachel* is 55, a new grandmother, and an established accountant. She's enjoying the CORE team experience so far. For decades, she's felt like something has been off about her church. It's clear to her now that a disciple can't just follow Jesus' moral teachings but also

must follow his methods. What's become very clear to her during the team meetings is the importance for a disciple maker to be relational.

As a strong introvert, Rachel is many things but relational isn't one of them. She's convinced of the path forward, but she's equally convinced that her gift and contribution is better directed elsewhere. Instead of relational disciple making, she wants to develop and lead events for young mothers and serve on the hospitality team. She's not going to disciple anyone, but she will attempt to be intentional with her family in order to fulfill her team responsibility.

3. *Kevin* is 64, a long-time church elder and one of the most respected people in the church. For decades he's led a small group and is currently leading an in-depth Sunday school class on the church fathers. Though a businessman by training, he's invested years studying theology and the historical church. The CORE team conversations have challenged his convictions on how to make disciples. He's convinced that a relational approach would be very effective and more accessible to many people.

Yet Kevin isn't going to move either. He believes that God's equipped him to make disciples by using his gift of teaching *in classes*. He can think of many examples of individuals who have grown from his teaching. Not only that, he imagines the amount of time and energy he'd have to expend in order to try this relational approach. He's ready to support the team as they grow in this and

he'll give modest effort, but he believes his best contribution is by doing what he's always done.

If you were leading a CORE team with any of these members, you might think that Jonathan, Rachel, and Kevin were fully on-board. Each is faithful to the meetings, the assignments, and encourage the general direction of disciple making. But none of them own the vision individually. Each has a different reason for their passive resistance: Jonathan isn't convinced of the solution; Rachel doesn't think she's capable or called to develop that capability; and Kevin is unwilling to trade competence for incompetence. On the surface, they are on board, but in their hearts, they aren't open to moving toward relational disciple making. When leaders don't relationally track with the individuals on their team, they'll miss the truth of what's happening at a heart level.

How to Help Individuals Move

As you can see, clarity does not guarantee movement or ownership. The team setting has the potential to induce socially prompted action, but action without ownership is never enough to transform the individual. And action without ownership will never be enough to infect others and encourage them to take ownership for themselves either.

In order to develop a strong CORE team, the leader must help each individual personally own and live out the vision. In a book like this, which is focused on developing the foundation of a team, it's easy to skim over this point,

but this point should not be undervalued or missed. Teams are only as strong as their weakest link. If a team sees that one person isn't fully on board then it threatens the entire culture of the team.

> If a team sees that one person isn't fully on board then it threatens the entire culture.

One technique that helps team members move through barriers is a coaching conversation. This is an intentional conversation that follows a simple pattern of asking the following questions in this order:

1. What is the desired future?
2. What is the current reality?
3. What are the barriers?
4. What is the next right step toward that desired future?

You can visualize these questions as a bridge from current reality to desired future. The bridge itself is made in order to conquer barriers and prompt necessary actions to get to the other side.[10] Without concrete target behaviors, most people struggle to move.[11] Helping individuals make individual action plans helps them move to action

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10. A more complete explanation of this coaching framework can be found in Appendix A

11. Black, J. Stewart, *It Starts with One 3rd Edition*, (Upper Saddle River, Pearson Education, Inc., 2014), 98.

and grow internal motivation.[12] The power of imagining the destination, naming the obstacles, and planning how to overcome them is difficult to overstate. A leader who is able to walk team members through these conversations, and then holds them accountable to those actions, can expect to see the Spirit transform people.

Leaders must also recognize that individual objections are just that—individual. While it's sometimes appropriate for the leader to address individual obstacles in the context of the team, most of the time it's better to do it with just one or two people. Addressing these matters in small relational contexts, away from the team, has several advantages.

First, it allows a person to deal with his own obstacle without worrying about what the others may think. No one wants to be singled out for not getting something. Whether the obstacles stem from a weakness or a difference of opinion, individual conversations with the leader allows each member to be heard in a relational context.

Second, addressing these matters in a relational way allows the leader to model a disciple making context for the team member. As the leader listens and patiently instructs, the team member experiences the power of disciple making in real time.

Third, addressing obstacles outside of the team allows the team to stay focused on topics that will bring about

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12. Black, J. Stewart, *It Starts with One 3rd Edition*, (Upper Saddle River, Pearson Education, Inc., 2014), 107.

common connection and development. The team's purpose is clearly and continually proclaimed when distractions are minimized.

The conviction to make disciples must be bigger than the individual, for every individual. In other words, each person's fear must be smaller than their conviction to multiply. As Jesus says in John 12:24, "Very truly

> **Each person's fear must be smaller than their conviction to multiply.**

I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." When a person is willing to step through their fears, they are ready to step into the fruitfulness of reproduction. The CORE team supports each person as they overcome their obstacles. The team environment puts them in relationship with others who are being stretched and transformed as they press forward together. The momentum of that transformation drives the team toward a new lifestyle and the acquisition of new competencies.

When disciple makers own the mission deeply, something amazing happens: people who have sat passively on the sidelines for years start getting very hungry to multiply. They are no longer content to leave the real work of disciple making to the professionals. Instead, they own their relationship with God and become powerful disciple makers.

A healthy CORE team is marked by synergy. The sum far exceeds the number of its parts. It doesn't make

sense, but when a team comes together it carries with it an energy that is dynamic and powerful. As we've seen, it's very difficult to develop a great team. Each leader must work hard to clarify a common vision and love deeply until each individual owns it. But there's even more to it.

A common vision is owned by members individually, but teams must also be in healthy relationship with one another. Lots of transformation happening on the same team leads to its own problems. People who are on fire for Jesus tend to have less awareness of how they are relationally impacting others. Many end up burning others or burning out. Team members who are ignited toward making disciples must be careful their fire doesn't drive others away, but how? A CORE team that relates well with one another fuels the fire of those on and off the team.

Relationally Resilient

In 2006, designer Peter Skillman developed a straightforward competition that has been repeated hundreds of times all around the world.[13] It's been done by CEO's, lawyers, business school students, and even by kindergarteners. Each four-person team has eighteen minutes to build the tallest freestanding structure possible using the following materials:

- twenty pieces of uncooked spaghetti
- one yard of string
- one yard of transparent tape
- one regular-size marshmallow

Outside of the time constraint, the only rule is the marshmallow must end up on top.

As you might expect there's a big difference in the results between the adults and the kindergarteners. Out of the four groups the average height in inches were as follows: 10, 16, 21, and 26. Care to guess the order? From

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13. Peter Skillman Marshmallow Design Challenge, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1p5sBzMtB3Q, accessed January 31, 2020

worst to first, the results were business school students, lawyers, CEO's, and kindergarteners.[14]

Yes, the kids are consistently the big winners of this challenge! How do the kids consistently do better than so many highly educated adults? How can a group of six-year-olds build towers that average over twice the height of business school students? The answer offers us a key to developing relationally resilient teams.

The surprising results have spurred lots of further study. Out of the many differences in team make-up, which ones are most important to the outcome? Clearly, the adults possess a much stronger grasp of strategy, physics, and how to respect others. Despite all of this, researchers have concluded that what made the kids' teams so successful was how they collaborated.

Each adult team started in essentially the same way. They talked about the problem, formulated strategy, threw out design ideas, divided up tasks, and sometimes even appointed a "CEO of Spaghetti Inc."!

The kids didn't do any of that. Instead of talking about the problem or asking for each other's ideas, they simply grabbed the materials and got to work. As they went along, they took materials from each other and communicated abruptly. "Give me that," "No, you can't," "Wait! Just let me!" An observer might describe their

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14. *Build a Tower, Build a Team,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0_yKBitO8M, accessed January 31, 2020

winning strategy as quickly finding a bad solution and then finding a slightly better one. Repeat.

It's not that the kids' team collaborated and the others didn't, but rather the type of collaboration revealed the team's top priority. The kids' top priority was to build the tallest tower possible. The adults' top priority was to manage the status and emotions of each person in the group. While the kindergarteners got right to work building their tower, the adults were busy trying to understand: Who's in charge? Is it okay to criticize someone else's idea? How do I contribute without upsetting my teammates?[15]

The essential difference between the older teams and the kids was not their individual skills, but the way they interacted as a team. A team's relational culture is its DNA; it carries within it a base code for its true priorities and values.

> A team's relational culture is its DNA.

The Challenge of Relational Resilience

One challenge every CORE team faces is relational in nature. Whenever you bring together a group of diverse individuals—diverse by gender, generation, ethnic background, etcetera—interpersonal issues arise. The presence of relational issues is a good indicator that your team is connecting with one another below the surface.

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15. Coyle, Daniel, *The Culture Code*, (New York, Bantam Books, 2018), xvii.

As good as it is, if these issues aren't handled well, they can quickly grow into a problem that sabotages the entire culture building process.

The struggle of American adults to relate honestly to themselves and to one another often prevents healthy teamwork and connection—even when each person individually sees and owns the vision.

In building a CORE team, the leader must be vigilant to identify words and deeds that build up the desired culture. In a disciple making culture, patterns of relating are a part of what needs to be shaped into the image of Christ. As such, it's important that the leader is growing in his emotional and relational health in order to help others do the same.

If leaders want the CORE team to have a culture worth exporting to the church and beyond, they must be skilled in praising the positive and pointing out the negative. Pastors are often pushed out of their comfort zone in giving both positive and corrective feedback. While many pastors struggle with people pleasing, it's natural for anyone to shy away from giving a needed admonition to a volunteer, especially if that volunteer is in charge of their job review! Despite the challenge, pastors must speak the truth plainly as one who ultimately answers to God. And then follow that truth-telling with love and concern communicated by leaning into the relationship. Such an example communicates expectations to the team and establishes trust in the leader.

When clear feedback is paired with grace, people feel safe to be who they are as they move toward becoming. Pastors can repeatedly communicate grace messages to the team by sharing their own personal struggles, weaknesses, and failures while inviting the team's help. The help can take many familiar forms such as accountability and encouragement as well as learning from others who are strong in that area. Alternatively, if a pastor is unable to give clear feedback—both positive and negative— teams are commonly pulled down by one or two individuals. Many of us have witnessed the negative power a complainer, an over-talker, or an aggressive truth-teller can have on a team or group. Be intentional in addressing this because if negative attitudes and behaviors are left unaddressed, it slowly erodes trust in both the leader and the process throughout the team.

Keys to Helpful Feedback

There are two keys to achieve clear and helpful feedback in the team setting. The first is relationship. When team leaders take the time to invest in individuals, it gives them relational capital that is vital for feedback to be heard. Let me emphasize, I'm not suggesting that relational capital should be the motivation for building connection—acting in such a way would be manipulative and will normally backfire. Still, the team leader's capacity to build personal relationships should limit the size of your team. At least once a month, the team leader should have the time and emotional bandwidth to intentionally

connect and converse with each member of the team. The connection should be done in an individual setting or in pairs with respect to the opposite gender.

The second key is giving feedback in the context of the team's performance. These feedback conversations are important for team members and the team leader alike. They give team members the opportunity to voice personal struggles such as insecurity, lack of following through, and overcoming obstacles in order to go where they feel God is leading them. For team leaders, feedback conversations allow them the opportunity to provide personal feedback. There are lots of common issues that a leader should speak into—again initially within the context of team performance. The insecure person will often negatively impact the team by either not speaking up or by being a "know-it-all." While the former robs the team of vital contribution and unity, the latter robs the team of robust discussion and individual value. Those who struggle with boundaries or others-awareness often have difficulty fulfilling their commitment to the team.

Direct feedback from the leader helps each person understand the impact they are having on the team and gives them a chance to adjust. In each case, it's the leader that must step up to address the myriad of issues that threaten the team's progress. When done with care and concern, each of these crucial conversations help team members to quickly grow. The sad reality is most adults have never had someone love them enough to speak the truth about how they are impacting others.

Such lack of love leads people to live their whole lives being talked about and avoided. The examples are abundant, and you can probably picture people you have known who were know-it-alls, complainers, overbearing, or a myriad of other connection destroyers. Leaders must be loving enough and courageous enough to address these things.

Handling Conflict

Leaders should also expect conflict to arise. Conflict is a part of relationships. Don't fear it. Jesus himself was a peace maker, not a peace keeper. The difference is huge. As my friend Lou says, "Conflict is always about leadership because leadership is always about character." Leaders must learn to handle conflict head-on. Avoiding conflict to keep the peace makes the problem bigger. Conflict handled well is an opportunity for growth and greater connection. Remember, the CORE team is a microcosm of your desired church culture. As such, take the lead to handle conflict biblically. If team members aren't handling it biblically, boldly step in to ensure that the conflict doesn't spoil the entire team. Recognize that helping team members appropriately handle conflict is a life skill that's essential to a reproducing disciple. Since conflict is a part of relationships, developing the life skill of conflict resolution will help them in their family, their workplace, and their friendships.

> **Conflict is a part of relationships. Don't fear it.**

Like a marriage, a healthy team setting allows immaturities to surface. Teams that seek to placate or bury these immaturities do not develop the culture they seek. Instead they develop a culture that values comfort over character. Team members relate to one another, themselves, and the world in a fractured way that aims at self-protection. An unsuccessful team engages one another, the church, and the world on the basis of what's best for each individual. The CORE team must learn to behave as anti-consumers, who seek to serve instead of being served, who seek to solve problems rather than simply identify them, and who strive to help others grow not just grow themselves. They must become surrendered disciples.

Like each aspect of developing a CORE team, it's a challenge, but this challenge is not insurmountable. I've seen many CORE teams relate to one another with both grace and honesty. Their relational resilience is on full display when conflict arises, and they willingly love each other through it. Your CORE team can do the same thing, but it won't happen without struggle and being dependent on God. Often God stretches the team and its members in painful ways, which is why the next chapter is so important. Toward the end of the CORE team-building process, an interesting thing happens: the leader and the members begin seeing things very differently than they had before, and their response to seeing things differently makes the ultimate difference in making disciples.

CHAPTER 6

Endure to the End

In the end, artist Bonnano Pisano quit. He left the tower leaning and incomplete. From the story in the first chapter, we know that despite years of effort and the expectation of success, once he faced an obstacle that seemed insurmountable, Pisano did what people often do. He quit. He buried the stone that proclaimed his brilliance as the tower's builder and simply walked away from a project that had consumed him for years. In his mind, the failure left him no choice. He thought he could do it, he tried his best, and it didn't work out.

It's easy to empathize with Pisano. We all know what it's like to fail, despite our best efforts, then quit. Every year millions make resolutions that follow the same narrative. We start out persuaded that we need to change. Then, we're convinced that we can do what's needed to make the change. So we start living into that change. Finally, we tire of the new way, and then we quit. Quitting is as human as trying.

A Critical Point in the Process

CORE teams come together because they believe that together they can do something that can't be done alone. Their sights aren't set on merely trying to change themselves but to change an entire culture. They are pressed into growth as they work to develop a common vision that is owned together. Team members are challenged together, frustrated together, and changed together. Over time their ability to work through relational land mines grows. It takes a ton of effort and commitment, but as they see the team working it begins to feel worth it.

By this point in the process, the CORE team has made lots of progress. Each member is in the process of transformation. Individuals have seen a new map for their lives and ministry, they have embarked on a journey toward individual and collective disciple making fruitfulness, and they are trying to make it all work. And now, as they press on toward the goal, they are feeling worn out. The temptation to return to their old ways is ever-present.

At the same time CORE team members are feeling tired, the team leader is normally feeling energized by what's happening. Some have ministered for decades without ever having had a team of people captivated by the same vision. Many have dreamed of having everyday disciples who are deeply committed to making disciples where they live, work, and worship. As the team moves outward toward individuals, the team leader often turns his attention to organizational levers to bring about a

disciple making culture (such as a discipleship pathway, funding the mission, etc.). This ends up being a mistake.

This shift in time, focus, and energy is a mistake because in the metaphor of resolutions, it's still early February, barely a month into the new year. Sure, there's a lot to be encouraged by, but leaders must remember that the goal isn't a disciple making team, it's a disciple making culture. Instead of decreasing involvement with the team, leaders must increase it during this final phase of becoming.

> **The goal isn't a disciple making team, it's a disciple making culture.**

The Temptation to Quit

What most leaders don't anticipate is the one remaining hurdle for the team to overcome: the temptation to quit. Now, when most leaders are tempted to quit or decrease their involvement with the team, that is precisely when they must increase it.

The entire weight of the CORE team process sits on the shoulders of individuals at this stage. To this point team members have bought into the leader's proclamation that they need a new map. They've been convinced that they had to do something different in order to arrive at a different destination. They have accepted the fact that the new map and the new ways would result in a steep learning curve. And they are on that learning curve now.

As they intentionally and relationally disciple others, they press up against their own uncertainty and incom-

petence. It's hard for anyone, let alone for the high-functioning adults who are normally chosen for these CORE teams. The frustration they feel from undesired results tears down their belief that they are on the right path.

Soon, they are plagued by thoughts such as these: *Perhaps, I'm not able to do this after all. Maybe my leader was wrong about this being the right way to go. My teammates look like they are better at this than I am, maybe I'm just not suited for this. I feel like I'm holding the team back, they would be better off if I just stepped aside.*

The team leader is encouraged by the team's progress, and yet at the same time, the team members are most vulnerable. In order for a CORE team to make it through the transformation process, they must endure to the end. To endure, team members need grit, honest communication, and a team leader who knows how to lead them through this final obstacle.

In front of the team, the leader needs to be adamant in encouraging the team. Before drawing the team to celebrate past success, he needs to revisit the big picture. Team members need to be reminded of why they are doing this, what's at stake, and how far they've already traveled. Revisiting the big picture makes the day's obstacles and the distance left to travel look smaller.

The Three Ds

Team leaders can navigate the final phase by being close enough to each team member to elevate and celebrate the three Ds: disciplines, discipling, and direction. In order

to maintain a close relationship with team members, leaders have to lean into the CORE team instead of stepping back and thinking the hardest work is behind. The three Ds are like steps up a slippery slope. They focus and inspire team members to fight through failure to the finish. They work because they provide measurable wins that the team members can reach and celebrate. Let's look at each one.

1. Spiritual disciplines. As team members focus away from growth for its own sake and toward reproduction, it's easy to lose sight of their relationship with Christ. No matter how mature a disciple is they need to remain rooted in their relationship with Christ. As every Christian worker can attest, there's a tendency to drift from one's own spiritual disciplines in order to make disciples. Take the time to ask about each person's time in the Word and in prayer. Don't simply ask if it's happening, ask what God is teaching them through those times. Ask about how God is encouraging, challenging, or simply caring for them during that time. Next share from your own time with God. Reflect together and lean into gratitude for who God is and those he's entrusted to you.

2. Discipling. Ask each team member who they are discipling. Listen well to their struggles and find areas to encourage them both in how they are investing in their disciple and in how God is using their gifts as they disciple. Celebrate the fact that they are discipling! Since most team members are discipling for the first time, you can expect them to make mistakes, to feel insecure, and

to feel responsible for a disciple's lack of progress. Keep reminding them that the real win is that *they are discipling* and share your past (and current) disciple making mistakes with them.

3. Direction. This practice contrasts the past with the present and then looks toward the future together. When done regularly, it defangs discouragement. On any journey, it's easy to forget how far we've come. In moments of fatigue or despair, remembering just how far we've come renews our strength. CORE team leaders must lift the sight of each person from their shoes to their Savior. It often sounds something like this: "Look at how far you have come! God is with you on this journey, so am I, and so is this team. I know you can continue. You are doing a great job staying focused on him (disciplines), investing in others (discipling), and continuing as he leads (direction)."

> By using the three Ds, leaders celebrate effort more than results.

By using the three Ds, leaders celebrate effort more than results. They focus the team on Jesus, discipling others, and the future. Each empowers individuals to endure in the battle for lasting transformation. Some members of the CORE team need these relational check-ins more than others, but it's the leader's job to make them a priority. Like every good shepherd, he must be close enough to the flock to know when one has strayed or when one is feeling ill.

Beyond the Three Ds

In addition to the three Ds, teams who endure have honest communication about the challenges they are facing. Teams need each other far more than they realize. Listening to one another's experience makes a huge difference. As stories of struggle are shared, hearts are encouraged, and grit grows.

CORE teams who endure to the end get to reap the harvest they have fought so hard to produce. Seeing the process through to the end gives the team a spiritual power that's dynamic. They move outward in the church culture and in the neighborhood with a sense of God's advancing kingdom and their role in it.

In other words, a CORE team serves as a firm foundation rooted deep in the heart of Christ. That firm foundation is what enables disciple makers to be made!

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CHAPTER 7

Tactics for CORE Team Development

Now that you understand the basic building blocks of forming a CORE team, I want to share some practical tips to help ensure your success.

Start with Prayer

I can't emphasize prayer enough. Building a CORE team can't happen without God moving. As individuals, we are insufficient to build a team, initiate change in another, or even in ourselves, on our own. In fact, without him, we can do *nothing* (John 15:5). Jesus not only prayed throughout the entire night before inviting his team, he also stayed in constant contact with the Father the entire time he led them (John 5:19–30). We must follow him in the same ways!

Who to Invite

As you begin to build a CORE team, keep in mind your goal for this team is to build a culture of disciple makers. It's not to simply raise up disciple makers, and it's not to build more spiritual leaders for programs. Your goal is to

create a team of disciple makers that will help you build a disciple making culture.

With that in mind, you need to think strategically. Pray and ask God to show you who to invite. It's important that your team is a cross-section of your church. So plan to include both genders, racially diverse members, and multiple generations of adults.

Plan to include both genders, racially diverse members, and multiple generations.

As you pray, ask God to show you those who are hungry for more of him. Those who are hungry for more take advantage of current opportunities, are willing to clear space in their schedule for more opportunities, and will faithfully apply what they are learning to their lives. This is the first and most important criteria.

If there are too many of the first group to include everyone, then select from those people who are influencers in the church already. This will help the culture to develop more quickly as they engage the mission as a team.

How (and How Many) to Invite

Disciple making is relational, so your invitation needs to be relational as well. An email alone isn't enough. It's okay to begin with an e-mail for clear and consistent communication, but follow the e-mail up with a personal conversation. At the end of the e-mail, let each person know that you will call or talk with them personally to

process the decision with them and to answer any questions they might have.

Most teams are four to twelve people. The determining factor is how many people the leader can relationally walk with through the process. In order for people to own the vision, the leader must track with each individual through an intentional conversation at least once a month. This could be a meeting or simply a focused ten-minute conversation after church. Frequently, the check-in will be brief and easy, but when a person is struggling with some aspect of the team a longer meeting needs to be set-up.

Some team leaders invite another established disciple maker onto the team to help with this role. Doing so enables the team to be bigger.

Emphasize the Commitment Not the Opportunity

It's true that "what you recruit to is what you recruit for." If you recruit someone to a team that will be fulfilling and fun, then that's what people will show up expecting. If you recruit someone to trust God together to do something difficult but important, then they will expect that. Remember that Jesus invited people to take up their cross, to eat of his flesh and drink of his blood, and to come and die (Luke 9:23; John 6:53; 12:24). I'm not saying to exclude the benefits as you invite people, just be sure to highlight the commitment expected.

Develop a Team, Not a Group

The challenge isn't just for team members it's for the leader as well. As we try to move forward, we can expect that our western culture will try to pull us back into consumeristic thinking that results in a group rather than a team. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, we are so used to engaging as a group that we aren't used to the effort it takes to be on a team. As the leader, you will need to view yourself as a player-coach and treat them as a team. Remember that a team is connected to both the mission and one another. Here are a few ideas for discerning whether you have a team or a group.

Try this: After you've met for a couple months, as they come into the room ask them to sit next to the person they've been encouraging lately. If you have a group, each will look around as if they missed an assignment. If you have a team, each will have someone and be happy to sit next to that person. It's important to ask who they have been encouraging because they can control their actions, not the actions of others.

Or try this: After someone has missed a meeting, ask that person who reached out to them to catch them up on what they missed. If it's a group no one will have caught them up, but a team will make sure that person is ready for what comes next.

Or try this: Without warning ask each person to share what God's been showing them in the Word lately, or how it's going with their closest non-Christian friend,

or what need they've been meeting for a neighbor or co-worker.

None of these are safe questions but becoming relationally resilient means we can handle the tension that exists between expectations and experience—without compromising either.

What about Curriculum, Application, and Accountability?

The curriculum you choose to use isn't nearly as important as how you use it.

As soon as you introduce curriculum to the group you must fight against the assumptions people will surely make. First, you will hear people confuse the purpose of the group. Instead of calling it a team, people will begin to call it a class or a study or a group. Each time, be ready to correct the language with a smile on your face. "No, this isn't a _____. We are here to become a team."

Team members slip back into using the old maps very easily. It shows up first in the language they use. At this point it comes out unconsciously, but if it's not corrected it returns as conscious thought—then as words, and finally as actions. As long as the team meets together, leaders need to communicate about the team's why and the team's objectives. Without such reminders, teams frequently forget and make reference to the team ending whenever the book does.

Most importantly, no matter what curriculum you choose, make sure you are making applications each

time. I like to use the SMART acronym—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant to a spiritual need, and Time Sensitive—to help us shape our applications. When you come together each time, refer back to each person's application as a way to build in accountability. Most

> **Transformation happens when applications are repeatedly made and applied.**

groups don't make applications, and some make them but never talk about them again. Transformation happens when applications are repeatedly made and applied.

Any solid disciple making curriculum can be fruitful in the right hands. A few of my favorites when building a team like this are: *The Alongsider* by Bill Mowry, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert E. Coleman, *Disciple-Making Culture* by Brandon Guindon, and Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians.

What about People Feeling Excluded?

For some leaders, the idea of having an invitation-only team feels risky. An internal struggle begins as they imagine the outrage of those who weren't asked to participate. This very rarely happens. Building a team of disciple makers requires prayerful discernment of who to invite on the journey. Jesus too, chose to invite only some onto his team of twelve, and within that the inner three. Scripture does give us one scene of the disciples jockeying for position within the Twelve (Matt. 20:20–28), but instead of protecting their feelings Jesus challenged them to act as servants—putting others before themselves. In the

same way, we can't allow the fear of hurt feelings to keep us from developing a CORE team. And again, seldom does the selection process cause discernible problems for the pastor.

Anticipate These Challenges

1. Definitions. People can't see the difference between what you are saying and what *they* are doing. Almost always this is due to the imprint of past maps and language. You say making disciples and they hear being a disciple. You say reproducing and they hear serving. One of the greatest challenges of the leader is to define both terms and objectives. Expect to do it over and over again from lots of different angles.

2. Faithfulness to expectations. It often goes like this: A couple months into trying to build a CORE team, something like this happens to you: Two hours before the CORE team meeting, Rob emails, "Hi Pastor, so sorry I can't make it tonight something came up." When you show up to the meeting you notice Monica is missing. After asking you discover no one knows if Monica is coming or not. Bill tells you that Chad's not coming because he got tickets to the local college basketball game. Despite each person committing to making this a priority and being there every other week, they are treating the meetings as optional.

How will you respond? How would you respond if you were coaching a basketball team and the players were doing this? Let both God's grace and that mindset guide

you. Remember the culture you develop on the CORE team is the only culture the CORE team has to pass on to the larger church culture. Don't be afraid to invite people to step off the team if they are unable or unwilling to hold to what they've committed. Do it gently and gracefully; sometimes it's just not right given the challenges before them at that time.

3. Unwillingness to move or change. This is due to our familiar nemesis, fear. Leaders must help the team both corporately and individually to identify, process, and overcome their fears. This takes time and patience, but it's worth it. As you are helping them, you are teaching them how to help others with their fears. Each time a team member moves forward through fear they carry a powerful story that will help someone else do the same. With love and intentional support, each person can move forward to becoming a disciple maker.

4. Retreating, quitting, or becoming tired. This is a natural part of the transformation process. When the team is functioning well, other team members can encourage and model that sticking with it is worth it. Additionally, setting up progress markers and celebration check-points gives people the energy they need to keep going.

It's up to the leader to help the team get through these challenges. In fact, the leader's commitment to the team and its members must be greater than the individual's commitment to themselves or to the team. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the team leader must be wholly committed to this process.

Perseverance Required, Not Perfection

Recently, I shared a meal with Pastor Joe. For over a year now, I've been helping him learn how to make reproducing disciples. Lately, we've been talking about developing a disciple making foundation for his church. He asked me to paint him a picture of what a CORE team looks like. For the next fifteen minutes I unpacked for him much of what I've written in this book. As I spoke, I could tell that he was catching a vision for the type of team that I was describing. That look of seeing made me speak with even more excitement and conviction. Not only was I painting Joe a picture, but I was adding color and flare to each aspect of building a CORE team. When I finally finished, Pastor Joe nodded his head and said plainly, "That sounds so intimidating. I don't think I could ever do it."

Perhaps, as you've read through this book, you feel like Pastor Joe felt that day. As I've stated before, building a disciple making foundation is difficult—very difficult. But it is doable. What I've described in this book is the ideal. In baseball terms, it's a "perfect game."

A perfect game in baseball is when no batter reaches base for the entire game. No hits, no walks, no hit batsmen, and no errors. They are incredibly rare. Since 1869, approximately 218,000 baseball games have been played. Of those, only twenty-three of them were perfect games, and no pitcher has ever pitched more than one perfect game. In a perfect game, not only does the pitcher have to be amazing, his teammates must play perfect defense as well. Even though they are rare, each time the umpire shouts, "Play ball!" a perfect game is possible.

For a baseball team, the goal isn't a perfect game; the goal is to win the game. As you build your disciple making foundation, keep in mind that the goal is a disciple making culture, not perfection. The process of building a CORE team takes time. Don't mistake obstacles for a crooked-tower moment. Instead, pay attention to each step in building your CORE team, but remember that the outcome isn't entirely in your control. When obstacles come, continue the work and trust that God is going to move to develop a team that can facilitate and support a culture of disciple making.

> **A well-laid foundation is worth everything it takes to develop.**

A well-laid foundation is worth everything it takes to develop. Churches that have a CORE team are able to build a disciple making culture that stands the tests of time and adversity. When culture shifts, a CORE team is able to lean into one another and to God as they adjust accordingly. When an individual falls, the

team is able to respond appropriately by picking them up or by drawing in someone else who is a better fit (recall the disciples drawing in Mathias to replace Judas, not to mention Paul).

A disciple making foundation allows the pastor to be one of several who carry the burden of leadership, embody the vision, and inspire others to join the mission. So go ahead, follow in the footsteps of Jesus and the apostle Paul by laying a foundation that will ensure long-term stability for your disciple making culture!

To most, building a straight eight-story tower in Pisa, Italy, in the twelfth century would have seemed impossible (remember "Pisa" literally means marshy soil). Even though Bonnano Pisano had the courage to try, the sheer difficulty of the task surely caused him to question himself. Unfortunately for him, his leaning tower moment caused him to retreat in shame. But imagine if he could see the tower today.

Imagine him standing with John Burland looking at the tower together. Burland is the expert who led the thirteen-person team to stabilize the tower in 1989. Pisano would be astounded the tower is still around. There's no doubt they'd have lots of questions for each other. Burland would want to know Pisano's process for laying the foundation. Pisano would want to know how the tower is still standing . . . and who finished it! As they talk, Pisano's shame would shift. He'd see how impressed this highly educated man was with his tower.

Pisano would hear what Burland told the press in 1989, "No matter how many calculations we made, the tower should not have been standing at all. The height and weight coupled with the porous soils meant it should have fallen centuries ago."[16] I can almost hear John saying, "You really created a masterpiece, Bonnano!"

Pisano's failure is a masterpiece. Ironically, the soil conditions that made it so vulnerable are the same conditions that protected it for centuries. The height and rigidity of the tower combined with the softness of the soil reduced vibration during earthquakes and other environmental variants.[17] What he'd left behind as a failure became one of the world's most iconic buildings. And thanks to Burland, it will remain that way for a long time.

Burland and his team rose to the challenge and worked to stabilize the tower for fourteen years, nearly three times as long as Pisano worked on it. They removed soil from the south side, installed a complex system of tunnels and wells to drain water. As they worked, they found remnants of the former foundation and connected heavy chains to it and the tower. They completed their work in 2003, and the tower has shown no signs of vulnerability since.

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16. Madrid Engineering Group. "Leaning Tower of Pisa Brief Construction History" Accessed on January 6, 2020. http://madridengineering.com/case-study-the-leaning-tower-of-pisa/

17. USA Today. Rice, Doyle, "Why Doesn't the Leaning Tower of Pisa Fall Over? Accessed on January 13, 2020. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/05/10/leaning-tower-pisa-why-still-standing/598673002/

The same can't be said of the American church. For nearly two decades now the church has been in trouble. You can see it. Like Pisano, you can see the lean and you know there's a big problem. Our culture continues to disciple people away from the church and the truths of Scripture. It seems like no matter what we try to draw people back, it falls on deaf ears. In most churches, there's a foundational problem that must be addressed.

Most pastors inherit a church whose foundation was laid long ago. From the inside, one can't help but notice the cracks in the walls. Each crack bears witness to the church's foundation problem. Jesus, the one true foundation (1 Cor. 3:11), is preached from the pulpit and taught in classrooms, but something is still missing. There's a critical problem to which the cracks of declining attendance, cultural isolation, and lack of societal impact testify.

From the outside the problem is seen even more clearly. Those who aren't a part of the church have the advantage of perspective. After all, a lean is more evident from outside the building. They see the religiosity divorced from application, dogma divorced from compassion, and a proclamation of life where decay is evident. It's not that the skeptics have less need for Christ, but in the church they see something other than Jesus who draws all people to himself (John 12:32).

Foundation problems can be ignored, but they can't be forgotten. Over time, as the lean increases so does the urgency. Despite the church's current reality there's a

growing movement of pastors and church leaders, the church's architects and engineers, who are committed to addressing the foundation problem. Foundation work isn't for the faint of heart. The church's clarion call is to make disciples, not just members (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 6:40; Eph. 4:11–12). It's not enough to provide an emotional experience that doesn't lead to action or education that doesn't lead to transformation. We can no longer strive to grow Christians without a goal or to be content with action and no reproduction. The best way to multiply is by building a disciple making culture, but that requires a disciple making foundation. Such a foundation is laid with three parts: a Christ-like leader, a CORE team of disciple makers, and Jesus. It requires a clear vision, an unwavering commitment to the ways of God, and perseverance.

> **The church's clarion call is to make disciples, not just members.**

As you embark on this journey don't forget that there are lots of people out there who are equipped to help you. Please don't hesitate to contact me or one of the many excellent disciple making organizations who partner with discipleship.org. Each one specializes in helping churches multiply disciple makers. After you have established your foundation, a CORE team of disciple makers, pick up Brandon Guindon's excellent book *Disciple Making Culture* for a wide-angle view of the entire disciple making process in a local church.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS

Reflection is the soil in which applications grow. Now that you have read this book, invest in your development as a disciple making leader by thoughtfully moving through these questions and prompts. They are designed for you to use in relationship with others, but you can still use them on your own if you don't yet have a team. As you reflect and share with others, intentionally push each other to take the next step. We are changed most when insights lead us to action.

Chapter 1 – Disciple Maker as Lead Builder

Are you a disciple maker? What "Timothy" would identify you as their "Paul"?

Write one paragraph on why you want to lay a disciple making foundation.

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Are you willing to build a disciple making foundation even if it causes your church's attendance and giving to fall (but still makes multiplying disciples)?

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Write one paragraph on how far you are willing to go for your church in order to lay a disciple making foundation.

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What other disciple makers come to mind in your church who could help you establish a disciple making foundation?

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Communicate what you've discovered to God. What next step is he asking you to take?

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Chapter 2 – The Difference a CORE Team Can Make

What is the difference between a team and a group?

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Why is a group insufficient to lay a disciple making foundation?

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What does the CORE team acronym mean?

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In what ways is it easier to lead a group than it is to lead a CORE team?

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How would you need to lead differently to develop a CORE team, not a group?

Communicate what you've discovered to God. What next step is he asking you to take?

Chapter 3 – Common Vision

What is the main obstacle to developing a **C**ommon vision?

What discipleship map has previously existed in your mind? In your church?

How long has that old map been present?

Write one or two paragraphs explaining the new disciple making map you'd like people to use.

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What does it look like for you to trust others to speak into that vision as you pray, wrestle with the Scriptures, and discuss?

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What will you need to remember or be reminded of as you develop clarity around this vision?

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Communicate what you've discovered to God. What next step is he asking you to take?

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Chapter 4 – Owned Individually

Why is it that people see a better way yet fail to move?

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Recall a time when you have been convinced of a better way but remained committed to your status quo.

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When did you know you "owned" Jesus-style disciple making for yourself?

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What types of passive resistance have you seen in your church? How could you address each of these types?

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Describe the major elements of a coaching conversation as outlined in this chapter. Practice by coaching someone.

Why are individual barriers better addressed in a relational (rather than a team) context?

What will you need to remember or be reminded of as you help each CORE team member own the vision?

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Communicate what you've discovered to God. What next step is he asking you to take?

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Chapter 5 – **R**elationally Resilient

What allowed the kids in the example of this chapter to outperform adults in the building competition?

When giving constructive feedback, what causes you anxiety? What does that anxiety reveal about you, others, and your view of God?

What needs to be present in order for negative feedback to be helpful to a team member?

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How do you normally respond to conflict or potential conflict?

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Write a paragraph explaining the difference between peace-making and peace-keeping.

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What will you need to remember or be reminded of as you help the CORE team become relationally resilient?

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Communicate what you've discovered to God. What next step is he asking you to take?

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Chapter 6 – Endure to the End

Why is it that people sometimes see a better way, move toward that better way, and yet still fail to finish?

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Recall a time when you were convinced of a better way to do something, started to adopt that new way, and then failed to finish. Write about it here.

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How do you know when the new way replaces your old way?

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Toward the end of the CORE team process, how does the team leader normally feel? How do the team members normally feel?

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What are the three Ds? How do they help team members endure?

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What will you need to remember or be reminded of as you help each CORE team member endure to the end?

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Communicate what you've discovered to God. What next step is he asking you to take?

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Chapter 7 – Tactics for CORE Team Development

How does a leader start a CORE team?

What factors should be considered when starting a CORE team?

When you invite people to join a CORE team, what should you remember?

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How will you help CORE team members to develop action steps? What about developing accountability?

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Which challenges will you need to be especially on the lookout for?

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Who will help you lead the CORE team by reminding you of what you've outlined from earlier chapters' questions?

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Communicate what you've discovered to God. What next step is he asking you to take?

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Conclusion – Perseverance Required, Not Perfection

What's the current state of disciple making in your church?

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What current foundation does your church have in disciple making? Is there a team? Do people know who's on the team?

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How is building a disciple making culture like pitching a baseball game?

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As you reflect on Pisano's journey, what can you learn
from his mistakes?

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Write a paragraph on why it's important to lay a disciple
making foundation before trying to build a disciple
making culture.

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Write a few paragraphs on what you have learned from this book and what you will do as a result.

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Tell someone else what you are committing to do.
Ask them to hold you accountable within a specific
timeframe.

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The Coaching Conversation

A useful skill in disciple making is the coaching conversation. This intentional conversation follows a pattern that helps a person unlock their desires and move forward toward their goals. Coaching conversations are built upon questions and follow a broad pattern that identifies the desired future, current reality, action steps, barriers, and boosts. Each aspect is powerful in helping a person move from mired to motivated.

Coaching uses skillful conversations to bring focus to transformation. It doesn't take much for a disciple maker to develop a coach approach. Instead of always teaching or telling, *ask*. A careful study of Jesus' life makes it clear that questions were his favorite way of teaching. Coaching provides a framework for those questions and allows space for the disciple to consider their own course of action.

Below is a coaching framework that's based on certain categories of questions. To help you remember these, think of them in terms of the bridge that I mentioned in Chapter 4. On one cliff you look over to the desired future, then look at your current reality; next, you think

about how you will get over there and then think of what barriers could disrupt your plans; finally, you think about what you learned through the entire process.

Below are sample questions for each category for your use and stimulation as you develop your own coach approach in disciple making.

Desired Future:

- What do you want to happen with _____?
- Why do you want to see that happen?
- What does success look like for you in this area?
- What motivates you to move forward in this area?
- How would success in this area change your life?

Current Reality:

- How would you describe where you are now?
- What are a few steps that you could take to move forward?
- What have you already tried?
- What are some other choices or options?
- What is the cost of not doing anything?

Action Steps:

- What needs to happen to achieve your goal?
- What else might you try?
- Which of those options is the most important to do now?
- When can you begin to implement those things?
- Is there anything these actions are leaving out?

Barriers:

- What do you need to follow through with these actions?
- What roadblocks do you expect and how will you get through them?
- How can your faith in God's power or Scripture help you as you move forward?
- Who else can you invite to help hold you accountable or encourage you?
- Is there anything else you will need to be successful?

Recap:

- What commitments are you making today?
- In what ways do you sense God at work in these things?
- What small wins can we anticipate as we move forward?
- Is there anything else you need from me right now?
- What did you learn today from our conversation?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JUSTIN GRAVITT is a nationally recognized disciple making leader. He has devoted his life to making disciples of Jesus who multiply generationally to reach the world. Justin's primary way of accomplishing this global mission is local. Since returning to the United States from missionary work in Southeast Asia in 2014, he co-founded and now directs the Dayton Disciple Makers Network, a denominationally diverse network of local churches. The network collaborates to develop a local movement of disciple makers from the church to the culture. Additionally, Justin reaches a global audience by blogging at justingravitt.com and hosting *The Practitioners Podcast*.

Justin has served with The Navigators for over twenty years. During that time, he's developed disciple making cultures in Texas, Ohio, and Southeast Asia. His current role with Navigators Church Ministries draws on his experience with everyday believers in both multi-cultural and multi-ethnic contexts. This diverse experience gives him unique insight into the church's challenge of effec-

tive disciple making practices in the local church. The goal for each church is clear: to develop a culture of disciple makers who are sent *out* into every facet of our culture and world.

Justin and wife Kristen live with their four children in Dayton, Ohio. To learn more, contact Justin, or to support his ministry visit justingravitt.com.