

Cultivating a Life for God
Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups
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Chapter 1
Lesson in Lifesaving
Remember the Prime Directive

When I get busy, I tend to forget the most important reason why I'm here, my prime directive – *to make more and better disciples* (Matt. 28:18-20)! In fact, unlike Jesus, the busier I become, the more I lose compassion for the lost. It doesn't take much for the multitudes to become more of a stumbling block to impede my effectiveness rather than a reason for becoming effective. Freeway traffic is a cause of frustration rather than compassion. A busy parking lot gives me a headache from the confusion rather than a heart that aches with compassion.

Compassion cannot be something pushed on us from obligation, it is something that comes out from within. In fact, the word "compassion" used of Jesus in scripture literally means "bowels" – it is something you feel in your gut. Compassion, real compassion, doesn't come about by lawsuits. It is a natural feeling that stirs in your stomach and comes out in your eyes, your words, and your actions. It takes "guts" to care for the lost!

There are times when I intentionally go to a crowded shopping mall or a busy restaurant and just stand among the throngs asking the Lord to break my heart.

With workers we can bring in a harvest.

Where do we go to find workers? Bible colleges and seminaries? parachurch ministries? Harvard School of Business? Churches? No, none of these answers are right according to this passage. The place where we need to go to find workers for the harvest is on our knees before the throne of God. Jesus said, "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest (Matt. 9:38)." The harvest begins with prayer to the "Lord of the harvest."

Jesus not only identifies what we're missing, and where to find them, but He also provides for us a great example of how to raise up workers for the harvest. He called them out of the harvest itself, empowered them and sent them right back into the harvest as workers doing the very same things He modeled. Jesus multiplied His ministry.

In this passage of Scripture, Matthew, the author of this gospel, is a great example. In the ninth verse of this chapter Jesus calls Matthew to follow Him leaving behind tax audits, accounting books and piles of money. In verses 37-38, he has Matthew praying for workers to go out into the harvest and then two verses later Jesus is sending Matthew out into the cities and villages (Matt. 10:1) to do what He himself had modeled in ministry (Matt. 9:35). He goes from tax collector to preacher in the course of one chapter of scripture. Most would think that this is too soon to send Matthew out into the harvest fields. He's too new, too easily influenced, he doesn't have enough knowledge to answer people's challenges. But Jesus saw Matthew as having many contacts with other lost people who need the gospel (Matt. 9:10-11). He also saw Matthew's new life change as a very persuasive presentation of the gospel in itself. He may not have had depth of knowledge but he

had a passion for Christ that many who have been Christians for years lack. I'll take a hot, impassioned witness over a cold, knowledgeable one every time.

Jesus shows us that the workers must come from the harvest itself.

The only barrier we face to a greater harvest is a lack of compassion that motivates prayer, which releases workers, which yields the harvest.

Life can keep us busy, but it is there in the midst of our busyness that we need to open our eyes and see if there is anyone in desperate need of a Savior. The moment we have been called upon to save a drowning soul can come in the midst of our busyness and we need to be prepared. Jesus was a busy man, but He never lost sight of His prime directive – to seek and to save those who are lost.

Chapter 2

The Need for Life Transforming Power

The church of Jesus Christ in the Western world is at war, but from all external appearances, seems to be losing! The United States was born as a nation seeking a free expression of faith in Jesus Christ. For many years, we were the leading people in taking the gospel around the world, fueling revivals in foreign lands with missionary enterprises. Today, we see mostly the residue of the faith of a previous generation. Whereas once we were the missionary nation, today we have become a mission field in desperate need of the gospel.

Currently the US is the fifth largest unchurched nation in the world with over 187 million Americans who remain untouched by the gospel. Of the adults who do attend any given protestant church on a typical Sunday morning, half are not even Christians. Churches lose 2,765,000 people each year and between 3500 and 4000 churches close their doors each year for the last time; while only 1100-1500 churches are started. Not a single county in all America has a greater percentage of church people today than a decade ago.

Tom Clegg, co-author of *Releasing Your Church's Potential*, asks the question, "If this is a Christian nation, why is it that the largest church in the world is in Seoul, Korea, while the largest Buddhist temple is in Boulder, CO.? If this is a Christian nation why is the second largest church in the world in Nigeria, while the largest Muslim training center is in New York?"

Somewhere in our past we became institutionalized and our church life became busy and complicated with building, budgets, buses and bureaucracy. Not that we shouldn't be busy, but we have somehow lost sight of the prime directive given to us by Jesus Himself: to "go and make disciples of all the nations." More of the same isn't going to make the difference. We need a miracle.

There is hope. We can still fulfill the great commission in this generation, but we will need to get back the power that spread the gospel across the globe in the first century. We will need to see multiplication of disciples occur among all those in the church. We must deploy all the troops in a charge against the gates of hell.

The Awesome Power of a Transformed Life

The miracle we need most right now is one that the Lord has freely given us already. It is the power of a changed life. The world is poised and ready to see the relevance and power of our message if only we would let them see it firsthand.

There is no power on earth more potent than the gospel in a heart of belief (Romans 1:16). Ed Silvano puts it like this, in his book *That None Should Perish*, “The church has been entrusted with something that every politician on earth would give an arm and a leg to have: the power to see hearts changed.” We have been given this power, through we generally leave it unused. Our pews are full of “Christians” whose lives show little difference from those who are in the world.

We already saw in Chapter 1 that Jesus valued the power of a changed life when He called Matthew and immediately put him into service. The New Testament has many examples of people who have only just met Jesus, have little knowledge of His person or work and yet are already able to effectively stand up to others with a bold witness. They do so all on the irrefutable persuasion of a changed life. My favorite such story is found in the ninth chapter of John.

One Saturday, Jesus and His disciples were walking through Jerusalem and happened to come across a man born blind. The disciples asked Jesus a question, “Who sinned, this man (in the womb is implied) or his parents?” Of course the greater question is, “Is it fair that God should have this man suffer all his life for the sins of his parents, or worse, for some sin he could commit in vitro?” But Jesus answered the question with something remarkable. In essence He said it wasn’t for sin that he was born blind but for this very moment. The He did the strangest thing. (All Bibles should carry a warning label at this portion of Scripture that reads: “Warning, do not try this at home.”) He spat on the ground, scooped up the muddy saliva and smeared it on the eyes of this unsuspecting man. He then gave this stranger a verbal command and said, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” Which he did.

This man did not ask to be healed or saved. Jesus took the initiative and did so in a rather unorthodox if not rude manner. He didn’t even introduce Himself. What’s worse, spitting in someone’s eyes or throwing dirt in someone’s eyes? The correct answer is “all of the above.” Later, after the miracle of seeing, the man described what Jesus did in more sanctified terms, “The man who is called Jesus made *clay* and *anointed* my eyes, and said ‘Go to Siloam and wash (emphasis mine).’” We do tend to soften Jesus’ actions and words, as though He needs our protection. I am convinced that Jesus wasn’t shy about making a lasting impression on people who otherwise would’ve lived the rest of their lives in mundane routine. To “diplomatically” dilute His actions and words, no matter what the motivation, leads to a mere characterization of the real God-man and is tantamount to idolatry. He doesn’t need our suggestions.

The man obeyed Jesus, which demonstrates at least some measure of faith. Of course, who wouldn’t want to wash his face with saliva and mud spread on your eyes? He was healed as a result of this small amount of faith.

This Sabbath miracle created quite a stir among the town. Everyone was questioning if this was indeed the man born blind. He just kept on saying with glee, “I am the one.” He wanted to tell the world what Jesus had done for him. He wasn’t shy about it. This was the best thing that ever happened to him and he wanted to tell everyone. The people would give him his day in court. They took him to the Pharisees.

It is here in the legal proceeding that we watch as the seeing man becomes just that – a man who sees. Watch as his emerging faith and conviction grows in the heat of examination and debate.

The Pharisees began in inquiry into this event because, in their eyes, a law was broken – the Sabbath law. They were not the slightest bit amazed by the miracle standing right in front of them, all they could see was that their petty rules had been broken. The Jewish leaders by this time had laid

down some 39 extra rules to limit people from doing most anything on the Sabbath day. All were punishable by stoning.

A debate ensued among the Pharisees over whether a sinner could perform such miracles or not. In the midst of this discussion the Pharisees made a mistake; they asked the seeing man what he thought of this Jesus. His answer came without hesitation – “He is a prophet.”

The Jewish leaders couldn't accept this conclusion so they began a ridiculous pursuit – to refute that this man was indeed born blind. They wouldn't accept the evidence in front of them so they called in testimony of other eyewitnesses; they called his parents to the stand. Fearing the decree that had already gone out – that if any would confess Jesus as the Christ he or she would be excommunicated from the synagogue – the parents simply identified him as their son and validated that he was indeed born blind. As to how he could see, they did not venture to answer but referred to their son who was old enough to speak for himself. That got the Pharisees nowhere. Back to square one.

Getting frustrated by a lack of progress the religious leaders turned again to the seeing man and said, “Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner.” It is interesting that Jesus declared in the beginning of this whole story that this man was born to give glory to God by demonstrating His miraculous work in him. He was, in fact, fulfilling the Pharisees' very request when he acknowledged the miracle Jesus had done.

While the Pharisees were appealing for him to give the credit to God and not to this “sinner” named Jesus, the seeing man declared an irrefutable argument in behalf of his new emerging faith. He said, “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that once I was blind, now I see.” There is no answer for this from the Pharisees. They can spout theology and pious statements of condemnation, but they can't challenge this simple statement of faith coming from a man who knows next to nothing about Jesus. He may not be an expert about the law, theology or the identity of the Messiah, but one thing he is qualified to be an expert on is his own experience. No one can challenge this.

Out of frustration they asked the seeing man once more how Jesus performed the miracle. By now, the man was weary of this whole proceeding and he began to see that these religious men don't have any answer to his statement. This gave him a growing sense of confidence. These men were not so “untouchable.” When they asked how it happened again he began to exert some of his strength and a bit of good old-fashioned sarcasm. He said, “I told you already, and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become one of His disciples too, do you?”

Confronted with this strong, uneducated witness who couldn't even read, the Pharisees began to feel threatened and react with their usual condemnation and pious recital of religious credentials for being right. They pronounced what they considered to be a grave accusation meant to hurt him, but in reality was the greatest compliment the seeing man had ever received. They said, “You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.” Then they went on to spout some theology and said, “We know that God has spoken to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.”

I think it was at this point that the seeing man felt a great release. He had never thought of himself as a disciple of anyone. Until this moment he was an outcast, a loser. Now he was a disciple of Jesus! I don't think he even thought of such a possibility until his highly tuned ears heard it for the first time from his accusers. He didn't even know Jesus yet, but suddenly he is a disciple of this man whom everyone talks of. He felt a little bolder, a little more confident of his position. The Pharisees

had fallen unsuspecting into a trap when they said in essence, our master (Moses) is better than yours (Jesus).

With this new boldness that came from identifying with Jesus, the man took the initiative. He went on the offense in front of the untouchable Pharisees! Without waiting to be asked he said, “Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes (the Pharisees never like it when they’re told that they don’t know something). We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time no one has opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.”

The seeing man was beginning to see even clearer. He suddenly began to understand that Jesus was greater than these hypocritical Jewish leaders. They played the “my-master-is-better-than-your-master” game by comparing Jesus with Moses, and now the seeing man began to expound on something of which he was an expert – the healing of people born blind. Not even Moses was able to do that! No one, since the beginning of time, had been able to do that! Checkmate.

Why did Jesus choose to perform this miracle in such a strange way? Jesus told us why in the very beginning. He said this man was born blind “in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Jesus healed him in a delayed fashion so that the seeing man could be brought before the Pharisees alone and Jesus would not be the one defending His own actions. I believe Jesus wanted the man to stand before the Pharisees, having never even seen Jesus and knowing little of Him, to refute and totally embarrass them.

A fascinating fact is that just a short time earlier Jesus had been in debate with these same Pharisees and they accused Him by saying, “You are bearing witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true (John 8:13).” Jesus responded in two ways. He first said, “Even if I do witness of Myself, My witness is true; for I know where I have come from, and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from, or where I am going.”

The second thing He did was to send this witness to defend where He came from. And he defended Him admirably. We often think that we need to send our most knowledgeable and intelligent people to witness to this world. We think that it is our education and philosophical arguments that will convince people of Jesus. The truth is that the most persuasive and effective argument for the validity of Jesus’ claims is the testimony of a changed life. This powerful ammunition is given to any and all who follow Him. It doesn’t require a high IQ, a degree or high position in life. Any one of us, no, every one of us has this power available.

Do you find it amazing that Matthew is a despised tax collector at one moment (Matt. 9:9), hosting an evangelistic outreach party the next (vv. 10-13), and then sent into the cities as an Apostle to preach the gospel just a few verses later (Matt. 10:2 ff.)?

Perhaps we have lost faith in the power of the gospel to truly change and empower a life.

Colson goes on to say, “It is not what we do that matters, but what a sovereign God chooses to do through us. God doesn’t want our success; He wants us. He doesn’t demand our achievements; He demands our obedience. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of paradox, where through the ugly defeat of a cross, a holy God is utterly glorified. Victory comes through defeat; healing through brokenness; finding self through losing self.”

The seeing man responded in faith and said, “Lord, I believe.” Then the gospel says he worshipped Him. Who needs a synagogue when you’ve got Jesus right in front of you (John 4:21-

24)! After being exposed to the weak and corrupt hypocrites who were in charge of the synagogue, I don't think it was difficult at all to adjust to being with Jesus as an outcast of the religious system of the day. This was a system in which he was already an outcast simply because of his disability. Finally, he was somebody with meaning that could contribute and even defend the Messiah before rulers! Jesus not only repaired his vision, He gave the seeing man hope and significance. His life now had meaning and purpose because of Jesus. He was completely healed and changed forever.

This true story exemplifies the awesome power of a life that has been touched by Jesus. Such a life is immediately empowered to be a change agent in this world. The church has traditionally hid these precious converts from the world in an attempt to protect them. Jesus shows us that it is the world that needs the protection from these powerful change agents. When we hide them from the world we sever the contacts they have with other lost souls who are, in fact, the very best evangelistic fields since they get to see the power of Christ demonstrated in this converted life firsthand. We also communicate to the world that we are defensive and we hide the very power we have that will set them on the defense. Why would the world want to believe our message if we feel the need to protect and keep its results safe from exposure to the world? Let me tell you that the world won't believe our message until we do!

In the book, *Dedication and Leadership*, written by Douglas Hyde who was once a top trainer of communists before he converted to Catholicism, he explains that the best way to solidify new converts to communism was to set them out alone on a street corner handing our communist propaganda. When opponents attacked them they found themselves fighting for their convictions which did much to cement them in their soul, just as it did with the seeing man in this story.

Perhaps this is why every young Mormon must spend a year going door-to-door talking with people about the merits of Mormonism. I firmly believe that by trying to protect our young converts we have done more to deprive them of growth than to help them to grow.

The Awesome Power of Multiplication

In his book, *Disciples Are Made Not Born*, by Walter Henrichsen he states:

The reason that the church of Jesus Christ finds it so hard to stay on top of the great commission is that the population of the world is multiplying while the church is merely adding. Addition can never keep pace with multiplication.

Multiplication begins slower than addition, but like a car rolling down a steep hill, it builds in momentum as it goes. What starts with a penny and then two cents later becomes millions, and then billions and within a short time trillions.

Multiplication may be costly, and in the initial stages slower than addition, but in the long run, it is the only way to fulfill the Great Commission in our generation.

We Cannot Cause the Growth, Only Release It

How can we cause spontaneous growth and multiplication of changed lives? We can't. Jesus made it clear in a parable given to His disciples that we don't cause the growth, we merely introduce the elements that can release the growth. He said,

The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows – how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself, first the blade, then the head, then the

mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come (Mark 4:26-29).

Jesus tells us that the farmer doesn't know what causes the growth. Today, in our more technologically advanced society with powerful microscopes and chemical engineers we still don't know what causes the growth. We know what is needed to allow the growth – but then so did the first century farmer. We can describe the life force, we can release it, but we can't create it. We can explain how the process works down to the tiniest particles, but we are still like the farmer in the parable – we don't actually know what causes it. We do know, however, how to plant seeds, water them and watch. Jesus teaches that if the right elements are in place, the crop grows “by itself.”

“How can I release a spontaneous multiplication of growing disciples in my community?” The answer lies in planting seed in the soil. Fruitfulness begins with the good seed in good soil. God created all living things to grow and reproduce.

In the sixth chapter of the gospel of John, Jesus tested His disciples with a challenge to do the impossible. He told them to feed a crowd of well over 5000 hungry people in a lonely place close to the Sea of Galilee. Having had only 200 denarii (a denarius was worth about a day's wages) they turned to Jesus in futility without any hope of fulfilling His desire. In a mustard seed amount of faith, Andrew volunteered another's lunch. He said, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?” Andrew could see the multitude, comprised of about 5000 men and probably many more women and children, and offered the school boy's sack lunch with a sigh of resignation. “What are these for so many people?” The fact that he even mentioned the boy's lunch reveals the smallest amount of faith. With this, Jesus took the five flat barely cakes and two fish, prayed, and then broke them up and distributed them to the multitude. In Jesus' hands the food was multiplied and fed all to their fullest with twelve baskets full of leftovers.

I believe that Jesus is still testing His disciples. I believe He wants us to look at the task at hand with what little resources we have and turn to Him and say, “It's not much, but here, take my life.” Unless we are given into the hands of Christ we are nothing more than a humble sack lunch, but in His hands we can see multiplication fill the hearts of the multitudes.

Chapter 3

Principle for Passing the Baton

What makes a strong and growing church? What motivates and facilitates this kind of multiplication? What sort of people make the best candidates, what are the most essential disciplines that need to be present for a life to be transformed? Life transformation and disciple multiplication.

1. The Strengthening of the Church: Strong disciples make a strong church, growing disciples make a growing church.

The first principle for leaving a lasting legacy of multiplication is that it all begins with being a strong disciple yourself. It doesn't start with what you do but with who you are in Christ. E. M. Bounds once wrote, “Men are looking for better methods, God is looking for better men.”

A strong church begins with a strong disciple who makes more strong disciples, who

then go on to make more. A strong church is a reproducing church.

Strength comes in multiplication.

The Great Commission is for all Christians. When we take the Great Commission out of the hands of every Christian, we immediately weaken the whole church and diminish her longevity. When we set the Christians to fulfilling the Great Commission, the church immediately and ultimately is healthier, more vital and enduring. As Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church in southern Orange County, California, has said, a church's strength is not determined by her seating capacity but by her sending capacity.

2. The Stimulus of Real Growth: The carrot works better than the crop.

The crop and the carrot will both motivate a horse.

The motivation for following Christ and reproducing disciples must be internal rather than external. If the drive for making disciples doesn't come from within, the process will eventually break down and will not carry on. Disciple-making that truly reproduces is propelled by an intrinsic motivation.

Paul cites three natural incentives and then three spiritual incentives for the Christian life. They are as follows:

Natural Motivations:

1. A desire to bring pride to those whom you are responsible to. Paul writes: "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier (2:3-4)."
2. A desire to be the best we can be. Paul describes this motivation when he says, "If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules (2:5; 4:6-8)."
3. A desire to benefit from the results of our efforts. Paul says, "The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops (2:6)."

Spiritual Motivations:

4. Moved by the love of Christ demonstrated in His sacrifice for our sins. Paul charges, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned (2:8-9)."
5. A compassion for the lost and dying souls in this world, who are headed to hell without Christ. Paul describes his own motivation with these words, "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory (2:10)."

6. Inspiration rooted in the character of God. Paul reminds us, in poetic fashion, of God's faithful character. He says, "It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself (2:11-13)."

All of these motivational incentives are internal drives that will cause someone to delay immediate gratification in order to aspire to a greater cause. These are the motivations that create a hunger for Christ and a drive to stay the course in the face of opposition (2 Tim. 2:3, 9).

The key to effective disciple making and multiplying is to tap internal motivation.

If the disciples don't want to move forward, but do so only out of guilt and obligation, then as soon as the pressure is removed the process will end.

The basis of Christianity is the new covenant, in which God writes His law, not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts (2 Cor. 3:1-11). The reason that Christianity continues is not because we have better rules than other religions, or stiffer punishments for breaking the rules. The reason that the church continues generation after generation is because God changes hearts by regeneration. Christianity begins in a heart that is set on fire from heaven and cannot be quenched on earth. Any incentive less than that will ultimately hurt the cause rather than help it. The good news of salvation by grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus is the spark that will change a heart and provide incentive for obedience the rest of our lives.

Superior weapons are often no match for hearts sold out to a cause worth dying for.

3. The Simplicity of the Process: We must pass the baton with ease!

If disciple-making and multiplying is essential for all, we must find a way to make it available to all so that it can be passed on from generation to generation. Most methods have been far too complex and leader dependent to be passed on to others in such a way that they can then pass it on to succeeding generations. Not all Christians are meant to be leaders, but all are meant to be reproducing disciple-makers! The third principle for leaving a lasting legacy is to keep the pure message simple, and unencumbered by complex methodology.

The disciple-making baton is so complicated and laden with unnecessary encumbrances that the work does not get passed on to the next runner, but rather is dropped. We must simplify the process so that it can easily be passed on without sacrificing the essential components that change lives.

We are often tempted to discount simple things believing them to be simplistic. Simple is not simplistic.

I believe that simplicity is a step beyond complexity. What is easy is often simple, but simple is not easy.

For most, discipleship has become so complicated that it is no longer an easy burden and a light load. Jesus intends for the Christian life to be easy and light and to bring rest to our souls. Fulfillment of the Great Commission is meant to be restful, not

stressful!

Simple is transferable.

We must refine the process so that it is simple and transferable. Simplicity is the key to the fulfillment of the Great Commission in this generation.

Perhaps the reason that we don't see multiplication of disciples more often is that we are trying to do too much too soon in the process. We fail to grasp the fact that discipleship, following Christ in simple obedience, is a life-long pursuit. We attempt to teach our disciples so much in the first year that we unintentionally sabotage the rest of the years by intimidating them into thinking it is way too hard for common people to do. We tend to overestimate what we can do in a year and underestimate what we can do in three years.

A helpful idea is for us to see disciple-making and multiplying as distinct from mentoring leadership.

By combining discipleship with leadership development we eliminate a good percentage of Christians from participation in the Great Commission. In reality, disciple-making is the foundation of good mentoring and leadership development. If we allow disciple-making to happen, unencumbered by complicated training methods, more will be able to do it and we will increase the pool to draw from for the purpose of mentoring leaders. Once we have growing and multiplying disciples we can build upon their emerging fruitfulness with intentional mentoring and training methods for those who demonstrate latent leadership potential.

We need to get back to the simple and yet profound basics when it comes to disciple making. When we attempt to teach all the theologies, disciplines and methods to a brand new Christian we slow down their obedience. The church is suffering from a bottleneck of teaching without obedience. In essence, we are educated beyond our obedience. We should simplify the process and free disciple-making and multiplying for all Christians.

What we need is a system that is significant enough to tap into the Christian's internal motivation, yet simple enough that it can be easily passed on from disciple to disciple.

Chapter 4

Candidates for the Kingdom: Where Do We Start?

In the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-32; Luke 8:15; Mark 4:1-20), Jesus describes how the kingdom of God spreads. The souls represent four kinds of soils. He defines the seed of the kingdom as the word of God (Luke 8:11).

What releases the life force that produces spontaneous growth and multiplication? Jesus taught that what is needed is the good seed in good soil. How do I determine what is good soil?

Good soil makes all the difference (Mark 4:1-8).

There are two criteria that aid in the discovery of good soil. They are what I use to test the soil before I invest time and energy into the disciple.

1. People who desperately need Jesus (Luke 5:30-32).

Jesus begins with those who most desperately need salvation.

Often we will avoid needy people for pragmatic reasons – they can be very demanding. Christian leaders even have terms for these people which we tend to keep secret by referring to them in acronyms. Very Draining People are called VDP's, Extra Grace Required People are called EGR's. Have we actually developed a code for such people so that we can refer to them without exposing our true intent of avoiding them? Are we embarrassed by our lack of grace and compassion?

In our church, however, we have a saying: Bad people make good soil! Fruitful plants tend to grow best where the fertilizer is abundant. Some people are drowning in fertilizer from poor decisions and acts of unrighteousness. We need to look for these people and begin to plant the seed of the kingdom there.

Regarding this Jesus said, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17)."

There are seven very important reasons that we must start the disciple-making process with people who desperately need Christ.

- a. Desperate sinners will hold onto Christ because their lives depend on it.
- b. Desperate sinners will see their lives change more readily than those who are already doing "well."
- c. Desperate sinners are more likely to confess their sin because it is more obvious.
- d. Desperate sinners will become walking and talking billboards to the power of the gospel to other desperate sinners.
- e. Desperate sinners usually have more contact with other desperate sinners who need Jesus.

- f. Desperate sinners are the very reason Jesus came and died. He delights to save them. Bring pleasure to your Master – give the gospel to a desperate sinner!
- g. Desperate sinners who are transformed by the gospel bring greater glory to God because it makes the miraculous that much more manifest. Only God could do such a miracle!

2. **People who stay faithful to the process (2 Tim. 2:2).**

”These entrust to *faithful* men who will be able to teach others also (emphasis mine).” If the man or woman who has entered the group is not faithful to the disciple-making process, he or she will usually drop out. The group should not continue if the members are unwilling to continue with the process. This second criterion establishes the balance for the busy person who is concerned about being drained by a needy individual who doesn’t really want to progress.

God Recycles for His Disciples

God loves to recycle. He transforms garbage into glory. He turns trash into a triumph. He receives more glory when He uses weak things that amount to nothing, adds His presence and power and turns them into men or women of substance and even legend.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame to things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

God delights in turning misfits into mighty men and zeroes into heroes.

Chapter 5

Breathing Life into New Disciples: Essential Ingredients to Transform Lives

1. Exhaling: the confession of sin (2 Tim. 2:19-22).

The first discipline necessary for a disciple to grow into usefulness is the confession of sin. Unless we are cleansed from sin we will not be useful or honoring to the Lord.

Christians are people of confession. John wrote, “If we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).” Without confession there is no cleansing. When we do confess our sins, we become cleansed and honorable, and our message becomes acceptable.

There is also a place in the Christian life for confessing our sins with others of a common belief and purpose. James says that healing may come for us when we do so in a supportive environment of prayer (James 5:16). When we have the courage to confess our inadequacies we often gain credibility in the eyes of others because we demonstrate humility, honesty, and courage. We are seen as authentic, brave, and most of all, human. This will tend to raise us in stature not tear us down.

2. Inhaling: receiving and obeying God’s word (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The second discipline needed to be useful to the Master is the regular intake of Scripture.

The truth is clear, that it is the word of God that changes lives.

Peter agrees with Paul on the two elements needed for growth in a disciple’s life: continual cleansing from sin and a steady diet of God’s word. There are, of course, several other spiritual disciplines that are needed for growth of the disciple such as prayer and worship. My purpose is not to exclude any others because they are obsolete or optional, but rather to present the two most essential elements needed to induce growth and multiplication. These two disciplines become the foundation for the others to be built upon.

Chapter 6 The Best Context for Transforming Lives

Lives change in the context of community.

Reproduction is always a cooperative effort. When God created mankind, He created them male and female and He said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” This is also His plan for His disciples, to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Lives change when we are together in community.

I believe that the best context for life change is a community of two or three. Consistently throughout God’s word there is reference to two or three. Here are five Biblical reasons why I think that a group of two or three is the best context for disciple making and multiplying:

1. Community

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

2. Accountability

It is difficult to be held accountable to a multitude of people who do not know you well. A group of two or three has a greater degree of strength in accountability.

3. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is much easier to control in a context of two or three.

4. Flexibility

An advantage to a group of two or three is that there is a better opportunity to coordinate schedules for a meeting time for all.

A second logistical advantage to a group of two or three is that they can meet almost anywhere.

5. Reproducibility

Simple things multiply easier than complex things. A group of two or three can multiply much easier than a small/cell group of ten to fifteen. All that is needed to multiply such a group is to find one more person and multiply into two groups of two. If we cannot see multiplication at this level, we will not see it at higher, more complex levels of church life.

By initiating multiplication here, at the base unit, we can infuse the very genetic code of the church with the value of reproduction. If we truly wish to see the power of multiplication released in our church it is best to initiate the momentum here at the grassroots level.

Church planting is my calling and passion. It dawned on me one day, however, that I could not find a single verse in all the Bible which commands us to plant or multiply churches. It's just not there! The command that God gave us was to make and multiply disciples, not cell groups or churches. Jesus does want to build His kingdom through church planting and multiplication, but His plan is to do so by multiplying disciples. It begins here – with the basic unit of the church – then it spreads through every pore in the body of Christ.

Even the Godhead exists in a community of three!

Chapter 7

Living Examples – Our Story

God was gracious in leading us to discover a simple way to multiply growing disciples.

I have always had a drive to make disciples and have always had multiplication as a value in disciple-making. Rarely did I see multiple generations of reproduction.

A leader is one who influences a group. Once the leader stops growing he or she will lead the group toward stagnation and mediocrity.

“This week I want you to read Proverbs.” Then they asked which Proverbs I wanted them to read. Their countenance changed quickly when I said, “All of them.” “In a week?” one asked. “Yes, 31 chapters in a week.” I figured that if Solomon and the Holy Spirit couldn’t teach this young man how to deal with his anger, then nothing that I or even Chuck Swindoll could say would help.

When we got together the next week, I discovered that the guys were not taking me too seriously and were testing my resolve. While I had finished the reading, the next closest to completing the reading was at about chapter 12. Because I didn’t think that they gave the Scripture a chance, and partly because they didn’t take me seriously, I told them, “OK, we’re going to read Proverbs again. And if any one of you doesn’t finish the reading, we will read it again, and again until we all show up at the same time with the reading done.”

Four weeks later we had all finished reading Proverbs. One of us had read the book four times in four weeks. It felt like a breath of fresh air had come across my face. This was exciting and powerful. This was a means of feeding myself as much as my disciples.

Unfortunately, my friend still had an anger problem so I thought I would continue to turn up the heat with more Scripture. They all seemed excited when they had finished reading Proverbs, so I said, “Let’s not stop, lets read James seven times this week. Again, we won’t move on until all of us finish the reading together.” At this point things in the group began to change. One man began to take a turn toward other things. He didn’t want to admit to himself that this was the case so he refused to stop being a part of our group, be he would never finish the reading. As a result of his flakiness, we read James 49 times before we were finally able to move on. After we finally finished reading James, the man who was holding us back decided that this group was not for him.

At the same time, the man who had an anger problem decided that he didn’t want to continue with the reading, the group, or our church, so he stopped coming. His girlfriend also stopped coming. Just when I felt an excitement for disciple-making again, the group died. But at the same time, God brought a new man into the kingdom and into my group. His name was Marty.

I immediately walked up to him and asked if he wanted to join our discipleship group. I was determined not to accept any answer but yes, because I could sense that God was working in his heart. He told me that he couldn’t join us because he couldn’t drive due to a suspended license. I told him I would pick him up at 5:45 a.m. Wednesday morning. He agreed. I arrived at 5:45 and honked my horn. After getting dressed he joined me and we went to the group together. After a few weeks of reading the Bible, Marty began to have a change of heart. He became a new creation, old things began to pass away as new things began to emerge. He asked if he could be baptized again (he was baptized in junior high). He felt that he was experiencing such a change of life that a baptism was in order and I obliged gladly.

Four other young people, Henry, Randy, Heather, and Veronica began meeting with us and we soon outgrew the booth we were sitting in at the restaurant and needed to move to a larger booth. The entire group was changed and was now made up of motivated people.

We settled into a pattern of reading about thirty chapters of the Bible each week. We continued the accountability to finish together in order to move on to another book.

I began to hear from God in my Bible reading and developed a great appetite for Scripture. Marty and the others did as well. After a couple of months this way, someone approached me after church on Sunday and asked me a question that sent me into a discovery process. He said, “Hey

Neil, what are you doing differently? Whatever it is, it's working. Keep doing it. Your preaching is so much more powerful."

One of the first things I noticed was that the group would start to grow and just when I expected us to break loose and need to rent a meeting room, it would dwindle back down to three. A short time later, it would begin to grow and again it would come back down to three. It would never die – it just wouldn't grow beyond three. The enthusiasm would never diminish, lives didn't stop changing, but the numbers would not grow as I had expected.

Finally, I listened to the Lord and figured out what He was trying to tell me. The group had a natural size that worked best. Rather than force the group to be something unnatural, I decided to keep the group limited to three, and then multiply. The results made an immediate impact on the groups. Within one year that one group became approximately ten groups! It is possible that there were as many as twenty groups in our church the following year.

"Marty, what do you think God is trying to tell you?" With his lip quivering and his eyes full of tears, he looked up at me and said, "I just can't believe that my best friend is in hell right now and there is nothing that I can do about it." (after an auto accident Marty was involved in with his friend)

I also found the need to integrate accountability for evangelism into our meetings.

At the same time I was reading *The Body*, by Charles Colson. In it he gives an example of some questions that Chuck Swindoll used to keep himself accountable with other pastors.

The questions have been adapted and altered several times since, but they have always been a simple way to hold one another accountable. They allow us to confess our sins to one another without feeling like we are intruding into personal areas that are none of our business. Once I started using the Accountability Questions, I saw the multiplication begin.

A short time later another man, Bob, came to me with marital problems and asked if I could help. I suggested that we start a meeting together for this kind of accountability, saying, "If confessing our sins together, and reading the Bible doesn't help, there's nothing my counsel will be able to do." His marriage began to improve as his own heart and mind were being cleansed and renewed.

Frank came to my office in desperate need. As we began to meet regularly his own life began to transform. As God's word became real to him for the first time, he learned the value of confessing his own sin and taking responsibility for his own life choices.

Frank went on to start a business of his own which had as a goal to employ church planters and pastors in such a way that they could stay home, work a few hours and make enough income to invest the time needed to begin a new church.

With Frank and Jim both starting groups of their own it was time for me to also birth a new group. My next group is the only one of our three that wasn't the result of conversion growth, but it was amazingly powerful nonetheless.

After seeing the dramatic changes in people's lives through this disciple-making process, a couple of the key leaders in my church asked me if I could do the same with them. Apparently the Lord had stirred up a godly jealousy in some of the elders in our church and who was I to deny these good men the blessings others had enjoyed. I began meeting with these two men on Saturday mornings. Within a year, one had given over his own business to the Lord, devoting it to employing bivocational church planters and accepting a call himself to become a worship leader in our church.

At the time of this writing he has employed several of our youth pastors and three tent-making church planters.

This one Saturday morning meeting, which began with a man in desperate need of help, grew and multiplied leading six people to the Lord, two men to devote their businesses to further the kingdom, at least one man into the pastorate and another to church planting. All this took place in less than two years time.

Chapter 8

The Life Transformation Groups System

The Life Transformation Group (LTG) system is a grass-roots tool for growth. Through this simple system the most essential elements of vital spiritual ministry are released to common Christians without the need for specialized training.

An LTG is made up of two to three people, all of the same gender, who meet weekly for personal accountability in the areas of their spiritual growth and development. A group should not grow beyond three but multiply into two groups of two rather than a single group of four. If a fourth person is added to the group it is recommended that the group consider itself pregnant and ready to give birth to a second group. Once the fourth person has demonstrated sufficient faithfulness (2-3 weeks) then the group should multiply into two groups of two.

There is no curriculum or training needed for the LTG. A simple bookmark which stays in the participant's Bible is all that is needed.

The LTG accountability consists of three essential disciplines for personal spiritual growth – a steady diet of Scripture, confession of sin and prayer for others who need Christ.

1. Sin is Confessed

The first thing the LTG does together at a meeting is ask one another the accountability questions found on one side of the LTG Bible bookmark. The meetings should always begin with this because it is easy to get lost in conversation and run out of time for the questions. Beginning each meeting with the confession of sin tends to sanctify the rest of the time together. The questions are straightforward. Each person in the group takes a turn answering each question honestly. The group must be a safe place where the participants feel they can be honest and vulnerable. This is the reason why coed groups do not work well. The questions are as follows:

1. Have you been a testimony this week to the greatness of Jesus Christ with both your words and actions?
2. Have you been exposed to sexually alluring material or allowed your mind to entertain inappropriate thoughts about someone who is not your spouse this week?
3. Have you lacked any integrity in your financial dealings this week, or coveted something that does not belong to you?
4. Have you been honoring, understanding and generous in your important relationships this past week?

5. Have you damaged another person by your words, either behind their back or face-to-face?
6. Have you given in to an addictive behavior this week? Explain.
7. Have you continued to remain angry toward another?
8. Have you secretly wished for another's misfortune so that you might excel?
9. Your personal accountability question _____
10. Did you finish your reading this week and hear from the Lord? What are you going to do about it?
11. Have you been completely honest with me?

It is important for those who are involved with an LTG to submit to the spirit of the system more than the letter of the law. These questions are meant to stimulate discussion and open sharing but they are not in themselves an exhaustive list of all that sin is, nor do they define what true righteousness is. Simply adhering to the behavior promoted in these questions does not necessarily solidify one's righteousness. Certainly obedience and the confession of sin can lead to righteousness, but we dare not believe that this list of questions is the standard of all that is righteousness. Jesus Himself is the standard of righteousness (Matt. 5:17-20; John 5:39-47). We must follow Jesus, not a list of questions if we want to pursue righteousness. The questions we have given as samples are only tools to help you in your pursuit of Jesus – the *only* Savior of our sins.

There are, however other alternatives to do the same thing. I have always said that people should feel free to adjust the questions to be of the most personal benefit. Some use questions that are more open-ended and less specific. For example, one pastor I know uses questions similar to the following in his LTG's:

1. How has God made His presence known to you this week?
2. What is God teaching you?
3. How are you responding to His prompting?
4. Is there someone you need to share Christ with this next week?
5. Do you have a need to confess any sin?

Both have advantages and disadvantages and either will accomplish the goal if applied in the proper spirit.

The goal of having accountability is not just sin management but rather to foster an honest relationship that is transparent, caring and where healing can come through the confession of sin.

2. Scripture is Planted

The power of the LTG system lies in the unleashing of God's word into the lives of people. The Lord made it clear that the word of God is the seed of new life. He said, "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. And the seed in the good soil,

these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance (Luke 8:11, 15).”

Each group agrees on a book of the Bible to be read. Sometimes an introductory reading schedule is used to help get things started. The goal is to have the people reading larger volumes of Scripture repetitively and in a whole context.

For a steady diet, I strongly recommend reading 25 to 30 chapters each week. If the book agreed upon is a shorter book, such as Ephesians or Jonah it is read five to seven times in a week. If the book is a moderate size, such as 1 Corinthians or Romans, it is read twice in a week. If the book is longer than that, such as Proverbs, Revelation or acts, the book is read once a week.

It is important to note that it is not a failure for someone to be unable to complete the reading in a given week. In fact, it is advantageous if that happens. It is best if it takes a few weeks to get through a book because the repetition helps in the understanding and application of the truth. For this reason, we suggest that the amount of Scripture chosen to be read be a stretch for the group to finish. If a group finishes the designated amount each week then they are probably not reading enough and need to increase the volume. If the group is reading over thirty chapters every week, and they manage to finish the assigned reading every week, it is not enough and the group needs to increase the amount of reading. Ideally, it should average about three to four weeks for the group to complete the assignment.

This form of accountability is a breath of fresh air in this highly segregated and individualistic society we live in. A major weakness of the Western church is the independent and individualistic approach to spiritual development. In the Eastern world, the ideas of family and community are stronger. It is interesting to note how cell-based ministry and multiplication is occurring more easily in cultures which naturally understand community as opposed to the Western world which prizes the individual over community. This affects all areas of the church. The LTG's in Biblical fashion, operate naturally in community. We stay together. We learn together. We move forward together. Our spiritual growth is tied to others in a natural bond (Eph. 4:11-16). We care about one another's progress. In a sense, we learn to love one another, as ourselves. My progress is tied to my brother's, and vice versa. This sanctified peer pressure works to stimulate growth in one another. Like a team, as each player improves, the ability of the entire team is raised to another level, far beyond any individual effort alone.

God has always intended for His people to work as a team. He wrote in Hebrews 10:24-25:

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

The LTG can be a first step for the Westerner to learn what community really is. Groups can then be built on transformed lives that have discovered the true value of community in an LTG.

3. Souls are Strategically Prayed For

Biblical principles of prayer and the salvation of lost souls.

1. I pray Lord, that You draw _____ to Yourself (John 6:44).
2. I pray that _____ seek to know You (Acts 17:27).
3. I pray that _____ hear and believe the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).
4. I ask You to prevent Satan from blinding _____ to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).
5. Holy Spirit, I ask You to convict _____ of his/her sin and his/her need for Christ's redemption.
6. I ask You to send someone who will share the gospel with _____ (Matt. 9:37-38).
7. I also ask that You give me (and/or my fellow disciple) the opportunity, the courage and the right words to share the truth with _____ (Col. 4:3-6; Eph. 6:19-20).
8. Lord, I pray that _____ turn from his/her sin (Acts 17:30-31; 1 Thess. 1:9-10).
9. Lord, I pray that _____ would put all of his/her trust in Christ (John 1:12, 5:24).
10. Lord, I pray that _____ confess Christ as Lord of his/her life, take root and grow in his/her faith and bear much fruit for Your glory (Rom. 10:9-10; Col. 2:6-7; Luke 8:15).

Summary of the System

- a. LTG's meet once a week for approximately an hour.
- b. LTG's are groups of two or three (the 4th person is the beginning of the second group and multiplication is imminent).
- c. The groups are not coed.
- d. There is no curriculum, workbook or training involved.
- e. There is no leader needed in the group.
- f. Only three tasks are to be accomplished:
 1. Sin is confessed to one another in mutual accountability.
 2. Scripture is read repetitively, in entire context and in community.
 3. Souls are prayed for strategically, specifically and continuously.

Chapter 9 Advantages of the LTG System

A Parable for the Church Today

The following story is taken directly from an article in the *Los Angeles Times* titled, "Hormone Disrupter Cause Sterility." The article was printed on Sunday, October 2, 1994 and carried the following sub-heading: "Sexual Confusion In The Wild: from gators to gull, scientists say pollution may be playing havoc with animals hormones. Some males try to lay eggs; some females nest together. Certain species may risk extinction."

It reads,

In the gender bending waters of Lake Apopka, alligators aren't quite male. They aren't quite female either. They may be both. Or neither. This sexual confusion in the wild, discovered in the steamy Florida swamp last year, is so disturbing to scientists that they keep performing test after test on the scaly reptiles trying to prove themselves wrong. But the more they look, the more evidence they find. In fact, hardly any young alligators with normal sexuality can be found in this vast lake on the suburban outskirts of Orlando.

Elsewhere around the world, the same astonishing phenomenon is turning up in a menagerie of fish, birds and other wild animals. Testosterone levels have plummeted in some males, while females are supercharged with estrogen. Both sexes sometimes are born with male and female reproductive organs, and some males wind up so gender warped that they try to produce eggs.

"Everything is really fouled up. It is indeed real, and it is very scary," said Tim Gross, a University of Florida wildlife endocrinologist on the team that discovered the feminized alligators. "We didn't want to believe it, in all honesty."

Wildlife scientists have uncovered persuasive evidence that artificial pesticides and industrial chemicals are infiltrating wombs and eggs, where they send false signals imitating or blocking hormones, which control sexuality. Although the parents are unharmed, their embryo's sexual development is disrupted, and some male offspring are left chemically castrated and females sterile. The potential consequences, if unabated, are unthinkable. If males aren't male and females aren't female, they cannot reproduce and some outwardly healthy populations could be a generation away from extinction.

The ability of these chemicals, called endocrine disrupters, to leave the parents unharmed but afflict the unborn is alarming.

"It's the hand-me-down poison, from parents to offspring," said World Wildlife Fund senior scientist Teo Colborn.

The most insidious aspect is that the damage easily goes undetected; the animals look healthy, even to experts. Their bizarre sexuality is discovered only if their internal genitalia are examined or their hormones are tested."

What would you think if 85-90 percent of the women in our country were infertile and incapable of giving birth? Would you be concerned for the health of these people? Would you be concerned for the future of our nation? Of course you would. So why are we not concerned when 85-90 percent of our churches are infertile and not giving birth to new churches?

Churches may appear healthy, but they are unable to reproduce, which threatens the viability of the church to carry on to the next generation. In this chapter we will discover that one reason that

she is infertile is because she is being fed a seed substitute, which acts much like hormone disrupter, and she has been rendered sterile.

The simple and yet significant ingredients found in the LTG system can bring health and fertility back to the bride. The LTG system itself is not a solution for all that ails a church, nor is it the agent of transformation of lives, ministries and churches. Lives are never really changed by any system or methodology. The Holy Spirit and the word of God working in a life that's cleansed and open to obey are what bring about transformation. The system itself is not what sanctifies and regenerates a soul.

A catalyst is not the ingredient that hardens the varnish or glue, but it accelerates the properties that are already inherent in the other ingredients. In a like manner, the LTG system is really just a catalyst that brings together the properties that cause change, into a relational context that is conducive to growth via multiplication.

1. LTG's plant the see, not a seed substitute.

Jesus made it clear that the seed is the word of God. In the parable of the sower, Jesus tells us, "The sower went out to sow his seed... and (some) seed fell into the good ground, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great. ... Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God (Luke 8:5, 8, 11)."

We are the most biblically privileged generation in all of human history! We have more Bible translations, helpful study tools and mountains of scholarly information than any previous generation in all of human history. Nevertheless, we are also the most biblically illiterate generation this nation has ever seen. In other parts of the world and in other times, people willingly gave their lives for free access to God's word, yet here in the Western world many of us have several unread volumes in a variety of translations collecting dust on the shelf.

No one exposes our shameful lack of Biblical knowledge more accurately and pointedly than pollster and author George Barna. Barna reveals that ...

- * 82% of Americans believe that the phrase "God helps those who help themselves" is in the Bible. It isn't.

- * 52% thought that the Book of Jonah was not in the Bible. It is.

- * 52% believed that Jesus committed sins.

- * 58% do not know that Jesus Christ preached the Sermon on the Mount. In all fairness, He was to one who was most selected, but Billy Graham came in a close second and is catching up each year that the survey is conducted!

- * 48% think that the Book of Thomas is in the Bible. What's really scary is that 12% of them indicate that they are actually reading the Book of Thomas in their Bibles!

* 12% (25 million Americans) actually believed that Noah's wife was Joan of Arc.

In reading the book of Acts it becomes clear that the word of God itself fueled the growth and expansion of the church.

To gain a perspective of the power of the word in spontaneous church expansion, let's start in Luke's account of the church multiplication movement in Asia Minor and take a brief walk backwards through the book to track the spread of the church to that point. You will see how the word of God is the fire that ignites a new life and passion and which spreads that new life in Christ like a wildfire until ultimately an entire empire is overcome.

- Acts 19:20 So **the word** of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing (in Asia Minor).
- Acts 19:10 And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard **the word** of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.
- Acts 18:11 And he settled there (Corinth) a year and six months, teaching **the word** of God among them.
- Acts 13:49 And **the word** of the Lord was being spread through the whole region (Pisidian Antioch).
- Acts 12:24 But **the word** of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.
- Acts 8:4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching **the word**.
- Acts 6:7 And **the word** of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Unfortunately, today's Western church has allowed herself to be distracted from this vital ministry. It's time for Christian leaders in the western church to make the same determination that these apostles made. Not that we need to lock ourselves up for even longer time in the study preparing for our sermons, but rather be fed by a steady and voluminous intake of Scripture with no purpose other than to hear from God and obey His voice!

The two contributions Martin Luther wanted to make most to Christendom were a Bible that all could read and understand, and a hymnal from which they could sing.

He said, “Let them loose. The flame will spread on it own.” The flame spread in the early history of the church and has done so throughout history. It can do so once again if we will trust it and let it loose.

To see revival spread through our churches and touch our society we need to trust God’s word more than all our “helpful” study tools and great growth ideas. In a sense we need to get out of the way and let God do what He does best, which is the next advantage of the LTG.

2. LTG’s remove the middleman

The lay Christian has become totally dependent on clergy to tell him or her what the Bible says and what it means by what it says. Many of the Christians in this country feel they are unable to read the Bible without some professional help. For most, the only time they receive any of the word at all is in sermons at church services.

If you doubt this claim, simply examine the facts. A majority of churchgoers are incapable of reading and understanding the Bibles they own. What is the most published Bible in America today? The King James Version (KJV) by a mile! What is the most read Bible in America today? Again the KJV by a landslide! Here’s the problem: According to the US Dept. of Education only 51% of Americans are functionally literate. That means that about half of the people in the United States do not have the literacy levels to comprehend the KJV. According to Barna, three out of four American adults cannot read the Bible they have at home! No wonder they are dependent on the clergy for understanding God’s word.

Pastors also contribute to the gap between Christians and God’s word. Without meaning to, pastors can communicate the importance of needing the help of clergy to understand God’s word.

When pastors speak about the Greek or Hebrew meaning of the text, they separate their flock a little further from God’s word. After all, how can common Christians understand the Scriptures themselves if they don’t know the original languages? The languages are best kept in the pastor’s study or the classroom and not in the pulpit.

When a pastor publicly ridicules someone’s misinterpretation of Scripture he scares the congregation into thinking that they had better not risk trying to understand it themselves without “professional” help.

Those of us in pastoral ministry have unintentionally programmed our church members to believe that they can’t understand the Scriptures without the help of the clergy. By doing do, we have erected a “false priesthood” between the Christian and God’s Word. Because we don’t trust common Christians to understand the Bible, they don’t believe they can.

A young pastor once challenged me regarding the LTG system. He didn’t feel I was being responsible allowing people to read the Bible without first giving them a sound

“hermeneutic”. “Hermeneutic” is a ten-dollar theological term that means the ability to rightly interpret the Bible. He thought it dangerous to actually put the Bible into the hands of ordinary Christians without first giving them training in how to study it. To do otherwise, he felt, was to allow wrong interpretations and spur heresy in the church. I was tempted to suggest that what he really meant was that it allowed interpretations that differed from his own point of view, but restraint got the better of me.

I said, “Our hermeneutic is actually a man-made system we have developed to help us understand the word of God, correct?” He said, “Yes, we need it because we are all sinful, depraved and incapable of understanding the truth of God’s word without help.” I agreed and emphasized, “We do need help, but we disagree on the best help. You believe that we need help from our hermeneutical systems and I believe that we need help from the author and illuminator of the book – the Holy Spirit.” I then asked, “Do you mean to tell me that given a choice of trusting a man-made system or trusting the Holy Spirit, the pure resident author of the Scripture, to interpret the Bible, you would choose the system made by the corrupt and depraved man rather than trusting God? You would rather choose to trust the corrupt man and his system more than the divine author Himself?” He paused a long time before he responded. In fact he didn’t really answer my question, he simply said, “You know, I hate to admit it, and I’ll deny it if you ask me later, but, you’re actually a more pure Biblicist than I am.” That was one of the greatest compliments I’ve ever received.

One very liberating idea is that we don’t have to be responsible to accurately interpret every line and every word in order to read the Bible and gain appropriate truth for life application. I confess that there have been many times that I have read portions of the Bible and found more questions than answers – but that doesn’t make the Bible wrong or me irresponsible. It simply means that I still have many levels of depths to plummet into the riches of His word. But I also want to point out that many of those times where I came away with questions I also found relevant truth that spoke to me personally. I have also found that years later, when I pour over old copies of Bibles that have worn out, many of the questions now have answers – but I have also found a whole new set of questions as well! All this shows me that I am a learner and I want to be a learner for the rest of my life! An early church father once claimed that the Bible was shallow enough for a babe to wade in without fear of drowning yet deep enough for theologians to dive into without ever touching the bottom. Who can actually claim that whenever they read the Bible they have full understanding of all that is in it? This kind of attitude leads to an arrogant mockery of real Christianity.

There is nothing in the world like hearing the God of the universe speak to you about your own life and circumstances.

In Hebrews, the writer referred to the recipients as babes who ought to be eating solid food but could only handle milk like a baby (Heb. 5:11-14). There are a variety of explanations as to what the author meant by milk and what solid food is. While he may have had deeper teachings in mind, I do believe that you can make a case for

eating the word directly rather than being dependent upon others' teachings. After all, what is milk but predigested food from another? The mother ingests the food, and it is processed and finally delivered to babes who are absolutely dependent upon their parent for sustenance. The exhortation given is that they ought to have become teachers by now (milk distributors) but rather still had to receive milk from others. All the tools and helps are good, but we also need to hear from God directly without a middleman.

By introducing a middleman to the disciple-making process we have introduced a seed substitute which harms all the succeeding generations. The seed substitute looks like the real thing, boasts of being the real thing, but in fact it ends up confusing the disciples. A synthetic seed is not the same as the real thing. Like the parable of the hormone disrupters we unintentionally sterilize the second generation and though they may appear to be healthy, they are incapable of reproducing.

When it comes to reproducing disciples and leaders, the same principles apply. Each succeeding generation must be directly linked to the Master if it is to maintain and reflect the purity and beauty of the Lord. Every generation that only mimics a copy of the Master will reflect back the flaws of both generations. Jesus said that a student can't be better than his teacher but at best he can be like his teacher (Matt. 10:24-25). If the teacher is always the next generation down the chain, then the quality of students and teachers diminishes with each generation. But if the student can learn to have the Lord as his or her teacher, then the quality of disciples will remain high. In fact, with this scenario, a disciple can actually emerge to have a greater extent of influence than his human teacher does if he is pursuing the Lord as his master.

Paul understood that the men he was training must have the Lord Jesus Christ as their ultimate Master. By getting his disciples into the word, and getting the word into his disciples, Paul empowered them to become disciples of the Lord directly, and not just followers of Paul. They must reflect Christ's beauty, purity and design in their own unique lives. Paul was only a copy of the Master; they needed to be directly connected to the Original Himself. In his farewell address to the Asian elders at Ephesus, Paul reminded them of this important truth. He said, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Thus, when they reached out to others, they in turn could do the same.

The number who will disappoint us can be dramatically reduced if we can connect them directly to the Master Himself. The connection is found in being accountable to God Himself, and to look "to the word of His grace" which is able to strengthen us in our sanctification (John 17:17). In a sense, the word of God is our master document revealing the character and works of God that we are to copy in our own character and behavior. If we each have as our highest goal to be found pleasing to our Lord, then we will live righteously even when there is no one else around to observe us, save God Himself. This is the only motivation that will keep one in the race to the finish (2 Tim. 4:1-8)!

3. LTG's integrate evangelism with the spiritual formation process.

We have committed an illegitimate divorce! When we separate “evangelism” from “discipleship” we are separating that which God has joined together!

Salvation is a lifelong process.

The gospel is not just for the unbeliever, but the Christian. It's the power of God for salvation *for those who believe* (Rom. 1:16, emphasis added). In fact I don't think the non-Christian will take the cross seriously for him or herself until we take it seriously for ourselves! The more it means to us, the more attractive it will be to the lost. Why should they be interested in that to which we give feigned interest in ourselves? If they don't see that we need it ourselves, then why would they feel compelled to need it themselves?

Salvation is so much more than mere fire insurance, or reservations made in heaven. Salvation is a transformed life. Salvation is a becoming. Regeneration is an ongoing process of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Each of us should be more like Christ this year than we were the year before. Our lives should reflect more of the grace and truth found in Christ next year than they do this year.

We must recognize that salvation is more than a decision made at the end of the sawdust aisle in a tent. Salvation is a process. It is a state of being. It is also a destination. It is so much more than what is sold to people from most pulpits, tracts and crusades today.

Wesley, however, did not rely upon these crusades as the means for lost people to be saved. Rather, he considered the public preaching ministry as merely a means to partially awaken the people to their need of salvation, but would then gather the people into small groups of people where they encountered holiness in accountability. Here, in the class meetings is where Wesley believed that souls were justified before God. He believed this so strongly in fact, that he felt to preach the gospel without forming class meetings was actually detrimental.

He said, “Preach in as many places as you can. Start as many classes as you can. Do not preach without starting new classes.” In his book, *To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit*, George Hunter says,

(Wesley) observed that awakening people without folding them into redemptive cells does more harm than good! In a journal entry of 1743 he declares, “The devil himself desires nothing more than this, that the people of any place should be half-awakened and then left to themselves to fall asleep again. Therefore, I determine by the grace of God not to strike one stroke in any place where I cannot follow the blow.”

Because we have cheapened the salvation process, and thus the gospel, we see pitiful results to our own evangelistic efforts. According to Barna, the majority of people who make a decision for Christ are no longer, in the church just eight weeks later. This is partly because we have not understood what salvation truly is and thus we short sell the meaning and power of the gospel. If nonbelievers see its relevance and power in our own lives they will want it too. They must see it in us before they will be willing to hear it from us. Donald Soper has said, “Christianity must mean everything to us before it will mean anything to others.”

I like what Francis of Assisi said: “Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words.”

As it stands currently, the common Christian is far from integrating the gospel and evangelism into their spiritual development.

- * 40% of born-again Christians, according to the Barna Research Group, do not have a clue what the word “gospel” means.
- * 53% did not know what “John 3:16” means. Once comedy film about NBA basketball had a wild fan point to a banner which read “John 3:16” and yelled to the coach, “Hey John that’s not a Bible verse, that’s your road record!” That’s about the level of understanding today!
- * 81% (4:5) of born-again Christians do not know what the phrase “Great Commission” means. They think its something like 25% of the profits!

What I have found with the LTG system is that people share the gospel because it is a part of spiritual growth – a natural expression of a soul that is being touched by God.

Add to the process daily intercession for the souls of lost people and the burden for the gospel becomes a natural product of a growing disciple. It is interesting that the very men Jesus instructed to pray for the harvest (Matt. 9:37, 38) are the ones He sent into the fields in the next chapter (Matt. 10:5). Praying for lost people cultivates an authentic compassion for them.

Some people in my LTG’s don’t even realize that others are embarrassed about bringing Christ up in conversation. They see their witness as a part of their spiritual life and growth rather than an obligation they grudgingly take upon themselves. The gospel means so much to them that they can’t help but share the good news with others! Can it be that a big part of our hesitancy to witness is a learned behavior? Can it be that a Spirit-filled life will produce a bold witness in the lives of Christians (Acts 1:8)? All through the book of Acts, one thing is clear – Spirit-filling resulted in bold witnessing.

4. LTG's form life-long spiritual disciples

The disciplines introduced in an LTG, reading Scripture, confessing sin, and praying for lost people, are sadly lacking in the Western church today. These can become the foundation upon which other spiritual disciplines can be built.

5. LTG's allow the Holy Spirit His rightful place in spiritual formation

The Holy Spirit is a surprisingly good teacher! The LTG's allow the Spirit of God and the Word of God to take their rightful place in leading the Christian into all truth. Most segments of the Christian faith believe in the illumination ministry of the Holy Spirit. However, many do not trust in it. When it comes to understanding the Bible, we tend to trust more in our interpretive systems and apologetic reasoning than we do in the author Himself. Many churches have been going on for far too long without the help of their most powerful and influential member – the Holy Spirit! He is, without a doubt, the best convictor of sin (John 16:8-11); witness for Jesus (John 15:26-27); worshiper of Christ (John 16:14); and teacher of Scripture (John 14:26; 16:13-15) in your church! He is named the “One called alongside to help” (John 14:16-17). We could all use His help!

Because the LTG system is leaderless and uses only the word of God rather than a man-made curriculum, the Holy Spirit is given greater opportunity to lead, guide and call out the disciples into the ministries He has for them.

6. LTG's empower common Christians to obey the Great Commission for the rest of their lives!

The Great Commission given by Jesus is a command to take the gospel to all the nations and make disciples. It is found in each of the four gospels (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16: Luke 24:; John 20:) as well as the book of Acts (1:8). The last word Jesus gave to His disciples in person before He ascended to heaven was this command. It is called the Great Commission because of its emphasis, its all encompassing authority as well as its global boundaries. It is the divine purpose handed down to the church from Jesus Himself with all authority of heaven and earth behind it.

The potential consequence of laity that is empowered and motivated to make more and better disciples of all the nations is staggering! A new believer can be released to pass on the baton in just weeks rather than years. The possibility of fulfilling the Great Commission in this generation is indeed a reality!

7. LTG's mobilize lay people for ministry.

Grudging duty is replaced by an internal drive to serve out of a love for Christ and others.

Once they feel empowered to do the most significant ministry of all – making disciples – common Christians actually feel prepared and equipped “to do *every* good

work” (2 Timothy 2:22; 3:17, emphasis added)! Their own life-change becomes a spring of life and ministry flowing into the lives of others (John 7:37-39).

8. LTG’s provide tangible evidence of an emerging leader

The LTD’s provide the perfect initial testing grounds for emerging leadership. If a person can’t influence and multiply a group of two, why should we entrust him or her with 15? With 50? Or a church of 200, or more?

9. LTG’s release the cell leader and pastor for more focused ministry

Though the evangelical church seems to be taking strategic steps toward a cell-based ministry, we must go further at lowering the bar of ministry beyond the cell leader to every Christian.

10. LTG’s tap the internal motivation of the disciples

With the LTG’s, the disciples do not get bored, for one can hardly exhaust the word of God.

11. LTG’s release spontaneous multiplication into the church at the grass-roots level

Early in the development of this system I was teaching that the groups need to multiply. I believed that I needed to stress this point or the groups would not reproduce. I applied a lot of external pressure and persuasion to try and get the groups to multiply.

At the same time, I had been studying spontaneous multiplication principles from the word of God and some other books. Some ladies in my church challenged me one evening by saying, “Don’t talk to us about multiplication. We don’t want to hear it. We like our group and don’t want to split up.” I considered this a good opportunity to test the natural function of planting seeds in good soil, so I told them that if they didn’t want to multiply they didn’t have to. I intentionally stopped pushing reproduction to test the truth of natural and spontaneous multiplication. Within about four months, that same group of women became three groups without any help from me.

In the past, I found that I needed to sweat and bleed to see even the most modest multiplication occur in discipleship. Today, I have seen the kind of spontaneous multiplication that I have always longed for but was doubting I would ever experience. We need to remember that reproduction is a natural function of the church and that it’s part of God’s design and plan. The power to produce multiplication is already inherent in the body of Christ; we need only to tap that power. If we would only plant the seed, rather than a seed substitute, into soil that is prepared, we would see multiplication.

Jesus described through parables, a kingdom that didn’t have any trouble expanding and multiplying. Luke documents a movement that gained such momentum through spontaneous multiplication of disciples and churches that its opponents accused Paul

of turning the world upside down! We may have read of such a thing happening in church history or on foreign mission fields, but most of us must confess that we have never experienced such spontaneous multiplication in the western church.

If we focus on making disciples, and keep the system simple and solid, multiplication becomes easy and natural. The thought of multiplication becomes more palatable in the disciples. Once the disciples experience a taste of reproduction, it is embraced more readily in other levels of church ministry. Multiplication of cells, ministries and even churches will be a more natural function because multiplication is in the genetic code of the base unit of the church – the disciples.

As was mentioned before, there is not a single command to plant a church or to multiply small groups. There is a lot of church planting and multiplying of groups going on in the New Testament, but not because the church was instructed to do so. The reason that groups and churches multiplied is because the first generation of Christians were obeying a very specific and simple command – to make disciples! When Christians are obedient to this single command, it results in the multiplying of groups and churches. To attempt to multiply groups and churches without multiplying disciples is not only disobedient, but it is downright impossible!

Many are very intentional about multiplying groups and churches, assuming that disciple-making will result, but the results are less than effective. This is Biblically backwards! The truth is that only when we become intentional about making and multiplying disciples can we be assured that groups and churches will multiply.

Recently, while in Australia, I met a man who had been using the strategy. He heard about it from a common friend. He told me of how he had been speaking with another friend who is a church leader on the island of Sri Lanka, south of India, and who had run into frustrations with typical discipleship methodology. The LTG concept was passed on through the phone lines and now LTG's are multiplying on the island of Sri Lanka. Who knows where they will go from there!

Chapter 10

Common Objection to the LTG System

1. The are out of control!

Because the groups give birth, multiply and die spontaneously, it would be very difficult to keep track of them. The temptation in trying to do so would be to control them, which would stifle their potential. My recommendation is to keep track of the numbers in worship attendance and the numbers of ministries and cell groups, but allow these groups to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and none other.

A good question to ask is, "Who was in control of the expansion of the church in the book of Acts?" It is clear from chapter one to chapter twenty-eight that there was not a single human leader in charge of the expansion of the early church. The Holy Spirit

was in charge. He is mentioned some 57 times in 28 chapters.

Control is often a big concern in our churches. We take great measures to control our activities for fear that all hell will break loose. I don't think hell is our greatest threat right now. Jesus already dealt with the power of hell, and he has declared that hell's gates pose no barrier to the church's advance.

The real question we need to ask is, "What will we do when all heaven breaks loose in our churches?" Would we be prepared if revival really came? Can we handle the lack of control? Can our egos manage not having the answers? Could we be comfortable with the chaos? Our church structures, our doctrinal statements, our denominational politics and distinctives are insufficient to contain the wealth and the power of heaven. Heaven is beyond our grasp, beyond our comprehension and beyond our control! Perhaps we should count the cost before we pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

If we are willing to relinquish control and allow for spontaneous multiplication in our churches, we will see the gospel go further than we ever dreamed possible. In the classic book written ahead of its time, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, Roland Allen describes the advantage of losing control in a release of spontaneous multiplication.

By spontaneous expansion I mean something which we cannot control. And if we cannot control it, we ought ... rejoice that we cannot control it. For if we cannot control it, it is because it is too great, not because it is too small for us. The great things of God are beyond our control. Therein lies a vast hope. Spontaneous expansion could fill the continents with the knowledge of Christ: our control cannot reach as far as that. We constantly bewail our limitations: open doors unentered; doors closed to us as foreign missionaries; fields white to the harvest which we cannot reap. Spontaneous expansion could enter open doors, force closed ones, and reap those white fields. Our control cannot: it can only appeal for more men to maintain control.

2. The questions are too personal to expect new believers to answer.

New believers don't really think that the questions are too personal. They don't even know to think such because they are only just forming their opinion of what this "Christianity stuff" is all about. The questions are too personal for staid Christians who are content with the status quo and threatened by opening up the closet and exposing what is inside.

I think that the lost of the world will respond well to truth that we embrace wholeheartedly and do not compromise in any way. We are in a day when it is important to call sin, sin and truth, truth!

3. The amount of suggested reading is too much for a busy person to do.

If an average reader will give half-an-hour every day to reading the Scripture, he or she will be able to keep up with the required amount. Most of us give at least that much time to getting ready each morning for the day ahead. If we can devote that much time to our physical readiness, why not our spiritual? Many people can't get through the day without reading the sports page of the newspaper, or Ann Landers' column, yet we can go a whole week or month without reading God's word. Some of us in the church today are more religious about hearing Leno's monologue than hearing from God through Scripture. No wonder there is no power in some of our churches!

The amount of reading required for an LTG is comparable to watching a half-hour sitcom on TV. Certainly we can afford the time to read God's word because we all give at least that much time to watching the television each night.

I have found that the busier I get, the more I need to read the Scripture! I have recently reached a point in my life where if I don't read the Scripture, I cannot effectively juggle the demands of my life and maintain a level of sanity or composure needed to remain fruitful.

4. The groups are too legalistic; they'll make the Bible a chore to read.

The fact is that Bible reading today is already considered by most to be a chore!

I believe that the reason that people consider it a chore is because they haven't fallen in love with it yet. Those who love the word of God have found that the more they read it the more they love it.

I have yet to find someone who has been faithful in an LTG that doesn't learn to appreciate the word of God and develop a true hunger for it.

Unfortunately, in most of our churches today we have made the Bible something to be studied or interpreted rather than something to be simply read, admired and obeyed. For some the Bible is not a love letter anymore but a legal document in which every word and punctuation demands careful research. Imagine what your sweetheart would think if you treated his or her love letter with that kind of scrutiny.

I understand that there is a place for a deeper study of God's word. I am merely adding that there is also a place for reading it for what it truly is – God's word to you personally.

In my experience, it is not unusual to hear people complain in the first week or two of an LTG that they don't get to really study the Scriptures because they are too busy reading them. This complaint only comes from those who have been Christians for a long time and it only comes in the first few weeks. Once they have actually done the level of reading that the LTG suggests, in just a few weeks they realize how much

they truly are receiving. The repetition, and the sheer volume, begins to awaken the reader to truth and he or she begins to become acquainted again with the voice of God. In fact, I have found that reading the Scripture in this way actually stimulates further study rather than reduce it. Questions naturally arise from the reading which motivates the reader to find out more. It is not uncommon to have people in an LTG still studying passages from a book in the Bible that was read weeks earlier even though the group has already moved on to another book in its weekly reading.

5. The groups will allow heresy to run rampant in the church!

Chapter 11
Common Questions to the LTG System

1. Can I reduce the reading and still be effective?

We do not recommend that you decrease the suggested reading. In our own field-testing we have discovered that when the reading is reduced, the disciple's growth and the LTG's multiplication is dramatically stunted. In contrast, however, when a group chooses to increase the reading to the amount we have suggested, then Christian growth increases exponentially!

There is value in stretching a Christian's capacity for reading rather than keeping them comfortable.

If a group has a slow reader, or even an illiterate one, we have found that they can keep up with the group simply by acquiring the Bible on audio tape and listening to the assigned amount with the same repetition as the group.

2. Can I change the accountability questions?

3. How do they answer the questions that arise from the reading?

One of the important steps for our church was to grant people permission to say, "I don't know," without feeling ashamed. Only when we are willing to admit that we don't know something are we going to be able to learn something.

One thing that will astound you is the way that the growing disciples are able to find answers to their own questions when they read the same passage of Scripture repetitively.

What happened is that he would write out the questions the first time he would read through the book that week. Since we were reading it five times in a week, by the end of the week he would understand the book enough to answer his own questions. I enjoyed watching him realize that he could read the Bible himself and that he didn't need a pastor to interpret it for him.

4. What do they talk about at a typical LTG meeting?

The accountability questions can stimulate great interaction. Men and women will find it liberating to talk freely about things that they previously felt ashamed to discuss. Where they once thought they were alone with unique struggles, they suddenly discover that they have common ground, and the group can exchange helpful ideas to overcome their temptations. There is power in a group of two or three working together as a team to overcome sin!

I have intentionally kept the groups from having any other agenda than reading the word, confessing sins with the questions and praying.

5. How do I get these groups started in my church?

The best place to start is at the grass roots – you and a new believer, a seeker, or a Christian who desperately needs help.

It is not hard to find people who need Christ and are desiring His help.

6. How long will these groups last?

The LTG's are living things that have their own life span. Some have lasted as long as three years, others have multiplied in as short a time as one month! Believe it or not, it is more frequent to see multiplication occur sooner than later! If a group does not multiply in the first year, the chances are that it will not. Don't let that concern you too greatly; you have all benefited by implementing important spiritual disciplines. You have also received a system that you can continue to use in your life. If you do find, however, that you have a group that is not multiplying after a year of faithful participation, we recommend that you look to start another quickly and initiate multiplication yourself.

Because these groups implant the true seed, rather than a seed substitute, multiplication rarely needs to be forced, coerced, or manipulated. In fact, our experience has shown that it doesn't usually need to be mentioned at all! It is good to cast vision for multiplication, but the real impetus for it comes from the seed itself, germinated in good soil.

A group will end in one of two ways: it will give birth to one or two other groups, or it will die. Both will happen, both are to be expected. Read the parable of the sower again (Mark 4:1-20)! You will see that there are four kinds of soil, which have four different responses to the gospel, only one of which was fruitful. If you are in a group, and it dies, don't be too discouraged. Try again. The fruit you will see in the end will far outweigh any discouragement.

Chapter 12

Troubleshooting Unproductive Groups

Typically there are four errors which slow the process down.

1. Reduced Scripture Intake Syndrome

2. Poor Disciple Selection Syndrome

It is very important to find desperate sinners if we want to make disciples.

The question is often asked, “Should I start with Christians or non-Christians?” That is not the right question to ask. The place to start is with a desperate need that only Jesus can meet – whether that person is a Christian or not.

It is common sense that shows us that if we start with “already committed Christian leaders” we will see less life change than if we start with desperate sinners – there is less to change.

3. Leadership Intrusion Syndrome

A third area where the system is often compromised is in the addition of supplemental material or a more defined leadership role. As bad as it sounds, pastors often don’t trust the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to do what they do best. Instead they tend to get in the way with “better stuff” and find that the whole process is lacking. They would never admit this, even to themselves, but they do betray this misplaced belief in actions. This is a natural temptation but it should be resisted. Faith in God and His word will never end in disappointment (Romans 10:11)! Leadership will emerge in groups naturally, but when it invades a group unnaturally it tends to hijack all the natural process that these groups can create.

4. Programmatic Implementation Syndrome

A fourth reason why LTG’s may not succeed in some churches is because they are implemented as a program instead of a grass roots system.

Chapter 13

Conclusion – Church according to Jesus

What makes a church a church?

The true church is much more than petty concerns.

The church is not to be identified by bumper stickers or fish signs any more than constitutions and by laws. It isn’t a steeple on the top of a building or a sign in the front that says “church” on it that is to identify the true church of Jesus Christ. Jesus said it was our “love one for another” that would identify us as His.

The second question was the real test. This is the most important question anyone will ever answer, and our eternal destiny hangs in the balance. Jesus then asked, “But who do *you* say that I am (emphasis mine)?” The scriptures don’t tell us this, but I can imagine that it suddenly got real quiet. I can also picture all the eyes that were so on fire with enthusiasm a moment earlier were now falling slowly to the ground. This question is much harder to answer because it is personal – if you get it wrong, it is you who are at fault.

Church begins with Jesus – who He is and what He has done. It is all about Jesus and if it begins to be about something else, then it stops being the church as Jesus meant it to be.

1. Jesus builds the church

There are many books, tapes, seminars and CD's that are made to help people build the church, but if you're building the church it isn't the church. He didn't say, "... and upon this rock you will build my church." Jesus, and only Jesus, builds the church. If we build a church based on a charismatic personality, an innovative methodology or anything else we have a church that is inferior to that which Jesus would build.

2. Jesus owns the church

He bought her with His own blood. He didn't promise that He "... will build *your* church." The church belongs to Jesus. He is building His church.

The church is Jesus' building project and He fully intends to live in it. When Jesus is at work building His church it will be beautiful and solid. He doesn't do sloppy work. If our churches are falling apart and are not healthy it is not because Jesus has done a poor job, but because we have taken the task upon ourselves.

3. The church is meant to be growing

Everyone has driven by a building that is being built. None of us have driven a second time by the construction and found it to be smaller the next time. When something is being built it grows bigger, not smaller. Jesus is building His church and it should be growing. The church is meant to grow. She should experience, spiritual growth, and seeing new souls brought into the kingdom of God is part of that.

4. The church that is growing will face opposition

Jesus said that we would face resistance when the church starts to grow. He identified the antagonism as that which comes from Hades. When ever the church is alive and growing, hell is opposing it.

One sign of a healthy church is that she faces hostility from hell. One preacher has said, "If you wake up in the morning and don't run into the enemy head on, then maybe you're going in the wrong direction." Ed Silvano rightly points out that the Bible doesn't say to ignore the devil and he will flee from you. We must stand firm and resist the enemy.

In *Releasing Your Church's Potential*, Tom Clegg has said, "I believe that the enemy divides all people into two categories, those he can ignore and those he has to fight. I want to be one of those that he has to fight." He went on to quote a friend of his who was a WWII bomber pilot: "If you're receiving flack you're over the target."

5. The church that Jesus builds is unstoppable!

The enemy we face is powerful. He has been around from the beginning of time and has been a constant study of human nature. His first attempt to destroy human life was against a man and a woman who were stronger and purer than we are – he succeeded. He has been perfecting his craft ever since. He knows each of our weaknesses and vulnerabilities. He has an army of soldiers at his command. He and all of his forces are invisible and surround us.

When I try to picture our situation in this light I begin to see church as a refuge or shelter. I see her as a fortress where we are defending the saints from the vicious wolf pack who surrounds us and wants to devour each of us. But this description of church does not fit the one given by Jesus in this verse.

Jesus said that the gates of hell shall *not* prevail against His church. It dawned on me one day that a gate is not an offensive weapon. Police don't pack loaded gates. Postal workers don't go crazy with semi-automatic gates. Terrorists don't hold victims at gate-point. Dogs don't run loose with little signs around their necks that read "Beware of Gate."

Gates are not a threat, they are defensive, and the gates Jesus was talking about aren't pearly ones – they're the gates of *hell*! The church is to be on the offense, not defense. The church has been held hostage at gate-point for far too long. It is time that we stop being intimidated by a gate!

If this is not enough, we are often threatened by one another! Some of us don't feel comfortable unless we are in defense as if being on offense is a sin. We are so defensive that it's offensive!

Rodin was a French impressionist sculptor. Though many do not recognize his name, most are familiar with his work. He created the Thinker. What you may not realize is that the Thinker was really a study he had done to sit on top of his greatest masterpiece – the Gates of Hell. For years we have been wondering what it is that the Thinker is thinking about. No, he's not wondering where he left his clothes the night before. What the Thinker is contemplating is an eternity of judgment separated from God.

My friend at the party began to describe the Gates of Hell for us. It is a tall, haunting work with countless figures writhing in pain and agony sliding down into their judgment with the Thinker sitting above it all with a mood of regret and contemplation. As she started to picture it she got caught up in appreciation for it and said in amazement, "Oh, I could just stare at the Gates of Hell forever."

There was a long pause in the conversation as her words began to sink in. A few gave an uncomfortable chuckle as it dawned on them how significant her words truly were. All I could think of to say at that moment was, "Oh, I hope not."

This adequately sums up for us the cost of the church remaining in a passive,

defensive posture. When we sit back in our fortress frightened by all that seems to threaten us we let countless souls remain captive to the forces of hell. We need to turn from defense to offense and storm the gates to set the captives free. This is church according to Jesus.

The church is a vibrant, authentic expression of Jesus' love and truth in this dark world, and with Jesus at the helm, she is unstoppable!

Summary

How can I release spontaneous multiplication of growing disciples in my church? Fruitfulness begins with the right seed in the right soil. The Life Transformation Group System can be the catalyst to release spontaneous multiplication of disciples in your own ministry environment but it requires that you begin the process. If your own life can't be transformed first, you have no right to expect to transform another's.

There is a cost involved with multiplication. For the salmon the cost is death. It swims upstream, lays its eggs in the sand and then dies.

Grain also dies to reproduce. Jesus said,

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal (John 12:24).

As disciples, we must deny ourselves and pick up our cross and follow Christ. This is all about surrender. This is about confession and repentance. This is about obedience. Where these things exist there is a dying of self and reproduction will come.

We've got to be willing to give up more than our time, talents and treasure – we've got to start by giving up our lives for the sake of His kingdom. If we are willing to pay the price – if we are willing to die to follow Christ – then we can see an abundant harvest of souls for the kingdom of God. The church of the first century was willing to give their lives for the expansion of the kingdom and they were able to reach the entire known world with the gospel. Every church throughout history that was willing to surrender their lives for the sake of Christ witnessed dramatic and spontaneous growth. This is one reason why churches thrive under persecution – the people of God are forced to decide what really matters most. They count the cost and pay the price. They die to themselves, and their spiritual lives reproduce, and church growth occurs through multiplication.

I have heard that scientific and statistical probabilities have demonstrated that if a single shaft of wheat is left unmarred and blighted and allowed to freely reproduce and grow, within only eight years it will have multiplied into a crop large enough to feed the entire world population – for an entire year!