

ALL PEOPLES CHURCH

LIFEGROUP
WHERE COMMUNITY HAPPENS.

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Chapter 1 | Why Discipleship

Several years ago, Jason walked out of prison, carrying the baggage of a destroyed marriage and an unemployable resume. City leaders considered men like him beyond hope. Historic recidivism rates cast a pall over his prospect of a new life.

The Sunday following his release, Jason walked into a church service, alone. He found a seat, searching for anything to help secure a fresh start. His hope seemed futile according to human logic. But God. God intervened by leading Jason to randomly sit next to family Lifegroup leaders. Following the service they introduced themselves – a simple, mundane act of kindness requiring no advanced spiritual gift.

In the course of conversation, Jason shared his story. The leaders patiently listened and prayed with him. Next, they took it further and invited him to lunch with their family and ultimately to their Lifegroup. He immediately committed to the group and to discipleship. Over the next year, his life was radically transformed. He found freedom from sin and addiction. He sought to turn around further by gaining consistent employment.

Whenever a person undergoes a life transformation, others recognize the change. Within a year, Jason's marriage was restored and his wife also experienced discipleship. Soon his brother came to Christ, followed by members of his former criminal network. Jason defied all the trends for prisoner reintegration, and after several years, city leaders began to take notice.

The police chief invited him to serve on a committee to help others transition back into society after incarceration. The local paper featured Jason and his story on the front page as a testimony to the whole city. His impact is hard to measure, but we estimate several hundred people have directly encountered God and connected to the church through his witness.

Jason's story is powerful. And it began with Lifegroup leaders introducing themselves and inviting him to lunch. It grew through simple, mundane discipleship. You may never serve on a civic committee or appear on the front page of the paper, but you can say "hi" to someone, you can invite someone to your group, and you can commit to helping others build foundations through discipleship. It may feel mundane, and it might not always seem to make an immediate impact, but it will change the world.

Your contribution matters. Discipleship is often quite ordinary, boring even, yet if we commit to consistently live out the basics of our faith then we too will turn around and see a legacy in our wake. Whether you are a stay-at-home mom, a teacher, a student, a business person, or in between jobs, you play a significant role.

Discipleship is critically important for spiritual growth. This simple process lays the basic foundations of faith, without which nothing else stands. And *you can do it*.

Foundations

Bonanno Pisano designed his most famous landmark nearly a thousand years ago. Today, people still easily recall his ornate vision, which stands as a wonderful example of medieval Romanesque style. A proud Italian seaport commissioned Pisano to expand its cathedral, viewing it as a matter of civic pride. The architect used the opportunity to demonstrate his advanced knowledge of arches and load distribution, technology far ahead of its time. The designer was brilliant, the town was expanding, the blueprint was groundbreaking.

Unfortunately, none of it matters. The reason for Pisano's global fame is his glaring failure. His beautiful design focused on external beauty...and it completely neglected the foundation. The Leaning Tower of Pisa endures as a monument to poor planning, more a memorial to the danger of a quick fix than a breakthrough in Italian architecture.

The ground beneath the tower contains weak subsoil, which went unnoticed, and was worsened by plans which allowed a mere eight foot foundation for the nearly two-hundred foot tall building. Within four years the tower began to lean; it's a small miracle it actually survived construction.

While we smirk at Pisano's mistake, his flawed thinking permeates our culture. We too love instant results and quick fame; we focus on external appearance, often to the neglect of the foundation underneath. Quick fixes are ubiquitous to Western Culture, and quick fixes lead to the same results.

Think about it. Almost all advertising entices us to believe a quick fix will solve our chronic problems. Hungry? Get fast food. Poor? Go play the lottery. While in high school, my friends and I were broke. We needed to get home but collectively produced a mere dollar in gas money. It was just enough to make it. But not enough for ice cream. Rather than prudently filling the car up with the necessary fuel, my friend walked into the gas station and purchased a scratch off lottery ticket. He won \$30, somehow violating Murphy's Law in the process, which gave us enough cash for a full tank and dessert. His indiscretion paid off.

This is the problem with the quick fix: *it works just long enough to deceive us into believing it actually leads to lasting change*. A fascinating study of lottery winners reveals that instantly winning millions of dollars does not lead to increased happiness, in fact, for many the prize is a source of pain. Why? The underlying problem of poverty is not solved by instant riches; the foundations of financial discipline and wise investing take hard work and years to develop. Adding millions of dollars to a weak fiscal foundation leads to collapse.

Unfortunately, this problem of idolizing quick fixes extends to the Church. We also believe in fast solutions to deep seated struggles. We prioritize external design over long-lasting foundations. Jesus warned us of this human tendency in the concluding story of His longest recorded sermon, found in Matthew 5-7.

Tale of Two Homes

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." Matthew 7:24-27

This passage reveals a terrifying truth: a house built on sand won't immediately collapse, in fact, the building will likely stand long enough to convince us it's stable. In other words, we live at risk of deceiving ourselves into believing a spiritual quick fix works permanently because it appears to stand for a season. Why take the time to find the stable rock if it appears the sand will suffice? But two things reveal a bad foundation: *time* and *trials*. Eventually these will destroy the flawed home.

Knowledge vs Application

I grew up reading this parable yet managed to miss the main point. I misunderstood the message to describe knowing the Word of God as the means to building a strong foundation. I was completely wrong. In reality both people in this story know the Bible. The contrast in their outcomes resulted from their response to the Word, not their knowledge of it. One simply heard the message; the other actually put it into practice.

This scares me. Accumulated Bible knowledge without personal application is described by God Himself as building a house on the sand. It is constructing my own personal Leaning Tower of Pisa. This problem is widespread. Think of the global Church, what do we emphasize? Knowledge? Or Obedience?

Increasing our Biblical knowledge is relatively easy, especially in the technological age. Mass distribution of books, teachings, blogs, videos, and conferences lead to a stunning availability of theological knowledge. Average church members today have ready access to material unavailable even to seminary students a mere two decades ago.

But our obedience hasn't increased at the same rate. We *know* far more yet *do* far less. In other words, the global Church is in danger of specializing in sand construction. How do we bridge the gap? How do we build deep foundations? Rather than following our flawed human instinct, let's look at the ministry model of Jesus.

The Example of Jesus

The ministry model of Jesus does not make any sense. Seriously. You would never have chosen His approach, and nor would I. The Bible is a shocking book yet, over time, the stories tend to grow overly familiar, causing us to miss the radical message.

Jesus chose the most unlikely ministry strategy to build His Church. He was born in a hick village, in a backward province on the edge of the Roman Empire. He avoided the political power of Rome and the theological influence of Jerusalem for most of His ministry. Despite this, dynamic ministry options consistently presented themselves.

In Mark 1:33-38, we read of Jesus healing a large number of people. He stayed up late into the evening healing an entire village. As in every single sick person. This is our greatest dream – a revival engulfing a whole area. Modern wisdom tells us to respond by buying big tents, launching nightly healing services, hosting large conferences, and topping it all off by penning a bestselling book. Yet Jesus' response blows me away. The next morning He awoke early and simply left.

This is shocking. It doesn't make any sense to our modern minds nor did it to the disciples. We exclaim "everyone is looking for you!" Yet Jesus replies, "I have a better plan."

The feeding of the 5000 is the one miracle story described in each of the Gospel accounts. Thousands of people experienced His authority firsthand to meet their needs. Predictably, this left a deep impression and John 6:15 described the electric atmosphere after the supernatural meal. The people understood that they had witnessed true spiritual power and responded by seeking to extend it politically by making Jesus king.

Imagine receiving an unexpected phone call from an unfamiliar number. You pick up to hear a stern voice. It's a powerful Senator informing you that Congress just declared you the new President. The Marine One helicopter is on the way. How would you respond? Surely this is your calling! It is an open door from the Lord for powerful ministry, a powerful chance to shape culture for a generation. Yet Jesus, faced with this very scenario, responded by retreating to the desert. Again, this does not make sense. What was His better plan?

Rather than embrace these opportunities, Jesus inaugurated the Church by finding a small town and selecting rough, blue collar workers (along with the occasional political extremist and white collar criminal) to be His base. His approach prioritized life-on-life discipleship with a few average people instead of the quick fix of political or spiritual notoriety. Maybe we should take note.

The small discipleship process Jesus initiated continues today, 2000 years later. His Kingdom is still advancing. Today nearly one billion people have put their faith in Christ. The church is growing and spreading across the world while the contemporary power structures of Jesus' day faded away long ago. The Roman Empire is a history lesson. The Temple is an archeology site. But the Church is still changing the world.

Our Mission

Jesus modeled discipleship, intentionally rejecting opportunities we consider more powerful. He also commanded us to disciple others. How do we build strong foundations? By reprioritizing discipleship as our primary ministry approach.

Teaching is wonderful and one of the gifts described in Ephesians 4:11. The gift of healing is much needed in the Body of Christ and is mentioned as a manifestation of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:9. The world desperately needs godly men and women to serve in politics, following the example of Nicodemus. But without a foundation of discipleship, none of these things will produce lasting change.

If we pursue knowledge, spiritual experiences, or societal impact apart from discipleship, then we are chasing a quick fix. With a base of discipleship, these gifts add a great depth to the mission of the Church. Without such a base, these deceive us into thinking the Church is strong when in reality either time or trials will soon reveal our fatal flaw.

The Great Commission

One month shook the disciples' entire world. For years they followed Jesus as He led the ministry and built His Church. They assumed His ministry existed as a precursor to the establishment of a new Jewish kingdom, only to find their worldview shattered with the death, burial, and resurrection of their Master. Before they even fully processed this fundamental shift, Jesus ascended up into the clouds. I can only imagine the sobriety of this holy moment. The baton of God's rescue mission passed on to them. To us.

His last commands describe the mission statement of the Church "Go, make disciples of all the nations." In other words, Jesus delegated His shockingly counter-intuitive ministry approach to the Church. It's really not complicated, but it is really difficult. Discipleship is messy and painful. Discipleship requires full participation from the church body, not just the professional clergy. Discipleship often fails to produce either quick or measurable results. As a result, we've focused on other giftings and other missions – not bad ones – yet failed to accomplish The Mission given to us.

Imagine a global Church built on a foundation of discipleship! All the other gifts would blossom: teaching leading to greater depth, pastoring facilitating greater healing, and social engagement leading to lasting transformation. Let's reclaim our calling. Let's prioritize our Mission.

The Example of the Early Church

Think of the word "church", what comes to mind? Buildings? Pews? Felt boards? Committees? None of these are inherently bad, well maybe felt boards, but neither do they define a Biblical Church. The book of Acts describes the early church and in particular Acts 2:42-47 vividly reveals how the disciples sought to live out their Mission.

Read the following passage and list the characteristics of the first churches.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

The first believers experienced God's presence, they grew in God's Word, and they consistently saw people added to their number. They met in a large group setting at the temple, but equally importantly they met house-to-house. Early Christians lived in deep discipleship community, so much so that "membership" in the church appeared to be those who met in houses, not those who listened to the temple lectures. Discipleship community was set as the foundation for church life, not an optional program for the most committed.

And Your Calling

Not all of us preach. Not everyone is gifted to serve in politics. Only a small percentage of Christians will ever serve in vocational ministry but everyone is called to make disciples. Businessmen and women, teachers, stay-at-home moms and dads, politicians, and retail clerks all inherit the same foundational mission. We make disciples.

Ten dynamic leaders will make an impact on a city, but no matter their talent, their legacy has a limit. No person is given limitless capacity. Yours may be far-reaching or it may feel painfully insignificant. Regardless of your capability, you can make disciples. Maybe it's your children, maybe you invest in one neighbor or co-worker, or maybe you have grace to disciple ten people. The number doesn't matter. What counts is every person playing their part, every believer in the game. Addition will never reach a city, but multiplication has no limit. You disciple two, who disciple two more, who in turn do the same. Eventually, this multiplies far beyond your limited capacity. But the Mission only works when everyone embraces the Mission.

We seek to facilitate multiplying discipleship through Lifegroups. These small groups exist to provide authentic discipleship community to every member of the church; ultimately, our desire is to see discipleship spread far beyond to the entire community.

Lifegroup provides deep community, but fellowship alone is not the ultimate goal. Discipleship is our calling. In fact, we describe discipleship as our "X Factor", which means that if given the choice to limit everything to only one ministry activity, we'd choose life-on-life discipleship.

Every member of the church is called to make disciples; some have the additional capacity to lead Lifegroups. These groups serve as the primary structure to facilitate discipleship in our church and are fundamental to our spiritual health. Whether you lead a full Lifegroup or have the grace to disciple just one person, you play important part in the mission of God.

Next Steps

This book seeks to empower you to make disciples. You will learn what makes a great leader and will discover ways to empower spiritual growth, and to care for pastoral needs. You will also learn to facilitate the actual Lifegroup meeting. The topics range from deeply spiritual to inherently practical but everything points to one goal – to make disciples. To conclude this chapter, let's go back to the Great Commission. This passage imparts a mission to the Church, but also provides critical steps toward seeing it accomplished. Take a few minutes to answer the following questions, which we will revisit throughout the rest of the book.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20

1. List the 2 promises found in this passage. If we genuinely believe them to be true, how would that affect our perspective on leading Lifegroup and discipling others?
2. Write down what immediately comes to mind when you think of discipleship.
3. List the 4 commands found in this passage. How does this compare to your answer above? What are the typical application of these commands in the Church? Do they reflect the Great Commission, or something different?
4. The final command is “teach to obey”, yet we often reduce it “teach”. List out typical teaching methods in one column and methods for teaching to obey in a separate column. What should you emphasize in order to lead a group that “teaches to obey”?

Chapter 2 | Your Role

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

For my 16th birthday, I received a decade-old minivan. Faux wood side panels graced the exterior, complete with the added benefit of forced humility for my teenager self. The tape deck mostly destroyed cassettes, which didn't matter much since I only owned CDs. The rear-view mirror was missing and a side mirror later tragically decapitated by a telephone pole. Rather predictably, the car did not survive the year.

I upgraded with my next vehicle. I still remember driving to a dealership on the other side of town to take possession of the small hatchback, complete with ironically imprinted racing stripes and the number 9. But I ran into a complication. Somehow in the purchasing process, I failed to realize the car contained a manual transmission.

For two hours, I drove the surrounding neighborhood seeking to master the shift from first to second gear. Right as my confidence began to increase, I heard a clanking noise and discovered the gears no longer changed. Apparently my driving lesson burned out the clutch. I limped back to the dealer and discovered the cost of fixing the part was actually greater than the price of the car. Rather than sink money into a mistake, I cut my losses and moved on, eventually landing in the luxury of a Buick.

My car woes taught me two great lessons: dating is overrated and a failure to properly change gears will always lead to burnout. Gears allow the car to increase speed exponentially, without necessarily increasing the pressure on the engine. Increased acceleration apart from a gear shift will cause the engine to red-line. It simply cannot go faster; the added force only results in exhaustion.

I've discovered leaders generally do not switch gears naturally, and, similar to my ill-fated racer, the result is burnout. Burnout stems from viewing increasing labor as the solution to every problem. Driving in one gear is possible, but constrained by a limit – your personal capacity. It is possible for leaders to thrive in their responsibility, but they must learn to shift gears.

This principle applies to virtually any leadership role, but is especially relevant for Lifegroup leaders and disciple-makers. Many work a full-time job, seek to disciple their children, and serve in the community in

addition to this responsibility. Three specific gears are fundamentally important: pray, model, and delegate. These three traits define great leaders.

Qualities of Great Lifegroup Leaders

Pray

I once discipled a man who recently escaped a lifestyle of drugs and alcohol. He joined my group and we met consistently for months, that is until he suddenly stopped taking my calls. I tried to reach him, yet simply couldn't get through. I knew he relapsed into his old habits but felt powerless to help. All I knew to do was pray. I prayed for him consistently for months, asking God to intervene and get his attention. To be honest, my faith was low.

I received a call out of the blue months later from my friend, asking to meet up. He looked visibly shaken the next day as we met. He described attending a party the previous night, drinking heavily and eventually ending up in the bathroom. But as he vomited up his excess, the power of God descended upon the room. He lay on the floor for hours, sobered and shaking in holy fear. He repented under the conviction of God. The experience marked him, still evident the next day, and catalyzed a turning point in his life.

His confession floored me. I discovered prayer carries greater power than I ever realized. I made a commitment that prayer would take a central role in discipleship. I have limits to my power, but God does not. We cannot mold another person into Christ's image. We cannot cause spiritual revelation, nor create true conviction. These are works of the Spirit alone, and He invites us to partner in prayer.

Pray for your Lifegroup and those you disciple, and pray for individuals by name. Start a prayer journal and list out specific requests for each person. Even consider doing this for the whole group. If you hit a roadblock within the group, invest time in intercession. I often catch myself spending far more time worrying about problems than praying for solutions. Above all, recognize the answer to problems flows from the power of God far more than your counsel.

Model

Think of someone who influenced you in a profound way. What caused the influence? Most people will describe the person's lifestyle far more than their words as the reason for the lasting impact.

Simply put, we value actions over words. Discipleship creates an environment to model our lifestyle, whether we like it or not. People will see you, they will see you interact with your spouse, they will see you on the good days and the bad. Preachers and authors may promote ideals, but disciple-makers live these values in real life.

This gear intimidates me more than the others; it's easier to tell someone what to do than it is to apply the same truth to my own life. No one perfectly lives Kingdom values; we all travel together in the journey toward Christ-likeness. But we do set the tempo. People see your hunger, they see your

transparency. They witness you aspiring to lead your family, confessing your own sin, disciplining yourself to seek God, and choosing integrity at work. These actions create a powerful impression.

When identifying great Lifegroup leaders and disciple-makers, the defining characteristic is their lifestyle, not hours spent in preparation. Commit to seek God as your first priority and over time, you'll discover people listing your name as the answer to our original question.

Delegate

"Work yourself out of a job" – my first job description as a newly minted Lifegroup leader. When dialoguing with leaders on the edge of burnout I almost inevitably discover they carry virtually every aspect of the group. They always host, they buy snacks, they organize the kid's rotation, they lead worship, they facilitate discussion, and they send all the reminders. I'm tired just listening to them.

It doesn't have to be this way. The best leaders do the least. But we face a big hurdle to shifting into this gear: delegation requires an initial investment in order to realize a later return. Most people find it easier to go with the status quo; that is, until they burn out. We do everything until we run out of energy and then respond by doing nothing.

List out every role required for the group. How many require your direct involvement? Start by listing the roles causing you the most stress. Which group member would be a better fit? If you personally fill all the roles, you rob other members of the chance to serve the group. While I believe the underlying motivation for this behavior is service, the destructive habit actually limits the group. I've been shocked to discover my most burdensome responsibilities become someone else's greatest joy. This is why God gives us different gifts. This is why He created us as a Body, comprised of many parts.

Create a rotation for consistent Lifegroup responsibilities as a starting point. Include snacks, host home, and kids. Consider training members to take on additional aspects of the groups, such as worship or discussion or communication. To delegate these latter functions, you will need to invest time training and coaching, but the result will allow your group to do far more, and it will cost you far less.

Wherever possible, I encourage Lifegroup leaders to develop co-leaders to share the burden of responsibility. Even without official co-leaders, you can still distribute the work, freeing yourself and increasing ownership among the group in the process.

Qualifications of Leadership

Character

The above traits mark great leaders, but we must also recognize Biblical qualifications for leadership. At times, people need to first resolve a character issue prior to leading. That being said, no leader is perfect. We all read this list and find areas in which we need to grow. The goal for a leader in regard to their character is direction, not perfection. Yet how a leader lives his or her life and the character with

which they conduct themselves will make a far greater impact than anything that is ever said. Overwhelmingly, the biblical standard for a leader is NOT experience or training, but character.

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 3:1-13

Many churches and ministries have fallen apart because of leaders falling into sin. These anointed men and women labored for the Kingdom for years, but because of hidden sin in their lives, destroyed the very thing they sought to build. None of us, regardless of our position of leadership, is beyond sin, but through the Holy Spirit, we can all walk in freedom.

Leaders must always stay accountable. It is a tragic tendency of leaders to see themselves as “above the law” and have no outside input into their personal lives. James 5:16 states, “*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*” If there is anything (even a “gray area”) in your life no one else knows, it may become a platform for more sin. James 1:13-15 describes the cycle of sin: “*Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*” Though it may start small and insignificant, if we do not confess our sins and deal with them, the hidden sin in our lives will grow cause destruction.

We honor gifting but never at the expense of character. We care more about the spiritual health of disciple-makers and Lifegroup leaders than we do about the need to fill the role. These biblical standards also serve as our standards for leadership. We desire a grace-based environment for each person to confess sin and find healing, but at times, may ask leaders to step down for a season to find healing for their own soul.

In addition to the 1 Timothy list, other biblical passages reveal critical leadership traits. Read the following and consider how these apply to your life.

Matthew 20:25 You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.

Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

2 Corinthians 10:23-24 “Everything is permissible”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible”—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Romans 14:20-21 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

Rather than exhaustively list each character trait asked of leaders, we instead point back to the Word of God and ask for a commitment to seek God wholeheartedly. We also ask for transparency and humility, even with your failure. Let's walk together in the steps of Jesus and trust in doing so we will blaze a trail for others.

One important note, due to the uniqueness of each person's life, we ask leaders to avoid personal "gray areas" at any Lifegroup function. Alcohol should never be a part of any Lifegroup event and any media should be entirely above reproach.

Requirements

We ask Lifegroup leaders to commit to leading for a year, generally from August to August, while fully recognizing situations emerge which require unexpected transitions. We also ask leaders to attend a monthly Lifegroup leader meeting and annual Lifegroup rallies.

Leaders must be members since they hold a pastoral position within the church, and leaders are expected to regularly attend church in order to stay connected with our larger spiritual family.

For leaders of groups with children, we may ask leaders to undergo a background check. Unfortunately, given the prevalence of sin in our culture, we need to strive even harder to live above reproach and believe this serves as a necessary safeguard.

That being said, we also celebrate transformation. Some people's past might make this requirement challenging; talk to your pastor and we will discuss other ways for you to lead.

Understand Your Place

I once led a "Deathgroup", perhaps the worst Lifegroup in history. Every guy I sought to disciple left. The group shrunk in half almost immediately, and within a year reduced to just four and a half members. One didn't talk and another only spoke Spanish, which no one else in the group knew. And we don't talk about the half member. Yet it was my best year of leading. I lived every ideal, embraced every best practice for leaders. I interceded for the group daily, I diligently prepared every week, and creatively sought multiple new outreach opportunities. And none of it mattered. My group fell apart.

Our spring outreach marked the low point. I cast bold vision for each member to invite unchurched friends to our cookout in a local park. I also knew the tendency of our group toward inaction so I built in a failsafe back-up. We cooked a large amount of fajitas, if no lost friends arrived then we planned to give out free food to others in the park and share the gospel. A beautiful plan.

But I didn't anticipate the rain. Right as the meat turned a golden brown over the grill, a fat raindrop hit my face. The park emptied immediately. No lost friends, no people in sight. Yet rather than admit defeat, I hung up a tarp in the tree and huddled alongside the two other members, silently eating our bountiful supply of Mexican food in a cold rain. I decided perhaps leadership wasn't my best fit.

God taught me a powerful lesson: success doesn't depend on me. Despite the challenge, this revelation set me free.

The commands of the Great Commission are bookended by promises. Jesus holds all authority and He is with us always. Therefore, we go. The word "therefore" links the promise with the command, and I believe is the difference between striving and rest in leadership.

I only go because Jesus has all authority. It's His power at work which enables me to step out and make disciples. There is no other way. Imagine the freedom if we truly believed this promise. We'd no longer pressure ourselves to produce results, instead when faced with challenges, we'd seek God and wait for Him to move. We still work hard, but our labor doesn't define our identity.

Matthew 11:28-30 describes God's yoke as easy and His burden light. We read the passage, nod our heads in agreement, but often fail to see its relevance in our lives. In theory, it is easy to believe God wants us to have rest and life. In practice, the more responsibility we are given, the wearier we become. Tiredness is not necessarily bad, but consistent spiritual weariness is an indicator something is wrong with the way you carry the burden.

Since the John Deere long ago replaced the yoke, we struggle to understand the passage. What once was an easily understood analogy has been lost in a modern, urban culture. Yokes hold two oxen together to plow a field, allowing the farmer to harness the power of two animals. The yoke keeps them moving in the same direction, otherwise the entirety of the weight would fall on one.

Jesus tells us His *yoke* is easy. Notice He did not say His *mission* is easy. And for good reason, it isn't; in fact, His mission is impossible. There is simply no way for us to carry it out. Instead, His yoke is easy,

meaning He is strong enough to bear the burden as long as we remain in step with Him. When we learn to abide and to live by the Spirit, we come under the yoke of Jesus. No longer do we carry the burden on our own. Instead, we allow Him to carry it for us. Our responsibility is simply to stay connected to Him. Far too often, believers embrace the mission of God and race out into the harvest field to plow on their own, a guaranteed pathway to burnout.

Let's diligently develop the qualities of great leaders. Let's embrace the qualifications of Biblical leaders, and let's recognize our place – staying in step with Jesus. If we commit to these, we will witness God multiply disciples, and we will thrive in the process.

Spiritual Growth Exercise

1. Share your personal testimony of salvation and spiritual journey that prompted you to lead.
2. From the list in 1 Timothy 3, where do you feel you are the strongest? Where do you most need to grow?
3. How will you prioritize your relationship with Jesus in the midst of serving others?
4. Which of the three indicators (prayer, modeling, delegation) is most natural for you? Most difficult?
5. Is there anything you feel needs to be resolved in your life prior to leading?
6. Are you able to embrace the commitment of leading a group?

Chapter 3 | Define Your Group

“Go”

I wanted to quit. Fresh on the heels of my ill-fated Deathgroup outreach, I determined leading Lifegroup wasn’t for me. At one level, I learned the lesson that God alone brings growth, but the pain of leading a dying group sapped whatever vision remained. *My vision by my strength* proved an ineffective formula. It was time to quit.

One week later it all changed. I was protesting my situation in prayer, my pleas woven with a confused mixture of frustration and surrender. I expressed my anger and confessed my ambition. In the quiet aftermath of my complaints, I sensed the Lord speak, “I’m going to send you five men. Disciple them.” That’s it. But this quiet response instilled a fresh resolve as I embraced a vision which neither originated in nor depended upon me.

My resignation was rejected and in its place a vision imparted. Leadership brought fresh life to my soul, even though my circumstances had yet to change.

Our groups generally wind down in the summer and I maximized the lull to intercede for this fresh calling. Though my Lifegroup appeared to barely survive on life-support, internally, I felt a deep sense of purpose. I left envisioned to see this group develop a culture of discipleship and a pipeline for missions.

Within nine months I was discipling five men. These five served as the catalyst for the Lifegroup growing to thirty. We multiplied the following year, and the next. Within several years, this original core served as the foundation for ten Lifegroups and nearly two-hundred people. Two international church plants were launched from the first waves of people brought into the group. It all started with a Deathgroup and a vision.

A clear sense of purpose is perhaps the most critical ingredient for a group. A defining purpose becomes the catalyst for fresh life, without it, direction is reduced to reactive leadership.

Go

The first command of the Great Commission tells us to *go*. The word implies action and movement, yet for many believers we instead expect the unchurched to *come* to us. *Going* is uncomfortable regardless

of whether the location is across the street, the cubicle, or the world, but only in doing so do we experience the life found in living on mission.

The Greek word we translate “Go” in this passage was written in participle form. “As you are going” is perhaps a better translation. *Going* does not necessarily require us to leave our location but rather challenges us to live on mission where we already are.

The delegation of the Great Commission to a few professionals limits the spread of the Gospel more than perhaps any other deception. We need to rediscover our calling to fulfill the Great Commission; we need to reject the lie that only trained pastors make disciples. When this occurs, anything is possible.

Rediscover Your Calling

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” 2 Corinthians 5:19-20

India is unmistakably foreign to Westerners; every sense is vividly assaulted by a beautiful array of sights, smells, and tastes. These reflections floated through my mind as I gazed out the taxi window while slowing weaving toward the center of Mumbai Peninsula, which serves as the home for 20 million people.

My destination was the United States Consulate. 45 minutes later, my ride abruptly ended outside the non-descript wall of a former maharaja’s palace. I walked past a few bored guards at the gate and into an elaborate security procedure, which eventually deposited me into a quiet courtyard and en route to a waiting room.

As I stepped inside, I found the atmosphere change from the swarming streets of Mumbai into the stillness of the consulate to be stunning. Everything felt like home, the staff even expertly captured the 1950-esque smell of a rural post office. It dawned on me – I just crossed the threshold from one kingdom into another. This is an ambassador’s job.

The significance of the word “ambassador” should not be lost on us. Ambassadors receive a commission to represent their Kingdom to another; it’s a position of high honor and high responsibility. Do we live our calling? When co-workers step into your office do they experience the same stunning atmosphere change? Do neighbors recognize the transition from one kingdom into another when they cross the threshold of your doorway?

Reach Your Sphere of Influence

Everyone has a sphere of influence. It’s unique to you – a combination of your social network, occupation, family, and geography. While some are entrusted with a large influence, most people’s circle is modest. And it doesn’t matter at all. The size of your sphere of influence exerts no sway over

your calling. Some ambassadors reach China, others the Maldives. The responsibility looks different but the commission is the same.

You are an ambassador to your sphere of influence; it's your primary occupation, regardless of the title on your business card. You are not "just" a teacher, but rather an ambassador to your school; not "just" a retail clerk, instead an ambassador to the store. Imagine the impact of each one of us embracing our calling! God positions His ambassadors across the city in stores, schools, neighborhoods, and businesses – but will we do our part? If so, there are more than enough Kingdom agents positioned to see our city transformed. We've seen this occur already throughout our city.

Mark found part-time employment as a barista for a coffee chain while attending our training school. He had no ambition to launch a career making lattes. He just sought to pay the bills. Despite the temporary arrangement, Mark recognized his primary calling was to be an ambassador and this store represented his current assignment.

In response, he resolved to be a great employee. Mark showed up on time and worked diligently. He labored to establish a positive environment of encouragement during every shift, seeking to create an embassy of Heaven behind the counter. People noticed. His boss soon promoted him to "Director of Employee Morale" after observing his effect on co-workers...not a typical coffee shop job description.

Mark's impact grew so dynamic that the manager's husband remarked that he knew whether or not Mark worked on a given day based upon his wife's mood when she returned home. Multiple employees accepted Christ through his influence of both lifestyle and words. Ambassadors change the atmosphere.

Brandon took a sales position with a local firm. He gathered weekly with few co-workers to pray before work. They committed to unwavering integrity and prioritized the needs of people over the lure of quick riches. At first nothing changed. In fact, some in management expressed concern about their meetings.

But after a year of perseverance, contracts started to land. Soon they were among the most profitable in the business and management regularly sought out their secret. The word began to spread. Other employees began to show up before work to share life struggles; clients started to call in prayer requests, even referring friends across the country also experiencing life crises. All this led to both a steady stream of salvation and a blessed business. Again, ambassadors change the atmosphere.

Lead Your Group

Every believer is an ambassador charged with making disciples within their unique appointment. Lifegroup leaders need to seek their personal calling but must expand their vision to define the broader mission of the group. Often these are closely linked. You cannot define your group's vision without first embracing your personal calling.

I've noticed many leaders on the edge of burnout due to a perceived discrepancy between personal calling and Lifegroup vision. This separation is unnecessary. Are you a young family? Then reach other young families. Do you have a passion for business? Then reach the business community with your

group. Lifegroup works best when the variety of groups reflect the variety of people within the church, and ultimately within the broader community.

Our community is diverse. No one group will reach everyone. But everyone can still be reached if we each do our part. Antioch Community Church launched over a hundred adult Lifegroups, each with a different flavor. One group launched with a vision to reach blended families, the leaders each having experienced the pain of divorce and the subsequent power of healing. They developed a passion to reach others going through the same.

Another Lifegroup reached out to disconnected ethnic minority groups. Several groups built around a vision for multi-generational diversity. Some groups focused on geographic areas, others on demographics. Some built around shared occupations. Each vision is unique and the more distinct the groups, the more realistic the capacity to actually reach our city.

Your group needs a vision, a clearly defined sense of purpose. You'll encounter the resurrection of Deathgroup with the fresh life of a God-given vision. The prospect of new guests will become exciting and intercession no longer a chore. Vision is not a silver bullet for group health, things may still be difficult, but vision is a critical first step.

Next Steps

Start the process of defining your vision by answering a few questions: What has God already spoken? Where do you already have natural influence? What is it about leading that excites you? What groups of people seem under-reached in our community? As you process these questions with the Lord, a theme will start to emerge; pay attention to the feeling of fresh excitement. Generally, it's a road sign you are traveling on the correct path.

Several years ago, I felt visionless. My wife and I had one child, with another on the way and didn't seem to have a place to reach out. I work at Antioch Community Church; our local family is all deeply connected to the church and after fifteen years, most of my friendships originated from ministry. Furthermore, our busy season of life made social and athletic clubs inaccessible.

After a date one evening, my wife and I felt burned out. We set aside time to seek God for fresh purpose. It dawned on us that hundreds, if not thousands, of new people visited our church within the past year – many of them were not yet believers or were brand new in their faith. A harvest field sat in right front of us.

We promptly started a new Lifegroup focused on new families to the church. We established the group to be accessible for new people. We met on Sunday afternoon in order to accommodate kids' nap schedules. We intentionally avoided insider language during the group in order to feel more welcoming to guests. We utilized regular interactions, such as in the nursing mom's room at church, as opportunities to reach out. Lifegroup felt alive again. Receiving guests became exciting rather than a burden. Over the course of six months, God sent us multiple key families, many of whom are now our closest friends.

There is always a solution. God will not call you to lead without giving you vision for where to go. It may not unfold immediately, but if you diligently seek Him then He will lead you.

Run with the Vision

Once you receive a fresh mission, start to align your group accordingly. What day of the week is the best fit? What time works? Do the lessons for kids reflect their age? As a general rule, I ask myself “do I enjoy my group?” If not, others probably feel the same. Go back to the drawing board and adjust. Learn from other group leaders reaching similar people and think outside the box entirely.

As the group takes shape, remember to communicate your vision regularly to the group. If you alone carry vision then it will not take off.

Check Your Indicators

The process of determining a vision seems simple, a straightforward one-time event, but most leaders find the opposite true. Why? In short, because things change. Kids grow older and school demands increase; some people get married while others retire. Each of these leads to a crisis of vision. What inspired yesterday may feel like a burden tomorrow. The process of defining your purpose is dynamic and requires careful attention. I find it helpful to identify warning signs to highlight a waning vision, much like the dashboard of a car.

The check engine light of my first car, the minivan, popped on one day while driving. I ignored it, unwilling to exert the energy to fix the problem. After several months, I started to hear a slight knocking sound while on the drive home from mowing lawns. My car regularly produced mystery noises so I drove on, but this time it persisted, growing louder with each passing mile. As I turned onto my street, the car sounded like a jackhammer before finally dying outside my home in a final, violent shudder as the engine gave out.

To be honest, I welcomed the van’s demise, but also learned a lesson: *don’t ignore your indicators*. Remember that not every indicator light represents a severe concern. For instance, every leader has a bad day, and I regularly wish to take a few weeks break from my group – regardless of how much I enjoy leading. These are natural.

But some signs point to a more serious problem. If you consistently dread your group, avoid inviting new guests, regularly look for an excuse to quit, or experience significant discord among current members then you may have a vision crisis. Create a habit to seek the Lord for fresh vision when you begin to regularly notice these warning signs. Don’t wait until a personal crisis happens to redefine purpose, be it yours or the group.

At times, the Lord may use these warning lights to prompt you to find a different way to serve instead of Lifegroup leading. There is nothing wrong with change. Just make sure you proactively follow the Lord rather than reactively quit due to a lack of vision. I’ve found that even when God transitions me out of a current role, He provides vision for what is next. It’s never only a reaction to the past.

Stay Open to People

While we embrace a clear vision and plan for outreach, we also need to acknowledge the ministry model of Jesus. He followed a clear ministry plan while on earth; in Luke 10:5 we read how He sent out the disciples with a mandate to only reach the lost sheep of Israel, a clearly defined target group. But Jesus always stood ready to embrace disruptions. He stopped His teaching for a paralyzed man descending through a roof. He rebuked His disciples for turning away children. Jesus pursued a mission, yet welcomed interruptions.

We need to exercise great care to never close ourselves off from people. I've found God consistently sends me people who may not easily fit the vision of my group. Years ago, I led a college ministry group filled with rich fraternity students and God sent me an autistic high schooler. It was wonderful. She added an important dynamic to the group; we didn't change the vision but did benefit from the diversity.

Please stay open to guests who may not naturally fit. I developed a long-standing policy to say "yes" to new people. Before inviting, I may first recommend a different group which I feel will fit more naturally; our current group has upwards of 20 kids and the discipleship is heavily focused on parenting. I consistently warn non-parents they may not enjoy it, but they're still invited. Staying open keeps us connected to God's heart for people.

Vision Exercise

Before moving into the next chapters, first review your vision. Evaluate the application of the next chapters through the lens of this vision. Above all, start consistently seeking God in prayer and watch Him create a path.

1. What is your natural sphere of influence?
2. What unique things has God spoken regarding your calling?
3. As you review the list above, create an initial vision statement for your group by answering the following: Who are you called to reach? How are you going to reach them? Why is this important?
4. In response to the vision statement above, consider practical elements of the group such as: When and where will the group meet? Who will you ask to partner with you? What format will you follow? Where will you position yourself to reach new people?
5. Take time to seek the input of your pastor or current group leader regarding the vision statement you've just created and the practice sharing it.

Chapter 4 | Disciple Your Group

“Make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Kate* returned home to a sterile note from her husband, announcing he was leaving and seeking a divorce. He gave no prior warning, married one day and gone the next. She sat in shock in the aftermath and was completely devastated. This sudden end brought back the hurtful memories of the dissolution of her prior marriage. The compounded pain rushed to the surface, and Kate* reached a breaking point.

God specializes in transforming pain into grace, and for Kate,* this grace arrived in the form of discipleship. She joined a Lifegroup with several other women and immediately poured out her heart. She confessed her anger and sought complete transparency. The other women patiently listened, prayed for their new friend, and pointed her to the Word of God. At times they shared advice but mostly they simply provided their presence.

Kate’s spiritual hunger plus the group’s care proved a potent combination. She found deep healing in the love of the Father, and she discovered restoration in her own places of sin. In short, Kate was transformed into a new woman.

A few years later, a new woman walked into the group sharing a similar story and with comparable baggage. Kate realized it was her turn to make a disciple. She reached out to this lady, sharing both her journey and her healing. Kate’s story of both loss and restoration developed into a powerful place of authority for someone else in need.

This story is the essence of Church. It’s a vivid reminder of both earthly pain and Kingdom restoration, a perfect Father working through fragile people. Stories like this give me hope. Imagine this emerging into the normal expression of Church; think about every believer receiving this type of discipleship, developing authority in their own life. Then consider them turning around and investing in someone else. Rinse and repeat. These basic ingredients are the recipe for transformation.

But the potential often goes unrealized. This type of transformation isn’t complicated but it is difficult. Investing in a hurting friend requires patience; it’s often unexciting. Progress is seldom a straight-line. Sure, we rejoice years later as we witness the fruit, but in the moment it feels more like one step forward and two back.

If I'm being honest, I've often felt bored leading Lifegroup; I'm not always excited to lead a discipleship group. But if I'm still honest, I strongly believe these changed my life more than anything else. It's the consistency of discipleship community over time which has served as the catalyst for transformation. In other words, *boring things change the world*. Let's face it, a conference with 10,000 people and a talented worship team is more exciting than answering accountability questions, especially when it's more or less the same conversation you've had for the last year.

We have to realize what is *most powerful is often not the most exciting*. This applies to just about any type of relationship. For example, good communication and healthy handling of conflict build the foundation for a healthy marriage, not romantic getaways. This principle takes us back to the first chapter – our obsession with quick fixes prevents us from achieving lasting change.

We need catalysts in our spiritual life, be it conferences, mission trips, or powerful times of worship, but a spark alone will not transform.

Sparks and Fuel

I realized I wasn't an Eagle Scout one night several years ago in the middle of the Sam Houston National Forest. I assumed the process of building a fire would be easy, despite the preceding 12 hours of rain. Apparently, wet wood doesn't easily ignite. I arrived prepared, or so I thought, with lighter fluid and plenty of matches. I spent plenty of energy gathering catalysts to light the fire, but almost none actually assembling the right fuel.

I paid for my mistake. I spent a futile 45 minutes squirting lighter fluid over fledgling embers before finally admitting defeat and eating my lukewarm hot dog, a punishment I wouldn't wish upon anyone. I discovered pouring lighter fluid is more exciting than gathering dry wood. It's a rush to see the flames explode upward, yet equally disappointing to see them fall back down.

Discipleship reminds me of building a fire. You need a spark, but without a solid base of fuel, the spark will never reach its potential. Before we move on and discuss the practical aspects of discipleship, let's first commit to actually do it. And let's commit to stick with it. As I reflect on fifteen years of seeking to be a disciple and striving in turn to make disciples, I truly believe the most significant quality has been the simplicity of continuing to show up. That's it. And yet that's a lot harder than most of us think.

The Process

The command to make disciples is the only imperative in the Great Commission; the other verbs are all participles. This is a geeky way of saying our mission is to make disciples and we do it by going, baptizing, and teaching to obey. In other words, if we don't make disciples then we've entirely missed the point, regardless of how far we go or how many we've baptized.

Discipleship Defined

Making disciples is a big deal so I believe it's prudent to define a few terms:

A **Disciple** is a person who looks like the One they follow, a person who looks like Jesus.

Discipleship is one person helping another become a lifelong, obedient, and reproducing follower of Jesus.

We never attempt to make disciples of ourselves – that's just weird – but rather we labor to see disciples of Jesus multiplied. However, we unashamedly believe the way this happens is through life-on-life investment. Our spiritual growth is not an individual sport. We need each other.

Lifegroup functions as our structure to provide discipleship to our church. As a basic standard, *we want every Lifegroup to have corresponding men's and women's discipleship groups*. These groups may gather as part of the Lifegroup night, either by splitting the night in half or through a rotation, or they may meet at a separate time during the week. This chapter describes the process of leading a discipleship group.

We generally encourage group discipleship rather than one-on-one. For starters, Jesus modeled group discipleship, albeit with some receiving individualized attention more than the others. Group discipleship creates peer accountability and de-emphasizes a hierarchical relationship; additionally, it also lessens the risk of forming co-dependent relationships.

That all being said, one-on-one discipleship provides other benefits. It may feel less intimidating for someone to disciple one person than to start a group. It also can be helpful in certain situations to provide a greater level of investment, especially if the person shows strong spiritual hunger or is walking through intense pain.

Regardless of which approach you utilize, remember that structure exists to support the goal, which is making disciples. This is our emphasis. Structure should never replace the purpose.

Teach to Obey

When teaching on discipleship, I typically ask the class to list the four commands of the Great Commission. Almost inevitably, they describe the last as “teach them”. It’s an innocent mistake. And the implications are profound.

A massive gulf exists between the charge to “teach them” and the charge to “teach them to obey.” One astute student remarked that this is similar to the difference between a teacher and a parent.

Dinnertime at my house often resembles a hostage negotiation. My wife and I dig deep within our arsenal of encouragement, exhortation, threats, and raw bribery for a single carrot. Victories seem pyrrhic at best. That being said, after four years of open warfare, I’m pleased to announce that one of our children now consumes a partially balanced diet. The jury is out on the others.

It’s one thing for me to teach my kids the importance of eating a healthy diet. It’s another entirely for me to teach them to obey actually eating their stupid vegetables. You get the point.

If my goal is to teach, then I will seek to broadly distribute my message. In our modern church age this is sermons, seminars, podcasts, blogs, books, seminary, conferences, classes, and Sunday school, to name a few. All of these are wonderful – as long as we invest even more energy into teaching *to obey*.

If my goal is teaching to obey, my tactics change entirely. Mass distribution is impossible, no more plausible than mass parenting. Teaching to obey involves setting an example, self-discovery, and accountability. These all require time and life-on-life investment. Our discipleship model emphasizes the process of teaching to obey more than the *content*.

Content is important, obviously we don't want people applying the wrong things, but we feel *the process* is generally the missing link for spiritual growth. Let's review a simple process for teaching to obey.

Friendship

Prior to a Lifegroup worship time to kick off the New Year, each member shared a way God changed his or her life through the group over the past 12 months. Many shared powerful stories but it was the last which most impacted me. I strained to hear as one woman quietly shared that it was through this group she learned to hear God.

It may seem mundane, but stories such as this describe the power of discipleship. Consider the massive implication for this woman's life! Learning to walk in ongoing relationship with God is foundational, it's life-changing.

The group never taught on hearing God. This breakthrough occurred through the influence of other group members. She watched the example of others; she was encouraged – even challenged – through the relationships formed in the group. None of her change involved teaching, but instead it came through relationship.

Your example matters far more than your words. This is why Jesus prioritized his 12 fishermen over the gathering crowds.

This reality is also frightening because it requires us to have a life worth modeling. My ability to make disciples is directly dependent on my willingness to first be a disciple. But don't disqualify yourself quite yet. No disciple is perfect. Sometimes the most powerful example is demonstrating how to respond when you fail. Seek to follow Jesus with everything and then, when you fail, model repentance.

Setting an example does not require any spiritual gift. You don't need to say anything. People will remember far more what you do than what you say.

Discovery

I heard a powerful story on the importance of self-discovery in the Word from a veteran missionary. He shared how a group of new Asian Christians gathered to discuss their approach to a controversial topic. The American missionary committed early on to teach these new pastors by always leading them to self-discover in the Bible instead of providing answers himself. It was a great plan, up until this meeting.

The topic at hand was whether or not Christians should beat their wives, a common practice in their culture. The missionary sat aside, sweating nervously as the leaders debated the Scripture. After a day of discussion, they finally announced their verdict: the Bible is clear that men should not beat their wives.

To our Western mind this seems shocking but to this culture the implications proved profound. For centuries past, this tribe believed that in order to be a real man, you must beat your wife. A basic question of morality to us challenged this tribe's entire worldview of marriage and masculinity.

By patiently allowing the leaders to discover the Word for themselves, the missionary created an environment for deep foundations for cultural change. Sure, he easily could have given the answer but his word alone would never sustain the fortitude needed for cultural transformation.

This story is extreme but the same dynamic applies to each of us. When we discover in the Word for ourselves through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the newly discovered truth provides a much deeper foundation for lasting change.

The discipleship material we provide is through a process of self-discovery. We utilize Discovery Bible Study as our basic structure. This tool is a series of questions which empower us to view the passage through a series of lenses. We start with five basic questions:

- What is the main point of this passage?
- What does it teach us about God?
- What does it teach us about mankind and how we should live?
- What do I need to apply to my life?
- Who will I share this with?

We list passages of Scripture for various aspects of spiritual growth, be it spiritual seekers, new Christians, or maturing Christians seeking to grow in living Kingdom values. But the point of it all is self-discovery.

Accountability

"I have never experienced anything like this before!" exclaimed my friend. He recently joined our Lifegroup and the guys meet every other week for breakfast for discipleship. Vulnerable accountability is a core part of the group and other men had just finished discussing upcoming business travel. They sought sexual purity and, in response, shared temptations and corresponding boundaries such as unplugging the TV and avoiding the internet at night.

Though my friend previously attended a wide range of large and healthy churches, he had never experienced this type of openness. It's situations like this that serve as the ultimate distinction between teaching and teaching to obey. Discovery alone quickly descends into just a more effective form of teaching without the additional element of accountability.

We balk at the word “accountability.” It may bring to mind past legalism or just feel constraining. But accountability is necessary for change. I’ve found without accountability, I seldom fully respond to the leadership of God. I once sought to follow the words of Jesus in Matthew 6 by fasting entirely in secret. It went great until about 11am, at which point I began to question whether or not I heard God accurately. Maybe it was actually *next* Thursday. Maybe He meant *feasting* instead. Regardless, I ate a delicious lunch that day, simultaneously learning the valuable lesson that I need accountability to complete a fast.

Self-discovery is a powerful safeguard to protect accountability from growing legalistic. We don’t hold people accountable to our standards, but rather to the Word of God and the leadership of the Spirit. There is certainly room to challenge each other, but ultimately everyone needs to hear God for themselves and they need a community of people to hold them accountable to actually walk it out.

When in doubt, focus on these three elements of discipleship. Build relationship, help people discover the Bible for themselves, and hold one another accountable to obey. It’s not complicated, just difficult at times, but by committing to this process, we will see incredible transformation.

The Content

Jesus charged us to teach them to obey *all that I have commanded you*. Oh, that’s all? No big deal. Seriously though, that seems a fairly impossible task. Getting people to obey anything in the Word is hard enough, but we’re commissioned to include everything Jesus commanded us.

We need to take a step back and realize that our responsibility in someone’s discipleship process is limited. We’re all on the road toward complete transformation into the image of Christ – all He commanded – but it is a journey. Our role in discipleship is to help the person take the next steps.

Great Commandment and Great Commission

Toward the end of Jesus’ ministry, the Jewish religious leaders sought to undermine His authority by asking Jesus an impossible question: Which commandment is the greatest? The entire Old Testament described God’s laws for His people and, absent the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the people struggled to prioritize and apply them. The question vexed religious leaders, yet in a few simple sentences Jesus cut through the confusion.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-39

Love God and love people. That’s the whole point of everything. Certainly unique situations create further complication and require clarity on how to obey these directives, but these summarize the commands of God. Add in the Great Commission, which is an extension of loving people, and you find

three broad applications for the Church: Love God, Love Others, Love Those Who Don't Know Jesus. In discipleship, "teaching to obey all that I commanded" points back to these three.

Up | In | Out

In our process, we simplify discipleship by challenging people to look Up, In, and Out. **UP:** How are we growing in our relationship with God? **IN:** How are we looking more like God in our character and relationships? **OUT:** How are we fulfilling the Great Commission in our life? Whether you are a mature believer or brand new Christian, this focus will lead to deeper growth in your relationship with Jesus.

We encourage discipleship group leaders to seek the Lord every few months for a fresh emphasis for their group. Try to think in terms of Up, In, and Out. Do you need to focus on all three? Or one? Or a specific aspect of one, such as parenting, marriage, or purity?

Our foundational discipleship lessons (found in our app and on makedisciples.me) provide a starting point for a discipleship relationship. After that, Look UP / IN / OUT should become the consistent rhythm of one's discipleship.

Don't be overwhelmed. On one level, if you start to consider everything people need in order to grow spiritually, then this process seems unbearable. But we need to keep perspective: The Holy Spirit is the One leading us into all truth. We cannot take over His job. Instead, we create an environment to help people respond to God's leadership. This is why we emphasize process over content. We have to trust God to lead us and we need each other to actually obey what He says.

If at some point you don't know what to do in a discipleship meeting, go back to the simplicity of Up, In, and Out by asking a basic accountability question for each. Something this basic leads to profound impact, as long as we don't give up.

New Believers

While we prioritize the process of discipleship over its content, the content still matters. This is especially true for new believers who don't yet know the Bible. A friend once described his spiritual journey to me and shared that after he committed his life to Jesus, he had no one to guide him in his new faith. All he knew to do was obey the Bible, so that's what he did with enormous zeal.

In principle, this seems wonderful. It's the main point of this whole book. However, in reality it was quite painful because no one ever told him to start in the New Testament. He spent a year seeking to conform to the Old Testament Law before finally realizing his mistake.

Each person is responsible before God for his or her own spiritual growth, but we, the Church, are charged to help new believers grow in the faith. Generally, I believe discipleship is not a cookie cutter process. Each person has different challenges so I've found discipleship should be tailored to address the pressing issues of life. This is why we encourage discipleship group leaders to seek the Lord for their group every few months.

However, I think discipleship requires a fairly linear process for new believers in order to build the right foundations. How can you address purity if they don't yet understand sin? How do they learn to hear God's voice if they don't understand His character?

We still utilize the discovery process for new believers, but encourage disciple-makers to walk through a series of foundational discipleship lessons as the first step following salvation. We additionally provide lessons for people who are not yet believers who seek to explore faith. These pre-believer lessons point seekers to the character of God and eventually lead to a clear salvation message.

The Discipleship App

In order to deliver discipleship lessons and material we created *Make Disciples App* available as a download on iTunes and as a web app which any device can access. We also provide a printed copy for church members. This app is merely a tool to facilitate the processes and content outlined in this chapter. You can download the app at makedisciples.me.

Technology is a wonderful thing, but remember you don't need it to make disciples. Jesus, Peter, and Paul all did a great job with mostly illiterate people. All you need is the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

Our prayer is that technology supports, not supplants, the process of making disciples by teaching people to obey all that Jesus commanded us.

What Discipleship is NOT

Anything powerful, when harnessed appropriately, provides an incredible potential for change. But it also creates an equal possibility of destruction if not utilized properly. The more powerful it is, the greater the potential for both transformation and devastation.

On April 26, 1986, the citizens of Pripyat, Ukraine experienced this firsthand. A decade earlier, a power plant was built on the outskirts of town with a promise of massive energy – both literal and economic. Over 600 people were employed at the plant.

But during a routine test, a sudden surge of power caused a fire and subsequent meltdown of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor. This crisis grew into the worst nuclear accident in history and led to the evacuation of the entire area. Humans cannot safely inhabit the abandoned city for another 600 years.

Anything powerful requires safeguards, and discipleship is no different. We've described what discipleship is, but I find it equally important to describe what discipleship is not. History gives many examples of discipleship meltdowns, be it controlling models of ministry, overzealous legalism, or just plain weird practices. Unfortunately, each of these cause deep pain for those involved.

Let's be mindful of history and let's establish safeguards, but let's also avoid the temptation to let go of our Mission. Discipleship is powerful, and our world desperately needs spiritual power in order to see transformation. It's worth it to pursue, yet it's also important to stay wise in our application and specifically avoid three discipleship traps.

Personal Moses

"I'm so frustrated with discipleship!" my friend declared over lunch. I sat quietly, waiting for him to explain. "I feel like everyone wants me to be their personal Moses and I just can't take it anymore."

His righteous frustration put words to something we all felt. Our goal in discipleship is to lead people to God. But often people want us to instead go to God on their behalf, which represents an Old Covenant mindset. Exodus 19-25 describes God demonstrating His power and laws to the Israelites on Mount Sinai, and only Moses was permitted to ascend the mountain. The rest of Israel remained at the base and waited for the man of God to return with the word.

This symbolizes one of the greatest dangers in discipleship; the tendency for us to try to become God's voice for those we serve, and for us to morph into a Personal Moses. After all, it's much easier to have Moses climb up the mountain while we stay in the comfort of our tents. And for us disciple-makers, we easily derive warped significance by being someone else's Moses.

But by falling into this trap, we hinder the work of the Spirit. In John 16:7, Jesus tells us it is for our good that he is going away so that He can instead send the Helper. The Holy Spirit *within* is better for us than the privilege of living *alongside* the Incarnate Christ. I don't care how wise you are nor how great a disciple-maker, the Spirit is better!

Let's instead lead people up the mountain of God for themselves; let's teach them to hear God's voice on their own. Afterward, let's descend the mountain together and learn to actually live it in everyday life.

Practically, I almost never tell someone what to do. Instead of issuing commands, I try to help the people I disciple ask the right questions. For example, if someone asks what job offer they should take, I give them a few questions to pray through, such as: How does this fit with my calling? How will it affect my family? What are my motivations? I will give advice, but only after encouraging them to seek God for themselves and always with the disclaimer that this is their decision to make.

Counselors

"Where do you find time to do all these things?!" the class appeared to ask in unison. They sought to make disciples but felt my exhortation to model a Kingdom lifestyle, self-discovery, and accountability was impossible. I followed up, asking why this felt so challenging.

"We spend all of our time processing the previous week and discussing the latest personal issues. That alone takes 2 hours and we are burned out! Are you asking us to do more?" they testily retorted.

I paused, thinking through the familiar challenge, finally replying, "I believe that if you focus instead on building the right foundations, then there will be fewer problems to discuss."

This is the essence of the problem. People feel frustration and pain; furthermore, we live in a culture with deeply broken relational ties. The need for community is natural and it's not being met in modern society; this is why we do Lifegroup! But you need to be careful. It's not healthy for you to singlehandedly meet everyone's community needs; instead, the group as whole should build strong relational ties.

The biggest problem hindering community is often the lack of spiritual foundations upon which a healthy life can be built. Address this first and everything else will fall into place.

Discipleship necessitates friendship, but this does not mandate you to develop into a counselor. I generally spend no more than a third to half of allotted discipleship time on catching up. I'm careful to never make it centered on me and to encourage group interaction during this time. However, I also strive to stay sensitive to the Spirit's leadership and will occasionally shift to focus on one person's needs.

Each group and each relationship comprise different dynamics. Some people require more prodding to speak openly, while others need a gentle exhortation to talk less in order to create space for others to share. Some groups I've led end up becoming my closest friends; while others don't seem to quite reach the same level.

Don't feel the pressure to be everyone's best friend. You can't. Don't feel pressure to be ever-present and always available to provide counsel. That's why they have the Holy Spirit. And don't worry if you end up closer to some people than others. Jesus did the same.

In addition to the universal need for community, most people also experience places of deep pain – whether past or present. Community, including discipleship, should be a place of powerful healing. Often our mere presence itself is restorative; we will naturally share words of encouragement and sympathize from our own life journey. That being said, we should not try to usurp the role of biblically-centered, professional counselors.

The line between discipleship and counseling often blurs together. Our encouragement, is when in doubt to encourage the person to seek out a godly counselor. For some people, they may only need one session, while for others, it may grow into a critical component of their healing. Disciple-makers function

similar to air traffic controllers. You don't need to provide everything for someone's spiritual life. Instead direct them where to go.

Force Feeders

Have you ever tried to force feed a child? Or anyone for that matter? I earlier shared the dietary wars fought in our household. As an ambitious pre-parent, I assumed feeding kids would be easy. Just stick the baby food in, they have to at least swallow it, right? I grossly underestimated the willpower newly budding in 9 month olds. No matter how intensely I tried, each of my children successfully rebuffed my efforts and retaliated by ruining their clothing in the process.

Force feeding doesn't work spiritually any more than it does naturally. If people don't want it then they won't take it. It's as simple as that. Jesus understood this truth; consider how many people He turned down who sought to be His disciple. Each contained a common denominator – they weren't spiritually hungry. Maybe they exhibited hunger to an extent but not enough to sell everything like the Twelve.

Unfortunately, we cannot gauge spiritual hunger as accurately as Jesus, so avoid setting too high a bar. At the same time, the same principle still applies. We cannot help people who are not hungry.

The best way to avoid this is to set expectations at the beginning of a discipleship relationship. Try using the Matthew 7 parable of the two homes as vision and share how this group will focus on applying the Word of God. It may be wise to agree together on expectations for attendance and for preparation. I generally encourage groups or one-on-one relationships to have a set time limit of six months to one year, except for the general groups within each Lifegroup. You can always extend the time period if desired.

We all have bad days so avoid casting judgment too quickly. But if you feel the group consistently shows no interest in responding for more than 4-6 months then I recommend having a direct conversation to initiate change. Be clear but also be kind and understanding. Perhaps they are hungry, but your group isn't the best fit, or they have unique needs in this season of life. Start the conversation by restating the vision of the group, then share that you haven't sensed that the group members really wanted it. Ask them to pray about it for two weeks and then reinitiate with you if they would like to continue.

If they decline, don't take it personally. Remember that Jesus had discipleship opportunities fall through and had other disciples betray Him. Instead, use this as an opportunity to go find others who actually are hungry.

As we conclude, let's remember Kate's story. A person was restored and is now restoring others. You may never preach, but each one of you can do this. And you are charged to do this by Jesus, Himself. Imagine the consequence if every single believer sought to fulfill our Commission. If we each simply discipled 2-3 people then entire societies would be transformed. But it all starts with one.

Discipleship Exercise

1. How has your understanding of Biblical discipleship changed from reading this book thus far?
2. What most intimidates you in facilitating discipleship for others?
3. Who can you initiate with to start a new discipleship group?
4. What discipleship pitfalls do you most need to avoid?
5. Review the Discipleship App.

Chapter 5 | Pastor Your Group

“Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”

It's the phone call Lifegroup leaders dread. Incomprehensible sobs greet you on the other line while you patiently wait for your friend to blurt out, “My father just died.”

It's the surprise coffee meeting with one of the men. What begins as a half-hearted confession of lust grows into a full-scale confession of adultery.

It's the group members who fear their son is clinically depressed, finally mustering up the courage to ask for advice.

No one feels equipped to deal with situations like these. Regardless of how many times you've received this call, sat through this meeting, or been asked for this counsel, these situations cause your stomach to drop. We grieve with our friends yet feel powerless to help. Sure, I can lead discussion and navigate awkward ice-breakers, but what do I tell someone who just experienced a miscarriage or was diagnosed with a dangerous illness?

We live in a broken world. Destructive choices of loved ones, hidden sin, and health crises all pen the script to life's many tragedies. But Jesus loves to reverse the plot. He hijacks our suffering and turns it into a vehicle of grace.

The Example of Jesus

Consider the story of Lazarus. John 11:1-44 paints a painful scene. Mary and Martha cried out to Jesus to heal their dying brother, but He didn't arrive in time; their prayer for healing unanswered. Jesus arrived three days later to a scene of grief. Mary poured out her pain when He stepped in the room, questioning God's lack of healing. But Jesus never answered her questions; instead, He simply wept.

Yet just a few verses later, Jesus stood in front of the tomb and commanded Lazarus to come out. The dead man rose to life and stepped out into the arms of his waiting family. The sisters asked for a miracle but endured a death. And then they witnessed a resurrection.

This story amazes me. Jesus knew Lazarus would rise, but still took time to grieve with Mary. It points to two powerful truths for believers: God draws close to us in our pain and He is always working a resurrection behind the scenes.

The example of Jesus should serve as a template for our response to the sufferings of others.

Presence is the best salve for pain. Don't try to give answers, often there aren't any. Instead, demonstrate a willingness to cry with the hurting and trust Jesus to bring life out of the darkness. Never forget we serve a God who defeated sin and death, even though we still live in the time of "Now but not yet." His Kingdom power is accessible *now* to work freedom and healing, but the fullness of His reign is *not yet* revealed. Sin still holds sway over mankind and death still serves as the doorway into eternity, but underneath it all God brings His life.

The Comforter

In making disciples and leading a group, you will deal with others' sin – both the sinner and the victim. You will walk members through life's challenges. On your own this is a daunting task, but you are not alone. John 16:7 reveals the Holy Spirit to be our Comforter. This word literally describes "one who runs to the aide of the other." In verse 13, our advocate promises to guide us. The Holy Spirit runs to our aid and empowers us to comfort others no matter how deep the pain. Step out in faith to serve your group because ultimately it's not about you but rather the Resurrector working through you.

"Baptizing Them"

The Great Commission commands us to baptize new believers in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The literal act of baptism is a powerful illustration of the spiritual reality of new birth. It is an essential step in the discipleship process and a direct command from Jesus. It also points to an important aspect of spiritual growth: the old aspects of worldly living and corresponding hurt need to be washed away and replaced with a fresh knowledge of the character of God found in the Father, Son, and Spirit.

HELP

We use the acronym HELP to train leaders and disciple-makers in how to respond to life's difficulties:

Have patience

Equip with the Word of God

Lead them into God's presence

Point them to professional support

When faced with challenges, utilize this template in order to determine your best response. Above all, remember the Comforter is running to your aide and leading you into all things.

Have Patience

The word *process* is defined as a series of actions taken in order to achieve a particular end. A restoration or healing *process* will require time, otherwise it wouldn't be a *process*. When walking alongside someone, we often feel we know the solution to their problem. Our formula seems infallible:

If they would just stop _____ or just believe _____ or just do _____ then their sin/grief/pain/troubles would go away!

Unfortunately, life doesn't work this way. The formula doesn't work for your life, so stop deceiving yourself into thinking it will for someone else.

Sinless God is patient with our *process*, as sinful man surely we ought to extend the same for one another. Two of the most potent tools we wield in the healing process are byproducts of patience: **listening** and **presence**.

Anyone can use these yet few actually do. Don't try to rush someone's process by giving pat answers, even if they are true. Take time to listen as they pour out their pain; and when words fail, simply be present. The time may come for action and speaking truth, especially if the problem is sin, but start with patience and you might discover your quick solution isn't quite as accurate.

Equip with the Word of God

It's an increasingly common scenario: A new couple attends the group for a month and shows signs of deep spiritual hunger, but after a casual discussion one evening after Lifegroup, it dawns on you that they're living together outside of marriage. To compound the problem, they have a child already and don't seem to realize anything is amiss. How do you respond?

More and more our society attempts to blur the lines of sin. People are still spiritually hungry, but hunger is no indication people actually know the Word of God. We feel insecure bringing it up, after all they are doing their best and things seem to be going ok. What's the big deal?

In moments like these, I find it's important to remember the truth that ***sin always brings death***, even to the ignorant. We cannot claim to love people and yet sit idly by while destruction spreads through their lives.

Develop the habit of pointing your group to the Word of God for answers. Let them discover the Word of God and the corresponding conviction of the Holy Spirit. At times this may even require a rebuke. I hate doing this, but recognize it's one of the purest acts of love. When you give a gift, you receive the joy of the response. When you share an encouragement, the recipient often reciprocates. But when you challenge someone, you risk a misunderstanding – even the relationship itself – in order to express concern. You risk everything and gain nothing, all for someone else's sake.

Lead Them into God's Presence

Wes walked up asking for prayer. His sister died only a few days earlier and she was the stable pillar in his family. For decades, he lived bound by drug addiction. Her life had been his only light. He knew she had prayed daily for his freedom and, in his grief, felt the best way to honor her memory was to seek prayer for deliverance.

He stood timidly and poured out his story through tears. Together we cried out for a touch from God. Instantly, Wes was healed. Years of addiction were broken off in a moment. Wes still required a deep healing process in his life, but the power of God was the catalyst for his freedom.

We tend to swing like a pendulum when seeking freedom and healing. We swing from believing the solution to everything is empathetic processing, to believing the solution always lies in professional help, to believing the only answer is a supernatural touch. Generally, the solution is all three. I'm deeply grateful for the capable hands of doctors, but mustn't forget to cry out for healing. I believe counselors and medicine are important aspects of treating mental illness. And I also believe in a God who leads us out of darkness.

The role of disciple-makers and Lifegroup leaders is to lead our groups to the presence of God while also pointing them to professionals trained to bring skillful care. Most personal testimonies demonstrate the importance of both while navigating the path to healing.

We provide the **7 Steps to Freedom** as resources for disciple makers and Lifegroup leaders.

The *7 Steps to Freedom* facilitates a process of revealing past (and present) places of sin, unforgiveness, fear, and negative spiritual experiences the enemy uses to exploit individual's lives. The tool guides the person through a process of renouncing sin and receiving the freedom of God in its place.

We hope every Lifegroup member is given the chance to walk through these valuable tools as part of their journey into encountering God.

Point Them to Professional Support

When teaching a child to swim, it's important for them to understand what depths they can or can't handle. Over time they may develop the skill to venture out alone into deep waters, but what matters right now is what they can do today.

Likewise, most leaders will at times find themselves out of their depth. Don't be discouraged; instead, know where to get support. In cases of suspected mental illness, such as depression, eating disorders, or addiction, we want our leaders to seek professionals rather than take it

on themselves. The group will still play a vital supporting role but should not try to supplant the role of a counselor.

We also find certain marital crises or situations of financial indebtedness are best helped through a trained counselor, in addition to the accountability within the group. A general rule is *when in doubt, ask.*

One important note: many times a person's healing journey will require medication, whether physical or mental. Leaders should never recommend someone to stop taking their prescription. If the person is planning to stop, ask them to talk to their doctor before making a decision. If you feel the counseling experience isn't helping the individual, then reach out to another counselor for a second opinion.

These difficulties remind us that life is challenging and pain is complicated, but in the process we must remember God is always seeking to resurrect us into fresh life.

Your Responsibilities

As we support people on their path to healing and breakthrough, we have a few responsibilities. These are necessary safeguards to help others find restoration.

Duty to Report

In certain situations, group members may confide troubling information which requires immediate action. These are suicide, homicide, and abuse of a minor – both past and present. You have a legal duty to report, but more importantly, it's the right thing to do. We never want to risk someone hurting themselves or others while we waited.

If someone expresses suicidal thoughts you should always take it seriously. If in doubt, ask them directly if they are considering suicide. If you feel they are at risk, call 911 immediately. Seek professional help as quickly as possible.

You must also report any allegation of child abuse; using either txabusehotline.org or [1-800-252-5400](tel:1-800-252-5400). This holds true regardless of whether you've heard from the victim or the perpetrator. If the abuse happened in the past, even going back decades, and the abuser is still around children, you still must report.

After you've reported the situation, reach out to a counselor for help navigating the next steps, but only after you have first contacted the relevant authorities.

Confidentiality

Professional therapists are sworn to confidentiality. Without it, patients may feel reluctant to truly share their heart. While Lifegroup leaders are not legally bound by these same requirements, the principle still holds true. Breaching trust causes deep pain.

Most leaders would never do this intentionally, but it can still accidentally leak out. If you feel the need to tell someone else, and sometimes you will, then tell the person first. If you need support on how to address a problem, don't share the person's name when seeking advice from a pastor or mentor.

The duty to report listed above always trumps confidentiality. Other situations may also require you to share with someone. But let's strive to honor in every possible way.

Next Steps

This chapter just briefly addressed the range of challenges in people's lives; the problem is compounded by the uniqueness of each person's situation. We provide an online resource for leaders, called *What To Do When* as a guide to help leaders address many of the common pastoral challenges. Check it out in order to deepen your understanding of pastoral care.

Lastly, we recognize this chapter contains heavy topics. Sharing Lifegroup bloopers stories is much more enjoyable than confronting the sobriety of people's problems amidst a broken world. As we conclude the chapter, let's return to the story of Lazarus. Jesus weeps with us in our pain and works resurrection in our destruction.

Before you move on, pause for a moment and consider a powerful testimony you've recently heard. Try to recall the specifics. Most great redemption stories began with one of the challenges listed in this chapter. Someone experienced sin, pain, and death. And God transformed their pain into a place of grace. You may need to walk alongside a friend through a challenging situation, but this may also be a front row seat to a dynamic story of redemption. In the end, you'll find it's worth it.

Discussion Questions

1. What past experience do you have providing pastoral care for people walking through difficult situations? How did you respond?
2. What common scenarios do you anticipate experiencing? How would you respond?
3. What intimidates you about walking alongside others in this way?
4. Pray for one another to walk in confidence and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 6 | Facilitate Your Group

I walked into the room filled with faith. My second night to ever lead a Lifegroup seemed promising as I watched several guests arrive, including a man I'd just met the night before. It felt like a move of God waiting to happen. That is, right up until the discussion time.

I asked the group to describe their relationship with their father. The question was meant to lead us into discussing our heavenly Father. Several members shared vulnerably and then I noticed my new friend raise his hand.

"May I read something?" He asked, holding his Bible.

"Of course!" I replied, excited that after a mere hour into this new group we already stood on the cusp of spiritual depth.

His choice of passage was a surprise. To be honest, I expected the Prodigal Son, not a judgment passage from Isaiah, but he seemed confident and I eagerly awaited the explanation. And waited. And waited. He proceeded to read several long chapters in a painfully slow, monotone voice. After ten minutes he abruptly stopped without explanation or summary. Nothing. My friend attempted to bail out the hopelessly derailed discussion by linking the passage to the topic but his feeble bid fell on deaf ears. None of the guests ever returned.

Several days later, I met with the man to clarify the vision for Lifegroup, politely explaining that we try to limit our talking in order to provide everyone a chance to share. He wholeheartedly agreed and then proceeded to tell me stories of the angels he speaks with regularly. I grew even more alarmed.

I felt apprehension build the following week as Tuesday night neared but experienced deep relief when he never arrived. Lifegroup was great and hope rekindled.

The following week wasn't as fortunate. I was dismayed to see his car pull up, and raced to meet him outside in order to respectfully remind him to stick to short scriptures or summarize if he wants to read a passage. He agreed and assured me it was no problem.

The night began on uncomfortable footing. Several guests obviously walked through the door while the core members shared a knowing look. Our new member attempted to correct another member as she shared a testimony but otherwise the night flowed smoothly. Until the discussion.

I watched him open the Bible after the first question, feeling slightly guilty for the knot forming in my stomach at the sight of God's Word. His hand shot up.

"Can I share a word?" he assertively asked, with an innocent expression on his face.

"Is it long?" I replied, oozing awkwardness.

"A few chapters" he countered. I was amazed. How on earth did he forget not one, but two direct conversations related to this very thing?

"Can you please either summarize or pick a few verses in order to give others a chance to share?" I responded, hoping to remind him of our previous dialogue.

"HOW ON EARTH CAN YOU SUMMARIZE THE WORD OF GOD?!" He loudly declared in state of righteous indignation. The members hid their smiles while the guests looked on in horror.

"I'm sure you can figure it out" I replied, well past the point of seeking to salvage the group.

In the ensuing silence, he eventually blurted out John 11:35, "Jesus wept" and never spoke again. None of the guests every returned and nor did my new antagonist. Through the experience, I learned Lifegroup doesn't always go as planned.

Unfortunately, we can't spare you every awkward situation. Every leader has a collection of war stories such as mine. It's going to happen, don't sweat it and move on. But we do believe we can give you a head start and empower you to avoid many of the pitfalls found in facilitating a group.

This chapter will walk you through the various elements of leading a Lifegroup meeting: fellowship, ice-breaker, worship, vision, discussion, ministry time, kids, and administration. Each section will provide a general list of best practices, plus a few ways to take this aspect of Lifegroup to the next level. We'll also share a few things to always avoid. Finally, we will list a few common models for the best ways to structure your meeting.

True, things will occasionally be uncomfortable but we pray you will both feel equipped and have grace to laugh in the midst of it.

Fellowship

"Ed, can you bring drinks?" asked the young adult Lifegroup leader, who sought to integrate the new member into the group by pulling him into the preparation process for a Lifegroup dinner.

Ed loved to serve; this responsibility excited him by giving the chance to reciprocate for all the ways others cared for him in his journey of faith.

He arrived promptly with several ice chests in tow. The first cooler contained ice-cold tea and lemonade. The second contained individual bottles of Jack Daniels punch. The third was filled to the brim with beer.

Ed gave extravagantly by buying enough alcohol for a frat party, beaming with innocent pride at the chance to help. The group leaders felt something else entirely.

Creating a warm environment of fellowship is the second most important part of the night, and it doesn't always go according to plan.

Best Practices

The desire for authentic community is universal, especially in an increasingly disconnected world. God designed us to need one another. Lifegroup exists to help meet this critical need. The goal for Lifegroup extends beyond community where ultimately we strive for discipleship. But we must recognize people will never embrace discipleship without first experiencing real community.

True community spreads far beyond the weekly meeting, but the Lifegroup meeting functions as a platform to build relationships. This is especially true of those with busy lives, as these two hours may be their only social activity for the week.

To establish a healthy community, you need to acknowledge the importance of fellowship time. I generally set aside 20-30 minutes to informally talk and connect. To achieve this, bring great food – not your stale Doritos and off-brand soda – and consider ways to set up the room to maximize interaction.

If you want to take it to the next level, consider hosting Lifegroup dinner periodically, with each member contributing part of the meal. To grow even further, take a Lifegroup retreat or go on a mission trip together.

Ultimately, church is people. Relationships, not structure are the primary building blocks of the Kingdom. These seemingly insignificant times serve an eternal purpose.

Things to Avoid

Setting aside the well-recognized danger of bad snacks, avoid the pitfall of allowing cliques to form. It's unavoidable that people will connect better with some than with others. That's life. But the leaders should pay attention to people who don't seem as connected, either because they are shy or because they are new, and find ways to help them integrate with the group.

Ice-Breaker

I selected the perfect question to start off Lifegroup; it was a light-hearted attempt at self-deprecatory humor, which I hoped would cause people to feel comfortable together.

Fellowship

DO

- // Bring great snacks
- // Create a hospitable environment
- // Set aside 20-30 minutes

DON'T

- // Let cliques form
- // Neglect guests

“Describe your funniest run-in with the police.” I asked, anticipating stories of comical misunderstandings. Somehow, I grossly underestimated the depravity of my group.

The conversation took a negative turn with the second story as a member shared, in vivid detail, a wild night of partying, out-running the police into a forest, and hiding in trees. Other less-sanctified members cheered him on with similar stories of evading arrest and general criminality. After a 45 minute-long celebration of crime, I lamely sought to lead the group into worship.

The purpose of an ice-breaker question is to facilitate conversation amongst the group in order to get to know one another. Fails notwithstanding, it is a great way to engage guests and to help people feel at ease talking together.

Best Practices

Ice-breaker questions should be limited in scope. Don’t ask open-ended questions unless you’re prepared to devote a significant portion of the night to the topic. When possible, tie the question to the discussion theme. For example, if discussing parenting, ask “What traditions from your family will you pass on to your children?”

Ice-Breaker	
DO	Seek variety between fun and deep with the questions. One week ask about everyone’s favorite summer activity. The next week inquire about fresh revelation of God’s character from each member. Consider alternating group members to share more in depth in order to learn more about one another.
// Alternate between fun and deep // Share names weekly // Link to the discussion topic	Remember to share names and basic biographic information consistently. Newer members may especially struggle with feeling like an outsider if leaders mistakenly assume everyone knows each other.
DON’T // Say “ice-breaker” // Ask questions which isolate members	To take this aspect of the group to the next level, consider a group game or activity.

Things to Avoid

While these questions serve to foster relational depth, as the first story demonstrates, ice-breakers can backfire. Avoid ever saying the word “ice-breaker,” instead cast vision for getting to know one another to start off the group.

Evaluate how members may perceive questions and avoid discussions which may isolate. For example, in a group with singles, don’t ask about everyone’s honeymoon destination.

If you lead long enough, you’ll inevitably experience uncomfortable discussions. Just press on, the group will survive.

Vision

My friend embarked on the exciting journey of leading a new group. He attended my Lifegroup for years and we determined it was time to branch out. He was thrilled when several men joined his new group and, following my leadership, initiated discipleship.

I repeatedly stressed the importance of clear vision, and my mentoring paid off. He took the lesson to heart and kicked off his new group with vision. I was pleased. Until I heard what he said.

"How'd it go?" I asked him after their first meeting.

"Well, I did what you said. But I'm not sure it worked," he sheepishly replied.

Slight alarm raced through my mind. I raised my eyebrows, "What happened?"

"I froze and forgot what to say," he responded. "So I explained that Jesus had 12 disciples and so I, too will make disciples. These men would now be mine. I clarified that I'm their discipler and they will my disciples."

I buried my head in my hands, not sure whether to laugh or cry.

Vision plays an important role in group life. It serves as the catalyst to communicate purpose and direction. Without it, the group regresses into a monotonous routine and eventually declines. It's not enough to have a vision, you must also regularly communicate it.

Best Practices

"Vision leaks" states Bill Hybels, a well-known pastor and leadership coach. He drew the illustration of a bucket, filled with water but also poked through with holes at the bottom. The holes represent life's struggles – bills, work stress, kids' activities, relational strain – to name a few. Casting vision fills the bucket, but immediately after the words leave your mouth, the vision begins to leak. The only solution is to repeatedly fill the bucket.

Vision	
DO	
// Repeat vision	Never take for granted that people understand the purpose of your group. Some care about community, others consider it a Bible study, and still others only come to find a date or because their spouse is pressuring them. Vision statements alone won't solve these problems, but they will help.
// Prepare ahead of time	
// Utilize the Word	
DON'T	
// Ramble	Identify a few fundamental Bible verses for your group. I've typically used Acts 2:42-47 or Matthew 28:18-20. Read the verse and share key attributes as ideals for your Lifegroup. For example, describe the depth of community found in Acts and the persistent feeling of awe in worship. Communicate the clarity of purpose in
// Assume people already know the vision	

the Great Commission and cast vision for where your group is called to “Go”. Consider facilitating a Discover Bible Study on these passages one week for discussion.

We use the phrase “Look Up, In, and Out” to clarify the motive for our groups. Our ambition is to encounter God (Look Up), love one another (Look In), and love those who don’t know Jesus (Look Out). One year I even created corresponding hand motions. Cheesy? Yes – but effective.

To take vision to the next level, ask group members to share a story of how their life was impacted by an aspect of Lifegroup vision.

Things to Avoid

A general rule for communication: people only remember one thing you say. Avoid the mistaken assumption that the more you talk, the more powerful the vision. Often the opposite is true; a rambling vision will prove ineffective. I encourage all new leaders to write out their vision statement in advance. Even practice it. Over time it’ll feel second nature if you will invest in the skill of casting vision.

Worship

It was my week to watch kids; however, to help my co-leaders, I offered to create a worship playlist for the adults. Christmas was rapidly approaching so I included a worshipful carol. Or so I thought.

In my haste to prepare, I neglected to actually listen to the songs I’d selected. I planned to play “O Holy Night” but instead choose “Silent Night,” sung by a children’s choir. I realized my mistake when I heard the gentle tune of the revered lullaby from the room next door.

By the time I recognized the error, the song was half-finished, too far along to change. I half-cringed/half-laughed for the next two minutes as the adults attempted to sing along.

The goal of worship is to encounter God. Fortunately for us, His presence is already with us no matter how awkward of an environment we create.

Best Practices

Try to start the worship time with a call to worship. People attend the group because they want God, but we all live distracted lives. Before hitting “play”, seek God for a way to pull the groups’ attention away from the mundane challenges of life and onto the person of Jesus.

Declare praises of thankfulness, speak out the attributes of God, take a moment to still your heart to listen to God’s voice, read a Psalm in unison. These and more empower us to focus on our King.

Practically, select songs familiar to the members so they can participate. Consider building a Lifegroup playlist of 10-12 songs you regularly sing. Be careful introducing new songs; new worship is essential to keep the time fresh, but don’t do more than one new in a meeting.

Some groups utilize YouTube worship videos with lyrics to help members engage. Generally, two to four songs works best in a standard Lifegroup, though leave plenty of room for God to lead otherwise. If possible, keep songs in the same key. If you don't know what that means then don't worry about it.

While you worship, also seek to create an atmosphere of ministry. Read 1 Corinthians 14:26 or Colossians 3:16 in order to remind your group that God gives everyone something to bring. Encourage members to pray for each other during worship and lead out by example.

Consider adding depth by facilitating the Lord's Supper as a group or by leading an extended time of intercession for the needs of individuals within the group or the world around us.

Take worship to the next level by hosting Lifegroup worship nights. There is a depth of worship that often requires extended time in the presence of God. We've periodically hired babysitters in order to create this type of longer, undistracted environment.

Things to Avoid

Many songs which are powerful in personal devotional times or large services are awkward when sung in a Lifegroup, these include long prophetic songs, high energy "dancing" music, lengthy instrumental interludes, and vocalists with a supernaturally high vocal range. There isn't anything wrong with these songs; it's just uncomfortable to try to sing with eight adults in a small room.

Also, stay mindful of any new guest's experience. You may feel comfortable with demonstrative charismatic expressions, but does this distract them from encountering God? 1 Corinthians 14:1-25 challenges us to consider our brothers and sisters in our worship.

We desire the gifts of the Spirit to find expression in Lifegroup; please don't hold back from passionately seeking God! At the same time, strive to make the experience approachable for new members by taking time to calmly and Biblically explain what occurs. We want encounters with God to be translated so that old and new members alike can encounter Jesus.

Discussion

The discussion time typically produces the most anxiety in leaders, often for good reason.

A Lifegroup member seemed to miss normal social cues. She regularly interrupted other members while they shared and tended to answer each question multiple times.

Each week, I increasingly dreaded the discussion until it became unbearable. My wife initiated with the member and was forced to clarify "talking rules" – no interrupting and only answering one time per question to leave time for others to share. Fortunately, she responded well.

Worship	
DO	// Create a song bank of 10-12 songs // Introduce new songs one at a time // Create space for ministry to each other
DON'T	// Play lengthy/dancing/prophetic songs // Forget to explain experience to guests

While it's true there is a potential for uncomfortable moments, discussion is far more frequently a powerful time. The goal is to simply get people into God's Word. Most people live surrounded by the latest teaching – be it podcasts, conferences, books or sermons – but rarely are we led to discover the Bible for ourselves.

Best Practices

We utilize Discovery Bible Study, the same process we use in discipleship groups, as the basis for our discussions. This process encourages people to look at a particular passage of Scripture through different lenses by asking questions. These questions generally don't vary much week-to-week. The goal is a reproducible process which trains people to discover the Bible for themselves and to learn to apply it to their lives.

Asking questions is the requisite skill for great discussions. The best leaders talk the least; rather than imparting more information, they ask questions to draw out others. As a result, silence is a normal part of a discussion. Don't worry about these pauses, often this is a sign people are thinking and extra space will give introverts an opportunity to mentally process.

At the end, leave time to wait on the Lord for each member to consider how they need to apply the passage to his or her life. Share with each other during the ministry time or the discipleship group and then remember to check-in the following week.

Take discussion to the next level by sending the passage (or topic) and the corresponding questions to the group members prior to the meeting. This provides an opportunity for them to wrestle with the Scripture first and then arrive with both revelation and questions for the group.

Things to Avoid

Notice this time is titled "discussion", not "teaching". This is intentional. The Body of Christ is blessed through the gift of teaching, but we don't believe Lifegroup is the best venue for its expression. Occasionally, leaders may feel that a topic requires it. This is fine but should not become the standard for the group. We ask leaders to contact their pastor if they plan to teach regularly.

God speaks to each member of the group, and a safe community is a wonderful place to learn to discover the Bible and hear the voice of God. Great discussions provide an avenue for this discipleship.

Discussion

DO

- // Utilize Antioch "DBS" lessons
- // Ask great questions
- // Embrace occasional silence

DON'T

- // Talk too much
- // Teach

Ministry Time

Time froze as the mob rushed past. I stretched out my arm in vain to stop the unfolding catastrophe, but moved far too slowly. Moments later, I grimaced as surprised screams erupted from the room next door. My removal from leadership appeared inevitable.

The Lifegroup met in the duplex of a reluctant member. Several other guys lived in the apartment and their fraternity brothers lived next door. Some of them periodically attended and were friends with a few of the ladies in the group. Following discussion, the Lifegroup routinely split into smaller groups for ministry, with the men going to one room and the women to another. The guys generally finished after a few minutes while the women regularly prayed for nearly an hour.

On this particular night, 45 minutes after the group officially ended, a neighbor walked over wearing only a towel, completely oblivious to the ladies in the nearby room. His friends recognized an opportunity, promptly removed the towel and threw the unwitting naked man into the room of praying women.

I've never seen a man run away that quickly. Fortunately, the women claim to have only seen a white blur fleeing the room.

Ministry time is the most important part of the night. It's the best environment for people to share their hearts, a great opportunity for accountability, and often the place for salvation. It's also the occasional scene of a disaster.

Best Practices

Plan to leave at least ten minutes for ministry. We've generally found it most effective to break into same gender groups of no more than 2-3 people. Leaders should use this time to connect with new guests. Pay attention to the prompting of the Spirit, because often He will lead you to ask a question to open someone's heart.

Ministry Time

DO

- // Model vulnerability
- // Share the Gospel if in doubt
- // Follow up throughout the week

Encourage people to share vulnerably by leading out by example. Share places you'd like to apply the Word and create an environment of grace-filled accountability. Always end by praying for each person.

DON'T

- // Run out of time
- // Neglect guests

Take ministry time to the next level by writing down specific prayer points and texting encouragements to members during the week. Follow up on the issue after the next meeting to check in on progress and breakthrough.

Things to Avoid

The greatest hindrance to ministry is the tendency for groups to run out of time. Generally, unless leaders plan ahead, other elements of the group will go longer than anticipated and the ministry time will be forgotten.

This time is fundamentally important if discipleship is our goal. A discussion may impart knowledge, even self-discovery, but foundations are not laid until knowledge grows into application.

Kids

“We are going to get our BB guns!” the boys yelled as they raced past the dads sitting peacefully on the porch. 25 children of various ages attended the group on this warm summer evening. The men were tired, mainly because of the small tribe of their progeny gathered next door, and elected to continue on with praying together before investigating.

Minutes later a loud BOOM shook the porch; the young boys quickly emerged and proudly displayed the freshly decapitated Copperhead snake. Their valiant effort to protect the girls with BB guns failed, but the neighbor’s shotgun blast proved plenty capable.

The mom’s inside were justifiably alarmed – both by the snake and their husbands’ indifference. But seriously, with 25 kids what else can you expect?

In my conversations with leaders over the years, they are most vexed by the dilemma of kids in Lifegroup. Many experienced dynamic groups as students and young adults but cannot seem to find the same life in family Lifegroup.

To be sure, kids change everything. But Lifegroup should be just as powerful an experience for children as it is adults. This requires significantly more work, but also provides a significantly greater reward.

The goal of kids in Lifegroup is the same as adults: *Discipleship*.

Best Practices

Discipleship requires intentionality, both for adults and children.. .

Most groups set up a rotation of adults to watch over the kids. To maximize this method, appoint a member in charge of preparing the necessary materials and communicating the discipleship plan to the kids’ workers each week. Create a basket for kids’ supplies to have on hand and commit to a regular rhythm of teaching kids’ lessons. Some groups may

Kids
DO
// Create a parent rotation
// Plan ahead with supplies and lesson
// Disciple the kids too
DON'T
// Fail to address behavioral issues
// Neglect safety standards

choose to pay babysitters. This approach is also fine, just ensure it's affordable for every member and still leads to discipleship, not just babysitting.

In order to protect our children, we generally ask for a minimum of two adults to watch over the kids. No adult should be alone with a child who is not his or her own, and, as an added precaution, all Lifegroup leaders are asked to undergo a background check. This may seem obtrusive but we believe the safety of our children is well worth it.

To take kids' discipleship to the next level, try to integrate them with the adult Lifegroup. We believe it's powerful for children to see their parents worship. To achieve this, play kid friendly songs and find ways to include activities during discussion. Remember, kids need vision too! Find creative ways to communicate the purpose of each element in the group and then lead them along with their parents.

Things to Avoid

In addition to child safety protocols, always remember to check in on the experience. Debrief the night with the people assigned to children each week and look for trends. Are there particular behavioral challenges with a child? Do you notice consistent values differences between children? None of these are fun to address, but if you discover recurring themes, you need to discuss it with their respective parents.

This is part of the challenge of Lifegroup but also the power of the group. Lifegroup allows us to get a close look into one another's lives, and we cannot hide. This leads to tension, but often that tension is necessary for a subsequent transformation.

Administration

The word administration scares people, and rightfully so in many situations. However, Lifegroup administration need not be overwhelming. The overall goal is to distribute group responsibilities so no one person bears the entire burden.

Best Practices

Each group should establish a sign-up sheet in order to rotate as many responsibilities as possible: kids, host home, and snacks generally serve as the top three. Planning 6-8 weeks at a time seems to be a

good rhythm for most groups. You can utilize paper and pen or any number of online calendars.

If you want to take administration to the next level, consider distributing responsibility for every aspect of the group, including all the aspects of the Lifegroup meeting. This will require time spent training and giving feedback, particularly with discussion and worship, but the effort will bear fruit by both developing new

Administration

DO

- // Distribute everything you can
- // Plan on a 2-3 month cycle
- // Develop members to do responsibilities

DON'T

- // Fall into the busyness trap
- // Assume no one will serve

Lifegroup leaders and also removing pressure off of the current leaders.

Things to Avoid

The main pitfall with administration is simply not doing anything. We easily fall into the busyness trap. We feel too busy to plan ahead, which in turn creates more work in the future. It quickly develops into a cycle. The busier you feel, the more important it is to effectively plan.

Avoid the mistaken assumption that people are unwilling to serve. I've found people desire to contribute but are waiting to be asked. You may feel overwhelmed by the group consistently meeting in your home, but unless you ask for other hosts the situation will not change.

If after your best efforts, still no one is willing to share the load, consider meeting with individual members to encourage participation. If this still doesn't produce change, talk to your pastor and consider launching a new group. The lack of engagement might indicate the need for fresh vision for everyone involved. Help the existing members find new groups and launch out with a new focus.

Group Models

Many leaders find it difficult to establish a convenient group structure. Travel distance, extra-curricular activities, homework, night shifts, and bedtimes all hinder the process of developing a functional group rhythm.

I've found a right perspective to be essential toward navigating these difficulties: *no matter the issue, there is always a solution*. I've coached leaders in dozens of cities across America, representing a wide variety of seasons of life. You may need to completely reinvent Lifegroup in order to express Kingdom values, but there is always a way. Talk to your section leader and find a group model that works for your people.

Wind and Sails

Lifegroup is similar to sailing a large ship. The seaworthiness of the ship, the size of the sails and the strength of the masts each factor into how far the ship will go. However, the most critical quality cannot be controlled...the wind. Without the wind, the sailing ship isn't going anywhere, regardless of the quality of its sails.

In the same way, Lifegroup, no matter how well led, will not grow full of "life" without the Holy Spirit. Diligently work to strengthen your group. Devote energy into learning the skill of leadership. Don't allow yourself to be overwhelmed by this chapter. No one is perfect. Above all remember that more than anything, we need a move of God.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the 3 biggest strengths of your current group? What are the 3 main challenges?
2. Where do you experience the most stress in facilitating Lifegroup?
3. What stood out to you most from this chapter regarding individual aspects of the Lifegroup night?
4. What 3 changes do you need to make now?

Chapter 7 | Multiply Your Group

March, 2010

The humid air smothered my face as I stepped out of the airport terminal in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The situation inside the arrivals lounge seemed to teeter on the edge of chaos; baggage haphazardly distributed by a bare bones airport staff along a non-existent security.

But outside was worse. Everywhere I looked I saw destruction. Buildings pancaked on top of each other, roads cracked and uneven; basic utilities and infrastructure destroyed. Seven weeks after the region's most devastating natural disaster, people still walked around in daze, shell-shocked from the tragedy. Virtually everyone experienced the loss of loved ones. Many people narrowly escaped death themselves once buildings began to sway.

My journey to Haiti began months earlier. I watched initial news reports of an earthquake in the late afternoon on January 12th, 2010. Details proved elusive but everything pointed to widespread destruction. Within 24 hours, the leadership at Antioch Community Church Waco rallied to seek God and immediately recognized we must respond.

But any response was complicated. The airport shut down entirely and the presidential palace collapsed, alongside hospitals and police stations. In fact, the scale of this crisis prevented effective government for several months. After three long days, our first medical teams crossed the border from the Dominican Republic and immediately spent the night treating intense trauma wounds at a woefully understaffed hospital. It was a scene reminiscent of a war zone. The next day, they ventured into the city and found an equally chaotic environment.

Back in Waco, we worked around the clock to scramble more medical teams. We gathered supplies, sought transportation, and nationally recruited trained specialists to work in makeshift clinics. Meanwhile, the team on the ground coordinated with the United Nations and countless agencies to seeking to stem the suffering.

And so it was, weeks later, that I struggled into a dilapidated van. The hour-long ride provided me an unwelcome opportunity to reflect. My energy had been dominated for weeks by the logistical demands of setting up our transportation and supplies, and it wasn't until we bumped along the broken streets that the scale of human pain overwhelmed me.

What did we, a few foreigners, have to offer in the face of so much suffering? As we continued to struggle through to our destination, I began to question the point of our efforts. I knew we'd help people in need, but it felt like a drop in the bucket. I coveted the peace of my home, which felt like a galaxy away from the surrounding misery. It seemed easier to ignore the pain entirely.

This wasn't my first time to hit this wall. I felt it in Iraq in 2004 while listening to stories of chemical attacks and torture from my Kurdish friends. I saw it in Afghanistan a few years later as I witnessed the hardships native to three decades of non-stop violence and oppression. And I've felt it here in the States watching people struggle through the pain of broken marriages, addiction, chronic disease, and depression, only to name a few.

When faced with overpowering need, our natural response is often to do nothing at all. Rather than face the pain head on, we instead retreat to comfort. While we grieve for the suffering of others, our efforts seem insignificant, eventually deceiving us into believing the subtle message that if we cannot do *everything* then we cannot do *anything*. If we acquiesce, this message grows into self-fulfilling prophecy.

This tension stands as a potent obstacle in the path of discipleship. Discipleship is transformative when everyone does his or her part; if we believe the lie that *my part* is irrelevant then it removes the very people critical to see lasting change. Discipleship is not contingent on a few powerful people doing everything, rather it works only when everyone does something. This hurdle is both universal and ancient. And Jesus powerfully demonstrated the solution.

2+5=5000

The Biblical story of Jesus feeding the multitude vividly illustrates this tension, and the experience left a lasting impression on the disciples.

It all began when Jesus was tired. He and the disciples ministered non-stop for days, and when they tried to rest by leaving town, thousands of people sought to join them. As Jesus gazed at the assembled multitude, He recognized their pain and their suffering. Despite His fatigue, He welcomed the interruption and taught the crowds.

It was a long day on the hillside until the disciples eventually determined people ought to return home for dinner, perhaps equally interested in getting a break themselves. But, in this weary moment, Jesus shocked His followers with an entirely unreasonable request: *You feed them.*

The disciples looked over the gathered thousands, completely unable to comprehend their Master's irrational demand. They appealed by citing the enormous cost required to just give each a bite. His request was simply impossible.

Jesus patiently listened but never responded to their appeal. Instead, He asked an entirely different question: "How much do you have?"

Five loaves and two fish was nothing compared to the hunger of this massive crowd. To consider it a solution was laughable. This amount was intended as a modest lunch for one person. To distribute to thousands essentially ensured everyone would receive a crumb, while the original owner would go hungry.

What could the disciples offer in the face of this immediate need? Sure, they could do something but it was just a drop in the bucket. They experienced the same tension we all confront. But despite their reluctance, they obeyed their Master's command.

Jesus lifted their sacrifice to Heaven, broke it, and handed it out to the surrounding throng. The disciples watched in amazement as their small offering multiplied to feed the masses. Jesus never asked His followers to gather enough food for everyone; instead, He asked them to give what they had – and He did the rest.

The story proved the Messiah's supernatural power to the assembled multitude, but it also taught the disciples a powerful lesson: When faced with human need, God doesn't ask us to provide everything, but instead He asks us to give what we have and watch Him multiply it.

Our Role

This passage illustrates the unique role of mankind within God's redemptive plan. Why did Jesus require the few loaves and fish for this miracle? In the Old Testament, He supernaturally provided Manna and meat to the Israelites in the desert. He fed a multitude far larger, and didn't need anyone's lunch to do so. What changed?

We need to review the basic story of the Bible to answer our question. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. He rose from the dead to give us new life; and He filled us with His Spirit to restore us back to a full relationship with Him. Our spiritual rebirth reinstates us back to God's original plan as described in Genesis 1:28:

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

God created Adam to live a life of spiritual blessing and close relationship with the Father. But He also called him to a life lived on mission. God commissioned Adam to fill the earth with His glory *before sin* robbed our inheritance. Part of His plan, before the creation of the world, was for us – you and me – to extend His Kingdom across the globe. Yes, sin warped God's design, but God took sin itself and wove it into His beautiful picture of grace. Our identity was redeemed and our calling restored.

Jesus fully intends to multiply His message to every tribe, tongue, language, and nation. And He fully intends to use us to do it. But to play our part, we need to give our few loaves and fish. We need to confront our insecurity and step out by faith into someone else's a place of need. You cannot meet the needs of your city; you cannot even meet the needs of your Lifegroup. But you can give what you have:

Invite a co-worker over for dinner, call a guest from church, initiate a discipleship group, and above all, keep showing up. Give your little and watch God multiply it to the masses.

The week in Haiti proved significant. We built a relationship with a small, forgotten community destroyed by the quake. The scale of destruction was vast, beyond any of our capacity to fix. Rather than retreat, we pressed in and gave the little we had, recognizing that the solution to the devastation in Haiti was the Haitians and a God who multiplies loaves and fish.

Several church members moved to the region and immediately focused on developing Haitians as the central strategy. Our team sought to let the locals determine the plan and to evaluate the needs. We provided support as needed, but ultimately focused on our partners. Multiplying Godly Haitian leaders became the primary mission with a simple goal of finding one, who in turn developed a few more, who then continued the same with even more.

Eventually this led to physically rebuilding over a hundred homes, providing medical training and education support to multiple communities, and planting churches. Multiplication is limitless, as long as we each continue our part.

This is Haiti's hope. This is America's hope. And it's God's plan for the world.

Our Response: Multiply

Addition will never reach the world. No matter how gifted, a few superstar Christians simply cannot fulfill the Great Commission. The primary culprit is math. Imagine identifying the most gifted evangelist, logistics coordinator, fundraiser, and worship leader. We could release them to travel the globe to host Gospel crusades in order to finish the Mission. But even if they reached 300,000 people daily, we'd still fall behind global population growth. Then throw in cultural differences, language barriers, security problems, and learning styles – never mind the additional two billion people living today who haven't heard the Gospel. On top of it all, our charge is to *disciple* all the nations, not just *evangelize* them. The addition approach is hopeless.

Fortunately, God steers us down a different path. His plan relies on the faithful masses, not the gifted few. Let's consider the multiplication approach instead: One person discipiles 2, who then discipiles 2 more, who then do the same. This continues, doubling every year. Within one generation, 33 years, the entire world can be *discipled*. No superstars needed.

Develop Everyone

Jesus charged us to "*obey all that I have commanded you*," which includes the command to "*go, make disciples*." You cannot be a disciple unless you seek to also make a disciple. Every believer inherits the Mission of God.

Respond by empowering each group member to discover the call of God on their life to disciple others. Help them identify where they are called to "go" by listing out five people they will reach out to. Discuss

ways to live on mission – start with daily prayer, look for opportunities to serve, and discover creative ways to share a testimony.

Set this standard early in the life of the group. Often the most effective people are the most recent converts because they still maintain deep relational ties with other non-believers. These newly minted disciple-makers can share what they've received just a few weeks prior while you provide coaching. In other words, keep it multiplying.

As you disciple others and lead Lifegroup, view it as your primary mission to develop those in your groups. This includes training them to make disciples; it also includes empowering them to identify and grow their other spiritual gifts. Your goal is to work yourself out of a job.

God distributes a wide variety of spiritual gifts to the Church. Identifying and releasing these giftings empower the Church to fulfill her Mission. However, if we fail to develop others then the entirety of ministry falls on a few people, overwhelming them and limiting the reproduction of the Church.

Many groups struggle to find leaders; this problem often originates from a flawed development perspective, which waits to raise up people until they are needed. But by the time they are necessary, it's too late; the development process requires time.

Compare that approach to a discipleship perspective, which instead encourages developing people when they are ready, not when they are needed. If you disciple five people, each with a capacity to lead, then train all of them. Rather than develop one leader, release all five to start new groups and multiply the Kingdom!

This principle applies to every gifting: administration, worship, prophetic, teaching, and more. Help disciples identify their gifting, and then steer them toward training opportunities alongside mature believers. Look for chances for them to step out – leading worship in Lifegroup, organizing a group outreach, or volunteering in other areas in the church.

The process takes time, but eventually you'll wake up one day to discover a group filled with mature, gifted believers who are ready to multiply the Kingdom to the world around them.

Raise Up New Lifegroup Leaders

Lifegroups fulfill a critical part of Antioch's discipleship process since they function as the primary vehicle for discipling the church. As such, identifying and developing new group leaders is critical to the health of All Peoples. Existing leaders serve on the front lines in this effort.

We desire every group to actively develop new leaders through an intern process. Interns should exhibit the character qualities found in Chapter 2 and demonstrate a desire to lead. Please inform the pastoral staff prior to initiating with a new intern to lead.

Once an intern accepts, set a defined training period, generally for 1-2 months. Walk them through this book in entirety and empower them to lead elements of the Lifegroup. Provide coaching prior and then give feedback after in order to maximize experiential learning.

Multiply Lifegroups

Our goal extends beyond replacing existing leaders with new ones. We seek to multiply leaders in order to launch new groups.

We deploy two primary methods for creating new Lifegroups: multiplication and planting.

Multiplication

Multiplication describes a process by which a group grows to a large size and then splits into two, with one group led by the existing leader and the other by the new intern. In this scenario, leaders should envision the group for the change for at least two months prior and then help guide the new group formation based on existing relational ties.

The primary drawback to this process is the rupture of relational consistency; if groups multiply too frequently then members may feel a relational disconnection.

Planting

Planting describes the process of sending out 1-2 couples to start a new group from scratch while the majority of the existing group remains. The new group should define a clear vision and outreach strategy. I generally recommend at least 2 couples or 3 singles form the nucleus of the group before launching. This process is frequently utilized to start new family Lifegroups.

Dying

All Lifegroups have a lifecycle, and it's not a bad thing. I've generally found groups start to die after 3-4 years, unless they relaunch with newly defined purpose. This process isn't inherently negative; in fact, it's often in this environment that people discover fresh vision to start something new.

If you find yourself leading a dying group, help it to die with dignity. Celebrate the wonderful things God has done in members' lives over the past several years. Encourage each member to seek the Lord for fresh purpose for next steps, even encouraging some to launch new groups of their own. Throughout the process, shepherd the group toward a new place of connection so that none slip through the cracks.

This process isn't easy at first, but often leads to wonderful new ventures.

Apple Illustration

As we conclude this book, consider one last question: *Can you feed your city with an apple?*

Pause. Think about your answer.

The kneejerk response is to scoff at the ridiculous question; one little apple? Of course not! But if you reacted this way, you'd be wrong. The answer is yes.

You can feed a city with an apple, but only with a perspective change. Rather than seeing a solitary apple you must instead see the seeds. Seeds grow to become trees; trees produce more apples, which in turn produce more seeds. The growth is limitless.

When we limit our perspective to just the apple, we try to cut and slice so that as many people as possible get a small bite. Ultimately, in the end everyone stays hungry. But if we change our view and refocus to instead plant the seeds, everyone ends up satisfied.

The Church needs a perspective shift. Rather than emphasizing a few big apples, let's instead focus on multiplying the seeds. Let's each disciple a few who in turn each disciple a few more; if we follow the example of Jesus there truly is no limit.

Discussion

1. Who can you ask to lead alongside of you?
2. What other giftings are present within the members of your group? How can you call them out?
3. If you are launching a new group, who will make up the nucleus of this new group? What will the first 3-4 weeks look like in order to establish the group?
4. Who can you encourage to launch a new group?

Dear Potential Lifegroup Leader,

You are embarking on an exciting journey with God! As you pray about your decision to begin leading a Lifegroup, this document will aid you in understanding the values and commitments of a successful Lifegroup leader.

Please prayerfully consider the values and requirements described below as you consider moving into a greater position of leadership at All Peoples Church.

Personal Values

- Lifegroup leaders understand that 'apart from God we can do nothing' and therefore set aside at least 30 minutes to for 'Face Time' alone with the Lord daily (John 15:5)
- Lifegroup leaders understand that a person's first test of leadership is in the home (1 Timothy 3:5) and will seek to manage his or her household in a way that glorifies God and advances the kingdom
- Lifegroup leaders understand that believers are called to be 'imitators of God' (Ephesians 5:1). A desire for purity and holiness must permeate every aspect of a Lifegroup leader's life.
- Lifegroup leaders understand that the Bible clearly teaches not to be drunk on wine, but to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)
- Lifegroup leaders understand that the eye is the lamp of the body and therefore submit all media consumption to the Holy Spirit and others for accountability (Matthew 6:22)
- Lifegroup leaders understand that the 'borrower is the slave to the lender' (Proverbs 22:7) and we are called to be 'bondservants of Christ' (Philippians 1:1). Therefore, Lifegroup leaders make a commitment to avoid consumer and credit card debt.
- Lifegroup leaders understand that the church is called to be a diverse community (Revelation 7:9). On non-essential issues of culture and conscience (politics, theology, etc) a Lifegroup leader will seek first to understand others rather than using their leadership position to communicate a personal agenda.
- Lifegroup leaders understand that Jesus came to serve, not be served (Matthew 20:28). Please do not use Lifegroup or our church as a platform for marketing or recruiting for your personal business ventures.

By committing to be an All Peoples Lifegroup leader, a man or woman is committing to:

Weekly Time Commitment

- Being present at Sunday Worship weekly, barring any emergency or extenuating circumstance
- Being present at Lifegroup weekly, barring any emergency or extenuating circumstance
- Being present at bi-weekly Lifegroup leader meetings

Annual Events

All Peoples Church-wide events (such as conferences and mission trips) are one of the main ways God transforms our community. Therefore, Lifegroup leaders commit to attending these events and helping their Lifegroup get involved. This commitment includes:

- Attending our church-wide annual conferences
- Attending Tijuana Mexico Mission trip training days
- Attending church-wide mission trip to Tijuana Mexico
- Attending a leadership training weekend at least once every year

Relational Commitment

Lifegroup leaders also realize that facilitating the Lifegroup meeting is just one aspect of Lifegroup leader. Other activities that a Lifegroup leader will be involved in include:

- Praying for one's Lifegroup daily
- Meeting with Lifegroup members for discipleship (according to one's capacity)
- Facilitating discipleship for Lifegroup members
- Inviting neighbors, friends, family, and co-workers to Lifegroup regularly
- Communicating with Lifegroup members occasionally via telephone, email, or text message

Pastoring Your Lifegroup

Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations. - Proverbs 27:23-24

Pastoring our groups well will insure that the values of our community and the inheritance of what God is doing in us is passed down to the next generation.

Know the condition of your flock:

- Pray for Group Members - God will give you prophetic insight
- Contact Group Members Regularly - Beyond the meeting is when community really happens, visiting people's homes always makes a big impact
- Be Aware of Big Life Transitions - births, marriages, illnesses, incarcerations, death in the family, etc...
- Be Aware of Response to What is Going On - People have different sensitivities that will be 'triggered' by different life events and events in our church community

Give careful attention of your herds:

- Horizontal Listening - What is the group saying? What are the dreams and needs of the people?
- Discipleship - Is everyone covered? What is the structure?
- Additional Needs & Counseling - Do people have what they need? Is extra help needed?

How to walk someone through a season of restoration:

Many times, groups will have several people who are in a season of personal restoration. These people may need extra pastoral help for a season while they are believing for personal breakthrough. Please think about the following...

- Is the person a Christian? If not, they will have little power to get breakthrough.
- Is the person being discipled? One-on-one discipleship is considered to be the 'x-factor' for spiritual growth and breakthrough.
- What frequency does this person attend Lifegroup or Church? Only in a crisis? Do they need to be encouraged to become more involved?
- Has the person been through the "Seven Steps to Freedom?" Breaking our agreement with darkness can 'close doors' in our life that allow the enemy to create bondage.
- Does this person need any coaching on lifestyle behaviors that are unhealthy or sinful? What resources can you connect them to?
- Has this person had an appointment for inner healing? Contact your section leader to discuss facilitating this.
- Would an 'outward focus' of service or evangelism help further this person's restoration?

How our pastoring works right now:

- Lifegroup leaders are our front-line pastors.
- Please review the questions above to assess how to best help a struggling person.
- Please facilitate discipleship for your Lifegroup members so they are pastorally covered.
- If you have a Lifegroup member in the hospital, in jail, or that has experienced the death of a family member please plan on visiting them and praying for them as their primary pastor.
- Lifegroup leaders will reach out to section leaders for advice and input.
- Section leaders will either A) Coach Lifegroup leaders on pastoral response or B) Become directly involved depending on the situation.
- Please *always* contact your section leader in the following situations: abuse, when someone is in personal danger, intense demonization, divorce, incarceration, when someone is in the hospital.

Lifegroup Pre-meetings

Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed - Proverbs 16:3

Planning and preparing for Lifegroup as a leadership team is essential to having a successful Lifegroup. I recommend that groups meet *outside* Lifegroup at least 1-2 times a month for a Lifegroup pre-meeting.

Why just meeting before Lifegroup is not enough: I have found that just meeting with my co-leaders right before Lifegroup is not enough. Why?

- People come early and distract the meeting
- Worship leaders are tinkering with music and instruments
- Food and hospitality details can take over

I suggest meeting with your Lifegroup leadership team 1-2 times a month, outside of Lifegroup, to plan and prepare for the meeting. Busy leadership teams could meet on a Sunday *alternate* with Lifegroup Leader meeting or after church on Sunday.

Elements of a successful pre-meeting:

- **Pray** - Pray over your group and listen to God together. What is He saying? What direction is He leading you in?
- **Unify** - Encourage one another as leaders and have a relational connection. Your unity sets the tone for the relationships of the group
- **Plan** - Plan who will be doing what in Lifegroup for that month (including meals, worship ,discussion, etc). This prevents last minute emergencies and insures that the group will not be frantic.
- **Pastor** - Talk about the people in your group (not in a gossipy way, but in an honoring tone). Are they being discipled? Who needs to be followed up with? What is the plan to connect with recent visitors?
- **Look Ahead** - Look ahead towards multiplication. Who can you empower? What is the plan? Do you have a date in mind?

Lifegroup Leader Worship Resource

Guidelines for leading worship in a Lifegroup

Here are a few guidelines to assist you as you plan to lead worship for your Lifegroup:

- Choose songs that are familiar to the members of your group.
- Choose songs that are within your ability to play well and confidently.
- Minimize capo changes and pauses between songs.
- Sing and play loudly! Unless we lead loudly, our people will may not feel comfortable singing out loud.
- If you are using an iPod dock make sure that you have a loud enough volume
- Make sure and have song sheets printed (No matter how well you think your Lifegroup knows the songs).
- Give good *vision* for why we worship in Lifegroup and how this differentiates Lifegroup from other types of small groups. 1 Corinthians 14:26-27 is a good place to start.
- Remember not to just 'go through' the songs, but pause and ask God if there are ways the group needs to be led. Give God the opportunity to speak and give spiritual gifts to the group's members for everyone's edification.

A Pastoral Note: Because Lifegroups are not just prayer meetings but also places of evangelism, we want to cultivate a worship environment where all types of people can 'jump in' and encounter God. As a result some songs may not be Lifegroup appropriate during the corporate worship time. This would include songs with extremely long instrumentals or un-explained prophetic worship. Please use wisdom when introducing a song to your Lifegroup and think through pastorally how the ambiance of this song will make people of all backgrounds feel.

Thoughts on iPod worship in a Lifegroup

- Rather than using a guitar, iPod gives the leader the flexibility to move around the group and pray for group members
- iPod worship equips your Lifegroup to find songs for themselves in their own homes
- Lifegroups are more reproducible when a live worship leader is not required.
- If leading iPOD worship, make sure your phone is charged, on "airplane" mode, and that you have the necessary speakers and connectors in advance.

Creative Worship Ideas

Many people have enjoyed experimenting with creative worship in their Lifegroup. Sometimes it can be exciting to have people to draw, paint, write a Psalm, experience “soaking” contemplative prayer, or enjoy meditating and reading Scripture.

New vs. Old Songs

Try to use songs that our church is familiar with. Many leaders have found it helpful to use a rotation of 2 old songs to 1 new song if a new song is desired.

Thoughts on Guitar-led worship

Worship leaders, remember to practice! The group will feel much more natural if you know the songs by heart and do not have to look at chord charts. This will keep your focus on leading the group rather than musical performance.

Here are a few websites where song charts can be found for most songs.

- www.iwillworship.com
- <http://soarworship.wordpress.com/worship-archive/>
- www.worshiparchive.com
- <http://www.bethelmusic.com/chord-charts>