

**Being and  
Making  
Disciples in  
the Western  
Church**

**A First Steps Guide**

**Mike Falkenstine**

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# Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: On Being a Church that Makes Disciples	11
Chapter 2: On Being a Disciple of Jesus	34
Chapter 3: Being and Making Disciples at Your Church	53
Epilogue	79

# Introduction

If there's one thing about my style of preaching, teaching and writing Christian content that I work hard to do, I pride myself in being 'right down the middle of the fairway.' For those of you that aren't golfers, let me explain. In the game of golf, one of the goals of the game is to hit the golf ball from the tee box, which is where the first swing and hit take place and put the ball into the hole on the green. The green is the lowest cut grass at the end of the fairway, where the flagstick and the hole are located. As you progress from tee box to green, a golfer is using clubs that progress from using the driver for the longest shot to the shortest shot with the putter.

It is this first shot on the tee box that goes the farthest and is generally where this phrase 'right down the middle of the fairway' comes from. As this shot is hit, the golfer is trying not to go too far to the right or the left, which would leave their golf ball in a place that would make it harder to make a good second shot. While the fairway is right down the middle and offers low cut grass ideal for a good second and third shot, if you put your ball too far to the right or to the left, this area is called the 'rough,' which is the longest grass and it's harder to hit a golf ball out of this long grass. And if you hit your ball far to the right or the left, you could be 'in

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the woods' or certainly 'in the weeds,' depending on the golf course you are playing.

As an example of how I like to keep it down the middle as I teach, a couple of years ago, I was invited to a church to preach on the Holy Spirit. Even though this was a Pentecostal leaning church, I didn't veer too far to the right or the left. I gave them the biblical details of who the Holy Spirit is: a person, the third person of the Trinity. He is a person equal in every way with the Father and the Son. All the divine attributes ascribed to the Father and the Son are equally ascribed to the Holy Spirit. I walked them through John 16 and gave them the biblical details found there about the Holy Spirit, gave a closing story and wrapped it up. No talk of terms like 'slain in the spirit' or that you must receive the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus in separate occasions to be saved, and I certainly didn't pull out a tambourine and start dancing wildly around the sanctuary. I kept it 'right down the middle.'

Having been in full-time ministry now for 27 years, I've seen a lot and been able to do a lot in ministry. I'm a consummate Bible geek, I bleed for overseas missions and as a former Navigator staff member, I love seeing people grow spiritually. I'm a huge fan of the local church and I can't get enough of seeing people come to know Christ. With all of this as a precursor, I'm writing this small book as a way to draw attention to the Western Church and some very concerning trends I'm seeing. By 'Western' Church, I'm talking about the Christian

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churches in North America, Europe, New Zealand and Australia. This Western Church has some real problems that need to be addressed, and I'm hopeful to draw out these problems in order to find solutions. And here's my promise to you, dear reader. This will be a direct examination using Scripture and only Scripture, without prejudice or predetermination of outcomes. I'll keep these chapters and their content 'right down the middle.'

Here's the thing about the Western Church: there's a lot of really fantastic things that are going on in our churches. Many of the people I know in Church leadership are serving with a heart for people and that they want to see others come to know Christ as their Savior. I think of the thousands of pastors I have interacted with over the years who are serving sacrificially in their posts and are 'standing in the gap' for their congregation in response to God's call on their lives. As these pastors are standing in the gap, many are struggling and are paying the price. According to one pastoral counseling ministry website,<sup>1</sup> the statistics on Western pastors are staggering:

- 70% of pastors say they have a lower self-esteem now than when they entered ministry.
- 70% constantly fight depression.
- 50% feel so discouraged that they would leave their ministry if they could, but can't find another job.
- 80% believe their pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families and 33% said it was an *outright hazard*.

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1. [www.soulshpherdning.org/pastors-under-stress/](http://www.soulshpherdning.org/pastors-under-stress/)

- 80% of ministry spouses feel left out and unappreciated in their church.
- 77% feel they do not have a good marriage.
- 41% display anger problems in marriage as reported by their spouse.
- 38% are divorced or divorcing.
- 50% admit to using pornography and 37% report inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church.

These statistics serve as both a testament of the price pastors are paying and a sign that there really could be something quite wrong with the Western church. Are we to believe that those serving in Christ's church, the bride of Christ, should be suffering so? It indicates to me that something is amiss, that something isn't going as it should. And while I don't want to underestimate the impact that the spiritual battle that these pastors are under, it seems to me that those called to be serving our great God and His Son Jesus Christ should not be struggling like this. God does want His church to advance, and it is the primary way that God has set up to do that is through His church, and the advancement of His church around the World. Shouldn't service in an organization overseen by God and set up for the glory of His Son go smoother for those involved? I would certainly think so!

And for Christians who make up the church, things are not going much better. In a recent survey done by Lifeway Research<sup>2</sup> found 80% of those who attend church

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2. <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/research-survey-sharing-christ-2012>

one or more times a month believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith. Yet despite this conviction, 61% have not told another person about how to become a Christian in the previous six months. In addition, in 2019 the Barna Group commissioned a study on the Great Commission<sup>3</sup> that found that 76% of Western Christians either don't know what the Great Commission is or can't recall what it means. This research indicates that those in the Western Church largely unaware of one of the primary commands Jesus gave us as His followers to do, nor do they have much of a heart to tell others about the life-giving message found in the Gospel. And this is despite the overwhelming biblical evidence that Jesus wants us to be fully devoted disciples of His, ready to share our faith with whomever and whenever. As disciples of Jesus, we clearly are called to abide in Christ,<sup>4</sup> remaining close to Him and as we do, we will bear fruit that leads to others knowing Him. The life-given relationship with Jesus has been lost, replaced by other things that are less important. Those who are Christians but have no interest in sharing about Christ give us a real-life oxymoron, a situation where two things should not go together.

As I examine the issues here, I've got three chapters for you to read and consider. In Chapter 1, we'll look at our churches first. It seems to me that while our churches are good at gathering people, what we do while we're gathered is a bit suspect, especially given biblical imperatives. I think our churches have gotten away from

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3. Barna Group, *Translating the Great Commission* (Ventura, CA 2019)

4. John 15:1-11

what their God-given purpose, so I'll refocus us on the biblical purpose of the local church and we'll look at why so few churches are involved in a reproducible disciple making strategy and how they can grow in this area.

In Chapter 2, we'll look at ourselves as Christians and see that there is only one thing we should be focusing on as followers of Jesus: Being fully devoted disciples of Jesus. As we'll see, to be a disciple is to be in an instructive, intimate, and imitative relationship with Jesus. Consequently, being a disciple of Jesus Christ is being in relationship with Jesus and seeking to be like Him. In other words, we follow Christ to be like Christ<sup>5</sup> because as His disciples, we belong to Christ. The disciple of Jesus has certain characteristics which differ from a 'Sunday-only' Christian in that they are commensurate with a relationship with Jesus. I think we've lost track of much of the roadmap here and I'll attempt to refocus our attention on 'first things first.'

Finally in Chapter 3, I'll attempt to help us see what the local church should look like and some practical tips and tricks in relation to becoming a church that makes disciples that make disciples. There are 5 key areas that I think churches should be focusing on, and I'll outline those 5 areas, with notes for church leaders on how to accomplish the goals within each areas, and notes for those in congregations who want to see their churches grow in these five areas.

A couple of final notes before we launch out: First, I want to thank you for reading this book. It is the

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5. 1 Corinthians 11:1

culmination of 25+ years of reading my Bible, spending time in the church, and trying to do my best to be a benefit to the Global Church. Also, I'd love to hear from you if you have any comments or questions, or if I can be of any service to you or your church, please don't hesitate to let me know. Finally, as we go through these chapters, I'm including a feature I'm calling 'Mike's Hot Takes,' which are either further commentary on the topic, or a way for me to point to a resource that we have available here at our ministry, One Eight Catalyst. Thank you again!

Ready... Set... Go!

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# Chapter 1

## On Becoming a Disciple Making Church

I have a complicated history with the local church, one that has been perplexing at times. When I became a Christian in 1986 as a senior in High School, I was excited to begin this new journey with Christ and was rightly told that I should find a local church to begin attending. Since many of the friends I had in Young Life were already attending the same church, I began attending that church too. And in the 35+ years that I've been a Christian, I've called 7 churches as my 'home church,' and in that time I think I've 'seen it all.' With so many years under my belt, I've developed some general impressions. In every case, I can truly say that most of the leaders in these churches were doing what they felt God calling them to do, and they were earnestly working to make their church the best it could be. I will always believe that church leaders, and church staff in particular are in their career field because they felt like God had called them into it, as they could have been doing a lot of other things with their life, and many of those things would have paid a lot better and would have been a lot less hassle. I think these leaders have generally taken their responsibilities seriously, and knew, at least in part, that God had given them an important responsibility to shepherd their flock to the best of their ability.

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But this is where the relationship gets complicated. As I've read and studied the biblical purpose of the local church, I've seen a lot of gaps between the activities these churches were doing and what I've read biblically about the purpose of the local church, and as a person with the spiritual gift of apostleship and discerning between spirits, I've wanted to help and have a discussion with these church leaders about how we together could make our church more effective for God's kingdom purposes for the local church. This spiritual gift combination, together with the gift of faith, has meant that God has made me as a spiritual entrepreneur and as a person who has been able to discern when someone is ministering in their own power or in the power of the Holy Spirit. As I've desired to authentically help, it has not always been met with open arms and has been generally looked at as a threat to Church leaders' leadership and authority. What makes this situation frustrating to me is that I really have wanted to help, as I have a deep heart to see the local church thrive. This desire comes firstly from an understanding of God's purpose of the local church, and the opportunity that a church who is making disciples that make disciples has to impact their local area and around the world!

### **The Biblical Purpose of the Local Church**

As we research what is the biblical purpose of the local Church, we fortunately find no lack of source material in this area. My first 'go-to' passage of Scripture

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in this area is always Acts 2. I love the early chapters of Acts because Luke wrote them on the heels of all the events we read about in the Gospels. Acts 1 records Jesus' ascension, and I can only imagine what the disciples were thinking and feeling! After all they had experienced and everything they had done with Jesus, their emotions must have been very raw—and now their question must have been 'What now?' I am thankful that the apostle Luke records, in the Acts of the Apostles, the answer to that question.

In the first couple of chapters in Acts, some significant events were happening. The apostles prayed about who should replace Judas and the Lord chose Matthias. Then the Holy Spirit came, as promised in Acts 1:8 and in Acts 2 we read one of my favorite sermons by Peter. His words clearly cut to their hearts, and those who were present asked, 'Okay Peter, what now?'

His reply? “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”<sup>1</sup>

Their response? Those who heard his reply were baptized, and “there were added that day three thousand souls.”<sup>2</sup> We now have a church, three thousand strong on our hands! We see then in the next verse, what they were purposed to do: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of

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1. Acts 2:38-39

2. Acts 2:41

bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”<sup>3</sup>

We see then in the very first local church ever to exist, the believers are receiving solid teaching, they are investing time together in fellowship, they are eating together, and they are praying together. As we read through the rest of the New Testament, the next big advancement in the progression of the local church comes as God calls a man that at one time was a major persecutor of Christians, Saul of Tarsus, becoming the greatest church planter of all time! As the apostle Paul is planting churches, he has two things in mind: First, he is making and strengthening the disciples. Paul was not interested in “somewhat involved” believers. In Acts 14, he is doing ministry in Derbe with Barnabas, as we see that as 'they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup> They were making fully devoted disciples of Jesus, then strengthening them in the faith!

Secondly, we see Paul planting churches and ensuring that each church had dedicated and trained elders. In the next verse in Acts 14, we read, “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”<sup>5</sup> Paul also gives us an

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3. Acts 2:42-43

4. Acts 14:21-22

5. Acts 14:23

additional hint into the purpose of the church as he is writing to the church at Ephesus, that, as the body of Christ, we are to be “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”<sup>6</sup> As the apostle Peter writes his first letter to a handful of churches in modern-day Turkey, he instructs them to “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” As we examine the New Testament, we begin to get a full picture of the purpose of the local Church. Taking these nuggets, together with the passages of the Great Commission that commands all Christians to preach the Gospel,<sup>7</sup> make disciples<sup>8</sup> and be His witnesses,<sup>9</sup> I've developed this biblical definition of the church:

The biblical purpose of the local church is to glorify God<sup>10</sup> by worshipping Him,<sup>11</sup> by edifying his people,<sup>12</sup> by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus to the whole world,<sup>13</sup> and by making disciples through the baptizing and teaching of new believers.<sup>14</sup>

If this is a good biblical definition of the local church, what would it take for a church to be doing this well? It certainly would be a church that would have evangelism as a way to be making disciples as the core mission and the cultural identity of the church. From the Senior pastor and elders of the church down, the

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6. Ephesians 4:15

7. Mark 16:15

8. Matthew 28:18-20

9. Acts 1:8

10. 1 Peter 2:12

11. Matthew 4:10

12. Ephesians 4:15-16

13. Acts 1:8

14. Matthew 28:18-20

message would be clear: 'We exist to glorify God by being a church that makes disciples that make disciples.' We see this mandate played out as Paul is instructing the young Timothy in 2 Timothy 2, "what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."<sup>15</sup> And yet, according to a recent study done by Discipleship.org and Exponential,<sup>16</sup> only 5% of Western churches have a reproducing disciple making strategy.

This brings up many questions in my mind. Of all the questions, two stand out as primary. First, if proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples is THE core mission of the church, why are only 5% of our churches doing it? And second, what are they doing instead of what God has called them to do? When I posed this second question to a ministry friend of mine, his reply was, 'Singing songs with a speech.' While that's a bit simplistic, it is true that if Jesus has given our churches a very clear call to evangelize and make disciples as the key activities He has given us to do, but a small percentage are actually doing those things, it makes one wonder what a lot of churches are doing with their time and resources! Here's what I'd like to do: Let's first look at some of the key reasons only 5% of all Western Churches have a reproducible disciple making strategy. As we unpack these reasons, I'll give a few quick 'first steps' for church leaders to begin to find victory in these four areas.

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15. 2 Timothy 2:2

16. <https://exponential.org/resource-ebooks/disciple-making-study/>

## **Many Pastors & Elders were not Discipled Themselves**

Discipleship at its core involves a life-on-life relationship between the one discipling and those being discipled. Having been involved in discipling others and teaching others how to disciple others, I've developed a now longstanding definition of discipleship that may help here:

Discipling others is the process by which a Christian **with a life worth reproducing** commits himself for an extended period of time to a few individuals who have trusted Christ, the purpose being to aid and guide their growth to maturity and equip them to **reproduce themselves in a third spiritual generation.**

Because this process involves a fully-devoted follower of Jesus who takes an extended period of time to invest in others, who will then be able to teach a third spiritual generation, its hard to instill that process into a church if no one in leadership at your church has been through the process with a disciple maker. One of the key reasons I have been able to invest in so many men's lives in a discipleship relationship over the years is that Brad Miller, staff member with The Navigators, invested time in me and taught me how to invest in others. I'll walk you through the specifics of what it takes to become a disciple maker that makes disciples in Chapter 2, but it's safe to say that a.) It's definitely a process and b.) If no one has taken you through the process, it's hard to do with others. The pattern for disciple making comes clear in 2

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Timothy 2:2. Paul, writing to Timothy is saying, 'Take what you've learned from me, teach it to others, and make sure that these others are people who will be able to invest their lives into a third generation.' If a pastor never had anyone who taught him how to invest in others that will invest their lives into the lives of others, it's hard to reproduce. It's the same reason that you wouldn't want me to fix the automatic transmission on your car. I haven't been taught how to do it, so I don't know how, leading me to have no 'blueprint' of how it's done. It is the same idea with disciple making!

### First Steps Toward Victory in the Area

While it is true that it is hard to start doing this at a church if no one at the church has been through the process before, it's not impossible. For the church leader who wants to grow in this area, there are a couple of really good resources. Because I'm a former Navigator staff member, I'm going to recommend a Navigator ministry specifically for churches who want to grow in the area of making disciples. It's called Navigator Church Ministries,<sup>17</sup> and on their website, there are a ton of tools to help you grow in this area, including books, podcasts, and other resources. For the church leader that wants to learn how to make disciples, they even have staff that will come and teach you how this is best done in a church setting.

I'll also direct you toward the website Discipleship.org, which is a treasure trove of ebooks,

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17. <https://navigatorschurchministries.org/>

blogs, podcasts, and a bunch of additional resources that will help you grow in this area. The resources are readily available. It's up to you to access them!

### **Many Seminaries are not Teaching up-and-coming Pastors how to Make Disciples**

Over the course of my 27 years in full-time ministry, I've toyed with the idea of getting a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited Seminary, but the path that God has had me travel never justified the need for a Seminary degree. But for those called into full-time church ministry, the value of seminary training cannot be overstated. A good seminary can add many valuable tools for pastor's ministry, and the meticulous study involved in seminary education lays a strong foundation for any preacher of God's word. On the other hand, as I've tried to discern why so few pastors have a reproducible disciple making strategy, one key issue that continues to surface in my research is how little our seminaries are teaching future pastors about disciple making and how to create a reproducible disciple making strategy.

Interestingly, a simple Google search on 'Things I Wish they would have taught me in Seminary' is an interesting look at the difference between what seminaries are teaching future pastors, and what they then find are the actual knowledge and information they need to effectively shepherd and run a church. Books are now being written on the subject as well. From, 'What

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They Didn't Teach You In Seminary,' a wonderful book written by James Emery White, Senior Pastor at Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina to '15 Things Seminary Couldn't Teach Me' by the Gospel Coalition, to the multiple blogs and articles you'll find on the topic, it's clear that there is somewhat of a difference between what Seminaries are teaching their students, and what these students need to know once they become pastors.

Look at this list of some of the more interesting things that seminary graduates mentioned in online lists on blog posts and articles that they didn't learn in seminary:

- Never taught me about Church finances.
  - Never taught me how to balance my marriage and my ministry.
  - Never taught me how to deal with sexual improprieties among church staff and how to handle the aftermath.
  - How most people in my congregation wouldn't care about theology.
  - How just because a pastor has an M.Div. degree from a well-known seminary doesn't make him a good pastor.
  - Never taught me how tough ministry can be sometimes, especially on my spouse and my marriage.
  - How to shepherd a church through a season of suffering.
-

And in relation to discipleship and evangelism specifically, there are quite a few items I found that seminarians mentioned about their seminary experience:

- They don't teach much about discipleship.
- They did not teach me how to lead a soul to Jesus Christ. I would have thought this to be most important as we are told to make disciples of all nations.
- They did not tell me I could learn sound theology directly from God and the Bible. I learned Greek, Hebrew, church history, ethics, philosophy, psychology, a lot about the Old Testament, a lot about the New Testament—and much historical and contemporary theology. To put it another way, I learned a lot about God. And about the Bible. They did not, however, teach me how to know Him.
- I never learned how to disciple an adult. Shouldn't that be vital for any minister? I don't believe there is a quick read that will teach us how disciple, because sanctification is a process for life. However, I have learned over my years of the great resource, *Spiritual Disciplines of a Godly Life*, by Donald S. Whitney. We, as ministers of the gospel, need to be disciple making.

And the list goes on and on. I am surprised how many pastors indicated that what they had learned in seminary did not equip them very well for the day-to-day activities they'd be doing in their job as a Pastor of a local congregation. In his book about what he'd wished

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he'd learned in seminary, James Emery White states, 'I knew about the Council of Nicea, but no one had ever told me how to lead my own council meeting. I knew about the Barth-Brunner debate but not how to handle the breakdown between two Sunday school teachers when one was asked to start a new class, for the same age

## MIKE'S HOT TAKE

My understanding of the mission of most Seminaries is to equip godly servant-leaders for the proclamation of His Word and the building up of the body of Christ worldwide with the redemptive power of the gospel and the life-changing truth of Scripture. In order to accomplish that mission, I would think that courses in the Spiritual disciplines, the life cycle of spiritual growth in the new believer and how to create a core mission and cultural identity of making of disciples would be essential. For those with access to Seminary leadership, please work on adding these types of courses and training!

In addition, while I know that many seminaries have a Training and Mentoring program for their students, I would suggest these seminaries focus these programs on making sure the student knows how to engage the Spiritual Disciplines in their lives and knows how to personally share their testimony and a good gospel presentation and know how to teach others these things as well.

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group, from the existing class..... I could tell you the leading theologians of the sixteenth century but not about leading and managing a staff.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, given all of these practical ministry tools that seminarians report they wish they'd learned that would have prepared them better for the day-to-day work found as a pastor, it does seem like something has been missed. If you've worked that hard in seminary thinking it will prepare you well for your future job as a pastor, it would be nice if many of the things on the list above were covered more completely. And given the direct commands from Christ to make disciples, I would implore Seminaries to add course content that helps future pastors become disciples of Jesus who know clearly how to make disciples.

### First Steps Toward Victory in the Area

It would be easy as a church leader to take a defeatist approach here and say, 'Well, I didn't learn this in Seminary, so I guess I won't work at making a disciple making culture at my church.' Please don't take this attitude! As I mentioned above, there are a lot of resources, including our book resources at One Eight Catalyst, that will help you. I would also encourage all those who did attend and complete a degree program at a Seminary to contact your academic institution and as an alum, implore them to add more content on how to make disciples in the church context. It is this type of grass roots effort that may affect change!

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18. White, James Emery. What They Didn't Teach You In Seminary. Baker Books, 2011, page 15

## **Many Elders and Pastors Think they are doing a good job at Disciple Making**

The aforementioned study on Churches in the United States by Exponential and Discipleship.org<sup>19</sup> is a wonderfully interesting study on how well churches in the USA are doing at having a reproducible disciple making culture. Of the most interesting things in the study was the difference between how well those doing the study found churches to be doing in this area, and how well the pastors of those same churches thought their churches were doing. The pastors who were surveyed were overly optimistic in their own assessment of the disciple making culture that was present in their church. Many times, the Protestant pastors in the study made significant claims about their disciple making activities while not being able to report significant impact resulting from these reported activities. It's sort of like a twisted version of the Dunning-Kruger effect, which is a type of cognitive bias where people who feel they've done really well or performed well cannot see how or why they did not do well at all. In the Exponential study for example, the average pastor surveyed reported 12.5 commitments to Christ in the last year per 100 people and yet, half of those pastors also indicated that their church saw no church growth. A bunch of questions pop up here. Among them would be, 'Where did these new believers go?' Also, if pastors' numbers about new commitments were projected to the national population, we'd have seen almost 6 million new Christians over the

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19. "National Study on Disciple Making in USA Churches: High Aspirations Amidst Disappointing Results." Sponsored by Discipleship.org & Exponential, research by Grey Matter Research.

past year. National studies by multiple organizations have shown no noticeable gains in Christian self-identification, basic Christian beliefs, church involvement, or born-again beliefs over the past couple of decades.

So what's going on here? Knowing that most pastors know God's word quite well, they know the command Jesus gives to His followers in Matthew 28 to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."<sup>20</sup> Everything that a church does in ministry should flow from or lead toward making disciples. This means the criteria upon which any church should measure its success is not how many new names are added to the roll, nor how much the budget is increased. The success of the church is in how many Christians are actively making disciples and training them to win the multitudes. But many pastors don't know how, either because no one has discipled them and/or because they didn't learn how to make disciples in their seminary training. So they instead skip to what they do know, which is how to sing songs, preach sermons, do separate men's, women's and children's ministry and hope that no one looks too deeply into their Bibles to find out the very thing God wants them to be doing is something they don't know how to do. When asked then about how they feel their church is doing in making disciples, the response is 'Yeah, we're doing great and I'm excited about what God is doing.' And yet, recent research

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20. Matthew 28:19-20

indicates that only 10% of Western churches have regular training sessions for their people on how to share their faith and a simple Gospel presentation, and a study done by Lifeway Research<sup>21</sup> found 80% of those who attend church one or more times a month believe they have a personal responsibility to share their faith. Yet despite this conviction, 61% have not told another person about how to become a Christian in the previous six months. This leads us to our third reason that only 5% of Western churches have a reproducible disciple making strategy: Many Church leaders see discipleship as a program that can be 'plug and played' into the church annual calendar, when in reality it's a much different animal than how it is portrayed in our churches.

### First Steps Toward Victory in the Area

The first steps here are really quite simple. Take the Discipleship.org definition of what discipleship in the church looks like and compare it to what is happening at your church in this area. Here's the standard we're looking for:

'People intentionally entering into relationships to help others follow Jesus, become more like Jesus, and join the mission of Jesus. Disciple making includes the whole process from conversion through maturation and multiplication, which is making disciples who in turn make other disciples.'

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21. <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/research-survey-sharing-christ-2012>

How does this standard compare to what is happening at your church? Pay attention to the part of this that mentions the 'whole process.' If the activities at your church don't match this definition, don't worry and don't take this as an affront to your leadership or the job you've done so far. Changes can be made, and under your leadership, they can and should be made!

### **Many Church Leaders see Discipleship as a Program**

As a man in ministry with a deep heart for making disciples, I always have my ears pricked up a bit when I go to a church and hear the word discipleship. I want to know what this entails at this church and by what means is discipleship taking place. Very frequently, discipleship in the context of the church is an 8 to 10 week program that can be gone through with a Sunday school class or other small group, usually with a curriculum of some type, like a workbook or handouts. While this 'easy disciple making' has its place, mainly as a 'stage 1' type encounter, true disciple making is much harder than going through a workbook for 10 weeks. In order to clarify what deep disciple making looks like, here's what I'd like to do. First, I'd like to define disciple making, then give some first steps toward deeper disciple making. The definition I gave earlier in this chapter has come from a lot of research, reading and Bible study. In order to drill down on this a bit more, let me repeat my definition:

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Discipling others is the process by which a Christian with a life worth reproducing commits himself for an extended period of time to a few individuals who have trusted Christ, the purpose being to aid and guide their growth to maturity and equip them to reproduce themselves in a third spiritual generation.

A couple of things to note here: First, the Christian hoping to invest in others must have a life worth reproducing, meaning they do not have any disqualifying sin issues and are walking with Christ in a way that brings honor to Christ. Also note that this person is committing themselves over an extended period of time. True disciple making takes more than 10 weeks, but is rather a process by which the discipler is committing to walk with the disciplee for an extended period of time (at least a year or more). This is important because the walking with someone for an extended period enables those being disciplined to learn from the discipler about how to walk with Jesus and how to disciple other people in the future. It also enables the one discipling to watch the disciplee's life and add course correction along the way. Finally, as these people walk down this road together and are growing in their lives toward maturity, the actual goal is for the second generation to be able to reproduce themselves into a third spiritual generation.

In reading the study I've mentioned by Exponential and Discipleship.org, they also have a definition of disciple making that I like, 'People intentionally entering

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into relationships to help others follow Jesus, become more like Jesus, and join the mission of Jesus. Disciple making includes the whole process from conversion through maturation and multiplication, which is making disciples who in turn make other disciples.' This definition gives a good look at the whole process, 'from conversion through maturation and multiplication.' The question then becomes, 'What does this look like in the church?' While this is not a comprehensive outline of effective disciple making with the church (that's a different book!), here's a few First Steps as a way to define disciple making at your church.

### First Steps Toward Victory in the Area

1. At all levels of the church, those in leadership can be developing relationships with congregation members with the mindset that 'What we do here is make disciples that make disciples.' This means if I as a leader see congregation member Charlie often for example, I'm going to be asking him these types of questions:

'So Charlie, what are you learning lately from God's word?'

'Charlie, how are you doing in your prayer life?'

'Tell me how you've shared with someone else about Jesus and all He's done for you?'

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Then as these types of relationships develop, I'm asking Charlie, 'Charlie, how would you like to meet twice a month to encourage one another in our walk with Jesus?'

2. Certainly, the elders and pastors should also have several they invest in weekly, helping them grow into maturity in Christ. At this level, it can be seen as 'future elder development.' While it will not lead to all the men who go through this experience becoming elders, I firmly believe that churches literally cannot have enough spiritually mature people participating in the life of the church. With your shepherding and oversight responsibilities of all the congregation, every person at your church is pursued toward becoming disciples that make disciples.

3. In this process of core leaders focusing much of their time on making disciples, two core foundations find their way into the leaders' weekly schedule, including a core foundation of weekly fasting and prayer for those in the congregation and a joyful expectation that at your church, you obey Scripture to become disciple makers.

4. This final point is one that I cannot emphasize enough. Your church will not become a disciple making church unless disciple making that makes disciples is at the core of the mission and interwoven into the cultural identity of your church. Every dollar spent and every decision made passes through a filter that answers the question, 'How does this enable us to make disciples that

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make disciples?’

## **MIKE'S HOT TAKE**

In my book, *Keeping Watch Over Souls: The 6 Marks of a Church that Makes disciples*, I give more detail into the focus it takes to be a church that does this well. I also give practical tips to church leaders on how to become a Church that makes disciples that make disciples. At the end of each Chapter, I give church leaders four questions per chapter for discussion that leads to grow in this area. It is a great resource for the elders and church leaders in your church go study together. Many have found it a useful study to go through as a group.

### **Making Disciples is Hard and it may Drive People Away**

Any good business owner probably has a story or two about ways that their business has tried to get new customers and keep those people as customers. In addition, most business owners will also be able to give you a story or three about things that they've tried to get and retain customers and strategies that have worked and what has not. In my experience with the Western church, far too often many of the same conversations are taking place about how to get and retain congregation members. Todd Wagner, in his excellent book *Come and See: Everything You Ever Wanted in the One Place You Would Never Look*, has a fantastic illustration about this.

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He states that people select churches much like they would a cruise ship. 'Whether consciously or otherwise, they ask certain questions that reveal their expectations. *Do I like the music in the ballroom? Do I like the captain and his staff? Do I get good service? Is it pleasant and comfortable? Do I like the experience enough to sail with them again?*'<sup>22</sup> And because pastors and elders have discerned that this is the way the people are selecting what church to go to, far too often they feel like they cater to these expectations. As a result, a dreaded question may follow: 'What do we need to do to make these people stay?' I call it the 'dreaded question' because it identifies that a church's motives are more about getting and retaining people, which by their tithing and volunteer participation keeps the pastoral staff employed, rather than every decision crafted around 'Does this activity help us make disciples that make disciples?'

If the primary purpose of the church is to please Christians, it allows Christians to choose the features that are most pleasing to them, and it allows many Christians to float through their church experience being mostly satisfied with the amenities of a particular church and it saps their zeal for reaching the lost and being involved in God's Great Commission. And I can guarantee you that if this is the situation at your church, this is not the way toward making disciples that make disciples. J.D. Greear says it this way, "Without the mission, a church is not a church. It's just a group of disobedient Christians hanging out."<sup>23</sup> And here's where the rub comes in far too

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22. Wagner, Todd. *Come and See: Everything You Ever Wanted in the One Place You Would Never Look*. Colorado Springs, David C Cook, 2017. p. 79

often. On one hand, elders really doing their biblical responsibilities in the areas of oversight, watching over souls and shepherding will require some probing into the lives of those in the congregation. The elders cannot do their jobs without seeing how people are doing in their walks with Jesus and providing course correction where Christians in the congregation are falling short of biblical standards. On the other hand, it's human nature to want to conceal our sin nature, which causes congregation members to leave when the heat gets turned up too high.

But for the pastors and elders reading this book, I'm here to tell you that it's worth it. I challenge you to read what I call in my book on the 6 Marks of a Church that Makes Disciples the 'awake at 3am'<sup>24</sup> verses, which are the three biblical passages that best describe what the biblical responsibilities of an elder are and tell me that some probing into the lives of those in your congregations will not be required. It will be required but think about your church with 90% of those in your congregation as a mature, fully devoted follower of Jesus, and the impact you could have in your community and around the world! By following some of the steps in this chapter, despite your training and past experience, you too can be leading a church that is making disciples that makes disciples!

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23. Greear, J.D. *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan

24. Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-3

## Chapter 2

### On Becoming a Disciple of Jesus

Billy Graham is perhaps the greatest individual evangelist of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. According to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) website, during the course of his life, Billy was able to personally preach the Gospel in-person to 215 million people in more than 185 countries<sup>1</sup> and more than 3.2 million people have responded positively to Billy's invitation to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Toward the end of his personal ministry, his BGEA ministry created a program called 'My Hope.' This program, created in the early 2000's, was designed to help individuals and churches invite others into a space, usually either a church-wide outreach, at a youth retreat, in small groups or in homes with friends where a 'My Hope Film' was showed followed by a testimony of an invitee and an invitation to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. In addition to a concerted effort to use this program in America, this program has been used in evangelistic campaigns in 60 countries around the world<sup>2</sup> as an evangelistic tool to gather people to hear the Gospel.

One of the 'My Hope' global efforts I read about recently occurred in December 2009 in Thailand, as the BGEA, together with major Thai church denominations, co-sponsored a 'My Hope Thailand' campaign. This

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1. <https://memorial.billygraham.org/official-obituary/>

2. <https://myhopewithbillygraham.org/about/>

campaign, which centered on a TV program that was aired several times on Thai national television and was available to watch on DVD, took on special Thai characteristics, with special testimonies and music videos from Thai celebrities and pop stars, together with preaching from Billy and Franklin Graham. As in other 'My Hope' campaigns, Thai Christians were encouraged to invite people into their home or into a church to watch the program, to share their own personal testimony, and materials were given to help them share the Gospel with those in attendance. According to BGEA and Thai sources, 20% of the Thai population heard the Gospel message during this campaign, with nearly 12,000 people accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior.<sup>3</sup> Interested in what impact this effort in Thailand had, researchers and missionaries Dwight Martin and Marten Visser followed up a year after the 'My Hope Thailand' campaign to see what the long-term impact was on the Thai Church. In their research, they approached over one hundred churches in Thailand, both those that participated in the campaign and those that did not, to find out what had taken place in the intervening year after the crusade.

The results of their research, as reported in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*,<sup>4</sup> was sobering. Almost all churches had new believers. That was to be expected in Thailand since the Thai church has an annual growth rate of just over 4%, mainly through new converts. But Martin and Visser found that there was no correlation

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3. <https://billygraham.org/story/continuing-the-work-of-the-gospel-in-thailand/>

4. Martin, Dwight & Visser, Marten, "Sense and Nonsense of Large Scale Evangelism," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, April 2012, Vol. 48, No. 2

whatsoever between the number of baptisms in any of the churches and whether or not they had participated in this national campaign. All efforts - preparation, training, and meetings - had no measurable outcome after one year. Surprising, isn't it? At first glance, it would seem certain that after 12,000 people had reportedly accepted Christ, there would be a large jump in baptisms, church attendance and church planting growth. But to have no discernable impact in the churches of Thailand and in their activity is a bit of a shock. And yet, when Christian organizations focus solely on the numbers, whether conversions, church attendance, or number of those attending an event or service, something is lost. And while I do believe evangelistic campaigns can have a great effect, especially as a first step for someone to begin their journey of finding Christ, without discipleship efforts to help new converts gain depth in their new walk with Christ, the results are often disappointing. It has been proven time and time again that focusing on numbers and evangelism alone is not enough. One of my favorite stories in this area comes from the life of Dawson Trotman, founder of the Christian organization The Navigators. He found through his early ministry that his evangelistic converts were no closer to Christ a year after they 'received Christ.' The results of the researchers looking into 'My Hope Thailand' found a similar result. And an examination of the New Testament reveals that the apostle Paul emphasized this very point. A quick study of Ephesians 4 gives a pointed study in this area:

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“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for **building up** the body of Christ, until we **all attain** to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to **mature** manhood, to the measure of the **stature of the fullness of Christ**, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to **grow up** in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”<sup>5</sup>

For Paul, there was a lot of work to be done in the life of the new convert: Equipping and building up toward maturity that leads to a fullness of Christ that the maturing disciple can endure false teaching as we grow in Christ. These mature believers then, according to Paul, join together with other maturing believers into a body that is then growing together.

In this chapter, here's what I'd like to do. First, let's 'clear the deck' to make sure we're all on the same page and revisit what the Gospel is, and how we actually accept Christ as our Lord and Savior. Next, let's look at what the 'next steps' look like as we go from new believer to fully-devoted follower of Christ. If you remember from

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5. Ephesians 4:11-16

Chapter 1, the founders of the early Church in Acts were looking not to just make converts, but their goal was to make disciples. God wants all of us to be all-in, no holding back, totally in love with Jesus disciples of His. And finally, as we individually take up our cross daily and become 'denying ourselves daily' disciples of Jesus, what impact should that have on our churches. The assumption would be, especially given what we've just read in Ephesians 4 that if you have a church full of disciples of Jesus, it would be a church that would make disciples of Jesus that make disciples.

### The Gospel Revisited

According to Britannica.com, the word *gospel* is derived from the Anglo-Saxon term *god-spell*, meaning “good story,” a rendering of the Latin *evangelium* and the Greek *euangelion*, meaning “good news” or “good telling.”<sup>6</sup> The key to understanding why the Gospel is good news is to start with the bad news. In the beginning, God made humans in His image and wanted us to have an intimate relationship with Him.<sup>7</sup> But we sinned and cut ourselves off from Him, creating a huge chasm between us and God. We have all sinned<sup>8</sup> and the punishment for that sin is death and eternal separation from God. Throughout the Old Testament, we see time and time again man trying on his own to bridge this divide. But a perfect God cannot have an intimate relationship with the sin that so pervades us. There was a law in the time of Moses that was given by God establishing that cleansing from sin

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6. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gospel-New-Testament>

7. Genesis 1:26-28

8. Romans 3:23

can only happen through the bloody sacrifice of an innocent life.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the Old Testament, we see people sacrificing animals as a way to appease God, which worked for a time, but was not a lasting sacrifice.

This is where Jesus comes in the story of the Gospel. Having lived a perfect life, He was the lasting sacrifice we needed as He took on Himself the punishment of our sins. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."<sup>10</sup> God sent His son to be a sacrifice for our sin. Jesus' death on the cross fulfilled the Law's righteous requirement.<sup>11</sup> Many of us think that maybe if we're 'good enough' we can earn our way to heaven, but the Bible is clear that there's nothing we can do to earn salvation. It is a free gift, given to us by God, not a result of our own work.<sup>12</sup> Peter states this well in 1 Peter 3:18, 'For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.'<sup>13</sup> Jesus' sacrifice paid in full the penalty of our sin, and through Christ, we are now fully 'justified' to God and can have a right relationship with God through Christ.

So how do we receive this gift that God has given us through Christ? We must recognize our sin and our need for Christ and repent of our sins and trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness.<sup>14</sup> If we repent of our sins and

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9. Hebrews 9:22

10. John 3:16-17

11. Romans 8:3-4, Hebrews 10:5-10

12. Ephesians 2:8-9

13. see also Romans 5:6-8

trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God.<sup>15</sup> Our only requirement is that we must accept this gift and believe that Jesus is our Savior, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”<sup>16</sup> This is why the Gospel is such good news! For those who believe in the name of Jesus, the Bible assures us that we will be with God for eternity. 1 John 5:13 says, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” Jesus Himself gives us a great assurance of our salvation as we believe in Him and surrender our lives to Him: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”<sup>17</sup>

Since I have you on the edge of your seat, I have great news! That's not all! God never intended for us to receive Him as Savior, then go back to whatever we were doing in our own pursuits. Jesus wants us to be imitators of Him, to learn from Him and to follow Him. He wants us to be His disciples.

### What is a disciple?

A common definition of a disciple is someone who adheres to the teachings of another. A disciple is a student. He or she is a follower or a learner. A disciple is one who disciplines himself in the teachings and practices of another. The word *disciple*, much like *discipline*, comes from the Latin word *discipulus*, meaning

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14. Acts 17:30, John 1:12  
15. John 3:16

16. John 1:12  
17. John 5:24

“pupil” or “learner.” It refers to someone who adopts the ways of someone else. When applied to Jesus, a disciple is someone who learns from Jesus how to live like Jesus — someone who, because of God's awakening grace, conforms his or her words and ways to the words and ways of Jesus. A disciple of Jesus wants to learn from Him, through the study of God's Word, the Bible, and as we listen to others teach from it. The disciple makes the Bible part of their life every day. As the Psalmist said, “With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.”<sup>18</sup>

What then is the real difference between a Christian and a disciple? A Christian is someone who has trusted Christ for forgiveness of sin and been assured of life forever with Jesus. A disciple is someone who not only meets the above definition of a Christian but is following Jesus in an effort to learn how to become more like him. And here is where we see one of the big problems in our Western Churches today. Far too many people are what I would call 'casual Christians,' happy to go to church on Sunday, maybe attend one other event over the course of the week, and casually peruse their Bibles a time or two a week. While I'm not advocating for a 'works based' salvation, God wants much more from us as we accept Christ as Savior and Lord. As we look at the characteristics of a Disciple of Jesus, use these three points as a way to examine your own walk with Jesus as I go through the main characteristics of a Disciple and give you a few pointers on ways you can be making progress in these areas.

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18. Psalm 119:13

Before we move on, a quick word about this idea of examination. In 2 Corinthians, Paul gives us a great admonition in this area, “examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”<sup>19</sup> A lot to be said here, but certainly this gives us a biblical exhortation that our walk with Jesus is something to be tested and watched over. Testing involves checking to see about the condition or health of something, and then depending on how the test goes, adjustments may need to be made. I often tell people that one of the surest ways to test the health of your walk with Jesus is to go through the checklist we see in Galatians 5 on being spirit-filled, ‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.’ If we are to be spirit-filled<sup>20</sup> as believers, this is a great way to be able to see how you’re doing in relation to growth in each of these 9 areas. Also, this passage in 2 Corinthians 13 was not the first time that Paul admonishes Christ followers to examine themselves. Earlier, he had observed the church participating in the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. He told them, “Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.”<sup>21</sup> Believers are to examine their motives, their actions, and the current condition of their hearts to make sure they don’t bring God’s discipline on themselves.

### **Saved by Grace, Then the Hard Part Comes**

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19. 2 Corinthians 13:5

20. Galatians 6:4

21. 1 Corinthians 11:28

I hope you're seeing that God never sent His son to die for our sins simply for us to be casual about our relationship with Jesus. There's a part of our relationship with Jesus that people are quick to forget, and it's this forgetting that concerns me. It's a bit of a conundrum that I feel I need to address here because we have two biblical truths that seem, on the surface, to clash with each other. On one side, it's completely true that there's nothing we can do to earn the salvation we find in Christ. Paul writes in Ephesians 2 that, "by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."<sup>22</sup> Amen? There's clearly nothing we can do to receive the gift we find in Christ... But then we must examine our faith, obey the commands of Jesus and do a lot of other things that look a lot like work. Just in the New Testament, we see instructions to be 'doing' a lot of work:

- Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.<sup>23</sup>
- Flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness<sup>24</sup>
- Do all things without grumbling or disputing<sup>25</sup>
- Do not be conformed to this world<sup>26</sup>

And this is just four of the over 1000 commands we find just in the New Testament!  
So what gives here? Let me attempt to explain:

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22. Ephesians 2:8-9

23. Colossians 1:10

24. 1 Timothy 6:11

25. Philippians 2:14

26. Romans 12:2

We read in John 1 that “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”<sup>27</sup> To me, this is a paramount verse when it comes to salvation, and when we look at the whole of the New Testament, the concept of belief in Jesus comes out loud and clear. Look at this brief sampling of verses that many of us are probably quite familiar with:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and **believes him** who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”<sup>28</sup>

Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “**Believe in the Lord Jesus**, and you will be saved, you and your household.”<sup>29</sup>

“... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”<sup>30</sup>

See the trend that I'm seeing? We must both believe that God raised Jesus and we must confess Him as Lord and Savior. But it's what comes next in a new believer's

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27. John 1:12

28. John 5:24

29. Acts 16:30-31

30. Romans 10:9-10

life that concerns me. I see a lot of people in our churches that have no more of the Galatians 5 marks of a spirit-filled person than any unbeliever who I may know. And if a church goer is not seeing growth in the 9 areas in Galatians 5 and they do not see any fruit being produced in their life, I worry that they may have never received Christ and fully surrendered their life to Christ. The commands for us to be 'doing' things in our walk with Jesus aren't a prerequisite for salvation, but rather a by-product of a life lived fully for Jesus. In Matthew 7, Jesus gives us a great explanation of this concept as he tells us that, 'every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.'<sup>31</sup> Good trees, connected to good vines, produce good fruit!

One more note that we need to make sure to pay attention to here, a very concerning passage of Scripture we all need to be aware of in 1 Corinthians 3. In this chapter, Paul is talking about his ministry and how he, like a master builder, lay good foundations into people lives as they hear the gospel and receive Christ. In verse 10, "Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation

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31. Matthew 7:17-18

survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."<sup>32</sup>

Read that passage again, this time much slower with your own life in Christ in mind. We read about a time, presumably when we pass from this life onto eternity, where the work we have given to this relationship will be tested (there's that idea of tests again!). If we've built on the foundation we have in Christ with shoddy material, it will be burned up and we will suffer loss. Nowhere else in Scripture do we read about this loss so we don't know exactly what that means, but we will suffer loss. And as to the 'salvation by grace' issue, this passage is clear: yes, we will be saved, but at a cost.

I've read repeatedly that counterfeit currency experts don't learn to spot counterfeit money by studying the counterfeits. They study genuine bills until they master the look of the real thing. Then when they see the bogus money they recognize it. In the same way, let's now take a look at what a disciple of Jesus is, what a disciple of Jesus does and I'll give you a few tools to begin working on being a fully devoted, genuine disciple of Jesus.

### **Characteristics of a Disciple of Jesus**

So what is a disciple of Jesus? A disciple is a follower, one who believes and trusts in a teacher and follows that teacher's words and example. As Jesus was calling His first disciples, He spoke the simple command, "Follow me."<sup>33</sup>

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32. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

To be a disciple is to be in a relationship. It is having an instructive, intimate, and imitative relationship with the teacher. Consequently, being a disciple of Jesus Christ is being in relationship with Jesus and seeking to be like Him. In other words, we follow Christ to be like Christ<sup>34</sup> because as His disciples, we belong to Christ. The disciple of Jesus has certain characteristics which differ from a 'Sunday-only' Christian in that they are commensurate with a relationship with Jesus. There are some who try to distinguish between being a Christian and being a disciple, but the Bible never makes this type of distinction. The early Christians were first called disciples. Being *Christ's disciple* and being a *Christian* are synonymous. Trusting, obeying and listening to Christ is what a Christian does. As a consequence, being a Christian is being a disciple, from the beginning until today. Here are three characteristics of a disciple of Jesus and as you examine your own walk in these ways, I'll give you 'first steps' toward growth in these areas:

### **A Disciple Listens to Jesus**

One could never claim to be a disciple of a teacher without being ready to listen to that teacher. The world is full of teachers who are looking for followers and listeners! A disciple of Jesus listens to Him and when Jesus speaks, the disciple listens. The disciple clings to every word of the Master as if that word were bread for the hungry or water for the thirsty. When Jesus gathered together His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration,

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33. Mark 1:17; 2:14; John 1:43

34. 1 Corinthians 11:1

God the Father spoke from heaven with a clear command: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”<sup>35</sup> To be a Christian implies that you listen intently to Jesus.

### First Steps in this Area

As I've helped people grow in their walk with Jesus, spending time daily with God in His word and prayer is a crucial first step. In a blog post I wrote about a year ago,<sup>36</sup> I've called the decision whether or not we get time with God in His word and prayer, 'the most critical decision we'll make today.' Skipping that time with God leaves you less connected to God and without an opportunity to hear his 'still, small voice.'<sup>37</sup>

### **A Disciple Learns from Jesus**

We must not only listen to Jesus. A disciple does not listen and then turn away as though the teacher's words had no impact. When Jesus calls His disciples, He instructs them to learn from Him as well as to listen. When they respond to His call, He says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”<sup>38</sup> To be a disciple is to be a learner, and the words of Christ carry weight. For those who are fully devoted followers of Jesus, our greatest desire is learning from Christ, which is foundational to all that we as disciples believe. Joyfully receiving the words of the Master is as vital as daily

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35. Matthew 17:5

36. <http://mikefalkenstine.com/the-most-critical-decision-youll-make-today-and-everyday/>

37. 1 Kings 18:20-40; 19:12

38. Matthew 11:29

bread, the disciple meditates upon them day and night.<sup>39</sup>

### First Steps in this Area

As you are spending time with God in prayer and in His word, doing a slow, steady reading of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke John) is a good first step. As you read the Gospels, take notes on what you are reading. When you see Jesus doing something, write down ways you can incorporate that into your own life as well. In other words, do what He did. Secondly, pay attention to what He commands His followers to do. Then make it a point to do those things too. Jesus in several places in the Gospels sharpens this point. My favorite example of this in John 14:15 as He states, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Of course, when teaching on this passage, my question is always 'What are you saying about what you think about Jesus if you are not doing what He's commanding you to do?'

### **A Disciple Obeys Jesus**

No one may call himself a disciple of Jesus who is not willing to obey Him. The disciple will put into practice what he learns from time with Jesus. Because Jesus has proven Himself worthy, not obeying Him is not an option. A passage in Luke 6 always resonates very powerfully to me in this area. Jesus uses an analogy of building a house on either a weak or strong foundation, and then He states, “Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and

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39. Psalm 1:2

hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock."<sup>40</sup>

### First Steps in This Area

In addition to doing the study I mentioned above of the Gospels, begin to make a list of the direct commands we see Jesus giving us, and make a determined effort to obey the commands you see on your list. I often tell a

#### **MIKE'S HOT TAKE**

In 2019, I wrote a book called *What You Do Shows Who You Are: The 6 Marks of a Disciple of Jesus*. This book is written to help Christians become fully devoted disciples of Jesus. In the book, you'll learn about the top 6 characteristics we see in someone who is walking fully with Jesus, and tips on how to grow in these areas. This book was designed to be used in a small group setting with 8 discussion questions at the end of every Chapter as I believe that spiritual growth happens best with others. Interestingly, since the books' release, pastoral communities from around the world have asked for permission to translate the book in their language to be used in their ministry. As a ministry resource, we're finding many Christians in need of help in finding depth in their walk with Jesus, and it's been exciting to see how God is using this book resource.

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40. Luke 6:46-48

story in this area of me asking my son to empty the dishwasher. If his reply was 'Dad, I'm going to put together a group of my friends and we're going to study what it would look like if I emptied the dishwasher, and I'll get back to you.' Of course, as his Dad, I'm looking for fairly immediate obedience. I don't want him to take a week to do this study! But isn't this what we do all too often when we see commands to obey from Jesus? We put together a Bible Study to study these commands and far too often we don't take the next steps and obey.

### **Final Word**

When we surrender our lives to Christ, a true conversion happens as we turn from our lives before Christ to a future living for Him. The apostle Paul is one of my spiritual heroes in this area. In passage after passage, we read of Paul's full surrender to Christ. I'll give you just a couple of them here:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”<sup>41</sup>

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now

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41. Philippians 1:21-23

live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”<sup>42</sup>

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.”<sup>43</sup>

Did you catch the crux of that last verse? Jesus died on the cross for you. He crucified your old self WITH HIM and He brought the debt you owe (your sin) to nothing, so that we're no longer held accountable for it and we've been set free. The last question is: What is your response? You'll either go full in with Jesus, wanting to listen to Him, learn from Him and obey Him or you won't. The overwhelming joy found in those who are fully devoted disciples of Jesus elicits a strong response with the surrender of their lives to Him.

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42. Galatians 2:20

43. Romans 6:5-7

## Chapter 3

### Being and Making Disciples at your Church

Driving to church for Sunday morning services, you can't help thinking about your community group and the way that you've seen the body of Christ stand by you, time and time again. With your recent job loss, you can't believe how clutch these people have been in your life. You knew that they'd be there for you, having walked closely with these people over the last couple of years, but this is 'next level.' It has truly affirmed what the leaders of the community group have been saying to you about how you all need to be abiding daily in Christ together, showing Romans 12:10 lived out to "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." Pulling into the parking lot, you are reminded of the training class you signed up for the next three Thursday nights on how to share the Gospel and your story of how you became a Christian. 'I've got to put that in my Google calendar,' you think to yourself. Even though the class runs every 6 months, you've been slow to sign up and a bit of anticipation and nervousness run through your mind thinking about it. You've never actually been trained on how to share a Gospel presentation but having been through other equipping classes at your church, you know that those leading the class will do a good job and you remember that if they

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are anything like the previous classes, they'll have refreshments, which is always a nice treat.

Walking into the church, you see your friends Billy and Suzy from your community group, and as if they are reading your mind, they ask "Are you all going to the Sharing the Gospel workshop on Thursday?" A brief conversation breaks out about the equipping classes that a bunch of you from the community group have been to together and the consensus of which class everyone liked better is divided between the 'Genesis to Revelation: Bible survey' course or the 'Basic Spiritual Disciplines' class that has been so helpful to those in your community as you have been diligent to help each other grow spiritually. A theme running through your community group has been trying to apply what has now become a key Bible passage in 2 Timothy 2:15 and as if on cue, Billy recites the verse to remind everyone of the common goal. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved..." Billy stops, trying to remember the rest of the verse. Your spouse chimes in, "...a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." "Billy and Suzy," you say, "Thank you for always being there to help us do our best!"

They then ask if you and your spouse want to sit together for the service. "Of course," you reply, "let us just take the kids to children's church and we'll meet you in there!" Walking to the children's area, you're thankful for the dedicated hours that the children's ministry team put into bringing Jesus alive to your kids, and how they're

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even learning to memorize short Bible verses. This sure makes things easier to be able to take their curriculum and use it for your Sunday night family devotional. Walking into the sanctuary, you find your spouse and your friends just as the service is starting. How fun! Billy and Suzy have found Ed and Nicole, who are also in your community group. As a group, you've been praying for them as they've felt God's call to serve in Indonesia with an organization reaching unreached people groups. It's been such a encouragement to see how Ed and Nicole have been encouraged by the Missions pastor in taking the 'so you're feeling called?' classes, by the community group leaders and the missions organization they've just joined that will serve as their sending organization. To your knowledge, Ed and Nicole are one of four families that are praying through the process of serving the Lord internationally.

As the leaders lead the congregation through the service, there's a few things that you notice specifically that you're thankful for. The worship music team always does such a good job of leading the congregation toward worshipping God and glorifying Him. No extra anything that doesn't need to be there, just worshipping God that brings glory to Him. As you hear the pastor give his message, you're thankful of the high view of Scripture that the pastoral and elder team have. To them, the Bible really is the written word of God and you hear constantly from them that 'if the Bible says it, we do it!' This passion for biblical obedience was certainly all over the

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Membership process you all went through 18 months ago. You can still remember the elders talking about their responsibilities of oversight,<sup>1</sup> as those who were going to have to give an account for how they did in 'keeping watch'<sup>2</sup> over the congregation. Because they have such a great responsibility biblically, they were asking you to take your responsibilities to the Lord and to this body of Christ seriously too. You are also regularly struck by the passion that oozes out of the pastor and his team for the transformative power of the Gospel in people's lives. To them, no one is outside of the power of the Gospel and no lives are 'too far gone.' Given the open door into people's lives, Jesus is able to save anyone and can radical transform anyone.

That passion for the transformative power of the Gospel bleeds over into making disciples overseas as well. After the sermon, you get a powerful update from the Missions Pastor about what God is doing internationally through the ministry of your church. Interestingly, the Missions Pastor repeats a phrase you hear often from him and other staff at the church, "We're not going to reach the lost overseas if we're not reaching the lost here at home." You remember that your community group leaders have been challenging everyone to 'just find one' person to invest in and begin helping them grow spiritually. On your way home from church, you begin thinking through the plans for tonight's neighborhood Barbeque that you and your spouse have been working on for weeks. It is the culmination of your efforts to be

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1. Acts 20:18

2. Hebrews 13:17

outside more often to intentionally meet your neighbors, to ask them their story and begin a friendship. It's been fun to get to know them better and actually call them by their names as you see them out and about! You and your spouse are hoping that God will give you both that 'just one' to begin investing in. All in all, you're thankful that God has given you such a great church with great leaders, and you're happily invested in the mission that God seems to have given your church.

What do you think? Is this a church where you'd like to be a member? While this is a fictional story about a fictional church, all the churches I've seen who are deeply intentional about making disciples that make disciples as a conviction to fully obey Jesus' commands all have a very similar feel and flow as the church in my story. This is a church that has not left any stone unturned in their pursuit to take the two 'Great' commands of Jesus<sup>3</sup> to heart. A church that makes disciples that make disciples do three things really well at their core: First, the leaders make sure that everyone in the church knows that loving the Lord with everything they have<sup>4</sup> is a pursuit highly valued. This includes knowing God's word and learning from each other to be pursuing Him daily. Secondly, this church knows that reaching their Jerusalem (local area), Judea (state or province), Samaria (their country) and the ends of the earth<sup>5</sup> is God's plan A for the people within the church individually and for the church corporately and there is no plan B. Whether through loving their neighbors well<sup>6</sup> or a variety of local and international

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3. Matthew 28:19-20, Matthew 22:36-40

4. Matthew 22:37

5. Acts 1:8

6. Matthew 22:39-40

God-given projects, fully devoted followers who love Jesus are making a defense<sup>7</sup> for the hope they have in Christ and are sharing the reason for that hope. They can't help it! Finally, this church has a deep heart to make disciples. As I've already written about in detail, making disciples through teaching and baptism is an essential that most Western churches are skipping over because the leaders of the church don't know how because no one taught them how to do it. This needs to end, and it's my

### **MIKE'S HOT TAKE**

For the church leaders and congregation members whose hearts are pricked by this fictional story and want their churches to look a lot like this church, the question may come up: How do we do it? Because I cover the answer to this question in excruciating (in a good way!) detail in my book *Keeping Watch Over Souls: The 6 Marks of a Church that Makes Disciples*, I will initially say to elders, pastors and assorted church leaders, for a great study that you all can do together, please consider taking 8 weeks to go through that resource together. I'm certain that you will be glad you did it together.

heart to help churches become disciple-making churches and those disciples make disciples.

Because I've already covered specifics in previous books, I'm interested now in bringing out a few broad areas that churches can be working on, both from the

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7. 1 Peter 3:15

perspective of the overseers, and from the perspective of the congregation. You've now already seen that God is both asking us as individuals to be a fully devoted disciples of Jesus, and for our churches to be making disciples that make disciples. As I bring this book to a close, let's take a broad look at these areas in three ways. First, I'll broadly detail each of these areas, providing a definition and what it looks like in a church that is making disciples that make disciples. Then I'll give church leaders some ways that area can be accomplished, and finally, I'll give congregation members of those churches both some notes in these areas and I'll give you some questions to be asking the elders when you see these signs as a way to encourage your pastors and elders toward being a church that makes disciples that make disciples.

For those who hesitate with this idea of holding the pastors and elders at your church accountable in this way, let me say to you: When we look at the Bible in relation to elders, we see two things. We see that elders must meet a biblical standard as laid out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Without going into too much detail, this is a very specific list, with 21 qualifications in all. Those qualifications are in the Bible for all to read, so I would think that asking any of the elders how they are doing in any of them would be fine. In addition, if you see that an elder is greedy, undisciplined, gets drunk or has an anger problem, it would be appropriate to talk with them about it and hold them accountable to the biblical standard,

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since the standards are clear. Secondly, there are three 'job description for elders' passages in Scripture that outline what an elder's job is in the church.<sup>8</sup> In summary, an elder is called to oversee the church with care, providing this oversight in a shepherding, caring way. An elder is called to keep watch over your soul, and according to Hebrews 13, they will be asked in Heaven to give an account (essentially a speech) on how they did at this job. To ask them, 'The Bible says we should be doing this, why don't I see us doing that?' is appropriate when done in a loving way to help them do what God has called them to do.

A note also to the pastors and elders receiving these questions, a word of caution to you. I asked several of my ministry colleagues about whether these types of questions are biblically OK, and definitively, they said two things. First, they said yes, if done well and in love and out of a deep concern for the church. Secondly, we all had stories of questions by congregation members being asked, and elders and pastors not handling them well. I've had elders screaming and yelling at me in anger over very simple questions, as have others. It seems to me that this is a sensitive subject with pastors and elders because they feel a sense of 'being in charge' at their church and they tend to get too wrapped up in that feeling. But I would remind you who is actually the head of the church: Jesus is, and maybe Jesus wants to use discerning people at your church to help you see areas that legitimately need care and attending. Remember to

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8. Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-3

represent well the standards we see in Scripture that we find in the 21 qualifications in addition to all the 'one another's' we see in the New Testament: Love one another,<sup>9</sup> bear one another's burdens,<sup>10</sup> encourage one another,<sup>11</sup> serve one another,<sup>12</sup> and yes, speak the truth to one another<sup>13</sup> among the 100+ 'one another's' in the New Testament. This would be a great time for you to listen well, to not respond in anger, and to know that the people bringing you questions are most likely coming to you with a genuine concern and love for your church.

While this list of the areas that a church needs to focus on to become a church that makes disciples that make disciples is broad, if your church can major on these 5 areas, it'll come a long way to getting where you want to be in becoming a church that makes disciples that make disciples.

### **Area #1: A High View of Scripture**

The first area to focus on in becoming a church that makes disciples that make disciples is to be a church that believes the Bible is the inspired Word of God and communicates to the congregation its value and worth. This is a Church that has a high view of Scripture and communicates to all in the church that we are a church that spends time in the Bible, looking to the Bible for our 'marching orders.' This type of church takes making disciples seriously. This may seem at first glance to be a given in the Western Church, but it's surprising to me how many church leaders say with their mouth that the

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9. John 13:14

10. Galatians 6:2

11. Hebrews 10:24-25

12. Galatians 5:13

13. Ephesians 4:25

Bible is reliable and is the inspired Word of God, only to clearly not show that belief with their actions. The clearest example we have of a Church leader who says with their lips that the Bible is reliable in all areas of life but does not make that a priority in their ministry at their church are the 95% of Western Churches that don't have a reproducible disciple making strategy. Although Jesus clearly commands us to make disciples, many in our churches simply are not doing it: Their words and their actions don't match up. In order to have a church that is making disciples that make disciples, the church leaders need to determine both what the Bible is and then, if it is the inspired word of God, they need to go to extreme efforts to communicate that to their congregation.

### Notes for Church Leaders

The first step in this is instilling at your church a 'if the Bible says it, we do it' mentality. This goes a long way as you communicate that God's word is authoritative and you're going to obey it to the letter. This will play itself out in a number of ways: Whether it's when conflict comes about and you walk through the biblical conflict models to randomly asking congregation members 'What are you learning from God's word today?' it's always communicated that at your church, you love the Bible because God speaks and directs through the Bible. These shifts will create an environment where it's completely normal for those at the church to be talking about the Bible, encouraging one another from the Bible,

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asking one another what they are learning from the Bible, quizzing each other on Bible verses they've just memorized. These are all ways that you as a leader can create a 'Bible-first' culture. If we believe, as the writer of Hebrews did, that 'the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account',<sup>14</sup> then we want our people to be in God's word constantly.

We all know the power of good preaching from God's word. For the church leader who wants his congregation to know the power contained in God's word, powerfully preaching and teaching from God's word is a great step. It seems to me that far too many pastors today are overly worried about having a 'relevant' sermon for their people on Sunday morning. If we believe that the Bible has authority because God's authority is absolute, there should be nothing more relevant to our culture today than the Word of God. The Bible transcends time, tradition and culture.

Finally, as I'm sure you are aware, your congregation is watching you as a leader of your church. Biblical obedience in your own life and how you apply it to your own life will speak volumes to those that are watching how you handle God's word. If you loosely obey Scripture in your own life, that speaks volumes to those

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14. Hebrews 4:12-13

in your congregation watching your life. This can play itself out in a million different ways. For example, in your own life, have you developed a life plan and daily living plan that is based on God's word? This may include everything from developing a plan on how interactions with those of the opposite sex that you are not married to are handled to how you handle your personal financial money decisions. To be able to quote Scripture and mention how those verses shaped your plan in these areas of your life speaks volumes.

### Notes for Members of a Congregation

One of the pet peeves I've had in the churches where I've been involved is hearing a pastor give a sermon on a topic only to see non-obedience by either the pastor or the actions of the church on that very topic. Quick example: It has been very common for me to hear a sermon on our need as Christians to be sharing the Gospel with those around us. In fact, this is probably one of the most common sermons that we hear, mostly because of the clear biblical admonitions in this area. And yet, as I stated earlier in this book, only 10% of Western Churches have regular classes for their members on how to share the Gospel and their story (testimony) on how they came to Christ. My extensive research has shown that it is this conundrum that causes most Christians to feel conflicted and leads then to thoughts among many Christians like, 'I want to share Christ because I know I'm supposed to, but no one has ever taught me how and it

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seems a little scary, so it's probably best that I don't because I'm going to mess it up anyway.' If you ever see this type of thing happening at your church, be sure to mention it to your pastor. 'Pastor, I heard you teaching that we should be sharing about Christ last Sunday, but I don't know how.... Can you teach me?' And this goes for any potential contradiction that you see in the difference between teaching from the pulpit and the actions that follow at the church. Feel free to ask someone about that, and it may lead to a good conversation that causes you to see that you were wrong in your perception of the issue, or it may lead to some changes in the way the church works.

In addition to that, may I strongly encourage you to take an interest in theology. I'm often surprised at how few of the people I know from church have an interest in theology, but it seems to make sense to me that if you are a Christian, that you'd want to know more about your faith through the study of God. A big first step in this area is a hard one for many Western peoples to swallow... We must put down our phones and cut down on time watching television and stop consuming so much of the varied entertainment options we have available to us. Talk to your pastor about putting together a list of books that you should read to begin gaining additional knowledge about God. Taking an hour a day to read a good, hearty theology title, in addition to your regular Bible reading, will do wonders for your walk with God and for your church. As you can imagine, as your

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understanding of God and His word grows, you'll be able to discern even more clearly both if there is any heresy being taught at your church and understand when topics taught on are incomplete.

### **Area #2: A Steely-Eyed Commitment to Making Disciples that Make Disciples**

In my book on the 6 Marks of a Church that Makes Disciples, I write about the United States Navy SEAL Team. As an avid exercise fan, I love reading about the SEALs and the rigorous training it takes to be a Navy SEAL. The Navy SEALs are the most elite special forces in the United States. To become a Navy SEAL, one must go through some of the most demanding and arduous training of any military force in the world. The main point of all that difficult training is to craft these soldiers into a special forces team that can be called on for the most difficult missions in the military. As we all know, if you want something done with excellence, it takes discipline, training and will power. And while I'm not suggesting that elders teams need to go through Navy SEAL training to lead their church (how many of us could do 90 push-ups in 2 minutes or less!), I do want to communicate that being a church that makes disciples that make disciples will take a high level of commitment and discipline at your church. You must set the vision that your church will make disciples because Jesus is calling you to do it, and when Jesus calls you to do something, you set forth to do it! And regardless of

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whatever push back, complaining, threats of people leaving, beating of breasts and tearing of clothes that you encounter, you will become a church that makes disciples that make disciples.

### Notes for Church Leaders

While I can essentially guarantee you that you will have all of the things above (and more) happen at your church, my extensive research shows that if you make a firm commitment to be this type of church, while you may have some people huffing and puffing (and some leaving), you'll get back many more who God will give you that will want to join in this journey with you and those are the people who want to join you anyway. Those are the type of people who want to spend time with God, want to be growing in their walk and want to share Christ with others because of all the awesome stuff happening in their own lives and in the life of their church.

I'm often surprised how few churches I come across do not regularly talk about the reason they exist in what we'd commonly call a Mission Statement. And far too often, church leaders can't recite their mission statement to others. This indicates to me a couple of concerning issues: These church leaders haven't clearly thought and prayed through why they exist, or maybe they do have a mission statement, but it got lost somewhere in all the other church documentation. I cannot communicate this any clearer: Have a clear and concise mission statement! Together with the entire elder team, develop this

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statement through a lot of time praying and asking God why He wants your church to exist and as you drill down on this statement, make sure that it doesn't contradict Scripture in any way. Finally, as a church leader, mention this new mission statement ALL THE TIME! Before the pastor preaches, 'And we can't forget that we exist to \_\_\_\_\_' When an elder is speaking to a Sunday school class or a staff member is address those in his ministry, he is talking about why this church exists as a part of his presentation. This is what we call visionary leadership! You should want everyone at your church to know what you all are doing there and the purpose God has given your church to accomplish.

### Notes for Members of a Congregation

If you're not hearing a mission statement ever stated, it would be incumbent on you to ask the Senior Pastor and/or the elders, 'Why does this church exist?' And depending on their answer, you'll either know they have a clear vision or they don't have one. If they don't, the next question would be, 'Can I be a part of a team to help strategically think through why this church exists? It's important for me to know what I'm a part of here.' This is important as well from a donor income perspective as well, isn't it? Certainly, I think you would not want to be investing in a church ministry that doesn't know why it exists... How do you know your funds are going toward something that is having a Kingdom impact?

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### **Area #3: A Determination to Equip All Your People**

In my biblical definition of the purpose of the church, there are four things that the church is doing to glorify God. The second of those four things is that the church exists to edify its people. But what is edification and why is it so important for the church to be doing in the lives of believers? The Greek word used in the New Testament is *oikodomé*, which translated means 'the act of building.' While edification is more of a King James Bible translation of the word, it today's modern translations its translated many times as 'building up.' The Merriam-Webster dictionary definition for edify is 'to instruct and improve especially in moral and religious knowledge.'<sup>15</sup> Taking what we know about the word edify, I would simply say that in the church context, what we're looking at equipping God's people toward spiritual growth.

#### **Notes for Church Leaders**

As you look to glorify God by edifying your people, I would categorize the building up in several categories, based on Bible verses we see about this topic:

##### **1. Always be Ready Training**

In 1 Peter 3, we read, “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”<sup>16</sup> As

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16. 1 Peter 3:15

15. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/edify>

elders and pastors tasked with 'keeping watch' over the souls of your people, you'll want them to be able to share the Gospel and share their testimony. This training is important on several levels. First, it enables them to obey this biblical command to 'always be ready.' It also fits the narrative I've encouraged you in that 'if the Bible says it, we do it.' And finally, you're enabling them to bear good fruit as they learn how to share the Gospel and trust God with the results of seeing Him work in the lives of those around them. Depending on your church calendar, it would be common to have this training, which generally can be done in a few sessions, every 6 months or so.

## 2. Handling the Word of Truth Rightly Training

In 2 Timothy 2, we read this admonition for us to, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”<sup>17</sup> While there's a lot packed into the verse, we see Paul instructing Timothy to be handling the Word 'rightly', meaning handling it correctly, with accuracy. Of course, the way we do that is by study and testing, spending time in God's word to know it well. As we do that, we are showing God that we're glorifying and honoring Him, without any shame to represent Him in this world.<sup>18</sup> One of your jobs is to help your people be this type of disciple, and this type of equipping takes focus and time. I've seen this done well in a couple of ways: In Men's and Women's Bible Studies,

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17. 2 Timothy 2:15

18. Romans 1:16

topical studies where participants are held accountable to be in God's word are good. One church I've studied as regular evening classes on everything from 'Genesis to Revelation' survey courses to Spiritual Disciplines training, regular training courses that equip your people through the context of continual growth in a few key areas is essential. One of the best curriculums that I know of is The Navigators 2:7 Series.<sup>19</sup> This discipleship training curriculum has three workbooks that are 11 weeks each and would be a great series to go through with all your people.

### 3. Be Witnesses of Jesus Worldwide Training

Throughout the New Testament, the message that we are God's Plan A for reaching the world with the Gospel is clear and yet, it seems to me that very few Western Christians have a heart to reach anyone for Jesus. As a Church leader, you have the ability to help your people have a heart for the lost, both in your local area and around the world. From the last words of Jesus in Acts 1 that we 'will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'<sup>20</sup> to the most popular passage on the Great Commission, the command Jesus gives us to 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.'<sup>21</sup>

This training can run the gamut from 'Reaching

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19. <https://www.navigators.org/resource/the-27-series>

20. Acts 1:8

21. Matthew 28:19-20

your Neighbors' training to offering Perspectives on the World Christian Movement<sup>22</sup> training every 6 months, training your people to see how they can get threaded into God's story of redeeming people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to Himself. This is essential if you're going to be a church that is making disciples that make disciples.

### Notes for Members of a Congregation

If you are a congregation member at a church, the simple note for you here is to observe what training in these three areas your church provides, and if you don't see these courses being offered, ask a leader why they are not offering this training. If you have spiritual gifts in teaching, offer to be a teacher for one of these courses. For the Navigators 2:7 series for example, there are helps for those leading the courses built into the curriculum. And finally, remember that it's not OK if you're church doesn't have any of this type of training. There so much about the responsibilities of the pastors and elders that they are missing. Don't stand for this inaction!

### **Area #4: A Confident Expectation in the Power of the Gospel**

As I work with Churches, I'm often surprised how many Western churches and church denominations today do not have an expectation that the Gospel can transform the life of any person: From the drug addict, the guy addicted to porn, to the lady that has an eating

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22. <https://www.perspectives.org/>

disorder, the God who is able to do 'abundantly more than all we could ever ask or imagine'<sup>23</sup> wants to set us free and give us a new life in Christ. It seems that in our Western context, it's easy for us to get complacent in our church life and forget who we really serve and what He is completely capable of doing. The church who has this expectation can say that whomever may walk through the doors of the church, no sin and no life circumstance is beyond hope in Christ. The Bible is full of stories of people who believed in this power. Quick example: In Acts 3 we see Peter and John speaking to those who marveled at their healing of the lame beggar, "And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all."<sup>24</sup> Whether the person walking through the doors is physically lame, or has any number of other physical or emotional ailments, faith in Jesus restores it all!

### Notes for Church Leaders

In this area, Romans 1:16 is always my first 'go to' passage, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." In the Gospel, we have the power of God... Think on that for a minute! Certainly we can say that whoever walk through the doors of your church, the Gospel interjected and accepted in their lives can radically transform their lives. Please don't take

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23. Ephesians 3:20

24. Acts 3:16

offense, but you must believe that to be true with every fiber of your being, and if you don't, you should, especially in your line of work. Remember those stats about Western church pastors I quoted in the introduction to this book? I have to think that those percentages would not be so high if pastors really believed this to be true. Because if you know that the power of God is present in your Gospel saturated ministry, what would you have to worry about? We're talking about the POWER OF GOD here! The one who created everything, is in charge of everything and controls everything? The only reason we wouldn't rest in this power is if we didn't believe it to be true.

Today as you continue in ministry, may I ask you to rest in the power of the Gospel, knowing that as you minister through the Gospel, for God so loved everyone that God places in your midst and He sent His Son to die for them all and He want them all to submit to Him toward a life of transformation.

### Notes for Members of a Congregation

In none of my writing would I ever encourage you to leave your church, since I don't know exactly what is going on at your church, but it is this area where I would probably come the closest to this type of recommendation. Over the years, my wife and I have been 'people that stick' when it comes to our church, even through things that we didn't end up liking about our church. It takes a lot for us to separate from a fellowship!

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A church who does not believe that the Gospel can transform anyone's life and does not believe, either through actions or words, that the Gospel has the power of God would be right of the top of our list in terms of why we would ever leave a church. My encouragement to you simply would be as you assess your church's leaderships' belief whether the Gospel can transform anyone's life, taking what you find seriously is important for your continued involvement there.

**Area #5: Spiritual Growth Happens  
Primarily through Community**

In the churches that I've researched that are making disciples that make disciples, they are churches that discover the true redemptive power of community. I've found that the vast majority of spiritual growth happens within the context of community. And while many Churches have small groups, Sunday school classes and other communities meeting together, I'm afraid that many churches have started a disciple-making resource that seems and remains incomplete. In biblical community, we want to be connecting people in authentic relationships that lead to spiritual transformation.

What am I actually talking about here? I'm primarily talking about your church's small group ministry, sometimes called community groups. It is in these small

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## **MIKE'S HOT TAKE**

I've written a lot about this in my book *Keeping Watch Over Souls: The 6 Marks of a Church that Makes Disciples*. In Chapter 5, I give you full 'how to' instructions, including how to make sure that those leading small groups have the resources and accountability they need to succeed and 6 Core Community Values that enable these groups to see people growing spiritually. These Core Values are key because they set a standard for what these groups will be doing together.

groups where relationships are built, and as standards are set about what the goals are for the group. These standards generally are centered around areas like encouraging one another to abide daily in Christ, to be devoted to one another and to exhort one another toward maturity. Paul's admonition in Colossians 3 is lived out daily as he states, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another."<sup>25</sup> When counsel is given within the group, it's biblical counsel and the group members are encouraging one another toward finding where God wants to use them to fulfill the Great Commission. Finally, in one of the areas of this book that may make you do a 'spit take,' I strongly believe that these groups need to be meeting weekly for them to be effective. It's hard to be counseling and encouraging one another in these areas if you only

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25. Colossians 3:16

see each other one night a month!

### Notes for Church Leaders

I know that to do community with this type of intentionality may be extremely hard. In your responsibility in the 'elder job description' verses, I strongly believe it takes this intentionality to obey them well. Think of it this way: When my kids were little, they would have wanted to eat jelly beans and donuts every day of their lives if I would have let them, but as their parent, I have to make sure they are getting fed good nutritional food (with jelly beans and donuts only occasionally.) Ask yourself the question, 'As one who is watching over the souls of my congregation, what is it that they need to be growing spiritually?' Meeting in community in this way leads to life and peace. In Romans 8, Paul is teaching on the difference between living in the flesh or living in the Spirit. As he is making conclusions in his teaching, he writes, "to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."<sup>26</sup> Leading your people toward life and peace goes a long way in your pursuit to obey Hebrews 13:17 and Acts 20:28. Remember as you get 'blow back' from some of your people about the intentionality and frequency of the new community groups that obedience, both yours to the Scripture passages you are responsible to obey, and their obedience as believers in Christ, is not determined by the outcome. If you get a lot of people grumbling, that is irrelevant to you since you want to be a 'God's word

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26. Romans 8:6

says it, so we do it' church.

### Notes for Members of a Congregation

The obvious first thought here is that it is easy for you to look at the activities and programs at your church and assess if there is a small group ministry. If there isn't, asking a pastor or elder about that would be appropriate. You can ask them how the congregation members can be 'teaching and admonishing one another' without the opportunity to be 'doing life' with others at the church. If there is a community group type ministry where the groups are only meeting once a month, this brings out another conversation for you to have with a pastor. My extensive research and experience have shown me that we can't be a good community if we meet once a month in a 'supper club' style group to swap information. It is the disciple making group that will increasingly intertwine their lives with each other, and it's my deep conviction that it is the biblical community group that meets together at least once a week. Here's the logic you can follow: You want to be growing spiritually because you want to be a fully devoted disciple of Jesus. It is through community that helps bring the Word of God to life and communal prayer ignites life change. You know you need people holding you accountable to be the person of God that He's asking you to be, because it's just too easy to let things slide in your life. I heartily encourage you to be encouraging the leaders in your church to work hard in this area!

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## Epilogue

I hope this book has been a good overview for you in relation to what a disciple of Jesus looks like and what a church that makes disciples that make disciples focuses on. The instruction on God's desire both for us as Christians to be fully devoted and to our churches to have all our effort flow from or lead toward making disciples is crystal clear. In my ministry, I spend a lot of time praying about and focusing effort to create resources that help churches and those in churches find ways to find victory in obeying these commands and finding Great Commission fulfillment. Because this is on my mind almost all the time, I was struck with an important concept that may help us as we find solutions to these issues as I was talking with my son recently, who is in the United States Air Force.

In the United States Military, few core principles are more serious than a respect for the chain of command. Those in the military take this principle so seriously that a failure to adhere to it can result in serious ramifications. Among those ramifications could be a charge of insubordination, which among other things, is the act of willfully disobeying an order given by a superior officer. The order given must be obeyed when it's a lawful order given as a command and directed at an individual. It

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must pertain to the person's military duty and the person receiving the order must have knowledge of the order. This charge is so serious because of the way that the chain of command works in the military as a primary way to maintain order, enabling the military to complete their purpose and the missions they undertake. The penalties for a charge of insubordination range from dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of pay and allowances, and/or up to 3 years in prison.

In our world as disciples of Jesus, we also have a chain of command, and we have a commander who has given us certain things to do. The Bible tells us that this commander has full authority over all the universe!<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that it is also imperative that we in the Western Church not be found guilty of an insubordination charge. God wants to use us as His plan A to reach the World for Christ and make disciples that make disciples. As I've detailed in this book and in other book resources I've written, a disciple of Jesus wants to obey Jesus, and clearly, Jesus has given us commands around proclaiming the Gospel, making disciples, and being His witnesses in our local area and around the world. What does it say about us that we largely don't want to do the very things He is asking us to do? With only 5% of our churches intentionally making disciples and few of us interested in reaching our world for Christ, is it unfair to say that we in the Western Church are guilty of insubordination as well? In our work with One Eight Catalyst,<sup>2</sup> the original vision we believe God gave us was

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1. Psalm 103:19

2. [www.OneEightCatalyst.org](http://www.OneEightCatalyst.org)

to connect the Western Church and its resources with the effort to reach unreached people groups for Christ. There is an example I often use to show how we may not be obeying the commands we see here as well as we could.

In our world today, according to Joshua Project, there are 7,739 people groups<sup>29</sup> around the world that are in the 'unreached' category, meaning that these people groups have less than 2% Christians among them. This 'less than 2%' designation is significant because it means that there are not enough Christians to reach the rest of the people within their ethnic people group, so they remain unreached and unaware of the Gospel message. For the last 10 years, the number of unreached people groups hasn't changed very much. And yet, we in the Western Church have the financial and human resources to reduce the number of unreached people groups worldwide. According to one online source,<sup>3</sup> for example, there are over 27,000 Christian Churches in Texas alone, which means that if three of these churches banded together to focus on one unreached people group, the number of unreached people groups would get to zero within 10 years or so! Imagine then the speed that job could be done with the hundreds of thousands of churches throughout the Western world!

Western Church, being and making disciples who make disciples is the way we ensure we're not fomenting insubordination against God and His word. We can do it!

I have a story I often tell of the impact we can have

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3. <http://www.texascounties.net/statistics/churches2010.htm>

when we focus on being and making disciples who make disciples. As I've detailed in this book, disciple making is a process by which a discipler spends time with people who have been won to Christ with the heart of seeing those people grow in their walk with Christ and disciple others. The process of multiplication shows itself true when this disciple making process is at work.

Let's say I spend time with a man for one year, with the idea that I'm helping him grow spiritually, with an eye on also helping him disciple someone else. At the end of the year, I tell him that I think it's time for him to go find someone to disciple, and I'm going to find someone new to impact for the next year. At the end of that year, the four of us are ready to find someone new, so at the end of that year, there are eight of us. The eight become sixteen, which becomes thirty-two, and if we were able to keep this multiplication going, we'd reach the entire world for Christ and have all those people disciplined in thirty two years! While we all know that hiccups happen and it'd be nearly impossible to keep the string going perfectly, it's a good illustration for the impact you can have if you focus on Jesus command for us to 'go and make disciples.'

Entire cities, countries and people groups can be transformed for the Gospel if we obey Jesus' commands and show Him we love Him by bearing good fruit for Him. And allow me to bring that home for just a minute... If your church has five elders and three executive level pastors, what if the eight of you were each meeting with a man weekly, helping him grow spiritually? According to

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this multiplication principle, in just five years, you'd have 256 leaders at your church, equipped to reach your city for Christ!

So Western Church, I hope I've been helpful to you in this small book in the process of being and making disciples. I've shown you what a disciple of Jesus is and what they prioritize in their lives. I've given Church leaders five areas to focus on in making disciples that make disciples at your church. Do you remember them?

1. High View of Scripture
2. A Steely-Eyed Commitment to Making Disciples that Make Disciples
3. A Determination to Equip All Your People
4. A Confident Expectation in the Power of the Gospel
5. Spiritual Growth Happens Primarily through Community

I've referenced several other book resources that you can use to progress in this process. And of course, you already have your Bible that you can use as the ultimate guide. Now it's up to you. Read the Bible and do what it says. I'll be praying for you as you go through the process, and if I can be of any help to you along the way, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Ready... Set... Go!

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**Additional Notes:**

