

HOW TO RELEASE
A MISSIONAL MOVEMENT BY
DISCIPLING PEOPLE
LIKE JESUS DID

BUILDING A DISCIPLING CULTURE

MIKE BREEN



Building A Discipling Culture

Third Edition

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First printing 2009

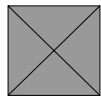
Second Edition 2011

Third Edition 2017

Printed in the United States of America

Design: Blake Berg

ISBN: 978-0-692-86234-6



3DM Publishing

3dmpublishing.com

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Note from Mike

It's hard to believe that it's been 10 years since the first edition of *Building a Discipling Culture* was released. Since its release, I have heard countless stories about how these principles have impacted hundreds of thousands of people all around the world.

I don't say that to brag. I say it because it's good news. As someone who seeks to follow Jesus' Great Commission to make disciples, it is tremendously encouraging to see how the ideas spelled out in this book have helped people do exactly that.

I decided to put together a new edition of *Building a Discipling Culture* so that I could put the latest iteration of these ideas into the hands of the movement. So in this edition, you'll find new material that includes:

- An updated introduction that explains the importance of the context of Family on Mission in Building a Discipling Culture
- The Five Capitals: thinking about how we pour ourselves into others and into mission. This section includes:
 - The Three As: considering how we can follow Jesus' example and avoid the core temptations of ambition, appetite, and approval
- New culture-creating language for the Person of Peace Strategy via a new shape

I'm eager to here the continuing stories of how *Building a Discipleship Culture* supports and resources the discipleship movement around the world. I pray that you and your family on mission will find this book a blessing as you embrace Jesus' Great Commission call to make disciples.

—M+

PART 1

UNDERSTANDING
DISCIPLESHIP

1

THE CHALLENGE

We live in a world of seismic shifts.

And these tremors are coming more and more quickly.

In the old days, we measured these shifts by ages. The Stone Age. The Bronze Age. The Iron Age. The Middle Ages.

Then came the Industrial Revolution, after which seismic shifts were measured not by centuries but by generations. The Machine Age, from 1880 until the First World War. The Atomic Age, from 1945 to around 1970. The Information Age, starting in 1970.

With the advent of the internet, things change even more quickly. Once you could email anyone around the world. Now you speak, face to face, at the touch of the button on a mobile device. Before long, your smartphone will be a smartwatch or another connected device you're

actually wearing. Who's to guess what may happen next.

Each of these developments fundamentally changes the way we live. Once, revolutions around the world happened without notice. Then television coverage changed the way we viewed the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s. A photograph shown around the world made us remember Tianamen Square revolts in China in 1989. We followed the Arab Spring on social media in 2011. The changes in technology fundamentally changed how we experience life.

These seismic shifts leave us shaking. And this is our common experience.

Those of us who are Christians must deal with these seismic shifts, no matter where we fall on the spectrum of faith. Protestant. Conservative. Mainline. Evangelical. Post-modern. Emergent. Neo-Reformed. Neo-orthodox. Fundamentalists. Ancient Future. Neo-monastic. Seeker Sensitive. Seeker Aware. Bible-believing. Charismatic. Dispensationalist. I could go on and on.

There are endless things that divide us: theologically, philosophically, practically. Some of those divisions are very real and quite important.

But for all of the things that divide us, the culture around us is a shared experience. It is one that we must live in successfully if we are to follow Jesus' command to go and make disciples.

A few years ago, my team and I commissioned a study to get to the heart of what keeps orthodox Christian leaders up at night. Our goal wasn't to figure out what divided us. We wanted to figure out what we are all experiencing together as orthodox Christian leaders.

What we found wasn't that surprising, but the singular voice with which these questions were asked was nothing short of stunning. These were the questions:

- What does the church of the future look like?
- How do we reach people who don't know Jesus?

As we dug around, continued to ask questions, listened and pieced together what people were saying, another question surfaced.

It was a question that people tiptoed around, but never once articulated explicitly. Yet so many responses indicated this was a question that they desperately needed an answer to. It was the question that no one was actually asking, or perhaps that no one had the courage to ask out loud. It is the question people don't want to admit not having the answer to.

Yet it is the question that everything else hinges on.

The answer leads to the future of the church. The answer teaches us how to reach people who don't know Jesus. The answer is everything.

And yet, either we haven't realized we should be asking it, or we can't seem to push ourselves to ask the question. It's as if it's embarrassing to even ask. Isn't this something we should have figured out by now? You could argue we are the most educated people who have ever lived, thanks to our ever-shifting technology and connectivity. Why are we wrestling with this question, and why don't we have good answers for it?

This is *the* question.

HOW DO WE MAKE DISCIPLES?

This question is at the core of every other question we hear about the church in our world.

- How do we grow the church of the future?
- Or, if you think things aren't going well, how do make sure the church of the future survives?

- How do we reach people who don't know Jesus?
- How do we change things for the better in our society?
- How do we bring the gospel to dark places marked by oppression and terror and the worst evil man or the demons could imagine?

It's all about making disciples.

This question doesn't only apply on a macro level. It is just as relevant in your specific context and your everyday life.

- How can my church grow (or survive) in the future?
- How do I reach that person—co-worker or neighbor or family member or friend—who doesn't know Jesus?
- How will my community change?
- How can I bring the gospel to the dark places I see and encounter and walk through every day?

It's all about making disciples.

So how do we do it?

THERE IS NO "PLAN B"

The problem is that most of us have been educated and trained to build, serve and lead the organization of the church. Most of us have actually never been trained to make disciples. Seminary degrees, church classes, and training seminars teach us to grow our volunteer base, form systems and organizational structures, or preach sermons on Sunday mornings and assimilate newcomers from the Sunday service. As we look around and see Christendom crumbling and the landscape of the church forever changing, a stark revelation emerges:

Most of us have been trained and educated for a world that *no longer* exists because of the seismic shifts that ripple through culture more and

more frequently.

However, the call to make disciples still remains. It never wavers and never changes. Make disciples.

Here's the thing that can be difficult to wrap our minds around: If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.

Most of us have become quite good at the church thing. And yet, disciples are the only thing Jesus cares about, and it's the only number Jesus is counting. Not our attendance or budget or buildings. He wants to know if we are "making disciples."

Many of us serve in or lead churches where we have hundreds or even thousands of people showing up on Sunday. But we have to honestly answer this question: Do their lives look like the lives of the people we see in Scripture? Are we just good at getting people together once a week and maybe into a small group, or are we actually good at producing the types of people we read about in the New Testament? Have we shifted our criteria for a good disciple as someone who shows up to our stuff, gives money, and occasionally feeds poor people?

Effective discipleship builds the church, not the other way around. We need to understand the church as the *effect* of discipleship and not the *cause*. If you set out to build the church, there is no guarantee you will make disciples. It is far more likely that you will create consumers who depend on the spiritual services that religious professionals provide.

For several years now, "missional" has been a buzzword in and around the church. People want to create missional churches or missional programs or missional small groups.

The thing is, we don't have a missional problem in the Western church.

We have a *discipleship problem*. If you know how to disciple people well, you will always get mission. Always. Somewhere along the way, we started separating being missional from being a disciple, as if somehow the two could be separated. Pastors started saying they didn't want to be inwardly focused, so they stopped investing in the people in their churches so they could focus on people outside their churches.

Granted, we should focus on people who don't know Jesus yet, but Jesus himself gave us the model for doing that: *Disciple people*. If you know how to actually make disciples, you'll reach people who don't know Jesus. Because that's simply what disciples do. That was Jesus' whole plan. If you disciple people, as these people do mission in their everyday comings and goings, with the work and shaping of the Spirit, the future of the church will emerge.

It all starts with making disciples.

Jesus has not called you to *build* his church. In fact, in all of the Gospels he mentions the church only two times. One time he mentions it, it's about conflict resolution. The other time? To say that *he will build his church*. Our job, our only job and the last instructions he gave us, was to *make* disciples. And out of this we will get the church. Out of this, the future will emerge, and out of this, there will be a missional wave the likes of which we have never seen.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

This book features a lot of practical tools, but if you look at it like a how-to book, your chances of success are frankly not great.

You could start with chapter 2 and go all the way through the last appendix, put everything you read to work, and still find it difficult to make disciples.

That's because making disciples requires *texture*, not just *structure*.

Think of it this way: which would be more fruitful?

- Trying to grow a garden in a damp, dark basement
- Or growing a garden in a yard with plenty of sunlight and rainwater

You have to have the right environment, the right texture, for the garden to thrive.

Just as garden plants thrive in the texture of abundant sunlight and rainwater, the texture in which discipleship thrives is family.

For more than 20 years, I have done missional discipleship and have trained thousands of people around the world in it too. Time and time again, we've seen it takes more than the structure of discipleship to really make disciples. That's because what really mobilizes discipleship—what fertilizes discipleship and helps it grow—is the texture of family.

In the 3DM movement, we talk about this in terms of Family on Mission. It's the texture of discipleship that allows the structure to do its job. Family on Mission is the music to the lyrics of discipleship. Family on Mission is how we stop thinking of discipleship as a task that we do and start living out discipleship as a way that we are. Family on Mission is how we stop doing discipleship as a class, program, or curriculum, and start living it as a way of life.

I have been fascinated by the popularity of *The Walking Dead*. Here is a self-described extended family made of blood and non-blood relationships that can only survive in a perilous world if it works together. Parents are no longer seen as threats, but more as flawed mentors and heroes. And children no longer compete for affection; rather, they collaborate for common goals.

The dystopian worlds of *The Walking Dead*, *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent* may be overdone, but the millennials genuinely fear that the overconsumption of the Boomers and the inactivity of Gen X have left them with a starkly uncertain future full of seismic shifts. Even the most cursory glance at television and cinema suggests that millennials believe that only heroes and heroic families can meet the challenge of the coming day.

Wherever they can, the emerging generation is seeking the succor and security of the extended family. From missional communities to homesteading and from Families on Mission to blended families, the emerging generation is showing a distinct desire to shake loose the rampant consumerism and deconstructionism of the past and move toward a reconstruction of the extended family—using the human materials and relational tools from the past and the present.

This tells me that, if those of us who are seeking to build our lives around the call to make disciples will do so in the texture of Family on Mission, we are pushing on an open door with the millennial generation. We are lifting up something they are longing to see, we are doing something they are already deeply committed to emulating. And so I'm very encouraged.

I talk at length about how we have created this kind of Family on Mission in my book of the same name, so I won't cover that ground again here. But I can't help but note now how vital this concept is as I talk about how we make disciples.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

In the upcoming chapters of this book, I'll share the vehicles, language, and basics of how I have learned to disciple people over the past thirty-plus years. I learned to do this in the crucible of post-Christian Europe. In the place where many of these ideas and practices sprung up, less than 1% of people were attending church, and a missional revolution

still began. What I have found, over and over again, is that if you disciple people it will always lead to mission. I've seen this in Europe. In Africa and South America, in Asia and yes... in the United States.

Jesus' model for seeing heaven colliding into earth, for seeing the Kingdom of God advance in community, for seeing the world put to rights and people becoming Christians, was discipleship. Period. That was his whole deal. So if you're counting converts, budget or buildings first and foremost, you're not counting the things that Jesus counted, and you're not counting the thing that will change the world: Disciples.

I want to be clear: I'm not saying this is the only way to disciple people or even the best way. This method has worked in shaping us, teaching us to be learners of Jesus, and has now successfully shaped and transformed communities all over the world. It isn't a perfect system because there are no perfect systems (which is particularly true when you realize discipleship is a relational endeavor depending on broken people living in the grace of God!). I humbly offer this book and my journey as a possible way of moving forward and once again taking seriously the Great Commission of *making disciples*.