

MAKING DISCIPLES



By
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CHAPTER 3

BUILDING A LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

**“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**

**Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
that by testing you may discern what is the will of God,
what is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

Romans 12:1-2.



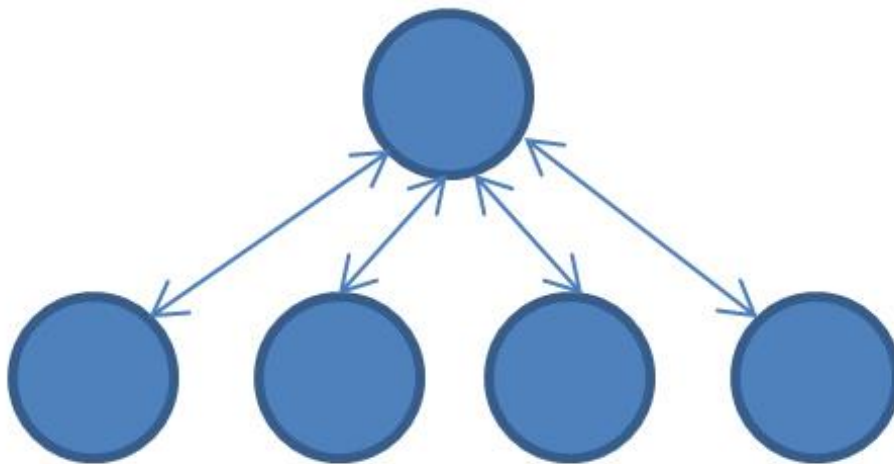
As we begin to gather people together to form a local church or ministry and work to develop a plan for a structure to develop spiritual formation in the lives of those who attend we must wrestle with the question of what kind of leadership model we are going to incorporate. Many churches incorporate a pulpit-driven leadership model. It involves a

pastor who is the top dog of the church. He or she may work with a group of elders, or a board, but for the most part the pastor is the one who calls the shots. The pastor is the one who does most of the preaching and teaching. The pastor is the one who designs the plan for spiritual formation, leadership development, vision, and priorities of the church – or the lack thereof.

Drawing Circles

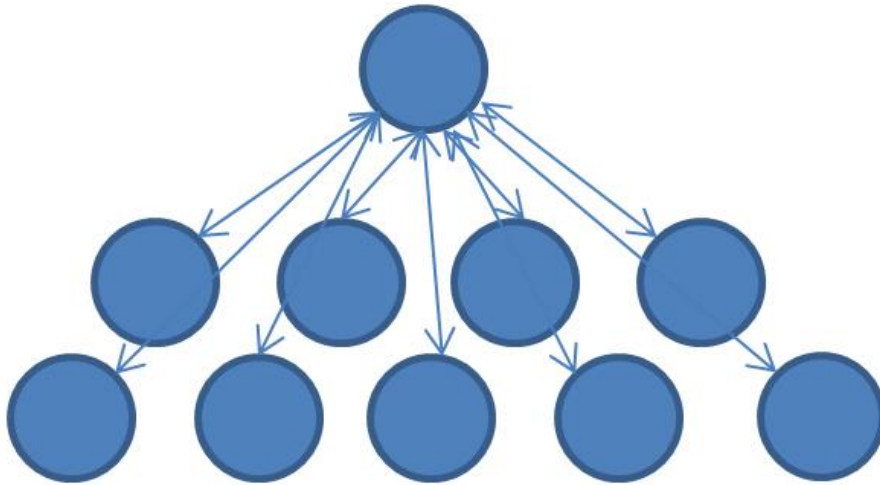
There are inherent limitations in a pulpit-driven leadership model. Let me try to explain this concept to you by drawing circles.

Let's say that the top circle represents me as a pastor. Aren't I a good-looking, symmetrical kind of a guy? Ha. Ha.



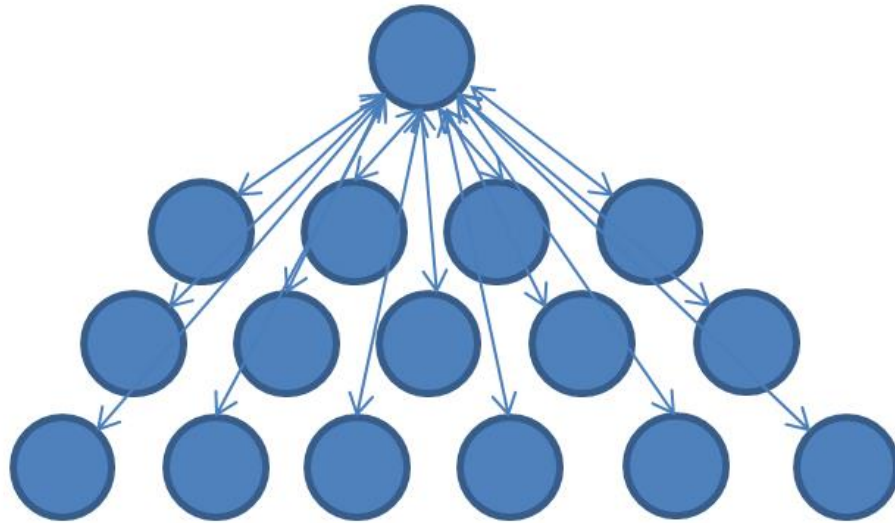
As a pastor I am a disciple of Jesus Christ and I am intentionally placing myself in a position of influence over others who are interested in knowing more about Jesus Christ. I'm praying for the others, serving them, demonstrating Christ's love to them, sharing the Gospel message with them, and they eventually come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Then, I work to teach them what following Christ looks like. I teach them how to read and study the Bible, how to pray, how to discover and use spiritual gifts, etc.

Those in the second row experience a life change as Christ does His amazing work in their lives and they begin to take steps of spiritual formation that are on the positive side of the Engel Scale. At some point, their spiritual formation prompts them to influence others around them for the sake of the Kingdom. They invite others to come and meet me, because I am the person who influenced them, and it leads to the next image.



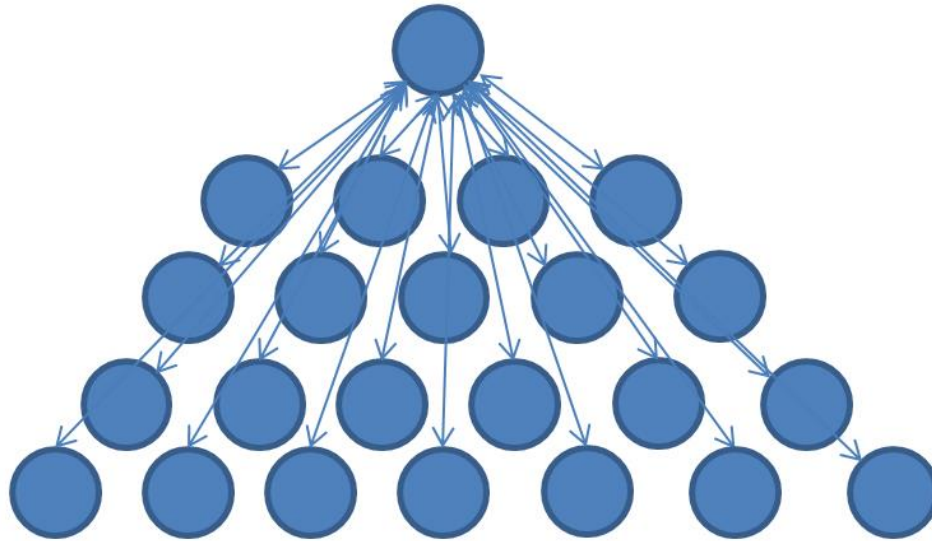
I am now ministering to those I led to Christ *and* their friends. I am praying for the new row, loving on them, serving them, sharing the Gospel message with them, and this row eventually come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior. I then work to teach them what following Christ looks like. All the while I am still ministering to those who initially came to Christ. I now teach the new row how to read and study the Bible, how to pray, how to discover and use spiritual gifts, etc.

They too experience a life change and take that life-changing message to others in their life. They bring more people to come and meet the person who influenced them and it leads to the next image.

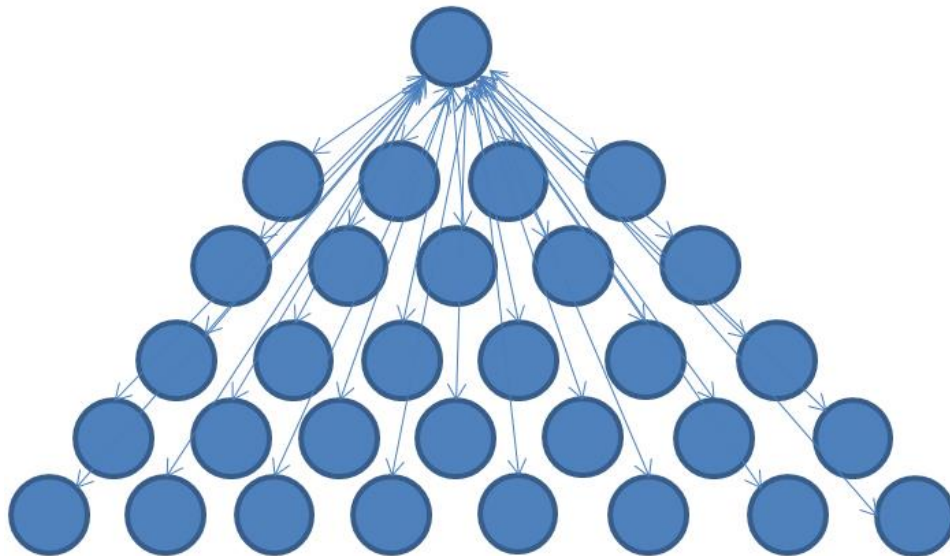


Having developed a successful process by which I am able to influence others, I now pray for the new row, love on them, serve them, share the Gospel message with them, and the new row eventually comes to know Jesus Christ as their Savior as well. Then, I strive to show them what following Christ looks like. All the while I am still ministering to those in rows one and two. The new row is invited to join the others as I teach everyone how to read and study the Bible, how to pray, how to discover and use spiritual gifts, etc.

They too experience a life change and take that life-changing message to others in their life. They bring others to come and meet the person who influenced them and it leads to the next image.



And so on... and so on...and so on.



Does this image look familiar to you? It's the model of the modern church! A pastor, a Sunday school teacher, or a ministry leader has a great influence over a group of people and these people are dependent on the pastor, the Sunday school teacher, or ministry leader to help them grow in their faith. Notice that the arrows only go between the pastor and the people. There are no arrows going from person in the crowd to person in the crowd. People continue to bring others into the church so that they can be influenced by the pastor or

teacher. The pastor bears most of the responsibility to meet with them, to pray for them, to teach them about Jesus, to counsel them, etc.

This model has some inherent limitations. The pastor, or ministry leader, is only one person! He or she can only meet with so many people at a time. As we talked about last chapter, there is only so much spiritual formation that can occur in a one-to-many model. As this model continues to grow it leads to the place where one person can't keep up with the needs of everyone! For a time people are patient, willing to wait their turn to have some one-on-one time with the person who discipling them (the pastor or ministry leader), but eventually, as more growth occurs, some find that the pastor or ministry leader doesn't have the time to meet their needs and they find another church to attend where they can get more one-on-one time and attention.

How Many People Can We Know?

Robin Dunbar was a British anthropologist who, in the 1990s, postulated that any one person can keep track of about 150 different people in their life (Dunbar). These are people who you know well enough to remember things like birthdays, family members' names, shared interests – and people who you have personal experiences with. These are not the “acquaintances” you bump into from time to time, your long-ago friends from High School, or all of those friends you might have on your Facebook whom you rarely talk to. It's not the total number of people you've met, you've known in your lifetime, or you're related to. These are the people who are playing some sort of an active role in your life currently. I know, the number is subjective to a variety of factors, and it will vary from person to person, but let's work with the number that Dunbar suggested.

Let's say that the average person has about 50 family members and friends that take up part of the 150 they're keeping track of and that another 50 is taken up with work or school connections. That leaves us with 50 connections we can make in a place like a church. Again, I know this is subjective, and it will vary, but let's just work with it for the sake of this example.

No matter how large a church may be, from 50 people to 60,000 people, each person can only realistically keep track of about 50 people in the church. You can only know so many names, so many birthdays, so many family facts, favorite sports teams, etc. Because people in groups tend to want to personally know and be known by others in groups, and in many cases want to know *everyone* in a group, churches have tended to be limited to a size where any one person can maintain connections with most of the others in the group.

A Barna Group study done in 2003 reported that the average Protestant church size in America is 89 adults. The report said that 60% of churches have less than 100 adults and that only 2% have over 1,000 adults in attendance.

With the weekly attendance numbers at churches like Saddleback 22,000, Willow Creek 25,000, Calvary Chapel 18,000, and the Gateway Church 27,000 (along with dozens of other churches reporting more than 5,000 in attendance each week) – there have to be thousands of churches with attendance less than 50 per week in order to create an average attendance of 89 per week. It's easy to see that the vast majority of churches in America have a weekly attendance of somewhere around 50 adults.

I suggest that there are two reasons why most churches have about 50 adults in attendance:

1. Most people want to know everyone who goes to church with them.
2. Most people want the pastor to be the one who cares for everyone in the church.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with either of these things, they tend to become factors that limit church growth rather than factors that enhance church growth. A church must develop ministries that allow people to connect on smaller levels if they are going to grow beyond numbers where everyone can know everyone else. This is usually done through small groups and targeted Bible studies or ministries.

In this pulpit-driven ministry model someone must come to the pastor anytime they have questions, need counseling, or want to take further steps to become involved in the church. The pastor's schedule becomes the bottle-neck that limits the number of people who can be

ministered to each week. I know that I've come to realize that I've been the bottle-neck for further church growth a number of times and had to wrestle with the process of giving responsibilities over to others so that I could stop prohibiting church growth.

In the average church, for the most part, the pastor is able to maintain a connection with everyone in the church because most people don't need personal attention every week. There are some who may call each day; and there may be some situations that require many days or weeks of the pastor's attention, but for the most part emergencies in a congregation are spread out so that the pastor can manage them one at a time. Still, this often leads to burn-out in the life of the pastor, stresses on his family, and will often lead people in the congregation to leave the church in search of a church where they will receive more on-on-one time with the pastor.

If you take the pastor out of this model the church experiences crisis (sometimes the crisis is extreme). They usually won't have anyone who is able to step forward and take the pastor's place. This model may cause the church to go into a hibernation mode until they are able to find another pastor to jump start its ministries once again. During that time many will find another church to attend where they can gain more pastoral attention.

Doing Better than Average

You might look at the numbers I presented above and think, "Wow, our church has about 100 in attendance. We're better than the average." I have two thoughts for you! First, are you okay with being above average? Didn't Christ demand that we invest our all in His Kingdom? Doesn't He deserve us to strive to lead a church that is so much more than "above average?" I think so!

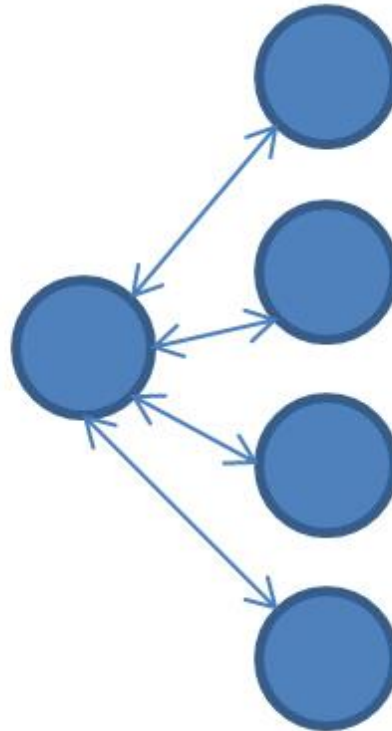
Secondly, assuming that your church only has one pastor on staff, your church might be "above average" simply because there is a retired pastor in your congregation, someone who has gone through some Bible training, or someone who is going through some pastoral training now. Perhaps they've gone to the pastor and said, "I know that you've got a lot on your plate. How about letting me head up Sunday school, the visitation ministry, leading

small groups, or something else that would free up some of your time.” In essence, you have two of these pyramids existing in your church. The people in the pews can look to one of two leaders to be their shepherd. They’re going to be able to lead about 50-100 people each, thereby doubling the amount of people they can care for as a church. You might be able to have more people around week to week, but if both of these people are taken out of the scenario now you have to watch two pyramids fall apart until new leaders can take their place.

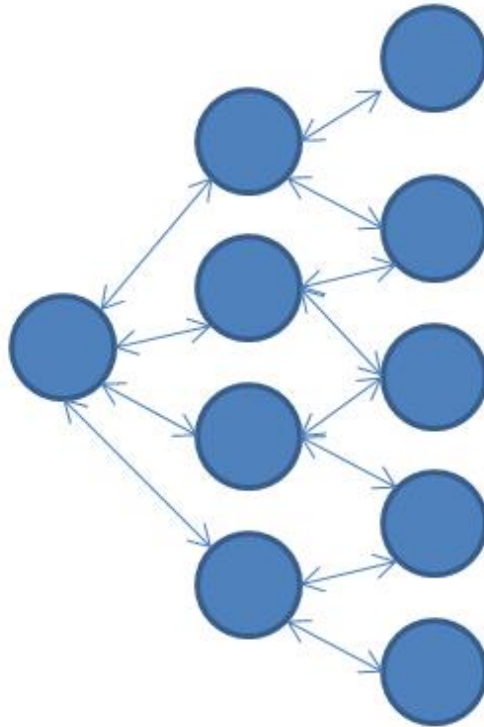
Discipleship Leadership Model

Let me present another model to you. It’s a leadership model that is based on biblical discipleship. In this model the circle on the left represents that same disciple of Jesus Christ who puts himself/herself in a position of influence over others who are interested in knowing more about Jesus Christ. That person prays for the others, serves them, loves on them, shares the Gospel message with them, and they eventually come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Then, that person works to teach them what following Christ looks like. They teach the others how to read and study the Bible, how to pray, how to discover and use their spiritual gifts, etc.

For the sake of this discussion, that person is still me. I’m still playing the part of a pastor, I’m still working on developing discipleship in the lives of others, but there are a few key differences in how I go about it! Trust me. You’ll want to read on...



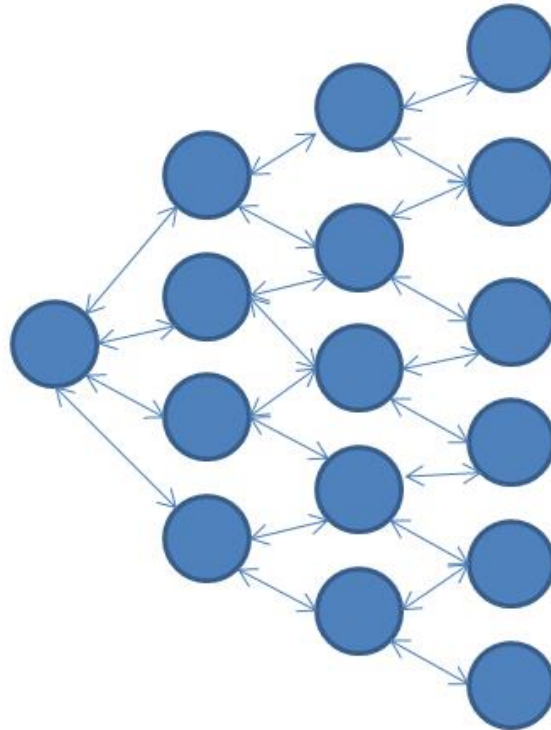
At first this model looks a lot like the pulpit-driven one. The difference in the discipleship model is that the person on the left intentionally teaches each of the people they're discipling how to have the same kind of a discipleship influence in the lives of others. Rather than encouraging them to invite others to come and meet me so that I can disciple them too, I teach them how to have that same pattern of love and commitment in the lives of others around them. The following image represents how their influence begins to spread.



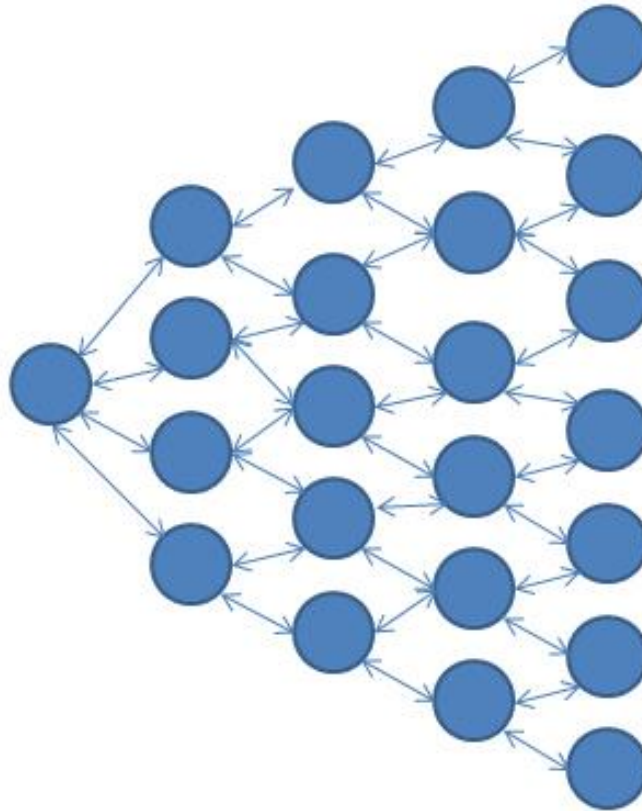
Notice the difference in the arrows. Rather than pointing everyone back to me, they take the responsibility of discipling those around them. They are praying for each other, sharing God's love with each other, teaching each other, answering questions, helping them become part of the Body of Christ, and working together to be used for the great things God has planned for His body – together.

In this model, when someone has questions about God, or practical needs that have to be met, they can depend on the person who is discipling them. When that person doesn't have the answers to their questions, or needs guidance in meeting their needs, he or she can then turn to me (the pastor) – as the one who is discipling them. I can then teach them, as the person I'm discipling, and that person can then pass that information down a level. In this scenario the person I'm discipling has learned new information about God, or ways to meet tangible needs, and has been the one who is ministering to the one they are discipling. Now they are better able to respond without help the next time these same questions or needs come up because I've taught them how to respond – rather than going around them to respond to the person they're discipling on my own.

As these new people experience a life change, and take that life-changing message to others, they depend on the person who discipling them to help them minister to others in their life. They are not dependent on the pastor – they are dependent on the person who is discipling them. This then leads to the next image.

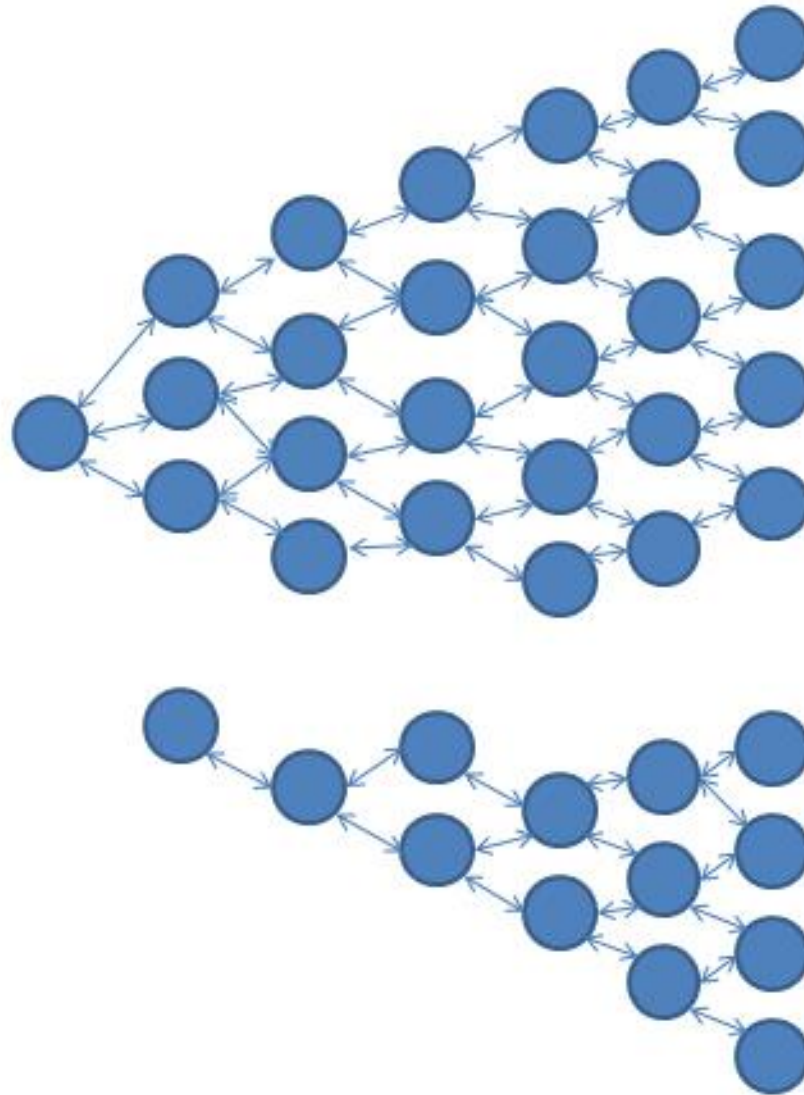


Now, as each of the levels of people are added, there are more and more people being trained in deeper discipleship knowledge and skills – and more people actively using those skills to disciple others. As each of them work to reach out to and disciple others, the church is able to grow, the leadership responsibilities are shared by those one level up, and the pastor is able to maintain a focus on those he is primarily discipling.



The limitations of the pulpit-driven model simply do not exist within the discipleship model. The majority of the pastor's time continues to be invested in a few, who are in turn investing in a few more, who are in turn investing in a few more, etc. There is no limit to the number of people who can be reached, disciplined, and cared for in this model.

In addition, as you take any one of these people out of the structure, others are trained to replace them, either in personal discipleship, or in ministry leadership. In fact, a church that has developed this discipleship model can even cut off a section of those in discipleship relationships and plant a new church with them. This new church will have healthy leadership from the start, a discipleship mentality, along with a healthy leadership growth process inherent in their DNA. The original church misses the people who are being grafted to be part of the new plant, but they have layers of leadership designed into their structure and new leaders are eager to step up into the vacant positions.



Don't get me wrong. The pastor or ministry leader is still a necessary part of the church in this leadership model. He or she still has influence over the whole church through their preaching and teaching, but they're sharing the responsibility and privilege of discipling others. As they disciple their leaders they are developing pastoral leadership discipleship skills in their lives, and they are seeing the fruit of their investment in the lives of others.

What Did Jesus Do?

Which of these models did Jesus employ in His life and ministry? If this isn't a rhetorical question for you, the answer is "The discipleship model!!!" A close look at how Jesus spent

His time in ministry will find that the amount of time He spent with people *increased* as their commitment to Him increased.

- He spent the least amount of time with the crowd.
- He spent more time with His believers.
- He spent even more time with the core believers. This would have been people like Mary, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.
- He spent even more time with His disciples. This group of disciples was first developed as He taught in the synagogue before He began His formal ministry. As He began His public ministry the number of His disciples was pared down to the final 12.
- He spent even more time with Peter, James, and John.
- We could argue that He spent the most time with either Peter or John.

Notice the spiritual benefits from Christ's investment of time and discipleship lessons. The crowd was the one who cried out to crucify Him. Many of those who claimed to be His believers weren't willing to make the sacrifices He called them to. His disciples, turned apostles, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, changed the world. Most of them were obedient to His plan for their lives even to the point of dying for their faith. As we read the book of John, the epistles that Peter wrote, and the history of the early church, we see the great benefit of the time that Christ spent with Peter and John.

Jesus invited anyone into this close, personal relationship with Him. It came with expectations and qualifications. Only those who were willing to meet those expectations were able to benefit from the close, personal one-on-one time with Him.

We Can See This Fruit Too

As a pastor, I've seen the great fruit that comes from spending time intentionally discipling the leadership of the church and asking them to spend time discipling others as well. I've set expectations and qualifications that are patterned after those Christ demanded of His disciples. Those who are willing to strive to meet them have benefitted from the time we've

spent together, and those they've disciplined have benefitted from the time they've spent with them as well.

Putting this model of leadership into action has caused me to ask the question, "How long does it take to make disciples of Christ?"