



# Crockpot Disciplemaking

How I Left My Instant Pot Behind

*A Pastor's Journey to Build a Disciplemaking Culture*

**Bill Mowry**

Author of *The Ways of the Alongsider*

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2.1 Version

# Introduction

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We all want change to happen in the church. Contemporary worship services, missional communities, or organic growth are all in today's marketplace of church change ideas. We bring our culture's values of speed, size, and more information into the church. Sometimes real change, though, is small, slow, and deep.

This is the story of Justin Forsythe, a pastor who embraced the need to start small, go slow, and build deeply into people's lives. To do this, Justin had to hang some new pictures in his mind's gallery. One picture he had to hang was that sometimes ministry is more like a crockpot than an instant pot. A crockpot cooks slowly over time while an instant pot heats and cooks almost instantly. Justin learned that real growth and change happens when we start small with a few people and go slow allowing God to build deeply into a life. Cultures are grown over time; they don't magically appear overnight.

Justin is the lead pastor at Community Springs Church, a mid-size church located in a major city. Justin is like many pastors. He is serious about his calling and wants his church to be all that God wants it to be. Justin and his small groups staff leader, Angie Gaines, have tried multiple programs and outreach events but have not seen the spiritual fruit they desired. This is Justin's story as he faced the changes needed in his church and embraced the challenge of growing a disciplemaking church.

You will be peering into Justin's journal, observing how he grew a disciplemaking culture. While Justin is fictional, all of the events have happened in the author's coaching ministry to pastors and churches.

It's time to meet Justin.

# Part I. The Report

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## September 12

My assistant brought in the consultant's report for me to read. I looked at the envelope with mixed feelings. I had been expecting this envelope for about a week. Our church was at a crossroads. Growth had plateaued, and there was a spirit of "been there, done that" among the people. One of the men on the Church Council knew a consulting ministry that conducted weekend church assessments. Our Council made the decision to hire Church Immersion Ministries. Tom, the consultant, was a gracious, inconspicuous observer for a weekend and promised a report within two weeks. He beat his timetable by several days.

I nervously read through the report and affirmed many of his recommendations. *Upgrade our worship service*, no problem. *Streamline duplication in our ministries*, already started. *Provide better signage*, we can do that. *Get rid of some of the clutter in the rooms*, our maintenance team can do this. The last one caught my attention: *Invest in an intentional discipling ministry*.

Discipling. There was that term again. Sure, I had studied the Great Commission in seminary, but the discussion about discipling was pretty theoretical. I knew I should be discipling others, but I didn't quite know what it looked like in everyday life. We had launched several discipleship programs over the years, but they always seemed to slowly fade out. I guess we haven't found the right curriculum yet.

I must be honest. I can't say I was ever disciplined. How could I disciple another if I had never experienced this? Sure, I had some mentors in seminary and a few close pastor friends I can call in a crisis. I've just never had anyone who "disciplined me." Not sure where to go from here, Lord.

## October 3

Just returned from a local pastors' prayer gathering. I shared my church's report with the group, looking for some sympathy. At the end of the time, Tim, the lanky senior mentor of the group, asked me if I had ever heard of the ministry of Church Discipleship Training (CDT). He told me I should contact their local rep, Donnie Bates. I decided to make the phone call.

## October 15

I'm sitting in a coffee shop waiting for Donnie. Two days earlier, we had a cordial phone call and he was eager to talk further. Suddenly a voice appeared over my shoulder, asking, "Are you Justin?" A middle-aged, slightly chunky, bearded individual sat down across from me. That's how I met Donnie.

I'm always a little suspicious of people like Donnie. Everyone has a plan to sell the local pastor on how to increase church attendance. I hope he's different. I wasn't sure what to expect from this conversation. To my surprise, instead of selling me a program or unfolding a brochure, Donnie asked me several piercing questions.

- "What's been your experience in discipling others?"
- "What training have you received?"
- "How would you describe a disciple?"
- "If someone from your church asked you to disciple him, what would you do?"
- "How would you describe your vision for discipling?"
- "What is your church's commitment to discipling?"

I faked my way through some of the questions and felt embarrassed that I couldn't answer all of them. I had to admit that I had never intentionally disciplined anyone. I've led a lot of small groups and taught dozens of classes, but intentionality and relationships were never part of my strategy. In my darker moments, I knew that my ministry passed on a lot of information to people, but I wondered what, if any, real transformation had taken place.

Donnie interrupted these thoughts with this statement, "I love this quote by the author Warren Wiersbe, 'No Christian rises higher than the beauty and quality of the pictures that hang in the gallery of his or her mind.' What do you think about this statement?"

He had my attention. I envisioned some of the "pictures" hanging in the galleries of our congregation about discipleship. Two came quickly to mind. One, discipling was the responsibility of skilled ministry professionals like myself. Two, discipling was a complicated process that few could do. What would it take to remove some of those pictures? What would I hang in their place? Donnie then popped this question.

"One step I take with pastors is to meet with them one-to-one and walk through some principles on discipling. I've learned that for change to happen we have to start with the

existing gallery in the pastor 's mind about discipleship. What do you think about spending several weeks together talking about discipleship?"

I gave a tentative "yes," and we agreed to meet the following Tuesday at my office at 8:00 a.m. I wasn't sure what to expect but was willing to give this a try.

# Part II. Donnie and Discipleship

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## November 1

I just finished my first session with Donnie. Instead of talking about how to help someone else Donnie zeroed in on me.

“The first principle I want us to explore is the way of life,” he said.

With that, he turned to Exodus 33:11 and asked me to read the passage. “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses, face-to-face, as a man speaks to a friend.” That’s when the questions began.

- “What do you think it means for the Lord to speak face-to-face with Moses?”
- “How do you think Moses felt about this?”
- “What do you think it ‘means’ to speak as a friend?”
- “How would you describe a friendship?”
- “Do you think people can be friends of God today?”
- “What are some ways that you can grow a friendship with God?”

This was a stimulating discussion. We talked about loving God and what fueled our thirst for Him. Then he asked this laser-like question, “If you could rate your friendship with God on a scale of 1-10, where would you put it?” I had to honestly admit that it would probably be about a five. “What would it take to move to a six?” Donnie asked.

I admitted that I had good intentions to meet with God daily in the Word and prayer. The problem was that I checked text messages or emails first thing in the morning and felt compelled to immediately answer them. Before I knew it, my morning was used up and my schedule of appointments kicked in.

“Sounds like you’re facing some significant obstacles to meeting with God,” Donnie said. “What could you do to overcome them?”

I suggested it might be helpful to create a “device-free” zone in my home study. I would put my cell phone and tablet in the drawer and turn the laptop off. I would open my Bible the night before with a selected passage to read. This seemed a reasonable approach. Then Donnie asked another question, “How many times a week would you like to meet with God?” I was tempted to say seven but decided on the more realistic figure of five.

“That’s great,” said Donnie. “Let’s touch base in two weeks and talk about how it’s going.”

## December 10

Over the past few sessions, Donnie faithfully asked me how my time with God was going. What I appreciated was that he didn’t ask, “Did you meet your goals this week?” Instead, he would ask, “What did God speak to you about in His Word?” I appreciated the focus on the relationship and not my performance. If it were me, I would have asked the performance question.

Donnie’s questions and accountability helped me faithfully meet with God. It’s been a while since I was successful at this discipline. I had a fresh focus in my time with the Lord. Not only did Donnie ask me about what I was learning, but I appreciated it when he regularly opened his journal and shared his latest thought from the Bible.

“Let’s explore another principle today,” he said. “This is the principle of relationships.”

We looked at Mark 3:13-14 together: “And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach. . . .”

- “Why do you think Jesus invested in a small group?”
- “What are the advantages of starting small to disciple people?”
- “How do you think Jesus lived life with these men?”
- “What did he do to build relationships with them?”
- “Why do you think the church more often relies on programs than relationships in discipling people?”

We talked about the importance of love, transparency, and vulnerability, topics I had done some thinking about but our conversation took them deeper. “Remember the VIM principle from our first discussion?” Donnie asked.

VIM is the principle of Vision, Intentionality, and Means. We discussed what it meant to have a relational vision for discipling. I agreed that I wanted to be intentional about this, but I lacked the means or a practical way to do it.

“Here’s a ‘means’ I want us to do for next time,” said Donnie.

The “means” was drawing out a timeline of our faith journeys. He asked me to list the people and events that had influenced my life of faith, and then we’d meet to share our timelines together.

## January 25

I'm looking forward to my next session with Donnie. It's about asking questions. This is a difficult topic for me. You'd think it would be natural for a pastor to ask questions. Like many pastors, I'm trained to teach, exhort, solve problems, and give answers. Nowhere did seminary teach me how to ask questions.

My gifts of exhortation and teaching naturally take over in conversations. However, I'm finding that something more is needed. Donnie's example of "asking more than telling" caught my attention. Questions made me wrestle with personal responsibility. Discovering something gave me greater ownership of the principle. While I was often frustrated by the tediousness of Donnie's questions ("Can't he just tell me what to do?") the process of discovery and ownership was invaluable. Questions forced me to go slow and grow deep. At 8 a.m. tomorrow, we're going to talk about the way of discovery, and I'm eager to learn how to ask better questions.

## February 12

I've been praying for a week about Donnie's challenge. He asked me to identify some men to ask into a discipleship triad, a group of three or four committed to a discipling relationship. I took the challenge seriously but did not see how my schedule would permit it. In fact, I listed all the ways I was contributing to discipling through my current activities and emailed this to Donnie. Looking at this list I could not see any way that I could add one more thing to an already busy schedule. This will be an interesting appointment.

## February 13

I showed Donnie my reasons for not starting a discipleship triad. He thoughtfully looked at them, and I expected him to concur and give me a pass. Instead, he asked me a question: "Do you have every breakfast and lunch booked in your schedule?"

Well, no I didn't.

"Could one of those breakfasts or lunches be turned into a triad that meets twice a month? Could you invest two to three hours a month meeting with two to three men?"

I had to admit that I could. "How do I get started?"

We talked about who to invite, how to invite, what's the best curriculum to use, and when to get started.

“Remember the intentionality principle?” Donnie asked. “Jesus thought big but started small . . . with 12 men. You are starting small by discipling two to three men, but you’re trusting God for these men to impact families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and this church. Trust God to use this investment!”

The Lord brought Donnie’s original challenge back to mind. I was learning to start small, go slow, and build deep.

## **March 15**

It went great! We had our first discipleship triad meeting yesterday and the Lord showed up in a remarkable way. I had anxiously invited three men to a breakfast meeting, and each one said “yes.” What a thrill to get started.

We talked about a vision for being a disciple and shared our faith stories. I learned things about each of the men that I had no idea were part of their lives. The transparency of sharing bonded us together and created a spirit of, “I can’t wait until we meet again.” God was so good in providing such a rich time.

Just received a text from Donnie, “Let’s talk about building a discipling culture tomorrow.”

# Part III. Culture Building

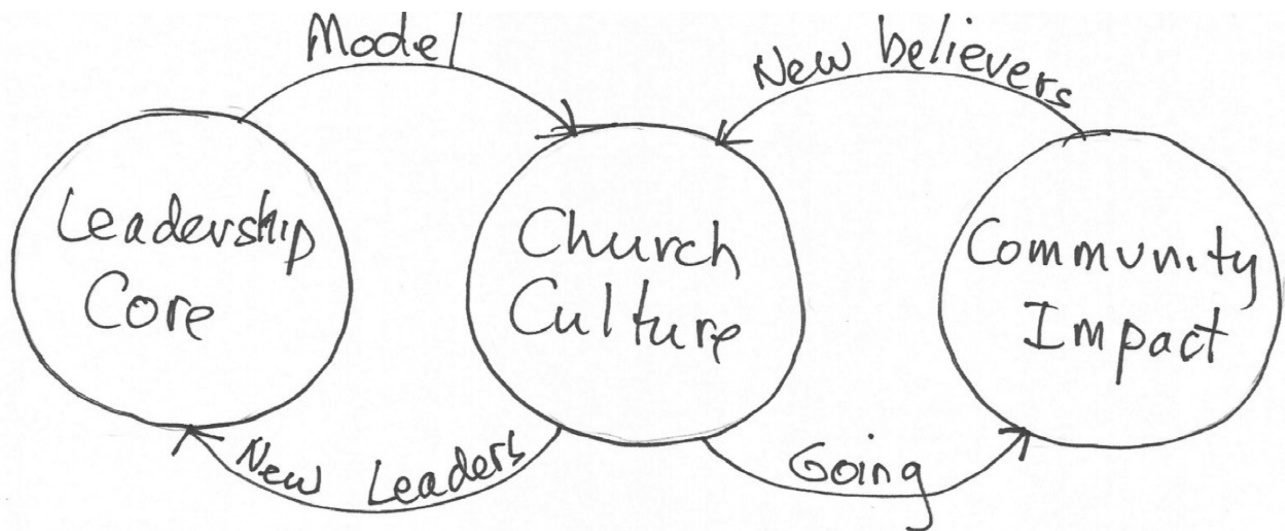
## April 6

Spring has finally arrived. I dislike mid-west winters. From January through March the prevailing sky and my mood is gray. Watching the early spring bulbs pop through the soil lifts my mood. What helped me get through this winter was seeing the hand of God on my ministry. I never expected to be discipling three men, knowing what to do, and actually enjoying it! I was beginning to experience what the apostle John wrote when he said, “No greater joy have I than to see my children walk in the truth” (3 John 4). It was a thrill to see these men’s lives change as we studied the Word, shared our discoveries, discussed application, and held one another accountable. Am I ever glad that I responded to the challenge of starting a discipleship triad!

It’s been a month since Donnie and I talked. I had taken some vacation, and he was traveling, so our scheduled times were interrupted. I was looking forward to our usual 8 a.m. meeting.

Today we caught up on our personal lives. Donnie was struggling with some issues with one of his adult children. I could tell this was hurting him so we spent some time praying about it. I gave him a report about the men’s group and what I was learning about discipling. It was then that he popped the question.

“How would you like a church culture where discipling was a natural part of what a church did? I’m not just talking about a strategic plan but a culture where you share a common



language about discipling, you have shared values, a common vision or story, and a shared way of doing things as you help people grow in Christ. What do you think about this?"

I realized that this was something bigger than a 10-week Sunday school curriculum. *Could God really create a culture of discipling?* "What would this look like?" I asked.

Donnie took out a piece of paper and sketched an illustration showing how a discipling culture would be built through a leadership core, realized in a church culture, and spill over into community impact. At the end of the time, we talked about the details, and he asked me to pray about getting started. I needed some time to think and talk over this proposal with our small groups coordinator, Angie. Donnie and I set up a time to talk next week.

## April 8

The meeting with Angie did not go as planned. I excitedly shared my experience in discipling some men and the possibility of inviting Donnie to help us build a discipling culture. I could tell that this wasn't connecting. I think she felt that an outsider was infringing on her territory. While I dislike territorial issues in the ministry, I could understand some of her concerns. I asked her to think and pray about it, and we planned a meeting with Donnie to talk about her concerns.

## April 20

I came out of the meeting with Donnie and Angie uttering a sigh of relief and a "Thank You, Lord." Meeting Donnie face-to-face helped ease some of Angie's concerns. Donnie's emphatic emphasis on being ruthless about the process but hands-off on the outcome was helpful.

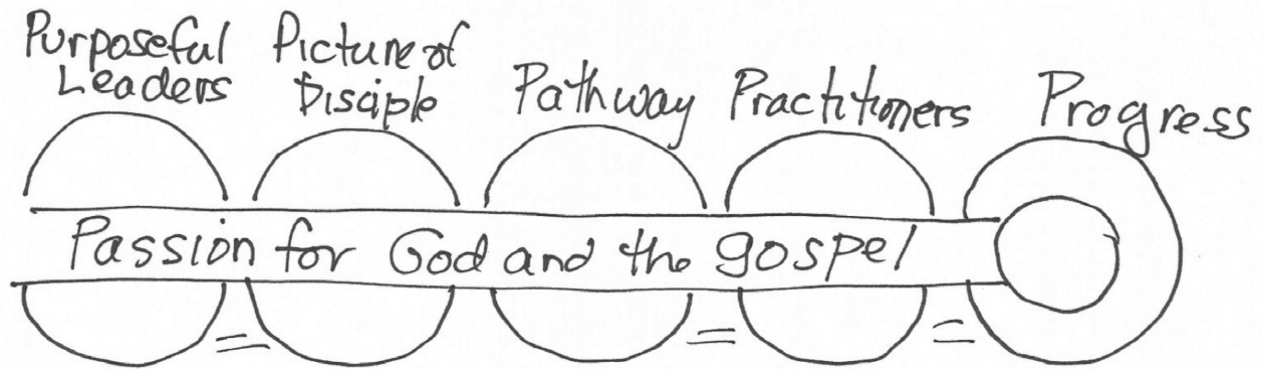
"I don't go to your church," he said. "I can't be the implementer nor the consultant who makes recommendations. As a coach, I want to help you develop a customized plan for your church because God has appointed you as leaders. I've learned my lesson in another church about trying to be the implementer!"

I saw the tension released from Angie's shoulders as she considered this statement. Bringing Donnie into the mix was not giving him a job but inviting him to take us through a process to create a discipling culture.

"For our next session let's talk about this idea of a discipling culture," said Donnie.

## April 27

“Let’s do a simple assessment of your church,” said Donnie. “Let me illustrate it in this way. Picture an old-fashioned steam locomotive from a western movie. What drives the train? It’s the drive shaft that propels the wheels forward. Let’s label this driveshaft a passion for God and a passion for the Gospel. These qualities should drive the life of the church.”



“Now picture five wheels on this locomotive. The first wheel is *purposeful leaders*. These are leaders who have a vision and passion for discipling. The next wheel is a *picture of a disciple*. Without this wheel, how can you know if you’re ‘making disciples’ like Jesus commanded?”

“The third wheel is a *pathway*, a simple process to help people move toward maturity. The next wheel is the most important one, these are the *practitioners*. Practitioners are the discipling-makers, the laborers that Jesus commands us to pray for in Matthew 9:36-38. These laborers invest life-on-life with people. Finally, the last wheel is our *progress*. What are the wins that we want to celebrate that tell us that God is at work?”

Donnie handed us an evaluation form and Angie and I marked what we thought was descriptive about our church. We then talked about our findings. We were growing in our intentionality, we did not have a picture of a disciple, our pathway was a series of ad-hoc adult classes, we had some isolated incidents of people making disciples, and our primary marker for progress was attendance at events. We had a ways to go.

“Let’s start talking about building a discipling culture,” Donnie said. “We will need to start small, go slow, and build deep.”

## April 29

I walked down the church hallway a little discouraged. We faced some hard realities about the discipleship culture at Community Springs. After taking the “train” assessment, Angie and I prayed together, asking God to change our church and help it become an intentional disciple-making church. I felt good about our conversation on culture, but it spawned another whole set of questions.

I began to grasp how culture was a common sharing of beliefs and values. At Community Springs, we have some elements of a discipling culture. However, we seldom talk about discipling nor do we have a vision for discipling. We definitely lack a shared way of discipling others.

What I like about a culture building emphasis is that it's more than a strategic plan. We've been through multiple strategic planning times. We've reworked our vision, changed our worship service, tried to “flatten” ownership through a team approach, and reduced the “silos” of our work through periodic analyses. It seemed we just floated around the edges, producing organizational change, but very little internal change of people. Building a culture seems to get at the internal issues of people's lives. I have hope in this process, but still have a lot of questions:

- “What kind of culture did we want?”
- “Would people embrace this?”
- “How do we get started?”
- “Who should provide the leadership for this culture change?”

Our next step is to pull together a Leadership Team. This group will be the catalyst for nourishing and building this culture. But first we have to secure our Ministry Council's approval since we would be offering Donnie an honorarium for his time. Angie and I have our work cut out for us.

## May 3

My lunch with Tom affirmed my little discipline of meeting monthly with each man in my triad. This one-to-one time helps me understand the backstory in a man's life. Even though we've developed an honesty in the group, men still leave some things unsaid until you meet them face-to-face.

I shared with Tom some of the disappointments with my one son. When I finished, Tom unloaded a burden for his children. He and his wife, Betsy, were struggling with their oldest daughter. Nearly a year ago, Megan's best friend died in an automobile accident, and it sent her into a depressed tailspin. Megan's grades dropped, she shunned all friendships, and her room became her refuge. "What should we do?" Tom asked.

The Lord brought to mind the prayer chapter that we had just discussed in our triad.

"What verses on prayer from the study could be applicable to this tough situation?" I asked. "What have you discovered about God that can be a comfort for you and Betsy?"

The questions took us back to the Scriptures and to the character of God. We didn't solve the problem with his daughter, but we agreed to pray for each other. Tom made an application to spend regular time with his wife praying for Megan. If I hadn't met one-to-one with Tom, this backstory might never have surfaced. I was discovering that discipleship means starting small with a few men and slowly building depth of character into their lives.

## May 13

Our Council meetings are usually pretty routine. Last night was not. When I presented the need for a discipleship emphasis and the investment of my time in this ministry, I noticed a slow smolder showing in Jack's face.

"I want to encourage all kinds of spiritual growth, but I feel that discipleship is creating a separate class of Christians that substitutes works for grace. Are some believers now better than others because we call them disciples? What right do we have to put people into categories?" fumed Jack.

His concerns were unexpected. The rest of the Council wanted to proceed, so Jack was the only disgruntled voice. I attempted to answer some of his concerns, but I sensed that no matter what I said, he would probably not agree. The money was not an issue, but the perceived status change among people was what rankled him. I left the meeting encouraged by the endorsement of the entire Council except for Jack. I felt good about pressing ahead but knew that Jack and I needed to talk about his concerns.

## May 25

Angie and I were facing a tough decision. Whom should we invite to our Leadership and Learning Team (LLT)? This small group would provide the leadership and energy for building a discipleship culture. We wanted influencers who had a heart for God and a heart to help

others grow. Experience was not as important as heart. We also didn't want only those who held official leadership positions in the church. We wanted a mix of formal and informal leaders. This team would be partners, models, and fans in building a discipling culture. *Lord, give us wisdom as we sort through the people.*

## June 10

Angie and I came into the office and felt like shouting "Hallelujah!" We had invited 10 men and women to the leadership team. Our invitation outlined our goals and their commitments for the next 24 months. To our surprise, and gratitude to God, all 10 agreed! We were off and running. I reminded myself that I must embrace the process of starting small, going slow, and building deep.

## June 25

Our first LLT meeting was a "quiet time" workshop that Donnie helped me develop. "Experiencing God through His Word and prayer is foundational to everything we do. Without this, we're only constructing a nice plan without a thirst for God," was Donnie's advice.

One word picture I shared with the group was the need for "fresh bread daily." "Just as the Israelites in Exodus 16 gathered fresh manna daily, so we need to daily have fresh bread from the Lord."

After some practical instruction on how to spend time with God, we broke up into groups of two for accountability and encouragement. Our next monthly meeting would begin the training process of discipling. I was going to walk through the same principles that Donnie had taken me through. We were trusting God to build a discipling culture through these 10 men and women. Angie and I began to pray that our LLT would gain a heart, vision, and know-how for discipling others. If God made this happen, it would be a huge step for our church.

## August 1

What are the biggest highlights of this whole culture-building process so far? Emphasizing a daily quiet time is paying off. The men and women on the LLT are keeping one another accountable in positive ways. People are experiencing God through their times with Him. What more could a pastor ask for?

Not only is this group sharing the Word with one another, but I'm hearing conversations about the Scriptures popping up in the church hallways after worship service. It's beginning to find its

way into the rest of the congregation. Now, whenever I meet with someone, I first share what God is speaking to me about from His Word and then ask, “What’s some fresh bread for you?” Roy, an LLT member and a Council member, suggested that we open each Council meeting with an opportunity for people to share some fresh bread. That was a great idea and I’m bringing it up with the Council at our next meeting. This is what culture building is all about.

## October 1

We had a commissioning ceremony last night for our LLT, celebrating their completion of the discipling training. After a catered dessert, we gave each person a “certificate” acknowledging their ability to disciple others, and I ended with a charge to action. People were beginning to catch the vision that discipling others was not running a program but intentionally coming alongside people in relational ways to help them become more fully devoted followers of Christ.

Our discipling training helped people learn and practice some simple skills of building authentic friendships, how to read the Bible with someone, how to pray for others, and we discussed how to encourage application and accountability. I attempted to model each of these principles with the group using some of the examples and methods Donnie used with me. Some new pictures were hanging in the gallery of people’s minds.

I challenged the group with the vision of each one leading a triad. “Let’s trust God together for 36 new people to be engaged in the discipling process within the next two months.” I would be thrilled if this could happen. I reminded the LLT that we were starting small, going slow, but trusting the Lord to build deeply into the lives of others.

## October 15

“So, how are you encouraging a greater ownership of this culture in the church?” was Donnie’s challenge. I realized that our LLT could be perceived as a select group of people who were making all the decisions for the church. While I constantly updated the Church Council on our progress, I knew the ownership needed to be spread among our small group leaders and adult teachers.

Donnie suggested a simple approach to create greater ownership. “I would form a “discipleship team,” he said. This ad-hoc group would meet quarterly to review our progress and give input into what we are developing. It would also be another group where we can share stories of what God is doing. Angie and I are creating a list of our small group leaders, ministry leaders, and adult teachers whom we will invite to this discipleship team.

## November 2

The LLT meeting last night was both laborious and thrilling. It was laborious because we asked each person to bring at least four names of people he or she would like to invite to a triad. We then listed all the names on the whiteboard.

Angie and I came to the meeting with some Bible study resources applicable for different stages of growth. As a group, we divided up the people and assigned leaders. It was a long evening, but we closed the time asking the Lord to build a disciplemaking culture in our church. To my surprise, Jack (the Council member) was on the list. We left with the goal to invite our designated people and have one triad meeting before Christmas. This action step was another movement forward to a disciplemaking culture.

## January 10

Our LLT is now in a monthly meeting pattern. One month we pray and update our triad progress. The next month we talk about one of the culture-building Bible studies. Last night was a time of sharing and updating our progress.

I wish more people could sit in on these meetings. Our LLT is pumped! People are regularly sharing their quiet times with one another. This is so transforming lives that we're looking for ways to include more of the congregation in this process. Then there's the anticipation of each triad. The newness of the process hasn't worn off, and people are hoping that the thrill they had of joining a small group would naturally carry over to the groups they will lead.

## January 15

I walked away from my conversation with Donnie both encouraged and overwhelmed.

"Building a culture starts with clarity of vision," he said. "How can you keep the vision of disciplemaking in front of people?"

He challenged me to clarify my vision. "You have a unique story of how the vision of disciplemaking has become central to your life and to the life of this church. Let's draw out a timeline of the story listing people who have shaped it and events along the way."

The timeline affirmed the Lord's hand in our church these past several years. I saw His sovereignty in new ways as we took time to look back. It was a huge confirmation of answered prayer.

“Here’s your next step, Justin. I want you to craft your story into a message and schedule a time to preach it. Building a culture starts with leaders passionately telling and passing on their stories. When do you think you could do this?” I settled on a church meeting date and began my work.

## March 1

Usually the LLT meetings are the highlight of the month, but last night’s was a bit of a downer. The initial enthusiasm of everyone having a quiet time is wearing off. Some are drifting back into old habits. Also, some of triads are having a hard time moving ahead. The material doesn’t seem relevant and some are having a hard time coordinating schedules. We resolved to pray together and trust God for renewed hearts for Him and for the successful launch of the triads.

## March 15

I walked out of the Council meeting on a spiritual high! God had been at work. Jack, the disgruntled Council member, publicly apologized to the group. “I reluctantly joined a men’s discipleship triad,” he said. “Jerry, the leader, was a personal friend and I didn’t want to turn him down. As I got into the material, I discovered the joy of meeting with God in a daily quiet time. I always knew I should have some kind of daily devotional,

but this book gave me a plan and the group built in the accountability. I’ve been more successful than ever in getting into the Bible and praying. This discipleship stuff works. I’m sorry that I raised the issue in the first place. Let’s see how we can encourage more people to be involved!”

## April 1

As an LLT, we’ve worked through our vision and values. Last night we explored in greater detail our picture of a disciple. Before we met, Donnie and I had our regular coaching time to discuss this study.

“Your picture of a disciple is the bullseye for your ministry and foundational for your disciple-making culture,” Donnie said. “When you craft this picture, you create a common language and values. It will become an assessment tool for your current ministries to measure their effectiveness. It will also help you select curriculum, because you now have a picture of the end product. But be warned, it will take some hard work.” Donnie was right about the work.

It was easy for the group to post the key points of a disciple. The hardest part was identifying the characteristics of each point. Donnie had said that people will give generalities but that

I must move them to specifics. We brainstormed on several of the qualities last night, and I assigned Angie to form a small task force to put all of the qualities and characteristics together on a single sheet of paper.

## May 15

The discipleship team met again last night. We had members of the LLT present our work on the vision, values, and picture of a disciple. I asked people two simple questions. One, “What do you like about our progress so far?” Second, “What can be improved?”

We had a very affirming discussion. Many on the discipleship team are in one of the triads, so the process was familiar to them. One big question that emerged was how to communicate our progress to the congregation as a whole. Should we hold a congregational meeting for an update? Should I begin a preaching series on the discipleship profile? How can we begin to incorporate our discipleship vision at every level of our leadership? These were good questions that I had no immediate answer for but needed to give attention to. By taking this group’s questions seriously, it communicates that we value their partnership in the process. What we are doing must be owned by a good portion of the church leaders and the congregation.

## June 15

We’ve labored the last six weeks on our growth pathway. The Culture Building Study on Spiritual Maturity gave us a biblical framework for a pathway. Everyone on the team saw the natural biblical progress of how God moves us from infancy, to adulthood, to spiritual parenthood. We quickly identified some key stages but became bogged down in how they interact together. Eric and Sue volunteered to pull together a smaller group to work on this. They just emailed their summary to me today.

## June 16

What this small group did was brilliant! God brought the whole process together. I love the key stages of connecting, growing, serving, and multiplying. Eric and Sue then gave some suggestions on goals for each stage and identified some resources for each step. This is what we needed!

## July 15

Donnie came to our LLT last night to help us think through our progress or “wins” for our disciplemaking culture.

“Too often we fail to celebrate what God is doing,” he said. “When we identify our progress markers, those wins of the Holy Spirit, we can truly celebrate how God is at work. Let’s start with your picture of a disciple. What are some wins you could celebrate to indicate that God is making progress in this area in your church?”

People immediately jumped in and contributed these thoughts:

- “This picture is being talked about in our youth ministries.”
- “People are talking about how they are helping someone move toward this picture.”
- “The pastor is preaching on this picture of a disciple.”
- “People are identifying areas of strength and growth from this picture.”
- “Our adult classes and small groups are using this as a goal for their ministries.”

From a list of nearly a dozen items, we selected the top four to five. “These are your progress markers for disciples. Now let’s identify markers for each area of your pathway.”

I was thrilled at the contribution of the team. It’s amazing to think that this group did not exist a year ago. They’re now owning the process, and each one is discipling another. We had a shared vision, some new vocabulary, and a shared way of making disciples. A culture is being built. God is at work!

## September 12

It’s been two years since the consultant’s report landed on my desk. I’ve invested two years of meeting with Donnie and being coached in creating a discipling culture. Have all of our problems been solved? No, they haven’t.

Two years ago, I had little success in discipling men. In fact, I was intimidated by the idea. Now I’ve led one discipleship triad, launched a second, and seen the men from the first triad begin discipling others. Meeting with men individually is now a regular part of my weekly routine. There have been some ups and downs, but I relish the opportunity to invest in people’s lives one-to-one rather than only teaching and preaching from a distance.

We now have a team of people committed to the Great Commission. While not every discipleship triad succeeded, the majority did and some have now multiplied. We have more people involved in an intentional discipling process than ever before.

A guest greeted me after last week's service with this statement: "It's easy to know what this church is about. You're about making disciples. Not only do you preach it but all of your signage and posters illustrate it. I will be back!"

I've now begun a discipline of regularly spending a half-day with the Lord to pray and capture life and ministry lessons. Here are a few I listed in my journal:

- Building a disciplemaking culture is more like a crockpot than a microwave.
- We must go deep before we grow big.
- We must go slow in order to grow deep.
- People need a firsthand experience with God in the Scriptures.
- Cultures will be built by someone, and that someone should be the leadership of the church.
- Disciplemaking is a lifestyle and not a program.
- Disciples are built one at a time through relationships.
- When ownership happens, culture is built.
- We must model before we plan.

It's been difficult to go slow. I wanted to rush the process and solve the problems, but the Lord encouraged me to be patient. I also felt the pressure to go big rather than small. We started with 10 people and two staff. This small group was trusting God to multiply our lives and grow a culture. As a preacher, I love teaching the Bible. In fact, I often assume that if a little information is good then more must be better. It can be hard to go deep in people's lives when information and not transformation is emphasized. Through this two-year process, the Lord has helped us as a team to start small, go slow, and build deep.

My comfortable reflections were shattered by Donnie's phone call: "Ready to go missional?" he asked.

# Part IV. Community Impact

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## October 1

Evangelism has never been a strength for me. I can preach a pretty good sermon and invite people to place their faith in Christ. I can easily share my faith with the family of someone sick or at a funeral. However, to befriend and initiate a conversation with a neighbor is difficult. I think pastors and church leaders face a vocational obstacle of living in an exclusively Christian world. The majority of people we associate with share our beliefs. I knew that something had to change in my life and in our congregation's life to move this phase of community impact forward.

"Who's in your circle of three?" Donnie asked at our coaching appointment.

"What do you mean" I asked.

"This is a circle of three unchurched friends who do not share our faith in Christ. You're committing yourself to pray for and intentionally look for ways to launch faith conversations with them."

I had to admit that I wasn't sure if I could fill this circle. "Modeling must precede planning," was Donnie's reply. I was looking for an evangelism plan for the church, and Donnie was asking me to model evangelism. I had to pray about this.

## October 10

"Have you ever considered how evangelism is a lot like juggling?" Donnie asked.

Really? This analogy never entered my mind! Using a paper napkin, Donnie drew out a simple illustration. He pictured someone juggling three balls. The first ball was labeled "go-to." The second, "come-to." And the third was titled "do-good." What did they mean?

Our conversation became a tour of the Bible. We looked at how Jesus described being sent to the world and how we are now His sent ones (John 17:18), going to where we live, work, or play to witness for Christ (Acts 1:8). Our next stop was a party at Matthew's house. After being recruited to follow Christ, Matthew invited friends to a "come-to" opportunity to meet Jesus (Matthew 9:9-13). Finally, we looked at the power of doing good (Galatians 6:10) and how God's goodness can bring people to repentance (Romans 2:4).

“Imagine having a church strategy where all three balls are being juggled! Instead of buying into the latest evangelism fad or methodology, we simply build a culture around these three balls: go-to, come-to, and do-good. Now every juggler has some basic skills. Let’s assume four simple evangelism skills: building relationships, starting conversations, sharing my story, and sharing His story (the Gospel). Let’s get started on motivating and preparing people in these basic skills.”

We brainstormed about ways to motivate people to share their faith. I decided to monthly interview people in the worship service, asking them to describe a recent faith conversation with someone. We scheduled an evangelism training seminar to help people “make friends for heaven’s sake.” The seminar taught people how to build relationships and start faith conversations in the natural network of relationships and routines of everyday conversations. At the end, we challenged people to identify a circle of three . . . and I challenged myself to set the pace.

To incorporate the come-to element, we identified which church events could be “come-to” events. We encouraged people to invite friends to our Christmas Eve services and provided questions to use as conversation starters after the event was over. In the summer, we gave away grocery store gift cards for people to sponsor “neighborhood gatherings” to invite neighbors to a cookout or picnic. Want to know the wildest success? It was serving a local elementary school.

Two other church leaders joined me in meeting with Julie, the local principal, to ask how we could serve her school. We did not ask for any name recognition and assured her that we were not going to evangelize the kids. We explained that God loves people in practical ways and we wanted to serve her school. After she recovered from the shock, we began brainstorming about ways to serve. We even invited her to a worship service where she explained the children’s need to our congregation.

From this commitment, we have supplied coats, backpacks, school supplies, summer reading materials, and meals for teachers. Along the way we discovered the school had a voluntary teacher’s prayer meeting led by one of the teachers. Since we regularly stopped by the office to drop off our latest project, I kept in touch with the principal’s personal life. This familiarity led to an opportunity to comfort Julie when she suffered the death of a parent. I could tell that it touched her heart.

Imagine my surprise when Julie called to inform me that the teacher who led the prayer meetings was being transferred. “Would you like to lead our teachers in prayer once a month?” she asked. It didn’t take long to say “yes”! The time “doing good” gave me the opportunity to share

the Bible and lead a group of teachers in prayer at a public school. Doing good should always be accompanied by good words.

Our juggling strategy is starting slow and small. We celebrate the victories regularly in our worship services. My wife, Jane, and I have embraced our neighborhood as our circle of three. Jane and I are connecting with our neighbors and enjoying some rich faith conversations. My prayer goal is to invite some of these neighbors to read the Bible with us. I'm learning to live on mission.

What's been the major lesson for me in this culture-building process? I've seen that building a disciplemaking culture is more like a crockpot than a microwave. Like most American pastors, I want the microwave. Show me a good program and curriculum and promise that disciples will be made within twelve weeks! God has taught me that building a culture is more like a crockpot. I need to put in the biblical ingredients and let the Holy Spirit savor and cook the mix over a period of time.

Community Springs is changing. More and more people are engaged in the discipleship process and many are building relationships and starting faith conversations with their unchurched friends. Our "wins" or progress markers are demonstrated life change, not the counting of people or money. We're asking God to deepen this discipleship culture and use our people to impact the community . . . and the world. We want to be a church that sees Matthew 28:18-20 as the Great Commission and not the "Great Option." Disciplemaking really is more like a crockpot than a microwave.

# Discussion Questions

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1. In what ways can you identify with Justin's story?
2. What changes did you notice occurring in Justin's approach to ministry?
3. Describe some of the highs and lows of this journey.
4. How would you describe the role Donnie played in this culture-building process?
5. Why do you think culture-building, particularly building a culture of disciplemaking, is so critical to a church's growth?
6. What did you discover about how leaders can shape a church culture?
7. How did Justin's perspective of disciplemaking change over this two-year period?
8. What critical principles of disciplemaking stood out to you from this story?
9. What did you observe about Donnie's approach to coaching?
10. What discoveries did you make about the marks or characteristics of a disciplemaking culture?
11. What did you discover about building a disciplemaking culture?
12. How do you feel about what happened in this story?
13. What is one new insight that you can apply to your church or ministry?

# What's the big deal about culture building?

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The interplay of Justin and Donnie is not a totally fictitious scenario. It's the blending of a variety of people and incidents drawn from my experience in working with pastors and congregations. Justin shares the heart of many pastors. He takes his call to serve his church seriously and wants the best for his congregation. Like many in the pastorate,

disciplemaking is a mysterious and illusive process. Thinking about culture building is an abstraction that only overseas missionaries consider. Deep down in his heart, Justin knew that culture building was important but he needed some direction and accountability to lead from what he knew.

Why culture building? One pastor told me that if he was only focused on his personal disciplemaking ministry, then it would fail. "However, if I focus on building a culture, it will outlast me!"

Pastors and ministry leaders must be committed to building, nourishing, and sustaining cultures of life-to-life disciplemaking. What we teach, model, and talk about sets the culture for our congregations and ministries. Effective leaders do not take culture for granted; they intentionally shape and build them.

Defining culture is like taking a drink from a fire hose, it can be overpowering and overwhelming. For the sake of simplicity, culture describes the shared language, values, story, and behavior of people within a given setting. Culture speaks to how people express and live out these values and shared story. It represents an internal roadmap that finds expression in a lifestyle.

# What are the outcomes of a disciplemaking culture?

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Remember Donnie's train illustration? These five outcomes mark a culture of disciplemaking. First, there are **purposeful leaders** who share a vision, mission, and value for the Great Commission. If the senior pastor, his staff, and church leadership are not intentional about disciplemaking, the culture will not be built.

Second, a church needs a **picture** of a disciple. This New Testament picture is the bullseye of disciplemaking from which leaders can preach, teach, and plan.

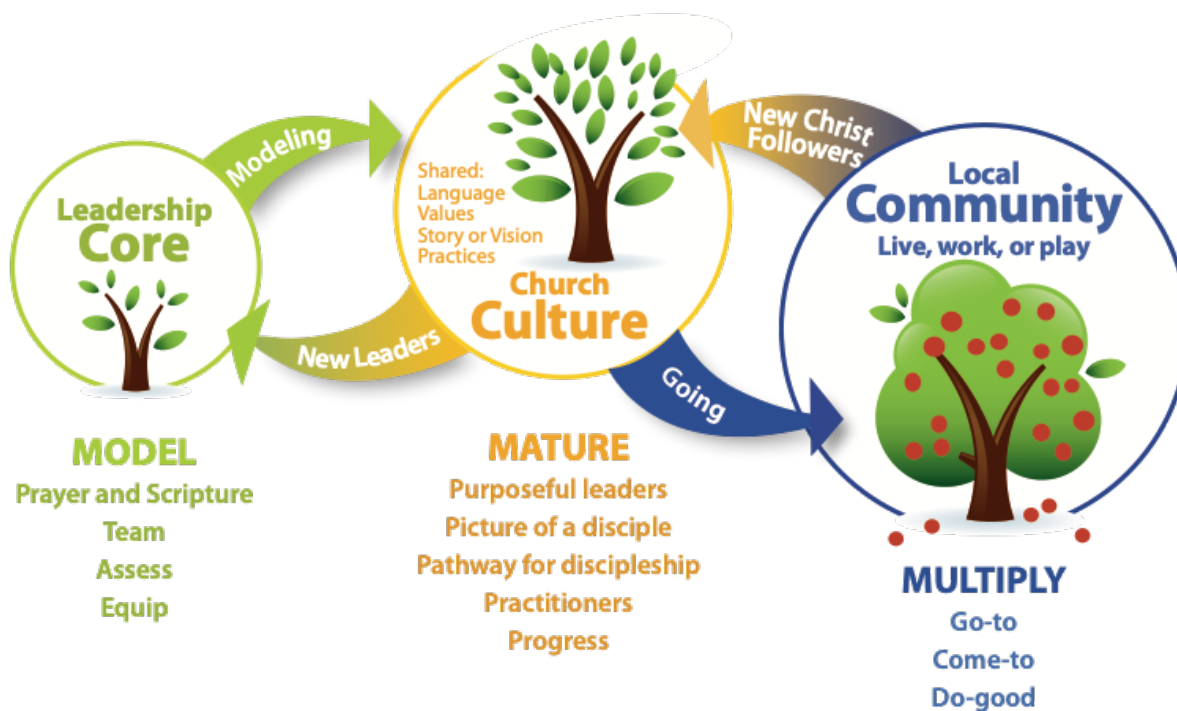
Third, there's a practical and simple **pathway** to move young believers to mature disciples. This pathway is a combination of large group, small groups, and one-to-one experiences.

The fourth, and perhaps most important, are **practitioners**. These are the disciplemakers, the laborers that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 9:36-38. Without the personal touch of life-to-life ministry, the culture is only a construct on paper and lacks flesh and blood.

Finally, a disciplemaking culture has **progress markers**, "wins" that help a church mark the work of God. These wins are frequently celebrated and extolled in the congregation.

## The Great Unveiling

Donnie took Justin through a process. Remember the picture he sketched out early in the relationship? Here's the illustration in a more refined way.



Notice how there's a movement from the Leadership Core, to the Church Culture, to Community Impact. Donnie first encouraged Justin to recruit his LLT, the leadership core that would drive the culture building process. Donnie invested in these men and women, helping them to experience God, assess the ministry climate, and equipped them to make disciples. They were then poised to build the culture through their modeling of disciplemaking, the leading of triads within the congregation.

Donnie then helped Justin and the LLT walk through the five marks of a disciplemaking culture. He assisted them in crafting their vision, creating a picture of a disciple, developing a simple pathway, training disciplemakers, and identifying their progress markers. The story ends with the start of the third leg of the journey, developing a strategy for community impact.

One word of caution. Culture building takes time. Author Bill Hull asserts that moving a church to a disciplemaking church takes three to five years. God's work is often small, slow, but deep. As we learned from this story, it's more like a crockpot than an instant pot. Building a culture of disciplemaking follows a pattern of starting small with a few, going slow rather than rushing a program, and building deeply into people's lives. Like the mustard seed in Jesus' parable

(Matthew 13:31-32), we allow the planting of the small seed of discipling to slowly germinate until it overflows into a harvest.

# The Closing

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Navigator Church Ministries is committed to helping churches grow disciplemaking cultures. We have a biblical and time-tested process that we can bring to your church or ministry. This is not the marketing of a discipleship franchise but a creation of a customized plan to build a disciplemaking culture. We sensitively work with church leaders to build upon what God is already doing and provide intentional direction for a disciplemaking culture to be nourished. Justin and Donnie modeled this process for you. Remember, we are asking the leaders to first model, and then plan. This is more than a strategic planning process but a development of a lifestyle and culture.

**Want to get started?** You can contact us at [navigatorchurchministries.org](http://navigatorchurchministries.org). We have skilled culture-building coaches available to help you on this journey of building a disciplemaking culture. After all, when disciples are multiplied, God is glorified.



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# Crockpot Disciplemaking

## How I Left My Instant Pot Behind

*A Pastor's Journey to Build a **Disciplemaking** Culture*

We all want change to happen in the church. Unfortunately, we often bring our culture's values into our thinking about church growth. Speed, size, and more information shape our thinking on church change and disciplemaking. We want the right program, right now, that will guarantee the outcome of more disciples. Sometimes real change is small, slow, and deep.

This is the story of Justin Forsythe, a pastor who embraced the need to build a disciplemaking culture in his church. To do this, he is challenged to hang some new pictures in his mind's gallery on disciplemaking. This booklet is Justin's story about how he believed God to build a Great Commission culture in his church.

You will be peering into Justin's journal, observing how he grew a disciplemaking culture. While Justin is fictional, all the events have happened in the author's coaching ministry to pastors and churches.

Are you ready to start the journey with Justin?



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