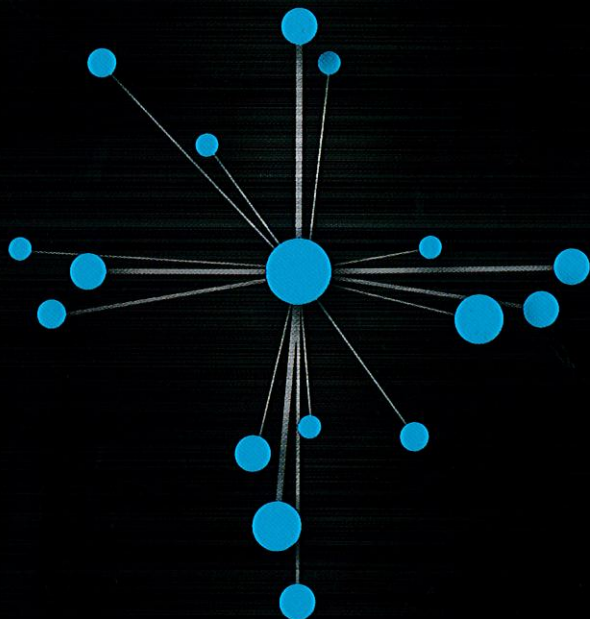


Steve Murrell challenges me to take risks, to focus on discipleship, and to give God His due glory.

—**ED STETZER**, missiologist and vice president of LifeWay Research



WIKI**CHURCH**

Making Discipleship
ENGAGING, EMPOWERING, & VIRAL

Steve Murrell

Steve Murrell is clearly a leader who understands discipleship and who has been able to build it into the core of his thriving church in the Philippines. This is a much-needed book for the church today. I highly recommend it!

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Steve Murrell chose to follow the footsteps of Jesus and focus on making disciples and teams rather than building institutions. His book is a must-read for every Christian leader.

—**DR. JUN VENCER**, Global Transformation Ministries, Inc.

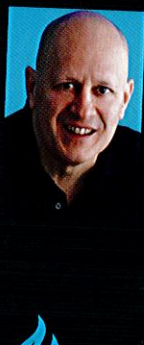
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- ESTABLISHING SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS
- EQUIPPING BELIEVERS *TO* MINISTER
- EMPOWERING DISCIPLES *TO* MAKE DISCIPLES

Imagine if every believer, not just leaders, was actively engaged in your ministry. That's the Book of Acts. That's a WikiChurch.



STEVE MURRELL is the founding pastor of Victory in Manila, Philippines; a director of the Real Life Foundation; and the cofounder and president of Every Nation. He and his wife, Deborah, first went to the Philippines in 1984 for a one-month summer mission trip that never ended. He has since lived and ministered between Nashville, Tennessee, and Manila, Philippines.

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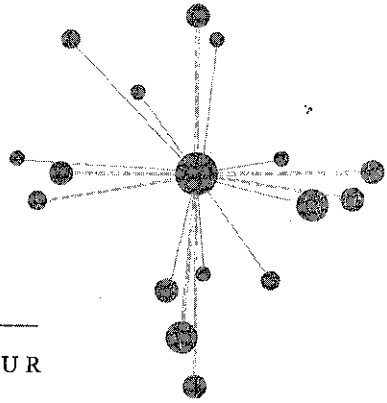
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CHAPTER FOUR

THE POWER OF PROCESS

DISCIPLESHIP IS NOT an event, encounter, or an experience. It is an ongoing process. Great spiritual experiences alone do not necessarily produce disciples who are following Christ, fishing for men, and fellowshiping with other followers. Two experiences from my early days as a Christian illustrate the importance of a simple disciple-making process.

Although I lived in one of the most religious cities in America, I grew up in a not-so-religious family. When I was young, my dad was a deeply dedicated man, devoted more than anything else to his Sunday morning tee time. Rain or shine, freezing cold or one hundred degrees, if the golf course was open, he was there. We didn't go to church very often,

but we never missed midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. (I never understood why they called it midnight Mass when it began at 10:00 p.m. and was over by 11:00 p.m.)

In 1975 I was sixteen years old and a high school junior at Jackson Preparatory School. The institution was private and exclusive and certainly not Christian. So my irreligious profile made no difference. At that time Jackson Prep was an all-white academic and athletic powerhouse, cranking out future Division 1 college athletes, debutantes, doctors, frat boys, and socialites. I was none of the above, except white. My dad was in the liquor business. Because he was the marketing representative for twenty-eight brands, I had access to advertising paraphernalia such as T-shirts, jackets, golf balls, and every branded promotional piece imaginable. These were warehoused in our garage.

Instead of wearing monogrammed sweaters and designer shirts branded with little alligators and polo players as all my friends at Jackson Prep did, my wardrobe consisted of blue jeans and liquor gear: Bacardi Rum golf shirt on Monday, Harvey Wallbanger T-shirt on Tuesday, J&B jacket on Wednesday, and so on.

In 1976, my sophomore year, First Presbyterian Church (First Pres) hired an enthusiastic new graduate from Reformed Theological Seminary as their youth pastor. The ink on Ron Musselman's diploma was not completely dry when he arrived at one of the more affluent churches in Jackson. Each Sunday morning the parking lot at First Pres was littered with the same German sedans and American sports cars that filled the prep school parking lot during the week.

Ron didn't really look like the typical prep guy. When long

hair was the trend, he had short hair, plus he always carried a Bible that he somehow managed to stuff into his back pocket. Lucky for us, Ron didn't really know what he was supposed to be doing. Instead of sitting in the youth pastor's office planning social activities for the First Pres teens, he made it his mission to go out and find some really lost kids. Ron left the ninety-nine and went after the one.

And so it was that Ron Musselman, certified master of theology and upstart youth pastor, came to my high school. He seemed to show up at every school event. It was as if he appointed himself unofficial chaplain of our football team, baseball team, basketball team, track team, and any other group he could identify. Ron was everywhere.

This youth pastor did not wait for people like me to come to his youth group. He took the youth group to us. A couple days each week there would be a table in the lunchroom where Ron held his little Bible study with a few students. My buddies and I would buy boxes of Milk Duds candy, strategically position ourselves in the cafeteria, and toss Milk Duds at the Bible study group. Every now and then we would throw M&M's, but Milk Duds were bigger and had a greater impact. This was my first involvement with small group discipleship. Had I known that in biblical history there was a long tradition of persecuting people by throwing things at them (usually stones), it would have added to my enthusiasm.

*Ron left the ninety-nine
and went after the one.*

An unintended consequence of all this fun was that eventually Ron figured out where the Milk Duds were coming from. We then became his high-priority prayer target. I ran for six months as the short-haired Jesus guy with the Bible relentlessly pursued me. Finally, concluding that he was never going to give up, I prayed his prayer, thinking he would then leave me alone. It only got worse after that. We met regularly in what he called an action group. I did not know what to call it at the time, but Ron had begun discipling my friends and me. Just like the team of Americans who came to Manila in 1984, Ron knew that he had very little time. By the time I surrendered my life to Christ, I was in the middle of my junior year in high school. So whatever he could do to establish me in the faith and equip me to minister to others had to be done in the next eighteen months. It was intense discipleship.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT HOME

My mom was happy about my newfound faith, but my dad—that was a different story. About the same time I surrendered to Ron (or Jesus), my older brother Jim had had his own life-changing encounter with the Lord. I remember Jim coming home from college for the weekend. We all sat down for dinner, but before we could dive into our food, Jim insisted that we thank God for the meal. We all just froze. That had never happened at our house before except maybe on Thanksgiving Day.

Jim began to passionately pray like a veteran preacher. The prayer continued for what seemed like an eternity. At one point in the extended blessing, Jim prayed, “Lord, we know

that You said in the Book of Deuteronomy...” At that point in my brief spiritual journey, I had never heard of Deuteronomy. My head was bowed and my eyes shut tight. I was too afraid to look up. I was thinking that Jim ought to stop but was more than a little apprehensive about what would happen when he did.

True to form, Ron’s spiritual radar began to turn toward my dad. My father became a high priority on Ron’s prayer list, and he insisted that I regularly pray for him too. He would ask me about my dad every time he saw me. Was I praying for him? Had I been honoring him? Almost every time I met with Ron, we prayed for my dad. Every chance he got, Ron spent time talking with my dad, trying to help him understand the gospel. Eventually my dad received Christ by faith, but that would be decades later.

Every week my friends and I would go to Ron’s Tuesday night youth Bible study along with a couple hundred other high school kids. We were learning God’s Word, and our friends were getting saved. In time, hundreds in my high school came to Christ. Almost all those new believers were the result of small group discipleship, not big meetings. The emphasis was on establishing theological foundations, practically following Christ, and sharing the gospel with our friends.

A couple of times I attended First Presbyterian on Sunday, but the experience left me completely bored. Nothing about those Sunday morning worship services related to me. It was hard to identify with what they were talking about, and I certainly looked out of place in my jeans and Chuck Taylor All-Stars amid a sea of dark suits. Fortunately, Ron was a lot like Jesus in that he enthusiastically welcomed and pursued people

like me. I am thankful that Ron's only concern was my spiritual growth, not the growth of First Pres. He never seemed concerned that I did not become a regular church member.

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH SPIRITUAL POWER

My brother found this place called Bethel House of God on the other side of the tracks. (This is not to be confused with the Bethel World Outreach Center, an Every Nation church in Nashville.) Our peaceful suburban neighborhood was a long way geographically and culturally from that part of town. I never knew that places like that existed in Jackson.

It wasn't long before my friend Greg Ball and I began going to Bethel on Saturday nights. We would drive down there in Greg's dad's Lincoln Town Car and park right out front. Both of us were pretty naïve about the safety of the car and never wondered why no other cars were parked on the street. Looking back, I am amazed that the wheels were still on when we came out. I suppose people thought that such a car must have been the property of a big-time drug dealer, and so they left it alone.

Despite the neighborhood, I felt safe with Greg. He was a black belt in karate and a full-contact kickboxer, the precursor to MMA (mixed martial arts). I had read in the Bible about angels protecting people. I had some measure of faith in those angels but figured that if the angel thing did not work out, Greg had my back.

Bethel House of God met in this little, dilapidated shack. I think some people lived at Bethel, or at least they slept there.

There were all kinds of interesting people there—not really the prep school and First Presbyterian types. It was a combo boarding house, rehabilitation facility, and revival center. There were few chairs. Most people just sat on the floor, stood on the stairway, or found any open space they could. When it rained, there was a pot on the piano to catch the water.

Greg and I thought it was the greatest place ever because we never knew what would happen next. Every time we went, people would be dramatically saved, healed, or delivered. Sometimes the meeting would go past midnight. We would see undeniable miracles and exorcisms right before our eyes. One cold winter night this huge dude with a twelve-inch beard and no shirt kicked the door down, burst in swinging an axe, and began cursing the preacher. Two huge scary-looking Bethel "ushers," or bouncers, threw him out and told him not to come back until he wanted to get right with God. Wow! What a way to spend Saturday night!

Occasionally Greg and I would bring our prep school and First Pres friends to Bethel. It was definitely a change of pace spiritually. For some reason, few ever came back. However, Greg and I kept going. It was better than any action-adventure movie we had ever seen.

Little did I know that two foundational building blocks were being established in my Christian life. In time, both would become key ingredients in the Victory–Manila recipe. The power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, which I learned at Bethel, combined with Christ-centered, Word-based, systematic small group discipleship I received at First Presbyterian would become two nonnegotiable Victory essentials. I'm thankful that God sovereignly saved me through a

Presbyterian church, then added a Spirit-empowered charismatic experience on top of a thoroughly biblical foundation.

A ROPE OF SAND

When I first moved to the Philippines, I contacted several of the pastors of the largest churches in Manila to ask for a few minutes of their time. I wanted to know how they were able to reach so many people. I was in my early twenties with a church of less than two hundred. They led congregations of multiple thousands. I was desperate to learn. I was lucky when a few of them actually agreed to meet with me and answer my questions. I'll never forget what one pastor told me: "Revival will get people in your church, but it takes administration to keep them in your church. A move of the Holy Spirit will attract people. But if you don't learn how to administrate, organize, and build systems, the revival will be short-lived."

That is truly the history of great revival movements. Few have ever been able to maintain the spiritual momentum for very long, much less transfer it from one generation to the next. George Whitefield was Methodism's first and most popular spokesman. Why is it then that the movement he co-led with John Wesley is known as the Wesleyan Revival and not the Whitefield Revival? Adam Clarke, an early historian of Methodism, suggests the reason was that John Wesley formed small groups for discipleship while Whitefield did not. Clarke writes, "We [Methodists] have been enabled to establish permanent and holy churches over the world. Mr. Wesley saw the necessity of this from the beginning. Mr. Whitefield, when he separated from Mr. Wesley, did not follow it. What was the

consequence? The fruit of Mr. Whitefield's labour died with himself. Mr. Wesley's remains and multiplies."¹

John Wesley was a great administrator and extremely methodical in everything he did. You might say that between Wesley and Whitefield, Wesley was the linear thinker. That was especially true in the way he made disciples. The Wesleyan movement was called Methodism because of its methodical approach to the discipleship process.

The two great revivalists eventually split over doctrinal issues (Calvinism versus Arminianism) and carried on separately. Whitefield, the extraordinary evangelist, did not continue with John Wesley's small group discipleship model. Later in his life Whitefield realized his mistake, as historian Adam Clarke records through a conversation Whitefield had with an old friend, John Poole. Whitefield told his friend:

John, thou art in thy right place. My brother Wesley acted wisely: the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class [small groups or classes], and thus preserved the fruits of his labour. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand.²

Looking back on my early days as a Christian, Ron Muselman's discipleship groups were structured and sometimes boring. We were always memorizing Scripture and praying together for our lost friends. At Bethel we saw demonstrations of the power of God that would make the hair on the back of our necks stand up. A few years later I began to check up on all my old friends from high school. To my knowledge three or four Bethelites ended up in the ministry. However, from my graduating class alone at Jackson Prep, there were at that

time more than twenty people in full-time ministry as a result of those small, "boring" discipleship groups.

From 1991 to 1993 we were struggling with our new Shangri-La church plant full of people we had not won to Christ, and I wondered why it wasn't fun anymore. I thought back to my early Christian experiences. I always had—and still do desire—to embrace the power of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit. I determined, however, that if I accomplished nothing else, Victory-Manila was going to be about making disciples. It was at that point in the history of our church that we made a commitment to create a relational culture and to implement a discipleship strategy that would be our one unstoppable spiritual judo move.

COPYING METHODS OR CATCHING THE SPIRIT

I can understand why a leader would say, "Let's not try to reinvent the wheel. Let's find what is working and duplicate it in our church." However, a process works because it fits the culture you are trying to engage, the leadership team trying to implement it, and the people who are going to execute it.

On numerous occasions I have had people from the United States approach me to deliver their happy news—that they are doing small group discipleship in their church exactly the way we do it in the Philippines. Instead of the expected congratulations and a pat on the back, my typical response is, "Why in the world would you do that?" I will give them this explanation: "I'm in a city of twelve million people. Most of them live in poverty, very few young people have cars, it is an animistic

Catholic culture, and the family structure is totally different from that in the West. The world you live in is completely different from Manila. Why would you copy us?"

When I was just starting out in ministry back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the greatest spiritual awakening and the world's fastest-growing church was in Seoul, South Korea. David Yonggi Cho had thousands of small groups, a mountain with hundreds of prayer caves dug into the side of it, and half a million people attending his church. Christian leaders and church growth experts flocked to Korea to study his model and bring it back to the United States. One US church acquired its own prayer mountain, but I don't know whether they got around to digging out the little caves. It is great to learn from others, but South Korea is not at all like the United States. Korean culture is very traditional, inflexible, and top-down. Americans are, by contrast, far more independent and innovative and do not like being told what to do. You do not hear much about the Korean model anymore in America because over the long haul it simply did not work.

*The world you live in is
completely different from Manila.
Why would you copy us?*

Rick Warren has developed a tremendous church growth model that has indeed worked in an American city. Many have read his books and tried to implement Saddleback's purpose-driven model in their own churches. What they failed to take

into consideration was that Saddleback Community Church is located in one of the wealthiest and most educated counties in the United States. Rick cracked the missional code for his community, but the code is different in every community.

There was a big purpose-driven campaign in Manila a few years ago, inspired by Rick's best-selling book *The Purpose-Driven Life*. The long-term impact on church growth in the Philippines was minimal because poor people are just not all that interested in purpose. They are more concerned about their next meal. However, our church took advantage of all the purpose-driven publicity by conducting a campaign, but first rewriting all the materials to address Filipino needs in Manila. At Victory the campaign was a phenomenal success because, rather than copying what worked in California, we changed it to engage Filipino culture and community.

A few years ago people started flocking to Bogotá, Colombia, to learn about the G-12 (groups of twelve) cell group strategy employed by César Castellanos and his 100,000-member church. We sent a couple of Victory pastors, Ferdie Cabling and Dennis Sy, to study the Bogotá model for a few weeks and to borrow some ideas. Ferdie came home with this summary report: "The secret to their growth is not their system. In fact, I think ours is better. The secret to their power is their compassion for the lost. Any church that loves and prays for lost people like those Bogotá people will grow no matter what discipleship system they use." So, rather than copying their program, their vocabulary, or their system, we tried to catch their spirit—their love for the lost.

Various aspects of what we do will work for you, others can be adapted to fit your culture, and some parts should be

completely replaced by your own inventions. You have to formulate a system that is appropriate for your cultural setting. There are even areas of Manila where pastors are modifying our process to adapt to the ethnic demographics of their communities. Writing your own program for making disciples takes time, prayer, and some trial and error—just as it did with us. We can, however, learn from one another, just as the Victory team is continuing to learn and incorporate ideas from other churches around the world, but only after modification to make sure the strategies make sense in our culture and community.

THE STARTING POINT

Church leaders frequently ask me to evaluate their new or improved process of making disciples. They want to know whether I think a particular process will work in their church. While I have a pretty good sense of what will and will not work in Manila, **the culture is changing so quickly that staying relevant requires our constant attention. If we allow ourselves to be distracted by focusing on the mechanics of our own efforts rather than our culture, we will become irrelevant almost overnight.**

So when someone asks for my opinion about their disciple-making process, the first thought that comes to mind is, *What makes you think I am going to know?* Because, however, that is not a very good answer to a sincere question, my more thoughtful response addresses three concerns:

1. Lead by example.

Change is difficult. In many cases we come to the conclusion that we have to make a change only after the situation has become desperate. That was certainly the case for us in the early nineties. Significant difficulties were what caused us to make equally significant changes in the way we did things. But *how* you make the change can be as important as *what* you change. Unfortunately, three questions that often emerge in discussions about adopting a new process of making disciples are: (1) How much will it cost? (2) How easily can it be implemented? and (3) How soon will we begin to see results? If those are the chief concerns that are driving the approach to a new process, you might be headed for more problems than solutions.

Values clarification is a good place to start. Does your team have a clear and commonly shared understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus? In other words, precisely what does it mean to follow Jesus, fish for men, and fellowship with others? How about those three key relationships—with Jesus, with nonbelievers, and with believers?

The leaders with the greatest effectiveness lead from the front, not from the rear. That is to say, they do not simply command the action of others as they observe from a safe distance. They continually lead by example and by challenging others to follow. Translating that into church-change language, *we should not try to change the church without first changing ourselves.* I cannot reasonably hope for members at Victory-Manila to adopt a lifestyle of honoring God and making disciples if I am not doing it myself. There are many layers of leadership between the first-time small group leader

and myself. Yet Deborah and I, along with the rest of the leadership team, can never graduate from making disciples just as the newest members do.

Live it before you teach it.

To lead by example means that we get our own minds and hearts focused on making disciples before trying to organize others to do so. Set your mind on following Jesus, fishing for men, and fellowshiping with others. More fundamentally, set your heart on deepening your relationship with Jesus, your relationship with nonbelievers, and your relationship with other disciples who are trying to do the same thing. In other words, *live it before you teach it.*

2. Nothing works without commitment and consistency.

What I mean is that *no discipleship process works automatically apart from our own commitment to make it work.* Even the best church growth models can actually weaken or even destroy churches if implemented without a high level of commitment to see them through. *Repeatedly starting and abandoning new programs in a church causes the leadership to lose credibility.* After numerous ideas are introduced and subsequently discarded, people are far more likely to sit back and roll their eyes with a wait-and-see attitude when the next idea is presented. With each round it becomes more and more difficult to inspire people, mobilize them to action, or simply get them to buy into anything you want to do.

One of my typical comments to leaders formulating their own process of making disciples is that the details of their system are not as important as how committed they are to the process. Even if you had the perfect disciple-making process for your community, it would not work automatically without commitment and consistency.

We have been updating and adjusting our methods for decades, not because we had nothing better to do, but always because some aspect of our process was not working as well as it should. Even though we have gained momentum through the years with the Victory discipleship process, it does not fuel itself. Focused hard work is required to keep it running.

What enables us to keep putting in the effort, fixing the problems, and seeking God about how to do it better? It is that we have committed ourselves to making disciples. We are not committed to getting big or to staying small. We are not committed to reaching politicians, athletes, or actors—rich people, poor people, or smart people. We are not committed to prosperity, political influence, popularity, or fame. We did not set out to formulate and implement a discipleship strategy to see whether it would work. What keeps us at it is not merely a *long-term* commitment but a *lifetime* commitment to the Great Commission. **We are here to honor God and make disciples. We have no plan B.**

3. Integrate everything around your primary objective.

Some churches have dozens of programs designed to address every demographic and every imaginable need. In fact, a church's effectiveness is often measured by the number of programs they have—a good church will have a dozen

programs, a great church will have twenty, and a super church will have a hundred.

At Victory—Manila we have one program with four distinct elements that we have been modifying and perfecting for many years. What makes the process successful is that each element is integrated with the others and aimed at a single target—making disciples who make other disciples. Our process of engaging culture through small groups feeds our process of establishing spiritual foundations through Victory Weekends. Young believers who have completed a Victory Weekend populate the Making Disciples and Training for Victory classes, which equip relatively new believers to serve as small group leaders. Graduates are immediately empowered to establish their own small groups to engage nonbelievers for Christ. And the cycle begins all over again.

As we have become more effective at each of those elements of our discipleship process, the process has gradually gained more and more momentum. It began as a slow but sure movement of making disciples. Today it is more like a gigantic boulder rolling down a hill. One generation of disciples creates a larger generation of disciples that in turn creates another still larger generation of disciples, and so on. It is the kind of multiplication that can get wonderfully out of control.

That is precisely what started happening to us around 1991 and 1992. For the first six years, we made some disciples and *added* a lot of people to the church. Attendance went from 165 to 2,000. The key word I used to describe that first stage of growth at Victory is *added*. At that time it was an addition process, and I worked very hard adding people while at the same time working equally hard trying to keep from

subtracting (or losing) people. The key word in this description is *I*. I worked at it so hard that the process began destroying my health. We changed our process of making disciples in the early nineties to one that caused us to grow by multiplication rather than addition. The key to moving forward successfully was a commonly shared idea about the definition of discipleship, a single focus, and a process-with-program element that worked together, not independently.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CLARITY AND DEFINITION

In the first few chapters of this book I talked briefly about the history, the philosophy, the goals, and the results of what we do at Victory. I used words such as *principles, process, methods, and models* interchangeably. Inside our leadership team discussions we tend to define things a bit more precisely, especially the following words and concepts.

Discipleship principles. We have identified four principles that serve as the foundation of what we believe and practice about discipleship. These principles are not unique to our context, but, like all principles, they are true for all time and in all places. Some people use different words and phrases, but the principles are the same. All four are essential. If one is removed, the discipleship process breaks down. We call these four principles the Four Es—engage, establish, equip, and empower.

Church culture. As we live out our values over time, we create a unique and distinct culture—mostly for better but sometimes for worse. While it is easy to rebrand and rewrite value and vision statements, changing a church's culture is a

time-consuming and tedious task. Church culture is developed over time, and it takes time to change it. I have seen many well-meaning church leaders use our discipleship material, copy our Four Es language, and start small group discipleship, only to fail as quickly as they started. Why? Most failed because they planted discipleship principles and ideas into the soil of a culture that killed the seeds. When it comes to making disciples, creating the right culture is much more important than using the right language and material. I wish I could tell you it's easy, but changing and maintaining a healthy discipleship culture is the most difficult and elusive part of ministry.

Discipleship goals. Our ultimate goal is expressed in our Victory motto: Honor God; *make disciples*. This book focuses on one aspect of that goal—how we make disciples. The *honor* God part of the motto is our way of expressing organizational values that describe our relationship with God and with one another. That is an entirely different book. But there are sub-goals that flow out of the previously mentioned values, culture, and principles. Identifying these basic discipleship goals helps us hit the big goal of honoring God and making disciples.

Church Culture	Discipleship Principle	Basic Goal
Relational	Engage culture and community	Share the gospel
Spiritual	Establish biblical foundations	Strong foundations
Intentional	Equip believers to minister	Basic ministry skills
Missional	Empower disciples to make disciples	Ministry confidence and competence

WIKICHURCH LESSONS

Everyone wants to make disciples, but many try, fail, then quit. Why? I think the easiest and most common way to fail at discipleship is to import a model or copy a method that worked somewhere else without first understanding the values that create a healthy discipleship culture. Principles and process are much more important than material, models, and methods.

WikiChurches create an ongoing process of making disciples who in turn make other disciples. This takes time, effort, and persistence. Among the reasons we have been successful are:

1. We took the time as a leadership team to fine-tune our common understanding of what it means to be a disciple.
2. We did not make sudden, radical changes in the church. Discipleship groups designed to engage nonbelievers began with the leadership team and slowly grew from there.
3. We made the decision to perfect one move (making disciples) rather than dozens of independent programs.

None of those steps are necessarily easy, but they are not complicated either. Perhaps the most difficult part for some is a simple decision—to progressively move the church toward the single focus of making disciples.