

## **TRAINING DAYS: THE ROAD AHEAD FOR DISCIPLESHIP?**

**Scott Green - Monday, June 16, 2003**

An Essay On Leadership & Unity  
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*"For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance." Psalm 66:10-12*

*"...everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." Luke 6:40*

My distant ancestor once wrote about the French Revolution, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times"--apt words for the church at this hour. After six months of disorienting tumult that has accompanied so much rapid change--some for the good and some for the worse, we all face together a humbling season of repentance and rebuilding. Many disciples, stuffed for years by an overpowering authoritarian discipleship dynamic, have come forth boldly, loudly--and sometimes self-righteously and bitterly--clamoring for needed reform. Churches all over the world, sabotaged not only by a lack of faith, but by a lack of faithfulness to God's sacred long-term church-building and family-building priorities, have grown weary and withered. Most of our large churches, in fact, have been stuck for a long time.

No matter what the times, however, this challenge remains: it is up to us alone to determine whether such times will represent our generation's worst spiritual defeat or finest hour. It's a choice no one can make for us, and a failure to stand firm for what's true is no one's fault but our own. While it's true that some of our most honored leaders have stumbled terribly, it's also true that each and every Christian, leader or not, survives day by day only because of the blood of Christ. We are a kingdom of desperate sinners. We are in it, for better or worse, together. And we have choices--urgent choices that call us out of anger, self-pity, and disillusionment. God is still with us, we still have His Word, we still know His mission, and we still stand at the crossroads of incredible opportunities to save more souls than have ever been saved since the first century. The harvest is plentiful, and the workers still not enough.

The story of Josiah affirms that God loves repentance and restoration. Every time His people move forward with courage, He blesses with abundance. Our own brief history is itself full of the blessings that follow earnest restoration. The Crossroads ministries and the Lexington/Boston church blazed an amazing restoration trail of commitment, evangelism, and deep fellowship. The disciples that came from these ministries went literally around the world, building hundreds of churches and baptizing hundreds of thousands into Christ. These were God's feats and great feats they were--perhaps unprecedented since the first century.

Now we face a new season of restoration. It's an important focus, I think--restoration. It implies discovery, learning, courage, forward motion. Sometimes amidst repentance, we forget about restoration. We may grieve and react, confess and condemn, and in our efforts to make amends, get confused about what it is we really believe in. Many churches are now embroiled in a crisis of trust--between leaders and "non-leaders," between full-time staff and non full-time Christians. My own opinion, based on conversations with Christians and Christian leaders around the world, is that the word best describing much of the present landscape is confusion.

And Satan wants to confuse us. He wants to baffle us with false assumptions as he attempted to do with Eve ("Did God really say..?") and with Jesus ("IF you are the Son of God..."). His primary goal is to separate us and then kill us. But one of his preliminary goals in this is to prompt, in this time of rebuilding, reactionary feelings and decisions, the very thing we try to disarm in marriages and families that are on the brink. Certainly at this hour we need both decision and action. But given that none of us are children and all of us have worked hard and sacrificed, we need to be even more committed, in my opinion, to making amends more than we make demands. We need some indignation, but indignation mitigated by our own sense of sin, and by our love and respect for family, for none of us sit in the judgment seat of God. I'd like to make the appeal that we all--young and old, victim and "perpetrator," leaders and new Christians--drink heavily from the well of humility. We need to begin changing the kingdom vision by taking care to first look for specks, beams, whatever, in our own eyes. Restoration is an inside-out job. Whether we see ourselves in this crisis as primarily sinners or victims, humility is our mutual and only hope of grace and is the launching pad for new, more mature, truly collaborative spiritual paradigms. When we humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, He will lift us up.

Humbly then, what is it we know? What do we believe in? Will we jettison all that God has taught us in the past 20-30 years? It could happen, more easily than we think. In our zeal to be cleansed and to be beyond reproach, it's profoundly tempting to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Jesus subtly warned against this in Matthew 23 by challenging the Pharisees to "practice the latter without neglecting the former." We need some very clear thinking--taking care to avoid oversimplifying and over-generalizing--about where we've erred and where we've been victorious; where we've done well and where we haven't; where we've been wise, and where we've been foolish. Most of our foolishness, in my experience, falls into just two categories: how we've led (treatment of others) and how we've built (godly or ungodly strategy). Right now, most of our worldwide attention has gravitated to the former--how we lead--but in fact the cracks in our inflexible leadership paradigm really only became manifest once our church building mistakes began to reap what they had sown. As long as we were growing, we tended to overlook the dangers of an immature discipleship. Inevitably, when we didn't mature, we also stopped growing numerically. In this essay, I'd like to try to tackle these problems of How We've Built and How We've Led, using the following outline:

- I. How We've Built--Wood, Hay, and Straw**
  - A. Speed
  - B. Accountability
  - C. Motivation
- II. How We've Led--"Discipleship" Dynamics**
  - A. The Family Paradigm Shows the Way
  - B. "Discipling" Relationships Change
  - C. Empowerment, not Authority is the Goal
  - D. Training versus Influence
- III. The Future**
  - A. What Should Maturity Look Like?
  - B. Structural/Application Questions and Observations

But first, I'd like to take a few minutes to address the present climate of upheaval and confusion in many corners of the kingdom, as I have experienced it locally and through hearsay--the latter being of limited value, as we shall see. Let me suggest that the process of Restoration cannot be separated from its fruits. It's not enough to desire change, to demand change, to pray for change. There is a right and godly way to change. Here are three concepts/observations that I believe are crucial to facilitating godly change:

### **1. Our most recent crisis is one of Conflict Resolution.**

I think most of us in leadership have come to varying degrees of conviction about how we have (or have not) personally condescended to those around us (or those seen as "under" us), treating them more like children than adults. This has blunted maturity, discouraged people from speaking up, left people un-empowered and sometimes disrespected, and essentially exasperated disciples. For those who have suffered abusive personal relationships, this is all an understatement. Like suppressed or abused teenagers, many disciples have lashed out in resentment or discouragement. My experience is that these conflicts are family conflicts in every way.

I suppose, given the immaturity of our discipling paradigms, it comes as no surprise that the strategies of some to bring about healing and resolution have also been immature. In the wake of "open forums" advocated by some to bring about change, repentance, or resolution of feeling, the Biblical pattern of conflict resolution stands, more than ever, in bold relief. What is that pattern? The Scriptures are familiar but need careful review. Here are a few central ones. *First*, from Matthew 18:15-17, we learn that conflict is to be resolved between the sinner and the sinned against, as privately, not as publicly, as possible. Think long on this. When we are offended, we are to go directly to the offending party, straightaway. In Seattle we have been adamant about Christians being as issue-specific as possible, as person-specific as possible, and as private as possible. There is no room for general indictments such as, "the kingdom has offended me," because such a broad accusation makes no Matthew 18 sense--it cannot be responded to meaningfully.

Similarly, a public forum for accusation or venting of grievances bypasses this scripture in the name of encouraging stuffed people to speak up. For those who have been intimidated and are afraid of speaking up, it's understandable that a public forum might seem like a more "safe place" (although we should ask "safe for whom?") to get open. Unfortunately, this contingency isn't granted a Matthew 18 exemption by Jesus. It's not His way to proceed. Imagine being the patriarch of a large dysfunctional family, one in which the Dad has personally offended several relationships, which in turn have offended one another. If the Dad calls a large family reunion and publicly offers, "it's all my fault," nothing will be resolved. I'm talking here about deeply hurt feelings about the relationships, not a public apology for choosing a poor clubhouse for the meeting (which might be fine). To really resolve the deep family experience, it will be necessary for the Dad to begin a Matthew 18 process, as personal and as private as possible, with each family member. He will also need to insist that each of the family members do likewise. Only after this, will a public summation of it all make sense and bring the chapter to a close.

I realize that some offended sharers might say that because their first (or second) attempt at Matthew 18 went poorly, they have no choice but to stuff it and then vent it in an explosive public atmosphere. This is, however, still a bypass of the scripture. God's will is crystal clear. When unresolved, we are to bring more witnesses--again, the goal is to be as private, not as public, as possible--and still more, in an attempt to give the person a "reality check." If this fails, we are to begin telling more and more--"tell it to the church" until something gives: either the person begins seeing it, or the "everyone" helps us see our own distortions. I realize there is always the risk of "yes men" supporting an offending party in more private settings so that justice isn't heard. But this risk will always exist, whether from the tyranny of one, or the tyranny of a group, or the tyranny of victims, or the tyranny of those determined to stay in a state of never-ending non-resolution . It's always a risk. We need the Holy Spirit. Numbers and committees won't save us from abuse but the systematic maturity of many will make it much harder to hide than it was before.

We ought to make protecting the Matthew 18 rights of every disciple part of our culture. In my own congregation, we don't want anyone to be "trapped" by someone's influence, including mine. We want everyday Christians to know that if they feel confused by a relationship with a more savvy older brother or sister, and don't know how to resolve it after attempting Matthew 18 Step One, they have an advocate in me. At the same time, I invite Christians who feel I've shut them down to get as much help as they need to make me listen. I can't emphasize enough what a cornerstone this must become in creating healthy, empowered fellowships.

*Second*, Matthew 18 strategies must be taught understanding that swiftness is part of the plan. Matthew 5:23-4 teaches that we are to leave our gift on the altar when we sense something is wrong between us and someone else. This doesn't mean that complicated matters can be settled in a day, but it does mean that we initiate the process in a day. We are not, once a blip comes up on our emotional radar screens, supposed to go home, brood on it, and build an invariably distorted case for a deeper resentment. This is a huge scripture for opinionated people, who easily take umbrage at what was said or done, but habitually go home to brood (I've done it myself many times), allowing the seeds of bitter roots to be sown in the relationship. This disastrous habit is tantamount to gossiping with one's self. Put another way, no matter what the circumstance or accusation, we are supposed to give each other the benefit of the doubt; if we can't, we are to contact that person immediately.

*Third*, Romans 14:1ff warns us to allow for a world of opinion, not passing "judgment on disputable matters." Without question, one of the biggest widespread blunders I've seen in my own life and in the lives of my people is the propensity to pass off opinion or traditional practices as God's will. I know I have erred, out of sincere concern for the relatively unwise choice-making of the immature, on the side of passing off my opinions as gospel. This sort of condescension is something I've been conscientiously apologizing for in all of my relationship interfaces. Perhaps in response to something similar, we are now seeing around the kingdom a new wave of reactionary judgmentalism, in which, again, we deeply feel our opinion--especially if we have felt stuffed--on an issue is gospel.

A prime example here is the worldwide special contributions over many years. Many Christians, for the first time, are wondering how the money was spent--the wondering is a sign of maturity, not overreaction. However, as each of us look at how monies were allocated--whether to the third world, first world, or to some sort of administration, we have to come to grips with the fact that it's an opinion issue, not gospel. (To me, the real issue with these distributions is simply the principle that there needed to be--in churches, in d-groups, wherever--more advisors in these matters to make victory sure.) People may disagree on how it was spent, but in the absence of gross negligence or scandal (I'm not personally aware of any, though I realize I could be naïve or uninformed), it's simply opinion. This tolerance for opinion, as a principle, explains why one-size-fits-all solutions to worldwide church problems don't really work. They don't work because they don't do proper justice to individual congregational problems and their complex contexts. We simply cannot pass judgment on situations beyond our immediate experience. If, for example, someone asks me, "How's London?" I say (and I'm not trying to be flippant here), "I don't know. I pray for them, and await tales of victory." That doesn't mean I'm not concerned, but it does mean I'm not going to judge something I know little about.

*Fourth*, Jesus warns us in Matthew 7:1ff that the measure we use will be used on us. It's a promise. Perhaps it's even a threat. We are expected to obey his challenge to take beams out of our own eyes before we attempt to correct one another. The inference of the language (we have the beam, they have the speck) is that no matter what we think we see in someone's else's life, our own issues are at least as large. We are fellow sinners in a world of opinion that includes an enormous amount of trial and error. This must--must--necessarily mitigate our right to indignation. The only person worthy to pick up stones (let alone cast them) against the adulterous woman of John 8 was Jesus. Anything else puts us squarely in the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18, (in the unflattering role.)

This issue of judgment came home to me in reading Gene Edwards, "The Tale of Three Kings." In this work, Edwards observed that David opted not to pass judgment on either Saul or Absalom. Moreover, he observed that if we are certain that we have a "Saul" in our lives, we are actually being an Absalom! If we are certain we have an "Absalom" in our lives, we are being a Saul! By contrast, David left final judgment and justice regarding both of these relationships to God. As fellow sinners, we are to gently bear with each other's opinions, including those of leaders trying their best to be responsible (Eph 4:25ff, Gal 6:1, Luke 6:31).

## **2. Lately, some wounded and intimidated Christians have tolerated a culture of Slander**

A second flaw in the "open forum" method of conflict resolution mentioned earlier is its systematic sanction of slander. I'm not speaking here to open forums that are positive sharing times or creative brainstorming sessions held in an atmosphere of encouragement and mutual trust. I'm talking about the attempt, again, to bypass the Matthew 18 process and resolve publicly what is to be resolved privately. In such a public atmosphere, any Christian speaking critically about another individual instantaneously calls into question that person's reputation in the eyes of everyone else who is listening. Similarly, when any Christian publicly criticizes or accuses "leadership," (although it could be some other broad brush target), his accusation taints all leaders in the innocent eyes of everyone else who is listening. It is fundamentally undermining to reputation, and such a phenomenon is what is meant by the term "slander"--the communicating

of misleading statements injurious to a person's reputation. I'm not saying the intent is malicious. But it is slanderous. It's true that, in the past, many leaders have censored people with legitimate grievances under the banner of "gossip." In fact, probably many of those circumstances were people simply trying to put Matthew 18 into proper practice. I'm afraid, however, that none of this justifies bypassing what the Scriptures have to say about slandering peoples'--all peoples'--fragile reputations (and all of our reputations are fragile).

For this same reason, emails and papers advocating one-size-fits-all indictments of "the movement," or "leadership" fall into the trap of unintentional slander. By claiming we're all the same, then citing horrendous anecdotes of leadership abuse (it doesn't matter how many), such viewpoints damage the general reputations of all--this may be therapeutic for some, but it's still just slander. Think on this. Such broad indictments are hopelessly devoid of essential truth-revealing local context, and give the accused no chance to reply in context--again, something that should be done as privately and as specifically as possible. Frankly, even reading or listening to broad brush hearsay indictments that have nothing to do with one's local experience gives ammunition to slander, taints one's trust, and, in my opinion, falls under the category of having "an unhealthy interest in controversy" (1 Tim 6:4).

In this context, perhaps it becomes more clear why even one-size-fits-all apologies also fail to serve the interests of Truth. If--a big IF--they bypass the painstaking conflict resolving work outlined above, such broad apologies, no matter what the noble motivation, amount to another kind of distortion, perhaps even self-slander; instead of resolving problems, they actually create the opportunity for more arbitrary doubt in a wondering public that has no way of knowing the specifics of individual problems or their vital contexts. On the other hand, if the painstaking, bridge-building work of Matthew 18 has been done already, then broader public apologies or summations of what's been learned will encourage the public by bringing appropriate chapters to a close.

### **3. A large part of the present Confusion centers on the concept of Responsibility**

When an organization fails, we all look to assign blame. It's normal. It's godly. We are searching for responsibility so that we can correct the failure and find resolution of our disappointment or pain. Responsibility is a lynchpin of mature living. We observe that the immature, as a trait, tend to be irresponsible. Since leaders ought to be, fundamentally, mature, responsibility, as a coveted strength, dominates the landscape of leadership. Thus, leaders who fail to be responsible won't be respected. They will be seen as cowardly or self-serving. They won't face the pain; won't take the hit. Ultimately, they won't be followed. Technically speaking, these leaders are under-responsible.

If we care about God and virtue, we zealously strive to avoid such under-responsibility at all costs. Sometimes, in so doing, we err in the opposite direction; we become over-responsible. This is like the well-meaning husband who claims, in the name of Ephesians 5, that he is completely responsible for his wife's happiness. Or like the parents who believe, in the name of Proverbs 22:6, that their parenting completely guarantees that their children will always make righteous choices. Neither are true. Ultimately, there is individual responsibility that overrides relationship influences.

In the same way, leaders who say, "the buck stops here," can inadvertently support the idea that the buck stops nowhere else. It may seem noble, superficially, to assume "full responsibility" for everything--it sounds good. One might think of Jimmy Carter assuming "total responsibility" for the botched Iran hostage rescue in 1980. Of course, in reality, he was only responsible for the decision to go. Many other players in the drama were responsible for many other things.

When we assert total responsibility, it creates a culture in which the buck, so to speak, is passed upwards. In our present crisis, this is akin to insisting that, in the end, since we were all influenced and led forcefully, the Kingdom "top leader" must be responsible for everything that has happened. We could keep passing the buck up though. We might even say it was his spiritual forefathers' fault, including Alexander Campbell. Of course I'm being ridiculous. But it's also ridiculous, confusing, and obscuring to over-generalize in assigning responsibility.

This is more than an issue of common sense; it is the scriptural sense of Ezekiel 18, which corrects the heresy of inherited guilt and inherited responsibility. The son is responsible for his own sin, and the father for his. The father does not share in the guilt of the son, and vice-versa. This reads the same for spiritual families as it does for physical families. Passing the buck of responsibility upwards (or downwards) is wrong.

On the other hand, the examples of Ezra (chapters 9-10) and Nehemiah (chapter one) exemplify some kind of corporate responsibility, right? The language they both use is instructive. In both cases of national repentance, these leader/prophets pray to God for forgiveness of the people's sins. In their confessions (which are to God, not the people, actually), believe it or not, they do not assume direct "total responsibility" for the sins of Israel: "I did it; forgive me." Instead, they assume a form of indirect responsibility--"we" are in this together. Father, forgive us.

In Seattle we are striving to act appropriately in areas of direct responsibility and in areas of indirect responsibility. For me personally, this began with initiating a Matthew 18 process with people who approached me because of direct offense. I needed to apologize to individuals with whom I had regular dealings--the dragons d-group, the Seattle staff on certain issues, the admin staff on some things, the BT leaders I work with in my Region, and the people of my own Bible Talk. These were my areas of direct responsibility.

Let me stress that these times were not just times of apology, but times of dialogue in which I needed to hear people's experiences, answer various questions, come to a deeper understanding of people's pain, provide context where needed, and hear new ideas for how to change things. As all of us dealt with our one to one relationship offenses, it became easier to discuss things in small groups.

After that, I invited the input and observations of the regional fellowship itself. These were people with whom I've had an indirect responsibility. It is significant that none of the other Seattle sector leaders felt it necessary for me to apologize to their sectors, nor to their collective BT leaders, although, because of past interactions, I strove to open the door to individuals in other sectors that had any personal offense with me. My fairly distant--very distant in an age of maturity--responsibility for these sectors in general was so completely overshadowed by the dramatic direct responsibility taken by the sector leaders for their own, that it simply hasn't been

an issue. (Let me say, however, that I have indeed felt the need to apologize to the entire congregation on at least two occasions--once in January and once at our financial meeting. I wanted them know I was sorry for any patterns of condescension that I practiced in my own d-groups which might have been imitated, and for not being collaborative with the mature lay leadership in assembling our missions contributions in the past) I'm thankful, in principle, for how they have each wanted to maximize direct responsibility and minimize indirect responsibility--this is a fundamental part of a maturity paradigm of leadership. This way of leading best builds every intimate bridge between members and their leaders, whether full-time or not. It also emphasizes what a team we really ought to be.

Do other kingdom leaders, for example, have some distant responsibility for the Seattle church's historic woes? Before we arrived in 1997, others used to be in charge of the discipling of the Seattle church. It's possible that we have some members who may feel they have personal unfinished business with leaders in other cities, and in that event, we will encourage them to call them if necessary and make the attempt at reconciliation (although we will encourage them even more to forgive and move on. We can't force people we don't deal with day to day answer to our grievances. We can only repair our local situations, because there we can meet face to face as long as it takes.) Perhaps we're all linked in some way. But no one here feels it's needed or appropriate to have any other leaders come up to Seattle and apologize for indirect influence over the years. Trying to make those who have indirect responsibility feel that they are always directly responsible is a subtle form of blame-shifting. It's not mature. These are deep waters and crucial distinctions, which lay the groundwork for a clearer understanding of the subtleties of responsibility.

## **I. Wood, Hay, and Straw**

In fact, in my opinion, we have for a long time been building, in many, many places in the world, with wood, hay and straw--the Corinthian description of fast but shoddy building. The Six Year Plan exacerbated this problem but by no means was the beginning of it; evidence of our short cut mentality well precedes 1995. At this pivotal hour, too many works are in danger of being burned up, and the match is at the door. In my opinion, here are some of our worst building habits--habits that eventually weaken faith and shipwreck dreams:

### *1. Haste rather than Urgency*

Undoubtedly out of a mixture of motives good and bad--competitiveness, godly ambition, urgency, compassion, task orientation, and desire for success--many of our churches live life too fast. Disciples in these places live as though they were on a constant evangelistic campaign, like the HOPE campaign in London nearly 20 years ago. Their weeks are filled with striving daily for commitments to church, studies are moved briskly along, in the name of urgency, and far too many weak conversions result. In these fellowships, life is dominated by accountability. Too much accountability. Accountability that renders a majority of disciples unhappy, guilty, and hopeless.

How many churches are we talking about? Based on talks with church leaders around the world over the last 15 years, I'm guessing about three-fourths. The kingdom statistics reveal that most

of our churches have at least one half as many fallaways per year as they do baptisms. Many, many congregations have many more fallaways. In 2001, the our collective churches baptized over 30,000 souls, yet saw over 26,000 fall away! Amazingly, in 1995, at a time during which we were supposedly much less spread out, the kingdom baptized over 37,000 souls, seeing "only" 25,000 fall away. While it's true '95 whupped '01, the fact is neither of these bookend results is in touch with reality. Long ago or short, for every 10 people coming into the kingdom, 7 leave. First and third world churches alike seem oblivious to the ridiculousness of it: would we, in our physical families, feel it acceptable to have 7 of our ten children not make it to heaven?? We all--China and Seattle included--desperately need to repent of our standards. Let me appeal to us all to set goals immediately to change the balance. Why can't we again see days when very few ever leave? It's something worth saying and something worth praying for as congregations. In Seattle--I realize in many areas we are hardly a paragon of virtue--we baptized over 100 (too few!) last year and saw about 35 (way too many!) fall away. We want to study with as many as possible, baptize as many as possible, and take as many as possible to heaven! Don't we? Perhaps we've been affected by an arbitrary theological goal: to win everyone in "one generation." Who says? It's an opinion. But why not adjust our vision for the long run? How about: to win as many as possible for ALL generations. Such a goal leaves room for building with no short cuts. If we could change our priorities in favor of the long run, our great-grandchildren's generation (that's not so far, is it?) will surely lead every person on earth to at least an invitation to church--a real miracle.

## 2. *Withering Accountability*

To change speeds and shift gears--that is, to slow things down in the short run so that we can win as many as possible in the long run--we need to change our mindset again about "accountability." Every scripture I can think of describes patience and grace as preceding judgment. The talents master came back demanding an account only "after a long time" (Matt 25:19). The fig tree master was even disappointed for three seasons and still gave the tree one more patient chance before cutting it down (Luke 13:9). The dominant scriptural paradigms of evangelism aren't junk bonds or fuller brush sales; rather, they are fishing and farming. Both punish impatience; both reward planning and follow-through. We need, in my opinion, to obey the laws of the farm. Sowing takes time, especially the cultivation of new fields in one's life. Watering takes lots of heart and time. Harvesting follows and the increase is brought by God.

There's nothing wrong per se with the concept of accountability; in fact, we cannot escape it. The truth is, our whole lives will be called into account (with grace) at judgment day. Schools call us to account. Professions have expectations. Spouses have expectations. So do children. The fact is, without some kind of calling to account, we will lose our sense of where we've been and what we've learned. We will find it almost impossible to determine whether or not we've grown personally. We will tend to run aimlessly, and forfeit the conviction that basic performance in life even matters (whether as a Christian, or as a leader, or as an elder, etc.) In the real world, physical or spiritual, a life of growth is necessarily accompanied by periodic evaluation, something that even existed in the lukewarm traditional churches I grew up in: in those days, if you were in the ministry, you were accountable for at least preaching well, or the congregation wouldn't want you. If you were a member, you had to at least show up on Sundays!

It's tempting, when we've been worn out by too much accountability, to oversimplify the mission, avoid all goals, have no strategy, and pooh pooh all planning--all in the name of a higher spirituality: "We just need to love God more and He will bless." Don't get me wrong, I understand this sentiment. But I remember hearing those very words week after week while we remained fruitless, year after year, in my traditional church years. Like all runners, we still need goals, targets, plans, and practice. This is simply how things get done in the universe that God designed. Using this analogy, perhaps it can be said that many of us have been over-trained, right into the ground. This doesn't, however, mean that training is the enemy. It can still be exciting and wonderful.

The pivotal question is, how often do we take things to account? I'm convinced this makes all the difference in the world. When accountability comes too quickly, it pressures us to take death-bringing & debt-bringing short cuts. In the China WS, we have been working over two years to completely change how we use goals and statistics--and we still have some goals and some statistics. First, we plan our harvests over 3 "seasons" a year. We don't keep track of baptisms every month. We don't evaluate our evangelistic fruitfulness each month. We DO evaluate it at the end of FOUR months, because we believe it's enough time to be wholehearted about sowing and watering without short cuts. This evaluation isn't harsh, because we humbly discuss our evangelistic fruitfulness knowing that much of it is out of our hands because much of it is in God's hands and in the hands of the decision-making non-Christian. This is making us more fruitful (but not LOTS more fruitful than before). It's also making our converts more solid (LOTS more solid) and its helping our people enjoy the mission again.

Perhaps one of the other reasons why accountability became burdensome is that it tended to come top-down, from those perceived to be "over you." Ideally, as fellowship peers we are all to hold one another "accountable" for our lives--for our "performance" before the Lord as His followers (Hebrews 3:12). For this to be so, we must allow peers and especially those we serve (even those "younger in the faith") to hold leaders accountable periodically. We need their input. We need to know, from their point of view, if we really are succeeding (or not) in serving them and in serving the lost. Leaders need this directly from the people they lead because that group will ultimately determine the reputation of that leader, since they work with him from day to day. Put even more bluntly, that group that the leader serves is paying his salary; therefore, they must be able to call him to account. Concurrently, a leader's peer group can help bring perspective to the helpful criticism he receives from his spiritual "constituents." Top-down accountability must be augmented, then replaced by one's own groups and peers calling them to account.

### *3. Compulsion Motivation*

I remember years ago asking Kevin Darby about my dream of going into the full time ministry. I was a punk college student and didn't know up from down. His quick but confident reply caught me by surprise: "First, you need to evaluate your motivation for going into the ministry," he said. Over twenty years later, I still am. We all are.

Why we do what we do makes all the difference. It's the difference between Pharisees and disciples, noble and ignoble, and between receiving one's reward in full this life rather than receiving praise from God in heaven someday. For me, the early days of ministry in Boston were

full of electrifying motivation--we felt compelled to preach the Word, because the need was so great, not because the duty was so great. Our zeal--a defining feature of our fellowship--extended not from admonitions to "be fired up," but from the profound urgency of our mission.

Times have changed. A common complaint now in our churches, from Christians and Christian leaders alike, is that people are hard to motivate. Hard to inspire. "Old-timers" seem resistant to inspiration. Lukewarmness actually exists in our churches, something we thought, back in the 70's, would never happen. As Marty Fuqua often quotes, you reap what you sow. The Christians, motivationally speaking, are worn out.

One of the reasons why they are worn out is because they have been poorly motivated. In such cases, grace motivation has been ignored, uncultivated. When disciples are first baptized into Christ, the motivation tends to be clear and pure--we become Christians because of God's love, His compassion on us, and our own deep need for forgiveness. Soon, we also embrace, as new missionaries, the motivation of helping to save others. Such a motive is fundamentally others-focused, and can be summed up in the words, "Someone needs me. People around me are harassed and helpless. I'm needed." We have Jesus' compassion (Matthew 9:35-38) steaming in our blood.

Slowly and subtly, however, if we don't constantly replenish these motives from God's Word and by developing best friend relationships with lost people, our motives can shift. Rather than feeling, "I'm needed," we begin feeling only, "I need to"--motivation by duty. Over many years, I've constantly found that motivational problems boil down to this leadership failure to distinguish between being compelled by the cross, moved by the ministry of reconciliation, and being under withering compulsion. The first two motives, portrayed eloquently by Paul in 2 Cor 5:14ff, never wear us out. Jesus' gift of grace on the cross--properly kept in focus--never fails to soften and stir our hearts. The ministry of reconciliation--how we are needed by the lost--cannot fail to inspire us to action: "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). 1 Cor 15:10 connects these two motivations--grace that caused Paul to "work harder than all the rest." The third kind of motivation, cited by Paul in 2 Cor 9:7, is compulsion--"I'm forced to." Such a motive eventually turn the heart to stone. It must be regularly recognized and rooted out.

In particular, the contexts of evangelism and financial sacrifice bring these issues into sharp relief. When people feel commanded and under compulsion to give, year after year, they become numb. When campaign after campaign almost forces us to evangelize, we lose the meaning of it. Certainly there's a time and place for doing what is right just because it is right, but such settings ought to be the exception rather than the rule. In Seattle, we have made a transition away from dictating what our people should give/must give as a special missions contribution, and towards challenging them to give from the heart, see what they commit, and then build our budgets. We've found our people to be, over the last few years, incredibly sacrificial and yet happy and unburdened. The same is true evangelistically. The more we feel needed by a lost world, the better we do.

This perspective runs parallel to a focus on people instead of tasks. Again, there's a time and place for being task-oriented, for just getting difficult tasks done--enduring drudgery for a noble cause--but this should be the exception. In the main, we ought to be people-oriented. It's the most

obvious thing about God and Jesus--their focus on people. Sometimes, well-meaning disciples and leaders focus too hard on the mission itself and lose sight of the point of the mission--people, and their eternity. We become task oriented more than people oriented, sabotaging our motivation. While it's true that we may be called the army of God, in fact, we are more the family of God.

That's why the shifting of relationships really matters. When leaders constantly move from church to church and from region to region; when "discipleship partners" constantly change from semester to semester; when we constantly try to control where someone should live (we shouldn't), we lose the crucial focus of putting down deep relationship roots. Our spiritual relationships become shallow. Our motivation evaporates. Armies don't really mind this, but families are crushed by it.

## **II. Mature Discipleship**

Personally, I've found the problem of how we build easier to think about and (hopefully) solve than the problem of how we lead. The problem of how we lead may constitute the most profound and most important field of restoration we've ever faced as a unity of churches. It certainly looms large on the horizon right now. If we cannot solve how we lead, we will stifle the Spirit, stifle future leadership, and stifle the growth of the churches. Moreover, if we cannot address successfully the problem of leadership, we will never address the problems of how we build. Since building reform comes about through leaders, we cannot have ongoing building reform without fundamental leadership reform.

I know that all of us in the full time ministry have been fervently praying about how we lead, thinking about it, discussing it, worrying about it, speaking about it, and--some of us, with fear and trembling--writing about it. I know my latest thinking has been deeply affected and changed by those formerly known as WSLs, by many GSLs, by the China "dragons"--especially Steve & Jane Chin, Danny & Kwan Chow, and Philip & Pandora Lam, and by the Seattle Church Leadership: elder Ron Brumley, Tom Snyder, Daren Overstreet, Jay Kelly, and West-Point-grad-military-expert Alex Whitaker. My wife Lynne, and their wives have been spared much of the difficult drag-on discussion, but have nevertheless, deeply affected the way I'm looking at things. I want to especially thank the Bible Talk Leaders in Seattle for providing tremendous perspective. While none of these relationships is responsible for these thoughts & opinions, I'm grateful to them all for how they've changed my life & mindset, especially since last November. In the aftermath of abusive leadership, too much authoritarian leadership, too much centralization, and all kinds of resultant disillusionment and alienation, how do we pick up the pieces? Is leadership itself the enemy? Is discipling the enemy? Is autonomy the answer? Is democracy the answer? Earlier I noted that as we react to sin & folly, we may heave out babies with bathwater. Have we taken the time to count the cost of doing that? I realize that for those of us who have been most hurt, counting the cost of reform may seem to be the last thing we feel like being careful about.

My own view: it's easy, especially when we've been hurt or disillusioned, to over-generalize in haste. It's important to grasp that while many have lived with pain in their spiritual relationships, many have not. There is no one-size-fits-all way to evaluate over 20 years of building in

hundreds of different churches. My own experiences and discussions with disciples in Hong Kong and in Seattle confirm that "the movement" as we've called it, often fell short of being a full-time Camelot. But neither was it an Inquisition. Let's not edit out the amazing wonders God has done over the past 25 years in our churches. Modern-day miracles really happened. The salvation of many really resulted. I do not believe that God has either left us or has contempt for us. I don't think--just one man's opinion--He is ashamed of us collectively.

We did not get it all wrong. We just didn't get it all--a serious, serious problem. And we need to get it all. And we were wrong not to. But God is still guiding. He has disciplined us without rejecting us. We can know this because of his unchanging nature as a good Father (Hebrews 12:5-8).

The idea that somehow we were deluded as we boldly highlighted utterly obvious patterns of training and leadership in Moses, Elijah, Jesus, the apostles, and the early church, is a foolish idea--perhaps even an insulting idea, when we consider the sincere labor and sacrifices of so many who have tried to blaze a trail these past 25 years. So many have longed to see what we see, to hear what we hear. We really ought to take care, as we argue about what went wrong and what we should do, to dig for the real issues, and take special care not to be given to buzzwords & convenient slogans ("it's because we've been a 'movement of men.'") Restoration isn't easy or simple.

The Bible is pro-leadership. It's steeped in leadership lessons. Leadership is of God and is not the enemy--our sin is. We can learn more from the Bible about leadership than any business school could ever hope to teach. Yes, the Bible is pro-"discipleship." Submission, obedience, respect for church authority, imitation, humility, encouraging, rebuking, admonishing, delegation and accountability--all these things really are in the Bible. They are an obvious, integral part of Jesus' ministry, the very ministry he urged his disciples to imitate and perpetuate. They are essential for the church to multiply and succeed in winning as many as possible. We were not crazy to believe in these things and teach them.

But we missed a huge thing. Perhaps if we had been more humble we would not have missed it. In my opinion, what we missed is that discipleship is meant to be a family dynamic. Not an army dynamic. Not a business dynamic. It only makes long-term sense in the context of Family. In Matthew 16, Jesus chastised the Pharisees for their failure to see the signs. In my opinion, we too have missed the obvious. We've missed what's right under our noses, something that should be "clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Ro 1:21). We've missed the fact that spiritual growth parallels family growth. Family is the ultimate leadership/followship model that God has given to us. It is timeless. It is clear. It is complete. A family paradigm of discipleship explains many things:

### *1. "Discipling" Relationships Change*

Most of our disappointing or abusive discipling relationships are static as a defining characteristic. One man baptizes another. He watches out for the younger brother. He trains him, raises him up, nurtures him, in many ways like a parent. The relationship begins, naturally, and continues as an "over-under" relationship, like a parent to a child or preadolescent. Perhaps a

good secular example is the martial arts training relationship: master-student ("Si-fu, Tou dai" in Cantonese). You always respect your "master" and imitate him. The relationship is quite linear, and there is little or no room for questioning and feedback. The relationship is a one-way impact relationship. That's the way it starts, and that's the way it pretty much always is.

Families--at least healthy ones--aren't that way. The relationship changes over time. A father trains a young child one way, but when the child becomes a teen, the training has changed. Later still, the teen grows up and out of the house, and the relationship must change even more. The parent must "butt out" and in almost every way, see the grown up child as an adult peer. Anything else will bring, at best, a rolling of the eyes from the "child", and at worst, resentment and alienation. I've experienced both in my physical and spiritual family relationships. A failure to see this change constitutes a fundamental condescension, a kind of disrespect for the growing disciple. It limits his potential and artificially keeps him dependent on the "teacher."

I believe this is what Jesus meant in John 15, "I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father, I have made known to you." The relationship he had with his disciples wasn't static. It changed. They began as servants, but ended as friends (at least in Jesus' eyes).

I think it's realistic, and not unspiritual, to affirm that pretty much all new discipling relationships--someone just got baptized--will begin with a Kung Fu paradigm that resembles Teacher-Student. Of course it should be friendship. But the fact is, new disciples, for the most part, crave direction. They want and often need so much training in many of life's categories. They love this new life of discovery. They want to know what you know. Let's call this a Stage One relationship, a relationship in which a new Christian is pretty much Trained-By-Others. (I recognize that even this example won't fit the starting place of people baptized at an older, wiser place of life. Our expectations must adjust.) This parallels family relationships. Parents, at the start, have to teach everything to their young offspring. But it shouldn't stay that way.

Children become adults. As adults, they still need to learn and grow--

20-something wisdom is woeful compared to 50-something wisdom--but there's a palpable difference between children growing through adolescence to become a true adult and adults just getting older and wiser. The biggest growth jump in life is the one at which you leave home. It's the decisive stage. The stage at which we leave home and spread our wings. It's also the stage at which, for most things in life, we shift from having been Trained-By-Parent to Self-Trained. What a shift! (Especially financially--Dad, send money.)

In the same way, young disciples ought to reach a point of maturity at which they outgrow a Trained-By-Others stage, and become more Self-Trained. I think this principle is self-evident, but perhaps we see its echoes in 1 Timothy 4:7, "Train yourself to be godly," or in Philipians 2:12, "work out your salvation in fear and trembling." The more "over-under" discipling paradigm must give way and change, allowing brothers to be brothers and friends to be friends. We are still a family, but we are no longer children. This will maximize the empowerment, leadership, and maturity of all disciples. Does this mean we outgrow being led? We shall see. Because we have tended to keep all relationships "ordered," more linear, more over-under, it's easy now to despise the Stage One relationship as a mistake. But I don't think it is a mistake. It's just a mistake not to outgrow it. But the time we spend at Stage One--more Teacher-Student--is a magical time, a time in which we really, truly, humbly want to be told more what to do rather

than reinvent the wheel ourselves. I remember that time with Doug Arthur at Boston University in 1981, and my years with Kip from 1982-1986. Those weren't harsh times; they were magical times, and I wish everyone could have the memories I have of those training/friend relationships. I realize that many don't, that their experiences with a primary Teacher-Student relationship have been unhappy ones. But mine weren't.

## *2. The Focus of Discipling is Empowerment (Maturity) not Authority*

With the sufferings of the cross imminent, Jesus spoke to his disciples about laying down his life: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24). Our lives won't be multiplied in others until we surrender and sacrifice. In a training relationship, I take this to mean at least that my focus must be firmly off of myself and on others. They come first. They must become greater, I must become lesser. In happy families, that's how good parents think.

Some tennis Dads and soccer Moms don't. We've seen the caricature: parents living out their lives vicariously through their kids. They overpower their teenagers and alienate the relationship. Why? Because their focus is on their own authority, their need to control results, and not on the empowerment of their kids. Again, this doesn't mean authority is a dirty word--far from it. It just means it shouldn't be the prime directive of the relationship. Marriages in which the husband's focus is only on submission to his authority don't do well because the husband is missing the main point, "husbands, love your wives" (Eph 5:25)--even though there indeed is a time and place for submission. In my marriage and family, as the relationships mature, I want to keep the amount of time I spend talking about authority and submission to a severe minimum (not as true when my kids were toddlers).

As families grow up, it's clear then that the sphere of my authority keeps changing, certainly shrinking. It's folly to make it my focus. Instead, my focus must be the maturity and empowerment of my kids (and "disciples")--it's all about them. If I can make this the focus of my "discipling," the Christians will feel it. They'll appreciate that I'm trying at every point to help them take responsibility rather than just depend on me. They'll possess a rekindled vision of leadership themselves, because they see that there is "infinite room at the top," not just a throne for one top dog (me). Empowerment, not authority, must dominate.

## *3. We Must Distinguish Training From Influence*

Good parents instinctively understand the difference between influence--which is lifelong--and training, which is limited. When my two teens, Stephen (14) and Ariel (12) grow up and grow out of the house, I still expect to have an influence on them, but it is a receding influence and grows to be more and more two-way. In fact they influence me already in many ways, making me a better father, husband, and leader. Over the long run, our mutual influence will be very peer-like; that's what they certainly will want, and it's a respect they will have earned anyway. Training will be even clearer, and its recession more abrupt. When they were small, Lynne and I had to train them in literally everything. Now, with each passing day, in more and more categories, they are shifting from parent-trained to self-trained. When they leave our house, they

will be almost entirely self-trained. Any other training they want from me will be highly specialized: "What's the right financial strategy Dad? What mutual funds?" It will involve only those areas where my experience clearly has an advantage over theirs: perhaps in parenting, perhaps in securing college loans.

Most of us have been guilty of practicing a one-size-fits-all discipling that is dissimilar to the family factors I just described. (I like to think we did this because in the early days of the "movement," we were pretty much all the same size--20 somethings learning the ropes of life and ministry). We have failed to see how the relationships change over time, and, perhaps more importantly, we have failed to distinguish relationships of influence from training relationships. All of us need lifelong influence. This is the influence of brotherhood. We need many close relationships that serve to "see to it" in our daily lives, helping us be open, deal with our sins and weaknesses, and grow. It doesn't take an over-under relationship, ultimately to accomplish this. Not when we're mature. We simply need a rich fellowship of concern, involvement, and openness. We need real friends.

We also need training. Jesus spoke this way in Luke 6:40 when he noted that "anyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." Training, in my experience, implies a limited kind of over-under relationship. If Greg Tacher (one of our deacons) is trying to fix my golf swing--which brings to mind Humpty Dumpty--it's not fundamentally a two-way relationship on that issue. He's the teacher; I'm the student. And this arrangement won't go on forever--well, with my golf swing, it might.

A few months ago I had an epiphany (or was it a hallucination? Time will tell) about Luke 6:40. I realized you can, in Jesus' words, become "fully trained." Training, in this scripture, appears to come to an end. As I prepare my kids for the rest of their lives, I have to realize that eventually this life training comes to an end. They segue into being self-trained. As I said earlier, I will still have a kind of influence in their lives, but it won't be the same as these training years--years that come to an end.

When we fail to distinguish between influence and training, we tend to make everything in the relationship a training issue, and this has incredible negative consequences. Since no one is perfect, I, as your trainer, might assume I never cease training you. I become too responsible for you. I feel, in fact, responsible for your entire life, which is ridiculous. Like a parent to a toddler, I try to control everything, reminding you of your need for my advice--and I really believe this. You, at the same time, wanting to please God and your earthly masters, assume your eternal role is to be "supportive." In reality, being "supportive" is a distraction; a distortion. It's never the goal. Being unsupportive isn't the goal either. The goal is Jesus' goal: friends. We need to act and talk like friends, overwhelmingly so.

The training of the "younger" to maturity should come to an end. Thus, "older" Christians who are training younger disciples should seek to minimize, not maximize the role of giving advice. I believe our general habit has been the opposite. Again, this fits a family paradigm. As a Dad, I must move away from giving much advice to giving very little. If I continue maximizing advice, the child stays immature; again, my goal in training my teenagers is for them to become more self-trained, not Scott-trained. Consequently, I must be constantly asking, "what do you think?"

instead of saying, "just do it my way." There is still room here, ultimately, for submission, but I have found that such an appeal becomes almost unnecessary when I take the opinions of my teens seriously. It's an issue of respect. I must respect their opinion as much as I want them to respect mine.

It doesn't mean we will always agree, (and here, again, submission will come into play), but it does mean I want to take them seriously every time. In a Bible Talk situation, it's crucial for me, as a Bible Talk Leader, to put these issues of advice and respect into practice, especially in decisions that affect the entire group. I ought to draw out their views and opinions on what goals we set, what meeting we believe to be valuable, what kind of schedule, if any, we keep, and how "prayer partner" relationships, if any, should be organized. I must be, in the name of respect and empowerment, be a consensus builder whose goal is not to reach unanimous decisions, but to forge decisions that everyone can at least "live with."

In summary, we all need stages of training--training that comes to an end. After baptism, we more than likely (I cannot say "absolutely"; it's an opinion issue) need the spiritual training, probably with the help of a big brother or sister in the faith (a "prayer partner" or "discipling partner"), that takes us from being spiritual babes to spiritual adults. I think it's likely that this training is quite involved, and may involve all kinds of categories of life. But at some point, perhaps after six months, a year, or sometimes longer, we become mature, and that kind of training should cease. After this, we may need a more limited training on how to become, for example, a Bible Talk Leader. Some of us may need the specialized training that comes in the full time ministry.

All of this training still allows a place for Scriptures that are all about training, Scriptures we've held dear for a long time--Scriptures about delegation and follow-up (Mark 6:30); about obedience (Heb 13:17); about imitation (Heb 13:7, Phil 4:9, 1 Cor 4:16-17, Luke 6:40); about commission (Matt 28:18-20, Luke 10). But all of these kinds of training come to an end--that is, we become self-trained. We graduate. Beyond this, there remains ongoing two-way influence--genuine brotherhood. No matter what our immaturity or maturity, we all need fellowship (not just one relationship), a fraternity that calls us to account, encourages us, sees to it, keeps us objective, & helps us grow.

### **III. The Future?**

Let's imagine a discipleship maturity paradigm in full bloom: a fellowship in which all are "mature", having similar experiences, all full of convictions, all capable, all fruitful in the ways we believe to be godly, all wanting to advance, together, the kingdom of God. In such a place, is there still a need for leadership? When Christians are "fully trained," do they still need to be led? I think the answer is: we may not need any more specialized training exactly, (except for the golf swing) but we still need inspiration, organization, and mobilization. We still have a job to do, and it requires leadership, delegation, and team-building. Vision must still be articulated; unified strategy must still be decided; and someone must still call our victory or failure into periodic, evaluative account. In the husband/wife relationship, there is no one way relationship, no superior to inferior arrangement, but instead there is partnership. At the same time, as a working

relationship, there remains room for leadership--which God gives to the husband. And so there is clear mobilization in the family without necessitating a teacher-student or master-slave marriage. In the same way, even mature well-trained disciples need mobilizing (but not babying) by a Bible Talk Leader; mature BTLs need mobilizing--not "freedom" to the point of unchallenged, uninspired wandering--from the staff; and staff members involved in the same city work need mobilizing as well. We need not confuse mobilization and organization with Stage One Teacher-Student structure.

How much mobilizing/leadership do the fully trained need? I think the answer is, whatever it takes to be successful--building fruitful, multiplying, maturing fellowships. Between separate churches in different cities--let's say one church has planted the other, like Seattle/Spokane--the dynamic is clearer. Mark McCune, the evangelist in Spokane, and his wife Annie, are fully trained--it's obvious from the fact they've been sent out "on their own." Do they still need hands-on training? Not really; they've graduated. Do they still need mobilizing and inspiration? Absolutely. In my view, this kind of mobilizing doesn't require a weekly phone call to Tom Snyder, the person who most recently trained Mark. But it requires something. A time and place for discussion (maybe once or twice a year?), for evaluation, a time to be called higher by someone with either more clear experience or success. If no one fits that bill, then peers must take turns calling one another higher and mobilizing for the future.

What about in the same church/same city? Perhaps the paradigm is just as clear. When evangelists are fully trained to do their jobs, what do they need? Training? Not exactly. They too have graduated. Certainly they still need influence, brotherhood, challenging and open fellowship--we all need this for a lifetime. But I would submit they need mobilizing, inspiration--this kind of ongoing leadership, especially in a locality where getting together is so easy to do. Such mobilizing still includes having unified expectations (not dictated but discussed), goals, and even accountability--not master-student accountability, but friend to friend calling things into meaningful and diagnostic account. Instead of a one-to-one "dp time", this could be accomplished through group staff meetings, whether once a week, once a month, whatever brings the kingdom forward successfully. And we need to think hard about what we believe about success.

The same is true for Bible Talk/family group leaders--that is, the "lay leadership" of the church. Some need lots of training time, including one-to-one time. Some don't. They are fully trained as BTLs. These fully trained leaders, though still need mobilizing and inspiration; they need help in drawing new plans, new maps, new goals, and new missionary dreams. Again, this could be accomplished through a group instead of one-to-one. Within a Bible Talk, the "average Christian," if immature, will like need dedicated one-to-one attention and training. Again this kind of training must have its eye on empowerment, not authority, and it must seek as few training categories as possible: just because I'm training you to be mature doesn't mean I have to dictate what kind of salad you should like for lunch. Mature disciples may no longer need traditional "discipleship partners." Perhaps they just need their group--their Bible Talk band of brothers, and a fellowship in which they can seek specific help on an ad hoc basis--after they have "graduated" to maturity.

There are many open questions of structure. Some remain fearful that we may again wind up building a bureaucratic hierarchy in the church. I think it's important to point out that in working relationships of role, some hierarchy--limited and not necessarily permanent--will technically exist. Getting anything done together requires lines of authority--this should be self-evident. Perhaps it would help us to distinguish in our minds the difference between a "hierarchy of power" and a "hierarchy of responsibility." A focus on the former impedes maturity and empowerment; a focus on the latter helps us understand who is responsible for what. Even in a discussion group of peers, someone plays the role Chairman--setting the agenda, calling things to order, streamlining debate, and organizing/summarizing issues to be brought to a consensus decision. Christians will still look to the full time staff for inspiration and leadership--it's part of what the staff is paid to do. Does this constitute a hierarchy from staff to non-staff? From the perspective of a working relationship--the mobilizing of the church--yes (hierarchy does not necessarily imply one-way relationships, devoid of feedback or consensus). From the perspective of a non-working relationship--no. We are brothers.

One thing I find particularly exciting. If we believe that training ends, and that the brotherhood/fellowship is adequate to supply, in general, what is needed, we will find expert trainers suddenly free to devote their one-to-one energies to those who really need their training. In the past discipling pyramid structure, top leaders presided over a network of relationships, with their time increasingly usurped by more and more already-competent leaders. We wind up spending all our time with the people who, training-wise, need it the least. Let's change that. Like college basketball coaches, let's train and "graduate" class after class of players--Bible Talk Leaders, full time ministers, etc., so that the body of Christ can be brought to rapid maturity, training, and overwhelming victory.

In Matthew 9:35, Jesus lamented that while the harvest was plentiful, the workers were so few. He longed for a mature band of brothers equal to the task of catching up to so many lost souls. Surely that is still his conviction at this hour. Despite seeing churches inspiringly planted around the world these past 20 years, the fact remains that Satan still has us pathetically outnumbered. A lost world waits to see what we will do. Will we wander around in confusion because we've erred in the past? Will we reject all we've learned and condemn ourselves to reinventing everything? Or will we, as an era focused on authority wanes, vigorously replace it with God-blessed humility? Will we rededicate ourselves to God, to restoration, repentance, and, more zealous than ever, to His mission?

May we answer with the pointed words of an American wartime president:

"Men's hearts wait upon us. Men's lives hang in the balance; men's hopes call upon us to say what we will do. Who shall live up to the great trust? Who dares fail to try?"