



**BANDING TOGETHER**  
A **Practical Guide** for **Disciple Makers**

JON WIEST

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**LEADER'S GUIDE**

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Are you looking for a historically-rooted, culturally-relevant, and applicable pathway of discipleship that leads to multiplication? Look no further. In *Banding Together*, Jon Wiest doesn't hold back from sharing his practical experiences of leading a disciple-making movement within the framework of a local church. He not only convinces you that Jesus' mandate of disciples making disciples is essential, but also shows a simple scaffold for implementation with the people God has entrusted to you. *Banding Together* will inspire, challenge, and help you lead a disciple-making movement that will lead to exponential fruitfulness in the kingdom of God.

—Ed Love, director of church multiplication for The Wesleyan Church

It's an easy read—simple, short, and practical—but its impact will be catalytic in starting a much-needed movement across the church. Wiest has recaptured the genius of Wesley's strategy for revival which is found, not in the clergy, but in the laity, and not only in his preaching, but in his small bands. As I read Wiest's book, I see how my own preaching over the years would have been more powerful under the guidance of these principals. Nevertheless, I'm excited about the big influence this little book will have on the church, with the result that many people who were once only "saved," will actually be converted by the power of God's Spirit unleashed through God's Word. These principals have already helped our church and they will help in yours.

—Steve DeNeff, lead pastor of College Church (Marion, Indiana)

Jon has written a simple, practical, and compelling approach to making disciples that can be easily implemented by your organization. I believe in this approach and have seen it work first hand in my church, in my discipleship group, and in the significant impact on my own spiritual journey. This has been one of the best ideas our local church has utilized in a long time, getting us to focus once again on regularly reading God's Word and applying it in practical ways to our lives. I am of the firm opinion that many churches and their constituents could benefit by following these principles and this plan for "making disciples who make disciples."

—Carl L. Shepherd, board chair, Indiana Wesleyan University

We tend to over-complicate disciple making and church multiplication. Jon Wiest brings the antidote to our poison with this clear, concrete guide. He'll walk you through convictions and practicalities that can turn your single congregation into a small movement of churches. I've been doing this a long time, but this book showed me two options I had long overlooked.

—Ralph Moore, founder of Hope Chapel Churches

*Banding Together* is written out of experience and results. There are many testimonies of bolder, more courageous and loving Christ followers who are continuing the journey of *Banding Together* in recent years. However, this is also based on several hundreds of years of practice resulting in transformation of people, communities, and nations. I like to imagine all God wants to do through the practice of this simple, yet profound, book.

—Jo Anne Lyon, Ambassador, General Superintendent  
Emerita of The Wesleyan Church

Pastor Jon's new discipleship material is tried and true. He has implemented this program into his local church setting and this program has turned into a movement! The plan has three simple elements; Scripture, the Spirit, and community. All three mingle together beautifully into life transformation for believers of all ages. This material for leaders is theologically grounded in the Wesleyan tradition yet welcoming to folks from all Christian denominations. Every place I travel and teach, I highly recommend this book to start (or jump-start) a church's Bible reading program.

—Dave Smith, pastor of ministry development and teaching,  
pastor at College Church (Marion, Indiana), and church ambassador  
and professor of Bible at Indiana Wesleyan University

To my friend, Mike Colaw, and the many  
discipleship group leaders at Trinity Church. This book  
is the fruit of your dedication to disciple making.



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# INTRODUCTION

## DISCIPLE MAKING

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*“Therefore go and make disciples.” (Matt. 28:19)*

How would you react if someone you loved returned from the dead to give you a special assignment? How well would you listen? How intently would you follow their commands?<sup>1</sup> I suspect that such an extraordinary experience would be met with absolute obedience and alter the trajectory of your life.

This scenario is not hypothetical—it happened. Jesus rose from the dead and gave the command known as the Great Commission. His words were clear: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples” (Matt. 28:18–19). Go and make disciples! Along with the command to love God and love others, these are the basic instructions of the Christian life (see 22:37–39).

Love God. Love Others. Make Disciples.

This is the operating system for every church and follower of Christ. Without it running in the background, nothing else

matters. Worship gatherings, ministry programs, small-group studies, and outreach events that aren't making disciples fall short. So let me ask, are you making disciples?

I've discovered in twenty years of ministry that the challenge is not convincing people of the importance of disciple making—it's explaining a clear process for getting the job done. How do you make disciples? This brief guide answers that question.

My goal is to present a simple, practical, biblical strategy for group discipleship that leads to multiplication. It's a strategy that will help you and your church take the first steps toward making and multiplying disciples in your context, with roots in one of the greatest disciple-making movements in history.

## **Sustaining a Movement**

George Whitefield was Methodism's first and most popular spokesperson. His first open-air sermon was on February 17, 1739, and by his own estimates, he gave at least 18,000 sermons in his lifetime. He preached more hours a day than he slept. More than ten million people on two continents are said to have heard his message. Whitefield was instrumental in the Great Awakening of Britain and the American colonies, making seven trips across the Atlantic to preach in America. Benjamin Franklin, one of Whitefield's admirers, devised an experiment proving that Whitefield standing in open space could easily address 30,000 people at a time. Eyewitnesses said his voice could be heard up to two miles away.<sup>2</sup> George Whitefield was one of the most prolific and powerful evangelists of all time.

Whitefield's passion for the lost ran high, and in 1770, the fifty-five-year-old made the famous statement, "I had rather wear out than rust out."<sup>3</sup> This statement would prove prophetic. The next day, after preaching a rousing sermon, George Whitefield died. Many would say the revival died with him. The movement ended, but another movement continued.

The Wesleyan movement began under the leadership of John and Charles Wesley and was carried over to the American colonies by Francis Asbury. Asbury is widely considered to be the father of early American Methodism, and like Whitefield, Asbury had great determination and drive. Estimates say he traveled over 130,000 miles on horseback, crossed the Allegheny Mountains sixty times, visited every state in the union once a year, and rose at 4:00 each morning to spend at least an hour or two in prayer. He preached more than 10,000 sermons and ordained upwards of 3,000 preachers.<sup>4</sup>

Asbury achieved for Methodism what can only be called a miracle of growth, launching the movement from a few hundred individuals in 1770, to nearly 500,000 members and 6,000,000 people fifty years later.<sup>5</sup> It is no stretch to say that the early American Methodist movement was the greatest disciple-making, church-planting movement in the history of the United States, thriving long after Asbury's death.

What was the difference? Why did Whitefield's revival end with his death, while the Wesleyan revival continued to thrive long after the death of its founder? The answer is found in Wesley's simple discipleship strategy of societies (large group gatherings), classes (small group gatherings), and band meetings

(groups of three to five). Adam Clark, an early historian of Methodism, commented:

It was by this means [the formation of Societies] that we 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 died with himself. Mr. Wesley's fruit remains, grows, increases, and multiplies exceedingly.<sup>6</sup>

Whitefield himself is said to have confessed to an old friend later in life, "My brother Wesley acted wisely; the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand."<sup>7</sup>

Whitefield was a passionate evangelist who proclaimed the gospel to everyone he met. Wesley realized that, while evangelism was essential, sustaining a movement required making disciples. In fact, Wesley felt so strongly about disciple making that he would not send preachers where he couldn't follow up with discipleship. Failure to support new believers was, in his words, "begetting children for the murderer."<sup>8</sup> Wesley wrote, "Establish class meetings and form societies wherever you preach and have attentive hearers . . . for wherever we have preached without doing this, the word has been like seed sown by the wayside."<sup>9</sup> These are words we need to consider.

The revival ended. A rope of sand. Seed sown by the wayside.

Wesley's genius, and the main reason we remember him, is in his blueprint that ensured Methodists would become faithful disciples of Jesus. This emphasis on intentional disciple making has been a hallmark, sustaining all the great movements of God. The early church, Celtic missions, Moravians, Methodists, Pentecostals, Chinese house churches, and twenty-first century awakenings have all had an intentional focus on obedience-based, group discipleship.<sup>10</sup>

It is also the focus of this book. If we want to see a movement that lasts, we must get intentional about making disciples.

## **A Multiplication Strategy**

I reference John Wesley and his methods throughout this book primarily because he is one of my disciple-making heroes. I am also part of the Wesleyan tribe. Recently, our leadership laid out the goal of “celebrating every time a disciple makes a disciple and a church multiplies itself until there is a transforming presence in every ZIP code.”<sup>11</sup>

There is an implied progression to that vision. It begins with disciples making disciples and continues with churches planting churches. If you make disciples, you will always have a church, but if you plant a church, you may not always make disciples.<sup>12</sup> Disciple making is the critical engine for multiplication. Only a strong wave of disciple making can provide the raw material for starting new congregations and multiplying churches.

Consider the difference. Church A has developed a ministry strategy around evangelism. It is a strategy of addition. They deeply desire to see people come to Christ and their plan is to grow increasingly larger through the primary draw of weekend worship services and creative programming. They are doing a fantastic job. They planted the church ten years ago and each year they have grown by almost one hundred people. In ten years, this high growth rate has resulted in many new believers and a church of almost one thousand in weekend attendance. Church A has quickly become a church of influence with an amazing cast of leaders, but their focus has never been on disciple making. They now seem to be hitting a lid. New growth requires even higher capacity leaders, higher quality services, better programming, and more streamlined systems to manage the crowds. While lay leaders have been equipped to bring friends and even share their faith, they aren't equipped to make disciples, and the growth of the church has slowed.

Church B has developed a ministry strategy around disciple making. It is a strategy of multiplication. Their plan is to grow through a firm commitment to making disciples and developing leaders. In the first year, the founding pastor does nothing more than invest in disciple-making activities with a few trusted friends, modeling the process of discipleship. He or she decides to put in place a practical system whereby each person is asked to make three disciples every year and then encourages those disciples to do the same. This slow-moving discipleship ministry creeps forward with only the pastor and three others being impacted in the entire first year. Compared to Church A's growth, Church B's could easily seem discouraging. In fact, by the third year, Church B has only multiplied to

twenty-seven people, and the pastor realizes he will probably need to be bi-vocational. But the commitment to discipleship is strong, and the church presses forward. By year five, the church has multiplied to approximately two hundred and forty disciples making disciples, and excitement is beginning to grow. Weekend services are finally launched, but the primary driver and focus of the church's time, energy, and resources is discipleship. How large would this church be in ten years if they continued to multiply exponentially?

60,000 people.<sup>13</sup>

Let that number sink in for a moment—60,000 disciples who are now unleashed to impact their world for Christ. That type of church will require a different kind of leadership and focus than Church A, but the result could be a disciple-making, church-multiplying, zip-code-changing movement. Whether those 60,000 gather regularly in a stadium or in thousands of homes around the city is beside the point. The point is the difference a focus on disciple making can have for the church.

Making disciples must be a core strategy for any multiplication movement.

## **A Practical Guide Is Needed**

If the final words of the resurrected Christ are to go and make disciples, if his favor has been poured out on disciple-making movements around the world and throughout history, and if we are convinced of the multiplying power of disciple making,

then why do so many individuals and churches struggle with getting the job done? To answer that question, I'd like to share an example from my own ministry.

God allowed me to have a part in planting two thriving churches over the course of ten years. Until a few years ago, I was convinced both churches were being obedient to the Great Commission. My philosophy of ministry was closer to Church A, and I had always interpreted the Great Commission as an evangelistic strategy. For me, church planting was about reaching the lost with the gospel. I prioritized the first half of the commission that talks about “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19) and often neglected the second, “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (v. 20). I wanted to grow the church so that we could plant other churches and establish a network of churches in our community. But over time, I began to put my trust in church growth principles and measure success on the metrics of attendance, professions of faith, and baptisms—to the neglect of making disciples and leading people into obedience. In my zeal to grow the church, win converts, and plant new churches, I lost my focus on discipleship.

Eventually, though, God got my attention. It came in the form of burnout followed by a three-month sabbatical. C. S. Lewis said that God “whispers to us in our pleasures . . . but shouts in our pain,”<sup>14</sup> and this was no exception. During my sabbatical, I saw that my philosophy of ministry was unbalanced and something was off in my approach. I had sacrificed disciple making at the altar of church growth and addition-oriented, evangelistic



strategies. I had failed to pursue biblical disciple making as the mission of the church. I needed to repent.

But repentance wasn't enough. I also needed a clear strategy for making reproducing disciples. Now that my heart was open to discipleship, I needed the tools to make it happen. I knew how to gather people, preach inspiring messages, and plan meaningful worship services. I understood how to launch programs for children and students, and even offer small groups and classes for adults. However, I lacked a clear process for making disciples who could make disciples of others.

This desire for a practical, reproducing, disciple-making strategy is the basis for this book. In these pages, you will learn not only how to make disciples, but also how to multiply them. This model can be integrated into the disciple-making strategy of your church or personal life. It is also easily reproducible.

Finally, I need to make a confession. I've been hesitant to put this process into print. We are at the beginning of a journey to make discipleship the main engine of multiplication in our church, and by no means do we have everything figured out. There are many more conversations that need to take place around these issues, and clearly there are other strategies and models for making reproducing disciples. But we need to begin the dialogue.

I am convinced there is a growing group of pastors and lay leaders who are restless and hungry for something more than what they are currently experiencing. There are growing numbers of pastors and lay leaders realizing that Church

A strategies won't produce the fruit of Church B. Addition-oriented strategies are different than strategies of multiplication. The good news is that God has given you the capacity for this type of multiplication movement.

It begins with understanding a basic framework for disciple making in Part One, continues with implementing a simple process for group discipleship in Part Two, and concludes by lifting your eyes to the possibilities of launching an even greater disciple-making movement in Part Three.

There is a reason this book is described as a practical guide. The word *practical* means “concerned with the actual doing or use of something rather than with theory and ideas.”<sup>15</sup> The purpose of this book isn't simply to get you *thinking* about making disciples. It's designed to push you forward and assist you in the *process* of making it happen.



## PART ONE

# THE **FRAMEWORK**

---

*Basic convictions must be understood and established.*

Vince Lombardi, the legendary American football coach of the Green Bay Packers, began each new season's training camp by pulling his team together, holding up a football, and saying, "Gentlemen . . . this is a football."<sup>1</sup> He would then walk his players out to the football field to show them the sidelines, hash marks, goal posts, and end zones. Finally, he would define for his players the goal of the game—to score more points than their opponent. Practice would then commence with blocking and tackling drills.

Basic stuff, to be sure.

Lombardi's focus on the fundamentals paid off. In nine years of coaching, his football teams played in the championship game every year but one, and his 1966-67 team won the very first Super Bowl, defeating the Kansas City Chiefs 35-10.<sup>2</sup> Lombardi understood that success in the game of football depended on learning and executing the fundamentals.

Disciple making is no different. We need to begin by establishing the fundamentals and framework for making disciples. In Part One of this book, we will organize this framework around five basic convictions. These five convictions serve the same purpose as Lombardi's "this is a football" speech. They will guide the rest of the book and give focus to our efforts.

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