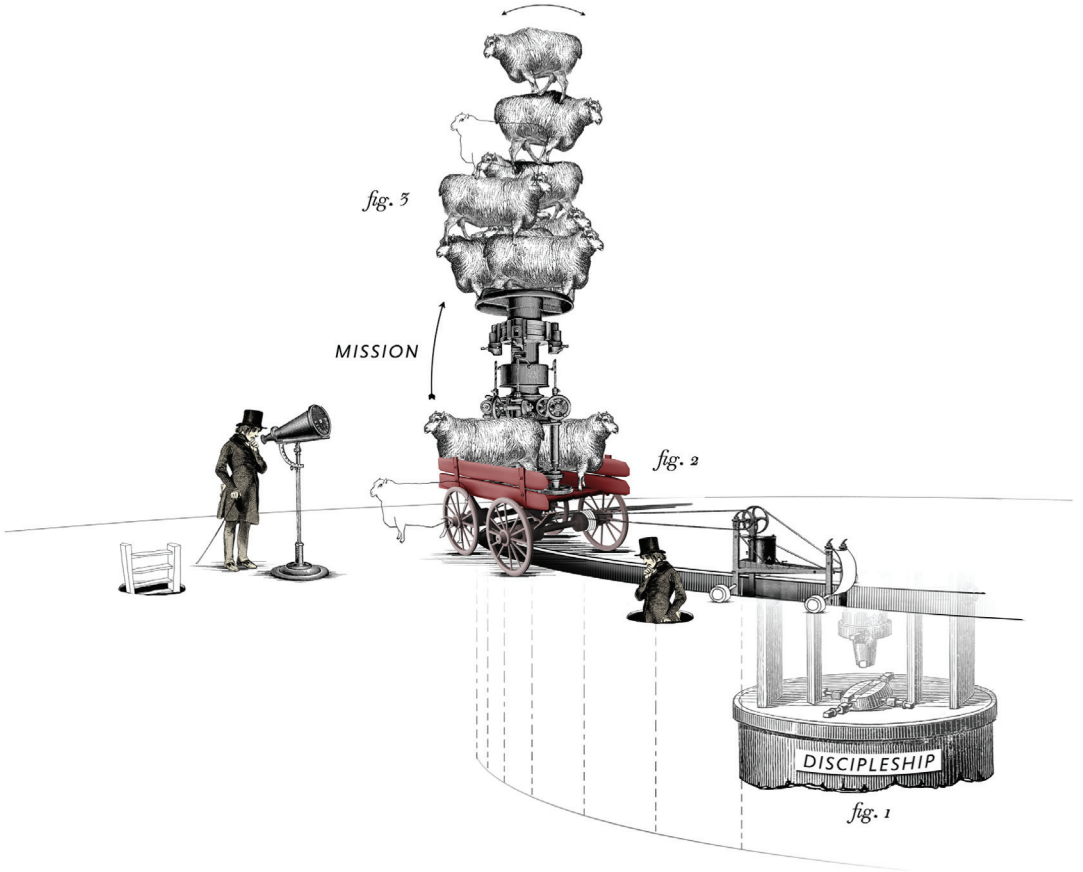
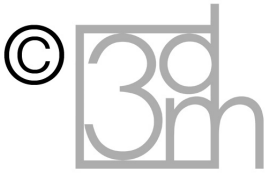


~ LEADING ~ MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

Rediscovering the power of living on mission together



Mike Breen and the 3DM Team



LEADING MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

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~ TABLE OF CONTENTS ~

A Brief Note About This Book Before Reading i

Foreword v

Prefacevii

PART 1: FOUNDATIONS for MCs

Chapter 1:

Understanding MCs and *Oikos* 3

Chapter 2:

Communities of Discipleship 15

Chapter 3:

Communities of Good News 23

Chapter 4:

Finding the Person of Peace 33

Chapter 5:

Both Organized and Organic 37

PART 2: LEADING MCs

Chapter 6:

Vision and Prayer 45

Chapter 7:	
Three Examples	51

Chapter 8:	
Growing and Multiplying.....	63

PART 3: PRACTICAL TIPS

Chapter 9:	
Why MCs Fail.....	81

Chapter 10:	
FAQ of MCs	91

CONCLUSION:	
Small Things With Great Love	109

APPENDICES: NOTES FOR CHURCH LEADERS

Appendix 1:	
It really is all about the discipling culture	115

Appendix 2:	
You go first: starting a pilot MC	119

Appendix 3:	
What about our current programs?	127

Appendix 4:	
MCs and church planting.....	133

A BRIEF NOTE ~ ABOUT THIS BOOK ~ BEFORE READING

Although this is a stand-alone book, it falls within a trajectory of content that we have crafted for the teams of people who engage in our two-year Learning Community process. This particular book serves as the fourth and final book of this series.

Our core books, following the trajectory of the Learning Communities, each build on the content established in the previous books. They are the following:

- Building a Discipling Culture
- Multiplying Missional Leaders
- Leading Missional Communities
- Leading Kingdom Movements

Because of this approach, what appears to be “insider language” may show up from time to time as we reference points made in the previous books. However, we believe we’ve made a concerted effort to explain these points so this book can stand on its own. But to aid your understanding further, we wanted to share a few foundational terms we’ll be using throughout the book.

Missional Leader

Someone who *mobilizes* God’s people to join his redemptive work in the world.

Huddle

A discipleship vehicle for *leaders* that provides support, challenge, training, and accountability, and that is led by a discipling leader. Members eventually start Huddles of their own, creating a discipleship movement through multiplication.

Missional Frontier

Places or networks of people where there is little gospel presence and an opportunity for a much fuller in-breaking of the Kingdom of God.

Missional Community

A group of 20–50 people forming an extended family on mission together.

Oikos

The Greek word for “household,” which refers to the 20–70 people, blood and non-blood, who made up the Greco-Roman household .

Character

Being like Jesus (the interior world of a person).

Competency

Doing the things Jesus could do (the external world of a person).

Disciple

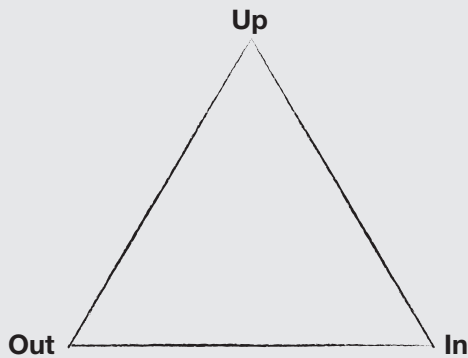
- A person who learns to be like Jesus and learns to do what Jesus could do.
- Discipleship is the process of becoming who Jesus would be if he were you (Dallas Willard).
- Someone whose life and ministry reflect the life and ministry of Jesus.

UP/IN/OUT

As we see in the Gospels, Jesus had three great loves and thus three distinct dimensions to his life:

- UP: deep and connected relationship to his Father and attentiveness to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- IN: constant investment in the relationships with those around him (disciples).

- **OUT:** entering into the brokenness of the world, looking for a response individually (people coming into a relationship with Jesus and his Father) and systemically (systems of injustice being transformed).



This three-dimensional pattern for living a balanced life is evident throughout scripture and needs to be expressed individually and in community life.

Kingdom Movements

A community that functions as a portal to the new world that God wants for all his children. A Kingdom movement is a community of disciples who passionately seek the expansion of God’s reign here on earth through the reproduction of disciples, seeking the transformation of whatever places they inhabit.

Missional Sending Centers

Communities that have enough spiritual mass, with leaders who embody the character and competency of Jesus, to become places of reproducing, training and sending leaders into the missional frontier, as well as safe harbors of return and refreshment for these leaders whenever they leave a missional frontier, either temporarily or permanently.

~ FOREWORD ~

After 20 years of normal Sunday-based church experience, I moved to a new town with a handful of friends to start an intentional community of missionaries. We were partially motivated by our love of lost people, and equally motivated by a desire to experience more of God. We wanted to wake up every morning with the expectation that God had plans for us and that those plans would change the course of history for our friends.

It happened! Homes filled up, friends found faith in Jesus, and we began to see and feel the presence of God changing us to the core. Adullam is now a congregational network of missional communities and the several hundred people who belong to it would say, “We can’t go back.”

But, we also failed a lot. Whereas the size of our movement is credible, it’s not nearly what it could have been if we had had a little help along the way; a little coaching, or a mentor-guide who had previously traversed the landscape we were trailblazing.

When I read this book, my first thought was, “Shucks, this could have saved us a lot of misery.” Mike Breen and the entire 3DM team have emerged as expert coaches and practitioners to anyone who is sniffing the flower of missional community, true spiritual formation, and kingdom practices. This short, simple book is an overflow of their experience and practical wisdom, and should be a plumb line for every leader and every church that wants to make disciples of Jesus.

Regardless of your context or church paradigm, this book is foundational and will help you set new rails, new rhythms, and new practices that God will bless.

— Hugh Halter, author of *The Tangible Kingdom* and
AND: the Gathered and Scattered Church.

❧ PREFACE ❧

Our previous book on Missional Communities (MCs), *Launching Missional Communities*, was a helpful tool for guiding church leaders toward understanding and pioneering MCs.

However, as we coached and consulted with pastors and church leaders over the past several years in our Learning Communities, we discovered something. It's one thing to learn how to *launch* MCs, but another thing entirely to learn how to *lead* them well so they become a reproducing hotbed for discipleship and mission in churches.

For this reason, we decided to go back to the drawing board and write a book that focused on the processes and principles of leading an MC so that it can multiply in a healthy way. Our overarching goal is to put discipleship and mission back into the hands of ordinary people. So, this book is written with the ordinary person in mind. We hope that everyone can use this book to learn the basic principles of launching, leading, and multiplying MCs. We hope you enjoy reading it and trying it out!

PART 1

∞ FOUNDATIONS FOR ∞
MCs

1

~ UNDERSTANDING ~ MCs AND OIKOS

A FEAST FOR EVERYONE

It's almost noon, and the house is saturated with the rich scent of roasted turkey, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin pie. Every family or friend invited prepared and brought food to share with everyone else. A few people came over early to help Mom and Dad make sure the house was ready for guests.

Some of the adults and older children are finishing up a game of touch football in the backyard while a few of the younger kids play tag. Your uncle brought a friend from work, a die-hard Detroit Lions fan who is glued to the TV with a couple of other people taking in the pregame show. Several others are talking in the kitchen as they put the finishing touches on the Thanksgiving feast they will all be eating in 20 minutes or so.

After sitting down at the table with one another for a laid-back, longer-than-usual lunch filled with laughter and connection, the day will continue—together. Some will begin putting away leftovers and washing the dishes. Some will immediately settle into chairs and couches for the football game (and probably a nap). Some will go back outside to play more touch football. Some will strike up conversations with cousins they haven't seen in a while.

Eventually, those who are hungry will get the leftovers back out for an informal supper. Some will be reading a beloved book on the couch, while others will be talking. The gathering will last well into the evening. Some will need to go home; others will spend the night. Before adjourning, they'll make plans to do things tomorrow.

This portrait of an extended family celebrating Thanksgiving is a distinctly American story, of course, but the same basic plot exists across the globe. The language, food, and geography may be different, but the theme is the same.

EXTENDED FAMILIES ON MISSION

It may sound strange to start talking about Missional Communities by talking about an extended family gathering around the Thanksgiving table. But that's where we have to begin. Why? Because, ultimately, **we don't want to talk about Missional Communities. We want to talk about family.**

Bear with us as we explain ourselves a bit.



**MCs ARE NOT
a silver bullet
that will solve all
of the church's
missional
problems.**

Missional Communities (MCs) are a hot topic right now in the church, and many are excited about the potential of MCs to help the church live out its mission in the world. We began using MCs in the 1990s and are now helping to lead the church in implementing them. (That's probably why you're reading this book.) However, **MCs are not a silver bullet** that will solve all of the church's missional problems. Although MCs are not the destination, they are enormously valuable, because MCs are a structure that helps us get to our true goal, **something we call *oikos*.**

Oikos is a Greek word used in the New Testament to refer to “households,” which were essentially extended families who functioned together with a common purpose. In the early church, discipleship and mission always centered around and flourished in the *oikos*. This vehicle facilitated the relational dynamic that allowed the church to thrive in the midst of persecution and hardship for hundreds of years. *Oikos* still helps the church thrive today, even in places where persecution is quite severe. We are absolutely convinced that *oikos* is what the church needs to reclaim if it is going to become the kind of movement the church was in its earliest days.

In fact, living as *oikos* has been the norm for almost every culture for most of human history. It's just how family was—not 2.4 children in a single-family home but a wider community sharing life and work and celebration and

commerce together. Only in the last hundred years or so in the West have we lost this sense of being extended families on mission. For a whole host of reasons, we have unwittingly embraced the fragmentation of the extended family and tried to live primarily as individuals and nuclear families. The results of this experiment have been utterly disastrous, and you probably see the aftermath all around you. Loneliness and depression are rampant, we are more stressed and busier than ever, and many people feel they are barely keeping their heads above water as they try to advance in their careers, raise their children, and seek some semblance of meaning in life.

In the midst of this sea of chaos and confusion, however, those of us who follow Christ have the remarkable opportunity to literally rebuild society by re-forming “extended family” *oikos* communities centered not on blood or ancestry, but on Jesus. Our commission is to compassionately reach out to those around us, invite them to join us in community, share the story of the gospel, make disciples, and gather them into families to follow Jesus together. That’s really what starting an MC is all about. This is not a fad or the latest church growth technique or a new name for cell groups. It is rediscovering the church as *oikos*, an extended family on mission where everyone contributes and everyone is supported.



**STARTING AN MC
is about
rediscovering
the church
as *oikos*, an
extended family
on mission
where everyone
contributes
and everyone is
supported.**

So, it isn’t that MCs aren’t important. They are, and that’s why we wrote this book. But MCs are simply the initial vehicle we learn to drive that gets us to the real destination: learning to live as *oikos*, extended families functioning together on mission with God. MCs are the training wheels that teach us how to ride the bike of *oikos*. They are the scaffolding that allows us to rebuild the household of *oikos*. MCs are the cocoon that allows the butterfly of *oikos* to emerge. You get the picture. In fact, we think that in 50 years, people will look back and say, “It’s hilarious—they used to make people join MCs because they didn’t know how to do this! Isn’t that amazing?”

We believe *oikos* is something the Spirit of God is doing in this time to restore the church’s ability to function fruitfully in discipleship and mission the way the early church did, publicly living out our faith in the various neighborhoods and relational networks of our cities. We firmly believe this is *the* make-or-

break issue for the Western church. We simply will not see God’s dream for the world come true unless we learn how to function as extended families on mission.

The good news is that it isn’t actually that complicated, and God will give us the power to do it. This isn’t a task reserved for church leaders, pastors, or experts—it’s for everyone! When MCs are led well, they are an extremely effective vehicle for training ordinary people to follow Jesus together and re-learn *oikos*, so we want to equip you as practically as possible to do this. But remember: The goal is not to run a program called “Missional Community.” The goal is to learn how to function as an extended family on mission. We really believe this is something *everyone* can learn to do.

Think of it like this: MCs are a great vehicle with a powerful engine (discipleship, but we’ll get to that in a bit), but the thing about a vehicle is that it’s supposed to take you somewhere. The destination the vehicle of MC takes us to is *oikos*. To drive successfully and purposefully, you need to know where you’re going, and you need to know how to drive the vehicle. That’s what you’ll find in this book.

A quote widely attributed to Margaret Mead captures the idea well: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed [people] can change the world. Indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”¹

Consider this your invitation to join a movement to change the world by simply building an extended family on mission.

WHAT IS A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY?

Before we dive into the principles and practicalities of starting and leading MCs, we need to start by defining what an MC is and describe some of the features that distinguish it from other kinds of vehicles the church has used. “Missional Community” has become a bit of a buzzword in the church, and people have used the term in a variety of ways. However, when we talk about MCs, we are talking about something quite specific. Here’s our definition:

¹ Attributed to Margaret Mead in Frank G. Sommers and Tana Dineen (1984), *Curing Nuclear Madness*, p. 158

A Missional Community is a group of approximately **20 to 40 people** who are seeking to **reach a particular neighborhood or network of relationships with the good news of Jesus**. The group functions as a flexible, local expression of the church and has the expressed intention of seeing those they are in relationship with become followers of Jesus with them. They exist to see God’s Kingdom come to their friends and neighbors. The result is usually the growth of the MC (as people become followers of Jesus and join them) and then the multiplication of new MCs (as people are trained to lead within the MC and then are sent out to start new MCs). They are networked within a larger church community, allowing for a “scattered” and “gathered” expression of church.



A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

Community is a group of approximately 20 to 40 people who are seeking to reach a particular neighborhood or network of relationships with the good news of Jesus.

These **lightweight, low-maintenance**, mid-sized communities, **led by lay people**, typically have three to four “official” meetings per month in their missional context. (This means that *when* they meet, *where* they meet, *with whom* they meet, and *what they do* when they meet are highly contextualized, determined by the vision and missional context of the MC.) Because they hold a strong value of “doing life” together, the people in the MC often meet with one another outside the “official” gatherings in more informal settings during the week. In structured and spontaneous ways, each MC **attends to the three dimensions of life** that Jesus himself attended to: time with God through worship, prayer, Scripture, teaching, giving thanks, etc. (what we call UP); time with the body of believers, building a vibrant and caring community (what we call IN); and time with those who don’t know Jesus yet (what we call OUT).

Let’s break this down into **five characteristics** that will make MCs easy to define.

1) 20 – 40 PEOPLE

This is an approximate figure rather than a hard rule, because MCs vary in size depending on culture and context. We’ll talk more about this later in the book, but for now, note that size *does* matter in MCs. They must be *mid-sized* communities, bigger than small groups but smaller than whole churches,



**MCs MUST BE
small enough
to care, but
big enough to
dare.**

because they must be **small enough to care but also big enough to dare**. What do we mean by this?

MCs are **small enough to care** because a group of 20–40 feels like an extended family where everyone can be known and loved and contribute meaningfully to the community. Because an MC is generally smaller than a whole church, it is much easier for individuals to find a place of belonging and feel like they are a vital part of a community. The small size also creates a more comfortable environment for a new person coming into the community, because 20–40 people create a “house party” dynamic that provides a semi-anonymous space in the community for people to hang out on the margins and observe before they move in closer for more in-depth participation. Small groups of six to 12 people don’t have this kind of space, and visiting a group of this size is often quite intimidating for a new person.


MCs are **big enough to dare** because a group of 20–40 people has enough human resource to substantively impact their chosen mission context, whether it’s a neighborhood or a network of relationships. In other words, they can get more done because there are more people involved than in a small group! In addition, multiplication is much easier with a group of 20–40 people. One of the reasons small groups don’t tend to multiply is that people don’t want to part with the close friends they’ve cultivated in the small group. Multiplying an MC, however, allows you to continue the journey with your closest friends while still expanding the Kingdom of God by fulfilling the Great Commission.

2) CLEAR MISSION VISION

It is vital that an MC gathers around a vision for mission *from the beginning*. If you don’t have a well-defined missional vision at the start of an MC’s life, it is difficult to bring a vision in later, because the group almost always becomes a social club for Christians or a Bible study. Missional vision means you have a desire and passion to share the good news of Jesus with a specific group of people through your words and your actions. Clearly seeing and articulating this vision is the **magnet** that draws people to the community and the **engine** that keeps the community moving.

Missional vision is focused on *sharing the good news of Jesus* and *making disciples* among the people of a specific **neighborhood** or **network of**

relationships. A neighborhood-focused MC centers on serving and bringing the good news of Jesus to the people who live or work in a particular geographic area (e.g., a housing subdivision or a few blocks of streets). A network-focused MC seeks to serve and bring the good news of Jesus to the people within a particular network of relationships (e.g., a sports club, creative professionals, a hobby group, a business community, students, a subculture in the city, etc.). Giving your MC a specific name, perhaps related to its vision, often helps to keep the vision forefront in people’s minds, and establishes a sense of identity and belonging within the MC.



**VISION IS THE
magnet
that draws
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community
and the
engine that
keeps the
community
moving.**

As we think about bringing the good news to people in a neighborhood or relational network, remember that an MC doesn’t just swoop in and do a few activities for a group and then leave. The MC emphasizes living among and working with the people or place they are seeking to impact. This “incarnational principle” helps prevent MCs from becoming a series of service projects performed by people who are disconnected relationally from those they are serving.

“The most vigorous forms of community are those that come together in the context of a shared ordeal or communities who define themselves as a group with a mission that lies beyond themselves — thus initiating a risky journey. Over-concern with safety and security, combined with comfort and convenience, have lulled us out of our true calling and purpose.”

— Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, *The Forgotten Ways*

3) LIGHTWEIGHT / LOW-MAINTANENCE

Every effort should be put into making MCs as lightweight and low maintenance as possible. This means they are inexpensive to run, not too time-consuming to plan, and not bound by building or maintenance costs. Leading an MC shouldn’t be a heavy burden on a leader. People with normal “9–5 jobs” should be able to lead them. For example, MC gatherings shouldn’t attempt to replicate a church worship service, because those take a lot of time and hard work to plan and maintain! Instead, look to implement regular, sustainable rhythms that allow people to connect as family. (More on this later, but what



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events.**

we're talking about is “recycling” time by missionally focusing the activities we are already involved in, rather than adding more events and extra commitments to the calendar.) Build a team around you to help lead and organize the various aspects of the community, releasing the body of Christ to function well together.

Remember this is about building an extended family on mission together, so let the idea of “family rhythms” guide your thinking. Have everyone bring food to share for meals together. Maybe have some people come over early to help clean up the house before the others arrive. Have everyone stick around afterward to do the dishes and help clean up—like a

family would! **It's about learning to live a missional lifestyle together, not attending a series of missional events.**

4) AN ACCOUNTABLE LEADER

MCs are led by leaders with vision, but those leaders are **accountable to and supported by the leadership of the wider church**. MCs are not church plants (at least not in the traditional sense). They continue to be part of a larger whole, orbiting a central church, where they receive training and support. This creates a **low-control, high-accountability** dynamic that is vital to MC health. **Low control** means that the vision for the MC comes from the leader of the MC, not the central church leadership. **High accountability** means that the central church leadership is very involved in helping the MC leader carry out the vision God has given him or her. The MCs become places of on-the-ground mission for the people of God, dispersed among the neighborhoods and networks of a city, but still orbiting a central church, which becomes a place of training, equipping, prayer, resourcing, and encouragement for the MCs.

Each MC has a regular orbit around the central church, depending on the MC's context and needs. Some communities come to Sunday gatherings most weeks and meet in their mission context mostly on weekdays. Other communities may meet in their mission context most weekends and come to a Sunday gathering just once a month—or anything in between! Again, this is

determined by the vision and mission context of the MC, and is agreed on in a dialogue between the MC leader and the church leadership.

5) UP / IN / OUT RHYTHM

MCs center their rhythms on growing in relationship with God (UP), with one another (IN), and with those they are reaching out to (OUT). This is community life centered on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission:

- “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind soul and strength” (UP).
- “Love your neighbor as yourself” (IN).
- “Go and make disciples of all people groups” (OUT).

Again, remember that we are not talking about merely scheduling a series of events for people to attend. We are talking about communicating vision and establishing rhythms and routines that allow us to become an extended family on mission together. To do this, we need rhythms that connect us with God in worship and prayer (UP), with each other in deeper community (IN), and with those in our mission context in love and service (OUT).

These are the key characteristics that define successful MCs. Now let's move on to foundations upon which MCs are built.

2

COMMUNITIES OF DISCIPLESHIP

So now that we have defined what an MC is, **what would it look like for you to start one?** Where would you start? What would you need to know? What are the practical tools you'll need to have the best chance of success?

As you think about setting off on this exciting journey, we want to lay out **four foundational principles** that we have found to be vital as we've seen hundreds of people launch and lead MCs. In our experience, these seem to be non-negotiable principles. Basically, MCs really don't work very well unless all four of these principles are in place and functioning well. In other words, this section is worth reading slowly, and perhaps coming back to again as you begin to make plans for launching your MC.

FOUNDATION 1: COMMUNITIES OF DISCIPLESHIP

A common misconception of MCs is that they are simply a way to get people out to do service projects in the community every once in a while. But MCs must be communities where real discipleship takes place, or they won't become places of *oikos* and will never multiply in a healthy way.

One MC leader recalls:

“Our MC was reaching out to the homeless who gathered at a certain park on Saturday mornings. Originally, we were bringing sack lunches and survival kits. Part of the MC was getting these hand-outs together each week, and another part was going down on Saturday mornings to hand them out. However, our city actually has some wonderful social services for the homeless. You can

always get a bed, shower and food. What we noticed, though, was that they didn't have any friends; no one would actually talk to them. So we changed everything. We made it much more simple and relational. When we visited them on Saturday mornings, we'd wait for others who were there to give them hand-outs, and then we'd set up tables and play checkers and chess and have coffee. As we got to know them, we'd pray with them, ask for ways we could serve them, share what God had been saying to us, and ask them to share what God might have been sharing with them. It was amazing to see what God was able to do when we switched from seeing our MC as a series of event or service projects to a family where we were trying to create a certain kind of culture.”

The first principle is that you'll need to build a **discipling culture** at the heart of your MC if it is going to be fruitful long-term. At the core of *every* effective MC is a culture of discipleship. Far more important than the infrastructure we put in place or the rhythms we establish is the culture we are growing in our MC through the rhythm and infrastructure. Culture trumps programs or events *every time*.



**YOU'LL NEED
to build a
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term.**

What do we mean by a **discipling culture**? A culture is kind of like what water is to a fish, or what soil and air are to a plant. It's the environment within which the whole thing exists. And just as certain kinds of soils make for better gardens than others, certain kinds of cultures make for better MCs than others. Just as you need the very best soil if you want a fruitful garden, you need a discipling culture if you want a successful and fruitful MC. Think of discipleship as the “ecosystem” of your MC. A discipling culture simply means that **making disciples of Jesus is what is always happening in your MC.**

The Great Commission is to make disciples. Jesus says that he will build his church,² and our task is to make disciples.³ Sometimes we get this backward and think that if we can figure how to build the church, then the end result

² Matthew 16:18

³ Matthew 28:19-20

will be disciples. But it actually works the other way around: We make disciples, and Jesus builds his church. Thus, the culture and mindset we want to build in our MCs is a **discipling culture**, where people understand clearly that we are called to both *be* and *make* disciples of Jesus.

This means that within an MC, we are learning to trust and follow Jesus in every area of our lives, growing to become more and more like him in our character (who we are) and competency (what we can do). As we do this, we invite others to share this life of discipleship with us, growing in expectation that God’s Kingdom will break into every area of our lives. We cultivate an identity as a “sent” people, missionaries to whatever sphere of influence or context we find ourselves in. As we truly make disciples (people who are becoming the same kind of person as Jesus was and doing the things he did), evangelism becomes a kind of overflow of our life of discipleship, rather than a program or event. Instead of feeling forced or contrived, evangelism will feel natural as people are drawn in by the fruit they see in our community.



**MAKING
disciples of
Jesus is what
is always
happening in
your MC.**

A discipling culture is about encouraging and cultivating the development of a missional *lifestyle* (faith at the center of everything we do) rather than missional *events* (faith at the center of events we organize).

So how do we make sure there is a culture of discipleship developing at the center of our MC? We start by looking at the way Jesus did it. Within the wider group of people who followed him, he gathered 12 people to be with him and learn from him in a more intentional way. They watched what he did, ate with him and one another, talked together, played together, prayed together, worked together. Eventually, Jesus sent them out to do some of the same things together they were watching him do,⁴ and they began to actually do the things Jesus himself had been doing. They came back together, and Jesus coached them,⁵ challenged them,⁶ encouraged them,⁷ and sent them

⁴ Luke 9:1-6

⁵ Luke 9:10

⁶ Luke 9:13

⁷ Luke 9:28-36

out again. When they returned, he again debriefed, encouraged, coached, and rejoiced with them.⁸

In all of this, Jesus moved his disciples toward the goal of having the capacity to be the kind of person he is (character) and do the kinds of things he does (competency). His goal is that they would have the same kind of life within themselves that Jesus had within himself. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus told them late in his ministry, “whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). Jesus’ goal was that they would be able to do the same kinds of things as he was doing, because they were becoming the same kind of people.

We also see this dynamic in the life of the apostle Paul. As he traveled around planting churches (communities that probably looked a lot like MCs), he always had a team with him, people he was training to do the same things he was doing. In a letter to the church communities of Corinth, he writes,

“I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 4:14-16).

He wanted the Corinthian believers to *imitate him* as children imitate their father or mother. Since he couldn’t come to Corinth himself to be their example, *he sent Timothy*, because Timothy would remind them of Paul’s way of life. In other words, Paul was saying, “I can’t come to you right now, but I’m sending someone who has become the same kind of person as me. Timothy will remind you of me just like a son reminds people of his father, because I have become his spiritual father, and he has become my spiritual son.” Isn’t that remarkable?

Paul urged Timothy to continue this reproducing pattern, because **every disciple of Jesus should eventually be capable of making more disciples of Jesus**. Part of *being* a disciple is *making* disciples. So Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy, “the things you have heard me say in the presence of

.....

⁸ Luke 10:1-24

many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”⁹ **That’s four generations of disciples in one sentence!** Paul (first generation) investing in Timothy (second generation), who invests in “reliable people” (third generation) who are to invest in “others” (fourth generation).

Discipleship, as Dallas Willard has noted, is simply being with Jesus to learn from Jesus how to be like Jesus.¹⁰ We do this best in community, in relationship with people who are more like Jesus than we are—by learning from them, observing them, doing life with them, being involved in a highly challenging, highly encouraging relationship in which we learn how to do the things that Jesus did by imitating the “way of life in Christ” of someone else. Then we invite others to imitate us as we imitate Christ.¹¹

Establishing a culture where this kind of process is normal and expected is the end goal of any MC, because we want to actually live out the kind of life we invite others into.

Even if it isn’t fully present right away, creating a **discipling culture** needs to be something every MC is working toward from the very beginning. A strong discipling culture leads naturally to the development of an abundant supply of new leaders, who, because they are living like Jesus and listening to the Spirit, will make more disciples and plant new MCs that contain the same **culture of discipleship** you have established. The **discipling culture** and **missional leaders** you are developing function “below the surface” as the foundation of any effective and fruitful MC.



⁹ 2 Timothy 2:2

¹⁰ Ben Sternke, a member of our team, heard Willard give this definition during an informal conversation

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 11:1

Looking at the pattern of Jesus, then, what are some practical things we can do to keep a discipling culture at the heart of an MC?

COMMON LANGUAGE

Jesus created a common language among his disciples by telling parables of the Kingdom over and over again. These oft-repeated word pictures functioned as the language that allowed him to create a culture of discipleship among his followers.

This lines up perfectly with what sociologists have discovered: Language creates culture. So if we want a discipling culture to take root in our MCs, we need to be intentional about using a common **language of discipleship** that everyone understands and uses regularly. This language should be something that's very simple and easy to remember. Because people today are so visually oriented in their thinking, we recommend using the visual "language" of **LifeShapes** to create a culture of discipleship.¹²

You'll need to be intentional about this at first, because it won't feel natural to use the discipling language initially. But as you persist in repeatedly using the vocabulary and living it out practically, it inevitably creates a culture of discipleship.

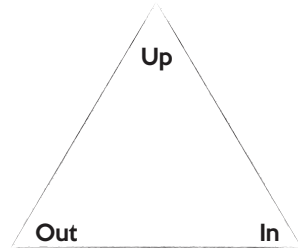
"At first I was pretty resistant to implementing this discipling language and using shapes as a way of remember them and passing them on," one MC leader said. "I mean seriously, shapes? But I agreed to try them for a while, and I couldn't believe how helpful having a consistent discipling language was. It changed the culture of our MC faster than I could have imagined. People I had been unable to get to do anything were suddenly bringing ideas to the table and asking if they could run with them. It was incredible."

Recently, a middle-aged woman came to a church where this discipling language was being used. Initially, she found it off-putting and hard to engage with, calling it "jargon." But as she grew in relationship with one of the leaders, she joined a Huddle (a vehicle for intentionally discipling and training leaders) and found that, as she heard the language used in a relational context and

¹² You can learn more about LifeShapes in our book *Building a Discipling Culture*.

intentionally expressed in life (not just talked about abstractly), it became very helpful. Now she understands the need for and the value of a discipling language and has started using it herself, not just as information but as a lifestyle.

We have seen it happen again and again, in almost every conceivable cultural situation. It is remarkable, for example, how simply drawing a triangle and talking about an “UP/IN/OUT” life begins to create a culture where people have a sense of being sent “OUT,” almost without even trying! Consistent training in and expression of a discipling language really do create a discipling culture.



COMMON RHYTHMS

In addition to a common discipling language, our MCs also need **common rhythms** that we regularly participate in, predictable patterns that instill a sense of stability in the community. The regular routines we engage in shape our lives deeply, affecting our mindset, outlook, and sense of identity and purpose. To grow a culture of discipleship, **we need to be together a lot**, participating in common rhythms of discipleship centered on deepening our relationship with God (UP), our relationship with one another (IN), and our relationship with our mission context (OUT). We can't develop a culture of discipleship unless we actually get together *often* as an extended family. We'll talk more about this in a bit.

DISCIPLING LEADER & HUDDLE

Finally, you simply don't get a discipling culture unless someone takes the responsibility to lead it. **The leader of an MC needs to be a disciple-maker, not merely an event-organizer.** Part of your responsibility as an MC leader is to look for and invest in potential leaders, considering things like godly character, skills, and whether the person already



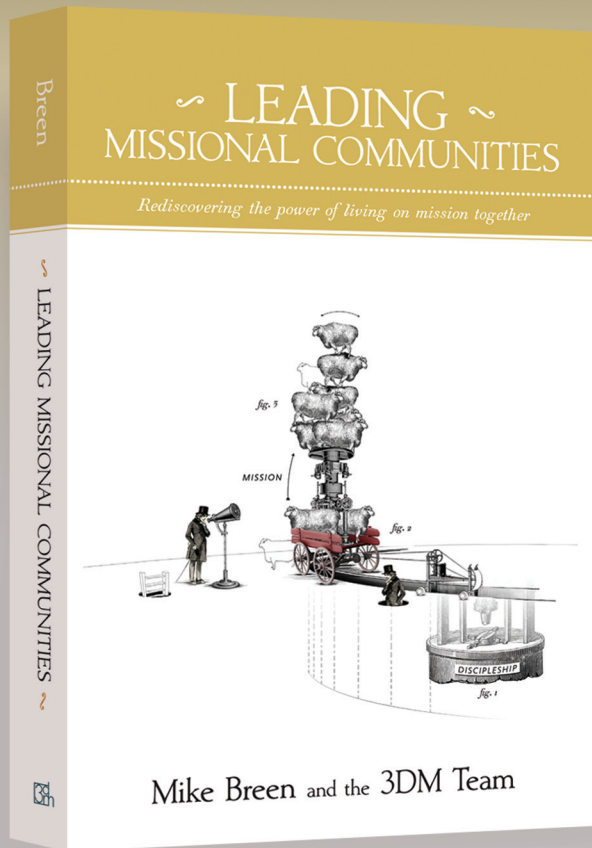
**THE LEADER
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organizer.**

influences others positively. You sow the seeds of multiplication by discipling and training these people as leaders. Invite potential leaders into a more intentional discipling relationship within the MC (giving them greater access to your life and training them in Huddle), and begin having them function on a leadership team within the MC, giving them growing responsibility and visibility as leaders in the MC.

This will sow the seeds of multiplication within your MC, because as these leaders grow in their character and competency, they will begin to have vision for what God wants to do through their life. New MCs can be birthed, because they'll have a new discipling leader with vision. Remember that the point of MCs isn't simply to create a space for people to experience community; we are called to participate in the advance of the Kingdom of God by making disciples who become leaders and multiply to make more disciples. This is why having a discipling culture at the heart of your MC is so important. We never truly multiply without it.

~ LEADING ~ MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

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