

HOW TO
ARGUE
LIKE

JESUS

LEARNING PERSUASION FROM HISTORY'S
GREATEST COMMUNICATOR

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How to Argue like Jesus

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DISCIPLESHIP

SPREADING AND SUSTAINING THE MESSAGE

On May 22, 1787, twelve British men formed a group known as the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.¹ Today opposition to slavery seems commonsensical. We live in a world in which slavery was officially abolished in the United States nearly 150 years ago and in most of the world by 1926, but for those men in 1787 the cause of abolition was as fanciful as it was unpopular.

Almost every empire in history fostered slavery in some form. As early as 2600 B.C., Egyptian rulers were forcing foreign peoples to erect pyramids, and the early Mesopotamian Code of Hammurabi notes slavery as one of the region's established institutions. The Greeks and Romans, the Indians and the Chinese all viewed slavery as a common practice, often subjugating conquered peoples or inferior domestic classes, sometimes dividing those classes along racial or ethnic lines. And while we think of slavery as a violation of basic human rights, even world religions failed to take a clear stand condemning the institution.

So it was truly revolutionary for twelve men in Britain to step forward at the height of the Atlantic slave trade and openly state their dedication to eradicating the institution. In fact, the only thing more preposterous than their attempt to abolish slavery in Britain (and subsequently the world) was the speed with which they achieved their goal.

The Committee, comprised of nine Quakers and three evan-

¹John Coffey, "The Abolition of the Slave Trade: Christian Conscience and Political Action," *Cambridge Papers*, June 2006, Vol. 15, No. 2.

gical Christians (Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, and Granville Sharpe), found in abolitionism a truly Christian cause. In France the cause of abolition had remained small, a pet cause of the liberal elite. But in Britain the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, the Quakers, and other groups were about to make it a grassroots campaign.²

From a core of twelve men (echoing the twelve disciples) rose a popular movement millions strong. Employing artists, writers, politicians, and housewives, the Committee and its sympathizers created visual arts, pamphlets, and books to hammer home the horrors of slavery. Thomas Clarkson traveled more than thirty thousand miles around Great Britain organizing lectures and assembling and spreading information.³ Most importantly, these men worked tirelessly to create disciples at home and abroad. In pockets around the U.K. women held antislavery meetings in their parlors. In the U.S. homegrown abolitionists and disciples of their forebears in Great Britain organized strong popular uprisings against the peculiar institution and also practical acts of rebellion such as the Underground Railroad. Masses of individuals, usually organized in small, dispersed clusters, distributed literature, engaged in debates, hosted political rallies, and cultivated the relationships necessary to convert others to the cause.

The efforts of these small groups proved to be remarkably successful. By the mid-1800s Britain abolished a 5,000-year-old institution, and in less than a hundred years those small clusters of Christian men and women had fanned a small flame of hope into the roaring fire of nineteenth-century abolitionism, changing the world forever.

That is the power of discipleship.

The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* defines a disciple as “a person who is a pupil or an adherent of the doctrines of another.” Whether in multi-level marketing businesses like Amway,

²“Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee_for_the_Abolition_of_the_Slave_Trade (accessed November 17, 2007).

³See <http://new.edp24.co.uk/content/PlaceinHistory/content/37Clarkson.aspx>; also, unofficial notes taken from Stephen Davies’s lecture at the Institute for Humane Studies, Advanced Studies in Freedom conference, July 7–13, 2007 at Loyola University (Chicago).

office mentorship programs, or historical movements, you've likely encountered the concept of discipleship and the power it has when combined with the dual concepts of cellular networks and small groups. In Christianity, discipleship is the process of transforming a person from being the recipient of a message to an active participant in that message. Discipleship was the key way in which Jesus Christ and his followers transmitted the message of Christianity to "the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47).

So how did Jesus do it? Modern organization gurus are just catching on to the power of cellular organizations. But two thousand years ago Jesus and his followers organized the Christian church as a distinctively cellular and discipleship-oriented institution. This structure allowed the new religion to quickly spread from a forgotten corner of the Roman Empire to the heights of global power. And that movement and the forms that catalyzed it show both the remarkable power of Christian discipleship and the ways in which that form of organization can be relevant to many spheres of organization and communication today.

The discipleship model is a rigorous, relationship-oriented, and complex system of message communication and replication that requires a great deal of time and energy. Not everything you do necessitates the formation of such a complex web of organization. However, for those critical messages—whether you're managing a political campaign, spreading the gospel, or attempting to spearhead a strategic turnaround in your small business—the lessons of discipleship can be essential to your success. Here's how Jesus did it—and how you can follow his example.

BUILD THE CORE

Just as every great structure needs a solid foundation, every movement requires a small core of devoted individuals. Discipleship starts with the small group.

As Christ approached the task of sending his message of hope and salvation from Jerusalem to the rest of the world, his first priority was to create a few small, solid groups of individuals totally dedicated to the message who could sustain it in his absence. This

task was essential to his ministry. Indeed, one of Christ's first substantial acts as he began to preach was to gather disciples.

According to the first chapter of John, the day after he was baptized, even before his first miracle, Jesus began to call disciples. His immediate priority was gathering devoted followers around him, teaching them, and developing close relationships with them as he spread his message.

Readers of the Gospels are familiar with Christ's closest allies. The core consisted of the twelve apostles who traveled with him until the time of his arrest. That group might also be expanded, though, to include a few other essential figures including Jesus' mother, Mary Magdalene, and John the Baptist (who was, in a way, discipled by the Father). But beyond that small cadre of close friends, Jesus also assembled another, larger group of disciples to supplement that foundational core. Luke 10:1 notes that Jesus gathered together seventy-two disciples after sending forth his twelve apostles and "sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go." Various other medium-sized groups of close followers are described or alluded to in passages such as the Sermon on the Mount. However you classify his disciples, what is clear is that while Jesus taught thousands of people around the countryside and healed multitudes in the course of his three-year travels, he cultivated closer relationships with at least two smaller groups, one of which numbered only twelve people. He taught them the most important lessons. He allowed them the privilege of witnessing every moment of his ministry firsthand. And he entrusted them with bearing witness to the things they had seen.

Jesus also assured that these small groups of men and women were absolutely committed to his message. Christ was very clear that serving as one of his disciples would be a taxing experience:

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:57–62)

Jesus was unambiguous about what was expected of his followers. To be one of his disciples—to be included in the inner circle—one had to be ready for exceptional dedication and sacrifice. Jesus knew that to maintain an effective core he needed people who were committed to bearing witness above all else and who realized that only sacrifice and selflessness could create the type of foundation he needed to reach the world. In return for such devotion, Jesus stood up for them, empowered them, trusted them, cried in front of them, answered their sincere questions, and forgave them when they strayed. He built a relationship of mutual trust and support, even asking them to keep watch while he prayed. By committing himself fully to those in his core group, he solidified their loyalty to him.

Similar models of core building can be found in business, politics, and sports. CEOs have close-knit groups of intelligent, hard-nosed people who surround them at the top of corporate pyramids and generate critical leadership within the larger company. Great leaders such as John F. Kennedy and Napoleon Bonaparte surround themselves with trusted advisers who believe wholly in the common cause of the group and are trained to advance it. Sprawling online communities like Daily Kos are sustained by a critical few who fight fiercely to spread key messages to the larger group. Great academics such as Socrates, Freud, and Pythagoras assembled small groups of devoted followers who replicated their teachings. Even athletes are at their greatest when they, like Michael Jordan throughout the 1980s and 1990s, are surrounded by teammates dedicated to building a cohesive and mutually supportive group.

Where do you need to build a core? Which messages, movements, and organizations might require you to assemble a core team

of disciples? The obvious answer is that you need a core group of family and friends dedicated to support mutual development and spiritual growth.

Beyond this, whether you are attempting to set the strategy of a sales team or leading a grassroots effort to lobby Congress, you'll need disciples. You will need to assure their dedication to the cause (with the level of dedication determined by the seriousness of the cause—rarely will you need to lead a movement that justifies followers' abandoning their families!). And you will need to build a core of people who in turn have their own independent cores to advance the message beyond your limited sphere of influence.

When building your core, pick people who are loyal but willing to challenge you. Select those who are willing to sacrifice. Spend time with them, cultivating close personal bonds that will sustain the group through difficult times. Invest—teaching them and listening to them—and open your heart to them. No core is stable without some measure of personal or professional trust. Let people invest in you just as much as you invest in them.

WORK IN CELLS AND SMALL GROUPS

Once this core is established, it must be transformed into a cellular or small-group-based organization. As we've noted, Jesus' formation of a core group of disciples was effective because it was small, relationship-oriented, personal in nature, and required mutual sacrifice. However, as organizations and movements grow, a contradiction arises. You want new people to hear your message and join in the cause, but it is more difficult to create relationships with all these new people and get real dedication from them. The original leader simply doesn't have the time or resources to mentor everyone, and the close cohesion of the group suffers as a result of growth.

Writer Malcolm Gladwell described this process in a *New Yorker* article on Rick Warren's success at Saddleback Church:

Churches, like any large voluntary organization, have at their core a contradiction. In order to attract newcomers, they must have low barriers to entry. They must be unthreatening, friendly, and

compatible with the culture they are a part of. In order to retain their membership, however, they need to have an identity distinct from that culture. They need to give their followers a sense of community—and community, exclusivity, a distinct identity are all, inevitably, casualties of growth. As an economist would say, the bigger an organization becomes, the greater a freerider problem it has. If I go to a church with five hundred members, in a magnificent cathedral, with spectacular services and music, why should I volunteer or donate any substantial share of my money? What kind of peer pressure is there in a congregation that large? If the barriers to entry become too low—and the ties among members become increasingly tenuous—then a church as it grows bigger becomes weaker.⁴

This is a common problem with growing organizations. People can be initially moved by a message, but they need to be part of a community that reinforces that message interpersonally to maintain their dedication. As churches, corporations, or government entities increase in size, people grow less connected, and each individual's dedication to the cause and to the group decreases. The movement itself grows less effective.

So how do you adjust for these growing pains? Gladwell continues:

One solution to the problem is simply not to grow, and, historically, churches have sacrificed size for community. But there is another approach: to create a church out of a network of lots of little church cells—exclusive, tightly knit groups of six or seven who meet in one another's homes during the week to worship and pray. The small group as an instrument of community is initially how Communism spread, and in the postwar years Alcoholics Anonymous and its twelve-step progeny perfected the small-group technique. . . . When churches—in particular, the megachurches that became the engine of the evangelical movement, in the nineteen-seventies and eighties—began to adopt the cellular model, they found out the same thing. The small group was an extraordinary vehicle of commitment. It was personal and flexible. It cost nothing. It was convenient, and every worshipper was able to find a small group that precisely matched his or her interests. Today,

⁴Malcolm Gladwell, "The Cellular Church," *The New Yorker*, September 12, 2005.

at least forty million Americans are in a religiously based small group, and the growing ranks of small-group membership have caused a profound shift in the nature of the American religious experience.⁵

This personal, flexible nature is one of the reasons the discipleship method modeled by Christ is so compelling. Jesus not only delivered a brilliant message and gathered around him a core group of believers, he also modeled the organization necessary to sustain and grow that message while maintaining its impact and intimacy. During his earthly ministry Christ created a small core of people that he sent out to gather other small groups. In turn these groups gathered their own groups. Before long there were small cellular organizations—churches—spread throughout the Middle East. Just as Christ sent forward pairs of disciples to prepare his way in Luke 10, he sent his disciples themselves out after his death to train new leaders, adapt to local customs, and create compelling cellular organizations in new regions with new people. The apostle Paul was indisputably Jesus' most brilliant student in disciple-making. Paul not only gathered key leaders around him and trained them but mentored the churches they formed through his letters and lecture tours.

Cellular, small-group-oriented organizations continue to enjoy immense success. Those who study organization now note the importance of small, intimate groups like the twelve disciples and put the maximum number of personal connections one can have at somewhere around one hundred and fifty (larger than the second group of disciples mentored by Christ).⁶ Numerous modern organizations adhere to these principles in order to exploit the flexibility, adaptability, dedication, and mutual trust they foster. As mentioned, Alcoholics Anonymous uses small groups to promote accountability and foster intimacy. Harvard Business School breaks its large, nine-hundred-person class into multiple sections of around ninety students, and these sections are further complemented by study

⁵Ibid.

⁶Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point—How Little Things Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000).

groups of six students. Military organizations have long realized that soldiers cannot be dedicated to the entire army in the same way they can be dedicated to small units; fraternities and sororities gain incredible dedication from their members by personalizing the college experience; and the house church movement has been successful worldwide because it relies on closely knit groups that foster peer pressure, accountability, and trust.

The same dynamic can be seen in families. Extended families tend to work best when they are loosely bound by the leaders of each cellular unit. Have you ever been to a family reunion? There is usually a matriarch or patriarch (typically one of the oldest family members) with strong ties to the next generation (your parents or grandparents). Each person in that subsequent generation maintains a smaller functioning extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins, and you in turn have your own spouse and children that you link to the larger body. All of these family units are distinct and have a unique personality, but they are bound loosely to the larger unit by the successful discipleship of the previous generation.

Cellular organizations and small groups are similarly essential to you as you attempt to communicate your messages and build support. When you see your organization or movement growing, do not make the trade-off between size and substance. Try to find ways to create smaller, individualized communities that can nurture themselves and the larger group. The tools at your disposal are numerous. Small groups function best in person, but you can also link those groups with online discussion forums, newsletters, conference calls (in the case of businesses), blogs, and strategically planned retreats (or, as your family might call them, vacations). Never let people fall out of these groups. Get everyone involved, and when individual units get too large, break them into smaller units that can better foster intimacy and trust.

TRAIN THE TRAINERS

We know that small groups are more effective and that cellular organizations foster better relationships and increased dedication. But how do you establish and manage a widely dispersed network of

tens, hundreds, or thousands of loosely bound groups? The answer, once again, lies in combining the discipleship model with a model of cellular organization. Great leaders don't simply train followers; they train other leaders, who in turn train other leaders, and the networks of dedicated people fan out around them in concentric circles. In the business jargon this is referred to as the train-the-trainer approach.

Train-the-trainer is readily evident in the example we used at the introduction of this chapter. The abolitionist movement in England was not simply a movement of twelve men and millions of followers. It was the story of small groups of men and women who convinced others to take a leadership role in the cause, thereby spreading both the message of abolitionism and the organizational model to extend and sustain that message. These leaders mentored one another, and their circles of influence extended throughout Britain and then overseas to all the colonies and former colonies of the British Empire.

Similarly, the train-the-trainer approach was modeled by the early Christian church as it followed the example of Christ. Jesus didn't merely train Peter and John to be dedicated servants. He trained them to reach other people and make them disciples, assuring that the system he set up would self-replicate to the millions who would eventually be impacted by the small groups these original disciples formed. Jesus didn't just teach his disciples to lead good lives; he taught them to teach others to lead good lives. Following Christ meant replicating all his actions, including his model of leadership.

This is likely one of the reasons that Jesus took his disciples with him to watch him preach. That was a form of apprenticeship. As he spoke to crowds, the select few who traveled with him not only learned the principles about which he spoke, but the methods Jesus used to deliver them. His example was replicated as the original disciples went forth after his resurrection. Similarly, in Paul's letters to Timothy we find that Paul mentored Timothy not only in the content of Christianity but in its transmission to others. Many of the disciples traveled at least part of the time with other younger or less experienced disciples they were training to take their places. In Acts

4 Peter and John traveled together, mentoring and supporting one another. Likewise, Paul himself was mentored and apprenticed by Barnabas. When Paul and Barnabas took separate routes to Antioch to revisit all of the churches they had raised on previous journeys in Acts 15:36–41, each took another disciple with him. Much of the book of the Acts of the Apostles is the story of leaders in training.

The most effective modern churches follow this example. Even as the influence of hierarchical religious organizations has faded in Western Europe, the evangelical church and associated cellular religious organizations such as the Mormon Church are spreading rapidly in places like Africa and the United States. As mentioned before, Rick Warren's Saddleback Church is growing quickly because it utilizes a train-the-trainer approach. Warren himself lectures extensively at churches around the world for the purpose of training other church leaders to replicate his cellular church success. In Atlanta, Andy Stanley's North Point Church has set a goal of one hundred thousand people in small groups in the Atlanta area. Stanley has trained leaders of several other churches, including Buckhead Church and Browns Bridge Community Church, to take the same model into the broader community. Stanley in turn was influenced by Charles Stanley, Chicago's Willow Creek Community Church, and countless other individuals and organizations. Throughout the United States, many of the fastest-growing churches are those that are led by people mentored by other leaders and taught to self-replicate, generating a new generation of leaders (not just followers) much like themselves.

Successful corporations do the same. Many large organizations offer management training programs and rigorous mentorship programs to assure that leaders, not just followers, emerge. McKinsey & Company relies on the fact that all of its consultants are leaders, mentored by more senior consultants and by peers who are capable of enabling others to lead within their client organizations. The success of the firm is indicated not just by its reputation in the business community but by the leaders they cultivate internally and in the organizations with which they work. Other companies, like Toyota, look to encourage problem-solving leadership even among junior

personnel. Amway is built on the principle that senior salespeople can train others to do exactly what they do (including training even more people to follow in their footsteps). Across the spectrum, companies are realizing that the increasing necessity of small groups and adaptability in the workforce requires discipleship by people who are willing to train others to be leaders like themselves.

When you communicate, are you training leaders or followers? In your family, do you teach your sons and daughters to be excellent parents or merely excellent sons and daughters? At work, are you taking the time to mentor others—to train them to train others—or are you just punching a time card and demanding results from those in your employ? It is not enough to teach people the skills to do *their* jobs. You must teach them the skills to do *your* job, and in that way they can expand the organization and spread the message through effective discipleship.

GENERATE SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Subsequently, the leaders you train must be equipped with the materials and tools they need to spread a message and maintain focus. Without firm supporting materials, messages become diluted. People make them too adaptable, taking them in their own directions, and the coherence of the message disappears. But with the appropriate supporting tools and materials, messages and organizations can stay focused even as they expand.

In Jesus' three-year ministry, it appears that his attempt to give his followers the materials to replicate his message was confined to oral transmission, primarily in the form of preaching and private instruction. In our media-centric age, such an approach may be too simplistic to be effective. Granted, Jesus was a rhetorical genius (as we've detailed in the preceding chapters) who utilized logos, pathos, and ethos and wielded narrative and imagery to hammer those messages home. But he was not multimedia. He did not paint or write. He had no computers to work with and no Internet on which to blog or hold group chats. In the broader context of Christian communication, however, Christ laid the foundation for the creation

of these materials and, at least as Christians understand it, directly inspired others to generate supporting materials for him.

First among these supporting materials is the Bible. In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul wrote, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (3:16). It is clear from both the Old and New Testaments that God considered the Bible his leadership and followership training manual. It was designed as an authoritative source for proper Christian training, influenced by the hand of God himself. Writers such as Paul recorded these materials on behalf of God, but they are the materials Christ intended to leave behind to guide the church he had created.

Second, the writings of Christian leaders extend beyond the Old and New Testament canons to various other epistles, gospels, and philosophic works. Writers such as St. Augustine, C. S. Lewis, and Thomas Aquinas took it upon themselves to add to the materials Christians could use in sorting out their world and their beliefs. Many modern writers such as Francis Schaeffer, John Piper, R. C. Sproul, Charles Stanley, Max Lucado, and Pope John Paul II have perpetuated this tradition, disseminating everything from philosophy to poetry throughout the world. Of course, these are secondary texts that do not hold the authority of the Bible itself. They are merely useful tools for Christians approaching their commission to witness to the world, but they are supporting materials.

Beyond the written word, great Christian artists (such as Rembrandt), musicians (such as Johann Sebastian Bach), and bloggers (such as Biola University professors Fred Sanders and John Mark Reynolds) have used visual media and new media to create ever-evolving tools for modern Christians to understand the heart of God and spread his message. And the overall basket of supporting materials for the Christian faith is comprehensive.

Other great thinkers and leaders mirror this example. At the time of the Revolutionary War in the United States, Thomas Paine released pamphlets such as *Common Sense*; and in the aftermath of the war, thinkers such as James Madison used newspapers, lectures, and pamphlets to argue for a federalist system of govern-

ment. When a politician like Hillary Clinton runs for office, she doesn't just travel the lecture circuit. She sets up websites, generates newsletters and policy briefings, creates MySpace and Facebook accounts, and authorizes autobiographies from sympathetic devotees. These people realize the importance of supporting materials in discipleship—just as Christ realized the importance of Scripture in the focused spread of the early Christian church—and seek new ways to innovate with the media at their disposal.

Likewise, businesses issue annual reports and company newsletters and set up complex public relations departments. Internal knowledge-sharing network companies now reach the public in numerous ways, and these tools have allowed corporations to grow ever larger in a decentralized way. Koch Industries owner Charles Koch went so far as to release a book on his management philosophy, *The Science of Success*, and McKinsey & Company regularly publishes short editorials in publications such as *The Economist*, detailed features in *The McKinsey Quarterly* (a magazine), and lengthy books like *Valuation* to forward vital messages.

As a modern communicator, you have unprecedented modes of content delivery at your disposal. You can utilize user-generated wikis to create both a sense of community and up-to-date information about your project. You can use group blogs to release new information to constituents and maintain personal interactions without face-to-face contact. You can use mass e-mail, hard-copy newsletters, or even self-published books (courtesy of sites such as lulu.com) to communicate firm organizational messages that followers can latch onto and learn from. You can also use podcasts or YouTube videos to put a voice or face with the message you communicate. All these tools are either free or inexpensive. You simply have to determine which ones are best suited to your message and your audience and how you can most effectively employ them.

REACH OUT

Finally, a compelling message, a solid model of discipleship, a network of small groups, and a plethora of supporting materials are worth nothing if you fail to engage in outreach. With respect

to the witness of Christianity, Christ referred to this as the Great Commission.

Christ did not come to save the eighty-four people he specifically named as disciples in the Gospels. As John 3:16 famously notes, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus came to save the whole world. And to do that, he needed to reach vast numbers of people—even those who were not inclined to agree with him—and to attempt to persuade them of the truth of sin and the necessity of repentance and salvation. Christ’s heart was the heart of a seeker, and his greatest pleasure was not relaxing in the embrace of his admirers, but finding and saving those who did not know or trust him.

According to Jesus, the number one thing that excites the Father is conversion. In Luke 19:10 Jesus states, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” And in the Parable of the Lost Sheep Jesus states, “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7). Jesus regularly spent time not with the religious leaders but with prostitutes, criminals, and tax collectors because they were the ones who most desperately needed his message and his help and knew it. And after his resurrection Jesus provided clear instructions for his disciples: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18–20).

Christ knew that he was training his disciples to reach new groups, to expand the number of cells in the church, and to grow the community of those who believed. This was never going to be an easy assignment. Jesus and many of his followers died for the message, winning hearts and making enemies as they preached the gospel. But they knew you cannot spread a message by preaching to the choir; you cannot grow an organization without seeking converts.

So Christ commanded his disciples not only to stick together but to disperse. While they were expected to mentor and support

one another, the heart of the Great Commission required that they spread out in order to transmit the message of Jesus. It was necessary for his followers to set out into uncharted territories and address those who had never been exposed to Christ's words. Jesus told the disciples they were "the salt of the earth . . . the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13–14). Jesus knew that salt was a preservative in the ancient world, that a little bit of salt goes a long way toward affecting everything around it. He also knew that light is stronger than darkness, that even a pinprick of light in a sea of darkness can illuminate its environment and give hope to onlookers. So rather than encouraging his followers to seek comfort with one another all the time (they certainly did some of the time), he encouraged them to be adventurous and to set out to impact the world.

Spreading important messages is hard work. When Thomas Clarkson set out riding around the English countryside to fight the evil of slavery, he faced hostile audiences and violent slave owners. But it was by seeking new followers that he spread a lifesaving message from a small group of twelve to the entire western world. He was salt; he was light. A core believer in abolitionism, trained to be a leader reinforced by a small community of like-minded people, and equipped with the skills and facts to combat the peculiar institution of slavery, he went out into the world and reached out to those who did not believe.

Martin Luther King Jr. did the same, making common cause with whites in America at a time when many African-Americans chose (perhaps justifiably) to vilify them. Thomas Jefferson did this when he wrote the Declaration of Independence, proclaiming the grievances of the colonies publicly to the entire world. Glaceau CEO J. Darius Bikoff did this, selling his bottles of enriched water from the back of his car. It is easy to get complacent when you do not have to face the hostility and loneliness of reaching out to the unconverted. It is even easier to lose touch with the world around you when you are surrounded by an echo chamber of like-minded people who never challenge your views. But it is by reaching out to others and taking a leap of faith that you ultimately spread a message or grow an organization.

This is, of course, particularly critical for the modern church, the most powerful cellular organization in the world. Toward the end of his *New Yorker* piece Malcolm Gladwell includes a lengthy quote by Rick Warren:

There is only one thing big enough to handle the world's problems, and that is the millions and millions of churches spread out around the world. I can take you to thousands of villages where they don't have a school. They don't have a grocery store, don't have a fire department. But they have a church. They have a pastor. They have volunteers. The problem today is distribution. In the tsunami, millions of dollars of foodstuffs piled up on the shores and people couldn't get it into the places that needed it, because they didn't have a network. Well, the biggest distribution network in the world is local churches. There are millions of them, far more than all the franchises in the world. Put together, they could be a force for good.⁷

Warren recognizes that there is power in discipleship and the cellular model, and that power is ours to use for good. It isn't there solely to reach others for Christ, though that is a critical mission. It is there, more broadly, to help people—struggling, fragile people like you and me. It ended slavery. It subverted the cruelties of the Roman Empire. It is fighting poverty and disease in Africa and beyond. And it has the power to be the most revolutionary force on the planet if we choose to use it well.

⁷Gladwell, "The Cellular Church."

CONCEPT REVIEW

Core: A small group of dedicated leaders who serve as the foundation of a movement or an organization.

Discipleship: The act of mentoring followers, based largely on the development of personal relationships; transforming someone from being the recipient of a message to being an active participant in that message.

Cellular organization: A movement or organization composed of small, loosely connected groups that provide a flexible, adaptable model for growth based on community, local knowledge, and discipleship.

Small group: One of the “cells” in an organization; and a limited collection of individuals who share a common goal or set of beliefs that reinforces itself through mutual respect, trust, and discipleship.

Train-the-trainer: The process by which disciples are not merely trained to follow but to lead, replicating the discipleship model with other cells in an organization.

Supporting material: All of the materials, media, and tools used to sustain a message and communicate it to adherents of the message.

Outreach: The process by which individuals in an organization or movement attempt to gain new followers or converts, reaching out to those opposed to or unaware of the organization or message.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. Do you have mentors? Do you mentor others? In what ways are you training disciples, and in what ways have you been trained?
2. Which organizations have the best models for mentorship or discipleship? Which organizations are worst? What separates the two?
3. Which cellular organizations work best, and which work worst? What separates the two?
4. What is the difference between training leaders and training followers? What makes a good leader? Can you think of someone who has trained you to train others? Describe that experience.
5. Give an example of an organization without outreach. What is the impact of that lack of outreach on growth? What is the impact on members of the existing community?
6. What organization or message with which you are involved could benefit most from the principles outlined in this chapter? What concrete steps can you take to make that happen?