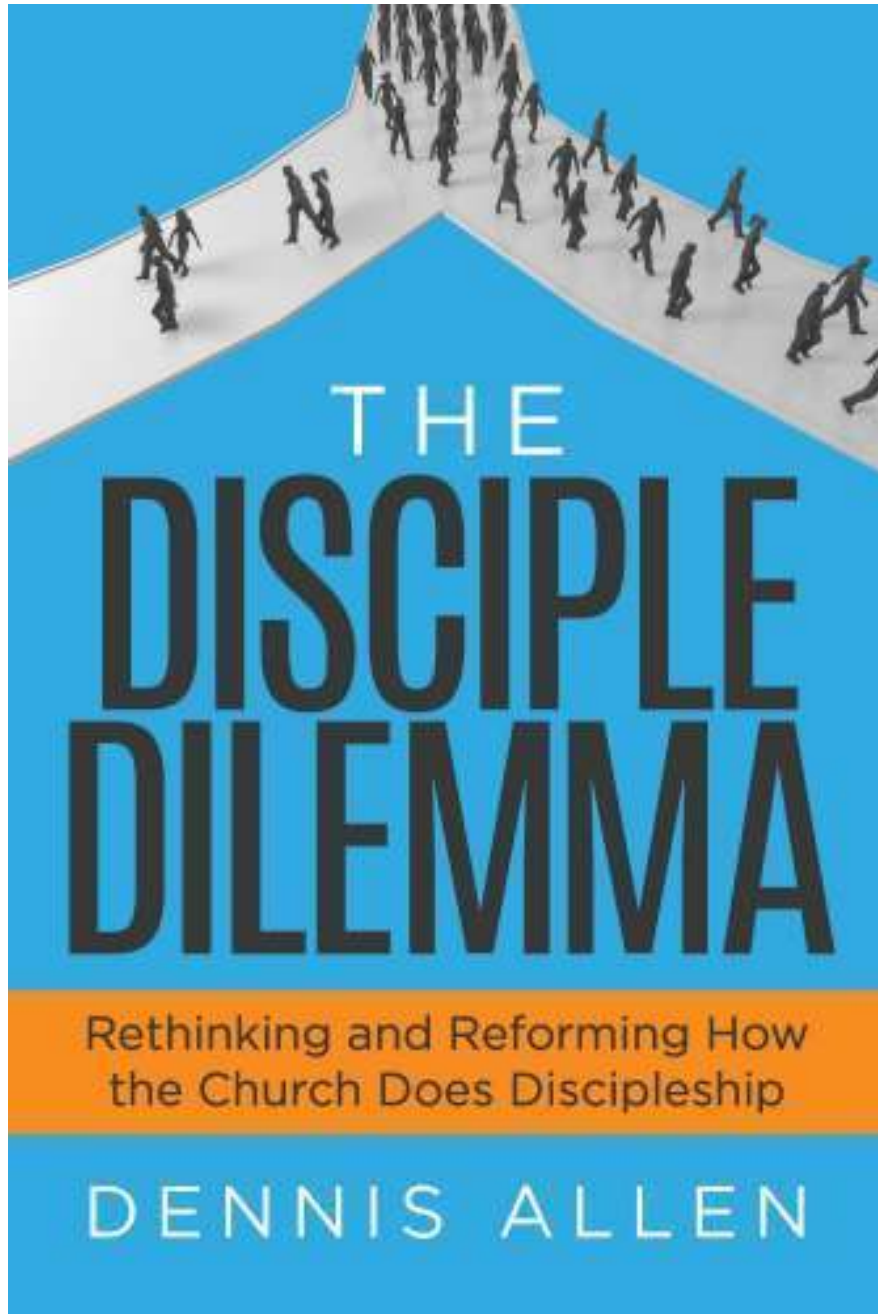


We hope you enjoy this month's download of:



Order a copy of the book here: [Order The Disciple Dilemma](#)

The Disciple Dilemma

ENDORSEMENTS

I'm known for books, lectures and debates focusing on Intelligent Design, and its antithesis - naturalistic Darwinism. So it caught my eye that *The Disciple Dilemma* claims discipleship is being diverted away from its Designer's intent, devolving downward, into a morass of spiritual entropy. Could this be true? Dennis Allen argues that Christianity's altered discipling "DNA" brings in an ominous dilemma. Get ready for a few jolts as Allen shows us how the historical Church, corporate America and today's Christian culture struggle with the discipleship mandate. You might find yourself laughing, recoiling or pushing back as you read *The Disciple Dilemma*, but I am quite sure it will change the way you think about your role in the quest to recover Christ's discipling for us all.

-Tom Woodward

Executive Director of the C.S. Lewis Society, Tampa, FL
Research Professor, Trinity College
Author of the award-winning book *Doubts About Darwin*

The Disciple Dilemma is a must read for those who desire to comprehend the tie between true leadership and discipleship grounded in the Lordship of Christ. It effectively sets before the reader the dilemma faced by Christians today: whether to follow the shallow 'easy-believism' of our Modern Western church and business traditions, or to comprehend and take on the costly service of following Christ in sound leadership and discipleship.

-Tom Harvey

Academic Dean of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford UK
Missionary and Seminary Professor to Asia
Author of *Acquainted With Grief: Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church in China*

I am an entrepreneur, investor and a global apologist. The two common links in all those roles are people and leadership. *The Disciple Dilemma* is making the case that leaders in all vocations and roles serving Christ must understand and tackle the dilemma we now face. If we are to restore committed and surrendered disciples to go into the watching world, we must understand these issues. If you lead one or more people in work, ministry or family this book is useful for you. Be ready for intrigue, provocation, perhaps even laughter, but above all be ready to be changed.

-Andy Moore

Entrepreneur and Apologist, Oxford UK

Managing Director at Chorus Network

Director at ADF International (UK)

Founder of Living Telos blog

If discipleship could be likened to the operating software for followers of Christ, then *The Disciple Dilemma* is making the case that some of our software has been hacked! *The Disciple Dilemma* brings to light peculiar symptoms infesting the contemporary Christian community generally, and disciples specifically. But it doesn't stop there. Dennis caught my interest when he began to connect ancient history, corporate practices and church traditions to our present-day challenges. And he's made a case that this trojan-horse code is infecting commercial, civic and societal outcomes as well as Christian discipleship. *The Disciple Dilemma* urges Christian leaders to reformat discipleship back to Version 1.0, Christ's way. This is a vital read for leaders!

-Mike Hardin

Provost and Vice President, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama

Professor of Quantitative Analysis

Formerly, Dean of the University of Alabama Culverhouse College of Business

Author and Ordained Minister

With candid insight that is as unapologetic as it is refreshing, *The Disciple Dilemma* locates the Western church in a place of spiritual anemia and exposes the ancient path of fast-held traditions that brought us here. Allen doesn't pave an easy road of sanitized solutions or cookie-cutter fixes, but instead calls us to seek out the wilder, messier, costlier road that Christ Himself journeyed on His mission to make disciples. As a leader in ministry and business, I encourage Christians to take the iconoclastic challenges found in these pages seriously... and then summon the audacity to do something about it.

-Kara Kennedy

Executive Director, ClearTrust LLC, Lutz, Florida

Entrepreneur and Apologist

Board Member, the Securities Transfer Association and the C.S. Lewis Society

Author of *Supper, Reflections from our Table*

One of the greatest challenges for me serving as a senior executive has always been people. Specifically, finding, recruiting, motivating and retaining great people to do what they are called to do. As a leader in the Christian community, you're facing that same problem, serving and coaching your people in discipleship. Allen takes us on a challenging walk through Biblical, corporate and church history to show us the divergence of Western discipling from Christ's way of doing things. If you are a leader in Christian community, and I am not only speaking to Pastors, the responsibility is on you to get discipleship with your people fully aligned with Christ's ways. This book is a strategic and Biblical workout that Christian leadership needs to consider with all our hearts, minds and strength."

-Dave Engelhardt

President of the C.S. Lewis Society, Tampa, Florida

President of CertainTeed Gypsum (Retired)

Formerly, President ThyssenKrupp Elevator

Why are millennials leaving the church in droves? Why do pastors and staff members work themselves to exhaustion while most church members warm the pews? Why do believers war with one another instead of pulling together? Why has society stopped listening to the concerns of Christians? Using humor and incisive insight, Allen presents an historic case for re-thinking the way we do discipling. I recommend *The Disciple Dilemma* for any leaders who wonder what's going on in the ranks of disciples.

-Dixie Hunke

IMB Missionary to China and Africa
Birmingham, Alabama

The Disciple Dilemma makes the audacious claim that since the second century the Christian community has been attempting to clone, instead of make disciples. What's the problem with that? Just as biological embryo cloning is fraught with high failure rates and subtle, life-threatening risks, discipleship cloning, which is another way to say mass-producing disciples, is not Jesus' way, and a low yield endeavor. Bluntly, cloning is not working well for the disciples nor Jesus' Church. Leaders, ranging from Pastors to teachers to personal disciplers need to read *The Disciple Dilemma*!

-Tim Bertram

CEO ProKidney, Raleigh, North Carolina
DVM; Board Certified Toxicologist

My life's work is discipleship, on the mission fields of Southeastern Europe, the U.S. and Latin America. *The Disciple Dilemma* aims at the world of disciples and missions. If you lead or disciple one, two or a thousand people you need to read this book. You may not agree with everything written, but you will feel like Allen has been looking over your shoulder, as the book takes you through the things that hamper disciples, and what we, as leaders, need to do to regain the fuller way of Christ in making disciples. Read the book!

-Josip Debeljuh

Serving as a Missionary, Zagreb Croatia
Global Outreach International & The Church at Brook Hills
DMin Candidate in Missions, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Where was this book when I began my pastoral ministry? Discipleship is something we pastors assume we are very familiar with, but are we actually on mission making disciples as Jesus has called us? Are we forging reproductive disciples or just multiplying 'Christianized' spectators? Dennis Allen challenges us to understand discipling properly and engage it effectively. We would like a simple three or four point guide, but Allen tells us we must do a lot more thinking through what is needed biblically. We can't simply copy what others are doing. You may not like everything Allen says, but I believe his book will help you be a better disciple maker.

-John Grossmann

Senior Pastor

Grace Evangelical Free Church, Cincinnati, OH

A must-read for leaders in every facet of Christian community. As a leader and global missionary with Campus Outreach I am convinced that being a disciple and making disciples are our calling, regardless of gender, vocation, age or location. And I believe discipleship is under siege today in many Christian communities. *The Disciple Dilemma* raises haunting questions as it forces us to hold our traditions of discipleship up to the looking glass of Jesus' model of discipleship. Whether you lead one or thousands, this book is a candid, clever and thought-provoking wake-up call to the disciple-making dilemma that sits before us!

-Melanie Rogers

International Ministry Strategy Director, Campus Outreach SERVE

Birmingham, AL

THE DISCIPLE DILEMMA

Rethinking and Reforming How
The Church Does Discipleship

DENNIS ALLEN



NEW YORK

LONDON • NASHVILLE • MELBOURNE • VANCOUVER

THE DISCIPLE DILEMMA

Rethinking and Reforming How the Church Does Discipleship

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*For Calvin & Barbara Miller, Mickey & Carol Dalrymple,
and Wilson & Charline Henderson.*

WITH IMMENSE GRATITUDE

To my beloved, Karen, my coach, counselor and friend. She really did try to clean up my tpyos.

To Newton & Vivian (Dad & Mom), Raymond, Brent, Ken, Dixie, Melanie, Meredith, Josip, Marko, Libby and Matt for your support and help in this project.

To the faculty and class of BP 2019 at OCCA, The Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. Especially David Lloyd and Os Guinness. This is your fault.

To the team at Morgan James Publishing, Chris, Emily, Amber, Jim, Wes, Tom and of course David, who tirelessly coached, counseled and kept us on track.

To Thomas Womack's insightful editing, and Lisa Grimenstein's precise proofreading, such that the fears of my grammar teachers were not yet again realized.

Reston, Virginia
Spring 2022

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**The duty of the fighter pilot is to patrol his area of the sky,
and shoot down any enemy fighters in that area.**

Anything else is rubbish.

Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron

My head is in a bad place

But I'm having such a good time

Dr. John, "Right Place, Wrong Time"⁸⁷

7

Christian Tradition:

The *Not* Main Things

Business Tradition:

Mission Drift

Cyprian, as new bishop for the third-century church at Carthage, faced a dilemma. Hooligans were demanding their restoration, back into the church's fellowship. They were a sorry lot of apostates, adulterers, idolaters, recanters, drunkards, and the like. Cyprian's staff wanted immediate excommunication for the ne'er-do-wells. Others across the church were pleading for gracious restoration of the purgatory-bound revelers. Anger from every direction. Something had to be done to appease a deeply divided church—some way to right the rogues, pacify the passionate, and indulge the indignant.

Wait! That's it! Let's indulge them! Indulgences. It has a warm ring to it, don't you think? A price paid to reduce time in purgatory. A barter. In exchange for works of merit or donations to the church, the church could then be motivated to assist the paid-up penitent.

Purgatory was a kind of pay as you play penalty box for the naughty-but-not-eternally-damned, a sort of time-out awaiting entrance to heaven. It was an ingenious plan. Right out of the temple moneychangers' playbook. A kind of covenantal commerce. We, the clergy, will assume pardoning powers from God to dispense credits—credits from heaven's treasury against less egregious sins. Don't bother looking it up in your concordance, because we had to, more or less, traditionalize it. Everybody knows there's a treasury, probably, maybe like that, yes? Work with us here. This treasury simply must be composed, mostly, of Christ's merit, but also merits from the good works of martyrs and the saints. Monetized merit. Bartered blessings. All we need to do now is set up an exchange rate. We can broker holy credits against the debits of the penitent purgatorians. They petition us to indulge their hot mess. Or maybe it was a relative's mess they're paying for. Anyway, quid pro quo. You do this for us, we do that for you. To get these indulgence credits we have several convenient payment options to choose from. You could, say, do extended prayer time with the rosary. Or we have the Hail Mary plan, or adorations, or even pilgrimages, if you're more inclined to stay up off your knees.

You want forgiveness, and we want publicity, cash and people in the pews. You have debits, and we offer credits. It's commerce. And the church can be flexible on terms. Cash, if you're so inclined, to help with construction (or wars). We can even broker petitionary letters of credit from worthy people who God really likes, transferring their good deeds to people the church really likes. That is, if the letters have legit bar codes—as in prison bars of the persecuted and the martyrs, which are worthy credits indeed, to redeem the errant. The saints in persecution can offer somebody else a break if they sign over their persecution credits. The saint doesn't need them, the church gets paid, the penitent gets a break.⁸⁸ Someday the Wall Street folks will congratulate us for inventing arbitrage. Brilliant!

Indulgences took on bizarre forms and uses. One wealthy congregant made a novel inquiry to the pope's chief indulgence officer, a priest named Tetzel. "Could indulgences be purchased in advance for a future sin?" Upon assurance that indulgences could indeed buy future forgiveness,

cash was exchanged, and a certificate of future pardon issued. The member then proceeded to beat the indulgence-issuing priest senseless, apparently electing to exercise his option immediately on the short market.⁸⁹ How about that? A futures market in forgiveness! Are indulgences great or what? In other news, Pope Pius X launched the first quantitative easing program around 1903, granting two hundred days of purgatory discounts as indulgence authority for his cardinals' discretionary use, one hundred days' authority for archbishops, and fifty days for bishops.

Like most social engineering programs, indulgences would become a bureaucratic nightmare of graft and corruption that churches would struggle with for centuries. Indulgences would also become a doctrinal, administrative, and political morass, with codified rulebooks large enough to make an IRS regulator envious.

More to our point, indulgences were a distraction and drag on the mission of the church. Mission must be the basis for dealing with circumstances like rebellious followers, lest the circumstances and their trappings hijack the mission, then become the mission.

This illustrates a principle known as keeping the main thing the main thing. Making the *not* main thing the main thing is a common foible for believers and businesses alike. And a very common ambush to mission.

GE—the General Electric Corporation—is the recordholder as the longest-standing member of the Dow Jones Industrials—over a hundred years. The market value of GE in 2000 was an eye-watering \$524 billion,⁹⁰ a number larger than the gross domestic product of all but the top forty nations in the world.⁹¹ From its start in 1892, GE was manufacturing. Beginning with lighting, GE expanded rapidly, producing power grids, jet engines, consumer electronics, and home and medical appliances.

By the mid-eighties, GE's growth had slowed. When you're one of the largest corporations in the world, it takes a lot of growth to move the results needle to satisfy Wall Street. Diversification yielding better profits became the new path forward. The appliance credit division, around for years to help people buy GE washing machines and refrigerators, was upgraded to Version 2.0, becoming an industrial bank, an insurance

company, as well as a consumer credit powerhouse. Meanwhile, back at headquarters, GE bought into entertainment, acquiring RCA and NBC, Vivendi, and Universal Pictures. GE would declare in 1990 that it was pursuing a whole new strategy known as “the boundaryless company.”⁹² Think about the term boundaryless as you read this old quip: “Whenever we attempt to remove a fence we should always pause long enough to find out why it was put there in the first place.”⁹³ Boundaryless can get to be a pretty confining strategy.

By 2000, GE’s stock price peaked at \$60 a share along with its aforementioned balance sheet showing a net worth of \$524 billion. As the complexities and distractions from “boundaryless” weighed on the Fortune 100 darling, a slide began, tilting its valuation downward.

As of press time for this book GE’s stock price trades regularly in single digits, down more than 50 percent in value since 2018 alone, when its legacy seat in the Dow Jones Industrials was lost from its demise. As of 2020, the company’s net worth is around \$54 billion, just 11 percent of the 2000 peak.

What happened? The business consensus is that GE’s leaders made the *not* main thing the main thing.⁹⁴

Distraction Dangers

How does this story about a corporation’s slide from glory have anything to do with discipleship? Indulge me if you will.

Like GE’s acquisitions, and like papal indulgences, distractions from mission as the main thing burn leadership’s time, resources, and commitment to the mission. They bleed organizations out from that main thing they’re supposed to do. Distractions that pop up may look like decent things—such as new land to build on or new causes to pursue. Or they may be emotional and political crises demanding immediate attention, like the things driving indulgences. It can all seem right and noble—just solving the problem, taking advantage of opportunities. But these issues must find their place within the mission, not by distracting from it. As an example, no effort in discipling the revelers in Carthage was apparent in

the stories of indulgences. Just papering over things with an eye toward revenue and social influence.

Outside the mission, such things become multiple twists and turns away from the real reason the organization exists. They may be wrapped in causes, but causes require loyalty, and that loyalty will negate any other issue that encroaches on or challenges its supreme cause, including the mission. What this means is that leaders must know and understand the main thing, focusing the design and operation on the main thing of the organization—whether a church, parachurch or business, which is the mission. That is leadership’s perpetual duty. Said another way: When the main thing isn’t driving all the other things, the other things drive the main thing. Not a good thing.

There’s a joke about a driver on a bus route in London, and his bus was constantly late. As for how he might improve performance, he declared, “We could run on time if we get rid of the customers!” In other words, eliminate the main thing so as to fix a symptom. Does the distraction get the driver’s seat, or does mission drive the encounter with the distractions?

Distractions come in many forms, all seeking to hijack mission. There are out-of-nowhere distractions, like Covid. There are also smoking-volcano distractions, always smoldering, waiting to blow up. Recurring allegations about a prominent person, for example. It smokes until it explodes, the consequences erupting large and in plain view. Or leaders can face deferral distractions—the proverbial can kicked down the road—such as not dealing with a prickly staff problem. The bill will eventually come due, in full, with interest. Often, church leaders end up entangled in business fads as a playbook instead of looking to the greatest management book ever written. It’s a book that presciently informs Christian leaders about man as man, about rituals and traditionalism, and of course, about pursuing the right stuff in structuring organizations and people. Which means the root cause of the disciple dilemma—and the path out of that dilemma—is found in sixty-six management texts that you probably carry (in print or digital form) into church every Sunday. The Bible is a fantastic leadership playbook. My career is a proof-text that even mediocrity can be

made effective by relying on Scripture. (btw, references are available about that mediocrity.)

Other examples of the *not* main things are the tendencies that Bill Hull describes in *The Complete Book of Discipleship* as he contrasts “the Jesus way” with “the consumer way”: competence beats prayer, individualism instead of community, impatience rather than endurance, and celebrity over humility.⁹⁵ But boy do we look good!

And there’s fear and despair, which often manifests as anger and outrage about the way things are, or ought to be. Despair is contagious mission distraction too, especially as despair contaminates leaders fighting tough circumstances and problems.

There are also “firefighting” distractions, a very addictive straying from the main things, where leaders forget mission as they’re caught up in the thrill of momentary crises and quick fixes.

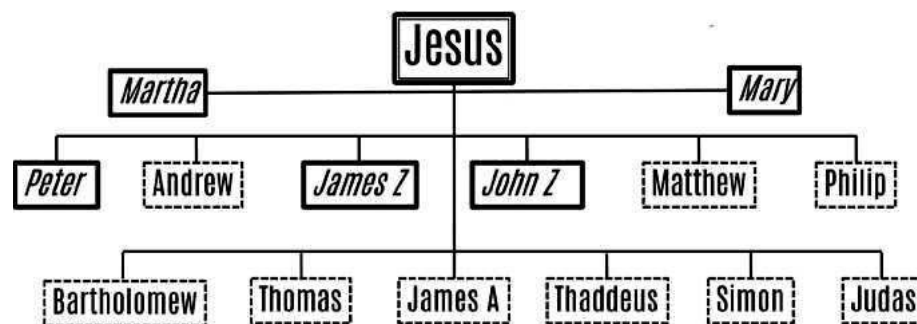
Lastly, and becoming a more common threat today, is distortion distraction—heresy sold as virtue in currying to modern man’s favor. An example of a that could be today’s obsession with sexual identity over Christian identity—as some churches fall all over themselves to accommodate the views of everyone other than the authors of Scripture. The distortion is not in being kind, gracious, and welcoming. The distortion comes in altering plain biblical views about a subject simply to pacify someone’s demands about what they personally view as fair, good, or right.

All these distractions—the good things and the bad—are corrosive when mission doesn’t hold sway over them. Take another look at Baron Richthofen’s quote at the head of this chapter. Shooting down the enemy is indeed the fighter pilot’s mission, just as a leader’s duty is to avoid the trap of distraction reaction—to keep everyone on their duty, their mission. “Everything else,” as the Red Baron said, “is rubbish.”

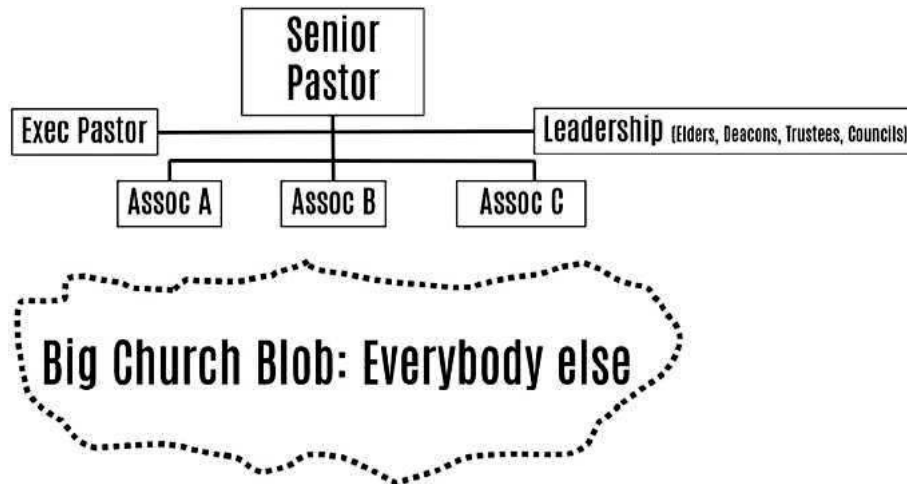
Consequential issues will always erupt in life, and those issues will be distracting. That’s precisely where mission must be intentional and influential in leadership thinking. Rather than reactionary moves against distractions, leaders must know ahead of time how all this works, and be capable of looking through the mission for thoughtful engagement with

any circumstance. Without such depth perception, distractions prevail and mission languishes.

One example of a distraction from mission is likely found in your organizational chart (if there is one). An organizational chart gives you a view of how the people structure supports the mission. For example, if we were to diagram Jesus's organization, it would look like this. Jesus had direct reports. He was discipling men and women in daily life and service. He also majored intently on three men. Then when disciples were ready, he sent them out to make more disciples. The takeaway from this chart is that Jesus intentionally structured his "organization" for the mission of making disciples:



Most larger churches have an organizational chart that probably looks something like this next one. You can see the staff, and maybe small groups or Sunday school. All good so far. But the distraction is in the failed design. Notice what's missing. Once past a defined staff level, all the people—the very core of the church—are a blob called "everybody in the congregation" (if they're even represented at all).



If discipling is the mission, then the people in the blob are the critical part of the design. But all those people are just the blob in most church designs. And according to Barna, we can see that the blob is languishing. Eighty percent of Christians in the blob are on their own, with no constructive discipling relationships to coach them. They aren't even visible as people.⁹⁶

Imagine a pharmaceuticals manufacturing company operating like that, a company making drugs that you depend on. The human resources VP says to the CEO, “The structure of our company’s people is shown on this org chart. We have very well-defined roles for the top people, as you can see. The rest of the employees hang out in what we call the blob. By our estimate, eighty percent of our employees are in the blob. We don’t know how many are really there, or who they are, because—well, because they’re in the blob. But they come in every day, sitting around in the factory. We don’t really know anything about them or what they do. They’ll head home at five after their workday, after whatever it is they do out there. Next day, they’ll be back—getting paid to be part of the blob.”

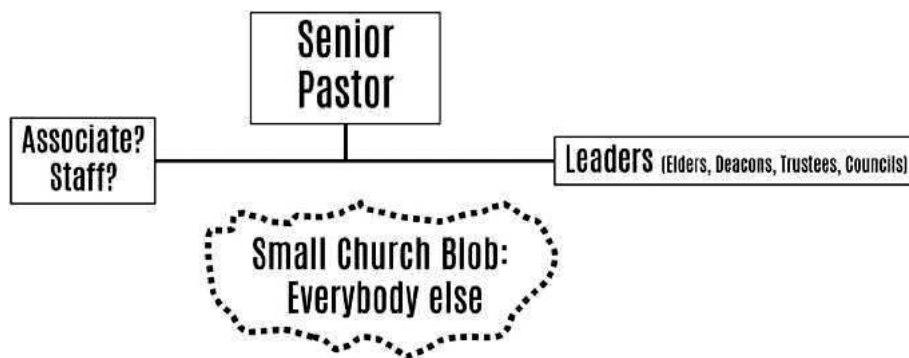
If you pitch a presentation like that to a CEO in a commercial enterprise, you should expect to receive sincere congratulations for your honesty. Then you’ll experience a lively eye-watering lecture and get an assign-

ment. The lecture may vary in its emotive ambiance, tone, euphemisms, and such. Your hair may even be wafted a bit off after the chat. But the assignment you'd get will go along these lines: "Fix this. Everybody has a mission. Everybody has a place. Everybody reports to somebody. Fix this really fast, or *you* won't be reporting to anybody."

Now why would it be that Jesus had visibility and direct reports for all the disciples he lived life with? Why do corporations have specific name-by-name report structures all the way from bottom to top? Because they design their organizations, then place all their people in roles to pursue a mission.

Why, then, do so many Christian communities just go with the blob? If clericalism—keeping the pros in power—was the mission, we could be okay with a blob. Blobs aren't supposed to do anything anyway, the clerics do stuff. But blobs are not blobs. They're *Imago Dei*. They're disciples. Disciples are individual people with individual needs and skills. If disciples are what Christ told us to focus on—and he did—then we need to design the organization to serve that mission. We need specific visibility and relationship with the people who are the mission, the mission of discipleship—connecting people in ways where an intimate few can relate to one another as disciples developing disciples, and going through life with them. No blobs left behind.

The same challenge exists for smaller churches.



Although a small church has fewer congregants, there are also fewer pastoral and lay leaders to connect with. The same blob effect. Maybe a smaller blob, but a blob.

It's really hard to make a convincing case for discipleship in blobs of 15, 150, 1,500, and so on. Yet most Christian organizations are designed to support administrative management, not the mission. There's the distraction—doing the *not* main things so much that the main thing is lost. Distractions aren't supposed to be the main thing. If you plot out your organization this way, you may come to realize that it's not organized, staffed, or purposed for discipling. It's designed to run a business and to hope that small groups, programs, ministries, and Sunday schools are gathering enough people around to have discipleship hit here and there in the herd community.

Enable and Empower

Imagine an aircraft factory where the CEO and his staff design in depth and in detail the roles of the executives. They work to get all the senior management roles perfectly defined, deeply coached up, intensely developed. Meanwhile, out on the factory floor, 98 percent of the folks there get little or no attention. They're all out there, happily bolting together the airplane you're about to board for your next big trip. The factory folks have a colorful pamphlet from upper management showing them exactly how the senior team is organized. They had a town hall meeting to get pumped up about the new factory building being built. They saw a PowerPoint presentation on the strategic plan and thirty-six core values for the business (which nobody memorized). The factory folks received no personal development about building airplanes, but they understand the executive layout. Now, I don't know about you, but I want the guy bolting the wings on that plane getting a *lot* of attention and training as a wing disciple trained by seasoned leaders before he goes out to do his job.

Most church people—again, around 80 percent according to Barna, have no engagement at even the most rudimentary level as disciples.⁹⁷ And if they did want to be disciplined, a church staff alone, including all its lay

leaders, is never going to be large enough to disciple in the way Jesus disciplined people. The leaders are outnumbered. Even if all the leaders—ministers and lay leaders combined—were fully involved in discipleship with a few, there would still not be enough disciplers to provide one-on-one (or one-on-few) discipling alongside everyone as Christ did, as Paul did.

Eighty percent of the people in the modern evangelical church have no study, no mentor, no younger disciples coming up behind them. It's a stunning number. Eighty percent with nothing other than a Sunday worship event, if even that, as discipleship. This kind of traditional practice may be unintentional, but it's very effective in producing passive Christians, individual spiritual isolation, confused thinking, and timid answers about hope in Christ. And in too many cases today, it prompts significant desertion as individuals seek saltiness elsewhere.

The distractions we've discussed are subtle ways to ensure the main thing is *not* the main thing. Just as indulgences consumed an inordinate amount of energy, time, and goodwill, so handling distractions outside of mission undercuts mission.

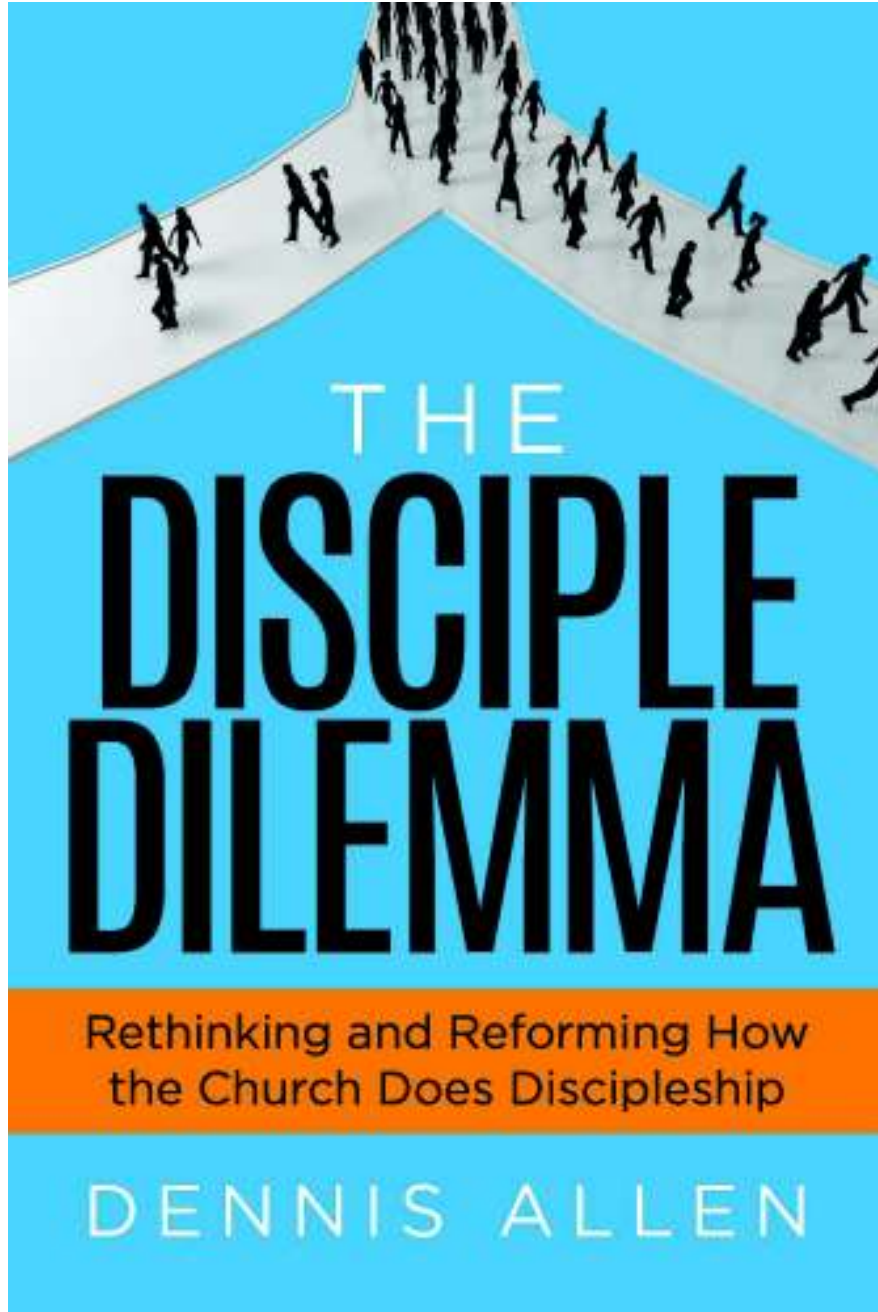
Defrauding the atonement of Christ with indulgences eroded discipleship because the main thing wasn't the main thing anymore. As GE discovered, doing the not main thing is not a good thing.

It isn't impossible, but it's a long shot to expect groups or congregational activities to produce wholehearted disciples. That's the job of disciples relating directly to other disciples. It's your primary role then, as a leader, to establish and sustain your community mission, such that your community enables and empowers people to disciple. To do otherwise is to subvert the main thing to other things.

In Luke 14:28–33 Jesus tells us that whether you're in construction, warfare, or discipleship, understanding the implications and costs of what you're about to do is necessary:

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foun-

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