

*“From Megachurch to Multiplication”  
A Church’s Journey Toward Movement  
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Book Note ~ Dave Kraft*

Is the American church model working the way it’s supposed to? When will we accept the fact that many of our best efforts are not only failing, but actually backfiring? The 20th century church model which revolves around buildings, weekend gatherings, sermons and such is not primarily focused on discipleship. As it relates to retention, participation, giving, attendance, biblical literacy and effect on culture all are down and dropping. It’s no secret. Many of us would admit that the American church model is on life support,

One DMM (stands for **Disciple Making Movement** and is closely related to CPM, which stands for Church Planting Movement) we know of had grown to between eight to twelve million people meeting in hundreds of thousands of house churches over a twenty- to thirty-year period. Even in the midst of much persecution China has perhaps seen one of the greatest movements of God in history. Since the 1970s, some researchers estimate that more than one hundred million people have become disciples of Jesus and are meeting in hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, of house churches.

How people measure success says a lot about why they do what they do. In most places where DMM is implemented, churches don’t even have traditional “weekend services” like in an American church. To those executing a DMM strategy, success can be summed up in two words: generational discipleship. They don’t plant churches hoping to get disciples (which is what I did). They make disciples and from those disciple-making efforts, churches are planted. Sunday attendance, money in the offering plates, and participation in programs are not counted. Instead, those who implement a DMM strategy are counting generations of disciples and churches. Numbers grow much quicker through multiplication than addition.

Movements unleash ordinary people to make disciples and plant churches. That’s part of what makes movements so different from a typical American church. At its core, DMM is not a “come and see” strategy. It is absolutely a “go and tell” strategy. The emphasis is on immediate obedience, hence, **obedience-based discipleship** used in the DMM definition. These churches aren’t typically large groups of people who meet in expensive buildings. They often meet in homes. The average size of these churches worldwide is fourteen believers. Occasionally these churches will cluster in groups of fifty to one hundred for encouragement and training, if the context permits.

At our ten-year anniversary celebration (2007-2017) I told the church that our Leadership Team sensed God leading us to pray for 1,000,000 disciples in the next 10 years. I emphasized that DMM invites every ordinary believer, not just pastors, to be a disciple maker and church planter.

In countries where DDM have been launched, ordinary believers think of themselves as church planters because they see it as their job to make disciples and to see churches planted. They don’t just view it as the job of their pastor. From every strategic perspective, megachurches and even average-sized churches will never fulfill the Great Commission without a goal and plan to launch thousands of rabbit (quickly multiplying) churches.

If an average rabbit church has twenty members, we'd need to see 50,000 churches started in the next ten years to reach the million. But that left us asking, What do we do with the elephant (the traditional American model)?

We knew we wouldn't figure out how to best leverage each individual ministry area unless we took risks and tried new things. My guess is that weekends are probably people's least favorite thing to change. But, of course, we weren't going to keep doing something just because that's the way we've always done it. While Western-style weekend services are common in traditional churches around the world, they are not very common in many of these DMM around the world.

Prayer and testimony are the fuel of revival. Movements don't happen unless people are reading, obeying, and sharing the Word of God. Jesus didn't say to just teach people. Notice what he told his disciples in Matthew 28:20: "Teach these new disciples to obey." Don't just teach them stuff. Teach them to obey the commands he's given us. That involves obeying and sharing, not just learning. People demand new content. That's not what Jesus said to do. Jesus said to teach the new disciples to obey. In movements overseas, it's called obedience-based discipleship.

The focus is on life transformation through obeying Jesus and sharing him with others. A better word, perhaps, if we want to communicate that we desire to teach to obey, is the word train. Training implies obedience or application. I felt that the Lord wanted us to focus more on teaching to obey, or training, in the next ten years, not just teaching for information transfer.

You guys (American pastors) focus on knowledge. We (DMM) focus on obedience.

These (DMM) friends call what we had been doing knowledge-based discipleship and what they do is obedience-based discipleship. In traditional American churches, obeying is not the goal. We move on once we've learned, not once we've obeyed; hence the term knowledge-based discipleship. "Learn one thing. Do one thing." Then they move on. You could argue that spiritual growth in the New Testament is measured not by whether you've learned but by whether you've obeyed (Matthew 7:24-27; Philippians 4:9; James 1:22-25).

Our Campus Pastors design their weekend services around prayer, testimony, and training.

It's worth noting that some pastors who have been on a journey similar to ours have not tried to leverage the weekend services at their churches. Instead, some have led their churches through the process of closing down their traditional church to plant many more churches in a different way.

As the years went by, I started to wonder if having just one primary teacher was healthy for me or the church. Acts 15:35 says, "Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch. They and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord there." As it turns out, Paul wasn't the only one preaching the Word in Antioch. people were more excited about the message than the messenger. People wanted to hear God's Word, regardless of the messenger! In the American church we've placed our focus on the messenger more than the message.

That's an American phenomenon and not the case everywhere else in the world. In my humble opinion, this has contributed to a "celebrity preacher" culture. The key to reaching a million people with the gospel in ten years is hundreds and thousands of "preachers" preaching, not just a few "celebrity" preachers. Sharing the preaching and teaching duties seemed healthier for me and for our church in the long run. I can't imagine what dreams and visions God would give Senior Pastors if they shared the teaching responsibilities and spent more time in prayer, seeking God for his vision for their churches.

This wasn't information Stan (our DMM coach) wanted to transfer; these were biblical principles he wanted to coach us to obey! Stan was going to make sure from the very beginning we weren't distracted by "learning"—he wanted us laser-focused on obeying.

If you want to go sailing, you not only need the wind, you need to raise your sails. A movement of God doesn't happen without the wind of the Holy Spirit, but a movement also doesn't happen if the wind of the Holy Spirit comes and you don't have your "DMM sails" up! Therefore, if you intend to go sailing, you need one thing you can't control and one thing you can control: the wind and raised sails. We want to get our DMM sails up so we're ready whenever the wind of the Spirit decides to blow! We don't bring movements. God does! We just need to have our sails up for when he comes!

### Here are the "Seven Elements"

that formed the framework by which we understood and implemented DMM

The **first element** in "raising the sails" for movements is "**Focus on God's Word.**" Simply defined, focusing on God's Word involves a regular pattern of reading, obeying, and sharing the Word of God. It's about obedience-based discipleship, a concept in Scripture that our friends overseas have helped us rediscover. The DMM practitioners measure spiritual growth by gauging how much people are obeying Jesus, not how much they know about Jesus!

Here are 3 questions asked each time we meet:

1. What are you thankful for in the past week?
2. What has challenged or stressed you or others around you in the past week?
3. Is there anything this group can do to help with those challenges or stresses, or is there any other need we can meet together?

We then read a passage of Scripture and ask these questions:

1. What does this passage teach us about God?
2. What does this passage teach us about people?
3. What will you do this coming week in response to this passage?
4. Who will you share this with in coming week?

The goal isn't simply to learn and move on but to obey. Sharing is absolutely essential. Asking the group questions about the passage of Scripture, rather than teaching them about it, allows each person to "discover" for themselves, I have found that people are more committed to truths they discover for themselves than those they are taught by other people. It's easy to see how many disciples can be made in a short period of time if people start reading, obeying, and sharing the Word of God. Each of the DMM church planting teams sent out from eLife have goals related to each of the seven elements.

The **second element** in "raising the sails" for movements is "**Multiply Extraordinary Prayer.**" In David Garrison's book Church Planting Movements, he lists ten elements that are found in every Church Planting Movement. Guess what number one is? Extraordinary Prayer. When we're asking God for a movement, we're essentially asking him to do again what he did in the book of Acts. We settled on Sunday nights. Every Sunday from 8 p.m.–midnight, we pray together as a team! When the apostles were unjustly arrested, they didn't call for a protest; they didn't reach for some political leverage. Instead, they headed to a prayer meeting" (referring to Acts 4:23–31). Therefore, there's no doubt that if we want to raise DMM sails for movement, we need to Multiply Extraordinary Prayer—a common element in every active movement in the world today.

The **third element** in "raising the sails" for movements is "**Go Out Among the Lost.**" There is no movement unless lost people are becoming disciples. We also asked that God would lead us to the person of peace (Matthew 10; Luke 10) who was open to the gospel and prepared to help that neighborhood receive it. As we walked, we would talk to people who were outside. We would tell them we were prayer walking the neighborhood; then we'd ask if they had anything about which we could pray for them.

When you go out among the lost, your ultimate goal is to find the person of peace Jesus spoke about in Matthew 10 and Luke 10. You're looking for the receptive person whom God has prepared to be a bridge for the gospel to travel over into that community.

Spend at least one hour each week as a team going out among the lost (new areas with people you haven't met). Spend time loving, serving, and sharing with your family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors.

The **fourth element** in "raising the sails" for movements is "**See Groups Start.**"

We begin training them immediately to focus on God's Word, multiply extraordinary prayer, go out among the lost, and see groups (Discovery Groups) start so the process can repeat all over again.

The **fifth element** in "raising the sails" for movement is "**Cast Vision.**"

God's great purpose for the American Christian is not just that they'd go to church each week, listen to a sermon, go home, and then go back again the next weekend. No way. A lot of deconstruction will likely have to take place in an American Christian's mind to really believe this, but it's worth the effort in casting vision. You can do this! You don't have to wait for your pastor to make disciples.

You don't have to just sit in a pew and hope your pastor plants churches. God wants to use you!" Filling up a room was no longer my measure of success. We've got to recover the "culture of empowerment" of ordinary believers that was evident in the first-century church. Cast vision to one believer each week to be a part of an upcoming DMM training.

The **sixth element** in "raising the sails" for movements is "**Train Believers.**"

As I mentioned previously, I often describe the training as "biblical principles to be obeyed, not information to be transferred." Obedience is what changes everything. We're assuming it will take casting vision to thirty people to find ten who are willing to go through the training. It usually takes three to five months to complete. My DMM coach says constantly that Church Planting Movements are basically Training Movements. Lectures aren't designed to teach you to obey; they're designed to transfer information into your brain.

The **seventh and final element** in "raising the sails" for movement is "**Ongoing Coaching.**"

The cold, hard reality is that we have pretty much found the ceiling on what can be accomplished with the approaches we are using. Each of our teams that have been sent out from eLife meets with one of our leaders weekly for coaching. Roy Moran said, "Movements live and die on good mentoring and coaching."

We walked away from an early meeting about DMM convinced that "movements" would likely be the future direction and vision for eLife. We felt we found a better way to accomplish the mission Jesus had given us. Obviously, God was blessing these movement efforts all over the world. The only problem was that there weren't many documented movements in America. There were tons in Asia. Tons in Africa. Even quite a few Europe, but hardly any in America. So, why not here, God? Why not now?

That very question began our journey from complex back to simple. Transitioning a church to DMM is going to cost you. Big-time.

If who you are is dependent on whether this thing works or fails, then you will never take a risk, you'll never do it. But if your identity is in Christ, then you say, "I'm going to try this; if it works, great, He gets the glory; and if it doesn't work—well, it didn't work, but I am still secure in who I am in Him." Most leaders haven't done that, they are not secure in who they are in Him. You become trapped by protecting your reputation. This is not going to work, it's not going to fly if your identity is in the ministry, if your identity is not firmly rooted in Christ. But when you root your identity in Him, then you can plant a million churches and no one knows your name and no one cares—and it's not a problem. This is an extremely core issue. It is very significant for us.

You may feel as if DMM goes against everything you were taught. It challenges most of your assumptions. As a result, if your identity is tied up in what you were taught, what you experienced in church growing up, or how you think things have to be done, everything you "know" to be true will be turned on its head. If your identity is rooted in anything other than Jesus, you're in a dangerous place.

We had fallen in love with a way of doing things, and we didn't realize that we associated ourselves so closely with that way of doing things that to challenge the method was to challenge us. This was a big problem. Leaders, a cost is involved in pursuing DMM, not only for you, but for your entire team. When some of your people experience the identity crisis, they may leave you. They may feel that because you have chosen a "new way" of doing ministry, you're attacking the old way, and as a result you're attacking them, since their identity is tied up in the old way. That's a cost you'll have to count. making sure our identity isn't wrapped up in any model of ministry.

Pursuing DMM will cost you financially. It's almost a guarantee. I'd strongly encourage you to lead your church to be financially conservative so that you can always follow the Lord wherever he leads, even if that results in financial loss. As we move forward, we always want to make sure there is enough margin in our budget to continue to send out church planting teams. Although the transition to DMM isn't easy, and the costs are high, the transition is worth it.

A focus on disciple making is going to make an impact in every area of your church. I think it will be a positive impact, and so do many others. But you'll find that many will also disagree. We knew that some people who had signed on for the vision for the first ten years wouldn't be interested in pursuing the vision for the second ten and would choose to move on. The American church has "done" church the same way for so long that any kind of major change is going to be tough.

When you start changing what people grew up with, what they've done their whole lives, and what has felt like a constant, people feel uncomfortable. If their lives were positively impacted doing church a certain way, it's only natural to think they would prefer to keep it that way. once someone believes they have found the "biblical," a.k.a. "right," way of doing anything, there's very little chance they will be open to change.

Claiming that you've found the "biblical" way by following the American model is a little shortsighted. If you read through the New Testament with a fresh lens and without a certain type of church in mind, I can almost guarantee you won't immediately think of the way Americans do church. Regardless of your church's size, there will be an attendance reduction if you choose to pursue DMM.

A small number of people catching the vision is plenty because movements are built on multiplication. Isn't that how it works with any new idea? Initially the new idea is met with skepticism and criticism; and then over time, if the idea becomes successful, it's met with admiration and emulation. The key is perseverance!

Typically, in the American church, we don't consider a leader to be "successful" if people turn away and desert the leader—but this was part of Jesus' strategy.

One often-repeated DMM principle is, "Focus on a few to win many."

Change is hard, but if God is leading, it's always worth it.

Pastors, you will always discover a church's idols by changing things. People may leave. Programs may stop. Giving may drop. Gossips may divide. Activists may undermine. Staff may revolt. You be courageous. When you call people to give up everything they have, the crowds will often desert you. Is this really worth it? Am I sure I heard the Lord correctly? What if this doesn't work? Am I setting myself up to fail? Are people even interested in disciple making? What if everyone abandons me? Can this even happen in America? Just because God has given you a particular vision doesn't mean he's giving everyone else that same vision. He can lead people to pursue different visions. And that's okay.

If you look at the way 99 percent of worship centers are built in our country, you'll see rows of chairs facing a platform at the front where people stand to perform and give the people sitting in those rows something good to "consume." When pastors or elders initiate change at a church, most people are thinking about whether they like it, not whether the pastors or elders have heard from the Lord. We need the pastors and elders who are leading Jesus' church to be free to listen to Jesus and do what he says whether everybody likes it or not.

When launching out to reach lost people, you have to gain access first. The word access is used a lot in DMM circles and refers to a reason for being there. The goal of gaining access is to find persons of peace, who start groups, which become churches that multiply generationally. Around the world, the number one way DMMers find those interested in God is by serving them.

Some people enter new places and just serve people without proclaiming the Kingdom, while other people enter new places and just proclaim the Kingdom without serving people. "You don't want to work with one hand tied behind your back. Do both! We want to join him where he's already working, and we trust that he will lead us to those places.

**PIPSY** helps us decide on who our focus should be to get things started:

**P** stands for "poor"

**I** stands for "international"

The second **P** stands for "prisoner"

The **S** stands for "sick"

The **Y** doesn't stand for anything—it just turns PIPS into an adjective so we can use it in a sentence. We often talk about a neighborhood being PIPSY or trying to find PIPSY people. the non-PIPSY places were the least receptive to us. Virtually every Church Planting Movement in the world today started among the poor."

We found it helpful to ask those we meet while on a prayer walk in a neighborhood, "If God could do a miracle in your life, what would you have him do?" We've found that going out and offering to pray for people is a great way to gauge interest in (and openness to) spiritual things. We were convicted that we weren't prayer walking enough.

This is an important practice in movements around the world to prepare the soil for the gospel to be planted. For those who were spiritually interested, we would offer to train them to lead a Discovery Group with their family and friends.

We found that connecting with schools and getting into the homes of needy families in those schools was by far the most fruitful means we had found for seeing groups start. We found that virtually every school was eager to have help meeting the needs of struggling families whose children attended. This became our most strategic means of gaining access into these neighborhoods.

We wanted to keep going back weekly until one of two things happened:

- (1) We found the person of peace, saw a Discovery Group started, and coached them through starting other groups in the complex so, in time, the whole complex would be reached; or
- (2) We found little openness and would need to wipe the dust off of our feet (Luke 10:10–11) and move on.

The hardest and scariest places often yield the greatest results.

We knew that doing church the “American” way by building buildings, raising money, hiring staff, putting on weekend services, and so on could not scale to reach millions. We’re unfortunately content to build traditional American churches that reach very few people and grow mostly by transfer, often passing on the Word of God like it’s just information; Why were we satisfied with a traditional American church when we could be “raising the sails” for a movement that could reach millions? Will you “go out among the lost” in places where internationals are and consider inviting them into your home?

One of our goals early on at eLife was to start ten campuses in ten years.

In movements around the world one way church planters are able to gain access into a new area is by asking if they can pray for the sick people in that area. If you were to look more closely at the more than 650 active movements today, most leaders would acknowledge that miracles have been very influential in the rapid multiplication of churches they are seeing.

Praying for the sick can result in open hearts, eager to hear the good news about the Kingdom. By meeting needs we establish a reason for being there and hope that God leads us to the person of peace. If we were going to see a movement, businessmen and women would have to believe they could be church planters too, even if they work a regular nine-to-five job. The average American church, even with all its bells and whistles, is struggling to reach people, If only full-time paid ministry workers see themselves as church planters, then we will not make it to the 1,000,000. Everyone has to see him- or herself as a church planter, no matter where he or she works.

**Prayer. Testimony. Training.** Those are the three primary elements in our new weekends that are leveraged for DMM. Each campus plans its service independently,



Typically, the Southwest Campus team will meet on Tuesdays to plan the following weekend. They'll spend the first hour of their meeting in prayer. We usually provide the "training" part of the weekend centrally, going through the book of Acts. We wanted to spend a lot of time in Acts in this season because Acts describes what we're hoping will happen in our church and in our region. We're asking God that the book of Acts would happen again in our day!"

DMM is based on obedience-based discipleship, so training is much more important than just teaching. As our speakers prepare their outlines, the sections usually look like this:

- Introduction
- Read the passage
- Re-tell the passage

Ask:

- What does the passage teach us about God?
- What does it teach us about people?
- What should we obey in response?
- Who should we share with?
- Personal story of obeying and sharing the passage
- Conclusion

Not only are we focusing on reading, obeying, and sharing in small groups, we're also focusing on those things when we get together in a larger group. We keep the trainings relatively short. Typically they run about ten to twelve minutes. We've found that the longer the trainings run, the more difficult it is for people to obey.

An effective boss or trainer should show you one or two things at a time, letting you give those things a try and ask questions along the way until you get it. When sermons go on and on, it is likely that the preacher is not expecting you to implement it, just be fascinated by it. And, in my opinion, that's the modern American sermon and is indicative of the American church model. The whole format of a lecture-type sermon is built to transfer information, not to help people obey. Remember, Jesus said we're supposed to teach people to obey (Matthew 28:20), not just be fascinated or intrigued. We strive for obedience, not knowledge acquisition.

As Ty prepares his message, he'll make sure that after he talks briefly about what he discovered in the passage, he gives a strong challenge to obey and share. These are two of the key elements at the heart of DMM that we often miss in the American church.

Testimonies have become one of the major elements in our weekends. The Southwest Campus team decided to give people the opportunity to come up to an "open mic" and share stories of how God has healed them or healed someone they know. If you come to our church now, you'll see many people coming on the stage to pray, share a testimony, or train. Notice that the testimony and prayer sections are interactive.

In the first ten years the congregation would basically sit through the service. In our new decade, we're encouraging everyone to get involved. The prayer and testimony sections serve to emphasize the challenge of the message and prepare people to obey and share. Believe it or not, sometimes we'll only stay in the building for ten minutes or so and then dismiss everyone to leave and implement the training immediately.

We train people to obey and share the Word of God, and then we pray that God will help us do this and share testimonies of how it's happening in our lives. We were making the switch from a knowledge-based church to an obedience-based church. When we follow Jesus, sometimes it leads to persecution. Sometimes it's messy. Sometimes it isn't easy. But obedience is the key. If we are comfortable, we are probably not leveraging all that we have for God and his Kingdom.

Jesus said that workers are supposed to go into the harvest fields, not just expect the harvest fields to come to them. His workers were supposed to be goers. Lots of people are ready to work if the harvest comes to them, but not many people are going into the "plentiful harvest" to work. In those 4 days (in local neighborhoods) our 4 teams were able to have 424 spiritual conversations, extend 121 Discovery Group invitations, and start 29 new Discovery Groups; in just one week! As a Leadership Team we took three months to read books and discuss DMM before even introducing the concept to our staff or anyone else in our church to our "1,000,000 in 10 years vision.

I tried to answer as many questions as I could and give as much information as I could with weekly staff updates, but I think there was still quite a bit of confusion initially. In hindsight, I definitely would have extended the initial rollout to our staff.

Another thing I would've done is to take the staff through the DMM training early on. We didn't go through the DMM training as a staff until about a year later, which was a mistake. Without question, I could've better shepherded the staff through this transition.

I feel that I shepherded the Leadership Team well, but not the rest of the staff. Learn from my mistake and be sensitive to your staff as they try to understand and come along. You need to drip the vision to them slowly, rather than all at once. From the time I started praying about DMM with the eLife Executive Team until our church announcement was around three years. This is something you want to take your time rolling out in order to gain as much buy-in as possible. We needed to address the problems in the American church to justify coming up with a different solution from the one we were already implementing.

Here are the "Seven Elements" again

1. Focus on God's Word
2. Multiply Extraordinary Prayer
3. Go Out Among the Lost
4. See Groups Start

5. Cast Vision

6. Train Believers

7. Ongoing Coaching

Doesn't that sound like God? He loves doing the things that we consider impossible. Jesus didn't say put on a worship service and invite people to come. Jesus said "Go and make disciples of all the nations"! (Matthew 28:19). Jesus said go, and for the first ten years, I now realize that we stayed. If they came, we'd reach them; but if they didn't come, I guess they were out of luck. The American strategy is not primarily a go strategy. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with a come strategy. Clearly, 10 percent might come. But what about the other 90 percent? Who's going to go to **them**?