

Principles of Generational Ministry:
A One-Year Case Study in Shifting
from a Ministry-Centric to a Generations-Centric Model

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Preface

I summarize many hard days of work, confusion, and frustration in the following pages. Countless and priceless relationships undergird the story below, but you cannot see them in the text. Those relationships, coupled with deep emotion, weave through this one-year summary. However, I elected to leave this story generic in terms of people, aiming to simply glorify God and His work.

Above all our clever strategies is an absolutely sovereign God who is totally in control of these stories. As you work through some of the more technical or structural issues here, please keep in mind, “in his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Prov 16.9). No new strategy or teaching method is a silver bullet to solve all our ministry woes. He, our Lord Jesus, is the only silver bullet.

Still, one component of the Great Commandment is love God with “all your mind” (Mat 22.37). So, in obedience to that command, I have written this story. It has one objective: that I may serve you by saving you from repeating my mistakes. If the lessons here are a help to you, then I praise our Lord Jesus; however, if the lessons are not helpful, please ignore them, and I praise Him just as much.

There is no “one size fits all” ministry solution here. The story is by no means meant to be a dogmatic teaching on how to raise up generational laborers, but rather an illustration of one way in which our Lord has begun and continues that kind of work at Fort Benning.

The Conviction of the Holy Spirit

I couldn't sleep at night. God had called me to advance His Kingdom through spiritual generations of laborers who would so multiply, that the world would change (Mat 28.19-20, Lk 10.2, Acts 1.8, 2 Tim 2.2). By October 2012, after two years of full time ministry on Fort Benning, Georgia with The Navigators, my practices were not achieving that result. I recognized two main problems. First, laborers who left Fort Benning, *and did not plug in with another Navigator ministry*, rarely continued to labor. At this rate, I knew I would not impact the world beyond what was happening at Fort Benning under *my* supervision. Second, laborers at Fort Benning rarely raised up other laborers. Many of the laborers could invest spiritually in others, but they rarely helped others begin to invest. The process ended at the third generation from me.

In October 2012, I began to implement some steps to remedy the problem. A year later, after some success and failure, I have enough perspective to crystallize the lessons into some principles of generational ministry. These principles are: Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, Teach to Obey, Build Generational Structure, and Impart Simple Curriculum.

Principles of Generational Ministry

- Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom
- Teach to Obey
- Build Generational Structure
- Impart Simple Curriculum

Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom

In April 2011, the Lord led me to decentralize our large chapel ministry. That meant that I asked each laborer to begin their own independent group where they would have to make disciples on their own. I believed that if I coached them to

function independently while they were with me, they would be more successful when they had to function independently *without* me. I believed their only chance for survival in the ocean was to raise them in the ocean, not a fish tank. However, about three months into the decentralizing, the groups were not growing and laborers were struggling to make disciples. Since we had stopped going to the centralized post chapel, our laborers could not sit in the back of the service and recruit chapel attendees to their communities. Consequently, they had to begin reaching out through their natural relational networks. That meant they had to begin sharing the gospel. I was very humbled to find out that not only were they uncertain about how to share the gospel, but I was uncertain about how to share it as well. I wanted to help them, but I did not know what to do myself! I had learned an illustration called *The Bridge* to share God's plan of salvation and I had taught it to many others. However, when I shared it with people, they usually replied with something like, "I already got saved." However, these "saved" people rarely wanted to follow Jesus and become his disciple.

I continued to read the Gospels, seeking a solution from the life of Jesus Christ. I realized that I was not sharing the Gospel Jesus shared. He shared a gospel message about a Kingdom (Mk 1.15-16). I shared a message about salvation. I was surprised at how much Jesus talked about the Kingdom, and how little he talked about salvation. I began to share the message that Jesus was the King and that He was calling people to submit to His Kingship and enter His Kingdom (Luke 6.46, Jn 13.13). In time we developed a tool called The Two Kingdoms illustration to simplify the message and make it pass-on-able. Many people I shared with rejected

this idea, though they considered themselves Christians. It started to become clear to me that we had a very deceived culture. However, I also found some who would say yes to Jesus and asked him to *rule* their lives. Not surprisingly, discipling these individuals was much easier than the supposedly “saved” individuals I had been discipling. This new group of disciples was willing to *obey* Jesus.

Teach to Obey

As we decentralized, the laborers struggled to know what and how to teach. Searching for a simple and effective curriculum, we taught a passage from the gospels each week. However, our content remained information-based. We failed to teach others to “obey” Jesus (Mat 28.20). Rarely was there accountability to the standard of *obeying* Jesus’s teaching from the week before. Jesus gives a strict warning to those who hear his words and fail to actually obey them (Mat 7.24-27), and I was facilitating the problem. Convicted and rebuked by a mentor of mine, I scrambled for a solution.

I decided to begin with our most mature group, or our Search the Scriptures (STS) group. This group had been doing inductive Bible study with me for some time, and was actively trying to disciple others. I thought that surely, the most mature of our disciples would not have any trouble with accountability to the foundational commands of Jesus. With some help, I developed eight foundational lessons: testify, represent, baptize, abide, relate, commune, give, and reproduce (www.benningnavs.com). We formatted each of the foundational commands, or Foundations, as we called them using the three-thirds process. We borrowed it from our brothers in Asia who were seeing movements of the gospel¹. The first

third is “Look Back.” It calls disciples into accountability for obeying the previous week’s lesson. The second third is “Look Up.” It teaches the disciple a new command of Jesus, and only as much as they need to know to begin accurately obeying Jesus. The final third is “Look Ahead.” This third helps disciples practice what they will obey. When you help disciples practice you know that if they do not obey the command it’s not because you did not show them, but because they were not *willing*. Each lesson had a specific application to which we held each other accountable, like share your testimony five times or read 20 chapters. As you can see, two-thirds of the process is about obeying Jesus’s teaching and only one-third teaches new information to obey.

One on one discipleship had been a ministry strength. More than anything, we found that meeting with individuals and personally coaching them imparted obedience. Unfortunately, the process of one on one did not reproduce as potently as we hoped. We found that new disciple makers easily found someone to meet with one on one, but they rarely used their time to teach to obey. We borrowed a process from Church Multiplication Associates (CMA) and called it the Accountability Team or A-Team². Our laborers had been in the habit of meeting one on one with people, but the A-team gave them a specific format to follow that facilitated obedience and naturally reproduced. The A-team format is simple. Two to three members of the same gender meet and work through *Up*, *In*, and *Out*. *Up* is the relationship with God the Father. Disciples agree to read and memorize His

Three-Thirds Process

Look Back:

1. Member Care
2. Loving Accountability
3. Prayer and Worship
4. Vision Casting

Look Up:

5. New Lesson

Look Ahead:

6. Practice
7. Goal Setting and

Word each week and answer two foundational questions:

“What did God say to you?” and, “What are you going to do about it?” *In* is the relationship with the body of Christ, or family. Disciples confess sin to each other. *Out* is the relationship with the Lost, or the fields. Disciples commit to pray for lost friends, and share the gospel every week. Finally, each week disciples invite a new friend into the team. Once the team gets to four, it multiplies into two teams of two.

The change was profound. Many people who sounded like good disciples of Jesus had a hard time obeying the Foundations or fulfilling the A-team commitments. Furthermore, some people stopped coming to our groups because we asked *everyone* every week if they had obeyed Jesus. But the best part was that some of the disciples blossomed! Faithfully, they began to live out Christ’s commands.

By March of 2013 we had finished the eight lessons and most of our STS members led their own A-team. Of the laborers who were left, most had learned to share the Gospel of the Kingdom. However, since we really had not mastered all eight Foundations, we decided to just teach them again until they became a lifestyle. This became the pattern with most groups we started. As we worked through the Foundations for a second time, people entered the Kingdom and got baptized. By the 1st of July, three months later, we saw six baptisms and four new groups begin. When we baptized the new disciples we asked them to share their testimony and

A-Team

Up

- What did God say from reading and memorizing the Word?
- What will you do?

In:

- Confess Sin and Repent

Out:

- Pray for Lost Friends
- Who did you share the Gospel with?
- Multiply the group at four people

invite their lost friends to their baptism. This ensured their sincerity and imparted the DNA of Kingdom living and obedience right from the start. The new groups held disciples accountable to whatever they knew Jesus expected, even if it was very little. By 1 October, six months later, we have seen 18 total baptisms, seven total second-generation groups, and four third generation groups. Sincerely, I attribute this all to the work of God, and nothing else. However, I believe the reason God worked this way is because we preached and emphasized His Kingdom, and obedience to His Son.

Build a Generational Structure

Maybe the most embarrassing discovery was that I really did not have a structure to see disciples and groups reproduce. The ministry structure I created was actually in the way of generations. Once laborers began to reproduce, I expected them to come to STS so I could begin to coach them. Essentially, I wanted my children to bring me their grand children to raise them. In a natural family, both the parent and the grandparent would reject this idea. But, in American Christianity we love this idea. The spiritual grand parent feels good because the congregation grows, and the spiritual parent feels good because they do not have to do the work! This diagram illustrates the ministry structure in March 2013:

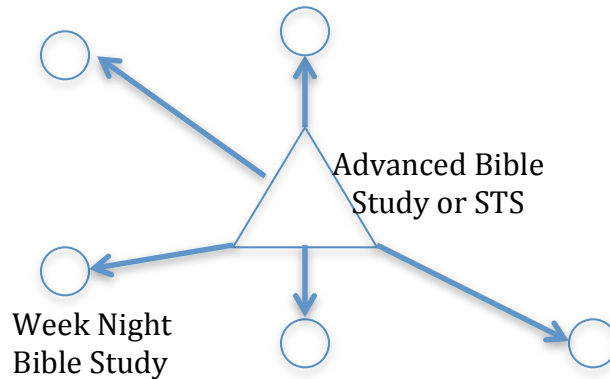


Figure 1: Ministry Centric Model

To shake loose this centralized thinking, we altered how we raised new births in Christ. Instinctively, the laborers who were sharing the Kingdom wanted to bring their new births back to the setting in which they were trained, to me. In an effort to build a generational structure, I began to discourage it, but not forbid it. Regardless of how new they were in their faith, I told the new laborers to begin a new group with the person they had just led to Christ. A laborer starting a new group could keep coming back to the original group, but could not bring their friends. They were to disciple their own friends. In time, I learned at the first meeting of a new group to empower and exhort the members to immediately start a new group with their own friends. If possible, we encouraged them to start in their friend's home, not their own. This way they could easily access the other person's lost friends. We tried to copy Jesus's teaching: "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person, and *stay at his house*, until you leave that town or region" (Mat 10.11, emphasis added).

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The greatest disadvantage of the ministry-centric model is this: it never gets beyond the third generation. By the summer of 2013, our new structure began to look like this:

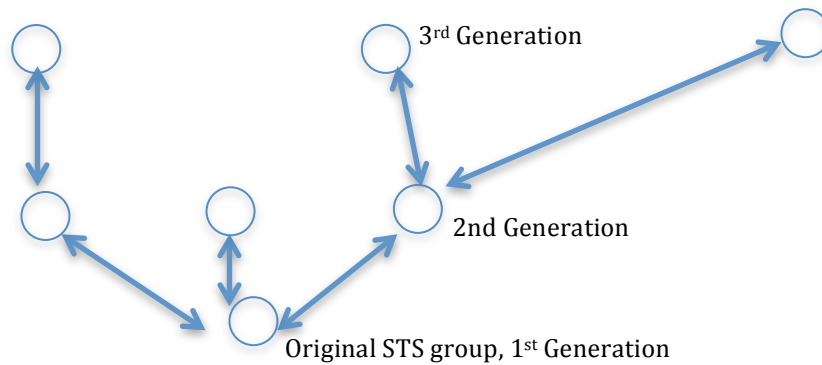


Figure 2: Generations Centric Model

I believe that implementing this strategy from March to September 2013, is the most significant explanation for the seven new second-generation groups and four third-generation groups. From the inception of the ministry we have never had this many groups and we have certainly never had laborer-led groups that raise up other laborers. I believe the reason that God honored this structure so much is because it puts His Holy Spirit at the center of the work, not an individual. As the generations go out, I have less and less control over what happens in the groups. There is only one person who sits in control of all the groups: God. No one person can take the credit. I thank God for His wisdom on how the Kingdom grows and for doing a beautiful thing in our day. Sometimes, the hardest thing in seeing Kingdom growth is getting out of God's way!

Impart a Simple Curriculum

Finally, I learned simplifying the curriculum is essential to reproducing the curriculum. We encouraged every laborer to teach *the same* Foundational lessons

that they were taught. We wanted them to stick to the script. Initially, this sounds like it stifles creativity, but is essential for laborers who are working with their own first and second generations. Often, if new laborers change the content, they corrupt some of its DNA. Typically this means abandoning accountability and practice. Without these, groups will almost never produce healthy disciples or reproduce. Now that some of our laborers are getting to the third generation, they are beginning to experiment and create without violating the principles in the Foundations.

Simplifying the Curriculum is Essential to Reproducing the Curriculum

The curriculum made it very easy to begin a new community; however, it became very difficult to live the material out during the week. Frequently we repeated lessons two or three weeks in a row because the disciples were struggling to obey the lesson. We spent a lot of time practicing the lesson to help people become competent at spending time in the Scriptures, Praying, or Sharing the Gospel.

Once our STS group actually became competent at obeying the Foundations, we moved on to some more advanced Bible study. The laborers attending that group would teach the Foundations in their own groups, but would grow deeper in their own faith through topical conviction studies. We called these Convictions (www.benningnavs.com). The curriculum across the generations looks something like this:

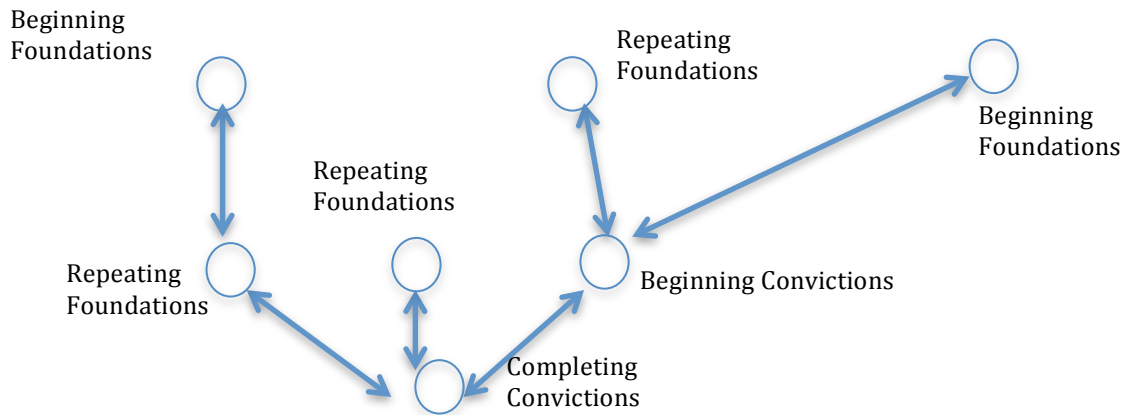


Figure 5: Movement Centric Model with Curriculum

Conclusion:

The Lord has done a great work in His harvest field in the last year at Fort Benning. However, many challenges remain. First, there are no groups in the fourth generation. This is a problem because the fourth generation marks the beginning of a movement. Most movement theorists agree that until there are six strings to the fourth generation, there really is not a major work of God at hand. This is something we are continuing to evaluate. We may have some poor forms that are blocking us from the fourth generation; or, our Lord may simply not be ready to work that way right now. We are not sure.

Second, once groups begin convictions, they typically stop inviting new people. The evangelism happens on the fringes, in the foundations groups. While this ensures that the newest generation is always at the pointy end of the spear, the leaders of the conviction groups lead new disciples to Christ and are not sure what to do with them. To deal with this, leaders of conviction groups sometimes begin a second group, starting again with Foundations. Sometimes they bring their new disciple to the conviction group and just begin training them from there.

Sometimes, they encourage the new disciple to go to a budding Foundations groups, led by someone in their second or third generation.

In spite of these current challenges, applying a few focused principles have made a big difference in seeing generations of laborers reproduce through the work of God at Fort Benning. Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, Teaching to Obey, Building a Generational Structure, and Imparting a Simple Curriculum have made a huge difference. My prayer is that some or all of these principles will be helpful to you as you seek to follow and obey Jesus Christ in making disciples of all nations. Currently, I am praying for this vision that I believe God has given me, **One, Two, Three, Four:**

- **One** agreed-upon goal
- In the next **Two** years (2014-2015)
- **Three** zero (thirty) strings of insider-led communities (not led by full time Christian workers)
- to the **Fourth** generation

In this vision, my wife Rolinda and I do not consider any groups we begin as the first generation. We consider ourselves generation zero because we are full time Christian workers. We ask God for four strings of Insiders, or people who have roles in society outside of full time ministry. If this gospel multiplying process is going to filter through all of society, we believe ordinary everyday people must be able to reproduce it without compromising the DNA. If you are interested in learning more about this or participating in this vision, please contact me at

jim.m.mcknight@gmail.com.

¹ Smith, Steve. *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution*. WIGTake Resources. Bangalore, India: 2011, Chapter 7.

² <http://www.cmaresources.org/>. See Life Transformation Group.