

## **Breaking the Discipleship Code**

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Imagine for a moment working all your life and ministry, leading and growing the church of your dreams, only to discover that something is fundamentally wrong.

This is what Bill Hybels appears to be saying in his bold confession at a recent Leadership Summit. “We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and became Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become ‘self feeders.’ We should have ... taught people how to read their bible between service, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.”<sup>1</sup>

It is this kind of raw honesty that forces us to confront the brutal facts. We all have a tendency to lose our way when it comes to being and making disciples.

In Revelation 3:20 there is a riveting picture of Jesus: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (NIV).

Where is Jesus in this picture? He is outside the church! What is He doing outside the church? He is knocking! Why is He knocking? He wants in!

Here’s a question: How did He get outside the door in the first place? You tell me. No, I mean really, you tell me. Think about it.

Examine.

Reflect.

Listen.

What do you hear? What is Jesus telling you?

I can’t tell you what He is telling you, but I can tell you what I heard Him saying to me while I was writing *Breaking the Discipleship Code*.

### **Two Phone Calls**

It began with a phone call. As I touched down on the runway at Hartsfield Jackson International Airport, I had a text and voice message from my wife, “Call me as soon as you can.” The conversation began something like this, “Dave’s [our son] okay, but I just got a call from Afghanistan and he was hit by an IED [Improvised Explosive Device].” I wouldn’t hear anything else until the next day when he called from a military hospital somewhere within Afghanistan.

Then there was a second phone call. This time it was my daughter. I had a difficult time making out her words between sobs. Sam had died. My body immediately went numb, and I couldn’t believe my ears. Sam, my daughter’s college boyfriend, had passed away. As best she could relay, I learned that Sam’s sudden reoccurrence of a childhood cancer had ended on an operating table. As I dropped everything and headed her way, I realized that nothing else mattered. Sam was gone, and my baby needed her dad. I still can’t believe it.

### **Breaking the Broke**

It was through this very difficult time and process that I broke the code, or perhaps I should say the code broke me. I had become overly religious. I was committed to Jesus' mission, I was part of a growing and thriving community, I lived a morally upright life, I practiced the spiritual disciplines, and I shared my faith. Yet, at the same time, something was missing. In all my busyness I had allowed Jesus to, ever so gradually and gently, be pushed to the edges of my life and beyond.

I was in the middle of writing this book on breaking the discipleship code and now the code was breaking me. For me, this meant losing my religion and rediscovering the simplicity of Jesus and His ways.

### **Our Mission**

Make no mistake, this is our mission: "Go make disciples." If we get this wrong, everything else is wrong.

At the same time, we make this thing way too complicated. We need to redefine discipleship. So often we believe you are a good disciple if you believe X. Or you are a good disciple if you attend church X number of times per week, participate in X number of groups, give X amount of your resources. While being a disciple impacts our beliefs and behaviors, at its core, being a disciple is about simply following Jesus and His ways. For me this means living like Jesus, loving like Jesus, and leaving what Jesus left behind, which is more of those who live like Him and love like Him.

### **Living like Jesus**

The best description I can find for living like Jesus is in Philippians 2:5–8: Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

It is here we see a kind of downward mobility that begins with ...

Jesus being God, yet choosing to become man,  
being man, choosing to become a servant,  
as a servant, choosing to die, and,  
choosing to die, accepts the cross.

John got it when he put it this way, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30, KJV).

Four years ago while I was out jogging with my wife, Tami, she was hit by a car. She was slightly ahead of me when I noticed a fast moving van. I screamed out to her, but it was too late, and I heard the thud. Time stood still. I recall having three very distinct thoughts at once: 1) I have just lost my wife, 2) What am I going to see when I get to her? and 3) what will I tell my kids? Mercifully, thankfully, she not only survived, but she thrived. About two months into her recovery I came home one day, telling her, "Every day I pass the spot where you were hit I found myself getting angrier." I will never forget her response: "David, can't you see? Can't you see what God is doing? He is at work all around us. He saved my life!" She went on to explain this sort of mysterious and invisible world that had come into vivid color for her.

Jesus put it this way: "The kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mark 1:15, KJV) Can't you see it? But I see that there are two kingdoms at hand. One is my kingdom, and the other is His. Living like Jesus is about

living in His Kingdom, and each day I decrease as He increases. Each moment I strive to see more of His Kingdom and less of mine. As I die to myself, I become alive to Him. His world blooms as my world dies. I decrease and He increases. It is a process, a journey, an adventure.

### **Loving like Jesus**

Through this experience, Tami and I discovered a whole new level of love and excitement about our relationship. Eighteen months before our twenty-fifth anniversary, I decided to buy her a special ring to symbolize our new-found intimacy. Off I went searching for the perfect stone for the perfect ring. Someone told me that when I found the perfect stone I would know it, but what they didn't tell me was that the perfect stone didn't have the perfect price tag. However, as I shopped for other less expensive stones nothing seemed to be sufficient for my wife.

One Sunday I found myself in deep thought about whether or not I should make this somewhat impractical purchase. I was drawn to the story in John 12 of Mary who took a very expensive vase of perfume and broke it, pouring it over Jesus' feet, washing His feet with her hair. Judas, the pragmatic, goes ballistic about how impractical this expression of love is, to which Jesus simply replies, "Leave her alone."

It dawned on me how impractical God's love is. Look at the cross: there is nothing practical about it ... only extravagant, impractical love. Look at Jesus' teachings: there is nothing practical about them ... turn the other cheek, give away your coat, go the extra mile, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. Totally impractical, yet Jesus calls us to this same kind of impractical love. I bought the ring.

### **Leaving what Jesus Left Behind**

Followers of Jesus not only live like Jesus and love like Jesus, but they also leave what Jesus left behind. How do you do this? By investing in people. Look at the Jesus way: "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him" (Mark 3:13, NIV). Jesus called those He wanted to do life with unto Himself. He did it relationally. He didn't start a program. He didn't develop a curriculum. He didn't start a non-profit. He did real life with a few where He taught them by example and expression how to live like Him and love like him.

### **Go Make Disciples**

Go make disciples, but not just any kind of disciples. Go make disciples who live like Jesus, love like Jesus, and leave what Jesus left behind. Doing so sets us up to live a life of no regrets.

<sup>1</sup>. [http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2007/10/willow\\_creek\\_re.html](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2007/10/willow_creek_re.html)

David Putman co-founded [ChurchPlanters.com](http://ChurchPlanters.com) and is a pastor at [Mountain Lake Church](http://MountainLakeChurch.com) in North Atlanta. He is the author of the new release, *Breaking the Discipleship Code*, (May 2008, B&H) and co-author of *Breaking the Missional Code* (May 2006, B&H). David's life mission is to help others rediscover the simplicity of Jesus and his ways