

One of

Beginning the
Missional Journey



Alex Absalom and Greg Nettle
With a foreword by Dr. Wess Stafford,
President and CEO, Compassion International

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For Joel, Samuel and Isaac:

Mum and I are praying that you will stand on our shoulders and go further for Jesus than we ever dreamed possible!

A.A.

For RiverTree:

The amazingly beautiful Bride of Christ that God has allowed me to serve for more than 20 years.

G.N.

One Of

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Credits

Cover Design & Layout: PlainJoe Studios

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“Here Alex and Greg team up to pool their hard won insights and long experience in leading the church in mission. As an intrinsic part of their discipling culture, the practice of person of peace model forms the basis of RiverTree’s approach to evangelism and mission. Its a great tool...churches are advised to use it.”

Alan Hirsch

Author of numerous books on missional Christianity, including *Untamed* and *Right Here, Right Now* (www.alanhirsch.org)

“This is a much-needed book about putting mission into practice! *One Of: Beginning the Missional Journey* by Alex Absalom and Greg Nettle is not more theory, but a practical handbook for how to live your life on mission. You and your team will want to read, discuss and live out these simple reproducible missional practices. This is the stuff of movements!”

Dave Ferguson

Lead Pastor Community Christian Church, Spiritual Entrepreneur of NewThing

“Absalom and Nettle create a visible threat to the kingdom of hell. Their example unfurls a wake of God's love advancing with grit and tender authenticity. Anyone

committed to making disciples of Jesus be warned - these guys take it seriously and their example will compel you to take unhindered, honest, self-sacrificing, gut-stirring action. Don't just read One Of - crash the gates of hell by living it. Leaders who have the courage to do so will be used by God to ignite reformation-scale growth in the church.”

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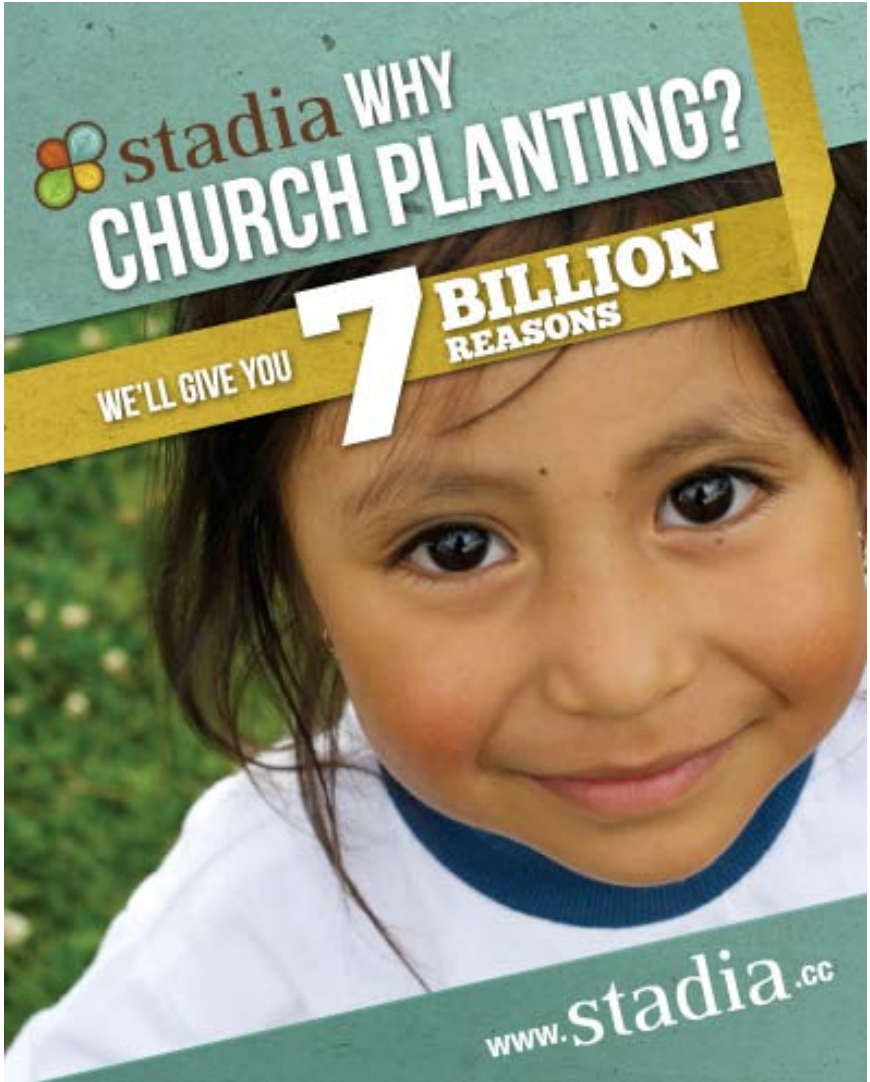
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The graphic features a close-up photograph of a young girl with dark hair and eyes, smiling gently. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. Overlaid on the image are several text elements: a logo in the top left, a main title, a large number '7', and a website URL at the bottom right.

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FOREWORD

By Dr. Wess Stafford, President and CEO, Compassion International

“And I, I took the road less traveled by.” This line from Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken” stirs the heart because deep within us, we sense our lives may be destined to have more meaning, purpose and adventure than can be realized by following the beaten path. Yet we seldom summon the courage at the crossroads to answer God’s call to the divergent direction. But Greg Nettle did! And as Mr. Frost concluded, “that has made all the difference” - not only for Greg, but thanks to God’s working through his obedience, for thousands of people across the globe.

Rarely have I met a man with such a fertile mind, tender spirit and remarkable courage. Soon after the 2005 release of *Too Small to Ignore*, my book advocating for children, my assistant Angie announced one day, “There’s a pastor from Ohio who read your book and has flown all the way to Colorado to see you... he’s in the lobby.” Needless to say, this was an extremely unusual circumstance. Moments later, Greg walked into my office. Our eyes had no sooner met when he burst into tears and slumped onto my couch. “How could I have missed it all these years?! I attended seminary, built a mega-church, have poured my life into pastoring my flock, yet never got it - that *children* really, really matter!” We wept together, newfound soul mates.

That moment launched a dear friendship. For a couple of years, I met with Greg every few months, discipling him about the importance of children in God’s Kingdom. In the course of our discussions, the topics expanded to include poverty, leadership and the role of the Church. Before long, our roles reversed, and I began to learn from a sincerely searching and caring pastor who had a deep

passion to empower God's people to live out their faith in a hurting world. It has been an honor to be a part of his journey.

I witnessed Greg's agony when an 80-acre farm that he had driven past and prayed about purchasing for years finally came on the market for a song. The perfect mega-church campus expansion within his grasp! But by then, his worldview, growing understanding of discipleship and revised priorities demanded that he choose to step out on a new path that took him, his family and his RiverTree congregation toward a life-changing mission.

You now hold in your hands the results of Greg's quest during the past five years. This is not theory, but practice, hammered out on the anvil of real experience in the lives of real people. Greg and RiverTree have moved from a solely attractational ('best show in town') model of church to combining it with a missional model of intentional discipleship, where God's people are engaged in their community's transformation. As Alex Absalom points out, John 1:14 says "the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood" (*The Message*). Here is a church that exchanged its *What would Jesus do?* bracelets for *What did Jesus do?* And then they went further, asking: *What did Jesus plainly tell us to do?*

It may be a road less traveled, but it's not a new one. This 'new way of doing church' was modeled by "I am the Way" Himself 2000 years ago. Greg and Alex feel compelled to share what they are discovering as they walk this different road of 'doing discipleship'. They give us ever-so practical steps towards building a culture where disciples make disciples.

From being born in a manger (Emmanuel - "God with us"), to living as *One Of His* little band of friends and followers, to issuing marching orders to go into the world and make disciples, Jesus lived the word-and-deed truth

of *For*, *With*, *One Of* and *In* that you will learn about in this simple yet profound little book. As I read *One Of*, I found myself asking Greg's question: "How could I have missed it?!"

If you want to discover what may be awaiting you down the road not taken, read *One Of* carefully and prayerfully. It could create a watershed moment in your understanding, growth and practice. It could alter your worldview, daily life, and ministry, not to mention the destiny of those you are called to love in a special way. It could just make all the difference.

PART 1: HOW RIVERTREE BECAME *ONE OF* – Greg Nettle Introduction

“Are we making disciples?”

After more than 20 years at the leadership helm of RiverTree Christian Church, that was the question that was keeping me awake at night. After being trusted so long in this leadership role, I had to take at least some responsibility for the quality of disciples that we were producing.

Now, don't get me wrong, I know that it is God who brings about the life transformation process and that we as humans certainly continue to have the freedom to make good or bad choices. However, surrounding my twenty-year anniversary as leader of RiverTree, I spent a lot of time praying and reflecting. And I didn't like what was revealed to me.

Time and time again, I was hearing stories about people who had been a part of the RiverTree community for a number of years. People whose marriages were now ending in divorce. People whose finances were an absolute train wreck. People whose kids were having an abortion. People whose character reflected more of the world around them than the character of Christ.

The RiverTree Elders graciously encouraged me to remember the incredible amount of positive life transformation that had taken place over the years. Marriages that were in deep trouble had been reconciled. Individuals struggling with addictive behaviors had been set free. We had given away millions of dollars outside our walls for the extension of the Good News of Jesus

Christ. Yes, many people were living the life of a disciple of Jesus. But, for me, by and large the quality of disciples that we were producing still did not live up to what I believe Jesus had in mind when He said, “Go and make disciples.”

The ‘attractional model’ of church, at which we had become highly skilled (our weekend attendance had grown from 100 to more than 3000 people per weekend), actually seemed to be counterproductive in many areas when it came to making true disciples who could then make disciples. For example, the consumer mindset within the church was absolutely disturbing. The lack of authenticity and accountability was heart breaking. The deficiency of community transformation where we live, work and play was deeply unsettling.

There Must Be A Better Way!

For RiverTree, it all came to a head when a realtor approached us to let us know that an eighty acre farm (which for ten years I’d been asking God to give us!) was now available to purchase at a great price. Land that would allow us to develop a mega-campus, with multiple worship venues, a café, teen center, wedding chapel... you get the picture!

But as the realtor was talking, I had a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. I knew that this was not what God wanted us to do. This was not the way (for us) to make disciples. Our leadership team concurred.

And so began our journey. How could we reach 100,000 people in Northern Ohio without investing millions of dollars in buildings? How could we make disciples who were serious about following Jesus? How could we transform the communities to which God had called us?

The past five years of questions, prayer and seeking wisdom have led us to several critical transitions.

Amongst them: The launch of more than forty missional communities (each averaging around 30 people in size). Investing more and more financial resources both locally and globally to bring about life and community transformation. Moving from 70% of our resources spent on our weekend gatherings and 30% spent on intentional discipleship, to 30% of our resources spent on our weekend gatherings and 70% on intentional discipleship. The result? We're getting better at making disciples who make disciples.

A critical point in our journey brought Alex Absalom into a leadership role on our staff. Alex had been one of the leaders in the missional church movement taking place in Sheffield, England, which had been pioneered by Mike Breen. The church in Sheffield saw tremendous fruit from using what we know today as Missional Communities and Leadership Huddles as the primary modes of discipleship.

In this book Alex and I will be writing together.

I'll write the first half, telling the RiverTree story and drawing upon Alex's practical experience as we transitioned from a purely attractional model (weekend gathering centric) to a combination of missional (discipleship takes place primarily outside the weekend gathering) *and* attractive church. The genius of the *AND*.

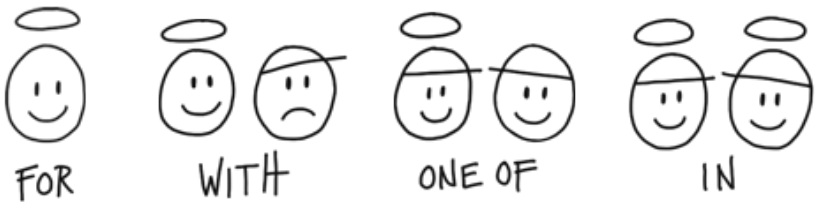
Alex will write the second half, focusing in on the key steps that enabled us to transition to a culture that more effectively makes disciples who are committed to being on mission. I'll be adding a few comments along the way, reflecting some of my experience of that transition journey. If you put what Alex writes into practice, both personally and across your church, you will be laying a great foundation for a church where disciples make disciples.

Alex and I both love the church. We believe that it is still God's chosen instrument of change in the world today. We believe that, for the church in the United States and beyond, its best days are ahead. But we also believe that a transition must take place. The transition from purely attractational to missional/attractive - because the church on mission will always be attractive.

Napkin Discipleship

One of the most important tools we have developed to help people on their journey with Jesus is what we call 'Napkin Discipleship'. Napkin Discipleship simply involves a series of drawings that anyone can sketch on a napkin at their local Starbucks, McDonald's, or even in their own home. Simple is GOOD!

The Napkin Discipleship tool that has been most important to us in assessing where we are as a church and as individual followers of Jesus is called *One Of*. When it is completed, it looks like this:



As we draw, we explain. . . God is For people. "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes In him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son Into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17). Not to judge the world, but to save the world. God is For people! That is good news!



God is *For* people (the smiley face with the halo represents God!).

But most people don't realize this and feel a long way from Him. God being *For* people was not enough.

We continue...

God isn't only *For* us but also He is *With* us.

We see this beginning in the Old Testament. God is *With* the nation of Israel as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God is *With* Moses as he speaks to him from a burning bush. God is *With* Joshua as Israel prepares to

conquer the land. God is *With* Daniel in the lions' den. God is *With* Elijah on the mountain. The list goes on!



God being *With* us is certainly better than God being *For* us. But God is still very different from us – His holiness and otherness feels like an unbridgeable barrier. And, therefore, most people feel sad in His presence (the sad face with the baseball cap represents you and me!). God being *For* people and even being *With* people still was not enough.

But God doesn't stop there. There's even better news: In Jesus, God becomes *One Of* us. "*For In Christ lives all the fullness of God In a human body*" (Colossians 2:9). Eugene Peterson says it this way in *The Message*: "*The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood*" (John 1:14).

God moved into OUR neighborhood!

Jesus lives as *One Of* us, loves as *One Of* us, even likes us while He is *One Of* us.

There are four words in the Greek language that we translate into English as the word love:

Storge = family love

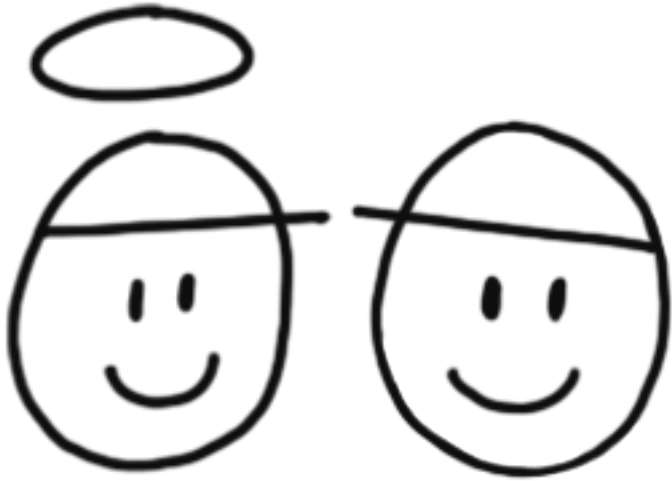
Eros = sensual love

Philos = friendship love

Agape = unconditional love

When Jesus was crucified, it wasn't because of whom he loved. In Matthew 11:19, Jesus is accused of *liking* sinners. He was, and is, a friend of tax collectors and sinners - all of us. The Greek word is *philos*.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day might have endured a mission by Jesus that was all about *agape* - unconditional love for tax collectors and sinners. And Christ's mission certainly included unconditional love, but for Jesus, *agape* went hand in hand with *philos*. And liking sinners couldn't be tolerated. The Pharisees didn't accuse Jesus of loving sinners, they accused him of liking them, of being their friend.

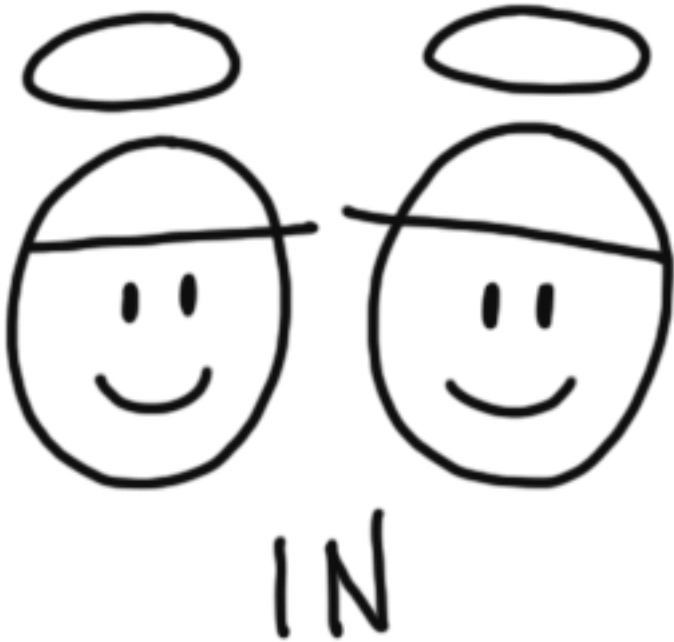


ONE OF

God, in Jesus, puts on the baseball cap. As good as it is to know that God is *For* us and *With* us, it amazes us that God is *One Of* us - and that He **LIKES** us! When most people discover this truth, they are no longer sad. *One Of* is the crucial transition.

Now, here's the best part:

When we understand the implications of God being *For*, *With* and *One Of* us, that often compels us to invite Jesus to be *In* us. And that changes everything. God Himself passes the DNA of Jesus into our very lives, which empowers us to live as Jesus here on this earth.



God being *For*, *With* and *One Of* us pales in comparison to God being *In* us. We are now walking around as 'little Jesus-es'!

And here's what happens if God is now *In* us:

This means that, like God, we must be *For* people, *With* people, *One Of* people, so that the DNA of Jesus can be passed through our lives into the lives of others and Jesus will then live *In* them.

We become disciples that make disciples.

This is the essence of missional living that is so attractive to others!

For, With, One Of, In – And The Church

As important as the *One Of* Napkin Discipleship tool is for us as individual followers of Jesus, it is also an incredibly valuable tool to assess where we are as a church.

If the church is a compilation of millions of followers of Jesus around the globe, then it should follow that the church is *For* people, *With* people, and *One Of* people, so that the DNA of Jesus can come to live *In* other people.

What we have discovered is that the world today does not believe that God is *For* them. Why? Largely because Christians aren't *For* them. Rather than the church being *With* people, we erect buildings and instruct people to come be with us!

With that said, many churches today have transitioned to being for people and have even progressed to being with people (they do this largely through 'great days of service,' by serving in homeless shelters, passing out free bottles of water at races, etc).

The biggest step for any church to take is to become *One Of* people.

This step changes everything.

This step is the defining shift from an attractional model that invites people to 'come be with us', to a missional model that is attractive and begins with the church being *One Of* them. If the church can make this transition, then we believe that more and more disciples will be made who can in turn make more and more disciples.

If God Is For Us...

Early in my ministry at RiverTree we were in a teaching series we titled, "What Would Jesus Say?" to a variety of

people. One particular week I was addressing Howard Stern (at that time, the most listened to 'shock-jock' on the radio). Our sign in front of the church, in big, bold letters, read, "What Would Jesus Say To Howard Stern?"

I was in my Monday morning staff meeting when my assistant buzzed me to say that Howard Stern was on the line and wanted to talk with me - on the air - right then. I was certain it was my college buddy from down the road playing another collegiate prank.

It was Howard Stern.

Someone had driven by our marquis and called in to tell Howard about the message on the sign. And now Howard was calling me to find out what Jesus would say to him.

What would you say?

God is *For* Howard, right?

I had three requirements that Stern had to agree to before I would go on the air with him.

1. Once the sermon was preached, he had to listen to a recording of it in its entirety.
2. The interview had to take place on Friday morning at 7am (20 million people listened to Howard during 'drive time').
3. After the interview he had to have a private conversation with me.

He agreed to all three!

Friday morning came and I found myself sitting in my office waiting for the Howard Stern show to call. At 6:50 they made the link up. At 7am we were on the air. We had more than 5,000 people across the country praying for the interview.

The following is a transcript of our opening interactions:

Howard: “On our phone right now, this is exciting, I’m very excited about this, we umm, I don’t know, I guess we got a fax or something from one of our listeners who told us about a church in Ohio, Christian church, that the Pastor, Greg Nettle, would be giving a sermon this Sunday, “What Would Jesus Say To Howard Stern?” And we got very curious because what would Jesus say to Howard Stern? Is this a positive... I don’t think it will be positive. I’ve never heard a church guy give me a positive sermon.”

Robin: “Well that’s what I was wondering, because now Jesus was always an open-minded guy. He accepted everybody. He had a way of understanding everyone.”

Howard: “Well let’s find out from the Pastor, because, believe it or not, Pastor Greg Nettle has been good enough to come on our air waves...”

Robin: “I am very pleased.”

Howard: “...Yes, and explain to us what the gist of the speech will be. Pastor?”

Greg: “Good morning Howard.”

Howard: “Good morning, thank you for joining us this morning.”

Greg: “Good to talk with you.”

Howard: “Yes, now I was quite honored...”

Robin: “Well wait, first of all, are you a fan?”

Greg: “Ummm, I listen to Howard occasionally.”

Howard: “Oh that’s good. Well wait a second, now this sounds positive. Pastor you’re saying that the name of your speech is, ‘What Would Jesus Say To Howard Stern?’”

Greg: “That’s right.”

Howard: “Now what would Jesus say to Howard Stern?”

Robin: “How did you come to the conclusion that you could tell what Jesus would say?”

Howard: “And not only that, do you really think Jesus would talk to me, if he came back?”

For the next thirty minutes I talked with Howard Stern (and twenty million listeners) about God’s deep love for him. I didn’t attack Howard. I didn’t chastise him. I simply shared with him that Jesus had died for him. And that, just like myself, Jesus was the only way he could have his sins forgiven.

And for once, the ‘shock jock’ was shocked.

For me, all of RiverTree, and hopefully for Howard, we had gained a deeper understanding of what it means for God, and us, to be *For* people.

This singular event determined that RiverTree would be a church that is *For* people. On our front sign we often have messages that read, “God loves divorced people,” and “If you have had an abortion, you are welcome here.” We want to send a clear message to our community that we are *For* people.

As individuals and as a church we do our best to let everyone know: God is *For* you and so are we!

But to make disciples that make disciples, being *For* people is not enough.

No Strings Attached...

From being *For* people RiverTree moved to being *With* people.

It began with encouraging people to serve outside the walls of the church building. We had business cards printed that said, “God loves you and so do we... no strings attached.” We encouraged people to return carts at their local grocery store, clean toilets at the local gas

station, buy donuts and deliver them to the police department - you get the idea. Once people had served others we simply encouraged them to also include one of the business cards: "God loves you and so do we... no strings attached."

Good plan.

One problem: on the flip side of the business cards we had printed the name of our church, our weekend service times and locations of our campuses. There *were* strings attached! We were serving people so that they would come be with us! As funny as this now sounds, it was an important step for us to take on our journey.

For And With Children

One of the most important aspects on our journey of becoming *With* people began when we started caring for children at risk. A RiverTree Partner, Brent, bugged me for a year and a half to get involved with Compassion International. Compassion is a global organization that, through child sponsorship, alleviates poverty and offers hope in Jesus' name. I repeatedly told him no. The main reason? I was concerned that if people began sponsoring children then our general fund giving would go down.

Eventually God began wrecking my heart over children at risk. We thoroughly researched Compassion's ministry and discovered amazing integrity and spiritual results. Over the years, RiverTree has become a HUGE advocate for Compassion. Today we sponsor more than 1,500 children around the world and take several trips a year for people to meet their sponsored children and care for children living in abject poverty.

As a result, we have learned what it means to be *With* children in need. Those who experience a Compassion trip return forever changed. Their desire to be *With* children at a local level increases exponentially.

This has been especially true for Julie and me. Sponsoring children through Compassion International - being *With* children at risk - has led us to become foster parents. Julie is a 'Big Sister' to a young girl in the city of Canton. And ultimately this led us to adopt our son Elijah. We are *For*, *With*, and *One Of*, children at risk!

Here are a few of the things we have learned on this journey of caring for kids. Over the past five years, RiverTree has sent more than 5 million dollars to care for children at risk. During that same time God has generously provided all we need at a local level for our ministries to flourish - our general fund has not been depleted!

We have also seen that as we have championed the value of caring for children abroad, the value of caring for children locally has risen dramatically. Rarely do we have difficulty finding enough adults to serve in our own children's ministries. Discipling children at risk has heightened our awareness for our need as families to disciple our own children.

Further Thoughts On With

The reality of our being *For* people plays out in real time by us being *With* people. Not sequestered away in our church buildings. Just as a reminder, in Matthew 28 Jesus instructs his followers to "Go into the world and make disciples." Jesus does not tell us to build buildings and to invite people to come be like us culturally. But that is exactly what we've been doing. Many Christians might concede that God is *For* people and they might even agree to be *With* people if those people will come and become like them. But according to Jesus the exact opposite is true - we must go and be with people.

Being with people means that the church must move outside of its walls. It means that we stop having so

many church programs that our people have no time to spend with their unchurched friends. It means that the measures we once used for church success need to change. Instead of counting how many people are 'with us', we begin capturing and retelling stories of how the church is 'with them'.

At RiverTree, we regularly share stories in our weekend gatherings about how we are with people.

For our friends Jon and Kelly, this meant sharing the story of their involvement in the arts community (a community that Christians are notorious for avoiding). Jon is the director of our city's Players Guild. At one time he was cast in the lead role in *Rent* - on Broadway! So, It seemed like a natural step for Jon to direct the Players Guild performance of *Rent* here in our city. Everything was going well until several Christians found out that *Rent* is all about people with differing sexual preferences, drug abuse and AIDS. Because Jon is a close friend of mine, a few of these well-meaning Christians asked if I would talk to him about the inappropriateness of his involvement with the performance.

What they didn't know was that Jon and Kelly were having the entire cast (many of whom were living out *Rent's* exact lifestyle) over to their house for dinner every Sunday evening.

What they didn't know was that *Rent* has an amazing redemptive message.

What they didn't know is that these people are exactly who Jesus would be hanging out with if He were here today.

If we want people to know that God is *For* them then we have to be *With* them.

But it doesn't stop there.

When God Moves Into The Neighborhood...

We say it this way, “Your life is your mission.” I’ve heard others say, “Love where you live.” As followers of Jesus we are commissioned to love the people we are *One Of*. Are you a soccer mom? Love the soccer moms you are already *One Of*. Are you part of a neighborhood? Love the people in your neighborhood. Are you a student? Love the students in your classes. Are you a golfer? Love your playing partners. Are you a Pittsburgh Steelers fan? Well, let’s not take this too far!

What neighborhood or network of people are you already *One Of*? As a follower of Jesus, are you *For* them? Are you really *With* them? Do you actually *like* them?

A more revealing set of questions might be: Would the people in my network or neighborhood say that I am *For* them? Would they say that I am *With* them? Do they consider me to be *One Of* them?

For Julie and me this means that we get invited to the neighborhood tailgate party before the local football game. We go to the party not with the intention of ‘winning people to Jesus’, but simply because we genuinely like being with our neighbors. I play in the Texas Hold’em poker tournament with the guys, not in hopes of getting to ‘witness’ to them, but because I actually like spending the evening as *One Of* them. We’ve taken vacations with extended groups of friends, not to build trust so that we can tell them they need to trust Jesus, but because we love sharing the journey of life as *One Of* them.

As a result of our genuine relationships with our neighbors, we have had numerous opportunities to serve and witness in Jesus’ name. For instance, in the Fall we sent out a series of text messages to invite neighborhood families to gather to pray for one another’s children as

they headed back to school. This past year more than 60 people came together for prayer - some were already followers of Jesus but many others simply believed that prayer for their kids couldn't hurt! We gathered with adults and children. We asked the kids what they wanted to pray for: "To be able to get my locker open." "To sit with someone nice on the bus." "That the bully wouldn't pick on me." And we prayed.

At Christmas we threw a 'birthday party for Jesus' at a local assisted living center. Once again, we invited our neighbors. Even people who were just beginning to be inquisitive about the whole Jesus thing joined in. Most parents wanted their children to be involved in something during the holidays that was more about giving than getting. We sang carols to the elderly, made Christmas cards together and concluded by singing Happy Birthday to Jesus and eating cake. Everyone had fun!

Far too often, when people are around Christians they feel like they have a target on their back. That at any moment we're going to get out our Gospel gun and open fire. But if we are really *One Of* them because we genuinely *like* them, then we'll have plenty of opportunities to disciple them on their journey of following Jesus - no matter where they are on that journey.

The DNA Of A Disciple

This is the best part. Time and time again we have been able to share our witness as we serve our networks and neighborhoods. The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives *and* in theirs! If we really believe that God is *For* us, *With* us, *One Of* us and now *In* us, and that He is also *For*, *With*, *One Of*, and at work *In* them, then, when the opportunity arises we simply have to be ready to give a reason for the hope that we have. It's a circular, repeating process. As disciples of Jesus who is *For*, *With*

and *One Of* us, and who have Jesus *In* us, we become *For*, *With*, and *One Of* others who respond to Jesus in our lives. As we serve we witness, and frequently they place their faith in Jesus inviting Jesus to come be *In* them.

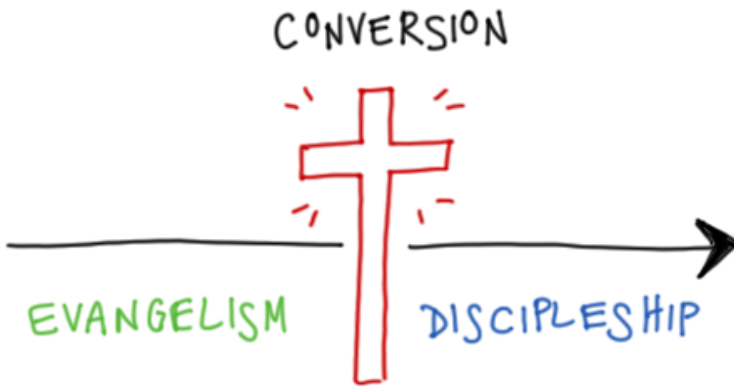
Disciples who make disciples.

But this requires a new definition of discipleship.

Redefining Discipleship

In virtually all of my training as a Christian over the years I was taught that my main goal as a follower of Jesus was to 'win' people to Christ, as they responded to the Gospel. Once I had been victorious in the 'dunk a sinner be a winner' contest, only then would the discipleship of that person begin. Most important was how many 'converts' were being made. This is typically the predominant measure we use in our churches today.

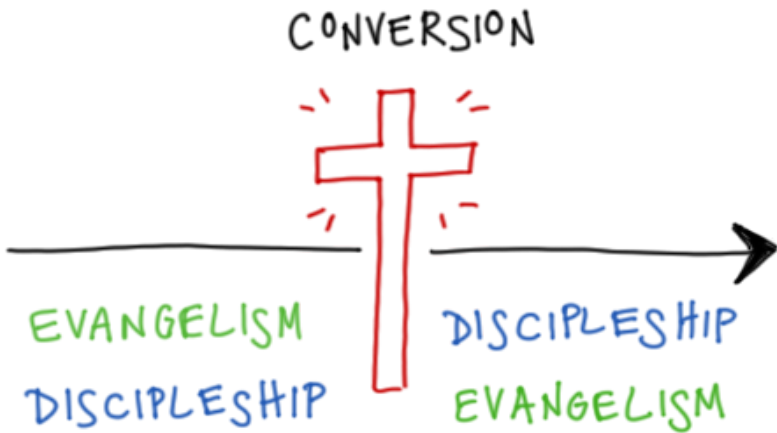
It looks something like this:



What I have come to believe is that discipleship begins from the moment we meet someone. So, there is pre-conversion discipleship, as we learn to follow Jesus, and post-conversion evangelism, as we continue to respond to the challenge of the Gospel.

Our job as *For*, *With* and *One Of* people is to help others move closer to Jesus and become more like Him. Somewhere on the journey, by God's grace, the Holy Spirit brings about the conversion process and Jesus comes to live *In* them. Discipleship continues as the new convert moves closer to Jesus, as they begin to move through the *For*, *With*, and *One Of* others, so that Jesus *In* them can be transferred into the lives of others.

It looks something like this:



Disciples who make disciples.

Today, after making this transition to a different, and, I believe, more effective mode of discipleship, we are watching more and more followers of Jesus make more and more disciples.

My friend Glenn, recently Huddled (more about Huddles in a future eBook) with me in a discipling relationship for a year before we climbed Mount Cotopaxi together in Ecuador. (We are part of a community of guys who raise money for children at risk through mountain climbing.)

For this particular climb our team made a commitment to discipleship prior to the actual climb. After meeting every

other week for accountability, Bible study and prayer (specifically focusing on God's heart for children living in poverty), we made the journey to Quito, Ecuador. We spent several days *With* children living in poverty. After being with the children, we turned to the mountain.

At 19,400 feet, Cotopaxi is the world's highest active volcano. After five days of climbing we made our summit bid. We began the ascent at midnight to make sure the glacier would be solid before the morning sun warmed and made the climb even more treacherous.

At a particularly challenging point only 300 feet beneath the summit, we were all very near our limit of endurance. The winds were whipping, we were climbing at a 45 degree angle and the temperature had plummeted. Our guide cried out, "For the children! For the children!" Because we had just been *With* the children, we knew them by name, we could see their faces in our minds... we pushed on. By 7am we had all reached the top. More than \$100,000 raised for the children of Ecuador!

After we returned to the States, I wondered what difference our discipleship experience would make. Today, Glenn leads his own huddle at a homeless shelter in downtown Canton. In the same way that we huddled for accountability and growth prior to our climb, Glenn now huddles with other leaders who are committed to discipling men in the city.

Disciples who make disciples.

First Steps

So where do we begin on this journey of transitioning from an attractional church that relies primarily on weekend services to make disciples, to becoming a church on mission that relies primarily on Missional Communities to bring about life transformation? What

are the first steps toward the genius of the *And*-becoming
the church on mission that is very attractive?

PART 2: BEGINNING THE MISSIONAL JOURNEY

– Alex Absalom

Step 1: DEVELOP A NEW SCORECARD

When my family and I arrived at RiverTree, we recognized that Greg and the leadership team had already taken a number of significant, and at times hard won, steps towards becoming *One Of*. It definitely felt like well plowed ground, which made the next transitions so much smoother.

The New ‘Win’

Greg and the team had already thought a lot about what they most wanted to see as the fruit of RiverTree. In summary, they concluded that the top objective, or their big ‘win’, would be to make disciples who make disciples.

Put another way, RiverTree’s mission is to make disciples who then go as missionaries to make more disciples. This multiplying movement has the potential to achieve our local church planting slogan - we want to make it hard to go to hell in Ohio!

Eldership Support

Part of this process had involved the RiverTree Elders (who are charged with the overall oversight of the church - RiverTree is staff led and Elder protected), who had helped the senior team clarify their thinking. Throughout my time here, the Elders have been tremendously supportive and on board with the changes that have

taken place. This is critical as you lead through significant change.

One of the issues we faced was determining what metrics we as the senior staff team should be held accountable for achieving. Measuring discipleship is notoriously tough to do - you are trying to look 'below the waterline' of what can be easily seen.

With the Elders we began talking about recognizing a 'preponderance of evidence'. This reflects our desire to value soft data (such as stories of life change) as much as hard data (things you can count), while trying to create some level of objectivity in what is a very subjective process. We then wrote this into a more formal document, which is included as an appendix at the very end of this book.

GREG: As staff leader of the RiverTree movement, I am accountable to the Elders for predetermined measures. As we made the decision to transition from a primarily attractional model of church to a more missional model, I explained that our measures would become very messy and, in the transition, difficult to track. I asked that we record in our 'official' meeting minutes the Elders' extension of grace for our measures throughout the transition period (approximately three years). This proved to be a critical decision, especially when the temptation came to revert back to our previous measures of success. On a regular basis we had to remind one another that we were now using a new set of metrics (disciples who make disciples), for which I would be held accountable.

Who Is In A Discipling Relationship?

One of the biggest transitions churches have to make - and which I have watched RiverTree make - is in what you count as important measures of success. In the past,

RiverTree focused above all on counting how many people attended weekend services, as well as how big the offering was each weekend. While we still count those things, the number one RiverTree metric now is counting how many people we have in discipling relationships.

The issue we have been addressing by this metric shift is that of attendees just being Christian consumers - filling up space in the building on weekends but with no intention of moving closer to Jesus outside of RiverTree's walls. While there are many awesome Jesus followers at RiverTree, it is fair to say that there were also quite a few who were attracted just to consume religious goods and services.

We have worked hard to break that consumer mentality, which starts with what you measure, celebrate and champion.

Define Disciple

At RiverTree we now have a simple and clear definition of what marks a disciple of Jesus.

A disciple is someone who is actively learning from Jesus, in all areas of life. They are regularly responding to the two core questions of discipleship:

1. What is Jesus saying?
2. What am I doing in response?

The Greek word for disciple is *mathetes*, which means 'learner'. So it is essential that people learn to hear and obey what Jesus is saying to them.

We would then add that a disciple should, in turn, disciple others. At RiverTree we aim to equip and encourage people to do just that. This gives us one of our links back to what Greg wrote earlier about *One Of*. A tangible marker of a disciple is that they become someone who goes to live as *One Of* the people God has called them to

reach. We repeat this definition all the time, so that people have to face up to the challenge of discipleship. We view this as a central task, since we view our call at RiverTree to be building a movement of disciple-making missionaries.

Measure The Generosity Factor

Another measure is that we have intentionally started celebrating what we give away, rather than what we take in as a church.

For instance, you will recall Greg writing about the high priority RiverTree places upon children at risk, one of the results of which led to our partnership with Compassion International. RiverTree partners have now committed to over 1,500 Child Sponsorships - which means that together we give away over \$684,000 to that cause annually (1,500 x \$38/month x 12 months). That is a huge win for the Kingdom of God, which we loudly celebrate!

In this new missional model, we are more interested in how finances flow to bless those outside the walls, than in seeking to finance church programs. Interestingly, the new missional structures that we have put in place (Huddles and Missional Communities - called GoCommunities at RiverTree) require relatively little financial support.

GREG: I mentioned earlier that at first I resisted Compassion Child Sponsorships because I worried about the general fund offering going down! But what we have discovered is that the more we invest in things close to God's heart, the more He entrusts to us to steward.

Measure Community Transformation

One of the questions RiverTree has been asking for several years is, 'If we closed down tomorrow, would anyone in the community notice or care?'

To answer that question, we measure our wider impact in creating community transformation, whether directly or through partnerships with other churches or organizations. For instance, we partner with our local Pregnancy Support Center to lower the number of abortions in our county. In 2011 the Pregnancy Support Center ministered to 364 abortion-minded women who instead chose to carry their children to term. That is something we measure and celebrate! Nevertheless, there were 750 abortions that still took place in our county, so our goal is to be such good news to our wider context that, year by year, the number of abortions keeps going down.

One of our GoCommunities, based in a wealthy gated golf neighborhood, has drawn in lots of unchurched neighbors to make a difference in the wider city. One of their projects was putting together backpacks and supplies for children in urban Canton who are either homeless or live below the poverty line. In 2011 they distributed over 1,200 backpacks - again, something to celebrate!

John Moores leads our student ministries, and in his early days here he arranged a meeting for him and a colleague at the local Middle School. They arrived to find not just the Principal but the Assistant Principals and several guidance counselors waiting for them - they thought he was coming to complain or to demand access to evangelize during school hours! They were completely amazed when he simply asked, "How can we help?" He then explained that RiverTree wanted to be a blessing to the school community and they were wondering how they could serve the Middle School! Out of that has grown a tremendous partnership of trust and respect, which has

allowed us to impact far more lives than would otherwise have been possible. For instance, we are now often invited into school events to serve and connect with both students and adults. We also have a thriving 8th Grade GoCommunity, which is populated by students from this Middle School, who are being sent back in to serve and witness to their fellow students.

The Measurement Is The Kingdom

Our goal is to build God's Kingdom, not the kingdom of RiverTree. In practice, this leads us to work with other churches and Kingdom-minded organizations, whether we're caring for children at risk, planting churches together, or changing our city for good. The big lesson about collaboration is that it is amazing what God can do through us if we don't mind who receives the credit!

GREG: One of the most critical moments in our transition came as I wrestled with God about my desire for 'success' (as celebrated by the American church culture) and my need to die to self so that significant (as celebrated by God) ministry could take place. Don't get me wrong, I still envision RiverTree reaching 100,000 people for Jesus throughout Northern Ohio, but it will be as a movement of disciples who make disciples, not as a massive group of people who are attracted to a personality-centric weekend gathering.

Step 2: CHANGE YOUR LEADERSHIP CULTURE TO A DISCIPLING CULTURE

Release Control Choose Accountability

If you are going to make disciples who make disciples, then it is absolutely critical that you create a culture that releases control and chooses accountability. *One Of* missional life grows from the bottom up rather than from the top down. Authentic community is born out of the common mission that is owned and controlled by those actually leading it at ground level.

The standard model for church leaders is to control the levers of power. The command and control approach determines who does what, when and where. It uses money, publicity and staffing to enforce that power, which leads to the senior leader(s) becoming a huge bottleneck, strangling the wide variety of vision and possibilities that exist if we can release people to pursue their God-given dreams and potential.

However, just releasing control is irresponsible unless there is a counter-balance of accountability. People who have been given freedom to innovate and pursue vision need to be accountable for their character and the way in which they lead. They should be representing the values of Jesus' Kingdom, as well as the church family to which they belong.

Huddles

Our first step in the journey was to create an intentional place for the RiverTree staff (who represent our key leaders and influencers) to receive encouragement and accountability. Like many churches, we do this in

community (since Jesus always disciplined the 12 within the context of the group), in what we call a Huddle.

A Huddle is a group of between 6 and 12 leaders, where the group leader is discipling them to become constantly aware of the two core questions of discipleship: What is Jesus saying? What are you doing in response?

Sometimes a Huddle is focused on character development, other times more on skills, and occasionally it delves into theology; however, the key thing is that the group becomes a highly interactive place where people are being challenged, as well as supported, in order to become the very best they can be for Jesus.

My wife Hannah and I led the first generation of Huddles at RiverTree. Those first two groups were made up of people whom Greg and the senior team thought would quickly be able to 'get it' and thus, in turn, be able to start Huddles of their own. The plan from the outset was for this to exponentially multiply- that people we huddled would in turn soon be huddling those they led in their daily lives. As a result, today many who are not on staff at RiverTree are in Huddles, and are being strongly disciplined through these Huddles.

However you choose to organize things, you need a clear structure in place for intentionally discipling your leaders in mission. This must be a model that is easily reproducible, so that they in turn can use it to disciple their circle of leaders.

Note: We will be writing more about Huddles in a future eBook, including providing practical resources for you to take and use.

GREG: When Alex first talked to me about Huddles... I was very resistant - the last thing I wanted to do was sit in group therapy for an hour every week! What I quickly discovered is that when people are regularly asking the

questions, 'What is Jesus saying?' and, 'What am I going to do about it?', serious discipleship takes place.

Margin For Mission

When I arrived at RiverTree, Greg intuitively concluded that around 70% of the church resources (staff, time, energy, finances) were being invested in making the weekend services great, with only 30% given to intentional discipleship. Our aspirational goal at RiverTree now is to reverse those statistics.

We are not there yet, and some weeks feel better than others! We still have a large building payment, although we are aiming to be debt-free as a church in the near future. Much staff time still goes into the weekends - for instance our excellent children's team still have to put a lot of energy into the Gathering times - but we are gradually giving them more margin for mission and discipleship.

In practice we have taken steps to reduce the amount of effort that goes into the Gatherings. There is less flash and glitz at weekend gatherings, as the stated yardstick has moved from 'excellence' to 'good enough'. This is still a high standard, but good enough means that we are content with stopping after a reasonable investment, rather than feeling that every Gathering has to have almost limitless resources poured into it.

When we write the eBook on how we launched GoCommunities we'll talk more about this, but note that our weekend Gatherings now have stories almost every week on what is going on in GoCos. Our focus is on equipping and encouraging people to be missionaries into their neighborhoods, workplaces and relational networks.

To summarize, the question we now ask ourselves is whether we are giving the appropriate weight and energy to the appropriate tasks. If weekends are now no longer

our primary disciple-making environment, we need to shift resources to the places where disciples are being made.

What Needs To Stop

If you are going to reverse the 70/30 formula mentioned above, it will take more than just reducing ‘excellence’ to ‘good enough’. Some things you are doing as a church will need to come to an end. As with a tree, this may mean removing a healthy limb in order to create room for new growth and more balance overall.

To be honest, when I came to RiverTree I was surprised by how much had stopped already. For instance, separate men’s and women’s ministries had come to an end. My own experience is that they’re generally defined by an inwards focus, so once you move beyond accountability group size (2-4 people) I’m not convinced they are a terribly healthy model for mission or discipleship. RiverTree had also stopped sports ministry (“because we want you to be *One Of* the wider community and either play or coach sports there”) and the choir (“because if you like singing, go and do it in your local community as a missionary!”).

For the staff and leaders, this means that they have to stop leading ministries and start equipping the church to do the work of ministry. This means stopping anything that reinforces co-dependency (ie things that prevent people from growing up in Christ). We continually stress that discipleship is not an add-on. Discipleship is our mission, which will most often occur primarily outside of the classroom.

Giving Permission

The disciple-making mode requires a lot of control to be released. In practice, this means that senior leaders need

to become permission givers - the instinctive answer to a request needs to become 'yes', rather than 'no'! This requires putting together many of the ethos shifts we've talked about already, even if it at first feels costly.

GREG: Our Worship Leader, Andrew, came to me and said that he believed God was calling him to begin a GoCo in his urban neighborhood of Canton, Ohio, in partnership with Love Canton (Love Canton is one of RiverTree's church plants led by Jason Lantz, who we continue to work very closely with). Leading a GoCommunity would require a significant investment of time and energy by Andrew. This was a critical decision in setting the priority for our staff and leaders to be involved in missional living. Yes! Yes! Yes!

Expectation Of Leaders

Our expectation of our leaders - whether staff, Elders or volunteers - is that they are engaged with this missional journey. For instance, we've had to challenge specific staff to become more involved in a GoCommunity, as this is now a central part of our RiverTree identity and life as a church. Whether they are on staff or not, all of our key leaders have to buy into this disciple-making *One Of* move.

Step 3 LEAD THE CHURCH INTO A DISCIPLING CULTURE

Realistic Timeline

Transitioning a church into becoming *One Of* across the board is a multi-year strategy - at least a 3 to 5 year process. When Greg asked me to join the RiverTree team, we had a number of (quite funny!) conversations where I'd be saying it would be 3 to 5 years to see major change and Greg, in his enthusiasm, would turn round and tell the

listening group that we'd be a fully missional church in 2 or 3 years!

When I talk about a 3 to 5 year process, what I really mean is that somewhere around that time you will be able to point to some significant permanent changes, rather than a finished product. My friend Jeff Vanderstelt says that in transition you can take some organs out of the body and it will survive, but if you transplant too many at one time then the body will either reject them or even die. So be wise about setting your rate of change.

This is a journey not a task, so realize that it will be your long-term focus, even once you have the *One Of* culture and practices in place.

Count The Cost

By focusing on making disciples who make disciples, you are striking a blow to the heart of Christian consumerism. When Jesus challenged the crowd in John 6 to “eat my flesh and drink my blood”, thousands of people turned their backs and walked away from Him. However sad that made Him, it is also clear that His focus was not on attracting a huge crowd above making disciples who could make disciples.

When you challenge Christian consumerism, there will be a price to pay!

At RiverTree we believe that the Lord has called us to a 'both/and' vision. Consequently we have worked hard to communicate that we are doing *both* missional *and* attractive, *both* decentralized *and* gathered, *both* GoCommunities *and* weekend Gatherings. Even so, we had several months where we heard rumors almost daily that RiverTree was shutting down our weekend Gatherings, that the building was being sold off, and that the only thing left would be these crazy groups doing

mission! Plan ahead on communicating repeatedly and clearly your positive vision for change.

During the first period of the transition process (before we had launched GoCommunities) RiverTree lost between 300 and 500 people, which was pretty embarrassing for me as I had been brought in to help the church grow! More seriously, for Greg and the team members who had been here many years, it was obviously a painful period of time.

GREG: During this transition process I have received numerous letters of complaint for a variety of reasons. I think that what made this rash of discontent so painful was the blatant consumerist mindset of the complaints - and that I had contributed to the creation of that mindset (even if inadvertently). The attractational model of church, by nature, can contribute to Christian consumerism, whereas the missional model strikes a blow at the heart of Christian consumerism.

While things are a lot better, there is still an ongoing battle against consumerism.

For instance, just this last weekend I preached on the Kingdom of God being present in the here and now. To conclude I illustrated the power of God's Kingdom by inviting those who were sick to stay for prayer for healing at the end of the Gathering. As people began to make their way to the front and I was about to join the team in praying, a man bypassed the line, came up to me on the stage and asked if he could have a word. He then proceeded to forcefully tell me that, as next weekend is Easter Sunday, I needed to instruct the staff team to dress far more smartly! To be honest, I was completely taken aback, as I had thought he'd come up for prayer for healing. He then repeated his demand that my team dress more 'appropriately', presumably in order to make him feel happy. I stood there thinking, 'The Holy Spirit is

moving, people are responding in hunger and humility, God is healing the sick, and this guy is lecturing me about Easter clothes!' It makes me want to turn up in my European Speedos next weekend! However, I don't want to intimidate Greg, so I won't - but this does illustrate how deeply ingrained consumerism is within church culture.

Who Is Responsible?

One of the consequences of replacing Christian consumerism with disciple-making is that we shift the responsibility for growing as a disciple. The consumer refuses to take responsibility for their growth, instead expecting their church (and especially the church staff) to spoon-feed everything into their mouth. This is often expressed when it comes to parents' expectations of who disciplines their children. A child's number one disciplers should be their parents, which means the church's role is to support and help that process along, not to enable the parent(s) to abdicate their responsibility. (Obviously we do have lots of patience and energy for children from unchurched homes, which is clearly a different scenario).

By contrast, a disciple of Jesus owns that they are the only one responsible for their spiritual health and well-being (and for that of their children). Ironically, that then frees them to embed more deeply into mission-focused Christian community, and to both give and receive in the context of authentic relationships.

Again, by forcing people to own their own growth and by refusing to enter into co-dependent relationships with them, we have experienced both encouragements and tantrums! But we have stuck with the message: ultimately your growth as a disciple is not my responsibility as a church leader, it is yours. We repeat it frequently and make sure our teams understand it clearly.

How Did Jesus Disciple?

We wanted to help the wider church family understand more of how Jesus made disciples who made disciples. There is great power in Scripture to challenge and change us, so to that end, we taught through Matthew's Gospel. We wanted to allow Jesus, the Great Disciple, to set a template for us in how we both receive and offer discipleship.

This also reflects a shift in our goal for preaching, so it becomes a power source that helps fuel the ongoing journey of discipleship that goes on throughout the week in homes, offices, schools and neighborhoods, rather than just a 'feel good' teaching from a great book.

Publicly Refocus Your Vision

It is really helpful in this journey to publicly redefine both your mission and vision, so that they reflect your call as a church as it is now, filtered through what is on the new scorecard.

The key thing for us at RiverTree was to talk in terms of becoming a movement that thinks of itself as becoming *One Of*.

"We are a movement of people with the DNA of Jesus inhabiting and influencing every nook and cranny of culture and society."

This reflects the realities of what a reproducing discipling culture will look like in a multi-site mega-church, that is at the center of a church planting network, with a call to serve the wider church. This works for RiverTree because it fits who we are. So think, pray and discuss it deeply, so that you can capture this missional shift in a way that feels entirely embedded in the best of who you are as a church family.

GREG: We are convinced that Northern Ohio will become a 'great light' for Jesus. This will happen as the church, comprised of disciples of Jesus who make disciples for Jesus, inhabit and influence every nook and cranny of society and culture.

PART 3: WHAT COMES NEXT...

– Greg and Alex

Thank you for reading this resource - we hope that it has both stirred your imagination and given you some practical ideas to implement as you seek to become *One Of* the place where you are called. If you have found it helpful please encourage others you know to download it as well (it is free for a reason!).

Whatever you have thought, we'd love to hear back from you - please go to the next page for details on how to connect with us.

To help you go further, in the coming months we are going to write several more free eBooks that will continue to share the story of RiverTree, including the lessons we have learned and the tools that we have found valuable throughout this process.

Watch out for future eBooks covering...

Making Disciples Who Make Disciples - There are lots of practical questions about how this happens! We'll cover some of the practices that help create a culture where discipleship is a lifestyle. We will also give more details on how to run Huddles, including key tools that we find useful.

How We Transitioned Into GoCommunities - RiverTree has exploded with life through GoCommunities! Here we'll go through the practical steps that we took to introduce the ideas, identify and train the first generation of leaders, teach the church, launch the groups, and coach the leaders.

How To Hear God's Voice - If a disciple is someone who listens to Jesus and obeys Him, then this book will give you down-to-earth coaching in hearing God's voice and weighing what you think He might be saying.

CONNECT WITH GREG AND ALEX

Greg

Twitter: gregnettle

Blog: www.gregnettle.com

Greg Nettles has served as leader of the RiverTree movement for more than 20 years. During his leadership, RiverTree has grown from a group of 100 people to more than 3,000. He is an author, speaker and consultant as an agent of change in the United States church.

Greg is also President of Stadia, a global church planting organization. Greg's most important partner in life is his wife Julie as they lead their children, Tabitha and Elijah, to fall deeply in love with Jesus.

Alex

Twitter: alexabsalom

Blog: www.alexabsalom.com

Alex Absalom, together with his wife Hannah and their three sons, is a missionary to the USA from England. This means that he speaks with a funny accent, drinks his tea hot and loves football of the round ball variety!

His great passion in life is to see people become disciples of Jesus, and churches become communities that GO and transform their culture.

He is Leader of Missional Innovation at RiverTree, as well as being a writer, speaker and above all a pioneering practitioner on all things missional.

Alex and Greg have worked together to transition a successful mega-church from attractional to missional, and have helped plant churches in urban missional contexts. They currently lead SYNERGY (www.synergymissional.com), a research and development

group that facilitates learning communities, conferences and apprenticeships for leaders and churches who are called to the missional shift.

APPENDIX – RiverTree Ends Plan, 2011-2012

“We are a Movement of People with the DNA of Jesus Inhabiting and Influencing Every Nook and Cranny of Society and Culture”

2011-2012 Vision Driven Ends Plan

Measures We Will Report Are Indicated in Italics

We are a Movement of People

To accomplish this, we will continue to transition RiverTree to a missional movement, and will provide monitoring data and reports that demonstrate:

- Transition of staff leadership culture and structure

The majority of pastoral staff will be being disciple in a huddle and will be leading a huddle by 4Q2011

- Missional teaching and vision in weekend gatherings

We will teach a series of messages about GoCommunities and hard launch them publically this fall. There will be a substantial emphasis of GoCommunity stories in the weekend services.

- The launch of 20 GoCommunities in 2011

We will launch 20 GoCommunities by October 1 2011

- Synergy Initiatives

People Are in Discipling Relationships [to be People with the DNA of Jesus]

A discipling relationship is defined as connecting regularly with a Go Community, using common vocabulary and moving toward Jesus.

We will provide monitoring data and reports that indicate:

- Number of Mission Centers / Campuses and Number of People in Mission Centers / Campuses
- Number of Go Communities and Number of People in Go Communities
- Move KSP(1) from 12 to 18 church plants in process by end of 2011: 4 Ohio State University plants, 1 Ecuador plant, 1 Cleveland plant.
- A RiverTree Missional Influence on KSP

We will provide teaching at regular KSP gatherings as well as other learning opportunities [Synergy Ignite and Synergy Edge] throughout 2011 and 2012.

- Number of People in Church Plants

We will not establish goals per se, but we will report year over year data for evaluation.

- Number of Baptisms

5 Baptisms per 100 attendees is considered a health measure.

- Stories and “Preponderance of Evidence” of Missional Life Change

Stories and evidence will be published in the bulletin, blogs, Facebook, emails, etc.

We Impact the Community Wherever We Are [We Are Inhabiting and Influencing Every Nook and Cranny of Society and Culture]

We will provide monitoring data and reports that indicate:

- Impact Stories

Stories and evidence will be published in the bulletin, blogs, Facebook, emails, etc.

- Dollar Value of Financial Resources Given Outside
- Serving Opportunity Funnels

We will provide events and opportunities for GoCommunities and individuals to serve.

- Number of Adoptions
- Number and Size of Compassion Child Sponsorships
- Number of Child Sponsorships
- Number of Missions Trips and Travelers

We will expand the number of “easy reach” missions experiences [Appalachia, Cleveland, other KSP communities] in 2011 and 2012.

We Are Financially Healthy

We will provide monitoring data and reports that indicate:

- Financial Viability [Giving, spending, reserve]

We will maintain the prescribed \$246K operating reserve level by meeting and/or adjusting giving and spending, as well as stay within the financial Executive Limitations.

- Movement Toward Debt Freedom

We will reduce debt principal by a minimum of \$700K in 2011 and by an additional \$800K [??] in 2012.

- Dollars per Baptism and Dollars per Person Being Disciplined

- We will establish a baseline of the % of operating budget we spend on the weekend gatherings compared to discipling and external impact [“70/30 to 30/70” shift].

(1) KSP = Kingdom Synergy Partnerships, the regional church planting network that RiverTree heads up, in partnership with Stadia Church Planting