

# A BATTLE PLAN FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Preparing your kids for their X...

Did you know leadership and discipleship are two siblings from the same family? By definition, *leadership* occurs when a person helps a group of people identify a problem and passionately pursue a solution for the greater good of the entire group. That's also a good definition of discipleship, isn't it? We help people identify Jesus Christ as the solution, and together, we passionately pursue Him—not for selfish reasons, but to develop a personal, intimate relationship with Him. As a result, we extend the Body of Christ in amazing ways.

Did you ever play with little, green army men as a child?



Do you remember what that was like? We would open the bag, dump them in a pile, and immediately start sorting them. We separated them by types. After all, you can't put the little guy kneeling down with a bazooka behind the guy who is standing with his rifle. That would be disastrous. So, we sorted them, separated them, and figured out where they fit. Then we set them up.

I don't know about you, but one little green army man always was my least favorite—the minesweeper guy. To me, it always looked like he had a mop. When I was a child, I had no idea what he was doing. I thought he was sweeping the floor or something. I would always put that guy in the very back. Out of sight. Who needs a sweeping soldier?

God has a sense of humor, I guess. When I became an infantry officer in the U.S. Army, I learned that minesweeper guy is one of our favorite people; we want him out front. He protects thousands of lives, and is essential to the battle, even though he was always my least favorite.

What do little, green soldiers teach us? Even a child can get an "army" ready for battle. He or she could organize the soldiers into ranks and then, in just a few seconds, the battle would be over, with plastic soldiers scattered across the floor for mom and dad to step on. It's all about the planning.

The same is true of planning for discipleship. I call it *planning for X* or *backward planning for intentional discipleship*.

It's a process. And how does a leader deal with the planning process? We take the end date of whatever we're planning

and move backwards to where we are today. For in-

stance, each year at Randall House, we plan the D6 conference. But the hard

work doesn't start on the day the conference

starts. We set a date 18 months out—the end date.

Then, we begin filling in the details to make the

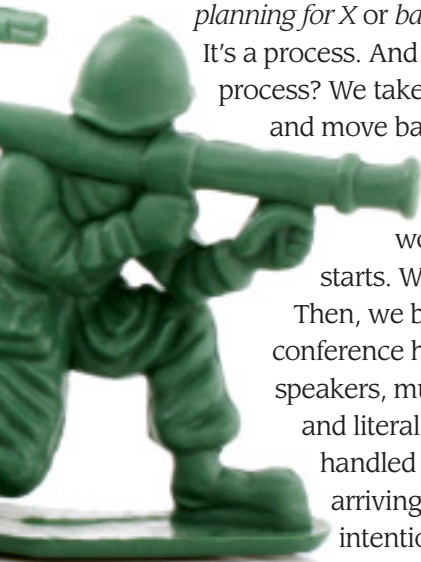
conference happen on that date: hotel, travel plans, speakers, musicians, sound, lighting, staff, registration,

and literally thousands of other details that must be handled before the conference attendees start

arriving. A conference does not happen without

intentional, careful planning. But, how does this

work with discipleship? We must start with the "X."





## THE RESCUE PLAN

I have a unique picture on my cell phone. It is a beautiful but grim picture of the site where the Oxford Martyrs died in England. During my Ph.D. studies, I spent a summer at Oxford, and a professor explained what happened on that spot. Bishops Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were burned at the stake because they refused to renounce their faith. As they died, their friend, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, watched from his nearby jail cell. His accusers told him if he didn't renounce his faith, he would soon face the same fate.

Several months later, Archbishop Cranmer died on that same spot. To this day, this picture is the screen saver on my phone. Every time I power up my phone, it reminds me we all have an X, the place we're going to die. No one knows where that X is located. But, if you knew the spot that marked the end of your life, would you live differently? What about your kids or the people to whom you minister? If you knew their X, would you change anything? Let me ask the question a different way. What would you do *between* now and then? Between this moment and the end? What should the backward planning model look like to get our kids ready to face their X?

A few months ago, the whole world was glued to the television as emergency workers tried to rescue a soccer team from the flooded Thailand cave where they had been stranded. The global family held its breath in anticipation, wondering if rescuers would get the children out in time. I couldn't help but ask myself, "Why did they go in there in the first place? What were they doing?"

As more details emerged, we learned they went after practice—just for fun. But a storm came. The amateur spelunkers didn't



know it, but it was the start of monsoon season. And when the water began to rise, they naturally moved deeper to higher ground. The players followed their coach, as he led them to safety, thinking, “We’ll just stay here until the water recedes, and then we will head out of the cave.” But the rain kept coming, and the water continued to rise, and they kept going farther into the cave until they ultimately wound up 2.5 miles from the entrance.

When I saw the story, I couldn’t help but wonder if that is not what the American church has done. We kept going “deeper into the cave” by repetitively doing what we’ve always done. We have taken our kids to church faithfully and turned them over to teachers, student pastors, children’s pastors, and the lead pastor, thinking, “You do it. You guys

are the experts. I’m not, so *you* disciple my family.”

Sadly, that one hour a week is nothing when it comes to teaching our kids to passionately adopt and pursue the heart of Jesus Christ. But we kept doing what we always have done; we kept “going deeper” because the water kept rising, and our church was hurting, so we kept doing what we’ve always done

Thankfully, just like the soccer team, God the Father had a rescue plan, and He shared it in Deuteronomy 6. Parents must wake up to the importance of discipleship in the home, and grandparents must become part of the solution. Together, they must say, “I want to champion Christ. I want to show my kids or grandkids how to love Christ and His Word so they can model the pattern I set for them.” That’s the answer.



## CHARACTERISTICS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

With this in mind, what are the characteristics of a healthy church? The answer is not new programs, or any other quick fix. It’s not in finding what someone else is doing and copying their methods. We must pursue principles over programs, start with ideology not practice. It’s tempting to go for the hands-on approach: what can I do, touch, feel, and implement today to make a difference?

So, what *are the* characteristics of a truly healthy church? Daniel Im and Ed Stetzer define these characteristics as: Bible engagement, obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, building relationships, and being unashamed. Other church leaders point to the characteristics of focusing on Christ and eternal values, meeting social needs, helping others find Christ, exhibiting grace, emphasizing purity, intergenerational connections, theology and apologetics, and consistent faith.

In all of these characteristics, I see one overarching, overlapping theme: discipleship. Every time. Healthy churches don't keep looking for the next big

thing; they simply keep refining discipleship. They may do things in a new way, but discipleship is always at the heart. How do we define discipleship? Some describe it simply as the study of Scripture, like we encounter in church, Sunday School, life groups, or small groups. Others see it as teaching maturity, or helping people become mature in Christ. However, Scripture does not describe discipleship as an event but a way of life. In Scripture, discipleship is learning to be like Christ, which results in making disciple makers. Those last three words are crucial. It's not about our own edification but about reproducing our passion for pursuing Jesus Christ. That's discipleship.

**How much time do you spend in discipleship in your home?**

**How can you be more deliberate?**



## **BIBLICAL FOUNDATION**

What is the biblical foundation of discipleship? In Genesis 1:28, God told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful, and multiply.” He wasn’t talking about populating the earth but sharing His image with the next generation. Sadly, humanity failed in that task, and in Genesis 5-6 when God looked at the wicked world that had forgotten Him, He was displeased, and told Noah—the one man who still honored God—to build a boat. After the flood, when Noah and his family walked out on dry ground, God repeated His command: “Be

fruitful, and multiply my image to the next generation.”

The *Shema* passage (Deuteronomy 6:4-6) challenges parents to teach God’s commands, share the love of Scripture, and to pass down the love of God to their children. Joshua also demonstrates this clearly when he says, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). He committed the coming generations of his family to pass down the faith, from one generation to the next.

In Ephesians 6:4, Paul instructed fathers and mothers to bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to guide them into becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. Psalm 78:6 urges readers to teach the faith to the next generation and even the generations that haven’t been born yet. And, in Matthew 28, we find the Great Commission. It reads that we are to reach *and* teach. When we understand generational discipleship, our “Jerusalem” starts at home where we must faithfully share the gospel. *Reach* our children and *teach* them to share their faith with others.

### How do you implement Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6:4?

## PRINCIPLES FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Let’s get back to the little green army men and use them to define some simple principles for discipleship:

**Principle #1:** Just as the little green army men come in all shapes, sizes, and functions, understand that in both church and home, each one of our kids is different. God has given them unique gifts, talents, and personalities. Recognize those unique qualities and parent each child accordingly. Help him or her discover God’s calling and affirm his or her particular talents and gifts.

**Principle #2:** In the military, training starts from the moment you enlist. No matter what rank you achieve, training never stops. The same is true of serving Christ. We must always pursue the heart of God and pursue discipleship. It should never stop. We will always be students on a journey of learning more about the Savior.

**Principle #3:** The general does not do all the training. I served as both an enlisted soldier and as an officer during my military career. During that time, I experienced peer-to-peer training, squad training, platoon training, company training, battalion training, brigade training, and on and on. The point is real simple: if you are a pastor, teacher, or

the heart of Christ.

**Principle #4:** We must prepare the next generation to fight life's battles, to defend their faith. We want to launch our kids as battleships, ready to sail the ocean of life, prepared for battle. This does not mean they go looking for a fight. The U.S. Armed Forces are not called an *offense* system; they're called a *defense* system. They are designed to defend our nation if attacked. But if the U.S. is attacked, our military is ready to respond.

Similarly, we must prepare kids to have the ability to engage, ask questions, and defend their faith confidently when attacked. We must prepare them for battle. Otherwise, they might walk away from their faith simply because they don't know how to defend it.

**Principle #5:** If you wait until the battle comes to prepare, your kids are likely to be defeated. An army would never go into battle with officers saying, "Quick! Let me tell you how to use this M-16" or "Here's how you launch a mortar." Soldiers must know and be confident in their knowledge.

The battle coming for your kids is their X. And we *must* begin preparing them for that

## WHAT ARE THE GENERATIONS?

- Greatest Generation 1928-1945 (41 million)
- Boomers 1946-1964 (72 million)
- Generation X 1965-1976 (41 million)
- Millennials 1977-1994 (71 million)
- Generation Z 1995- (23 million and counting)

key leader in your church, you should be training, but you should not do all the training. You should equip parents and grandparents to train. You should help single adults, even older teenagers who aren't parents, to teach and train their peers and those coming behind them. Your entire church should work together to help every generation of believers pursue

X from the moment they are born—infant, preschool, childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. We read to them, sing to them, pray with them, and prepare them every single step of the way. That preparation is their way of life as they see mom and dad live out their faith every day.

**Think about your kids. What are their unique gifts, talents, and personalities?**


**How are you training your kids?**

**Name those areas where you need to be a better example to the next generation.**

Consider the biblical example of Timothy. In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul describes how this young pastor was prepared for his X: “I know that I have seen the faith in you that I also saw in your mother Lois and your grandmother Eunice.” In Ephesians, when Paul described the armor of God, he was talking about equipping, preparing. We also need to teach our kids to put on that spiritual armor. Timothy didn’t become an incredible

ministry leader without preparation. Timothy had an X, and his family and his friend Paul helped him prepare to face it. We must do the same.

My questions for you are: Are you planning for the X? Do you know what you need to do between now and the moment that X occurs? Are you preparing your children to defend their faith?

It is time to develop a battle plan for discipleship. 

*Article adapted by permission from Ron Hunter’s keynote address to the 2018 D6 Conference.*

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