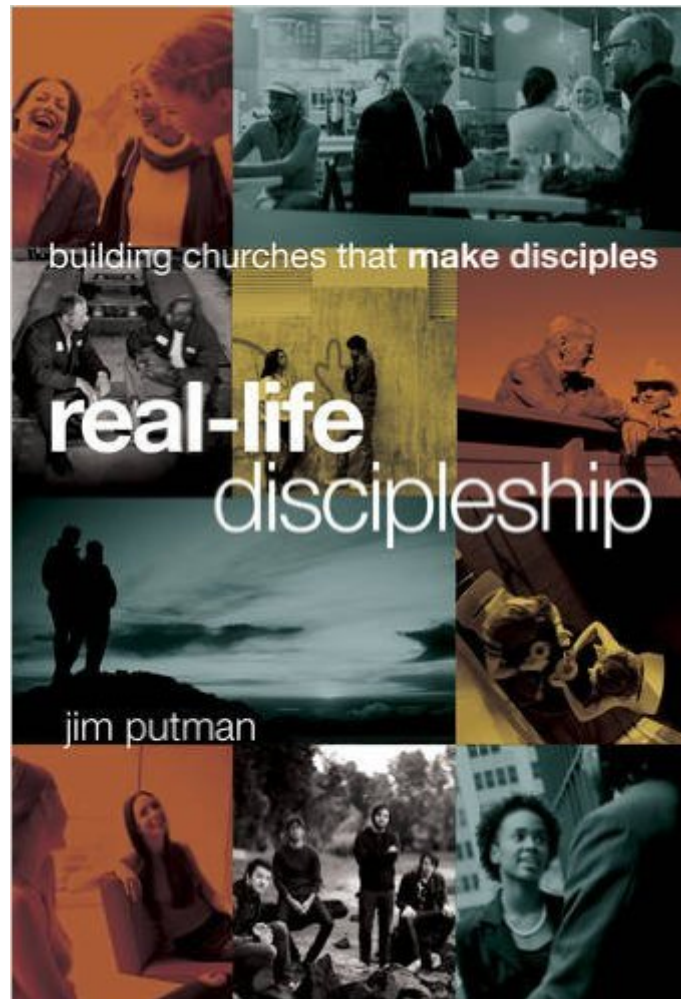


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# Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples



## Synopsis

Real-Life Discipleship explains what should happen in the life of every Christian and in every small group so that the church becomes an army of believers dedicated to seeing the world saved. With the overriding goal to train disciples who know how to make more disciples, this book offers proven tools and strategies from Real Life Ministries, one of America's fastest-growing churches. Discover what the Bible says about true and effective discipleship with these strategies and practices.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1913 Henry Ford introduced the assembly line and standardized car manufacturing. In 1955 Ray Kroc opened his first McDonalds and standardized the fast food process. And it seems in the 21st century Jim Putman has standardized spiritual growth. You can't argue with success, and so when I heard of Jim Putman, Real Life Ministries and the influence they were having in their community (8,500 people attend their church in a city of roughly 30,000) my curiosity was piqued. Not only had they seen God bring such great numerical growth, but they did it without seemingly focusing on the Sunday morning show but rather through the slower process of discipling individuals and training those disciples to make other disciples. An age old concept to be sure, but here was a church that seeming was actually doing it. Since then I have read and reread the book, had my entire staff read it, elder board, and now we have distributed it to all of our small group leaders. I've been so engaged with this book for the past few months it prompted one of my children to ask me, "Dad, haven't you been reading that book for a long time?" I say this to frame the review that follows

because it may seem at times like I'm negative on the book, which I am obviously not. I may just spend more time talking about the book's deficiencies rather than its more prominent and numerous strengths. The one contribution that Putman brings to the whole discipleship discussion is the word "process." Where most churches break down in making disciples is that although they talk about the importance of it, they leave the entire process to chance and maybe intuition. While a few gifted and motivated ministry leaders may be able to systematically help people become better followers of Jesus Christ, many of us mere mortals lack either the structure or the organization to gain any real traction. What Putman puts forth in *Real Life Discipleship* is a clear, simple, reproducible system for discipleship that takes out a lot of the guesswork. There is not really much new here, other than the fact that the author applies much of the current discipleship thinking to his system. In fact as I was reading, I found myself saying, "This is exactly what I always say" or "I could have written this." The difference is that rather than just having strong values or a philosophy of ministry, Jim has crafted a system and process that actually works and, for the most part, moves the ball forward. Much of what is in the initial chapters of the book will be familiar to those who have read even a couple books on discipleship as Jim sets the stage for the acute need for it and the critical lack of it in our contemporary churches. The genius of Part 1 is Jim's insistence that a mature disciple is characterized by reproduction. This shifts the definition of maturity from intellectual assent or knowledge to obedience (specifically, obedience that results in developing new disciples), a shift that is helpful although perhaps incomplete. Jim says, "I know many Christians who have the ability to be spiritual parents but don't make it a priority. Though they would like to call themselves mature, I would say that they are not. Why? Because they have not prioritized their lives around the mission of Christ, which is to make disciples." Although many people might want to take issue with Jim's assertion, he makes a strong case throughout the book. The bulk of the book is then spent describing moving a person through the discipleship process from infancy to maturity, how to identify where a person is at, what their needs are at each developmental stage, and how to address those needs. Much of what he shares in these chapters is helpful although those more seasoned in ministry might find themselves frustrated at what seems to be simplistic answers to issues we know from experience can be quite complex. Those whose personality and spiritual gifting tends more towards the creative/intuitive side of the equation will routinely feel stifled by a system that, at least on the surface, seems to constrain and restrict original thought or ingenuity. *Real Life* is the McDonalds of discipleship (chapter 15 is even titled "Creating a Leadership Development Factory"). If you want an individually tailored approach and the freedom to craft and create a different method for different people, it's probably not for you. On the other hand, if you

want to adopt a model that seems to work for most people, I would highly recommend this book. I predict this book will simultaneously be extremely frustrating and very helpful for the emerging church crowd. Jim's standardized approach and method is going to make enough postmodern church leaders at least have a mild gag reflex. In addition to taking out all of the creativity and individualism of the discipleship process, there is almost no talk about seriously instilling Kingdom values like justice, mercy, compassion, etc... The thrust of the book seems to be more about the Mission of the Kingdom (creating disciples) rather than reflecting the culture of the Kingdom, which is a weakness. If one were to read only the Sermon on the Mount, it would become immediately obvious that a mature believer is one who lives by the priorities, ethics, and ideals of the Kingdom of Heaven, not just for spiritual reproduction. Inculcating Kingdom values and ideals in people like forgiveness, compassion, generosity, justice and righteousness are more caught than taught; and some aspects of spiritual growth you just cannot script or design. But at the same time, many in the emerging church and missional church movements have much to learn from Jim. Although in the last decade some very creative and culturally relevant expressions of the body of Christ have been started, what most of these more organic expressions have struggled with is the task of actually making disciples and they lack (or refuse to embrace) a clear, simple, reproducible model on how to make more and better followers of Jesus; something any serious student of Jesus wouldn't deny we are called to do.

Often books of this nature are so tied to culture and time that they are of limited use beyond a narrow scope of time and place - this is NOT the case of this book. Real-Life Discipleship is so rooted in scripture and "real life" that the principles will help any person in any culture who desires to build the Church of Jesus Christ. The forms and suggestions are so people driven that they apply to people in any culture. The fundamental needs of people to be connected to each other and to God are given a real opportunity through this teaching. The "circle of discipleship" rests on the universal framework of human growth and development. This simple but profound setting allows any person to gain a fresh view of themselves in relationship to Christ's central mission for His Church. By this simple framework people are able to become intentional about being and helping others become a Disciple of Jesus. Every illustration in the book comes from "real life" people on a journey with Jesus. This is not a book of theory even though you will learn the theory it is a book about how our relationships need to be very strategic with the goal of "Making Disciple Makers." In the spirit of Dawson Trotman this is an exciting application of Biblical principles to help congregations and individuals accomplish the work Jesus has called all of His Disciples to accomplish. The simple four

part process of Share, Connect, Minister, and Disciple (SCMD) seems at first encounter to be a little hard to grasp. But in once you grasp how this process fits into the Discipleship Wheel you will get it. Now your activities become intentional in the spirit of Simple Church in a dramatic and encouraging process. This book will change the way you think about doing ministry and helping people know Jesus and follow His Great Commission. The excellent workbook called a Training Manual is an excellent complement of tools and procedures to use Real-Life Discipleship as a base for training and leading other to become Disciple Makers! As Jim says, "The leadership of the church must view its job s that of making disciples who can make disciples." This leadership goal must be a fundamental aspect of your every part of the ministry is the point Jim is calling us all to accomplish. Just the next step in learning Church Is A Team Sport Church is a Team Sport: A Championship Strategy for Doing Ministry Together

How do we create disciples? Putman's idea is to do what Jesus does. Makes sense right?! yeah. However, I still have to believe that the individual has to make the decision to grow as a disciple. Some people get stuck in one "age group". Putman has a very detailed list of how to classify the spiritual stage of an individual; death, infant, child, young adult and parent. He gives the readers the general characteristics, typical beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes along with the needs of each stage. My fear is we will classify people too quickly with this information. I know for me I still have a child like view on certain things but a very young adult perspective on others, based on Putman's information...so what does that mean for me? Mr. Jim Putman, has some good ideas and I believe that these are how we create disciples, however the theology of believing that the "goal" of Christianity is heaven is very wrong. (page 116) Our lives are meant to be glorifying to God, as an offering for our King. Heaven is a by product of our Christ centered lives. This should be read in very loose context. And use your people skills to know how approach and encourage people in faith. Being a disciple is being loving, bold in the face of the enemy and humble before our God. Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from NavPress as part of their Blogger Review Program. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

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