**Transition to Church**

**From** [***Living Fire: Advancing God’s Kingdom in Challenging Places***](https://www.amazon.com/Living-Fire-Advancing-Kingdom-Challenging-ebook/dp/B0DTC2SQSX/ref=sr_1_1?crid=24F9QPWSS1FDX&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.mwwCfst6Z0pGJl1uYxzLxQ.klmXPVSeZ4soNAewYpmmotWOdb6L_vB6tU78t2LAuYA&dib_tag=se&keywords=living+fire+aychi&qid=1740426037&sprefix=%2Caps%2C122&sr=8-1)

“When a family or group comes to faith together, it’s much easier for them to transition from Discovery Bible Study to functioning as a church. They already have relationships of trust among them.”

“We consider it vital to aim for multiplicationrather than addition. In the past, we did many things that resulted in addition—adding people to create a big church. Although adding new people is good, addition tends to extract people from their social context. We’ve learned that multiplication happens when new believers stay close to their social group and context, allowing multiplication to occur, and often quickly. In chapter after chapter of Acts, I saw that God gave the Early Church rapid multiplication. We have seen a similar dynamic as we have shifted our focus from addition to rapid multiplication.”

“What brings a movement is multiplication*—*disciples making other disciples who, in turn, make more disciples, and churches planting other churches without waiting until they become “mature.” They obey what they know of God’s word, and that provides enough maturity to begin another church. In our work, the youngest churches have the highest potential to multiply, and the newest disciples have the highest potential to multiply themselves. For this reason, we intentionally implement a strategy of multiplication from day one. ”

“We always aim for multiplication in three areas: disciples, churches, and leaders. All exhibit the same DNA of multiplication.”

“In our disciple-making, we expect that every disciple is a disciple maker, and every disciple maker is a church planter. Everything becomes generational.”

“As much as possible, we try to minimize the number of believers in each group: on average, 25 people, or two families.”

“We look for the DNA*—*the essential elements of a biblical church. These groups identify as a church, and it’s their primary fellowship gathering.”

“Every church planter knows, “I am here to find a person of peace, and that person will start an indigenous church. I won’t start a church*—*the person of peace will start an indigenous church.””

“When the ministry is indigenous from the start, the church planter can leave and move on to another place, and the movement remains indigenous. Without indigenous leadership, a group will not multiply effectively. We don’t raise up a singular indigenous leader for a church; we raise up a *plurality* of leaders. The New Testament always describes plural leadership, not singular leadership, so we develop plural leadership for the groups.”

“The structure of the Discovery Bible Study allows the same basic pattern to continue even after the group comes to faith and becomes a house church. In fact, they experience some of the interactive elements of church life even before becoming a church.”

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**From** [***Cabbages in the Desert: How God Transformed a Devout Muslim and Catalyzed Disciple Making Movements among Unreached Peoples***](https://www.amazon.com/Cabbages-Desert-Transformed-Catalyzed-Movements-ebook/dp/B0D261B5TQ/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1OZUM95PJOIMN&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.eo0R4vmS_9hCeaq60dXkioSiq_w6vMCHliiY05ZnKThC4PGSi1n9LAk5vAEmQvhcQrhXHzzIfx0i0foV_xzCBAmxQDN7jmQLh-FM8UYTkRoyr6UAqO16lRS9FO1_XHrM05Lw_1dDX8_izzvOxbovz07wfrtI7Q9IjzTDLKfMV57S-dfxsLGjGLfd9aFRvgEt.cXUbSWK-h2ct8XU8Lyi31QwRgiVLXSNGkEwbClXDgFA&dib_tag=se&keywords=cabbages+in+the+desert+book&qid=1740426144&sprefix=cabbages+in+%2Caps%2C119&sr=8-1)

“It’s important to clarify what a person means by “church,” because it varies in different contexts. For me, a church is a local, independent, functioning body that relates to other bodies, and functions in a network that provides mutual support. But it’s autonomous and it can grow and influence the kingdom of God. Not standing by itself, but as a part of the larger body of Christ. I have a very simple definition of church. I just say, “A church is a group of baptized believers (though some might still be in the process toward baptism) with recognized leaders, who regularly meet for worship, the ordinances, fellowship, discovering God’s will from his written word, prayer, supporting each other, and sharing their faith in the community.” That’s a very simple definition: not qualifying it by the number of people, but by the functions – what they do when they come together. It has to be more than just “two or three gathered in Jesus’s name,” because a gathering of just two or three can’t support itself to fulfill all the functions of a New Testament church. The average size church we’ve seen among those from a different faith background is 12-15 believers; among those from a tribal religious background, 23-25 believers, and some are much larger. It varies from one tribe to another.[[1]](#footnote-1) They need to appoint elders (leaders), as we see in the book of Acts, and as Paul instructed Timothy and Titus.”

“When many people in the DBS come to faith, we bring them together, maybe with four or five other groups, and they become a church. The church has certain elements: worship, the word of God, offering, baptism, communion, and all the other practices that characterize a church. After the church is formed, the believers don’t remain stagnant. They start a new DBS and plant more churches**.** They don’t think: “Now we’ve become a church, we don’t need to go anywhere; we’ll just build ourselves up.”

The churches often gather on Sunday, often under a tree. Elements of the gathering include praise (singing), prayer (worship), offering, DBS (*must* include DBS), everyone sharing what they have learned, and accountability: how they will obey, and with whom they’ll share what they have learned.”

“After the group becomes a church, they still sit and discover together from the Scriptures. If someone puts a preacher up front, the fruit is zero! That church will not grow as a discipling church. We find that everybody grows when they discover together. Nobody in the group acts like they know a lot; nobody is a teacher. We allow everybody to discover the truth in the word of God. When people from another faith come to Christ, their identity is as a “disciple”; not a “Christian” or a “religious person.”

Through singing, we exalt our God. But we don’t sing a lot. We sing a little bit, but mainly focus on studying God’s word. We teach each other how to go and find a person of peace, and we discuss which places we could go to, that are not yet reached.”

“Nowadays, if you came to my church on a Sunday, you’d find that some of those people don’t attend the Sunday service. They go to their DBS, then we meet midweek to discuss how it went: how things are working, successes and challenges. We pray and learn together, and plan to continue this pattern.”

“**Whenever we have some people in a DBS who believe and get baptized, we start doing some church practices, and we move *toward* having it become a church. We’ve seen in some cases, a DBS goes on and on as a DBS, because some people want to wait for *everybody* in the DBS to believe before they make it a church. But we observed that quite often, not everyone comes to Christ at the same time. So whenever a certain percentage of the DBS follows Christ, we transition it to become a church, and start doing church elements**.”

“When we train people to facilitate a Discovery group, we tell them, “As the facilitator, you don’t need to propose the idea of a church. Read the relevant Scriptures with them and let them discover about the church. When they conclude that now they want to begin meeting regularly on Sunday for worship and performing the other functions of a church, you’ll know they are ready. You can help them gain clarity on that.

The gathering as a church normally includes singing, preaching, and all those things. When they come to the point where they consider themselves a church, they do all the functions of a church, including Discovery Bible Study. We encourage them to continue doing Discovery studies as a church, because DBS is the process God uses to make the church grow. It equips them to learn, to share with other people, and continue the process.

If the facilitator attends the church service, they might do some preaching and teach others how to do it. But we teach our leaders not to pick somebody and say, “You are now the pastor.” If you do that, it messes up the biblical relational dynamics in the group, because they have often seen how traditional pastors handle things. In the Discovery group, we form a team and work as a team. As we train them, this team works together. Even if they reach a point of including preaching in their service, they still do it together. One person does it this week, and another person does it the next week. As they do that, the Holy Spirit will help them identify who has the most pastoral gifting.”

“in the very strict areas, our leaders don’t want to be seen associating with “Christians,” so we train those leaders in a very private way, sometimes one-on-one. We need to train them well, because we as outsiders don’t hang around in those places. We equip and empower them, then disappear so we don’t expose them to undue suspicion within their community. In some of the very sensitive areas, we sometimes help the leaders go to another location for one or two days of training.

In other areas, where the believers are known and accepted as followers of Jesus, church gatherings look quite Christian, with songs in the local language and all. In some of the more sensitive areas, though, the believers meet just to study God’s word, pray, and then leave. Some (especially those still living under their parents’ authority) still go to their family’s place of worship and pray in the name of Jesus, while also making disciples of those open to God’s truth. But as the opportunity arises for more freedom, they become more openly known as followers of the Lord.

In different contexts, the disciples use different approaches, as the Spirit leads them. We don’t try to push or enforce any one particular approach for all believers or all groups. The Lord gives specific wisdom for specific situations. We trust him as the Shepherd of all his sheep and the one who best knows every local context. ”

“When a Discovery group reaches the point where many of the attendees have become believers, **we help them discover the functions that make a church a church**. We are very strict on encouraging them to do their own baptisms. The disciple-makers and coordinators all know that. We were able to attend one baptism of more than 100 people. But we were adamant: The disciple-maker baptizes his disciple, and the disciple baptizes his disciples, and so on through the generations of reproducing disciples. In that way, we maintain clarity: Who is my discipler? Not the head, or a coordinator, or something like that. After they begin to baptize (which we try to encourage as an act of obedience), they begin to break bread (the Lord’s Supper).”

“The DBS group ideally will grow (both in numbers and obedience) and emerge into a DMM church. This transition prevents stagnation. The group should aim to multiply even as they grow into doing church ordinances and functions. They will often also grow in their influence in the community. In Acts 16:5, we read that the Church “grew daily in numbers.” We also see that happening in many places, because the disciples are actively reaching out to the community and sharing.

Not everyone in the group may have made a decision to follow Christ at this point, but that should not deter those already believing from transitioning the group into a church. The group should have at least six or seven members who are believers when they begin transitioning to become a church. Unbelievers are welcome and encouraged to keep attending. We trust the Holy Spirit to also lead to Christ those yet to believe. Our goal is the journey of disciple-making, not just an event of conversion.

Before transitioning a group to become a church, we help them do Discovery studies on the functions of the Church, as in Acts 2:42-47. We help them discover all the things involved in being a church. Do they continue to learn, obey, and share the Scriptures? Do they baptize new believers? Do they break bread in communion? Do they pray together? An outside leader is always coaching the process, to help them discover for themselves the biblical teaching on the subject.

We’ve noted the importance of transition points between all the places in the circle, in the diagram on page 187. When a person starts a DBS group, they know that the DBS is not an end in itself. After the majority of a DBS group has come to faith and begun growing in the Lord, the messenger’s role transitions to coaching or mentoring as they help a group launch their first church. We consider it important to instill this vision in believers from the beginning of their commitment to Christ – when they get baptized – rather than trying to do it later in the process. Each catalyst will make sure that the group looks forward to that at the appropriate time, helping them start discovering church, via DBS in the book of Acts. We intentionally introduce the functions of the church, including baptism, so when disciples have been baptized and start doing those things together, they know they are a church – even while some in the group may still be on the way toward full commitment and baptism. The transition to identity and functioning as a church plays an important role in maturing the movement and the disciples. They learn about church by seeing it in Scripture and experiencing it for themselves; not by putting up a sign in front of a building.

When the DBS group transitions to become a church, they might join together with another group, about once a month, for a celebration gathering. But they will continue as a DBS group, because that’s what keeps their focus on obeying the Scripture. We don’t want people to stop taking fresh steps of obedience after they become followers of Christ.

When the group starts to do the functions of a church, it becomes self-sustaining, self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-leading. They, in turn, will start to plant more churches as their own DBS groups grow and mature.”

“One of the unique features of a DMM church is that the word of God is presented through a DBS. The people break up into appropriate-size groups for a DBS, for 40-60 minutes, and discover God’s truth and its application for their lives. Then they come back as a large group for celebration. The leader or speaker for that day will give some exposition of the same Scripture text that was studied in the DBS.

A DMM church is usually larger than just one DBS group. Among those from a more antagonistic religious background, a church will average about 15 people. Among disciples from more open backgrounds, the average is 23-25 people or more, depending on the size of the village and how many from that village have come to faith.”

“**From DBS to church**

The process begins when we start a DBS through the person of peace. They gather everybody in the house: father, mother, children, and maybe other relatives – who come to start discovering the truth. After they come to faith, they begin to move toward becoming a church. They discover in Scripture the functions of a church: to worship, to break bread, to fellowship, and all the other things involved in functioning as a church. They discover the truth for themselves, and begin practicing the functions of the church. Then the group becomes a church and that DNA is the energy transferred from group to group, and the groups mature.”

“The teaching happens throughdiscovery. No lectures, even in the church meetings. Everyone contributes to the discussion. We ask, “What have you learned? What will you do with it? Who will you share it with?”

We also have intentional sending in groups of two or three. We say, “Go to this street, go to that town, go to the market buildings.” We just go where the people need to hear the gospel. But no preaching; no crusades.”

“After people come to faith, the DBS becomes a “gathering.” That’s where people learn the word of God in depth. It’s also where baptism takes place, and where leadership development happens. All the functions of the church happen in the gathering. Teaching normally happens through DBS. We praise and we worship, but DBS is the heartbeat of the gathering and the key to the movement.

The gathering meets mainly on Sundays, but we also have DBS during the week. The gathering is bigger than a DBS, and some DBS’s grow into gatherings. It depends on the leader of the DBS. He’s the one who organizes the regular meeting – on either a daily or weekly basis. We give room for our disciples to work things out for themselves, and we also encourage them to do DBS daily in their families – each evening or morning or noontime – whenever they have opportunity. A family may be a nuclear family or an extended family, or even extend to neighbors.

The gathering also includes leadership development. The leaders trained there will then move to another place – to find another person of peace and begin another DBS, which can become another gathering. And that gathering does leadership development, so the process goes on and on. It repeats itself as it expands into various villages and areas. ”

“When a majority of people in the group speak about their life transformation and get baptized, the group shifts from being a Discovery Bible Study for unbelievers to being a church. We still study the Scripture using DBS, we worship (in song), and we talk about what we are going to do outside the group. The gathering also includes the Lord’s Supper, prayers for the lost, learning how to function as a church, and so on. We have church under trees or wherever space is available. ”

“**DBS becoming church**

We’ve seen a lot of churches start through DBS. We first look for a person of peace, and when we find one, that person gathers some people from around them: family, neighbors, or others from their village. That group will gather once or twice a week to study the Scriptures together. Using that pattern, in two or three months, we usually can see a church established in that place. When the group gathers, they share the word of God, and everyone participates in the discussion. They all hear from God through his word and through what others in the group share. When people come to faith, they get baptized, and then the DBS transitions to become a church.”

“A DBS typically has 10 or 11 people. If it becomes larger than that, we encourage some of the people to go start a new DBS. The goal is multiplication, which is how we reach more people. We don’t aim to have a large gathering. Also, most of the houses won’t hold 20 people. Even if the group meets under a tree, we tell them that because of security issues, they need to stick with gathering only in a small group.

In a typical worship gathering, we don’t have a preacher. We have a facilitator, whose role is to help the disciples express for themselves what they are learning from Scripture and what God is doing in their lives. On one occasion, we were in a particular village and a pastor came to test us. He asked, “Is this a church?”

“Yes, this is a church. We’ve gathered because we believe in Jesus.”

“Why aren’t you singing songs?”

One of the brothers said, “If you have a song, feel free to start singing it. We’ll join you in praising God because the Bible says, ‘When you gather, if someone has a psalm or a song or a revelation, they should share it.’ So please share your song and we’ll sing with you. No problem.” There’s no rule that says, “Now it’s time to sing; now it’s time to pray.” We don’t have a set ritual. We all share as the Spirit leads us.”

1. Also, the prior context of that phrase in Matthew 18:20 makes it clear that the church Jesus envisioned (verse 17) was significantly larger than the three or four believers described in verse 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)