

Chapter Twelve: For the Church Leader — Leading This Change

Everything from Chapter Seven onward has addressed a single believer: what to do with your own hour, your own Timothy, your own Paul. But a pastor, elder, or ministry director reading this book is usually asking a different question — not “should I disciple someone” but “how do I move an entire congregation, staff, and budget toward this pattern without it collapsing into one more failed initiative.” That is a leadership problem, not merely a discipleship problem, and it deserves its own chapter.

Naming the Real Constraint

Chapter Six named the danger of professionalized ministry honestly, and it is worth being equally honest here: most pastors already know they should be discipling more people, and most are not primarily failing from a lack of conviction. They are failing from a lack of margin. A congregation that wants its leaders to recover Mark 3:14 — “that they might be with him” — has to be willing to give something up in exchange: fewer programs, fewer meetings, or a longer runway before results are expected. Leading this change starts with an honest inventory of your own calendar, not a motivational push toward everyone else’s.

Start With One Group, Not the Whole Church

Every historical structure surveyed in Chapter Five — the class meeting, the collegia pietatis, the modern parachurch discipleship movement — began small and unofficial before it became a program. Resist the temptation to announce a new church-wide discipleship initiative in a single sermon. Instead, start one triad, dyad, or mentoring relationship yourself, using the framework in Chapter Ten, and let it run long enough to produce a visible result — someone further along, ideally leading a group of their own, as in the example that closed that chapter. A congregation trusts a pattern it has watched work in miniature far more than it trusts a plan announced from the platform.

Two Starting Points

The shape this takes will look different depending on your context. Two composite examples, drawn from common patterns across very different congregations, illustrate the range:

- **A bi-vocational church of sixty.** One pastor, no additional staff, and a congregation used to a single Sunday service. Here the realistic starting point is not a new program but the pastor identifying two or three men or women already showing spiritual maturity and inviting them into a single dyad or triad using the covenant template in Chapter Ten — no announcement, no committee, just one relationship, run for a year, before asking anyone else to join.
- **A multi-site congregation of several thousand.** Staffed, programmed, and already running small groups that may have drifted, per Chapter Six, toward socializing more than discipling. Here the leverage point is usually not starting something new but auditing what already exists: which of the current small groups are actually functioning as triads in the sense Chapter Seven describes, and which are purely social or purely study-based with no mutual accountability. Reclassify honestly before adding anything new.

Bringing It to Your Board or Staff

A change this significant should not be adopted unilaterally, and it should not be smuggled in as a minor adjustment to small-group curriculum. Bring it to your elders or staff directly, and bring something concrete rather than a general conviction: a one-page summary naming the specific structure you want to pilot (a triad, a family-catechesis pilot, a restructured small-group audit), who will lead it, how long the pilot will run before being evaluated, and what would count as evidence it is working — not attendance, but the fruit named in Chapter Two: has anyone's faith, obedience, or capacity to disciple someone else visibly grown. A board is far more likely to support a bounded, evaluable pilot than an open-ended cultural shift.

A Realistic Sequence

- **1. Months one through three.** Lead one triad or dyad yourself, using Chapter Ten's framework, without announcing anything church-wide.
- **2. Months four through six.** Recruit two or three additional leaders — the "faithful men" of 2 Timothy 2:2 — and coach them personally as they start their own groups.
- **3. Months seven through twelve.** Bring the pattern to elders or staff with real results in hand, not a proposal in the abstract, and decide together whether and how to expand it.

- **4. Year two and beyond.** Begin the structural changes named in Chapter Seven — reorganizing the church’s small-group system, training group leaders in the Socratic method of Chapter Eight, auditing existing groups against the diagnostic questions below — only after the pattern has already proven itself in miniature.

When a Leader Pushes Back

Every long-tenured pastor has heard some version of “we tried small groups in [year] and they died.” That objection is usually accurate as history and irrelevant as an argument, because Chapter Eight’s distinction matters here: a small group that fails is very often a monologue delivered in a smaller room, not a genuine Socratic, accountable triad. Ask what killed the earlier attempt — most commonly a lack of a fixed curriculum, no accountability structure, or a volunteer leader given a topic but no method — before assuming the underlying pattern itself was the problem. Chapter Ten’s covenant template exists partly to prevent exactly this failure mode: without a written who, what, when, and accountability, a group drifts.

Four Questions for a Congregation

Chapter Ten offered four questions for a person to ask of their own life. A leader can ask the same kind of honest, diagnostic question about a whole congregation:

- **1. Do we have any structure that actually produces a 2 Timothy 2:2 chain?** Not a program that produces attenders, but a traceable line of one believer investing in another who is now investing in a third.
- **2. How many of our small groups are discipling, and how many are only socializing?** Chapter Six’s diagnosis applies at the congregational level as much as the individual one — a full small-group calendar is not evidence of discipleship unless the groups meet Chapter Seven’s actual criteria.
- **3. Could every adult member name a Timothy and a Paul?** If the honest answer is that most could name neither, the congregation’s discipleship structure is aspirational rather than actual, whatever the mission statement says.
- **4. What would we have to give up to make room for this?** Margin does not appear on its own. Naming the specific program, meeting, or expectation your church would trim is more useful than adding one more initiative on top of an already full calendar.

None of this requires denominational permission, a large budget, or a gifted communicator. It requires a leader willing to start one relationship, let it run long enough to bear fruit, and then hand the same pattern to someone else — the same

mechanism Chapter Eleven traced all the way to Revelation’s innumerable multitude, now applied deliberately to the particular congregation God has actually given you to lead.

Leader takeaway: Pilot one relationship before proposing one program. A board can evaluate a result. It can only guess at a conviction.

A Discussion Guide for Your Leadership Team

The chapter above makes the case. What follows turns it into a working session. Bring these eight sections to a staff meeting or an elder-board retreat and work through them together, out loud, rather than reading them silently — each section pairs a short reminder of the relevant idea with decision questions and a space to record what your team actually decides. Leave a box blank if you are not ready to decide; an honest “not yet” is a better outcome than a decision made only to fill in a box. Plan on ninety minutes for a first pass through all eight sections, or roughly fifteen minutes each spread across several meetings. Sections One through Three are diagnostic and should not be rushed — a team that moves to piloting before finishing an honest diagnosis tends to build the wrong pilot.

1. Where Are We Now?

Draws on Chapter Six and the Four Questions for a Congregation above.

A full calendar of programs is not evidence of discipleship. A congregation can be busy and still be undisciplined.

- 1. Do we have any structure that actually produces a 2 Timothy 2:2 chain — a traceable line of one believer investing in another who is now investing in a third? Name it, if it exists.
- 2. Of our current small groups or classes, how many are actually discipling — Scripture, prayer, and mutual accountability — and how many are primarily social or purely content-delivery with no accountability?
- 3. Could most of our adult members name a “Timothy” and a “Paul”? Guess honestly, not aspirationally.
- 4. Which of Chapter Six’s five forces — consumer individualism, the attractional model, easy-believism, digital distraction, or simple busyness — best describes our specific congregation, as opposed to the modern church in general?

Our honest one-sentence diagnosis:

2. Naming Our Real Constraint

Draws on the pastoral aside in Chapter Six and “Naming the Real Constraint” above.

Most pastors are not failing from a lack of conviction. They are failing from a lack of margin.

- 1. What does our lead pastor’s or staff’s week actually look like? Where is the margin — realistically — for a sustained, unhurried relationship with one or two people?
- 2. If we are honest, is our current expectation of our pastor(s) compatible with them also personally discipling someone? If not, what would have to change?
- 3. Whose job, currently, is “discipleship” in our church — a staff member’s, a program’s, or no one’s in particular? Does Ephesians 4:11-12’s equipping model actually describe how we operate?

What we would need to give up, or protect, to create margin:

3. Choosing Our Starting Point

Draws on “Two Starting Points” above.

Start with one relationship or one honest audit — not a church-wide announcement.

- 1. Which composite — the bi-vocational church or the multi-site church — is closer to our situation, or is our real starting point some third option neither describes?
- 2. If we are the smaller/simpler case: who are the two or three people a pastor or leader could realistically invite into a dyad or triad in the next month?
- 3. If we are the larger/programmed case: who will lead an honest audit of our existing groups against Chapter Seven’s actual criteria, and by when?

Our starting point:

4. Designing the Pilot

Draws on Chapter Seven's structures and the Discipleship Covenant Template in Chapter Ten.

- A bounded, evaluable pilot earns trust. An open-ended cultural shift asks for trust in advance.***
- 1. Which structure are we piloting — a discipleship dyad/triad, a family-catechesis pilot, a mentoring pairing, or a small-group audit?
 - 2. Who will lead it personally? (Not a committee — a name.)
 - 3. How long will the pilot run before we evaluate it — six months? A year?
 - 4. What would count as evidence it is working? Chapter Two's answer is fruit, not attendance: has anyone's faith, obedience, or capacity to disciple someone else visibly grown?

Our pilot, in one sentence (who, what, how long):

5. Bringing It to the Board or Staff

Draws on "Bringing It to Your Board or Staff" above.

- Bring something concrete rather than a general conviction.***
- 1. Have we written the one-page summary naming the pilot, its leader, its timeline, and its evaluation criteria?
 - 2. Who on our board or staff is most likely to raise the objection "we tried this before and it died" — and have we asked them, specifically, what killed the earlier attempt?
 - 3. What is the smallest version of this proposal our board could approve today, without asking them to commit to a church-wide change they have not yet seen work?

Who presents this, to whom, and by when:

6. Sequencing Our First Year

Draws on "A Realistic Sequence" above.

- Structural change follows proof, not the other way around.***
- 1. Months 1–3 — what, specifically, will be true by the end of this window?

- 2. Months 4–6 — who will we have recruited and begun coaching?
- 3. Months 7–12 — what will we bring back to the board, and what decision are we asking them to make at that point?

Our first checkpoint date and what we'll review then:

7. Anticipating Pushback

Draws on "When a Leader Pushes Back" above.

A small group that fails is very often a monologue delivered in a smaller room — not proof the underlying pattern doesn't work.

- 1. Has anything like this been tried here before? If so, what actually killed it — no curriculum, no accountability structure, an untrained leader, or something else?
- 2. Who in our congregation is most likely to be skeptical, and have we talked with them directly rather than only presenting to a board?
- 3. What is our answer, in one sentence, to "we tried small groups before and they died"?

Our answer to the strongest objection we expect:

8. Our Own Leadership Covenant

Adapted from the Discipleship Covenant Template in Chapter Ten, applied at the leadership-team level.

Structures endure when expectations are made explicit rather than assumed — for a leadership team as much as for a dyad.

- 1. Who: which staff members or elders are personally committing to lead a pilot relationship?
- 2. What: what specific material, structure, or audit is each person responsible for?
- 3. When and how often: what is our review cadence as a team — monthly check-ins? Quarterly?
- 4. Accountability: who reports to whom, and what happens if a commitment quietly lapses?

Signed / affirmed by (names and date):