

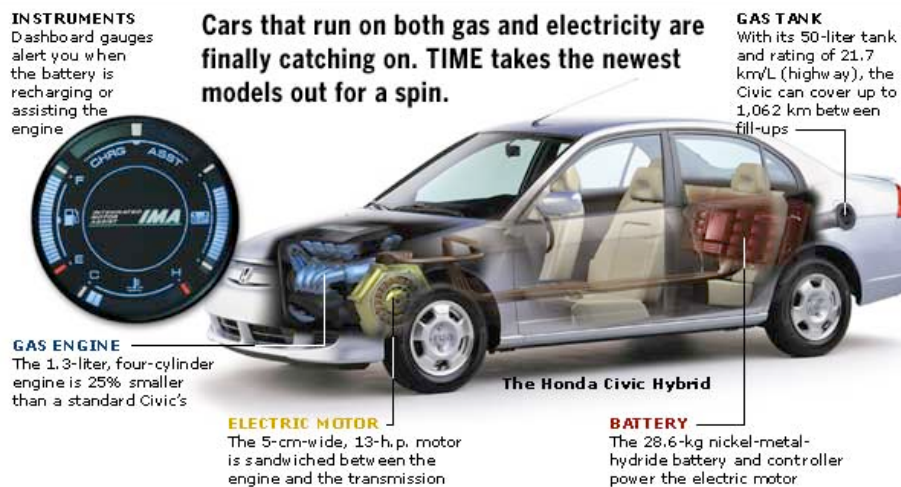
Church

by Roy Moran

My introduction to current automobile technology came when my octogenarian in-laws wanted a new car although neither could drive at the time! You just don't argue with 80+ year old people. A friend owned a car they were looking at so we borrowed it for a test drive. I had never driven a Hybrid car.

Being ever practical my mother in law wanted to stop by the grocery store on the test drive so I parked just outside the door of her favorite market and waited while she ran into to get a few things. Half an hour later she emerged with a small bag of groceries and climbed in the hybrid car.

It was then the drama began. I hadn't turned the car off because it didn't seem to be running. So when I started forward it was a strange sensation not to hear an engine rev. It must have been strange also for the lady who walked right in front of me. Fortunately the brakes are conventional, worked and created a threatening screech!



I am sure that it never occurred to the lady holding two bags of groceries coming out of the store that a car not making a sound could be a threat to her health. She grew up in a world where cars make sounds when they move and especially when they move from a stand still.

Her world had now changed! Her old paradigm had brought her in harms way and her survival depended on her changing her thinking and behavior. Hybrid cars that possess both a gas and electric engine had entered her world. No longer could she count on hearing a car coming at her, she must now understand that cars move silently propelled by an electric engine.

It was this moment that gave birth to a new way of thinking about how I did “Church¹.” In 1994 I began a journey to establish a “[Willow Creek](#)” model church. After 11 years [Shoal Creek](#) was approaching 800 people and growing. It didn’t take a Einsteinium mathematician to figure out that our current facility had an expiration date.

Having planted the church from 6 people in my living room, I was sure that I only had one of these in me. The clawing for viability while raising a family left trace elements of stress, fatigue and aging! Thus the beginning of a journey to find a scalable strategy that would both reduce the dependence on facilities and allow us to continue to aggressively participate in seeing the lost found.

This journey visited all the typical venues; multi-site, church planting, video venue, house/simple church, missional communities conferences as well as the typical list of books and mp3s from the latest gurus of everything church. Yet in that journey a constant irritation was a story from India of unbelievable proportions that became a irritating splinter in my mind.

After each visit to these experiences, much evaluation and discussion lead to the same conclusion, our current format was not easily reproducible.² Which then lead to a fork in the road, do we change how we do what we do so that we could find a scalable model?

We liked what we did/do and it was effective. Every week 10 new families visit 5 of which self identify as not yet followers of Christ. Changing our strategy with that kind of exposure to the unbelieving world seemed rather foolish. That thought further complicated and magnified the irritation of the story from India.

As a last resort, I dove into the [Bhojpouri story](#) via David Watson’s [website](#). It didn’t take long for the pain of the splinter to turn to an inquisitive wonder. The echoes of “It is a cultural thing,” slowly faded as I discovered that this phenomena, 2 million new disciples in 80,000 churches over 14 years was not unique to India but had spread to Indonesia, East/West Africa and in fact over 120 different movements of this type had been identified around the world.

This story and the principles being applied drove us back to the Bible. This was a re-read for us which made it deceptively difficult. Never were we more aware of the cultural bias that we brought to the Bible. The forms that have developed over centuries had to be submitted to the functions that the Bible laid out and the practices with which Jesus used to launch the first disciple making movement.

¹ I will use Church to refer to church universal and church to refer to a particular local church

² Shoal Creek drank the “Willow” style cup all the way down and even to this day has no musical worship on Sundays, making an inviting place for those seeking a faith.

Now a holy collision was set up; a viable Biblical strategy to make disciples who would multiply at viral rates irrespective of trained leaders and adequate facilities and an

Mission: Turn Spiritual Seekers into a Community of Fully Devoted Follower of Jesus

Matthew 11:28

Come to me,
all you who are
weary and
burdened,

Matthew 28:19

Go make
disciples

Gas Engine

Electric Engine

Discovery Process

attractional church with an aggressive heart to reach those not yet vitally connected with their Heavenly Father thru his Son.

But how would this collision be explained? Two unique and somewhat competing strategies existing alongside one another, a hybrid! Yes, the car I was driving that almost flattened an innocent grocery shopper gave me the inspiration to put these two strategies together.

The car had two unique power sources in it, gas and electric. The gas engine is an old technology which is well understood and commonly used.

The electric engine although not new is a recent application to the automobile and particularly the presence of both gas and electric alongside each other in the same automobile.

We trust the gas engine because we know it yet of late we are more aware than ever of the dangers it poses to our world. So the electric technology has been put alongside it to create better efficiencies.

The two technologies are distinct in every way; principles on which they are built, the dynamics of producing power, the parts and maintenance. Yet they cooperate with one another when they serve a common mission, to propel the car.

This metaphor became a picture for Shoal Creek. On one side the old attractional model-gas engine-inviting people each week to Come and discover a life that they've always wanted and on the other a gospel planting model-electric engine-that equips people to move into their neighborhoods, workplaces and relational networks with a life changing truth of Jesus.

On one side we ask people to invite their friends aggressively on the other we train people not to mention Shoal Creek unless asked. On one side we have a group structure that organizes virtual strangers into small biblically functioning communities on the other we exploit natural relational connections to plant the gospel in obedience focused groups.

Why do we do this? We've prayed for years that God would allow us to see the 300,000 people who are our near neighbors to come to follow Jesus. Once, I allowed myself the privilege of experiencing what that would look like to have that prayer answered. It was a nightmare! We couldn't handle the answers to our prayers. So we allowed the holy collision to take place and entered a hybrid world.

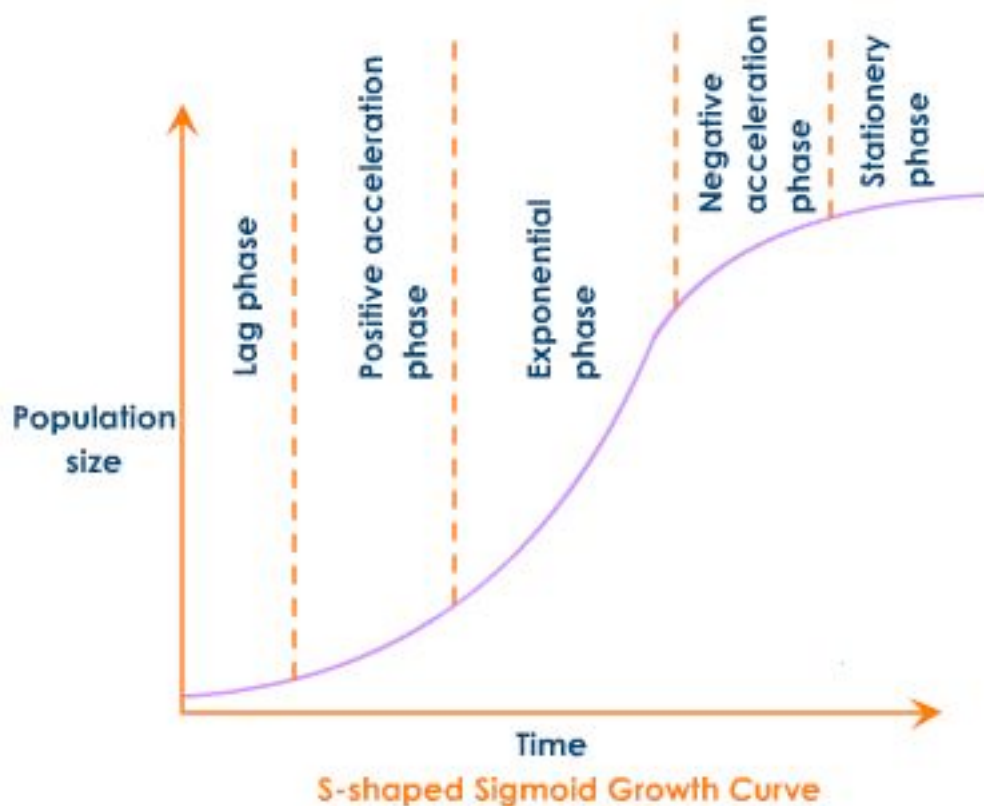
How did we do it? Awkwardly at first. The western mind does not hold things in tension well yet our world is held together at the atomic level by just such tension. So our hope was to tell a story long enough for people to begin to get it.

We decided not to roll this out like we would other new ideas. This was something that couldn't be marketed, it had to be caught not taught. So we took on the role of a terrorist and looked for people who were vulnerable to a new and different way of reaching out.

This type of change has to be seen before the majority of people will adopt it. So we focused on high value targets, men and women who already had a demonstrated love and concern for their lost friends and relatives. These people had already exhausted the "Come Strategy" by repeated invitations to their relational network.

The repeated nature of these invitation were bordering on irritation by this time so they were ripe for a new and different way of reaching out. In fact we discovered there was about a 7 years S curve they all had in common.

The S curve describes most growth. At the bottom there is a distinct turn from downward to upward and it is steep. That growth continues for a period of time until there is a peak and if something doesn't take place, the peak will evolve into another downturn. To avoid the downturn at the top something needs to engage the descent to create ascent.



That process was identified in numerous people and they all had an approximate 7 years growth spurt in common. If we caught them at the right time they were ready for something different because their relational networks were not expanding as fast as their ability to invite³.

³ It is important to note that these people were growing in the relationship with God primarily because they were reaching out. When their ability to reach out in their natural relational networks began to slow down so did their growth.

Enter a strategy learned from David Watson's website and heard explained in person by David Broodryk⁴ for the very first time, disciple making movements⁵.

Disciple making movements (DMM) is a strategy that has 6 key characteristics, God ordained, Spirit dependent, Bible centered, Obedience focused, Discovery based and Disciple driven.⁶ In brief DMM turns average followers of Christ into event planners rather than salesmen for Jesus so that they can invite their friends, neighbor and workmates into a small groups designed to hear from God thru reading the Bible and obeying what He says.

Our attractional side/Come strategy or our gasoline engine was running well but we understood that it didn't have the scalability to reach the more than 300,000 in our area with the Gospel. The new DMM/Go strategy did offer the possibility of reaching those 300,000 and beyond.

Putting the two together was no easy task. They at times are seemly opposite or even contradictory in nature. That is where the Hybrid metaphor helps us communicate our vision.

Like the Hybrid auto Shoal Creek has a mission. The car's mission is transportation so the two different power plants serve that greater mission. The design allows each power plant to work when it is most effective thus cooperating together despite their disparate technologies.

Shoal Creek's mission is to turn spiritual seekers into a community of fully devoted followers of Christ. The two sides, Come/Go, serve to support that mission when each is most effective.

From our antidotal research we have discovered that about 50% of our target audience will look for a spiritual beginning in an existing community of faith. There is something inside them that attaches safety and security to an established church. So they are

Key Learnings

- a passion for the lost drives strategy
- a priority on Kingdom growth over church growth
- small conversations rather than big promotions
- failing faster was the best way forward
- turning failure into learning moved us forward
- train, train and retrain
- aggressive coaching and mentoring

⁴ [David Broodryk](#) had a guest post on David Watson's [blog](#) just before I was headed to South Africa to host a training session. On a lark I asked if he would do the training for us and he agreed.

⁵ Disciple making movements is a term that started as CPM or Church Planting Movements brought into the public view by David Garrison in his book of the same name.

⁶ More information on the Key Characteristics of DMM found [here](#)

susceptible to a large meeting outreach that provides in their mind a safe place to be exposed to spiritual ideas.

The other 50% isn't coming to a "church service" if their life depended on it. They either have had bad experiences with church or they don't even have a category in their thinking for church. That is, when they think about spirituality, church is not one of the options that enters their radar screen to deal with spiritual issues. It is as if they don't have a column on their spreadsheet for spiritual pursuits to enter data for "Church."

So the strategy we use depends on our target. This is important to keep in mind. At the forefront of this metamorphosis is a love for people who are far from God. That passion drove us to the Hybrid model and is the first and driving principles behind this thinking.

A passion for the lost then formed a desire to not only grow a church that focuses on people far from God but also but also bring Jesus' kingdom from heaven to earth. Although sounding deliciously symbiotic, there is a second and fundamental decision we had to make regarding our Come/Go strategy.

Growing a church and expanding Jesus Kingdom on this earth despite your ecclesiological underpinnings, are not always good bed fellows. Once we adopted disciple making movements thinking we had a second and very important value to live out.

It would have been easy to allow each side of the strategy to bleed into the other and use Discovery Groups⁷ as a way to grow attendance at Shoal Creek. But if our 50/50 assumptions were right then an invitation to Shoal Creek on the Go side would confuse rather than clarify the main issue of God being creator longing to reconnect with His creatures.

The second important key to this strategy (the first being a passion for the lost) is a willingness to build Jesus' Kingdom on earth even if it means not growing our church attendance.

Sitting on my deck with a group of mega-church pastors discussing this issue, one of these perceptive guys looked at me and said, if you aren't careful, you are going to work yourself out of a job. He saw the implication clearly, that if the gospel moves away from the Church (small "c" church as in Shoal Creek) it might threaten the viability of what we have called church. We are more than willing to see this happen if it means progress toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission in our lifetime.

⁷ A written training sheet for Discovery Group can be found [here](#) or a video on how to lead a Discovery Group can be viewed [here](#). On the Come side groups are called Journey Groups on the Go side they are called Discovery Groups

It is no easy task to move the Hybrid model from thinking to practice. It requires a “bi-modal” thinking skill. Bi-modal thinking consist of holding competing ideas in tension without jettisoning either. To be a bi-modal thinker is to be both logical and intuitive, big picture and detail oriented, near and far looking. Holding these competing outlooks in tension becomes a valuable asset. Although there is an objective picture of the Hybrid strategy that appears clean and clear cut, the practice is not always so.

It might seem that with such a visual and unique strategy that the typical communication and marketing channels would have been the best source thru which to launch. But the Go strategy is so counter intuitive especially to people who have “churched” genes that pushing it thru a marketing loud speaker produces disappointing results.

A third value that we stumbled on was getting in touch with our inner terrorist. Instead of shouting “We have a new thing!” from the front we discovered that it is more effective to lurk around the edges for disenfranchised, even dissatisfied people.

These people were marked by 3 characteristics

- a positive hope that there is something more even though the church is not reaching what they feel is its potential
- by serving activities outside the formal church structure
- ample relationships outside the church especially with people who didn’t share their faith journey.

These folks didn’t respond to announcements and promotions but to conversations about what was happening around the world and a question, “Could this happen here?” An experiment intrigued them not a program. The simplicity of the DMM strategy infused a courage and confidence that they in fact could do this.

These conversations led to many mini-training sessions. First in how to lead a discovery group⁸ and then the many counter-intuitive principles that allow movements to happen.⁹ But shock came when we began implementing these groups.

Our fourth and painful learning experience was that failure was the path to success. That might be a great line in a speech on how to succeed but it is not a pleasantly accepted practice by Americans. No one likes to fail!

⁸ View this training [here](#)

⁹ For instance, good group facilitators ask questions don’t give answers, start group in others homes not yours, don’t grow your group multiply it as fast as possible,

But failure as in groups starting and then having people drop out or find excuses not to attend became an all too familiar reality. This led to another key learning, which might seem like the “DUH!” of the decade but as obvious as it is, it remains critical, **LEARN FROM EVERYTHING!**

Many of our partners around the world use DBS or discovery Bible study to describe their groups. While failing at starting a group one of our leaders helped us eliminate “Bible” from our group name.

Upon asking friends to join a “Discovery Bible Study” group reading the Bible to find out what God says about life, they found a resistance. Wanting to learn we had them explore the “No” answers they had received.

The answer was enlightening to say the least. The non-believers answered that a “Bible Study” was a place where Christians go to display their knowledge about the Bible and since they knew nothing about the Bible they didn’t want to go to another place in their life where they felt stupid. We learned to call our groups- Discovery Groups not Bible studies.

A fifth realization, eased the pain of failure. We took every opportunity to make each failure a learning experience. Connecting leaders to one another and providing tools for them to share their learning helped establish a culture that was constantly in a beta testing mode so we could celebrate failure thru learning.

To ensure that all this learning was moving thru our Go side culture we have a commitment to train, train and retrain. Stan Parks says in an interview on the Disciple Making Movements Sandbox¹⁰ that before we see disciple making movements in North America we will have to see training movements.

To care for this learning environment we discovered that the casual exchange of learning was helpful but not sufficient. There was and is a need to catalog and categorize the learning and communicate it in formal settings to allow the give and take of Q & A to further infect our disciple making disciples with the DNA of DMM. A sixth principle, train, train and retrain.

Since this is not leading edge but bleeding edge stuff, it becomes vital to have a value of training, coaching and mentoring at the heart of catalyzing a movement. Great battles like Napoleon in Russia were lost not because of superior opposing forces or better strategy but because his army wasn’t able to supply itself the proper needs of the

¹⁰ The interview with Stan is available [here](#)

animals and humans. Movements live and die on good mentoring and coaching. So we started our movement catalyzing efforts surrounded with coaching opportunities.

This seventh principle, providing coaching and mentoring, was not easy working with suburbanites, establishing a radical view of how the Gospel will spread. Americans don't seek nor especially appreciate coaching.

There is a spirit of competence that resides inside the suburban mentality. It may arise from a sense of democracy or even insecurity but it causes people to resist seeking advice and evaluating the results of their action.

So our coaching and mentoring could wait for questions to be asked. After each group a phone conversation or face to face meeting with our disciple makers took place. The agenda?

- how the group went,
- what did the obedience statements look like,
- how is the sharing going

These along with a regular connection to the disciple makers own personal journey create a successful coaching.

In adopting the Hybrid Strategy we had to start moving toward a very different way of handling the truths that Jesus provided us. This meant radical movement in our thinking from a traditional perspective.

Knowledge to obedience

Although Jesus said, "If you love me keep my commandments," (John 14:15) Christians have always placed a high valued on those who knew the most about the Bible.

Discipleship has become synonymous with the acquisition of knowledge about Jesus which seldom translates to a life becoming more like Jesus. Or at least what we know fare out paces our ability to obey.

Both in what we valued and our practices, obedience became our desired outcome. When opening the Bible our main questions is "If this is God speaking, what are we going to do about it?" Most if not all the Bible is easily understood in the English language by the average reader and doesn't need explanation but demands obedience.

Telling to asking

With obedience the main focus then the key to facilitating groups becomes learning the fine art of asking questions rather than giving answers. Giving answers hijacks the learning process from the learner and creates a passivity that is detrimental to the

discipling process. Adults especially trust their conclusions much more than they trust the conclusions given to them.

It is no wonder that we have created a consumerist mentality in the church. It comes with the valuing of experts who give us the answers that we could seek for ourselves. But moving from telling to asking pushes against consumerism and has the unintended consequence of revealing those who are genuinely interested in the discipling process.

John 6:44,45 gives us a new way of thinking about the teaching learning process. It says that God will draw people to himself and be the teacher and bring people to his Son.

It is no secret that the great teachers from Socrates to Jesus have always used questions as their key teaching tool. Seeing their key function as “causing to learn” rather than the exchange of facts some times thought of as teaching.

On a practical level this meant focusing on the Bible to the exclusion of any sort of curriculum or book. Our goal is to create a disciple making disciple who has a face to face relationship with God. Not a relationship mediated by disciplers, pastors, authors, spiritual mentors or the like. It is no wonder the nobility of the Bereans is noted in Acts 17:11 because they searched the Scripture for themselves.

Equipped to released

Modern education has taught us to value subject matter experts, the formally educated who possess credentials and degrees. Roland Allen in his formative book, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* suggested in the early 1900's there the church didn't possess enough money to educate and deploy the men and women to fulfill the Great Commission.

If that is true on a global level then the dirth of people willing lead at the local level is just are dire. There just aren't enough people equipped people to get the job done. That is unless you change the lens in which you see the gospel expanding.

Jesus gathered his disciples in the mountains of Galilee in Matthew 28 to give them a final command. We find two types of people gathered, Worshippers and Doubters. It was to this crowd that Jesus gave the Great Commission-Go make disciples.

It didn't bother Jesus that some doubted. He was fully convinced that it was the Gospel that was the power of God that would lead to a new life with God not the Worshippers or the Doubters level of competence.

Just as in viral transmission there is a period of contagion that is usually very close to when the virus was transmitted. When it come to obeying the Great Commission the sooner a disciple begins to call people to partner with them in obeying the Bible, the more likely they are to create disciple making disciples.

Simple, repeatable strategies were developed that allowed the newest person to begin inviting their friends, relatives and workmates to a life of following Jesus. The group process empowered the neophyte to be contagious to their relational network.

Stop evangelizing start discipling

Re-reading the New Testament, two surprising discoveries created much discomfort. First, the concept of “Evangelism” as it is commonly practiced and second, the definition of the “Gospel” as it would be regularly explained.

No where is there an example of someone sharing the Gospel as is commonly taught in evangelism training classes. Pieces parts are found all over the place but in moments like Acts 2 where Peter challenges those gathered at the feast of Pentecost or in Acts 7 where Stephen defends himself to his about to be executioners, the idea of Gospel

- God loving us,
- being separated from God by sin,
- Jesus dying for our sins and
- the need to receive him as Savior and Lord

don't seem to have the same priority as is given in modern explanations of the Gospel.

Surprisingly when Jesus is asked the “Gospel” question by the rich, young ruler (Matthew 19:16-30), His response is so unsettling that we find ourselves doing theological gymnastics to avoid the implication of being able to buy your way into heaven. Jesus is declaring at least that entering Heaven requires a surrender of rival gods.

The Gospel when shared in the Bible more often than not goes back to Abraham or Creation and comes thru the Messiah to the Cross and Resurrection. It is a fuller less distilled version of what goes by the name “Gospel” today.¹¹

Because of our shifts in thinking about the Gospel, we began to train people not to be salesman for Jesus but event planners. Instead of cajoling people to persuade friends what to believe about Jesus, we taught them to invite their friends to a groups that was going to read the Bible and discover what God had to say about life. Believing that God would show up, be the teacher and bring people to His Son.

This reading began in Genesis with creation, traveled thru places like Leviticus and Isaiah, before arriving in the Gospels and culminating at the Cross. This presentation of the Gospel was more in keeping with what we see the Bible describing the Gospel.¹²

If research on evangelism tells us anything, we ought to be encouraging repeated exposure to the Gospel. The average person hears 7 gospel presentations before responding to one. Our Discovery Groups provided repeated exposure to God's story in a relational context where they are encouraged to obey what God is saying and share what they are discovering with their friends.

More importantly, the understanding of the whole Gospel challenges a disciple to more than belief. Instead of persuasion which attacks what someone believes, discipling pre-Christians brings people to the issue of true repentance: Who is their King and whose

¹¹ Scot McKnight's King Jesus Gospel looks at every “Gospel” presentation in the Bible

¹² A list of our discipleship curriculum can be found here <http://bit.ly/O1ALFG>

Kingdom will they live for. Small acts of obedience leads to God's act of regeneration and a new life before their Creator and King.

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More importantly, the understanding of the whole Gospel challenges a disciple to more than belief. Instead of persuasion which attacks what someone believes, discipling pre-Christians brings people to the issue of true repentance: Who is their King and whose Kingdom will they live for. Small acts of obedience leads to God's act of regeneration and a new life before their Creator and King.

Our story is just beginning and hopefully there are others out there who can come along side us and learn together. Because we are so new to this, everything written here is up for revision as God leads.