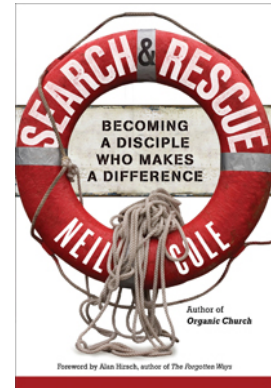


A Refresher Course in Basic Math: *The Unstoppable Power of Multiplication*

By Neil Cole (an excerpt from *Search & Rescue*)



Paul wrote Second Timothy at the end of his life. His primary concern was that the special power and transformation of the Good News be passed on through the generations and not end with his death.

He wrote: “You therefore my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:1-2). How many generations are in this verse? Paul...Timothy...faithful men...others also—there are four generations in this verse.

Multiplication is a popular topic in missions and church today. Unfortunately, much of what people call multiplying is really just addition. When a small group is added, it is often called multiplying, but it is really addition. When another worship service is added on Sunday morning, it is often called church multiplication, but it is merely addition. Adding a venue for worship in your church is not multiplying a church, it is merely adding. I am not against addition, but let’s not call addition multiplication.

Even if you add an additional church to your denomination, you are still not multiplying, at least not yet. $2+2=4$ and $2 \times 2=4$ as well. In the early stage of multiplication, addition plays a part. The difference is found in the sum of succeeding generations. If you merely add another 2 the sum is 6, and you are adding by twos. But if you multiply you get to eight, then sixteen, and now you know you are multiplying.

It is true that addition has a role to play in multiplication. In fact, multiplication is when every part adds an equal part to the whole. I guess, in theory, you cannot have multiplication without addition. Addition is not a bad thing; in fact it is far better than subtraction or division (which many of our churches in the West are experiencing).

Addition is good, multiplication is better, way better. Addition produces incremental growth, but multiplication produces exponential growth. The difference is seen in the results of multiple generations. I have counseled people, “Let’s not call it multiplication until we get to the fourth generation.” Until we get to “others also” we have not succeeded in multiplication. It is possible for a strong leader to attract other leaders who, because they are leaders, will have followers. You can have three “generations” of influence without really multiplying. But in order to get to the fourth generation everyone must be giving it all away—and that is when you have multiplication. When we have great grand-daughter disciples, leaders, or churches, *then* we are multiplying.

The thing about math is it is a world of absolutes; there is one right answer and many wrong answers to every equation. But if processes are mixed up, the solutions are screwed up. In Christendom today we have poor math skills, and our bottom line is wrong in the end because of it.

Multiplication is not an option for today...it is an imperative!

In 1987 I went to the Urbana Missions Conference as a young pastor of a college ministry. The biggest news of the conference was a world record of monumental proportions: for the first time in history, the population had passed 5 billion people. That was only two decades ago, which may seem like a lot for a young person, but in the scheme of history, it was not even a blip on the radar. Today the population has passed 6 billion and is almost half way to 7 billion. What took multiple millennia to reach is now happening in mere decades. Why? Because the population of the world is multiplying. The church in the West, however, is not. We must find a way to get back to multiplying again.

The power of multiplicative momentum

You may have heard the fable of a father who offered his two sons a choice of either one dollar a week for 52 weeks, or one cent the first week, and then the amount doubled the next week to just 2 cents and, continuing for 52 weeks. One son took the buck; the other took a chance and accepted the penny. We all know who wins: the son who took the dollar would have 52 dollars at the end of the year. The one who began with a penny would have enough money to pay off the national debt by the end of the year and still have plenty left over! That's a father with some deep pockets!

Multiplication begins slower than addition, but like a car rolling down a steep hill, it builds in momentum as it goes. What starts with a penny later becomes millions, and then billions, and within a short time...trillions.

Imagine what would happen in life if you got the two processes mixed up. What would happen if NASA engineers added when they should have multiplied? What would happen in your own household budget if you made the mistake of multiplying figures when you should have simply added? The results would be problematic at best, disastrous at worst. So why do we confuse the two when it comes to something as important as reaching the world for Christ?

Because addition is faster in the beginning and multiplication takes time, often we are content with addition growth. We choose the more immediate success and instant gratification of addition instead of waiting for the momentum that can build with multiplying. Don't be content with addition! Stop applauding the pathetic success we see in addition and start longing again for the incredible power of multiplication.

Of course, in our current context, the success promised by addition is hard to turn down. It is so rare to have a church ministry grow at all that one that grows fast with addition is very desirable. It is hard for leaders to turn away from the crowds and invest in the few, but that is exactly what Jesus did Himself.

Jesus knew the power of multiplication, and He was willing to wait for it. He rejected the pressure of the crowds and chose instead to spend His life with the few that would multiply. We need leaders who are willing to do the same.

Small things can make a big difference. A tiny microscopic virus is devastating the largest continent on the earth, one life at a time. HIV has no bias about color, creed or culture, yet it is

altering entire societies and ultimately governments and economies will succumb to its destructive agenda.

The devil understands the simple power of multiplying small things and creating extensive damage. It is time for us to counter our enemy with a strategy that works.

I have also found that there are small things that can have a big impact in a positive way. Jesus referred to the kingdom of God as a mustard seed, the smallest of all the seeds known to man at the time. He went on to say that it would grow into a large tree that cast a shadow across the entire planet and down through the ages of human history. He also spoke about the kingdom of God being like leaven; add just a little to a lump of dough and through reproduction, soon the entire loaf is transformed. It is time for God's kingdom to reawaken to the same principle: small things can make a big difference in this world.

Still Haunted By My Times Tables

I was not a good math student growing up which makes it somewhat ironic that now I am teaching something about multiplication. As a boy it was not easy to memorize my times tables. I felt like I was being haunted by the numbers while trying to commit them to memory. I still am haunted by the math, but in a far different manner. Today it is not the memorized answers that haunt me, but the new questions. In fact, there are some questions that have haunted me for several years.

These questions have led me to a simpler way of living for Christ and of being church together. Let me share some of these questions with you: What would your church do if 100 people came to Christ tomorrow? You would probably rejoice and find some new seats for your church auditorium. What would your church do if 1,000 people came to Christ this week? You would probably have to start adding many more services and hiring new staff. What would your church do if 10,000 came to Christ this month? Now you are stretched beyond imagination, but it is feasible to hire a venue to handle that size of group for church. What would your church do if one million people came to Christ this year? Now you are beyond the limits of your idea of church. But the real question is not "what if" but "how." How can our churches be prepared for rapid expansion?

Now, let's get more personal with these ideas. Take your current goals for your ministry and multiply them by 1 million. If you hope to reach 100 people this next year and you multiply that sum by 1 million, you come up with 100,000,000 people who will come to Christ in a year. Does that sound farfetched to you? Of course it does, it is so far from any reality we have ever experienced. But, humor me, what if it *could* happen, would your current ministry methods be able to handle that amount of growth? The answer is more than likely no. Your buildings could not hold such numbers. Your staff could not accommodate the needs of that many people, and you couldn't hire enough staff to do so. You couldn't add enough worship services to your weekend or even your week to satisfy that populace. Everything about the way you see and do church would have to alter remarkably.

The truth is, if you do not have the ministry structure or systems to reach that new goal in your life time, you do not have the systems that will multiply. If this isn't possible, your ministry strategy is based in an addition model. You see, multiplication growth can reach

exponential results and a momentum that is beyond anything we can imagine based on all our addition-bound experience. We can talk about multiplication all we want, but if the only key on our calculator has a plus sign we will never see multiplication happen.

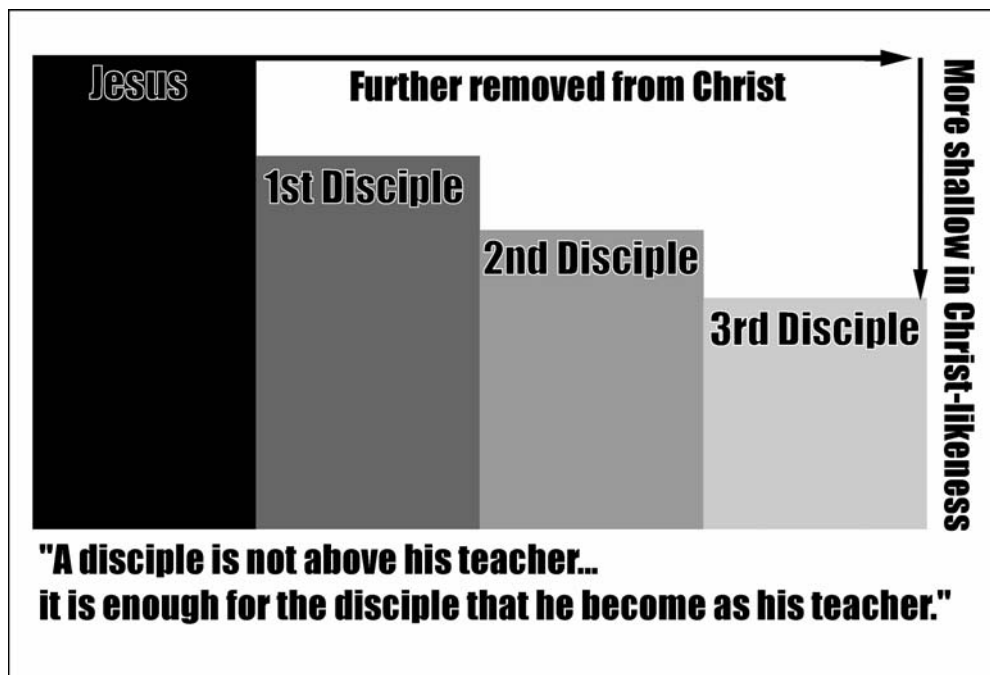
You cannot use an addition strategy to produce a multiplicative result. This is just a reality. One thing that is always true in arithmetic is that it is always true. It makes sense and is absolute. Math is black and white, right and wrong. We cannot pretend that the methods of incremental growth we employ will result in exponential impact. That is fooling ourselves. And to think we can start with addition strategies and slowly adapt and evolve into a multiplicative method is also to delude ourselves. We are deceived in the same way that the U.S. once thought it could slowly adopt the metric system...inch by inch. You must die to the old to put on the new.

Jesus said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies it remains by itself alone. But if it dies it will bear much fruit." If you are content with the results of addition and are unwilling to let go of the method in order to see exponential growth, you are foolish.

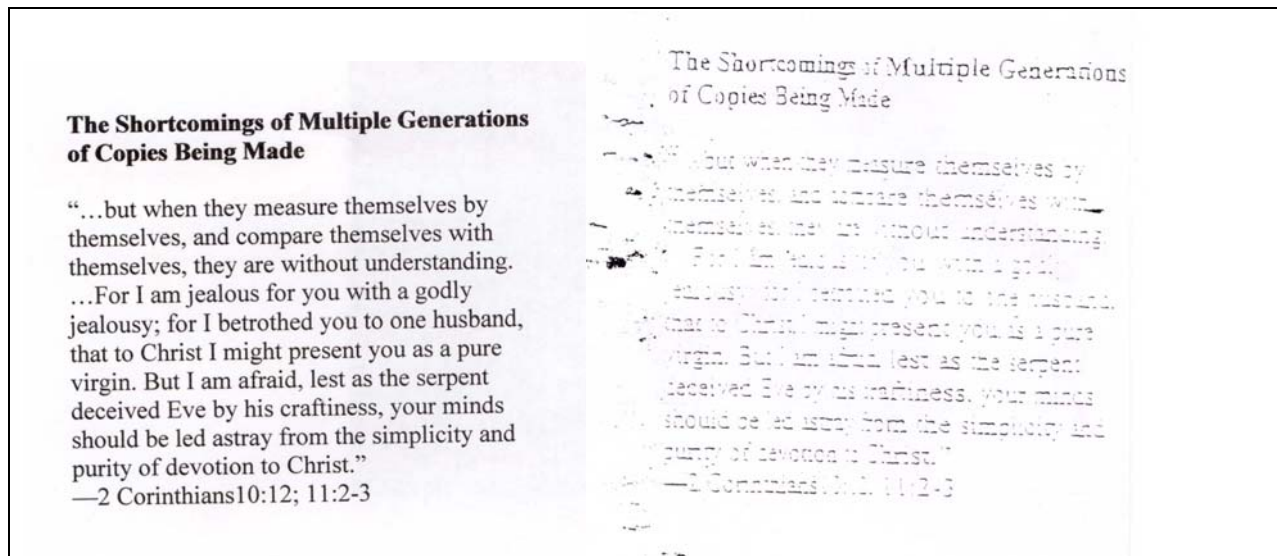
The Mishaps of Multigenerational Disciple-making

Getting to the fourth generation in reproduction is not easy. Much of our disciple-making materials today have the disciple following the one ahead of him or her. Of course this makes some sense, but without realizing it, this approach eventually sabotages itself.

Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but it is enough that he become like his teacher." In other words, the best you can hope to do is match the character, skills and knowledge of your instructor. As the following diagram demonstrates, as you progress to the next generation and the one after that, a noticeable depreciation in quality occurs:



Each generation is further removed from Christ and becomes shallower in Christ-likeness. It is much like making a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy. As the examples below demonstrate, the further you go down the photocopy path, the more corruption becomes obvious and every flaw is passed down to all succeeding copies.



The solution is to make every copy from the Master Himself like the copy on the left. In other words we need to make every disciple a first disciple. Our commission is not to make disciples of us, but disciples of Christ, and there is a big difference. This is actually the only way that disciples can excel beyond their human teachers and maintain the purity of God's kingdom through multiple generations of reproduction.