

Cultivating Deep People

Quotes & Key Thoughts

The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people. —Richard Foster

Disciples [deep people] are not manufactured wholesale. They are produced one by one, because someone has taken the pains to discipline, to instruct and enlighten, to nurture and train one that is younger. —Oswald Sanders

Leadership (a word that romances all of us) is first about character, then about a disciplined charisma and competence. In other words, reshape the spiritual parts of a person, as Jesus did, and a forceful but humble kind of leadership begins to emerge from within.

What might happen if a church made the development of deep people its highest priority? What if a church decided that its pastor's greatest responsibility was to lead the effort to produce a continuous flow of deep people?

Here's the point of an elevator story. You've got the time it takes to reach the thirtieth floor to tell this guy exactly what your company does.

What is your church doing today that would cause anyone to be attracted to it?

An elevator story is a brief description of an organization, its products or services, and how it gets the job done.

Lives would begin to change; that's conversion. People would begin to love, to care for, to enjoy one another; that's community, or fellowship. A spirit of generosity would start to fill the air as each person invested his or her energies and resources in the life of the gathering; that's servanthood. Children would be instructed; youth mentored; adults of every age would be encouraged; older people might be appreciated, even listened to. That's love. And from there? There might follow an apostolic spirit in those people that would begin to burst outward, beyond the church, into the larger world so that others might experience the redemptive love of Jesus in all sorts of ways. That's being missional.

How could the Ephesian church have lost so much momentum?

If Ephesus had lost its first love and fallen from its height, how what had gone wrong with the church at Ephesus? What had caused this vibrant congregation to lose what the angel called its first love? How had that amazing elevator story lost its credibility?

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.” Three words, built on powerful Shepherds (those at the center of the congregation) were the people who had responsibility for the flock (the larger congregation). Their job description was threefold. They defined the direction in which the flock would move, they assured that the flock was properly fed and rested (you could say nurtured and strengthened), and they guaranteed that the flock was protected from danger and disease at all times.

How does a church provide for a continuous supply of shepherd-type people who will sustain the elements of the elevator story and prevent the wolves from messing things up?

I suspect that we're talking about something more. People—both men and women—who possess a universal spiritual quality that is more important than mere competency. What is that quality I'm looking for?

Our church has to start envisioning new responses and initiatives to express the Christian way in this new world. We'll be a different kind of Christian community seven years from now, and we're going to need people at the center who will discern what God wants us to be. Don't stop thinking!

I wish I could say that I saw more deep people in the younger generations. Maybe the better word for the younger people is deepening. Most of them are not there yet.

How can our church enlarge its core congregation with deep people who are prepared to take us into tomorrow exemplifying the Christ-following life and inspiring us to fulfill the mission God has given us?

All organizations need a continuous supply of trained people who know how to bring people together and motivate them to grow to do their best.

You've got two kinds of flowers: cultivated and volunteer. It's nice to have both, but what you really want is more of the cultivated ones.

The cultivation of deep people is not just another generic program in a church. It is something instigated by a small team of people at the beginning who make this effort their number one passion. Any serious effort in this direction needs to be spearheaded by the leadership.

You may have to become like a RABBI for some people.

Training and cultivating people: you know, really, that's not even on the pastor's job description. I get the feeling they want it to be there . . . that they think I should consider moving it up the priority list and make it my—well, really, our—first priority."

One of them was about getting more specific about such terms as deep and deepening people and what we really meant when we spoke of cultivating them. At one point we talked about the issue of selection: **What does one look for when searching for potential deep people? Are there obvious indicators?**

Growable describes a person who is eager that his or her life be continuously reshaped to replicate the redemptive and serving love of Jesus Christ.

Deep people was a fresh term. Teachable: an old word. Growable: a new one. Mentoring: often used but not adequately appreciated or understood. Cultivation

“Father, you’ve been there for us over these many, many years. We could probably come up with a thousand stories of times when we needed guidance, and you gave it. And we remember moments when we had nothing to go on but faith, and you responded. And now, Lord, we face another one of those occasions when the question is bigger than our ability to completely understand it. We feel the stirring of a new idea, an idea from you . . . the chance to be a spiritual mother and a father to younger Christ-followers, to oversee their growth into being deep people of influence in and beyond our church. If this is your purpose for us, please, please make it clear so that we do not walk into something you’d not planned for us . . .”

Are we in fact the ones to do whatever needs to be done to get this thing going?

Are we prepared to back off some things we’ve always enjoyed doing and to focus on a relatively small group of “growable” people?

It’s first about raising up a group of deepening people who know how to hear God speak, how to respond, how to find the maximum point of service that fits their situation. My assumption: that such men and women—rightly cultivated—will give our church all the leadership it needs both inside the church and far beyond its organizational borders. Easy to talk about; more challenging to make happen.

The challenge to pass on from one generation to another generation what has been learned and experienced.

I was not interested in cultivating people simply for church work. I wanted to invest myself in people who might master the art of spiritual influence seven days a week.

When did we stop asking our pastors to give their primary energies to the thing they were called to do: turn people into disciples of Jesus, become spiritual leaders who can help the church do what it’s supposed to do?”

Your greatest contribution to the people in our church is the way you relate to each other. Many of us have learned how exquisite a marriage can be by watching you two. We know you’ve had your challenges, just like a lot of us. But you’ve even taken your challenges and made them something that we could learn from.

If you’re going to pour yourselves into young, would-be deep people, then do it as partners; show them how two people can make something happen together.

There are important aspects to spiritual and leadership development that only a woman can understand.

Raising up a new generation of Christians who really have the life of Jesus growing in them and flowing out of them.

If they’re going to become part of the next generation of leaders in and out of the church, they have to begin to know and trust one another.

Jesus was first and foremost a rabbi. All his ways were the way of a rabbi. If you don't understand the rabbinical contract, you don't really know as much as you should know about Jesus.

This way—dealing with just a small collection of people at a time—may be the only way there is to really change the orientation of someone's life.

You Christians sometimes act as if you've copyrighted Jesus and can make Him into anything you want. For some of you He's a solid right-wing American. Others? Yourself, maybe? You obviously revere Him; you honor Him in a most admirable way. But sometimes Christians seem to forget that Jesus was first and foremost a Jew living in the great stream of Jewish tradition. Everything about Jesus was Jewish, including the fact that He was a rabbi.

Among the highest priorities for a rabbi were his handpicked students. Rabbis always had students—each called a talmid. The group would have been called the talmidim. There was usually a close following of these students—disciples, you Christians sometimes call them. They were very dedicated learners.

Rabbis tended to teach in a spiral. First, there would be instruction. And when the rabbi instructed, the disciples were to sit in silence. That's a rabbinical term. They listened and then memorized what the rabbi taught them. What he taught was sometimes called the rabbi's word, or gospel. He taught them the Torah and offered his version of what the Torah meant. Then when he permitted, the students would ask questions: 'What does this mean?' and 'Why didn't you see it that way?' The students might quote interpretations of other rabbis and ask him to make comparisons. "Then when the teacher concluded his instruction, he left the students alone to discuss what they'd heard. They would argue and debate until the rabbi's word was fully digested. Now his word was, you could say, in them.

The second way a rabbi taught was through imitation. Now the spiral tightens a bit. Disciples watched their master—another word for teacher—like a hawk because they believed that the Torah came to life in him. His very way of life was an animated version of Torah, and the followers would want to mimic him in every way, to the last detail. When Jesus said that He was the way and the truth and the life, he was saying, 'I am acting out My own word in living color. Copy Me and you bring the Torah to life.'"

The third thing a rabbi did could be called examination. Now the spiral is really tightening and ready for another circle of teaching. A rabbi constantly tested his students. He gave them little assignments to teach other people, for example, so that he could know if they were learning what they should.

Rabbis didn't mind allowing their students to fail.

The relationship of a rabbi to his students always came to an ending point. This relationship was not like a marriage.

I don't want to do it in a church building. I want our connection with these people to stay outside the institution where there's some sense of larger reality.

You Christians are finally going to learn that the way Jesus did it is the way it should have been done all along. Get your teachable young people and push them hard to learn. You'll produce some of those deep people.

To assist him Paul gave Titus a list of qualifications he could use in order to spot leadership potential as he went from church to church: blameless, solid marriage, having children who would not betray their father, even-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, ethical and moral in their work, hospitable, loving the good, self-controlled, holy, disciplined, solid in an understanding of the faith.

Spiritual leadership 'is the power to change the atmosphere by one's presence, the unconscious influence that makes Christ and spiritual things real to others.' Paul was saying, 'If you find people like that, appoint them to leadership. And if you can't find any, cultivate them.'

We are living in new times that require new kinds of leadership.

- The next generation of leaders will have to be cultivated.
- We are not talking about a new program but a whole new way of doing ministry.
- Such an effort may mean a reshuffle of the responsibilities of the lead pastor & others on staff.

Is there a way to produce a continuous flow of men and women who are mentored into spiritual depth and trained to lead when God calls them?

- Are you talking about adding more staff?
- Would this great idea affect the budget?
- Is this just about wanting to make the church bigger?
- What kind of leaders are we talking about here? Decision makers? Bible study leaders? Program coordinators?
- Are you saying that our present leadership is inadequate?

As a person moves into the latter years of his or her leadership, the priority needle has to point more and more in the direction of investing in younger generations.

Men and women, the church of a few years from now will look nothing like the church of today. The recent economic realities, the problem of epidemic joblessness, the changing sociological patterns in our country, the shift in philosophical thought, the technological revolution ... even the broad changes in the world of international politics: these are all affecting us dramatically.

We have to keep asking ourselves what it means to live integrally as Christ-followers so that the people we connect with see something in us that is redemptive and constructive. If we don't know how to do that, then we can anticipate falling into irrelevance. So we have to begin to enlarge our core of deep people who can help do this. They will build tomorrow's church when most of us at this table are gone.

I think we need to begin to consider our church a teaching church in the same way that some hospitals are called teaching hospitals. Our slogan might be reduced to three words: training, training, training.

This great idea is, at its base, a spiritual work. Again, it's not about talents and management. It's about God's deepening work in the lives of people. And when we see it happening, we will all agree that the Holy Spirit of God was in the midst of it. Without that spiritual power, we won't make it to first base.

We believe that a business can be only as good as its training. Our very best people are expected to allocate a significant portion of their time to training. You couldn't last long around here if you didn't do that. We train constantly. We teach people to grow by growing ourselves.

If you skimp on training, you spend more & more of your time problem solving. Bottom line? We make big investments in training because training is less expensive than problem solving.

Because we don't want to offend anyone in the church, we do not ask much. People in the church come and go as they please; they arrive late, leave early, maybe not show up at all. They are asked to prepare things, and often they do not. They are challenged to get into the action, but they sit back and let someone else do the work. No one can respect an organization like that.

An organization is only as good as its commitment to training leaders for the future.

Imitation, instruction, examination ... then send them out.

You go for depth of character first and then follow on with the practical stuff of technique and method. And I think this is an important distinction about our great idea: *depth comes before competency*.

Jesus turned away three volunteer disciples. And it occurred to us that you never hear of Jesus opening up places for volunteers among His disciples. He selected His people; they didn't select Him.

It seems to me that when you open leadership development to everyone—you know, kind of just one more public meeting—the effort gets degraded. People looking for something really serious think it must not be worth it, and the volunteers often show up there because they're hungry for recognition or the perceived power that they think leaders enjoy. Or they just want to get close to the pastor and others they think are important in the church's life.

Jesus did nothing in the way of disciple-selection until he'd prayed and prayed hard. I think he was telling us something—that this most critical event—selecting growable people—has to start on your knees. Then he began identifying people who he sensed had a potential for depth and service and invited them to learn with him.

Who are the growable men and women in our congregation?

People, younger and older, who have reached a moment in their spiritual journeys where they want someone to push and poke at them and challenge them to enter into a process of spiritual cultivation so that they can become all God has made them to be.

They have a sense of worshipful reverence for Jesus. Also, you could tell that they really care for others ... in and out of the church. They have a calmness and a certainty within them when they face difficult experiences. They are unashamed to talk about God's grace and blessing in their lives. They maintain a vigorous devotional life. They have great faith and optimism in God's power. And in one way or another, they influence others. People look to them for inspiration, guidance, and assurance.

A holy influence. It pertains to men and women who renounce mediocrity and embrace the possibility that God can use them in extraordinary ways to serve others.

We know that we're on the search for potentially deep people: deep in the love of the Lord, deep in their desire to follow Christ, deep in their willingness to serve in the church or the larger world.

Why not have just one activity in the church where you refuse to allow mediocrity, laziness, or spotty participation to be the standard?

It would be better to invest our energies in six growable people who are willing to pay the price to mature in their faith than to waste time with one hundred people who want to play religious games but won't be any different at the end than when they started. I'm just not going there again. I'm eager to see the ministry to be about growing deeper people.

Theme Verse For CDP (LDI: Leadership/Discipleship Initiative): cultivation was right there ...

"Just as you received Christ, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."
Colossians 2:6-7

A simple but significant description of deepening people: rooted, built up, strengthened, and overflowing with thankfulness. This describes exactly what we want to see in the lives of "growable" people.

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. Here's Paul saying that his business is more about cultivating depth or maturity ... in Christ than anything else. And that's really supposed to be the business of the entire church. And it's obviously the business of this CDP venture. **Perhaps we need to see the CDP idea as something that will ultimately pervade every level of life in the church.**

Cultivating Deep People *"to identify and prepare people whom God has called and gifted with the potential of extraordinary influence."* Four objectives:

- Identifying growable people
- Folding them into learning communities focused on spiritual maturity
- Helping each person discover his or her giftedness and calling
- Pointing them toward leadership opportunities in the church or in the larger world

Broad outline of activities that might mark a CDP year: reading, temperament studies, examining the marks of Christian character, identifying spiritual gifts, teaching leadership skills. We emphasized the group-centeredness of everything, the importance of prayer, storytelling, reading and dialogue, shadowing leaders, and linking up with mentoring couples in the congregation.

They say they follow Jesus, but they don't like to subscribe to doctrinal statements. They love community, but they dislike authority. They say they believe in the importance of personal salvation, but sometimes they're not sure how salvation happens. We have to think in two ways about these people. First, what are they offering us with their new way of Christian thinking? What can we learn from them? And second, what do they have to learn from us?

Have you folks thought about how those people who don't get selected for this program are going to feel? Won't there be some who feel rejected?

CDP, as we've conceived it, begins with selecting growable people, not advertising for volunteers. This means a very careful, prayerful, wisdom-centered process of vetting those whom we believe the Holy Spirit has targeted for that moment. If we turn out to be wrong, we'll just have to bite the bullet. But here's where we may have to risk offending someone. And I'm prepared to take that chance.

- Each CDP group – one a year – would last for about 40 weeks & then come to an end.
- Team-lead the first couple of groups until we could train others to take our place.
- We would not compromise on selection and requirements for participation.
- Age, marital status, gender, length of time in the faith were not deal-breakers; but “growability” was.
- Our target date for the first CDP group would be early September; the selection process would begin in the spring; actual invitations to participate would be given in June.

Deep People:

- Demonstrate a consistent loyalty to Jesus and speak of Him as their redeemer and Lord
- Have a hunger to keep on growing in every aspect of their lives, regardless of age
- Have a clear sense of how a Christian conducts him-/herself in the larger world
- Maintain personal relationships that appear to be healthy and life-giving
- Are respected because of their wisdom and integrity
- Are aware of how the Holy Spirit has gifted them & possess a sense of personal mission or call
- Love to inspire and lead others toward personal Christian growth
- Have firm convictions about faith, yet are not rigid, pushy, or judgmental
- Are generous with what they have and always seem to know just how to serve others
- Are compassionate, the first ones to spot people who need counsel or encouragement
- Are people you love to be with because they love life and seem to know the best ways to live it
- Are influential wherever they go

Anyone coming into CDP has to clear their calendar of all priorities in the church and do nothing but CDP for a year.

Intelligence and giftedness alone are not enough to keep an organization or a church going. If any group of Christians wishes to be a pleasure to God, there must be some deep people at the center who know how to hear God speak and how to draw upon his power to do the work Jesus has called us to do.

Deep people are influential. Wherever they show up, human beings, institutions, and churches are inspired, renewed, even changed.

What was it like in this period of Israel's history when there were no deep people? Confusing and chaotic seem apt words to describe things.

**Deep people are not going to magically appear at our front door.
We're going to have to cultivate them.**

And as we select the first CDP group, we've got to make sure that we have one or two people who might be candidates to lead their own CDP group in another year.

Personal Invitation: We'd like you to think about spending a year of Monday evenings with a small group at our home, where we can work through what it means to be a person of spiritual depth and influence. We're talking about something that's more than just leadership; it's an attempt to explore how a person can be spiritually influential.

Deepening people, are men and women who want to take the life and the teachings of Jesus to a new level in their own life experience. They want to influence others to bring Jesus into the center of their lives. The result would be that everyone grows in their personal relationships, the quality of their work lives, and their service in the church and in the community.

Discipleship – those times in the Scriptures when the older poured his or her life into the younger. Note the relation of Jesus to his twelve disciples and how these very ordinary men grew up to be the founders of the greatest movement the world has ever seen.

You are people who have the potential to make a difference in the life of our church and in the life of our community. The key word that describes each of you is growable . . . each of you has shown us that you want to mature as Christians and in your ability to influence others. Now you need to know what we'd expect of you. First, unless you are dying, we'll expect you to be here every Monday night. Second, we will always start on time. Promptness is part of the deal. And we need to agree that no one leaves early. We'll be together for the full three hours. Third, everyone participates. No one gets a free pass from conversation. Fourth, everyone will have a mentor, an older person or couple from the church.

CDP is all about developing a new generation of leaders who will maintain our church's faithfulness to its mission.

Paul used to say—as all rabbis said in his day—'Follow my example.' In other words, watch us as something of an example. Notice the way we work as a team. See if you can figure out how we're different from one another. See if we support each other in the best possible way. See how much we enjoy each other. For sure, we're far from perfect, and we'll disappoint you from time to time, but keep watching. And don't be afraid to ask us questions about what you see.

Ministry's Sweet Spot

LDI is an intuitive approach to leadership development.

Goals for Each Group:

- To identify people with potential to influence others if they were appropriately coached.
- To accelerate their spiritual growth so that they would become strong, self-nourishing follower of Jesus who would seek to grow in godliness for the rest of their lives.
- To give them an experience of all that the Christian community is capable of becoming when people truly love one another as Jesus loves us.
- To demonstrate what it means to feel called and gifted, and to discover that there is no greater joy than to be caught up in God's purposes for a particular generation.

We were not interested in people who got attention by having chronic problems. LDI was not meant to be a support to therapy group. The teaching partner doesn't have to be a spouse, but team leadership is key.

We Were Looking For ...

- People who were teachable. Individuals who asked good questions, who took seriously the Christ-following life, who went out of their way to grow spiritually.
- People with essential social skills. People who showed respect and regard for others, not so argumentative or abrasive or touchy that they didn't fit well with others.
- People who would not simply sit for an entire evening saying nothing. We wanted "players" who were unafraid to mix it up, experiment with ideas, move the conversation along, and venture opinions.

We're inviting each of you to consider LDI for the next year. But we don't want you to accept our invitation until you've spent several days thinking through the implications. It's going to mean every Monday night for about 40 weeks. It will require getting her early, staying late, being prepared, diving into the event's events with nothing held back, and giving yourselves to some challenging work. Are you ready for this? Don't say yes until you've prayed your way to a decision and you're sure, because once you say yes, you've begun a covenant relationship – not just with us but also with a dozen other people. Our affection for you will not change whether you say yes or no.

Greatest Regret ... that we didn't have the wisdom to start LDI during our earliest years in ministry. We should have insisted that our job description include the fact that 20% of our pastoral time each year should be invested in 15-20 people.

"I no longer call you servants ... Instead, I have called you friends,
for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."
John 15:15 (NIV)

"But now I am going away to the One who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. ⁶ Instead, you grieve because of what I've told you. ⁷ But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you."
John 16:5-7 (NLT)