



## Making Digital Disciples eBook

Jesus told his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt.28:19-20). We have been given the mission to carry the Gospel message to the entire world, and the digital age has made it possible. We have almost every nation within our reach with digital means for sharing the grace and hope of Jesus Christ.

It is estimated that half the world's population is online. That means that we currently have access to billions of people worldwide. People are searching online for answers to life's problems. How does this information get posted on the internet? People are creating content and posting it online. Search engines are not a genie with all the answers. With billions of people searching, we, the church, can provide solutions through an online presence.

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When you decided to go into ministry, you probably didn't realize you would need to make the shift to online or what it would take to reach new people in your community. Pastors are among the group that has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. The stress of not knowing what to do is too much for most—this stress is common. Many church leaders are facing similar frustrations.

There are many reasons for the frustrations. There is an increased need for technology, resources, finances, and training to implement these things if you are blessed enough to have them. Suppose you have gone hi-tech, great! If not, take heart, my friends; it does not have to be that complicated. I want to talk about some simple ways for you to begin to have a thriving online ministry.

The key is not having expensive equipment or using a specific platform when it comes to digital ministry. It's all about relationships. I have worked with many pastors trying too hard to figure the technology aspects of an online presence while the relational aspects get ignored; it simply will not work. While some technology is required, When you engage people in conversations, comment on photos, and chat in groups, you share the gospel. With just a smartphone and window light, you can present a clear and compelling video. The key to a successful online ministry is in understanding how it works and learning the strategy. So before you invest a small fortune high tech gear, start learning how digital discipleship works to create lasting relationships and develop a plan for engaging people.

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## A Digital Ecosystem

Having a strategy for making digital disciples begins with understanding that social media is an integrative system that is most effective in reaching people when your website is connected to at least one social media platform such as Facebook, Youtube, or Instagram. It is helpful to think of social media as an ecosystem. Understanding it as an integrated system is the key to the digital discipleship process.

Each media platform should point back to the originating network, such as your website. Digital discipleship is most effective when it begins with social media (where the people are) and drives traffic to your website. This compounding process will reach far more people than posting to your website alone.

The integrated system comprises creative content, distributors, hosts, and curators within a network community, and this all works together to get the message out. Truly shared evangelism thrives best in a digital ecosystem. Everything on social media is interconnected and interdependent. Digital Discipleship is all about the conversations we have online.

Like we have hospitality teams in church, we need to have them online. Would we expect a first-time visitor to come back if nobody greeted them? Many go to great lengths to have welcome packets with goodies, friendship cards, and a list of our church events. We introduce ourselves and ask them their name and invite them back. When we ignore greeting online, why should we expect anyone to return?

Social media was designed for communication with participants, hence the term "*social*" media. We have to shift our thinking from treating digital space as if we were solely for getting our message out and connecting with people. We need to change our thinking from *billboard* to *bonding*.

Livestreaming or a chatbox host is a great way to have two-way communication online. Greet them by name and ask them how you can pray for them, and you will have made connections to show you care.

## Creating Shareable Content

Blogging is another way to provide Godly answers to people's problems. You can use an excerpt of your sermon or have parishioners share about how God is working in their life. When content is shared, the algorithms favor your content and, in turn, share with even more people in need. In other words: topics with search traffic potential. The benefits of sharing content get multiplied like feeding the 5,000 in Matthew 14:13-21.

We can all benefit from that increased web traffic, but what does it have to do with making disciples online? My answer, everything. Once people have become engaged in your social media platforms, the potential is unlimited to invite them to the church- be it online, in groups, or the building. Churches are meeting the needs of hundreds of thousands of people on Facebook alone. At Pendleton Center UMC, a parishioner wrote a testimonial about a lenten fish fry that reached than 13,000 people! Think of it- more than 13,000 people are reading about God! When we shift from billboard to bonding mentality, we share the stories that resonate with people. Jesus knew stories were a way to

connect with people. Ask yourself *why* we do what we do? What are the results of what we do? Once people can relate, they will be open to you and your church. It may take some time to grow, but the results will be well worth the wait.

## Which Social Platforms are Best?

Depending on your goals and target population, you may choose to use various social platforms that will help you connect with your followers. However, if you want to keep it simple, an excellent place to start is with Facebook to connect people to the church and your website. If you are new to social media, start with one and keep it simple. Facebook has 2.80 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2021). According to Pew Research, Facebook is used by half of America's teens, contrary to popular belief. While we can reach more young people by incorporating other social platforms, we will not lose them by relying on Facebook.

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## Live Streaming

Many social platforms offer live streaming, which is a fantastic way to connect with others and reach people for Jesus Christ! The goal of an online presence is to have a meaningful digital ministry. Facebook is the biggest social media platform, and more than two billion people use it every month.

We can use Livestream worship, devotions, prayer, and testimonies as a way of reaching people. Research shows that Facebook Livestream attracts seven times more people than a pre-recorded video or a single post. People are looking for interaction.

## Social Posts

Social images are also about connecting with people. Gone are the days as it is about us sharing content with others. Hence the term "social" media. Active engagement is crucial for every social platform to develop meaningful

relationships and draw people to Christ. There are several types of posts social media users, that when used together, are most effective.

Do not make every post a call to action or invitation to join your church events. Many social media users are under the false assumption that social media should be used as a billboard. Remember, social accounts exist to engage with your audience. Those you are targeting will eventually become so familiar with your church that they will come to you when they seek help with life's problems. In the meantime, keep your posts engaging, fresh, and exciting without always directly advertising.

## Call to Action Posts



There are a variety of post types to consider. The first type of post is the call to action that most churches default to. It is easy to make every post an advertisement such as "Come to our Fish Fry. "Use this post sparingly. You will not build up your audience this way, and the social algorithms will target you and make your posts almost invisible to your followers.

They want you to engage followers, not advertise to them.

That doesn't mean that you shouldn't make call-to-action posts, however. You still have some opportunities to promote your products. However, limit these to about 10% of your posting

## Engagement Posts



You want your engagement posts to interest your followers' curiosity. A parishioner took the image post shown on the left at our church. It is a great way to let people know you are a church that cares and engages them on your social platform.

## News Posts



People liked to be kept up-to-date with what happens around them. If you can find a way to connect your church to the



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*Shares, comments and LIKES boost your content for others to see, even if they are not followers your page!*

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latest news, you could create a post on that theme. For example, suppose your church outreach team is helping people with a current crisis. In that case, this can generate more shares than any other type of post or just a simple reminder about daylight saving time coming up. Shares, comments, and Likes boost your content for others to see, even if they are not following your page! Social media likes this kind of engagement and shows it to others searching for similar content.

Careful consideration should go into your posting as you will notice a decrease in your return if you post images for the sake of it. You want to share content that connects with your followers' needs and concerns and emotions.

Digital discipleship is about the church getting to know and connect with people. We want to focus on a strategy for developing relationships rather than a polished production. Some technicalities are needed but should not focus on an online ministry. Much in the same way, you would not place all your focus on building the church's physical structure while ignoring the people you are trying to reach.

Jesus sent the disciples out on foot into an environment they were already equipped. They knew which trees were safe to eat of its fruit and could fish for their supper. Most of us today are not going out into the wilderness having to fend for ourselves. We don't have to know how to hunt or fish or defend ourselves against the dangers of wild animals or find shelter from the elements while seeking to make disciples. While some missionary work may provide this training, there remain so few people who can survive under these primitive circumstances that they may be awarded a million dollars on national TV for doing so on the television show "Survivor." Instead, we now have an entirely new way of reaching people with social media. Like Jesus' disciples, we need instruction to reap the full benefits of this digital ecosystem system.

***Are You Ready to Launch into The Deep?*** Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets. (Luke 5:4).



Peter, the professional fisherman, had employed all the techniques. He had worked all night and had caught nothing, and it seemed hopeless to cast the net by day, but Jesus had given the command, and Peter obeyed.

With a greater need for technology, the current times challenge us to have the faith to launch out into new uncharted and deep waters. When social media is utilized as intended, we will discover that our nets will nearly break once we step out in faith and cast into the deep.

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***When social media is utilized the way it was intended, we will discover that when we step out in faith, like Peter, our nets will nearly break once we cast into the deep.***

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Author Lori Jagow

Lori's mission is to assist by teaching and supporting pastors with online and social media strategies to help churches grow their reach.

She is also a writer and contributing author of the best-selling "Chicken Soup for The Soul" series and Facebook Minister for a large church ministry at Pendleton Center UMC. In addition, her work has been featured on numerous media outlets promoting digital discipleship, emotional and spiritual wellbeing

## Suggested Reading

**From Social Media to Social Ministry: A Guide to Digital Discipleship** by Nona Jones

### Free Resources for Getting Started

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**Wix** is a free, user-friendly, website building platform. Wix can help our users to create amazing, professional-looking sites, which can be updated and edited with ease - no technical skills required! What's more, Wix sites are built to be search engine friendly. <https://www.wix.com/blog/2016/11/10-wix-essential-tutorials>

**For digital discipleship training, contact:** Lori Jagow [Loriannjagow@gmail.com](mailto:Loriannjagow@gmail.com)

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***Deep Launch Media, Ministry Development***

