7 LAWS OF REAL CHURCH GROWTH

Straight Talk About Building Disciples Instead of Drawing Crowds

Will Mancini

Bullet Book Series

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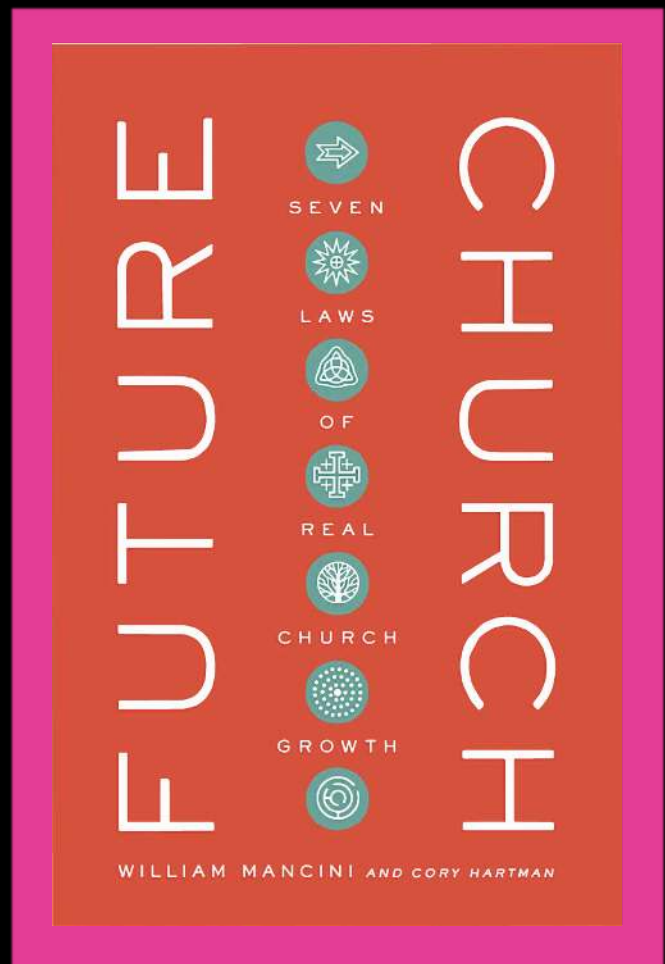.CO

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The 7 Laws of Real Church Growth are taken from the book Future Church by Will Mancini and Cory Hartman, published in 2020 by Baker Books.

Introduction

Let me guess - you're killing it with your Sunday attendance, but something still feels off. Maybe you're like the 65-year-old Presbyterian pastor I met who, despite "success" by all conventional metrics, pulled me aside and muttered, "Will, the church has got to be more than the Rotary Club with a choir." Or perhaps you're more like the 35-year-old Baptist pastor who confided, "I have to convince my people that church is more than a show on Sunday with a few hooks in the water throughout the week."

Here's the thing: Whether you're leading 50 people or 5,000, we're all facing the same crisis. The North American church has become dramatically over-programmed and under-discipled. We've mastered the art of drawing crowds while somehow missing Jesus's actual mission.

Let's be honest - you didn't sign up for this. You didn't spend years in seminary to become an entertainment director or a program manager. You wanted to make disciples who make disciples. You wanted to see lives transformed by the gospel. You wanted to lead a movement, not maintain a machine.

This short guide cuts through the clutter to give you seven fundamental laws that separate real church growth from the fake stuff we've been settling for. These aren't just principles - they're the difference between building an audience and building disciples.

Before we dive in, let me be clear: This isn't about abandoning your current church structure or blowing everything up. It's about rediscovering how to use your existing platform for actual disciple-making. Think of it as an operating system upgrade, not a complete reboot.

These seven laws come from two decades of working with churches of every size and stripe. They're battle-tested, but more importantly, they're biblical. They're what Jesus modeled, and they still work today.

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Law #1: The Law of Mission

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Law #1: Real Church Growth Starts with a Culture of Mission, Not Worship

Here's a provocative thought: What if starting with worship is actually holding back your church's growth?

Look, I get it. You've been taught that everything flows from worship. Your seminary professors quoted "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Your mentors emphasized the centrality of the Sunday service. And they weren't wrong - worship is crucial.

But here's what Jesus showed us: Mission creates worship. Not the other way around.

Think about it. When Jesus launched his ministry, he didn't start by building a worship center. He started by pursuing people. He was on mission, and that mission created worshippers. The disciples didn't start worshipping Jesus because they attended his services - they worshipped him because they saw him on mission and joined him in it.

Here's the problem: Most of our churches are built exactly backwards. We start with worship services, hoping they'll somehow produce missionaries. But what if we started with mission and let it produce worshippers?

Let me break this down practically:

Program Church (What Most of Us Do):

- *Build excellent worship services*
- *Hope people show up*
- *Try to turn attenders into missionaries*
- *Wonder why it's not working*

Church on Mission (What Jesus Did):

- *Engage people where they are*
- *Invite them into mission*
- *Watch mission create authentic worship*
- *See multiplication happen naturally*

The hard truth is this: If you start with worship, you get worship services. But if you start with mission, you get worshippers. Between them lies all the difference in the world.

This isn't theoretical. When the early church exploded across the Roman Empire in its first 300 years, it had no buildings, no professional clergy, and no worship productions. What it had was a culture of mission that turned everyday believers into disciple-makers.

The Question That Changes Everything

Instead of asking "How can we get more people to our worship service?" start asking "How can we mobilize our people for mission where they already are?"
This shift changes everything:

- *Your staff meetings become about equipping, not programming*
- *Your budget priorities flip from attraction to mission*
- *Your measure of success shifts from attendance to impact*
- *Your people move from consumers to contributors*

The Real Win

You know you're winning at the Law of Mission when your church doesn't need a building or a program to make disciples. The worship service becomes a celebration of what God is already doing through your people, not the primary tool for making it happen.

02

Law #2: The Law of Power

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Law #2: Real Church Growth Is Powered by the Gospel, Not Relevance

Let me tell you an uncomfortable story from my college years. I was that guy - the one who spent three years perfecting his evangelism pitch with Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru). I had the spiritual interest surveys, the perfectly timed follow-up visits, even a map of my dorm with rooms marked where people had accepted Christ.

And here's the kicker - I thought my skill as a communicator was what made people come to Jesus.

Sound familiar? Maybe you're not mapping conversion locations, but I bet you've got your own version:

- *The killer sermon series with perfect graphics*
- *The weekend experience that rivals a TED talk*
- *The coffee bar that would make Starbucks jealous*
- *The kids' ministry that Disney would envy*

Here's the brutal reality: We've become addicted to relevance.

The Problem with Relevance

Relevance is exhausting. It's like running on a treadmill that keeps getting faster. What was cool last year is cringe this year. What connects with millennials misses Gen Z entirely. And just when you think you've nailed it, the culture shifts again.

But here's the deeper issue: Relying on relevance shows we're actually ashamed of the gospel.

Wait, what?

Think about Romans 1:16. Paul says he's "not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."
Notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say:

- *"I'm not ashamed of my communication skills"*
- *"I'm not ashamed of our excellent programming"*
- *"I'm not ashamed of how relevant we are"*

When we rely on anything other than the gospel to draw people, we're quietly admitting we don't think the gospel is powerful enough on its own.

The Power Move

Here's what happens when you switch from relevance to gospel power:

1. *You stop trying to be cool and start being authentic*
2. *You quit worrying about your "brand" and focus on your witness*
3. *You release the pressure to be impressive and embrace being faithful*
4. *You move from performance to proclamation*

The crazy thing? When you stop trying so hard to be relevant, you often become more relevant. Why? Because authenticity is always in style.

A New Metric

Stop counting the crowd you're drawing and start counting the conversations your people are having. The gospel doesn't need a platform - it needs people who believe it enough to share it naturally.

Remember: The gospel plus nothing equals salvation. The gospel plus your coolness equals distraction.

Want to know if you're winning at the Law of Power? Ask yourself this: If all your production value disappeared tomorrow, would your church still grow? If the answer is no, you might be building on relevance instead of gospel power.

Ready for Law #3? We're building toward something big here, and I want to show you how all these pieces fit together.

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Law #3: The Law of Love

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Law #3: Real Church Growth Is Validated by Unity, Not Numbers

Let's talk about your scoreboard for a minute.

I know what you're tracking - attendance, giving, social media engagement. Maybe you're more sophisticated and you're counting small group participation, volunteer hours, or baptisms. But here's a number I bet you're not tracking: one. Yeah, you read that right. One.

Here's what Jesus prayed the night before he died: "...that they may be one as we are one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:11, 21).

Get this: Jesus said the world would believe because of our unity, not our utility. Our oneness, not our bigness.

The Math That Changes Everything

Most churches operate on this equation:

$$1 + 1 + 1 = n$$

(where n is some target number we never quite hit)

But Jesus's math looks different:

$$1 + 1 + 1 = 1$$

This isn't just cute wordplay. It's the difference between:

- *Building a crowd vs. Building a community*
- *Creating consumers vs. Creating family*
- *Managing growth vs. Manifesting love*

The Unity Paradox

Here's where it gets interesting. True unity isn't:
- *Everyone looking the same (that's uniformity)*
- *Everyone getting along (that's superficiality)*
- *Everyone agreeing on everything (that's impossible)*

Real unity is the miracle of diverse people loving each other because of Jesus despite their differences. It's what makes the world stop and take notice.
Think about it:
- *The world can copy your production value*
- *The world can match your programs*
- *The world can outspend your budget*

But the world cannot fake supernatural unity

The Hard Questions

Let's get real for a minute. What would happen if you had to choose between:
- *More people or more unity next Sunday?*
- *Better production or better relationships?*
- *Faster growth or deeper love?*

Your honest answers reveal whether you're building by the Law of Love or just playing the numbers game.

Signs You're Winning at Unity

You know you're getting this right when:
1. *Your leadership team has genuine diversity of thought and style*
2. *Conflict leads to stronger relationships, not silent departures*
3. *People stick around even when the programming isn't perfect*
4. *Your church looks more like your city than your target demographic*

The Real Validation

Here's the kicker: When you focus on unity, growth often follows. But it's different growth. Instead of gathering consumers, you're building a family. Instead of maintaining attendance, you're multiplying love.

Remember: A divided church of 1,000 has less impact than a unified church of 100. Why? Because Jesus said so.

04

Law #4: The
Law of Context

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Law #4: Real Church Growth Is Local, Not Imported

Remember that time you tried to copy that amazing idea from that conference? You know, the one where that celebrity pastor shared their silver bullet strategy? How'd that work out?

Let me guess - not great.

Here's why: You can't franchise the Holy Spirit.

The Big Box Problem

For the last 30 years, we've built churches like we've built Walmarts. Find a big piece of land, build a big box, and draw people from a 30-minute radius. The bigger the box, the bigger the draw, right?

But here's what we missed: While we were building bigger boxes, we were actually making smaller impact. Why? Because we were pulling people out of their natural mission fields to sit in our buildings.

Think about this: Every person in your church has 8-15 people they naturally interact with weekly. That's their mission field. Their neighbors, coworkers, barista, gym buddies - these are their "crowd cloud." But we've trained them to leave that mission field to come serve in our programs.

The Power of Local

Here's what happens when you get serious about context:
1. *Your People Stay Planted: Instead of pulling people out of their neighborhoods for church activities, you equip them to be the church in their neighborhoods.*
2. *Your Impact Gets Personal: Rather than trying to reach "the city," you reach actual people with names and stories.*
3. *Your Strategy Gets Specific: No more generic programs. Everything you do addresses real needs in real places.*
4. *Your Growth Gets Organic: Instead of manufacturing growth through attraction, you cultivate it through presence.*

The Local Church Revolution

What if instead of: One church of 1,000 in a big box
You had:
- *Ten churches of 100 in neighborhoods*
- *Fifty house churches of 20 in homes*
- *Hundreds of microchurches of 3-12 in coffee shops and offices*

This isn't just theory. It's already happening. Churches are getting smaller to get bigger. They're going local to go global.

The Practical Shift

Here's how to start:

1. Map where your people actually live

2. Identify natural neighborhood clusters

3. Empower leaders in those areas

4. Support organic ministry expressions

5. Stop competing with what God is already doing

The Real Win

You know you're winning at the Law of Context when:

- *Your church doesn't need to advertise because your people are visible*
- *Your impact is felt Monday through Saturday, not just Sunday*
- *Your growth comes from presence, not presentation*

Remember: Jesus didn't command us to gather crowds. He commanded us to make disciples. And disciples are made in context, not in conference centers.

05

Law #5: The Law of Development

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Law #5: Real Church Growth Is About Growing People, Not Managing Programs

Let me share a story about my friend Chuck Swindoll. When I analyzed his church's numbers, I discovered it took over 400 adults to make one new adult follower of Jesus in a year. When I told him this uncomfortable truth, Chuck could have gotten defensive. Instead, he asked, "Will, what does this mean?"

That's the difference between a program manager and a people developer.

The Training Problem

Here's a reality check. If someone wanted to learn to swim, would you:

- *Give them a weekly lecture about swimming*
- *Show them swimming videos*
- *Have them join a swimming discussion group*
- *Actually get in the pool with them*

Obviously D, right? Yet somehow when it comes to making disciples, we do A, B, and C all day long, rarely getting to D.

Your church has mastered:
- *Teaching*
- *Informing*
- *Inspiring*
- *Entertaining*

But what about:
- *Modeling*
- *Practice*
- *Evaluation*
- *Accountability*

The Hard Truth About Church Tricks

Let me ask you something uncomfortable: Are you training disciples or just teaching church tricks?

Church tricks look like:
- *Knowing when to say "Amen"*
- *Following along in your Bible*
- *Praying out loud with holy language*
- *Volunteering for programs*
- *Giving the expected percentage*

None of these are bad things. But they're not the same as being transformed into the image of Christ.

The Development Revolution

Real development happens in three areas:

1. Doctrine Development (What to Know)
- *Biblical knowledge*
- *Theological understanding*
- *Kingdom principles*

2. Skills Development (What to Do)

- *How to study Scripture*
- *How to pray effectively*
- *How to share your faith*
- *How to make disciples*

3. Reproductive Development (How to Multiply)

- *How to train others*
- *How to release authority*
- *How to multiply ministry*

Most churches are good at #1, okay at #2, and terrible at #3.

The Shift from Programs to People

Instead of asking: "How can we get more people into our programs?"
Start asking: "How can we develop more people who develop people?"

What This Looks Like:

OLD MODEL:

Sunday Service → Small Group → Ministry Team

(Each step is a program to manage)

NEW MODEL:

Watch Me → Try It → Show Me → Release You

(Each step is a person to develop)

The Real Win

You know you're winning at the Law of Development when:

- *Your leaders produce leaders, not just manage volunteers*
- *Your metrics track transformation, not just participation*
- *Your "programs" exist to facilitate relationships, not replace them*
- *Your people can make disciples without needing your permission*

Remember: Jesus spent three years developing 12 people. We spend years developing programs. Which approach changed the world?

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Law #6: The Law of Leadership

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Law #6: Real Church Growth Is Led by Calling, Not Celebrity

Let me tell you about my most uncomfortable client meeting. I was consulting with one of America's largest churches - the kind with its own highway exit. Every time I got an Uber there, the driver would make some comment about the "monstrosity." One driver was actually relieved for a few moments when he thought we were driving by the church to go somewhere else. "No, this church is my stop," I replied. When he dropped me off I told him I was the architect. We had a laugh.

Here's the thing: The size wasn't the problem. The celebrity culture was.

The Celebrity Trap

Let's be honest - you've felt the pressure:
- *The perfect Instagram feed*
- *The book deal dreams*
- *The conference speaker aspirations*
- *The podcast possibilities*

And hey, there's nothing inherently wrong with any of these. But here's the dangerous question that creeps in: Are you building your platform or empowering your people?

The Three Deadly Cs of Celebrity Leadership:

1. *Centralization (Everything flows through you)*
2. *Control (Nothing happens without you)*
3. *Credit (Everything points back to you)*

The Jesus Flip

Want to see something mind-blowing? Look at how Jesus handled authority:

- *He had all authority (Matthew 28:18)*
- *He gave it away (Luke 9:1-2)*
- *He let his disciples fail (Luke 9:40)*
- *He disappeared when crowds got too focused on him (John 6:15)*

Jesus was literally the only person who deserved a platform, and he kept giving it away.

The Authority Difference

Here's why celebrity and authority are different:
- *Celebrity can't be shared (it's a zero-sum game)*
- *Authority can be multiplied (it grows as it's given away)*

Think about it:
- *If you give someone money, you have less*
- *If you give someone authority, you lose nothing*

From Green Room to Growth Room

You know you've got a celebrity problem when:
- *You need a "green room" for a church of 50*
- *Your face is on everything*
- *You can't take vacation without attendance dropping*
- *Your volunteer teams are referred to as "your" teams*

The Leadership Shift

Instead of asking:
"How can I build my platform?"
Start asking:
"How can I release authority to others?"
Real leadership means:
1. *Finding people's calling before filling your slots*
2. *Developing leaders who develop leaders*
3. *Celebrating when people surpass you*
4. *Building systems that don't need you*

The Pastorhood of All Believers

Here's the revolutionary idea: Every believer is a pastor with a flock. They might not be on your payroll, but they have a parish - their workplace, neighborhood, gym, or coffee shop.
Your job isn't to be THE pastor, but to:
- *Identify their calling*
- *Train their capacity*
- *Release their authority*
- *Support their ministry*

The Real Win
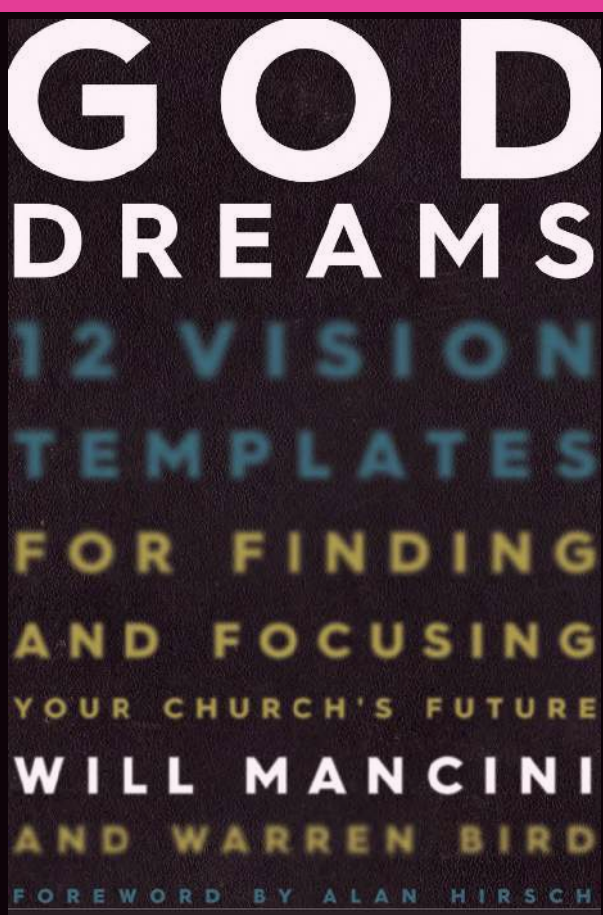
You know you're winning at the Law of Leadership when:
- *Ministry happens without you knowing about it*
- *Your absence may accelerate growth rather than stall it*
- *People follow Jesus more than they follow you*

Remember: The greatest legacy you can leave isn't how many people followed you, but how many people you developed to follow Jesus' lead.

07

Law #7: The Law of Vision

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Law #7: Real Church Growth Is Energized by Shared Imagination, Not Shared Preference

Let me tell something you already know but probably haven't named: Your church's vision statement is boring people to death.

"Love God, Love Others, Serve the World"
"Gather, Grow, Go"
"Connect, Grow, Serve"

Sound familiar? These aren't visions. They're generic mission statements that could belong to any church, anywhere, anytime.

Ready to break free from generic vision? I wrote a book called God Dreams that walks you through every step of the way. Grab it here.

The Preference Problem

Here's what happens when vision is replaced by preferences:
- *People engage based on what they like*
- *Programs survive based on who complains loudest*
- *Growth is limited to people who share the same tastes*
- *Innovation dies because "we've always done it this way"*

Three Colors of Real Vision

1. The Deep Tone: Kingdom Parables

Jesus didn't cast vision with bullet points. He told stories that captured imagination:
- *A mustard seed becoming a tree*
- *A woman searching for a coin*
- *A shepherd leaving 99 sheep*

2. The Mid Tone: Local Impact

- *Not "reach the city" but "reduce the divorce rate in our five zip codes by 50% in seven years"*
- *Not "serve others" but "ensure no middle school student in our county goes hungry"*

3. The Bright Tone: Personal Calling

Each person seeing their unique role in God's story:
- *The teacher transforming her classroom*
- *The businessman redeeming his industry*
- *The barista creating gospel conversations*

The Imagination Revolution

Instead of asking: "What do people want?"

Start asking: "What could God do here that would be impossible anywhere else?"

Real vision is:
- *Specific enough to be measurable*
- *Local enough to be meaningful*
- *Personal enough to be actionable*
- *Big enough to be impossible without God*

Breaking Vision Free

Steps to shared imagination:
1. *Stop copying other churches*
2. *Start studying your context*
3. *Name the unique problem you're called to solve*
4. *Paint a picture of a better future*
5. *Connect every person's calling to the bigger story*

The Real Win

You know you're winning at the Law of Vision when:
- *People can articulate the dream in their own words*
- *Stories of impact replace complaints about preferences*
- *Innovation flows from imagination, not imitation*
- *Your vision attracts people different from you*

Remember: God doesn't need another generic church. He needs your church to be exactly what He created it to be.

08

Moving Forward

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Run Free: Your Next Move

You've just absorbed seven laws that separate real church growth from the fake stuff. But here's the thing - knowing these laws isn't enough. You need to know how to use them. Think of it like this: Having the playbook isn't the same as running the plays.

Over the past five years, I've had the privilege of guiding over 100 churches through a paradigm shift process using these seven laws. Even after 24 years of helping churches clarify vision, what we've discovered has been game-changing. These aren't just principles to nod at - they're levers that completely transform how churches operate.

What We've Learned

Here's the brutal truth: Most churches try to apply new ideas through old systems. It's like installing the latest software on a computer from 1995. It just doesn't work.

We created something unique called the Pivvot Process. The easier part of my journey was writing the 7 Laws. The challenging aspect was developing the tools to truly integrate this into the system, focusing on the mind, heart, and emotions first, followed by the design of your church.

What's Different About the Pivvot Process?

This isn't another church growth program. It's a complete operating system overhaul that helps you:

- *Move people from preferences of church to purposes of Jesus*
- *Shift from attendance metrics to disciple-making measures*
- *Transform from program management to people development*
- *Convert from celebrity leadership to calling-based multiplication*

How We Help You Run Free

We've created three ways to partner with churches ready for real change:

1. SPRINTS

- *3-day intensive experiences*
- *Total immersion in the 7 Laws Toolbox*
- *Immediate action steps for your context*
- *Perfect for churches ready to move fast*

2. SEASONS

- *4-month collaborative journey*
- *Deep training in implementation*
- *Ongoing coaching and support*
- *Ideal for thorough transformation*

3. STAFFING

- *1-year fractional staff opportunities*
- *Embedded support for your team*
- *Consistent guidance through change*
- *Built for sustainable revolution*

This Isn't About Programs

Remember: We're not trying to add another program to your church. We're helping you Pivvot toward what Jesus started - a movement of disciples making disciples.

The Team to Get You There

I've assembled a fresh team of practitioners - not just consultants - who are living these principles in their own contexts. They're not just teaching theory; they're showing you what works in real church environments.

Your Next Step

If what you've read resonates - if you're tired of faking growth and ready for the real thing - let's talk.

Book a free 60-minute discovery session at RunFree.co
In this session, we'll:
- *Map your current reality*
- *Identify your biggest opportunities*
- *Outline potential next steps*
- *Determine if we're the right fit to help*

No pressure, no sales pitch - just honest conversation about where you are and where you could be.

The Real Question

The question isn't whether these laws work. We've seen them transform churches of every size and style. The question is: Are you ready to run free?

Your church can become what Jesus intended. Your leadership can have the impact you dreamed of. Your community can experience real transformation.

But it starts with a decision - will you keep managing programs, or will you start making disciples?

Ready to run free? Visit RunFree.co

About RunFree.co

Will Mancini founded RunFree.co to help pastors realize freedom by designing the church God called them to lead, rather then the one they inherited from a prior leader, generation or model. We provide Vision Framing for church teams, based on the 7 Laws of Real Church Growth outlined in the book Future Church, published in 2020. This Vision Framing collaborative journey is also known as the Pivvot Process. Additionally, Run Free offers one-on-one and team coaching through our Meta>Performance approach. Teams that engage in coaching consistently surprise themselves with what they can achieve together.