

The Revolutionary Disciple draws from years of experience as well as countless hours of implementation to present a comprehensive discipleship strategy for your home, work, and church. You'll benefit greatly from reading this book with your discipleship group or church staff.

Robby Gallaty, pastor and author of *Replicate*

This book is a long overdue call to us as leaders to humble ourselves before the Lord and the people we lead. The Western Church is not exempt from the self-blinding sin of pride nor its disastrous consequences. We will not be able to take ground for the kingdom until we deal with arrogance. That is Jim Putman and Chad Harrington's objective in *The Revolutionary Disciple*.

Ed Litton, pastor and president of the
Southern Baptist Convention

This incisive book offers readers different perspectives on some of the most important areas impacting the lives of Christ-followers. It is provocative and well worth the read.

Carol M. Swain, PhD, editor of *Be the People News*

The Revolutionary Disciple has me in a state of anxious introspection: my role as a talk radio host, my belief that the hardcore Left has fallen under spiritual evil that requires us to perform a counterrevolution, and my cherished identity as a Jesus follower are in a state of collision. I continue to think we need a counterrevolution, and this book lays out the way to the only lasting one. *The Revolutionary Disciple* presents the ultimate revolution, which as it happens is also the solution for our conscience and the only hope for our souls: we must come to act with the outrageous, shocking, and brave humility of Jesus Christ in all the spheres our lives cover.

Todd Herman, regular guest host for
The Rush Limbaugh Show

Undivided hearts. We want to be authentic disciples who change the world by making more disciples, but our pride prevents us from fully submitting to Jesus' lordship. Harrington and Putman expertly blend story and Scripture with practical tips. The result: wisdom for how to develop single-minded loyalty to King Jesus.

Matthew W. Bates, author of *Gospel Allegiance* and associate professor of theology at Quincy University

Jim Putman has done it again, this time in partnership with Chad Harrington. Their five spheres framework provides a breakthrough construct to guide believers into being disciples. In a straightforward, vulnerable style Jim and Chad provide a roadmap to a better place than where many of us were heading. The secret sauce—humility. It is literally breathtaking how far Jesus' brand of humility will take us in all the spheres of our lives. Who doesn't want that? Warning—while you will most definitely enjoy this book, Jim and Chad are not quite satisfied with that outcome. They are going to call us to actually give it a try. It will require something from us, but it will result in a glorious ending.

Randy Frazee, pastor and author of *His Mighty Strength*

The Revolutionary Disciple makes a much-needed case for a discipleship path that fully integrates all of our relationships and every area of our lives. You'll find it a helpful antidote to the self-centered "it's all about me and Jesus" path that so many have taken.

Larry Osborne, author and teaching pastor at North Coast Church

The Revolutionary Disciple calls us to approach all aspects of life with humility and a revolutionary-spirit disciplined by God's love and Christ's relentless sacrifice. This book is a gift the post-pandemic church needs to embrace, a practical guide challenging us to set aside our pride and walk humbly in the footsteps of Jesus

toward the church of tomorrow that longs not to be served but to serve.

Shane J. Wood, professor at Ozark Christian College and best-selling author of *Between Two Trees*

The authors issue both a warning and a guide to avoid spiritual pride and how it destroys our work and our souls. This is worth the read. They have peeled back the layers of human personality and motivation and exposed our immaterial natures. Please read it, pray through it, and then follow their advice.

Bill Hull, cofounder of The Bonhoeffer Project and author of *The Cost of Cheap Grace* and *The Discipleship Gospel*

Most Christians realize that the first step to becoming a genuine child of God is humility. What they tend to forget is that humility is also the ongoing posture required if they ever want to come close to being mature disciples of the same God who saved them. The benefits that come with being a serious disciple of Jesus are consistently blocked by our human pride. Jim Putman and Chad Harrington know all about the underbelly of pride and how it undermines so much of what we are and could become as followers of Christ. In their vital book *The Revolutionary Disciple*, they honestly and transparently take their own pride to the woodshed and in the process show all of us how to humbly put God and keep God in his rightful place in our lives—the driver's seat.

Dr. Tim Kimmel, author of *Grace-Based Parenting* and *Grace-Filled Marriage*

Great, substantive message in short, readable chapters. I would recommend it highly without knowing the authors, but because I do life closely with both and know how they live, I more than highly recommend it.

Bobby Harrington, pastor, author, and CEO of Discipleship.org and Renew.org

Nothing is more radical nor revolutionary than answering the call to follow Jesus as disciples. Here is a book that has timeless answers for being a disciple in today's world. I am happy to recommend to you *The Revolutionary Disciple* by Putman and Harrington.

Rev. Dr. Winfield Bevins, director of church planting at Asbury Seminary and author of *Marks of a Movement*

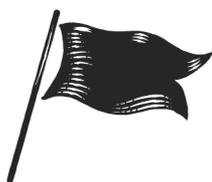
An easy-to-remember five-sphere model for humble discipleship supported by practical ways to develop humility in each sphere. Read this book if you believe Jesus' words that "those who humble themselves will be exalted." And then act like it.

Renée Webb Sproles, director of cultural engagement at Renew.org

Addressing a rarely mentioned subject, Jim and Chad tackle an absolutely critical aspect of successful discipling . . . humility. A challenging subject that demands some honest evaluation and thought by every disciple maker. An excellent resource to read, ponder, discuss, and allow God to use in our own lives. I highly recommend this book to you.

Dr. Dann Spader, author of *4 Chair Discipling* and founder of Sonlife and Concentricglobal.org

The
**REVOLUTIONARY
DISCIPLE**



Nashville, Tennessee



The Revolutionary Disciple

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To my mom, Bobbi, and my dad, Bill—a humble
couple who gave their all to the very end.

— Jim

To Nanny and Papa,
who learned to walk humbly with Christ
even with the odds against them.

— Chad

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I (Jim) would like to acknowledge the elders and staff at Real Life Ministries, both past and present. We were in it together from the beginning and are still seeking to bring praise to Jesus—the truly humble one!

I (Chad) want to thank my wife, Rachel, for giving me grace and space to work on this book. Thanks also to my dad, Bobby Harrington, and the Discipleship.org team for the invitation to write this book and partner together on this project.

Introduction

A REAL LIFE BATTLE



“Maybe it’s time to leave,” I (Jim) finally said out loud to myself. For six months, I had seriously considered leaving the church I helped start. Honestly, I never thought I’d say those words.

We had planted the church Real Life Ministries fifteen years before that point, and our church experienced rapid growth in our first ten years—some eight thousand people coming to weekend church services at our peak. More important, around 70 percent of our attendees were in some kind of intentionally relational discipleship group.

When we hit our peak, we began planting churches to reach even more people, instead of adding more buildings to our church. As a result, our people went out to plant churches and our numbers declined at the mother church. It was great for the kingdom, but painful for me because some of my closest friends and coworkers transitioned elsewhere. I was okay with some of this, but I also felt that we had focused too much on planting and not enough on reaching people in our area.

The plateau and decline were part of the reason I was discouraged. If I’m honest, I wanted to lead us to take more ground but felt as if I had to act more like a manager. I wanted us to go through what I saw as an obvious open door to launch a sports and outdoors

ministry that would meet a real need in our area. The community had finally approached us to form a partnership! Our community had far too few resources, and the people of our church were passionate to help. I was ready to take ground.

I couldn't see it then, but my pride could have potentially upended my ministry at Real Life. God had a few things yet to show me.

Discouraging and Disappointing Conflict

We have an elder-led church, so I went to the elders and said, "We're losing ground. We need to get moving and figure out how to reach more people in the community."

The elders quickly replied, "No, Jim. We need to solidify the team here and get good processes in place before we take the next hill. We can't keep growing wider; we need to go deeper right now. So we don't want to take new ground."

I pushed back hard, but they wouldn't budge. I don't mind telling you I was extremely frustrated because I believed we could solidify our team while still taking ground. *How could they be unwilling to move forward to expand our reach? Besides, wasn't I the senior pastor?* Most of these men had grown up spiritually under the ministry I had helped create. My pride started to tempt me. I told them that if we continued to decline, we might have to lay off staff.

Discouragement and disappointment marked this whole time. On the personal front, my son had just come out of drug addiction, during which I felt like I had to step back from leading the church in order to focus on my family (which I needed to do). *Now* was the time to refocus, both with my family and with our church. But again, the elders and I were not on the same page.

To make the situation more tense, a divisive staff member decided to start a church down the street with several of his volunteers from his leadership team at our church. He lied to them to get their support, which led to a lot of hurt in our church. This new church started without my knowledge while I was on a three-month sabbatical. When I returned, I was disappointed in how our executive team

and elders had handled the situation. In my mind they had been too passive, and the congregation was now confused.

The overall frustration of these individual issues caused us to have many conversations that led some of our elders to conclude I wasn't really listening to them and that I was being too intense. But they weren't really talking to me directly about it, and when I found out about their conversations, I felt hurt. *How could they go behind my back when this was absolutely contrary to the relational environment we had so often talked about and practiced cultivating?*

In the past when conflict had arisen, we had always dealt with issues directly and quickly, rather than going around the person or holding secret meetings. We didn't let conflicts go unresolved. Their actions now were the last straw—I was done. Even though I had taught thousands of people never to leave a church over this type of disagreement—but rather to fight for relationship—this, with everything else, felt like too much for me. What was revealed, from their perspective, was that I wasn't listening, and though they didn't want me to go, they were hurt too.

A Personal Conviction

It just so happened that I had to go on a pre-planned mission trip to India. I told the elders I would be praying about what to do and tell them my plan when I got back. On this trip to India, a very influential national ministry leader and I had a frank conversation after I shared my struggle.

He said, "Is your entire eldership in agreement that you should slow down and work on some issues for right now?"

"Yes, they are," I replied.

"Jim, is it possible you are making irrelevant what they said about your need to change because of *the way* they said it? Are you excusing yourself by hiding behind what you perceive they did?"

Ouch!

Later, he gave me a book he had written about spiritual pride, and let the Holy Spirit do the work. Since my room in India had no

television or internet, I had nothing to do but think and read. As I got into the book, I was undone. I realized that while I believed in being coached, being humble, and being held accountable, I really wasn't putting my beliefs into action. I realized that humility is measured by our willingness to submit to authority, even when authority doesn't always "do it right" in our view. Submitting when we don't agree is a test of our humility. I had nearly rejected the authorities God had placed over me. The Holy Spirit revealed the real problem *was with me*. Integrity is a big deal to me, so realizing I wasn't willing to do what I taught just wrecked me. My hypocrisy was clear, and my lack of humility looked me straight in the face: *How had I gotten here without even recognizing it?*

I knew little trust existed between me and the elders, so who would make the first move? Then a simple truth struck me: *humble leaders are willing to go first*. I thought of how Jesus chose to love us first and didn't wait for us to reconcile with him. The truth of 1 John 4:19 hit me like a ton of bricks: "We love because he first loved us." Jesus went first to reconcile with us, and he calls us to go first to reconcile with others as well. Despite my hurt and frustration, I went to talk with my elders.

Humble leaders are willing to go first.

A Turning Point

The elders and I had a big sit-down meeting so I could share what I had decided. I said, "First, I want to work this out with you, but I don't trust you right now, and I don't think you trust me." I shared my frustration about how they had discussions *about me* rather than *with me*. But I also sensed the Lord calling me to take the humble path, so I apologized for not creating a safe environment for them to talk to me. On the spot, we all forgave each other, and then I continued with the humble pie.

"Second, if you all believe it's the right decision to wait on taking more ground, then I will submit to you—whether or not I like it

or agree with you. I believe you all love the Lord, and you're not in it for yourselves. I'm going to stay here and work this out with you. I will submit to your authority and do the best I can to follow through with what you think the Lord is telling you." Their heart toward me after this amazed me, and my change of heart dumbfounded them. My confession, this act of humility—which honestly felt more like humiliation in the moment—ended up being a turning point for us all. It led to a massive reconciliation among our elders.

We worked it all out, and I stayed with the church. Eventually, our church even grew to the new heights I had hoped for. The devil had tempted me with pride to destroy our church. But with the help of others—and God—humility set us on a different course as God's team. I knew that strong spiritual leadership requires becoming more Christlike, but I learned in a fresh way that being Christlike includes being the first to act. We so easily put contingencies on our actions without even knowing it: *I will only act if they go first. I will do the humble thing as long as they do it too.* But this is self-seeking. We don't do the humble thing because we'll come out on top but because Jesus, our Lord and Savior, was humble. He taught us to live this way. It doesn't always work out for our immediate good, though. In Jesus' case, it led to his death. That's why true humility is rare. *That's why it's revolutionary.*

Humble Restoration

Like Jim, I (Chad) also needed help to deal with my pride. I was twenty-seven, single, and living at home for a short stint after seminary. It was a tough scenario for everyone involved! To make matters worse, I had a log sticking out of my eye, and I needed help seeing it. One particular eye-opening moment came in a conversation I had with my dad during that time.

A little background: Growing up in a pastor's home, I was very compliant. Even when I was supposed to be rebelling in my teenage years, I didn't. Then, I followed in my dad's footsteps toward ministry and went to Bible college. At that point, we had a great

relationship. In my twenties, however, we started arguing regularly. In my eyes, my dad had been perfect my whole life. Then suddenly, I saw his flaws. I was angry, and I took it out on him. I thought, *If my father has flaws, that means I have flaws too. Is it possible for us to change?* Our personal issues combined felt like too much to handle. I didn't want to deal with my flaws—or his.

As a result, our relationship became more contentious. By the time I entered my last year of seminary, our relationship was at an all-time low. What had once been a close father-son bond now hung on by a thread. In fact, I wasn't sure we would have a close relationship again. To add insult to injury, I blamed our bad relationship on him. I couldn't see my part in it. That is, until my dad put it all on the line one Thanksgiving morning.

I walked into the kitchen and saw my dad standing by the counter. We stood talking in the kitchen that morning, and tensions were high as usual. Our conversation quickly spiraled, and I spoke in pride to him. At one point, he asked whether I even wanted a relationship with him. I didn't know what to say. So he finally said, "I want to have a relationship with you, Chad, but I don't need it. I'll be fine without it. But for your sake—whatever is going on with you—you've got to figure it out, or it's going to follow you the rest of your life. You need to honor me and your mother, whether you think we deserve it or not. It's not good for you to act like this."

His words hit me hard. He was willing to let me go my own way if that's what I chose. But in that moment, the sincerity in his face convinced me that he was truly for me. He wasn't in the relationship for himself; he really wanted my good. In this case, that meant my growth in humility with him and others. He knew from life experience what would happen to my character if I didn't deal with this. It would impact every area of my life for the worse.

It was as if the scales suddenly fell from my eyes, and I could see reality. I knew my issue was deep, and while I had blamed our struggling relationship on him, the fault was with me. My attitude toward him revealed my issue. I was focused on his sometimes-rough edges,

not the good in him. I had blown his mistakes out of proportion and minimized mine.

In short, *I was proud.*

Our conversation that Thanksgiving morning started me on a different path, and thankfully, during the years that followed, our relationship healed. Now, we are truly reconciled. For us, it wasn't a dramatic reconciliation, like Jim's with the elders, but a slow one. And through it all, I experienced the goodness and peace of humble restoration. While pride threatened to follow me the rest of my life, Jesus showed me a different path: the path of humility. In that sense, my journey is like Jim's and every disciple's journey. We all have the opportunity to walk humbly with Jesus.

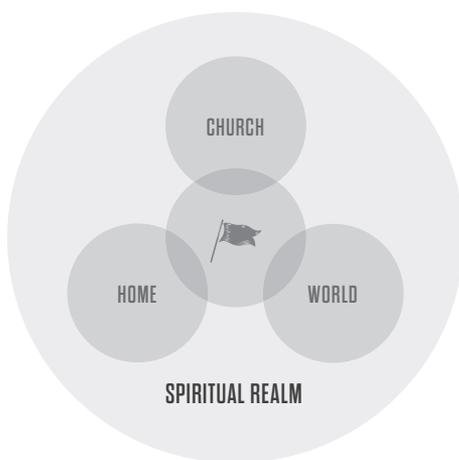
Through experiences like these, Jim and I are better able to understand pride because we've seen it deeply in ourselves. We're convinced that pride plagues the church today. Only by learning to walk humbly *in every area of life* can we experience the spiritual revolution we all seek.

*We can experience
the spiritual
revolution we seek
by walking humbly.*

The Missing Combination

We wrote this book as a guide for walking humbly with Christ in all of life. We write not as leaders who have "arrived" but as fellow travelers with you. So walk with us and learn the humility of Christ as we travel through what we call the Five Spheres of Discipleship:

1. Abiding in Christ
2. The Church Sphere
3. The Home Sphere
4. The World Sphere
5. The Spiritual Realm



These spheres cover every area of life and frame the discipleship journey for disciples of Christ. In the pages that follow, we will walk with you as we describe each sphere and unpack what humility looks like in each one. Leading up to the spheres chapters, we will share with you our understanding of what humility looks like in the first place. How can we walk humbly in the face of massive cultural changes? We deal with that in Chapter 1. Then, we'll share with you the nature of humble discipleship in Chapter 2, the heart of a revolutionary disciple in Chapter 3, and the core practices of humility in Chapter 4.

You might wonder why we're focusing on the theme of humility. We decided to tie together the five spheres with this theme because it's largely missing from discipleship conversations today. Many people have written about discipleship as well as humility, but we have not found a book, at least in recent years, that addresses both discipleship and humility together. Perhaps this book can help start necessary conversations to address this hole in discipleship discussions today. Even so, we readily admit that what we've written here is just one voice in the conversation.

We're passionate about the theme of humility because we know the intense damage pride wreaks on discipleship, and we're desperate

to see the church succeed at her core mission on earth—making disciples. We’ve seen it time and again: without humility, discipleship is dead in the water. Pride keeps would-be disciple makers passive by luring them to think they are above the call to make disciples. Pride also makes disciples in our churches “twice as much a son of hell” as their disciple makers (Matt. 23:15). But that’s only when pride takes over. While pride kills discipleship, humility makes it sing.

*While pride kills
discipleship,
humility makes
it sing.*

I (Jim) have been on a personal quest in ministry to lead our church toward maturity in Christ by making discipleship our main goal in all we do. In fact, we have also made discipleship the goal of the Relational Discipleship Network, which trains disciple makers to shift their church culture toward disciple making. I have found the five spheres language we use in this book immensely helpful among leaders.

The idea of walking humbly in these areas is not ours, though. It comes from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians as he describes following Jesus in every area of life (what we call the five spheres). As we’ll see, Ephesians provides a solid map to navigate our journey through the spheres. I (Chad) have treasured Paul’s letter to the Ephesians over the years because I believe it provides a unique message for the church that all generations need to hear. For these reasons we’ve selected Ephesians for this book because more than any other of Paul’s letters, it provides the clearest roadmap for understanding God’s heart about the church and how we are to live as God’s people within the church. As we’ll see, Paul progresses seamlessly from sphere to sphere, touching on every major area of life.

Why do we need to address this issue of humility today? Because most Christians have been converted but not discipled. Even for those who were discipled, their discipleship experience seldom goes beyond doctrinal training or information transfer. Biblical maturity in Christ, however, is something we live out in every area of our lives. Pride gets in the way, so we must walk “with all humility,” as Paul says in Ephesians 4:2 (ESV).

I (Jim) worked with my team to develop the five spheres framework from training disciples and disciple makers with leaders in our church and around the world. I have increasingly used it in recent years when I train leaders in our church and beyond because more than any other framework, it transforms the way people view *the scope of following Jesus*. Christians can easily compartmentalize their lives and limit Christ's work to certain spheres, but in Ephesians we're called *to all humility*. This means God gets total control. God wants us to love him with everything we are, in all areas of life. Through the five spheres framework, we've seen God open people's eyes in powerful ways, and we believe God can use it powerfully in your life too.

In this book, we will share with you what we've learned from other leaders, authors, and disciple makers, but most of what we've learned comes from God himself. He has formed us, and as you've already witnessed, it hasn't always been pretty. We've fallen short time and time again. So just like our lives are flawed, we know this book is not perfect. But because we anchor our words in the Word, we believe our message can reliably help you walk through the tumultuous times of today with strength.

We've written with Christian leaders in mind, but the principles of this book can help all disciples think clearly about their progress through each stage of the discipleship journey. We hope this book will help you take significant steps as a disciple of Jesus. Pride presents a real-life battle for all of us, which is not just "out there" but also in our hearts, in our families, and in our churches. If we can win on these fronts, then by God's grace we can win on all fronts.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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