

Fresh Insight

for holistic small group ministries

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Launching new groups: Ignite your church and transform your community!

By Michael Mack

In This Issue:

Reviews:

- *Swimming + Lessons*
- Grant Edwards

Featured Resource:

- *Encounter God* - Jim Egli

Feature Articles:

- *Launching New Groups*
- by Michael Mack
- *Mission Malawi!*
- By Randall Neighbour

Events & Resources:

- *2008 Making Cell Groups Work*
Pastor's Training - FREE!

T minus 3 ... T minus 2 ... T minus 1 ... I have witnessed hundreds of small group launches, and unfortunately I've seen many of them fail to launch or come crashing down soon after liftoff. What a tragedy. As a leader and a small groups minister, I've had the opportunity to learn, mostly the hard way, how to successfully launch a group.

One of the biggest mistakes I've seen leaders make when starting a new group is to rush the process. They get some training (maybe), gather a few other people, and then start to meet. Viola, they think, we have a small group!

1. Wait

A space mission begins with an intense, thorough planning process that takes years before an eventual launch. The Early Church also began with a well-devised plan. Before the disciples launched the church, Jesus instructed them to wait. Before they were to "go and make disciples of all nations," they were to wait in Jerusalem ... to wait in community with one another ... to wait for the power that God had promised. And so they obeyed and went to an upper room, and, while they waited, they prayed. That's the first step in any great launch

... to prayerfully wait for God to move.

It is not easy for us in today's fast-paced world to wait. We want to get into action—to go, do, make things happen. But in so doing, we miss God's purposes. Small groups often launch quickly, without much planning or discussion about God's vision or mission for them. Then, in a few weeks or months, they wonder why they have accomplished so little or why they are breaking apart.

What does a leader pray for while waiting?

First, acknowledge that this is God's group. God has called the leader to start this group and this leader will shepherd the group as an act of stewardship. The leader never thinks in terms of leading his or her small group, but leading God's group.

Second, ask God who He wants to be a part of this group. Scripture clearly says that God puts the parts of the body just where He wants them (1 Cor. 12:18). When Jesus put together His small group, He prayed all night before He selected them (Luke 6:12-13). Jesus never did anything

without first checking it out with His heavenly Father. Neither should we.

What does a leader do after he prays? He waits some more. He waits expectantly for God to answer his



Continued on page 6

Featured Resource



The Encounter God Weekend

By Jim Egli

Published by TOUCH Publications

The most commonly-asked question from small group leaders is “what do we do with a person who _____.” Fill in that blank with: is controlling; refuses to speak; seems to love their sinful lifestyle; is very angry; who battles an addiction; or needs more time from a leader or their group than is humanly possible.

The answer? Spiritual freedom from strongholds, of course!

In successful small group-based churches, you will find a spiritual freedom component at the beginning of their discipleship path. If you don't have one in place, you will find *Encounter God* to be an excellent place to begin.

The DVDs in the bundle teach the session for you. The *Retreat & Instructor's Guide* shows you how to set up the event for maximum participation and impact. The *Participant's Manual* contains truths from the DVD and the all-important Encounter Card which provides the participant with an inventory of past religious experiences, hurts, ungodly practices, habits with which the person still struggles.

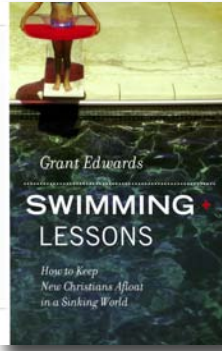
One thing is for sure. When you offer a freedom experience like the one found by using *Encounter God*, your small group members will be set free to grow in Christ and your leaders will thank you over and over and over!

[\[Click here check out the Encounter God DVD bundle\]](#)

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In Review



Swimming + Lessons
How to keep new Christians afloat in a sinking world

Grant Edwards

Specificity Publishing
206 pages

(Available through TOUCH's web site, but not available through other online places)

Randall's Review: ◆◆◆◆
(3 stars)

Lately I have been reading everything I can find on relationship-based discipleship. It's woefully missing in the American church, and I've discovered it's also missing in small group or cell group-driven American churches.

Grant Edwards pastors the Fellowship Christian Church in Springfield, Ohio. This church's small group ministry is growing primarily due to Grant's dogged determination to equip members to win and disciple others for Christ.

To that end, he wrote this easy read on discipleship, outlining four fundamentals: Prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and witnessing. He focuses on these because “they're how we get to know God better.” He goes on to say, “And when new believers come to know God well, they experience God and his love more fully. It's that first-hand experience that brings joy, peace, and motivation to keep growing. The experiential relationship becomes the reason disciples want to dig deeper and stand firm.”

In that same chapter of the book, Edwards makes a brilliant point when he writes, “The shortcoming in many discipleship programs is that what's taught is pretty much the denominational distinctives of the teaching organization. It's as much of an initiation to the denomination as a faith foundation.”

I could not agree more. What

every church needs is to help members develop a passion for relational evangelism and discipleship beyond their unique denominational distinctives.

Years ago, people found discipleship in Sunday School, but that's gone now. Small groups are wonderful for connecting with others with Christ in the midst, but small groups will not produce mature Christians without one-on-one mentoring in addition to the community experience.

Edwards compares discipling a new believer to teaching a child how to swim, which is a great analogy. First, the teacher must build a trust relationship with the student, proving they will not let them drown. Then, they must show them how to move through the water efficiently and not take in water.

I'm giving this book three stars out of four because it's an easy read (which I love). It inspired me to keep discipling people, keeping it simple. Edwards explanation of how to teach new believers to pray is one excellent example. He encourages the discipler to help the new believer pray for specific issues and help the person see how some prayers might be selfish, yielding a “no” from the Lord.

I would have given it four stars, but Edwards pushes his church's discipleship resource called *First Steps* (which I am confident is as good as his book). This isn't inherently bad, but it could lead the reader to feel that using *First Steps* is mandated by the person handing them the book, and that might not be the case.

Because of this single issue, the book's a great read for church leaders who want to develop a relational discipleship path for small group members, but it may not be the best book to give to small group members who won't be using *First Steps*.

www.smallgroupfriends.com

Tired of trying to connect with group members & leaders with Facebook or Myspace's sophomoric approach?

Grown-up social networking for the small group world ...
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What is Small Group Friends?

It's a totally free social network (similar to Myspace or Facebook, but with a far more straightforward interface) designed for small group pastors, leaders and group members. Unlike other social networks, real names are required and the site is closely monitored to ensure privacy and on topic: Small group life, leadership, and discipleship.

Will it help your small groups?

The site is an excellent place to discuss what's working in small group ministry and gain ideas. You can blog, use the forums, upload documents and forms for your leaders, all free of charge. Your small groups will have an online place to privately post prayer requests and keep a group calendar.

What about privacy?

When you join, you'll see that the site gives you control over who sees what in your own profile and the online groups you establish.

How can I win that iPhone?

Sign up for a free membership and start inviting your leaders and small group members to join. The member with a completed profile and the most friendship connections by midnight on 4/30/08 wins the iPhone. Any motivated pastor can win. Just invite your small group members and leaders to join!

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The fun, free way to connect small group members and leaders

Mission Malawi!

By Randall Neighbour, President, CCPF

[For three weeks in May, Etna and Randall Neighbour will be travelling Malawi and South Africa to train pastors, small group leaders, and small group members in local churches. As you read the following article, please pray for them and the pastors and churches in whom they will invest and consider how you can be a part of this exciting effort!]

In 1996, I travelled to South Africa with my father, who trained pastors to transition from programs to cell groups.

Within minutes of arriving at the host church where the conference would be held, I met three pastors from Malawi (top photo). Through a combination of hitchhiking, walking, and riding on the handlebars of a bicycle (locals will take you from A to B for a fee), these determined men of God made their way to South Africa from Lilongwe, Malawi for the training.

These humble men approached my father and me for prayer before the training began, asking for a fresh anointing for their church planting ministry. Their current strategy for church planting was mind-blowing to us, but effective for them. Church planting pastors moved to a remote village, served the people living there, and waited until someone became deathly ill or died. Then, they prayed hard and watched God heal the person or even raise them from the dead, resulting in widespread revival. Yes, you read that right... their church planting strategy included raising the dead! John Wimber would have been proud, even though these pastors never read his book, *Power Evangelism*.

The reason they asked for prayer was that it had been three months since someone was raised from the dead, and it was very concerning to them. They had confessed sin, fasted, prayed, and examined their methods carefully and could not determine what was wrong. So, they wanted to know if we would pray for them that God would give them a fresh



Top: Randall with original Malawian pastors. Left: Pastors being trained in 2006. Below left: Pastors enjoying a cell group meeting during the training. Bottom: Poor Malawian boys selling dried field mice as a roadside snack.



anointing for this kind of church planting.

Imagine what ran through our heads as Westerners who had never prayed over a corpse. How does one pray for another to do what we had never done before? Dad looked at me and smiled, saying, "Son, you pray for these dear brothers first!" I had just been thrown into the deep end of the pool by my dad to learn how to swim. Yikes!

I prayed for these pastors with one condition. I wanted them to pray for me as well, and give me the kind of faith they possessed. I wanted their "old anointing" since they were done with it! After a good laugh, we prayed and God knitted our hearts together in a special way as you'll read next.

Fast forward - 2006

Meeting these pastors and praying for them was something I would never forget. Ten years later, I called Charles Barry, a pastor friend in South Africa and asked for an update.

Charles told me that the Malawians went home after the conference and organized their church planting movement with my dad's 5x5 structure. They had over 200 churches in the network to date! For every five village cell groups, there is a pastor.

For every five pastors, there is an area coordinating pastor. And for every five area coordinating pastors, there's a district pastor. It's a amazing how they



Continued on page 7



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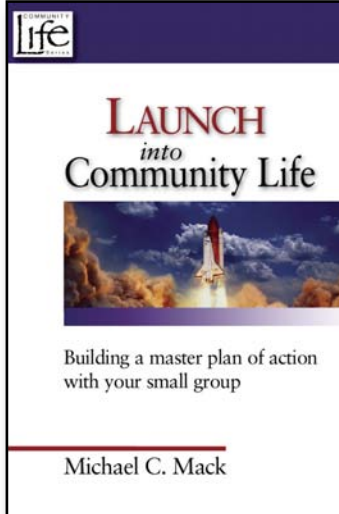
Due to the content taught, we urge senior/lead pastors to attend (and bring up to five key leaders).

Syllabi & box lunch for Day 2: \$25
 (A request for a donation will be made during the event to offset costs and support our ministry.)

Seating is limited to 30 persons.
 Register early!

More information can be found on our website in our "Training and Consulting" area or by clicking on this picture to take you there!

Launch your new groups with a team-based approach!



Michael Mack (author of *Moving Forward* and *Leading From The Heart*) has created a four-meeting curriculum book to help a new group create a master plan of action:

Week One - The Key to Success: Organization

Week Two - The "Perfect" Small Group

Week Three - Radically Real Christian Community

Week Four - Going Forward Together

By moving through this curriculum with the group, the leader creates a core team, a master plan of action; creates a vision for the group; determines a doable mission (something God-sized); and nails down lots of important stuff like who will champion prayer, evangelism, servanthood, hospitality, coordinate fun stuff for the group to do together, and more!

[\[Click here to download a sample of the book and buy your copy!\]](#)

**Call 1-800-735-5865
to buy your copy!**

Continued from page 1

prayer. He waits with spiritual eyes wide open for God to put the right people in his path. I have prayed this way on numerous occasions, and it's always incredible to see how God answers. Recently I asked God to show me who He wanted in a new turbo group I was launching. Within a week, Larry came to our church offices asking to speak to me. We had never met, but I sat down to talk with him. He told me he was looking for a church where he could get involved in a small group. Then he told he had been led to Christ in Houston by a man named Ralph Neighbour. The next day, Ralph had Larry in two small groups, and Larry has had a passion for small group ministry ever since. God had just sent me the first two people—Larry and his wife Glenda—for our turbo group. God sent six more people for that group over the next several weeks—none of whom I had ever considered on my own, and several of whom I rarely knew before. We all soon became great friends. Today, each of these people are leading their own groups.

2. Team Up

Another mistake I often see new small group leaders make is launching a group on their own. Soon, they wear down and burn out. Or they keep going but are not very effective. The best groups launch first with a nucleus of 2-4 people. These are the people the group leader has been praying for, and they are usually the ones God will send first.

The first people God sent to Jesus for his group were two sets of brothers: Simon and Andrew, and James and John. This would become Jesus' core group.

Each person in the core group can use his or her spiritual gifts and strengths and perhaps take on specific serving roles to help lead the group. This group meets several times—perhaps over meals together—and repeats step one together. They wait with one another, just like the first believers did in Jerusalem, and pray together for God's direction.

3. Decide

Together, the core group discusses why they are coming together as a group and what this group will be about. Later, they will build ownership of the mission with the rest of the group as well, but for now they simply need to know where they are going to go.

After listening to God about this, the core group discusses who else they will invite to the group. Together, they watch for whom God puts in their paths, ready to make an invitation.

4. Barbecue

Before the first "official" meeting, the core group should plan a party at which people can get to know one another and hear a little more about the plans for the group. This is a simple, fun opportunity for people to meet some new friends. At the party, the core group takes a couple minutes to let everyone know all the specifics of the first group meeting: Date, time, place, what to bring, etc. Also, of course, they tell them a little about why this group is meeting and what this group will be doing.

5. Launch!

As the new group launches, they first must *become* a group—a group that enters into community life together with a plan of action for their future. I have written a 4-session guide called *Launch into Community Life* that helps a new group launch well by building a master plan of action together. In these four sessions, the newly formed group examines the launch of the early church as described in the Book of Acts, and applies what they learn as they launch their small group.

In my book, small groups learn and experience together how to become a small group—but not just any kind of group. They will learn together how to be a group deeply devoted to radically real Christian community, just like the early church was. They will become more than just an ordinary group. They will launch with purpose and specific goals that will help them have a God-inspired vision and carry out a God-given mission.

Continued at top left, page 7

Continued from page 6

But even more than that, I wrote *Launch into Community Life* to help a group to launch as a true team that moves forward together, even through difficult circumstances. They will:

- develop crew members who know and perform their roles well.
- Everyone is important to the mission.
- have a specific destination and a flight plan to get there.
- recognize the different stages of community life and how to navigate safely through each stage.
- always be prepared to make necessary modifications to their plan as they move forward.
- continue moving forward to the next phase of their mission.

Launch into Community Life is a small groups guide that is designed as a tool for small group leaders to help shepherd their groups well in the first stages of community life. I tried to provide a lot of support for the novice leader—as well as the veteran leader launching a new group—including several sections in the front of the book that help a leader know where to start. Also, each of the four sessions includes an inspirational and often challenging devotional to help the leader tune into the lesson before leading it. Each session also includes lots of leader helps along the way, so that the leader always feels ready to lead a life-changing meeting. The secret to connecting people in life-changing Christian community is not simply to launch more small groups but to embark on a journey with God in which He launches groups through us. Groups that launch with God's vision and mission are also those that transform lives, develop new leaders, and reach more people ... just like the church in the Book of Acts.

Michael C. Mack is Life Groups Minister at Northeast Christian Church in Louisville, KY. He is the author of several other resources for small groups. He and his wife, Heidi, live in Pewee Valley with their four school-aged children. His passions include coaching youth sports and mountain biking.



Continued from page 4

took a local church's cell group oversight structure and applied it to a network of churches.

During that phone call, Charles also told me he had been to Malawi two times and they needed more training and printed resources for leader training and member discipleship. When I heard this, I instantly knew I wanted to go to Malawi, see the work, teach them what I knew, and learn about faith from them.

In May of 2006, I made my first trip. I taught 65 of the 200+ pastors an overview of Dave Earley's book, *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*. They sat on small wooden benches for hours on end, taking it in with eager enthusiasm. Many evangelists go to Malawi and preach the Gospel, but no one had made the trip to train leaders how to create holistic small groups and raise up people to lead new village groups.

We also found a couple of excellent translators for selected TOUCH resources, and they've been busy for the last few years doing revisions on the books, which will be printed this year.

What lies ahead

In just a few weeks, Etna and I will travel back to Malawi to teach pastors more about the team-based approach to leading a group, coaching skills for middle managers, and how to mentor a new believer. God provided all we needed for our airline tickets, praise the Lord!

Our desire now is to see all 200 church planters come in for the event, but we must pay for each of them to come because these pastors are too poor to pay their own way.

\$20 sponsors one pastor for a weekend of travel, food, and lodging. We've raised a little over \$1,000 for sponsorships. This only leaves \$3,000 to go, and we know God will provide for these pastors!

As you read this report and look at the pictures, I pray that God moves on your heart to sponsor a bunch of pastors personally or through your church!

How to Sponsor This Training

You don't have much time if you want to help. We

must wire the donation money to the sponsoring church by May 1st, so today is the best day to donate if you want to support this effort!

The best thing to do would be to call 800-735-5865 and let us charge your tax-deductible donation on a credit card. Or, you can mail us a check if you do it quickly. Make donations out to: *The Cell Church Planting Foundation* and send them to P.O. 7847, Houston, TX 77270.

If you would like more information about CCPF, [click here](#) or call me for details. I'm happy to visit with you about the foundation and our current focus: Mission Malawi!

Randall Neighbour serves as President of The Cell Church Planting Foundation. This foundation is a non-profit organization. 100% of donations made go into missions initiatives.

All administrative expenses (including salaries and personal travel) are covered by TOUCH Outreach Ministries and private contributions designated for these specific purposes.

Please give generously to CCPF and partner with us in global church planting!



Partner with us and sponsor the training of these Malawian pastors.

