

# Fresh Insight

for holistic small group ministries

## Case Study: It's all about Spiritual Formation

by Randall Neighbour

A few weeks ago, I was invited to do a weekend of consulting and training in an energetic, soul-winning church in the Northeast part of the country. This church has implemented a discipleship pathway (what some call *spiritual formation*) and are enjoying the results of helping new believers become fully-devoted followers of Christ. Their main objectives for bringing me to the church were: to increase participation in discipleship; help them launch new groups that were highly missional and holistic; and move the staff and congregation deeper into a transition away from building-centric programs to relational ministry. [In this issue of *Fresh Insight*, I'll address the first issue of increasing participation in discipleship and leave the others for future editions in the months to follow.]

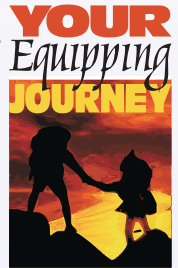
### Finishing the race

This church has named their discipleship pathway *The Journey*. The map for each part of the discipleship journey is printed in their Sunday bulletin and they bring attention to it in every service. Every new believer is taken through it by someone in their group, which is typically the person who led them to Christ.

In this church, one in four believers complete *The Journey* and move into cell group leader training. If the goal of discipleship were to simply prepare group members for cell group leadership, this church would be doing just fine.

However, the pastoral leadership of this church is not interested in making disciples just to have more cell group leaders! They want to help people become self-feeding, fully-devoted followers of Christ who live "on-mission." They know that if they aim for spiritual maturity, God will provide all the leaders they need for new cell groups. Discipleship must always primarily serve the person and the Lord, not a church structure.

As I examined their pathway, I noticed they were not launching it with a self-assessment tool. Without something like *The Journey Guide for New Believers* to help a person take stock of their life, share struggles, and discover how they can grow if they take charge of the discipleship process, completing *The Journey* probably won't be a reality for most. When I met with the lead pastor and staff members, I shared an important thought: without a point of origination and a firm grasp of the destination, a traveller will have no sense of direction or accomplishment. (Selah)



### Running the race

The other issue this church is wrestling with is that there are many long-term believers in groups who feel the church's discipleship pathway is too basic or beneath them. These folks have attended a church for many years and they think they know everything! Like so many

churches who launched groups but didn't instill the value of discipleship from the first days of group life, there are some who refuse to go through their church's discipleship process. My recommendation was not to push these pseudo-pillars of the church to complete *The Journey*, but to throw them in the deep end of the pool to motivate them. Here's how I did it . . .

On Sunday evening, I was asked to encourage the group leaders, hosts, and meeting facilitators. Instead of training them on the finer points of meeting mechanics or urging them to sign up more members to go through *The Journey*, I taught them the principles of relational evangelism printed on the back panel of *The Blessing List* poster that TOUCH produces. These principles are common-sense things about genuine friendships that most long-term Christians have forgotten. Without employing these principles, they will fail to deepen friendships with lost people—and those lost people won't be able to see Christ's activity in the lives of the believers.

The idea behind my strategy is simple: help a group reach people for Christ. Now, discipleship is important because there are baby Christians to feed. The members of the group will force themselves to get two or three weeks ahead in their church's discipleship pathway so they can give away what they just learned. Folks, this works!

### Creating self-motivated runners

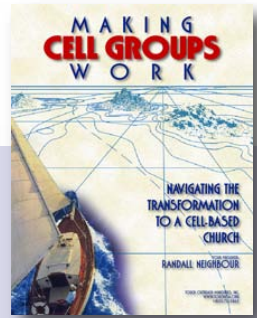
I returned home from the trip really excited. Few churches have a comprehensive disciple-making pathway for new believers that is prioritized in their church's calendar, budget, and appears each week in their bulletin as a core value of membership. As this church integrates *The Journey Guide for New Believers* into their pathway and mobilize groups for relational evangelism, they'll see big changes in their discipleship results. Far more group members will complete *The Journey* and move into leadership positions to see themselves as ministers with a ministry and a mission, not just a group member.



*Randall Neighbour is an author and the President of TOUCH Outreach Ministries. In his role, he serves as a coach for churches who want to grow missionally through holistic small groups or cell groups. If you need a knowledgeable, outside source of encouragement to develop healthy groups in your church, give him a call at 800-735-5865 for a free church health assessment!*

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