



MAKING CELL GROUPS WORK

Navigation Guide

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A Toolbox of Ideas and Strategies for
Transforming Your Church

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William A. Beckham is president of TOUCH Global, a catalytic ministry to help birth the cell church movement around the world. He speaks and consults with churches and organizations looking to embrace the cell group church model. For over 15 years, he served as a Southern Baptist church planter in Thailand. Prior to that, he pastored three churches in Texas. He has authored two books, *The Second Reformation* and *Redefining Revival*. Currently, Bill is working with Dr. Neighbour in developing the TOUCH Family. He is also the primary instructor at TOUCH Global, an internet-based training for cell church equipping. He and his wife Mary have been married for over 35 years and are watching their family grow with grandchildren.

Joel Comiskey is an internationally recognized cell group and cell church consultant. He has served as a missionary with the C&MA in Quito, Ecuador and is now planting a cell-based church in Southern California. Joel has written best-selling books including *Home Cell Group Explosion*, *How To Lead a Great Cell Group Meeting* and *Reap the Harvest*. He holds a Ph.D. from Fuller Seminary in Intercultural Studies. He teaches as an adjunct professor at several theological seminaries. Joel and his wife, Celyce, have three daughters.

Dr. Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr. has been a pioneering pastor, writer, researcher and teacher for over 50 years. He has personally tested his methods in many churches, including those in Houston and Singapore. He has

written over 30 books that are used worldwide, including *Where Do We Go From Here*, *The Shepherd's Guidebook*, and *The Arrival Kit*. He has held numerous teaching positions in seminaries and has consulted with churches on every continent. Currently, Dr. Neighbour continues to consult with churches while planting a church in Houston and starting TOUCH Glocal, a unique training center for equipping pastors and leaders in cell group church concepts and skills.

Randall Neighbour serves as the the President of TOUCH Outreach Ministries, and has been with the organization for more than ten years. Randall took the reigns of the organization from his father, Ralph, in 1995. Desiring to multiply the resources, training and ministry his father and other staff members produced through the years, he worked with key leaders from the US and pastors overseas to create sister organizations in Hong Kong, Australia, Brazil, Russia, South Korea, Germany and England. Due to this effort, many of the original published works are in numerous languages, and cell movements have been successfully resourced around the world. He has been the editor of *CellChurch Magazine* and *Cell Group Journal*. In addition to his contribution to this Navigation Guide, Randall is the author of *Are You Fishing With A Net?* and *Answers To Your Cell Group Questions*, *Community Life 101* and *The Naked Truth About Small Group Ministry*. Randall and his wife Etna (who also works for TOUCH) are the proud parents of Lady, their golden retriever, and he loves to spend his spare time on his marine aquarium or turning pens on a lathe.

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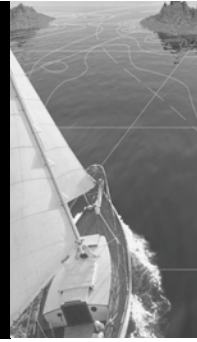
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Introduction



NAVIGATING YOUR JOURNEY

M. Scott Boren

The body of Christ is made up of many different parts, with Christ as its head. Every individual church has an organizational structure to organize these parts—some structures being better than others, of course. Many churches around the world are discovering the power of organizing the body around cell groups that provide a place for individuals to enter into community with others.

Cell groups work. They provide a context for connecting, ministering to, and mobilizing people. They open doors for friendships between people who've never had true friends. They facilitate ministry through and to ordinary people who are often overlooked in other church structures. They serve as a seedbed for mobilizing ministers and leaders, resulting in reaching more people and starting more groups. They promote an atmosphere of love, the kind of love every human being longs to receive and give. Cell groups work because God works through relationships based in this kind of love.

The journey toward making cell groups work in a church is full of excitement and dreams, the joy of fulfillment and the sense of accomplishment. There's nothing like the experience of community in a cell group. The first time I experienced it, I remember thinking that I felt like I was living in Acts 2. I sensed such a love for others. We were serving one another and seeing God move in our lives. We were challenging one another and seeing the unchurched being transformed. I couldn't wait to see the next step he would have us take.

At the same time, the journey has its fair share of challenges and disappointments, and even heartache and pain. Cell groups are about people, and whenever people are involved, there will be struggle. Cell groups are based on love. And love involves risk. The journey toward making cell groups work is not a journey without risk. Whenever a ship sets sail, it always takes a risk. Therefore, a wise ship captain will take every measure necessary to ensure that he's not taking any unnecessary risks. One way he does it this is to study the captain's logs from previous journeys.

Whenever a church sets sail toward the destination of cell groups, the pastor and leaders should follow a similar pattern. Too many churches have had too many experiences for others to make the same mistakes. The cell group strategy is no longer in its infancy. Those who are about to set sail toward cell groups, and those in the middle of their journey, can learn from the experiences of those who've gone before them. This *Navigation Guide*, and the book, *Making Cell Groups Work*, serve as captain's logs for those who are navigating the journey to making cell groups work.

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR THE JOURNEY

While writing *Making Cell Groups Work*, it became obvious that one book couldn't hold all the practical tools and resources pastors, church planters, and church leaders need. In fact, as I completed the book, I saw a need for something very different from a traditional book. As we prayed and brainstormed about what we could do, a vision for something unique took shape, a toolbox or resource kit that would provide practical tools to equip church leaders in the necessary skills for developing cell groups.

Making Cell Groups Work outlines eight stages of navigating the journey from no cell groups to an expanding cell group base. This *Navigation Guide* follows the organization pattern established by *Making Cell Groups Work*, but it has a different purpose. It fleshes out the topics introduced in the book and it provides tools, exercises, assessments, resources, and teaching outlines, so church leaders can move through the eight stages of *Making Cell Groups Work*.

HOW THESE TOOLS WERE DEVELOPED

In 1973, Dr. Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr. founded TOUCH Outreach Ministries to provide resources and consulting to churches that wanted to experiment with alternative church models that included evangelistic small groups. Dr. Neighbour is a pioneer thinker and leader whose nature is to think outside the box first. He traveled to Korea and Africa to understand the cell group churches there. He synthesized the principles he learned from those churches, and tried to communicate those principles so others might understand them and implement them. During the 1970s and 1980s, few churches in North America were ready to venture down the road of experimentation. Those that did found only marginal success

The 1990s proved quite different. With the publication of Dr. Neighbour's book, *Where Do We Go From Here?*, the vision for the cell

group based church took off in North America. Meanwhile, he was working with a large church in Singapore, and of course developing tools to help other churches implement what they were doing. When the Singapore church proved itself as a viable model, Dr. Neighbour began receiving calls from around the world to teach them how to develop cell group churches. This resulted in his developing of a four-part course entitled, *The Year of Transition*. After three revisions, it was further adapted into a new four-part course, *Advanced Cell Training*.

The editions of *The Year of Transition* and *Advanced Cell Training* had many hands working on it in addition to Dr. Neighbour: Bill Beckham, Jim Egli, Les Brickman, Twyla Brickman, and Randall Neighbour.

Randall Neighbour assumed the role of president of TOUCH Outreach Ministries upon the retirement of his father. In 1998, Randall invited me to join the TOUCH team as the Director of Research. *Advanced Cell Training* was in its final stages of development. That final form of the course has been taught around the world, including the countries of Russia, England, Australia, Korea, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, the United States, and many more.

After four years of presenting this material in the United States, we decided to ask hard questions of churches that had developed effective cell groups. This led me down a path to discover why some churches effectively transition from the old way of doing church into the new cell group way, while others fail. This research on churches large and small from many different traditions led to the development of the eight-stage process outlined in *Making Cell Groups Work*.

Even with the development of the eight-stage process, pastors still need tools to move the church through those stages. While brainstorming the various tools and resources needed for this *Navigation Guide*, the enormity of the project became overwhelming. It became quite clear that it would take years for anyone to develop such tools. Serendipitously, the years of work had already been done. I only had to put the pieces together, and the eight-stage process of *Making Cell Groups Work* provided the logical organizational rubric.

The logical starting place was the material found in *The Year of Transition* and *Advanced Cell Training*. In these manuals were practical nuggets that are still needed by pastors but had never been developed into an accessible format. Dr. Neighbour was the primary author of this material in its original form. Randall Neighbour has led the way in updating and

revising this excellent material. His passion for cell leadership and evangelism has led him to equip many around the world in the principles of cell groups that he writes about.

The second major contribution came from Bill Beckham. After traveling the globe teaching *Advanced Cell Training*, as a part of a sister organization called TOUCH Global, he began developing new training pastors could use to explain the vision of cell groups to their primary leaders. Bill has the ability to conceptualize the cell group vision and provide theological roots for it. Independently, he was writing new training material to help church leaders attain a conceptual and theological foundation for leading people into cell groups. After reviewing his material, I immediately saw the natural fit of his work within this *Navigation Guide*.

Over the last few years, Joel Comiskey has performed more research on the worldwide cell group church than anyone else. After writing, in multiple books, about eight of the most prominent cell group churches, he began to write about practical ways to implement the principles that are common to these churches.

Joel originally wrote a manuscript that aims to equip churches that have started cell groups to take those groups to the next level. After completing the draft, he set it aside to work on some other writing projects. When we started working on the *Navigation Guide*, we discovered how the practical nature of his chapters fit perfectly into the vision of it.

Upon completion of *Making Cell Groups Work*, I found many topics I wanted to address, but didn't have the room to do so. This *Navigation Guide* has provided a medium for me to fill in some of the holes left in the first work.

In addition to the primary authors, others have graciously contributed their expertise. They include Jim Egli, Lawrence Singlehurst, Michael Mack, Alan Corrick, and Daphne Kirk.

The goal of this *Navigation Guide* is to provide a multi-faceted toolbox that will guide pastors, church planters, and church leaders step-by-step through the process of making cell groups work.

NAVIGATING THE EIGHT-STAGE JOURNEY

The eight-stage process of *Making Cell Groups Work* breaks down the journey from no cell groups to an expanding cell group base into manageable parts. For many, they see the final destination of the cell group vision and become overwhelmed by its enormity. Therefore it becomes difficult to

actually work toward the vision.

Imagine you're the captain of a ship. You receive orders to sail to a new destination, the port of London. Because you and your crew have never sailed to London, you must do your homework and discover as much as you can about this new destination. But determining where you're going isn't enough. You must also determine your point of origin. For instance, a ship in the port of New York will take a much different route to London than a ship in the port of Hong Kong. Therefore, the journey of each ship will be unique, even though they have the same vision. This is called navigation.

Likewise for churches. Imagine your church is a ship and you've received orders from God to develop cell groups. How you navigate your ship toward the vision of cell groups will be different than other churches. Two churches with the same vision for developing a cell group church will each take unique journeys to that vision. One church might have a quite easy journey with a direct path and few storms. Another might have to navigate around large islands, sail through a narrow strait, and endure a rough storm.

At the same time, the basic principles of sailing all ships are the same. When a captain and crew understand the principles of navigating a ship, they can apply those principles to each unique journey. When pastors understand the principles of guiding a church toward the cell group vision, they can implement these principles in many different navigational situations. These eight stages are navigation rules for sailing the ship of your church from its point of origin today to its point of destination—an expanding cell group base.

The eight stages are designed to answer eight broad questions pastors ask about cell groups. These questions are:

1. What is my first step?
2. How do I get people on board with the vision?
3. Will cell groups work in my church?
4. How do we prepare the church for cell group success?
5. How do we start the first groups?
6. How do we experience dynamic cell group community?
7. How do we establish cell groups as a base of the church?
8. How do we mobilize groups to reach people?

Each of the eight stages addresses the eight corresponding questions:

Stage 1: Discover the Cell Group Vision

This is the place where the pastor and key leaders learn as much as possible about the cell group destination. The leaders must know where God is leading them, if the church is going to sail in the right direction.

Stage 2: Develop Vision and Strategy as a Team

A Cell Group Vision Team must be convened to work on leading people toward the destination of cell groups.

Stage 3: Assess Your Current Reality

The Cell Group Vision Team must clearly define the church's point of origin, so they can articulate a clear strategy and set specific goals that fit the unique situation of the church.

Stage 4: Prepare the Church through Transformation

It's not enough to change the structure of a church. Leading people into cell group community is about transformation of the heart. The church will need heart preparation as the structure is being changed. The two work together. Without new wine, new wineskins (structures) are not needed.

Stage 5: Launch the First Groups with Kingdom-seekers

The first four stages focus on building a strong foundation. Stage 5 focuses on starting strong groups with people committed to the Kingdom of God. The first group members should be the cream of the crop, so that future groups are built upon a strong foundation.

Stage 6: Generate Cell Group Momentum

At this point in the journey, cell groups must gain momentum in order to move from a novel idea to a broadly accepted vision. To generate this momentum, the church must focus on specific support activities that have proven to produce cell group health and growth.

Stage 7: Establish the Hidden Systems that Support Cells

To ensure the long-term health of cell groups, the church must develop support systems that are often unseen. Without these systems, cell group growth stymies, cell leaders burn out, and few new leaders are developed.

Stage 8: Expand the Cell Groups to Reach the Unreached

It's not enough to start cell groups and get them full of church members. Cell groups must be on mission if they're going to be lining up with the heart of God. In this stage, the cell groups focus on developing ways to reaching the unchurched.

One might assume these eight stages are linear in nature, that one stage must be completed before moving on to the next. In reality, they're overlapping. A church won't complete Stage 1 before moving to Stage 2, but the leaders will start Stage 1 before starting Stage 2. Therefore, how a church moves through these eight stages over time might look something like this:

Stage 1: Discover the Cell Group Vision

Stage 2: Develop Vision and Strategy as a Team

Stage 3: Assess Your Church's Current Reality

Stage 4: Prepare the Church through Transformation

Stage 5: Launch the First Group with Kingdom-Seekers

Stage 6: Generate Cell Group Momentum

Stage 7: Establish the Hidden Systems that Support Cells

Stage 8: Expand the Cell Groups to Reach the Unreached

Time

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS GUIDE

• Read *Making Cell Groups Work*

This *Navigation Guide* will make much more sense if you first attain an understanding of the eight-stage process by reading *Making Cell Groups Work*. We designed the book and the *Navigation Guide* to work together, the former pointing you in the right direction, and the latter providing practical tools for moving in that direction.

• Use What You Need

Unlike most books, we've organized this *Navigation Guide* so you can find what you need and use it. This is not a book you'll read from start to finish. We designed it for repeat uses and return references.

• Getting Started

Read the section about the four different kinds of churches below and you'll see places to get started. Once you determine the stage of your church, turn to that part of the book and work through the material that piques your interest. Here are some other general starting points:

- "Form Follows Function" page 39
- "A Cell Group Model to Fit Your Church" page 25
- The Stage 3 assessments page 199

• Evaluate Progress

The goals found in the chapter, *Leading People through Stages 4-8*, (page 227) are designed for repeated use by the Cell Group Vision Team. This evaluation instrument will help the team assess the progress toward the goal, and plan ways for moving forward toward the goal.

• Read Suggested Resources

In the margins of many chapters, you'll find other books and resources that go deeper into the topic of the chapter. Invest the time to learn as much as you can. Don't shortchange yourself and make unnecessary mistakes.

• Visit <www.cellgroupeople.com>

Click on the box that reads "Navigation Guide Resources" for additional articles on related subjects found in this Guide. In the margins of many chapters, an icon highlights specific web resources. New web articles

will be added as new insights are discovered. The username is “nautical” and the password is “navigation”.

- **Work on the Suggested Activities**

In the margins of many chapters are activities—some are personal in nature, while others are team oriented. These activities are designed to facilitate the implementation of the material, so that reading this *Guide* will prove to be more than an academic exercise.

- **Follow the Icons**

Not only does this book provide practical tools, it also points to other resources not included within its pages. The following icons will guide you through the book, highlighting tools within this *Navigation Guide* and resources outside of it:

Written Resources: Books, booklets, and articles that provide further information about the topic are highlighted in the margins.



Written Resources

Cell Group Vision Team Exercise: Some of the articles are designed specifically as exercises for the Cell Group Vision Team. Others are inserted in the margins.



**Cell Group
Vision Team Exercise**

Personal Exercise: These exercises are designed for the senior pastor or the cell group champion who’s overseeing cell group development.



Personal Exercise

Web Resource: Many additional articles, tools, and resources are available on our website <www.cellgrouppeople.com> or the special website only for users of this *Navigation Guide* <www.makingcellgroupswork.com>. When you visit the special *Navigation Guide* page. This page will be updated with new articles periodically. The username is “nautical” and the password is “navigation”.



Web Resource

Tool: These practical techniques are scattered throughout the eight stages.



Tool

FOUR KINDS CHURCHES THAT WILL BENEFIT FROM THIS NAVIGATION GUIDE

This *Guide* walks churches through the entire process of developing cell groups from start to finish. Because different churches are at different places on their journey, they require different tools and resources. This *Guide* provides such tools, no matter where a church is on its journey.

1. Churches that want to start cell groups

Churches in this category are the most natural fit for the *Navigation Guide*. Pastors and leadership should work through this book stage by stage, applying the tools that apply to their situation.

2. Church planters

Planters should also walk through the *Navigation Guide* stage by stage. There are a few sections which specifically target the church planter, but most of the tools apply to starting cell groups in an established church, as well as a church plant.

3. Churches that already have cell groups

How these churches will use the *Navigation Guide* is quite different. If you're in this category, go to the assessment in Chapter 21. Take this self-evaluation. To what degree have you completed the goals of each stage? You'll find some of the specific stage goals have been completed, while some have been skipped or only partially addressed. Work through this assessment with your team (See Stage 2 on developing a team), thanking God for what you've accomplished. Most will discover they need to go back to complete some of the goals of earlier stages that they haven't addressed. In addition, you'll find the articles by Joel Comiskey in Stage 6 and Stage 7 especially helpful to your journey.

4. Pastors who are coaching other churches through the process

For pastors of churches with growing cell group systems, they may find themselves answering many questions about cell groups from other pastors. The *Navigation Guide* is a resource for such pastors, as they can use the tool to walk pastors through the eight-stage process and feel confident they're providing excellent answers to the questions.