

PRAISE FOR

**BREAKTHROUGH
CELL GROUPS**

“I have had the privilege of being Karen Hurston’s senior pastor for quite a number of years. The Hurstons are synonymous with cell ministry. Karen is truly an expert on the subject of church growth and has twenty-first century insights that bring fresh life to cell ministry in any size church. In her new book *Breakthrough Cell Groups*, she raises the bar for ministries all over the globe to effectively reach their generation.”

JOHN KILPATRICK

Senior Pastor of Brownsville Assembly of God, Pensacola, FL

“In this book, Karen shows us how we can break through to reach today’s people through creative cell groups. Many years ago, I brought Karen to Phoenix First Assembly to help us develop and start an effective deacons’ visitation ministry, whose impact we still enjoy to this day. May the practical insights from this book help you develop an effective cell group ministry that will last until Jesus comes again!”

TOMMY BARNETT

Senior Pastor of Phoenix First Assembly

“Any Christian who yearns to know the dynamics behind the explosive growth of the first century church reads the book of Acts regularly. Any Christian who yearns to know how those dynamics can be repeated for the explosive growth of the twenty-first century church should read this book. Insights gained can be applied in any church, helping the church to grow.”

JOHN KIESCHNICK

Senior Pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Houston, TX

“For many months I have been saying that Victory Christian Center is the premiere cell church in America. I have made several trips to study the model. It endorses what I have been saying since 1974 — that every cell group MUST have a target! Please do more than read this book: put it into action. Copy their strategy and their spirit and form target groups for every cell — and see the converts flow in!”

RALPH W. NEIGHBOUR, JR.

Houston, TX

“I highly recommend Karen’s book, *Breakthrough Cell Groups*. She has found a dynamic cell system that had created groups that reached and broke through to every segment of their city. Read this book and learn how you, too, can create breakthrough cells groups.”

DR. DAVID YONGGI CHO

Senior Pastor of Seoul, Yoido Full Gospel Church

“Whether speaking or writing, Karen brings enthusiasm, energy, and excitement that is contagious. Although she could discuss theory with the best of cell church experts, she is fundamentally a practitioner. This book provides the ‘tracks to run on’ for the person who is serious about the New Testament model of authentic fellowship.”

DR. JAMES GARLOW

Senior Pastor of Skyline Wesleyan Church, San Diego, CA

“Karen Hurston gives a detailed account of the history of small group ministry at Victory Christian Center that includes the pitfalls and successes along the way. Her account of what has happened at Victory since 1983, along with a detailed description of their small group ministry is complete with sample group meetings and much more. Very comprehensive and thorough.”

TED HAGGARD

Senior Pastor of New Life Church, Colorado Springs, CO

“Karen Hurston is one of the foremost authorities on successful cell group church development. I believe this book will greatly enhance the ability of every pastor to bring his church in line with New Testament methodology of saints doing the work of the ministry, not just the ministers. I highly recommend this book.”

BISHOP KEITH A. BUTLER

Pastor of Word of Faith International Christian Center, Southfield, MI

“Karen Hurston’s description of Victory Christian Center is exciting and motivating. In careful detail, she describes their extensive network of small groups or cells and the practices that support them. The outcomes are reported in inspiring stories of people who are dramatically affected. She whets your appetite to see God’s power released to change lives for the better! Thank you, Karen, for your labor of love in documenting the still unfolding story of Victory Christian Center.”

CARL GEORGE

BREAKTHROUGH CELL GROUPS

BREAKTHROUGH CELL GROUPS

*How One American Church Reaches
People for Christ through
Creative Small Groups*

KAREN HURSTON



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<http://hurstonministries.org>

This book is dedicated to my parents,
JOHN AND MAXINE HURSTON.

*DAD, you have been an avid champion of the cell church
since 1964 when working with Dr. Cho to start his cells.
You are a marvelous mentor, a gifted minister,
a wise advisor, and the best father a girl could have.*

*MOM, you are an extraordinary example of
a godly wife, mother, and missionary.
You are my most cherished friend,
my favorite prayer partner, and the wind beneath my sails.
Remember: the best is yet ahead! I love you!*

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Billy Joe and Sharon Daugherty, thank you for the privilege of researching and writing about your great church and exciting cell system. The cell church movement owes you a debt of gratitude!

Jerry and Lynn Popenhagen, thank you for the time and effort you so graciously gave to set up interviews, answer endless e-mails, and tirelessly review and correct manuscripts. I could never have written this book without you (and Tonia)!

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Victory's dedicated staff, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for time in interviews and observation, including such people as: Bruce Edwards; Steve Worley; Margaret Hawthorne; Terry Glaze; Gary Stanislawski; Tom Dillingham; Jeremy and Carissa Baker; Jodi Hill; C.J. Jacobs; Ed Brownfield; Howard and Cheryl Shouse; Eric and Melody Castrellon; Al and Maria Leerdam; Jerry and Jan Hauser; Henry and Tonia Barlett; Don and Arlene Hanson; Edwin and Delia Miranda; Barbra Smith.

Victory's capable cell leaders and coordinators, thank you for allowing me to observe and ask questions about your groups, including: Pam

Cornwell; Nancy Mashburn; Jim DePriest; Don and Susan Lipke; Allen and Kandi Thurman; Kaye Freeman; Steve and Wendy Pogue; Bill and Michelle Cooley; Leanna Harvey; Les and Tammie Wallace.

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The many who spent endless hours to tabulate our survey, I am grateful, with deepest thanks to Patricia Towles and Barbara Lassiter.

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Dad and Mom, thank you for every chapter you read and critiqued, and for your ongoing encouragement and prayer. Dad, this book was really your idea!

Jesus, most of all, I am grateful to You. You lived and died so every good thing that happened in this book would be possible. Empower us, by Your Spirit, with the boldness and wisdom to break through and reach people for Christ through creative cell groups!

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FOREWORD

Karen lives and breathes cell ministry. She came to Victory to see what was happening with us. Her kindness and sincerity won the hearts of our staff. She asked lots of hard questions and uncovered areas we needed to improve. Her research was thorough in regards to what we are doing. God used this time to strengthen our ministry.

As you read the story of Victory's cell groups, you will sense our struggle. It has been, and continues to be, a process for us. We are pressing ahead with the cell vision. Lives are being changed one at a time. We are grateful to Karen for helping us see that what we are doing can work for others who know they need cells, but just have not found a way to do it.

Billy Joe Daugherty
Senior Pastor
Victory Christian Center
Tulsa, Oklahoma

INTRODUCTION

Join me on a written journey to one of the best-kept secrets among America's cell churches, Victory Christian Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "Victory," as its members affectionately call it, has had cells for nearly 20 years. But Victory's leaders are cautious: they wanted their cell groups to be genuinely workable before sharing with others.

What you will discover at Victory is the most evangelistic cell system you have yet seen in America. Last year, Victory's more than 850 cell groups recorded 6,149 salvations; 70% of these salvations came through Victory's Kidz Clubs (children's cells), bus route cells, and S.O.U.L. outreach youth cells. Each month during 2000, Victory's cells averaged a reported 512 salvations. By January of 2001, Victory reported more than 900 cell groups, expecting to soon march past 1,000 cell groups.

You might be like me. My mother tells me I am a lot like her, a woman of great passion. The more I studied Victory, the more excited I became about what I had learned. After months of interaction, I also grew to love Victory's people and leaders. Don't get me wrong; there are several good cell church models, each one worthy of study. But at this point, I haven't gone beyond Victory.

I'm not sure when I fell in love with Victory. Maybe it was during the faith-filled sermons of Pastor Billy Joe Daugherty, hearing his encouragement that everyone get involved in cells. Or while listening to all the inspiring workshop tapes of their first national cell conference, tapes that are the source of a few quotes found later. Maybe it was when I stood before more than 20 volunteers as we manually tabulated cell survey results, with some findings in this book. Or when I went on a "prayer journey" with the Care Pastors to one of their districts, or interviewed Jerry and Lynn Popenhagen, staff pastors and directors of the Pastoral Care Department, or the other staff I talked with.

Maybe it happened when I observed Don and Susan Lipke's zip code cell, or Allen and Kandi Thurman's business cell, or Kaye Freeman's Kidz Club, or Henry and Tonia Bartlett's Friday night international cell, or saw a Sunday Cell for inner city children, or maybe when I talked to the captain of a bus route cell.

Whenever it happened, I fell in love with Victory and remain so, for this reason above all: the staff and congregation love God, His Word, and the lost, and they use the vehicle of cells to make His love known.

Some cell church advocates might argue that Victory Christian Center is not a true cell church because certain cell methods vary from cell group to cell group. But that is the Victory way — different strokes for different folks.

To prepare for our journey, I have spent months observing, interviewing, reviewing questionnaires, and listening to training tapes to discover what makes the Victory cell groups effective. In this book, I include more details than is usual, because I want our journey to be complete. You will go with me into the offices, homes, schools, and lives of the people of Victory. My goal is to show you what goes on, so you can catch a glimpse of those things that stirred my excitement about this church.

My approach is up-close and personal, not analytical. I share lots of testimonies and many names of the people that minister through cell groups. After all, groups are about people, each with a name and a story to tell. I explain how different groups work so you can understand what they do. And finally, I chronicle a day with one of the Care Pastors to reveal an insider's point of view to their ministry.

As you go with me on this journey to Victory, what can you learn? Learn about five breakthroughs to benefit you in your cell ministry.

1. Learn one example of breakthrough cell church success in America. It is great to know about thriving cell churches in Seoul, Singapore, Abidjan, and Bogotá, yet our hearts hunger to hear more of strong cell churches in our own land.

Victory is one such church. As you read the exciting and sometimes “bumpy” journey of Victory’s cell system in chapter two, be encouraged. The church had its failures and frustrations, but continued to believe God that cell groups were their destiny. They are now one of the select churches in the world who will soon break through the 1,000 cell group mark.

2. Discover workable breakthrough principles, practices and stories you can share and teach others. Don’t go on this reading journey for yourself alone, but also for the many you lead and influence. Observe and use the steps, stories, and testimonies in the sidebars throughout. Notice Victory’s approach to leadership training in chapter five. Read the informative insights listed in chapter eight. Glean dozens of “cell church nuggets” to benefit you and those you serve.

3. Learn creative ways the cell church can break through to reach more people. Pastor Daugherty determined that Victory’s cell system would be evangelistic, and he challenges each cell to pray for and reach the lost. Through the years, Victory has blended four different group models, all with one goal: to reach even more people for Jesus.

Victory started with home-based geographical groups, inspired by Dr. David Yonggi Cho's church in Seoul, Korea. That later developed into what is termed a "5x5" system, ideally with every five groups overseen by a senior lay leader (area coordinator) and five area coordinators overseen by a pastoral staff member. Although their growth and impact was good, Victory found several pockets of people they could not reach. To touch even more lives, Victory added "target cells" to reach specific groups of people. Soon target cells met weekly in factories, businesses, schools, and workplaces around the city.

Then Daugherty decided that each department of the church should develop its own cells. Victory's leaders discovered many on-site church groups were not finding the same level of relational community, ministry, and care as in their cell groups. They adapted certain aspects of the "meta-church" model espoused by Carl George, and soon every department had cells; even on-site church groups discovered the joy of regular meetings and relationships aimed at outreach, ministry, and care.

Victory most recently began transitioning to G-12, groups of 12 or "principle of 12," a system aggressive in raising up new leaders that started in César Castellano's church in Bogotá, Colombia. Victory is now busy helping other leadership groups in its system adopt the G-12 approach, a key feature in their goal of 2,000 future cells.

As you read chapters three and four, learn about 24 of the 35 types of groups Victory uses to impact a broad range of people. Consider how you, too, can help your group and cell church break through and reach even more for our Lord!

4. Discover a new way to break through in ministry to children in the cell church. Parents are concerned for their children. Rarely have I taught in a leaders' conference where no one asked about the role of children. As you read about Victory's fast-paced and inspiring "Kidz Clubs" in chapter four, discover a dynamic new way to minister to children, from

the department that has the most off-site children's cells of any church in the nation.

5. Use this book as curriculum for a group or committee to experience breakthrough in their thinking about the cell church. At the end of each chapter are small group discussion questions, complete with an "icebreaker." If you lead a group or committee that is looking into cell groups or the cell church, material in this book might be your answer to prayer for your own breakthrough or turning point.

Curious? Intrigued? Read on and I think you might fall in love as well . . . or at least find your concept of cells broadened and your heart greatly warmed.

But a word of caution. One beauty of the cell church is that it is constantly changing in order to meet the needs of those it seeks to serve and reach more effectively. No matter what you learn or glean from this book, know that its statistics are "time dated," and will expire. As of January of 2001, Victory has 913 cells with 35 varieties of groups. Even as I was writing, Lynn Popenhagen told me that Victory will soon be reaching 1,000 groups, and that one of their beloved Care Pastor couples, Howard and Cheryl Shouse, were going to move out of state to work in a family member's church. If you go to Victory, you might find their numbers have increased, and some staff members' names have changed. But one thing will remain the same: Victory will continue to use the vehicles of groups to reach the lost, and to train and minister to believers.

So, read on, and be open to the creative possibilities in using cell groups to break through and reach every segment of your community!

BREAKTHROUGH CELL GROUPS

Victory's Cell Challenge

**VICTORY'S
EVANGELISM GROUP
PROFILE FOR YEAR 2000**

**Total salvations
through 850 cells: 6,149**

**Monthly range of salvations
through cells: 451-612**

**Monthly average of
cell salvations: 512**

**Average annual number of
salvations through each cell: 7**

**Average annual number of
salvations through each Kidz
Club, bus route cell, and
S.O.U.L. Outreach Youth Cell:
23**

**Average annual number of
salvations through other
kinds of cells: 3**

On a cool Wednesday night in Tulsa, I join 2,000 cell leaders, group members, and church attendees packed into the multi-purpose auditorium on Victory Christian Center's west campus. Sharon Daugherty has just led the ethnically diverse crowd in lively worship, and Senior Pastor Billy Joe Daugherty steps to the platform's center.

Daugherty looks at those gathered, and begins, "Victory has 900 cell groups that meet across the city of Tulsa — in homes, businesses, schools, factories, service and construction sites, the Cancer Treatment Center, downtown high rise office buildings, apartment complexes, and our own church prop-

erty. If you aren't already, it's time for you to be in a cell group!"

**OVERALL PROFILE OF
VICTORY CHRISTIAN
CENTER** (January 2001)

Year started: 1983

Founding pastor:
Billy Joe Daugherty

Number of cell groups: 930

Current membership: 11,000+

Sunday worship attendance:
7,700 (9, 10, 11:00 A.M., 6:00 P.M.)

Midweek attendance: 2,200

**Average of number weekly
attending cells in 2000:** 7,483

Highest event attendance:
21,000 (Easter, 2000)

Number on pastoral staff: 31

Number on support staff: 98

Denomination or movement:
Charismatic Word Church

Affiliation: Pentecostal and
Charismatic Churches of North
America (P.C.C.N.A.) & International
Charismatic Bible Ministries

Best known identifier: Two of
three main campuses across the
street from Oral Roberts University

Source: Bruce Edwards,
Associate Pastor

Many in the mid-week congregation nod their heads as Daugherty continues his challenge, “God has called us to go into every man’s world! If you can’t find a cell group you like, maybe it’s time for you to start one. Think about having a cell group in the neighborhood where you live, the place where you work or go to school, maybe meeting during lunch time.”

Daugherty launches into his sermon, explaining that Jesus Himself had a small group. In Luke 6:12-13, Jesus prayed all night before choosing His group, the twelve disciples. Then, in Acts 2:42-46, large groups of New Testament Christians met both in the temple and in small groups from house to house.

“That pattern continues at our church,” Daugherty stresses. “Small groups, or ‘cell groups’ as we call them at Victory, are vital. A cell is a place you can know someone personally, not just as a face in the crowd. A cell is a group of people where you can be known and cared for, and have practical needs met. In a cell you can

ask questions about God’s Word and the Christian life, and share out of your heart the deposit of God’s Word already in you.”

LIVING EXAMPLES

Daugherty's repeated "cell challenge" to his congregation has had great impact. From 1983 to 2001, Victory has grown from 29 groups to breaking the one thousand cell mark, with one of the longest continuous "group track records" of any church in America. By July of 2000, more people (7,344) attended Victory's cell groups than the estimated 7,000 who then attended Victory's four Sunday worship services. While many church members attend cells to aid them in their Christian walk, many others who attend cells are not yet involved in Victory; these cells form Victory's most effective channel for discipleship and evangelism. Even Ralph Neighbour, Jr., a leading communicator in the cell church movement, has publicly declared Victory's cell group system the most mature system he has yet seen in America.

What impact have these groups had? My first research trip to Victory, I heard Daugherty's inspiring challenge to his congregation. On my second research visit, I was overwhelmed by verbal and written testimonies from living examples of Victory's breakthrough cell groups, groups that have broken through to salvation and answered prayer.

Kerry and Angela Wilburn's workplace cell group knows that God answers prayer. Already, members have received jobs and promotions, broken

VICTORY'S CONTEXT: TULSA

Tulsa proper population:
390,437 (July 2000)

Tulsa county population:
551,141

Size of Tulsa proper:
192.3 sq. miles

Size of Tulsa county:
555 sq. miles

Number of churches in Tulsa:
500 *

Typical household:
2.4 persons

Average household income:
\$47,444

Unemployment: 2.5%

Source: Metropolitan Tulsa
Chamber of Commerce
(July 2000)

**Source: Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry*

relationships have been restored, and one small child has been healed of cancer.

In Randy Kreil's "zip code cell," David confessed that he was a cocaine addict with family problems. The group rejoiced with David as he tearfully received Jesus as his Savior, then watched his water baptism during Victory's next Wednesday evening service.

Samantha Franklin prayerfully started her workplace group in a tense government department. Fifteen people attended the first meeting, and one lady accepted Jesus right there in her office.

When Robin arrived at Victory in a wheelchair, she and her caretaker Alice were welcomed by Jerry and Shirley McCoy, leaders of a Sunday cell. "I just can't tell you how many churches we have tried and it never worked out," Alice said, with tears in her eyes. "I thank God for our Sunday cell. Robin loves to come, and so do I."

Mikael Axelsson and his wife had just moved from Sweden to Tulsa. They were lonely for friends until they discovered Todd and Charly Young's nearby zip code cell group. Axelsson declares, "Now we want to become cell leaders."

A PLACE TO BELONG AND BECOME

Victory's cell system has created a network that gives members a place where they can belong and become who God has called them to be. Consider Wendy Tyler's story. Wendy had never gone to a large church, but her husband insisted they attend Victory. The first Wednesday night they went, they both knew Victory was the church for them and became members. Even though they joined, they still questioned how they would ever find meaningful relationships in such a large church.

The second week after they joined Victory, the Tylers attended a cell group. Two weeks later, they started training to be cell group apprentices. Within six months, the Tyler family led four cells: Wendy

and her husband led a zip code cell group, their 10-year-old daughter was leading a Kidz Club, their 17-year-old foster son led a high school cell group, and their 16-year-old foster daughter had a teenagers' cell group in their home.

Radhika Mittapalli, a convert from Hinduism, also wasn't sure where she fit in Victory, and had considered leaving. Then she heard someone talk about cells, and instead started a young professionals' group. Mittapalli no longer questions whether or not she belongs in Victory. She now serves as a volunteer "young adults cell coordinator," and leads a G-12 group that has birthed five other groups, including two workplace cells. As a result of her diligence, Mittapalli has become a key leader among Victory's young single professionals.

A CELL GROUP DEFINED

What is the "Victory definition" of a cell? With few exceptions, a Victory cell group involves three or more people who meet together on a weekly basis. Whether it be a "zip code cell" that meets in a home, a workplace cell that meets in an office, a G-12 cell that focuses on leadership, a "Sunday cell" that meets in a church facility, or any of Victory's 35 varieties of cells, each cell has four purposes: 1) to evangelize and reach the lost, for this is the most important priority for any group; 2) to minister and give pastoral care to the needs of its members, both during and between meetings; 3) to disciple members in spiritual growth; and 4) to multiply when it reaches twelve people (or a number past the group's ability to provide care), in order to start other cells.

Victory's cell leaders guide their meetings by Daugherty's "five-fold vision." Groups that can take 90 minutes for a meeting, such as the home-based "zip code cells" and the G-12 groups, do all five parts of the vision. Groups more limited in their time, such as cells that meet during