

MOVING Forward

Helping your group members
embrace their leadership
potential

A book of cell agendas by Michael C. Mack

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10055 Regal Row, Suite 180
Houston, Texas 77040 USA
(713) 896-7478 • Fax (713) 896-1874

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Find us on the web at: www.cellgrouppeople.com

To visit the author's website, visit www.michaelcmack.com

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Introduction

God created us with vision to move forward. Like a river streaming down a mountain, our very nature is to intentionally flow forward in every aspect of our lives. I too have a passion to grow spiritually and to help others grow in their faith.

This passion emanates from my own faith journey. When I became a Christian sixteen years ago, God created a thirst and hunger within me to know Him and become more like Jesus. I remember digging into the Scriptures. I remember looking forward all week to my cell group meeting. It was in the environment of that community I grew best.

A few years later, my growth plateaued. I no longer had the zeal that I had as a baby Christian. It felt like a desert. I also remember breaking out of that condition when I stepped out of my comfort zone to serve by leading a group. That may have been the single greatest growth spurt in my life! Since then, I've grown consistently as I've allowed the Holy Spirit to transform me from the inside out.

Moving forward spiritually is not really complex or mysterious. A simple pattern is revealed to us in Scripture. So, how do we grow, and how do we help the members in our groups grow spiritually?

What is the goal? Christlikeness

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). We start with the understanding that the ultimate goal of all spiritual growth is to become like Christ. Everything we do is targeted toward helping people become more like Jesus! Each day, each week, each month, each year, parts of our lives are transformed so that we are more like Him. This means much more than just our actions; it means our attitudes, thoughts, character, and minds. The fruit of the Spirit quantifies this goal of "Christlikeness": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

What is the context? Authentic biblical community

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Everything that grows has an environment in

which it grows. For a microorganism, it is the culture in the bottom of a petri dish. For a plant, it is the soil. The environment for the growth of a Christian is authentic biblical community. That community can be defined by how well the “one anothers” in the New Testament are being lived out. We know the process happens best where people genuinely care for one another, spur each other on, confess their sins to each other, pray for each other, and encourage one another daily!

Who or what is the agent? The Holy Spirit

“God the Father chose you long ago, and the Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed Jesus Christ and are cleansed by his blood” (1 Peter 1:2 NLT). The agent for life change is not the cell leader or a teacher, but the Spirit of God. Your role as a cell leader is to facilitate the working of the Holy Spirit in people’s lives. The leader makes the environment right for the Spirit to work and for growth to occur. This means you must be sensitive to the Spirit, which only comes through spending time with God regularly and meaningfully.

What are the means? By the renewing of our minds

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2a). The word *renewing* means to renovate. The word *mind* means our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and will. So when we are being transformed, we — our whole being, everything we are — is being completely renovated, not just cleaned up. As a cell leader, you must see people holistically and realize God wants to use you and your group to change them from the inside out.

What is the method? Application of scripture

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The cell group puts the scriptures to use in people’s lives. We don’t just do Bible studies to become more knowledgeable; we actively use it to become equipped for every good work.

What is the time frame for spiritual growth? A lifetime process

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of

me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14). We do not become instantaneously like Christ at conversion. Parts of our character or attitude or thoughts will become like His as we grow in the midst of authentic biblical community.

This agenda book will help members of your group enter into this process. It will help your members ask some of the questions above and find the answers for themselves by looking at God’s Word and discussing the implications and applications for their lives.

Jesus said that whatever we build should be built on a strong foundation. The first two agendas in this book build that foundation, by showing what real spiritual growth is and is not and discussing the power for all spiritual growth.

In the third week’s agenda, you will discover what a real disciple is and does. In week 4, you will look at the most critical aspect of the transformational journey of discipleship by looking at the lives of some people who were transformed by Jesus. Week 5 describes the cost of living as a disciple and what is really needed to live a life for God.

The first five agendas will prepare you and your group for the last in the book, in which you will see how the process leads a transformed disciple to the essential next step in the “growing up and moving out of the house” process.

God has called cell leaders to a very strategic position in His church. At first, that job may seem overwhelming, but then we realize that He has provided everything needed to carry out the mission He has given us. We are simply managers over that which He has entrusted. As good stewards, let’s throw our lives into His vision as people fully devoted to Jesus Christ and His cause.

—Michael Mack

How to Use This Book

Devotionals

Each agenda begins with a personal devotional for you, the cell leader. The best way to use this devotional is to meditate on it each day between your meetings. For example, if your group meets on Thursday evenings, use the next week's devotional to begin your daily time with God on Friday morning, meditating on the scripture each day until the next Thursday. Ask God how the truths discovered in the scripture and devotional should shape how you facilitate the meeting and work with your group members one-on-one.

This Week

The devotional is followed by a brief overview of the agenda, goals for the meeting, and instructions. Reading this insures your group will get the point of the agenda and you'll be prepared.

Agendas

The agendas are organized around four *W*'s, which are *Welcome, Worship, Word, and Witness*. These four areas are designed to help your group experience Christ's presence, embrace His power, and understand His purposes for your lives to the point of practical application.

- **Welcome:** An opening question to get your group members involved in the weekly meeting.
- **Worship:** Practical ways for your group to enter into Christ's presence.
- **Word:** Applying God's Word to your everyday lives that results in member-to-member ministry in and out of your meetings.
- **Witness:** "Putting feet" on what you've discussed so your group can live out Christ's purposes for your lives.

In some agendas, you'll notice the order is not as it appears here. This has been done to keep it interesting for your group and set an important tone.

Leader's Notes and Tip Boxes

We've included helpful tip boxes and author's notes under many of the discussion questions to help you understand their meaning. Read through the agenda a few times in the days before your meeting to grasp the direction and outcome of each agenda. *Use the notes and tips to prepare, but don't read them aloud during your meeting.* They have been placed within the agenda to help you become a better facilitator.

Questions in the Word Section

Each numbered question in this Word section of the agenda has been written so you can simply read it to your group. To increase involvement, write each question on a slip of paper and distribute them to various members of your group to read aloud in smaller groups. If you feel these question should be rephrased to better fit your group or make the meeting more powerful, go for it!

Keep the last questions in each agenda for yourself as the main facilitator. These are ministry questions that require follow up.

Between-the-Meetings Options

Because healthy cell life is more than a once-a-week meeting, it will be important for you to look over these ideas, possibly share them with your group, and then determine which option or options will help your group grow.

If you find implementation to be especially challenging, remember these practical things are what make cell life so powerful and different from other kinds of small groups you may have led before. Work as hard at your between-the-meetings activities as you do preparing for your weekly meeting and you'll see growth in yourself and your group.

Scripture Memory Verses

Each agenda ends with a scripture verse, which we highly recommend your group members memorize. There's nothing like scripture memory to keep your mind on glorifying God! Feel free to copy this verse and pass it out to everyone as your members walk out the door after each meeting. To make it fun, offer a small prize (a candy bar, etc.) for the first person who can recite the verse to you when you next meet. When you celebrate scripture memory, everyone will join in.

At the back of this book you'll find an appendix with each week's scripture verse on a time-saving, easy-to-duplicate page. This is one area of cell life that you can easily delegate. Ask a member to duplicate the scripture verses and distribute them for you for the next six weeks as the meetings conclude.

Your Devotional

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:10-12)

Warning: You are entering Enemy Territory. You are not simply preparing to facilitate a meeting; you are deploying to war! You are on a dangerous but crucial mission.

The last thing the enemy wants is for your group to grow spiritually. He knows that Christians who are transformed into Christ's likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18) become dangerous to his kingdom and his agenda. So he will put up a fight, and he'll start with the leader. Get ready!

Satan wants to take you down. Don't forget how powerful he is, and that he commands legions of fallen angels in a cosmic battle. He has his scope on you as a leader. He is aiming at your heart, so guard it well (Proverbs 4:23). The apostle Peter instructed us to be self-controlled and alert, to resist the devil and stand firm. But we dare not do any of this on our own. As Peter reminded, God will make us strong, firm, and steadfast (1 Peter 5:8-10). That's why you must put on His armor as you prepare for battle.

Perhaps you've never considered cell group leadership as a spiritual battle, but it is a more real and critical fight than any battle ever fought in this physical world. So, leader, start your preparation for this week's meeting on your knees. Pray through Ephesians 6:10-20. Pray for each member of your group by name. Surrender yourself and commit your plans to Him. Submit to His authority and power. Acknowledge that it is His group, not yours, and don't forget to ask Him for His protection.

In what areas is Satan attacking you right now? How could that be part of his plan to diminish your impact or take you out of the battle? What's your battle plan?

This Week

The Objective

This lesson will help members of your group:

1. Understand that salvation is not the finish line, but the starting line, and that spiritual growth is normal for Christians.
2. Decide to pursue spiritual growth by being rooted, built up, and strengthened in the faith.
3. Resolve to live a life in the fullness of Christ – a life based on a biblical worldview, with biblical convictions, rather than on human tradition and the principles of this world.

The Point

Something is wrong in today's church. Check out these statistics:

- 84% of Americans claim at least a nominal Christian faith.
- 4% of American adults have a biblical worldview (which implies that 96% live their lives based on the principles of the world).
- 9% of those categorized as born-again Christians have a biblical worldview.

Many people who call themselves Christians are not disciples. They don't even call themselves disciples. Some who made a decision to follow Jesus have never been taught exactly what the term means. Many others have bought into several myths about discipleship: that it is optional, that it is automatic, that it happens the same for everyone, that it is easy, and that it takes individual effort. We need to dispel these myths and pursue life in Christ. Spiritual growth is normal for the Christian and it is the heart of the Gospel.

Preparation

1. Ask someone from your group to bring enough blank paper and pencils or pens for each member to be used in the Welcome activity.
2. Gather a small potted plant, a model of a building (a Monopoly house will work fine), a dumbbell, and a pitcher of water and glass to illustrate each of the four images from the passage you'll discuss this week.
3. Copy the scripture memory verse from Appendix C and cut the verses into strips to hand out to everyone after your meeting.

The Agenda

Worship

Ask your worship leader to begin the meeting with a simple prayer recognizing God's presence in the room, His purpose for participants to grow spiritually, and His power to transform us into the image of His Son, Jesus.

This Week is Different:

This week, you'll do the Welcome activity after a time of worship.

As you worship the Lord with your group members, surrender leadership of the group to Him and commit the meeting to Him so that He may receive the honor and glory He deserves. You are the facilitator ... Christ in your midst is the leader.

Tip:

This activity is easily delegated! Whoever facilitates the Welcome portion should share their picture first to set the tone and the level of appropriate sharing for the group.

Welcome

Icebreaker activity: 10-15 minutes.

Instructions: Give your members a blank piece of paper and a pencil or pen.

1. Ask everyone to draw out their spiritual journey, focusing on where they are *today*. Challenge them to be creative, but not to spend more than 5 minutes on this activity.

For example, a creative drawing might use a graph or chart, a series of stick figures, a road map, or a picture (such as "The Bridge" illustration). Everyone should be able to participate, regardless of how short or long their spiritual journeys. Encourage them to focus on where they are presently rather than on the past. Are they growing, stagnant, plateaued, sliding, or coasting?

2. Ask members to share their pictures.

Ask follow-up questions as you go, discovering how long individuals have been in their current stage, why they are where they are, how they got there, and what life situations or other forces have brought them to where they are now.

Week 1: The Truth About Spiritual Growth

Word

Read each myth and ask the group why it's not true. Then, read the truth about that myth and read the next one.

Myth #1: Spiritual growth is optional. If you don't feel like growing spiritually, you can just "coast" if you feel like it.

The Truth: Spiritual growth is expected for Christians. God commands us to continue to grow as His children. Stagnation has never been His plan.

Myth #2: Spiritual growth just happens. It's automatic if you are a regular attendee at church services and this group.

The Truth: Spiritual growth must be intentional. It takes personal commitment and effort. Philippians 2:12 reminds us to continue to work out our salvation.

Myth #3: Spiritual growth happens the same for everyone.

The Truth: People learn and grow differently. There is no one program or event that works for everyone.

Myth #4: Spiritual growth is easy.

The Truth: Spiritual growth can be a struggle. The apostle Paul concedes this and admits his struggle in Romans 7. The fact is, spiritual maturity is not easy, but it's not impossible either.

Myth #5: Spiritual growth takes individual effort. We have a personal relationship with Jesus, so we must spend time alone with Him in Bible study and prayer to grow.

The Truth: Only God can bring spiritual growth, through His Spirit. We do not make it happen ourselves. And we can't go it alone. We need others in authentic biblical community to help us grow.

Week 1: The Truth About Spiritual Growth

Now ask someone to read Colossians 2:6-10:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. (Colossians 2:6-10)

1. What is Paul encouraging Christians to do in this passage?

When the apostle Paul was writing to the Colossian church it was filled with false teaching, including a dependence on human wisdom and traditions. He refuted these errors throughout the letter, showing their complete inadequacy and emptiness compared to the complete adequacy and authority that Christ has in our lives.

If Jesus indeed is Lord and Master of our lives, then it follows that we will “live in Him.” Paul tells us how to live in Christ. To grow in Christ we must first be deeply rooted in Him. Second we must be built up in Him, which infers growth in knowledge and understanding. Third, we are strengthened, which implies building spiritual muscle for defending our faith and fighting the good fight for the sake of the Gospel. Finally, what God is doing inside us will begin overflowing with thankfulness, which expresses itself in love and good deeds and sharing the good news.

2. Why do you think Paul is reminding them of this?

Reread the five myths (just the myths, not the truths), and then ask your group this question:

3. Which of these myths have kept you from growing in your faith as you should?

Challenge your group members to be specific and speak only for themselves, not for believers in general or the whole group. This is a time of personal confession to the group.

Week 1: The Truth About Spiritual Growth

4. Consider your level of spiritual growth today versus one year ago. Have you grown? If so, *how* have you grown?

Once again, you're asking your members to disclose the truth about themselves. You'll find that those who lose eye contact with you and don't speak may need to be called upon to share. Allow a time of silence for people to process and hear the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

5. Paul uses four images of our growth as Christians: rooted, built up, strengthened, and overflowing. Pick one of these as an image of how you are growing right now.

Tip:

Use the potted plant, a model of a building, a dumbbell, and a pitcher of water and a glass to illustrate each of these four images from this passage.

6. "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ." What does this mean to you as you continue to live the Christian life in Him?

Expect one or possibly two answers to this question. Feel free to ask if anyone has a different take on it or does not agree completely with what's been shared thus far.

*Your Ministry Time this week
will be done during the Witness portion of your meeting.*

Witness

Read the following statement:

Joe Aldrich, a respected Christian writer, defines evangelism as "the constant and spontaneous overflow of our individual and corporate experience of Christ." Aldrich says the three specific ways that Jesus works through the activity of His children are (a) proclamation (telling our stories and sharing the Gospel message), (b) fellowship, and (c) service.

Week 1: The Truth About Spiritual Growth

1. Into whom is your life in Christ overflowing?

You are looking for names of individuals to be shared by your members. You will only have two responses. Those who voice a name or names, and those who remain silent or reveal they are not currently relating to any unbelievers.

First, take time to pray, by name, for those with whom your members are sharing, serving or fellowshiping. Then, ask the group to gather around those members who are not relating to unbelievers and pray over them. Instruct the group to pray that their eyes be opened to the people all around them who do not know the love of Christ.

2. In what specific ways do you want to extend Christ's love and forgiveness this next week?

As each person shares, ask them to pray aloud and ask God for His love, attitude, and words for that person. The rest of the group should simply agree with them in prayer.

Close your meeting with a prayer that God would allow your lives in Christ to overflow into the lives of friends, neighbors, family members, and co-workers.

Don't forget to pass out the Scripture Memory Verse and plan to do at least one of the Between-the-Meeting Options found on the next page!

Week 1: The Truth About Spiritual Growth

Between-the-Meetings Options

Option #1

Meet with any group member(s) who seemed tentative or unsure completing or discussing the "Welcome" exercise. Talk through their spiritual journeys and where they are now. Ask questions and actively listen, trying to discover how you can help them move to the next level of spiritual maturity.

Option #2

Challenge some of the more mature members in your group to visit other members who expressed a recent belief in any of the myths about spiritual growth. Ask them to reinforce the corresponding truth(s) about spiritual growth, helping them work through whatever may have caused their myths or misunderstandings.

Option #3

Send letters to several group members to encourage them in their continuing spiritual growth. Be specific about ways you see them growing. If you sense a leading to do so, cast vision for where they might grow in the future – for instance as a leader.

Option #4

Call your intern or apprentice (or another member of the group if you do not have one yet) to discuss the spiritual maturity of group members and how you can most effectively lead them to continue to grow.

Option #5

In addition to option #4, call your intern or another member and pray together for the spiritual growth of group members.

Option #6

Challenge your group members to study Galatians 5 in preparation for your next gathering. Ask them to meditate on its truths and meaning, pray through it, and journal their thoughts about it.

Week 1: The Truth About Spiritual Growth

Scripture for the Week

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” (Colossians 2:6-7)

Week 1: The Truth About Spiritual Growth

Leader's Weekly Journal

I endeavor to raise up others to become cell leaders by ...

This week, I learned the following about these group members ...

(Share your thoughts with your coach or pastor when you next meet.)