Groups of 12, 5x5, the Cho model, Purpose-driven groups, Meta-church, Free-market groups, how do you know which one works best? In 1512, Ponce De Leon traveled to the new lands of America, looking for the fountain of youth. He sold a bunch of men a bill of goods, convincing them of the existence of nectar that would restore youthful vigor.

In the church today, the search for this magic nectar has continued. Many have touted their cell group structure as the church's proverbial fountain of youth. They make claims that they have found the New Testament model, promising everything from transformation of your church to unlimited exponential growth equal to the multitudes of Abraham.

Sadly, many fall for such sales pitches because they want to see the Kingdom come. But there is no fountain of youth, no silver bullet, and no oceanfront property in Arizona. The "perfect" cell group model is nothing but a myth.

Regularly, pastors have called me saying, "Which oversight structure should I adopt? Which one is the best?" They want a predetermined oversight model that they can lay over their churches and implement with little difficulty. But the cookie cutter does not exist. The shape of the cookie never improves the taste. Incredible cookies make your mouth water because of the ingredients and how they are cooked. The ingredient that makes overseeing cell leaders work is not found in the structure. It is found in what the people in that structure do—mentoring.

The Key Cookie Ingredient

Mentoring is the spiritual principle that makes all of the best small group systems work, not the cookie shape. You cannot tell Elim Church in El Salvador that the G-12 structure works better, when their 5x5 structure has grown to reach over 120,000 people. Try telling Cho that his cookie shape does not work. We miss the point when we fall into the trap of comparing structures. In all of the structures, mentoring is what causes the system to work, whether it is based on groups of five, seven, or twelve.

Why is mentoring so crucial? Cell group leaders will care for their people in the same way that they are receiving care. If the pastor trains and appoints leaders and only talks with them when they see a problem, how do you think those leaders will care for their groups? Barring rare exceptions, they will lead their groups every week, perform their minimum duties and only address issues of concern as they arise in the groups. They won’t be actively involved in the lives of their group members because no one in leadership is being actively involved in their lives. And no matter how creatively the cookie is shaped, it won’t taste good unless the leaders...
Community Life 101:
Getting the Most Out of Your Small Group Experience by Randall G. Neighbour

Ever wish you had a small, easy to read booklet on cell life that you could put into the hands of incoming cell members or those who have joined a group and think it’s just a weekly Bible study or fellowship group?

This new, pocket-sized resource will bring your group members into a fresh understanding that cell life is a seven-day-a-week ministry!

The biblically-based content is written in a non-threatening or heavily theological way. The author did an excellent job of including numerous personal stories that drive the points home in an applicable way.

The chapters cover the following issues:

- Experiencing powerful biblical community is only found through Christ.
- A personal prayer life protects the group and its members.
- Learning to “overlap” one’s life with others in the group brings true friendship in a busy society.
- Evangelism is not a dirty word, but a Kingdom-building lifestyle changes.
- Spiritual growth requires accountability with another person and one’s group.
- The practical aspects of hosting a weekly meeting in one’s home so the evening is a success.
- Participating in each aspect of the meeting will help the whole group enter into true edification.

This booklet will make a great Christmas gift for your group members and will surely be the gift that has many happy returns! We highly recommend this new resource for all cell members.

Click here to read the first chapter of Community Life 101
Click here to purchase
1-800-735-5865

The Treasure Principle by Randy Alcorn
Multnomah Publishers
104 pp.
Reviewed by: Robbi Stokovaz

As believers interact in small group ministry, values are impacted!

The transformational discipling process is not complete without an inspection of one’s heart treasure. In His teachings, Jesus emphasized money and possessions because He knew the fundamental connection between a person’s spiritual life and how they view and handle money.

This short, upbeat book uses meaningful illustrations to help readers embrace the treasure principle that states, “You can’t take it with you—but you can send it on ahead.” Randy Alcorn offers six practical keys to understand and apply this principle of life stewardship. He urges churches to release the spiritual gift of giving and especially challenges American Christians to recognize that God abundantly blesses some so they might share with those in need.

In a personal, easy-to-read style, Alcorn points toward an eternal perspective of joyful, generous giving that pleases God and others, as well as the giver. Church leaders will find this book to be a powerful resource for inspiring and challenging group members to examine their heart values, to generously share with others, and to make Kingdom-building lifestyle changes.

Gospel and Our Culture Network
Reviewed by: Scott Boren

Over the last decade a group of theologians, missiologists, and pastors have linked arms to re-think what it means to be the church in America at the turn of the century, forming the “Gospel and Our Culture Network.” The two resources that have arisen out of their research are reviewed here.

Stormfront
by James Brownson, Inagrace Dietterich, Barry Harvey, and Charles West

This is a collaborative effort of four theologians who wrestle with the biblical meaning of being the church today. In a relatively short work, they contrast this biblical call with the demand placed on churches to provide spiritual goods and services. They define vision for the church to be on mission to provide an alternative life to the patterns of this world.

Treasures In Jars of Clay
by Lois Barrett, Walter Hobbs, Darrell Guder, George Hunsberger, Linford Stutzman, Jeff Van Kooten, Dale Ziemer

Treasures in Jars of Clay is a compilation of case studies performed on churches who have embraced the missional vision outlined in Stormfront. It provides a unique mixture of testimony, story, and theology to illustrate what it means to be a church on mission in today’s North American culture.

It is easy for churches to embrace the small group vision and even to get quite a few groups launched. But it is a far cry from developing a system of small groups that are “on mission.” Such a mission is much bigger than getting people saved. It is a mission to be a church that provides an alternative life, a different way of living, a contrast to a society that stands opposed to the life established by this world. Small groups can help promote this vision for mission, but it is not automatic. These books don't provide easy answers or ready-made models, but they do invite the reader to wrestle with the foundations which help shape an atmosphere that promotes biblical community through holistic small groups (or what we call cell groups).

A Word about our “In Review” book links to Amazon.com

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◆ How to raise up, train, and release cell leaders
◆ Developing an effective coaching system over your groups
◆ Why is “evangelism” so scary to your members? ...and what to do about it!
◆ Why a mentor-driven discipleship path is a cell church must
◆ Setting your church members free to minister: Deliverance redefined
◆ How to start youth groups
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MAKING
CELL GROUPS
WORK

Check our website for dates and locations for 2005!
This two (in some cases three-day) event for pastors and church leadership will give you the tools required to create a game plan for your church. You’ll enjoy the interaction with TOUCH staff and other pastors in a limited size group, and leave with a clear understanding of how to proceed in your unique environment.
Click here for pricing and hotel information!

Bring this workshop to your church!
Facilitator: Randall Neighbour

For more information, call Robbi at 800-735-5865 or click here.

New Resource Watch List

Community Life Series - Cell Agendas
This set of 4 cell agenda books will help your groups grow by challenging the members to discuss and apply basic truths surrounding the Great Commandment and the Great Commission (6 lessons, devotional and leader’s notes included). Release date: 2/1/05

Where Are We Now? by Bill Beckham
A new book by Bill Beckham (author of 2nd Reformation and Redefining Revival) examines the small group movement and the various models operating. Now Available from TOUCH!

Cell Church Solutions by Joel Comiskey
Joel’s latest book is filled with examples of how North American churches have made cells work. Release date: 1/1/05
Continued from page 1
are being mentored.

Until a few years ago, spiritual mentoring was an ignored topic in church circles. When I attended seminary, there were no classes on mentoring, and now there are only a handful of seminaries that teach future pastors this skill. We have assumed that if we tell people how to do something that they will know how to do it.

The fact is that we don’t learn how to “do life” in a classroom. Jesus did not teach the disciples the Kingdom of God through one-hour lectures. He demonstrated the Kingdom and then mentored them in the ways of that Kingdom. Those men then repeated the process after Jesus had ascended and the Holy Spirit filled them. While the communication gifts of teaching and preaching are crucial in the church, we cannot depend upon them as the sole means of equipping the church for ministry.

Our lecture model of teaching is a Greek concept, one based upon the eloquent communication of abstract principles to a broad range of people. The Hebraic concept of teaching has a much broader application. While it includes verbal communication to masses of people, it is focused much more on mentoring, the passing down of a spiritual heritage to those less mature in the faith. This is illustrated in Moses relationship with Joshua and Elijah’s tutelage of Elisha. Paul instructed Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim. 2:2). Without the mentoring component, the teaching will have no practical meaning. Therefore those being taught will lack the ability to implement the truths spoken.

Paul writes, “Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:15). The Greek word paidagogos, translated in the NIV as “guardian,” has no direct translation into English. It was a word used for a slave or paid attendant who had the responsibility of caring for the children as they went to and from school. They had the paid duty of overseeing their education, but not the investment of a father.

“The fact is that we don’t learn how to ‘do life’ in a classroom. Jesus did not teach the disciples the Kingdom of God through one-hour lectures.”

The paidagogos corrected the children, but many different people could play this role. Paul says here that though the Corinthian Church had thousands upon thousands of such “educational guardians,” his relationship with them was different. He had birthed something in them, becoming a father to them. Fathers set an example in life and deed for others to follow, modeling of a way of living. For this reason he called them to imitate him and not get distracted by the many Christian “educational guardians.”

Mentoring Through Every Model
Cell group leaders need someone who can speak into their lives as a spiritual mother or father. They need more than good teaching on how to lead a cell group. They need more than a good book on group dynamics. They need spiritual mentoring from someone who can impart life into them. This is what the section leaders provide for the cell leaders at Yoido Church in Korea. This is what the zone leaders do at Elim Church in El Salvador. It is also what the G-12 leaders provide for the group leaders in Columbia. Whatever the structure, mentoring is what makes it work. If you practice this ingredient, the structure will develop naturally. If you look for the cookie cutter model to copy, you might miss this key ingredient that makes the cookies worth eating.

Mentoring is the spiritual anointing that flows down through the four roles discussed in part one of this article series. The senior pastor must mentor his key leaders around him, who will mentor cell coaches, who will in turn mentor cell group leaders. After understanding the four roles of leadership in an effective cell group structure, (vision direction, cell pastoring, cell coaching, and cell implementation), and you begin to practice the key ingredient of cell oversight, (mentoring), then it is time to think about establishing an oversight structure. This will be discussed in part three of this series.

Scott Boren is a staff pastor at Hosanna! Church in Houston, Texas and the author of Making Cell Groups Work.