

PRAISE FOR GROUPS OF 12

Great book! I read it through in one sitting. Joel Comiskey has extrapolated the basic biblical truths found in the G-12 model used in the International Charismatic Mission in Bogota, Columbia and makes them user-friendly for any pastor desiring to implement any of these values in the local church.

LARRY KREIDER

International Director, DOVE Christian Fellowship International

God has graciously poured out the new wine among us, and the G-12 model is the new wineskin that will contain the coming massive harvest.

JOHN ARNOTT

Sr. Pastor, Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship

This is a masterpiece! Joel Comiskey has made a significant contribution to the cell church movement with this book.

RALPH W. NEIGHBOUR, JR.

Founder, TOUCH Outreach Ministries, Inc.

Excellent! Comiskey gives the most comprehensive and insightful explanation of G-12 I have yet heard or read. Chapter seven alone is worth its weight in gold!

KAREN HURSTON

Hurston Ministries

Once I read this book, I knew exactly what to do next with our cell ministry. It answered key questions and pointed out dangerous pitfalls to avoid. Reading this book is more informative than going to Bogota and a lot cheaper. Comiskey's thorough research and first-hand experience combine to give us a powerful book that will help countless leaders.

JIM EGLI

Director of Training, TOUCH Outreach Ministries, Inc.

Understanding the foundational principles of ICM's G-12 model would help any church reach more souls, make strong disciples of Jesus Christ and have continuous growth. Joel Comiskey clearly articulates these principles and at the same time gives insights for flexible application in the North American church. This is a refreshing and eye-opening account of the G-12 cell church model.

BILLY HORNSBY

National Director, Bethany Cell Church Network

PRAISE FOR GROUPS OF 12

Joel clarifies the G-12 principles to help both the inquiring and transitioning church. These principles will help “kick start” evangelism and multiplication in our church. Thank you, Joel, for another excellent examination of the cell-based church’s vision to fulfill the Great Commission.

DR. AL WOODS

Sr. Pastor, Door of Hope Church, Fairbanks, AK

I devoured Joel Comiskey’s new book *Groups of 12* within the first 48 hours after receiving it. Leave it to Joel to give us such a clear explanation of the G-12 model and the International Charismatic Mission, while not letting us forget that God’s blessing always has far more to do with values than structure.

JAY FIREBAUGH

Clearpoint Church, Houston, TX

Joel Comiskey has made the G-12 model easy to understand by uncovering the underlying principles that make the model so powerful for raising up and releasing leaders. This is must reading for those who are serious about multiplying leaders for the harvest.

GERALD MARTIN

Sr. Pastor, Cornerstone Church and Ministries, Harrisonburg, VA

Joel Comiskey has done the cell church movement a great service with this book. Taking advantage of his first hand exposure to some of the greatest cell churches in the world, he carefully lays out both the pros and cons, foreign and domestic, spiritual and practical aspects of the G-12 model. This book is what we have been waiting for — an honest appraisal of what God is doing in the cell world with Groups of 12.

DR. STEVE BENNETT

Sr. Pastor, Colonial Hills Baptist Church, Southaven, Mississippi

Joel Comiskey has captured for us the essential core of the G-12 model that is taking the world by storm.

BOB DAVIS

Sr. Pastor, Long Reach Church of God, Columbia, MD

GROUPS OF 12





GROUPS OF 12

A NEW WAY TO MOBILIZE LEADERS
AND MULTIPLY GROUPS
IN YOUR CHURCH

JOEL COMISKEY



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FOREWORD

When David Yonggi Cho was a young pastor, God gave him the vision of commissioning Korean believers to become leaders of cell groups. He pioneered the cell church patterns, hammering out details through many years of trial and error. A study of his church reveals an initial seven-year period when the cells doubled and doubled again. Then the ministry exploded like a rocket leaving the launch pad! At present, Pastor Cho not only pastors the largest church in the world but has also sent Korean missionaries into every corner of every continent.

This phenomenal growth came after much prayer and Spirit-given guidance. Prayer and fasting became the heartbeat of his equipping track as he inserted a zeal for harvesting into the hearts of every cell member. Those who have visited his ministry will observe the classic model of Cell, Congregation, and Celebration. It has taken 35 years to mature.

Many of us, including myself, have followed his pattern of structuring cell groups as the “Basic Christian Communities,” church in its most basic form. This Korean pattern is called in this book the “Five by Five” (5x5) strategy.

In the past few years, an alternate structure for developing cells has been created by the Holy Spirit through the servant hearts of César and Claudia Castellanos in Bogota, Colombia. They have called this structure the “Groups of Twelve.” It has been emerging year by year, led by the pastor and his “G-12.” On my two visits to Bogota, it became evident that there were many fingerprints in the design of the structure. César Fajardo, one of the Twelve, has had a major part in its development. Others in the pastor’s Group of Twelve have also contributed to the concepts and strategies now in use.

The development of Misión Carismática Internacional, reported in this book, is a report of moist, unhardened clay in the hands of Spirit-filled potters. It is now considered to be the second largest cell church in the world!

The “Principle of Twelve” has been adopted by churches everywhere. You will return to this book many times to reflect on the brilliant report made by Dr. Joel Comiskey. Pray God’s richest blessings to be showered upon César and Claudia Castellanos, entrusted with this concept. Pray also about how you will apply the principles presented in this book to your own ministry.

Dr. Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although my name stands alone on the cover of the book, I was not alone in writing it. The success of this book is because of the significant contributions of certain people. First and foremost, I want to thank my wife, Celyce, for her support, revisions, and encouragement. Second, I want to thank my editor, Scott Boren, who carefully guided the development of this book by taking a messy manuscript in its early stages and giving it order. Scott's expert guidance shaped this book in a significant way. Jim Egli provided foundational research on the G-12 model and freely shared it with me. I also want to thank the entire staff at the International Charismatic Mission and especially Luis Salas for helping me understand the G-12 model. Finally, I want to thank each pastor listed in chapters 10-11 for sending me summaries of how they adapted the G-12 model to their own context.



INTRODUCTION

The Groups of 12 movement (G-12) is spreading across the world like a wildfire. After implementing the G-12 model, the International Charismatic Mission in Bogota, Colombia (ICM), the founding church of this strategy, mushroomed from 70 small groups to 20,000 small groups in just eight years. Four of the largest cell churches in the world are now G-12 churches.¹ Reports come from India about churches there being transformed by this simple strategy. Since Bethany World Prayer Center, the most prominent cell church in the U.S., decided to adopt this model, many other North American churches have followed its lead. Churches want to understand the G-12 model, and more importantly, how to apply it to their unique situations.

One pastor traveled to ICM to “catch the fire” and learn about the G-12 model, and God transformed him during his time there. He witnessed healings, watched 18,000 people gather for a Saturday

youth service, and grasped ICM's vision to reach a city. This pastor discovered how the 20,000 cells cared for the cell leaders and produced the amazing growth. He decided that his own church should follow the same route.

Like many before him, he went back to his church, desiring to implement this new strategy. Soon, however, he became discouraged. His congregation lacked the spiritual dynamics found at ICM. The church's prayer base was weak, and few people understood the need for small group multiplication. The six ingrown cells at his church resisted the thought of giving birth to new cells. His enthusiasm dwindled as he discovered that his circumstance differed from that of ICM.

Many return from Bogota pumped-up because of the revival atmosphere of ICM. They desire to copy the entire G-12 model but fall short by not discerning between transferable G-12 principles and those that are culturally bound.

Churches are also at a disadvantage when they try to implement the G-12 model because so little is published about it. Since so little is known about ICM, people travel to Bogota to understand the ICM system. This book can save you the trip.

DEFINING G-12

What is this G-12 model? Dr. Ralph Neighbour states, "The G-12 model is confusingly simple."² Is it a new focus on discipleship? Another cell system? An emphasis on homogeneous groups? The following chapters will define the G-12 model and remove the shroud of mystery that hangs over it. But before delving into the inner workings of the G-12 system, some initial observations are necessary.

First, the G-12 model does not effectively replace the cell church system. Rather, it can improve your cell church system by increasing

your capability to develop leaders and multiply groups. It can fine-tune your cell church system, but it will not replace the cells. César Castellanos, the founder of ICM declares:

The International Charismatic Mission has grown so rapidly and has impacted the world because of our cell structure. I have arrived at the conclusion, after becoming acquainted with other ministries in different countries, that the best method for a church to grow is through home cell groups. We left behind all of our programs that absorbed so much of our time (and produced few results), and we established only one program: cell ministry.³

The G-12 model (or a combination thereof) provides a way to fine-tune your cell church for growth. It requires less structure and flows nicely from the grass roots level. It won't, however, make you a cell church.

Second, the G-12 model preserves the fruit of evangelism. Castellanos says, "The G-12 model is not for your church to grow. What gives the growth is the evangelistic work. The G-12 model is God's strategy to conserve the fruit."⁴ The key, according to César, is evangelism. Many people want to learn the G-12 model, but they're not winning the multitude. The advice of César Castellanos is to first win the multitude and then preserve the fruit through the G-12 model.⁵

Third, the crowning principle of the G-12 model is that it views every member as a potential cell leader. All cell leaders at ICM seek to transform their cell members into cell leaders. The G-12 model is essentially a leadership multiplication strategy.

Fourth, the G-12 model will fine-tune and improve your pastoral care for cell leaders. For years, the cell church primarily used the Jethro

model (5x5 structure) to care for cell leadership. The G-12 model has given the cell church a new alternative, a new way to look at cell church ministry.

The G-12 model holds every cell leader accountable to a higher authority while taking responsibility for younger, emerging cell leaders. César Castellanos said, “This model totally eliminates the problem of care because everyone is cared for by a leader of 12.”⁶

LOOKING BENEATH THE OBVIOUS

I visited ICM in 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999. Each visit was nearly a year apart, so I was able to discern significant progression in the G-12 model and analyze it over time. My original research was part of my Ph.D. degree at Fuller Theological Seminary. I have analyzed its material (mostly in Spanish), attended its meetings, and interviewed its leaders.⁷

Because ICM is constantly changing as it follows the Spirit of God, I had to dig below the surface structure in order to delineate vital G-12 principles. After you understand these principles, you should apply them to your own situation.

This book is far more than a theoretical exercise. I serve as one of the pastors in a cell church called the Republic Church in Quito, Ecuador. My senior pastor, Porfirio Ludeña, visited ICM on two different occasions. He patiently guided our cell church in the transition to the G-12 model. We, as a pastoral team, wrestled with applying G-12 principles in our context. More importantly, we had to determine which principles we wanted to apply in our church. At this point, we have fully transitioned to the G-12 model. But our G-12 strategy is different from the Bogota model. I predict that your transition will also result in a unique model. God desires each cell church to use its creativity.

While this book will explain the original G-12 model of the International Charismatic Mission, it does not endorse all aspects of that model. You don't have to be "charismatic" nor in agreement with ICM to benefit from the G-12 principles. Instead, a clear understanding of ICM should guide you to the crucial principles that you can apply in your church.

IS THE G-12 FOR YOU?

If you desire to view each person as a potential leader or want to know how to integrate each person into your training system, the G-12 model will provide the missing link. Churches throughout the world are discovering that G-12 principles provide effective discipleship and pastoral care for new cell leaders. You don't have to apply the entire structure of ICM to benefit from the G-12 principles.

If you're just not quite sure about the G-12 model, by the time you finish this book you will understand the fundamental G-12 principles and should know which ones apply to your particular situation.



BUILDING ON A VISION

Some problems are wonderful — like church growth so rapid you must rent a football stadium to contain it. What about renting the stadium and then immediately needing two services? Can you imagine a Saturday night youth service drawing 18,000 people each week?

Welcome to the International Charismatic Mission where prayer and a revival atmosphere are a way of life. Begun with eight people meeting in a living room, it has captured the world's attention because of the powerful work of God's Holy Spirit.

ICM is giving the world a new perspective on Colombia, a country better known for drug peddling and guerrilla warfare than rapid church growth. About Colombia, the world's chief exporter of cocaine, Patrick Johnstone writes, "Corruption, blackmail, kidnapping, assassination and revenge murders have brutalized society."¹

Yet where sin abounds, God manifests His amazing grace. Pastor Castellanos stood against the tide of sin and grasped a different future

for his country. People are now hearing about Colombia in a positive light. They can't talk enough about God's amazing work through the G-12 groups. Christ is conquering the darkness of sin and Satan and showing the rest of the world how dynamic growth happens.

TESTIMONY OF CÉSAR CASTELLANOS

César Castellanos was the eighth child in a family of 12. Due to his father's untimely death, his mother raised the entire family.² César, like many teenagers, experimented with drugs and sought answers apart from Jesus Christ.

As a university student in 1972, he became annoyed with his philosophy professor, who continually attacked the Christian faith. With the Bible in one hand, this professor dared anyone to prove him wrong. César accepted the challenge, although not a believer at the time. God in His sovereignty used an atheistic professor to stir him to study the Bible.³

As César began to read Genesis, God revealed Himself. God's presence flooded the room with a brilliant light, and César submitted himself to Jesus Christ. Christ transformed César freeing him from drugs and alcohol. The Holy Spirit filled the void, granting him a hunger for God's Word.⁴

DISAPPOINTMENT IN MINISTRY

Filled with a burning passion for Jesus Christ, Castellanos began proclaiming the gospel message on the streets of Colombia. Like John Wesley and George Whitefield, he carried his message to the masses. Castellanos also preached from pulpits and for nine years pastored several small churches among a variety of denominations. No extraordinary success marked those early years of ministry. Like Moses,

God was preparing Castellanos on the backside of the desert.

He grew frustrated by the lack of commitment and discipleship among his new converts. People received Christ, entered the church and quickly escaped through the back door. The traditional methods of church growth brought little lasting fruit.

God brought him to a breaking point.⁵ Under the urging of the Holy Spirit, he resigned from the pastorate to wait on God and determine His will. “Lord, I’m not going to commit myself to anyone until you speak to me. I need to know what You want me to do,” he said.⁶ And God spoke.

GOD SPEAKS

“What kind of church would you like to pastor?” God asked Castellanos in 1983. He pictured a church of 120, the size of his largest church. Castellanos explains:

I was striving to expand that number in my mind, but I couldn’t. So I began to look at the sand of the seashore. As I looked at it, each grain of sand became a person, and I began to see hundreds of thousands of people. Then the Lord said: “That and much more I will give you, if you are in my perfect will.”⁷

Encouraged by the vision, Castellanos started another church, this time in his living room. He named his church the “International *Charismatic* Mission” as an evangelistic strategy to reach Catholics. In the 1980s, the Colombian Catholic majority (97%) rejected the name “Evangelical” but was more open to the term “Charismatic.”

This time Pastor César began with God’s anointing, vision and commitment to making clear goals. His first goal was to reach 200 people in six months. He writes, “I could see the people arriving. There

were so many I could see them forming lines. People were waiting for others to leave so they could get in. From that moment on, everything I have done and everything I do is based on faith!”⁸ In just three months, there were 200 people!

FOLLOWING THE KOREAN MODEL

Pastor César’s trip to Korea in 1986 provided foundational principles for establishing a cell church system. He and his wife Claudia returned transformed by the potential for unlimited church growth. Castellanos always believed in the role of small groups, but in 1986, he grasped the need for a cell church system as the way to support the growth of small groups.

Having only one model to follow, ICM copied Dr. David Yonggi Cho’s system in its entirety. Pastor César organized his small groups geographically throughout Bogota. As he reflected back, he acknowledged that the early system needed fine-tuning. While copying the entire model, he failed to adapt it to his own cultural context. ICM limped along from 1986 to 1991, hoping for success but sensing that something was missing. The cells grew, but very slowly. By the end of 1991, there were only 70 cell groups.

THE REVELATION OF THE 12

Castellanos cried out, “Lord, I need something that will help me accelerate the growth.”⁹ God showed him the missing link, revealing the concepts that have become known as the G-12 model. This revelation, according to Castellanos, was like Newton discovering the law of gravity. César imagined Newton watching apples fall to the ground until, one day, he began asking himself some questions like, “Why does the apple fall directly to the ground? Why doesn’t it fall upwards? Or to the side?”

Castellanos' discovery began similarly as he read about Jesus and his 12 disciples. Although he had read this passage many times previously, this time he saw something new. "Why 12 disciples? Why not 13? Why didn't he train the multitudes?" As he began to ask himself these questions, like an apple falling from a tree, God led him to the concept of the 12.¹⁰

The passage was Matthew 9:35-10:1:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." He called his 12 disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

Jesus called his 12 disciples, knowing that the harvest was too plentiful for one person to reap it. He needed to work through others to minister to the masses. Christ chose 12 disciples to help Him carry out His Father's work. The 12 were His helpers, his assistants in the work.

Jesus stayed with his 12 disciples continually. They were His "long-term" or "permanent" disciples. He laughed with them, rejoiced with them, and taught them daily lessons. He would say to them, "Observe this." Afterwards, he would ask, "What did you discover?" On one occasion, Christ's disciples observed the generous offerings of the religious leaders compared to the two copper coins of the poor widow. Jesus taught them that the widow offered more because she gave from her poverty (Luke 21:1-4). Jesus took advantage of each situation to