

# Handling a Cell Group

**Adapted from Cell Leader's Manual**

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This edition: December 1, 1998.**

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# Introduction

“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 Timothy 2:2

It is bold, almost foolhardy, to put half a dozen lives into the hands of a nineteen or twenty year old youth. And this is exactly what we do in our cell groups. What is more, the people in the hands of our cell leaders will become the leaders and thinkers who will guide the Caribbean into the twenty-first century. We dare do such a thing only by standing on God’s power. We believe he is able to make us “competent as ministers of a new covenant ... of the Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 3:5,6

**competence takes time, training, practice and learning from our mistakes**

Such competence, however, does not come in one searing, life transforming moment of transfiguration. The disciples were not suddenly transformed at Jesus’ transfiguration, neither did they become instantaneously perfect at Pentecost. Rather competence takes time, training, practice and learning from our mistakes. This is why Paul urged Timothy to find faithful men so that he could train them to train others also.

“And [Jesus] went up to the mountain and summoned those whom he himself wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them out ...”

Mark 3:13-14, NAS

**the heart of what Jesus did before he was crucified was to stake his kingdom on a cell group of twelve very ordinary men**

When we chip off the sapwood, the heart of what Jesus did before he was crucified was to stake his kingdom on a cell group of twelve very ordinary men. Was he making a mad gamble, risking all on one throw, or did he know something, something so powerful that he could safely leave his kingdom in the hands of twelve – no eleven – ordinary men? Such a principle could serve in our cell groups, as a basis for transforming lives and changing the course of our region and even the whole world.



# The Dynamo

Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. He had in his hands a strategy that, even with ordinary men, could change the course of history. I believe it can do so in our cell groups.

The first point is the power of example:

“Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.”

Luke 6:39,40

The blind can lead the blind – straight into the nearest ditch. People become just like their leaders and teachers. In short, example is the essence of effective teaching and leadership.

**Jesus made disciples – his strategy was, and is, people**

Jesus made disciples – his strategy was, and is, people. First he challenged them to follow him: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” He lived with them, taught them, and set an example for them. Eventually he could say, “they are not of the world, even as I am not of it.” Then he sent them out under his authority and with the power of his Spirit, to challenge the world.

Matthew 16:24

John 17:16

We, therefore, must be good guides and examples – we must know where, why and how we are going.

Someone may object, “but Jesus is an example, not a mere man!”

Let’s put it another way, “whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” If there is anything at all in our lives that we cannot hold up as an example, we must get rid of it. Those who follow us will follow our example, even into the ditch. We must be able to join Paul as he says, “join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”

1 John 2:6

Philippians 3:17, cf 1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 Peter 5:2,3

We must first see situations, people and issues the way God sees them: “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” We must learn to listen to God and obey him.

1 Samuel 16:7

“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. Consider carefully what you hear... With the measure you use, it will be measured to you - and

Mark 4:23-25; cf John 10:27; Proverbs 3:5,6

even more. Whoever has will be given more, whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”

We must obey God and make full use of what he shows us. Otherwise, we will be blind leaders of the blind. Our own walk with God, built on the foundation of prayer, worship, and practically-focussed Bible study, is the basis for vision, exemplary living and effective ministry. Let us, therefore, “keep watch” over ourselves and over the flock, committing ourselves to the Word, which can build us up.

Acts 20:28-32

## Body Life



**The same Holy Spirit who transformed the lives of twelve men and changed the course of history is available to each of us**

The second dynamic in a cell group is body-life. The same Holy Spirit who transformed the lives of twelve men and changed the course of history is available to each of us.

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good...”, “[Jesus] gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ might be built up...”, “the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work”.

1 Corinthians 12:7  
Ephesians 4:11-16

We do not have to rely on our own ability. “Our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant ... of the Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 3:5-6

Our task as leaders is to teach, guide, encourage, and regulate, so that there is freedom, flexibility, and growth, without disorder; “God is not a God of disorder but of peace”. We should help each member blossom in their own relationships with God, their relationships with the rest of the body and the unique ministry to which God has called them. When each of us is fulfilling our role, the group, and the wider body, will grow in size, strength, love and unity.

1 Corinthians 14:33

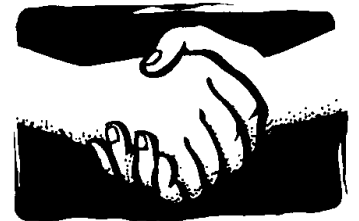
# Group Dynamics

Cell groups are groups of people. Groups come together around mutual purposes. Association forces the group to work out relationships, roles, responsibilities, norms, goals and tasks. Each person seeks to derive personal benefits – “What is the group doing for me? Is it what I want?” Out of the interaction between the members, the tasks and the team formed a definite pattern of processes results:

- Goals have to be worked out and pursued. This leads to planning, interacting, and working together.
- Friction results from trying to interact, communicate and cooperate. Conflicts break out between members, and inside the minds of members: “This is not what I really want! What will I do?”
- Conflict is key. Correctly handled, it builds both the individual and the team. Poorly handled, it will deeply wound the individual, and can shatter the group.
- The best approach first admits that conflicts exist. It sees them as neutral, even beneficial. Second, it is willing to forgive hurts – it only brings up problems to correct, encourage and heal. It looks first for “the plank in your own eye,” and only then will it speak to the other person. “Judge not, that you be not judged” speaks to just this point. Finally it seeks to work out problems face to face, “just between the two of you.”
- The process of positive conflict resolution helps the group grow and achieve its goals. Of course, resolving one conflict is no guarantee against the emergence of another.
- Finally, no group is static. New people come in, and old ones go. Projects are completed, and groups wind up. We must learn to adjust and come to terms with success, failure and goodbyes.

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Matthew 7:1-5, 18:15-17;  
1 Corinthians 13:3-7;  
Galatians 6:1-5



# Programming

How can we best work to harness the power of discipleship, group dynamics, and the potential put in each of us by the Holy Spirit?

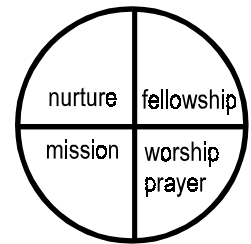
This problem was successfully challenged by the very first church:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Acts 2:42-47

Four factors stand out:

- teaching (nurture)
- fellowship and mutual ministry
- worship and prayer
- effective evangelism (mission)



These factors should be present in our cell groups and our individual lives. But what was the point? Without a clear aim we will get nowhere. The aim is quite simple:

“[Jesus] said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you ...’”

Matthew 28:18-19; Titus 2:11-14

“... the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good”.

Together these two texts tell us the goal of the church, and of the cell group: a people, from all nations, who are the holy people of God. To

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this end we reach out to men to challenge them to follow Jesus as his disciples. Evangelism is the means, not the end.

There's one other point: good programmes start with people where they are, and work to help them towards a definite objective, being righteous in pursuit of excellence, and yet compassionate. People are the point.

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At the year's end cell members should be saved, and know why, and how to explain it from the Bible. They should be open and honest with both God and people. There should be no doubt that Jesus is their Lord, or that the Bible is authoritative. They should be able to study the Bible inductively, and make forceful applications to their lives and to the issues of the day. Worship, prayer and Bible study should be part of their daily lives. They should see themselves as called to serve God, under the Commission, and should be actively evangelizing and working to build up the body of Christ. They should be active in other aspects of the UCCF chapter, and in a specific congregation. They should see their role as a student in terms of ministry while on campus and preparation for future ministry after they leave. They should be willing to see and use their careers as support for ministry. They should be willing to go into missionary work or other career ministry.

These objectives will require much work. Typically our cell members will not be really sure that they are saved, much less be able to show why or help another find salvation from the Bible. They probably cannot study the Bible properly, and have shaky prayer lives. They are more likely to want, and need, ministry than be active in ministering.

If that sounds strong, ask people things like, "how does prayer or faith work?" or "what is praise?". Discuss other things too: what they really think about themselves, family life, sex, handling time and money, handling problems etc. This will give a fuller picture and help keep the cell group on target.

We must build people of vision and power, people who are firmly grounded and whose aim in life is to build the kingdom of God. We should stress personal growth and involvement, against the backdrop of discipleship, body dynamics, and group dynamics. Cell meetings should balance teaching, Bible study, sharing, ministry by all members, worship, prayer, involvement in the wider UCCF group and the wider Church, and strong evangelistic activity. Outside of meetings we should learn to share with one another, visit, counsel and so on. A cell group is far more than just a meeting.



# The Cell Meeting

The cell meeting, beyond all doubt, is the central feature of a cell group. It brings us together, to share, to minister, to study, to worship, and to reach out. It sets the tone and focus for the group.

Paul sums it up: “When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”

1 Corinthians 14:26;  
cf Hebrews 10:23-25

The key factors are focus and flow. Imagine a cafeteria, full of students eating and talking. Suddenly there is a loud noise and a ghastly scream in one corner. Every head will turn to see what is happening. There is now a focus. For a meeting to develop it must begin to flow. For instance the commotion could be the opening of a dramatic presentation.

Meetings, generally, develop a focus, and the focus must flow. The question is how the Spirit wants a focus, and how it should flow in theme, time, space, style, and so on. Flexibility and creativity are important.

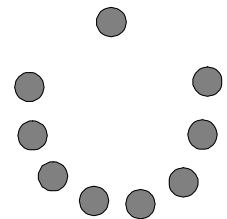
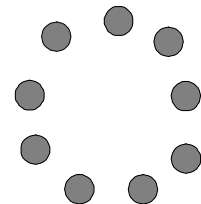
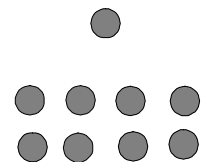
Too often everything is ‘up-front, centre’, and even our row by row layout shows it. Circle based layouts are open to interaction, are personal (we can see one another’s faces) and so are better suited to true body ministry. The focus of a circle can be anywhere. A ‘U’ has a main focus at it’s open end, but allows a focus to form anywhere along the arc.

Time is vital. Meetings should start, and end, on time. Pace the meeting so it doesn’t drag or go too fast. Learn to cut an item and move on. Leave time for reflecting and interacting.

The key to the whole is that we are “drawing near”, near to God and near to one another: “since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ... and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience ... let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another ...”

Hebrews 10:19-25

**Circle based layouts ... are better suited to true body ministry**





Access to God has always been a problem. Even though we can't hide from him we can't get close to him because of our sin. The elaborate ceremonies of the old covenant drove this point home again and again. It is only by sin-free blood that sin can be removed, and only then may people approach God.

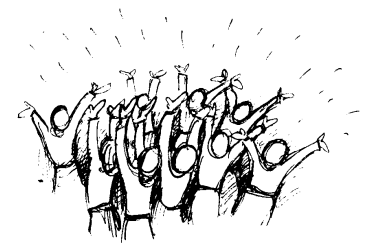
By the blood of Jesus we have access to God. Under the old covenant only the high priest, once a year, could go behind the curtain to the most holy place. In it, above the ark, was a visible radiance that was God's manifestation of his presence in the Temple – the Shekinah Glory. But now we have free access to the immediate, manifest, intimate presence of God.

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This is not merely a fine point of theology. It means we don't have to try to work up the presence of God by singing, clapping or anything else. We boldly enter God's presence on the basis of Jesus' blood. As we come we "enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise." We draw near freely, with clean consciences in the confidence of faith. Praise God!

Psalm 100:4

Let's pause to look at praise, worship and thanksgiving. In the strict sense, they refer to different things. We thank God for what he has done or has promised to do. We praise Him for who he is. We worship, falling down before him, literally or figuratively, as man before God, creature before creator. Worship is the underlying attitude which finds vocal, musical or bodily expression. That is why speech, song, dance, raised hands or bent knees can all be expressions of worship.



**Christianity  
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business**

The second aspect of our drawing near is our drawing near to one another, before God. Christianity is not a solitary business – God calls us to be his people, his royal priesthood, his family, his house, his body. Even the command "be filled with the Spirit" is corporate: "speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 5:18-21

It is against this backdrop that the framework of Bible study, teaching, fellowship, body ministry, worship and outreach takes place. Prayer, by the way, is an aspect of worship; it acknowledges our dependence on God for our needs. Worship, then, deals with our drawing near to God. The others deal with drawing near to one another.

The basic idea is that “we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” Our relationship with Jesus makes us one body – the interactive, inter-dependent body of Christ. That is why we must meet regularly to share, encourage, and build one another.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Outreach is the key point. We must be witnesses in the power of the Spirit. We must reach out with the only really good news there is. It is our privilege and duty.

Teaching and Bible study form the basis for everything else. We must understand what we experience and experience what we understand. The focus must be inductive, probing the Bible’s text to see what it actually says, asking questions to discover what it means and seeing how it relates to real life. We must balance three emphases:

- dealing with God’s advice for facing problems, issues and the struggles of practical living
- the fundamentals of discipleship – how to lay a firm foundation, put down roots in God and bear fruit
- getting to know the Bible itself so that we know what it teaches and where and how it teaches – basic knowledge of the Bible and it’s teaching



**If we fail to establish our cell members on a firm Biblical foundation we have failed**

If we fail to establish our cell members on a firm Biblical foundation we have failed. We must give the Bible priority in our ministry and stress “seeing it yourself from the Bible.” Paul summed it up beautifully: “continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of ... you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 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 3:14-17

Generally , cell meetings should first focus on God: worship. They can flow into interaction, sharing and body ministry by members. The study and teaching element should not be confined to a slot for “the Word” but should permeate the whole – it’s natural to give explanations as we go along. A good explanation can really ignite times of worship, prayer or sharing and ministry.

Don’t be afraid to break the mould. Hold a planning and evaluation session. It’s great leadership training and will improve the meetings. Go out to a play or to dinner. Watch a video. Go fishing. Sponsor an ice cream lime. Be flexible and creative.

# Building disciples

**our cell groups will be judged by one sharp question: “have we built effective disciples?”**

After all is said and done about programming and cell meetings, our cell groups will be judged by one sharp question: “have we built effective disciples?” People are the point.

First we must focus on laying a firm foundation: disciples must be saved and know why. Jesus must be their Lord. They must see and use the Bible as their basis for thinking and living, especially principles such as repentance, faith, holiness and the power of the Spirit. They must know the principle of ministry: God working with them and through them. They must live as stewards who will give full account to God, their judge.

Hebrews 6:1,2

Disciples must have firm roots in their relationship with Jesus, the Bible, the Holy Spirit and the body of Christ. All spiritual sustenance comes through these sources and channels. Their devotional life, therefore, must be rich and practical – they must spend time with God in worship and learn to listen to him as he speaks. Fellowship, encouragement and body ministry must be integral to their life.

John 10:27

It is only then that disciples will be able to face hardship successfully. Hardships will come. Disciples must be ready so that hardships will build them, training them in godliness. “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Hebrews 12:11; cf John 15:1-8; James 1:2-4

Out of our own hardships comes ministry. God “comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” Moreover, “to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” Effective disciples must learn how to help others grow in God, and must see themselves as called to be ministers of the body of Christ. They must fulfil their call.

2 Corinthians 1:4

1 Corinthians 12:7

**effective disciples are people who learn to read and think for themselves**

There are a host of other things – planning, administration, apologetics, preparing and presenting talks, leading inductive Bible studies and so on, but these can be picked up along the way as they become necessary. Bluntly, effective disciples are people who learn to read and think for themselves. They must become independent, able to teach and fend for themselves. The central issues on our cells must be foundations, rooting relationships and ministry.

The problem is that many young Christians do not see these things as vital and that people come into cell groups at differing levels and have varying interests and, consequently, grow at different rates. The rates vary from zero to very rapid.

The trick is to balance what you do. If we take input from members and get feedback from them we can keep our cell meetings, personal visits and prayer relevant and interesting. Quite often the sources of the problems our members face lie in the three areas we stress. If we dig to the roots of problems and bring out the links, our focus on these areas will make sense to our members. Additionally, the stress on solving practical problems will keep our ministry relevant, practical and effective.

Someone may object, “people will think I’m nosy, trying to stick it into other peoples’ business.”

That’s the catch. Unless we lead the way, setting an example of openness and honesty we will simply stir up hostility. People rightly resent nosiness. If, however, they see that you too are open, serious and honest even about shady things it will make a difference.

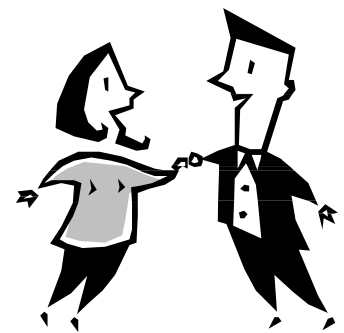
**The best way to convince people, the only way in fact, is to help them see it for themselves**

Explain, explain, explain. The best way to convince people, the only way in fact, is to help them see it for themselves. At every step we will have to work to build up this kind of personal conviction – especially when it comes to taking action steps

Start by suggesting the issue and asking what they think: “What do you think about sharing about deep or dark or painful things? Do you think it could ever be necessary?” Tease out promising lines with probing questions like, “did you share about something that hurt with a good friend? Did it help? How?” Follow up by sharing from your own life. Be honest and humble. When people see who you really are they respect you more. Don’t be afraid of losing face. Lead by example.

**the key to building disciples is good relationships**

In short, the key to building disciples is good relationships. By building openness into the cell group you lay a basis for trust, caring and sharing. Individuals will respond at different levels. Don’t force them, some are not ready to take off yet. Use personal visits to build on the basis of the meetings. Encourage those who are ready to take off – hand over some leadership responsibility to them, give them some extra training.



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What we must keep in the back of our minds is balance. We must balance dealing with people where they are now and taking them through a definite programme of training in discipleship. A good objective is to leave behind at least two people who are ready to take over the cell group at the end of the year.

## Odds and Ends

There are all sorts of other things that could be said. Here are some things that deal with likely problems and issues. You can think of more.

**The first meeting:** A job that's been started right is half done. The first few meetings should serve as a gentle introduction to cell group life and set the tone for the whole year. Focus on getting to know one another and on laying a basis for the relationships, tasks and goals that will be the group's focus for the year.

**Working with a co-leader:** In many cell groups leadership is shared. It is vital for leaders to meet regularly to discuss, plan, share and pray. A good rule is that they should seek consensus in everything they do with the cell group. Share up leadership responsibilities by mutual agreement. Work together.

**Taking charge:** Don't be afraid to lead the cell group, it's your responsibility before God. The point about authority isn't that you have to start everything or do the whole job. The point is that you coordinate and enforce the rules and standards of the group. Establish the standards from the Bible and fearlessly enforce them.

**Older members:** "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." It helps to seek advice from older or more mature members and to give them some responsibilities but you must not allow age or maturity to become an excuse for undermining your importance as the appointed leader. Do try to work closely with such members – they have much to contribute.

1 Timothy 4:12

**Lateness and irregular attendance:** The truth is that we do what we see as important. We tend to ignore or forget what is unimportant to us. Make sure the cell group meetings are relevant, lively and speak to burning issues. Involve all the members. Don't have just "another (boring) religious meeting." Start on time and finish on time. Point out that being late is actually very arrogant and start on time with whoever are there, the others will get the point. Remind people.

**Doctrinal clashes:** Establish that the Bible is the basis for what we believe. Teach the principles of inductive Bible study. Develop the attitude of being willing to follow wherever the Bible leads. Most problems come from ignoring or misreading the Bible, so get people to look at the Bible itself, carefully. If the point is sidetracking a meeting stop it, sum up the sides, put it off for a future meeting and get back on track. Research the point and deal with people one on one as much as possible. Keep your promise to deal with it in a future meeting.

**Inviting new people:** Encourage the practice. Lead by example.