

Reaching Your Target Area Through Cell Groups

(This material adapted from Campus Crusade's "Catalytic Ministry" publication called "Reaching the Campus Through Cell Groups" and Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership by Carl F. George)

Purpose: To understand how Cell Groups can increase the effectiveness of bringing about quality and quantity spiritual growth in the Target Area, and to know how to start and grow new Cell Groups.

Objectives:

1. To understand what a Cell Group is and know how to start and grow one.
2. Know the key roles and key elements needed to make a Cell Group work.
3. Willing to implement the Cell Group strategy in your Target Area (if your present strategy to reach your Target Area is not already working well).

Key Verse: Acts 2:42-47

I. Introduction - What is a Cell Group?

A cell group is a group that is going somewhere. The purpose is "to create an environment where people are connected to one another for the purpose of knowing God, developing a heart for the lost, and developing true community." It's a proven way to help people connect with God, with each other, and the spiritually lost. Many churches have seen the benefits of utilizing this method of discipling new believers and equipping members for ministry. It has also proven effective on the college campuses:

Kohichi, a PH.D. student at MIT in Boston, was excited about starting a cell group with his circle of friends. In his laser lab, he had been working with a Muslim woman, Farzana, and for one year had been sharing Christ with her. After seeing Kohichi's life and other Christians, Farzana received Christ. She began attending Kohichi's cell group and has been growing in her relationship with God ever since. She is deeply touched by the way the cell group loves and accepts her.

People today want a place to connect. So many are from broken homes or are in a broken home. Pastors are burning out trying to keep up with all these needs. Cell groups remedy this by developing "lay pastors" who can help carry the load and provide a social (relational) context for people to safely process Biblical truth and develop personal convictions. There are no minimum qualifications to be a part. New believers can be mixed in with more mature believers and both can benefit. God can use the entire body to meet the needs of new believers (even seekers) at any level of study. In the cell group, participants are free to invite their friends to be in the same group with them regardless of their maturity level and regardless of when the group started. Cell groups are not created to refine commitment but to provide for the process of Christian growth without the need to filter out those who are not ready to take the next step.

Stacey's cell group included students at various spiritual maturity levels. One of her members, Jennifer, had been slowly drifting from God. Because of the structure of the cell group Jennifer still felt free to come and participate in the group meetings. The cell group was her only involvement with Campus Crusade and God used it to restore her walk with God. The following year Jennifer and Stacey were both student leaders on their campus.

A cell group is an expression of Biblical community. Life among the family of believers in the New Testament church is pictured in Acts 2:42-47. This Biblical community exhibited four values:

- A. They had a **passion for God** expressed in prayer and praise.
- B. They had a **commitment to one another** expressed in caring fellowship.
- C. They had a **desire to grow** expressed in Biblical teaching.
- D. They had a **heart for the lost** expressed in leading others to Christ.

A cell group consists of 5-15 people that exist for the purpose of turning lost people into Christ-centered laborers. A cell group has LIFE, and because it has life, it grows. As a cell group grows, it multiplies by giving birth to new cell groups, which give birth to more groups. A cell group is the means of taking the gospel to every person in a Target Area. The work of ministry is not only being carried out by the pastors and church leaders, but also as members of cell groups creatively and prayerfully reach out to the lost.

A cell group is **not...**

- just a Bible study, though Bible study is a vital part to a Christian's growth.
- just a fellowship, though relationships can make or break a group.
- an end in itself, but a means of taking the gospel to a Target Area.

II. The Benefits of a Cell Group

- A. Christians are strengthened in their relationship with God through prayer and Bible study.
- B. Friendships are developed through group discussions and social activities.
- C. The group provides a team context for evangelism through prayer for lost friends and training in ministry. Members of the group are encouraged to build common-ground relationships with the lost. Periodic parties and Bible studies support the evangelism process.
- D. New believers (as well as other Christian friends) are easily incorporated into the group. A **chair** is left empty at each meeting to symbolize openness to new people. In most cases the new Christian has a comfort level with the group from having been at parties and other events with the Christians.
- E. Spiritual growth occurs in the context of community. Modeling takes place because of the mix of mature Christians and newer Christians. One-on-one discipleship can be arranged

as needed outside the group. Various people, not just the leader, can handle personal follow-up and mentoring.

- F. The group can be co-ed, or can be divided into men's and women's groups.
- G. The cell can be a bridge to the local church. New believers will naturally want to attend church with their friends. Church or student volunteers and Christian faculty can lead cell groups on campus or in homes.
- H. Tools and resources are available to help the cell group leader prepare for the group. Church cell groups may discuss the previous Sunday's message and how it applies to them, answer questions about baptism or communion, or they may choose to go through a book of the Bible or any of a number of Christian books and studies. College cell groups could use Campus Crusade's InterActa Bible studies, which are easy to use, student-friendly, relevant, and suitable for various levels of spiritual maturity.
- I. Leadership development and ownership are enhanced through cell groups. Each group begins with a leader (facilitator) and apprentice (assistant). Since the optimum size of the group is 4-10, it will one day need to form a new group. While the new group can happen in various ways, each begins with a leader and another apprentice.
- J. An initial cell group can be the beachhead for an eventual Target Area-wide ministry. As new groups are born, the group leaders meet weekly for a "VHS" (vision/huddle/skills) meeting.
- K. A cell group can have an impact on the world.

III. Steps to Take

- A. Select both a leader and an apprentice.
The qualifications for these positions are consistent spiritual growth, ability to build relationships, and a commitment to the mission of the group.
- B. Recruiting people to be members of the group.
Look for people who share the values of Acts 2:42-47. Explain that this is more than a Bible Study - it is a group that is going somewhere. Don't overload them with too many qualifications. Remember, spiritual growth will happen in the context of the group.
- C. Promote group interaction.
Keep it informal. Include discussion-oriented Bible study. Also share prayer requests. Success is not measured by how much the leader says, but by how much people talk about meaningful things.
- D. Encourage Outreach.
Encourage each person to pray for three friends who do not yet know Christ.
- E. Welcome new people into the group.

These can be new believers or other friends from the Target Area. An empty chair is always a visible reminder that guests are welcome.

- F. When the time comes, birth a new cell group. When you have 10-15 people and you have qualified new leadership (apprentices), it's time to birth a new group. As with all births, it will be both painful and exciting. Either the apprentice or the leader can start the new group (it may be best for the leader of the original group to go and start the new cell, and have the apprentice take over the role of leader. Both need new apprentices). Reassure the people that there are many ways to maintain relationships between the groups.

- G. Once you have several groups, begin a Video Home Showing meeting (Also, see lesson 11 in this Leading Groups series). Cell group leaders will need shepherding and input on a regular basis. They'll have plenty of problems to solve. The VHS meeting is a chance for you to develop these leaders.

A "coach" may need to regularly visit cells to help give direction and training. Coaches also debrief with the cell group leaders (individually or with other cell group leaders in a VHS meeting) to develop them to be more effective as leaders.

Be aware that some "problems" in the cell group may need to be referred to professional pastors or counselors (marital conflicts, rebellion, etc.).

IV. Key Roles in a Cell Group

- A. The **leader** organizes the group and gives it direction. The leader needs to cast vision and coach the group. Sometimes the leader facilitates the Bible Study, but others can do this also.
- B. The **apprentice** (assistant) is being mentored for future leadership. This person will have the chance to lead various segments of the cell group and do some mentoring outside the group. The leader regularly teaches the apprentice how to lead in the cell and do ministry. Responsibilities are delegated in these areas, and there should be debrief times to evaluate progress.
- C. The **hospitality** person organizes food and helps ensure a fun, informal environment.
- D. The **media/communications** person arranges for publicity and facilitates broad exposure strategies using media.
- E. The **prayer coordinator** leads praise and intercession in the group and develops a prayer plan. This person may put people in prayer partnerships or implement other creative ways to encourage prayer and dependence on Christ.
- F. The **evangelism coordinator** encourages personal evangelism by doing it and bringing others along. The coordinator also provides periodic training (how to share Christ, giving a testimony, etc.) and helps people organize four-week evangelistic discussion groups with

friends. Parties now and then where people can bring their non-Christian friends are also an idea for the coordinator.

- G. The **missions** person encourages prayer and involvement in a missions partnership (local or overseas). It gets exciting when the group (or all the cell groups) decide to get involved.

Except for leader and apprentice, not all of these positions must be filled, and some could be combined (ex. Prayer and Missions). It would be good for the people filling these key roles to meet periodically to evaluate, plan, and pray.

V. Key Elements of Cell Groups:

- A. **Bonding** - Community, members feel like they are a team, bonded together as friends, committed to each other's well-being and growth. Affirm people's spiritual gifts and the need for them to be used interdependently in the body. The group may want to serve outside the "group time" by doing work around the church, serving in a "soup kitchen," etc. Ask yourself, "How can we experience Biblical community?"
- B. **Bible** - Quality Biblical content, self-discovered learning with application. Review previous lessons on "How to Lead a Group Discussion" and "Hook/Book/Look/Took." Ask yourself, "What will we study from the Bible?"
- C. **Prayer and Worship** - The focus is directed to God and His goodness and greatness. There is a sense of praying for each other, the campus, and the world. Ask, "What will we do to pray and worship together?"
- D. **Outreach** - Think of what can be done to help push the group further to reaching out in a culturally relevant manner. Cell members could be challenged to target, pray for, and serve two people who don't know Christ. Cell members can be updated on how to pray for each other's "mission fields." Ask, "How can we reach our friends who don't know Christ yet?"
- E. **Discipleship** - Individuals are followed-up, discipled to greater maturity, and trained through either one-on-one discipleship (pairing up new believers/seekers with leaders in the group) or through the cell group itself. Often the one-on-one discipleship between cell meetings contributes more to the effectiveness of the group than the actual meeting itself.

VI. Top 10 Mistakes to Avoid in Organizing Cell Groups:

- A. Starting a group that is not going anywhere, an end in itself.
- B. Doing all the talking.
- C. Being too formal or having no refreshments.
- D. Starting a group without an apprentice.
- E. Not having an empty chair--a closed group.
- F. Missing the importance of relationships.
- G. Not sharing responsibility or developing ownership among the members.
- H. Becoming cocooned as a group and not engaging non-Christians.
- I. Not having an atmosphere of acceptance.
- J. Neglecting to pray and trust God for the group and its mission.

VII. Sample Format for a Cell Group Meeting

The group can meet in someone's apartment or home. If this is a college group, the group could meet in a dorm room, dorm lounge, or a comfortable room in the student center. The more informal the atmosphere the better. As the leader, you could drop each person a note or call to remind them of the group just before the first meeting. Be sure to build relationships with your people outside the group. There are many ways to get to know people from playing sports or board games to eating meals together, etc.

- A. **Mixer/Ice-Breaker:** Relax, laugh, have some refreshments. One bi-weekly cell group met every other Sunday after church in a home and called the meeting "Sunday Brunch." Scrambled eggs and English muffins were a big hit. (See Appendix B "Sharing Questions" in the previously taught session "Leading a Small Group")
- B. **Welcome/Vision:** Guests are introduced; the leader sets a tone for the meeting. This can be a good time to introduce the theme or restate the vision for the cell group.
- C. **Bible Study:** You could use the previous Sunday morning message or a Christian book or a book of the Bible, etc. On the college campus, the InterActa Bible studies discuss a variety of relevant topics. Whoever leads the Bible Study must prepare ahead of time. Read the leader's guides (if available) to get the important overview of the lesson and for you to understand where the study is headed. Work through the study and the leader's guide and decide exactly how you will teach the lesson. Most studies are flexible and you don't need to perfectly finish every lesson and fill in every blank. The key is to ask questions - which stimulates discussion and discovery of the Biblical truths. Avoid preaching through the lesson.



- D. **Prayer:** Invite people to share prayer requests related to the Bible study or other personal issues in their lives. This is also a good time to pray for the Target Area and for lost friends.
- E. **Announcements:** This is a good time to hear from the hospitality coordinator or evangelism coordinator about upcoming events. Something like: “We’re going to the football game together this Saturday and meeting at Mary’s afterward for a fifth-quarter barbecue. Feel free to bring friends.”
- F. **Tool Time:** Occasionally you might want to equip the group with a particular ministry skill tied to real life. For example, people might enjoy hearing ideas on how to organize a four-week discussion group with some lost friends.

This is only a sample, so feel free to mix and match. Other things could be added, such as having people share (“I had an answer to prayer this week.”) or asking a group member to share their testimony. (Ask in advance - don’t put someone on the spot.) Be sure to finish on time, and remember, the more relational the better.

VIII. Evaluation

Some final questions to ask yourself concerning the cell group meeting:

1. Were you well prepared? Did you ask good questions? Did members leave with a concrete plan of application? What would help you to prepare next time?
2. Did you include the different elements mentioned on the next 6 sample cell group meetings?
3. Did any element run too long? Did the group get off on too many tangents? Did you begin and end on time?
4. Evaluate each of the four elements of the cell group. What would you change next time in each element?
5. Was everyone at the meeting that should have been there? What do you need to do to contact those who were absent? Pass around an attendance roster each week for names addresses and phone numbers.
6. Are there people from the group that you should meet with personally before the next cell group?
7. Have you already chosen an assistant (apprentice)?
8. Do you know what to do if the group grows too large?
9. How can you be praying for the group members through the week? Are you meeting with your apprentice (and other people who fill key roles - evangelism, etc.) to focus on God and trust Him in prayer for the Cell Group?
10. Are you a busybody like Martha - involved in so many things for the Lord, or are you like Mary - regularly meeting with the Lord in prayer and devotional reading of His Word? (Luke 10:38-42; John 15:4,5) Are you personally maturing in Christ?

In light of these questions, what overall changes do you need to make for the next cell group meeting? What areas went well that you would keep the same?

The next 7 pages introduce 6 actual cell group meetings you can use. Some of the elements mentioned above will be used. See how these will work for you. Parts of each of the 6 actual cell group will be the same to act as reminders.

Discussion Questions:

1. Are you or your church or campus ministry presently utilizing a Cell Group strategy? If yes, how is it going? Are people maturing in Christ and being equipped for ministry? After reading this session's notes, have you noted some things that could be implemented in your Cell Groups? Write them down.

2. If you answered "no" to #1, do you think this may be a workable strategy for your Target Area? (if your church or campus strategy is currently seeing lives changed for Christ and believers effectively being equipped for ministry, please continue with that strategy). If "yes," who would you need to meet with to discuss implementing this in your Target Area?

3. If you will be starting a Cell Group strategy, who could be your apprentice? What about other key roles (see IV)?

4. How do you start and grow a cell group?

Cell Group Plan Week #1

Building Relationships: (20 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 10 Min. for 1 hour meeting) Go around and have each person share the best and worst moments of their previous week. Have food or snacks.

Bible Study Content: (40 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 35 Min. for 1 hour meeting) Do a Bible Study on “Assurance,” or continue with whatever studies you may be on. Other ideas include: Discovery Group series, New Ten Basic Steps to Christian Growth, Experiencing God, Search for Significance, or other good transferable Bible studies which have leaders guides.

Prayer: (15 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 10 Min. for 1 hour meeting) Take requests from members. Leader prays.

Outreach/Training/Announcements: (10 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 5 Min. for 1 hour meeting) How to do a campus or community survey. Empty chair - explain that the reason we have an empty chair is that we want more people to come to our group.

Hint: Under announcements bring up your current ministry activities at the appropriate time. Be sure to plan ahead with the announcements. For example, if you have a Fall retreat in October, begin making announcements from the second week of the semester to give everyone plenty of time to consider going. The same would be true for the Christmas conference (begin recruiting in October), and Summer projects (begin recruiting in December and/or the Christmas conference).

Other Ideas: Call each member who attended the study just to talk.

Hint: As in any Cell group plan, you may set-up your own order, content, and time allotment but try to keep these four elements (Building Relationships, Bible Study Content, Prayer, and Outreach/Training/Announcements).



Now that you've looked at one sample cell group plan, several points need to be mentioned.

1

First, there is consistency and similarities in all six cell group plans. This will help the leader make a habit of including the five key elements in each cell group they lead.

2

Second, the leader has the flexibility to change the timing of each element, the order, activities, and Bible study. Make the plan work for you.

3

The Interacta Bible study series is a suggested plan with excellent potential in leadership and ministry training on the campus. However, you can use a study of your choosing which should train and bring your disciples to spiritual maturity.

As you use different Bible study plans in your cell group, be sure that the material is transferable and emphasizes the fundamentals of the Christian life. A Bible study with a study guide is of great advantage because it is easier to prepare and can be done so in a shorter period of time.

You only have one to four years with a college student. The same could be true in a community ministry. Make the most of your Bible study and training in your cell groups by choosing good material.

4

Build relationships with people outside of the cell group. Get together relationally to build a sense of community.

Also, as you get to know the people in your group, involve them and assign them to lead different parts of the group. For example, you might have one member lead the “Prayer” time, while another leads the “Building Relationships” part. Think of whom you can place in charge of each component each week (or rotate responsibilities).

Cell Group Plan Week #2

Building Relationships: (20 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 10 Min. for 1 hour meeting) Go around and have each person share something that makes them different from everyone else in the room. For example, "I have never water skied before".

Bible Study Content: (40 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 35 Min. for 1 hour meeting). Do a Bible Study on the Holy Spirit's empowering in order to live a consistent and victorious Christian life, or continue with your present study.

Prayer: (15 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 10 Min. for 1 hour meeting) Take requests from members. Leader prays.

Outreach/Training/Announcements: (10 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 5 Min. for 1 hour meeting) Pass out flyers together advertising your Bible study. Put up posters in your living area. Have an empty chair at the cell group.

Other Ideas: Bring to church as many members of the group as you can.

Hint: As in any Cell group plan, you may set-up your own order, content, and time allotment but try to keep these four elements (Building Relationships, Bible Study Content, Prayer, and Outreach/Training/Announcements).

Cell Group Plan Week #3

Building Relationships: (20 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 10 Min. for 1 hour meeting)

Have each person make three statements about themselves. Two are true and one is a lie. See if the other members in the group can tell which one is a lie.

Bible Study Content: (40 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 35 Min. for 1 hour meeting)

Study the blue "Have you Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit Filled Life?" booklet. This will give you a chance to model how to share the booklet with someone as well.

Prayer: (15 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 10 Min. for 1 hour meeting)

Split up the group into two or three and take personal prayer requests and pray for each other. If the group is small you may stay together.

Outreach/Training/Announcements: (10 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 5 Min. for 1

hour meeting) Pair up with another member of the cell group and share with another Christian in the community (or on campus) the "Spirit Filled Life" booklet.

Other Ideas: Go to lunch or dinner together as a group or with individuals if more

convenient.

Cell Group Plan Week #4

Building Relationships: (20 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 10 Min. for 1 hour meeting)

Take five minutes to look through your wallet or purse. Find something that you've had a long time, something you're proud of, something, which reveals a lot about you, something, which reminds you of a fun time, and something, which concerns or worries you. Go around and share the first item. Then go on to the next item. It takes too much time you can stop with two or three categories.

Bible Study Content: (40 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 35 Min. for 1 hour meeting) Do a

Bible Study on God's unconditional love and forgiveness.

Prayer: (15 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 10 Min. for 1 hour meeting) Split up the group into

pairs or by three's and each pray for three non-Christian friends.

Outreach/Training/Announcements: (10 Min. for 1.5 hour meeting, 5 Min. for 1

hour meeting) Explain the idea behind the empty chair and make it an emphasis. Ask members why this would be a good idea. Explain that the group may someday split for greater effectiveness.

Other Ideas: Play sports together this week (hoops, volleyball, or play a board game

together).

Cell Group Plan Week #5

Building Relationships: Ask these questions of the group: 1. What do you do for fun?
2. What would be your ideal vacation?

Bible Study Content: Do a Bible Study on the importance of depending on the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Pray for three non-Christian friends and one personal request in pairs or by three's.

Outreach/Training/Announcements: How to use personal follow-up after someone prays to receive Christ or is already a Christian. Also, train your members how to follow someone up if you've done a survey on campus or if you had some other evangelistic event.

Other Ideas: Visit the cell group members.

Cell Group Plan Week #6

Building Relationships: Ask these two questions of your group members: 1. What is one characteristic you received from your family that you would like to keep, and one characteristic that you would wish to change? 2. If you knew you couldn't fail and money was not an issue, what would you like to do in the next five years?

Bible Study Content: Principles on how to share the Four Spiritual Laws booklet effectively.

Prayer: Pray for three non-Christian friends and one personal request.

Outreach/Training/Announcements: Pair up with another member of the cell group and share the Four Spiritual Laws booklet with someone this week.

Other Ideas: Go to an athletic event with your members.