THE POCKET GUIDE TO



burnout-free small group leadership

how to gather a core team and lead from the second chair MICHAEL C. MACK

TOUCH

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Introduction

Don's small group started smoothly and seemed to go well the first several months. Within the first year, Don called me to tell me he was stepping down from group leadership. When I met with him to ask what happened, he told me about his increasingly frantic pace of life and the overwhelming amount of time and energy required to facilitate weekly small group meetings and keep up with the members of his group.

In the leadership training at my church, we emphasize that the leader is primarily a shepherd. As Don shared his heart about leading his group, I could tell he was serious about that responsibility. He described the time he spent preparing the study, calling members, caring for some of the needy people in the group, discipling two of the newer Christians, dealing with

issues and conflicts, helping his wife clean the house before meetings, and praying daily for group members. On top of all this, Don had a very demanding job, a family, and other church responsibilities. No wonder he was stepping down from leadership!

Joel Comiskey writes, "All cell leaders face the 'tyranny of the urgent.'" He is absolutely right. Unfortunately, dealing with the urgent all the time leads to stress, frustration, discouragement, and eventual burnout. Don's predicament as a leader is nothing new. As a small groups pastor, I see it all the time.

Christian counselor, author, and speaker John Townsend provides a cure to leadership burnout using the following mathematical structure:²

RESPONSIBILITIES < 1

In the ideal world, he says, you as a leader should have an equal amount of (or more) resources compared to your number of responsibilities. When you become frustrated and burned out as a leader, on further inspection you will find that you have far more responsibilities than resources.

There are two ways to remedy small group leader burnout: reduce your responsibilities or increase your resources (or both). Don did what lots of leaders do—he chose to eliminate his responsibilities by abandoning the position. Don could have easily chosen to add resources had he known this option was available. Townsend suggests that one of the best resources to battle leader burnout is people. By adding people to the leadership role, the resources outweigh the responsibilities and small group leadership becomes fun and quite fulfilling.

As a small groups pastor, I want to keep my small group leaders from burning out. Even more, I want to help them succeed in their shepherding ministry, which is vital to God's plan and the health of our church. Time and time again, I've found the best ways to help my leaders do this is to show

them ways to reduce their responsibilities and increase their resources by creating a leadership team.

I know that not everyone identifies with athletic metaphors and terminology. So when I discuss a term like "teams" feel free to think of a work team, a ministry team, a debate team, or any other type of team on which you've been active. I am a sports enthusiast, however, so I'll use sports stories, especially basketball and mountain biking, two of my favorite athletic pursuits.

What I propose in this book is not a new method or organizational structure. It's a natural, organic, and highly relational way to lead, shepherd, and disciple the members of your group with others instead of doing everything yourself.

Over the last several years I've invested a lot of time studying team building. And for a very good reason: I was not very good at it! Like many leaders, I thought I could and I even needed to do it all myself! Not only was I burning out as a leader, I was also keeping others from using their leadership gifting. So I started reading everything I could get my hands on about team building. I attended seminars, browsed web sites, and spent time with people who are great team-builders.

As I've grown as a team-builder myself, I've discovered that it's really not difficult; in fact it's made leadership more fun, encouraging, and rewarding.

In this little book, I want to share with you what I've learned about turning your small group into a soul-winning, care-giving team. No matter how stressed or overwhelmed you may feel in leading your group right now, I believe what you are about to learn will revolutionize small group leadership for you and make leading your group more fun, encouraging, and rewarding for you too!

Chapter One

Change the Leader of Your Group

Every team requires unity. A team has to move as one unit, one force, with each person understanding and assisting the roles of his teammates. If the team doesn't do this, whatever the reason, it goes

down in defeat. You win or lose as a team, as a family. -Jack Kemp

For a number of years, I've coached youth sports. Last year, my second son, now 15 years old, played on a solid eighth-grade school team called The Dragons. While the team has very talented athletes, the coaching staff has worked overtime to help these individuals work together.

What our young players have yet to learn is that great individuals do not make a championship team. The Dragons consistently lose games to teams with far inferior players. A team is not just a group of players with the same uniforms, running the same plays on the same court. A great team sacrifices personal desires and goals for the good of the whole. After years of frustration as a coach, I can appreciate the feelings of baseball legend Casey Stengel, who once said, "It's easy to get good players. Getting them to play together, that's the hard part."

Your small group is not automatically a "team" just because you meet regularly in the same place, eat the same food, and study the same Bible passages. Becoming a successful, fruit-bearing team takes work and sacrifice. It starts with knowing who the real team leader is. It then grows stronger with a commitment to the team and the group's goals. While it may be easier to launch a small group as a team effort, you can also transform your current group into a winning team using the biblical principles found in the short chapters of this book.

Christian writers Win and Charles Arn wrote, "Disciple-making is most effective when it is a 'team effort.'" In fact, everything in the Christian life is more effective when we do it together. Studying and applying truths from the Bible is better together. Serving is better together. Evangelism is better together. And eating is always better together!

Solomon wrote about the benefits of teamwork nearly three thousand years ago:

It's better to have a partner than go it alone. Share the work, share the wealth. And if one falls down, the other helps, But if there's no one to help, tough! Two in a bed warm each other. Alone, you shiver all night. By yourself you're unprotected. With a friend you can face the worst. Can you round up a third? A three-stranded rope isn't easily snapped.

(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, The Message)

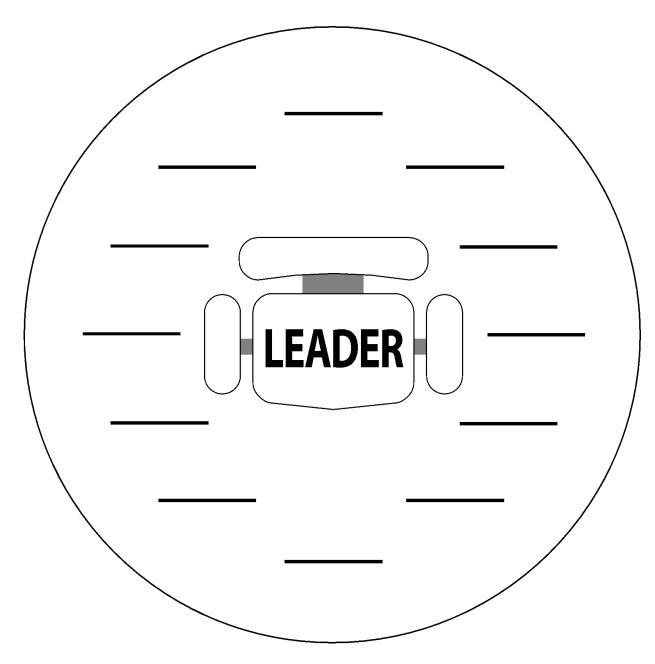
Partnership produces not only protection, but also synergistic results. This passage also confirms that the opposite is true: individualism in ministry places a leader in danger and limits his or her effectiveness. It is indeed lonely at the top when you have no one to help you lead!

Individualism is a disease that has disabled the church. Countless other books and articles have adequately covered the causes and effects of individualism on the church. It's time for small group leaders to stop thinking and acting like the world— to be countercultural to individualism and lead like Jesus led, as a team. The slogan we need to repeat today is...

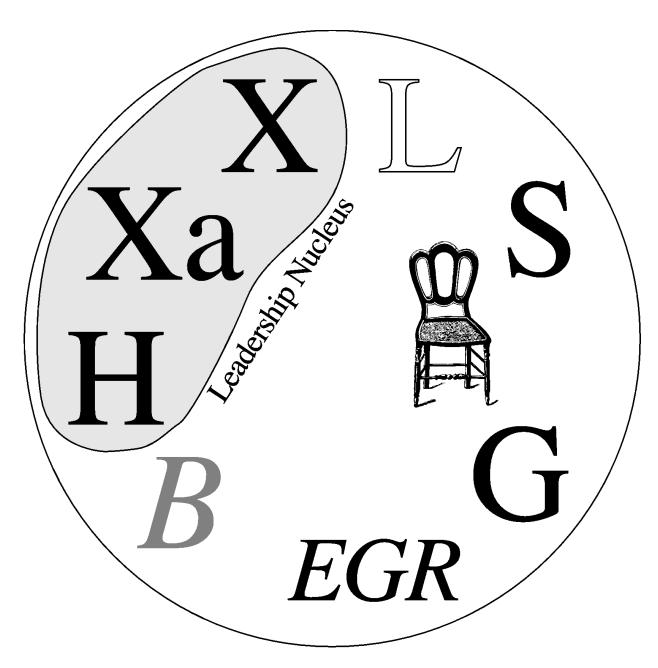
No One Leads Alone

Member):

The Traditional Small Group Leader Paradigm For several decades, small group leaders have been taught that leading is a solo act. For the most part, they have been given the sole responsibility for finding, inviting, shepherding, calling, praying for, and ministering to the rest of the group—a group usually consisting of 8-12 people. I have seen training manuals that picture small groups something like this (_ = Group



In 1991, a church growth expert named Carl George introduced what he called the "MetaChurch." He said that a healthy small group consisted of people at various spiritual levels and must be led by a "leadership nucleus." This nucleus is comprised of the leader, apprentice, and a host:²



X - Facilitator

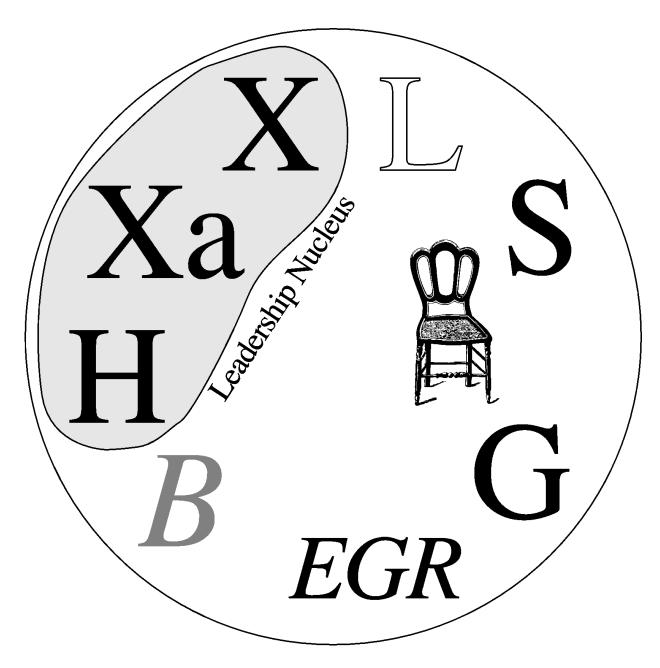
Xa - Apprentice

H - Host/Hostesss B - Babysitter (optional) L - Coach (drops in

from time to time) ${\bf S}$ - Seeker

 \boldsymbol{G} - Growing Christian \boldsymbol{EGR} - Extra Grace

Required Person



(also optional, but expected). The Empty Chair

For many years, church leaders have understood the need for the leadership nucleus, but it didn't solve many of the problems found in small group leadership. Leaders still burned out. Many groups did not grow or multiply. For all the great structures, designs, and birthing protocols developed and taught through the years, vital ingredients were still missing.

I've seen little evidence that these leadership nuclei were ever taught how to operate effectively as a team. That's a major reason I've written this book,

and I'll show you specifically how these leadership nuclei (or what I call core teams) work together. But there's something even bigger missing from George's picture of a healthy group, something very central and essential to spiritual leadership.

Small Group Leadership and Good Stewardship The power for small group health, growth, and

multiplication comes not from a model, program, or even one's leadership abilities. It is vital to remember the lesson of stewardship. God owns everything. We are simply managers. You are not the real leader or shepherd of the small group under your care. You are not the center of the group. If everyone in your small group sat in a circle, closed their eyes, and then simultaneously pointed to the group leader, they should all point upward! "The Best Small Group Leader Ever" prayed to

I spelled out your character in detail to the men and women you gave me. They were yours in the first place; Then you gave them to me, And they have now done what you said. They know now, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that everything you gave me is firsthand from you.

(John 17:6,7, The Message)

the Father about his group:

Jesus modeled steward-leadership well for his followers. He knew they really belonged to the Father, but that the Father had given them to him to lead as an act of stewardship. He modeled for them, and us, that everything God gives us is firsthand from him: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does" (John 5:19, NLT). In other words, Jesus always pointed up!

One of the members of his small group (a disciple named Peter) later wrote,

Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly— not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to

serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example. And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory and honor.

(1 Peter 5:2-4, NLT, emphasis mine)

The first thing you must learn to avoid burnout as a small group leader is that God is the real leader and center of every Christian small group. Your group belongs to him, but he entrusts it to you as his ambassador or representative. He has assigned the group members to you for care, guidance, and ministry until Christ returns. Therefore, your leadership in your group is an act of stewardship that looks like this:



God's rightful position is at the very center of the group. He is the Master, Leader, Shepherd, and Owner of your group. He is the Head of the Body of Christ. He is the reason for the group's meeting, the one who brings it together, and the one who brings power and transformation to the gathering. He "has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (1 Corinthians 12:18). This should not only humble you as a leader, but take away your heavy burden and the pressure you put on yourself! God is in charge and "able to do immeasurably more than all we

ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20).

I want to encourage you to stop reading for a moment and think about how you've viewed your role as a small group leader. Is God in charge and at the center of your ministry? Are you beside him leading as a faithful steward under his power or your own? If you find that you are leading under your own power, pray about that right now and give your group to God and give him permission to be the center and leader of your group.

Leading from the Second Chair

As a small group leader, you are "leading from the second chair." In a book by the same name,³ Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson provide principles and guidelines for being a second-tier leader. The description for this book says, "Leading from the Second Chair will raise awareness of the need for strong leaders in secondary positions. . . . It will reshape the way they view their role, with an emphasis on their own responsibility as leaders. It recognizes the unique challenges and frustrations of serving in a subordinate position and equips these leaders with the attitudes and skills that they will need to survive and thrive in this new paradigm." The fact is, every effective Christian leader is a second-chair leader, leading from a subordinate position. Christian leaders follow Christ.

The apostle Paul modeled true second-chair leadership: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Jesus himself modeled second-chair leadership: "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). As a second-chair leader, you are to be completely dependent on the One who sits upon the throne of your life. He leads through you. Your attitude should be much like that of Mother Teresa, who said, "I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world."

Most of us have never been taught how to lead from a subordinate position to God and it does not come naturally. So we must reorient ourselves to think and lead in a new way. I believe this is exactly what the apostle Paul had in mind when he penned these words:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2, NLT)

This passage helps us as we consider how to transform our lives and leadership from the normal behaviors and customs of our world to being Goddirected. It begins with placing our lives before God each day as an offering. Each morning when I wake up—before my feet even hit the floor—I surrender my day to God. Although I am faithful in doing this daily, I've found that this is not enough. Throughout my day, I must stop and surrender a meeting I'm walking into, a phone call I'm about to make, or an email I'm writing. Sometimes I find I must stop in the middle of an activity or conversation to surrender it to God.

Over time, God is slowly changing the way I think, but some part of me always wants to try to regain control. It's a constant battle. But I've found that when God is on the throne and I am in the second chair, my steward-leadership is powerful and quite effective. I could recount numerous instances of this as proof for you, but one I always remember happened a couple years ago.

I received a call from Carolyn, a long-time church member whose husband was near death. On my way to the hospital, I prayed for John's family and what I might say when I arrived. I remember telling God that I had absolutely nothing of substance to offer. I did not know what to say to the family and had some nervousness and fears about how to minister to them. I said, "Since I have nothing, Father, you'll have to do all the work. Just use me any way you want."

When I walked into the room, I had absolutely no agenda or plan of my own. I was just there. I can't even remember what I said or did that day. But when I left, I sensed that God had used me in a powerful way. One of the daughters called me the next morning to tell me John had passed away peacefully, and she expressed her thankfulness for how I ministered to her

family. I knew I could only take credit for being an instrument that God used to love this family as they walked through what David called "the valley of the shadow of death." As she spoke, I felt humbled and privileged at the same time.

Just last month, John's son-in-law gave his life to Christ. Deep within my spirit, I felt an overwhelming sense of joy I could not explain, but again I sensed God's sovereignty—I knew how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is. And I knew God used my time at the hospital that day to share Christ's love in a transformational way.

I meet people all the time who struggle with knowing God's will or what he wants them to do. It starts with allowing God to truly be the Lord and Leader of your life, allowing him to change the way you think. Then, as Romans 12:2 tells us, you will know what God wants you to do. This is where burnout ends and spiritual, second-chair small group leadership begins.

Your Role as a Leader

Your mainjob asaleaderisverysimple: to stay very close to God. You must be connected to the Vine in order to bear any fruit. Apart from him you can do nothing (John 15:5). In my book Leading from the Heart, I used King David —a man after God's own heart—as a biblical illustration of how to lead out of an intimate relationship with God.

Just like the Psalmist, imagine your life as a cup. Christ pours his abundant life into you as you spend time with him. In fact, he continues to pour into you even to overflowing. (The word Jesus used in John 10:10 for "abundant" or "full" actually means "superabundant" or "overflowing.") Christ's activity within you overflows into the lives of the people who are closest to you. As David put it in Psalm 23:5, "my cup overflows" with God's grace, love, and blessings.

As you gather together with your small group in Christ's name and for his purposes, he is literally present with you (Matthew 18:20). How do you make his presence and leadership real? I always take the first part of every meeting to welcome him and to ask him to lead, help us listen to him, and show us his way. That's a start, but I've found that the group can still forget

who is in charge unless we continue to keep him central throughout the meeting. In every part of the group gathering, the leader leads the group to Christ and ushers Christ to the group.

The apostle Paul often compared his ministry to running a race (Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 9:24; Galatians 2:2; 5:7; 2 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 12:1). Paul's goal was to "finish the race and complete the task the Lord has given me" (Acts 20:24). He was able to do that because he was "compelled by the Spirit" (v. 22), not by his own agenda. Paul knew Your first burnout prevention tool:

Transform your paradigm from leadership to stewardship.

that God is "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:21), and the apostle was dependent on this all-powerful God as the real leader. For him, leadership was stewardship. This is where it begins with you and me as leaders as well.

But it does not end here. Once we acknowledge the real Team Leader and understand group stewardship, we must learn how to share our secondchair leadership with others.

Chapter Two

Make More Disciples by Making Less

Disciples cannot be mass produced. We cannot drop people into a "program" and see disciples emerge at the end of a production line. It takes time to make disciples. It takes individual, personal attention.¹

- Leroy Eims

As a small group leader, how many people do you think you can effectively lead, shepherd, and disciple? Eight? Ten? Twelve? Twenty? Let me ask the question another way: If you are to bear much fruit, fruit that will last . . . if you are to see true transformation of people's lives . . . if you are to see people develop into leaders so that you are multiplying your leadership . . . into how many people can you invest your life?

"The Best Small Group Leader Ever" formed a small team that would eventually change the world. But first, Jesus called two sets of brothers to walk with him: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Three of these men (Peter, James, and John) became Jesus' inner circle or what could be called his "core team." Jesus poured his life into these three men, investing into them and modeling a life surrendered to the Father for them. He took these three away with him to pray and heal, and they were with him when he was transfigured. While Jesus did not ignore the other apostles or his followers, he focused on these three with extra time and attention. He intentionally discipled these three and developed them into leaders. Do you remember the diagram from the last chapter about allowing God to be the leader and taking a supportive role as the steward for your group? Here's how Jesus' ministry looked with his core team:



Jesus knew something vital about leadership, discipleship, and shepherding people. No one can effectively lead, disciple, or shepherd more than two or three people. Even Jesus didn't attempt it. Each of the three areas of group leadership—leading, discipling, and shepherding—are based on close relationships in which the leader invests into the life of those he or she is leading.

Bust Burnout!

"When you're burned out, problems seem insurmountable, everything looks bleak, and it's

difficult to muster up the energy to care—let alone do something about your situation." Has this ever described you or small group leaders you know? According to experts in stress management,

burnout has a variety of causes, including:

- Being expected to fill too many roles for too many people
- Taking on too many responsibilities without enough help from others
- Lack of close, supportive relationships
- The need to be in control; reluctance to delegate to others
- Being a high-achieving, type A personality⁴

All of these describe many small group leaders I know—including myself! Burnout-producing stress has been likened to keeping a dozen balls in the air with little recognition or reward. I can only literally juggle two balls. It's not much of an achievement, but I can do it really well! I can juggle three balls for five seconds. If I practiced really hard (and for a long time) I'm sure I could learn how to juggle four or five.

Leading, shepherding, and discipling people is infinitely more complex than juggling balls, and the consequences of dropping one is far more significant. One of the main reasons small group leaders burn out and their small groups fail is because they attempt to do far too much! Even the most extraordinary leaders cannot effectively disciple a small group of eight or more.

Small Groups Are Too Big

Programs, events, or even "discipleship studies" do not produce disciples. Disciples are not even created by small groups! Disciples are made in the context of authentic community by individuals through the power of the Holy Spirit. For years, the church has assumed that small groups make disciples. But they don't. Small groups are simply the context or environment in which disciples can be produced. Disciples are made with a life-on-life exchange. As Leroy Eims says, "It takes individual, personal attention. It takes hours of prayer for them. It takes patience and understanding to teach them how to get into the Word of God for themselves, how to feed and nourish their souls, and by the power of the Holy Spirit how to apply the Word to their lives. And it takes being an

example to them of all of the above." 5 Small groups cannot accomplish this. And leaders cannot achieve this on their own with a group of eight to twelve.

When Jesus told his disciples to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19), he wasn't teaching them a new program or process for growing the church. He was simply commissioning his followers to continue to do what they had seen him do and what he had taught them to do—to invest their lives into the people God gave them (to be "with" them), to invite them to follow Jesus, and to teach (disciple) them in the new way of life in the Kingdom of God. This was the fulfillment of Jesus' words to them: "A student [disciple] is not above his teacher; but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

When one calls himself a Christian today, it does not necessarily mean he is a "disciple" or "follower" of Jesus. This is sad. To be called a Christian does not mean very much. The word disciple also has gone through some very unfortunate misuses over the last several decades, so I want to be very clear what I mean when I use this term. First, just a little background on the word: I find it fascinating that the word disciple is only found in the New Testament in the Gospels and the Book of Acts. It's never used in any of the letters to churches or individuals. A disciple was always tied to a rabbi, and the concept of a rabbi-disciple relationship was uniquely Jewish in terms of religious culture. As the gospel spread beyond the Jewish world, this concept may have lost some of its meaning.

Another important fact to remember is that Christ is still present and is the Head of the Body. He is still the rabbi we follow. (I believe that was part of his reasoning for stating at the end of his Great Commission, "surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.") It is critical to remember that as a leader, you do not have your own disciples. I've heard folks say "I'm a disciple of Reverend Smith" or "I'm a follower of Brother Jim." Let me say it again: you do not have your own disciples! You make disciples of Christ. You help people follow him only. You want people to follow your example, but not to follow you. Furthermore, you want them to follow your example only as you follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Discipleship is intricately tied to relationship. Discipleship is not a program, a set of practices we learn, or a list of procedures in which we participate.

Discipleship is the personal relationship in which one believer pours his or her life out into another to help that person become more like Jesus. Different people do that in different ways based on different spiritual gifts, time availability, and a wide variety of other factors.

I like the simple definition of discipleship I recently read on a blog: "When you use the term discipleship, what comes to mind for me is intentional, intimate relationships between 2-4 people with the prime objective being spiritual maturity to Christlikeness." I believe real discipleship happens as one person invests into the life of another. I think most people can make this kind of investment with at most two or three people at once. In the best circumstances, these two to three should be people within your small group. It does not make a lot of sense to be in one group for discipleship, another for fellowship, another for Bible study, and yet another in which you serve together. That leads to burnout for everyone (yet I've seen plenty of churches organized this way).

The small group is where you do life together, serve together in missional community, and discuss and apply the Bible together. It's also a warm and welcoming place where you can invite friends who do not yet know Christ—where they can see the love portrayed in your community life and meet the One who makes it happen. Within that larger small group, discipleship happens one-on-one or with two or three who meet regularly for more intense Bible study, memorization and personal application; prayer; confession; and accountability. In this more personal and even private setting, discipleship can be very intentional, accountable, and reproducible.

In his book, The Search to Belong, Joseph Myers discusses the four spaces of community: public, social, personal, and intimate. He defines public belonging as connecting through outside influences or sharing a common experience, for example, being a Pittsburgh Steelers fan or participating in a worship service with several hundred others. Social belonging is where you share "snapshots" of who you are with others. This is a space where you can connect socially and perhaps select people with whom you might grow into deeper relationships. Personal belonging is the space where you share private, although not intimate experiences, thoughts, and feelings with "close friends." Finally, intimate belonging is where you share what Myers calls

"naked" experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Most people have very few intimate relationships.

I believe most small groups exist in one or both of the social and personal spaces. They begin in the social space as individuals meet and start to form a group. Healthy groups move into more personal belonging patterns over time as members share more deeply and become friends. But, of course, not everyone in a group will be at the same level of belonging with one another. I'm in a group right now in which I share just the beginnings of a social relationship with one couple, a personal relationship with one of the men, and something in—between with several others. Plus, I share an intimate relationship with one member of the group: my wife.

In groups of two or three, however, relationships are much more personal in nature. These are close confidants whom you trust. The relationships are more authentic and intentional than in the larger small group. The table on the following page summarizes some of the intentional differences between the larger small group and the subgroup of two or three.

Small Group Two or Three

Social to personal belonging: a group of friends, perhaps very good friends Personal belonging with trusted confidants

Do life together

Discuss and apply the Bible together Gather regularly for intentional discipleship

Intense study of God's Word, memorization, personal application, and accountability

Worship and pray together More personal prayer and confession

Serve together

Invite others in; pray for one another's lost friends Specific discussion and accountability for how we are serving and sharing

our faith

Group members often balk when faced with the proposition of deeper prayer, accountability, and especially confession in a group setting . . . and for good reason! Most small groups are too big for these Biblical practices. But a core group of two or three is just right.

Two or Three

Jesus had relationships with the Twelve, but he had very close, personal relationships with his inner circle of Peter, James, and John. He spent more time with them and intentionally invested into their lives. And while the Gospels do not explicitly state it, I've noticed that Jesus shared an increasing amount of leadership with these three over time. Perhaps that's why Peter was so outspoken and why James and John (or at least their mother) thought they deserved special seats next to Jesus in heaven. Note that the names of Peter, James, John, and Andrew are always mentioned first in the listing of the apostles. Why do you rarely hear anything about Bartholomew, James son of Alphaeus, and Judas son of James? Perhaps it is because they were not the main focus of Jesus' attention. Also, the fact that Peter and John were key leaders in the early church, especially in Acts 1-6, demonstrates that they had already assumed some shared leadership in the group before Jesus' death and resurrection. (Besides the listing of the apostles in Acts 1:13, the apostle James' name is mysteriously missing in the rest of Acts. But we know he was still active; he was the first of the apostles to be martyred-Acts 12:2.)

Why did Jesus choose three men as his inner circle? Three is a significant number in Scripture. The Godhead consists of three persons. Noah had three sons, who repopulated the earth after the flood. Abraham met with three visitors (probably Christ and two angels). Jesus was in the tomb three days. The Holy City that comes down out of heaven will have three gates on every side.

I'm amazed by how often Scripture refers specifically to two or three:

• "Two are better than one [but] a cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

- "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses" (1 Timothy 5:19; also see Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; and Hebrews 10:28).
- "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20).
- "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said" (1 Corinthians 14:29).

I'm not saying there is anything "magical" about a core group of three. I want to be clear that I'm not advocating a new program or system for small groups consisting of no more than three or four people.⁸ I'm simply pointing out that there are limits to the total number of people you can effectively lead, shepherd, and disciple. And I believe that number is two or three.

Small Group Fractaling

Jesus, as part of the Godhead of three, poured his life into the three in his inner circle, who in turn invested into the rest of the Twelve. This design has a name: fractaling. A fractal is "a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be subdivided in parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a smaller copy of the whole. Fractals are generally selfsimilar (bits look like the whole) and independent of scale (they look similar, no matter how closely you examine them)." Fractals are found throughout nature: ferns, leaves, snowflakes, crystals, and coral reefs, just to name a few. They are found in the human body, too: our blood vessels and nervous system are obvious examples. In a novel called The Shack, a character representing the Holy Spirit shows the main character a garden, which looks like a mess at first glance. The Holy Spirit's character shares that when viewed from above, however, it is a fractal: "a fractal . . . something considered simple and orderly that is actually composed of repeated patterns no matter how magnified. A fractal is almost infinitely complex. I love fractals, so I put them everywhere."10

Our lives, our small groups, our churches often look rather chaotic and messy from ground view. But if I can step back and see the bigger picture that God sees, perhaps I will see a beautifully simple and orderly yet infinitely complex design—a fractal! God is not a God of disorder (1 Corinthians 14:33). The Body of Christ, as God designed it, is a living

organism that has a fractal pattern to it. Jesus' small group was also a fractal: it had a repeating pattern of subdivided parts, not very obvious at first glance, but simple and orderly when viewed more carefully.

I rest my case

Like a trial lawyer, I've presented solid evidence in this chapter for the core team approach to small

Your second burnout prevention tool: Let God lead you to two or three people whom you can disciple.

group leadership. I've shown you as a case in point how Jesus focused on three men out of the twelve disciples. I've demonstrated psychologically how we burn out when we try juggling too many balls at once—or try leading too many people at once. I have established sociologically that most small groups are actually too big to effectively make strong disciples. I've exhibited the many biblical examples of the significance of "two or three." I've shown scientifically how fractals occur in nature as evidence of God's design.

Consider a new answer to the original question: As a small group leader, how many people do you think you can effectively lead, shepherd, and disciple?

Two or three for discipleship within the larger group of eight to twelve for community. This is the simple design that worked for "The Best Small Group Leader Ever," and it will work for you too!

Chapter Three

Discover and Develop a Core Team to Launch a New Group

"It's only as we develop others that we permanently succeed." — Harvey S. Firestone

Robert is one of the most conscientious small group leaders I've encountered. He led a small group in a church at which I ministered about ten years ago. Robert had a shepherd's heart, led great studies of the Word,

and even wrote his own lessons. He followed up with members between meetings and invested in their lives. He was absolutely sold-out for God and felt a strong calling as a small group leader.

One day Robert shared that despite all his hard work and effort, he didn't see much evidence of his group members growing spiritually. In fact, the members were very comfortable in the group. They attended the meetings every week because Robert was a good leader and facilitator. But none of them were willing—nor did they think they were able— to move beyond being fed by Robert.

"Why do you think that is?" I asked.

"Well," Robert began, "I've tried to get them to

step up and help me lead, but none of them want to. They're really dependent on me."

I let several awkward moments of silence go by before Robert finally said, "Maybe I've been doing too much. I don't want to sound full of myself, but maybe I've been too good of a leader!"

Robert was right. His example set a high standard for what leadership looked like and he modeled near-perfect solo leadership. Even though he had the ability to sustain this for a short time, his leadership style did not bear fruit.

It doesn't have to be this way

Dave and Carol started their group much differently. Like Robert, they are also very gifted leaders in both the marketplace and church. They started a group of newly married couples with a core team of one other couple. (Dave and Carol have been married about 20 years and were "mentors" for the rest of the group.) They invested their lives in this couple and increasingly shared ownership and leadership with them. Over time, they shared leadership with other group members as well. Dave and Carol consider small group leadership to be a collaborative effort.

Because of this inclusive approach, their group members have grown spiritually. Within a year, the new couple, along with a third couple from the group decided to launch a new small group for young families. This

happened naturally without any prodding from me (their small groups minister) or from Dave and Carol.

The difference is obvious. Dave and Carol shared leadership and had a strategy and steps for discipling and developing members collaboratively. Like other leaders at our church, Dave and Carol have learned from the Best Small Group Leader Ever how to lead a healthy, fruit-bearing small group. Here are the steps Jesus used to develop his core team that you can utilize in your own strategy.

Ask!

Since your group really belongs to God and you're leading from the "second chair," it's important to find your core team through prayer. In other words, wait on God to move. Do not move ahead in your own power, but only by the move of the Spirit of God. This is not easy for many leaders who have been trained to "make things happen," but it's the only way to make core team leadership work.

How did "The Best Small Group Leader Ever" find his core team? It began with his heart, his relationship with his Father, and how he viewed his ministry. As discussed in Chapter 1, Jesus viewed his life, ministry, and his group of followers as an act of stewardship. He understood that these men belonged to God and were a gift from God (John 17:6).

Jesus did not go out and recruit his small group of disciples. He apparently did not even have a job description nor did he interview people to find the best candidates. His Father simply gave them to him. Before Jesus even approached the men who would become his followers, he spent forty days fasting in the desert. I wish the Bible gave us more details about what he was doing out there between Satan's temptations. I do believe he was praying while he was fasting. After all, these two activities always go together in Scripture.

Jesus was a man of prayer, and, after thirty years on the earth, he was about to launch his ministry, which would be focused on the twelve apostles and especially on the three (his core team). The selection of these men was undoubtedly crucial. Their character and faithfulness would determine the

future of the church. Everything was on the line! I have no doubt that Jesus spent some of his time talking with his Father about the men the Father would give him.

Jesus found his group in at least two stages. First he called some to follow him as his disciples. Then, later, he selected out of his followers his group of twelve apostles. Again, Jesus spent time in prayer before making that essential selection:

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew . . .

(Luke 6:12-14)

My first staff ministry position was at a church in central Indiana. I knew no one in the church and was given the assignment of starting a new small groups ministry in a Sunday school environment. I knew I wanted to start one group that would be developed into a planning team and provide the ministry with leadership. But where would I find these potential leaders?

I remember standing in the church parking lot late one afternoon looking out at the fields that surrounded the church's property, wondering where I'd find more leaders. Then God spoke to me. It wasn't audible, but it was clear.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

I know that verse, I thought to myself. Then you know what to do, God responded.

Through the years, I've learned that launching any kind of life-changing group begins with asking the Lord of the Harvest to provide the workers (Matthew 9:37,38)! He will respond and do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20).

Wait and Watch Expectantly

What you do after you pray is crucial as well. When you pray, expect that God will answer, but remember this important fact: the timing is his, not

yours.

Jesus gave his disciples a vision and mission before he returned to heaven: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8, NLT). If I had been standing there that day, I would have said, "Come on, let's go!" And I'm guessing some of the disciples, especially impetuous Peter, felt that way at first too.

Not so fast! Just a few moments earlier, Jesus told them, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised" (Acts 1:4). The disciples obeyed and waited in an upper room until the Holy Spirit entered and empowered them to move forward . . . and while they waited, they prayed. This is vital for any group that will bear fruit: before doing anything else, prayerfully wait for God to move. Then keep your spiritual eyes and ears open for those God will send you, no matter how long it takes. And if God sends you just one person at first, be faithful in your stewardship of that one person (which may be the single "talent" God expects you to manage well). God has given you this one person for a reason. Invest in this one person until God gives you more.

Waiting and watching does not mean you are passive. As you wait, pursue active involvement in places where you will likely meet people. Walk your neighborhood. Talk to neighbors. Attend community and church events and talk to people. Keep your eyes open before and after your church services. And remember that perhaps God has already given you some of this core team. Who is already in your sphere of relationships?

One of the most fascinating stories in the gospels to me is found in the first chapter of John. Jesus has just called Philip to follow him. Then Philip went and found Nathaniel and told him about Jesus. As Nathaniel approached, Jesus said, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false" (v. 47). Nathaniel was surprised. "How do you know me?" he asked. Apparently Jesus had never met Nathaniel but saw him with spiritual eyes and knew him because the Father had already told Jesus about Nathaniel.

Over the years, I've learned to depend upon God as I start new small groups. A couple years ago, I prayed everyday, asking God to help me know whom he wanted in a new group I was starting. One day, Larry walked in the front door of our office building and asked if he could visit with the small groups minister. I reluctantly set aside my group planning and went out to meet him, all the while a bit irritated by the unannounced intrusion into my work. I assumed it was probably a salesman who had come to the office to waste my time.

Larry introduced himself and we sat down to talk. As we chatted, I discovered that he and his wife Glenda had been led to Christ and then discipled by Ralph Neighbour, the founder of TOUCH Outreach Ministries. Larry invested years on various church staff ministries, and recently moved to Louisville, looking for a church where he could get involved in small groups. It was as if God shouted, "Mike, open your eyes!"

The next Sunday morning I saw Chris standing around in our church's lobby. It seemed odd to me that he apparently had nothing to do. I had known Chris and his wife Tiffany for several years. Chris works on our backstage crew and has a huge servant's heart. Something inside me told me to go over and talk to him. I obeyed, but had no idea why.

On my walk over, God told me—and it was extremely clear—to ask Chris to be in my new group. Hearing this stopped me in my tracks in the middle of the lobby. Chris is a successful home builder in our area, but I did not consider him to be a potential small group leader. Finally I obeyed and walked over to speak to him. I shared with Chris what the group was about and invited him to be a part of it. I expected him to say he'd have to think about it, but he immediately said, "Yeah! I'm in!"

God had given me a core team. It had nothing to do with my ideas or choices. How cool is that? God arranged "the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (1 Corinthians 12:18). One person after another was given to me for that first group, and the same thing will happen to you if you wait on God to show you whom to approach for his core team.

Meet with the Core Team

Once God gives you two or three core team members, meet with them to pray, plan, and wait on God to move. The core team may meet together for a week or two or several months before God shows you all what he has in mind for you. In my church, I train our leaders and their core team members not to rush the process. Again, the timetable is God's. The core team prayerfully discusses why their group exists and what the group will do, remembering that "we humans keep brainstorming options and plans, but God's purpose prevails" (Proverbs 19:21, The Message). Pray about whom else God will give you for the rest of the group and then wait expectantly for God to place these people in your paths.

During this time, you must invest into your core team members in a variety of ways. The main focus is to build a relationship with each person, discovering along the way what each individual needs and desires in terms of discipleship, prayer, and shepherding. From the outset, you should share ownership of the group with them, inviting them to lead in areas of their giftedness, abilities, strengths, and passions.

This formation time is vital to the group's development. Realize that this core team is not just a subset of the greater group that is to come; this is the group God has formed for you! The core team has been placed in your care to lead, disciple, and shepherd. This may be a bit of a paradigm shift for you, so you may need to redefine your role and expectations as a small group leader. To make sure you understand what I'm writing, let me phrase it another way:

Your role as a small group leader is not to lead the entire small group of eight or ten or twelve. Your role is primarily to shepherd and disciple (develop) two or three people in your inner circle—and then to share ownership and leadership with them.

Move Forward and Party!

After praying and planning together, the core team should now begin to invite others to join you. The core team members usually find that God has already put the right people in their paths in their neighborhoods, at other church activities, in their families, workplaces, and other social activities

(such as their kids' sports activities). Following is an example of how others are brought into the group by core team members.

Fariba is a core team member of a women's group in our church. She usually attends one of our Sunday morning services. One particular weekend, Fariba sensed God leading her to come Saturday night, although she didn't understand why at the time. As she entered the auditorium, she felt led to sit in an unusual spot in the auditorium. As she entered the row, she noticed a young woman sitting by herself. Fariba is a very shy person, but she felt God lead her to ask the young woman if she could sit next to her. The young woman agreed.

After the service, Fariba talked to her and noticed that she was deeply moved by the worship and something the pastor said in his message. They talked for a while and the woman shared some of her troubled story. Fariba once again felt moved by God, inviting the woman to her small group. The next week, she attended the group meeting and got to know the other group members, sharing her struggles with them.

Several weeks later, Fariba and the rest of the group led this young woman to Christ. I watched in amazement one Saturday evening as Fariba baptized her new friend during a worship service. Needless to say, it was a very emotional and spiritual moment!

In many small groups led by solo leaders, the leader is the only one who "recruits" or invites people to the group. This is inefficient and often ineffective. The core group takes ownership right away by praying and then inviting people in their spheres of relationship into the group. This act is also vital for how group members will be shepherded and discipled in the future. Relational discipleship and shepherding happens naturally among the people core team members have invited. This is the power of "fractaling" within the group.

Before the first "official" meeting, the core team might plan a party at which their guests can get to know one another and hear a little more about the plans for the group. This is a simple and fun opportunity for people to meet some new friends.

At the party, the core team (not just you, the leader) takes a couple of minutes to let those present know the specifics of the first group meeting: date, time, place, what to bring, and so forth. Also, someone from the core team should tell them a little about why this group is meeting and what this group will be doing during meetings and as a group in the areas of fellowship, ministry, servanthood, and mission.

Launch!

As the new group begins, you must first become a group—a group that enters into community life together with a plan of action for the future. (I have written a four-session guide called Launch into Community Life that helps a new group launch strong by building a master plan of action together. In these four sessions, the newly formed group examines the start of the early church as described in the Book of Acts, and applies what they learn as they launch their small group.)

You can continue to lead solo like my friend Robert, or you can team-lead like Dave and Carol (and, by the way, Jesus). I've given you five easy steps for developing your core team:

- 1. Ask
- 2. Wait and watch expectantly
- 3. Meet with the core team
- 4. Move forward and party
- 5. Launch

Your third burnout prevention tool: **Share leadership by launching with a core team.**

If you have taken these steps, your new group still has some important work to do. You need to get off to a good, healthy start with everyone on the same page. A big part of that depends on how well your core team works together, which I'll discuss in future chapters.

Chapter Four

How to Develop Teamwork in Your Present Group

"The basic building block of good teambuilding is for a leader to promote the feeling that every human being is unique and adds value."

— Unknown

While much of this book shows you how to start a small group as a team, many of you already have a group and would like to turn it into a team. How do you do that? How do you move from leading solo to team-leading the group?

1. Move Over

Biblical team leadership begins by relinquishing the leadership of the group to God. That means you move over to the second chair, and lead as an act of stewardship to the real Leader and Shepherd of the group.

But how do you successfully make that move? First, you must love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. I know this seems very fundamental. But it's so basic that it might be overlooked. Your move to the second chair starts with how much you love God, his Word, his Son, Jesus, and what he loves. If you love yourself more than you love him, you will never move!

When you really love someone, you desire to spend time with that person. David wrote, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and stand before him?" (Psalm 42:1-2, NLT). If you do not draw close to your heavenly Father each day, desiring to spend time in his Word, praying, and listening to him, start today. I spend time with God every day simply because I love him. I don't do it out of compulsion or legalism, but out of love and because of our deep relationship. Your relationship with God is foundational. It is more important than your relationships with your spouse, kids, and small group members. Those relationships flow out of and grow because of your relationship with God.

Second (and just as vital), you must let Christ direct your life. If you are still on the throne of your life, directing your own decisions, thoughts, actions, and plans, you must move out of that position. For the born-again believer, Christ must be in the driver's seat and call the shots. This begins with faith

in Christ and a trusting dependence on him. You cannot turn your group over to him if you have not turned your life over to him first.

In John 15, Jesus illustrates this indispensable first step:

Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. I am the Vine [first chair], you are the branches [second chair]. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing."

(vv. 4, 5, The Message)

Part of the sanctification more holy, more Christ-like) Christ to be in the first chair (the driver's seat) in more and more areas of your life. You may never totally arrive at living a Christ-directed life every minute of every day, but you should constantly ask process (becoming

involves allowing yourself the question: Am I moving in that direction? Who is running my life? Who is in control? Am I yielding control to him? The move to secondchair leadership begins with your heart and will . . . and it's not a one-time thing.

Next, help your group members take ownership of this vital value. Begin your meetings by not only recognizing Christ's presence in your midst, but also his power and purpose. Recognize aloud that he is not only a part of the meeting but truly in charge of it—he is the real leader and shepherd of the group, and the only reason you have gathered together.

This is a fundamental first step, but don't fake it! Allowing Christ to be leader of your group will come naturally if he is first leader of your life. Move toward surrender as each day passes, but remember that sanctification is a process. You don't need to reach perfection to lead your group in this way.

Before your group can take additional steps toward team-based leadership, each person must know the real leader of the group. This step starts with your heart. You must truly believe that God is the real leader and Christ is in

control of you and your group. Explore this concept with your group members in upcoming meetings and enter into Christ's presence, experience his power, and embrace his purposes for your lives together. This will prepare you and your group for what lies ahead.

2. Share the Load

Once you and your group recognize the real leader of the group, it's time to partner with him to build your core team from your existing group. This is where some of the leaders I work with struggle. They don't know whom to recruit! Some don't see any potential team members. Others feel every member should be on the team. Or they think no one will say yes to their request. And some know one or two group members will be jealous if they are not approached to be core team members.

The selection process does not have to be difficult or fraught with potential conflict or rejection. Here are a few secrets I've found that work:

Abandon your desire to recruit!

Ask the Lord of the Harvest—the real leader of your group—to show you who should serve on your core team. These will be just two or three persons with whom you will share leadership. Do not move ahead in your own power or with your own ideas about who your core team members should be. Ask God and then wait and watch for his response.

I have found that this single action (waiting) is one of the most difficult things for small group leaders to do. It often feels more natural to run ahead and get something done. But, just as the apostles waited in an upper room for the Father to empower them, you must wait for the Father to empower you with running mates through the working of his Spirit.

What to do if no one looks like a potential core team member

If you think no one in your group could be a core team member, surrender your own thoughts, pray, and faithfully wait for God's reply. You might be surprised! Or, God may move a new person into your group who could be a core team member. You must believe that "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (1 Corinthians

12:18). He will—or already has—put every part of your core team in the group, just where he wants them to be.

Some group leaders have unrealistic expectations of potential core team members. Rather than looking for potential, they look for perfection. Rather than looking at the heart, they look at external factors such as Bible knowledge, teaching skills, personality strengths, and leadership abilities. The best leaders are those who don't necessarily have any of these outward appearances, but they do have humble, godly hearts. If you don't believe me, just look at Jesus' disciples!

Six years ago, Laura asked me to help her find a woman's group. I was still new in my pastoral position at the church, and I was praying for God to send me some leaders. I thought I sensed the Spirit prompting me about Laura. So I asked her if she'd consider starting and leading a group instead of joining an existing group. She gave me every reason you might think of for not being able or ready to lead, but after a few conversations exploring the possibility, said she'd pray about it. A couple weeks later she told me she'd give it a try. Laura was one of the most reluctant potential leaders I'd ever met, but she sensed God's leading.

Today, Laura's first group has multiplied five times with new leaders and new groups. She serves as a coach over those groups and other leaders of women's groups. A few weeks ago, she agreed to become the leader over all our women's groups and coaches. In just a few years' time, Laura moved from reluctant potential group leader to one of the strongest leaders in my church's small group ministry.

If you met Laura, you might not be immediately impressed with her as a "leader." You'd probably see her more as a servant and someone who has a simple abiding relationship with Jesus. Yet she has produced much fruit, fruit that will last!

Who in your group can serve from the second chair with you? Who has gifts that complement yours? With whom do you enjoy spending time? Who has a humble servant's heart? These are the kinds of people the Holy Spirit might lead you to. But don't listen to me; listen to God!

I've had several leaders tell me no one from their group would step up to be a core team member if asked. They're too busy. They don't think they have the skills. They don't know the Bible enough. I've discovered these same people will say yes more often than I think if a couple things are true:

• I've prayed and determined they're called to serve

on the team. How can they say no when God is calling them to it? Allow God to soften their hearts and prepare them to team-lead by praying hard for them before you approach them.

- I've cast a compelling vision for team-leadership. They must understand the value for sharing leadership as a team (rather than leading as a one-person show). They must see how their contribution to the team will help produce more and better fruit. They must see how their gifts and passions will be used to help the group grow. They must understand that I simply cannot—and will not—lead alone any longer. By helping them see that whatever extra time commitment it will take—and it's usually not that big of a time commitment if you are truly sharing leadership—it will be well worth it.
- I ask them to join a team rather than just performing a task. They will have certain tasks on the team, but there is more to being on a team than just the tasks involved. Share how you will interact as a team: you desire to not only share leadership with them, but to really seek a deeper friendship, a partnership, and become running mates. Plan times when the core team will get together over dinner, for instance.

One of the reasons I've found that people hesitate to be on a team is that they see a leader who does too much. As the group's steward leader, you must grow in your ability to allow others to participate. You can't keep doing everything yourself! You must learn to trust others with leadership, even if they don't do things exactly like you or as well as you might do the same task. Some gifted leaders can lead incredible studies they wrote themselves, shepherd the group by calling people and visiting with them between meetings, and plan serving events for the group without breaking a sweat. Their group is in awe of this "Superleader." No one thinks they could ever lead that well. Surely Superleader does not need anyone's help, right?

If you are Superleader, resign from doing everything. Lead from the second chair, not the first, and then use your extra time and leadership abilities to find ways to get others involved in helping you lead. Humbly back off from doing everything. If you are a perfectionist—which drives a Superleader to do everything and do it with excellence—make sure you are leading for the right reasons, and not out of needing people to be in awe of you rather than God.

What to do if too many of your members think they should be on the core team

I've also had leaders inform me that if they asked select group members to be part of their core team, other members would wonder why they were not asked and hold a grudge.

How do you handle this problem? First, diagnose the issue behind it. The root of the problem is most likely one of two issues:

- The group has lots of mature Christ-followers who are potential leaders (which is a great "problem" to have).
- The group contains immature people—leader "wannabes"—who need to move past their petty jealousies and grow up!

Mature Potential Leaders

If your issue is that you have mature Christians in your group who could be leading a small group themselves, perhaps it's time to talk about sending them out to start new groups. Remind them that this is a main reason for developing a core team, and, since the group has an abundance of potential core team members, you will now begin the planning process to send some of them out together to team lead new groups.

[A note of caution: if you follow the principles outlined in this book, you have already asked the Real Leader of the group who should be part of the core team. You have patiently waited on the Lord to show you whom to ask, and you have watched those for whom God has called out. Is God calling these people to be core team members and potential future leaders in your group right now? Or are they promoting themselves to a heightened position

in the group? If your answer is the latter, read the section below under "Immature Wannabes."]

If you discern that the members of your group are mature and are called to serve as leaders, go ahead and invite everyone to be a part of the core team. Consider the group a leadership-training group and turbo-charge their leadership development as preparation to send them out to launch new groups. Bathe the whole process in prayer, of course, listening very closely for the Spirit's voice in how you develop and then deploy these emerging leaders.

Immature "Wannabes"

More likely, group members who complain about not being "picked" to be on the core team are immature in their faith, emotionally immature, or both. Their response to your asking others—not them—to be on the core team uncovers a host of possible spiritual and emotional issues too numerous to discuss here.

Some people with a low self-esteem try too hard to be noticed or to be seen as important or successful. They may see the core team as an opportunity to climb the church ladder of success, which is a poor motive for leadership. Other group members do not have a biblical understanding of spiritual leadership. Like several of Jesus' apostles, they seek to have more authority and to be in charge. "Instead," said Jesus, "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:43-45). As you discern God's plans, keep your eyes open for group members who seek to serve others. Look for those who see participating in leadership as the best way they can serve the group.

Immature group members need discipleship. As they grow in Christ and take responsibility for their emotions and actions, they are being developed into future leaders. When the time is right, invite them to be part of a core team when God calls them to this role.

How do you respond to a person (let's call her Julie) who wants to be on the core team but is not ready or called? Tell her that you'd like to see her grow into this role in time and as God leads. Encourage her to keep pursuing God and be faithful to the group. Challenge her to serve without a title or position. If she wants to be called a leader but will not serve, she is not ready to lead. Put the focus on God, serving, and the good of the group—and off of the wannabe leader.

I've found that some group members just want to be more involved. And as the group leader, that's what I want too. The more everyone is involved, the more they will have a sense of ownership in the group. In chapter 6, I discuss sharing roles with everyone and I provide a list of possible roles. Everyone has a role, and some of them (the core team) will have leadership roles.

Don't make a big deal or strong public differentiation between the core team and everyone else in the group. If an alien showed up for your group one night and said, "Take me to your leader" you'd introduce the alien to everyone, all of whom would be pointing upward to God. Perhaps not everyone is a part of your core team, but everyone can lead in some capacity through servanthood.

If Julie gets her shorts in a twist because she was not invited to be on the core team after you've followed the advice I've offered here, invite her to take on a specific role; something in line with her gifting or interests. She could be the group prayer champion, food coordinator, timekeeper, social chairperson, or any other role that fits her. This is a way for her to serve the group, but she also is involved in leading in that group role.

Transitioning away from Apprenticeship

Another area that will require your attention is moving from an "apprentice model" to a "team-led model" of group leadership. The apprentice model was used to raise up new leaders in a group. Usually, a leader had one potential or emerging leader who was being intentionally developed to start a new group. That model has had limited success in the West, at least in churches in which I've been involved. The apprentice was not really a team leader, but a leader-in-training, which is a totally different role.

Core team members, on the other hand, are much more than leaders-in-training. They share leadership in the second chair with the main leader. Leadership development comes naturally and organically through this weekly interaction. The core team concept also helps the group to grow both spiritually and numerically, preparing the way for core team members to be sent out to launch new groups with their own core teams (described in Chapter 6).

Don't view your core team members simply as apprentices, interns, or leaders-in-training (or whatever you've called them). A small group is all about discipleship and development, and your job as a leader of the core team is to disciple and develop them. It's just what a small group does. Small groups are natural leader breeders. But that happens as a natural result of meeting together to grow in your faith together.

3. Do Ministry Together

Once you have your core team, you now must act as a team. I've seen a variety of hazards I want to help you avoid once your core team is set:

Don't go back

I've seen leaders (and I tend to be one of them) who have a core team but then continue leading alone. Don't do it. In fact, ask your core team to hold you accountable. (By the way, the next step will help with this.)

Create a very clear plan of action

Who will do what and when? How will you communicate with one another? How often do you want to meet separately from the group to play, pray, and plan? Ask everyone on the core team to write down the decisions made when you meet.

Become a team

Enjoy fun activities together and build friendships with one anther as a core team, away from the other members of your group. Take a ropes course or go camping together. Eat together. Love one another. Bond with them and let

them bond with you. Share the role of shepherding

Look at your group's roster when you meet with your core team. With whom do your core team members have natural relationships? Utilize those friendships as a point of origination to shepherd them through the core team members.

Apart from natural friendships, you can also shepherd group members based on things they have in common with core team members. In a young couples group, several of the couples did not have kids while others had toddlers. One couple with young children on the core team strategically shepherded the other couples with kids. It was a natural alignment. Later, as the group grew, the couples with kids were sent out to launch a new group. It could not have happened more organically and easily!

Share the role of disciplemaker

Especially with newer Christians in the group, employ core team members to provide one-on-one discipleship for those with whom they have a natural relationship. Shepherding and discipleship go hand-in-hand.

Actively develop your core team members.

Leadership development is easy and natural with the core team approach, but it does require effort on your part as the leader of the core team. For example, strategically give your core team members opportunities to lead group meetings. Then, visit with the core team afterwards to encourage the person and provide feedback. If you do this with other core team members, everyone will benefit and become an encourager. I like doing these recap sessions right after a meeting, when possible. They don't have to be long meetings, but they sure are powerful for developing core team members into future core team leaders.

Attend training together

When your church has leadership training, recognition, or other small group leadership events, the whole core team should attend. If your church only invites the main leaders to these trainings, extend an invitation to your core

team. (Of course, make sure you've received approval from your church ministry leader first.)

4. Extend the Kingdom

Core teams make for healthier small groups, and healthy small groups grow. As you move to a core team model, your group will surely grow and Your fourth burnout prevention tool:

Transform your current group by building a core team of select members and sharing leadership

multiply. It is just the natural result (the fruit) of doing small group leadership as a team, leading from the second chair, and enjoying the role without the burnout.

Groups that are led by second chair leaders who share leadership with a core team send out new leaders more easily and quite naturally. It does not need to be forced. In my church, we do not put any time limits or even group size limits on groups. We simply help them to be healthy and let it happen spontaneously.

You can set a goal for group multiplication in the future. Think of it as a group "win." But then focus more on the health of your group, which will produce the win, than on the win itself. In other words, don't force it. Let God add to your number daily those being saved. Let him make things grow. Team with him and your core team to see God 's Kingdom extended to more and more people.

Core team leadership is far more fun and rewarding than leading alone! Chapter Five

Let Go of Leadership

"As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence." — Lao Tsu, The Art of War

On a group mountain bike ride a few years ago, my front tire hit a deep rut, throwing my bike and me eight feet into a creek embankment. I was fine, but I could get neither my bike nor myself up the steep and muddy incline. Fortunately, my friend David was right there to pull me up. Then a couple of other guys stopped to make sure I wasn't hurt and helped fix my bike. This reminded me of King Solomon's wise words:

Two are better thanone, becau se the y have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

I've learned a lot about the Christian life on my bicycle. I used to ride alone, but I've discovered group rides are best! I like having others along to pick me up if I fall. I enjoy the mutual encouragement as well. By riding in a group, we push one another to go farther, faster, and sometimes more dangerously! There is also the benefit of taking turns being the front rider on road rides, because the rest of the group gets a draft from the wind.

Two are better than one on the road, on the trail, and all along the journey. The same is true in your small group, and especially in how your core team works together.

The Type of Leader Needed

It takes a certain kind of leader to share ownership with a core team. Becoming this kind of leader begins with being the right kind of person, and that starts within your heart. Sharing leadership demands servant-leadership. "The Best Small Group Leader Ever" said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). He also said, "But among you, those who are the greatest should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant" (Luke 22:26, NLT).

How you view your leadership—as a leader first or as a servant first—makes all the difference in the world. If you approach leadership as a leader, you will naturally try to control, make decisions, push your agenda, and give orders. If you approach leadership as a servant, you build partnership and shared leadership. As a servant-leader, you will develop a team. Leadership must never be viewed as a power play or an ego-trip.

I believe every Christian leader should read Leadership by the Book by Ken Blanchard, Bill Hybels, and Phil Hodges. "To be a servant leader," they say, "you can't have a big ego." They define ego with the acronym Edging God Out, explaining, "A big ego can't co-exist with a servant's heart because it puts concern for self ahead of service to others and pleasing God."¹

To lead a core team, you must have genuine humility. As you lead, you "do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather [you] think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (Romans 12:3). This does not mean you are a passive or weak leader, however. As the authors of Leadership by the Book point out, team leaders "don't think less of themselves, they just think of themselves less."²

Management guru Jim Collins describes this leadership duality as "Level 5 leadership," which means: modest yet willful, humble yet fearless. A Level 5 leader is the highest level of leadership in Collins' leadership hierarchy.³ It is someone who, in biblical terms, can blend a Christ-like humility with a Christ-like passion for God's Kingdom.

Beyond a big ego, I've discovered three main obstacles to sharing leadership: the heart, the head, and habits. (Use the table on the opposite page to help diagnose and resolve your obstacle, if you have one.)

Working as a core team begins with you as a leader, with your heart, head, and habits. The next important consideration is how your core team works with one another.

Core Team Interaction

How well your core team works together will determine how your whole group will work together. Healthy relationships and healthy communication are necessary for a healthy core team.

One of the first things you can do as a leader with your core team is to talk about why your group exists. Small group participants often come to a group with personal expectations and hopes for the group. As your core team meets together to pray and

Issue Diagnosis You find it difficult to hand off $responsibili_{The}$ ties to others. This Heart

issue stems from a lack of trust or a need to control, but either way, this attitude asphyxiates the group.

You have simply not The learned to share leadHead ership. When you

were asked to lead you thought it was your job to do everything, so you do everything.

Prescription

Ask God to help you change your heart; ask for humility. Humility always precedes surrender. It's not difficult for a humble leader to surrender control of the group. Begin by asking God to change your heart to be more like Jesus'.

- 1. Learn the skills of building a highly functioning team.
- 2. Let your group know things are going to be different.
- 3. Apologize for not giving them opportunities and responsibilities in the past.
- 4. Ask them to remind you to let them be involved.

You are generally Habits good at everything—

except building a team. Even though you have exceptional facilitation skills and Bible knowledge, your group is unhealthy, stagnant, or struggling to survive. Why? Because group members do not sense they are really needed. You do

everything too well! Recognize the issue and simply back off from doing it all. Swallow your pride; other group members may not lead the same as you or as well as you do, but that's OK. If you find you are a perfectionist, work at becoming flawless at giving others an opportunity to do what you do, even if they're not as good as you!

plan for the future, be sure everyone knows what "shared group leadership" means and what you are hoping to achieve together. Your core team is not necessarily a democratic form of group governance. God is the Senior Leader of the group, so you look for his direction first. Remain the key stewardleader of the group by showing your core team the way without controlling the individuals.

Beyond expectations, "all new teams need to have a sense of purpose as well as some clarity about team values and goals, individual roles, team norms and decision making procedures."

As Scott Boren points out in his book The Relational Way, another vital commitment a team needs to make is to belong to one another. Today, unfortunately, we often belong to our possessions (materialism), to ourselves (individualism), and to being entertained (escapism) more than we belong to other people. Belonging to others requires authenticity and accountability. Belonging to one another also requires you as individuals to make an upfront commitment to the core team and then to spend as much time together as possible. This up-front commitment can be formalized as a written covenant or at least an informal agreement you discuss with one another. If you choose the latter (to keep this process more casual), then be sure someone takes notes on what you decide.

Beware of Dysfunctional Team Behavior

An excellent resource as you seek to build and begin to work as a team is Patrick Lencioni's The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.⁶ The five dysfunctions are as follows:

1. Absence of Trust

This dysfunction is caused by a team's unwillingness to be vulnerable with one another. Team members who are not genuinely open concerning their weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation of trust. Nancy Ortberg points out that this vulnerability-based trust makes a team great. She says, "When a leader admits to his or her weaknesses, they are inviting others to participate in leadership to fill the gap of what the leader cannot do. No one

can do everything, and this kind of vulnerability allows for everyone on a team to contribute in meaningful ways."⁷

Spending time together and talking about issues builds trust. Again, this starts with a leader who models authenticity.

2. Fear of Conflict

The failure to build trust sets a tone for the second dysfunction: fear of conflict. Teams that lack trust are incapable of engaging in an unfiltered passionate debate of ideas. Instead, they resort to veiled discussions and guarded comments. If you avoid conflict, you will never be relationally strong. Conflict is a natural stage for every partnership, group, or team. Face it head on and biblically (see Matthew 18:15-20 as an example). A great team works through conflict together and comes out stronger.

3. Lack of Commitment

A lack of healthy conflict brings on the third dysfunction of a team: the inability to commit. Without having aired opinions in the course of passionate and open debate, team members rarely take ownership of decisions, though they may feign agreement during meetings. Healthy core teams take time to research options, dialog (which is different from discussing opinions and persuading others to give into one person's idea), and then commit to a decision together. Once the decision is made, they suspend further debate or second guessing because it will sabotage the plan of action. 4. Avoidance of Accountability

Because of this lack of real commitment and buyin, team members avoid accountability. Without a commitment to a clear plan of action, even the most focused and driven people hesitate to call their peers on actions and behaviors that are counterproductive to the good of the team. You do not need to force accountability on team members. Doing so often creates unneeded tension. However, accountability is a necessary part of authentic community and leadership. Accountability should be agreed upon and asked for by each team member: "I give permission to the rest of you to hold me accountable to this. How can we hold one another accountable to what we've agreed upon?"

5. Inattention to Results

Failure to hold one another accountable creates an environment where the fifth and final dysfunction can thrive. Inattention to results occurs when team members put their individual needs (such as ego or expectations) above the collective goals of the team. We know that results are not completely in our hands. Sometimes we plant the seed, and God is responsible to make it grow. But that does not take us off the hook for irresponsibility. Just read the parable of the talents!

Empower the Core Team to Get Going!

Working well with your core team—discipling, shepherding, and developing these individual as coleaders for your group—will prevent you from burning out and reap great results for your small group. Your style of discipling and development may be different for each core team member, due to each individual's level of faith and leadership gifting. Remember that your main role as a steward-leader is to shepherd your core team, and to shepherd them most effectively, you need to meet them where they are, not where you want them to be or think they should be. There's a big difference.

Ken Blanchard (one of my favorite leadership authors, if you couldn't tell) has developed a very helpful process for leadership development that he calls "situational leadership." He states, "There is nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of unequals."

If a member of your core team has low competence (a function of knowledge and skills) and high commitment (a combination of confidence and motivation) in his or her faith or leadership, then you use the leadership style of directing (provide structure, control, and supervision). For those who have some competence but low commitment, use Your fifth burnout prevention tool:

Shepherd your core team members while they shepherd other members of your group.

the leadership style of coaching (direct and support them). If they have high competence yet variable commitment, utilize the style of supporting (praise,

listen, and facilitate). Finally, for those at the level of high competence and high commitment, use the style of delegating (turn over responsibilities for core team decision making).

Are you the kind of leader who can share ownership and leadership of the group? If not, the good news is you can learn how by following the counsel in this chapter. This involves not only letting go of leadership but helping the core team to work together well. As you begin meeting with your core team, keep a discerning eye on any dysfunctional team behavior, then shepherd and empower them to lead together.

The last words of The One Minute Manager Builds High Performing Teams reads: "Empowerment is all about letting go so that others can get going."

How your core team "gets going" is the topic of the next chapter. Chapter Six

Launch the Group (and Go!)

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." — Unknown

One of the things I love about being a basketball coach is taking a ragtag bunch of kids who don't know one another at the beginning of a season and helping them develop into a winning team. One team I coached several years ago did not look like much at first. I was given one kid with physical and mental disabilities, two with learning challenges, and several others with attention-deficit disorder. Many of the kids could not dribble or catch a ball, much less shoot or be in the right place on defense. After our first practice sessions, I wondered if we'd ever win a game!

I was very fortunate to have three guys on the team who were not only good basketball players, but also humble kids who shared the ball and patiently helped the other players. We started those first practices with the following ground rules:

1. I was the coach, and when they were at practice or

games, they listened only to me (I told the kids and their parents that while on the court, I wanted them to follow only my instructions).

- 2. They were to call me "Coach" (even my own son).
- 3. When I blew the whistle at the beginning of practice, they were to drop everything they were doing and sprint to me. They were not allowed to shoot one more basket or continue a conversation.
- 4. When I spoke to them individually or as a group, they were to look me in the eyes and listen. Everyone understood and agreed upon our ground rules and we even agreed on a set of consequences if any player did not follow the rules. From the first day we were together, we spent time with one another doing fun things between routines. We talked about our favorite things to do off the basketball court, our families, pets, favorites teams, and so forth. And we talked about what it meant to be a real team.

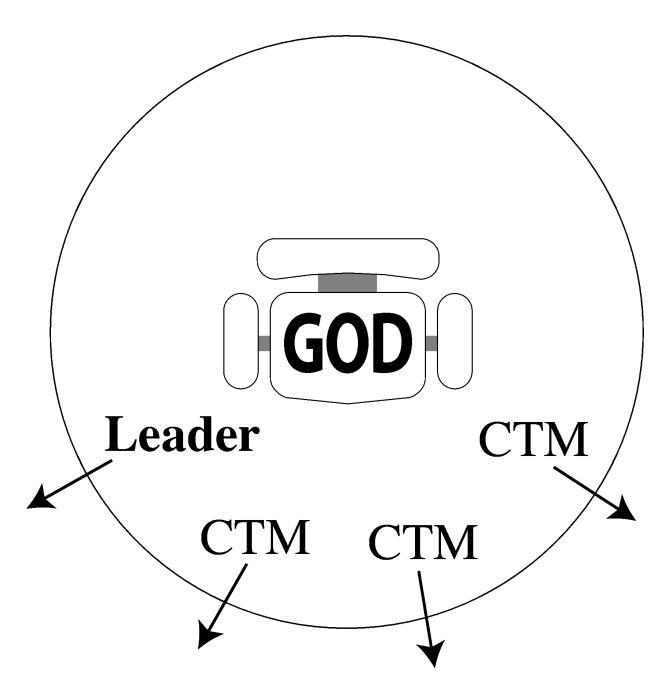
Everyone was encouraged to provide input, but as the head coach I made the final decisions. Our practices were spent on the fundamentals of basketball. I made practice entertaining with lots of games that taught them skills while having fun. They also learned their individual roles on the team. The kids learned that not everyone would score a lot of points. Some would excel in rebounding, others on defense, some on passing, and others on setting screens. We learned how to cheer for one another for all of those things and work together to win the game. We ran no offensive plays, but everyone knew his role. My three floor captains positioned the other players in the right places, reminding them what to do, coaching them on the floor. We surprised people by losing only one game that year, but that was not the best part. The most exciting times were when Dawson, who had many challenges, totally shut down other teams with his defense, sliding his feet just as we had practiced and not allowing anyone by him (whether they had the ball or not). A couple of kids who had never made a basket in a game hit shots the very last game of the year. The crowd from both teams erupted in cheers!

Small groups are much like sports teams. With all of our challenges, they must hear the clear voice of and listen to the real Coach, even with competing voices yelling from the crowd. They need good"floor captains" who help guide the group in the midst of the action. They should decide on ground rules and how to make sure they are followed. They must work on fundamentals before running fancy plays. And last but not least, they need a

game plan and each person needs to know and fulfill his or her role in the group.

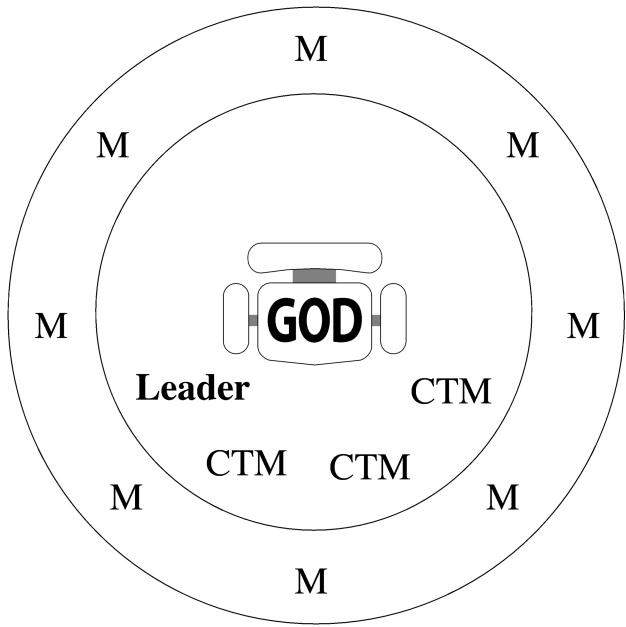
Expand the Core Team Into a Life-Changing Small Group

In Chapter 3, I discussed how to launch your small group and lead it with a core team. In review, as a core team you have prayed together, discussed your mission and goals, and asked God to give you people for your group. Now your core team is actively watching and waiting for the people God is going to give you. So far your group looks like this:



CTM = Core Team

Member The core team is partnering with God in reaching out to others who do not know him or are not yet involved in a small group. As they invite their friends, neighbors, and others they meet in their spheres of relationships, the group begins to expand, looking like this:



 $\mathbf{M} = \text{Member}$

Core team members already have relationships with those they invite. These relationships will provide natural shepherding and discipling opportunities for these team members. This takes all the pressure off the leader, eliminating a big reason for burnout. At the same time, core team members team up with one another to lead and disciple the rest of the group. As the group gets to know each other deeply, they build trusting relationships with one another; giving each person opportunities to help others in the group grow in their faith.

It always fascinates me how this works. I invite a friend to the group, and soon he makes additional friends with whom he has common interests. He hangs out with them, and grows in his faith because of those new friendships. Yea God!

The real power of a team is expressed in the word's acronym: Together Everyone Accomplishes More! Famous basketball commentator Dick Vitale once said, "The glory of sport is witnessing a wellcoached team perform as a single unit, striving for a common goal and ultimately bringing distinction to the jersey the players represent." This reminds me of the apostle Paul's words: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12).

Paul goes on to say, "In fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (v. 18). God has put the people in your group—each one of them—just as he wants them to be. He puts just the right combination of people, with their various gifts and passions and personalities, into the group. And, because of that, he will use your group to do great things for his glory.

Dream a little with me. Jesus started with his core team of Peter, John, and James. That group then expanded into a group of twelve disciples that God had given to Jesus. That group of seeming misfits and uneducated ordinary men changed the world. The same can happen through your group!

Share Roles with Everyone

The core team members will continue to be involved with the new group members, especially those they've invited. This is where the beauty of fractal-leadership comes into play. What do they do with these group members? The same thing you as a leader did with them. You might start by asking them to read the first five chapters of this book. They will each take a role in helping to lead, shepherd, and disciple some of the people in the group. But remember, they're not alone. No one leads alone!

When your group has its first official small group meeting, be sure everyone has a role in the group. Let every person know from the beginning that a

high value in the group is that everyone gets to play! No one just sits and soaks. In fact, make this part of your group covenant.

Roles that group members can fulfill:

- Group Communication Champion: Communicates with the group and the church
- Study Champion: Facilitates study time; helps group decide on materials
- Serve Champion: Helps plan serving opportunities with group
- Evangelism Champion: Helps group reach out to and pray for others
- Worship Champion: Leads worship in group
- Social Champion: Helps plan group social events
- Prayer Champion: Leads prayer times, may keep prayer journal
- Host(ess)/Hospitality Champion: Hosts group or helps plan who hosts
- Food Champion: Helps plan anything dealing with food
- Timekeeper: Helps group stay on track with time

People grow spiritually not just by being constantly fed, but by being actively involved in the functioning of the group. In other words, people grow spiritually as they do ministry, not just receive ministry. Look how the apostle Peter described the involvement of everyone:

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the gloryandthe power forever and ever. Amen.

(1 Peter 4:8-11, emphasis mine)

"Each one" of us should be involved in administering God's grace in its various forms." How cool is that? The apostle Paul backs him up: "From [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:16, emphasis mine).

Many small groups (at least in North America) have fallen in line with the culture. One person leads while the rest come to receive. We must change this unfortunate and unbiblical group behavior!

I often find myself in conversations with people whose greatest priority seems to be comfort: "I'm just not comfortable with leading (or sharing my faith or serving or whatever)." "I just need a comfortable group right now where I can grow in my faith." "I'm uncomfortable with the conflict my group is going through right now. Can you help me find another group?" Jesus spoke much about the costs of discipleship. It's when we count the cost and get out of our comfort zones that we really grow and change our communities.

Leroy Eims once said, "We all know how participation in some great cause or noble enterprise— especially when there is a hint of danger or some element of sacrifice—draws people together as nothing else can. When we are striving toward the same heroic goal, all else is forgotten and our hearts are knit as one." A group becomes a group so that they can participate together in God's work, and, as Eims says, they become a stronger group as they do so.

Enter the Battle

As Eims said, great teams are involved in great causes and noble enterprises. Fighting together against a common enemy bonds you into a band of brothers (and sisters). As a Christian small group you have one common enemy: the devil (1 Peter 5:8). You are engaged in spiritual warfare with and for one another. No one dares enter this war alone.

The battle is actually waged on several fronts. The first front is the battle within you (see Romans 7:23; James 4:1). Each one of us needs others to stand with us, even though the battlefront is very personal. In the smaller groups of two or three trusted allies, we can confess our sins, seek accountability, and pray for one another so that we may be healed. When we fight these battles alone, we remain alone in our sin. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer so poetically wrote,

He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. . . . In confession the breakthrough to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power . . . He can confess his sin and in this very act find fellowship for the first time.²

We must have the community of close foxhole friends in this battle within us.

The second front is against a corrupt culture around us: warped philosophies, barriers erected against the truth of God, proud arguments that keep people from knowing God (see 2 Cor. 10:3, 4, NLT and The Message). As we enter the world each day, we enter a culture at war against God and godly living. Our small group is the best place for us to prepare for these everyday battles. In our group, we learn and apply God's Word together, pray for one another, encourage each other, and spur one another on to do good instead of evil. "Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy" (1 Peter 3:15, The Message).

Steve, the leader of my small group, works in an office where he faces these battles every day. Steve asked me to pray for opportunities to share Christ. I pray for him every single day, and Steve is sharing victories in this area of his at-work ministry. Steve is not alone. We're a team!

A third battlefront is an eternal one. It's a battle between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom. I'm referring to the war that's been waged by Satan since he was cast down from heaven to earth. When the apostle Paul says he has "fought the good fight" (2 Timothy 4:7), this is the fight he's talking about. This eternal battle is for the hearts and minds of people. As God's people, we are involved in it whether we realize it or not. This battlefront actually encompasses the other battles we fight. Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi to remind them about this battle:

But whatever happens to me, you must live in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ, as citizens of heaven. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing side by side, fighting together for the Good News. Don't be intimidated by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this fight together. You have seen me suffer for him in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of this great struggle (Philippians 1:27-30).

We don't normally think of sharing the Good News as a part of a battle, but it is. Our enemy the devil fights against it. As a small group, remember that you are in the fight together, standing side by side, fighting together for the Good News.

Keep Growing and Going ...

Your g roup keeps g row ing to gether for a purpose so that you can go into the world with the Good News together. The fellowship of the early church is expressed well in Acts 2:42-46. It's a familiar passage for most Christians in small groups. These early followers were devoted to the apostle's teaching, doing life together in community, eating together, and praying together. They shared sacrificially with one another and worshipped joyfully together. And then verse 47 shows the result of this community life: "People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved" (The Message). Sharing the Good News is a natural by-product of doing life together in radically real Christian community. Your group's radical love for each other and unity attracts people to the group and to Christ (John 17:21-23; 1 John 1:3).

Sharing the Good News is a team effort. No single person has the spiritual gifts necessary to share God's love with everyone. I do not have my wife's gift of mercy, which opens doors with people all the time. She's so good at making friends and listening! Without much effort, she develops trusting relationships. At the same time, Heidi does not have my gift of evangelism, which enables me to share Christ's love and the gospel message in a way that moves people toward the cross. God has often used us as a team to bring people to him. Neither of us could do it alone. Evangelism is most effective when its done by a team of uniquely gifted people.

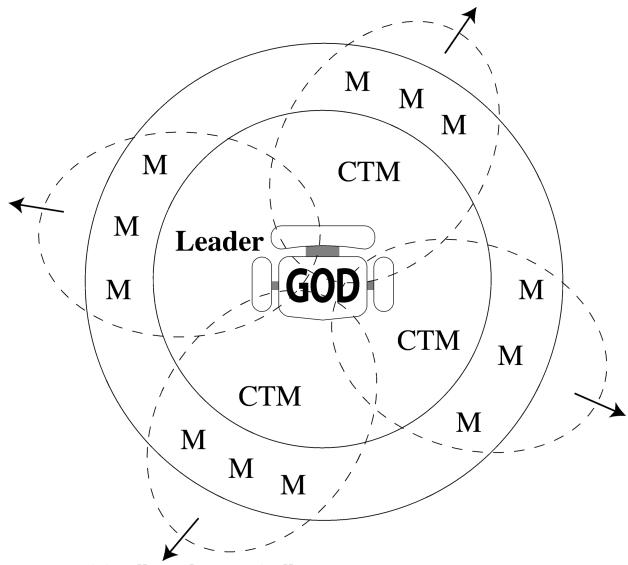
At my church, our small groups serve together regularly. It's fun to wrap gifts together at Christmas time in the mall as an outreach, build a house together in the summer months, clean a school's grounds together before classes begin, or go on a mission trip together. We naturally use the gifts and passions and skills God gave us to serve, and we do it better together, making a bigger and better impact on our community and world.

Grow Smaller While Growing Larger

As team-led small groups grow and go out to make disciples together, they naturally "subgroup." That is, usually about two to four members break out from the larger group to perform certain tasks together. These subgroups also get together socially between meetings. This is human nature. People seek out those in a larger group with whom they have more in common. Some have children of the same age or they enjoy the same activities or have common interests. (Usually, this happens around the core team members who invited them in, but not always.)

As healthy groups are going out to serve, they are also inviting new people in. As a partial result of using core teams at my church, some of our small groups are not very small by definition. They are having so much fun, are so attractive to others, and are so effective that they just naturally keep drawing in new people. We have groups of 18, 20, and even more from time to time. We've even had groups swell to 30 people before the group birthed a daughter group, and that's just counting adults!

Many small group experts have said a small group must be a certain size (about eight to ten) to be effective. Yet these big small groups are some of the best, healthiest, most fruitful and productive groups I've ever seen. How do they accomplish this? They subgroup into smaller groups of three to six or more for Bible study and prayer times, going to different parts of the house. Core team members are already prepared to facilitate a subgroup during the meetings, and continue to lead, shepherd, and disciple part of the group between meetings. The group begins to look something like the illustration on the next page. (As core team members develop, they might lead their own subgroups. If the core team is still being discipled and developed, the leader would likely continue to keep them as his or her main focus and not lead a subgroup.)



Grow (Spiritually and Numerically) So You Can Go

One of the main purposes of sharing leadership with core team members is to naturally develop new leaders who will form new core teams and create a new group. "The Best Small Group Leader Ever" had a very specific goal for his core team, which he shared with them from the beginning: "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Jesus further clarified his purpose for them shortly after his resurrection: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Jesus' goal was to reproduce his life and ministry into them with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit (see v. 22). It was the only way to continue

what he started and build his church so that you and I could be his followers today.

Just as Jesus sent his disciples, so he also sends us (see John 17:18, 20). That's why discipleship is not a one-time event, program, or class. True discipleship is an ongoing relational process. Disciples in your group will grow like weeds when they are taking on roles and are involved in discipling others.

As discussed earlier, your main role as the group's second-chair leader is to shepherd and disciple core team members, and you can readily see why. This not only prevents burnout and allows you to share ownership of the group, it is a natural way to develop new leaders. This developmental process is very simple (see box at right).

This is the process you must use when you launch a small group with

I lead ... you watch
I lead ... you participate
You lead ... I participate
You lead ... I watch
You lead ... I coach from a distance

a core team. At first, they watch as you lead, but soon they participate in leading and shepherding the group. As they do, you disciple and develop them by providing lots of encouragement and additional feedback. Use situational leadership as you develop them, utilizing the appropriate leadership style of directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating. Note that some members of your core team will be at different developmental levels. Continue to develop them as they learn to lead and you finally delegate most of the responsibility of leadership.

Go So You Can Grow More

In this stage, you are ready to send core team members out to form their own core teams and launch their own groups. You do not need to force this stage or even set a strict timetable. It happens naturally as the group grows

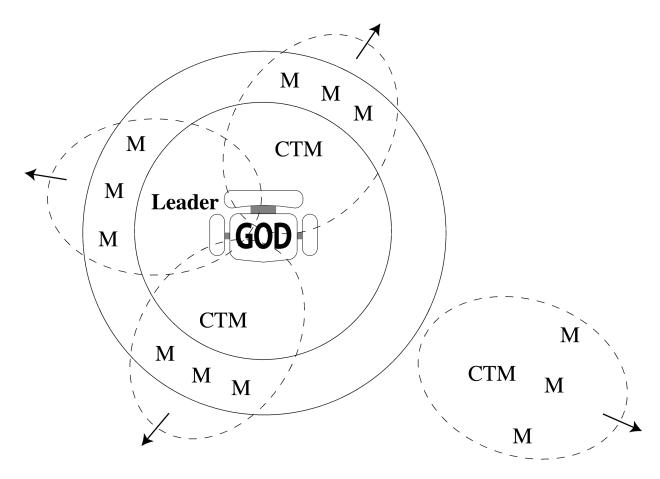
spiritually and numerically, and as your core team members develop into leaders.

Another way you'll know it's time to send out core team members to start new groups is one of simple common sense: the members of the group cannot fit in one house! When subgroups outgrow the bedroom or basement where they are meeting, it would be better to meet down the street at another member's home. Or, the original group now has several subsets within it. Here's an example:

One of our women's groups multiplied recently into four new groups. One is now for single moms, another for women with eating disorders, another for women with preschool children, and a fourth for moms with elementaryaged kids. A newly married couple's group just multiplied as well. Two couples in the group now have kids, whereas the rest have not started families yet. It was natural for the couples with kids to form a new core tam and launch a new group.

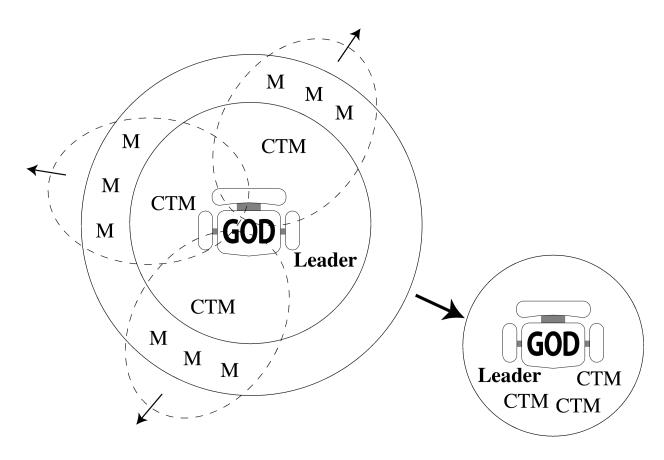
These group births are not "splits" and are not seen as something negative or contrived like a forced divorce. They simply occur naturally because the group and its members are healthy. That doesn't mean there isn't some discomfort or even pain in the process—after all, it is a birth—but it is as natural as, well, childbirth! Another helpful factor is that the group members have discussed and practiced moving out of their comfort zones during their time together. So this is not new. The small groups that have multiplied at my church continue to gather regularly together for social events and parties after they have launched new groups. Some of these groups even serve together or sit together at church services years after they've launched.

The new core team birthing process looks something like this: The new group begins as a core team, consisting



Stage One A new core team forms and prepares to launch out.

Stage Two The new core team launches. The original core team adds a new core team member who was part of the leader's subgroup.



Your sixth burnout prevention tool: **Develop others to lead and produce, not just facilitate your group meetings.**

of the people who were relationally connected in the original group. The real leader of the new core team, of course, is God. The human leader leads as an act of stewardship and leads from the second chair. What do they do now? Everything discussed in this book since chapter three!

Prioritize the vital, not just the urgent

Dealing with the tyranny of the urgent always leads to frustration and burnout. Leaders must spend less time on urgent concerns such as fine tuning a lesson, calling members, cleaning the house before the meeting, planning social events to spend more time on those things that are vital. The most vital thing you do as a leader is to develop new leaders. A real leader, like "The Best Small Group Leader Ever," does not focus on gathering more followers, but developing leaders.

Make disciples who will go and make more disciples . . . That's your new game plan.

End Notes

Introduction

¹ Joel Comiskey, Leadership Explosion (Houston, TX:

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http://www.cloudtownsend.com/videoserver/video.php?clip =CCNT1774.

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Chapter Two

¹ Leroy Eims, The Lost Art of Disciple Making (Grand Rapids,

MI: Zondervan, 1978), 45, 46.

² While it seems that Andrew was not included as much in Jesus' inner circle as the other three, he was included at least once when the two sets of brothers pulled Jesus aside privately to ask him some questions (Mark 13:4). Interestingly, when the Gospel writers listed the Twelve, Matthew and Luke list the brothers together: Peter and Andrew, then James and John. But Mark separates the sets of brothers, placing Andrew fourth on the list behind Peter, James, and John. In the listing of the eleven apostles in Acts 1:13, Luke places them in this order: Peter, John, James, and then Andrew. Is there any significance to this? We can

only surmise, but the order of names in a list was usually very significant in Jewish culture.

³ Melinda Smith, M.A., Ellen Jaffe-Gill, M.A., Jeanne Segal, Ph.D., and Robert Segal, M.A., contributors, "Preventing Burnout: Signs, Symptoms, Causes, and Coping Strategies," Helpguide.org. www.helpguide.org/mental/burnout_signs_symptoms.htm.

- ⁶ Roberta Julke, May 21, 2008, www.root48.wordpress.com. www.root48.wordpress.com/2008/05/16/discipleshipproposal-1-roles-goals/
 ⁷ Joseph R. Myers, The Search for Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 39-51. See also Joseph's blog and other materials at www.languageofbelonging.com.
- ⁸ In his book, Cultivating a Life for God, Neil Cole does advocate these smaller groups, which he calls "Life Transformation Groups," based on this principle of "two or three." While Cole makes many excellent points in this book, I do not necessarily agree with his conclusion. I'll speak more to the place of the larger group (of about 8-12) later in this book.
- ⁹ The Free On-line Dictionary of Computing, © 1993-2007 Denis Howe. ¹⁰ William P. Young, The Shack (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007), 129.

Chapter Five

¹ Ken Blanchard, Bill Hybels, and Phil Hodges, Leadership by the Book (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company,

1999), 68, 69.

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⁴ Ken Blanchard, Donald Carew, and Eunice Parisi-Carew, The One Minute Manager Builds High Performing Teams (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, 2000), 28.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Eims, 45, 46.

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³ Jim Collins, Good to Great (New York, NY: Harper Collins,

Chapter Six

- ¹ Leroy Eims, "Teamwork," Discipleship Journal, Issue 5, 1981.
- ² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1954), 110-113.

Another burnout-busting resource by Michael Mack...

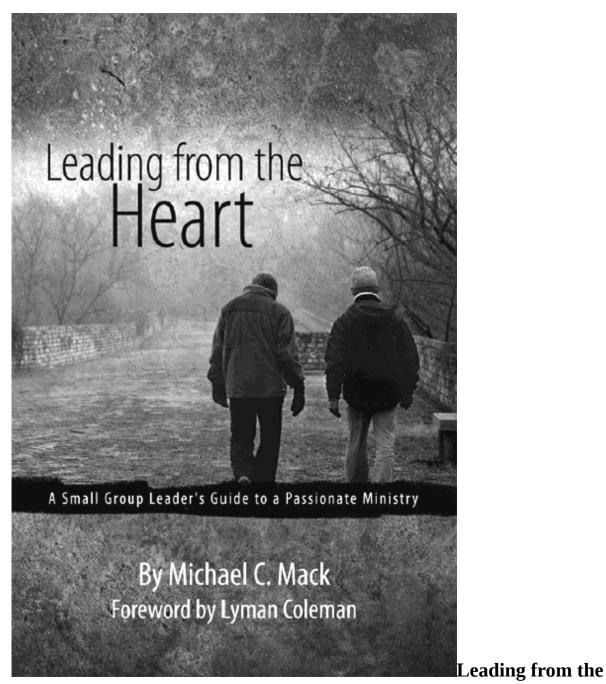
⁵ Boren, 221, ff.

⁶ Patrick Lencioni, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

⁷ Nancy Ortberg, "Ministry Team Diagnostics," Leadership, Spring 2008, 41. The theme of this issue is "New Ways Teams Lead ."

⁸ Ken Blanchard and his team write about Situational Leadership in their books, Leadership and the One Minute Manager. They expand on this process for teams in The One Minute Manager Builds High Performing Teams. See also http://www.kenblanchard.com or the Management for the Rest of us website at http://www.mftrou.com/ken-blanchard.html.

⁹ Blanchard, et al., Leadership and the One Minute Manager, 33.



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