

Beyond the Mother Church

A Theology of Small Group Ministry in the 21st
Century

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“God has always existed,” suggested Gareth Icenogle, “as a community of Being. Throughout human history, He has revealed Himself through this community of Being as Father, Son and Spirit...an eternal small group.”[\[1\]](#) The face of ministry, especially in urban settings, has changed—and will continue to change and evolve as the 21st century progresses. Small groups will continue to be an integral component that addresses a rapidly changing society. The intent of this book is to theologically evaluate the important role that “cell” or “small” groups[\[2\]](#) play as a branch of the “mother church” from which they are birthed—with an emphasis on how they impact the surrounding community.

Four main topics will be explored as they relate to small group ministry in our postmodern society—prophetically glimpsing at its impact on the rest of the 21st century. The first is the theological dynamic of small groups and their importance in today’s society. Secondly, how fellowship and discipleship are worked-out as a result of small-groups—and how they supplement what the mother church can’t do on Sundays. The third is how

leadership training evolves within the small group setting—with an emphasis on identifying, training, and launching fresh leaders in the Church. And fourth, evangelism as a product of small group ministry—small groups touching society within the sphere of each member’s influence.

Theological Importance of Small Group Ministry

First, we must glance at small group ministry through theological lenses. God created humanity as a community starting with Adam and Eve. “The minimum group of two,” explained Icenogle, “together with the [triune] Community of God, is a call to live in intimate, reciprocal, dialogical and growing relationship.”^[3] Jesus even said, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am their in the midst of them.”^[4] So powerful is the intimacy with Jesus and Abba Father that when a small group of just two believers get together, God’s manifest presence transcends in a very special way with those believers.

The relationship the Church has with its Head (Jesus) is representative of Jesus’ relationship to the Father, and likewise I believe the mother church’s relationship with the small group. God works mightily in the midst of the small group that is under authority to the mother church. Graham Tomlin, a contributing author to Michael Green’s Church Without Walls, examined two theological approaches to cell (or small) groups: the cell structure as a form of the Trinity (God, Mother Church, and Cell Group)

and the cell group and the cross (both the cell group and Christ surrendering power and “rights” exercising power through love).^[5] These approaches are cautioned to not be too independent or too introspective so as to take on its own identity and power structure—the small group is to stay connected to God and the mother church in all its functions.

The Present State of Things

The small-group movement, which includes many groups, not just Christians, has become a major feature of American life.^[6] Robert Wuthnow reported, in his book I Come Away Stronger, which in 1994 Americans were participating in small groups to a proportion equal to that of those who attend religious services in any given week. At that time he concluded that this statistic revealed that small groups were larger in “market share” than the most popular television programs—except the Super Bowl.^[7] Jeffrey Arnold who authored, The Big Book on Small Groups observed:

The small group movement, whose roots are in both the early church and later church history, became a broad phenomenon in the late twentieth century. Highly mobile and disconnected people of all ages began to seek deeper fellowship and spiritual nurture in groups. Key leaders began to emerge: Yonggi Cho, Lyman Coleman, Roberta Hestenes and Dawson Trotman...and new leaders like Bill Donahue, Carl George and Ralph Neighbour.^[8]

The small group structure, which traditionally spins off of a “mother church,” can provide a more intimate setting that a Sunday gathering, even in the smallest church, cannot offer. Tomlin argued:

Because of the intimacy that becomes possible due to their smaller size, the emphasis placed upon sharing one another’s lives, and the importance given to the small group as the basic unit of church life, cells have a greater capacity to create genuine and effective community than many other models of church life.[\[9\]](#)

Much of urban (and in increasing cases—suburban) life in western society has severe “unrootedness” when it comes to family and church life. Many children are now being reared in single-parent home environments and have never experienced the love a dual-parent (or extended family) household offers. Gary Newton discussed how an intergenerational small group helped one girl, Sally, who came from a “rough, single-parent, non-Christian home” and began attending a traditional church small group. She consequently found that a family developed around her—making her a strong Christian woman to this day.[\[10\]](#)

Another cause of “unrootedness” is technology—a family is now mobile and “in-touch” with wireless communications to the point that they can roam anywhere with no reason to be grounded in one place. If a person’s work can be done remotely, they can live in the mountains of Utah

one year and the beaches of the Bahamas the next. This reminds me of the Scripture in James 4:13-16:

Go to now, ye that say, today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.[\[11\]](#)

Today, one can dial-in on their laptop a Church service in progress anywhere around the world to “fulfill” their Sunday morning worship “obligation.” It may be too early to find any kind of statistic that would help describe whether this is a phenomena which is effecting Church attendance today. Technological advances are occurring at lightening speed and, given the limitation of this research, literature does not seem to have kept up with how this trend may be impacting the 21st century Church.

The Importance of Small Group Ministry in Postmodernity

In addition, postmodernity poses a whole new set of issues for the 21st century Church. Many new small group church plants are emerging as a result of “traditional evangelical” churches’ failure to respond to postmodernity. Many of these “traditional evangelicals” have taken a stance to ignore postmodernity because of its possibility of tainting their values. Thus, a majority of new small group church plants are “swimming in the water of postmodernity.”[\[12\]](#) Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, so I

send you,” therefore, it is obvious in the 21st century we, the Church, must go to the “postmoderns,” we can’t sit back and wait for them to come to us.

[13] Additionally, small group ministry has the ability to be a platform for community outreach with quick, lasting results.

Included in the thrust of “postmodern ministry” is a desire to feed the postmodern’s hunger for “community.” Part of this community lies in the small-group dynamic, which is now also stemming from seeker friendly/seeker driven Sunday church services. “Community is a central value,” stated Stetzer, “in most churches that are reaching postmoderns... [it] is a central value in all postmodern communities whether secular or sacred.”[14] Small group ministry may be what sparks a church plant or the very thing that complements the growth of a church or church plant. Either way, *community* is the very foundation of our faith, which stems back to the first church that put heavy emphasis on this value.

A powerful, yet overlooked, force in the church that is reaching America’s postmoderns is the youth. In a small group context, youth groups can impact a whole community (even city) by serving college students or any other groups that are open to be ministered by them. This group of church-goers are usually, but not always, entrenched in postmodernity and can meet together to pray, worship and share God-inspired ideas on how they can touch their world and their generation. Concerning age, small

groups that are either age-specific or intergenerational, are both powerful weapons God is using for the onslaught of secular postmodernism. Intergenerational groups offer youth and adults a “family,” whereas age specific groups offer continuity in societal outlook which can yield far-reaching, unified results.

Small Groups: A Vehicle for Enhancing Fellowship

The Colin Brown New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology defines “fellowship” as “to have a share in, unite, communicate, or to join oneself to.”^[15] The word “fellowship” as used in 1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have *fellowship* one with another...,”^[16] is the English translation of the Greek word *koinonia*, which means partnership, participation, or (social) intercourse: communion.^[17] Based on these definitions, one can see the social impact small groups can have when fellowship takes place in this setting—the word that comes to mind is *synergy*.

Likewise, Craig Nesson wrote concerning *koinonia* within the early Church, “[They] recognized the value of their community life as a form of witness in demonstrating how Christians love one another.”^[18] Nesson hit on the topic that when God’s people come together in the name of Jesus, thousands are put to flight in the surrounding community and whether they

are part of the small group or not, some type of atmospheric change begins to take place. Nesson continued:

The essence of Christian *koinonia* involves the quality of a community's life together. Does a community reflect the spirit of mutual love and concern shown by Jesus to those who followed Him? Are all made welcome in the name of Jesus? Is the ultimate source of power that of the crucified Christ, and is that power shared in common? Is special effort made to express concern for the least of the sisters and brothers? And, when there is failure to live up to the ideal, is there readiness to ask for and grant forgiveness for Christ's sake? Each of these questions addresses aspects of Christian *Koinonia* and are as validly asked of the quality of church life today as of ages past. [\[19\]](#)

Moreover, it seems that relationships are the primary vehicle God uses to knit His people together—not “programs.” Although programs can be vehicles for relationship building, God seems to be interested in building people who love one another the way He loves. He is not interested in how many programs a church can come up with—regardless of how “good” they are. Some could argue that small groups are programs, but they are much more than a program—they are a lifestyle. “Small groups,” reasoned Betty Wieland, “are all about people because the crown of God's creation is people. Its *people* He wants us to build, not programs.”[\[20\]](#)

In addition, small group ministry can take the sterility out of “programs” and add intimacy between people and God. Fellowship is accomplished when a group of believers operates together as a family

outside their meeting on Sunday at the “mother church.” Consequently they are able to “live” out their lives together and, as Hebrews 10:24-25 stated, “Consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...but exhorting one another,”[\[21\]](#) provoking one another unto good works. Fellowship of this nature helps believers become accountable to one another and aid each other through life—especially as needs arise.

Commenting on the issue of fellowship that stems from small group gatherings, Thomas Kirkpatrick, in his book, Small Groups in the Church, remarked, “My studies and experience confirm that the majority of people in churches of all sizes desire more close personal relationships. As one person said, ‘Life is too difficult to face alone. I have plenty of friends, but not enough people around whom I can drop my guard and really tell it like it is.’”[\[22\]](#) There appears to be more value placed on relationships in the 21st century—something small group ministry within the church can provide. Kirkpatrick continued,

While most community sociologists and psychologists report that people today have a ‘pursuit of loneliness,’ the majority of church members in my research project reported a desire for more close personal relationships. And in view of those who suggest that only *some* church members have a special interest in sharing with others at a personal level, I found that the majority of church members desire to participate in a personal sharing group.[\[23\]](#)

Furthermore, one of the challenges with a church member's ability to join a small group is time management. Most Christians are already over-scheduled with various meetings throughout the week, but if they are not getting the fellowship they are lacking, then one (or several) of their activities must "give" in order to prioritize what is *really* important. "Our crowded schedules," pointed out Kirkpatrick, "may also limit creation of Christian community in our congregations. Unless we drop some current commitment, project, or amusement, many of us simply cannot add another meeting to our schedules." [\[24\]](#) While sharing life together may seem like a novel idea to those who recognize their loneliness and lack of "plugged-in-ness," there still requires commitment and sacrifice in order to enrich one's life within a small group.

Small Groups: A Vehicle for Enhancing Discipleship

Another element that is enhanced by small group ministry in the Church is Discipleship. "The word *discipleship*," according to Jeffrey Arnold, "is a catch phrase in the church today, often without meaning. As a result, some people think of discipleship when they think of Bible study workbooks or adult Sunday school. What they forget is that the process of disciple-making is a dynamic relationship between fellow Christians and their Lord, and that it is marked by continued progress." [\[25\]](#)

The Colin Brown New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology defines “discipleship” as a “lasting relationship of a pupil or disciple to his/her master or teacher...the words connected are applied chiefly to the followers of Jesus and describe the life of faith [through obedience to Him].”[\[26\]](#) True to its meaning, discipleship is another key component that develops among small groups. As the leader of a small group begins to impart knowledge by God’s anointing, the disciples of that leader begin to not only absorb this impartation, but soon develop a burning desire to spread it. However, there are obviously exceptions in each group due to the fact that not every one has a teachable spirit. There are two topics pertaining to discipleship for the purpose of this essay: spiritual parenting and the “principle of twelve.”

Spiritual Parenting

Spiritual parenting is a primary result of discipleship which can, and in most cases does, emerge from the small group setting. “Disciples,” Arnold asserted, “are made intentionally. Just as children don’t grow up without personal care, or learn mathematics on their own, so discipleship will not occur without faithful Christians being intentional about meeting together.”[\[27\]](#) People of all levels of spiritual maturity are bound to show up at any given small group meeting. Those who have even just a little faith, and are willing to commit to a group, are worth “parenting.” Jesus’ mustard

seed parable and the parables of the sower and the seed (Mark 4:1-31) come into play here. David Stark, author of Growing People through Small Groups commented, “The process of growing people in small groups is very much like discerning the difference between soils and seeds and wheat and weeds. We can’t always immediately tell where people are spiritually.”[\[28\]](#) One way Brian Sauder and Larry Kreider suggested for small group discipling was, “to let the Holy Spirit disciple them.”[\[29\]](#) They continued by saying, “if the Father is already working in a new Christian’s heart, our approach should be to find out what the Father is doing in his or her heart and reinforce and encourage it.”[\[30\]](#)

However, discipleship is an ongoing process, and small group ministry allows us the time and place to nurture that process. As small group leaders take new disciples “under their wing,” there must be a mutual commitment to see each other grow in their respective roles. The small group leader-disciple model will allow the new disciple an opportunity to try out their “new wings”—especially when it comes to spiritual gifts where they must be encouraged and developed. The small group setting is the perfect place for ministry training because it is non-threatening, yet controlled. Those who try their spiritual gifts out in the Sunday morning worship service, as opposed to a supervised small group, position themselves for let-down and possible criticism (yes, the Church does criticize). It is no

different than a parent training their child table-side manners at home before they go eat at a formal dining engagement. Discipleship in small groups prepares the disciple to proficiently minister in all situations.

Furthermore, a pastor can hardly parent and disciple all congregation members from the pulpit on Sunday morning. Therefore, small group ministry acts as the complement to the pastor's vision for discipling the "sheep." The "Principle of Twelve" is a discipleship model for multiplication; and one that addresses the pastor's inability to disciple his/her whole congregation. It functions properly when a leader discipless twelve believers and teaches them to find twelve of their own and so on.

Larry Stockstill elaborated, "The 'Principle of Twelve' is confirmed again and again throughout the Bible: The 12 patriarchs, 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles, 12 foundations in the heavenly Jerusalem [etc.]...underscoring the importance of this number as the number of "government."[\[31\]](#) Stockstill continued, "The 'Principle of Twelve' has changed the traditional concept of cell multiplication by offering the possibility of continued relationship AFTER multiplication." He added, "The key in finding "your twelve" is to focus on three...disciple three and challenge them to find three. When each of your 'three' finds their 'three,' your group of 'twelve' is complete."[\[32\]](#) This is another phenomenon of not only complementing the on-going ministry of the "mother church," but a way to grow the "mother

church” simultaneously as cell multiplication occurs. This is the very concept that spurred Yonggi Cho’s church in Seoul, Korea into being the world’s largest church with almost a million members as of this writing.

Leadership Training as a Result of Small Group Ministry

Small group ministry in the 21st century will be the breeding ground for future leaders of the Church. Due to the “mother church’s” continued growth and maturity, small-groups that support “her” will be the place where future leaders will not only be identified, but trained. The first component of a successful small group is the training of that small group leader by the ministers of the “mother church.” Icenogle contended, “Small group leaders must be trained by being in good model groups and in real group situations. Classroom training of small group leaders can be informational but not formational. Good leaders need to be formed and reformed in the context of real groups.”[\[33\]](#) Kirkpatrick concurred that “besides good planning, nothing is more important for developing an effective small group ministry than good leader training.”[\[34\]](#) Once the leaders of the small groups are developed, then they can be put in a leadership role to mentor and disciple new potential leaders...thus the idea of the “Principle of Twelve” is again reinforced.

Dr. Joel Comiskey discussed in his book, From 12 to 3, the concept of G-12 groups—groups that are specifically keyed-in on training leaders.

He commented, “There is a major difference between a G-12 group and...a cell group. The G-12 group meets at a particular time (often before a planned worship service in the church building) and involves cell group leaders. Its purpose is discipleship and coaching.”[\[35\]](#) These G-12 groups meet every other week, rather than weekly like the cell groups, and focus totally on cell leadership training. In contrast, the cell or small group is open, evangelistic, and seeks to multiply, the G-12 group is closed and new people don’t join it; this group never multiplies and never changes—each leader has his or her 12—always![\[36\]](#)

Additionally, as the mother church’s pastoral staff (no matter how big or small) is taxed with increased responsibilities; they begin to delegate them to the cell leaders. The “Moses Ministry Makeover Model,”[\[37\]](#) as Larry Stockstill calls it, eases the burdens of self-focused ministers on the verge of burnout. This concept is based on Exodus 18 where Jethro (Moses’ father-in-law) taught Moses the idea of delegation. This idea has proven to work in the ministry of Dr. Yonggi Cho in Seoul, Korea who baptized 300 people one Sunday and suffered from physical exhaustion for weeks after. He proceeded to delegate the work of the church to individuals who “stepped up to the plate” and now all the work of the world’s largest church, Yoido Full Gospel Church, is done through Cho’s 25,000 cell leaders.[\[38\]](#)

Consequently, one of the best ways to find candidates for full time ministry is to raise-up small group leaders. They can receive hands-on exposure to what pastoring a flock is all about. From this place of training they can be groomed for greater ministry responsibility in the church.

The Role of a Small Group Leader

Stark and Wieland identified the role of the small group leaders as a “Gardner.” They explained that the small group was God’s garden and the small group leader is the one who manages that garden. “The process,” they explained, “of growing people spiritually in a way that He designs includes empowering leaders who understand the vital roles of *praying*, of identifying their small group *purpose*, and of measuring the *progress* of individuals, the group, and themselves [prayer, purpose, progress].”[\[39\]](#) Praying, according to Stark and Wieland, was a non-negotiable for being in leadership. A small group leader must pray for the spiritual maturity of everyone in their group. In addition, finding and keeping a purpose to the group was another responsibility that Stark and Wieland found to be essential for a small group leader. Setting forth a covenant that everyone agrees upon was their recommendation for keeping purpose and vision ever-before the group. Consequently, when a covenant is in place, there is no question as to why that group is meeting. This covenant also establishes commitment for group members to attend and be participative. Lastly, progress was a principle that

Stark and Wieland saw as critical in the life of a small group. The leader was encouraged to consistently evaluate the group, as well as themselves, on a regular basis to keep focused on whether the purpose was being accomplished. Exemplified in their book, Stark and Wieland offered templates of evaluations that small group leaders could use.

My Own Personal Experience Being Trained as a Cell Leader

Before my wife Larisa and I came to know Christ, we were being prayed for in a cell group that was based from the church we now attend, Bethel Christian Fellowship. One of the members of this small group was a client of my wife's and she put us on her prayer card that she and her small group prayed over every week—they prayed for Larisa for two years. Consequently, we went to one of Larisa's client's church services that she invited us to and we accepted Christ during that service. As we grew spiritually within the church, my wife and I began to take every leadership class our church offered. In addition, we went to a variety of small/cell groups, and eventually we were approached to start our own. As we started a group in our home we began to learn, "hands-on" what spiritual leadership was all about. Not only were we preparing and presenting teachings, we picked up the inner-city members, counseled them, fed them and taught them God's Word.

In several of our meetings people experienced God's healing, deliverance, and His wonderful gift of salvation for the first time. One night we ministered God's delivering power to a demon-possessed woman who had relations with several men, one of which was involved in the occult. She left the meeting free of demonic activity, she gave her life to Christ, and she is still walking with Him to this day. Also, we attended leadership training seminars about once a month with our church's pastoral staff. This leadership training gave us the tools we needed to minister in ways we would never had the privilege to unless we were small group leaders. It was because of this "taste" of leadership that I felt called to receive formal seminary training in order to take my leadership role to the next level. Much fruit came from our small group leadership experience and we continue to have a passion for this type of ministry.

Small Group's Effect on Evangelism.

Most experts and scholars who've written on the topic of small groups all agree on the positive effects small group ministry has on evangelism within a community. Many small groups begin with prayers for the "lost," or at some point during the meeting they will split up in groups and pray for unregenerate friends and family. Exemplified in our own cell group, we found that a time of worship, praise reports and a short Bible teaching set up the meeting to give an evangelistic appeal so unsaved visitors

have an opportunity to receive Jesus. Then we would pray for the lost, and any needs, later in the meeting. From the research I've done, as well as my own experience, most experts say that prayer for the lost within the cell group seems to breed conversions within that small group.

Similarly, Sauder and Kreider agreed that “the primary focus of each home cell group should be outreach.”[\[40\]](#) They explained that evangelism stems from the cell group as the New Testament pattern of *oikos* is instituted. *Oikos* is the Greek word for *household or house of people*. “Your *oikos*,” Sauder and Kreider suggested, “is that group of people to whom you relate on a regular basis.” [\[41\]](#) Their recommendation was to have a small group praying for three or four of each member’s unsaved *oikos* (family, friends, coworkers, etc.). They elaborated:

Ask everyone in your cell group to write down 20 people in their *oikos* who need the Lord. Then ask them to prayerfully choose two or three to focus their prayers on. During the next months, continue to pray for these people and watch the Lord begin to use cell members to reach people with the Good News of Christ.[\[42\]](#)

Prayer evangelism is a strong component of small groups with far-reaching effects. In Dave Finnell’s book Life in His Body, he paralleled Sauder and Kreider’s thoughts on small group evangelism. He stated, “Each time your [small] group meets, you will not only fellowship with one another, you will also fellowship with God through praise and prayer.”[\[43\]](#)

It is out of this intimate setting of group/divine fellowship that praying for the lost becomes a powerful evangelistic weapon. As earlier discussed, my own salvation, as well as my wife's, was result of us being on a cell group's "prayer card." "Prayer for the salvation of specific individuals," continued Finnell, "will be offered to God as the group is empowered to secure souls from the kingdom of darkness in to the kingdom of light."[\[44\]](#)

In his book, Prayer That Brings Revival, Yonngi Cho articulated a strategy of prayer that every small group in his church embraces. He explained,

In our cell meetings...they pray for potential new converts so the church may continue to grow...In our cell leaders' conference, I stress that the cells must have a clear goal in their prayers; therefore, our cells paint a clear picture of their goal as they pray in faith...they will not stop praying [for specific people's salvation] until that person comes to Christ.[\[45\]](#)

Cho expressed that intercession, along with effective daily witnessing, is what caused an average of five people a day to come to Christ at the start up of his church's cell ministry. That number has grown to about ten new converts a day at the time of this writing. Cho and his congregants recognized that the church is "at war against Satan in this earth."[\[46\]](#) "Our opposition," continued Cho,

is the devil and his demonic spirits. Our battlefield is the hearts of all men and women...Therefore, we plan carefully: We have a [prayer] strategy, we have a plan, and we execute that plan like a well-trained army. Yet, most importantly, we bathe our

plans in prayer so that God may breathe His breath of life into our efforts, and they will be fruitful.[47]

Evangelism that stems from small groups can supplement, or even replace, “outreach events”—because it is extremely relational. Stockstill suggested, “A show of hands in cell conferences typically reveals that approximately seventy-five percent of believers were born again...because they developed a personal relationship with a believer.”[48] Outreach events are full of enthusiasm at first, but the excitement fades the minute it’s over and follow up can become drudgery and is usually sacrificed due to lack of ambition. Stockstill commented, “Why are we spending the vast majority of our time with “event evangelism” when people are most affected by one-on-one relationships?”[49] In addition, the likelihood of unbelievers attending a small group meeting is higher than attending a church service. The reason for this phenomenon seems to be that a “home” environment is less threatening for an unbeliever than a church service.

Small Group Ministry – A Prophetic Look into the 21st Century

Small-group ministry in the church is taking on a new look in the 21st century.

One case described in Stockstill’s The Cell Church, was of a single mom who took a promotion and relocated from New Jersey to Baton Rouge. This woman was recently divorced and knew nobody in her new location. When

she reluctantly attended a cell meeting she found a “family” connection which brought healing to her wounded soul and support to help her raise her child—which was especially helpful in times when her job forced her to travel![\[50\]](#) With our transient postmodern society, and the sometimes-forced mobility of even single parents, we see another benefit of a small/cell group structure. People who are strangers may not find a new “family” simply by attending church on Sunday—their roots must go deeper and small group ministry can be the rich soil that causes the roots to grow strong and deep.

The 21st century church will need to rely strongly on some form of small group ministry for increased effectiveness. From the underground church in China to the growing, “covert-turned-overt” church in Seoul, Korea, small groups will be a driving force of church growth and relevancy in the 21st century. As change occurs at the blink of an eye in our digital, hyper-speed society (especially in the western hemisphere) “rootedness” and “grounding” will most likely be the buzz words of the Church. Stockstill, in reflecting on Yonggi’s Cho’s model of small group “rootedness” in the face of an ever-changing hostile political environment wrote:

I had also read about the way Dr. Yonggi Cho...in Seoul, Korea, began his cell-church structure in the shadow of a North Korean invasion, realizing that an invasion would mean certain death to himself and his staff. Now, however, with the cells in place, Cho is assured that even if the “trunk” of the tree were to be cut down, the “roots” of his cell groups would continue to flourish easily underground.[\[51\]](#)

Conclusion

Consequently, as the Church prepares for an end-time outpouring of God's Spirit, a "net"-work must be in place to catch and disciple the "harvest". Many people when asked what the Great Commission is will flippantly say, "Go preach the Gospel to all nations," when really Jesus said, "Go and make *disciples* of all the nations."[\[52\]](#) How can people effectively be disciplined—especially in hostile environments, or in a mega-church setting, without the intimacy of small-groups? Stockstill, looking ahead, stated

In my heart of hearts, I believe we will be in 'harvest' and 'hostility' as a post-Christian society gropes for reality and casts off our biblical moorings. When these things happen, the 'root structure' of thousands of Western Hemisphere cell churches will be deep and relational instead of shallow and sensational...These churches will be built upon the principle of "family" and not just 'knowledge' or 'ministry.' The Greek model for maturity was based on knowledge, but the Hebrew model was based on relationship.[\[53\]](#)

Wuthnow, looking ahead, similarly prophesied, "small groups are likely to be regarded as a new force, stemming the tide of disbelief and moral relativism [in the 21st century]."[\[54\]](#) A major advantage of small group ministry is that it builds "family" into a church, making the members "sons and daughters" in that mother church—not just servants. They develop ownership, initiative, connection and security,[\[55\]](#) and it is from this

foundation that the Church will be relevant to society as the 21st century continues to unfold.

In conclusion, Wayne Booth eloquently put words to how I feel regarding the task of research and writing that went into these pages:

After my best efforts, here is what I believe to be true—not the whole or final truth, but a truth important to me and I hope to you, a truth that I have supported as fully as time and my abilities have allowed, so that you might find in my argument good reason to consider it, even to accept it, and perhaps even to reconsider what you believe.[\[56\]](#)

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About The Author

Robert Bagley or "Rb3" as he was known in the corporate world has a wife of 15 years and two daughters; FaithAnn is 13 years old and Mandi is 11. Robert has owned several businesses in his 20s and then went into corporate sales for the last 15 years. In those rolls, he was a executive sales person, a Regional Vice President of sales, and recently a Director of Sales Training with fortune 500 companies in the flooring industry.

Robert started an online ecommerce business part time to pay some medicals that were plaguing their household - even though he made a strong 6-figure salary. That business now does employs family members and does robust 5-figures in gross sales monthly.

Interestingly Robert is also a seminary graduate trained preacher and pastor which he does voluntarily for churches across the country.

He is documenting his departure from corporate America on a YouTube channel and now has a weekly show, "The RB3 Show" on the same YouTube channel:

Channel Name: RB3 Bagley,

Here's link also:

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=F7sezq1vY_Q

iTunes Podcast Link:

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-rb3-show/id980920498>

Facebook Group " RB3 Game Changers " :

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/RB3GameChangers/>

Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/Q4salestracker>

Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/RobertBagley>

If anyone wants to see a video of one of his sermons...

<http://www.godtube.com/rb3bagley/>

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- [1] Gareth Icenogle, Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 370.
- [2] The words “cell” or “small” will be used interchangeably throughout this text. However a true “cell” group intends to multiply itself, whereas a “small” group may never multiply.
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- [12] Ed Stetzer, Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 149,115.
- [13] John 20:21 NLT.
- [14]¹⁴ Stetzer, 150.
- [15] Colin Brown New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. “Fellowship,” 639.
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[25] Arnold, 23.

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[33]³³ Icenogle, 213.

[34] Kirkpatrick, 55.

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[37] Stockstill, 74.

³⁸ Ibid.

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[39]³⁹ Stark and Wieland, 142.

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[48] Stockstill, 50.

[49]⁴⁹ Ibid., 125-126.

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[53] Stockstill, 131.

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