

Fresh Insight

for holistic small group ministries

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F.I. Interviews Ralph Neighbour *So what have you been up to for the last 17 years?*

It's been seventeen years since you published your last book, *Where Do We Go From Here?* What have you been doing for the last two decades?

At the time I wrote that book, the cell church movement was in its "child" stage, undeveloped. The Father moved us to Singapore to work with a young pastor who had been thrown under the bus by the Baptist church for experiencing the gift of tongues. I had mentored him earlier and he asked me what he should do? I said, "Start a cell church and I will mentor you!" He assembled a team and I flew back and forth for a year and a half meeting with the team, then finally resigned my position as a professor at Columbia Seminary and moved over to become Associate Senior Pastor. I spent from 1990-1994 there, and we saw the cell church grow from 300 to almost 7,000. I wrote the entire Equipping Track there and revised it through several generations to get the bugs out. The team was fabulous! I also formed the *TOUCH Equipping Stations System*, a pastor's training school for cell pastors that was finally registered with the government. I had pastors from many nations come to learn from us.



Among them were pastors from South Africa. This led me to the next stage in my journey. I felt the time in Singapore had accomplished its objective and went to work in South Africa, beginning in 1995. I wrote the manual called *The Year of Transition* and used it for one year with about 300 pastors. This led to an invitation to teach it a second year for the Apostolic Faith Mission, a 2 million member denomination formed out of the Azusa Street Revival and now slowly dissipating. So during the years 1995-1998, I commuted regularly from Houston to work with the pastors in that nation. It was an exciting time as the movement formed and reshaped the entire church life of South Africa.

Next was Brazil. Robert Lay had met me in Singapore and came to see me in Houston. We crafted the materials I had developed for South Africa to fit Brazil and he began to transform the churches of Brazil into

In This Issue:

Reviews:

- *Finding The Flow*
- by Tara Miller & Jenn Peppers

Featured Resource:

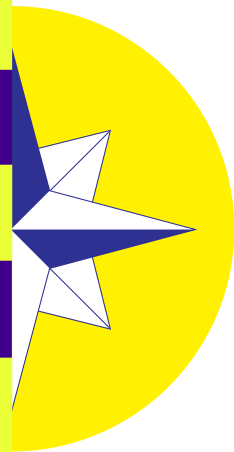
- *Life In His Body*
- by David Finnell

Articles:

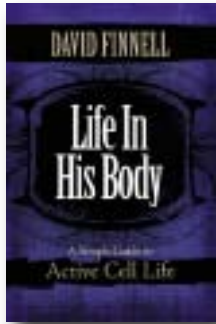
- *FI Interview: Ralph Neighbour, Jr.*

Events:

- *Cell Church Symposium*



Featured Resource



What we like most about this classic by David Finnell is the way it contrasts programs and the traditional church with the way a cell church operates. Each chapter delves into a different area of the cell-based model, helping the reader gain a new paradigm for living in Biblical community and operating as the church in cell groups. Chapters include:

Introduction to the Cell Church

1. The Concept
2. Basic Christian Community

Spiritual Foundations

3. Spirit-filled Servanthood
4. The Power of Prayer

Cell Group Dynamics

5. "Oikos" Relationships
6. The Cell Group Meeting
7. Understanding Outsiders
8. Reaching People Through Cell Life

Leading a Cell Group

9. Cell Group Servants
10. Administration

If you are looking for a resource to work through with key leaders (deacons, elders, lay leadership) to help them see the difference between a "come to our building" type of church and an organic model for church life (cells), you will find this book helpful. This classic continues to sell well year after year because the subtitle says it all...

"a simple guide to active cell life."

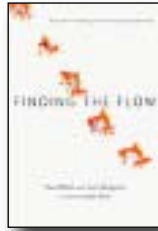
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In Review



Finding the Flow: A Guide for Leading Small Groups and Gatherings

by Tara Miller & Jenn Peppers
InterVarsity Press
239 pages

(Available through Amazon.com by clicking on the picture of the book)

Randall's Review: ♦♦♦♦
(3 stars out of 4)

Most books for group leaders that I read (and our ministry publishes, for that matter) are very practical and easy to read. They're the kind of books you can hand to your leaders and most will read in a couple of hours. In these books, one can instantly see how the principles can be applied in the very next group meeting or in a relationship within the group.

Miller and Peppers write about leading a small group in a very deep, thoughtful way. Their writing is far more challenging to digest and requires reflection and prayer. I was surprised by this, and I've enjoyed reading each deep chapter.

Their premise is that God moves through a small group of believers who gather in Christ's name like a river. Therefore, it is the leader's responsibility to find the flow of that river and move with it. Each author describes different experiences in depth, providing a wonderful balance. Another feature I love about this book is that it is written by two very sensitive women, not one task-oriented man (typical).

This book contains the kind of writing that leaders who love to read will enjoy.

Michael Warden, author of *The Transformed Heart*, commented on

Finding the Flow and has graciously allowed me to reprint his comments:

"Jenn Peppers and co-author Tara Miller have put together a resource that does what few (if any) other Christian small group resources do: Assume that God is actually present in the midst of a small group gathering, and respect His role as the primary leader of the group.

Here's what I mean: Though most Christian small group resources strive to be God-honoring in their content, their strategic advice and group study outlines tend to be written as if God isn't present. I've written small group curriculum for over 20 years now, and I can tell you that most of it is written in a functionally agnostic way...believing God is real, but not terribly close by, and certainly not actively engaged in a small group discussion. Most curriculum "bookends" God with a prayer at the beginning and a prayer at the end, but the guts of it assumes He's on the bench watching passively as we teach.

Finding the Flow puts God back in the Leader's chair. And it gives small group facilitators real-world practical guidance for how to move beyond addressing small group issues as "issues" and instead fully engaging with other people as human beings. Jenn and Tara lead the way by sharing a lot of their own personal stories in the book. They don't give easy answers or any quaint but ridiculous "5 Steps to Success." Instead, they invite you into a conversation where God is present and active and pointing the way forward. And that is what "finding the flow" is all about. ♦

More info on some reviews can be found at: www.randallneighbour.com

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What is Small Group Friends?

It's a free web site designed for small group pastors, leaders and group members.

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- JIMMY SEIBERT, Pastor, Antioch Church, Waco, Tx*
- BILL SMITH, Church Consultant, Washington, D.C.*
- MARIO VEGA, Pastor, Elim, El Salvador*
- ROBERT LAY, Director, Ministeria Igreja Em Celulas, Brazil*
- HAROLD WEITZ, Pastor, Little Falls Christian Center, South Africa*



Workshop Speakers:

- WILLIAM A. BECKHAM, Touch Global International Ministries*
- JAMES LASSITER, CWMI Staff*
- JOEL COMISKEY, Author/Cell Church Consultant and Church Planter*
- ROSE LEO, AbbaLove, Jakarta, Indonesia*
- RALPH W. NEIGHBOUR, Author, Church Planter, and Adjunct Professor, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary*
- RANDALL NEIGHBOUR, President, TOUCH Outreach Ministries, Houston, TX*
- DENNIS WATSON, Pastor, Celebration Church, New Orleans, LA*

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Continued from page 1

cell based congregations. He was truly anointed and he now has 17,000 pastors trained after twelve years. I have made many trips to work with him all over Brazil. A highlight was when I was invited to go to Manaus to train several thousand Cell Leaders in a week's seminar co-sponsored by the Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and Assemblies of God national leaders.

I then began to have a burden for Houston, my home town. It had turned from Caucasian/Spanish to a melting pot of people from all over the world. A handful of us formed the TOUCH Family and we planted cells among immigrants here. I must confess that I hit a brick wall working with that church plant. The independent streak embedded by us being "the land of the free" and the endless commercialization of church life in this nation makes the forming of authentic community here very hard. I am still plugging away at this task.

At present I am Adjunct Prof at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and mentoring Doctor of Ministry men who have signed up for a three year cell church leadership track.

What motivated you to write your newest book, *Christ's Basic Bodies*?

There are two types of small groups: those that are man-made and those that are God-made. There are many wonderful pastors who have committed themselves to the forming of small groups in their churches. Most of them are "holding tanks" to stop the exiting of church members. Thus they form around interests of people, Bible study, fellowship, recreation, etc. They are not evil; they are just made for man, not particularly for God.

However, we are dealing with a very serious issue that faces the church around the world. Our theology of what "church" is all about is very distorted by centuries of traditions. We have thrown the authentic *ecclesia* under a bus—unwittingly, of course.

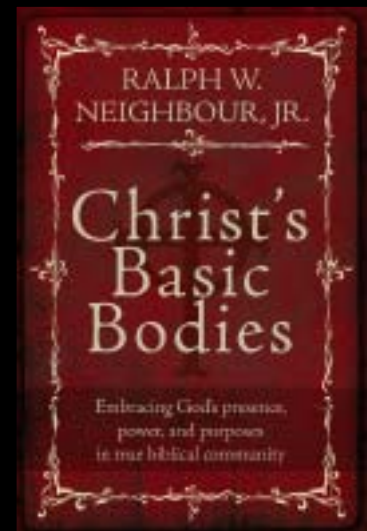
I am seeking to outline the nature of the present body of Christ in this book. We have to start by realizing there has been an improper placement of the Son of God who now occupies us in small groups to become His arms, legs, and inward parts for His present task on earth. That assignment is to reveal His presence and power through basic Christian communities.

A God-made small group is extremely sensitive to Christ's indwelling presence and exists solely to experience His life operating in and through them. They are His sacred community and are led by His mission to draw all men to the cross for their salvation from not only the penalty of sin but also the controlling power of sin.

In a few paragraphs, can you describe the contents of the book for Fresh Insight readers?

I have repeated the theme of the book over and over. *Christ's Basis Bodies*: A community formed and baptized by the Holy Spirit. Each member is led by the embodied Christ, who edifies and reveals his presence, power and purpose through them.

In the first section, "Defining Church," I present the importance of seeing it from God's perspective rather than man's view. I trace the history of the church that got us into our present dilemma and expand



Are your small groups man-made or God-made?

Worshipping a historical Jesus without embracing an indwelling, eternal, and everlasting Christ will keep a small group a man-made gathering. When Christ's presence, power, and purposes are the sole focus of the gathering and every other agenda is set aside, it becomes a God-made group and takes off!

This is a penetrating, theological look at the true origin of the church (the cross, not pentecost), the Holy Spirit and the use, abuse, and misuse of spiritual gifts today, and what is required of the members of a true biblical community. Like Dr. Neighbour's other books, this work pulls no punches... if it needs a good whack, he hits it five or six times for good measure!

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or download a free chapter!**

the explanation of each part of the theme.

In the second section, "Theological Issues," I focus on the Godhead's choice of assigning the Son the tasks of being incarnated in Jesus, on mission to reveal the Kingdom of God and atone for our sin. I further discuss why the Anointed One had to inhabit a new body form to fulfill His next task—revealing His presence and power through Basic Communities.

In the final section, I deal with practical issues, including how Christ's Basic Bodies are formed and function authentically today. I place Christ as central to all this, with the place of the Holy Spirit defined as the paraclete, the one called alongside to help.

Why is this book so important for the small group and cell group movement today?

Today's small group structures fall short of expressing the true nature of the church. I find the scripture in I Corinthians 14:24-25 powerfully describes what should take place when the community of believers meet in a valid gathering: *But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"*

Today's small group movement will be energized beyond comprehension when they are shown how to edify one another. As their gatherings demonstrate Christ's gifts operating fully, in full view of guests, we will experience a new form of evangelism. Instead of a cognitive teaching of the new birth, the life of the new body will magnetically attract the cynics in our generation.

To illustrate, one of my closest fishing buddies was a total agnostic until his granddaughter was healed from blindness. I will never forget the joy I felt in my heart when he choked out the words to me, "Ralph, no power on earth could have done that!" I saw him fall down and worship God. A few years later, I preached his funeral with joy, knowing that the evidence of Christ's presence in the small group where we had prayed drew him to faith.

Is there anything else you might want to share with Fresh Insight readers before we close our interview?

We are not yet at the level that will be experienced when every small group honors the life and leadership of the indwelling Christ! It is my constant prayer that many church leaders will read this book and say, "How have we missed this truth?" We need a total transformation of our core values related to the small group movements that are man-made and everywhere existent today.

We are going to have a powerful gathering of only 300 delegates for a Symposium that will include this important issue in June of this year. If you would like to attend, there are still a few spaces left. Visit the web site (www.cellsymposium.com) and see if you can still make a reservation. If not, keep in touch with the reports of the dialogue, which we will post right here for you when it is over. Also, visit my blog for Boot Camp videos (free) and discussion questions on the chapters of my new book (which I will be posting from time to time in the future weeks). ♦



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