

Fresh Insight

for holistic small group ministries

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Cross-cultural Missions: Transforming inward-focused groups through service

By Randall Neighbour

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Two weeks ago, I returned from a trip to Malawi where I trained pastors, spent a day in a rural village, and interviewed a taxi driver who pastors a church and runs an orphanage of 148 children with his extra income.

This was my second trip to the fifth poorest country in the world, but the first for my wife and an elder from a church in California whose members are funding the translation of our books into the Chewa language. While driving down dirt roads from one place or another, it was interesting to watch their facial expressions and visit with them about what they were experiencing, how they were feeling, and the impact the experience was making in their hearts.

For me, I came back with a different view on a number of things. One significant issue was putting my possessions in perspective relative to ministry, relationships, and family. Let me explain.

My family's main vehicle is a 13 year old sedan with 127,000 miles on it. Earlier this year, we started shopping for a younger car that would be dependable, dentless, and of course, more fuel efficient. Because my wife and I have decided not to borrow money for depreciating items like automobiles, choosing the kind of car was only the beginning of the process.

We still have to save up for the model we want to buy. So, we were talking about where the funds would come from, how we could save up, and how long it might take to get enough money together for the purchase.

Then we went to Malawi, and the time there stopped us dead in our

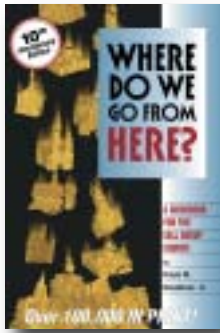


tracks. When we saw how a majority of the people live and how hard they work to survive, it caused us to rethink our plans to replace our car.

In Malawi, if a family saves up enough to buy a bicycle so one of the young men or the dad can become a self-employed bicycle taxi driver, he can probably feed that family with two or three meals per week. Moreover, he's proud of owning that bicycle. He's now an entrepreneurial, middle-class Malawian!

Most of the pastors I trained were too poor to take time off from work to travel to Lilongwe where we held the

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Have you read the book that launched a movement?

Where Do We Go From Here?
by Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr.
Published by TOUCH Publications

It's surprising just how many pastors are using the holistic small group model for church life and missional expansion and have never read the definitive book on it!

In one of our favorite chapters, the author delves into the fact that our theology breeds our methodology. So, adding groups to traditional forms isn't going to help groups produce fruit or be the church.

If you've never heard of this book, then you don't understand just how revolutionary it was when released in the early 1990's. In 2000, TOUCH revised it to include new examples of churches using cell groups effectively and to fine tune the original manuscript.

Worldwide sales of this book now exceed 100,000 copies, which is an amazing number for a pastoral level resource!

We encourage you to dig into this movement-making book and learn deep, transformational principles that are not found in fad-driven books released by big Christian publishers. It's one of a kind for sure, and you will not be disappointed. Below you will find a link to the table of contents and the introduction. After you read this, you'll be sold on reading it cover to cover. We promise!

[Click here check out a free sample chapter!](#)

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GO BIG with Small Group
Eleven Steps to an Explosive Small Group Ministry

by Bill Easum & John Atkinson

Abingdon Press
122 pages

(Available through Amazon.com - Click the picture of the book to be taken to the online listing.)

Randall's Review: ◆◆◆◆
(1 star out of 4)

I had high hopes for this book considering the authors. Bill Easum is a very well respected consultant to denominations and large churches. John Atkinson is a small groups pastor that oversees a church with 'almost 200 groups' [back cover copy]. As I read through each chapter, the word that came to mind was "program." The approach is textbook new program launch, Southern Baptist style.

The eleven steps include getting the pastor on board with groups, establishing a management system, creating a culture of multiplication, training leaders, holding a rally to assimilate as many members into groups on launch day, adding sermon series to get more people into groups, finding and training more leaders, then expanding the groups to meet the member's desire for affinity (families with small kids, singles, and so on).

If a church uses the eleven step process and works hard over the course of a couple of years, they will wind up with a small group ministry where 70 percent of the congregation is involved. I distinctly recall visiting with a pastor in South Korea who had 10,000 members in his congregation. I asked him how many groups he had, and he replied, "We have 1,000 cell groups and 100% attendance from the weekend services." When I asked

him how long it took to transition the church to cells, he said, "Oh, we have yet to begin our transition. We just got the members to join a group."

There's a big difference between getting everyone organized into groups and having healthy groups that focus on Christ in their midst, reach the lost, and disciple one another to maturity.

What's missing from *GO BIG with Small Groups* is organic growth through evangelism and relational leadership development through discipleship. The authors mention relational evangelism ever so briefly, but don't focus on it as the goal of a group or even the results of a healthy group.

My other big issue is that the authors outline a 1:25 ratio for the oversight structure. However, they go on to recommend the lay coach over 25 groups is to contact leaders *monthly*. That's more than one leader each work day of the month. I am a coach over groups in my church. Frankly, maintaining close, supportive relationships with four or five leaders is a sizable task. I'd never recommend having this kind of ratio unless the person was a full-time salaried staff member.

I gave this book one star out of four because it has some practical advice in it for choosing leaders and handling difficult people. None of this is new information, but I thought the reminders on some of the pages were helpful and right on target.

The remaining three stars just weren't earned. This book breaks cardinal rules of healthy small group ministry: Making congregational assimilation a primary goal, and assimilating those people into groups so rapidly that any healthy DNA is damaged beyond repair.

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Will it help your small groups?

The site is an excellent place to discuss what's working in small group ministry and gain ideas. You can blog, use the forums, upload documents and forms for your leaders, all free of charge. Your small groups will have an online place to privately post prayer requests and keep a group calendar.

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MISSION MALAWI! REPORT

I love it when God answers prayer and throws in bonus stuff. And that's exactly what happened throughout our trip to South Africa and Malawi.

In the days leading up to our departure, Etna asked me to share what I hoped to achieve on the trip. Here's a report on what I wanted to accomplish:

1. Interview someone who had been raised from the dead.

I first heard about this kind of miracle from the Malawian pastors in 1996. I believed them, but wanted to capture an interview on video tape to share with the world. I also thought it would be very cool to meet the "faith full" pastors who prayed for dead people and saw them raised as well as a person who had been dead for a time and came back to life. On this trip, all this happened.

This wasn't some near-death experience where she died on the operating table, saw a bright light for a minute or two, and went back into her body. This woman testified that she was hovering above her body in the room

watching everything that went on for nearly 24 hours . . . grieving family, the pastors coming in and praying for her, and feeling frustrated that she couldn't communicate with anyone.



Later that week, I had a conversation with Pastor Opa about praying for the dead to come back to life. We were walking through his village and I noticed a hole being dug for a

funeral underway. An eight year old that was apart of a different church in the village had died from malaria. When I asked Opa why the pastor of her church didn't pray for her to come back to life (thinking he didn't have the faith to do it), Opa told me something very simple and profound. He said, "We don't pray for everyone who dies. Some people are supposed to remain dead. We only pray for certain individuals that God has given us a 'holy unction' to pray for. We only seek to do what the Father instructs us to do and nothing else. There is no reason to pray for someone where there is no power. We should be ministering to the family instead."

Sometimes I wonder why I even open my mouth to ask questions.

If you want to watch the testimony from the woman, it's in two parts on YouTube and is about 15 minutes in length:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nERjXc_uCPs (part 1)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IGNeJkxKSM> (part 2)

2. Teach the Malawian pastors new stuff about groups.

It's not unusual for Americans to fly to Lilongwe and hold tent revivals. All the big names have been over there doing it, even though reaching Malawians for Christ is something the local churches do very, very well. 79% of the people of Malawi are reported to be Christians.

What we wanted to provide them with was practical



tools they can use to train leaders and disciple members. So, I spent the first Saturday of the missions trip teaching nearly 200

pastors about accountability partnerships, mentoring new Christians through a maturity-driven process of discipleship, and how to form core teams to lead cell groups (versus the leader doing all the work himself or herself).

What I love about teaching in Malawi is that the pastors attending are not pleased with "just" 8 or 9 continuous hours of teaching, even though they are sitting on small, handmade wood benches. They can't get enough!

Bonus Stuff

3. Interviewing Enoch about his orphanage.

Pastor Enoch was a porter at one of Lilongwe's nicest hotels for fifteen years. Taking very early retirement, he took his pension and bought a car with the money so he could make far more as a taxi driver. The average Malawi family makes approximately \$275 a year, so owning a car is a big deal.



At first, Enoch decided to use his car to travel and preach in villages outside of Lilongwe. When he returned, he noticed he'd developed an entourage of orphans. When he asked people in the village why they weren't home eating dinner with their family one night, he learned their parents died of AIDS and they were homeless. The families in the villages fed the children when they had extra, but there's not a lot of extra food to give away in Malawi, being the 5th poorest country in the world.

So, he visited with the village chief, who gave him the

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Continued from page 1

training. So we paid for their bus tickets, food, and gave them about \$5 to cover lost wages.

Temporarily living in a different culture—one where people do anything they can to simply survive—changes a person. It caused both my wife and I to be incredibly thankful for all we have as *spoiled-rotten* Americans! The day we came back from the trip, we got in our old car to drive somewhere. As I left the driveway, I thought, “This car is very nice compared to a bicycle. We don’t need a new car. We need to get another 125,000 miles out of it if we can.”

But wait! There’s more...

My current small group is comprised of mostly 20 somethings apart from my wife and I and one other “old” person in their late 40’s. Many of these young adults are self-focused.

For last week’s meeting, our group leader asked us to share our videos of the trip and talk to our group about what we saw and learned while in Malawi and South Africa.

The game park shots of elephants and giraffe were a big hit, but these young people were speechless after we showed them a video interview of the pastor who self-funds an orphanage (watch the amazing video interview for Enoch’s story).

This week, our leader took time at the beginning of our meeting to brainstorm ways we can reach out to others as a group. Within a couple of minutes, one of the members asked if we could do something to raise money for the orphanage. Then, a new member told us about the at-risk kids she was working with in a summer program. Coincidentally, she had just been assigned the task of finding churches and groups to make meals for them while they were in the program. So, we reserved a date and agreed to make dinner for 40 pre-teens.

Transformational Servanthood

What I’ve shared is really nothing new for most readers. Mission trips

change the missionary as much as they serve the people in the community where the missionary served. I wish I could have taken my whole group with me to Malawi to see the orphanage and work with the children for a week or two, but it probably won’t happen. Yet, kids who need our help are just 15 minutes away in Houston, the 4th largest city in the United States. I know that our time with these inner city kids will transform us as a group and give us a completely new perspective on life and broaden our world view.

So let me ask you a question. What are you doing to motivate your small groups to serve others? Are your groups making plans to go out as a group to people who aren’t like them and serve those people in some tangible way? Are individuals headed out of town, out of state, or out of the country to serve as short-term missionaries in the dog days of summer, 2008?

Harness the typically unproductive days in July and August this year to challenge your groups to minister as a team instead of disbanding for the summer. Help them find a part of town where the kids need support or an elderly person needs their house painted. Just about anything they do outside their own neighborhood and away from your church building will transform them individually and bond them as a team for outward ministry!

Randall Neighbour serves as President of TOUCH Outreach Ministries, a consulting, training, and resource ministry located in Houston, Texas.



Randall is currently working on his next book entitled, *The Naked Truth About Small Group Ministry: When it won’t work and what to do about it.* Watch for the release of this new title in October!



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use of a small building. He took in 8 children and fed them two meals a day. Then, he discovered the need was much greater. There were hundreds of children who roamed the streets without food, shelter, clothing, schooling, or family to look after them.



You will never believe how many children Pastor Enoch feeds, clothes, and houses on a taxi driver's salary if I were to tell you. You'll just have to watch the video and hear it for yourself!

Watch the Yahoo! video download here:
<http://video.yahoo.com/watch/2800125/8120786>



TOUCH is taking non-taxable donations for Enoch's work. 100% of donations given to us will go to him and our partner ministry in South Africa will ensure the monies are used to feed, house, clothe, immunize, and teach the children in his orphanage. Contact us at 800-735-5865 to make a donation today!

4. A trip to a Malawian lakeside village.

One of the unexpected highlights of our trip was travelling to Monkey Bay to visit a fishing village. Nothing helps you understand a culture better than to get smack dab in the middle of it and see it, smell it, and taste it!

As we walked along the shore of Lake Malawi and saw the dugout canoes and fish drying on bamboo racks, it gave me a whole new perspective on the church planting work underway in Malawi. Pastors walk or ride on the back of a bicycle taxi between villages to preach each week and encourage cell leaders. These godly men have never been to seminary, yet have learned so much about the Word and how to effectively lead others to Christ and disciple them.

As we drove away from the village, Joshua Churchyard, the pastor of Church of the Way in Benoni,



Randall Neighbour interviewing Pastor Opa in front of his village home.

South Africa, (our host for the mission trip), described the value of what I had brought to these pastors. Two years ago, I gave a copy of *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders* to Pastor Sam, one of the senior elders of the church planting movement. He read it repeatedly, rewrote pages from it for personal reflection and to teach from, and then passed the book to another pastor who undoubtedly did the same.

Last year, Joshua visited Malawi and a pastor came up with the book in hand, asking for a fresh copy. A few pages had fallen out and one other particularly valuable page had been carefully cut from the book. He also asked if the translation into Chewa was complete, because his English wasn't as good as his native language.

How often do you and I receive books and toss them on the pile, only to be ignored? Let me tell you, when you give a Malawian pastor a good book on small group leadership, he devours it and so will a dozen other pastors!

5. The Chewa translation project.

We are currently working with two University of Malawi professors to translate 8 TOUCH titles into Chewa, the national language. When these translations are done later this year, we will be ready to print copies in South Africa and drive them to Lilongwe for distribution. This is where we need your help.

We've raised enough money to translate all eight books (discipleship and leader training resources, by the way) but we have not raised enough money to print all eight books. We only have enough money for a short run of one title.

If your church would like to sponsor the printing and distribution of discipleship and cell leader training materials as others have done, it would be great! Individuals and churches have given generously in the past and we're seeing fruit from it. Won't you join us in equipping leaders and discipling believers in a place where raising people from the dead is common, but no discipleship resources can be found?

Call 800-735-5865 for more details!