

Fresh Insight

for holistic small group ministries

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This issue contains "easter egg" specials (subscriber-only discounts) on *The Arrival Kit* and *Beginning the Journey*, two of our excellent discipleship books!

Can you find them?



Have you hammered on your discipleship process lately?

by Randall Neighbour, Ministry President

Someone once told me that when the only tool in your toolbox is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. I looked in my small groups toolbox over the weekend and I have a bunch of tools... but the hammer needs to strike the head of the discipleship nail once again because it's still sticking out of the wood. In fact, I'm confident that some churches have never even attempted to strike the nail (because there is no nail to be found) while others have tried but failed (considering all the marred wood surrounding the nail).

Another wise person once told me that if you ask the right questions, you'll get the right answers. So, here's some of the best questions I can find to help develop a discipleship path that actually moves people from spiritual immaturity to maturity and into leading others along the same path.

Where am I?

A couple of weeks ago, I bought a GPS unit. What an amazing little gadget and time-saver. However, as nifty as it is, the thing is worthless for providing direction to the driver if it cannot obtain the requisite satellite signal to inform the GPS unit where it is on planet Earth. Without a point of origination, it's a very expensive

road map that's cumbersome and not worth the time to use over a printed map from the gas station.

Many church discipleship programs or processes have no instrument in place to help people determine a point of origination. Without some process or tool to discover where one finds himself or herself on the giant map of Christian maturity, one can never move in any direction with confidence knowing he or she is progressing toward a destination.

My father discovered this fundamental discipleship principle in the 1980's. He developed a little booklet entitled *The Journey Guide For New Christians* that is still for sale today and does a good job of helping a new believer—with the help of a mentor—

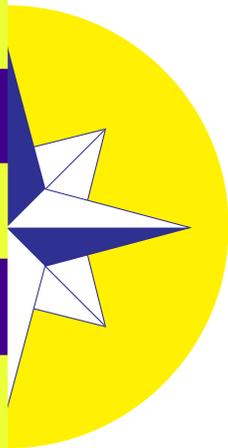
determine where they are with a knowledge of God, God's values, their own learning style, and basic milestones for a road to spiritual maturity.

When I turned on my new GPS for the first time, I was forced to walk outside so it could find out where I was. When a satellite signal was found, the gizmo came alive with features. It changed screens and said aloud, "Where do you want to go?"

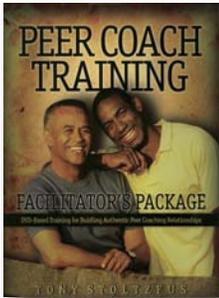
A self-assessment tool will help a

"When the only tool in your toolbox is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."

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Featured Resource



Peer Coach Training

Tony Stoltzfus

Published by
Coach22 Resources,
Virginia Beach, VA

We've just discovered a wonderful new way to create healthy (read non-controlling) accountability partnerships among church members!

This excellent training weekend (or half day launch followed by five weekly sessions) moves fast because of the way it's designed: lots of interaction by the participants!

If the level of healthy accountability in your church is not where it should be, *Peer Coach Training* will take the work out of the process of moving everyone into an accountability partnership that works!

We've bundled everything a church needs to get started. The following materials are included in this \$99 bundle:

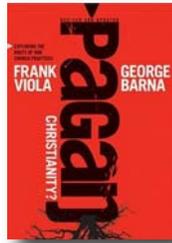
- The Peer Coaching Facilitator's Guide
- Leadership Coaching (the book)
- The Peer Coaching DVD Set
- One Peer Coaching Workbook
- Ten (10) Peer Coaching Brochures (for getting the word out about the training).

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In Review



Pagan Christianity

Frank Viola and George Barna

BarnaBooks
336 pages

Reviewed by Dennis
McCallum, Co-Pastor, Xenos
Christian Fellowship,
Columbus, OH

Dennis' Review: ◆◆◆◆ (2 stars)

In a nutshell: Not good enough.

As a leader in a house church planting ministry, I so wanted to like this book! Frank Viola has been writing in favor of a more organic understanding of church life for years. Observers have often pointed out similarities between his books and some of mine. I see the overlap as well, along with some differences, which should be clear from my most recent book, ***Organic Disciplemaking***. [The need for, and nature of disciplemaking was one area of solid agreement!] Readers like me who share the authors' desire for an organic, New Testament-style church will experience real excitement while reading some parts of this courageous critique of the modern institutional church. All this said, I'm afraid the work is seriously flawed.

We've all seen steer wrestling at rodeos. The cowboy seized the horns of the steer and twists his head, eventually forcing the hapless animal in a direction it never wanted to go. Some interpreters steer-wrestle the Bible and history to fit pre-conceived views of the church. I'm not denying that many, and maybe most of their claims are true. But mixing in exaggeration and selectivity can seriously distort the picture.

I am on their side of the river,

and I'm recommending this book, even though I think they overreached on a number of their points and weakened their case as a result.

Buildings: They show how the concept of church buildings as holy places originated and drew most of its content from pagan influences. They focus on the major formalism added at the time of Constantine, but in fact, church buildings were around, and were viewed as holy houses of God well before Constantine. He did greatly expand the acceptance and the number of "churches" throughout the empire. They then over-reach to the extreme of implying that using buildings at all is pagan and alien to the New Testament.

Their suggestion that the church could just rent or borrow a building like the schoolroom of Tyrannus or Solomon's portico for special occasions doesn't match New Testament precedent. Paul didn't rent the schoolroom for a special occasion, but as a base of ministry that he carried on "daily." (Acts 19:9) Solomon's portico was in regular use also. Outdoor venues like that work well for warm-climates like Jerusalem. It wouldn't work so well where I live in Ohio. The point is that the poisonous part—viewing buildings as the "house of God" and auditoriums as "sanctuaries" (which means "holy places")—should be decried without discrediting the whole argument by exaggerating.

Would you like to read more? This is the first of a four-part review by Dennis McCallum of this controversial new release by Viola and Barna. To read the balance of the review or comment on Dennis McCallum's blog, [click here.](#)



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Fresh Ideas for Accountability: The Power of Goal Setting

by Tony Stoltzfus

Have you ever thought that God sets goals? For instance, when He told Abraham that his descendants would be like the sand on the seashore, God was proclaiming a future He was committed to reaching. That's what goal-setting is: declaring a specific future objective and committing yourself to reach it.

Jesus set goals as well. Luke 9:51 states that, "When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus knew clearly that He was headed for the cross: He told His disciples ahead of time that He "would suffer many things... and be killed, and on the third day be raised." By verbalizing His intentions and "setting his face" to go, Jesus made a decisive commitment to that goal. Though He faced opposition (His first step toward Jerusalem was blocked by the Samaritans and He had to make a detour), His mind was made up. Each of the towns and villages of Galilee He visited along the winding road to Bethpage and up the Mount of Olives was a milepost on the way to His objective.

Goal-setting is making a decisive choice to accomplish something specific. The story of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is a good example of the value of setting a goal: it makes your intentions clear, solid and measurable. Jesus' goal clarified where He was headed: every step He took after that was toward Jerusalem. When you share your objective with others, as Jesus did, that act of will solidifies your choice into a robust commitment that can overcome obstacles and endure detours and delays. We ask new believers to testify publicly about their faith for the same reason: their decision for Christ becomes a public, accountable

commitment instead of merely a private experience that can be privately reevaluated at will. And setting a clear goal made Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem measurable. We can track His progress on a map and clearly see at any point whether He is on course to meet His objective.

What Can God Do For You?

Clarifying, solidifying and measuring commitment is what goal statements do. But even more important is what they allow God to do for you. God has chosen to work with us as co-laborers. That means that some things He intends to do (often things He wants to do for you!) depend on your cooperation.

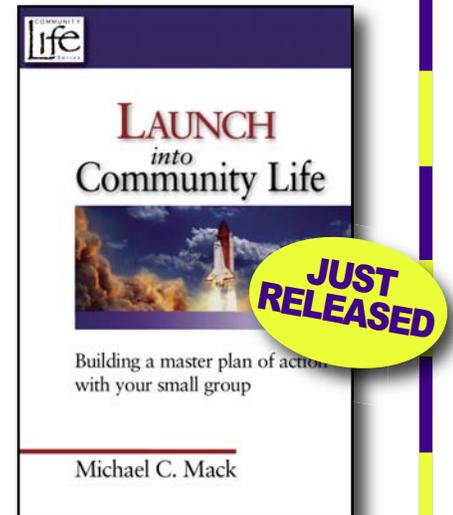
Think of a challenge you need to tackle in the next few months that is on God's change agenda for your life. At this point, you have an idea of what to do, maybe even an intention to do it, but not a commitment to it. Converting that idea into a goal is a decisive choice: it turns your "want to" into "will do". And aligning your will with God's will for your life is a decision that unleashes the power of God on your behalf.

For example, thinking, "Someday I'd like to start a neighborhood men's group," is a nice idea. However, if you say, "I will start a small group in my neighborhood within 60 days," you will probably be amazed at the hungry men God sends to you. When we choose to act on God's will, God acts on our behalf.

Several years ago I set a lifetime goal to replicate what God had given me into 400 leaders. That seemed like a huge objective at the time. As I began moving toward that goal, God began to act, too: much more quickly than I was

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Launching new groups after Easter Sunday?



Michael Mack (author of *Moving Forward* and *Leading From The Heart*) has created a four-meeting curriculum book to help a new group create a master plan of action:

- Week One* - The Key to Success: Organization
- Week Two* - The "Perfect" Small Group
- Week Three* - Radically Real Christian Community
- Week Four* - Going Forward Together

By moving through this curriculum together, the leader creates a core team, a master plan of action; creates a vision for the group; determines a doable mission (something God-sized); and nails down lots of important stuff like who will champion prayer, evangelism, servanthood, hospitality, coordinate fun stuff for the group to do together, and more!

[\[Click here to download a sample of the book and buy your copy!\]](#)

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Tired of trying to connect with group members & leaders with Facebook or Myspace's sophomoric approach?

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It's a totally free social network (similar to Myspace or Facebook, but with a far more straightforward interface) designed for small group pastors, leaders and group members. Unlike other social networks, real names are required and the site is closely monitored to ensure privacy and on topic: small group life, leadership, and discipleship.

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.

What about privacy?

When you join, you'll see that the site gives you control over who sees what in your own profile and the online groups you establish.

How can I win that iPhone?

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The fun, free way to connect small group members and leaders

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believer see where they are and where they can go with Christ. It also shows the believer how important their small group is in the process of *working out your (plural use of the word) salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil. 2:12). If you don't have an initial interview piece like this in your discipleship process, you no longer need to wonder why people don't start down your discipleship path in the first place or why folks don't make it through it ... they have no idea they need to make a move in the right direction. Self-assessment is an excellent inoculation for *spiritual alzheimer's*.

Where am I supposed to go?

I have a confession to share here. For many years, I believed (and taught) that it was vital to the small group ministry's success that we disciple new believers into strong group leaders. In other words, the core motivation was to train believers to a point to where they could expand a man-made structure inside a local church.

Friends, there are only two reasons to disciple others into spiritual maturity:

1. We're called to do it by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20.
2. It's healthy for everyone involved in the process.

Today, I firmly believe we are to make disciples to build the kingdom of God and provide individuals with a strong, driving sense of personal and corporate purpose in life. If we do this well, the church gets an endless number of people who can be mobilized as small group leaders as one of their first leadership responsibilities. You read that right. Small group leadership isn't a big thing really, and it should be the first of many leadership roles a believer embraces.

So, to answer the question, *Where am I supposed to go?*, a church must examine its mission and vision and

create an end-goal that is in perfect alignment.

My mother was brought up in the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination. With great regularity, her pastor invited CMA missionaries to come and share about their missions work in Africa, Asia and South America. As she aged and matured in Christ, she felt that winning the prize (Phil. 3:14) was to serve the Lord as an overseas vocational missionary.

The CMA continues to cast a strong vision for vocational missions, and they use their small groups as a support structure to raise up missionaries. What does your discipleship path reflect? Does it answer the question for the disciple, "Where am I supposed to go?"

When it comes to discipleship, you must answer the most basic questions the believer needs answered to create a well-lit path.

How am I to get there?

I no longer teach there is a superior way of helping a believer get from point A to point Z. There are many learning styles and methods. However, I will say this about myself—I do not learn in classrooms or by reading books. I learn by interacting with someone who loves me deeply and is willing to walk with me into whatever I need to experience so I can learn verbally. (There are actually seven types of learning styles. Check out [this web page](#) for more information about them.)

I don't profess to be a discipleship

expert by any means. But I do know that offering a discipleship class ain't gonna cut the mustard. It will require small group members taking responsibility for other small group members to get the job done.

I love the analogy of hiking up a sizable mountain with a guide. The mountain is so large that part of the mountain rises above the clouds and I can't see the summit. However, I'm confident I'll make it to the top. Why? I am motivated by my senior pastor, who has been to the summit many times. Moreover, I am not alone... I have a friend who's been much higher in elevation on this climb than I have ever been, and he's come back down the mountain to show me the way.

As we hike along a steep path, I know the climb won't happen fast and we're not in a hurry. Each day, we consider the day's pace and how long it will take us to get from the base camp to the camp found at 1,200 feet. There, we will learn about the rock formations ahead and learn techniques for climbing those rocks. We'll get tools for that part of the journey, and build upon what we learned when we were hiking in the days before on lower elevations.

Where will we camp along the journey?

Most of the discipleship paths I have examined carefully have covered ground in the areas of basics of the faith such as the depravity of man, the true nature of God, the life of Jesus Christ, the work of the cross, salvation by grace, water baptism, the Trinity, tithing, avoiding sin, developing spiritual disciplines, and the inerrancy of the Bible. I'd want all this in my church's discipleship path for sure.

Yet much is missing. What about freedom from satanic strongholds and the need for deliverance? How about training for relational evangelism and mentoring/discipling a new Christian effectively? There are many other areas

along the spiritual path to maturity that may not be easy for a mentor-guide to help a believer move through. That's where the church must rise to the occasion with corporately implemented events. At strategic places in every discipleship process, there must be events (camps) where the local church helps believers move to the next level.

The Vineyard church where my wife and I serve has a six month intensive program to help people walk through and out of relational and sexual brokenness called Living Waters. While I've been through this process, I am also a big fan of weekend events like Encounter God, which help the believer see the need for something much deeper.

The combination of weekend events in the form of retreats and mentoring makes for a powerful and transformational process.

Who else is going along?

I have a lot of axes to grind when it comes to the way people do church, but none needs grinding more than what I'm about to share. If the church was commanded to make disciples, why does it so often fall short of the mandate by discipling only those rare individuals who want to sign up for it? Discipleship is something every small group member should be involved with, and they should know their current position on the path. Any discipleship process for a small group ministry that's worth its weight in salt involves everyone in the discipling process.

This is an easy thing to conceptually agree with in theory, but a much harder thing to do in reality. My grandfather would shout, "There's a fly in the ointment!"

Many a small group ministry has zero discipleship going on beyond what is heard from the pulpit. Even if a stellar discipleship pathway were set in place, many existing small group members would say they are already mature

Christians and don't need to go through it. One in five would be correct by my estimation. And that 20% aren't that mature in Christ. If they were, they'd instantly see the opportunity to mentor others.

Implementing a new discipleship process must be done very carefully. Donning my strategic hat, I'd say that the latter portions should be implemented first with the so-called "mature" believers in the small group ministry... spiritual gift assessments and relational evangelism training would be two higher milestones I'd want to move through first, after accountability partnerships have been established among the members.

I am certain of one truth about small group ministry: everyone *must* be personally involved in the Great Commission. When this is happening, the small group structure is welcomed by everyone involved because it supports the lived-out values of the disciple makers. Let me repeat a small group truth here to insure it's caught through repetition: Small groups will not move lazy consumer Christians into action. Structures don't motivate anyone who isn't already motivated. ♦

RANDALL NEIGHBOUR is the president of TOUCH Outreach Ministries. His new book, *The Naked Truth about Small Group Ministry* will be available this fall. Check out his blog at



www.randallneighbour.com

[End Note: I cannot take credit for many of the principles and concepts in this blog entry. That credit belongs to my dad (Dr. Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr.), who was one of the first pastors I know of who create a systematic equipping system for small group members which I have moved through numerous times with new believers.]

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envisioning! Less than a year later I was invited to build a large leadership training program, and in only five years I had reached that original goal. So I reset the target, much higher this time—and again I see God moving in ways I never could have predicted to make it possible.

Setting goals for your walk with God can have a powerful impact on your future. It is a worthwhile aim to pursue a bonus at work, get in shape, or save for your kids' education. But Paul says, "*Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come*" (1 Tim. 4:7–8).

As you think about setting a growth goal, ask yourself, "What does God want to do in me this year?" It could transform your life!

Tony Stoltzfus is a master Christian coach and coach trainer, and author of numerous books, CDs and training programs for coaching in ministry situations. Check out his excellent training package for accountability partners!



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