



# Destiny Incubators: A Powerful Approach to Small Groups

## Overview of Small Group Ministry

### Michael's Story

I was saved in a church-planting ministry in 1974. We believed in small groups and began to practice them from the very start, although we didn't necessarily understand a healthy philosophy about them. Throughout that whole-time period, we planted many small groups. Some of them were successful and some were not.

A short time later, I met John Wimber. We became part of the Vineyard movement and planted a vineyard church in the city of San Francisco. We started with small groups. This was John Wimber's philosophy of planting churches. We then multiplied our groups. We didn't start doing Sunday morning services until we had five groups with a total of around 80 people. That was an amazing experience for us because it did several things at once. One, it gave us the ability to have fun together without the pressures of church. And, to raise up leaders in an amazing process without the performance of church. Two, it embedded a value and culture of small-group relationship that carried on throughout the whole history of our church.

By the time of the peak growth of our church, we ended up having about 70 small groups. We had some groups that experienced attrition, therefore, we had actually planted about 100 groups by that time. We were at about a 65% self-reproduction rate; many of our groups were multiplying into the next group and multiplying into the next group, etc. Some of our groups were multiplied as a result of independent training.

### The Biblical Pattern

If you look at Scripture, it is very interesting to note that the early church had two primary forms of meeting.

1. They met publically.
2. They met from house to house

You see this in the early chapters of the Book of Acts. You also see this reiterated by Paul the Apostle with the Ephesians elders in Acts 20:20:

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*"...I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house."*

Acts 20:20

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This is the reason some people even call the vision for small groups a 20/20 vision. The ability to meet in small groups and to meet in a large public setting serves two, separate, essential purposes for the local church. Ralph Neighbour, leader of TOUCH USA, says that small groups combined with public celebrations are the two-wings of the church. A church cannot fly with only one wing.

There has been a gradual frustration and a diminishing value of small groups in our day and age. Something has been seriously lost in the process that is producing a series of weaknesses and problems in local churches. We want to solve these problems but they cannot be solved without some kind of small group ministry in the local church.

### **Vision and Motivation: Every Member Ministry**

God's vision for the church is not to build buildings on street corners and have congregations gathering for an hour or hour and a half on a Sunday morning. That is not church. In fact, that is not the church that Jesus built. It is not the church the apostles built. In fact, Jesus said,

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*"...If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."*

Matthew 16:24

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We are living stones being built together into a dwelling place of the Spirit. (Eph. 2:22; 1 Peter 2:5) We are a body and each one of us represents a different part of the body. (1 Cor. 12:20) All of us are different.

The purposes of Christ will not be fulfilled until every member is mobilized according to their God-given design and destiny. Every member must be mobilized for Christ to be most glorified on the earth. Church exists as a community of called-out ones to help mobilize every member to serve the living God based on their unique design and calling in Christ.

If the purpose of God for the church is to mobilize and equip every member for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12), then we must take a good look at our current structures and ask, "How are we doing?" It is like the old business questions, "What business are you in?" And, "How's business?"

If I was asked the question, "What business are you in?", the answer would be, "We are in the business of making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples." If I was asked "How is business?", and all I have is a Sunday morning service, I am going to be hard-pressed to give a positive answer. Therefore, Sunday services were never designed to produce personal discipleship. They are part of a larger organizational celebration. This is when the key leader speaks and gives the vision for where God is leading the group. This is when the key leader teaches the group the essential



principles that will guide them on the journey towards organizational fruitfulness. It is the place where the best worship leaders are leading the best praise and times of intimacy with God. It is the place where the best ministry teams are ministering. It is the place where large group is experienced. But, in the process of only large-group experience, there are only a few key people who are doing the ministry. That can be a problem. If 15 people are doing ministry on a Sunday morning, that means that the other 100 people in the church are not being activated. If this is their only experience of fellowship in each week, then they are not moving forward in their discipleship. Therefore, the early church practiced the two wings of the church, according to Acts 20:20; publically and from house to house.

If our goal is for every member to be mobilized and activated according to their divine gifting and calling then we need a context in which every member can function, speak, have a role and be a player; not just a spectator.

There is a need for large-group meetings, or the publically-side. But, you also need small-group meetings as well. Start to develop both because your true fulfillment as a pastor comes when every member is functioning fully in Christ.

### **The Church Has Many Priorities**

The church has the primary purpose of mobilizing members, yet also has many priorities. We have the priorities of outreach, enfolding, community, presence, training and leadership. Large gatherings are good for what they do, but it is the small gatherings in which every member starts to touch that purpose and those priorities. This is the context in which every member starts to experience ministry at a very basic level; both receiving that ministry and giving it out to others. We need to see small groups as essential to activate every member for the ministry that they are designed to fulfill. Every single small group is to be a destiny and a leadership incubator.

### **Small Groups and Schools of Ministry**

Some pastors might have started a school of ministry instead of having small groups. That seems like a very popular thing to do right now. The problem is that they do the schools of ministry just like they are doing the Sunday morning services. So, all the members still do not have an opportunity to speak, serve, minister, etc. When you do a school of ministry in that way, there is no vehicle for personal, individual development.

We are moving away from the idea that small groups are just a way to meet people's needs to a place where we develop people. Pastors are, generally, good delegators but not very consistent people-developers. We want to build people. We want to raise people up. That is the heart of the great commission – to make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples so that the knowledge of the glory of God would fill the earth like the waters cover the sea.