



Activate: Uncut

A Special Report by Nelson Searcy

Including the Missing Pieces, the Activate Principles and the Answers to Your Most Frequently-Asked Questions

**\$23.95
value!**



Meet Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas



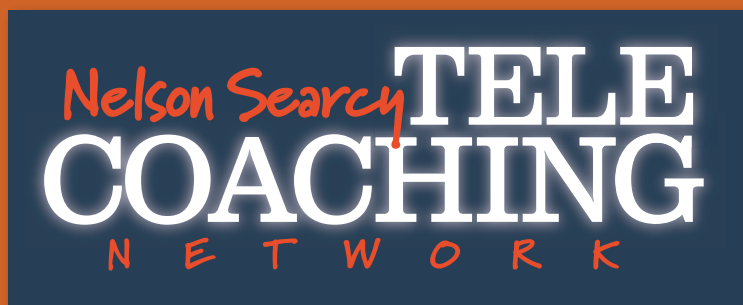
Nelson Searcy is the Founding and Lead Pastor of The Journey Church in New York City. Since 2002, The Journey Church has grown from one family to over 1,200 in weekend attendance, over 700 baptisms and 1,400 in small groups! This groundbreaking church sees the majority of its growth coming from new believers and currently meets in six services in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. Nelson is the author of the books *Fusion: Integrating Newcomers into the Life of Your Church*, *Activate: A Completely New Approach to Small Groups* and *Ignite: How to Spark Immediate Growth in Your Church*. Nelson is

an experienced church planter, coach and church growth strategist. Before moving to New York, he served as the Director of the Purpose Driven Community at Saddleback Church. He is also the founder of ChurchLeaderInsights.com, the Church Leadership Training ministry of Nelson Searcy and The Journey Church.



Kerrick Thomas is the Executive and Teaching Pastor of The Journey Church in New York City. He was part of the launch team that started The Journey Church from scratch in 2002. He's led the development of The Journey's Small Group system that has seen over 110% of its average Sunday attendance sign up for Small Groups every semester over the last six years. Kerrick is the co-author of *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups*. He also leads Coaching Networks for Executive Pastors, Small Group Pastors and Church Planters, and regularly co-teaches training events with Nelson Searcy.

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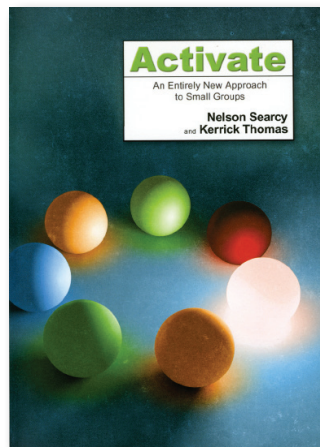


Activate:

More Insight For Your Entirely New Approach to Small Groups

In the world of publishing, some things get left on the cutting room floor. Wait, maybe that's in the world of film...but you get the picture. Due to length constraints, some pretty important material was left out of *Activate's* introduction — material that I consider to be foundational. So, now that many of you have had a chance to digest *Activate* and start implementing the system, I want to take you back to the beginning and give you some more detail on how the *Activate* strategy came to be. For those of you who haven't read *Activate* yet, here's a little teaser. Enjoy!

Oh and one more thing: After the intro you'll find a comprehensive list of some important "Activate Principles" and answers to the top 10 questions we've received since writing the book. And now...



Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups

By Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas

Available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or [ChristianBook.com](https://www.ChristianBook.com)



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The Activate Introduction: Uncut

We haven't always loved the idea of small groups. In fact, as recently as six years ago, we didn't think very highly of small groups at all.

Maybe you feel this way too. And maybe, like us, you know that small groups are part of God's plan for spiritual maturity...but you can see that current small group systems simply aren't working. Perhaps you are asking yourself the same questions we asked in the beginning of our small groups journey. Questions such as:

- Is it possible to have a small groups ministry that isn't complicated?
- Is it possible to operate a small groups ministry without hiring dozens of staff people?
- Is it possible to see 100 percent adult attender participation in groups?
- Is it possible for true life-change to happen in groups?
- Is it possible to have a small groups ministry that you and your staff are passionate about?

The limiting factor for Sunday School is that it must be done "on campus" and "on Sunday."

In this book, we will walk you down our path of conversion from being apathetic toward small groups to becoming raving fans of small groups. We believe that we have found a way for groups to be simple, self-sustaining and life-changing. Our change of heart didn't happen overnight. Rather, it took place little by little, through the life of our local church: The Journey Church in New York City. We will admit that we started with some basic assumptions:

Assumption #1

Sunday School is a great option for some churches, but not the best option for the majority of churches...and not the option we planned to pursue. We won't be rehashing the Sunday

School vs. Small Groups debate here.

The first church I (Nelson) pastored was a small, traditional Baptist church. Like most small, traditional churches, we had on-site Sunday School. We would faithfully post our Sunday School attendance numbers on the little board behind the pulpit. Some weeks our numbers were downright embarrassing! But most of the time, we had between 35 percent and 45 percent of our weekly worship attenders in Sunday School. Not too bad by some measures.

**Begin with the
end in mind.**

Looking back, I have realized that Sunday School is actually a type of small group — but not the type we will focus on in this book. In fact, we think Sunday School is a great option for many churches. The limiting factor for Sunday School is that it must be done “on campus” and “on Sunday.” This means that, right off the bat, 50 percent or more of the congregation finds it limiting. As we studied the most biblical approach to fostering spiritual maturity among believers, Sunday School just didn’t seem like the best replica of the New Testament model, where the vast majority of adults met in small house-to-house gatherings.

Assumption #2

Small groups are biblical. Our goal in the pages ahead is not to revisit the theology of small groups or the plethora of reasons why you should consider small groups. Instead, we are simply working from the widely-validated assumption that small groups are biblical.

With these two foundational assumptions in place, we started thinking about what the end result of successful small groups at The Journey would look like. You’ve probably heard the saying “Begin with the end in mind.” That’s exactly what we did. We knew that God was calling us to build a small groups system that He could work through to produce the results He most desired. With that ultimate picture of effectiveness clearly in mind, we began to work backwards, establishing clear goals that we knew we wanted our new small group system to help us reach.

Small Group Goals:

- Build a biblical small groups ministry that will create maximum life-change.
- Build a small groups ministry that will see 100 percent adult participation.
- Build a small groups ministry that is outwardly focused.

- Pinpoint the ideal size of a small group.
- Create a small groups environment that encourages the formation of friendships.
- Develop a clear and simple sign-up system that will multiply involvement.
- Utilize the natural flow of the calendar to maximize sign-ups and life-change.
- Reproduce new group leaders without overwhelming trainings.
- Multiply without having to split existing groups.
- Nurture small group leaders who are excited about leading and want to lead again and again and again.
- Develop a simple structure that keeps growing with our church.
- Implement a promotion plan that gets people excited about small groups.
- Discover how to mobilize small groups for ministry in the church, for evangelism in the community and for mission in the world.

We wanted to accomplish all of these goals while avoiding some of the traps that have commonly been associated with small groups, such as renegade groups, theological messes, administrative nightmares and leader burnout. With these goals in place, we set out to develop a small groups system that works.

But before we move into the future of your small groups system, let's take a look back at how this all began...



History of Groups

at The Journey Church

The Journey's birthday is Easter Sunday of 2002. That's the day we began weekly services. We launched with a blast — 110 people on our first day. But we launched without small groups. As we detailed in our church-planting book *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch*, we did this intentionally. We made an initial decision to wait at least six months before beginning small groups at The Journey. [For more on our Church Planting strategies, check out our first book together, *Launch: Starting A New Church From Scratch* (Regal)]. We knew that groups were going to be an essential part of our church but, like many new churches, we put their implementation off as long as we could.

Soon enough, the day came when the small groups discussion could no longer be avoided. I (Kerrick) remember it vividly. The Journey had been in full swing for just over six months and things were going well. Then, one Monday morning, Nelson announced that it was time to start thinking about small groups. At the time, we had three people on staff, all of whom were assembled around our conference table (which was actually just a coffee table): Nelson, myself, and our only paid staff person — our worship leader. When Nelson went on to say, "I think someone sitting here needs to lead this charge," I thought to myself, *Uh-oh*. I looked around, considering our options. Our worship pastor — and the owner of the coffee table — was already carrying the heaviest load. And I knew by the fact that Nelson was the one making the announcement that it wasn't going to be him. I shrank in my chair, shying away from the inevitable reality that I was going to be the one called upon to start The Journey's small groups adventure. I had never been in a church-based small group. And I definitely didn't consider myself a small groups guy. None of us did. But that day, we committed to moving forward with small groups in our church, and I was heading the charge.

We made an initial decision to wait at least six months before beginning small groups at The Journey.

Wanting to be nothing if not informed, we set out on a mission to learn everything we could about small groups. We bought the audio from every small groups conference

we could afford; we bought every book written on small groups that we could find; we leveraged every relationship we had, to talk to some of the best small groups gurus in the nation. As part of our research, we began to break down and examine the pieces of all the small groups systems we discovered. We knew enough to know that before you adopt someone's system you'd better take a close look at that system's results.

Even though Sunday School wasn't an option for us, we had seen that it could garner up to 50 percent participation. Surprisingly, many of the small groups systems we analyzed were actually getting far less participation than that. Several popular systems of the time — ones that we were strongly encouraged to buy into — were only pulling 30 to 40 percent of adult attender participation; less than some Sunday School systems! While participation isn't everything, such low numbers definitely caused us to question the methodology and effectiveness of those small groups systems.

We decided from day one that we would not compromise or settle for mediocrity. We wanted a system that would produce true life change in 100 percent of our weekend service attenders.

This early commitment led to a second important conversation in the life of small groups at The Journey. This one took place in a back booth at Burger King. (That's right. We only dine with Kings and Queens — Burger King and Dairy Queen. Dairy Queen is our

We wanted a system that would produce true life change in 100 percent of our weekend service attenders.

favorite...but it was breakfast time.) We were coming to a critical realization concerning all of the material that had been written and taught about small groups up to that point. While all of it was important in building the base of our thinking, none of it was very useful in helping us reach the goals we had set for our groups. Inspiration often comes in the most unlikely places. That day, in the back

of a Burger King, we began sketching out what we now call the 12 Big Ideas. You will be introduced to each of these Big Ideas in part one of this book.

One of the most defining decisions we made that morning was to base our small groups system around our nationwide academic calendar. We decided to acknowledge that there is a natural rhythm built into our culture. People start school in the fall and take a break at Christmas. They come back in January and run hard until the summer break. Whether you or your children are involved in public school, private school or a university, you adhere to this natural flow of the calendar. Even once we are finished with school, the

inherent susceptibility to the varying seasons follows us into our adult lives, whether we live in Manhattan, Michigan or Mississippi.

So, we decided to work with this reality by creating what is now known as our *semester-based* small groups system. In our system, small groups kick off at the beginning of a school semester, last from 10 to 12 weeks and wrap up before a natural break in the calendar. We have formed our small groups year around three semesters — fall, spring and summer — with short breaks in between. Just as a university class has a definite beginning and end time, so do groups. We will explain all of this in great detail a little later.

Then one day, as I (Nelson) was getting home from work and making my usual stop through the mailroom of my apartment building, I saw a stack of very large books under the mailboxes. Assuming that the books in the pile were new phone books, I went over to pick one up. To my surprise, they weren't phone directories. They were copies of The New York University Continuing Education Catalog, full of thousands of courses available the coming semester. People in New York City love personal and professional growth.

In addition to their love for growth, people in our city hate anything that is small. New York City is a place that rewards the big (big buildings, big ideas, etc.) and abhors the small (small apartments, small thinking, etc.). Because of this, we realized that actually calling our small groups "Small" Groups could hurt us.

With an understanding of our city's mindset as a driving factor, we combined the anti-small mentality with the pro-growth mentality, and decided to call our groups "Growth Groups." Some churches have adopted the same term, others simply use "Small Groups," while others have reached unique conclusions about their communities and

refer to their groups as "Home Groups" or "Life Groups" or "Community Groups." Find the best term that works for your area.

With all of these concepts coming together, albeit in rough form, we knew we had hit the point where we had enough to begin implementing this new small groups system at The Journey.

In the fall of 2002, we began the process of testing these ideas in our church. Sign-ups for our first round of small groups began in early September. Groups were set to kick off in October. We had seven small groups in place — four of which were being led by Nelson, by myself (Kerrick) and by our worship pastor. We found six other individuals in the

We have formed our small groups year around three semesters – fall, spring and summer – with short breaks in between.

church whom we paired up to lead the three additional groups. We were pumped up! We pulled everyone together for a quick leaders' training, and then we were off and running.

Imagine our surprise when over the course of September, 110 people signed up to be in a small group! Since our initial launch day, six months before, we had never had more than 80 people in Sunday attendance any given week. Interestingly, by the end of that first small groups semester, our average Sunday attendance was close to 110 people.

Huh? Little did we know that this 100 percent-plus involvement, which led to matching church growth, would turn into a trend. Something was working.

During that first semester of groups at The Journey, we grew by the number of people who were involved in small groups — from 80 to 110. The next semester we were determined to double our number of groups to 14 to see what God would do. So, we began January/February of 2003 as a church with just over 100 people. But we had 147 people signed up for our 14 Spring 2003 Growth Groups.

Guess what happened?

You got it! By the end of that semester, we were averaging more than 150 every Sunday at the church. Here's how things developed over the next few years at The Journey:

Semester	Number of Groups	People in Groups	Avg. Weekly Attendance
Fall 2002	7	110	80
Spring 2003	14	147	150
Summer 2003	12	142	175
Fall 2003	23	325	300
Spring 2004	36	500	500
Summer 2004	28	540	575
Fall 2004	64	900	750
Spring 2005	75	975	800
Summer 2005	71	900	850
Fall 2005	80	1,050	950

Let's define a few items in this chart:

- By "Number of Groups," we mean the number of groups that were available for people to join.
- By number of "People in Groups," we mean the actual number of people who signed up for a growth group. (We understand that sign-ups are different than show-ups. But as we will argue later, we believe that sign-ups are the most important number.)
- By "Avg. Weekly Attendance," we mean the average Sunday attendance at the *beginning* of each semester.

Running a small groups system is unpredictable and messy. Sometimes attendance is up and sometimes it is down. That's just life in the church.

As you look over the numbers in the chart, note that running a small groups system is unpredictable and messy. Sometimes attendance is up and sometimes it is down. That's just life in the church. But these are the honest numbers as they progressed at The Journey - using the system we are about to detail.

We continue to run this small groups system, with consistent evaluation and adjustment — until today. In fact, five years into the system we conducted an overall evaluation of our small groups and were amazed that life-change was occurring, pastoral care was happening, new people were getting plugged in, the back door was being closed and we were spending less than one percent of our operational budget on maintaining our groups system.

Small groups effectively close the back door by giving people relationships and responsibilities, both of which encourage them to stick.

At this point, it's worth mentioning what small groups do not do for our church. Small groups rarely attract new people or unchurched people to our church. The Sunday service is still, by far, the biggest front door for new people.

Small groups effectively close the back door by giving people relationships and responsibilities, both of which encourage them to stick. If people come to our church and sign up for a small group, it's highly likely that they will get plugged in, begin to grow in their faith and become active participants in the church. If they

don't connect with a small group, they will probably find their way to the back door.

The goal of this book is to help you develop a small groups system that both you and your people can be excited about, and that can help you realize God's dream for your unique church. We have been praying for you as we've written what you are about to read and can't wait to see what God does through your willingness to step out of your comfort zone and *activate!*

2009 - 2010 Church Leader Insights **SMALL GROUPS PASTOR** **TELE-COACHING NETWORK** with **Kerrick Thomas and Adam Bishop**



Kerrick Thomas
Executive Pastor,
Teaching Pastor
The Journey Church
of New York City



Adam Bishop
Small Groups Pastor,
The Journey Church
of New York City

This BRAND NEW Small Groups Tele-Coaching Network is an 8-month relationship-based coaching network for Small Group Pastors and other staff pastors seeking to learn how to effectively implement a semester-based small groups system that allows them increase small group participation, develop new small group leaders and multiply life-change in their church.

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Activate Principles

As those of you who have read *Activate* know, we filled the book with tangible, spurring “Activate Principles” to underscore key ideas. Many of you have asked for a comprehensive, consolidated list of these principles. Well, ask and you shall receive.

1. Allow casual friendships to develop without feeling a need to force intimacy.
2. Groups help us form personal and intimate relationships by providing a safe space within the group where we make friends who could then become more intimate friends outside of the group.
3. People grow over short periods of time (stress). Then they need to rest (release). After the period of rest, they can grow again (stress), and the growth cycle continues.
4. I don't grow if I'm not stepping out of my comfort zone and exposing myself to new people and new ideas.

5. If you give people too many options, their involvement will be so spread out that you won't have their full participation or momentum in any one area.
6. With every step you add to the sign-up process, you are going to lose a percentage of participation.
7. Average leaders focus on what happens next. Extraordinary leaders focus on what happens after what happens next.
8. Your church's attitude toward small groups will be a direct reflection of the senior pastor's attitude.
9. People will know what is important by what you do, not by what you say.
10. As long as you have complete control over your system, you will only be able to go to a certain level before you plateau.

11. You can structure for control or you can structure for growth, but you cannot structure for both.
12. Multiply groups by identifying leaders.
13. Pinpoint the most convenient locations for your people and make sure the majority of your groups are concentrated there.
14. Your sign-ups goal should surpass your average Sunday attendance goal.
15. Never ask someone to serve in any area of leadership without providing a beginning and end date for that service.
16. The Form month is mostly about making the right “asks” of the right people in the right way.
17. Trust God with your leaders and trust your leaders with your groups.

18. Devote the entire promotion month exclusively to group sign-ups.
19. Promotion months require creative redundancy — saying the same thing but in new and different ways.
20. People don't join anything if it's unclear how they should do so.
21. Adding additional steps will exponentially decrease your total sign-ups.
22. Next to preaching on the biblical basis for groups, testimonies are the most powerful way to motivate people to join.
23. Good data will help you get good sign-up results.
24. The best potential group members for the upcoming semester are people who were in groups the previous semester.

25. Every newcomer God entrusts to your church should receive a clear, heartfelt invitation to be in a group the coming semester.
26. People do not do what's important; they do what is urgent.
27. Since facilitation is the key to leading a group effectively, the training can be done in a short period of time.
28. People do not go to training when they should go; they go when they need to go.
29. People take seriously the expectations that you take seriously.
30. Agreements on the front end will prevent disagreements later.
31. The group covenant is ultimately a spiritual growth tool; people grow best when the accountability is high and the expectations are clear.

32. The group that plays together grows together.
33. Maximize the groups' experience leading up to Easter to ensure that Easter is indeed the celebration it should be.
34. If you take care of your group leaders, they will take care of your small groups system.
35. Nothing happens until someone takes action. (This one didn't make the book, but is critically important to all of the others!)



Activate Q&A

Since Activate's release, we have been engaged in an ongoing conversation with our readers, in an attempt to further explain and clarify any questions. Here are the top 10... okay, 11...questions we have received and their answers:

Question: Does the semester-based system (groups that meet for 10 to 12 weeks and then end) keep deep and meaningful relationships from forming? Doesn't the group end just as people are really getting to know each other?

Answer: This is one of the most common questions we receive about the semester-based small group system, but it is based on fundamentally flawed information. Here's the deal: Most church leaders assume that, if involved in a "standard" 18-24 month small group system, 10-12 people will sign up, love being together and become intimate friends. But that's not what actually happens...

In reality, some people will click and others won't. If the group extends beyond 12 weeks, those who haven't really clicked start looking for an escape route. Their attendance gets spotty. And even those who have formed strong friendships begin to get bored before that year and a half to two years is up. As a result, they let other activities start taking precedence over the group.

The goal of semester-based groups is not to encourage intimate relationships, but to create safe, healthy environments through which basic friendships can form. The meaningful relationships that start

during the semester will continue to grow naturally outside the group after it ends.

We would all be much better off if we stopped promising (and then trying to force) intimate relationships within our small groups. It's a promise we can't deliver on. What we can and should deliver is a safe, healthy social environment where people can meet other

The goal of semester-based groups is not to encourage intimate relationships, but to create safe, healthy environments through which basic friendships can form.

like-minded people so that relationships can develop naturally. This truth takes a lot of pressure off of small group leaders. Too often, leaders feel like failures when the people in their groups don't become great friends.

One side note: if you are like us, you are constantly trying to get unchurched men to sign up for small groups. Realize that these guys aren't consciously looking for deep relationships, but they would like to have a place where they can meet some other cool people, learn something new and explore what it means to know God more deeply. If you stop talking about the amazing, intimate relationships that will form in small groups, you just might stop scaring them off!

Question: We are in the process of creating and launching a new small groups system at our church and I've found the *Activate* system to have great potential for us. Our church is 150+ years old and we've hit a critical point in our history where we need some significant change if we want to be relevant for people in this current/future culture. With that in mind, how do we transition from being a church "with" small groups to a church "of" small groups?

Answer: First of all, to transition to a church "of" small groups I recommend patience. The transition is not easy, but the fruit it bears makes it worth the effort.

Many of the ministries you have right now will probably transition quite smoothly into a semester-based small groups system. For instance, you can run women's and men's ministries as well as community service ministries through groups, by offering those types of small groups specifically – i.e. by offering "Women's Groups," "Men's Groups," and "Community Service Groups." From time to time, gender-specific groups can sponsor retreats/events, etc, to bring larger groups of women or men together.

The goal is to have as many of your areas of ministry as possible running through the small groups system so that you don't have competing ministries.

The goal is to have as many of your areas of ministry as possible running through the small groups system so that you don't have competing ministries. If you have ministries in your church that don't fit into the small groups structure, you might have to gradually phase them out by not advertising or pushing new people toward them.

Question: Does the semester-based small group system enable people to simply hop around from group to group between semesters without ever going deeper in their spiritual growth or committing to life-transformation?

Answer: In the semester-based system, all groups come to an end when each semester ends. As a result, everyone signs up for a new group each semester that will study a new topic with a new group of people. Most criticism of this model stems from two traditional assumptions about spiritual growth and small groups that we believe are a little off base. False Assumption #1: Long-term groups lead to deep spiritual growth. The truth is that it's easier to remain stagnant in your spiritual growth when you attend the same group with the same people month after month and year after year. What you are doing is creating a

**False Assumption #1:
Long-term groups lead to spiritual growth. The truth is that it's easier to remain stagnant in your spiritual growth when you attend the same group with the same people month after month and year after year.**

comfort zone for people and then inviting them to live smack in the middle of that comfort zone. As we all know, people don't grow stronger until they are pushed beyond of their comfort level, or until stress is added to the environment.

Consider this example: a body builder doesn't engage the same muscle groups in the same exercises every day. If he did, he would never grow. Instead, he rotates his workouts, so that his muscles stay challenged. He also commits to periods of rest between his workout sessions, in order for his muscles

to rest and rejuvenate. These well-known physical growth principles parallel spiritual growth principles that we tend to overlook...

People don't grow if they are in a comfortable routine. In order for true spiritual growth to happen, groups need to (a) bring new people into the equation on a regular basis; (b) introduce new and relevant study topics; (c) and have rest periods where groups aren't meeting. (Remember the Stress and Release Principle – giving people rest periods between group semesters serves the same purpose as letting farming ground lie fallow every few years or taking the Sabbath every week). The semester-based small group system allows for all of this. Conversely, by putting people in ongoing groups with predominantly the same attenders week after week, month after month, year after year, we actually keep them from deepening and growing their faith.

False Assumption #2: Long term groups lead to intimate friendships. In the semester-based system, people have the opportunity to establish valuable relationships with various people that will carry on outside the boundaries of the group environment. For example, if there are 12 people who attend a small group, 4 to 5 of them will really click. When the semester is over, those four or five may decide to join a group together the next semester. Perhaps two others who clicked will decide to lead a group together. This natural development of close personal relationships begins in a group and continues into all of life. On the other hand, forcing all 12 members of the group to stay together longer in hopes that they will form deeper relationships is unrealistic. It's not going to happen. And, as we mentioned in answer to a previous question, after a while the group will dwindle down to those who get along best. The others start finding excuses not to show up. After a year, most 12-person ongoing groups will have dwindled down to 5 or 6 people.

The semester-based model allows for those valuable relationships to form and then move outside of the initial group. If someone is in that group and had a good time but didn't really connect with anyone else on a deeper level, that's okay. When the group ends, they can sign up for a new group and take another shot at it, which is a much better option than disconnecting altogether.

When it comes to groups ending, avoid using terms like "break apart" or "split up" or even "multiply."

Question: The question I have for you deals with the small number of ongoing groups that have done really well. Five or six of our small groups have been going strong for a full five years. They have invited people in and are still active. They have never gotten stagnant. How do you best get these groups to buy into breaking apart each semester? There are strong relationships there and I am afraid they will be hesitant to break apart and join a new group. Do you have any suggestions?

Answer: First of all, when it comes to groups ending, avoid using terms like "break apart" or "split up" or even "multiply." In the semester-based system, groups just come to an end naturally when the semester ends. Terminology is important in creating buy-in from your people. That said, if I were trying to convince already existing groups to willingly get on board with the semester model, I would take several approaches:

- I would invite the decision makers in each group to lunch/coffee/informal meeting. I would cast vision to them for the new direction and let them know why we feel like the semester-based small groups system will benefit the entire church, corporately and individually. Talk to them about getting more people plugged in, developing more leaders, increasing the spiritual growth in the church, initiating more true friendships, creating variety in the small group system, etc. If you can get them to see your vision for more effective groups overall, things will likely go well.
- If you sense some hesitancy from these decision makers, go to each of their groups and cast the vision for everyone involved.
- Ask the group leaders of these groups to recommend new, potential leaders from within the existing groups. Approach those recommended and ask them to lead their own semester-based group the next semester. Encourage them to just try it for a semester. If you can get two people from an existing group to lead a new group together, even better. Once people in the existing groups begin to leave to lead new groups, the group as a whole will probably be less hesitant about making the change.
- If the groups are not troublemakers and there is a lot of resistance – i.e. if some of them insist on continuing to meet together – continue the plan of pulling leaders out from those groups, but you might also allow them to keep meeting. Just be sure not to promote their group and make sure no one new signs up. There comes a point where you don't need to fight an unnecessary battle. Just move forward with the new system and make sure no one knows about the old group that's still meeting. Usually the group will breakdown after a while, and get excited about checking out the new groups with the more diverse options.

When it comes to small groups, you should stay out of the childcare business.

Question: What do you do about childcare for small groups?

Answer: When it comes to small groups, you should stay out of the childcare business, no matter how much pressure you get to take on the responsibility. Believe me when I tell you that if you don't make this decision on the front end, childcare will become a growth

barrier and logistical nightmare as your number of small groups grows. The best solution is to empower each small group to be responsible for its own childcare needs. Be prepared to give your groups some creative and workable options:

- Have everyone in the group who has children pitch in financially to hire a babysitter or two every week. When all of the parents give a little the cost is surprisingly minimal.
- Set up a rotation where a different couple in the group baby sits the children each week. Make sure no one has to baby sit more that once or twice during the semester.
- Challenge every couple with children to find a solution before coming to group (baby sitter, relative, etc.). After all, they have to find childcare when they go out on a date or have a work function. Most parents have several childcare options.
- Create a child-friendly group where parents are encouraged to bring their children. This works best with moms' groups who meet during the day and plan their group around activities for the children.

These are just a few of the many options available to you. The big point is: *Don't get roped into providing the childcare solutions for your groups.* Let the groups come up with creative solutions themselves, with some helpful input from you.

Each group member signs a covenant committing to attend the group every week, serve, give, and keep up with the reading material for group discussion.

Question: With everyone rotating groups each semester, how do you manage accountability?

Answer: First of all, accountability is provided within the small groups during the 10-12 week semester. Each group member signs a covenant committing to attend the group every week, serve, give, attend

The Journey on Sunday and keep up with the reading material for group discussion. Group members and leaders help hold each other accountable for those important spiritual disciplines during the duration of the group. When you look deeply into the implications of this strategy, there are more people being held accountable through a semester-based small group system that involves over 100% of the average Sunday attenders than through

a long-term small group system that only has 30% of the Sunday attenders involved. And the goal is that individual accountability for issues that are more personal will develop naturally through longer term relationships that develop within the group and then carry on afterwards.

Secondly, church membership provides the structure for long-term accountability. All new members sign a Membership Covenant committing to certain standards of membership – giving, serving, being in a small group, attending, and living a godly lifestyle. Before they sign the Covenant, we let them know that we will be holding them accountable for everything that's trackable. We may not be able to keep up with their lifestyle decision, obviously, but we can keep an eye on whether or not they are involved in the small group system, whether they are giving, etc. If we see a member falling down in one of the trackable areas, we reach out to them, see what's going on and help them get back on track.

So, in short, I would say that having a Small Groups Covenant, a Membership Class, a Membership Covenant and holding members accountable for the commitments they make serves as a strong primary accountability structure.

If we see a member falling down in one of the trackable areas, we reach out to them, see what's going on and help them get back on track.

Question: What if a small group doesn't get enough sign ups? We have a few small groups where just a handful of people signed up and I'm afraid the groups aren't going to make it. What should we do?

Answer: When you do semester-based small groups, where people get to join the group of their choice every semester, you will inevitably have some groups that don't get a lot of sign ups. The first step you should take is to figure out why the group has not filled up. Then, you'll have a better idea how to correct the situation. Here are three of the most common reasons groups get low sign-ups and what you can do to turn things around:

Reason 1: Inconvenient Time or Location and/or Poor Topic Choice – Is the time or area of the meeting not convenient to the majority of your people? Is the book to be studied not something that's resonating with your culture? These concerns pop up in a few groups

every semester.

Solution 1: If you catch this issue early enough, you can make the necessary changes. Ask the group leader to move the meeting location to a more convenient place, choose a better time or reconsider the book to be studied. If it's necessary, you can even postpone the start of that new and improved group for a few weeks to give more people a chance to sign up.

Sometimes if two groups have low sign-ups and they are planning to meet on the same day or are geographically close to one another, you can combine the two groups to make one good-sized group.

Reason 2: Lack of Leader Promotion – Has the leader been personally inviting people to join? Has she been volunteering to work the groups information table at the weekend

Sometimes if two groups have low sign-ups, you can combine the two groups to make one good-sized group.

service? Sometimes the problem is connected to a leader who hasn't done a good job of promoting his or her own group.

Solution 2: Encourage the leader to start taking steps to promote the group. He can ask his friends to sign up, reach out to others in the church that he knows, or serve on a Sunday to help get the word out about his group.

Reason 3: Flawed Sign-Up System – Are people having a hard time figuring out how to sign up for a group? If you are seeing low sign-ups in several of your groups, there could be a system problem.

Solution 3: Take a hard look at the structure and implementation of your Small Groups System. Read *Activate: An Entirely New Approach To Small Groups* again! We've put a system in place that can help ensure the success of your groups.

Unfortunately, sometimes there is no solution when a group's sign-ups are falling short. There are times when you just need to call it off. The most important thing in this scenario is to keep the leader encouraged. Let him know that these things happen and it is not a reflection on him or his leadership abilities. If you think the leader has potential, encourage

him to try again next semester.

Question: I read in *Activate* how you should be a church OF small groups, not a church WITH small groups. And I agree. Here's my question: don't classes 101-401 create drag on your small groups system? Or are your classes offered AS small groups?

Answer: We do, indeed, use the Purpose Driven C.L.A.S.S. series (101, 201, 301 & 401) to help our members grow and take next steps on their spiritual journey. However, The Journey remains solidly a church OF small groups by strategically incorporating these classes and coordinating the timing of them into our overall calendar. Here's how: we offer CLASS 101 - 401 between group semesters. Now we do occasionally offer Class 101 more often, but since you only attend each class one time, it doesn't compete with our semester-based growth groups. We offer each class from 1-4 on Sunday afternoon. This allows us to be very intentional about helping people take specific next steps through the C.L.A.S.S. series AND to avoid creating drag on our two main activities (Weekend Services and Small Groups).

The key to quickly producing more small groups is to multiply small group leaders.

Question: We need twice as many small groups next semester if we want everyone in our church to be able to join. What's the best way to quickly double our number of groups?

Answer: There's a common misconception around this question. Many pastors think that the way to increase their number of groups is to split /divide existing groups. It's not! People hate group splits and they seldom work in the long run. The key to quickly producing more small groups is to multiply small group leaders. How? By identifying potential leaders in current groups and raising them up to take on the responsibility of leadership.

At The Journey, we have learned how to raise up new leaders effectively through lots of experience. New York is a transient city. People are always moving in and out, which poses a leader problem for us. In 2007, we lost over 60 strong small group leaders to

moves. Can you imagine losing 60 leaders in a year? Needless to say, we have had to learn how to be continually raising up new leaders. Here are some of the principles we live by:

1. Don't set the leadership bar higher than it should be. Our small group leaders aren't required to be Bible scholars, counselors or have the gift of teaching. We simply ask that our leaders love God and people, and that they understand how to facilitate discussion. We let the curriculum be the teacher and give every leader the freedom to say "I don't know." If you keep your expectations for your small group leaders at a manageable level, you'll have many more potential leaders to choose from.

2. Make sure every group has a "Coordinator." Create an official position within each small group where someone who would make a good leader serves as the current leader's assistant/apprentice. The coordinator can get experience by leading one or two discussions during the semester and by being involved in the details of running the group. By the next semester, he will be ready to lead a group on his own...with a coordinator.

3. Keep current leaders on the lookout for new leaders. At the beginning of each semester,

Our small group leaders aren't required to be Bible scholars.

let all of your current leaders know that you want them to be on the lookout for those in their groups who may make good leaders in the future. Just over halfway through each semester (6-7 weeks in), contact all of your leaders and coordinators. Ask them directly 1) if they plan on leading the next semester and 2) who in their group would make a good leader.

4. Make the BIG ASK. When you ask potential small group leaders to lead for the first time, don't ask apologetically or tentatively. You are giving them the opportunity of a lifetime; you are challenging them to take a bold step of spiritual growth – one that is important for them personally and for your church collectively. Approach potential leaders with confidence.

Question: How do your support and recovery groups look within the semester system? We too operate on the semester system, but many of our recovery groups have a look and feel of their own due to the nature of the group. Your

thoughts?

Answer: We do and have had support/recovery groups at The Journey. We run them through our semester-based small groups system and not separately (i.e. not outside the system on an ongoing basis as many other churches do). This can work in two ways:

- You have a group that meets for 10-12 weeks to support those dealing with a difficult topic that just ends after that semester. An example that we have seen in the past is a group that met for women with eating disorders. We had a couple of leaders who wanted to lead a group on that topic and found a great study. So, they led the group. It filled up. And though they didn't lead on that topic every semester, those who attended that group were helped and some great lifelong friendships and accountability relationships were formed out of the group.
- You could also have leaders who really feel called to lead groups on specific support/recovery issues lead on that topic semester after semester (with different studies/books). Some people might sign up for that group for multiple semesters. Some might just attend once and not again. The key is that the mix in the group and the specific take on the issue will be slightly different from semester to semester. An example of that might be a men's group meeting on purity/lust issues or a group for those who have struggled with alcohol.

Allow support/recovery groups to operate within the context of your semester-based small group system.

Again, these groups are great, but we would discourage you from forming a separate arm of ministry for them. Instead, allow them to operate within the context of your semester-based small group system.

Question: In listening to your online seminar you mentioned that some experts have said that when you reach the 4,000 to 5,000 range of participants that your model will begin to break down. Have you given any thought to the adjustments you will have to make? We currently have about 1,500 people in groups, but an average weekly attendance of about 4,500 adults and students (another 1,000

kids). I expect we could bump that “upper limit” in the next year to year and a half. Any thoughts?

Answer: This is a great question. The fact is that we don't see why there would be any problems with the *Activate* semester-based small group system past 5,000 people. It just hasn't been attempted yet. The “experts” who said they weren't sure if the system would work at a larger church were not using the system at all; they were steeped in ongoing small groups. And honestly I think they made such an unfounded critique as an excuse not to have to put the work in that it takes to implement a new, more effective system.

If a college can effectively enroll 30,000 students for classes on a semester system, I don't see why a church couldn't get 5,000-10,000 people in small groups each semester. The key is to have a scalable structure in two areas:

You can't simply hire people to handle the groups, while the rest of the staff is hands-off.

1. You must have total staff involvement. You can't simply hire people to handle the groups, while the rest of the staff is hands-off. Rather, every staff person has a small group responsibility as a part of his or her job description. So, as your staff grows to reflect the size of the church, the number of staff who are helping run the system grows as well. Each staff person can effectively manage and help set up 15-25 small groups each semester.

2. You must be constantly raising up new small group leaders. And that's the best part of the semester-based system. With every new group you add, the potential for raising up future leaders is multiplied.

As long as you are structured correctly on these two points, the semester-based system can continue to grow as your church grows!



2009-2010 Church Leader Insights **Small Groups Pastor** Tele-Coaching Network



Kerrick Thomas
Executive Pastor,
Teaching Pastor
The Journey Church
of New York City



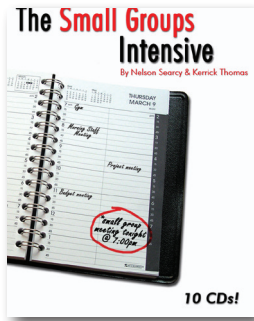
Adam Bishop
Small Groups Pastor,
The Journey Church
of New York City

This BRAND NEW Small Groups Tele-Coaching Network is an 8-month relationship-based coaching network for Small Group Pastors and other staff pastors seeking to learn how to effectively implement a semester-based small groups system that allows them increase small group participation, develop new small group leaders and multiply life-change in their church.

The heart of the Network is found in a group of small-group pastors talking together monthly over the phone for two hours, focused on taking small groups in their respective churches to the next level. The Coaching Network will consist of five or more approved Small Group Pastors.

The network will cover the 12 Big Small Group Ideas and the 4 F's of Implementing an Effective Small Group Ministry. You will discover how to get over 100% of your regular Sunday attendance signed up for small groups, how to multiply your small group leaders, how to mobilize your small groups for ministry and mission and how to create the best small group environment for spiritual growth and godly relationships.

**For more information or to
download an application, [CLICK HERE](#)
or call 212-730-8300**



Featured Resource:

The Small Groups Intensive

By Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas

Is it possible to have 100% of your attenders involved in small groups? Absolutely! At The Journey, we consistently have 100% of our regular attenders and members participating in our small groups system – and you can, too. In the *Small Groups Intensive*, Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas walk you through the details of setting up a system that will ensure your people's complete involvement.

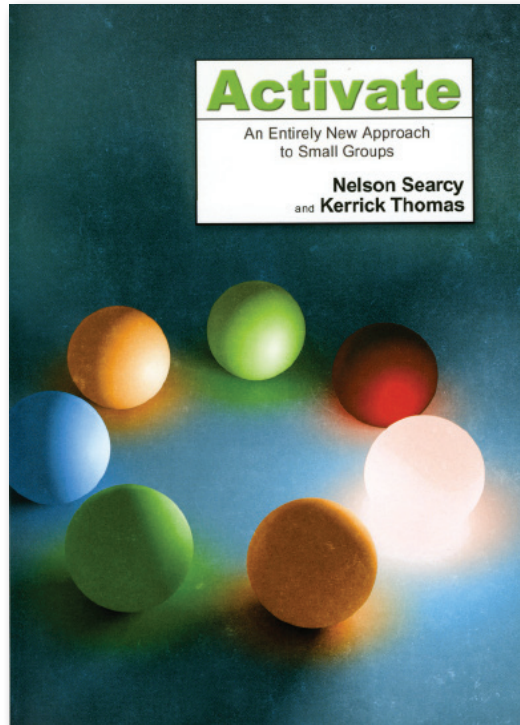
The Small Groups Intensive is the live recording of a two-day small groups event that Nelson and Kerrick held exclusively for coaching alumni. Now available to any pastor wanting to maximize his groups system, the *Small Groups Intensive* digs much deeper into practical discussion and application than the basic seminar and even goes beyond what was covered in Nelson and Kerrick's book, *Activate: An Entirely New Approach To Small Groups*. This resource includes:

- How to get 100% of your weekend attenders involved in small groups
- How to encourage people to join a group for the first-time
- How to continually recruit new small group leaders
- How to train your small group leaders
- How to keep your small group leaders from getting burned out
- How to grow a small groups ministry that you and your staff are passionate about
- How to maximize the semester-based system
- How to take advantage of big days in your church to help grow groups
- How to be more effective in ministry by utilizing your small groups system
- How to hold your members and attenders accountable for small group participation
- How to foster true life change in your small groups
- How to develop a clear and effective sign-up system
- How to mobilize small groups for evangelism
- How to use small groups to keep new people connected to your church
- How to create small group environments that encourage true connection
- How to use the natural flow of the calendar to support your small groups system
- How and why you should develop a small groups covenant
- Plus so much more, including answers to the top 47 questions asked by those in attendance!

As an added bonus, we will also include the three-hour, best-selling resource, *The Small Groups Seminar*.

Secure your copy of *The Small Groups Intensive* and turn the possibility of 100% participation into reality for your church!

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