


Practical Ministry Skills:

Birthing Groups Well

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How to Use This Resource

Take a quick peek here to maximize the content in this training download.

Whatever your past experiences with birthing—whether you love it, hate it, or are indifferent—apprenticing and launching new leaders is the vision of leadership we gain from the New Testament. The focus of this resource is how to birth new groups in a healthy way.

Set the Stage

Before we can launch new groups, we have to set the stage. This section will help you understand the incredible opportunity of leadership development, how to help your group members understand the vision, and how to find an apprentice. These things will help the birthing process happen naturally and in the healthiest way possible.

Birth a New Group

Once you have an apprentice, you'll need a birthing plan, and these articles will help you form one. Eric Metcalf helps you decide how to birth, while Maegan Stout helps you minister to the emotional needs of group members along the way. And Beatrice Rusu helps the birthed group get off to a great start with "The Beginning of Something Beautiful."

—AMY JACKSON is Associate Editor of SmallGroups.com.

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Create a Culture for Multiplication

Small-group leaders must understand their call to develop leaders.

By Maegan Stout

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In the Gospels, Jesus instructs the crowds, loves on the kids, rebukes religious leaders, and invests deeply in a handful of guys we know as his disciples. He left his legacy in the disciples and, in his final moments with them, empowered them to build the church. As leaders, we often think that our legacy is about that "thing" we leave behind: our unique accomplishments or contributions, our masterpiece or big idea. Legacy isn't really about what you leave on the canvas but about what you leave in people.

Paul accepted Jesus' challenge to make new disciples. He is famous for being a model evangelist and church planter, but he was also a great disciple-maker, and his letters to Timothy and Titus give us a window into his relationships with those he personally disciplined. Timothy and Titus were leaders of local churches Paul helped establish. When Paul talks to them about legacy, it echoes Jesus' command to make new disciples.

In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul says to Timothy, "You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others" (NLT). Paul urges Timothy to pass it on. Paul invests in Timothy as an equal shareholder in the kingdom of God on a common mission to make disciples. And he asks Timothy to do the same thing with people that will continue the chain.

To Titus, Paul says in Titus 1:5, "I left you on the island of Crete so you could complete our work there and appoint elders in each town as I instructed you." In other words, *You do it, Titus. You develop leaders and take responsibility to build the church.* Paul is passing the baton.

Think about today's church. Who are the leaders? We have pastors, deacons, and a board of elders to tackle big financial and pastoral issues. But who leads the people of God through the bumps and joys of day-to-day life? Small-group leaders. *You.* You're called to develop leaders, just like Titus and Timothy.

Most of us don't think about developing a new leader until our group has reached max capacity or we're worn out. Then we get a co-leader to lessen the burden. By the time we're at the point where we need a new leader, the group has become a problem to manage and not a discipleship opportunity to steward. Raising up a new leader is a form of discipleship. It is the natural and primary task of leaders.

As a small-group leader, if there is anything you need to know about developing a new leader, it all comes down to two key words: time and intentionality. There are no short cuts.

Discipleship vs. Damage Control

Has your small group become a large group? By the time you are in a bind to figure out what to do with your group, it's too late! Developing a new leader is not damage control; it's discipleship. Casting vision for leadership development early will speak life and purpose in your group. Let the group know from the very beginning that you are praying for God to raise one (or more) of them to leadership. For the natural leaders in your group, this will tap into and fuel their desire to lead.

Pray

From the very beginning, pray intentionally for the faith and leadership of future leaders in your group. As you select and disciple a new leader, continue to pray for them and with them.

Empower Your Group

Let me tell you a story about a small-group member who snuck her way into leadership through organizing snacks. She was an administrative queen. She was also in the position of many young professionals in D.C.: she had to walk everywhere. (Few of us have cars here.) She asked if I would drive her to the grocery store, and I gladly agreed.

As soon as I picked her up I discovered she had printed off the directions to the store . . . one of the *only* grocery stores on Capitol Hill, and one I frequented all the time. Plus, she had made a very complete list of the ingredients she needed for the next two weeks of meal planning and had priced out each item to make sure she stayed within budget. I told her she was a total "J." She had no idea what a "J" was, so I described the Meyers-Briggs personality test. She didn't like the term "Judging," but I explained to her that being a J was a really great thing.

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Truth be told, it was precisely her J tendencies that made her such a great leader within our group. I told her I was a "P" and have a tendency to take life as it comes. This information did not surprise her. Before she graciously took over snacks, it would dawn on me about 10 minutes prior to group that I should scrounge the cupboards. But ever since she created a schedule, people were happy to bring snacks and we were eating like royalty compared to the past. The following semester, my J friend led her first group and now disciples and raises up new leaders of her own.

Empower people in your group with opportunities to lead—even small ones like taking responsibility for a snack schedule. Give away leadership every chance you get, and always be looking for ways people can lead. Noticing and affirming gifts can be the single most encouraging thing you do for those you lead. Don't hoard all the responsibilities when there are wonderful opportunities for emerging leaders to take ownership and practice leading.

Identify Potential Leaders

While mechanics of leadership and skill development can be taught, commitment to the group, desire to grow spiritually, care for others, and basic social skills are things even the best leaders cannot impart to someone else. So look for potential leaders who show commitment, desire, and care—even if they don't have a clue of how to lead a group. And remember, potential leaders don't often look like mature leaders. Be willing to put the work in. After all, Christ told us to *make* disciples.

Be on the lookout from the beginning and try to make the ask early. If a new small-group term begins in January, don't ask someone in December. It will most likely take the length of the term or longer.

When you do ask, be generous with your words. Don't hold back your affirmation. Speak truth into an emerging leader's life. Point out things you've noticed about him or her and how that can be helpful to serve the body of Christ through leadership.

And while it's hard to do, don't say "no" to leadership for somebody else. You can always make an excuse for why somebody shouldn't lead: they are too busy, they are going through a difficult season, etc. Leadership is not convenient. And leadership development is not a recruiting campaign for churches. Leadership fuels growth in the emerging leader. Think of all the ways you have grown through leading. You are investing in them and giving them a chance to grow when you invite them to leadership. And if they decide it's not the right time, trust them to say "no" for themselves.

Disciple Your New Leader

To disciple an emerging leader, give them increasing levels of responsibility over time. Most new leaders will show leadership potential but lack confidence. Slowly integrating them into leadership will build both skills and confidence. Make sure you talk about why you do things and how they are processing their new role.

Involve Your Group

Casting vision early for leadership development provides a healthy environment for both the emerging leader and the group. Then, when you announce you've found a potential leader, the group won't be shocked. The group will understand that growing leadership is part of group life, and that they have a unique opportunity to invest in the emerging leader. This creates a culture for multiplication and sets healthy patterns and expectations for group life.

Never Lead Alone

Just refuse to do it. For many of us, this is a perspective shift. But when we bring people into what we are doing, it gives us permission to speak into their lives and influence them. We have influence to the same degree we have relationship. Bring others into the mission of small-group leadership and let them become equal shareholders with you. It will naturally empower leadership.

We are all part of today's chain of faith. Somebody was faithful to pass on what they knew to us, and as leaders we have a responsibility to pass it on, too. The model of Christ, copied by Paul, is the same model we must use

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today: invest in people, help them grow in the faith, and ask them to invest in others who will do the same. In the kingdom of God, leaving faith generations in your wake is a true measure of legacy.

—MAEGAN STOUT trains small-group leaders at National Community Church in Washington, D.C. Copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss:

1. Do you normally see birthing as a form of discipleship or as a form of damage control? Why?
2. How well do you empower your group members? What steps can you take to improve?
3. How do you feel about never leading alone? What is your initial reaction to that? Why?

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An Exciting Opportunity

Communicate clearly about birthing to your group

By Amy Jackson

I love reading about Paul. He was a man who loved Jesus and was on a mission to help others draw near to him as well. And he had a huge impact on the early church, but Paul couldn't do it all. Instead, we read about Paul going to a city, starting a church there, identifying new leaders, and apprenticing them into their new roles. And after they're set up, Paul goes on to another city. He realized that it was only by empowering others, apprenticing them into leadership roles, that he'd have a lasting impact in those cities.

As small-group leaders, we have the incredible opportunity to identify and apprentice people into leadership as well. When I think about birthing groups, I see it as an opportunity to intentionally invest in potential leaders. And that's exciting! It's exciting to help others realize their passions, gifts, and talents and how they can use them to benefit others. Who wouldn't want to get behind that?

I can still remember apprenticing Ashley as I was graduating from college. When she joined my small group, she would smile and offer to bring snacks, but she was nervous to share her story. I saw something in her—an exciting blend of humility and care and intentionality—that prompted me to begin apprenticing her. As we met, I learned so much about her and was able to encourage her gifts and her sharing. When I left at the end of the semester, Ashley was confident, bubbly, and full of encouragement for those around her. And she made a great small-group leader. Years later I was privileged to meet some women that she had apprenticed into small-group leadership. Imagine if I had not helped Ashley see her potential. She might still be a shy woman sitting in a small group, nervous to share anything.

Step back from the motivation of numbers and think about how small groups can have an important role in calling people out and developing them as leaders. Who wouldn't want to get behind that? When you cast this vision for birthing, your group members will want to be involved, knowing they have a role in developing new leaders. Here are a few tips to ensure your group gets the right message about birthing.

Always Apprenticing

Make it a rule of thumb that you will have an apprentice at all times. If you are always investing in a new leader, you'll always have the ability to start a new group—regardless of the size of your own. Hopefully, size will never become an issue if you're always developing new leaders. Plus, group members will no longer see apprentices as a warning of imminent division. And you won't have to rush the apprentice through the process in order to split the group before it's too large.

Never Set a Number

Don't decide that at a certain number of members your group must birth. Base birthing on the readiness of the apprentice leader, not on what you feel the group needs. Trust that God will provide a leader when one is needed. In the meantime, get creative with sub-grouping to help group members feel cared for.

Talk About Calling

Infuse the language of calling into your group's vocabulary. Encourage group members in their gifts and talents. Point out where people seem to be serving in their "sweet spot"—whether or not it's in the group setting. Help to call out in people the mission that God has on their life. When this becomes your natural language, your group members will help you call out potential apprentices by the things they call out in each other.

Communicate Along the Way

Don't keep apprenticing a secret. Talk about when you were apprenticed, share what's involved in apprenticing, and let the group know when you've found an apprentice. The more you talk about it, the less of a surprise it will be. Plus, it doesn't feel like you're doing something behind the group's back. And when you decide to birth, keep them in the loop along the way. Why is the leader ready? When will it happen? When will you

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celebrate together? How will it affect the current group? Answer the questions your group members are asking themselves.

Celebrate Leadership

What you celebrate shows what you value, so think about what you celebrate with your group. Get excited about your new apprentice, talk about exciting leadership developments in the church, and congratulate group members in their leadership at work and home. And be sure to throw a party when you birth the new group. You'll be able to commission the new leader and celebrate all that's happened in the group.

Value Apprenticing

If you're not excited about apprenticing, no one else will be either. So go to God if you're not feeling it. Pray for vision and excitement. Additionally, commit to the process. If you truly value raising someone into leadership, don't take shortcuts. Your apprentice will feel cared for and will be fully trained. It also sends a message to your group members that apprenticing is important and you don't want to throw someone into leadership unprepared.

Think Outside the Box

Too often we do only what we've experienced (or what we've grown comfortable with), but there are many ways to birth a new group. If you're continually apprenticing new leaders, there's no need to split your group. Consider sending off new leaders to begin a new group to a demographic that they're passionate about. Help them see the specific needs in your church and investigate how they might meet them with their new group. Is there an abundance of newly married couples? Are there several unconnected people who can meet on the same night? Some of your current group members may want to join the new leader on this adventure as well. Another option is to allow the apprentice to remain with the current group while you go off to start a new group. Or perhaps you co-lead for a time until one of you is ready to move on. If group members react negatively to the thought of birthing, it may be to the specific method of birthing they've experienced. Think through a different method to use.

Keep Health Central

Above all, keep healthy groups as your focus. Healthy groups should be missionally minded with a focus on love, trust, and encouragement. They're a place where we live out the one another commands and are truly known by others. It's the perfect breeding ground for healthy leaders. But if things aren't healthy in the group, you will need to start there. Unhealthy groups won't produce healthy leaders, and they'll likely be hurt by a birthing experience. Know your group and work with your coach or small-group point person to build a healthy small group. If you have an apprentice, have him or her help you with the process. He or she will be a stronger leader for it.

—AMY JACKSON is the Associate Editor of SmallGroups.com and has served as a small-group leader, coach, and director; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss:

1. What is your group's initial reaction to the idea of birthing? Why?
2. How can you improve your communication about birthing?
3. Are you committed to always having an apprentice? Why or why not?

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How to Find Your Next Apprentice

It doesn't have to be a difficult experience if you remember Who is in charge.

By Sam O'Neal

For some small-group leaders, finding an apprentice is about as difficult as walking around the block. They automatically think of that individual or couple in their group who has been blessing the socks off the rest of the group members—encouraging people, praying diligently for the group, volunteering to lead discussions, and making the best apple pie north of the *Rio Grande*. They are easy to tab as future leaders because they stand out so clearly within the group.

But if that doesn't sound like your situation, don't worry. Small groups that have an obvious choice for an apprentice leader are the exception, not the rule. It's much more common for a group to have a leader who does almost all of the work, and then a collection of group members who always receive and rarely give.

In those cases, we often don't know where to begin when it comes selecting someone as a potential apprentice leader. And that's okay. In fact, it's an opportunity to help one or more of your members experience significant spiritual growth—and an opportunity for you to grow, as well.

The following steps will help you navigate through the process.

Pray, Pray, Pray

The first thing you need to remember when searching for a small-group apprentice is that you are not qualified for the job. You don't have sufficient wisdom to discern the spiritual lives and maturity of your group members and figure out which ones are ready to step toward leadership.

That job belongs to the Holy Spirit. He knows what your group needs, what you need, and what your next apprentice needs. And the way to hand over the recruiting responsibility to the Spirit is prayer. "Pray to the Lord of the Harvest," Jesus said, and his words remain sharp and active today when it comes to identifying and recruiting spiritual leaders.

So if you want to move beyond your own wisdom and smarts when it comes to finding an apprentice, pray for your small-group members every day. Pray that God would be working in their lives, and pray that he would be sanctifying them through the Holy Spirit. And as you pray for the growth and development of your group members, ask God to raise up workers for the harvest in your community. And ask for wisdom to see who those new workers may be.

Use the Eye Test

As you interact with the Holy Spirit in prayer and request eyes to see the people that are ready for a new step, you also need to be watching your group members. Specifically, watch their eyes and their faces as they participate in group meetings, and as you interact with them in the "real world."

Which person's eyes really light up when it's time to dig into God's Word? Who gets excited when the discussion goes deeper? Who displays empathy and a kind heart when other group members open their hearts or confess their sins? These are the people who may be ready to join you in leadership. These are the people you need to especially lift up to the Holy Spirit in prayer.

In the same way, if you have a person or two in mind that you think the Spirit might be calling into leadership, watch their faces and their behavior within the group. If they pass the "eye test," it may serve as a confirmation of the Spirit's leading. If they seem bored or disinterested during important elements of your group's time together, you may be barking up the wrong tree.

Recruiting Questions

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In addition to the "eye test," there are some questions you can pay attention to as you pray, and as you observe the members of your small group.

- Who is faithful?
- Who understands your vision (and the vision of the small-group ministry)?
- Who is eager to learn?
- What person/couple seems to be a natural leader of the group?
- Do they have the ability to train others?
- Who would be good candidates to be trained to minister alongside you?

Again, as you think through these questions, be sensitive to the work and leading of the Holy Spirit—especially if that leading is taking you in a direction you don't want to go, or a direction you hadn't thought of before.

Don't Impose Your Own Boundaries

One final piece of advice as you go through the process of identifying a small-group apprentice: don't limit your opportunities. Be open to new directions that you didn't think of—and even new people you don't know very well.

For example, it's possible that your next apprentice will be a person that is not currently part of your small group. This is not an ideal situation, normally, but if you keep coming across a person who shares your passions and is being called by God to take a new step in leadership, there may be something going on. Don't resist it out of hand.

In addition, your church leaders may have identified people who are on fire for God and need to be mentored for leadership in a small-group setting. It may be that your group is just what these future leaders need.

—SAM O'NEAL is the author of [Field Guide for Small Group Leaders](#) and was a former editor of [SmallGroups.com](#); copyright 2010 by and Christianity Today.

Discuss:

1. How often do you go to God for wisdom when it comes to finding a new apprentice?
2. Thinking about the eye test, who in your group gets excited about your discussion time? Prayer time? Worship time?
3. Who in your group is a potential apprentice? Why?

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The Nuts and Bolts of Apprenticing

How to identify and train apprentices

By Eric Metcalf

When I was in fifth grade, I was an aspiring young artist and my teacher, Mr. Guinn, recognized this. He identified me as a person who had talent and invited me to oversee the development of a significant art project: a chalk art drawing of about 50 Walt Disney characters. I was both floored and excited about the chance to show off my talent and passion for art.

Even though I didn't go on to pursue a career in art, I have never forgotten the confidence and empowerment I gained when Mr. Guinn recognized specific gifts in me. As small-group leaders, we have the opportunity to do this for others when we identify and train an apprentice leader.

Before we discuss how to develop an apprentice, we need to begin with how to recognize one. And let's face it: this is one of the biggest challenges we encounter in the apprenticing process. In fact, it is the number one question I get from leaders.

I've had my fair share of experience in not knowing what to look for, too. I've been too eager to just pull the trigger and ask anyone who has a pulse and shows *some* interest in leadership to be my apprentice. One of those people was too serious, highly opinionated, and extremely set in his ways—you get the picture. The plain truth is that I should not have asked him to be my apprentice. He wasn't ready or even right for the role. So why did I recognize and recruit him as an apprentice? Because I *really* wanted to have an apprentice. I had caught the vision of reproducing, and I wanted in on the action.

Don't worry if you struggle with indentifying the right people. You'll get better with practice. But you should always start with the "must haves"—qualities that simply must be in place before you can consider someone as a potential apprentice.

Must Haves of Apprenticeship

You can't drive a car without wheels, without an engine, or without gasoline. You can't bake a cake without flour or eggs (not a good one anyway). You can't eat a true Chicago hot dog without onions, mustard, and relish. And when it comes to small-group apprentices, they must have these things:

1. Spiritual Velocity
2. Relational Intelligence
3. Teachability

Spiritual Velocity

Velocity refers to the direction the person is heading. You'll want to look for someone who is heading toward Jesus, always seeking to grow more in Christlikeness. If people are heading away from Jesus, or if they're content to stay where they are, they're not apprentice material. The apprentice must have a Jesus-centered life—not a life of perfection, but a life centered on Jesus. Maybe you've heard people list their priorities like this: God is first, family is second, church is third, and job is fourth. But what if it could actually play out more like this: God is at the center of our lives, and everything else revolves around him and his will. For the Jesus-centered person, faith impacts all areas of life: relationships, finances, schedule, etc. Who they are behind closed doors is the same person they are in public.

Relational Intelligence

Relational intelligence is the idea that a potential apprentice needs to have the basic understanding that people matter to God and they need to matter to us. A person with relational intelligence has the knack for seeing the best in people. They're not oblivious to growth areas, like some sort of blind optimism. Instead they possess a keen ability to see greatness in someone.

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Another attribute of relational intelligence is what our staff likes to call the "parking lot test." The test is simply this: when you see the potential apprentice's car in the parking lot as you pull in, is your initial reaction to feel excited to see them, or to hope that you'll be able to avoid them? It's basically a chemistry question. When this person walks into a room, how do people feel? Leadership is not solely about the role, it is about relationship. Too often we assume that by simply giving someone the authority of role, people will follow. This is not true. Leaders must lead with relational intelligence. Otherwise, they're simply micro-managing.

Teachability

Teachability requires humility and a willingness to learn. A person has to be willing to accept feedback in order to be developed *and* they need to be willing to do the harder work of allowing God to change his or her character and behaviors. In fact, the entire apprenticeship concept is based upon teachability—the process can't exist without it. In order to be teachable, apprentices must be able to accept feedback gracefully and be willing to change how they do things. Teachability needs to be coupled with trust, and as leaders we are responsible to develop that. If an apprentice trusts us, he or she will be much more open to being apprenticed by us.

The Process of Apprenticing

Picture apprenticeship like a bicycle: you need to pedal both pedals to have appropriate balance and momentum. When it comes to developing our apprentices, we need to pedal both the pedals of the role we are reproducing and the relationship we want them to have with Jesus.

Role Training

I have found that this progression works well to develop the role:

I do. You watch. We talk.

I do. You help. We talk.

You do. I help. We talk.

You do. I watch. We talk.

You do. Someone else watches.

Here's how it works. Begin by leading the group while your apprentice simply watches and participates as a group member. Afterward, talk about what you did to facilitate discussion, how you handled tricky situations, and how the meeting went overall. Use the meeting as a teaching moment. When your apprentice is ready to get his or her feet wet, move to the next step: I do. You help. We talk. Let the apprentice help by giving him or her a specific part of the meeting to lead. You could have the apprentice lead the prayer time or ask the icebreaker question. And don't forget to meet afterward to talk through how the apprentice did and what questions he or she may have. In the next step, the apprentice leads the majority of the meeting and you help with the prayer or icebreaker. Later he or she leads the entire meeting while you simply participate as a group member. As you debrief after the meetings, you'll get a sense for where your apprentice is at and what he or she is ready to tackle.

The last step in the progression is very important and often overlooked. If you want your apprentice to become a leader who apprentices others, you need to instill this from the beginning. Some churches actually require that new small groups have an apprentice in place before beginning. Know that the timing of this progression is hard to pin down, but it could last from six weeks to 18 months.

Invest Relationally

To make sure we're developing the relational aspect of the apprenticeship, we refer to Luke 2:52 where we're told that Jesus grew in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and men. We use the acronym RPMS to remember to check in with our apprentices about these four important areas in life. Use these questions to talk with your apprentice about his or her RPMS.

R—Relational: How are you doing relationally (marriage, neighbors, co-workers, etc.)?

P—Physical: How are you doing with pace of life, schedule, and overall health?

M—Mental: How are you connecting with the world around you (media, pop culture, study, etc.)?

S—Spiritual: How are you doing with spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, reading Scripture, etc.)?

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Leader Readiness

Over the years, I've seen many churches base multiplication on group size. But I believe that if you force groups to multiply whenever they reach a certain size, groups will never want to get that big. This is detrimental because they won't be inviting people or helping to connect newcomers. I believe the better way to time multiplication is to base it on leader readiness.

If your group reproduces due to leader readiness, then the group multiplies due to the apprentice's call to follow God's mission. That's an incredibly different motivation, and your group will gladly get behind your apprentice and celebrate what God is doing. So when you and your apprentice agree that he or she is ready and that God has given you the okay, begin to birth a new group.

Do you know how many times I have experienced this process—either for myself or by leading someone through it? Over 100 times. I am privileged to be part of a reproducing church that believes in apprenticing leaders. As a small-group leader, have your eyes open for potential leaders in your group. Then take them through the apprenticing process and see all that God does in the two of you.

—ERIC METCALF is the director of [NewThing](#) and co-wrote [The Apprentice Field Guide](#). Copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss:

1. Think about a time when you apprenticed someone. What was it like? What went well? What was difficult?
2. What are your own "must haves" for apprentices?
3. Do you tend to invest more in your apprentice relationally or in role training? How can you ensure that you're doing both?

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Cutting the Cord

How to successfully birth a new small group from an existing one

By Eric Metcalf

First love often seems perfect in our minds—the season, the romance, the memories. For many people, their first small-group experience also seems perfect. They wonder, *How could any group be as good as this one?* That's why birthing a new small group can be a scary proposition.

For those of you who have had a child, your first birthing experience is vividly etched in your minds—crazy, scary, beautiful, awesome, or whatever mix of emotions was strongest for you. What's more, that first birthing experience colored or influenced your feelings about your second child's birth. In the same way, your first small-group "birthing" experience, good or bad, has a lot of psychological power to influence later births with fear or excitement. So birthing your group in the right way will produce a positive legacy.

Let's get a proper definition to start out. Birthing a new small group—or multiplying or reproducing, or whatever term you use for it—should be a local missionary "sending" experience. It is the disciple-making mechanism that has exponential potential for reaching an exponentially growing world.

There are different ways such a birth can take place:

- The apprentice leader stays with the current group, while the leader births out and forms an entirely new group.
- The leader stays with the current group, while the apprentice leader births out and forms an entirely new group.
- Either the leader or the apprentice births out, and the current small group divides between them to form two new groups.
- A new group is formed outside of the current group, and several members of the current group break out to join it. (The outside group could be formed by someone who has just finished a turbo-group experience, for example.)

Prepare for the Birth

Whichever method your group chooses, there are certain steps that you can take to prepare for the birthing experience and minimize the pain. First, be sure to start "subgrouping" various parts of each meeting. For example, split into two groups when it comes time to pray, and have the apprentice lead one and the leader take the other. In time, the apprentice can begin leading entire meetings. The goal is to allow each person in the group—over a course of several weeks—to experience having the meeting led by the apprentice.

It's also important that both the leader and apprentice begin looking for new apprentices. The best birth happens when both the leader and the apprentice have new apprentices in place when the new group is birthed.

Finally, make sure the existing group has had time to build intimacy before the birth. Spend time in the group and out of the group learning one another's stories. Take pictures or videos of the existing group, and make sure everyone gets copies. Also, make sure everyone knows each other's phone numbers and e-mails by keeping the roster current. Nothing is worse than going through a small-group birth and feeling like you never had the chance to get to know the people in your group.

Have a Birthing Plan in Place

Follow these steps to keep things smooth and healthy during the birth:

- Make sure the new group leader has been intentionally apprenticed by an existing, mature group leader.

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- Make sure the church leadership is aware of the birth—whether a coach, shepherd, pastor, etc. Also, make sure that the church leadership has talked through the needs of the new group and is ready to offer support.
- Speak to the group members individually about the birth, and cast a vision for their decision regarding which group to participate in. Group members need to make their own decision, and no one should be forced to go or stay.
- The leader should announce to the group the apprentice's readiness and interest in starting a new group.
- The group as a whole should set a decision date (for who will be in each group) and a birthing date.
- Both the leader and the apprentice should offer any help that is needed for group members during their decision-making process.
- Both leaders need to begin an intensive search for new group members from outside of the original group.
- Have a commissioning ceremony. This means taking time to celebrate during the last full group meeting before the birth, and to have a time where everyone can pray for the newly formed group.

Minimize Post-Partum Depression

After the birth, it's very important to make plans for both groups to get together and continue in fellowship. It's also a good idea to finalize a covenant for the new group to ensure that it gets started on the best footing possible.

Let the members of both groups know that sadness, frustration, and feelings of loss are a common part of forming new groups and new relationships. After most groups birth, there are a lot of strong emotions, and it may take months for some people to fully realize the degree of impact the birth has had on them. Both leaders should meet with their group members individually to see how the birth is affecting them.

In the same way, both group leaders need to meet with their coach regularly to discuss how the birth is impacting their members, and to see if any additional church resources are needed to keep the transition as smooth as possible.

—ERIC METCALF is director of NewThing, a church-planting network. Used with permission of [Community Christian Church](#) and the [NewThing Network](#), copyright 2008.

Discuss:

1. What birthing method have you experienced in the past? Which method seems like a good choice for your group?
2. Have you connected with your coach or small-group point person about birthing? What opinions about birthing has he or she expressed?
3. There's a good chance group members will feel a sense of loss after the birth. How can you help group members understand that grieving is acceptable?

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Prepare for a Smooth Delivery

Follow these steps to overcome several obstacles in the birthing process.

By Mark Ingmire

Giving birth to a baby sounds so romantic—so sweet! But any woman who has actually done it will tell you that the experience comes with as much pain as joy. It's similar with birthing a small group. The idea sounds so lofty—so spiritual. But anyone who has gone through the process will tell you that it takes a lot of work and is hardly ever without pain.

Fortunately, there is a way to help the process go a little more smoothly. Just as a couple takes steps to prepare for the birth of their baby, there are a few steps small-group leaders can take to successfully birth a new small group.

Talk About Birthing from the Beginning

When I do premarital counseling, one of the questions I always ask an engaged couple is, "How many children do you plan to have, and when?" This way there are no surprises for either partner with such an important decision.

If your small group begins with the expectation that they will birth another group, they will have a much easier time mentally and emotionally anticipating the birth itself. And if the group has a good birthing experience, it will be more likely to work towards a second, third, fourth, and so on.

When I came to my church, I inherited a small-group ministry whose primary purpose at the time was shepherding. I decided to bring our groups more in line with our church's mission statement, and I began to foster the idea of having our small groups reproduce themselves. Initially our group leaders bristled at the idea—even those in my own small group. In fact, I can recall one of our group members saying, "No one is going to leave our group!" One year later, she was one of the first to say, "When are we ever going to birth? It's time!"

Demonstrating patience with those in the group and with my own timetable for birthing was vital in making the birth successful. When a group is pregnant with too many members, you will see people start to get uncomfortable with their present state and ready to move forward with new life.

Choose a Birthing Model

When my wife was pregnant with our children, she and I had to choose the model of delivery that would provide the greatest chance of a successful birth for our situation. One was born through a C-section, and the other was a natural delivery. Both were born in a hospital rather than at home with a midwife.

The model you choose to birth a new small group will probably be determined by the size of your current group and the makeup of your group members. If your group is small—eight people or less—you can start a new group by sending out two of your current members as a new leader and new apprentice. If your group is larger, sending out a leader and an apprentice won't help much in terms of the group's size—things will still be a bit uncomfortable. Another option is to encourage half of the current group to stay with the current leader, and the other half to go with a new leader and apprentice.

Share the Leadership Responsibility

To increase the odds of a successful birth, couples usually enlist the help of others to take on specific responsibilities in the process. The doctor is in charge of monitoring the health of the baby and the mother-to-be, for example. There are also birthing coaches, nurses, Lamaze trainers, anesthesiologists, and so on.

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But all too often, small-group leaders feel like they have to do everything on their own—usually because they think a little too highly of themselves. One of the most important things a group leader can do is share responsibility. You can start with major responsibilities or with minor, but continue to give more and more responsibilities to your apprentice and group members the closer you get to birthing a new group. These responsibilities can range from leading the Bible study to coordinating refreshments.

Create a Timeline for Your Birthing Experience

Unless people are clearly not ready to think positively about birthing, don't leave an indefinite birth date for your new small group. When a couple is expecting a child, they are always given an estimate for the due date. How would you feel if you were expecting a baby and the doctor said, "Yes, you're expecting, but I can't tell you when you'll give birth. It may be a month, it may be a year or two." Talk about leaving something up in the air!

Setting a goal for the birth of a small group allows the group members to prepare mentally for the event. It also gives them something to look forward to. In the end, if you don't set a goal of when you will birth a new small group, the birth will probably never come.

Plan a Birthday Party

We celebrate the birth of a new child by visiting the couple and bringing flowers or a gift. Birthing a new small group should also be a joyous occasion. Allow yourself to have fun. You have achieved something special.

And because it is a special time, plan more than just a party—plan a time of closure as well. Whether this closure comes over several weeks or just in one meeting, plan time for the group to share what it has meant to be part of a community, and to give a blessing to the new leaders.

—MARK INGMIRE; copyright 2001 by Christianity Today.

Discuss:

1. How can you begin to share the leadership responsibility with other members of my group?
2. What steps will your group need to take in order to come up with a birthing plan and potential due date?
3. How will you celebrate together?

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Ministering to Emotional Needs while Birthing

Birth in a healthy way so group members feel cared for.

By Maegan Stout

A couple years ago I turned on my computer to find this e-mail patiently waiting in my inbox:

Subject – Need URGENT guidance for small group

Body – Our issue is that we have TOO much interest in our group, which I guess is one of those good problems to have; we just don't know how to handle it. Last week at our first meeting we had 29 people show up, 25 of which were girls! In addition, we had 3-4 people who couldn't come last week but intend to this week, and 5-6 more pending interest e-mails that I haven't responded to yet!

Sound familiar? If you've ever been in this position you understand the potential logistical and relational dilemmas that can erupt. There are many reasons why a group would need to multiply, an over-packed living room is just one of them. Here are some guidelines to help navigate multiplication well, and help group members grow through the process:

Have the Right Perspective

Multiplying your group is a spark for growth or the result of growth—and sometimes it's both. It probably means you are doing something right in your leadership. Multiplication is healthy. Through multiplying, you have distinct opportunities for discipleship. And our highest calling as small-group leaders is to make disciples

But *how* you facilitate the natural growth of your group will make all the difference in your leadership and in those you disciple. Multiplication is not a recruitment plan to grow a church numerically; it is about facilitating discipleship experiences for people to grow deeper in their faith. Numerical growth may follow, but hopefully God will not send us more people than we are able to disciple well.

Don't Lie to Yourself

These are some common myths leaders buy into that keep them from multiplying their group when it's time:

Bigger Space

I'll just find a larger space to meet, and then my group won't have to split.

The truth is that there is legitimacy to this, and there may be groups that this is appropriate for. If you do move to a larger meeting place, divide into two or more smaller groups for discussion. Even though a space can accommodate a large group, it still robs folks of the small-group experience when the overall group is too big, and it runs the risk of shifting from a group to a class.

Us Four and No More

My group has become so tight that I am afraid the dynamics will change.

The fear that somehow branching off will go bad or result in less community is totally understandable. The truth is that groups can flop with or without multiplying. Generally speaking, communities collapse when they are too inwardly focused for too long. One of the reasons we don't want to multiply our group is that we like our group. But the risk is stifling spiritual development, which will eventually lead to unhealthy community.

Good Groups Last Forever

If my group members love the group, why change?

Just because discipleship is an eternal investment doesn't mean your group should be. This does not mean you can't be friends with people you meet in small group over the long haul (or even continue to meet on an informal basis), but groups become stagnant when they close their doors to change.

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Cast Vision Well

Cast vision for multiplication early on. You must be proactive and intentional in clearly casting the vision. Let group members know that multiplication is not a solution to a problem; it is the plan for your group. If multiplication is reactionary (to too many people, a burned out leader, etc.), it sets up your group for a potentially painful split. Be sure to communicate that you want to multiply, not divide. Put it on the radar of your group early so it won't come as a surprise, and they can be involved in the process.

As you cast your vision, watch your language. When executed properly, your group will "birth" a new group. Don't use the words "split" or "divide"—not just because they sound more negative, but also because they don't mean the same thing. You can birth a new group without splitting or dividing the existing group. And be sure to let your group members know that they have the opportunity to encourage and commission a new leader. Get them excited about the role they are playing in what God is doing.

Empower Emerging Leaders

Great leaders take people with them, and aren't so concerned with protecting their own leadership that they can't give away opportunities. Disciple potential leaders in your group and give them opportunities to lead with you. The best test for discipleship is measured in one's ability to pass the baton to the next generation—just look at 2 Timothy 2:2. Empowering emerging leaders is a great privilege and opportunity for intentional discipleship. Plus, when you make potential leaders visible in your group by allowing them to lead with you, the group will already see them as leaders when it's time to multiply.

Timing Matters

Make sure you multiply at the right time, and that it actually is the best move. It is helpful to seek wise counsel from your coach or whoever provides support for your group. Multiplying prematurely can restrict the growth of your group, while waiting too long can lead to a decreased ability to build community. Discuss with your coach how you can continue to build biblical community based on what season your group is in.

DTR Your Group

DTR stands for "define the relationship," and it's a vital conversation to have with your group. It sounds like an awkward middle school conversation, right? The tough reality of multiplication is that things don't stay the same. Ideally, everyone will see multiplication as a good thing, but there's just no happy formula that works for every group. Group life is messy and unpredictable like the rest of life.

When you DTR, let your group members know about the plan to birth a new group with your apprentice leader. Be sure to explain when and how this will happen. Let group members know that even though the group dynamics may change, the friendships they have made don't need to. Make it a priority to collectively and individually honor people. I typically go around the group and call out gifts and thank people for who they are and what they've brought to the group.

Celebrate as a Group

Have a party to celebrate the new group. God is expanding your group's ability to be disciple-makers, and that's worth celebrating! Spend time talking about all that's been accomplished in and through the group, and allow group members to share their favorite memories. Celebrating provides closure for members as they change gears. It marks an ending to a season on a positive note. This is also a great time to celebrate new leaders. Have the group pray and commission them out in the style of Acts 13.

Follow Up

Follow up with each person individually to help them process. Even in the ideal scenario, it can still be an emotional experience where people need your guidance in order to navigate. And while the group celebration helps to provide closure, group members may experience more emotions when the new group begins or when their group starts up again without some people. Continue to be available to them and see them through to their next steps. Send them quick e-mails or notes to let them know you care and you're available to talk if needed.

—MAEGAN STOUT trains small-group leaders at National Community Church in Washington, D.C.; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

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Discuss:

1. Which of the myths above have you believed? Why is believing these myths unhealthy?
2. How well have you cast the vision of birthing to your small group? What else do you need to do to cast the vision?
3. When is the appropriate time to DTR in your small group?

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The Beginning of Something Beautiful

Tips for the first meeting of a birthed group

By Beatrice Rusu

The birth of a new small group is cause to celebrate. But leading that first meeting as a newly birthed group can feel a bit daunting. Below you'll find some best practices for your first meeting.

When Everyone Is New

Many times when a new group births, the group members are mostly new to each other and don't know each other well. You'll need to help people start building relationships from the first meeting.

The first meeting should be casual. It's hard to open up to a new group of people, so starting off with some basic get-to-know-you steps is important. A meal is a great way to build community. There is something about sitting around and sharing food that helps set a tone of fellowship and festivity. The simplest way to do this first meal is to set it up for your group. You could also have your host come up with a plan. Ordering pizza or setting up a taco bar are options that would let you focus on building relationships during the meeting and not worry about a lot of food preparation.

Once everyone has food, introductions can begin. Have members share some basic information about themselves. They might share their name, what they do, or how they started coming to the church. Base these questions on the format of your group. For instance, if you are leading a group of married couples, ask how long they've been married and how they met. If you're leading a group of parents, ask the names and ages of their children.

After introductions, it's time to get conversation started. The ideal recommendation would be to start with a fun, silly question and then ask a *slightly* more serious question. Here are some lighthearted questions to get everyone participating:

- If you could have any superpower, what would you choose?
- What was your favorite cartoon (or book or movie) as a child?
- Would you rather go without the Internet or a car for a month?
- Where would you like to travel if money were no object?
- What is the last movie you watched and would you recommend it?
- If you could go back in time to see a historic event in person, what would it be?

The goal of the more serious question is to get everyone to share a little about themselves. Questions relating to family of origin can be a non-threatening way to do that. Here are some suggestions:

- Do you have any siblings? And where do you fall in your family? What was the best part about being the oldest, only boy, middle child, etc?
- What is one of your favorite childhood memories?
- Did you grow up going to church? How old were you when you started a personal relationship with Christ?

Bring everyone's attention back by sharing expectations for the small group. If your church has set expectations, share the vision and get the group excited. Let them know the "how" and the "why" of the plan.

If your group will decide what your structure will look like, get group members involved in the decision. Would members like to be a study group or a group focused on sharing and prayer? Do group members want to serve together? What time commitment are they looking to invest in this group? Hand out note cards for

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people to share one or two things that they would like the small group to be. Encourage members to write their name on the card. This activity ensures that everyone has a say without a dominant personality setting the agenda.

On the other side of the note card, members can share suggestions of what they would like to study or read (a book of the Bible, a specific topic, or a book). The leader can then look through the suggested study materials and select two or three options to present to the larger group in an e-mail or at the next meeting. Set the right tone by ending the meeting with prayer for the future of the small group, the members, the leaders, and your church.

When People Know Each Other

Sometimes birthed groups include a number of people from the original group, so they already know each other well. Starting the new group with a meal is a good way to bring people together for a new season of community. Instead of having the leader or host handle the dinner preparations, everyone can bring something to share for a themed meal, such as Mexican food or breakfast for dinner.

Because people are more familiar with each other and comfortable making small talk, formal conversation can begin after everyone has finished eating. Then ask people to share an update on their lives since the last meeting of the original group. Talking a little about what's been going on will help members reconnect and get more comfortable with sharing.

When everyone has given their personal updates, ask members to talk more specifically about what the Lord has been teaching them. After a member shares, pause and have someone pray for that person. Asking members to pray for each other aloud helps build a sense of deep caring for each other.

If your church has a set vision and structure for groups, remind group members of the vision. If your group will form its own vision, get members involved by handing out note cards to write one or two expectations for the small group. Having people put their names on the note cards is helpful to the leader, but not essential. Once people have had five minutes or so to think and write, ask them to flip the note card over and write suggestions for group study. The note card helps to get members' feedback without the conversation focusing on the positive or negative aspects of the original group. Because members have already been in a group together, they will probably have more concrete expectations, suggestions for what the group should focus on or study.

Conclude the first meeting in prayer. The small-group leader can pray for the small group, focusing on personal and relational growth. Ask a group member to pray for the small-group leader to live with integrity and to lead the group wisely. Another group member can close by praying a blessing for the original small group and for the church as a whole.

While the multiplication of small groups is a joyous thing, it can also be sad to end one thing to start something new. The leader should be mindful of the loss that some group members may feel. Be available for group members to talk about their feelings.

You might also consider a combined social event six to eight weeks after the group has birthed. This allows time for both the new group and the original group to become accustomed to their new dynamics. This event can help group members stay connected and serve as another opportunity to celebrate all that God is doing in your small groups.

—BEATRICE RUSU is a contributor for our sister resource [Kyria](#) and has served as a small-group leader; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss:

1. What are your plans for your first meeting after birthing?
2. How can using something as simple as note cards get your group members involved in forming the vision for your group? Is there another method you could use?

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3. Do you feel it would be wise to gather the original group and the birthed group in a few weeks? Why or why not?

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Further Exploration

Websites and books to help you birth well

[SmallGroups.com](#). We specialize in equipping churches and small-group leaders to make disciples and strengthen community.

- [Empowering Group Members](#) (Training Theme)
- [Is Our Church Discipling?](#) (Assessment Pack)
- [Small-Group Apprentice Orientation Guide](#) (Orientation Guide)
- [Small-Group Leader Orientation Guide](#) (Orientation Guide)

[LeadershipJournal.net](#). This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

[Kyria.com](#). A website ministering to women leaders within the church.

[Emotionally Healthy Spirituality](#) by Peter Scazzero. The author gives seven steps to transformation that will help you live a life of authenticity, awareness, and hunger for God (Thomas Nelson, 2011; ISBN 978-0849946424).

[Field Guide for Small Group Leaders](#) by Sam O'Neal. A guide on how to lead a life-changing group (IVP Connect, 2012; ISBN 978-0830810918).

[Walking the Small Group Tightrope: Meeting the Challenges Every Group Faces](#) by Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson. The authors help you explore and deal with six dynamic areas of group life (Zondervan, 2003; ISBN 978-0310252290).