

Unit 3: An Overview of Joel Comiskey's Books

The following paragraphs are an overview of Joel Comiskey's books ordered by publication date. My hope is that this material will allow an insight into the ongoing development of Joel's thinking. *Information in italics is quoted from book descriptions on Joel's website; when bold type is used, the emphasis is mine to make a point.* Order from <http://store.joelcomiskeygroup.com/allbobyjoco.html>.

Joel's author description from Amazon.com indicates his importance in this field of research: *Joel Comiskey (Ph.D. Fuller Seminary) is an internationally recognized church consultant and speaker. He has served as a missionary with the C&MA in Quito, Ecuador, and is now founding pastor of a cell based church in Southern California. Joel's books have sold 130,000 copies in North America and an additional 200,000 copies worldwide. Joel teaches as an adjunct professor at several theological seminaries. Joel and his wife, Celyce, have three daughters and live in Moreno Valley, California.*

All of Joel Comiskey's books provide practical instructions for implementation. Earlier books, however, seem to me to focus more on the detailed reporting of methods and models from foreign cell churches. I believe that later books more reflect Joel's work as a consultant with churches seeking to implement the cell model and reflect his understanding of the best means to practice cells in a North American cultural context. If you are interested in *how they do it*, I would read the earlier books and the book on Elim Church; if your interest is in *how you can do it*, the later books are very helpful.

1998: Home Cell Group Explosion: How Your Small Group Can Grow and Multiply

Home Cell Group Explosion is the most researched and practical book ever written on cell group ministry! Joel Comiskey traversed the globe to find out why certain churches and small groups are successful in reaching the lost. He found the answers and freely shares them within this volume. If you are a pastor or small group leader, you should devour this book! It will encourage you and give you simple, practical steps for dynamic small group life and growth.

1999: Groups of 12: A New Way to Mobilize Leaders and Multiply Groups in Your Church

The International Charismatic Mission in Bogota, Colombia is infiltrating its nation and touching the world with the G-12 model. Through on site research, international case studies and practical experience as a G12 pastor, Joel Comiskey has discovered the secrets behind this powerful model. In this book, he not only tells you what ICM does, he also outlines the G12 principles that your church can use today.

1999: Reap the Harvest: How a Small-Group System Can Grow Your Church

This book is an excellent description of the basic characteristics of a functional discipleship system that uses multiplying cells.

*Have you tried small groups and hit a brick wall? Are you looking to make your small groups more effective? Cell-church specialist and pastor Dr. Joel Comiskey studied the world's most successful cell churches to determine why they grow. **The key: They have embraced specific principles. Cell churches are successful not because they have small groups but because they have the system in place to support the groups.** In *Reap the Harvest*, you will discover how these systems work.*

2000: Leadership Explosion: Multiplying Cell Group Leaders for the Harvest

This book is an best description available of the use of functional equipping tracks toto form a healthy core group that is continually expanding. The number of mature, committed, disciple making leaders is the primarily limiting factor in the fulfillment of the Great Commission in a local church.

If your groups need more leaders, this book is for you! Dr. Comiskey demonstrates how effective churches develop leaders. Then he shows you how to do the same by outlines the principles of leadership development that will work in any church.

Comiskey provides an inspiring panoramic view of leadership in this book. The concluding chapters, which outline the guidelines, models and principles for training effective cell group leaders, will prove especially helpful to churches that are seeking to deal with leadership issues (Karen Hurston, Hurston Ministries)

2001: How to Lead a Great Cell Group Meeting.. . So People Want to Come Back

You can lead a great cell group meeting, one that is life changing and dynamic. This book will show you how to:

- Prepare yourself spiritually to hear God during the meeting*
- Structure the meeting so it flows*
- Spur people in the group to participate and share their lives openly*
- Share your life with others in the group*
- Create stimulating questions*

- Listen effectively to discover what is transpiring in others' lives*
- Encourage and edify group members*
- Open the group to non-Christians*
- See the details that create a warm atmosphere*

By implementing these time-tested ideas, your group will go home wanting more and return each week bringing new people with them.

2002: An Appointment With the King: Ideas for Jump-Starting Your Devotional Life

With full calendars and long lists of things to do, people often put on hold life's most important goal--building an intimate relationship with God. Often, believers wish to pursue the goal but are not sure how to do it. They feel frustrated or guilty when their attempts at personal devotions seem empty and unfruitful.

With warm, encouraging writing, Joel Comiskey guides readers on how to set a daily appointment with the King and make it an exciting time they will look forward to. This book first answers the question 'Where do I start?' with step-by-step instructions on how to spend time with God and practical ideas for experiencing him more fully. Second, it highlights the benefits of spending time with God, including joy, victory over sin, and spiritual guidance. Third, this book inspires and motivates those who already have a quiet time to press ahead and grow in their intimacy with God.

An Appointment with the King discusses personal priorities, the use of Scripture, listening, place and time of day, meditation, increased power in prayer, and other helpful topics related to daily quiet time. The book will help Christians tap into God's resources on a daily basis, so that even in the midst of busyness they can walk with him in intimacy and abundance.

This book will teach you how to spend quality time with God each day, refreshing your soul and preparing you for the day ahead. Each chapter will provide practical suggestions on how to experience

God more fully in your quiet time. The goal is to help you understand the whys and hows of spending time with God.

2002: From 12 to 3: How to Apply G-12 Principles in Your Church

In this book, Joel Comiskey creatively adapts the G12 system more directly for implementation in North America, particularly with regard to easing the leadership time investment needed to make the system work in our culture. Lack of free time to invest in ministry is a primary limiting factor for us.

*How to apply G12 principles in your church: Joel Comiskey has spent years researching the G12 structure and the principles behind it. **From 12 to 3** focuses on the application of principles rather than adoption of the entire model. It outlines the principles and provides a modified application which Joel calls the G12.3 strategy.*

*Peter Banzon writes, "**From 12 to 3** is a timely piece of work that will greatly assist those who want to apply G-12 principles for the formation and development of a cellchurch. Joel hits the nail on the head when he cautions against adopting an entire model rather than applying the principles that made the model work. To his credit he takes nothing away from Cesar Castellanos who pioneered the G-12 model of cell church development. He fully appreciates the heart and contributions of Castellanos and His international G-12 network. He gives practical, realistic and timely suggestions for those seeking to implement the G-12 vision in their church situation. Joel is no armchair professor but a practioner who understands and advocates cellchurch principles. If there is a book you need to add to your library of G-12/cell church literature then this one is must reading. Don't venture further with the G-12 vision without it."*

2003: How to Be a Great Cell Group Coach: Practical Insight for Supporting and Mentoring Cell Group Leaders

“Coach” and “coaching” is a comfortable metaphor for North Americans to describe the leader in the cell network who supports, encourages, mentors and supervises the cell leader. Americans resist the concept of someone giving them orders that need to be obeyed; too often, honestly, this resistance includes our willingness to follow commands from Jesus Christ as Lord.

Research has proven that the greatest contributor to cell group success is the quality of coaching provided for cell group leaders. Many are serving in the position of a coach, but they don't fully understand what they are supposed to do in this position. Practical insights on how to develop effective coaching habits are outlined in section one. Section two addresses how to polish your skills as a coach with instructions on diagnosing problems in a cell group, how to lead coaching meetings, and what to do when visiting a cell group meeting. This book will prepare you to be a great cell group coach, one who mentors, supports, and guides cell group leaders into great ministry.

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- 1. Receiving from God*
- 2. Listening to the needs of the cell group leader*
- 3. Encouraging the cell group leader*
- 4. Caring for the multiple aspects of a leader's life*
- 5. Developing the cell leader in various aspects of leadership*
- 6. Strategizing with the cell leader to create a plan*

7. Challenging the cell leader to grow

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2004: Passion and Persistence: How the Elim Church's Cell Groups Penetrated an Entire City for Jesus

The example of the Elim Church of El Salvador was the primary inspiration and guide to the transition of Bethany World Prayer Center to cells. In Comiskey's lists of the ten largest cell churches in the world (<http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/worldwide/tenLargest.htm>), Elim is number six, one of three South American cell churches. (The top four are Korean churches that still use the Yoido "5x5" system.) Joel writes: *Sixth on the list is the Elim Church, located in San Salvador, El Salvador. Between 35,000-40,000 people attend the weekly Sunday celebration services. Yet, three times as many people attend the 11,000 cell groups during the week (approximately 110,000). I estimated that 600 rented public buses brought the faithful to the Sunday celebration services from all over the city (the cell groups rent the buses for the day). I was amazed at Elim's professional statistical reporting. By Monday morning, the church knows exactly how many people met in the 11,000 cell groups. (This number includes 5,500 children's cell groups, which are a likely predictor of significant future growth.) Like Yoido, their membership has overwhelmed the ability to provide a building sufficient for weekly worship; in order to answer criticism that their membership claims were exaggerated, Elim once rented five stadiums to allow the entire congregation to worship at the same time.*

This book describes how the Elim Church in San Salvador grew from a small group to 116,000 people in 10,000 cell groups. Comiskey takes the principles from Elim and applies them to churches in North America and all over the world.

Ralph Neighbour says: "I believe this book will be remembered as one of the most important ever written about a cell church movement! I experienced the "passion" when visiting Elim many years ago. Comiskey's report about Elim is not a "pattern" to be slavishly copied. It is a journey into grasping the true theology and methodology of the New Testament church." You'll discover how the Elim Church fans into flame their passion for Jesus and His Word, how they organize their cells to penetrate a city and world for Jesus, and how they persist until God brings the fruit.

2005: The Spirit-filled Small Group: Leading Your Group to Experience the Spiritual Gifts

The focus in many of today's small groups has shifted from Spirit-led transformation to just another teacher-student Bible study. But exercising every member's spiritual gifts is vital to the effectiveness of the group. With insight born of experience in more than twenty years of small group ministry, Joel Comiskey explains how leaders and participants alike can be supernaturally equipped to deal with real-life issues. The book explains what the gifts of the Spirit are and how they can be practiced in the small group setting. You'll find practical guidelines on how to experience your own spiritual gift (s) and help others experience theirs. Put these principles into practice and your small group will never be the same!

2007: Five Book Equipping Series

- Live! Experience Christ's Life
- Encounter! Receive Christ's Freedom
- Grow! Deepen Your Relationship with Christ
- Share! Make Christ Real to Others
- Lead! Guide a Small Group to Experience Christ

This graduated, five book equipping track helps people through each stage of spiritual growth in cell life, from seeker to cell leader. An overview of the entire series is here:

<http://www.cellchurchsolutions.com/download/FiveBookSeries.pdf>

2007: The Church that Multiplies: Growing a Healthy Cell Church in North America

This is the totally updated and re-titled edition of the older book called CELL CHURCH SOLUTIONS. This new edition includes all new statistics, new churches, new resources and another entire section.

Many people are asking, "Does the cell church strategy work in North America?" This book not only declares that the cell church concept does work in North America but explains how to make cell churches work in North America by giving practical examples and instructions. The book dedicates an entire chapter to examining North American churches that are successfully using the cell strategy to grow in quality and quantity. This book also examines North American culture and how to overcome the obstacles that confront small group ministry here.

2007: Discover: Use Your Gifts and Help Others Find Theirs (Advanced Training)

Everyone has at least one spiritual gift, according to the Bible. But many don't know what that gift is or how to use it. This book provides clear steps and guidelines to find and activate spiritual gifts. The eight lessons offer biblical insight on what the gifts are and practical suggestions on how to use them. This book will especially help those leading a small group to know how to discern the different gifts among group members and then to help each person activate that gift. The only way to discover spiritual gifts is in the context of relationships. Spiritual gift tests, while helping believers to think through the possibilities, are insufficient in themselves. The atmosphere of trust in a small group is the key cornerstone that allows the free flow of the spiritual gifts. When trust is established, people are more willing to risk and try out new, potential gifts. A small group can provide honest feedback about the persons success, as well as areas of improvement. This book prepares each small group member to understand what his or her spiritual gift is and then instructs the person how to use that gift. Discover is a great resource to use individually, in a small group, or in a classroom teaching setting. (Book description from Amazon.com.)

2007: Coach: Empower Others to Effectively Lead a Small Group (Advanced Training)

My favorite coach is John Wooden. During his time coaching college basketball with the UCLA Bruins, Wooden won ten NCAA titles, including seven in a row from 1967 to 1973. His UCLA teams also had a record winning streak of eighty-eight games, four perfect 300 seasons, and won thirty-eight straight games in NCAA Tournaments. Yet, Wooden wasn't overly focused on winning basketball games. He was more concerned about building character in his players. He stimulated his players to be successful in their school studies, attitudes, and behavior which ultimately resulted in success on the basketball court. And Wooden lived the life that he asked his players to follow. Wooden was an amazing

coach because he built into the lives of his players and developed their character. Coaching small group leaders has similar characteristics. The goal of Christian coaches is to move people toward Jesus Christ. The Christian coach strives to lead people forward to conformity with Jesus Christ, knowing that the ultimate crown is the one that will last forever (1 Corinthians 9:25). While Christlike character is most important, a small group coach also equips leaders with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective in small group ministry. A cell coach encourages, nourishes, and challenges cell leaders to grow and multiply their cell groups.

*The word coach is descriptive of the role a person plays as he or she supports cell leaders under his or her care. It is not a sacred term. In fact, churches use many terms to identify the role played by the cell group coach: supervisor, section leader, G12 leader, cell overseer, cell sponsor, even L (which is the roman numeral for 50). This book provides step by step instructions on how to coach a small group leader from the initial stages of leading the group all the way to giving birth to a new one. Those who have never coached before will receive clear information on how to take the small group leader to the next level. And someone who is already coaching a small group leader will also find the eight lessons in this book invaluable to empower others to lead fruitful groups. I have another, more in depth book on coaching called **How to be a Great Cell Group Coach**. Some of the same concepts are covered in both books, but the major difference is that this book is a hands on training manual to prepare someone to be a coach of small group leaders. My other book, **How to be a Great Cell Group Coach**, would be a great reference manual to use alongside this book. (Book description from Amazon.com.)*

Oct 1, 2008: Planting Churches that Reproduce: Starting a Network of Simple Churches

Organic networks of simple churches is the theme of Unit 6 in this class.

*The goal of **Planting Churches that Reproduce Starting a Network of Simple Churches** is to simplify the church planting process in order to start a network of simple, reproducing churches. This book will give invaluable information to those contemplating church planting or in the process of planting a church. Comiskey has been gathering material for this book for the past ten years. He has also planted three churches in a wide variety of settings. **Planting Churches that Reproduce** is the fruit of his research and personal experience. Comiskey uses the latest North American church planting statistics, but also extends the illustrations to include worldwide church planting. In the first section, Comiskey lays out the Biblical basis for church planting, including the all important question what is the church? In order to understand how to plant a network of reproducing churches, its essential to know how the New Testament defines Christ's church (and the New Testament definition is a simple one). Paul the apostle was the first century's model church planter and arguably the most effective church planter the world has ever known. The book goes into detail about how Paul planted churches and the important lessons that we can apply twenty centuries later. The book then moves from the Biblical basis to the contemporary scene. Comiskey answers the question of how in today's complicated society we can plant churches that reproduce and even start a network of simple churches. The book shows statistically why church planting is absolutely essential to keep up with the population growth. Many statistics are noted to demonstrate the grave need for continual church planting today. Then Comiskey tackles the question of the modern day church planter: **What makes a modern day church planter successful? What are the key characteristics that today's church planters need to successfully plant a church in the 21st century?** Comiskey provides in depth information from recent studies about the character qualities necessary to plant a church. Comiskey provides helpful information on church planting barriers. These barriers come from the field, both from those who have planted churches and/or those who are currently doing so. The book reveals what church planters would do differently if they could do*

it over again. This information will help future church planters avoid similar mistakes.

The second section goes into detail about the **three main church planting strategies** the celebration approach, the cell church strategy, and house church planting. Those who use the **celebration approach** focus on launching a church with a large crowd. While a core team starts the process, the church really begins on launch day. The **cell church strategy** plants the church when the first cell starts. The goal is to then to multiply the cell and to eventually unite those cell groups in a worship service. **House church planting**, on the other hand, views the house church as a fully planted church. While Comiskey is admittedly biased toward the simple cell church planting (and includes more material for this approach), he fairly treats the other two strategies and provides ample material to fully understand all three approaches. The reader is not just given information about these three principal church planting approaches but is also shown how to practically plant churches using these three strategies. The books overarching goal is to show how reproduction is the key to church planting. If reproduction/church multiplication is critical to all effective church planting, then the approach must be simple enough to keep the process going. **The church planting movements that are exploding today realize that simple, reproducible structures are key.** If only a chosen few are smart enough to plant churches, Christ's vision to make disciples of all nations will not be accomplished. Comiskey's book is a "must read" book for all those interested in establishing Christ honoring, multiplying churches. (Book description from Amazon.com.)