

Unit 3: The Second Wave: South American Innovations

Lecture: Introducing the G12 Systems

Our example church for Unit 4 is Bethany World Prayer Center near Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Bethany was originally inspired by the Elim Church 5x5 cell management structure and had a net growth of 600 families in 1993, their first year of cell ministry. Net growth had been flat for 1990-92, so they know that the increase is due to the transition to cell. In 1993-1996 they had gained a net growth of 2000 families (CC: 22). In 2002 their goal is to plant 500 indigenous churches in Third World countries. Bethany is now the primary proponent of the second wave *G12 management structure* in the United States.¹

The G12 is truly an innovation in evangelistic small groups and is spreading widely throughout the cell church world. Joel Comiskey is the authority on the G12 and there is a folder on the G12 in the Workshop Materials section; two books by Comiskey are essential:

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.

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.

The International Charismatic Mission of Bogota, Columbia, has grown from eight members in 1983 to 24,000 in cell groups by 1998 using the G12 cell management structure they invented and was reported in 2002 as having 300,000 participants. G12 as interpreted by ICM pastor Cesar Castellanos has stood at different times for “*Groups of Twelve*” or the “*Government of Twelve*.” As variations proliferate, they are now known by a variety of names, such as the J12 (Little Falls), V12 (Victory Christian Center, Tulsa, OK) and Bethany now calls their implementation of the G12 the “*Principle of Twelve*.”

The number 12 is of central importance to the G12 concept, which is simply based on the choice of Jesus to call twelve from among those who followed Him to serve with him in ministry as his disciples and work with his followers; he then trained them for this work as a “discipler.” In this understanding, a disciple is not a “follower” but a leadership position in ministry. Then He commanded them in the Great Commission to make their own disciples. As Jesus is our model in all things, we are to follow His example and make our own disciples (cell leaders) out of Christians in our cells. As their discipler, we train them and support them in their ministry to their own cell as Jesus trained and supported his disciples in their ministry. In the G12, it is believed that the example of Jesus is to be

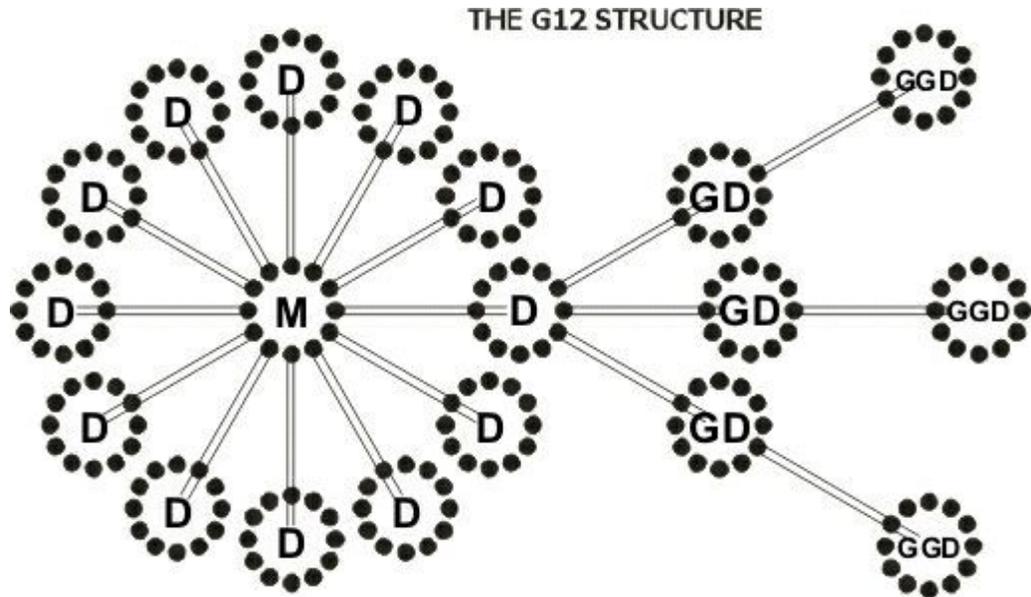
¹ For a comparison of the 5x5 and G12 model, see the article by Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr. “Structuring Your Church for Growth - An Examination of Three Cell Structures” in the Workshop Materials section of this unit.

followed in always creating groups of twelve.

A picture is worth a thousand words - let's begin with a diagram of the G12:

The "M" or minister has a cell of his/her own disciples, each of which leads their own cell group of twelve and identified as a "D."

One of these "disciples" of the minister has daughtered three cells as "grand-daughter" cells. Each of those cells has opened a great-granddaughter cell.



I like to imagine the G12 as a series of concentric circles; a span of control of twelve leads to some very large numbers as the circles expand. In the inner most circle, the minister has twelve disciples and mentors them. In the second "daughter" circle, there are twelve disciples, each with a cell with 12 members; when that circle is full, the church will have 12×12 or 144 members. One disciple in the 2nd circle is the *discipler* of three *disciples* in the third circle, each of whom leads a granddaughter cell; when each disciple in the 2nd circle has 12 disciples in the third circle, there will be $12 \times 12 \times 12$ or 1728 cells and 20,736 members. Each disciple in the 3rd circle is the *discipler* of one *disciple* of their own in the fourth circle whom leads a great-granddaughter cell; when the fourth circle is filled there will be $12 \times 12 \times 12 \times 12$ or 20,736 cells and 248,832 members. If a fifth circle is filled, there will be a church of over 2,488,320 members with only five layers of management.

Each week each *disciple* participates in three meetings. He meets with his own cell and encourages them to evangelize and become a disciple or cell leaders themselves. He meets with his *discipler* in the next interior circle for supervision, support and training. He meets with his own *disciples* in the next exterior circle to provide supervision, support and training for his *disciples*. One primary advantage of the G12 is that relationships are never broken through multiplication; you still meet each week with the same people, but slowly they move from the cell group of followers to the G12 group of disciples. When a leader has twelve disciples leading groups, they then just work with their disciples. A second advantage is that cells are always being opened on the growing edge of the church by converts new to the church and expanding into the new web of relationships; the new cells are being supported by the experienced leadership of the earlier cells.

In real life, disciples don't always fill circles so neatly; long chains of cells groups can form with

disciples who just have one disciple. The more the layers of supervision, the more there are problems with quality and consistency. One solution is a “summit meeting” where an interior disciple will call together all the cell leaders downstream in his/her network.

The following story may help illustrate the system; each circle is illustrated by a letter of the alphabet.

Carl opens a cell and welcomes Dan, who becomes a Christian. Dan continues to participate in the open cell and grow in faith. Carl encourages Dan and all other converts to open and lead their own cells.

When Dan opens his own cell, he stops going to Carl’s cell and joins a special group lead by Carl for his “disciples” called a Group of Twelve or G12 group. Eric is converted in Dan’s cell, and when Eric opens a cell, he becomes Dan’s disciple and Dan begins his own G12 group with Eric as the first member. Dan’s next disciple, Ed, opens his own cell group and joins Dan and Eric in the G12 group.

Dan’s leadership of his cell is supported by many kinds of Celebration gatherings, classes, retreats and other training opportunities which train him and to which he can bring his cell members, but his primary supervision comes through his participation in Carl’s G12 group. This relationship of trust between Carl and Dan, which began with his conversion, will never end; it is a relationship like father and son. Dan will always have Carl in his life and Carl will always be there for him.

Dan still meets with all his old cell friends each week in Carl’s G12, and all his friends from his original open cell in his G12. Dan’s convivial South American culture relishes this frequent interaction with his closest friends.

Carl also participates each week in the G12 cell of Brian, the man who led him to Christ and whose disciple he became when he opened his own cell group. Brian likewise participates in the G12 of his spiritual father, Alfred. When Carl has twelve disciples, he will dedicate his energies to helping Dan and other members of his G12 to fill up their own network of twelve disciples. Brian is like a grandfather to Dan, and Alfred is like the wise patriarch of their extended family or tribe. Alfred, Brian, Carl and Dan represent four generations, like four widening circles, of a G12 structure; when Eric opens a cell, that will be a fifth generation.

Paul describes a four generation structure of disciples in 2 Timothy 2:2: what you (*Timothy=Carl*) have heard from me (*Paul=Brian*) before many witnesses entrust to faithful men (*Dan*) who will be able to teach others (*Eric*) also. (Alfred, of course, is Jesus.)

The main complaint about the system in the USA is the need for three meetings a week in the original design of the system. Time pressure always conflicts with our desire to serve Christ. Comiskey suggests a variety of ways to deal with this in his book *From 12 to 3*. One is to reduce the span of control from 12 to 3. Another is to do away with the individual coaching of the new disciple/cell leader by having them continue to attend the original cell; there are advantages and disadvantages to this. The G12 system also asks the new disciple to participate in schooling and two retreats, so the relationship between disciple and discipler is more relational accountability than training and instruction.

I’m not certain that three meetings a week is a problem if (1) these people are my friends with whom I would want to spend all my free time anyway and (2) if I have no other tasks to do in the church except attend worship. The G12 would certainly be a joy for extraverted people persons.