



Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups

Nelson Searcy , Kerrick Thomas

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Church leaders want to know how to make small groups work for their church communities, yet a quick look around shows that while small groups are all the rage, much of the time they create more problems than they solve. Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, founding pastors of The Journey Church in the heart of New York City, suggest that this failure is due to widely held beliefs about small groups that just aren't true—and they aim to debunk the myths and set the record straight! Drawing from the startling success of small groups at The Journey Church (which has had over 100-percent participation in small groups for more than 4 years) Searcy and Thomas show how church leaders can implement a life-changing small-group ministry that gets the maximum number of people involved and solves many of the important (yet irritating) problems facing churches of all sizes.

Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups Details

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Author : Nelson Searcy , Kerrick Thomas

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From Reader Review Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups for online ebook

Tiffany says

Regardless of what model you decide to use for small groups, there are useful insights and tips within this book. I don't subscribe to a one-model fits all approach which so many "system-based" books promote. However, I do tend to learn something from each model, and this model is no exception. Approach this book as you would any systems-book, seek to understand the cultural elements that made that particular system successful. Fortunately, this book provides enough background information for you to easily make that assessment.

J.K. Turner says

My Rating – Probably Not Worth Your Time

Level – Easy read, moderate length (reads quicker than its 300 pages)

Summary

The subtitle pretty much sums it up, though I'd quibble with the 'new' part. Activate is Searcy's system for running/managing small groups. The book is broken into two parts, The Activate Mindset and The Activate System. The former is his attempt to 'challenge' existing 'beliefs' on small groups and is broken into four sections (all of which begin with Rethinking Small Group) Methodology, Structure, Strategy, and Leadership. Each of these is broken down into chapters which he calls Big Ideas, of which there are 12.

The System is also broken into four sections – Focus, Form, Fill, and Facilitate. Again, each of these is broken into further chapters, each one being a step or guiding principle to the subset of his system.

My Thoughts

I picked this book because I am a small group leader, though not one that would fit his definition, and I also thought it could be helpful for our Community Pastor, who is a little newer in his role. The title is a little (unintentionally) misleading. I thought it was going to be the groups that were being activated, made stronger, more engaged, etc. However, activate is the name of his system for signing people up for groups. I guess it is people you are activating.

Overall, I was disappointed in this book. To be fair, maybe it was revolutionary 10 years ago, when it was originally published. That's when I finished grad school, got married, and first attended a church that did small groups. My church in high school had Sunday School, so there weren't small groups. My current and former church do not have Sunday School, and instead work entirely with small groups. So, all of his ideas in the Mindset part of the book might have been new then, I don't know how groups were typically run prior.

That being said, many of the ideas he proposed as being the prevailing thought really seemed to be strawmen. I seriously doubt anyone pastor believes that sign-ups should be complicated (compared to his 'big idea' that they should not). Now, many pastors may not put much effort or thought into sign-up and they end up being unnecessarily complicated, but that isn't how he presents his arguments.

The second part of the book, the System, is fairly interesting and has a many good points and practical steps. However, this is only true if your small group fits his definition, which is a group that meets 10-12 weeks to study a specific topic or read a particular part of the Bible. My church offers these, but also offers deeper groups that stay connected for years, as many other churches have and are often called home or community groups.

So, if you have the topical side, his ideas for roll out, launch, and general marketing principles are great. The authors clearly have a good mind for marketing a practical actions steps for achieving goals. I think most pastors could learn a few things, or least use this to augment their current system. If you are looking to change, relaunch, or start this type of small group, this book would be one of the few that would be worth grabbing and reading before putting together your strategy. This is particularly true if you are a seeker church or a very large church.

Now to the problems, this book really left me with a strange feeling. I'm sure the authors are caring pastors who have come up with a system that they think is the best and are genuinely excited to get it out there to everyone else. Everyone knows people like this, those high energy endlessly positive people, that's how I imagine these authors. However, I don't think it translated to the written form. Far too much of what is written comes off as a sales pitch. It doesn't help that Searcy markets his other books eat least once a chapter or so, and tells you to go to his website on every other page. At points it started to seem like an infomercial.

I'm a cynical guy, so in an attempt to see the positive, I went to his website thinking maybe he put everything out there. While there are few free downloads, most of the site is selling his other books or his 'coaching' services and subscriptions. Honestly, it is a bit off-putting. There is little discussion in the book of making disciples, but much about growing numbers, both total and participation percentage. Two particularly egregious sections come in the book on page 93 where he states that the best investment you can make in your staff is to hire him for small group coaching and again list his website. The second is on page 147 where he lists the different types of leaders – group leader, team leaders (who manage a number of group leaders), and group coaches (who manage a number of team leaders). He lists the requirements of each of these people and under group coach he states they must have 'an unshakable commitment to the activate system.'

Again, I don't know these people, and I'm fairly confident they are just pumped about their system, but much of the book rubbed me the wrong way. It was just far too much of a sales pitch, that included what seemed like upselling. Like I said, there are parts I think you can find helpful if what you are doing matches their groups and you have the same goals/type of church as them. However, if you don't fit nicely in or you already have fairly successful groups, this book is probably not worth your time.

*I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review

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JT says

Great book full of great suggestions in beginning the process of forming a small group culture in your church. However, the authors didn't mention one of the biggest barriers to small groups. . . childcare!

Eric says

One of the most practical books I've read. It includes step by step ideas and instructions for basically everything, though you may not want to adopt it all. I found the first third of the book the most beneficial, but the last third was good too.

Nicole says

Lots of practical help in here. I won't apply all of it --- but I will certainly be returning to this again and again to help me shape the structure and execution of group ministry

Mark says

With a title like that, you better be prepared to deliver... and Nelson Searcy & Kerrick Thomas (pastors at The Journey in Manhattan) actually manage to live up to the implied promise. As someone who's been interested in small group life for a long time in my various ministry roles (youth pastor, church planter, senior pastor), I've read a lot of small group stuff: Serendipity, Willow Creek, Cloud & Townsend, Lifeway, etc. I've been trained multiple times... and still, much of what is in Activate is a new spin on how small group ministry works (and doesn't work) in a church.

Nelson & Kerrick take on a number of pervasive myths:

- small groups need to be small to work well
- small groups are great places to develop deep relationships
- small groups get better the longer they meet
- small groups should have a "high-bar" entry to make sure people are serious about spiritual growth
- small group leaders need extensive training before they lead
- small groups grow best by splitting/birthing groups out of existing groups

Chances are, like me, you were taken aback that these two guys think that the conventional wisdom of small groups is wrong... but this book does a bang-up job of proving it... and then offering a new way of organizing small group ministry to deal with those issues.

For some folks, it's hard to get past the highly practical nature of Nelson's books – but it's important to understand that he's offering a systems-oriented way of structuring ministry that doesn't undercut the need for orthodox theology or Biblical teaching. He just assumes if you're reading this book, you're already doing those things.

victoria says

This book was very unique writing and compelling to read with also giving a knowledge to help you to implement a small group system that both you and your people can be excited about, and that can help you realize God's dream for your unique church and this God does through your willingness to step out of comfort zone and activate in your group. I highly recommend to everyone must to read this book." I received

complimentary a copy of this book from Baker Books Blogger for this review”.

Nay Denise says

This book came at the right time for me as I started my own small group and wanted to really cultivate it. This book can best be used for a small church ministry, but seeing as my ministry is outside of the church it still works. This book is filled without a lot of tips, some I agreed with, others I didn't feel suited what I was doing. This is one of those kind "help" books that will reach everyone differently. For me I found the second part of the book to be more helpful than the first part. The model they provide is a good one, but for me I would personally branch off from it as my main small group model. Do I recommend this book? Of course, it's a good one to have on your shelf for your own small groups or one in your church. It'll be useful whether you realize it or not. Good read.

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Copy sent to me for review.

This book came at the right time for me as I started my own small group and wanted to really cultivate it. This book can best be used for a small church ministry, but seeing as my ministry is outside of the church it still works. This book is filled without a lot of tips, some I agreed with, others I didn't feel suited what I was doing. This is one of those kind "help" books that will reach everyone differently. For me I found the second part of the book to be more helpful than the first part. The model they provide is a good one, but for me I would personally branch off from it as my main small group model. Do I recommend this book? Of course, it's a good one to have on your shelf for your own small groups or one in your church. It'll be useful whether you realize it or not. Good read.

Peter says

This was a really helpful and practical book. It's not about the theology of small groups or the reasons to have small groups. This book has a great deal of helpful information. I would recommend forcing yourself to read beyond the first section if you find things that you don't agree with in the 12 big ideas. The best part of this book is in the focus, form, fill, facilitate model. If you run a small group ministry and are struggling with the how and not so much the why, Activate will certainly provide you with some helpful ideas.

Luke Evans says

Very good and practical. These guys are correct on a lot.
Going to implement a lot of this

Reid says

Searcy puts together a manual to duplicate what his church has done to organize small groups.

"Church leaders want to know how to make small groups work for their church communities, yet a quick look around shows that while small groups are all the rage, much of the time they create more problems than they solve. Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, founding pastors of The Journey Church in the heart of New York City, suggest that this failure is due to widely held beliefs about small groups that just aren't true—and they aim to debunk the myths and set the record straight! Drawing from the startling success of small groups at The Journey Church (which has had over 100-percent participation in small groups for more than 4 years) Searcy and Thomas show how church leaders can implement a life-changing small-group ministry that gets the maximum number of people involved and solves many of the important (yet irritating) problems facing churches of all sizes."

Almost so organized that it could be done without the Holy Spirit!

Still, the effort necessary from a leadership standpoint, to develop other leaders is intriguing.

Marc Stephens says

small groups made easy

This book is very well written, easy to understand and gives step by step methods to implement a healthy small group ministry in your church or make the one you have better. Small group ministry in churches create a culture. This book explains how to make that culture healthy and successful.

Oak says

Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups is an interesting book written by Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas (with Jennifer Dykes Henson). From scheduling team leader meetings to promoting groups to newcomers, the book covers a wide range of specific details on how to make your small group thrive, as they provide many helpful tips for forming and running a small group. My favorite part of the book talked about rethinking small group leaders; I especially liked the subsection that discussed how to "think decentralization, not staff control." Though books focusing on organizational growth and success can sometimes be dry, this was not the case for Activate; it was a very enjoyable read!

I received this book for review purposes.

Paul Langworthy says

Great model for a small group program.
