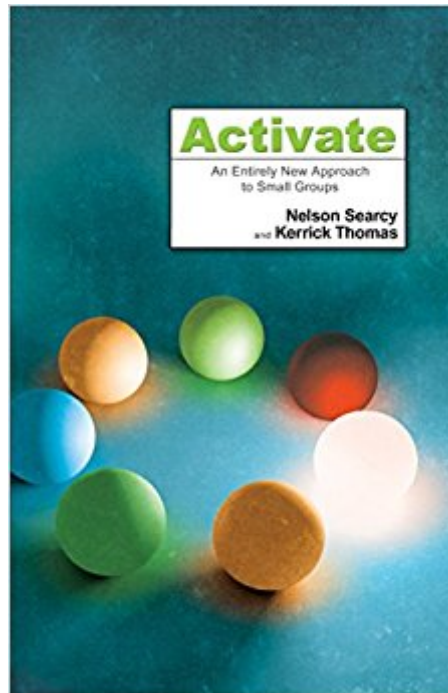




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# Activate: An Entirely New Approach To Small Groups



Synopsis

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 popular, 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, 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 problems facing churches of all sizes.

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Customer Reviews

If you are tired of being involved in a small group ministry that does not excite, fails to get people plugged in and takes a lot of energy to sustain but shows little results, then Activate is for you. The strategies in Activate will help you remove many of the barriers and answer the questions in the way of life-changing small groups at your church, such as: How do I get people excited about small groups? How do I get 100% of my church involved in small groups? How do I raise up and train enough small group leaders? How long should a small group last? How big should a small group be? What does a successful small group structure look like?

How do I get small groups involved in ministry and evangelism? With Activate, you will discover, and learn to implement, proven, strategic principles and strategies that will make small groups at your church successful! --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Nelson Searcy is the founding and lead pastor of The Journey Church. Started in 2002 in New York City, this groundbreaking church sees the majority of its growth coming from new believers and currently meets in locations in Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island, as well as additional locations in San Francisco and Boca Raton. Nelson is the recipient of the prestigious 2013 Donald A. McGavran Award for Outstanding Leadership in Great Commission Research. He is the author of more than seventy-five church growth resources and twelve books, including The Generosity Ladder, Maximize, Connect, and Ignite. Nelson is also an experienced church planter, coach, and church-growth strategist. Before founding The Journey, he served as the director of the Purpose Driven Community at Saddleback Church. He is also the founder of [ChurchLeaderInsights.com](http://ChurchLeaderInsights.com) and the Renegade Pastors Network. Kerrick Thomas is a teaching pastor at The Journey Church and regularly co-leads training events with Nelson Searcy. Prior to his move to New York to plant The Journey, he received a Masters of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary.

Searcy and Thomas have written an outstanding book on starting or developing a small groups program within the local church. The material presented demonstrates a depth of insight that only comes from experience - it's easy to see how Journey Church in New York City went from a handful of people to over 1100 in worship attendance and over 1200 people in almost 100 small groups in just a few years. The book is easy to read, very well organized, very practical, yet gives the important 'why' behind each of the main ideas presented. (I would characterize his other book *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church* in the same way.) The material is covered in several sections within two parts: the Activate Mindset, and the Activate System. The first half talks about several novel principles and shares some solid insight in sidebars and examples. The second half is really nuts-and-bolts on how to apply this approach not just as a set of disconnected ideas, but as a complete system that can be put in place. It doesn't tell the reader what needs to be covered or try to set an agenda for the groups, so there is still a lot of freedom for application and customization of the system to best match the needs of the

church. Part One: The Activate Mindset\* Rethinking Small Group Methodology - Think Inside Out... Not Outside In - Think Larger... Not Smaller - Think Friendship... Not Intimacy\* Rethinking Small Group Structure - Think Short-Term... Not Long-Term - Think Promotion Months... Not Ongoing Sign-ups - Think Church of small groups... Not with small groups\* Rethinking Small Group Strategy - Think Easy... Not Hard - Think Ahead... Not Behind - Think Full Staff Participation... Not Staff Specialist\* Rethinking Small-Group Leadership - Think Apprentice... Not Expert - Think Decentralization... Not Staff Control - Think Leader Multiplication... Not Group Multiplication

Part Two: The Activate System\* Focusing Your Groups (with 5 Focus steps)\* Forming Your Groups (with 3 Forming steps)\* Filling Your Groups (with 11 Fill factors)\* Facilitating Your Groups (with 5 Principles)

Some may be put off by the subtitle 'An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups'. That type of marketing line seems to be best left for readers and reviewers to decide, but the material in the book is not as self-promotional as the title. I had previously read several books by Donahue and others stressing being a Church of Small Groups (not with). What I particularly liked about Activate was that several foundational principles were in common with these other books, while several aspects of the approach were quite different - and Searcy and Thomas discuss the reasons why. (For example, the approach to sign-ups and promotion is different in the Activate system, but with a good rationale.) I would strongly recommend that pastors and/or those responsible for starting or growing a small groups ministry read 'Activate' in addition to the excellent books from other successful practitioners in small group ministry (e.g. Bill Donahue and Andy Stanley, including 'Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone' and 'Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Small Group Culture').

I was asked to take over small groups when our worship/small groups pastor went to another church. After coming across this book I felt like it challenged traditional thinking in a positive way. I presented to our Sr Pastor then the Elders (with power point and handouts to be more effective) and they decided to give it a try. We went from 90 people in small groups to over 220 sign-ups. And since I'm the full time Youth Pastor, we did the same with our youth ministry. We had over 80 student sign-ups and we have never had more than 30 involved in small group within our youth ministry. People were challenged and grew spiritually. We were able to see MANY people get involved that had never been involved before. And many became regular attenders instead of just monthly attendance. It is a great assimilation tool. And possibly the best thing we received out of it was a healthy leadership structure for staff and volunteers. The leadership structure from the book changed the way I run my ministry because it is so very effective. One other thing that is a great

benefit, is existing relationships from small groups do not have to be broken. It gives people the opportunity to sign up together in order to stay together. Yet at the same time people can try something else. Also, there is the serving together concept. Each of the 3 semesters the group does an evangelistic project, a fun night, and serves 2 times a semester on Sundays for church as greeters, ushers, and clean-up crew. Another way to connect people to the working of the church! Definitely worth your time!

I am a Church Planter Pastor and I now very well the importance of a good discipleship system to help people move forward. Small Groups are essential to provide the opportunity for people to connect deeper with God and with others. After reading this book I decided to take the Small Groups Coaching (<http://www.churchleaderinsights.com/sgcoaching>). It helped me to go deeper in the system and prepare my team to apply it in our church. When we launched this system at our church it doubled our Small Groups participation right away!!! Since then, our groups just keeps growing and growing. Even if you need to adapt this system to your reality and specific context, this book will give great advices.

I thought this was a very good book for those wishing to understand how one church has implemented small groups. It is very detailed providing not only a philosophy of small group ministry, but also practical steps of implementation. I can easily see a church that wishes to transition to being a church of small groups using this as a manual. If you need a step by step "how-to" book this is a good option.

Searcy and Thomas have designed a system for small groups that trumps just about everything else out there. They are honest about why small groups don't attract more than a small percentage of worship attendance at most churches, and explain from the ground up a system that has been working in many churches now for a decade. This is about how to have a church OF small groups, rather than a church WITH small groups. They have figured out how to lower the barriers to participation and to create excitement about getting involved. They break it down into parts so that you can find applications even if you don't adopt the entire system. We are not giving up traditional Sunday School for all ages at our church, but I was able to find several transferable ideas here. Searcy has an audio seminar on Small Groups that is a great compliment to this book.

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