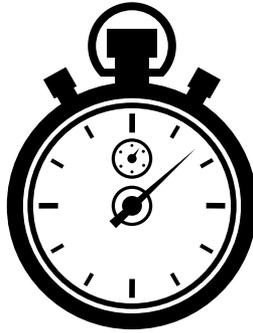


COUNTDOWN

*Launching & Leading
Transformational Groups*



David Francis & Rick Howerton



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Rick Howerton is the Discipleship & Small Groups Specialist at LifeWay Christian Resources. If you entered Rick's house on most any Tuesday night around 6:30, you'd find Rick and his wife Julie welcoming some of their closest friends: their small group made up of believers longing to live in authentic Christian community. Rick attends the church he planted, The Bridge Church, in Spring Hill, Tennessee and serves in the role of founding pastor.

David Francis is the Director of Sunday School at LifeWay Christian Resources. On a typical Sunday morning, you can find David and wife Vickie at First Baptist Church Hendersonville, Tennessee. They arrive about 8:00 to set up their pre-K room, attend the 8:30 worship service, teach their class of 4-5 year old kids at 9:45, and participate in an adult Bible study group at 11:00.



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INTRODUCTION

“Making Humans an Interplanetary Species”

Science fiction? Maybe! But it is also part of the vision of SpaceX, a company that designs, builds, and launches rockets and space vehicles. Founder Elon Musk has big dreams. Like inhabiting Mars!

Mars or Heaven?

I didn't know much about SpaceX until our youngest son moved to Los Angeles to join them. SpaceX intends to put together a team of “the brightest talent on the planet.” Every job profile includes this challenge:

“If you're undaunted by the impossible, actively seeking out insanely challenging projects under tight schedules, and want to work with a remarkable organization pushing the envelope of human exploration, then you will want to be part of the SpaceX legacy.”

Musk says, “SpaceX is like Special Forces... we do the missions that others think are impossible. We have goals that are absurdly ambitious, but we're going to make them happen. We have the potential here at SpaceX to have an incredible effect on the future of humanity and life itself.”

(www.spacex.com/careers)

Read that last sentence again, but substitute the name of your church or group. As a group member or leader, you get to see people embrace Jesus' promise of abundant, eternal life—a life worth living forever! That's a mission like no other. I (David) love Rick's vision:

A biblical small group within walking distance of every person on the planet making disciples who make disciples.

What's yours?

Houston: We Have a Problem

At least Jim Lovell knew where Apollo 13 was supposed to be going when he uttered these four infamous words. In many churches, the groups ministry has a mission deficit. That is, groups don't really know what their mission is, much less why they do things the way they do.

Critical Design and Mission Readiness Reviews

If you are in the business of designing, launching, and guiding rockets and manned space vehicles, you develop and use detailed checklists to make sure nothing is overlooked. The format of a NASA review checklist looks something like the chart below, but with many more rows. Why so much detail? Because people's lives are at stake.

REVIEW CHECKLIST					Initials:
Questions	Applicable?		Compliance?		Date:
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Comments
1.					
2.					
3.					

If we are in the Master's business of designing, launching, and guiding groups, should we not take equal care with people's spiritual lives?

Checklists and Conversations

We have tried to identify most of the major topics and terms you might use to create a checklist for reviewing the design and mission readiness of your group(s). Did you notice the NASA checklist asks the reviewer to determine if the checklist question is applicable? You'll have to make that call, too. Or have a conversation about it. Eventually, design must become a launch. Next to the signature line at the bottom of a NASA pre-launch checklist is this affirmation: "I have personally performed or visually inspected all items on the above checklist and declare them to be complete." Do your groups matter that much?

Conversation Beats Presentation

Materials are available online for presenting this material. But a presentation is not enough. Read each section in preparation for a conversation. Make notes. Jot down questions. Ponder possibilities. Nobody has to "own" or defend the ideas in the book. Just gather to discuss them. Maybe dream. Perhaps decide. Declare. Do. The countdown clock is ticking. Let's get started by reviewing some terms.

10 TERMS

Impacting Conversations about Discipleship through Groups

10.1 Discipleship

Which of the choices below best describes what you think of when you hear the word *discipleship*?

- A path or process for disciple-making that includes all kinds of groups, encourages individual spiritual disciplines and practices, and endorses and employs a wide variety of approaches to disciple-making.
- A particular kind of group defined mostly by the depth and duration of a course of study.
- A training program of the church that is made up of such groups and/or courses, distinct from and doctrinally deeper than ongoing entry-level groups (like small groups or Sunday School), for the purpose of equipping people for ministry and missions.

We so desperately want it to be the first definition. When we use the term *discipleship*, we intend it in the sense of a

- **process or path** for
- **making or becoming** a disciple.

Big D and little d: An SBC Legacy

Those of us with Southern Baptist roots have a little history to deal with when it comes to the word *discipleship*. Some of us may have chosen the second or third description—or all three. If you are not part of the SBC family, you may want to skip to 10.2 now!

In the SBC, there remains a lasting impact from a strong program ministry whose name evolved from Training Union to Church Training to Discipleship Training and then to just [capital D] Discipleship. *Deeper* and *course* became associated with the program. “University” or simply “U” was common, as was the traditional occasion: Sunday afternoon prior to the evening worship service.