

SMALL GROUPS HELP MEN GROW

By Rheta Murry

HUNTERSVILLE, N.C. (PD) — For the past year and a half, God has used men-only small groups and strong just-for-men Bible study resources to grow the men of [Christ Community Church](#) in Huntersville, N.C., spiritually and relationally like nothing else before.

"Sharing real stories about real issues and then challenging the men every week with consistency has been key," Chris Alvis said.

Alvis, who heads up the small group portion of the church's growing men's ministry, started these men's small groups 18 months ago with three men meeting at a local restaurant. Now that number has grown to more than 40.

But for Alvis, the men's ministry growth has been about much more than numerical growth – it has been about what has happened in the hearts of the participating men, including himself.

"The group has thrived and grown with the accountability," Alvis said. "When we go out every week, we know we are going to have to stand before another man and answer questions. It helps deter you from falling to temptation."

According to Alvis, the men have built trust into their relationships with one another as they have opened up about their struggles. Using men's small group materials such as [Every Man's Battle](#) and [Every Man, God's Man](#) have helped as well. The books address specific issues and temptations that men face.

Alvis discovered the *Every Man* books a few years ago when he was going through a tough time in his own life. God turned his past and pain into a passion to help other men. The books, he said, work as a tool to bring other men into the group so they can address their own issues.

Because of Alvis' passion for the *Every Man* books, Alan Higgins, who coordinates discipleship events for the church's men's ministry, asked Saddleback Men's Ministry Pastor Kenny Luck to speak at the church's

second men's conference last March. Each man attending received a free book and an eight-week small group study guide. Luck challenged every man in attendance to participate in a study using the material. During the conference, 14 men accepted Christ and 64 recommitted their lives to him. Many more committed to be a part of a men's small group. Alvis said it's difficult to gauge how many joined or formed groups following the conference, since men from other churches also attended. He said 10 joined his groups, while the church's men's ministry leader, Alan Higgins, recently started a study with another eight men.

It is difficult to get men to commit to a men's group, Alvis said. Still God has used the Everyman series to work and do amazing things with the men who have committed to growing.

Craig Rayner, who attends one of the Alvis' groups, said it challenges and motivates while giving him a desire to develop a deeper relationship with God. "It is awesome to know we can share life struggles with other men who strive to deepen their faith and knowledge of Jesus," he added.

The men challenge one another to stop blending in with the non-believing world by refraining from cursing, telling crude jokes, and not putting themselves in an atmosphere that isn't conducive to a godly lifestyle, Alvis explained. This means eliminating R-rated movies, identifying television shows full of temptation, and not patronizing business establishments having a 'sexual atmosphere' – along with having a quiet time each day.

"We discussed how we need to eliminate those from our lives in order to remove temptations or raise our standards," Alvis said. "When standards are changed, it takes [us] to another level of maturity."

The men have become transparent, open, honest, and 'real' with one another and pray for one another – which are all keys to developing a successful men's ministry, Alvis said. Relationships formed cause growth in men's lives. One man, through the trust in the relationships, opened up about hurtful things in his past. That man had not talked to his father in 25 years. As a result of the group relationships, the man and his father talked face to face, which brought many things that had haunted the younger man for years out in the open, allowing him to begin to heal.

"Had it not been for the support and encouragement of my brothers and Christ, that is an event that I never would have done on my own," Mark Jones said. "(One man) even offered to go with me. Nobody has ever been willing to do something so selfless for me!"

Another man said that it was not until he connected with men that he felt the Holy Spirit move within him.

"We gathered as a group to fight what turned out to be a universal battle for each man," Hoang Drouin said. "Because of the common enemy, each man was in the same fight and was eager to help the other."

Alvis said he and the other men contact one another via e-mail or phone calls, encouraging one another and making themselves available in case something came up. The men know they can contact one another in the midst or aftermath of a struggle.

"It has shown the men who have joined the group that we care, that this is a relationship," Alvis said. "You have to be sensitive to the specific needs of the group and address those needs."

Though the groups have an agenda, Alvis said he tries to be sensitive to God's leading. For example, he may share something that he has been burdened with during a quiet time. It usually will help another man and spark a discussion within the group.

God faithfully continues raising leaders within the small groups to handle the larger number of men seeking God's will in their lives.

"As the men grow and mature, they are stepping up and taking on more leadership and doing mutual ministry within the group," Alvis said. "I have been watching the guys mature and reach out to other men who are now joining and growing."