

HEATHER ZEMPEL

FOREWORD BY MARK BATTERSON

big  
change  
small  
groups

FREE SAMPLE

Big Change, Small Groups  
Published by Orange, a division of The reThink Group, Inc.  
5870 Charlotte Lane, Suite 300  
Cumming, GA 30040 U.S.A.

The Orange logo is a registered trademark of The reThink Group, Inc.

All rights reserved. Except for brief excerpts for review purposes,  
no part of this book may be reproduced or used in any form without  
written permission from the publisher.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the  
*Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®*. Copyright © 1973, 1978,  
1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan.

Other Orange products are available online and direct from the  
publisher. Visit our website at [www.WhatIsOrange.org](http://www.WhatIsOrange.org) for more  
resources like these.

ISBN: 978-1-63570-071-8

©2018 The reThink Group, Inc.

Writers: Heather Zempel  
Lead Small Editing Team: Afton Phillips, Steph Whitacre  
Art Direction: Ryan Boon  
Project Manager: Nate Brandt  
Design: FiveStone

Printed in the United States of America  
First Edition 2017

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

04/20/18



brought to you by the team that developed  
**LEAD SMALL**

## DEDICATION

---

If you are reading this book, you are probably in the position of leading a small tribe of people. That's right, you are a small group leader. You have the courage to focus on a small community of people in order to take on a big challenge. You choose to invest—really invest—in a few lives.

This book is dedicated to you. You are the heroes of the church.

You are making a big difference  
one discussion,  
one lesson,  
one snack,  
one group meeting at a time.

Or maybe you're not a small group leader yet—you're still considering it. Someone has asked you to take that leap of being a small group leader.  
Or you think it's something that might fit with your passion, skills, and schedule.

This book is also dedicated to you. We hope in these pages you will be ignited with a passion for making big change by investing in a few.

## A FEW WORDS IN ADVANCE

---

So you're leading a small group of adults. Congratulations!

Maybe, like many others, you're wondering . . .

What exactly do you do?

Where do you fit in their lives?

What is your role?

And even more, *why*?

That might even be why you picked up this book.

If so, good news. This is your handbook, your user guide.

As you read, you will notice sections marked "Journal."

Benjamin Franklin said, "The shortest pencil is longer than the longest memory." The stuff we write down tends to stay with us longer. And the principles we process on paper seem to be absorbed more deeply. Most of what you read in this book may be forgotten two minutes after you close it. But the stuff you write down will stick.

Warning: If you are reading this on an e-reader, please don't mark on your screen with pen. You might have a little trouble getting it off. Instead, grab a spiral notebook, some sheets of paper, or even that old journal that someone gave you as a gift that you never used. Record your thoughts as you go along to make this book personalized to you.

So, read it.

Contemplate it.

Personalize it.

Let's get started.

**12**

**foreword**

**14**

**big challenge.  
small solution.**

**18**

**leading small**

**22**

**chapter 1  
be present**

**44**

**chapter 2  
create a safe place**

**74**

**chapter 3  
make it personal**

**106**

**chapter 4  
move them out**

**130**

**conclusion**

# foreword

---

There's a good chance you're reading this because you either currently lead a small group of adults or you are considering it. Good for you! I wholeheartedly believe that adults—just like kids—need an awesome small group experience with a great leader. You may also be reading this because you don't feel 100 percent confident you're the right person for the job. Even better! Why? Because I'm convinced you're holding the right resource in your hands this very moment.

How, exactly, will this book help you fill the big shoes of a small group leader?

First, it shrinks an overwhelming role into four primary tasks. I believe as you dive into these four tasks, leading a group will suddenly seem much more doable. (In case you were thinking you must be all things to all people, forget it; nobody can or is.)

Second, *Big Change, Small Groups* explores our innate need for (and the power of) community: God created it; Jesus embodied it; the early church thrived because of it. An effective small group environment is an ideal place to develop authentic faith, impact others, and fulfill the last instructions Jesus gave us to go change the world. You play a significant part in making this happen for the adults you lead, for the glory of the God you serve!

Third, it encourages you to jot down your thoughts as you read. If you don't consider yourself a journaler, let me urge you to make the effort. In my experience, recording your thoughts leads to exploration, inspiration, and even motivation.

One reason I am convinced this is the right resource for you because I know the person behind the words. Heather Zempel is a leader in every sense of the word who also happens to have a passion for helping others grow spiritually. Heather serves as our Pastor of Discipleship at National Community Church in Washington, DC, where she oversees small groups, directs leadership development training, and serves on our weekend teaching team. I'm not sure I know anyone more passionate about discipleship or more gifted at groups. The "community" in National Community Church wouldn't be what it is without her!

I am also convinced you can do this; you can "lead small." You know that what you do for a few has more potential than what you can do for many. You can be engaged and present in little ways that make a big difference. You can learn to see past the mess that may sometimes make its way into your group and wait patiently for the miracle. You can be the leader who makes a difference in the lives of the adults you lead. Yes, YOU.

And it may just change your life as well.

## **Mark Batterson**

**Lead Pastor, National Community Church  
Washington, DC**

# big challenge. small solution.

---

The last command Jesus gave His followers was

Go make disciples.  
Of *all* nations.

Change the world.  
Take the message everywhere.  
Make sure people on the other side of the globe who speak different languages and live with different priorities know about Me.

Change the world in the same way I changed your life.

That was a seemingly impossible task for a small band of 120 Jews living under Roman occupation in the First Century. There were no cars, zero printing presses, and social media hadn't been invented.

Most of us would have started a campaign.  
Launched a mass marketing strategy.  
Organized a rally.

We would have done something big to meet Jesus' big challenge.

To gain a big following, you have to ...  
make a big, compelling, persuasive speech.  
accomplish a big feat.  
gather a large following of people.

Get noticed.  
Get attention.  
Get people talking.

Go big or go home.

But what if “go home” was actually the solution Jesus advocated?

It was a big challenge. But Jesus had a small solution.

The power of community. Leveraging the place where you live.

### **What we call leading small.**

When God came to earth wrapped in the skin of His own creation, He did not call a press conference or organize a world tour or advertise five nights of revival at the Colosseum in Rome.

In fact, He never even went to the places of influence or power. Instead, He settled around the fishing villages on the Sea of Galilee and gathered twelve men around him. He did life with them and pointed out the character and mission of God along the way. He said, “Follow me. Do what I do the way I do it.”

That was His strategy for changing the world. It was a strategy followed by the apostle Paul. As Paul took the message of God to more and more distant cities, he started churches as small groups in homes.

**Lydia’s house.**

**Priscilla and Aquila’s house.**

**Nympha’s house.**

**Philemon and Apphia’s house.**

Paul told his young protégé Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” (2 Timothy 2:2).

In other words, here’s how to get started. Just gather together some faithful people and share your life with them. And then encourage them to gather small groups around them.

**Pass on the faith one small group at a time.**

**Change the world one small group at a time.**

**Fulfill Jesus’ mission one small group at a time.**

Within a few hundred years, these gatherings had so transformed their world that the entire empire was buzzing.

Two thousand years later, small bands of Jesus’ followers still gather in homes, coffeehouses, work conference rooms, playgrounds, and church classrooms to experience the transformative power of community.



**BIG CHANGE  
HAPPENS  
WHEN WE  
LEAD SMALL.**

# leading small

---

“What exactly do you mean by leading small?”

That’s a phrase we’ve picked up as we’ve seen the power of small groups with consistent leaders. We’ve seen it work for every age: from the preschoolers to kids to teens to grown-up groups like the ones we’re talking about here.

What we do for a few will always have more potential than what we do for many.

That means we simply make a choice to invest strategically in the lives of a few over time so we can help them grow an authentic faith.

The idea of community is essential to the character of God. In fact, God exists as a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It’s a theological construct called the Trinity that is impossible to grasp yet inextricably core to our understanding of the connection God wants us to pursue. The God we follow exists as a community in and of Himself.

To follow the heart of God, we must live in community. There are dozens of commands in Scripture that we cannot be obedient to outside the context of community.

They are the “one another” commands.

Love one another.  
Serve one another.  
Honor one another.  
Forgive one another.

Accept one another.  
Bear one another's burdens.

In John 13:35, Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Jesus made it clear that our love for one another would send a clear and compelling message to the world.

Not our sermons  
or books  
or worship songs.

Instead,  
**The way we connect to one another.**  
**The way we cultivate community.**  
**The way we love.**

In John 17, Jesus prayed that his followers would be "one." That just like He and the Father walked in inseparable community, those coming after Him would find strength, identity, and purpose within the context of community.

His reason? *"So that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 20:21)."*

Once again, community would be the catalyst for spreading his message and changing the world.

Small groups would be the engine for discipleship.  
Small groups would be the fuel for spreading the message of Jesus around the world.  
Small groups would be the crucible for building and growing authentic faith.

Jesus' last command cannot become our least concern.

It's not an overwhelming task if we choose to begin small.

**We lead small to build big faith.**

**We lead small to generate lasting faith.**

**We lead small to produce authentic faith.**

In every stage of life and stage of their faith journey, every person needs the kind of influence you have the potential to give.

But what exactly do you do?

What exactly is your role?

There is the potential to wear so many hats:

Pastor

Resident theologian

Counselor

Caregiver

Coach

Prayer warrior

Teacher

Best friend

And all with a touch of Martha Stewart hospitality.

How can one person be expected to be good at all of those things? You can't. But it's not your job to be all of those things to the people in your group.

That's why we've attempted to boil down the small group leader (SGL) mission to four primary tasks:



**Be  
Present**



**Create a  
Safe Place**



**Make It  
Personal**



**Move  
Them Out**

Even more, you will understand how these four strategies will encourage the personal, vibrant, passionate, tested, living, authentic faith needed to face our big challenge, and why the only way to fully invest in these strategies is by leading small.

So, let's change the world.

Oh, you still have a few questions? Okay, keep reading!





**be  
present**

# be present

## CONNECT THEIR FAITH TO A COMMUNITY

---

In the beginning, God created.

At the sound of his voice, galaxies were hurled into orbit.

Light beamed from the heavens and waters covered the earth.

Valleys dug deep and mountains sprung high.

Birds flew in the air and fish swam in the seas.

Insects filled the ground and dinosaurs thundered across the land.

And it was good.

Then God made man.

Adam.

The perfect image of God Himself. The masterpiece. The magnum opus of all creation.

But . . .

It. Was. *Not*. Good.

Not yet at least.

Immersed in lush vegetation, living in paradise, surrounded by every species of animal, Adam found himself alone.

Even though he was designed to be the perfect image-bearer and reflection of the Creator . . .

Even though he was made to have direct community with God himself . . .

Something was wrong.

He had no one like him—to talk to, to laugh with, to dance with.

What we might read as a hiccup in the creation story may be an intentional play by God to drive home an important idea:

## **WE WERE CREATED WITH THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY.**

So God made Eve.

And now, with man and woman together, God declared that His creation was very good.

Fast-forward thousands of years.  
God came to Earth as man.  
At the beginning of Jesus' ministry  
He chose twelve guys.  
He didn't invite the masses.

**His goal was not to fill the largest amphitheater in Corinth.  
He led thousands but chose to invest in, to do life with, a few.**

Understanding the human need for community and its significance in our lives, Jesus surrounded Himself with a few deep relationships. In doing this, He connected the faith of the twelve. And after Jesus was no longer on Earth to lead them, the disciples were able to stay strong in their faith because it was connected to others.

Still not convinced? Let's go a step further.

Fifty years passed and Paul was busy setting up the Church in cities across the known world—building the Church around this concept of community.

**The earliest churches had no buildings.**

No pulpits.

No choirs or praise bands.

**There were no kids' programs.**

No student ministries.

No fall festivals or Easter outreaches.

**There was simply community.**

In Acts 2, we catch a glimpse of what the early church was doing. It says that they met regularly

**in the temple**

(kind of like their regular church service)

**and from house to house**

(getting up close and personal).

They were devoted to

**the apostle's teaching**

(they were learning together)

**to fellowship**

(they were having fun, laughing, sharing, doing life together)

**breaking bread**

(we church people have a long history with the potluck)

**and prayer**

(connecting with God together).

Genuine, pure, tight-knit, nothing-to-hide, kill-my-best-goat-for-you kind of community.

The church wasn't a place. It wasn't a building or an event or an organization. It was a group of people whose lives had been changed by Jesus and who were on mission to spread His message and build His kingdom. Whenever the group gathered, the church thrived. Wherever the group gathered, the larger communities around them were impacted. Widows

and children were fed. The poor were seen as equals. The sick were cared for. It was said that those in the Roman Empire would remark, "See how these Christians love one another."

When Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, he made a statement that reveals, almost defines, this early glimpse of community:

"So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well (1 Thessalonians 2:8)."

There it is.

### **Your job as an SGL.**

You care.

You love.

You delight.

But most importantly, you share—not just the Gospel—but your life as well.

God *is* community—as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God created us for community.

Jesus illustrated community.

The Church practiced community.

Therefore, connecting the faith of your few to a community is your primary goal. So, how do you create this community?

## **BE PRESENT.**

**When you choose to be present you  
connect authentic faith.**

**When you choose to be present,  
that means you . . .**



1

**Show up predictably.**



2

**Show up mentally.**



3

**Show up randomly.**

## 1

**Show Up Predictably**

For most of you, showing up predictably means showing up weekly. For a few, it may mean bi-weekly or even monthly. But for most, it is showing up every week.

Being there.

Arriving on time.

Physically being present.

Showing up consistently and predictably establishes the foundation of a small group that foundation is trust.

You cannot lead a small group without trust.

You cannot build a community without trust.

And the first step to gaining the trust of your few is making sure they know you will show up consistently and predictably.

**The recent college graduate** needs someone they can call when they need some life wisdom.

**The female executive** needs someone to know that this season at work is high pressure and high stakes, but her relationships matter most.

**The schoolteacher** needs someone who will encourage them just a little bit more at the start of the school year.

**The new dad** needs someone who can show him how to clean a diaper explosion, wipe off the spit-up, and get a screaming kid to sleep all while tending to the needs of his thriving business.

**The young stay-at-home mom** needs someone who can string together actual sentences and relate to her many more-than-full-time jobs.

Everybody needs someone who knows their name and knows what's happening in their life.

Granted, you probably can't be all these things to all the people in your group. But you can lay that foundation. Establish that expectation. And create an environment in which people can be those things for each other.

Make your group a place where each person can play a role in making a difference in someone else's life.

Does it happen overnight?

Does this kind of community happen the first time you meet?

Is there a formula for creating it?

No.

But consistent, predictable presence steadily weaves the relational Velcro that will eventually create strong, healthy, and vibrant community.

To start building a framework of a group where everybody knows your name and cares about what's happening in your life, have them share:

Ask a different person to share their story each week as you launch a new group.

Ask each group member to share their week's high point and low point.

Ask people to share their hero, highlight, and hardship from childhood.

Or use an icebreaker question. Lean into icebreaker questions that are fun and reveal someone's history and personality. Try something like:

If you could go to any concert in the history of the world, what would it be?

What accomplishment, before the sixth grade, are you most proud of?

What three people have been most influential in your life?

What are your family's Christmas/Thanksgiving/Easter/Fourth of July traditions?

What was your favorite family vacation and why?





## 2

**Show Up Mentally**

Next, show up mentally. That means being fully present with those in front of you. Physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Before you come to the group, make sure you're prepared.

If there is a lesson, make sure you've completed it.

If you need to have questions ready to ask, make sure they are thoughtful and have a progressive movement to them.

Move from questions surrounding

**Facts** (What did you read? What did you observe)

to

**Opinion** (What did you think about this? How did it make you feel? How do you reconcile these truths with what you experience in your own life?)

to

**Action** (What are we going to do about this? How can we make this practical?)

If a group is meeting at your home, make sure it is comfortable and inviting. If you are meeting in a public space like a coffeehouse or a restaurant, arrive early enough to grab a good spot. Regardless of where you meet, make sure it sends the message "we were expecting you."

Be prepared by praying.

Pray for your group members and the needs you know are present in their lives.

Pray that the time your group spends together would be beneficial and encouraging.

Pray that you, as the leader, would have wisdom, discernment, and grace as you lead.

While you are at the group, be present mentally by . . . turning off your phone—or at least silence the rings and notifications. not thinking about work—it will still be there when you get back. leaning in to listen—and not to make your next point.

Let your curiosity guide you. Be aware of what's being said, what's being felt, and what's happening in the group.

Don't be so determined to get through a curriculum or a series of questions that you miss a moment.

A moment for encouragement.

A moment to let some silence sit so new ideas can sink in.

A moment for someone else to speak up.

A moment to stop and pray.

Be engaged.





## 3

## Show Up Randomly

Once you start showing up predictably, your few will begin to expect it. Good. But what if, on occasion, you surprised them? What if you showed up at a time and place they weren't expecting?

When I was walking through a pretty confusing time of infertility, I only shared my experiences with a very small circle. A couple years later, I received a card in the mail from my friend Nina. It simply said, "I'm still praying." That was it. No lengthy prayers. No theological discourse. Not even a Bible verse. Just a simple reminder that I was not alone.

Many years and a toddler later, I still have that note. There is something about it that brings me courage and builds my faith when I go through any kind of challenging time because it is a reminder that

I  
am  
NOT  
alone.

People are thinking about me outside of group. They are praying for me outside the scheduled prayer time. They are "with me" in my journey.

When we say "random" we don't mean haphazard. We mean showing up in very intentional but perhaps unexpected ways. Intersecting their life where it happens. Making small gestures that make a big impact.

Another time, I went to the hospital to visit a member of our church. When I arrived, it was standing room only. The room was packed with this member's small group, which had already figured out plans for meal delivery, care, and how they would be chauffeured home from the hospital.

That's the way the church should operate.

Help someone move.

Make a phone call to encourage someone before the big presentation.

Give a shout-out on social media.

Send a birthday card or an anniversary card.

Buy a small gift card for that person who always brings the snacks.

Shoot a text that says, "I'm still praying."

When invited, show up to their party or their kid's recital or concert or game or chess match.

It doesn't have to be big and earth-shattering. Again, it's about the power of small groups—being engaged and present in little ways.





These small connections may seem insignificant—and sometimes even inconvenient. But when you choose to be present in an unexpected way, outside of your weekly group time, you reinforce your group members' connection to the community you are creating. They have a greater sense of belonging because they feel cared for and connected.

And this sense of community will grow and encourage authentic faith when you . . .

**1**

**Show up  
predictably.**

**2**

**Show up  
mentally.**

**3**

**Show up  
randomly.**

Your group will begin to trust. They will begin to open up. They will begin to do for others what you have done for them. They will begin to root themselves in the kind of community . . .

God designed them to need.  
Jesus illustrated with the disciples.  
the early church practiced regularly.



**WHEN YOU  
CHOOSE TO  
BE PRESENT,  
YOU CONNECT  
AUTHENTIC  
FAITH.**

## Big Change. Small Groups

You are a small group leader of adult small groups—the hero of the church. You have the courage to focus on a small community of people in order to take on a big challenge. You choose to invest—really invest—in a few lives. Because you believe that what we do for a few will always have more potential than what we do for many.

You are making a big difference  
one discussion,  
one lesson,  
one snack,  
one group meeting at a time.

But you may be wondering . . .  
What exactly do I do?  
Where do I fit in their lives?  
What is my role?  
And even more importantly, why?

In *Big Change, Small Groups* Heather Zempel explores the four primary tasks every small group leader of adults needs to know. You'll understand how these four strategies will encourage the personal, vibrant, passionate, tested, living, authentic faith needed to face our big challenge, and why the only way to fully invest in these strategies is by leading a few.



[WWW.WHATISORANGE.ORG](http://WWW.WHATISORANGE.ORG)

