

THE POCKET GUIDE TO  
LEADING A  
SMALL  
GROUP

52 ways to help you  
and your small group grow

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# Introduction

We had just finished a Saturday morning training seminar for new small group leaders in a large church. Afterward, Dan and his wife, Kim, thanked us for coming to their church. They were excited about their future, but we could tell they were apprehensive about launching out into small group leadership.

Then Kim looked at us intently. With a big smile she asked, “Which one of you will go home with us until we get this right?” Of course, we couldn’t go home with them and we can’t go home with you either—but we can help you!

## **Why we wrote this book**

Small group leadership is one of the hardest, yet most fulfilling challenges one can accept. We also collaborated on this book for three other reasons.

Reason #1 - Small group leadership demands immense patience and perseverance. It is extremely difficult to work for a harvest that seems slow in coming. At times it feels like the enemy is fighting you every step of the way, doesn’t it? This book provides encouragement in strong doses.

Reason #2 - After you lead a group for a few years, there may be a temptation to rely on your own experience, knowledge, and insight. By working through this pocket book a few pages a day during your devotional time, it will serve as a reminder that the spiritual life of the group flows from the giver of life, Jesus Christ.

Reason #3 - It's common for leaders to fall into a routine or a rut. You may find yourself doing what you have always done with the same old results. Is your group stagnant or meetings monotonous? In this book, you'll find fresh ideas, practical suggestions, and a new perspective.

### **Why so many short chapters?**

Learning to lead a healthy, growing, multiplying small group effectively is a little like eating an elephant. You can't 'get it' all at once. You have to "eat it one bite at a time," learning a little more regularly and putting it into practice.

We have culled our combined sixty years of small group leadership experience to give you what we believe are the 52 most important lessons on small group leadership. If you take each lesson seriously and apply it to your ministry, you will enjoy a healthy, growing, multiplying small group.

This "small but mighty" book contains high-octane equipment, empowerment, and encouragement for any small group leader. Great for beginners, it also offers practical guidance for the most seasoned veteran. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem in 52 days. You can learn to effectively lead a small group through these 52 chapters. Each one is written as a stand-alone article, yet they tie together to train, teach, and encourage small group leaders through the daily and weekly challenges all leaders face.

## **How to use this book effectively**

The human mind typically creates vague memories and then builds on them like a pearl does with a grain of sand. Reading this pocket book more than once will give you the greatest benefit. Because of its size, it won't take long to read and then re-read. Consider the following options to get the most out of the content.

If you've been leading a group for a year or more, read the whole book straight through to get the big picture of how to lead small groups more effectively. Then, read a chapter a day for 52 days and highlight the issues you currently face as a leader. When you're done, go back through it, find the highlighted areas, and work on them one at a time.

If you're new to small group leadership, read the whole book straight through and then re-read just one chapter a week. Work hard on the application of each chapter's content throughout a calendar year and you'll become one of those special leaders that people love to follow.

If you're married, you can read this book aloud to your spouse using one of the routines above and then apply it as a team. We also recommend that you discuss what you are learning with your small group coach or pastor, other small group leaders, and with those you are mentoring as future leaders. Verbalizing the content of this book increases retention dramatically and turns fleeting ideas into lifelong ministry principles.

We pray that this little book will become more

than a book to you. May it become your pocket coach, equipping encourager, and idea catalyst.

- Dave and Rod (while enjoying looking at the mountains from Dave's back porch at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains.)



## Chapter 1

# God's Big Priorities

By Dave

Everyone in our small group leader training session had been instructed to introduce themselves to five people before they sat down. Tony sheepishly extended his hand to me and with some embarrassment said, “My name is Tony. I am *just* a small group leader here.”

I looked him in the eye as I shook his hand. I smiled and replied, “There is no such thing as *just* a small group leader. In God's eyes, small groups are a *big* priority and so are small group leaders.”

### **We need each other**

The heart cry of every human and the lifestyle of every follower of Jesus Christ is an overwhelming need for community. Christian community is essential to us because we were created to work together. The Apostle Paul's favorite term for the church was “the body of Christ.” He emphasized that no single part could survive on its own. Every part relied on the others. In 1 Corinthians 12:21, he wrote, “*The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don't need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don't need you!’*”

Living a life of isolation has damaging results. Loneliness has been called the most devastating

illness of our day. Phil Zambaro, a Stanford University professor writes,

“I know of no more potent killer than isolation. There is no more destructive influence on the physical and mental health than isolation of you from me and us from them. It has been known to be the central agent in the etiology of depression, paranoid schizophrenia, rape, suicide, mass murder, and a wide variety of diseases.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Our relational DNA**

Our hunger for relationships is an identifying mark of our humanity. Small group experts Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson write, “God chose to embed in us a distinct kind of DNA. God created us all with a ‘communal gene,’ an inborn, intentional, inescapable part of what it means to be human.”

They continue,

This relational DNA or “community gene” helps explain why churches need small groups. People don’t come to church simply to satisfy spiritual needs. They come internally wired with a desire for connection ... their hunger for togetherness is an inescapable mark of humanity.”<sup>2</sup>

What better way to scratch this human itch and fill this gaping need for community than

through an effective small group? Learning to lead a small group where people move from isolation to connection and from loneliness to love is one of the greatest ministries on the planet!

Make no mistake about it. Your small group is a big priority. It has the power to create community and connectedness. It can foster real fellowship. Biblical fellowship involves participating in life with others to the point of knowing them, feeling their hurts, sharing their joys, and encouraging their hearts. Chuck Swindoll describes what happens when real fellowship occurs. “Fences come down. Masks come off. Welcome signs are hung outside the door. Keys to the doors of our lives are duplicated and distributed. Joys and sorrows are shared.”<sup>3</sup>

**Lesson #1:  
Your small group  
is a very big  
priority to God.**

### **First things first**

The first thing every small group leader should know is that their small group is a BIG priority. It is vitally important. Being asked to lead a small group is one of the greatest privileges on the planet. Don't take it lightly or think yourself lowly like the young man I met at that training event. Value the opportunity and prioritize it in your schedule.

### **Action Points:**

1. Thank God for the opportunity you have been given to be involved in a small group.
2. Determine to cooperate with God to become the best small group leader you can possibly be.

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### *Notes:*

1. Charles Swindoll, *Dropping Your Guard*, (Waco, TX, WORD, Incorporated, 1983), p. 222.
2. Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2001), p. 24.
3. Swindoll, p. 22.