

Change Happens

Finding Your Way

Through Life's Transitions

Leader's Guide

by

C. W. Brister

This *Leader's Guide* provides suggestions for guiding a group study of *Change Happens* by C. W. Brister. The book is available from Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., by calling **1-800-568-1248** or by visiting our on-line bookstore at **www.helwys.com/online.html**

PREFACE

Life has a way of pushing us into the cross-currents of change at every stage of our existence. Some changes are of our own making; others are made for us. This guidebook conveys the author's desire to assist you in facing major turning points and growing through the seasons of life.

You will discover real drama, see how events impact lives, and learn coping skills from other persons' stories as you read *Change Happens: Finding Your Way Through Life's Transitions*. The work of transition management is challenging, difficult, yet rewarding. You will sense the author's optimism about possibilities for growth that change events offer. The sources of my hopefulness for facing life's passages are twofold: faith in God as our anchor in this universe and faithful companions who provide true friendship for life together.

Our clearest expressions of how God cares for the earth and for us may be found in the life of Jesus Christ. His visit to Planet Earth is what the New Testament is all about. Whatever your circumstances, God's care for you continues today through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Begin reading *Change Happens* with expectancy that your story is part of the universal stories of humankind. You will find yourself identifying with experiences as you read, at least with some of them. Still, no other story is like *yours*!

Each chapter of *Change Happens* closes with questions for you to answer. Then there are group questions for discussion. This guidebook will help you move to advanced questions and learn from others' experiences about transition management. It anticipates group discussion in which you will find wise companionship and certitude for reaching your life's destination.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

You may be asking, "What's in this guidebook for me?" Happily, you are not a lone ranger. You will need to complete responses to assignments yourself. Then you will share a Support Group's ministry. Here is how it will work.

THE SUPPORT GROUP IDEA.

This guidebook is designed for use by Support Group members in a Life Transition Support Group, 12-Step Support Group, Corporate Change or Workplace Support Group, or Turning Point Support Group. A Support Group may be formed in any setting where persons face challenging issues or troublesome events and meet to strengthen one another. Contexts for Support Groups include congregational settings, schools, workplaces, expatriate organizations, military bases, medical and rehabilitation centers, prisons, and international retreat centers.

THE SUPPORT GROUP EXPERIENCE.

The focus of a Support Group is to foster commonality in

dealing with life issues, especially transition experiences. The group's goal is twofold: sharing an inward journey of understanding life-impact events and starting an outward journey toward some personal or group destination. The goal is discovery and growth—emotional, intellectual, and spiritual maturity. Participating in the group process invites reflecting on *Change Happens*, sharing of stories, enjoying creative moments, bonding with kindred spirits, and targeting future goals.

HOW TO SHARE THE SUPPORT GROUP PROCESS.

First, read the assigned chapter in *Change Happens* prior to your group session. Note the thought questions in the Reflective Exercises at each chapter's close. Write your responses in the Study Guide to assignments for your chapter. You will experience the link between the book's discussion and life's events. Your group facilitator will highlight big ideas from *Change Happens*, then invite group discussion based on your responses.

HOW TO RESOURCE A SUPPORT GROUP.

Facilitating a Support Group requires a wise, skilled, competent and caring leader. A Support Group is more than a hug-and-cry circle. It is neither a clique of snobs nor a cluster of bitter losers. A wise facilitator enables negative emotional expression, yet inspires forgiveness, courage, and the resolve to face life's turning points. Group participants encourage and gain strength from one another, as well as empowerment from God's Spirit. Your goal is getting to a new destination on life's journey while assisting other travelers on the road.

THE SUPPORT GROUP COVENANT.

Starting a Support Group requires an effective facilitator; a group of persons sharing similar, though not identical, life issues (example: divorce); a suitable, private meeting area; and child care for group members with young children. A group covenant of dates, time, place, initiative, and responsibility for meetings is essential. Confidentiality of group interactions is confirmed by a written pledge at the first meeting.

A SAMPLE SUPPORT GROUP COVENANT.

I pledge to respect the individuality and integrity of each person in this Support Group. I will look to the Facilitator for group leadership, follow group protocol, and will honor the confidential nature of group sharing and group process.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

GETTING A SUPPORT GROUP STARTED.

How does one start a Support Group for transition management? First, target a few persons facing turning points—like a job search, facing a plant or military base closure, divorce, forced terminations, care of a “special” family member, a spouse’s death, imprisonment, or surviving a major disaster. Transition management is akin to grief recovery as persons try to link true spirituality with life events and transform the heart for future stories.

MARKETING YOUR SUPPORT GROUP.

Advertise in a local paper. Words like *Discovery*, *Bumps on the Road*, *Turning Points*, *From Termination to Determination*, or simply *Facing Life’s Transitions* will attract potential group members. Provide a central office phone/fax number so that specific information about the next group may be provided to callers. If fees are involved, they should be clarified up front—for books, resource materials, facilitator’s charges, and the like.

SHARING SUPPORT GROUP LIFE TOGETHER.

You will be growing and learning as a Support Group member. There will be strangers in the room who soon will become your friends. Some things you share will be fantastic, some depressing, but most will be inspiring. Now, please read through each chapter. Respond to the exercises in the Study Guide in advance of each group meeting. Best wishes on your journey.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS AHEAD FOR US?

Change is inevitable. Like the ocean tides that rise and fall twice a day, caused by the gravitational attraction of the sun and moon on the earth’s surface, change happens. Shifts may be fast or slow. An automobile accident can happen instantly and alter the rest of one’s life. But it took 300 years to end the evil apartheid system in South Africa that held a promising nation hostage. And China’s history has unfolded over thousands of years. Change brings something new, or at least different, to life and prompts varied responses on a continuum from denial to acceptance. Reverses prompt feelings of loss, confusion, and resentment. Not all changes improve our welfare, but without change life becomes static and stale.

Transformations affect so much all around and inside us: from health experiences to homelife, from diets and exercise programs to media shifts from printed to visual images, from fads in clothing to styles of music and sources of entertainment. Adult USAmericans’ “Ozzie and Harriet” world has been transformed into an interactive, high-tech global village. Computer-resistant workers are being replaced by cyberspace

citizens who embrace and use the latest technology. Organizations are being dejobbed.¹ Today's workers are encouraged to search for work that needs doing rather than for a particular job or position.

When change is imposed on people without their input or consent, their response is usually negative. Forced events, like terrifying violence in a war-shattered country or being held hostage at gun point, tend to paralyze behavior and prompt feelings of anxiety and resentment. People resist change when its purpose, cost, and direction is unclear. When we are comfortable with the way things are, we resist the challenge to change. When life's routine gets interrupted and the future is uncertain, our thoughts get confused and anxiety is elevated.

INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS FAITH

The religious faith factor can make a great difference in the degree of one's anxiety, frustration, and adaptation when change happens. A medical doctor on a healing mission with war-scarred expatriates confessed: "We could see the Lord's hand in all of those events and felt a real confirmation that our being there was distinctly under (God's) orchestration." Trust in God works differently for members of different generations and belief systems. Boosters in positions of power and influence do church, pray, and experience faith differently from Boomers or Generation Xers. Whatever one's experience, trust in God's steadying power reassures us and calms our fears. We don't always have the luxury of choosing what happens to us or someone we love. We can shape our attitude in responding to life's unplanned circumstances.

Events imposed on us are often disruptive, even destructive. When Lauren was only four years of age, she was abducted by two boys, ages ten and fourteen. They offered her a ride on their bicycle and promised to take her to a carnival. Instead, they carried her to an athletic stadium where empty school busses were parked. Each of the boys sexually attacked Lauren, forcing her to lie on an empty school bus floor. Fortunately, a security guard spotted the bus door ajar and surprised the boys, who were apprehended and handed over to juvenile officers. The negative impact of that experience on Lauren may be processed over her entire lifetime. And the boys each face up to forty years' imprisonment for their abusive behavior.

When reversals happen, they evoke varied responses: like a natural disaster, a house fire, an attempted robbery, getting lost in a strange city, cancellation of a holiday trip, a corporate downsizing or hostile takeover with job terminations, loss of a cherished piece of jewelry, an accidental fall with a consequent spinal cord injury, a major stock market correction, a child's accidental drowning, a hunting accident, or diagnosis of cancer. When life wounds, disrupts, or disappoints us, we may feel victimized, betrayed, taken advantage of, or angered by events that seem unfair. We may even become angry with God.

Theresa Neil, a 35-year-old elementary school teacher,

testified to the strength faith in God provided in her battle with cancer. In the ten months since she learned that cancer had exploded throughout her body, Neil was forced to rethink what it means to live!² The mother of three children—daughters age 16 and 7, and a son, 12—struggled through disbelief at the diagnosis, but finally came to terms with reality. Before her health experience, Neil was not a religious person. Now, she has affirmed her devotion to God. “How terrible to think there isn’t a higher power,” she observed in her final weeks of life.

How easily we forget that positive, celebrative things also happen to us: a gift trip to summer camp; a clean bill of health after a physical examination; all “A’s” on a school report card (when we expected a “B” in algebra); a surprise birthday party; engagement for marriage; unsought recognition or good fortune; a job promotion; a successful surgical procedure, like cataract removal with lens implant; or an event that becomes “a blessing in disguise.” Stress decreases when we count our blessings and cultivate gratitude.

Our minds have an affinity for negative experiences and hurtful occurrences. Because of our memory storehouse of adverse events—abusive persons; annoying disabilities; experiences of family alienation, broken relations, and deep loss; our own violated values; scars of war; and losses from quirks of mother nature—changes involve giving up painful emotions. We must reeducate our memories to focus on positive virtues, surprise gifts, favorite friendships, inspiring travels, unmerited privileges, and new directions. Joystealers hurt and humiliate us, but “the joy of the Lord is (our true) strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

INTERNAL CHANGE

Things happen *to* us, but we initiate many alterations ourselves. We may need a wide-angle lens to revision *internal* changes—the things we make or help to happen. The paradox of change is that variations often occur *through* us, not just *to* us. Further, our responses to wake-up calls are highly personal and idiosyncratic. Some persons appear characteristically hopeful, positive, optimistic, and upbeat. A person you know may be singularly understanding, forgiving, affirming, or encouraging. He or she can take the raw materials life dishes out and build a dream castle. In contrast, a characteristically negative, grumbling, resistant, or angry person can experience a similar event and react in a defensive, critical, aberrant, hurtful, or destructive manner.

Think again of those *self-initiated* changes with positive outcomes: a youth’s decision to make something of his or her life; a team’s renewed effort to win an athletic contest; a politician’s efforts on behalf of his or her constituents; a student’s determination to obtain an advanced professional degree or licensure; a just outcome to social oppression; a couple’s decision for marriage; a person’s vocational decision favoring altruism, not greed; a weight loss incentive; or taking the dream trip of a lifetime. Life’s game plan can be reevaluated internally because of an external event, like a firm’s outsourcing

a parts contract, or a terrorist attack on a government installation.

We do not know all that is ahead of us. Some changes are part of every day. They come and go silently, with little notice, like our dress for the day, mealtime, traffic signals, odometer mileage on a vehicle, getting the mail, weather, getting a new computer software program at work, or news on TV. Other events are more massive and affect the flow of history, welfare of institutions, and destiny of nations, like population birthrates and demographics, the ozone layer, a generous endowment of the arts, a coup d'etat and violent overthrow of an existing government, increased AIDS infections and positive HIV diagnoses, aging population shifts, speed of information on the Internet, and transfer of powers as in Hong Kong's handover to China.

Positive persons tend to see the beneficial factors resulting from altered events. They tend to view life with holistic vision and see larger patterns of history. Successful changers are open to others' suggestions and ideas. They are fair-minded and inclusive in spirit. They tend to feel good about new experiences and are willing to move forward in support of innovative projects. We view successful change navigators as open-minded, reasonable, caring, and decisive. They focus on benefits of transitions and celebrate even small victories. In contrast, change inhibitors are resistant to the need for vision, alteration, improvement, and advancement as they travel through life's voyage.

THE CHANGE CONTINUUM

Some change researchers see patterns of adaptation in a predictable change cycle. Lillie Brock and Mary Ann Salerno have developed a simple tool to assist people to move through six stages from loss to integration.³ The authors of this interchange cycle schema attribute a flow of feelings and behaviors for each of six observed stages of loss management. Their work is based on the premise that personal change precedes organizational change. Their how-to manual is akin to grief management typologies developed by psychiatrists almost a century ago.

My own research, observation, and experience points to a continuum of responses to change rather than to a predictable cycle. In truth, individual differences govern responses to events. Experts cannot tell you how you are supposed to feel at some critical point. Your spiritual values, emotions, and adaptive skills are yours; they cannot be prefabricated into stages.

In answer to our introductory question, "What is ahead for us?" I will illustrate change responses on ten scales. They typify the wide ranges of responses people make to change events in personal and family life, the workplace, industry, entertainment, communication, technology, science and religion, government and international affairs.

When change management professionals think about change in human systems, they can identify three levels of

intervention: the larger, whole system, the group or team, and personal adaptation. In spiritual terms these changes relate to God and the realm of the ultimate meaning of existence; other persons in one's family, workplace, community, and the world order; and to oneself. Let's invert this order and consider continuums of continuous adaptation to change events related to oneself, others, and God. This typology is illustrative, not inclusive of Focus on understanding the session content.transformations.

How would you score your own "comfort level" (balance, homeostasis) in these areas if the left item is a *one* and the right item is a *ten*?

Adaptation to Change Processes Related to Oneself:

1.1

From MYSTERY to MEANING. Some people live in a fog, unable to understand why things happen to them, to family and friends, or in the larger world order. Others, in contrast, pursue life with vision, purpose, and goal-oriented meaning. Is life simply a matter of luck?

Our ancestors sang, "Through many dangers, toils and snares, we have already come " Had the hymn writer stopped with life's awful chaos, generations following might have remained mired in pitfalls. But John Newton's faith in the Spirit of God was reflected in his closing, triumphant stanzas of **Amazing Grace**. Long before, the ancient psalmist located the Source of meaning as he praised God: "You send forth your Spirit and we are recreated" (Ps. 104:30). The forces of nature, often beyond human understanding, were viewed as renewing "the face of the earth."

Philosophers have long sought to interpret life's tragic mysteries. Stoics, for example, sought to repress passion and dichotomize flesh and spirit, dividing the head and the heart. Other ascetic types sought holiness by denial of human feelings through passive escape from life's rigors. The religion of OT Jews and NT Christians, pictured in the Bible, invites us to face reality with God who is very near. Experiencing God is more than "a stiff upper lip;" it is the way of real *shalom*, peace, and wholeness.

1.2

From ENTRAPMENT to FREEDOM. History has shown us pathfinders of unbounded freedom, venturesomeness, creativity, and risk-taking. We are attracted to such persons whom we view as role models. Others around us appear trapped, cynical, self-focused, and unable to tackle life's challenges. Between these extremes are emerging persons, struggling out of imprisonments of self or spirit or situations. Others courageously adapt to physical challenges or emotional limitations. What about yourself? Where do you fit on the one (trapped) to ten (free) scale?

1.3

From **IDENTITY CONFUSION** to **VOCATIONAL CLARITY**. The power to recognize that one is needed, to choose who “I” am, what I will make of my life (more than a livelihood), and ability to move into a satisfying career — all characterize someone you know or know about. When one is confused about his or her identity, sexuality, age (generational focus), spiritual gifts, calling, and interests, one tends to live in a bewildered Fantasyland. Adults without clues to their vocation in life are the plug-in, plug-out temporaries of today’s workworld whose jobs are continually disappearing. Or they may be among throngs who do not know what they are doing and are always waiting for “Friday.” Life requires the completing power of vocational commitment in a world of confusing choices and contradictions. Vocational clarification ultimately is the task of spiritual imagination, careful preparation, wise mentoring, and consistent accountability.

1.4

From **DESPAIR** to **HOPE**. Despairing people are resident hand-wringers. They appear drawn to the dark side of existence: poor health, morbid stories of accidents, tragedies, and death. Ravaged by self-deprecation, mistrust, low self-esteem, and often fading health, the despairing person has little hope of things working out for the best. We view them as frail, dependent, weak and fainthearted.

The hoping process builds on finite experiences; heroic models of courage, determination, and fortitude; and transfinite objects or ideals (such as faith and freedom). Hope building is the true vocation of religion. Hope and courage that sustain us in the face of failing health, opposition, hardship, or danger originate in sources that transcend the human condition.⁴ In the Judeo-Christian faith, hope and courage are rooted in the character of God (Ps. 75:3).

Adaptation to Change Processes**Related to Other Persons:****2.1**

From **ALIENATION** to **RECONCILIATION**. We all know persons who are emotionally fragile, whose feelings are easily hurt, and whose anxiety constricts their relationships.

We call them shy, defensive, wounded, withdrawn, different, or even paranoid. Some people are alienated from the human community, from family and would-be friends, by their own disposition toward inwardness. Others are alienated by chance or circumstance in the aftermath of racism, social injustice, sexual abuse, ageism, involuntary termination, corporate downsizing, physical deficits like hearing impairment, or growing up in a tightly controlled society.

Reconciliation seeks to transcend barriers, negotiate differences, soften animosity, and heal unforgiveness through

acceptance, trust building, forgiveness, and relational harmony. Is there someone or some organization you know from whom you still feel estranged? What can be done to overcome that cutoff and make peace? Will you take the first step toward relieving stress and renewing a relationship?

2.2

From CRUELTY to COMPASSION. Abusers of power reside all around us—people who damage the environment, animals, children, elders, spouses, workers, sex victims, and causes (like racial justice or human rights), as well as social institutions. Such victimizers take pleasure in dominating or inflicting pain on others.

How far along the continuum are you or someone you know toward compassionate behavior, with core values of courage, mercy, kindness, peace, goodwill, and help for the underdog? Religious devotees see such behavior as Christlikeness (Phil. 2:1-11). Are you unrelenting in your perfectionistic expectations and criticism of others; or are you gracious, sympathetic, and passionate for human gladness in the earth?

2.3

From PROVINCIALISM to UNIVERSAL VISION. People cocooned in their safe gated communities and walled-in psyches can live in quite small worlds. Such provinces of the human spirit are more than backwoods places or small towns. Provincialism implies a narrowly focused, constricted, hidebound, localized worldview.

In contrast, someone of holistic vision sees a cosmic order, pursues varied interests, and maintains many contacts. Universals are seen as locals, but as larger issues, too, like environmental concerns, equal treatment of the opposite sex, fair employment practice in the workplace, and human rights for all people. How large is your world? How much terrain (spiritual and social space) can you see, enjoy, work in, support, pray, or play on?

To beg the question of narrowness through computer versatility does not guarantee wide-ranging interests. One can lock in on virtual reality of some software program (like pornography) to the neglect of broad human concerns. Seeking universal vision invites us to consider personal and social transformation.

Adaptation to Change Processes Related to God:

3.1

From FATE to DIVINE PROVIDENCE. Life for many USAmericans is a matter of luck. Faith is placed in chance and circumstance, not in the OT God of covenant or NT life and saving love of Jesus Christ.⁵ “What is to be will be” is more than

passivity; it is acceptance of a fateful worldview. Fate in the fabric of life itself grows in the seedbed of betrayal, rejection, and broken promises.

Belief in the character of God, on the other hand, is formed first in early childhood by learning to trust parents and believable adult figures. In young adulthood, trust is nurtured in mentoring communities. As one learns more content (biblically and experientially) about God's faithful and steadfast love, how God keeps promises and cares for all creation, one develops trust in the Ultimate Source of life. True, we may question divine motives, as to why a certain illness persists or particular accidents happen. We may imagine it is punishment for some sin in cause-and-effect fashion. Still, confidence that God cares and acts in our behalf leads us to trust in divine providence (Rom. 8:28).

3.2

From ANOMIE to SALVATION. I once read a story: "Cipher in the Snow," about a small boy who fell accidentally from a school bus and froze to death in the snow before anyone noticed. Zero was the sum of his all-too-brief life. The centerpiece of anomie is meaninglessness. One exists on "empty," with no ultimate purpose or destiny. This is why we describe anomie as lostness. A "lost" person is adrift in the universe. A confirmed atheist thinks when he or she dies that's the end, and eschews the doctrine called resurrection of the dead.

Changes that move a person toward salvation, and the maturing process of spiritual growth, may range from negative losses to luminous enlightenment. Hoping in God is equated in the Bible with believing in God. We read in Romans, "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it (i.e. eternal life) with patience" (Romans 8:24-25, NRSV). God's gift of salvation is both a present reality and a future hope. Its ultimate shape has yet to be revealed.

3.3

From ALONENESS to COMMUNITY. It was the Creator's intent that we should not live alone (Gen. 2:18). Man and woman were made for one another and for family life. The family was God's founding community. The first man was viewed as incomplete in his isolation. While God called all else good that he had made, God saw Adam's loneliness as "not good." This does not mean, however, that one is not a whole number.

Many people are alone by chance and circumstance, and thus must rely on friends and workmates for companionship. Others are alone by choice, preferring a solitary existence perhaps while pursuing a career goal. God placed the solitary in families on purpose (Ps. 68:6). Furthermore, God created the church, through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, as a community of believers. The apostle Paul described a congregation in bodylife terms with a reminder that each

believer is part of the larger body of Christ (1 Cor. 12-14; Rom. 12).

Changes may force us into lonely choices, conditions, or circumstances. But our socialization needs drive us beyond solitude to surround ourselves with people (or at least with a pet) and to participate in a wider fellowship.

In summary, the world was once structured and reliable. Today many people feel confused, obscure, and uninformed despite the virtual reality of high-tech media. People need help to find a spiritual home.⁶ Vast multitudes of strangers from distant shores are searching for a place in US American cities, for security, for significance, for a chance at life, literally for a home for the heart. People in religious communities seek strong interpersonal relationships and high touch, a personalized ministry—a touch of *home*.

This study guide to *Change Happens: Finding Your Way Through Life's Transitions* offers a map to help you navigate your way *home*. Let's plunge into the chapters. Read the book. Then respond to the questions at the conclusion of each chapter, along with opportunities here for thought, written response, discussion, and action.

NOTES

¹William Bridges, *Jobshift: How to Prosper in a Workplace Without Jobs* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994).

²Carlos Illeseas, "Facing Death Has Taught Women to Savor Life," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 13 July 1997, A-1, 31.

³Lillie R. Brock and Mary Ann Salerno, *The Interchange Cycle: The Secret to Getting Through Life's Difficult Changes* (Falls Church, VA: Bridge Builder Media, 1994), 26.

⁴Andrew Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

⁵Wayne E. Oates, *Luck: A Secular Faith* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

⁶Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997).

Chapter 1

Changes, Challenges, and Choices

For Group Discussion

1. What are your expectations in joining this group? As your anticipations change, you will have a way to talk about the changes.
2. Compare your expectations with views of other group members. Why do you feel it is important to be clear and honest about your assumptions?
3. What stereotypes or negative reports of group experiences have you heard in the past that make sharing yourself here feel risky?
4. What happened that caused you to seek help in this support group? Tell your story.
5. Recall some of the deepest feelings you had following the event(s) you described above. For example, anger, embarrassment, loneliness, guilt, uncertainty, inadequacy, anxiety, or grief.
6. Do news reports of assaults, rapes, and violent crimes make you cautious? USAmericans try to protect themselves with cellular phones, home security systems, watchful neighbors, and guard pets. What are you doing to “cocoon”—play it safe—to stay alive and well?
7. *Loss of control* was mentioned in chapter one as a price tag of change. A young USAmerican working in southeast Asia contracted a rare parasitic infection (some doctors said it was caused by an amoeba). He experienced severe abdominal pain and diarrhea, lost a lot of weight, and feared dying. He was flown to a U.S. medical center for diagnosis and treatment. If you were a member of his medical team, what would you do to try to encourage him? Thumb through your memory scrapbook to a time when you felt loss of control. What was it like?
8. What price tags for change are too high for you to pay? Fighting for personal goals, like a job promotion at the cost of your family, is a good example.

9. In reflecting on stories of lifechange in chapter 1, how does one's age or generational outlook affect change management?

10. Why is spreading a veneer of religious jargon or magical thinking over change events an inadequate means of transition management?

11. How do transitions compel us to take new initiatives in life? Please illustrate from your own experiences and share with your group.

Chapter 2

The Many Sides of Change

For Group Discussion

1. What are some transitions your parents or grandparents faced? How did they work through those changes?

2. List some changes that have taken place in your life and try to discern the prompters of those changes. For example, was a change prompted by a decision you made, circumstances, a crisis, conviction, or even your religious conversion?

3. Since choices and circumstances interact as you work through transitions, what are some circumstances that may prompt the choices you make? A personal skiing accident, for example.

4. How can choices you make force on others change by circumstances? Leaving your religious denomination (church) and joining another faith group, for example.

5. Change in our lives interacts with the community of people, culture, traditions, and values that surround us. What are some events taking shape in our communities that may prompt change in our lives? Example: immigration and new ethnic groups with different value systems. How will you respond to other people's ways of thinking and doing things?

6. Let's play a little game. Imagine you are very interested in a new position which offers a potential pay boost, better fringe benefits, and a three-week annual vacation. Your family and friends say, "Go for it!" What would you do or say to in trying to get the new position?

7. Look around. How do you see persons caught up in larger-than-life forces, moving them toward uncertain destinations? Example: a diagnosis of cancer.

8. When you see something labeled *Made in China* (or wherever, outside of the U.S.A.), do you resent it? Do you think people in other nations like U.S.A. labels on their stuff? Reread the section on globalization, page 19, and imagine eating at McDonald's in Moscow. Is the world becoming just one big marketplace?

9. Life at its best requires compromises and tradeoffs. What one thing would you change—at home, school, work, or church—to achieve a beneficial outcome? What would you give up to get what you desire?

10. Sometimes a major misunderstanding leads to resentment which can last a lifetime. Are you still dealing with some hurt that has cost you a relationship? What can be done to free you or others from that resentment?

Chapter 3

When Things Are Set In Motion

For Group Discussion

1. Do you recall watching on TV the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989? In a short time after the wall came down, everything changed for Europe. Have any “walls” come down for you? What changed?

2. A great flood washes away familiar landmarks and changes people's lives, along with the landscape. They are forced to clean up, rebuild, and move forward after the water recedes. Have any “floods” come your way and forced you off the beaten path? Any discoveries in your wake-up call?

3. The American poet Robert Frost once wrote of seeing two roads diverge while out walking, and of his ambiguity in choosing a pathway. “I took the one less traveled by,” he concluded, “and that has made all the difference.” When things are set in motion and you are being swept along in history's stream, how do you decide on a course of action? When other persons are involved, are decisions harder?

4. In our violent land of deep changes there is a hunger for and comfort in spirituality. How do you account for this God-shape in human personality?

5. When 21-year-old Julie was badly crippled in an automobile accident, she experienced prolonged pain, endured physical therapy, and learned to walk with a cane. Have you ever had to depend on other persons for care? What is it like to have to accept help?

6. When a child loses a parent by death or divorce, and other kids at school bring something up about a mom or dad, it makes the hurt child sad. What can be said or done for such wounded children?

7. A student brought a new bike to her university campus. It was stolen from her apartment five days after moving in even though it was locked. She called the police, but got no help. Have you ever had the privilege of buying the replacement for something that was lost, stolen, or broken? What did it feel like to experience loss?

8. A dad described the impact of increased auto insurance rates now that his son is sixteen, has finished driver's education, and is a licensed driver. The dad is glad his son is growing up and sad to pay for this rite of passage. Do you identify more with the son or his father? How?

9. Protestant churchgoers in a Southern USA city were surprised when a Buddhist temple was built in their neighborhood. People resent what they fear. Do we need religious understanding of other faiths while deepening our own faith?

10. A young naval officer was excited about his assignment as "tactical weapons specialist" aboard a newly christened vessel. Imagine yourself in charge of something big, valuable, and new. What kind of care does new "ownership" require?

11. If your church asked you to sponsor a group of teenagers on a mission trip to an international city, would you accept? How do *new* experiences challenge you? Bother you?

Chapter 4

Finding Your Way

For Group Discussion

1. We are learning that events (changes) occur outside us, but true transitions are experienced internally. Think of experiencing a move. A van quickly takes our belongings to a new location. But disengaging from home and getting into a new place is gradual soulwork. Have you any thoughts about what goes on “out there” compared with what is being felt “in here?”
2. Do you find it interesting that the Ten Commandments came in neither Egypt nor Israel, but in the Sinai desert? God’s light shone in a time-between-the-times. What might it feel like to be in the *neutral zone* right now?
3. What makes “ordinary people” feel unordinary, vulnerable, exposed, or on-the-spot when some extraordinary event—like a suicide in the family—occurs?
4. Why do you suppose political candidates, elected to office in the nation’s capital, appear increasingly out of touch with voters? How can *winner*s stay in touch with the real world as they move on to “bigger and better” things?
5. Workers who can’t keep up with changing technology are finding fewer places that will hire them. They don’t want the \$5.50/hour jobs, but they lack skills for the \$12/hour ones. So, how can old-order refugees adapt to change?
6. A young U.S. naval officer was assigned to the “search and rescue” team, fine-tooth combing waters of Long Island Sound for victims of the tragic TWA 800 explosion in 1996. The navy searchers ferreted out bodies, personal items, and bits and pieces of the damaged airliner, but no survivors. Through that traumatic quest, he sensed people’s need for God and decided to study for the ministry. How can experiencing traumatic events lead to changes in one’s vocational direction?
7. One measure of adaptation to change is how up-close and personal one is to a particular event. At corporate headquarters, a chief executive’s termination may spell turmoil for his close associates. But out in the franchises worldwide, news of a turnaround in the home office may be welcomed. What difference does closeness or distance make in facing change?

8. Often people live out others' expectations of being the perfect student, wife, parent, or leader at work, but resent the mystique of perfection. What are you doing to "get real" and stop living out expectations of other people?

9. In the author's references to the biblical story of Joseph, page 43, he noted: "To offer forgiveness to an offender does not guarantee the transaction. There must be reciprocity." How does that comment match your own experience with forgiveness?

10. When you are blindsided by some misunderstanding, accident, or error, what resources help you to find your way? Are they transferable to others?

Chapter 5

Pathways to Change Management

For Group Discussion

1. Life can become so cluttered and complicated that we feel lost, confused, abandoned, and at risk. Describe how you would direct someone who has lost their way through traumatic or transitional events.

2. As a child, did you have an imaginary friend or a cartoon/comic hero or heroine? How can imagination enrich our lives and help us devise pathways in facing the future?

3. A quarter century ago, Microsoft did not exist. Neither did the World Wide Web. Today, countless Web sites exist for building "internal connections" around the globe. What means of communication do you use to stay *connected* with people you cherish? How do you stay in touch with God?

4. If artists, philosophers, and politicians take note of change first or early on, why is it that the church and religious guides often come last to the work of transition? Does their behavior occasionally appear out of touch with the real world?

5. A man described the course of his cancer treatment thus: "You may recall I had cancer seventeen years ago. The doctor removed forty-two lymph nodes. I had a long therapeutic regimen of chemotherapy. When we saw each other again, you said, 'You're a *survivor*, Neal.' I've never forgotten that. You gave me hope to live." How might a *survivor* become a hope-bearer?

6. What values do you have that are the same as or different from your parents? What factors influenced those values being the same or different? (Examples: age, education, economic situations, social environments, life experience.)
7. Did Ben Walsh (see page 66) miss an opportunity by failing to remarry after his wife Mildred's death? Have you ever missed an opportunity? (Example: to make a wise investment, take a trip, accept a job promotion, or say the right thing to a hurting friend.)
8. The Union Pacific Corporation was heavily invested in the Bethlehem, PA infrastructure prior to moving its national headquarters to Texas. How can a major company *connect* with a city like Dallas? (Example: through corporate contributions, employee volunteering, charitable giving via matching-fund giving, etc.) How can employees *connect* with churches, public or private schools, the arts, etc., in a new residential city?
9. What are some ways you can reconnect with the heritage of your family and culture? For example, one young lady collects and records past stories and facts about members of her own and her husband's family tree. Using her grandmother's recipes maintains an internal connection with her most admired heroine.
10. How has some true friend helped you to move "between worlds" as you have faced a major transition? What was the most effective thing he or she did?

Chapter 6

Losing the Place We Call Home

For Group Discussion

1. The author links the idea of finding one's "inner home" with becoming a whole, healthy self in the real world, under God! In contrast, American Buddhists seek "the enlightened mind," divorced from everyday life. What is your idea of *home*? How may home become lost?
2. Scott, a teenager, was shot in the face in a freak accident. Now, he is blind in his right eye, deaf, brain-damaged, and faces a series of surgeries to rebuild his injured face. When wounds, physical or psychological, come, how do children face home loss?

3. Business executive Bob Buford wrote in *Halftime* (Zondervan, 1994) of his son's accidental drowning death in the Rio Grande River, at the age of twenty-four. Ross had been his father's only child, heir of promise, and hero. Amidst his own pursuit of success, Buford's crushing loss reminded him of another world beyond his cable TV empire. How is home lost when one's only child and heir dies? Does losing a child cause a review of life's values and investments?

4. Mildred is a hemodialysis patient in her sixties. Married to a retired salesman, she had worked in education until kidney failure forced her to stop work. Accustomed to an independent lifestyle, Mildred and Jim must make three scheduled dialysis "runs" each week to a regional center. In addition, she faces strict dietary and fluid intake restrictions in a weakened condition. Some days, Mildred wants to stop treatment and give up. What has Mildred lost of the place we call home?

5. Francina grew up on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. Once, she asked a person about his Protestant faith and shared her Roman Catholic background. "The sisters at Notre Dame Academy were very evil."

"How's that?" he replied.

"They beat us and were mean," Francina explained. She told him she was searching for spiritual security and had left her Roman Catholic religious roots. Is Francina's experience of searching for a new spiritual home common to people you know? What is involved in losing one's spiritual home?

6. We are told that one-half of all US Americans who live into their mid-eighties experience Alzheimer's disease symptoms. What of home is lost in mild to severe memory loss? What of home is lost as one moves from middle age into his or her aged years?

7. Mary's mother had come to live with them five years earlier, threatening their feelings of freedom, autonomy, and privacy. Paul and Mary Browning had no idea what Mary's mother's presence would do to their relationship or to their personal sense of well-being. What happens to a couple's sense of privacy and intimacy when a beloved, though often intrusive, guest comes to live in their home? What would you do if parent care changed your home arrangement?

8. Haley told her mother a man she trusted from their church had hurt her "down there" when he lured her to his greenhouse under the pretext of showing her some beautiful flowers. A medical exam revealed she had been sexually abused. What is lost when trust is violated? How can a child, in dealing with invasive grownups, cope with the abuse of power?

9. Residents in a storm—or flood—ravaged region may lose more than *things*. All familiar landmarks, such as key buildings, may be swept away. All family photographs may be water damaged or destroyed. How does a person or family regain its bearings (its security of a *home* place) when nature levels a community and strips residents of all that is familiar?

10. “I don’t like the term *widow*,” Marge said to two old college friends. “Rick’s been dead thirteen years and I’ve remained single (pause). It’s like I’m still married but was never married, since we were so young when Rick had the heart attack.” Is *one* really a whole number as Marge adapts to single life? How does being single again affect the place we call home?

11. There is a stereotype about the faith of a college freshman. Leaving the security of one’s hometown, the student is confronted on campus by new ideas and the existence of other religions. As the story goes, his or her faith is lost, sacrificed because of intellectual honesty. Could one’s exposure to new ideas actually broaden a student’s horizons and deepen one’s commitment to his or her faith home? How?

Chapter 7

The Struggle to be Home at Last

For Group Discussion

1. Your world may have once felt structured and reliable. Now you may feel uncertain, obscure, and uninformed about your place in the larger scheme of things. Comment on the idea that people need help to find a spiritual *home*.

2. Tammy was never all that her father thought she should be. Much of her life was tormented by his criticism. Burdened by low self-esteem and unresolved feelings toward her father, she struggled with her sense of inner home. What are some ways Tammy can begin to pave a pathway *home*?

3. What makes up who **you** are? For example: gender, where you are from, language/dialect, things you do, your roles, age, relationships, sense of humor, and so on. You are more than any *one* thing. Make an inventory of your resources to build on your self-definition. What areas of your identity may prevent you from moving forward toward home?

4. People struggling to navigate and survive the whitewater of continuous change sometimes wonder if they’ll ever make it *home*. What waters are you navigating these days?

5. We are not alone in this vast universe. It was *home* for God and many persons before we got here. How do we connect with our Creator by faith, to feel *at home* here and assured of *home* for eternity?

6. A young woman has been overweight most of her life. Sick of ridicule and criticism, she put herself through plastic surgery and countless diets trying to improve her image. Her identity is tied almost entirely to the way she looks. Her failed attempts and unrealistic expectations have created turmoil in her search for home. What are some other components of her identity that should contribute to her self-definition? What must she do to move toward home?

7. In heading toward home, one must take a strong “I” position, which is distinct from egotism. An at-home “I” maintains a clear commitment to his or her beliefs, intentions, or ideas while caring for others and respecting their uniqueness. Do you need new core values or self-managing strategies to find your true *home* (“I” position)?

8. Living *at home* requires effective skills of communication, decision making, and conflict resolution. Are you still “at loose ends” with anyone or cut off in relationships that keep you away from *home*? How can you work together to restore harmony?

9. We begin to feel at home when we are at peace with God. In what ways are you nurturing your relationship with the God who created you? How might that divine bond be strengthened?

10. What would it be like to spend a night away from home in jail? Have you ever been inside a prison cell? What was it like?

11. Do we need a coach or mentor to help us find *home* when we are confused by some wake-up call? To whom might you turn as a respected mentor?

12. Who are you *becoming* in the Lord? Are your priorities in line with God’s plans? Are you growing more Christ-like or are you stuck in an area of life you haven’t given over to God?

Chapter 8

Taking Responsibility for Your Life

NOTES

For Group Discussion

1. Comment on the author's claim that mastering transitions is an unending challenge—whether for individuals, families, institutions, political parties, businesses, cultures, or nations.
2. An eleven-year-old's orthodontist discovered during checkup that eight "baby teeth" were still in place, impacting her adult teeth. The dentist told the parents that Tammy's "baby teeth" had to be extracted (all at once). The young patient was scheduled to leave in three days for summer camp. If you were Tammy's parents, what would you do about her dental health?
3. We experience transitions, not merely in clear-cut endings, but in feelings of ferment when we are in some sort of change process. Describe for your group a "change process" you face right now. What's happening? Who's being affected?
4. We need people in our lives to help us manage all that life brings. How are you cultivating relationships and investing in the lives of others? Share an experience when someone helped you through a transition in your life.
5. When a young person turns sixteen, some parents help him or her buy a car to celebrate a new extension of independence and responsibility. Are there rituals or celebrations that have made a transition in your life meaningful? Tell about it.
6. A housewife left her purse, with cash, a driver's license and several credit cards, at a major chain restaurant one evening. She and her husband were nearly back home before she missed it. When they returned, the waiter had not only already found it, but had put it in a safe place. Take the role of the three persons in this drama: wife, her husband, and the waiter. What would you have said and done in such a tempting scenario?
7. A middle-school principal went on a business/pleasure trip to Vancouver, B.C. knowing he had two teaching positions to fill upon his return. After his trip and to his dismay, six additional faculty persons had resigned—leaving eight slots open. He had only two weeks before pre-school workshops began to fill the positions. If you were "Principal Jones," how would you go about enlisting the eight new faculty members?

8. What do you think the writer meant by saying we must cultivate the art of “being absent” from the familiar if we are to experience change well? Have you ever given up someone or something dear? How would you describe the experience?

9. The writer said viewers of the identical event respond to it differently, according to their involvement level, emotional stability, and spiritual maturity. Imagine a sixteen year old, recently licensed to drive, who had an automobile accident that caused a spinal cord injury to a victim. Contrast different responses to the accident—by the victim, the youth, his parents, then, his grandparents. Who do you think will be most understanding?

10. At ninety-two, Cynthia Burch is considering moving from an independent living arrangement in a retirement community into a nursing home. She is frail, not ill, but is anxious about the future. Cynthia wants to remain in control of her life. How would you advise her? Are there any by-the-way cautions you might warn her about?

EPILOGUE

TURNING TO AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Anticipated changes in light of your core values and context may permit you to enjoy good times while facing transitions. Getting through difficult events, on the other hand, is hard work—sometimes shattering. Successful transitions require more of us than just “toughing things out.” People trapped in chronic anxiety hang on to negative feelings. When emotions call the shots, people tend to rationalize what they do based on how they feel at that moment. This study guide provides a map of life’s emotional landscape to give you a broader view and help you name experience.

A wake-up call may be amoral in itself, but the context of its management in relation to other persons, nature, history, and God requires integrity and wisdom. A disposition toward the future and a determination to face change events with honesty and courage form the secret of successful transition management.

Change Happens: Finding Your Way Through Life’s Transitions proposes a coherent pattern of meaning for facing change. Each end-of-chapter response pointed you toward successful change management, as did responses in this study guide. Still, you may be in a fog about all the concepts, from “how change happens” to “how to take responsibility for your life.” Would it help to hear it again, stated simply and clearly?

You may feel confused if some change you desire won’t happen. You may be facing some stubborn, unyielding issue. A

job won't turn up. A piece of property will not sell. A wound will not heal. Rehabilitation is taking too long. A cut-off of some relationship may make reconciliation seem impossible. Your creative work goes unappreciated. A book manuscript you've sent to fifteen publishers has been rejected again. The way the world has "dealt your cards" you may blame yourself for some failure, view yourself as a victim, or as a burden to the system.

In basic terms, here is what my idea of transition management is about. Here is a brief summary of my *Change Happens* theory.

1. Change is a constant continuum of challenges in relation to oneself, others, and God.
2. Transition management is holistic, universal, and future directed.
3. We manage life's turning points by forming experience into narratives (stories).
4. Planned change stimulates initiative and imagination, but imposed change provokes resistance.
5. Successful changers overcome adversity, and in the process build character.
6. Some resistance to certain changes may be expected.
7. Hopeful change relies on sources that transcend the human condition, and ultimately on God.
8. To know a person's full story requires us to understand that multiple changes are happening at once.
9. We manage transition better in communities of faith and understanding than in toughing things out alone.
10. True spirituality tries to place human experiences into some framework of meaning.

Becoming a change manager of excellence occurs slowly over an entire lifetime. There are bumps in the road, false starts, breakdowns, curious sights along the way, and would-be passengers that wish to come along for the ride. Turning to an uncertain future requires our ongoing response to divine mystery. Life's ultimate questions will keep us humble, stretched, and growing until we are /at last, face to face with God.