

CREATING A

LEAD SMALL CULTURE

MAKE YOUR CHURCH A PLACE
WHERE KIDS BELONG



FREE SAMPLER

REGGIE JOINER
KRISTEN IVY ELLE CAMPBELL

We hope you enjoy this complimentary sample of
*Creating a Lead Small Culture: Make Your Church a
Place Where Kids Belong*, by Reggie Joiner, Kristen Ivy,
and Elle Campbell.

This sample contains the introduction, information
about the authors, and the complete table of contents.

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Creating a Lead Small Culture
is available in print and digital versions.

ENDORSEMENTS

“I’m fortunate to be surrounded by a staff who makes small groups for kids and teenagers a priority. That’s why the principles discussed in *Creating a Lead Small Culture* resonate so deeply with our church. This is a timely work that provides a much needed blueprint for churches everywhere who believe kids and teenagers should be a priority in their ministry.”

**- MARK BATTERSON, NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
AND LEAD PASTOR, NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH**

“After 14 years as a lead pastor, I’m convinced more than ever that a healthy church is built around making small groups a priority. If you don’t connect kids and teenagers relationally with great leaders, you will sabotage the future and faith of a generation. That’s why *Creating a Lead Small Culture* is such an important book for your team. It’s a one-of-a-kind manual to help every church create environments where kids can find a place to belong and someone who believes in the potential of their faith to change the world.”

- PERRY NOBLE, SENIOR PASTOR, NEWSRING CHURCH

“*Creating a Lead Small Culture* gives you more than just random ideas to help you do small groups better. It promotes proven strategies that actually work. If you are serious about discipleship and want to build a team of adults who invest weekly in teenagers, you need this book. So read it carefully, and get ready to rethink how you do student ministry. I learned a lot!”

**- DOUG FIELDS, AUTHOR, SPEAKER, CO-FOUNDER
DOWNLOADYOUTHMINISTRY.COM**

“My wife Wendy and I have seen the benefits of small groups up close. Our daughter Jesse and our son Cole have been greatly influenced through small group leaders who share our values and yet speak to our kids from a different perspective. This has been a huge blessing to us as parents. As a pastor, I highly recommend *Creating a Lead Small Culture* to anyone who works with kids and teenagers. This is a smart, sustainable strategy with enormous generational impact.”

- JEFF HENDERSON, LEAD PASTOR, GWINNETT CHURCH

“As a parent, leader, and researcher, my goal is that all kids will be surrounded by adults who lovingly help them be changed by Christ to change the world around them. This wise book gives your church the practical tools you need to make that goal a reality.”

- KARA POWELL, PH.D., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE FULLER YOUTH INSTITUTE (FYI)

“It’s one thing to see the potential in small groups; it’s another to create a church culture in which small groups thrive. *Creating a Lead Small Culture* is a must read for every senior leader and leadership team. In a masterful and engaging way, Reggie, Kristen and Elle explain the behaviors every team can incorporate into their culture to see kids, teens and families flourish through the ministry of the local church.”

- CAREY NIEUWHOF, LEAD PASTOR, CONNEXUS COMMUNITY CHURCH

CREATING A LEAD SMALL CULTURE

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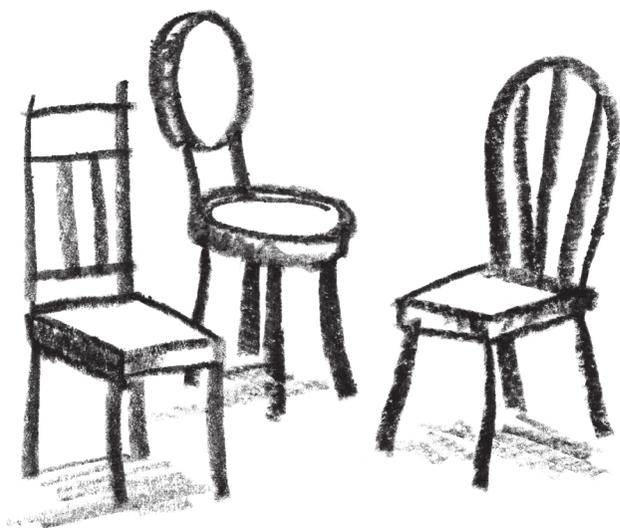
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CREATING A
**LEAD SMALL
CULTURE**

MAKE YOUR CHURCH A PLACE
WHERE KIDS BELONG



REGGIE JOINER
KRISTEN IVY ELLE CAMPBELL

ABOUT THIS BOOK

For the past three years we have met with ministry leaders around the country to discuss one idea: how can age group ministries create a culture where small groups win? We met about it. We outlined it. We met about it some more. We taught it. We edited what we taught. We collected stories. We did a little more refining. Then, we wanted to put it into print. That doesn't mean we won't want to change it in a year or two, or maybe as soon as you email us with some new best practices. But for now, this is it. This is how we think you can create a lead small culture.

AUTHORS

When it came time to actually write *Lead Small Culture*, we were in a bit of a conundrum. With so many great leaders around the country weighing in on this idea how would we decide who put the words on paper? So, we drew straws. Okay, no. Since, we wanted a variety of experiences represented, we landed on three people who could bring three unique perspectives.

REGGIE JOINER @ReggieJoiner

Since someone on this writing team needed a little “experience,” we thought maybe this was a good selection. Reggie has over 30 years of ministry experience leading teams who work with children and teenagers. As the family ministry director of North Point Ministries for 11 years, Reggie worked to build and refine a ministry that supported small groups for every age kid. Reggie is the founder and CEO of Orange, an organization whose purpose is to influence those who influence the next generation.

KRISTEN IVY @Kristen_Ivy

It’s hard to talk about small groups without getting some input from a small group leader. (Have you ever noticed how some small group leaders have opinions about how small groups should work?) Kristen has 15 years of experience leading small groups of middle school and high school girls. Her opinions about creating a lead small culture come from years of reflecting on what ministry leaders can do to help the small group experience win. She has a Master’s of Divinity and currently works as the executive director of messaging for Orange.

ELLE CAMPBELL @EIIIIIIIIIIe

We also needed a little expertise on YouTube sloth videos, which is why we selected Elle. That, and the fact that she has helped transition her middle school ministry at The Chapel at CrossPoint in Buffalo, New York, to one of the best lead small cultures we know. Elle has made recruiting, training and developing small group leaders her top priority. Her fresh ideas and energy keep us excited about everything that is still to come.

ARCHITECTS

These ministry leaders each have over 10 years of experience implementing a lead small culture. They have brainstormed, wrestled with, taught and evaluated the concepts in this book to make it what it is.

SUE MILLER @SueMiller01

PRESCHOOL/CHILDREN

Sue led preschool and children's environments (Promiseland) at Willow Creek Community Church for 17 years. After retiring from Willow, Sue joined the Orange staff in 2005. She continues to travel the world speaking and consulting with church leaders to help them reach the next generation. She is author of *Making Your Children's Ministry the Best Hour of Every Kids Week*, and co-author of *Parenting Is Wonder-full*. Sue loves to mentor leaders, inspire volunteers and consult with churches that strive to partner with parents.

CAREY NIEUWHOF @CNieuwhof

LEAD PASTOR

Carey is the lead pastor of Connexus Community Church, a growing multi-campus church near Toronto. Prior to starting Connexus in 2007, Carey served for 12 years in a mainline church, transitioning three declining congregations into one, rapidly growing congregation. He speaks to North American and global church leaders about change, leadership, and parenting. Author of *Leading Change Without Losing It*, and co-author of *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*, Carey and his wife, Toni, live near Barrie, Ontario, and have two sons, Jordan and Sam.

KEVIN RAGSDALE

HIGH SCHOOL

Kevin Ragsdale serves on the leadership team and is the multi-campus high school director for North Point Ministries. As one of the first family ministry staff, Kevin developed the North Point student ministry philosophy to champion small groups. In addition to leading a staff that is responsible for over 2,000 high school students every week, Kevin also designs environments, oversees curriculum, roots for the Oklahoma Sooners, and plays hypercompetitive pickup basketball. Kevin is the co-author of *Make Believe: Five things great student pastors choose to believe*. Kevin and his wife Gina live in Cumming, Georgia, with their three children.

TERRY SCALZITTI @TScalzitti

LEAD PASTOR

Terry is the lead pastor of Ocean View Baptist Church in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. In the few months since his arrival, the church has doubled in size. Known for his ability to connect with all types of audiences, Terry is passionate about reaching an unchurched culture. Previously, Terry was the associate pastor for adult and family ministries at First Baptist Fort Lauderdale where he and his team spent eight years transitioning to a lead small culture. He and his wife, Jennifer, have a son, Connor.

TOM SHEFCHUNAS @CoachShef

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tom is the North Point Ministries multi-campus director of Transit (middle school). Tom's passion involves working with campus directors and their teams to recruit and develop the hundreds of small group leaders it takes to pull off Transit at five church campuses. Coauthor of *Lead Small*, Tom and his wife, Julie, live in Cumming, Georgia, with their three children, Mac, Joey and Cooper.

CONTRIBUTORS

These ministry leaders are currently working in churches to create a lead small culture. They live out the beliefs and behaviors of this book every week. As you read, you will see examples from their real world practical experience. Use these bios to see which leaders are in a context similar to yours.

CASS BRANNAN @CassBrannan

PRESCHOOL

Cass is a groups director in Waumba Land at Buckhead Church, in Atlanta, Georgia. Cass graduated from Georgia Southern University and Southeastern Seminary. He's passionate about helping churches influence preschoolers and their families. Cass loves to do anything outside including but not limited to walking, running, playing ultimate Frisbee, biking, or whatever he can do with his four amazing boys and wife, Mary Beth.

ABBIE CARR @OrangeAbbey

ELEMENTARY

Abbey has been involved in children's ministry for over 12 years, both as a ministry director and a volunteer. She currently works for Orange, developing relationships with church leaders and helping them win in their elementary environments. Abbey has served as an SGL for 4th and 5th grade girls, and looks forward to leading a new group of Kindergarteners this fall with her daughter, Lillian.

KENNY CONLEY @KennyConley

ALL AGES/MULTISITE

Kenny has been in children's ministry for 15 years, and is currently serving as the NextGen pastor at Gateway Church in Austin, Texas. His passion to see the next generation come to know and follow Christ propels him to constantly rethink how the church approaches ministry to kids and their families. Three places Kenny wants to visit before he dies include Antarctica, the summit of Kilimanjaro, and Advanced Base Camp of Mount Everest.

DEXTER CULBREATH @Dextext

ELEMENTARY

Dexter is the “VicKids” elementary director at Victory World Church in Norcross, Georgia. He’s had the privilege of working with children, teens, and families for many years and has an outrageous passion for relationships. He might also have an outrageous passion for giving everyone he meets a nickname.

ADAM DUCKWORTH @Adam_Duckworth

ELEMENTARY

Adam currently serves as the family pastor at First Baptist Fort Lauderdale. At First Baptist, he played a critical role in their transition from a Sunday school model to a lead small culture. Adam also has over 1,100 Disney Vinylmations and sees no end in sight.

AMY FENTON @AmyMFenton

ELEMENTARY

For 18 years, Amy served as a children’s pastor at The People’s Church in Franklin, Tennessee and then The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, leading a team of over 300 volunteers. Currently, Amy travels the country coaching church leaders and volunteers. Amy could eat peanut butter chocolate ice cream from Baskin Robbins daily.

MATT IVY @TheMattIvy

HIGH SCHOOL

Matt has lead middle school and high school small groups for the past 10 years. As an XP3 Orange Specialist, Matt spends most days talking to student leaders about their ministry strategy and curriculum. If you grab him a quad, tall Americano with two raw sugars, you’ll probably be best friends.

DR. DARREN KIZER @DarrenKizer

ALL AGES/MULTISITE

Darren was executive pastor of family ministries at Parker Hill Community Church for 11 years. At Parker Hill, he lead staff and volunteer teams for three campuses. Darren also invests in NextGen leaders through consultation, education, and writing. He and his wife Becky live in Scranton, Pennsylvania— where the TV show *The Office* was set.

BROOKLYN LINDSEY @BrooklynLindsey

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Brooklyn began working with teenagers in 1997 as a volunteer and became a full-time youth pastor in 2001. She currently works with middle schoolers at Highland Park Church of the Nazarene in Lakeland, Florida. Without her two little girls, Kirra and Mya, she probably wouldn't have much of an Instagram account.

GINA MCCLAIN @Gina_McClain

ELEMENTARY/MULTISITE

Gina started on staff at LifeChurch.tv in 1999 where she remained for over a decade. Currently, Gina is the children's pastor at Faith Promise Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. Having led in two large multi-site churches in the past 14 years, Gina is even more convinced that relationships are not only vital, but the only sustainable way to reach kids.

BOBBI MILLER @BobbiMiller17

ELEMENTARY

Bobbi began full-time ministry at Willow Creek Community Church 23 years ago. After her time at Willow, Bobbi joined the world of kid's ministry in a small church setting in Michigan, and is now on staff at Bent Tree Bible Fellowship. Bobbi's husband, Paul, is also on staff at Bent Tree, and the two of them get to practice leading small every day at home with their small group of five kids.

LATASHA MORRISON @LatashaMorrison

ELEMENTARY

Latasha is currently the children's director at First Evangelical Free Church of Austin, Texas. Previously, she was the NextGen director for a church in Atlanta, Georgia, overseeing everything from the cradle to the career in a 6,000-member church. Currently, Latasha lives in Austin, Texas, where she recently completed her Master's in Business from Liberty University.

KATHIE PHILLIPS @KidMinspiration

ELEMENTARY

Kathie has served in children's ministry since age 13 and has spent six of the last eight years overseeing ministry in both small and larger church environments. She currently serves as director of children's ministry at Central Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, Maryland. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, reading, and watching episodes of her favorite TV show—the original *Beverly Hills, 90210*.

NINA SCHMIDGALL @NinaSchmidgall

ALL AGES/MULTISITE

Nina serves as director of family ministry at National Community Church in Washington, DC. While working in the nation's capital as a legislative director in the House of Representatives, writing and directing education and family policy, Nina realized her passion for strengthening the family and the home. She has overseen the family ministry department at NCC since 2001. In that time, NCC has grown their children's programs to seven locations.

JEFF WALLACE @IAmJeffWallace

HIGH SCHOOL

Jeff is an urban ministry innovator, author, and leader. He serves as pastor of youth development at Peace Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia, where he oversees all of the children, teen, and young adult ministries. Jeff enjoys doing life with his wife Quovadis and three boys, Jeffrey, Christopher, and Cameron.

JEREMY ZACH @JeremyZach

MIDDLE SCHOOL/HIGH SCHOOL

Jeremy started student ministry in 2002 at Bethany Church in Los Angeles, a church of about 500. In 2010, he joined the XP3 Students team as an Orange Specialist, and is currently a middle school small group leader at Browns Bridge Community church. He loves cats.

JENNY ZIMMER @JenZim15

PRESCHOOL

Jenny is the family life director, and the director of FX and preschool environments at Discovery Church in Simi Valley, California. She's been doing ministry for over 10 years. Jenny has what she considers four children, although not everyone may see it that way; she has two daughters and two Cocker Spaniels who are her babies.

A NOTE ABOUT AFTON @aftonsaid

Afton Manny is the glue that holds Lead Small together. When there is a meeting, she is there. When ideas have to be captured in notes, she is there. When we had the idea to make an app to help small group leaders win . . . well, Afton's life got very busy. We would like to thank Afton for—in her own words—having ears that “perk up like a dog when someone says, ‘Lead Small.’” Afton: You not only make this happen. You keep it fun.

(Disclaimer: This Twitter account will not help you lead small. But it might make you laugh.)

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CULTURE:

the beliefs and behaviors
that define a social group

These pages explore the beliefs, behaviors, and habits that drive leaders who make small groups a priority.

These leaders share a common conviction that kids and teenagers need other adults besides their parents.

They need other adults . . .
who believe in God.
who believe in them.
and who give them a place to belong.

That's why we wrote this book.

We are not claiming
it answers every question
or solves every problem.

But it will give you more ideas on how to effectively
create a culture where kids can connect relationally.

If you want to influence what kids believe about
God, themselves, and the rest of the world,
then give them somewhere to belong.

That's why we also hope you will
join this conversation and champion the belief that relationships
with kids and teenagers should be a priority in our churches.

GIVE THEM SOMEWHERE

I love nouns. It's probably because nouns were the easiest things for me to identify when I (Reggie) had to diagram sentences for Miss McGuffey's class in high school. Nouns are simple. They are just a person, place, or thing. They're not nearly as confusing as adverbs, participles, or dangling modifiers. (Make sure you don't use that last term in front of middle schoolers.) I'm glad that nouns are clear, tangible, and concrete.

What does that have to do with creating a place for kids to belong? A lot. We think kids and teenagers need two important nouns in their life. They need *someone* and they need *somewhere*.

Before anyone can wrestle with abstract concepts like faith, hope, and the meaning of life, they simply need to know who loves them and where they belong. In my early days, I tried to hand students a list of action verbs before I handed them a few solid nouns. I think I forgot that in the English language, nouns usually come before verbs. Since then I have learned that before you can expect kids to believe, you usually need to give them someone who believes in them. Before you ask teenagers to "go tell the world," you need to give them a safe place where they know they belong.

KIDS NEED **TWO** IMPORTANT **NOUNS** SO THEY CAN ANCHOR THEIR LIVES TO SOMETHING SOLID.

They need a
PERSON

They need a
PLACE

Research suggests the earlier they identify the "who"s and "where"s of their life, the more solid their faith will be. That's where you come in as a ministry leader. You can't force or determine the faith or future of anyone, really. The only thing you can actually do is recruit leaders and establish places so kids can know they belong somewhere.

Never underestimate the power the right place has to affect relationships. Think of some of the best friendships you have observed. There was probably a significant gathering place that became the iconic symbol of the relationship.

Seinfeld had a diner.

Friends had a coffee house.

Cheers had a bar.

Okay. Those may not be the best examples of relationships. But they all speak to the power of having a place “where everybody knows your name.” If you want to get serious about influencing the hearts of this generation, you have to think about creating an actual, visible, consistent place where they know they belong.

When it comes to designing environments, no organization has more opportunity than the church. Unfortunately, some of us have insisted for a long time the Church is not a place, but rather it's people. Maybe we have forgotten that people still need a place and realistically, the Church is both.

For nearly two thousand years the Church has met in homes, catacombs, restaurants, buildings, cathedrals, tents, theatres, town halls, coffeehouses, storefronts, schools, and hotels. What do all these have in common besides the fact that they are all nouns? They were actual physical places where groups of people could meet. Regardless of your denomination or worship style, the local church has always been a place where people could sit down and engage in a learning and worship experience.

The point is you need a place.

Regardless of how you define the church, you can't ignore that one of its primary functions is to make it easier for people to assemble. The church has always involved a location. Ideally, the church may be made up of people, but practically the church has to assume a responsibility to establish a place where multiple people can actually meet.

Think about it this way:

The church can't force people to follow Jesus.

The church can't demand that people embrace the gospel.

The church can't dictate that everyone connects relationally. But the church *can* create a safe and relevant place for people to engage, learn, and connect. Just remember that every church, regardless of its size or budget, can create an environment that makes it easier for kids and teenagers to experience authentic relationships.

One of the most important things your staff should do as a team is prioritize which place is most important in your church. Some churches have so many programs or environments it's easy to have competing systems that confuse people and dilute their potential to influence a kid's faith. That's why we think every church should ask this critical question, **Where do you want someone to be?**

If we amplified this question, we could say it in a number of ways.



Where do you want kids to ultimately be so you can influence their faith and character?



What is the most optimal environment in your church where kids have the best potential to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ?



If every week, kids or teenagers can only show up one time, experience one environment, participate in one activity, where would you tell them to go?

Every church needs to ask and answer questions like these if they hope to lead kids to a more authentic faith. Since you have limited resources, volunteers, and time, it's simply important to prioritize which environment in your church is most important. It's difficult to lead kids somewhere if you don't know where you are leading them. So, what is your answer to the question, "Where do you want kids to be?"

Is it Sunday school?

Is it children's church?

Or is it Activate Live? (The weekly program for your teenagers—not the yogurt).

You need to decide. Until you do, you can't really be strategic in how you organize your ministry. We think the best answer to the question is to ask another question.

**It's difficult
to lead kids
somewhere if
you don't know
where you are
leading them.**

Which environment connects a small group of kids with a consistent leader?

(If we were in a restaurant eating lunch, this is when we would draw a dot and a circle to represent a small group and a leader.)

Generally speaking, we use these terms to clarify two big ideas:



Small group: *a consistent gathering of a few for the purpose of growing in their relationship with God and each other.*



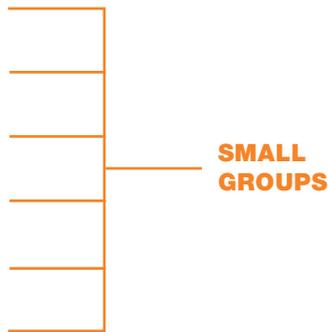
Small group leader (SGL): *someone who chooses to invest in the lives of a few to encourage authentic faith.*

So, if you ask us the question, “Where do you want kids or teenagers to be?” Our answer will be, “In a small group.” You can pick a different answer, but just remember: everything else in your culture will be affected by how you respond to this question. When you create a lead small culture, you establish a priority with everyone in your ministry that everything you do should somehow point to small groups. Therefore, small groups become the primary focus of your ministry strategy.

When a lead small culture is established, it tends to simplify how you evaluate success and how you communicate what is important. There are two basic indicators that prove you have actually made small groups a focus in your church.

1. SMALL GROUPS BECOME AN ANSWER TO EVERYTHING.

- How do we disciple kids and teenagers?
- How do we nurture an ongoing relationship with parents?
- How do we plug students into service opportunities?
- How do we evaluate what is working in our ministry?
- How do we give someone a sense of belonging?
- How do we monitor what is happening in kids’ weekly lives? GPS tracking devices maybe or . . .



2. SMALL GROUP BECOMES THE ANSWER EVERYWHERE.

You'll know that you've made small groups the focus when every age group pastor or ministry leader also has the same answer. Remember that too many different answers usually indicates nobody knows the answer. That's why a lead small culture tends to put everyone on the same page and creates synergy with the team. Not only should all roads lead to small groups, but all voices should as well. Alignment on a team will make a critical difference in your church. When everyone on your staff is saying the same thing, it will move everyone in your church in the same direction.

IF SMALL GROUPS BECOME THE PRIMARY PLACE YOU WANT KIDS AND TEENAGERS TO BE, THEN THAT WILL ULTIMATELY CHANGE HOW YOU POSITION A LOT OF WHAT YOU DO.

It will change how you do PROGRAMMING.

You will start evaluating your programs on the basis of whether they complement or compete with groups.

You will tweak programs so they can move people to a small group more effectively, and you will learn to stop doing things that don't really lead anywhere.

You will shift from creating special events or camps for just kids or teenagers individually to an emphasis on events for small groups to attend together.

It will change how you work as a TEAM.

You will reorganize your staff to make sure someone is focused on making small groups win.

You will hire or recruit organizational leaders who think more strategically about how to arrange groups and track progress.

You will see the advantage of having consistent meetings for various age group directors or pastors to improve the overall small group structure.

It will change how you recruit VOLUNTEERS.

You will make sure the average volunteer understands specifically how their role helps small groups win.

You will elevate those who volunteer to lead small groups as the most critical in your organization.

You will mobilize teenagers to partner with adults to lead small groups of preschoolers and kids.

It will change how you create ENVIRONMENTS.

You will leverage every platform to promote and explain how to connect in small groups.

You will draw a clearer distinction between teaching a class and discipling kids.

You will evaluate presentations and curriculum on the basis of how they affect the activity and connection within the small group.

It will change how you partner with FAMILIES.

You will position your small group leaders to have relational influence with parents.

You will invite parents into a strategic partnership with small groups so they know they have an advocate for their family.

You will think about ways to resource both leaders and parents to synchronize them in a comprehensive strategy for kids and teenagers.

When you create a lead small culture, you tend to move things around in your organization so everything points to small groups. It's interesting how simply re-arranging the furniture in a room can enhance or inhibit how people relate and connect. But that's one of your principal jobs as a next generation leader. So hopefully, these next chapters will help you sharpen your skills—

- To architect and design better environments.
- To create places where kids have a better chance to connect relationally.
- To re-arrange the furniture so every kid and teenager has a seat at the table.

Every kid needs a PERSON and they need a PLACE.

Just remember: as a leader, you are responsible to give kids the nouns they need to grow personally. You may be the best chance they will ever have to find somewhere to belong.

Give them somewhere to belong.



GIVE THEM SOMEONE

Do kids really need to belong before they can believe? Is it necessary to re-arrange your ministry to make sure teenagers have a place where they are known and people who know them? We think so. We actually think a small group is one of the best ways to introduce this generation to the concept of a God who loves them unconditionally. Think about it.

You can't see God.

I have never seen God, and neither have you.

Okay. Maybe you think you have. But I'm going to bet it wasn't actually God. More than likely you were staring too long at a cloud formation, or you drank too much Nyquil. The point is there are no tangible, verifiable images you can hold up and say, "This is God."

It's too bad social media didn't exist thousands of years ago. It would have settled a lot of issues for skeptics.

Imagine if . . .

Moses sent a pic of God writing the Ten Commandments.

Peter uploaded images of Jesus walking on the water.

John posted video of Jesus ascending into heaven on YouTube.

(If social media had been around, it could have settled that whole dinosaur debate, too.)

Your job as a pastor or Christian leader would be a lot easier if those moments had been captured with some actual digital images.

Instead, you probably spend a lot of time trying to convince kids or teenagers to pursue a God they have never seen. It's tricky. God doesn't have a Twitter account or a Facebook page. So, how do you invite people to follow someone they can't touch, or see, or hear? And how do you move them toward an authentic and personal faith in a God who may seem distant, vague, and unpredictable?

How do you
move them
toward an
authentic
and personal
faith in a
God who may
seem distant,
vague, and
unpredictable?

We have watched hundreds of churches debate which strategy is best for children and teenagers. We have listened to confident leaders promote their interpretation of biblical truth and advocate their version of church as the solution for the dying faith of a generation. And while ministry leaders may not agree on every detail, we are connected by a common mission to help kids and adults grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

So, back to the question.

How do you build authentic faith in kids and teenagers?

We think we have finally discovered the answer.

And it's really simple.

Just kidding.

The truth is, it will never be simple. That's the nature of faith and pursuing a relationship with a mysterious and majestic Creator. We aren't writing this book because we think we have the answer, but because we have made a number of key observations through the years about kids and faith. Here are a few:

- You don't shape a kid's faith by teaching them doctrine. (Whatever you talk them into, someone else can talk them out of.)
- You don't shape a kid's faith by persuading them to have better standards. (They may ultimately *give up* if they feel like they can't *measure up*.)
- You don't shape a kid's faith by getting them to attend your events. (At some point, they will compare the quality of your production to what culture produces, and you will probably lose.)

**BUT YOU CAN SHAPE A KID'S FAITH BY
CONNECTING THEM TO CARING ADULTS WHO
WILL BE PRESENT IN THEIR LIFE.**

Are we saying theology, lifestyle, and church attendance don't matter? Not at all. But we are suggesting any of those things, without caring and consistent relationships, will have a limited impact. You don't have to look

very far to find sobering stats about the number of teenagers and college students who have walked away from church.

Our experience suggests that most kids who grow up and leave church did not run away from caring relationships. They ran away from prejudice
judgment
irrelevance
and religion.

For the past twenty years, I (Reggie) have been able to hang out with a distinctive group of college students during the summer. They are the interns who show up to help at summer camps and they represent a group of college-age individuals who didn't walk away from faith. Instead, they decided to use their summer breaks to invest in the faith of teenagers.

I'm always curious about their stories and what helped shape their faith to this point. At the beginning of the summer, I traditionally take them through an exercise. I ask them to pinpoint a few things in their past that contributed to their spiritual growth. Then, we write those things down on index cards, put them on a creative board, and look for similar patterns in their stories. For nearly two decades the results have been the same. Every defining moment in their stories always comes back to one or more of these five issues.

Life-changing truths – change how they see themselves or God

Spiritual disciplines – help them connect personally to God

Ministry opportunities – increase their sense of mission

Pivotal circumstances or events – compel them to rethink their priorities

Significant relationships – help them navigate their spiritual journey

One of the most enlightening moments of these sessions with our camp interns is always the point when we scan the board for the names of people who have impacted their lives. **In everyone's story of faith, there are people who have shown up and become catalysts for their spiritual growth.** Think about it. If you are reading this right now, chances are you believe what you believe and you do what you do because of the way someone influenced your faith. More than likely, it wasn't just one person, but several. You could probably write down a short list of people who have been strategic influences in your life.

Just like the people in ancient times developed their view of God as . . .
the God of Abraham
the God of Isaac
or the God of Moses,

You have developed a sense of who God is because you have met . . .
the God of Susan
the God of Carlos
or the God of Jeff.

God uses people. That's the point. He always has. Sometimes we forget the God of the Bible is the God of the *people* of the Bible. God has always used people to demonstrate His story of redemption.

The essence of our faith is linked to the idea that God actually became human. He became one of us. So we could . . .
touch Him.
hear Him.
see Him.

God simply decided the most effective way to redeem us was to become one of us.

The narrative of the Bible is anchored to the fact that God became a man so He could prove how much He loves us. And that Jesus literally became human. What happened on the cross and at the resurrection is so significant that sometimes we fail to recognize what God did just by showing up as a person.

He became us.
Not a book.
Not a really cuddly looking animal.
Not a supernatural being from Ezekiel's vision.
But a real, live, breathing human being.

So, what's the point of all of this? As believers, it's possible to get so caught up in our sermons, ordinances, doctrines, spiritual disciplines, and church programs that we forget the character of God was revealed to an ancient culture through an actual person. Turn that one over in your head when you can't fall asleep at night. Evidently, God saw the need to show who He is to people who couldn't see Him by sending someone they could see.

**God saw the
need to show
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couldn't see
Him by sending
someone they
could see.**

The incarnation is one of the most complicated, paradoxical truths of our Christian faith. Jesus was as much man as if He were not God at all, and as much God as if He were not man at all. He was God and man at the same time. He stepped onto the planet so we could see God. This is what makes our faith different from most other religions. We follow a man who believed He was God. He actually said things like, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” Of course, that statement raised a few eyebrows with the religious leaders. They charged Him with blasphemy, convicted Him of a capital crime, and executed Him. The only problem: He was God, so He didn’t stay dead.

Of course, because He was God, He accurately predicted He would be killed and then come back to life. For some reason, everyone was surprised when He actually did—but don’t judge them too quickly. Sometimes it’s just easier to understand things when we’re looking backward. It kind of makes sense that what Jesus said before He died became a little clearer to the disciples after He came back to life.

When you read what Jesus says and you believe He actually came back to life, it gives His words a little extra punch. So, if you think something He said seems a little unreasonable or impossible, just remember—He was dead and now He’s alive!

With that in mind, here’s one of His statements that seems a little outlandish:



“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in Me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even *greater* things than these, because I am going to the Father. . . . And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.”

John 14:12, 16-17a, NIV

Sounds a little crazy, doesn’t it? When He left, Jesus promised to send His Spirit to be here with us. Maybe that explains why He prayed such an unusual prayer,



“Father, just as you are in Me and I am in You. May they (those who are followers of Jesus) also be in us so *that the world may believe* that You have sent Me. . . . *Then the world will know that you sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me,*” **John 17: 21b, 23b, NIV**

Did you get it? Jesus, the God Man, the Man God, who died and rose again, predicted that one day the world will know He loves them, even though they *can't* see Him, because they *can* see the people who are following Him.

Please don't miss this.

PEOPLE CAN'T SEE GOD.
PEOPLE CAN'T SEE JESUS.
PEOPLE CAN'T SEE THE HOLY SPIRIT.

BUT PEOPLE CAN SEE PEOPLE WHO FOLLOW GOD.
PEOPLE CAN SEE THE CHURCH.

That's why what you do, as a pastor or leader, is so important. The church has been part of God's strategy for a long time.

The best chance someone may have to personally see God is to get a close-up look at the people who follow God.

That's why your mission is simple, but complicated. You're supposed to do what Jesus did. Show up in the lives of others so they can see God. Engage with broken people so they can believe in the Jesus who bled for them. That's why the work of your church is so critical. You are called to do more than simply make a presentation of the gospel. You are called to engage in the messiness of humanity *because* of the gospel. You are compelled by the Spirit of Christ in you to convince your world that *God* loves them by the way *you* love them. The fact is, the Church is one of the most divinely strategic organizations that exists. But when or if a church fails to make relationships a priority, it risks becoming irrelevant.

So, let's settle it. God wired your faith to be shaped and influenced by someone else's faith. And God designed you to love people in such a way they can see Him working in you.

Regardless of the style or size of your church, your greatest asset to building faith in the next generation is not your Bible study, worship band, facilities, or budget. The most valuable resources you have to help people see God are the people in your church who know God.

The most
valuable
resources you
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who know God.

And if you hope to help a generation of kids and teenagers know God, then you have to be strategic about how you connect them to small group leaders who believe in God and who believe in them. We'll talk more about the role of your small group leaders later, but for now, let's just agree that every kid needs someone who believes in God and who believes in them.

When *Fortune* magazine released "The World's 50 Greatest Leaders" in 2014, Geoffrey Canada was number twelve on the list. Canada has been someone we have respected for years because of his work with children and teenagers. A few years ago, we had the privilege of meeting with him. Canada is an education reformer who grew up in the South Bronx, went to Harvard graduate school, and came back to Harlem as the president and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone. He has dedicated his life to giving disadvantaged kids a better chance by helping them graduate high school and get into college. In a conversation with Geoffrey, he made an interesting observation about the kids in Harlem. He said the reason so many of these kids don't believe in God is because they've never seen adults who are God-like. What he was saying was simple—in order to believe in a good and creative God who loves them in spite of their mistakes and their mess, kids and teenagers need adults who will do the same.

We know recruiting SGLs to invest weekly in the lives of kids is not the only thing you have to do as leader, but we do believe it is the most important thing you do. We hope you are reading this book because you believe that, too. If you don't, we hope you will by the time you finish.

Our premise is simple.

Leaders who connect with kids in a SMALL group over time have the potential to make a BIG impact on their faith.

That's why we challenge leaders to lead small.

When you **lead small**, you simply make a choice to invest strategically in the lives of a few over time so you can help them build authentic faith. When you lead small, you realize that what you do for a few will always have more potential than what you do for many.

So if you want kids to know God, maybe one of the most important things you can do is to give them someone who will talk with them, hang out with them, and do life with them.

The best way to help kids know God is to connect them with someone who knows God.

ACT LIKE YOU BELIEVE IT

How you behave has a direct effect on what you believe.

And what you believe has a definite impact on how you behave.

Sometimes it's hard to know which one is driving the patterns you see in your organization. But they both have profound influence in your culture.

I (Reggie) remember listening to a lead pastor of a church explain how he had built his church. At one point in the message he actually stated, "We don't do small groups at our church. We tried them, and they just didn't work." The speaker who followed him was a friend of mine, and I smiled when he responded by saying, "He's right, I have been to his church and groups don't work at *his* church." He knew what we all knew. This pastor never modeled or championed groups personally. If you don't act like groups are a priority, then they never will be a priority. **If the leaders in your culture don't really behave like groups are important, then they won't be.** Simply put, your behavior has a way of reinforcing your belief.

I have been to that same "no-small-groups" church. The children's ministry environments are breathtaking. There is state-of-the-art technology at every entrance. Hallways and rooms are designed with jaw-dropping visuals that highlight the theme for each teaching series. They value excellence in everything they create. It is a church wonderland for any child.

There was only one problem. The ministry wasn't organized for children to interact with the same adult leaders every week. So each time kids showed up, they were ushered to tables with leaders who didn't really know them. Why? The lead pastor sent a clear message about what should be the priority. Since there were multiple times the church offered Sunday morning services, the pastor wanted the children's ministry to stay flexible. (Unfortunately, it seems that in some churches the primary role of children's ministry is to keep the kids busy so parents can go to church.) The pastor didn't want to create the expectation that families should come to the same hour every week. He was concerned if they got up late and missed their hour, they wouldn't come at all. So, it was important to him that every adult knew they could come to whichever

hour they wanted. That one decision made it extremely difficult for kids to be connected to the same leader each week. It also created a pattern of behavior or a culture where small groups could never really work.

It communicated something else too. This philosophy suggested that what happened on the church's stage was more important than what happened in relationships. The church leaders behaved like drawing a crowd was more important than connecting in a circle. The children's ministry was just one example of how the church devalued small groups. Maybe that's part of the reason small groups never took off in their church. When small groups are not a priority everywhere, it's hard for them to be a priority anywhere. People are smarter than you think. No matter what you say you believe, people can tell what's important by the way you act. And your behavior will affect what they believe.

Maybe people decide small groups don't work because their church leaders don't act like they *believe* small groups really work.

Several years ago, a pastor asked me to meet with his elders and staff to help them evaluate their church. They had recently transitioned to a small group model and wanted to discuss ways to improve. After a few hours of talking through their strategy, one of the leaders asked this question: "What do you think is the best discipleship program for our Wednesday night gatherings?" Surprised by his question, I replied, "So you have a discipleship program at your church in the middle of the week?" He said, "Yes, we are just not sure that groups will really be the ultimate answer for discipleship." So I responded, "Then they probably never will be the answer." When he looked confused I explained, "As long as you have another answer, groups will probably never become *the* answer. If you want small groups to actually become the primary way you disciple people, then you need to start acting like you believe small groups are the best way to disciple people." You give energy to what you believe in most. And the people who follow your leadership are smart enough to know when you believe what you say.

It's simple. If you believe the best way to disciple people is to organize them into small groups, then act like it. When you create multiple options to disciple someone, you risk establishing competing systems that will ensure nothing works well. **Again, too many answers can guarantee nobody really knows the answer.** As long as you act like something else is really the answer then it probably will be.

BELIEF INFLUENCES BEHAVIOR AND BEHAVIOR INFLUENCES BELIEF. THEY ARE THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS TO UNDERSTAND WHEN YOU ARE TRYING TO SHAPE A CULTURE IN YOUR CHURCH.

HERE ARE TWO MORE TERMS YOU MAY WANT TO KNOW AS YOU READ THIS BOOK:

BELIEF:

The confidence or conviction that something is true.

BEHAVIOR:

A visible pattern of conduct that results from a particular belief.

If you are trying to create a culture where every kid has a place to belong, then there are three critical beliefs and behaviors you need to embrace.

BELIEF: The quality of relationships is linked to the quality of your structure.

BEHAVIOR: IMPROVE THE STRUCTURE.



BELIEF: The scope of your influence is determined by the success of your leaders.

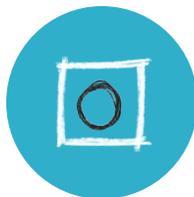
BEHAVIOR: EMPOWER THE LEADER.



BELIEF: The truth of your message is amplified by the depth of your relationships.

BEHAVIOR: CREATE THE EXPERIENCE.





ONE

BELIEF

The quality of relationships is linked to the quality of your structure.

It might seem strange to put the words “structure” and “relationships” in the same sentence. They seem like unrelated topics, but we believe they are dependent on each other. Most people need some type of structure to help them connect consistently. Your potential to be successful in connecting people relationally is directly linked to how you organize your ministry. And when you actually start believing people need some type of organization to connect, then you will be more likely to practice the following behavior.

BEHAVIOR

IMPROVE THE STRUCTURE.

This means, you will spend time tweaking the systems in your organization to help people connect effectively. It suggests that someone on your staff will make leading a group strategy their focus. They will have to assume a variety of responsibilities that will include monitoring what *is* and *is not* working; arranging and re-arranging how people are organized in groups; and leveraging various platforms to lead people into small groups.



TWO

BELIEF

The scope of your influence is determined by the success of your leaders.

Every smart leader should embrace the idea that a ministry to kids or teenagers should never be built around one person. If you don't, you may promote a "pied piper" style of leadership that leads to a very unhealthy culture. It's possible you can become a barrier to discipleship if you decide you should be the one who discipled everyone. We hope that you, as a leader, are self-aware enough to know you have a limited capacity. If you expect to be successful at building a place where kids belong, then your smartest move is to help mobilize SGLs to do it.

BEHAVIOR

EMPOWER THE LEADER.

If you hope to give more kids a genuine sense of belonging, then you will need more leaders. Don't forget: you can't disciple kids in a crowd. Kids need to be in a context where they are known by someone if you hope to influence their faith. That's why you make recruiting, training, and developing leaders a priority. It's simple. If you want small group leaders to make a weekly investment in kids, then you need to make a weekly investment in small group leaders. So, start acting like what you do for



THREE

leaders is just as important as what you do for kids.

BELIEF

The truth of your message is amplified by the depth of your relationships.

Here's the truth about truth. Kids tend to care more about what you say when they know you care about them. They are not compelled to embrace something simply because it's true. As far as they are concerned, it doesn't matter if it's true. It matters when it matters to them, and it matters to them even more when they know they matter to you. Does that mean it isn't important to teach or communicate truth? No. It just means you need to recognize that your message is best understood and received in the context of a caring relationship.

BEHAVIOR

CREATE THE EXPERIENCE.

This leads us back to the one thing you can ultimately do as a ministry leader: you can create an experience where kids have a better chance to connect with an SGL. Think about it. You can't make kids believe or force them to have deeper relationships. But you can create a place that makes it easier for them to belong and believe. That's why you have to work diligently on the weekly experience that is actually happening for the average kid. When it's all said and done, it's what happens in group that will determine your success.

So, let's summarize. If you believe the best way to disciple kids or teenagers is to connect them to consistent leaders, then you need to make sure you act like it. If you don't intentionally act like small groups matter, then people will probably never believe they matter. If you want to create a culture where small groups flourish then you need to have an ongoing plan for what happens with your structure, leaders, and experiences. If you are interested in having such a plan, then keep reading. That's what the rest of this book is about.

AUTHOR BIOS

REGGIE JOINER

Reggie Joiner is the founder and CEO of Orange, a non-profit organization whose purpose is to influence those who influence the next generation. Orange provides resources and training for churches and organizations that create environments for parents, kids and teenagers. Prior to Orange, Joiner co-founded North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, GA, with Andy Stanley. During his 11 years as the executive director of family ministry, he developed a new concept for relevant ministry for children, teenagers, and married adults. If you end up road tripping with him across the country on Orange Tour, be prepared to stop at every antique store along the way. He has found a way to wear orange for 3,453 days and counting.

Joiner has authored and co-authored books including, *Think Orange*, *The Think Orange Handbook*, *Zombies*, *Football*, and *the Gospel*, *Seven Practices of Effective Ministry*, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*, *Lead Small*, and *Creating a Lead Small Culture*.

Joiner and his wife Debbie live in Cumming, GA, and have four children: Reggie Paul, Hannah, Sarah, and Rebekah. For more information about Reggie Joiner, visit ReggieJoiner.com or follow him on Twitter @ReggieJoiner.

KRISTEN IVY

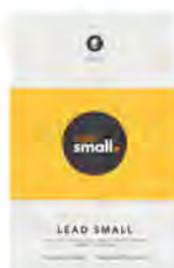
Kristen Ivy is executive director of messaging at Orange. Before beginning her career at the company in 2006, she was a high school biology and English teacher, where she learned first hand the joy and importance of influencing the next generation. She received her Master of Divinity in 2009. At Orange, Ivy has played an integral role in the evolution of the preschool, middle school, high school and curriculum and has shared her experiences at speaking events across the country. Ivy is co-author of *Playing For Keeps*, and *Creating a Lead Small Culture*. She is a collegiate cheerleading captain, turned theologian whose dream is to star in Cirque du Soleil.

Ivy lives in Cumming, GA, with her husband Matt, and her two children, Sawyer and Hensley. For more information about Kristen Ivy, visit KristenIvy.com or follow her on Twitter @Kristen_Ivy.

ELLE CAMPBELL

Elle Campbell is the middle school small group coordinator at The Chapel at CrossPoint in Buffalo, NY. In addition, she also develops lead small and middle school ministry content for Orange. Campbell is co-author of *Creating a Lead Small Culture*. She and her husband Kenny are the creators and operators of their website, *Stuff You Can Use*, to provide resources for youth pastors. Campbell is an expert at finding sloth YouTube videos and clearing 10 inches of snow off her car with a butter knife. For more information about Elle Campbell, follow her on Twitter @EIIIIIIIIIIle (with eleven I's) or visit ElleCampbell.org.

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Small groups come in many sizes. Those that wear diapers. Those that watch Disney. Those learning to drive. Those picking a college. **Lead Small: Five Big Ideas Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know** clarifies the responsibilities of the small group leader who works with children and teenagers. It establishes five common threads so that those who choose to lead in any size church can work off the same blueprint.



Make Believe: 5 Things Great Student Pastors Choose to Believe is for student leaders. It explores five ideas that combine faith and imagination—plus practical steps to turn those beliefs into behaviors—with the goal of reinvigorating student pastors' hearts and ministries.



Every kid needs parents with a strong marriage. Every church needs couples with strong marriages. **Married People: How Your Church Can Build Marriages that Last** is for every leader—pastor, age group minister, family minister, even the dedicated volunteer—who needs a vision and a step-by-step strategy for empowering marriages and strengthening the church in the process.

ORANGE BOOKS

Connecting leaders to a better strategy for influencing the next generation.