

Make  
Believe



FREE SAMPLER

*5 things great student  
pastors choose to believe*

**BEN CRAWSHAW & KEVIN RAGSDALE**

We hope you enjoy this complimentary sample of *Make Believe: 5 Things Great Student Pastors Choose to Believe*, by Ben Crawshaw and Kevin Ragsdale.

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

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*Make Believe*  
is available in print and digital versions.

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# Endorsements

I think being a student pastor is one of the hardest jobs on the planet. That's why I'm thrilled that folks like my friends Ben and Kevin are addressing the unique challenges of student ministry with a fresh perspective. And best of all, they don't pull any punches—refer to the chapter titles if you have any doubts. As a dad with daughters headed toward adolescence I'm deeply encouraged that resources like *Make Believe* are going to dramatically amplify the critical work student pastors do.

**JON ACUFF**, NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *START AND STUFF CHRISTIANS LIKE*

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*Make Believe* takes a practical approach to some uncommon principles that can make or break your ministry. Crawshaw and Ragsdale invite you to imagine again and equip you to continue dreaming.

**MARK MATLOCK**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, YOUTH SPECIALTIES

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After 30+ years in student ministry, I'm more convinced than ever that our niche of ministry is one of the most difficult and important jobs in the church. That's why I'm so grateful that Ben and Kevin have written a resource that not only encourages student pastors to stay the course, but gives them some practical tips to effectively take their ministry to the next level. This isn't just theory. *Make Believe* offers doable strategies from real leaders in real churches. To remain relevant and engaging to teenagers over the span of one's career will require us to re-imagine the way we do ministry over and over. And that is what *Make Believe* invites us to do: Re-imagine our strategy. Re-imagine our role. Re-imagine our relationships with students, parents, and even our own church staff.

**DOUG FIELDS**, AUTHOR OF THE BEST-SELLING *PURPOSE-DRIVEN YOUTH MINISTRY, YOUR FIRST TWO YEARS IN YOUTH MINISTRY*, AND CO-FOUNDER OF [DOWNLOADYOUTHMINISTRY.COM](http://DOWNLOADYOUTHMINISTRY.COM).

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Some days youth ministry leaves you asking, “what is the point, exactly”? Some days you might feel like an event planner, game creator, camp fundraiser, announcement giver, safety inspector, liability detective, official notary, financial manager, media developer, or first-responder. But there is so much more to be discovered and offered in youth ministry than the functional hats we wear. Ben and Kevin know this firsthand. They know there are days when the gritty and sometimes overwhelming reality of our roles beg us to reimagine them, our relationships, and the “why” behind the “what” we do week after week. This is the type of conversation that every youth ministry leader should be having with someone. And this book is a great place to start.

**BROOKLYN LINDSEY**, AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND YOUTH PASTOR AT HIGHLAND PARK CHURCH IN LAKELAND, FLORIDA

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I have witnessed the imagination and genius leadership of Ben Crawshaw and Kevin Ragsdale first-hand. The powerfully simple and practical principles that shape *Make Believe* are not just philosophical fluff. They are real, timeless, and proven. Ben and Kevin are humble, honest, unassuming leaders. *Make Believe* sends a timely and important reminder that, as youth leaders, “Tomorrow will look a whole lot like today unless you learn to lead with some imagination.” I needed this book. I love this book. You will too.

**STUART HALL**, ORANGE LEADER, COMMUNICATOR, CO-AUTHOR OF *THE SEVEN CHECKPOINTS* AND *MAX Q*

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## **MAKE BELIEVE**

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pastors choose to believe*

**BEN CRAWSHAW & KEVIN RAGSDALE**

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# Table of Contents

## **PART ONE: GREAT LEADERS MAKE BELIEVE**

- 10 ..... Head In The Clouds
- 14..... The Spark
- 17 ..... Catalysts For Change

## **PART TWO: YOU WILL BE HERE FOREVER**

- 22 ..... Highs And Lows
- 24 ..... The Most Important Job In The World
- 28 ..... Reverse The Turnover Rate
- 31 ..... The Training Ground
- 36 ..... *One: Work On Making It Great*
- 39 ..... *Two: Build A Network*
- 42 ..... *Three: Develop A Strategy*
- 44 ..... *Four: Never Stop Learning*

## **PART THREE: YOU WILL LEAVE ONE DAY**

- 50 ..... The Problem With Doing It All
- 52 ..... The Rock Star Mentality
- 54 ..... Build A Bigger Base
- 58 ..... *One: Re-Prioritize Your Time*
- 61 ..... *Two: Share The Spotlight*
- 63 ..... *Three: Check Your Ego*

## **PART FOUR: YOUR SENIOR PASTOR IS RIGHT**

- 70 ..... Who's Responsible?
- 72 ..... Follow The Leader
- 75 ..... Walk In His Shoes
- 78 ..... Live What You Want Them To Learn
- 80 ..... *One: Ask The Question*
- 82 ..... *Two: The 40-List*
- 83 ..... *Three: Learn Something Together*
- 84 ..... *Four: Follow*

---

**PART FIVE: YOUR CHILDREN’S PASTOR IS COOL**

88 ..... Children’s Pastors Have A Tough Job  
90..... The Importance Of Childhood  
92 ..... Serve Or Be Served  
94 ..... Benefits Of Working Together  
97 ..... *One: Connect As Human Beings*  
98 ..... *Two: Work On Something Together*  
99 ..... *Three: Make Kids Heroes In Your Student Ministry*  
100 ..... *Four: Serve Your Children’ Pastor*

**PART SIX: YOU NEED PARENTS**

106 ..... Exceptions To The Rule  
108 ..... Lasting Influence  
110 ..... Speaking “Family”  
112 ..... The Need To Be Needed  
115 ..... *One: Connect Parents With Leaders*  
117 ..... *Two: Connect Parents With Your Strategy*  
119 ..... *Three: Connect Parents With Other Parents*  
120 ..... *Four: Connect Parents With Their Kids*  
122 ..... *Five: Connect Parents With Big Moments*

**PART SEVEN: IT STARTS WITH YOU**

128 ..... The Next Generation

1



**GREAT  
LEADERS  
MAKE  
BELIEVE**

## Head In The Clouds

I (Ben) remember it vividly. Me, nine years old, playing basketball in my driveway.

I grew up in the pre-subdivision days, when having land was king. The neighbors I played with were within biking—not walking—distance, so it wasn't always possible to coordinate hangout time. My closest sibling, my sister, was five years older and much more interested in Finger Pop Mittens and Madonna's "Lucky Star" than she was shooting hoops with me. My dad was at work.

Needless to say, I was ballin' solo that day.

It was the golden era for my hometown Atlanta Hawks: Dominique Wilkins, Spud Webb, and Doc Rivers. We even had a center named Tree Rollins. How can you not love an NBA team with a Spud, a Doc, and a Tree?

The '85-'86 Hawks finished first in the NBA Central Division that season. And the icing on the cake? Dominique won the Slam Dunk Contest in '85; Spud Webb won it in '86. I was captivated by our high-flyers.

So I would imagine that I was the Hawks' starting point guard (sorry Doc Rivers). And not just the point guard, I was the unquestioned physical and emotional leader of the team. I'd have pretend conversations with Dominique during pretend timeouts. I'd direct traffic on the court. It was a great time!

Inevitably, we'd end up in the NBA Finals matched up against the Lakers. It was a highly publicized duel between Magic Johnson and me. It would always come down to game seven. It would always come down to the last shot.

And I would always take it.

Most of the time I missed that shot because I was a terrible shooter. This allowed for some solid chronokinesis. For those of you who are rusty on your superpower lingo, that's time travel. I would basically run the play over and over until I *finally* made the shot. The crowd would go wild. I'm talking out-of-control crazy. The Hawks won the NBA Finals! It was unanimous—I was the Finals' MVP.

I was just about to answer Pat O'Brien's first post-game interview question when my mom called me inside for dinner. Just like that I went from one of the greatest basketball players in the world to a fourth grader who didn't want to eat meatloaf.

Imagination time over. Back to reality.

But for an hour or two, it was magical. I was a world-class athlete at age nine. How cool is that? All the realistic obstacles were gone—my age and lack of actual basketball ability. I was the best version of myself. I was on top of the NBA world.

Do you remember playing make believe as a kid? Some of you were probably too logical and mature. But I bet most of you had *something* that you pretended to be. A superhero? A princess? An astronaut? Make believe doesn't always have to be epic. My wife would make believe that she was a grocery store cashier.

Since the beginning of time, boys and girls have been storming castles, catching bad guys, fighting fires, and searching for hidden treasure (I'm not sure if they have actually been doing it since the beginning of time, but it seemed like a cool way to start that sentence). But here's the problem:

→ **IMAGINATION IS HIGHLY SUPPORTED IN CHILDHOOD,  
BUT IT'S HIGHLY SUPPRESSED IN ADULTHOOD.**

## Make Believe

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Eventually, we lose the ability to make believe. As we grow up, we're told to "get our head out of the clouds" and "use our brains." But isn't imagination the very thing that has catapulted us to do great things? It's put humans in the air, under the sea, and on the moon. If you drive to work, you're benefitting from someone's imagination. If you ride the train, you're benefitting, too. If you check your email on your phone while you wait for your stop . . . well, you get the idea.

When you think about it, imagination and faith are similar. They both stir us to believe something or believe *in* someone. That's why anti-faith people use the same language that anti-imagination people use: "Get your head out of the clouds" and "use your brain."

But you and I were created in the *image* of God. I'm not sure I know exactly what that means, but I think part of that "image" shows up in our imagination. Think about it. Human beings are the only species with the ability to imagine what doesn't exist and create it. As great as pets are, I doubt you've ever had one who pretended to be a robot and then made a robot friend out of cardboard and dryer vents.



### FAITH TAKES IMAGINATION.

I'm not saying faith is only imagination. But you need a little imagination if you're going to envision a God you can't see or pray to—a God you can't hear audibly.

Just like it's sad when a kid has reached the age when he or she is too old to play make believe—when they become too aware of their obstacles and the worst version of themselves—it's sad when we as adults quit imagining how things *could* be, and what it might take to get us there. We let real life keep us from believing that there could be a better way. In other words, **we let the harshness of reality weaken the hope of our faith.**

Now, let's turn all of that to you and your role in student ministry.

- Are you imagining?
- Are you dreaming?
- Is your faith growing?
- Or have you let reality stifle your ability to believe?

I hope this book builds your faith. And I hope it catapults you to imagine a better way to lead students.

### The Spark

When you're a leader, you have influence. Whether you believe that or not, it's true. And when you use your imagination, it gives those who follow you permission to do the same. Sometimes people use the phrase "cast vision." That's a fancy way of saying that you paint a picture that other people can imagine and give them a vision of something they can believe in. Actually, it's much quicker and easier to say "cast vision," so just stick with that.

When you seek to inspire people, you're attempting to say or do something that helps others build their belief.

Think of it this way:

**LEADERSHIP → IMAGINATION → BELIEF**

Steve Jobs was a modern technology prophet. As the co-founder of consumer electronics powerhouse Apple, Jobs didn't just lead the charge—he was the charge in revolutionizing the computer industry. Whether you're an Apple lover or hater, you can't argue with the company's ability to innovate. Jobs built a loyal and passionate customer-base that deeply believes in the products Apple creates.

It was Jobs' dream to inspire users with a unique electronic experience that they could easily navigate. In Carmine Gallo's book *The Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs: Insanely Different Principles for Breakthrough Success*, he notes that Jobs believed **innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.**

Jobs never lost his ability to imagine. Instead, he used his imagination to innovate. And with that innovation, Jobs inspired people to believe in him as a leader. The result? Astonishing

momentum. If you own an iPhone, iPad, iMac, or any of the many Apple products, then you believe in the imagination of Steve Jobs. You are following his leadership.

Nelson Mandela was also a man with a relentless vision. His determination to end racial discrimination in South Africa earned him 27 years in prison. Quite a different payoff than Jobs, who got a billion-dollar company. Yet, despite his imprisonment, Mandela never stopped pushing people toward equality and reform. Mandela imagined a different South Africa and invited the South African people to imagine it with him. He saw hope, restoration, and freedom instead of poverty, oppression, and hate. He famously put it this way:

***“The power of imagination created the illusion that my vision went much farther than the naked eye could actually see.”<sup>1</sup>***

Mandela led by helping people envision a better country to live in. His imagination helped other people imagine. And their collective imagination, along with a whole lot of determination and effort, literally changed the reality for a whole nation.

In Galilee, when Jesus told His followers, *“Go and make disciples of all nations,”*<sup>2</sup> He helped them imagine a movement that would take His message to Jews and Gentiles around the world. And when He added, *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age,”*<sup>3</sup> He instilled belief that it was actually possible.

Then Jesus left. What happens next is the book of Acts. Talk about people who could’ve been overwhelmed by the harsh reality of their circumstances! Instead, a band of unlikely trailblazers, led by Peter and filled with the Holy Spirit, established the irresistible movement of the church.

Decades later, when Peter wrote to a group of Christians in Asia Minor, he said, *“To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours...”*<sup>4</sup>

## Make Believe

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Wait. A faith as precious as the Apostles'? A faith as precious as the missionaries' who put their lives at risk? A faith as precious as Peter's? Yes. Peter was letting them know that he didn't have some elusive, superior faith because he was one of the church's founding fathers. No, *everyone* had access to a faith that was just "as precious."

Peter gave these early Christians something to believe in. Shortly afterward, he was martyred. But the movement continued.

**Leaders use their imagination to spark faith in others.** Leaders invite people to believe in something they may not otherwise believe in—something that feels unlikely or unattainable. Jobs did it. Mandela did it. Peter did it. Jesus did it.

Now you go do it.

As leaders who lead students, think about this: it's impossible to improve something without imagination. You can't change something without imagining something better. **Your tomorrow will look a whole lot like today unless you learn to lead with some imagination.**

So you *must* imagine! Make believe is essential to your leadership and their faith.

## Catalysts For Change

Growing up in Oklahoma City, I (Kevin) loved going to my church. And I was unembarrassed to be vocal about it. In high school when my friends stayed at my house on Saturday nights, they had no choice but to tag along with me to church on Sunday mornings. I thought it was a perfect finish to a great weekend.

Then my friends quit staying at my house on Saturday nights.

Looking back, I realize that I went to church because I believed it was the best place on Earth to be. I thought church was fun and engaging. My friends, however, had a different set of beliefs. They thought church was boring and weird.

I thought the problem was that my friends didn't have enough conviction or devotion to God. In reality, they just had different thoughts about church. And honestly, my church could've done some things to make the experience more appealing for them. (They were invited to join the Handbell Choir. What more did they want?) In the end, I showed up at church because I believed it was great. They avoided church because they believed it was bad.

It's a small example of a powerful idea: if you can change the way you think, you're on your way to changing the way you act. Paul said it this way: *"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*<sup>5</sup> You'll see a change in behavior once you imagine a change in belief.

→ **You can create change not only by doing something differently, but also by believing differently.**

There's a relationship between what you believe and what you do that's important to understand. It's the reason why, if you

## Make Believe

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communicate to students, you don't simply say "do this" or "stop doing that" and then close in prayer. Instead, you clearly explain the *why*, because you want to change their belief—not just their behavior—in order to shape their future.

The purpose of this book is to offer five specific things that we want you to believe. But we won't stop there. In the second half of each section, we're going to provide some specific behaviors that will help reinforce that belief. Why? Because we're confident of this:

### **IMAGINATION + BEHAVIOR = BELIEF**

We want you to imagine what your student ministry could look like. And we want you to develop some behaviors that could make that dream a reality.

**Imagine it. Do it. And in the end, we hope you believe it.**

Let's practice a little make believe,  
shall we?

If you could make believe that you were any famous person in the world right now, who would you be?

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Back to reality. What is the best version of you as a ministry leader?

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What is the best version of your student ministry?

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If you could change one thing about your student ministry, what would it be?

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## About the Authors

**Ben Crawshaw** leads the student initiative (*XP3 Students & High School Camp*) at Orange. At 19, Ben began traveling and speaking to students. He graduated from Lee University in Cleveland, TN, and then took a job as an assistant pastor at age 22. After that, Ben became the Creative Director of High School Ministry at North Point Community Church, where he produced programs, media, and events for over 2,000 students. He currently writes, speaks, hosts and creates camps for students all over the United States (and a couple of other countries, too). In his free time, you can find Ben doing the Braves' Tomahawk Chop, watching non-horror movies, or eating Reese's Pieces. He and his wife Holly love living in Dahlonoga, GA. They have two daughters and an unruly cat named Cupcake. Learn more about Ben at [bencrawshaw.org](http://bencrawshaw.org).

**Kevin Ragsdale** serves on the Leadership Team for North Point Ministries and is the Multi-Campus High School Director of North Point Community Church and its four other Atlanta-area campuses. Kevin was one of the first family ministry employees at North Point and developed their student ministry philosophy, which includes the small-group model. He also created Student Impact, a program that provides an opportunity for students to serve every week in the church. In addition to leading a staff on 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 and his wife Gina live in Cumming, Georgia, with their three children.

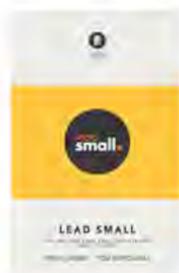
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Strategy, best practices, training tips, and real-life stories—***Creating a Lead Small Culture: Make Your Church a Place Where Kids Belong*** has what you need to create an effective small group culture in your church. For every leader of small group leaders.

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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.

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Every student 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.

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