



LEAD SMALL

FIVE BIG IDEAS EVERY SMALL GROUP LEADER
NEEDS TO KNOW

REGGIE JOINER TOM SHEFCHUNAS

ABOUT THIS BOOK

After almost 50 years of combined ministry experience, we knew we wanted to write a book to small group leaders. We saw two possible ways of achieving that goal. We could either go out and find the single most incredible small group leader on the planet and ask them to write a book, or we could create a team of small groups leaders and draw from their collective experiences. For their creativity, their transparency, and their commitment to live out this idea of leading small, we would like to thank Abbey Carr, Eryn Erickson, Kristen Ivy, Cara Martens, Kristie McCollister, Matt McKee, Sue Miller, Courtney Templeton, Lauren Terrell, Jeremy Zach and Mikaela Zach.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

As a guide for small group leaders of all ages, we realize not all the topics and examples will apply evenly across the-board. As students grow, the role of a small group leader changes. Some practices that we ask of a preschool leader, we would never encourage from a student leader. And some things a good student leader will do, would be entirely inappropriate at the preschool stage. As you go through this book, you will notice journal sections intended to help you put some of your own ideas into practice.

Look for the P, C and S to help you figure out how each topic can apply specifically for the age group you lead.

P

Preschool

C

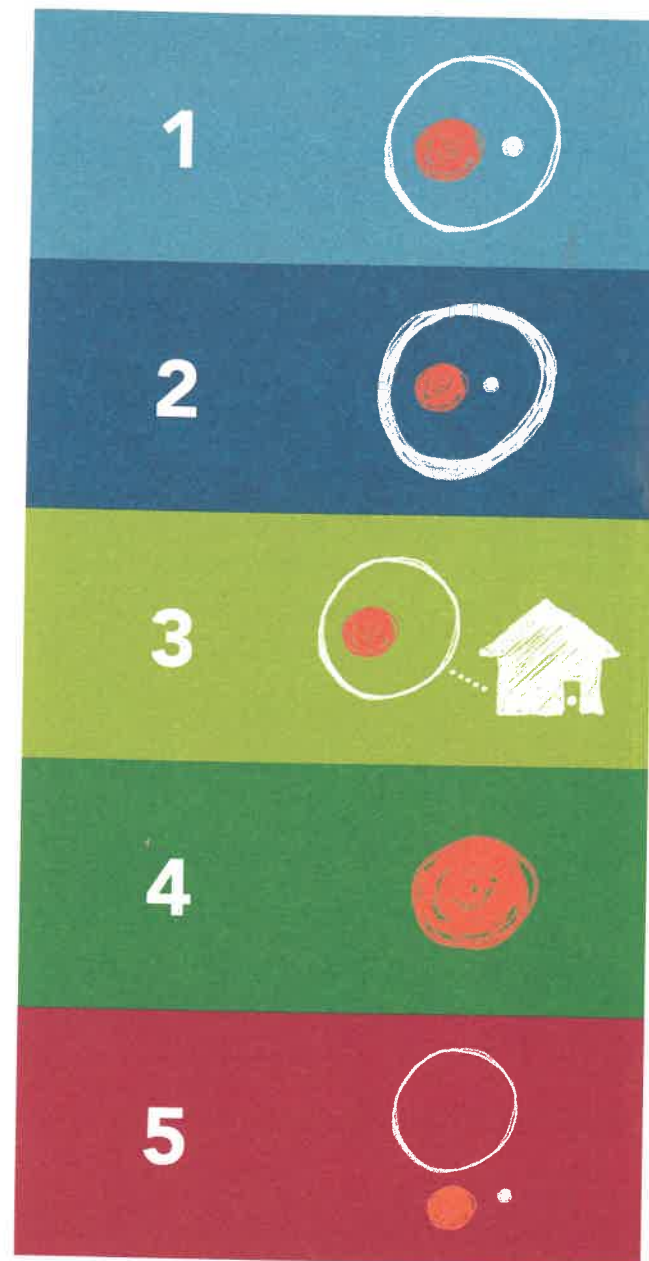
Children

S

Students

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BIG CHALLENGE. SMALL SOLUTION.

We have a challenge. A BIG challenge. Most studies today indicate that at least half of students will walk away from their faith in college. Why?

Pushy professors?
Radical roommates?
Cynical sweethearts?

Although these may be the easy mark, the real culprit starts long before English 101. It's not something they come across on campus. It's not lying in wait beneath dorm room lofts.

It's something they bring from home. It's packed in their bags next to their "shower shoes," beneath the keepsake from a nearly forgotten high-school romance.

It's a pseudo, immature, green, borrowed or fragile faith.

Now, before you start the blame game, we, as parents and leaders in their lives, didn't necessarily fail them. Think about their stage of life.

They are young.
They have a lot to learn.
A long way to go.
They have yet to experience life at its fullest.

Their faith is, to some degree, **unchallenged**.

So, now that you understand the BIG challenge, what's the solution?

This is where you come in. Your goal is to raise kids with a stronger faith—with what we call authentic faith.

If you're wondering what that looks like, it's probably something like what Paul described when he wrote to Timothy:

“

“Okay son, listen up because you are out on your own now—ready to do what God called you to do. You will need to hold onto the commands I’m giving you so that you can fight a good fight. Hold onto faith. Have a good conscience. Don’t reject them and suffer like others have done,”
(1 Timothy 1:18-19, RJLT).¹

”

Isn't that what we are after? We want a generation to grow up holding onto a faith that is rooted in scripture. We want kids who place their trust in God, not only

In a moment

At VBS

On the last night of camp

But every day.

We want them to have a really **BIG** faith—
an authentic faith.

And the only way you can cultivate
authentic faith is through leading **SMALL**.

¹ RJLT = Reggie Joiner Loose Translation. This is not a real translation.

Lead Small

"What do you mean 'lead small'?"
 "Shouldn't I make a BIG difference?"
 "What about changing the world?"

Most people dream of
 finding an opportunity to do
 something BIG.
 To make a BIG change.
 To lead BIG.

That's why we . . .
 Accumulate Facebook friends and Twitter followers
 Make videos in hopes of going viral
 Climb the corporate ladders
 Audition for "So You Think You Have the Voice to Dance with
 the Biggest Loser."

In fact, most of us believe—

The best way to make a
 BIG difference is to get a
 big following.

And when the masses don't follow,
 when the 11 o'clock news isn't knocking down the door ...

We try something else.
 Something BIG.
 Like dancing on an over-sized keyboard with Tom Hanks.

But ...

What if the things we consider BIG
 Don't matter as much as we think?

What if the biggest difference is made
 By not doing something big at all?

What if the biggest things are really accomplished
 By doing something **SMALL**?

If we aren't careful,
 we can work so hard at leading big
 we never experience the power
 of leading small.

When we lead small we realize
 that what we **do for a few** will always have more potential
 than what we do for many.

When we **lead small** we simply make a
 choice to invest strategically in the lives
 of a few over time so we can help them
 build an authentic faith.

We lead small to build authentic faith.

It's the principle this book is dedicated to.

You are the person this book is dedicated to.

You are a **SMALL** group leader.

You had the courage to think **SMALL** enough to take on the
 BIG challenge.

You chose to invest in the few lives in your group.

And while group members come in all sizes—

Those who wear pampers

Those who watch Disney

Those who have squeaky voices

Those who are learning to drive

Those who are picking a college—

Every size, every age, needs the kind of influence you have the potential to give.

But what exactly do you do?

What exactly is your role?

You may feel lost at times, like you fall somewhere between a parent and a friend, a coach and a teacher. Remember, you aren't supposed to be *any* of those things. You are a little of *all* of those things.

You're a little bit of a friend, parent, coach, *and* teacher combined. Let's say you're a Friend . . . Poacher?

No, that's bad. Let's just stick with small group leader. Or **SGL**.

And when we say SGL, we are talking about anyone who chooses to invest in the lives of a few to encourage authentic faith.

As you read this book, you will discover how to

BE PRESENT
CREATE A SAFE PLACE
PARTNER WITH PARENTS
MAKE IT PERSONAL
MOVE THEM OUT

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

As you read, you will also notice a few important graphics.



A circle represents a group. Not a group of wild boar. (Although, they may seem to be at times.) A group of students or kids. And not just any group. *Your* group.



A large orange dot represents YOU. The SGL. Don't you look good?



A small dot represents one individual in your circle. Someone you are leading.



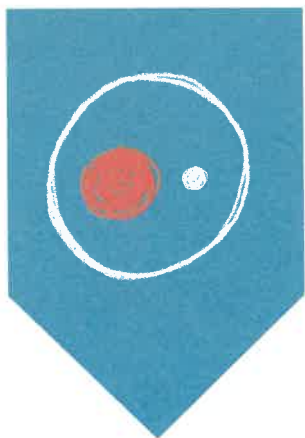
A home represents . . . well, a student's home. What else would it be?

A dotted line is just a dotted line. I think you get the point.

So, I guess we're done. Now you know absolutely all you need to know to be a good SGL. You have all the tools you'll need: a circle, two dots, a home, and a dotted line.

So, go out and lead
Invest.
Encourage.
Change lives.

No? Things still a little fuzzy? Okay, okay. I'll explain a little more.



be present

CONNECT THEIR FAITH
TO A COMMUNITY

When God made man, Adam was alone in Eden—what has since become the icon of perfection.

Peaceful.

Tranquil.

Eden.

—And Adam.

But it wasn't perfect, was it?

Adam was immersed in lush vegetation of all kinds.

He was surrounded by hundreds of different living species.

But Adam was still lonely.

The vines made lousy dance partners.

The hyenas were poor conversationalists. (They laughed at their own jokes! Who does that?)

The elephants were (not so surprisingly) dreadful at hide-and-seek.

But God understands the human need to connect.

God *created us with a need for community.*

God *knew it wasn't good for man to be alone.*

God *made Eve.*

Fast-forward thousands of years.

God came to Earth as man.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry He chose twelve guys.

He didn't invite the masses.

His goal was not to fill the largest amphitheater in Corinth.

He led thousands but chose to invest in, to do life with, a few.

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

STILL NOT CONVINCED? LET'S GO A STEP FURTHER.

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

The earliest churches had no buildings.
No choir rooms.
No praise band.

There were no kids' programs.
No Sunday school classes.
No fall festivals.

There was simply community.

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

The church wasn't a place. The church was a group. And wherever the group gathered, the church thrived. As our first example of living out an authentic faith, the early Church clues us in to just how important community is.

In fact, there is a passage in Thessalonians that reveals, almost defines, this early glimpse of community in Paul's own words:



"SO WE CARED FOR YOU. BECAUSE WE LOVED YOU SO MUCH, WE WERE DELIGHTED TO SHARE WITH YOU NOT ONLY THE GOSPEL OF GOD BUT OUR LIVES AS WELL."
(1 THESSALONIANS 2:8).



THERE IT IS.

YOUR JOB AS
AN SGL.

YOU CARE.
YOU LOVE.
YOU DELIGHT.

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

God created us for community.

Jesus illustrated community.

The Church practiced community.

THEREFORE, CONNECTING THE FAITH OF YOUR FEW TO A COMMUNITY IS YOUR PRIMARY GOAL. SO, HOW DO YOU CREATE THIS COMMUNITY?

BE PRESENT.

When you lead small you choose to **be present**.

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

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

1

Show up
predictably.

2

Show up
mentally.

3

Show up
randomly.

Your very first, basic, fundamental task as an SGL is to

SHOW UP PREDICTABLY.

Show up consistently; for most of you that means weekly.

This is what you signed up for. This is the bare minimum of your job description. But don't let that fool you. It is also the most important thing you can do. Because until you are showing up predictably, consistently, regularly, you cannot check off the rest of the tasks in this book.

You cannot lead a small group without trust.

You cannot build a community without trust.

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

Everyone needs someone who is predictable in their life.

- Toddlers need someone who doesn't look like a stranger.
- Elementary schoolers need someone who remembers the name of their goldfish.
- Middle schoolers need someone who is up-to-date on their weekly—sometimes daily—dramas.
- High schoolers need someone who knows their personal struggles and is committed to walking through it all with them.

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

So, once you have your mind wrapped around the commitment behind this first task, stay focused. Because your next task involves a wee bit o' brain power.

NOW THAT YOU
HAVE THE BASICS
DOWN, LET'S MOVE
TO THE THIRD,
MORE ABSTRACT,
AND POTENTIALLY
MORE IMPACTFUL,
WAY TO BE
PRESENT IN THE
LIVES OF
YOUR FEW.

SHOW UP RANDOMLY.

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

A few years ago, there was a high school student interning with me (Tom) and my team. She was sitting in on a meeting to discuss ideas for training SGLs.

As we discussed, brainstormed, contemplated, she suddenly blurted out . . .



"DO YOU WANT TO KNOW THE BEST THING MY SMALL GROUP LEADER EVER DID?"



We all stopped and looked at her. Of course we wanted to know. Why hadn't we thought to ask her—the one person in the room who had grown up in the small group model—about her experience? As we hid our embarrassment, she continued.



"BACK IN FIFTH GRADE I WAS REALLY NERVOUS ABOUT A TEST, AND I MENTIONED IT IN SMALL GROUP. THEN, THE NIGHT BEFORE THE TEST, MY MOM SAID I HAD A PHONE CALL. IT WAS MY SMALL GROUP LEADER. SHE HAD CALLED TO TELL ME SHE WAS THINKING ABOUT AND PRAYING FOR ME AND THAT SHE THOUGHT I WOULD DO GREAT ON THE TEST!"



AS A STAFF, WE
WERE AMAZED.
HERE WAS A HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENT
TELLING US
ABOUT A SIMPLE
PHONE CALL AN
SGL MADE MANY
YEARS EARLIER.
NOT ONLY DID
SHE REMEMBER IT
... SHE DESCRIBED
THAT LITTLE PHONE
CALL AS THE "BEST
THING" HER SGL
EVER DID.

NEVER
UNDERESTIMATE
THE POWER OF
SHOWING UP
RANDOMLY.

- A PHONE CALL
- A BIRTHDAY
CARD
- A BALL GAME
- A TEXT MESSAGE
- A FACEBOOK
POST
- A POSTCARD
FROM YOUR TRIP

These small **connections** may seem insignificant. But when you choose to be present in an unexpected way, outside of your weekly group time, you reinforce your students' **connection** to the community you are creating.

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

Show up predictably.

Show up mentally.

Show up randomly.

Your students will begin to trust. They will begin to open up. They will begin to root themselves in the kind of community—

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

You can't be present for everyone. But you can be present for a few.

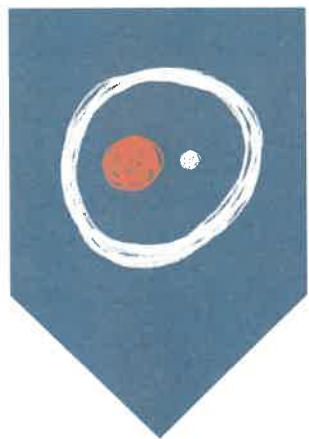
That's why the best way to be present is to **lead small**.



JOURNAL

What are some of the most thoughtful ways others have shown up for you?

Look for opportunities to incorporate some of your ideas to show up predictably, mentally, and randomly.



create a safe place

**CLARIFY THEIR FAITH
AS THEY GROW**

So, you have a circle—
Five, eight, maybe ten mini-yous.

And you can't wait to lead them to

Think like you

Talk like you

Act like you in every way.

You are going to spend Saturday afternoons watching all six episodes of *Star Wars*. You are going to share your favorite hiking trails with them. You are all going to buy season passes to the local roller derby bouts. . . .

If you're still nodding your head, maybe you haven't met your few yet.

On the other hand, if you've been with your few for even a couple of

WEEKS
HOURS
MINUTES

you've probably already been disillusioned
(and that's a good thing).

You've already experienced some tension.

It's the inevitable tension created when a group of different people with different personalities and different backgrounds come together in one place. The tension shows up in families. The tension shows up in groups of friends. And you can bet the tension will show up with your few.

Some will love apple juice.
 Some will love milk.
 Some will love hip hop.
 Some will love country.
 Some will love the NFL.
 Some will love the PGA.

Of course, the tensions won't all be as surface as pop culture and sports. As you go deeper with your few, new, more difficult, tensions will arise.

And one of your most challenging tasks as an SGL is learning to accept and manage the tensions that come up in group.

Your few are very aware of tension. They are watching how you deal with it.
 How you deal with it has the potential to give them a sense of security and safety.
 As strange as it may seem, **tension is a good thing.**

Tension is actually the platform that gives you an opportunity to demonstrate that this is a safe place.

How you handle **conflict**
 How you handle **hard questions**
 How you handle **discipline**
 How you handle **fears**

You are the leader.
 You can't do away with tension.
 You can manage it.
 You can use it to show kids that this is a safe place.

And the safer your environment is, the more honestly your few will clarify their faith in the context of your circle.

THE MORE YOUR FEW CLARIFY THEIR FAITH, THE CLOSER THEY GET TO DEVELOPING AN AUTHENTIC FAITH THAT WILL STAY WITH THEM BEYOND THEIR GRADUATION DAY. THAT'S WHY ITS SO IMPORTANT TO

CREATE A SAFE PLACE.

When you lead small you choose to **create a safe place.**
 When you choose to create a safe place you help your few **clarify** authentic faith.
 When you chose to create a safe place, that means you . . .



Lead the group.



Respect the process.



Guard the heart.

Small group leaders of little ones know kids will say anything.

"My dad eats his boogers sometimes."
 "My mom drank three milkshakes yesterday."
 "My friend said God isn't real."

FOR THE MOST PART,
YOUNG CHILDREN
SIMPLY TRUST YOU
BECAUSE YOU ARE
OLDER. AND TRUST
IS IMPORTANT IF
YOU ARE GOING
TO HELP YOUR
FEW CLARIFY THEIR
FAITH. BUT THE
TRUTH IS, EVERY
YEAR A CHILD
GROWS OLDER,
THAT TRUST IS
HARDER TO EARN.
IT'S LIKE THEY START
TO HOLD BACK.
FILTER. BECOME
MORE ... GROWN-UP.

So, how can you earn trust? The first step is to

LEAD YOUR GROUP.

Lead your group to value acceptance.

Lead your group to value confidentiality.

Lead your group to value honesty.

Expect relational tension and set the example you want your few to follow.

If you expect someone
to share openly with you,
there has to be a foundation
of acceptance.

Acceptance can be established in the little things that show how much you care.

Be happy to see them.

Give eye-contact.

Get on their level.

Lean in.

The more often you can be positive and specific, the more you will build an atmosphere of acceptance.

But acceptance is fragile. It's broken by something as subtle as

an eye-roll

a heavy sigh

a knowing smile

The way you handle relational tension sets the tone of acceptance. You can consistently protect your few from the risk of rejection by

celebrating everyone equally
shutting down gossip
privately addressing individual issues as they arise.

And while it may not be realistic for everyone to fully accept each other at all times, the consistent attempt on your part will prove to your few they are in a safe place that values acceptance.

They will feel safe with you.

They will share.

And then their struggles will be tweeted, whispered and immortalized in Jennifer's note to Hannah that gets confiscated and read aloud during science class the next day.

That's where
confidentiality
comes in.

Confidentiality may be the most difficult to monitor. You typically won't know about a breach until after—

Mark has told the whole football team about Jake's history of bed-wetting.

Tiffany has tweeted about Robyn's disgusting foot fungus.

Ryan has shown the whole class pictures of Justin's blankie.

YOUR JOB IS TO
BALANCE THE
TENSION BETWEEN
ENCOURAGING
CONFIDENTIALITY
AND KNOWING
WHEN TO PROMPT
ONE OF YOUR
FEW TO USE
DISCRETION.

We would all love to have the perfect group filled with enough respect and maturity to know for sure that what is said in group stays in group. In fact, that should probably be a rule you set up in the beginning. Absolute, 100 percent, swear-on-my-poster-of-Justin-Bieber confidentiality should always be your goal.

But we have to be realistic. I heard a rumor there was a breach of confidentiality even in Jesus' circle.

Know your group. When one of your few begins to disclose

something personal *in your circle* that you feel might come back to hurt him later, prompt discretion. Lead the group by asking him to share with you later instead of encouraging him to share juicy details for hungry ears to hear. (And keep in mind, as the SGL, you can't always promise confidentiality either—but we'll get to that.)

As you lead your group to create a safe place that values acceptance and confidentiality, you have opened the door for another important group characteristic—*honesty*.

Honesty is the only way for your few to

Be themselves

Share doubts

Ask questions

Admit struggles

We could probably write a book just on that list alone and why each of those things is essential for clarifying their faith, but let's just sum up by saying:

IF THEY CAN'T be their Monday-through-Saturday-self when they are with you in group, they will have a hard time applying their faith in everyday situations.

IF THEY CAN'T share their doubts in community, they will dwell on them privately.

IF THEY CAN'T ask you their questions, they are going to ask someone else.

IF THEY DON'T admit their struggles to someone, they will never experience the power of bringing things to light in a way that facilitates freedom and forgiveness.

SO, YOU
ENCOURAGE THE
HONESTY OF YOUR
FEW. YOU REACT
WITH GRACE TO
NEW (SOMETIMES
SHOCKING)
TRUTHS. YOU
PROVE TO THEM
THAT YOUR
INVOLVEMENT
IN THEIR LIVES IS
UNCONDITIONAL.

YOU MODEL
HONESTY IN THE
WAY YOU SHARE
WITH THEM.

Now, about that last statement—*be honest*—as an SGL, have you ever personally struggled with the tension between honesty and inappropriate disclosure?

IN ORDER TO
CREATE A SAFE
PLACE WHERE YOUR
FEW FEEL THEY
CAN BE HONEST,
IT'S IMPORTANT
TO BE HONEST
ABOUT YOUR
OWN SPIRITUAL,
PERSONAL, AND
RELATIONAL
STRUGGLES—
TO A POINT.

You need to be aware of their maturity level and stage of life.
The Lion King is terrifying to a two-year-old.
An R-rated movie is taboo for a 4th grader.
Drinking is still illegal for a high school student.

You get the picture. Before you share a personal story, thought, or anecdote, you may want to ask yourself,

"How will this story benefit them?
What am I trying to accomplish?
Why am I sharing this?"

If the answer to that last question is—

To get them to laugh
To get them to like me
To get their advice
—reconsider.

You can make friends. You can hire a therapist. But your few will never forget the image of tweety bird tattooed on your


Ankle

Now that you are leading the group to value acceptance, confidentiality and honesty, let's add something else to your job as an SGL.

RESPECT THE PROCESS.

There is no checklist for developing an authentic faith in your few. In fact, there is

No finish line.

No plaque.

No medal.

No, "Congratulations! Your few have now achieved authentic faith!"

Instead, authentic faith is a continual process. It's not static. It is the molding, crafting, shaping, and changing of faith through time, life experience and reflection.

And this process isn't the same for everyone. Each individual is different.

That's why you should expect some intellectual tension.

Some will ask,
"If God is so 'good,' where do natural disasters fit in?"

Others will wonder,
"If Sunday is a day of rest, where does football fit in?"

Still others will need to understand,
"If God made man the day after He made animals, where do dinosaurs fit in?"

Maybe the latter question doesn't apply to many but it was definitely a piece of my own process.

WHEN I (TOM)
WAS YOUNG,
I WAS A VERY
INQUISITIVE BOY. I
ALWAYS WANTED
TO KNOW HOW
THINGS WORKED. I
WANTED TO KNOW
HOW THINGS WERE
PUT TOGETHER. I
WANTED TO KNOW
HOW MY FAITH
MESHED WITH
THIS WORLD.

So, when it came time to have the discussion about creation and where the world came from, my interest was piqued. My science book and my Bible seemed to be telling me different things.

So, I asked my Sunday school teacher what I thought was a simple question.



"HOW DO THE DINOSAURS FIT INTO THE CREATION STORY?"



My Sunday school teacher got frustrated, which was a surprise to me. And then, in an irritated tone, I got this response:



"YOU JUST HAVE TO HAVE MORE FAITH THAN THAT!"



I was obviously confused. I didn't think I was asking about my faith . . . I was simply eager to understand how God made the dinosaurs and where they all went.

And while I didn't get the answer I was looking for, I learned something else that stuck with me for years.

My lesson was this:

Church is not a safe place to ask questions. It's a place to come when you are already confident about your faith.

Fortunately, I *un*-learned that lesson as I got older and my church experiences were more varied.

Unfortunately, many children and students are still learning this lesson in churches every week.

Every once in a while one of your few will ask a question or make a statement about what they believe that will make you cringe.

"Did God really make the whole world in six days?"

"Will my Buddhist friend go to heaven?"

"How far is 'too far'?"

"Am I supposed to be a Republican?"

Your insides might churn. You will feel the need to "set them straight."

You need to make sure they don't walk out of your group with any uncertainty on this important issue. You need to know they understand Truth.

Right?

BUT WHAT IF
GOD IS DOING
SOMETHING
BIGGER IN THEIR
HEARTS?

WHAT IF GOD'S
PLAN ISN'T TO
MAKE YOU FEEL
ASSURED?

I know that's a risky thing to say. So let me clarify. I believe—



ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED AND IS USEFUL FOR TEACHING, REBUKING, CORRECTING AND TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, SO THAT THE SERVANT OF GOD MAY BE THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK. (2 TIMOTHY 3:16).



Your job is absolutely to help your few connect their faith to the timeless truth of Scripture. You should open your Bible together and talk about what it says. But a quick answer isn't always the best solution.

Questions aren't bad. They are inevitable. In fact, in order to clarify faith, your few will wrestle with questions. They might even wrestle with them for longer than the hour you spend with them once a week. So, **respect their process.**

Your goal isn't to give correct answers to all of their questions, as though you were some brilliant walking, talking biblical encyclopedia. Don't miss this:

You don't have to have all the right answers in order to be an SGL.

When you don't have a perfect answer, it's okay to say, "I don't know." You can tell them what you *do* know. Share your experiences. Look up Scripture together. Ask your pastor. Go on a journey with them.

But respect their process and they will learn that just because they have questions or doubts, doesn't mean they have lost their faith. It just means, like you, they are in the middle of the unique process of clarifying authentic faith.

NOW HERE'S
THE PART THAT'S
TRICKY ABOUT
CREATING A
SAFE PLACE:
WHEN YOU ARE
SUCCESSFUL, KIDS
WILL TRUST YOU.

And when they trust you they may share something that's above your pay grade.

It may be about home life.

It may be about a boyfriend or girlfriend.

It may be about something the individual is considering.

These are the moments you need to understand that creating a safe place means you . . .

GUARD THE HEART.

Faith is personal. We often process the most difficult times in our lives through the filter of faith. Which is why, as an SGL, you should expect some pretty tough, even shocking things to be revealed during small group time. Things that will create emotional tension.

Your job is to live in the tension between respecting confidentiality and knowing when you need outside help. For this reason, we always put a disclaimer on confidentiality. There is no way for an SGL to promise complete confidentiality. Part of creating a safe place means protecting your few. In some cases, the best way to protect your few is through a breach of confidentiality.

Sometimes we talk about the things above the SGL pay grade as the "three hurts:"

1. BEING HURT
2. HURTING OTHERS
3. HURTING THEMSELVES

When one of your few is being hurt, hurting others, or hurting themselves, it is your responsibility to guard their heart by seeking the help of someone in an authority position. If you are leading in the context of a ministry, you should talk to whoever is in charge right away. They will help you figure out the next steps based on their knowledge of the situation as well as the church's policies. Then you can move forward as part of a qualified team to help the individual.

Some risks are unpreventable. But others—well you can do something about those.

Your few could simultaneously contract a powerful case of lice. You could get an angry call from a mom because your game of "jump or dive" gave her son a bruise the size of Kansas on his chest. You could have to call 911 for a kid reacting to a severe peanut allergy.

That's why every SGL needs to *establish boundaries*. In fact, there's a good chance your church has a list of what some of those boundaries need to be. Here, we'll give you some room to write those down. One of them should probably be: "Don't use a hairbrush for your 'sharing' illustration."



make it personal

**INSPIRE THEIR FAITH BY
YOUR EXAMPLE**

We all naturally look to others for examples of—

What to wear

What to eat

Where to vacation

What to believe

Okay, maybe some of you don't like that. I can feel you pushing back already.

"I am my own person, thank you very much. I do what I want, wear what I want and think how I want."

Fine. Maybe you are independent. Maybe you are a free thinker. But I bet your mouth still waters a little when you see a commercial with a plate of sizzling fajitas.

And I wouldn't doubt if your few influence you in ways you may or may not realize—

Maybe you bought that new video game for your nephew that someone was talking about in group.

Maybe you stopped wearing white tube socks after your few deemed them "gross."

Maybe you reverted back to saying, "I need to go potty."

(If that last one is true, you should really get some new friends—preferably over the age of five.)

There's no denying the power of example. And if it can inspire you—*trendsetting, groundbreaking, trailblazing* you—it will be sure to inspire the minds of your few.

THAT'S WHY, AS
AN SGL, YOUR JOB
GOES BEYOND
YOUR SCHEDULED
MEETINGS. IT
GOES BEYOND
BOWLING OUTINGS
AND STARBUCKS
CONVERSATIONS.
IT GOES BEYOND
EMAILING PARENTS.

IT'S ABOUT THE
EXAMPLE YOU ARE
SHOWING THEM
THROUGH YOUR
OWN LIFE.

The example you are setting for your few through the way you live your personal life is just as important as those hand-drawn postcards you send out on their birthdays.

**That's why we are going to take some time to
Make it Personal.**

This is all about you.
Your free time.
Your life away from your few.

Because the most important
thing you need to lead is not
your few—it's actually you.

As it turns out, being an SGL is a little more complex than you first thought.

Already you have to pay attention in the circle, randomly connect outside the circle, and partner with their parents. What more could be expected? A 3,000-word reflective essay on the developmental patterns of your few to be turned into your supervisor quarterly?

No. Just the small task of making sure your personal life is in order—making sure you are living an example you want your few to follow.

Your few have a front-row seat to your life. The question is, what are they watching? Is it just a show? Or is it a real-life adventure pursuing God? What if watching your personal growth could really be their front-row seat to what God wants to do in their lives?

IF YOU WANT YOUR FEW TO HAVE HEALTHY
RELATIONSHIPS, THEY NEED TO SEE IT IN YOU.
IF YOU WANT YOUR FEW TO SET BOUNDARIES, THEY
NEED TO SEE IT IN YOU.
IF YOU WANT YOUR FEW TO BE CONFIDENT IN WHO
GOD MADE THEM TO BE, THEY NEED TO SEE IT IN YOU.

MAKE IT PERSONAL.

When you lead small you choose to **make it personal**.

When you choose to make it personal you **inspire** authentic faith.

When you choose to make it personal that means you . . .

1

Live in
Community.

2

Set
Priorities.

3

Be Real.

In the book, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*, we outline five big ideas for parents. And making it personal is the one skill that bridges across both parenting and leading small.

Making it personal is essential for anyone who wants to have an impact on the faith of the next generation because, guess what?

They have a very acute "fake detector."

IF YOU TRY TO BE
SOMEONE IN YOUR
CIRCLE THAT ISN'T
CONSISTENT WITH
WHO YOU REALLY
ARE WHEN YOU
AREN'T IN YOUR
CIRCLE, YOU WILL
EVENTUALLY BE
FOUND OUT BY THE
ONES YOU LEAD.

When Timothy was a young leader of the church in Ephesus, his SGL, mentor, Paul, reminds him—

“

DON'T LET ANYONE LOOK DOWN ON YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE YOUNG, BUT SET AN EXAMPLE FOR THE BELIEVERS IN SPEECH, IN LIFE, IN LOVE, IN FAITH AND IN PURITY, (1 TIMOTHY 4:13).

”

The second step to making it personal—to inspiring the faith of your few through example—requires you to

SET PRIORITIES.

Have you ever lost sight of what really matters in life? All of a sudden you realize:

**You haven't slept more than four hours in the past week.
It's been three days since you brushed your teeth.
You've eaten nothing but Big Macs for a month.**

Okay, maybe that's a little extreme. But the point is, we all have a tendency to get distracted and forget what's really important.

One of the best things you can do for your few—and for yourself—is to make your priorities clear. They need to see what you value. And when they see the way you prioritize your life, it might even inspire your few to think about their own priorities.

The first priorities you set should be

Spiritual priorities.

This should come as a no-brainer to you. You are leading your few to grow spiritually. You should also be invested in your own continual spiritual growth.

No matter the age of your few, this is true:

The only way you will effectively be able to discuss authentic faith with your few is if you are experiencing authentic faith in your own life.

IF YOU ARE SIMPLY
TRYING TO INSTILL
FAITH AND MORALS
FOR THE SAKE OF
YOUR FEW, BUT IT'S
NOT A PERSONAL
PRIORITY, THEY'LL
EVENTUALLY
CATCH ON.

A CHILD WILL
NEVER FEEL
SIGNIFICANT
UNTIL YOU
GIVE THEM
SOMETHING
SIGNIFICANT
TO DO.

I (Reggie) know an SGL of high school girls that understood this principle and used the time she was given to show her girls what it meant to be the Church.

Each year, the student ministry held a retreat at the church. The SGLs would stay at homes with their few and travel to the church for sessions in the morning and evening. Each Saturday, the schedule allowed room for a five-hour free time, and the church would provide \$15 per student so the SGLs could take their few paintballing, shopping, bowling, etc., in order to have down-time together to solidify the relationships.

While I still think there is value in all of those things, this particular leader decided to use the time (and money) the church provided to do something a little different. Instead of sitting in pedicure chairs or buying matching bracelets, she made a tradition of using those five hours to volunteer—as a group. They cleaned homeless shelters, prepared meals, and planted inner-city gardens. Not only that, they combined their \$15 each and donated it to the charity they helped serve.

When it came time for dinner back at the church, her girls showed up with dirt under their nails, leaves in their hair, and smelling of sweat. But you know what?

They felt significant.

We cannot underestimate that feeling of being important in someone else's life. As an SGL, it's your job to introduce them to that feeling—to encourage them to move outside the circle and get involved. In fact, this may be one of the best strategies when facing that BIG challenge we talked about at the beginning of the book. **Because what we have found is that if they aren't being the Church when they are with us, they won't know how to be a part of the Church when they leave us.**

So, now you're ready to move them to someone else and move them to do something significant. But what about that unsettling thing we mentioned earlier? What about the day when you are no longer their SGL?

Whether you are the leader of a toddler group or a group of high school seniors teetering on the edge of adulthood, you should always be looking forward. You should always be aware of what is next for your few. And you should be looking for ways to ease these transitions—ways to

MOVE THEM TO WHAT'S NEXT.

Are your few about to

Start school?

Graduate Kindergarten?

Move into middle school?

Get their driver's license?

Go to college?

No matter what is next in their lives, it is your responsibility to do everything you can to set them up for that transition and make sure it goes as smoothly as possible.

If they are moving into a new circle for first grade . . .

Maybe you can hand their new SGL something specific and positive about each individual in your group.

If they are facing the big halls of middle school . . .

Maybe you can bring in a team of resident eighth grade experts to share a little bit about what it's like in a world with lockers and vending machines.

If they are filling out college applications . . .

Maybe you can plan to clear your calendar for an extra year, to walk them through one of the most significant transitions of their life.

Our church asks high school SGLs to commit to stay with their circle for four years. When we made a decision to ask for that level of commitment, I was a little nervous. Four years is a long time. Looking back, I can't imagine leading students any other way.

A few years ago, an SGL I (Reggie) know did something I hadn't seen before. She went through four years of high school with her circle of girls. She saw the ups and downs. She helped them through confusing times and celebrated their accomplishments. Then, graduation day came. The church gave her a small token of appreciation for her service and her job was over—but something wasn't right. If she simply started back over with a freshman group, she would be disconnecting right when the stakes were the highest. She would be sacrificing her relational influence when the felt need was the greatest.

So, she went to the youth minister and asked if she could spend an extra year with her girls—a fifth year making sure their transition to college was smooth.

She spent that year staying connected through social media, visiting college campuses, connecting her few to a local church, and planning get-togethers over the holidays.

Not every SGL is wired for a five-year commitment. But don't miss the point.

No matter the age or stage of your few, they will eventually face a life transition. How you prepare them for and walk them through that time can ease the growing pains and anxiety to make them feel more comfortable about what's next.
