



# Week 1

For the next four weeks, we're going to be taking a look at the book *Lead Small*, by Reggie Joiner and Tom Shefchunas. I am so *excited* to walk through this book with you. If you and I are already friends, then you might already know that I am completely obsessed with this book. Not kidding. And if you didn't know that about me already, well, you're about to find out.

But, before we dive in, let me tell you a little bit about my story.

I grew up going to church. I was there every Sunday morning (and most Sunday nights), every Wednesday night, for weekend retreats, special events, lock-ins, and camps, and... you get the picture.

**But, even though I've spent my entire life immersed in the church, there is one thing I never experienced: a consistent Small Group Leader (or any adult, really) who wanted to invest in me.**

Because this idea of a consistent Small Group Leader had never been modeled for me, I didn't really know what I was missing. But, then, when I was in 11th Grade, a few things happened.

First, I realized I wanted to start mentoring and investing in some younger girls in a meaningful way. So I signed up to be a Small Group Leader in our Middle School Ministry. Then, I was promptly given *thirty* 5th grade girls (some "small" group, huh?). And then... my church hired a new youth pastor.

The New Guy came in with lots of crazy ideas, like...

- "Hey, let's make small groups a really big deal!"
- "Let's have Small Group Leaders stay with their group of students *for several years*, instead of ditching them every year for a new group of kids."
- "What if Small Group Leaders started investing in their small group *outside* of church, too?"
- And, **"Small Group Leaders, I want you to think of yourselves as the youth pastors of your small group."**

Of course, this rocked a few boats. That usually happens when things change in an organization. Some people were intrigued. Some were hesitant. Others were flat-out angry.

But as a seventeen-year-old brand new Small Group Leader with 30 precious little 5th grade girls in my care... **I don't think I had ever heard anything more exciting.** This Small Group Leader thing wasn't just a glorified babysitting job with some Jesus thrown in. This was a serious investment! This was a long-term commitment! I could make a significant difference in the lives of my few! I was so pumped.

And just like that, I was hooked.

I finished 5th grade with my girls. Then I moved up into 6th, 7th, and 8th grade with them. Then I thought about letting them move on into high school while I took a new 5th grade group. But they hated that idea. So I stayed with them through 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade, too.

Over the years, our church recruited more volunteers and our group of thirty got a lot smaller (thankfully). We lost some girls, and we added some more, but our group has maintained a consistent core of girls for almost ten years now. **And writing that sentence just made me feel... so... old.**

My girls just began their sophomore year of college last month. And, although I'm not "officially" their Small Group Leader anymore, they come to my house every Thursday night for book studies and heart-to-hearts and potlucks and movies. They are wonderful girls. They're strong, talented, authentic, so smart, and they're following hard after Jesus. Oh, and they're all serving as middle school Small Group Leaders now, too.

I tell you all this because it's this part of my story that has made me so passionate about Small Group Leaders. I've been a Small Group Leader and, now that I work at the church where I grew up, I get to *lead* Small Group Leaders, too.

One of my favorite things in the world is thinking about how to better train, equip, lead, and encourage Small Group Leaders to "be more awesome," as Kid President would say.

Which brings me to this *Lead Small* book study. I've [said it before](#), and I'll say it again: **this book is the best resource I have ever seen on leading a small group.** It's helped me be a better Small Group Leader, and it's helped me be a better leader of my team of Small Group Leaders. My only complaint is that it didn't exist sooner.

So if you haven't read it yet... just get ready. It will be awesome.

Grab your copy. Open it up to the very beginning.

And let's get started.

## **BIG CHALLENGE, SMALL SOLUTION**

Reggie and Tom begin *Lead Small* with a reminder of *why* they think Small Group Leaders are such a big deal: because we're in the midst of a crisis.

All the statistics show that at least half of teenagers and college students who grow up in church will walk away from their faith. But that's where Small Group Leaders come in. Because **if our students are going to build the kind of faith that lasts, they need people in their lives who will help them build it.**

As ministry leaders, it's so important for us to keep this in perspective: **our goal isn't to build a great small group ministry. Our goal is to help kids build *authentic faith*.** And Small Group Leaders are a *great* way to make that happen.

"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." (p.15)

## LEAD SMALL

As a Small Group Leader and, now, someone who *leads* Small Group Leaders, I can tell you first hand that *it is really hard* to explain what exactly a Small Group Leader is and does. The ideal Small Group Leader is a really unique combination of teacher, friend, coach, mentor, and maybe even a little bit of a parent, too. **The role of an SGL is unlike anything else, which can make it a little difficult to describe and even more difficult to teach and train.**

For years, I've been trying to figure out the best way to communicate what being a great SGL look like. I've come up with my own definitions, told a lot of stories, given my SGL's some books to read, and made a list of the "essentials" of small group leading (and then *remade* that list a few times).

And then *Lead Small* came into existence. And I rejoiced. Because, suddenly, I had the definition I had been looking for:

**A Small Group Leader is "anyone who chooses to invest in the lives of a few to encourage authentic faith."** And to make that happen, a great Small Group Leader does 5 things:

1. Be Present.
2. Create a Safe Place.
3. Partner with Parents.
4. Make it Personal.
5. Move Them Out.

In the next 3 weeks, we're going to spend some time hashing out what each of these principles looks like. And I can't wait. So get ready.

# Week 2

Hi! Welcome back to our little *Lead Small* book study. In week 1 of this study, we kicked off this study by reading just the Introduction together. Today we'll start getting into the meat of the book with Chapters 1 and 2. So crack open your books! Here we go.

## CHAPTER 1

### BE PRESENT: Connect Their Faith to a Community

Last week, I shared that I've been with my small group for almost ten years now. Even though they've graduated high school and I'm not "officially" their Small Group Leader anymore, we're still doing life together and practicing many of the same rhythms we practiced as a small group throughout their middle school and high school years.

I recently asked my girls to think back on all of our years together and to tell me what things from our time as a small group have meant the most to them. Do you know what they said?

I'll tell you what they *didn't* say. They didn't mention the great depths of my wisdom, or my incredible skills in small-group-leading, or any of the smart things I've (hopefully) said to them over the years.

Instead, they talked about apple picking every fall. Screaming at terrible scary movies together. Practical jokes gone wrong. Seeing me at their dance recitals and birthday parties and prom pictures and high school graduations. Always having an adult they could count on. They talked about the memories and the laughter and the relationships. **It's the *community* we've created that means the most to them.**

**They know I don't do this Small Group Leader thing out of obligation. I do it because I actually *like* being with them.** And to a teenager (to anyone, really), that's a really big deal.

I love the passage of Scripture that Reggie and Tom refer to in this chapter:

"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)

This is such an important message to send to our Small Group Leaders. There is so much power in what SGL's do because they're not *just* sharing the Gospel with kids. They're sharing *their lives* with them, too.

"God created us for community.  
Jesus illustrated community.  
The Church practiced community."  
(p. 28)

A great SGL connects the faith of their few to a community. How do they do it? Three ways, according to *Lead Small*.

1. **Show up PREDICTABLY.** They show up when they're expected to show up. They're consistent. Their consistency builds trust with their group, and trust is the foundation of great community.
2. **Show up MENTALLY.** When they come to group, they've prepared. They pay attention. They're focused, energetic, and ready to invest.
3. **Show up RANDOMLY.** Not only do they show up when their group expects them to show up, but they occasionally surprise them, too. They send birthday cards, show up to a baseball game, or call the night before a big math test.

So that's what BEING PRESENT looks like for a Small Group Leader.

Now, as the people who *lead* Small Group Leaders, here's a question.

**How can we help our Small Group Leaders BE MORE PRESENT? How can we encourage them to show up predictably? Mentally? Randomly?**

One of the ways we encourage our SGL's to show up predictably, mentally, and randomly is by doing a giveaway every semester. We give every SGL a list of GOALS we want them to accomplish during that semester, including... 1) Write a postcard to each of your students during this semester. 2) Plan a small group party for your few (our ministry will help with the cost!). 3) Pick one of your few and go to one baseball game, recital, talent show, or other event "on their turf." If an SGL accomplishes all of their goals that semester, they get a prize.

**TAKE A MINUTE TO WRITE DOWN SOME IDEAS OF YOUR OWN...**

# CHAPTER 2

## CREATE A SAFE PLACE: Clarify Their Faith as They Grow

Over the years, I've seen my group of girls grow, not just physically or mentally or emotionally... but *spiritually*, too.

**They've grown up. And their faith has, too.**

But growing up is never an easy journey. You learn things. You question things. You *unlearn* some things. You wrestle. You doubt. You try things. You fail. You explore. You wonder who you are, and what exactly you believe, and what you're going to do about it.

And, in a small group setting, you do all of those things publicly, to some degree, *in front of your peers*. Peers who are *also* questioning and wrestling and doubting and failing and growing. Without the attentive, loving, protective hand of a Small Group Leader, you can probably imagine how this can go very, very badly.

**That's why great Small Group Leaders are *great* at making their small groups a place where their few feel safe, loved, and accepted.** Because if kids can't feel *safe*, they'll never really *share*.

"If you expect someone to share openly with you, there has to be a foundation of acceptance." (p. 53)

The scary thing about creating a *safe place* for your small group, though, is this: **when they feel safe, when they trust you, they really *will* open up.** Small Group Leaders need to be prepared for that. They need to encourage it. We want honesty from our few, even when it's painful to hear.

"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." (p. 57)

So a great Small Group Leader **CREATES A SAFE PLACE**. How? They...

1. **LEAD the Group.** They deliberately create an environment of acceptance, confidentiality, and honesty. They respect their few and they help their few respect one another.
2. **Respect the PROCESS.** They create space for their few to ask difficult questions, to explore their faith, to wrestle, and to doubt. They don't have all the right answers to every question, and they're ok with that.
3. **GUARD the Heart.** They protect their few. Because kids trust them, they listen to the stories and hurts that those kids share with them. They do what they can to protect their few. And, if a kid is being hurt, hurting others, or hurting themselves, they have the wisdom to get help for that student - even if it means breaching confidentiality.

That's what **CREATING A SAFE PLACE** looks like for a Small Group Leader.

**QUESTION: How can we help our Small Group Leaders CREATE A SAFE PLACE? How can we train them to lead their groups? Respect the process? Guard their hearts?**

One of the ways we help our SGL's navigate tricky situations in their groups is by getting our SGL's together in small groups throughout the year to talk, brainstorm, vent, and problem solve together. We ask strategic questions about leading small groups and our SGL's share either problematic situations they're walking through or helpful tips they've learned along the way. When one SGL is struggling, the others come to their aid. It's really helped us cultivate a "safe" atmosphere among our SGL's so that they can, in turn, cultivate that with their students.

**TAKE A MINUTE TO WRITE DOWN SOME IDEAS OF YOUR OWN...**

# Week 3

Hey there! Welcome back to the *Lead Small* book study. So far, we've looked at the introduction to the book and the first two chapters: BE PRESENT and CREATE A SAFE PLACE. Today we'll talk about Chapter 3 and the third principle for being an awesome Small Group Leader: PARTNER WITH PARENTS.

## CHAPTER 3

### PARTNER WITH PARENTS: Nurture an Everyday Faith

Reggie and Tom begin this chapter by casting some vision about *why* partnering with parents matters. It matters, they say, because we're meant to live an *everyday faith*. We, of course, want the kids and students in our ministries to have a faith that lives *outside* the walls of our church buildings. **We want them to think about their faith, to talk about their faith, and to practice their faith every day.**

So how can Small Group Leaders nurture an *everyday* faith in their few? Should they text Bible verses to their few every morning? Meet them for lunch every day? Pray with them before bed every night?

That's kind of creepy. So probably not. But if a Small Group Leader can't be a *daily* part of the lives of their few, how can they help nurture an everyday faith? Well...

"Unless you're planning to spend 24/7 with your few, it might be a really good idea to **partner with parents.**" (p. 85)

Because...

"At best, you will have temporary influence. By default, a parent has lifelong influence." (p. 87)

In our church, we've been talking about this idea of partnering with parents for a long time. We've talked to our Small Group Leaders (and sometimes our whole church) about how **we believe that parents are the primary influence in a child's life** and, as the church, we simply want to come alongside them. To help them. To partner with them. To give them Small Group Leaders who can be another voice in their kids' lives.

But, a few years ago, we realized we had a problem. Because, although we had *talked* about partnering with parents for years... very few of our Small Group Leaders were actually *doing* anything about it.

So we did a little investigating. And here's what we discovered: **although our Small Group Leaders *wanted to partner with parents, they weren't exactly sure how to do it.***

As ministry leaders who are trying to cast vision on this issue, it's so important for us to remember to put ourselves in the shoes of our Small Group Leaders. We think about this stuff all the time. We're immersed in it. We read about it, we talk to other ministry leaders who are doing it well, and we look for creative ideas on how to make it happen. But our Small Group Leaders do *not*.

So, when we talked about "partnering with parents," our Small Group Leaders understood the principle. They got the vision. They believed in it. But... well... they weren't sure what they were supposed to actually *do about it*. Because, at the time, this was a new concept for our church, our Small Group Leaders simply had no frame of reference for what "partnering with parents" looked like in practical terms.

So we decided to try something new. We realized we had talked about the philosophy and cast the vision for long enough. Now it was time to actually *do something*.

Our staff sat down and asked, "What would it look like for parents and Small Group Leaders to partner? What's the first step?" We landed on two things.

1. **First, Small Group Leaders and parents needed to actually *meet each other.***
2. **And second, Small Group Leaders and parents needed to *have a conversation.***

So we planned a Small Group Leader and Parent Breakfast. It was simple. So simple. Maybe, we thought, too simple. But we tried it anyway. We talked to our Small Group Leaders about the importance of this event. We encouraged *them* to encourage *parents* to be there. We made little invitations that our Small Group Leaders handed out to parents (which was a fun little exercise, since many of our SGL's didn't actually know who most of their kids' parents *were* yet).

We weren't sure what to expect, but we knew we needed to try *something* to turn things around.

**And to our surprise... we watched this simple little one-hour event have an *enormous impact.*** In hindsight, it changed everything for us.

For the first time, in many cases, our Small Group Leaders were finally looking parents in the eye, hearing their stories, sharing their own, building bridges, and **dreaming together about how they might be able to work together for the sake of the kids that they both loved.**

The event was only supposed to last an hour, but we had trouble getting people to leave. They wouldn't stop talking. Some groups went home, having already planned their next parent and Small Group Leader get-together. And parents were crying. Seriously. *Crying*. Here's what some of those parents had to say:

*"Today I learned that we are not alone in this precious job of being parents."*

*"I never knew anyone cared about my kid like this."*

*"Thank you for saying 'yes' to God's call on your life. You are making an investment in our child we can't ever thank you for enough."*

And our Small Group Leaders?

They realized **partnering with parents was a lot easier than they thought.**

They learned that **the parents of their few really *did* want to get to know them.**

They **saw what was at stake.**

And they finally **understood what partnering with parents could do for the faith of their few.**

For us, this event changed the trajectory of our ministry. And it taught us a valuable lesson. As ministry leaders, we can't just talk about partnering with parents or tell Small Group Leaders to do something about it. **We need to actively facilitate partnership between Small Group Leaders and parents.**

So we continue to do annual Small Group Leader and Parent Breakfasts. But we're also constantly on the lookout for new tools, new methods, and new opportunities to facilitate those partnerships.

Because great SGL nurtures an everyday faith by partnering with parents. How do they do it? Three ways, according to *Lead Small*.

1. **CUE the Parent.** They let the parent know who they are. They initiate a relationship and a partnership. Then they help bridge the gap between *church* and *home* by letting the parents know some of the concepts being discussed in small group, which help parents have more meaningful conversations with their kids.
2. **HONOR the Parent.** A great SGL knows that kids struggle with authority. Especially parental authority. But a great SGL doesn't capitalize on that struggle to win relational points with a kid. They honor the parents of their few, and they help their few to do the same (even if they disagree with that parent).
3. **REINFORCE the Family.** A great SGL doesn't compete with the family or cause division within the family. Instead, they look for ways to elevate the family, reinforce the relationship between kids and their parents, and keep in mind that, while their own influence might be temporary, the influence of a family is forever.

So that's what PARTNERING WITH PARENTS looks like for a Small Group Leader. Now...

**QUESTION: How can we help our Small Group Leaders be better PARTNERS WITH PARENTS? How can we train them to cue the parent? Honor the parent? Reinforce the family?**

We already talked about our **Small Group Leader and Parent Breakfast**. Because it was such a big hit for us, I'd love it if you'd steal it and use it for your ministry. Because sharing is fun. So, if you want to borrow our idea, the whole how-to guide and editable elements are [available for download right here](#).

To help our SGL's "cue the parent," we've also created little SGL Business Cards, which we customize with our SGL's faces and contact information. Then, they get a big stack of these business cards to hand out to all of their kids and parents. Feel free to steal this idea, too. You can [download them right here](#).

And one more. Because we want parents to know what's going on in our ministries so they can have more intentional conversations with their kids at home, we post all of our small group

discussion questions on our website so that families can access them. If you want to [steal our template](#) you sure can.

**TAKE A MINUTE TO WRITE DOWN SOME IDEAS OF YOUR OWN...**

# Week 4

Hello and welcome to the final week of our *Lead Small* book study! We've only got two chapters left to discuss. So open those books to the beginning of Chapter 4, and let's check it out!

## CHAPTER 4

### MAKE IT PERSONAL: Inspire Their Faith By Your Example

In all the years that I've spent as a Small Group Leader for my girls, there have been a *ton* of moments where I've seen a little bit of myself reflected in my girls. Sometimes it's been cute and encouraging. But it hasn't always been a good thing.

I've noticed them repeating phrases they've heard me say.  
Picking up on my habits.  
Imitating my attitudes.  
Adopting my opinions.  
Learning about relationships, and marriage, and growing up from my example.

I never intended for *any* of those things to happen. But they did. They're part of being a Small Group Leader.

I've heard it said that "leaders *leak*." Our beliefs, our values, our habits... they will eventually rub off on the people that we lead. Whether we like it or not. **Regardless of what we *intend* to impart to those we lead, we will ultimately *leak* what, and who, we truly are.**

As ministry leaders, it's so important for us to keep this in mind when we are recruiting, selecting, and training our Small Group Leaders. Our Small Group Leaders need to be people of character, who love God and love students and are sincerely trying hard to follow after Jesus. **It's not enough for Small Group Leaders to be able to lead a good discussion or give good answers to kids' questions. They've got to *live it, too*.**

Because, more often than not, **it's not a Small Group Leader's *words* that will stick with their few, but their *example*.**

"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." (p. 116)

A great SGL knows that, if they want to lead their few well, they need to *first* lead themselves. They do this in three ways...

1. **Live in COMMUNITY.** Just like they want *their few* to be engaged in meaningful community, great SGL's practice community *themselves*. They are in a small group, or serving, or practicing some form of community *on purpose*, where they can grow and be challenged and develop friendships.
2. **Set PRIORITIES.** Great SGL's maintain healthy boundaries and priorities. As much as they love their small group, they know their families, their spouses, and their own personal faith journeys take precedence over their small group. They model that for their few.
3. **Be REAL.** Great SGL's know that, because their few are learning from their examples, that they need to be authentic. They share insights into their own journeys, they allow kids to see (appropriate) glimpses into their personal lives, and they model what it looks like to be comfortable with who they are and who they are becoming.

**QUESTION: As a ministry leader, how can we encourage your Small Group Leaders to MAKE IT PERSONAL? How can we train them to live in community? Set priorities? Be real?**

In our ministry, it's really important to us that our Small Group Leaders are taking care of themselves and their families emotionally, physically, and spiritually. We're constantly talking about this and encouraging our Small Group Leaders to "fill up" so they can then "pour out" on their few. One of the practical things we've done has been to create a Small Group Leader Library. It's super simple. Just a small bookshelf in our ministry area that is stocked with recommended books, DVDs, and other resources for Small Group Leaders - things they can grab when they need a little something to take extra care of their hearts.

**TAKE A MINUTE TO WRITE DOWN SOME IDEAS OF YOUR OWN...**

# CHAPTER 5

## MOVE THEM OUT: Engage Their Faith in a Bigger Story

I love this last *Lead Small* principle.

Like we talked about in Week 1 of this study, being a Small Group Leader is a weird job. In some ways, it's almost like parenting. Like a parent, a great SGL knows that their few will not be "theirs" forever. Their few will move on. They will seek out new influences. They will move away. They will grow up.

Like a great parent, a great SGL doesn't fight that fact. Instead, they prepare for it. They use the time they *do* have with their few to make sure, when they *do* move on, that they're ready for whatever's next.

"When you focus on the bigger story of their lives, you understand that **what happens inside your circle is measured by what happens outside your circle**. The incredible potential of leading small really is in your ability to move them out." (p. 140)

This idea of *moving them out* depends on the Small Group Leader's ability to build longterm relationships and fight for longterm influence in the lives of their few *while simultaneously* holding loosely to their "position" as Small Group Leader. Because their role as Small Group Leader is temporary.

So, in preparation for the day that they will no longer be their Small Group Leader, here's how a Small Group Leader moves them out...

1. **Move Them to SOMEONE ELSE.** A great SGL knows that their few are far more likely to build a faith that lasts if they have *multiple* influential adults in their lives. So they don't get possessive over their few. They encourage them to build relationships with other Godly adults. And, when it comes time to end their season as an SGL, they hand them off to the next person, encouraging and supporting that relationship, rather than competing with it.
2. **Move Them to BE THE CHURCH.** A great SGL realizes that following Jesus and building authentic faith takes much more than sitting around and talking about it. So they seek to mobilize their students to get involved in the movement and mission of God in tangible ways. They organize service projects. They help their few use their gifts to serve others. By giving them something significant to do, they teach them that they are the Church, the hands and feet of Jesus.
3. **Move Them to WHAT'S NEXT.** A great SGL is sensitive to big seasons of transition in the lives of their few. Moving into middle school... moving into high school... driving... dating... graduating... In each of these seasons, a great SGL stays by the side of their few, looking for ways to help them make that transition smoothly.

**QUESTION: As a ministry leader, how can we help your Small Group Leaders MOVE THEM OUT? How can we train them to move them to someone else? To be the Church? To what's next?**

In our church, we love this idea of mobilizing kids to be the Church. It's actually a requirement in our ministry that, every year, every Small Group Leader organizes at least one service project or fundraiser with their few, so that their few can begin to do tangible things with their faith. Last year, our middle school small groups got together and built a clean water well in Sierra Leone, Africa! It was cool.

**TAKE A MINUTE TO WRITE DOWN SOME IDEAS OF YOUR OWN...**