

REGGIE JOINER

A
New
Kind of
Leader



**WHAT YOU BELIEVE CAN OPEN A DOOR
FOR A KID OR TEENAGER'S FUTURE**

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THERE'S A NEW KIND OF
LEADER WHO BELIEVES

KIDS MATTER

MORE THAN ADULTS



MAYBE YOU'RE THINKING THAT THE STATEMENT, "KIDS MATTER MORE THAN ADULTS," IS A LITTLE EXTREME. IF YOU'RE AN ADULT, YOU MIGHT BE EVEN SLIGHTLY OFFENDED.

Before you discredit the idea as too radical, think about it. Even your dog figures this out pretty quickly. When a new baby arrives, everyone's status changes.

I'm not trying to devalue any human at any stage of life. The statement isn't intended to imply that an adult's life has any less value than a kid's life, nor that the world should in any way revolve around a child. What it does suggest is that if you want to affect the way a generation sees the world, then it makes sense to start influencing their character and faith when they are young.

Every expert agrees that the first eighteen years of a person's life are extremely crucial in laying a foundation for their future. But the tension is that even though a lot of people might agree that kids matter, sometimes we fail to act like it. What if there really was a new kind of leader who believed that every phase of a kid's life—from birth through adolescence—really matters?



What if you started acting like

**WHAT YOU DO FOR KIDS IS MORE IMPORTANT
THAN ANYTHING ELSE YOU DO.**

By *kids*, we mean anyone who is not yet an adult. And no, that does not include Uncle Frank and his fourth-grade sense of humor. We are thinking of anyone between the ages of zero and around twenty.

It may not seem like what you do for kids is all that significant. Sometimes it's just . . .
showing up to change a diaper.
remembering the name of a pet goldfish.
filling endless quantities of water balloons.
writing a text to say you're praying for their test.

Even when it seems insignificant, what you do for a kid early on will leave an impression. And early impressions matter more than we think.

Sue Gerhardt, a researcher on emotional health in children, says a child's brain "is built up through actual experiences. What you put in is more or less what you get out."¹

1 - Sue Gerhart, *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 89

That's why what you do for a kid is like making an investment. It gains more value over time.

The sooner you start paying in, the greater the return will be later. The longer you wait, the less you earn.

Simply put:

Making deposits in someone's life while they are young will earn more interest.

When you wait until they're adults, the gains are slower.

We could restate the original principle this way:

What you do now for a kid is more important than what you do for them later as an adult.

Our team is leading an in-depth research project called "It's Just a Phase." Our goal is to interview reputable educators, counselors, and pediatricians, and to review the best books ever written on the topic of child development. What we are discovering both confirms and challenges much of what we believe about shaping the faith and character of kids. These discoveries are also launching a new initiative in our organization to influence parents and leaders to rethink how they love and lead kids.²

² Follow along with this initiative at www.justaphase.com

Imagine if you waited until a child became an adult before you taught him or her to read. Parents who want their child to become educated adults enroll their child in school. They pack a backpack for today, so their child is educated for the future.

No wonder *adult* governments pass common-sense laws to ensure the educational and physical well-being of the average child. Why? Because what happens to kids matters more.

According to the World Health Organization, “The early years of life are crucial in influencing a range of health and social outcomes across the life course. Research now shows that many challenges in adult society—mental health problems, obesity, stunting, criminality, heart disease, competence in literacy and numeracy—have their roots in early childhood.”³

So if it's important to start guarding the mental and physical health of a kid's life now, then what about their moral, emotional, relational, and spiritual growth? It's naive to think that what happens in a kid's life now really doesn't matter as much as what happens to them later. It's not a leap to suggest that what happens now in their life relationally and spiritually will also impact their future in exponential ways. The early years shape so much of an individual's sense of purpose, belonging, and identity.

3 - Lori G. Irwin Arjumand Siddiqi Clyde Hertzman, *Early Child Development: A Powerful Equalizer*, Final Report for the World Health Organization's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, June 2007, 4

Here's another thought:

what your church does for kids is more important than anything else your church does.

I know what you're thinking.

Preschoolers take up a lot of room.

Children can't sit still.

Teenagers don't dress appropriately.

But what you do for kids matters both for kids and for your church.

What you do for kids will transform the culture of your church.

Something transformational happens in churches when more children and teenagers are around.

Parents become more engaged.

Volunteers become more motivated.

Staffs become more focused.

Everybody becomes more involved.

Your church will love deeper, think harder, laugh louder, and pray more. I might even make the argument that your pastor's sermons could become more interesting. (But I don't want to over promise.) I do believe a few more kids can change the dynamic and the energy of your entire church.

What you do for kids will keep your church from dying.

The age of the average church member increases by seven years every decade and in the next ten years, the average age of members in many mainline denominations will be over sixty. In most places, the average age of a churchgoer is fifteen years older than the surrounding community members. Basically, churches are “greying” because members are getting older, and younger families are just not attending. The only way to reverse the trend is to reach more kids.

That’s one reason you might consider opening the door a little wider for kids in your community—just to make sure that the doors of your church are never permanently closed.

That’s what Dalton Baptist Church, a congregation near Scranton, Pennsylvania, did. There were barely a dozen senior adults left attending the church so they voted to do something unusual. Instead of letting their church age out of existence, they donated their building to a youth ministry from a church up the street. When asked why they did it, one of the elders replied, “We believe it’s our mission to keep the doors open.”

Maybe you should take your cue from Jesus.

Think about how Jesus challenged His culture to shift the way they thought about children.

Jesus evidently had a pretty high opinion of kids.

Remember, He actually said, *"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."*

In other words, He said, "I want you to treat kids like you would treat me. And by the way, just in case you haven't figured it out by now, I am God. So just make sure you understand that when you welcome kids, it's like you are welcoming God."

Okay, that's a paraphrase, but you have to admit, Jesus made every kid a pretty big deal.

It was like Jesus was suggesting . . .

no one should feel more welcome at your church than a screaming baby.

no one should feel more welcome at your church than a bratty kid.

no one should feel more welcome at your church than a hormonal middle schooler.

no one should feel more welcome at your church than a defiant teenager.

So what if kids don't . . .
sound like God.
act like God.
smell like God.

You should welcome every kid and every teenager as if you were welcoming God. And if there's one thing Jesus modeled for us clearly, it was that the people who follow Him should welcome kids.

Jesus positioned Himself as the way to know God, then He threw the door wide open.

That's why the Pharisees panicked. They had an identity crisis because there were people walking through the door who didn't look like they did.

If everyone in your church is comfortable with who is showing up on Sundays, then you haven't opened the door wide enough.

You can almost hear Jesus saying, "See those tax collectors, let them in!" "See those prostitutes, let them in!" "See that Samaritan woman, let her in!" "See those middle schoolers, let them in!"

That's why He's expecting you to keep the door open.



KIDS NEED A NEW KIND OF LEADER WHO WILL
VOLUNTEER TO DO SOMETHING MORE.



Maybe you should just simply decide:
You will do what someone did for you.
You will do what you wish someone had done for you.
You will do what you hope someone will do
for your kid or grandkid one day.

Let's pretend I was your pastor (now, that's a scary thought).
But if I were, here's what I might say:

"No one can volunteer for anything until we have enough
leaders for kids and teenagers."

"We are canceling Sunday morning adult classes,
so you no longer have an excuse."

"If you haven't volunteered for over two years,
you need to go to another church."

Okay, maybe I shouldn't have to say any of those things and you should just do one of the following:

1

If you are not volunteering, start. *Don't wait to be asked. Take the initiative.*

2

If you are volunteering some, consider volunteering more. *Getting more involved will change you more than them.*

3

If you are volunteering a lot, go find someone else to volunteer with you. *The best new volunteers are usually recruited by the best already-existing volunteers.*



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MAKE A LIST HERE OF TWO OR THREE PEOPLE WHO INSPIRED YOU WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD OR TEENAGER. DESCRIBE HOW THEY MADE YOU FEEL. LIST A FEW OF THEIR QUALITIES.

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MAKE A LIST OF PEOPLE YOU KNOW YOU COULD
RECOMMEND AS VOLUNTEERS.

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