



FUEL

TRANSITIONS

MOVING FORWARD



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MOVING FORWARD

Freshman

Making Faith Your Priority

ISBN 978-0-7644-9002-6

Sophomore

Stepping Into Maturity

ISBN 978-0-7644-9003-3

Junior

Making Sense of It All

ISBN 978-0-7644-9004-0

Senior

Preparing for the Future

ISBN 978-0-7644-9005-7

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Credits

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group.com

simplyyouthministry.com

Printed in the U.S.A.

Edited by Ryan Jackson, Rachel Jackson, Lindsey Roberts

Graphic Design by Ryan Jackson

Produced for Carmel Baptist Church.

Commentary is from the ESV Study Bible

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Getting Started - Transition to 8th Grade Year

You did it. You survived a year of middle school. Throughout the next year of your life, you will be at the top of the school. You will be the oldest class, high on the pecking order of power and privilege. A were a big eighth-grader.

Your 8th grade year is an important one. It sets the stage for how you will launch into your high school years. It's our hope (meaning the collective world of adults who pray for you and desire to watch you make great decisions) that you would really figure out this year how to make Jesus central in your life.

In this study we are going to focus on what it means to mature if your faith, something specific to pursue this particular year.

8th grade year is so tough because it is the year you really choose if you want to grow up. You can either continue to act like a kid and be lumped in with them, or start looking toward being more mature. For some students this is a pretty easy decision to make because they want to be seen as more mature, but for others this is a rough season to go through.

Some of you are going to be frustrated when you read that the goal of this devotional year is for you to become more "mature." Yes, that seems to imply that people don't currently think you are mature. Many of you are relatively mature and have a lot of your faith journey and life journey figured out. If that's you, keep going. However, everyone can mature in some areas of their life.

The goal of this study is to help you think about your faith. You may have a great and strong faith that has been nurtured for years by loving parents, student volunteers, church members, friends, coaches, and many other people. Maybe it's been the opposite experience for you: You don't have a big community of Christ-followers around you that have been helping you grow. You've been doing it all on your own. Whatever your story, this study is for you. This study contains different things for you to read, think, and pray about—plus action steps aimed at helping these ideas solidify a little bit more in your brain.

Transition to 8th Grade Year

WEEK

1

PSALM 139:13-16

HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU WITH YOU?

It may not feel like the world really cares right now, but you need to know how valuable you are. If you asked a lot of adults if they knew who they were as middle schoolers, they might give you some answers about things they were involved in or things they liked. As far as defining who they were, that question would be a lot harder.

How comfortable are you with what you know you really like and with who you are?

This year you will experience some tough relational, social, and spiritual situations where being comfortable with yourself will come in handy. God has made you exactly the way he planned, and your job is to figure out how to thrive with that reality.

How well do you believe other people know you? Do they perceive you to be something or someone different from who you really are?

If you could do or try something that you really like, knowing that no one would make fun of you or judge you, what would you do?

THE WORLD THINKS:

This is kind of a weird one, because on one hand the world tells you to be yourself and do what you want, but the world also sends the message that you shouldn't push it so far that you don't fit in anymore. You are caught in a contradiction of feeling like you are supposed to be different but that you could pay a price because of those differences.

Read Psalm 37:4 and Ephesians 2:10.

How does delighting yourself in the Lord impact your desires?

Why do you think God made you the way he did?

ACT:

Without judging your friends, take a few days to simply observe your friends' and their unique characteristics. Figure out a way to celebrate the way God made them and encourage them to be comfortable themselves.

IF YOU COULD CHANGE THINGS ABOUT YOURSELF, WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

What are some things you want to change about yourself?

Why do you want to make these changes?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

How does being a new creation in Christ allow you to change?

THE WORLD THINKS:

The world speaks all kinds of messages about what you should change in order to fit in and stand out. On one hand you should just be you. Don't worry about what anyone else thinks, and if you don't want to do something, don't do it. On the other hand, if you don't look a certain way there is something wrong with you.

God made us and gave us specific gifts for a reason. Often we don't use those gifts in the ways he intended. You may be incredibly smart, yet you may procrastinate on every assignment. You may have all kinds of interests and ideas but you allow those interests to distract you.

How do you think God reacts when you don't wisely use the gifts he's given you?

Wanting to change isn't a sign that you're unhappy with who God made you to be, and it isn't an indication of low self-esteem, either. It's the recognition that you're an individual capable of growth and change and maturity. That's such an important part of your faith journey.

Read Colossians 3:1-17.

ACT:

This week, begin the journey of changing a habit. If there is something in your life you want to stop doing, come up with a plan to change it. Write it down, tell other people about it, and work hard to focus on changing that one thing.

YOU ARE PERFECTLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

Nick Vujicic was born without any arms or legs, yet he knows that he is perfectly made. Nick is probably one of the most influential Christian speakers today, a man who shares incredible stories about God's love and how Jesus transformed his tough circumstance. He speaks all over the world and also does activities that you would never expect someone with his limitations to do, including participating in several different sports and being able to type. Nick believes God made him this way for a specific purpose: so that he could be an influence in the lives of millions. At first glance, many people would doubt that Nick is "perfectly made." However, that is exactly what he believes. God knew exactly what he was doing when he made you, too. All the hairs on your head, the freckles on your nose, and the toes on your feet—God has put you together for a specific purpose, and you are perfect in God's eyes.

How do you feel when you read the words "You are perfectly made"?

Does hearing Nick's story change how you view yourself? Why or why not?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Some people are just born more perfect than others, and stories like Nick's are not normal. You probably have flaws, and that is proof that no one really created you.

Read Psalm 139:13-16.

How does this passage impact the way you view yourself?

ACT:

Go to lifewithoutlimbs.com and read through Nick's testimony. Think about the limitations you believe you have, and consider how you can rethink your own struggles and ask God to use you exactly how he made you. Tell three friends the unique ways you notice that they are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Read Matthew 10:29-31 and Ephesians 1:4-6.

What impact does it make to you that the one who knows all of your faults still chooses you to be his son or daughter?

Read Psalm 105:2.

How do you worship differently knowing that you are wonderfully made?

Transition to 8th Grade Year

WEEK

2

ROMANS 5:8

WHERE DO YOU FIND YOUR SELF-WORTH?

It's an odd thing to admit, but many of us don't know how we are supposed to find our self-worth. We often get caught up looking for it in places where we likely won't find truth. We sometimes end up in unhealthy relationships because we buy into the lie that if someone "likes" us we must have worth. Sometimes we focus so intently on one particular thing—because people pat us on the back for it—we neglect all the other parts of our life.

What are three specific things you feel good about yourself?

Self-worth is a tough thing, and figuring it out can be a long journey. At times you will have a strong sense of it and how God sees you, but other times it will have a bit more of a struggle. Keep going and look to see how God affirms those things in you.

Where do you look for affirmation? Why?

What are some negative places you look?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Look in your bank account to find affirmation and self-worth. See how many people favorite something you post on social media to find your self-worth.

Read Genesis 1:26-27, Romans 5:8, and John 3:16.

How does God show you that you are his most precious creation?

ACT:

Sometimes we need to spend time preparing for when we feel down. Take a piece of paper and write out three things that you like and that help you feel good about yourself, and put it in a place you can read when you feel low.

WHO DOES YOUR PAST SAY YOU ARE?

It's easy to hang on to the past. Sometimes we do this because our past was great and filled with a lot of wonderful memories. We attempt to re-create these events over and over, instead of pursuing new opportunities and new dreams; we become hooked on reliving the past. On the other end of the spectrum, sometimes we hang on to the past because it was difficult and filled with painful memories that seem to hold us captive. We want to move on and leave those things behind, but we feel trapped; our mind plays them over and over and over.

What are some things from your past you wish you could forget?

What are some things from your past you wish you could repeat?

The truth is that much of our past follows us as we get older, but our past doesn't have to define us. We can move beyond the bad things (and the good things, too) and work to live in the present. Thinking about how you are shaped by your past will help you work through who you are today and who you can become tomorrow.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Who you are today is shaped by your past, and you can never get away from the things that happened there. If you messed up, that will always be with you. You'll have to deal with the consequences on your own.

Read Acts 22:1-29 and Philippians 3:7-9.

How did God use Paul's past?

God can heal and redeem the painful moments. God uses our past to shape us. God also can give us new memories that surpass the greatest ones from the past.

How do you think God might use and redeem the tough, difficult, painful things from your past?

When good and bad things happen to you, where do you think God is? Is God equally present during good and bad times? Why or why not?

ACT:

Write a list of five major things you remember from your past—both negative and positive things. What did you learn from each of those events or moments? If you have a trusted Christian adult in your life, ask that person to help you make sense of how God might be using some of your past—or how God might use those moments in the future.

YOU ARE HOLY

Many of us struggle daily with unholy or unworthy thoughts, actions, words, and deeds, making us feel like we aren't able to go to God. When people are struggling with sin they may stop coming to church because they don't feel right about being there when they are struggling with stuff. When you struggle, church is exactly where you need to be!

How does it make you feel when you do things that you know are against what God wants you to do?

The Bible proclaims God as "holy" in many places. God's chosen people, the Israelites, were constantly told in the Old Testament that they had to do things in particular ways in order to "be holy"—a big deal because God could not interact with an "unholy" people. So they had laws about everything, all set up to keep them from being unholy or impure. In the New Testament we see Jesus coming as a conclusion and answer to this law—through his death and resurrection we can be made holy.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Why do I need to be holy? I just need to be good and do nice things for others. No one is holy. Everyone fails.

Read Leviticus 11:44-45, Psalm 99:5, Philippians 4:8-9, and 1 Peter 1:13-16.

What is the common thought in each of these verses?

Read Colossians 1:21-23 and Hebrews 10:1-14.

How can you be holy?

What are some action steps you could put into place that would help you to turn away from things that you know are not good for you?

ACT:

Write down an action plan to making sure your speech, thoughts, writing, and actions are pure.

Transition to 8th Grade Year

ROMANS 12:9-10

WEEK

3

WHO ARE YOU WITH YOUR FRIENDS?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You need friends, especially at school because it is an unsafe and scary place. Don't do anything to ruin your friendships. Go along with what other people want because you need them.

What would you say is your role in most of your friendships?

How scared are you of being alone? How does that shape the way you interact with your friends?

What are some parts of your personality that you wish you could expose more to your friends?

How much of a role would you say your faith plays in your friendships?

When would you say you are guilty of compartmentalizing your faith away from your friends?

WHO DO YOUR FRIENDS SAY YOU ARE?

You may feel totally comfortable with your friends because they accepted you for who you are. You know that you can be open, honest, and real around them.

If this is your story, congratulations! It's great to have these kinds of friends—especially if they're followers of Christ, too. Invest in these amazing friendships. Value the people who accept you just as you are—your successes, your failures, your strengths, and your flaws.

It's likely some of you have a different experience: Either you don't have close friends or you don't feel like you totally can be yourself around them. It's hard for you to open up, and you struggle to be fully you. This may be your story today, but you can build better relationships starting now.

What would your friends say about you? Why do they say that?

The reality is that we are all concerned about what our friends think of us because those friendships really matter. Our friends play a large part in our lives and how we feel about ourselves. It's important to surround ourselves with people who truly know us and genuinely care about our best interest.

THE WORLD THINKS:

The world has a couple of thoughts on friends. On one hand we are cautioned to not get too close to anyone, and on the other hand we hear that friends are more important than family. Both of these extremes can be risky.

Do your friends think your faith and trust in Jesus is strong? Why or why not?

Read John 15:12-15.

ACT:

How can you be a better friend to people in your life? Think of three friends, and come up with a list of specific things you could do to help them out this week. Then do it.

WHO DO YOUR ONLINE FRIENDS SAY YOU ARE?

Social media provides so many opportunities to miscommunicate, er, connect with so many people. Your online friends may have a pretty different view of your life than how it is in reality since you only show them most of the good stuff!

WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF CONSISTENCY AND BEING THE SAME PERSON
WHEREVER WE ARE AND WHOMEVER WE ARE WITH.

What do you believe your online friends think of you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

It's OK to be a different person in different spaces. Everyone needs the freedom to be whoever, whenever and wherever they want to be it.

How do you portray yourself online? Is it an accurate depiction of who you really are? Do your social media friends see a side of you that doesn't show up at youth group, school or family time?

ACT:

Remove the items from your public profiles that do not represent Jesus well this week.

Do you sometimes find yourself spending more time with your online friends than your real-life friends? Why or why not?

How much do your online friends see of your faith in Jesus? Is that something that's important for you to share with them? Why or why not?

ADJUSTING YOUR FRIENDSHIPS

Read Colossians 3:12-14.

If you lived according to this passage, what impact would that have on your friendships?

Read Proverbs 13:20, Proverbs 22:24-25 and 1 Corinthians 15:33.

How have you experienced the truths embedded in these passages?

How would you handle getting out of a friendship that is harmful in any way?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10.

How do your friends see a difference in you because of your relationship with Jesus?

How can you start having more Jesus-centered conversations with friends?

Transition to 8th Grade Year

WEEK

4

ACTS 2:41-47

ARE YOU KNOWN AT CHURCH?

This question isn't about being popular. It also isn't about testing whether or not you feel like fit in at church. This question is about you choosing to plug into transformational community. It's about having accountability. It's about being disciplined and serving to help disciple others. You will not see sustained growth in your walk with Jesus when you try it alone.

We are called to be in community, and that's why the church isn't a building; it is a gathering of Christ-followers, people who are in this together. Being active in the church and a transformational discipleship community where people know your name, welcome you, and walk alongside you through your journey is a big deal. Trying to do any journey alone is so much more difficult than being with others. It's important as you step into maturity.

When do you sit under the teaching of God's Word? When do you aid in others being disciplined?

How has your level of involvement in discipleship community, student activities and worship services increased or decreased in the past year?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Be careful about getting involved with a church because they will tell you what you to do and make you give a bunch of money. You don't want to get too close to others because they will let you down.

Read Acts 2:41-47.

What benefits do you see to being involved with other believers?

How can you get more engaged in the life of the church?

ACT:

If you already are active participant in church and student ministry activities, look for others who are not and see if you can get them involved. If you are not involved, do your best to get connected.

HOW IMPORTANT IS JESUS TO YOUR FRIENDS?

Most likely you and your friends are a tightknit group. Together you may even have strong convictions and stick to them. However, we still have to be careful not to make poor choices with our “Christian” friends. Sometimes the strongest peer pressure can come from other believers.

How important is Jesus to your closest friends?

If the answer is “not very,” how does that impact you? If the answer is “a lot,” how does that impact you?

As Christians we know that we are supposed to have good Christian friends. Sometimes we fool ourselves into believing that all of our friends love Jesus. We do that because it takes the pressure off of us to have to choose new friends that would be a better influence on us.

Throughout this next year you have to decide if Jesus really has much of a role in your day-to-day experiences. Unfortunately, you may discover that some of your friends who are really important to you didn't have a real connection to Jesus at all.

Maybe your friends are helping you travel in the right direction, toward a mature faith and life in Christ. Maybe they're leading you in the wrong direction. Maybe it's somewhere in between. Take some time to ask yourself hard questions about how your friends are helping you or hurting you.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Your faith is your faith, just like my faith—or my lack of faith—is my own. It really doesn't matter who you spend time with, so spend time with people from all kinds of faith backgrounds.

Read Psalm 41:9 and 1 Corinthians 15:33.

Do you have any friends you believe you should walk away from? Why or why not?

What might be the potential long-term impact of having close friends whose beliefs are different from you?

ACT:

Put together a list of your closest friends and simply write next to their name if you know they follow Jesus or not. Then, in another column, write if you think that friend has a positive or negative impact upon you. Finally, write three things you can pray about for each friend.

DO YOU MAKE YOUR FRIENDS BETTER?

One mark of growing in maturity is making the people around you better—focusing less on yourself and more on those you care about and spend time with. Think of this as being similar to a point guard on a basketball team. That position's job is to set up other teammates to score by getting them the ball at critical moments when they can be successful.

How good are you at making people around you better?

THE WORLD THINKS:

This is a rough world, so it's okay to be a little selfish. Focus on yourself. You need to just worry about you and not about other people. Making it in this world will be all about you relying on yourself.

Read Proverbs 27:17.

What are some ways you make or can make your friends better? Give specific examples.

Read Proverbs 27:6.

Are there specific gifts and talents God has given you that you believe can be used to better your friends? How are you using these gifts and talents—or how can you use them?

What is the benefit to you when you make others better?

Read John 15:13-14.

ACT:

On a piece of paper, write the names of two friends. What specific things could you do this week that would make them and their lives better? What can you sacrifice to do something great for them?

Transition to 8th Grade Year

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10

WEEK

5

STRENGTHENING YOUR FRIENDSHIPS

Many adults regret two things: First, missing out on some really great friendships in high school because they were not willing to invest time with people; and second, letting some friendships fade over the years that they should have maintained.

This year you have the opportunity to strengthen some of your close relationships and to even build upon some new ones. Seize that opportunity and build strong connections with classmates. Commit to specific ways you can stay in contact in the years ahead.

What are some ways you can strengthen friendships that you already have this next year?

What people at school do you wish you had become friends with but hadn't—and why? What has stopped you from doing that?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You will probably never spend time with these people again and will likely forget them after high school, so don't waste too much time. People are only useful for what they can offer you.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 and John 15:12-15.

Why do you think God has put the people in your life that he has? How do they help you grow closer to him?

ACT:

Look for specific ways to strengthen some friendships. Start by honestly approaching your friends and simply talking with them about it. Being straightforward and saying you want a deeper friendship will go a long way toward encouraging growth. Another challenge is to think about people that you wish you were friends with but aren't. If that's a genuine desire, find a way to make it happen.

FINDING MENTORS

Do you have someone that speaks truth with wisdom into your life? The kind of person who has the ability to look at things from a very different perspective from you, and because they know you well and cared for you, they are able to package their wisdom in a way that is perfect for you to hear. If you don't, you need to find someone like that.

The reality is that sometimes you need other people. Look for a few trustworthy mentors and wise people who can speak truth to you.

What people have you gone to for answers in the past? How have they helped you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Don't trust people because everyone has a hidden agenda and one of these days, you'll get burned.

Read Proverbs 3:13 and 27:17

What people has God put in your life already that might be key mentors and sources of wisdom for you?

What are some issues that you need someone to walk through with you?

ACT:

If you already have mentors in your life, go and talk to them about your future and ask them to help you walk through it. If you don't have a mentor, ask your parents, your trusted friends, or some wise people in your church to suggest someone who might be a good mentor for you.

KEEPING DOORS OPEN

You have to make some big decisions your senior year, but you can do it in a way that allows God to lead and to change your plans if he wants. For example, if you are applying to colleges, consider applying to more than just the one school you want to attend because that wouldn't leave many open doors if that college says no. In the same way, hold loosely to your own plans because they may change—or God may change them.

How do you know when you are making the right decisions? Where does your affirmation come from?

What door do you want to shut but haven't because God may be using it in your life?

Have you already shut some doors that you wish you could reopen? If so, what doors—and why do you want them reopened?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You need to do whatever you want and not worry about what anyone else thinks. Doors have to shut because there are just too many possibilities. It's okay you don't need worry about repairing relationships.

Be careful not to burn bridges in your relationships. The way that you treat others and how you mend broken relationships can have a tremendous impact on your future and your legacy.

Three reasons to maintain relationships:

- 1) You may need that person someday.
- 2) You might have been the one that was wrong.
- 3) Others are watching.

Read Matthew 5:23-24.

Describe some practical steps that you can make so that you keep doors open in your friendships?

ACT:

So, does someone have something against you? Do you have something against him? If you have burned the bridge of a relationship do your best to reconcile it. Go and seek reconciliation, right now—whether you are wrong or right! That is the way of Jesus Christ.

Transition to 8th Grade Year

WEEK

6

EXODUS 20:4

WHO ARE YOUR IDOLS?

All of us have idols in our lives. Maybe it is an author, TV star, guitarist in a rock band, power, or even technology. Maybe you are more into athletics and you idolize certain sports figures. Image is a huge idol that many of us struggle with. We want to look a certain way or be a certain type of person. We have pictures of pop stars, actors, and models hanging on our walls—people that we wish we could be more like.

What three people do you most idolize—and why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Your goal should be to become the idol everyone wants to be like. If you just eat less, you'll be so pretty. If you work harder to be the starting quarterback, everyone will love you. Spend all your time focusing on things that matter, such as money, fame, and popularity. These are the things that really count.

Read Exodus 20:4.

Is it wrong to have idols? Why or why not?

What are some differences between having an idol and having a role model?

ACT:

It's not wrong to have things you really like. In fact, God created us to have specific talents, desires, and free will. God actually takes delight when we use the gifts he's given us. We create problems when we put those things before God. Put a rubber band around your wrist; every time you see it, pray that nothing you love would become an idol that you place higher than God.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU GET BUSY?

Do you feel the pressure to always be doing something?

Life gets busy. You're just starting high school and might be handling sports, clubs, jobs, homework, youth group, family stuff, and more. It's a whole new thing in ninth grade with so much pressure and responsibility. It's hard. People often try to convince themselves that they are better and more worthy when they are involved with as many things as possible. Imagine what that was like before smartphones

You have probably experienced the moments when it just feels like everything you are doing had a major project, due date, game, or need all at the same time. Those moments often cause us to crash, get sick or just overwhelmed.

What things are you currently doing that you wish you could just quit?

When you get stressed, what is your usual response?

Read 1 Peter 5:7.

When you get busy, how do you prioritize everything you need to do?

THE WORLD THINKS:

If you don't get involved in everything you possible can to build your résumé, you will never get into the college you want. You have to fill your schedule with everything so that you will appear "well rounded" and look like the kind of student that a college wants to accept. Busyness is a great thing and will eventually lead you to be successful in life.

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

What formula does Jesus give us to manage our priorities?

How pressured do you feel by your parents to do things?

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

ACT:

Grab a sheet of paper, and in one column write down everything you are currently doing and the amount of time you think it takes you each week. In another column write down some things that you wish you could do but you just can't seem to find time to do. Now take this list and pray over it. Ask God to direct you to which things you are supposed to be doing and which things you maybe should cut. Seek guidance for things you wish you had time to do.

WHERE IS JESUS IN THE WORLD?

You might not see Jesus in the world very much. He often isn't someone we spend a lot of time looking for. Maybe around Christmas or Easter you'll see Jesus on the cover of some magazine. Often you will hear him mentioned if something controversial paints Jesus in a bad light.

In the daily reality of an 8th-grader, you may not see him. Unless, of course, you take time to really look. Sure, it would be easy if Jesus was walking around today and performing miracles on the streets. That would be on TV and the Internet almost immediately.

How do you see Jesus in the world today?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Jesus is dead. That's what happened on the cross. He doesn't have a place in the world today. The people who believe have issues. You need something you can't find on your own so you try to act like Jesus has some sort of place now. We're tired of you Christians acting like it matters. It doesn't. We tolerate all the hype around Christmas and Easter and we might even go to your church because our parents want us to, but we don't believe any of it.

Who can you look to that Jesus is working through?

When do you know that Jesus is at work?

Read Matthew 25:34-46.

What can you do to join the work of God to display his love for the world to see?

ACT:

With some friends or your small group, be a part of a ministry that is caring for people in your city. Go spend an afternoon helping them out. See how they work and what they do. Ask people there why they are doing what they do. You'll probably hear a lot about Jesus.

When Christians love others in the name of Jesus through word and deed, it clarifies there is no other idol before them and their busyness doesn't trump the importance of sharing Jesus in the world.

Transition to 8th Grade Year

WEEK

7

ISAIAH 55:6-7

HOW DO YOU CONNECT WITH GOD?

Connecting with God can be difficult. Maybe your pastor, parents, or friends seem to have something that you don't. That might bring up questions about whether or not God really exists or makes a difference or wants a vibrant relationship with you. If that is you, you are not alone. A lot of people have been in the exact same place as you. Many adults go through those kinds of questions and struggles, too.

It may just be that you haven't figured out the best way for you to connect with God. There are tons of ways of connecting with God: Bible reading, praying, walking in nature, singing or listening to worship music, serving others, practicing silence, fasting, and more.

What's one way that you feel like you connect best with God?

What are some ways that you feel like you don't connect with God? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Connecting with things or beings you can't see is weird. Are you going to be a Christian who carries around a big Bible all the time? I don't even understand why you would be even interested in "connecting" anyway. Doesn't Christianity end up only being a list of do's and don'ts? Why would you want to connect with anything that tells you that you can't do the things you want to do?

What is the purpose of connecting with God?

How do you know if you have or haven't connected with God?

For you, how important is having a regular time with God?

Read Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, and John 6:15.

ACT:

Try some new ways of connecting with God this week. Go on a walk and look around at nature. Sit somewhere quiet and just listen. Take a journal and write out your prayers. Get up early and watch the sunrise. Create something using clay or paint. There are so many different ways of connecting with God, and I believe you will benefit from trying some that are new for you.

DOES YOUR CHURCH HELP YOU GROW?

There is a delicate balance of opportunities given by a church for an individual to grow in their walk with Jesus and the individual actually wanting to grow. For example, how can studies like this help you grow? The words in this study by themselves are not going to make you grow. You have to choose to actually do something with these words.

List as many ways as you can think that this church/student ministry helps you grow?

What are some specific examples of growth in your life that came from attending or serving at church?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Church is a waste of time. You'd be better off sleeping in on Sunday mornings and figuring out on your own what you should believe. Going somewhere and having someone tell you what you should believe isn't right. You need freedom and space. Church is a bunch of old people who have nothing better to do. It's all just a bunch of rules, anyway.

Read Acts 2:42-47.

Does it sound like it was a waste of time for the believers to gather in Acts 2? Why or why not?

What would it require to have this kind of fellowship and growth of believers in the Church today?

What can you do about making a positive change in the culture of this church to help others grow?

ACT:

Spend some time looking through the church website this week and see what opportunities you have available to grow in your relationship with Jesus. Find a new opportunity and try it out.

WHAT HOLDS BACK YOUR GROWTH?

Almost anything can hold a Christian back from growing. It could be as simple as year-round soccer or baseball practice that limits your ability to go to youth group. It might be parents who don't want to drive you to church. It could be more serious like an addiction you are struggling with or a home filled with chaos. Friends have a lot to do with this, too. Being obsessed with relationships with the opposite sex. You might have something similar holding you back—or something totally different. Lots of factors can limit your growth. Your job is to figure out how to minimize them.

How important is your faith to you right now? What evidence in your life would confirm your answer?

What things right now are holding back your growth?

What are some ways you can overcome some of those obstacles?

THE WORLD THINKS:

I tried that church thing and it didn't work for me, so I quit. I went to youth group for a while and I just grew out of it. I don't have a need for God right now. Maybe when I'm older and have kids of my own I'll go back. I want them to have a foundation, at least, but I don't think it's particularly relevant in my life right now. Besides, the Bible was written so many years ago—how could it relate to life now?

How do you need help in order to grow?

ACT:

Find a local Christian ministry that serves people, such as a food pantry or a homeless shelter. Invite your small group or just an adult you trust and take them with you to serve. Experience what that ministry does, and see the responses of the people they are serving. Ask the leaders in that ministry why they do what they do.

Read Matthew 14:24-33.

How did Peter show that he wanted to grow? What caused him to sink? How did Jesus respond?

SPIRIT LEAD ME WHERE MY TRUST IS WITHOUT BORDERS. LET ME WALK UPON THE WATERS.
WHEREVER YOU WOULD CALL ME. TAKE ME DEEPER THAN MY FEET COULD EVER WANDER.
MY FAITH WILL BE MADE STRONGER, IN THE PRESENCE OF MY SAVIOR. —HILLSONG

Transition to 8th Grade Year

WEEK

8

MATTHEW 6:33

HOW DO YOU SET HEALTHY PATTERNS?

Get up at 6am to read the Bible and pray. Pray every night before going to bed. These patterns when you are in high school may not work for you. Why, because you fall back asleep at 6:05am, or you fall asleep three minutes after you start praying at bedtime. You may find it very difficult to do things early and late. It is difficult to stay focused at either time.

Rather than continuing to struggle and feel bad about it, set your own patterns and not just take ones that work for others. You may find that the best time for focused prayer and reading your Bible is around 10am or right before dinner. By that time I've woken up, eaten, had coffee, and gone through my morning emails at work. I can slow down and take time to focus then. That is a healthy pattern for me.

So the key is to know which patterns work for you and which don't. Don't feel guilty if you aren't a 6am prayer person or a 10pm Bible-reading person. Discover what patterns work best for you, and then cultivate those habits that strengthen your faith and help you step into maturity.

What are some healthy patterns—spiritual, physical, social, or any other category—you have set?

How did those patterns get established, and how have they helped you?

What are some patterns you've tried that haven't worked?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Don't worry about patterns. Just do what works for you when it works for you, and stop it when it doesn't. You don't need to be concerned with doing anything in order to get better or grow or improve; it should just happen.

Read Matthew 6:6 and Psalm 1:2

When do you normally have time to yourself during the day? How could you use that time to spend with the Lord?

What are some different possibilities you could try that might work for you?

Read Psalm 1:3 and Jeremiah 17:7-8

How can a healthy pattern of seeking the Lord help you?

ACT:

For one week, pray and read your Bible at a different time each day. Try early in the morning, mid-morning, lunch, afternoon, or after dinner. Discover what works for you.

HOW CAN YOU STAY CONSISTENT?

The sad reality is that many of us just don't know how to stay consistent. That's one of the reasons some people wonder why anyone even bothers with New Year's resolutions. We make the major decisions and statements about how we want to live our lives differently, yet within only a few weeks or months we often return to our old patterns of behavior. The changes we wanted to make just didn't last like we had wanted them to. Many people say that it takes about two months for something to change and become a pattern in our lives.

What are two specific things you want to stay consistent with?

What challenges typically hinder your consistency in those areas?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Do what feels right when it feels right, and don't feel any pressure to follow any pattern. You choose for yourself what works, and don't let anyone tell you there is anything you have to do.

Read 1 Timothy 4:8 and Hebrews 5:14

How do you train for godliness and mature in your faith even at your age?

It is incredibly hard to change patterns. Those who were capable of changing patterns always have a similar strategy: Come up with a reasonable plan, let others know about it, and stick with it no matter what gets in the way.

How can you stop things from getting in the way?

For you, a real plan might be to simply make the commitment that you will always participate in student ministry activities. Yes, things will get in the way. You will have too much homework, be studying for a test, or be really tired. You will have friends facing crises, your room will need to be cleaned, or you'll have a major breakout on your face. However, consistency says that none of those things can get in the way of following your plan.

ACT:

Decide on the changes that you want to make. Share it with your family and accountability partner. Give them the freedom to keep you accountable for your change.

WHAT TAKES YOUR EYES AWAY FROM JESUS?

You probably have some things in your life that are really important and consume a lot of your time and energy. It might be a particular sport that you play well, and you've found yourself being added to more and more select teams. It could be that you have a boyfriend/girlfriend or just regular friends that you spend a ton of time connecting with. Maybe you are focused on school and that takes a lot of your time. These things aren't inherently bad, but they can take our focus away from Jesus.

What things take the largest chunk of your time?

How much do you think about Jesus in the midst of your activities and busy life?

Most likely your main challenge is simply being busy. Creating margin and space in your life is hard. When you add in homework, sports, practice, clubs, church, work, family, friends, social media, reading, and sleep—well, you just end up with a busy life, and any of those things can easily distract you from thinking about your faith or focusing on Jesus.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and Matthew 6:33.

How does seeking God first help you focus on him and balance your time and energy?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Fill your life with everything you can. You have to try everything to figure out what you are good at, what you do well. If you want to get into a top college or land a high-paying job, you are going to have to show them that you have diverse tastes and have been involved in many different things.

ACT:

Create margin to make Jesus a priority in your life this week. If that means that you have to step away from a club or activity to keep focused, then do it.

Transition to 8th Grade Year

COLOSSIANS 3:1-2

WEEK

9

THE FIRST BIG SUCCESS

Success is a funny thing. On one side is our desire to be proud of ourselves and feel like we accomplished something good. The other side, though, is that piece that makes us feel like we have to continue to replicate it in order to stand out. It must be tough to be an Olympic athlete. You have one chance every four years to compete for only a few medals. Most of the athletes only end up competing in the Olympics once in their whole lifetime. So, what if you went to the Olympics and won, but then that was the last win of your life? Yes, you would probably feel good, but in just a short while you probably wouldn't be as good, fast, or strong as you once were. The tension you have to deal with is how to enjoy the moment. God gives us gifts and talents, and we in turn have the opportunity to use them to glorify him.

What's one thing you know you are good at?

What types of successes have you had in the last six months? What about failures?

What have you learned from recent successes—and recent failures?

Read 1 Samuel 17.

In the passage above we discover the story about David and Goliath. It's a good win for David, but if you keep reading through 1 Samuel, you will see that he also had failures as well as a few more successes in his life.

THE WORLD THINKS:

It sure seems the world says that people who have visible success are way more valuable than the rest of us. We see it all the time. It's amazing to watch how much screen time is given to the athletes who have had constant success.

How does it feel when people around you are doing well but you aren't?

How can you become the type of person that encourages others when they do something well?

ACT:

Focus for a week on encouraging people who were doing things right in the day-to-day, mundane parts of life. For example, encourage people for using kind words or being generous. Those moments are a big success that needs to be recognized.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU FAIL?

Failure is something that many people can relate to. We all have failure stories from our lives. The real question, though, isn't how often we fail but what we do when failure happens.

What is your go-to response when you struggle or fail at something? Give a specific example.

THE WORLD THINKS:

You are dirty. If you fail, you are worthless and really shouldn't walk inside the doors of a church. It would be better if you didn't come and taint everyone with your unworthiness.

Many people choose to disappear from church because they feel too ashamed to come to church because of what they have done. It is a part of our sinful nature to want to run and hide. However, God desires something different.

Read Romans 3:23, 6:23 and 1 John 1:9.

How do you think God sees you when you fail? Why do you believe God sees you this way?

Read Acts 2:38, Acts 10:43, and Ephesians 1:7.

What are some ways that you can use your youth group, adult mentors, or friends to help you not fail—or to help you learn how to get back on your feet after you fail?

ACT:

Forgiveness can be something that is incredibly hard to give. Chances are good that in the 13 or 14 years you've been alive, someone has hurt you and has failed in your eyes. What if you took a moment to forgive that person? It might be really hard to do. One of the reasons we have a hard time believing that God forgives is because we have trouble doing it. So call, write a note, send an email or a social media message, and tell someone that you forgive him or her.

WHERE IS JESUS IN YOUR PAIN?

I went through a really difficult season in my life when I was younger. My family was going through a roller coaster ride of dysfunction, and my parents weren't living together. I felt as if my whole foundation of life had suddenly disappeared, and I had no clue how to function in this new normal. I felt like my friends really didn't understand how bad I was hurting, and the answers they were giving me just weren't helpful. It was so hard, and I was completely unprepared. I remember days when I only left my room a few times. I dived into books to try to experience a different reality and to mask the pain I felt. It lasted for a long time. One day I couldn't take it anymore, and I just went to a friend's house to talk. I ended up lying on his floor crying while he and a couple of other people prayed for me. This was the beginning of healing because I was allowing Jesus to meet me in the pain I was feeling. No matter what kind of pain you might be experiencing now; Jesus absolutely wants to be with you in our pain.

How do you respond to pain?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Pain is just something you have to suck up and deal with. Everyone experiences pain. Everyone hurts. Everyone gets over it. Just figure out how to do it on your own. No one can really help you through it. It's up to you.

Have you had any situations of pain that you felt Jesus was able to help you with?

How have you been able to help other people who are experiencing pain?

ACT:

There might be a homeless shelter or food pantry/kitchen in your town. Get together with some other people and see if you can go and serve. As you serve, see if you can talk to the people who work there and are being served there, and listen to them share how they find help. If it is a Christian ministry, ask them about how Jesus meets them in their pain. The answers they share may give you insight to better know how Jesus will meet you in your pain.

Read Psalm 69:29, John 16:19-22, and Revelation 21:4.

Ultimately, keeping an eternal perspective of salvation in mind helps us walk through whatever trials that come our way.

Transition to 8th Grade Year

WEEK

10

PSALM 31:14

WHAT ROLE DOES JESUS PLAY IN YOUR LIFE?

You may be in a place right now where you go to church with your parents, or maybe the important part of church is getting to see your friends. That's an okay place to be, but ultimately you must answer the question of where Jesus fits in your life. How you answer that question has big ramifications for the way you live the rest of your life and how you approach church and ministry opportunities.

If your life was a car and Jesus was in it, where would you make him sit, and why?

What role do you see Jesus playing in the life of your parents and family?

Answer truthfully: Right now, how important do you think Jesus is going to be in your life after high school graduation?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Compartmentalize your life. Keep all the areas separated. Everyone does it. Make sure you have the right answers for Sunday school and youth group, but don't feel the pressure to be that Christian kid everywhere. You can choose to be whom you want when you want, and Jesus doesn't have to play a big role in your life.

Read John 6

After Jesus had fed everyone they came around to the other side of the lake looking for another miracle and another meal. Jesus told everyone that he alone could sustain, not just actual food (see John 6:35).

Is Jesus the king and Lord of your life or just someone you claim on Sunday mornings?

Read John 6:66-67.

When have you had to face this question? How would you answer that question today?

Read Luke 12:22-31.

How does your relationship with Jesus impact what you strive after in this world?

Read Galatians 2:16-21.

How does the work of Jesus impact you for eternity?

ACT:

Find a high school senior you respect, and ask that person what role Jesus has played in his or her decision on what to do after high school. You might find out that it's a big deal, but it might not be. Then ask an adult what role Jesus has in his or her big life decisions, and see what that person says.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT DATING?

Dating can be a weird thing. People often wrap their entire identity up in having a boyfriend or girlfriend. It is as if dating gives people some sort of self-worth that being single couldn't provide.

Most likely you have thought about dating. Maybe it's already part of your life. Maybe it's just something you want. Maybe you're unsure if you're ready. Maybe you don't want to date anyone until you get your life sorted out after college. Either way, it's something worth considering and discussing seriously so that you do not jump into it just because "everyone else" is dating or because you feel a void that you want to fill.

How do you feel about dating as a sophomore?

Have you had a boyfriend/girlfriend, and if so, how long did the relationship last?

If you had to give one reason for dating, what would it be? If you had to give one reason against dating, what would it be?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Date everyone you can and anyone you want. As a 8th grader, you need to start worrying about your social standing in school, and getting invited or having a pool of people you can invite to dances is important. Make sure to "try out" a lot of relationships before you get married.

Read Song of Solomon 2:7.

Love is demanding, and in giving of oneself, fatigue is inevitable. As appealing as love is, it should not be forced or rushed, hence the urgent request of the woman to the daughters in this verse. It is clear that the couple is already in love, but they must allow their love to proceed at its proper pace, which includes waiting until the right time.

What impact does the Biblical advice above have in how you deal with the pressure of the culture about dating?

How could you get to know others in safer ways than being in a relationship?

Read Hebrews 13:4.

How can having a high view of marriage help you look toward a future spouse and make great decisions about dating?

ACT:

Now might be a good time to start writing out a list of qualities you want in a future spouse. You might be amazed at how having that kind of list can help you make good choices now.

WHAT CAREER WOULD YOU CHOOSE RIGHT NOW?

Take a moment and dream about your future. Hold that dream loosely. The future is God's and everything in it. To some of you that might be frustrating, but to others that brings a great hope. You don't have to have it all figured out now; you can dream and pray and ask God to direct your plans.

If right now you had to choose a career path for your future, what would you pick? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

"You can do anything you want." The world says it, but it's not true. You can't be a rocket scientist if you're not smart enough. You can't be a ballet dancer if you don't have the skills it would take.

If money, fame, power, and stability weren't deciding factors and you could choose one career or lifelong way to serve God, what would you pick? Why?

Read Psalm 31:14.

Ultimately, how much of a role are you willing to give Jesus in your dating life and future?

LOOKING BACK

How do you feel now that you have completed this study?

So now you are thinking, okay, now that I've completed this study, I know everything I need to know now, right?

Discipleship isn't about completing a study. It is about a lifestyle of learning and living as you follow Jesus throughout your lifetime. What you have learned throughout this study will become more important to your Christian life in the months, even years, to come. Think about some of the major concepts that you have learned and lived out.

- Became more comfortable with who you are and how God created you.
- Knowledge that you are fearfully and wonderfully made.
- Found your self-worth in your relationship with Jesus.
- Learned about the dangers of compartmentalizing your life.
- Thought through the image that you portray to your friends about yourself.
- Examined the way that you represent yourself in each of your social circles.
- Discovered the importance of being known at church.
- Learned how to make your friends better.
- Considered the friendships that are most important to you and how to maintain them.
- Learned about the importance of strong mentors in your life.
- Considered the parts of your life that you put before your relationship with Jesus.
- Discovered new ways to connect with God.
- Thought through how the church equips you to live your faith each day.
- Examined what holds back your personal faith.
- Learned how to set healthy patterns.
- Examined what takes your eyes off of Jesus and removed them from your life.
- Learned how to approach success and failure with grace.
- Knowledge that God desires to be with you even in your pain.
- Examined where Jesus is Lord of your life and where he needs to be.
- Considered how your relationship with Jesus impacts your day-to-day decision-making.

Wow! That's a lot! Now it's time to continue to live out what you have learned in this study.

Getting Started - Transition to Freshman Year

At this point you might be a little bit freaked out. Throughout the last year of your life, you were at the top of the school. You were the oldest class, high on the pecking order of power and privilege. You were a big eighth-grader. However, now you are getting ready to start over. For some of you that's a welcome thing. You are excited to leave the painful years of middle school behind and start fresh in a new school and with new people. Maybe the last couple of years have been rough and you didn't have a good time. This is a chance for you to make your mark and decide you are going to be someone different or do something different. Yet, you may be a little scared because you really don't want it to be like the last few years, or you may have had a great time and you are just hoping that high school will continue that. How do you make sure that will happen? What if it doesn't? You are worried that you don't really know what you are getting yourself into.

You are making this big transition, and with all transitions, some things come with you and others are left behind. If you've ever moved houses you know what this feels like. You have to choose how important all your stuff is and make decisions based on that. Some things go in the truck, and others just get sold at a garage sale or are donated to charity.

Your faith is something that is important to you. You feel that there is this piece of your life that just seems more right when God is involved. It's hard to explain, but you know deep down that you want to stay close to him.

The goal of this study is to help you think about your faith. You may have a great and strong faith that has been nurtured for years by loving parents, student volunteers, church members, friends, coaches, and many other people. Maybe it's been the opposite experience for you: You don't have a big community of Christ-followers around you that have been helping you grow. You've been doing it all on your own. Whatever your story, this study is for you. This study contains different things for you to read, think, and pray about—plus action steps aimed at helping these ideas solidify a little bit more in your brain.

Your freshman year is an important one. It sets the stage for the rest of your high school time. You're going to experience so many things for the first time, and you'll benefit from thinking through how you want to respond in situations. It's our hope (meaning the collective world of adults who pray for you and desire to watch you make great decisions) that you would really figure out this year how to make Jesus central in your life.

It will not be easy. With this new season in your life you are going to have to deal with so many different things. This study will point out to you some steps and things that will help you as you work on figuring out how to be a ninth-grader who is trying to make Jesus central.

Transition to Freshman Year

COLOSSIANS 3:23-24

WEEK

1

Welcome to the first time you do a whole bunch of things! That's one of the great and scary things about your freshman year. You get to experience everything for the first time. Maybe this isn't a big deal because you handle change and transitions well, or maybe you are a bit nervous about what this all means. The thing about firsts is that you only have one chance to experience them. For example, with a "first impression," you have really only one opportunity to show people who you are—and after that you are either reinforcing or trying to change what they think of you.

What things do you want to "bring" with you from your last school, and what things do you want to "leave" behind?

With all of these things you are stepping into brand-new territory. How will you respond? Do you have a plan? Are you prepared when things don't go the way you expected? The goal of this study is to help you think about these "firsts" in the context of your faith journey.

Take a moment to pray and ask for God's help, to prepare you, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight, wisdom, words, and courage.

THE FIRST DAY

Imagine this: You wake up. You put on some clothes. You grab something to eat and then head to school. You might be walking, getting dropped off, or catching a bus. It's a new school and you are feeling a bit nervous. Even if you don't want to admit it to yourself, it's affecting you. We have all been there. That feeling you get walking on campus for the first time can be scary. Guess what? That's okay. You are supposed to be feeling these things. It's natural and normal. However, that probably doesn't make you feel better.

When you walk on campus and you have a choice as to whom are you going to be? Whether your faith is weak or strong, you still have to choose what to do with it and what it means to you.

Do you want your faith to be a part of your life at school this year? Why or why not?

During that brief moment that you first walk on campus ask God to allow you to see things as Jesus might. That's going to take really only one thing: You have to think beyond yourself.

Read John 3:30.

THE WORLD THINKS:

The world wants you to leave your faith at church and not bring it to school. The big way the world wants to discourage you from thinking about Jesus at school is by making it seem weird. The world wants you to think that the two things don't go together and that if you want to try, you'll have to carry around a big Bible with you and preach in the lunchroom.

ACT:

Guess what? You can be a teenager who has faith and trust in Jesus without coming across as "weird." You don't have to carry a big Bible or preach on campus. What you need to do is pretty simple, it really comes down to making a choice to love and serve your neighbor. What if you just decided this week that you were going to work on doing that? You could be the individual who decides to talk to people that others seem to forget or ignore. You could choose to not talk bad about people. You could encourage your friends and tell people what you like about them.

Read John 13:34.

How might Jesus want you to reach out to hurting people at your school? (Yes, as a freshman you can still have an impact.)

THE FIRST TESTS

As if you didn't already feel the pressure of having to "fit in" with the social world of your school, you now have to deal with the first academic parts of the year. You may face a lot of pressure from your parents to do well, which can be tough. Maybe you are scared because you really don't understand some of your classes. Perhaps you feel confident going into your tests. That's a great place to be, too.

How do you study? Does it work well? Why or why not?

What classes do you feel confident in? Which ones do you struggle with?

If you have the option to cheat and pass an exam, or not cheat and fail, what do you choose? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

"You are a freshman; what you do this year doesn't matter." The world wants you to just slide by and hide your struggles or try to find ways to cheat and just get by. The world wants you to believe that your struggles are not your fault and school is rigged against you.

ACT:

Action in this area requires two things: 1) Give your best effort. 2) Ask for help. Often when we don't fully understand something, we find it really hard to ask for help. On the flipside, when we fully grasp something, we often forget to think that others might benefit from our help. Talk to your teacher, another adult, another student, or a counselor. Ask someone to help you. If you know what you're doing, look for someone who might need your help. You have a gift that you could offer someone.

Read Colossians 3:23-24.

WHERE IS JESUS IN YOUR SCHOOL?

Often there is a major separation between church and school, and it is difficult for church volunteers and pastors to get into schools. Yet, that doesn't have to stop you from leading well on your campus. Jesus wants to have something to do with your school. Jesus has a place in the spots that are most important to us, the spots where we spend a lot of time.

What types of Christian clubs or groups are at your school?

THE WORLD THINKS:

There is a reason we have a separation of church and state; Jesus shouldn't be in our schools. If we are going to let Jesus and Christians in, we have to open up the door to everyone. We have to make sure to not offend anyone.

How do you think Jesus might want to be at your school?

Read John 8:12 and John 18:20.

JESUS SPOKE OPENLY ABOUT HIMSELF, EVEN IN PUBLIC PLACES.

Read Matthew 28:19-20.

Jesus commands us to go and make disciples. "Go" can be literally translated "as you go," meaning, wherever you go we are to be making disciples.

What are some ways you could share Jesus with people at school?

Transition to Freshman Year

1 CORINTHIANS 10:13

WEEK

2

THE FIRST TEMPTATIONS

One of the main differences between middle school and high school is the amount of freedom that you have. This might depend upon your school and parents, but you likely will have more opportunities in high school to be in places where temptations are in front of you than you did in junior high. Chances are good, too, that you might at some point be around some older friends who have experienced those things before you. There are just a lot more opportunities to get in trouble and to have things pop up in front of you that you haven't experienced before.

Your faith during high school can be super strong and central in your life, but if you haven't experienced some of these temptations before, how can you possibly be prepared? The goal of this study is to help you make your relationship with Jesus central in your life. Here's a quick tip, though:

IT'S REALLY HARD TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE IN THE MIDST OF TEMPTATION.

In fact, you will often fail if you find yourself having to make decisions when temptation is presented to you. However, don't worry; there is hope! How? Make the right choices before you enter tempting situations. You need to figure out what you will do in situations way in advance.

How do you protect yourself from making bad choices?

What are some things that you know could potentially be major temptations to you?

How do temptations and struggle play into your faith journey?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You'll probably hear quite a few times this year that it's okay to experiment. The world will even tell you that many people make bad choices, but they all turn out okay, so you shouldn't feel bad if you struggle and stumble a little. "Everyone is doing it," so it must be okay. You might even hear that your freshman year doesn't really matter, so if you are going to mess up, you should do it now. Adults might tell you that they all "experimented" a little, so it is okay if you want to do it.

Read Matthew 6:13, Luke 22:40, and 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Describe the difference between what the world thinks and what the Bible communicates about temptation.

THE FIRST PARTY

You will most likely end up at your first party because: (1) you got invited and decided to go or (2) you were with friends and next thing you knew, someone wanted to go to a party so you went along. Either way, how do you make some good choices about the way you are going to act?

You may even make some good choices and not partake in any of the illegal activities that happen there. You might even have a great time and maybe nothing bad happens. However, sin and struggles have a way of slowly taking over our lives.

How confident do you feel saying no to something you don't want to do?

What do you think about drinking alcohol and getting drunk?

If you had to choose between being "popular" and a partier or "unpopular" and sober, which would you choose? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You don't have to watch TV for too long to see people fully participating in the "party" lifestyle. The world wants you to believe that you can do that for a while and then simply stop and become a responsible adult.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:9-13.

Why is it important to be aware of the influence you have over others?

ACT:

What if there was something else for students to do on a Friday night instead of partying? Not every student's goal is to drink too much and puke. They just want to have fun.

So how could you (or you and some friends) be a catalyst for fun without temptations?

WHERE IS JESUS IN YOUR STRUGGLES?

The reality is you might be—and if not now, then you likely will at some point have to fight temptations and struggle against sin. We all probably wish that we had a magical "Jesus button" that we could press when we struggle—if we made a really bad decision, pressing that button would make all things right. We could start over and act as if it didn't ever happen.

THE WORLD THINKS:

You are on your own. You got yourself into this mess, and you'll have to get yourself out of it. It's no one's problem but your own. Good luck with that, and please don't let your issues affect us. Everyone has problems. You'll get over it. Jesus doesn't care about you. Your problems are so small compared to major things happening in the world. If there really were a Jesus, he'd focus on those things not you.

Do you think Jesus cares about your struggles and temptations? Why or why not?

How do you think Jesus enters into our issues with us?

What is your go-to response when you find yourself struggling with something?

Who are the people you feel you can go to when you are struggling with something?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:33, Ephesians 6:12-18 and 1 Peter 5:8.

Combining the armor of God and surrounding yourself with great Christian influences is a great strategy for success against temptation.

Transition to Freshman Year

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:7

WEEK

3

THE FIRST CRUSH

As a teenager today, you have the ability to be connected to people 24 hours a day if you want. Cell phones, text messaging, the Internet, and all the other ways to stay connected often allow relationships to progress extremely fast. Before all the ways that we have today to connect relationships didn't grow very quickly. Communication is also much more private than it used to be with the use of personal electronics. The major changes that we have seen in our culture in communication make it much more difficult for teenagers to create boundaries. This means you really have to be intentional about protecting yourself.

Do you have a crush on someone? What things are attractive to you, and what do you look for?

How have you seen crushes and dating go badly with your friends?

Do you think you are ready for a relationship now? Why or why not?

THE WORLD THINKS:

The world wants you to believe that simply jumping from one relationship to another is okay. You should "try out" a variety of different people so you will know what type of person you should be with. The world wants you to believe that there are not a lot of consequences to this type of dating. It's all about you anyway, right?

Read Song of Solomon 2:7.

Love is demanding, and in giving of oneself, fatigue is inevitable. As appealing as love is, it should not be forced or rushed, hence the urgent request of the woman to the daughters in this verse. It is clear that the couple is already in love, but they must allow their love to proceed at its proper pace, which includes waiting until the right time.

What impact does the Biblical advice above have in how you deal with the pressure of the culture?

THE FIRST DANCE

The heading above either strikes fear within you or excitement. Some people hate dances; yet, others wouldn't miss a dance in high school for anything. At some point you will most likely end up at a high school dance and be found standing along the wall with your friends. Talk about awkward! Dances can create a lot of anxiety, and chances are good that you will have the internal debate of wondering what you are doing there.

How comfortable are you in social settings such as a school dance? What do you fear—or enjoy?

A quick reminder to give yourself: Chances are good that everyone feels just like you and no one is actually looking at you as intently as you are looking at yourself. Dances often reveal how comfortable an individual with who they are. So try to be free and enjoy. You don't have to dance, but it's always good for you to be yourself.

What do you like to do? How can you do more of that?

THE WORLD THINKS:

In general, it seems like the world values people who are different. So if you are "hyper social" or "slightly freaky," you have the most value in social settings. Consider any reality TV show, the individuals that are chosen are usually very interesting people. The world encourages individualism but only under the banner of what it dictates.

Who do you listen to that gives you value?

Read 2 Samuel 6:1-22.

ACT:

Figuring out who you are is difficult—especially if you are sitting around waiting for someone to tell you. Your action step is to take a "healthy risk" into something that is good and hard for you. That might mean having a difficult conversation with an adult or friend where you ask them to give them feedback about you. It might mean doing something as simple as stepping out on the dance floor and dancing with someone.

WHERE IS JESUS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS?

It wasn't that long ago that guys could see their girlfriends and girls could see their boyfriends at school, but then went home and that was it (other than using the phone or occasionally hanging out). With the ability to stay connected to your significant other almost 24 hours a day, a relationship can go deep quickly without any downtime from that person. It's so easy to get so close so quick.

Since relationships can gain this depth so quickly, it becomes even harder to make sure to maintain a healthy dialogue with Jesus about what you should be doing. It's almost as if you have to be really careful because before you know it, you are in a serious relationship and you may have not really talked to Jesus about it first.

How do you make decisions about relationships?

What things are important to you when you think about dating?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Just jump in and date whomever you want. It's all casual, right? You should "try before you buy"—and consider trying out a lot. Don't worry about consequences now because you are young.

Read John 15:13 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

What are specific ways you can involve your faith in your dating?

Have you ever felt like things were moving too fast in a dating relationship? How can you stop that from happening?

Read Ephesians 4:2-3.

How would this passage apply to breaking up with someone?

ACT:

What if you put together a "group date" for some friends? Get some guys and girls together to do something fun with no expectations, pressure, or drama. You might find this is a totally healthy and easier way to get to know someone that you are interested in.

Transition to Freshman Year

MARK 12:30-31

WEEK

4

THE FIRST FRIENDSHIPS

It is not exactly always easy to navigate new friendships in high school, but these friends will most likely seem a lot more "real" as you spend more time with them. Most likely your parents will begin to let you hang out more with friends independently from them. To be prepared for this, you must consider what it is that you really need as a friend.

What types of qualities do you look for in a friend? Why?

Do you have friends in your life that you can tell what you are truly feeling or thinking?

THE WORLD THINKS:

We are often taught that we need to be self-sufficient and that people can't be trusted. You might see depictions of friendships being fairly shallow on TV. Friendship is for merely based upon what the other individual can offer you.

Describe why it is important for you to make deep friendships.

ACT:

Reach out to people who don't "fit" into your perfect mold of friendship. Go to school with an open mind and ask God whom he would like you to spend time with. Then do it.

Read 1 Samuel 18-20.

Make a list of the things that Jonathan did for his friend David.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR FRIENDS?

Friends are incredibly important. The friends you choose have an opportunity to be a source of spiritual growth or detriment for you. Having a group of friends that do not cause you to stumble and fall into temptation can be difficult to find and maintain.

THE WORLD THINKS:

The most important people in your life are your friends. They are more important than your parents or anyone else. Don't do anything that will cause your friendships to end. Your friends have your back and will always be there for you.

How have your friends helped you to grow—or have they?

How have you lost friends? How did that make you feel?

You might hear at some point in your life that if you want to make better decisions, you have to surround yourself with people who make good decisions.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:33.

Are your friends doing things that you don't want to get caught up in? If so, how are you handling these situations?

If you have any friends who aren't followers of Jesus, what do you as a Christ-follower believe is your responsibility to them?

ACT:

What if you tried to actively reach out to people at your school who don't appear to have any friends? How might you impact someone that feels lonely if you reached out to him or her? Sometimes just a simple smile to someone who doesn't often receive one will make a huge difference.

WHERE IS JESUS IN YOUR FUTURE?

A lot of us have dreams, but as a freshman it might not feel like you will have to worry about the future too much. However, you probably have some dreams about what you would like to see happen in your future. Maybe you have been thinking about this for a long time and you have a path pretty well mapped out with whom you are going to marry and even what that wedding day will be like. You might be totally the opposite: no clue about what you want your future to look like. Both are okay.

What talents and skills do you think God has given you?

If you had to choose a career right now, what would you pick—and why?

Who are some people in your life you can ask for help in figuring this out?

What role do your friends play in your future?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You have to figure this out now. Just pick the job that you think is going to make you the most money so that you are happy—because that's what really matters. The only person who cares about your future and can make things happen is you. So you need to have a plan and do it.

Do you think God has one plan for you, or are there multiple things you could try?

ACT:

Find an older Christian person in your world that you can go to lunch with and ask them to share with you how they saw Jesus leading them into their future. See what they can tell you about the path they traveled. Ask them what it was like if they tried to do it alone. Where did they finally figure it out?

JESUS WILL LEAD IF YOU ALLOW HIM THE CHANCE.

Read Psalm 33:11, Proverbs 19:21, and Jeremiah 29:11.

It is important not to take these verses out of context. These verses speak to the ultimate plans and purposes of God that are always fulfilled. Therefore, these verses provide hope for our own future because they point to God's sovereignty and ultimately the redemption of his people. God's revealed will for us is to love God and to love people. When we do those two things we are within the will of God and our choices about the future reflect our relationship with him.

How can you make you use scripture to make decisions about your future college choice, career choice and even to whom you get married?

Transition to Freshman Year

LUKE 24:45

WEEK

5

THE FIRST NEW DOUBTS

Teenagers who have grown up in the church are often frustrated because they feel like doubting is a sin or isn't okay. Doubting is okay. Don't feel like you are weird or not a true Christ-follower if you have doubts. Many Christians have experienced a season where they didn't feel like God was real in their lives. The danger in doubting is when you don't voice your doubts within a circle of believers and have them walk with you to discover answers. God is bigger than your doubts.

Do you feel like doubting in God is safe? Why or why not?

Who in your life can you talk to when you have doubts?

How do you respond when you have doubts? Some people write, others pray, some talk, and others read. What works for you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

The world is big on taking doubting to an extreme. In fact, we are often led to believe that we should doubt everything all the time. Doubt people's intentions. Doubt that there is any higher power. Doubt that you will make it or that anything will work out the way you want it to.

Read John 20:24-31.

How did Jesus respond to Thomas' doubts?

What does Jesus say about those who don't have the opportunity to put their hands on the scars?

ACT:

Spend some time writing out your doubts on paper and share them within a small group with an adult leader that you trust. Make it a place that you can be honest and talk about the things you are having a hard time believing.

WHERE IS JESUS IN YOUR DOUBTS?

Every once in a while, we all struggle with believing certain things. It might be as simple as having no idea how you are going to make a deadline, pass a test, or fix a broken friendship. In your faith you may wonder if this whole "Jesus, God, and the Bible" thing is real. You feel like you are putting a whole bunch of energy and effort into something that might be a total lie. That's a hard place to be because doubt puts a huge damper on everything. It's almost like it removes the color from a picture.

Doubt may be something that is hard for you because it causes you to question yourself and to wonder what your problem is. Here is some hope for you, though: Doubt is good. Jesus isn't afraid of your doubts. The church isn't scared of your doubts either. You have the freedom to wrestle through things and work stuff out for yourself. That is what leads to an authentic faith. The church wants to help free you from doubt and sit with you while you experience it.

What are some of your doubts about Christianity?

How do you feel when you have doubts?

Where do you look for answers?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Skepticism and cynicism are good. Don't get sucked into believing things that aren't true and can't be proved. Don't trust people, because you'll just get hurt. The Bible is an outdated book written by too many people a long time ago. You can't trust what it says in there anyway.

ACT:

Make a list of things you doubt about faith. Let the list be as long as you need it to be. Then start asking people you trust about those doubts. Find a youth worker, parent, or friend and ask them to explain things to you. You may still have doubts, but their answers likely will help you.

Read Luke 24:36-49 and Jude 1:22

Compare how Jesus responded to doubt to Jude 1:22.

WHERE IS JESUS IN YOUR FEARS?

When have you been totally overwhelmed with fear?

Do you believe that in moment of being terrified God was with you in your fear? Why or why not?

What is something you are totally afraid of?

Read Joshua 1:6-9.

How might Jesus enter into that fear with you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You're only a freshman. What do you know about fear? The things you are afraid of are silly compared to other people. What does Jesus have to do with your fears? The only way you will overcome anything is by being completely like a stone. You can't let anything get to you. Fear is failure.

If fear wasn't an issue at all, what's one thing you wish you could try?

ACT:

One thing we can do to overcome our fears is to allow ourselves to experience just a little bit of them at a time. So if you are afraid to speak in front of people, sneak into the auditorium and get on the stage and talk when the room is empty. Or practice what you would say to that girl or guy you want to ask to the homecoming dance. Figure out one fear that you identified above and see what you can do to practice overcoming a little of it.

Read 2 Timothy 1:7 and 1 John 4:16-18.

What are some ways you can confront or overcome some of your fears?

Remember, fear and doubt torments, but God wants to help you overcome and deliver you from them. Don't stand still in terror, take the hand of God and walk with him.

Transition to Freshman Year

EXODUS 20:4

WEEK

6

WHO ARE YOUR IDOLS?

All of us have idols in our lives. Maybe it is an author, TV star, guitarist in a rock band, power, or even technology. Maybe you are more into athletics and you idolize certain sports figures. Image is a huge idol that many of us struggle with. We want to look a certain way or be a certain type of person. We have pictures of pop stars, actors, and models hanging on our walls—people that we wish we could be more like.

What three people do you most idolize—and why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Your goal should be to become the idol everyone wants to be like. If you just eat less, you'll be so pretty. If you work harder to be the starting quarterback, everyone will love you. Spend all your time focusing on things that matter, such as money, fame, and popularity. These are the things that really count.

Read Exodus 20:4.

Is it wrong to have idols? Why or why not?

What are some differences between having an idol and having a role model?

ACT:

It's not wrong to have things you really like. In fact, God created us to have specific talents, desires, and free will. God actually takes delight when we use the gifts he's given us. We create problems when we put those things before God. Put a rubber band around your wrist; every time you see it, pray that nothing you love would become an idol that you place higher than God.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU GET BUSY?

Do you feel the pressure to always be doing something?

Life gets busy. You're just starting high school and might be handling sports, clubs, jobs, homework, youth group, family stuff, and more. It's a whole new thing in ninth grade with so much pressure and responsibility. It's hard. People often try to convince themselves that they are better and more worthy when they are involved with as many things as possible. Imagine what that was like before smartphones

You have probably experienced the moments when it just feels like everything you are doing had a major project, due date, game, or need all at the same time. Those moments often cause us to crash, get sick or just overwhelmed.

What things are you currently doing that you wish you could just quit?

When you get stressed, what is your usual response?

Read 1 Peter 5:7.

When you get busy, how do you prioritize everything you need to do?

THE WORLD THINKS:

If you don't get involved in everything you possible can as a freshman and build your résumé, you will never get into the college you want. You have to fill your schedule with everything so that you will appear "well rounded" and look like the kind of student that a college wants to accept. Busyness is a great thing and will eventually lead you to be successful in life.

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

What formula does Jesus give us to manage our priorities?

How pressured do you feel by your parents to do things?

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

ACT:

Grab a sheet of paper, and in one column write down everything you are currently doing and the amount of time you think it takes you each week. In another column write down some things that you wish you could do but you just can't seem to find time to do. Now take this list and pray over it. Ask God to direct you to which things you are supposed to be doing and which things you maybe should cut. Seek guidance for things you wish you had time to do.

WHERE IS JESUS IN THE WORLD?

You might not see Jesus in the world very much. He often isn't someone we spend a lot of time looking for. Maybe around Christmas or Easter you'll see Jesus on the cover of some magazine. Often you will hear him mentioned if something controversial paints Jesus in a bad light.

In the daily reality of a ninth-grader, you may not see him. Unless, of course, you take time to really look. Sure, it would be easy if Jesus was walking around today and performing miracles on the streets. That would be on TV and the Internet almost immediately.

How do you see Jesus in the world today?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Jesus is dead. That's what happened on the cross. He doesn't have a place in the world today. The people who believe have issues. You need something you can't find on your own so you try to act like Jesus has some sort of place now. We're tired of you Christians acting like it matters. It doesn't. We tolerate all the hype around Christmas and Easter and we might even go to your church because our parents want us to, but we don't believe any of it.

Who can you look to that Jesus is working through?

When do you know that Jesus is at work?

Read Matthew 25:34-46.

What can you do to join the work of God to display his love for the world to see?

ACT:

With some friends or your small group, be a part of a ministry that is caring for people in your city. Go spend an afternoon helping them out. See how they work and what they do. Ask people there why they are doing what they do. You'll probably hear a lot about Jesus.

When Christians love others in the name of Jesus through word and deed, it clarifies there is no other idol before them and their busyness doesn't trump the importance of sharing Jesus in the world.

Transition to Freshman Year

COLOSSIANS 3:1-2

WEEK

7

THE FIRST BIG SUCCESS

Success is a funny thing. On one side is our desire to be proud of ourselves and feel like we accomplished something good. The other side, though, is that piece that makes us feel like we have to continue to replicate it in order to stand out. It must be tough to be an Olympic athlete. You have one chance every four years to compete for only a few medals. Most of the athletes only end up competing in the Olympics once in their whole lifetime. So, what if you went to the Olympics and won, but then that was the last win of your life? Yes, you would probably feel good, but in just a short while you probably wouldn't be as good, fast, or strong as you once were. The tension you have to deal with is how to enjoy the moment. God gives us gifts and talents, and we in turn have the opportunity to use them to glorify him.

What's one thing you know you are good at?

What types of successes have you had in the last six months? What about failures?

What have you learned from recent successes—and recent failures?

Read 1 Samuel 17.

In the passage above we discover the story about David and Goliath. It's a good win for David, but if you keep reading through 1 Samuel, you will see that he also had failures as well as a few more successes in his life.

THE WORLD THINKS:

It sure seems the world says that people who have visible success are way more valuable than the rest of us. We see it all the time. It's amazing to watch how much screen time is given to the athletes who have had constant success.

How does it feel when people around you are doing well but you aren't?

How can you become the type of person that encourages others when they do something well?

ACT:

Focus for a week on encouraging people who were doing things right in the day-to-day, mundane parts of life. For example, encourage people for using kind words or being generous. Those moments are a big success that needs to be recognized.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU FAIL?

Failure is something that many people can relate to. We all have failure stories from our lives. The real question, though, isn't how often we fail but what we do when failure happens.

What is your go-to response when you struggle or fail at something? Give a specific example.

THE WORLD THINKS:

You are dirty. If you fail, you are worthless and really shouldn't walk inside the doors of a church. It would be better if you didn't come and taint everyone with your unworthiness.

Many people choose to disappear from church because they feel too ashamed to come to church because of what they have done. It is a part of our sinful nature to want to run and hide. However, God desires something different.

Read Romans 3:23, 6:23 and 1 John 1:9.

How do you think God sees you when you fail? Why do you believe God sees you this way?

Read Acts 2:38, Acts 10:43, and Ephesians 1:7.

What are some ways that you can use your youth group, adult mentors, or friends to help you not fail—or to help you learn how to get back on your feet after you fail?

ACT:

Forgiveness can be something that is incredibly hard to give. Chances are good that in the 14 or 15 years you've been alive, someone has hurt you and has failed in your eyes. What if you took a moment to forgive that person? It might be really hard to do. One of the reasons we have a hard time believing that God forgives is because we have trouble doing it. So call, write a note, send an email or a social media message, and tell someone that you forgive him or her.

WHERE IS JESUS IN YOUR PAIN?

I went through a really difficult season in my life when I was younger. My family was going through a roller coaster ride of dysfunction, and my parents weren't living together. I felt as if my whole foundation of life had suddenly disappeared, and I had no clue how to function in this new normal. I felt like my friends really didn't understand how bad I was hurting, and the answers they were giving me just weren't helpful. It was so hard, and I was completely unprepared. I remember days when I only left my room a few times. I dived into books to try to experience a different reality and to mask the pain I felt. It lasted for a long time. One day I couldn't take it anymore, and I just went to a friend's house to talk. I ended up lying on his floor crying while he and a couple of other people prayed for me. This was the beginning of healing because I was allowing Jesus to meet me in the pain I was feeling. No matter what kind of pain you might be experiencing now, Jesus absolutely wants to be with you in our pain.

How do you respond to pain?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Pain is just something you have to suck up and deal with. Everyone experiences pain. Everyone hurts. Everyone gets over it. Just figure out how to do it on your own. No one can really help you through it. It's up to you.

Have you had any situations of pain that you felt Jesus was able to help you with?

How have you been able to help other people who are experiencing pain?

ACT:

There might be a homeless shelter or food pantry/kitchen in your town. Get together with some other people and see if you can go and serve. As you serve, see if you can talk to the people who work there and are being served there, and listen to them share how they find help. If it is a Christian ministry, ask them about how Jesus meets them in their pain. The answers they share may give you insight to better know how Jesus will meet you in your pain.

Read Psalm 69:29, John 16:19-22, and Revelation 21:4.

Ultimately, keeping an eternal perspective of salvation in mind helps us walk through whatever trials that come our way.

Transition to Freshman Year

WEEK

8

ISAIAH 55:6-7

HOW DO YOU CONNECT WITH GOD?

Connecting with God can be difficult. Maybe your pastor, parents, or friends seem to have something that you don't. That might bring up questions about whether or not God really exists or makes a difference or wants a vibrant relationship with you. If that is you, you are not alone. A lot of people have been in the exact same place as you. Many adults go through those kinds of questions and struggles, too.

It may just be that you haven't figured out the best way for you to connect with God. There are tons of ways of connecting with God: Bible reading, praying, walking in nature, singing or listening to worship music, serving others, practicing silence, fasting, and more.

What's one way that you feel like you connect best with God?

What are some ways that you feel like you don't connect with God? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Connecting with things or beings you can't see is weird. Are you going to be a Christian who carries around a big Bible all the time? I don't even understand why you would be even interested in "connecting" anyway. Doesn't Christianity end up only being a list of do's and don'ts? Why would you want to connect with anything that tells you that you can't do the things you want to do?

What is the purpose of connecting with God?

How do you know if you have or haven't connected with God?

For you, how important is having a regular time with God?

Read Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, and John 6:15.

ACT:

Try some new ways of connecting with God this week. Go on a walk and look around at nature. Sit somewhere quiet and just listen. Take a journal and write out your prayers. Get up early and watch the sunrise. Create something using clay or paint. There are so many different ways of connecting with God, and I believe you will benefit from trying some that are new for you.

DOES YOUR CHURCH HELP YOU GROW?

There is a delicate balance of opportunities given by a church for an individual to grow in their walk with Jesus and the individual actually wanting to grow. For example, how can studies like this help you grow? The words in this study by themselves are not going to make you grow. You have to choose to actually do something with these words.

List as many ways as you can think that this church/student ministry helps you grow?

What are some specific examples of growth in your life that came from attending or serving at church?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Church is a waste of time. You'd be better off sleeping in on Sunday mornings and figuring out on your own what you should believe. Going somewhere and having someone tell you what you should believe isn't right. You need freedom and space. Church is a bunch of old people who have nothing better to do. It's all just a bunch of rules, anyway.

Read Acts 2:42-47.

Does it sound like it was a waste of time for the believers to gather in Acts 2? Why or why not?

What would it require to have this kind of fellowship and growth of believers in the Church today?

What can you do about making a positive change in the culture of this church to help others grow?

ACT:

Spend some time looking through the church website this week and see what opportunities you have available to grow in your relationship with Jesus. Find a new opportunity and try it out.

WHAT HOLDS BACK YOUR GROWTH?

Almost anything can hold a Christian back from growing. It could be as simple as year-round soccer or baseball practice that limits your ability to go to youth group. It might be parents who don't want to drive you to church. It could be more serious like an addiction you are struggling with or a home filled with chaos. Friends have a lot to do with this, too. Being obsessed with relationships with the opposite sex. You might have something similar holding you back—or something totally different. Lots of factors can limit your growth. Your job is to figure out how to minimize them.

How important is your faith to you right now? What evidence in your life would confirm your answer?

What things right now are holding back your growth?

What are some ways you can overcome some of those obstacles?

THE WORLD THINKS:

I tried that church thing and it didn't work for me, so I quit. I went to youth group for a while and I just grew out of it. I don't have a need for God right now. Maybe when I'm older and have kids of my own I'll go back. I want them to have a foundation, at least, but I don't think it's particularly relevant in my life right now. Besides, the Bible was written so many years ago—how could it relate to life now?

How do you need help in order to grow?

ACT:

Find a local Christian ministry that serves people, such as a food pantry or a homeless shelter. Invite your small group or just an adult you trust and take them with you to serve. Experience what that ministry does, and see the responses of the people they are serving. Ask the leaders in that ministry why they do what they do.

Read Matthew 14:24-33.

How did Peter show that he wanted to grow? What caused him to sink? How did Jesus respond?

SPIRIT LEAD ME WHERE MY TRUST IS WITHOUT BORDERS. LET ME WALK UPON THE WATERS.
WHEREVER YOU WOULD CALL ME. TAKE ME DEEPER THAN MY FEET COULD EVER WANDER.
MY FAITH WILL BE MADE STRONGER, IN THE PRESENCE OF MY SAVIOR. —HILLSONG

Transition to Freshman Year

JAMES 1:19

WEEK

9

THE FIRST BIG ARGUMENT

You've probably had a few fights and arguments already in your life. Maybe they were with parents or siblings or close friends. Sadly, you will probably continue to encounter conflict in high school. In high school it feels like the ramifications and consequences of arguments are so much worse.

How do you respond to conflict? Are you proud or ashamed of how you react? Why?

How would you respond if the offender takes a while to apologize?

THE WORLD THINKS:

"You should always be right." One dominant philosophy in the world today is that you should never have to admit you were wrong. If someone doesn't like how you respond, just move on because that person is not worth the effort. Being right is more important than anyone else's feelings.

What are some strategies you could use to resolve some arguments? What things work for you?

What have you argued with your parents about? How can you more effectively handle those kinds of situations?

Read Galatians 5:22-23.

How can focusing on the positive "fruit" that Paul talks about help you during arguments?

ACT:

More often than not we get into arguments because we don't fully try to understand and "hear" someone. Work on being a listener and repeating back to someone what they are saying, to show you are listening to them. This isn't always easy, but it is so important in relationships and conflict.

DO YOU APPRECIATE THE IMPACT OF YOUR WORDS?

Words. We use a ton of them every day. They can inspire or destroy. Many are spoken, but a lot are texted or typed on websites. We communicate all kinds of messages through what we say, how we say it, and what we don't say. We have so much power when we say things.

How have your words hurt someone? How have another person's words hurt you?

What are some things that have been said to you that have encouraged you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

People need to have thicker skin. If they can't take the truth, then that's their problem and not yours. Say whatever you think, and if other people can't handle it, it's not your fault.

Read Psalm 19:14 and Ecclesiastes 9:17.

How do your words reflect your witness as a follower of Jesus?

ACT:

What would your day look like if you decided to listen instead of talk? Take an entire school day and not talk unless you have to. So if a teacher asks you a question, answer it, but with other people try to limit your talking to almost nothing. See if they notice. You will probably be surprised at the responses you receive if you are acting quiet. If asked what you are doing tell them you are weighing your words carefully because you know they have tremendous influence.

Read James 1:26 and 3:1-12.

How can you use your words to steer conversation positively within your circle of influence?

WHERE IS JESUS IN YOUR FAMILY?

You might have a family that is all about going to church and being involved, or you might have the opposite. Life is busy and there is always a ton of pressure. At times you might see in your family things that don't really look like they involve Jesus. The Bible is full of stories of somewhat wacky families that still ended up following the Lord in some way. Hopefully you have great examples from your parents, but even if you don't, you are called to be that example for them and other family members.

How important do you think faith is to your parents?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Families are so messed up; you shouldn't put too much hope in your family, anyway. Jesus doesn't have much to do with your family. Just go to church a couple of times each year at Christmas and Easter and you'll have done your part.

Read Acts 10:1-2.

If your family were the one mentioned in this passage what would it say?

What kinds of conversations do you have about Jesus with your family members?

ACT:

Do you know your family's faith history? There may be parts of the story you know, but what about the whole of it? This week, ask your parents to tell you their story of faith. We often call this a "testimony." Find out why faith is important (or not) to your parents. How has it impacted decisions they've made?

How do your words and the way you engage in arguments that are directed toward your family reflect your relationship you have with Jesus?

List some creative ways that you can use your words as a family to impact your neighborhood with the message of Jesus.

Transition to Freshman Year

MATTHEW 6:33

WEEK

10

HOW CAN YOU SET THE RIGHT PATTERNS?

The number one New Year's resolution is each year is to eat healthy and exercise. However, following through all year long is a tough challenge. Most people can stay committed to something just as long as life is simple and easy, but throw a wrench into our plans and it's so easy to stop doing things. Unfortunately, setting good patterns in our faith can be just as challenging.

What are some healthy patterns you have in your life right now?

What are some unhealthy patterns you might feel stuck in right now?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Please, you're only a freshman in high school. You don't need to waste your time setting patterns right now. Do what feels right and good to you, and don't worry about anything else. You'll have time later on to figure out what you are supposed to do.

How can you set good patterns in your faith walk that you will be able to follow?

What is one pattern you would like to set for your faith?

Read John 13:12-17.

What other examples did Jesus set for us to follow?

ACT:

Share the faith pattern you want to set with three people and have them keep you accountable. Write out your faith pattern on a piece of paper and stick it on your bathroom mirror. Put it on a note card and stick it in your binder for school. Do whatever you can to help make your pattern become part of the rhythm of your life.

HOW DO YOU MAKE CHOICES?

Maybe you haven't had to make a lot of tough choices yet in your life. Perhaps the choices you have made don't feel like they've been particularly difficult. This is not meant to discourage you, but they will get harder. Learning to make tough choices is one of those things you must do. Decisions are tough and you will be faced with a lot of them in life, so be ready.

What's the hardest decision you've had to make?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Just go with what feels right. Don't worry if something was wrong; just get out of it and do something else. Don't worry about other people's feelings; you are the center of your own universe, so all you have to do is make the right decisions for yourself.

Where do you look for answers when you have to make tough decisions?

How do you know which decision is right?

Read Philippians 4:4-7 and James 1:5.

Scripture clearly indicates that if we desire wisdom then we should ask the Lord. Our culture looks in every direction for wisdom except to God when making decisions. Skipping a conversation with God in our alone time and thinking that his answer will come through our culture is a big mistake.

Describe the danger of only seeking the opinion of the culture without interaction with God.

God does use people, their experiences, and great relationships to help us understand his will for us.

Name the specific people who can help you make good, wise, and right decisions?

ACT:

Ask someone about a tough decision they've made and how they handled it. Find an adult you trust and ask them about the hardest decision they have made and what they learned from that experience.

WHERE IS JESUS IN YOUR PRIORITIES?

One thing you will face as a freshman is how to prioritize things in your life. You have the possibility of doing so many things and trying to figure out which is best is sometimes really difficult.

Imagine a dresser with five drawers. Pretend that the top drawer holds the most important part of your life and go down from there. What would you part of your life would you put in each drawer.

Drawer 1)

Drawer 2)

Drawer 3)

Drawer 4)

Drawer 5)

THE WORLD THINKS:

Your priority needs to be making sure you get a great job and make lots of money so you can have a happy life. Focus on yourself because ultimately you are the only one who cares about you. Faith is something that you can come back to when you get older.

Read Matthew 6:25:34.

How does is Jesus' perspective on priorities different than the world?

How can you make Jesus central in the priorities that you would place in each of your dresser drawers?

Name any activity or priority that you may need to give up in order to help you keep your priorities straight.

ACT:

Go find someone you respect and ask that person how he or she made faith in Jesus central in life. Ask them how they made tough decisions and how they feel Jesus was a part of those choices. Ask them about any times they failed to prioritize their faith and how that influenced their life.

LOOKING BACK

How do you feel now that you have completed this study?

You've just gone through 10 weeks of study aimed at helping you make your faith a priority this first year of high school. So now you are thinking, okay, now that I've completed this study, I know everything I need to know now, right?

Discipleship isn't about completing a study. It is about a lifestyle of learning and living as you follow Jesus throughout your lifetime. What you have learned throughout this study will become more important to your Christian life in the months, even years, to come. Think about some of the major concepts that you have learned and lived out.

- Learned the importance of taking your faith with you to school.
- Considered how you would handle your first major tests.
- Developed a plan to handle temptations and struggles that will come your way.
- Created a response to how you will approach parties.
- Thought through your perspective on dating.
- Considered how you can be within God's will when deciding about your future.
- Examined the importance of having godly friends.
- Discovered how to handle healthy doubt and fear.
- Considered the parts of your life that you put before your relationship with Jesus.
- Learned how to approach success and failure with grace.
- Knowledge that God desires to be with you even in your pain.
- Discovered new ways to connect with God.
- Thought through how the church equips you to live your faith each day.
- Examined what holds back your personal faith.
- Considered the impact of your words.
- Learned how to influence your family positively.
- Learned how to prioritize your life according to the Bible.

Wow! That's a lot! Now it's time to continue to live out what you have learned in this study.

Getting Started – Transition to Sophomore Year

INTRODUCTION

The sophomore year is so weird. You aren't a freshman anymore, which is great, but you don't really have any sort of distinct place in the school. You aren't an upper classman and you don't really want to be categorized with the freshmen, so you're kind of on your own. Some people would say that the 10th grade year feels like a holding pattern: You are just trying to get through it as best you can so you can rule the school the next two years. You still have to figure out who you are going to be. In this study, we are going to focus on what it means to step into maturity, something specific to pursue this particular year.

Sophomore year is so tough because it is the year you really choose if you want to grow up. You can either continue to act like a freshman and be lumped in with them, or start looking toward being more mature like juniors and seniors. For some students this is a pretty easy decision to make because they want to be seen as more mature, but for others this is a rough season to go through.

We all know one thing that happens during this year: You turn 16 (most of you will, anyway). That means you could get a driver's license. That is a major milestone in the life of most teens, and one of the reasons we are focusing on maturity.

Some of you are going to be frustrated when you read that the goal of this devotional year is for you to become more "mature." Yes, that seems to imply that people don't currently think you are mature. Many of you are relatively mature and have a lot of your faith journey and life journey figured out. If that's you, keep going. However, everyone can mature in some areas of their life.

Transition to Sophomore Year

WEEK

1

2 PETER 3:18

What does a mature faith really look like? There is no real answer to that question because nothing is ever "mature," only "maturing." So what does it look like to be growing in your faith?

A maturing faith, is one that is moving toward Jesus. It's a faith that has legs and is going somewhere. You don't need to have everything figured out, but you do need to be growing. This probably means you are interested in how the Bible connects to your life as a sophomore. It means you are starting to care about your friends who don't know Jesus. It means you recognize that the place of meaning in your life is rooted in your faith in God, and you start to ask questions about how that applies to your future.

There are not three easy steps that will mature your faith; but you will need to own your faith at some point and let your faith move beyond something you do just because that's what your parents do. During your sophomore year, a lot of faith-formation questions start to come around. You need the freedom to talk about what you believe and don't believe. That's how you mature.

WHAT PART OF YOUR FAITH IS EXCITING?

Read Psalm 16:11.

Being a Christian and serving God doesn't have to be boring and hard. The Christian life can have excitement. It's often when we lose any sort of that excitement that our faith becomes stale and boring. There are times when the simple things of faith will have to sustain you—habits and disciplines such as reading your Bible, praying, meditating, and spending quiet time alone, yet, even those things can be very exciting.

You may have an incredibly busy and full life, and thinking about that upcoming retreat with the student ministry where you will have the opportunity to slow down and think—that's exciting to you. The goal is to think through where that excitement starts and make sure that you include it in your spiritual rhythm.

What specific things in your Christian life do you find the most boring and difficult to do? Why?

Are there ways that those things could become more exciting and give you more energy?

What specific parts of your faith are exciting and give you energy? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Church can be really boring. Christians are mostly boring. The whole Bible is a book telling you what you can't do, and it puts so many restrictions on your life.

Is this the way you think as well? Do your beliefs line up with the world's view of Christianity?

Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-22 and Ezra 6:13-22.

ACT:

Think about the great things that God has done and celebrate them with your family. For example, you could celebrate a spiritual birthday or an anniversary of a God-moment.

IN WHAT WAYS DOES YOUR FAITH GROW?

You may always look forward with anticipation toward the next camp or retreat. During those weekends, the messages, music, and conversations may help you to grow closer to God. It may have been one of these camps or weekends when you placed your faith and trust in Christ.

Maybe that's not how it works for you. You may be someone who needs quiet times of reflection for reading, praying, or journaling. Maybe you love to be outdoors and you see God's hand in the beauty of the world. Maybe it's a small group or a mentor/leader who shares their testimony, and that challenges you in a good way. There are many ways to grow in your faith, so strive to figure out which ideas and strategies work best for you—and also recognize when you are changing and need to try other things.

Read Matthew 6:25-34, Matthew 9:27-33, Luke 17:6, and John 14:12.

In what ways does your faith grow? What things do you find don't help right now?

If you are feeling down in your faith, what can you do to jump-start it?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Faith doesn't grow. You either have it or you don't. How do you decide what to put your faith in, anyway? Seems like it's pointless.

What people in your life know about the things that make your faith grow? How can those relationships help you grow?

ACT:

Find a leader or mentor this week, and ask him or her to help you come up with a list of new ways you could try to help your faith grow. He or she may have resources and ideas that you don't have and likely can point you in the direction of things you've never tried.

HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU WITH DOUBT IN YOUR FAITH?

It is okay to doubt and question things as your faith grows and you begin to make your faith your own. Although doubting isn't wrong, it's not good to stay there. The key is to actively pursue answering that doubt with Scripture and with solid Christian mentors. Often in our doubts we can grow immensely.

What are some doubts you have about faith, God, or Jesus right now? How long have you been wrestling with those doubts?

Where are some possible places you think you could find answers?

How do you think God, your parents, your friends, or leaders at your church feel about your doubts? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

So much of life is a mystery that we can never unravel. You will never truly have any answers to your questions. If you think you will get answers, you are fooling yourself. Doubt is your mind's way of telling you that something is likely not true.

How can you seek help from others, yet not depend on others as you make your faith your own?

Read John 20:24-29.

Jesus answered Thomas' doubts. He wants to answer yours as well.

ACT:

Take a piece of paper and write down doubts you have about your faith. Seek out Scripture, family, and solid Christian leaders or mentors to help you answer your doubts.

Transition to Sophomore Year

ROMANS 1:17

WEEK

2

WHERE DO YOU LOOK FOR TRUTH?

There is an interesting pattern that has begun in many conversations: When someone is in the middle of a discussion and someone makes a statement about a fact that sounds like it couldn't possibly be true, someone else will instantly say, "Google® that and check it out." We live in a culture where smartphones are common, it's easy to look up "facts" about things, find out what's true or accurate, and then go on with the conversation.

What if you are trying to figure out whether or not you're going to drink alcohol or follow a certain group of friends or place your own desires ahead of everyone else's needs? An online search engine isn't very helpful if you're doubting your faith, trying to figure out your role in the world, or trying to determine if some major decision is right for you. What matters is where you look for truth right now.

What is something you wish you knew the truth about?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Truth is up to you to decide. You can't look to anyone or anything to define it for you. What might be true for others doesn't necessarily have to be true for you. The only person who has the right to decide for you is you.

What are some resources you use to try to find truth?

Read Psalm 25:4-5 and Psalm 43:3

Both of these passages describe truth as what provides direction or leading. How can truth lead you?

Read John 14:6.

How does Jesus describe himself? How can he lead you?

WHAT ROLE DOES YOUR FAITH PLAY IN HOW YOU SEE THE WORLD?

What is one specific way your faith influences how you see the world?

If you had to describe what it meant to see the world through the "lens" the Bible, what would you say?

THE WORLD THINKS:

There is no connection between what you do on Sunday mornings and the rest of the week. The church and your faith in Jesus don't really have anything to do with your real life. You can believe whatever you want, but when it really comes down to it, you just have to figure out how to live in this world independent of your beliefs.

Describe how you would explain your faith—including how it leads you to make everyday choices—to someone who is not a follower of Jesus?

ACT:

Find an individual that runs a business or at least has significant responsibilities within their company and ask them how their faith impacts their work. Ask your parents the same question.

Read Philippians 3:7-10.

What impact did Paul's faith have in how viewed the gains he had in the world?

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT BIG FAITH STEP?

Stepping into Biblical manhood or womanhood is a big responsibility. As a sophomore you are growing into becoming a man or woman you have to choose to make your faith your own. The days are coming for you to start making big steps in your faith.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Just make sure that whatever steps you take in life ultimately help you succeed in what really matters: getting into college and landing the right job that pays lots of money. You will eventually walk away from your faith like most 20-year-olds do, so don't do anything that will hinder your future success.

Take some time to think about things and contemplate what a next step in your faith journey might be. Maybe your big faith step is to study your Bible every day, earn money to give it away, go on a mission trip or make it to church every Sunday. Consider what your next step might be—and then take it!

Read Joshua 3.

After the Israelites wandered in the desert after leaving Egypt, they now had to take a step of faith.

When did the water part?

What caused them to believe that the water would part?

What are some next steps you might want or need to take in faith?

The Israelites had to wait 40 more years to enter the promise land because they were afraid the first time. Their choice to be afraid held them back from what God had in store for them.

Is anything in your life holding you back from taking a next step? If so, what?

Read Mark 2:1-12.

How might you need support from others in order to take the next step?

What was your last major faith step? Take a moment to celebrate that.

Read Romans 1:17.

ACT:

The thing about "steps" is that they require you to actually do something. Think through some big steps that will help your faith grow and help you step into maturity. Put together a little chart or write a few things on a piece of paper that you know would help. If you can't figure those out on your own ask your parents to help you think through it.

Transition to Sophomore Year

ACTS 2:41-47

WEEK

3

ARE YOU KNOWN AT CHURCH?

This question isn't about being popular. It also isn't about testing whether or not you feel like fit in at church. This question is about you choosing to plug into transformational community. It's about having accountability. It's about being discipled and serving to help disciple others. You will not see sustained growth in your walk with Jesus when you try it alone.

We are called to be in community, and that's why the church isn't a building; it is a gathering of Christ-followers, people who are in this together. Being active in the church and a transformational discipleship community where people know your name, welcome you, and walk alongside you through your journey is a big deal. Trying to do any journey alone is so much more difficult than being with others. It's important as you step into maturity.

When do you sit under the teaching of God's Word? When do you aid in others being discipled?

How has your level of involvement in discipleship community, student activities and worship services increased or decreased in the past year?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Be careful about getting involved with a church because they will tell you what you to do and make you give a bunch of money. You don't want to get too close to others because they will let you down.

Read Acts 2:41-47.

What benefits do you see to being involved with other believers?

How can you get more engaged in the life of the church?

ACT:

If you already are active participant in church and student ministry activities, look for others who are not and see if you can get them involved. If you are not involved, do your best to get connected.

HOW IMPORTANT IS JESUS TO YOUR FRIENDS?

Most likely you and your friends are a tightknit group. Together you may even have strong convictions and stick to them. However, we still have to be careful not to make poor choices with our “Christian” friends. Sometimes the strongest peer pressure can come from other believers.

How important is Jesus to your closest friends?

If the answer is “not very,” how does that impact you? If the answer is “a lot,” how does that impact you?

As Christians we know that we are supposed to have good Christian friends. Sometimes we fool ourselves into believing that all of our friends love Jesus. We do that because it takes the pressure off of us to have to choose new friends that would be a better influence on us.

Throughout this next year you have to decide if Jesus really has much of a role in your day-to-day experiences. Unfortunately, you may discover that some of your friends who are really important to you didn't have a real connection to Jesus at all.

Maybe your friends are helping you travel in the right direction, toward a mature faith and life in Christ. Maybe they're leading you in the wrong direction. Maybe it's somewhere in between. Take some time to ask yourself hard questions about how your friends are helping you or hurting you.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Your faith is your faith, just like my faith—or my lack of faith—is my own. It really doesn't matter who you spend time with, so spend time with people from all kinds of faith backgrounds.

Read Psalm 41:9 and 1 Corinthians 15:33.

Do you have any friends you believe you should walk away from? Why or why not?

What might be the potential long-term impact of having close friends whose beliefs are different from you?

ACT:

Put together a list of your closest friends and simply write next to their name if you know they follow Jesus or not. Then, in another column, write if you think that friend has a positive or negative impact upon you. Finally, write three things you can pray about for each friend.

DO YOU MAKE YOUR FRIENDS BETTER?

One mark of growing in maturity is making the people around you better—focusing less on yourself and more on those you care about and spend time with. Think of this as being similar to a point guard on a basketball team. That position's job is to set up other teammates to score by getting them the ball at critical moments when they can be successful.

How good are you at making people around you better?

THE WORLD THINKS:

This is a rough world, so it's okay to be a little selfish. Focus on yourself. You need to just worry about you and not about other people. Making it in this world will be all about you relying on yourself.

Read Proverbs 27:17.

What are some ways you make or can make your friends better? Give specific examples.

Read Proverbs 27:6.

Are there specific gifts and talents God has given you that you believe can be used to better your friends? How are you using these gifts and talents—or how can you use them?

What is the benefit to you when you make others better?

Read John 15:13-14.

ACT:

On a piece of paper, write the names of two friends. What specific things could you do this week that would make them and their lives better? What can you sacrifice to do something great for them?

Transition to Sophomore Year

PROVERBS 3:5-6

WEEK

4

WHAT DECISIONS HAVE YOU MADE THAT YOU KNEW WERE RIGHT?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:31.

Most likely you have felt that nobody notices when you do something right. People only notice and give feedback when you do something wrong. Under the umbrella of not boasting about your own ability, rather what the Lord has done, consider the times that you have made wise decisions. You may not get a lot of credit for decisions you make as a sophomore, that's okay because God sees them.

Read Psalm 5:12 and Psalm 11:7.

When have you been with a group of friends that you chose to go home because they were on the verge of doing something wrong?

How will getting your driver's license this next year give you the ability to walk away from harmful circumstances?

Think of something specific that you believe you did right. How did your worldview impact that decision?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Whenever possible, take credit for the good things you do. Tell everyone when you do something right because you are likely going to fail again and you'll need something to balance your failures against.

How do wise decisions help you honor and earn trust with your parents?

Without bragging about the good decisions you make, how can you let other people—such as your parents—know so they can trust you more?

ACT:

Without boasting of your own strength, boast in the Lord to your parents about how he enabled you to make a good choice in a harmful circumstance.

HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR DECISIONS?

You may have gotten yourself into risky situations before because you didn't think about something before you jumped in. Maybe you are the opposite: You really think through things and diagram all the possible outcomes of each and every decision.

What's one decision that you wish you had taken more time to think about before making? What were the outcomes?

What decision did you have the most difficult time making? How did you end up making it?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Don't think; just do. The people who are most successful in life don't spend a lot of time thinking about decisions; they just work hard at adapting to situations that they encounter. Even if you don't make the best choice every time, it's no big deal—you can live with the consequences.

Read James 1:5 and Proverbs 2:1-5.

Where does your faith fit into your decision-making process?

ACT:

Ask someone older than you how they make decisions. See if they will discuss a decision they made that they regret and the reason they believe they made the wrong decision. Think about some decisions you are facing, and ask that person for advice on how to make the right call.

HOW DO YOU MAKE TOUGH DECISIONS?

You may have a good process for making decisions already. You might have a solid connection with God, trusted friends, parents you can talk to, a leader who knows you well, and even a journal for processing your thoughts. You may be mature for your age and have a good sense of discernment. Whatever your level of maturity, it's always good to think through how you make tough decisions and how you can mature in that area.

What's the toughest decision you've ever made? What made it so difficult, and how did you make your decision?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Everyone gives advice. You have to choose what's right for you and not for others. If you can't make a decision, just use a search engine to do some research, because your story is probably not too different from others. See what they did, and then copy them.

Read Proverbs 3:5.

Where should you start to look for help in making a decision?

God is faithful in showing you the path that you need to take. You must be willing to go down the path that he shows you.

Read Hebrews 11:1

How is your faith exercised when you have to make a tough decision?

Read Proverbs 15:22.

If you're facing a situation where you've been struggling to make a decision or find a solution, how can you involve some other people in the process?

After seeking the Lord through prayer and Scripture, then wise Godly counsel, what other methods of decision-making could you utilize?

How can you mature in your decision-making process—particularly when it comes to tough, difficult decisions?

ACT:

Ask for prayer in the difficult situations you face from your parents and those you trust.

Transition to Sophomore Year

2 SAMUEL 11:1-12:13

WEEK

5

WHAT MISTAKES HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM MOST?

Mistakes don't always have to be major or illegal. We have all made different mistakes, but the biggest issue in a life of maturing decisions what you learn from it.

What are some things you've learned from mistakes?

How is your learning helping to mature your decision-making processes?

Specifically, what have you learned that could help others as they make decisions?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Everyone makes mistakes. Don't worry about it. Just roll with it and move on. There will always be more mistakes, and you will need to simply forget about them.

Read 2 Samuel 11:1-12:13

What were the mistakes that David made?

How did David respond when his sin was revealed?

Read 1 John 1:9

When we sin what are we to do?

Even though David was forgiven did what consequences did he face?

ACT:

Read Psalm 51. Repent of your sin and ask God to cleanse you.

HOW DO YOU REFOCUS WHEN YOU HAVE STUMBLER OR STRUGGLED?

The sad reality is that the last place a lot of us want to go when we are struggling is church because that's where we feel the most judged. At church we should feel the most loved, cared for, and surrounded by grace. Unfortunately, it doesn't always happen, causing us to feel out of place, judged, and falsely believing that God doesn't want us there around all the "good" people. Often the perception of being judged may just be conviction. Refocusing our faith can be hard because we sometimes get so far down a bad path that it's hard to get back. However, with God nothing is impossible.

Have you ever felt like you shouldn't be going to church? Why or why not?

CHURCH ISN'T A MUSEUM FOR GOOD PEOPLE,
IT'S A HOSPITAL FOR THE BROKEN. —JEFFERSON BETHKE

How have you refocused your faith when you have struggled?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Failure is not something Christians believe in. Most churches will tell you what they are against and not what they are for. They don't want you there if you mess up. Parents send their kids to church to be around "good" kids, and if you are always making mistakes, you are not one of them and you won't be welcome.

Read John 4:4-30.

When you have stumbled or struggled with sin, how could your feelings of being out of place or judged be conviction?

ACT:

Be welcoming and communicate a gospel of grace to others, especially at church.

HOW ARE OTHER CHRISTIANS' STORIES HELPFUL TO YOUR FAITH?

Stories of Christ-followers help our faith mature. We identify with others who have experienced similar stages of life, and hearing about how they figure it all out is very helpful to our faith. As a student, you probably will have the opportunity to hear a lot of sermons and talks at church, camp, conferences, and retreats. Listen for the stories that are told. They can help you grow and mature.

How have you been impacted by the faith story of another Christ-follower? How did his or her story specifically impact you?

Why are stories so helpful in our growth as followers of Christ?

THE WORLD THINKS:

The modern day stories are probably helpful to Christians. However, all the stories in the Bible probably aren't true or are not accurate enough to trust.

Read 2 Peter 1:16-18.

How does knowing there were eyewitnesses help you to trust the Bible?

Read Hebrews 11.

How do the stories of the people mentioned in this passage increase your faith?

If you were asked to share a story right now about your own faith, what could you share that might help others to grow?

Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

ACT:

Knowing that stories of other Christians help increase your faith. Share your story of redemption with someone else this week.

Transition to Sophomore Year

MATTHEW 6:33

WEEK

6

HOW DO YOU SET HEALTHY PATTERNS?

Get up at 6am to read the Bible and pray. Pray every night before going to bed. These patterns when you are in high school may not work for you. Why, because you fall back asleep at 6:05am, or you fall asleep three minutes after you start praying at bedtime. You may find it very difficult to do things early and late. It is difficult to stay focused at either time.

Rather than continuing to struggle and feel bad about it, set your own patterns and not just take ones that work for others. You may find that the best time for focused prayer and reading your Bible is around 10am or right before dinner. By that time I've woken up, eaten, had coffee, and gone through my morning emails at work. I can slow down and take time to focus then. That is a healthy pattern for me.

So the key is to know which patterns work for you and which don't. Don't feel guilty if you aren't a 6am prayer person or a 10pm Bible-reading person. Discover what patterns work best for you, and then cultivate those habits that strengthen your faith and help you step into maturity.

What are some healthy patterns—spiritual, physical, social, or any other category—you have set?

How did those patterns get established, and how have they helped you?

What are some patterns you've tried that haven't worked?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Don't worry about patterns. Just do what works for you when it works for you, and stop it when it doesn't. You don't need to be concerned with doing anything in order to get better or grow or improve; it should just happen.

Read Matthew 6:6 and Psalm 1:2

When do you normally have time to yourself during the day? How could you use that time to spend with the Lord?

What are some different possibilities you could try that might work for you?

Read Psalm 1:3 and Jeremiah 17:7-8

How can a healthy pattern of seeking the Lord help you?

ACT:

For one week, pray and read your Bible at a different time each day. Try early in the morning, mid-morning, lunch, afternoon, or after dinner. Discover what works for you.

HOW CAN YOU STAY CONSISTENT?

The sad reality is that many of us just don't know how to stay consistent. That's one of the reasons some people wonder why anyone even bothers with New Year's resolutions. We make the major decisions and statements about how we want to live our lives differently, yet within only a few weeks or months we often return to our old patterns of behavior. The changes we wanted to make just didn't last like we had wanted them to. Many people say that it takes about two months for something to change and become a pattern in our lives.

What are two specific things you want to stay consistent with?

What challenges typically hinder your consistency in those areas?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Do what feels right when it feels right, and don't feel any pressure to follow any pattern. You choose for yourself what works, and don't let anyone tell you there is anything you have to do.

Read 1 Timothy 4:8 and Hebrews 5:14

How do you train for godliness and mature in your faith even at your age?

It is incredibly hard to change patterns. Those who were capable of changing patterns always have a similar strategy: Come up with a reasonable plan, let others know about it, and stick with it no matter what gets in the way.

How can you stop things from getting in the way?

For you, a real plan might be to simply make the commitment that you will always participate in student ministry activities. Yes, things will get in the way. You will have too much homework, be studying for a test, or be really tired. You will have friends facing crises, your room will need to be cleaned, or you'll have a major breakout on your face. However, consistency says that none of those things can get in the way of following your plan.

ACT:

Decide on the changes that you want to make. Share it with your family and accountability partner. Give them the freedom to keep you accountable for your change.

WHAT TAKES YOUR EYES AWAY FROM JESUS?

You probably have some things in your life that are really important and consume a lot of your time and energy. It might be a particular sport that you play well, and you've found yourself being added to more and more select teams. It could be that you have a boyfriend/girlfriend or just regular friends that you spend a ton of time connecting with. Maybe you are focused on school and that takes a lot of your time. These things aren't inherently bad, but they can take our focus away from Jesus.

What things take the largest chunk of your time?

How much do you think about Jesus in the midst of your activities and busy life?

Most likely your main challenge is simply being busy. Creating margin and space in your life is hard. When you add in homework, sports, practice, clubs, church, work, family, friends, social media, reading, and sleep—well, you just end up with a busy life, and any of those things can easily distract you from thinking about your faith or focusing on Jesus.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and Matthew 6:33.

How does seeking God first help you focus on him and balance your time and energy?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Fill your life with everything you can. You have to try everything to figure out what you are good at, what you do well. If you want to get into a top college or land a high-paying job, you are going to have to show them that you have diverse tastes and have been involved in many different things.

ACT:

Create margin to make Jesus a priority in your life this week. If that means that you have to step away from a club or activity to keep focused, then do it.

Transition to Sophomore Year

PROVERBS 1:5

WEEK

7

WHO ARE YOUR ROLE MODELS?

I'm sure you have role models. Perhaps you have had a number of them through the years. That's pretty normal. Early on maybe it was a brother or sister and then it switched to an athlete or someone famous for something else.

ROLE MODEL—A PERSON LOOKED TO BY OTHERS AS AN EXAMPLE

Who are some role models you've had in your past? What did you learn from them?

Who are some of your role models today?

What qualities about them are important to you? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Follow celebrities. They have somehow figured it out, and since everyone's goal should be to become famous, learn from them and do what they do. Be your own person, too. Just pick and choose things you want to learn from others and blend them together. Be yourself—while imitating others.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:4-7, and 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9.

What authority did Paul have to say what he did? Isn't that prideful?

How can you be a role model for others? What traits do you have that you think are worth following?

ACT:

Evaluate your role models according to 1 Corinthians 15:33. Get rid of bad role models.

WHO ARE YOUR MENTORS?

Consider this question: Who is teaching you and what you are learning from them? You might be surprised at the things you learn from people that you never expected to teach you anything.

MENTOR—AN EXPERIENCED AND TRUSTED ADVISOR

Describe the difference between a mentor and a role model.

What people are you learning from now? What specific truths or lessons are you learning?

Read Proverbs 1:5.

How do you display a teachable attitude?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Mentors are great to help you build key skills for success in your future. It is not necessary to have a mentor for spiritual matters.

Read 2 Timothy 3:10-15.

Describe the relationship that Paul had with Timothy.

Who in your life would you like to learn from? Why?

Is anyone learning from you? How are you helping that person to grow spiritually?

ACT:

Write down three things that you would like to learn. Find someone to help you grow in that area.

WHAT ROLE DO YOUR PARENTS PLAY IN YOUR DECISIONS?

Read Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:1-4.

How does seeking input from your parents honor them?

Early in your life your parents told you what to do and you did it. No problems, right? You didn't make a lot of decisions; they made them for you. As you have matured and aged they trusted you with smaller decisions and eventually maybe even a big decision. Eventually you will have to make all of your decisions on your own. However, that doesn't mean you can't ask for advice.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Times have changed. Your parents didn't grow up in the world you are living in, so they can't possibly understand the decision-making process you have to go through. Life is harder now; how could they possibly help?

Read Proverbs 17:6 and 2 Timothy 3:1-2.

How can you set an example to your friends in how you treat your relationship with your parents?

If you had a tough decision to make, how could you approach your parents for help?

What's the last decision you made where you felt like help from your parents was very important?

How can you show your parents that you are willing to listen and learn when you go to them and ask for advice and help? What reward is in that for you?

If you don't have a good relationship with your parents, how does seeking their input honor them and help the relationship?

ACT:

Come up with a list of three things you are trying to decide. They can be simple things or more difficult issues. Make sure at least one of them is a significant decision, such as what you will do after high school. Sit down with your parents and ask for help with the decisions. If you want to be seen as mature and want to grow in how you make your decisions, this will go a long way to demonstrate that you are maturing.

Transition to Sophomore Year

EPHESIANS 2:10

WEEK

8

WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THAT YOU ARE?

All of us want to know that people have positive, good, encouraging things to say about us. We want to be liked, believed in, and trusted. When God created us, he created us in his image and called us good—and even though humanity's perfection was damaged by sin, God's design and his declaration form a great foundation to start from. Often what people say reflects what God did when he created us, but sometimes their words don't line up with how God sees us and we simply have to rely on and trust the things God says.

How would someone else describe you?

What are some things you wish people knew about you? Why are those things so important or meaningful to you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You define who you are, and you don't need to worry about what others think. Have thick skin because more often than not, others will try to bring you down to build themselves up.

What are some hurtful comments that people have said about you?

How did those statements impact the way that you see yourself?

Read Psalm 139.

What do you believe God thinks about you?

Read 2 Corinthians 2:15-16.

Ultimately, what do you want to be known for?

ACT:

Without being annoying, make a conscience effort to positively change the way others see you.

ARE YOU A LEADER OR A FOLLOWER?

As you continue to mature and make more mature decisions, you'll eventually need to decide if you lead or follow. This decision is so important because it is hard to make good decisions all the time if you are simply a follower. Sometimes we don't understand the consequences of blindly following other people.

It's also true that you can get in trouble as a leader because we don't understand the responsibility of being a leader. If you've never had the opportunity to lead chances are, you may not know how to do it—or how to do it well.

What's an area in which you feel you've simply followed other people? Why haven't you led?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Everyone wants to be a leader, but there just isn't enough space for that to happen. Some of you have to be followers. Deal with it.

Is there a group or an area in which you are a leader? How do you lead?

What are the benefits of being a follower? of being a leader?

Read Exodus 15:22-27 and Joshua 1:6-9.

What does it does great leadership require?

Read John 3:30 and Hebrews 13:17.

Describe the importance of following in order to be a great leader.

In your maturing process, how might you need to grow as a follower and a leader?

ACT:

Look for opportunities to lead, and go from being just a follower to being a leader.

WHERE DO YOU SERVE AND GIVE BACK?

Serving and giving back are essential choices in stepping into maturity and growing your faith. You may already have ways that you give back, but if not, take up an opportunity to serve—it is such a rewarding and growing experience.

Where have you served or given back in the last year?

How did you feel while serving or giving back?

What are service opportunities you know you enjoy doing, and why do you enjoy them?

THE WORLD THINKS:

What do you have to offer? You just want to serve because it makes you feel better, but the reality is that you don't make much of a difference. Go ahead and serve because people will think more highly of you if you serve.

Read Matthew 20:25-28 and John 13:1-16.

What example did Jesus set about serving?

Read Joshua 24:14-15.

There are a lot of great opportunities to serve. How do you determine where you should serve?

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

As a follower of Christ, what is the expectation of caring for and serving others?

ACT:

Lead the charge among your friends. Get signed up for a mission opportunity.

Transition to Sophomore Year

WEEK

9

1 TIMOTHY 4:12

WHOM ARE YOU LEADING?

There is something about a mature faith that other people look at and want to have. They want to follow and experience that same kind of relationship with Jesus themselves. You might think that as a sophomore you don't really have much to offer to others and that no one wants to follow you. That simply isn't true.

Read 1 Timothy 4:12.

As you think about the people you are leading, expand what that even means. Are you on a sports team? How are you leading them? You may be serving in your church and leading there. You could even be leading in your own home if you have younger brothers or sisters. How you interact with them is a form of leading, so lead well.

Where in your life do you have leadership roles?

How are you leading others towards Jesus?

THE WORLD THINKS:

People follow strong leaders who have it all figured out. If you are not strong, loud, and focused, you can never be a leader. Just sit back, don't make waves, and get ready for a lifetime of following.

In what areas would you like to take on more roles in leadership? Why?

Read John 13:13-17.

How did Jesus show humility in his leadership? How does that change your perspective on leadership?

Who are some leaders in your life that you look up to? Why do you admire them?

Read Psalm 23:1-3.

Where does God lead his people? What does it look like for you to lead others by quiet waters?

ACT:

Evaluate any leadership role that you are currently in. How can you begin releasing those that you are leading to allow them to lead, too?

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO CONFLICT?

We can't completely avoid conflict in life; it's going to happen. Do you bottle things up and hide? Do you blow up at everyone? Do you gossip about it and slander the other person? Do you stew on it for so long that you actually make the conflict worse because you are so frustrated in your head?

What is the typical way you respond to conflict? How has your typical response changed in the past year or two?

Hopefully you are able to bring things we learn from Jesus into conflict such as grace, mercy, love, and kindness. Those things all help when dealing with conflict.

As followers of Christ, we are called to live differently. What are some characteristics we are called to display that can help in conflict situations?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Conflict is a part of life. You don't have to get along with all people. If they can't handle you or the way you think, just walk away from them. It's their problem, not yours.

Read Matthew 18:15-19.

Biblically, how are we to handle conflict? What does it take to handle conflict in this manner?

Read Ephesians 4:2-3.

How can you apply these verses during conflict? What if it is their fault?

What is a conflict you are dealing with right now? How do you need to respond?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:8-10.

How do you move forward if the conflict doesn't get resolved?

ACT:

Ask your friends and parents how they see you deal with conflict, and ask for some tips and advice to do it better.

HOW MUCH DO PEOPLE TRUST YOUR DECISIONS?

This is the pinnacle, right? Wanting to be someone that others trust. We all want to know that people trust us when we make decisions. Even as a sophomore, you will be making decisions that you want people to believe in. Probably more often than not, you are looking for your parents to trust you. You want them to see that you are making mature decisions and growing in your faith. Although you might not be making huge, life-altering decisions this year, you still have to make choices about things—and the more consistently you make good ones, the more you will be trusted.

Why do people trust your decisions—or do they?

Once you start making decisions and discovering that you can do it well, it does feel good. You've made a decision that you feel is right. Maybe you asked people advice, got some different ideas, and ultimately got feedback from others that you did the right thing. Feels good—and gives you motivation and momentum to keep making good choices and continue stepping into maturity.

THE WORLD THINKS:

People will only trust you if you keep making the right decisions. As soon as you make one wrong one you will be back at the bottom on the trust ladder. Don't mess this up. You have a lot of pressure and consequences riding on this

Read Luke 16:10.

How can you pursue consistency in making good decisions?

ACT:

If you have lost trust with someone, find out from that person how you can earn his or her trust back.

Transition to Sophomore Year

PSALM 31:14

WEEK

10

WHAT ROLE DOES JESUS PLAY IN YOUR LIFE?

You may be in a place right now where you go to church with your parents, or maybe the important part of church is getting to see your friends. That's an okay place to be, but ultimately you must answer the question of where Jesus fits in your life. How you answer that question has big ramifications for the way you live the rest of your life and how you approach church and ministry opportunities.

If your life was a car and Jesus was in it, where would you make him sit, and why?

What role do you see Jesus playing in the life of your parents and family?

Answer truthfully: Right now, how important do you think Jesus is going to be in your life after high school graduation?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Compartmentalize your life. Keep all the areas separated. Everyone does it. Make sure you have the right answers for Sunday school and youth group, but don't feel the pressure to be that Christian kid everywhere. You can choose to be who you want when you want, and Jesus doesn't have to play a big role in your life.

Read John 6

After Jesus had fed everyone they came around to the other side of the lake looking for another miracle and another meal. Jesus told everyone that he alone could sustain, not just actual food (see John 6:35).

Is Jesus the king and Lord of your life or just someone you claim on Sunday mornings?

Read John 6:66-67.

When have you had to face this question? How would you answer that question today?

Read Luke 12:22-31.

How does your relationship with Jesus impact what you strive after in this world?

Read Galatians 2:16-21.

How does the work of Jesus impact you for eternity?

ACT:

Find a high school senior you respect, and ask that person what role Jesus has played in his or her decision on what to do after high school. You might find out that it's a big deal, but it might not be. Then ask an adult what role Jesus has in his or her big life decisions, and see what that person says.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT DATING?

Dating can be a weird thing. People often wrap their entire identity up in having a boyfriend or girlfriend. It is as if dating gives people some sort of self-worth that being single couldn't provide.

Most likely you have thought about dating. Maybe it's already part of your life. Maybe it's just something you want. Maybe you're unsure if you're ready. Maybe you don't want to date anyone until you get your life sorted out after college. Either way, it's something worth considering and discussing seriously so that you do not jump into it just because "everyone else" is dating or because you feel a void that you want to fill.

How do you feel about dating as a sophomore?

Have you had a boyfriend/girlfriend, and if so, how long did the relationship last?

If you had to give one reason for dating, what would it be? If you had to give one reason against dating, what would it be?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Date everyone you can and anyone you want. As a sophomore, you need to start worrying about your social standing in school, and getting invited or having a pool of people you can invite to dances is important. Make sure to "try out" a lot of relationships before you get married.

Read Song of Solomon 2:7.

Love is demanding, and in giving of oneself, fatigue is inevitable. As appealing as love is, it should not be forced or rushed, hence the urgent request of the woman to the daughters in this verse. It is clear that the couple is already in love, but they must allow their love to proceed at its proper pace, which includes waiting until the right time.

What impact does the Biblical advice above have in how you deal with the pressure of the culture about dating?

How could you get to know others in safer ways than being in a relationship?

Read Hebrews 13:4.

How can having a high view of marriage help you look toward a future spouse and make great decisions about dating?

ACT:

Now might be a good time to start writing out a list of qualities you want in a future spouse. You might be amazed at how having that kind of list can help you make good choices now.

WHAT CAREER WOULD YOU CHOOSE RIGHT NOW?

Take a moment and dream about your future. Hold that dream loosely. The future is God's and everything in it. To some of you that might be frustrating, but to others that brings a great hope. You don't have to have it all figured out now; you can dream and pray and ask God to direct your plans.

If right now you had to choose a career path for your future, what would you pick? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

"You can do anything you want." The world says it, but it's not true. You can't be a rocket scientist if you're not smart enough. You can't be a ballet dancer if you don't have the skills it would take.

If money, fame, power, and stability weren't deciding factors and you could choose one career or lifelong way to serve God, what would you pick? Why?

Read Psalm 31:14.

Ultimately, how much of a role are you willing to give Jesus in your dating life and future?

LOOKING BACK

How do you feel now that you have completed this study?

The sophomore year can be such a tough time. You may face setbacks and issues, but don't be discouraged or lose hope. Some teenagers view this as their year to waste, but it's really your chance to be different, to find ways to step into maturity, to look for opportunities to help others, and to prepare for your elevation into the upper classes next year.

So now you are thinking, okay, now that I've completed this study, I know everything I need to know now, right?

Discipleship isn't about completing a study. It is about a lifestyle of learning and living as you follow Jesus throughout your lifetime. What you have learned throughout this study will become more important to your Christian life in the months, even years, to come. Think about some of the major concepts that you have learned and lived out.

- Examined what part of your faith is exciting.
- Learned ways to help you make your faith grow.
- Learned how to handle doubt in your faith.
- Considered where to look for truth.
- Examined how your faith impacts the way you see the world.
- Considered how to take your next big step of faith.
- Discovered the importance of being known at church.
- Learned how to make your friends better.
- Examined your decision making process.
- Learned how to recover from mistake and grow from them.
- Considered ways to recover after you have stumbled in your walk with Christ.
- Learned how to set healthy patterns.
- Examined what takes your eyes off of Jesus and removed them from your life.
- Discovered the importance of having a mentor.
- Honor your parents in allowing them to help you make decisions.
- Learned about the importance of leading well and the weight that it holds.
- Learned that leadership begins by following and sitting at the feet of Jesus.
- Discovered new areas and ways that you can serve.
- Examined where Jesus is Lord of your life and where he needs to be.
- Considered how your relationship with Jesus impacts your day-to-day decision-making.

Wow! That's a lot! Now it's time to continue to live out what you have learned in this study.

Getting Started – Transition to Junior Year

INTRODUCTION

It's now time to start seeing who you in Christ, how comfortable you are with yourself, how you represent yourself and Jesus. All of life is a process, and you don't have to have it all figured out right now. This is the year when you have to start figuring out a lot of things.

Figuring out who you are doesn't mean who you are going to be, but simply who you are right now. This is a starting point as you begin doing a lot of self-evaluation. We're more focused on the past than on the future. Who are you right now? What do you believe? What do you care about? How do you look at the world? This is the year that a lot of those questions need to get answered.

Are today's answers the final ones you'll give in your life? Not likely. Your answers and your beliefs about things may change in the coming years, but you do need to figure out some of what you believe right now because you are on the cusp of making some major decisions about the future and charting your life's direction. You will need to base a lot of those decisions upon how you are experiencing and living life right now.

For this study it is going to be important for conversation to be directed to the specific groups of people that are mentioned. This is a great opportunity to speak into compartmentalization that we are so often guilty of.

Transition to Junior Year

WEEK

1

PSALM 139:13-16

HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU WITH YOU?

It may not feel like the world really cares right now, but you need to know how valuable you are. If you asked a lot of adults if they knew who they were as high school juniors, they might give you some answers about things they were involved in or things they liked. As far as defining who they were, that question would be a lot harder.

How comfortable are you with what you know you really like and with who you are?

This year you will experience some tough relational, social, and spiritual situations where being comfortable with yourself will come in handy. God has made you exactly the way he planned, and your job is to figure out how to thrive with that reality.

How well do you believe other people know you? Do they perceive you to be something or someone different from who you really are?

If you could do or try something that you really like, knowing that no one would make fun of you or judge you, what would you do?

THE WORLD THINKS:

This is kind of a weird one, because on one hand the world tells you to be yourself and do what you want, but the world also sends the message that you shouldn't push it so far that you don't fit in anymore. You are caught in a contradiction of feeling like you are supposed to be different but that you could pay a price because of those differences.

Read Psalm 37:4 and Ephesians 2:10.

How does delighting yourself in the Lord impact your desires?

Why do you think God made you the way he did?

ACT:

Without judging your friends, take a few days to simply observe your friends' and their unique characteristics. Figure out a way to celebrate the way God made them and encourage them to be comfortable themselves.

IF YOU COULD CHANGE THINGS ABOUT YOURSELF, WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

What are some things you want to change about yourself?

Why do you want to make these changes?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

How does being a new creation in Christ allow you to change?

THE WORLD THINKS:

The world speaks all kinds of messages about what you should change in order to fit in and stand out. On one hand you should just be you. Don't worry about what anyone else thinks, and if you don't want to do something, don't do it. On the other hand, if you don't look a certain way there is something wrong with you.

God made us and gave us specific gifts for a reason. Often we don't use those gifts in the ways he intended. You may be incredibly smart, yet you may procrastinate on every assignment. You may have all kinds of interests and ideas but you allow those interests to distract you.

How do you think God reacts when you don't wisely use the gifts he's given you?

Wanting to change isn't a sign that you're unhappy with who God made you to be, and it isn't an indication of low self-esteem, either. It's the recognition that you're an individual capable of growth and change and maturity. That's such an important part of your faith journey.

Read Colossians 3:1-17.

ACT:

This week, begin the journey of changing a habit. If there is something in your life you want to stop doing, come up with a plan to change it. Write it down, tell other people about it, and work hard to focus on changing that one thing.

YOU ARE PERFECTLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

Nick Vujicic was born without any arms or legs, yet he knows that he is perfectly made. Nick is probably one of the most influential Christian speakers today, a man who shares incredible stories about God's love and how Jesus transformed his tough circumstance. He speaks all over the world and also does activities that you would never expect someone with his limitations to do, including participating in several different sports and being able to type. Nick believes God made him this way for a specific purpose: so that he could be an influence in the lives of millions. At first glance, many people would doubt that Nick is "perfectly made." However, that is exactly what he believes. God knew exactly what he was doing when he made you, too. All the hairs on your head, the freckles on your nose, and the toes on your feet—God has put you together for a specific purpose, and you are perfect in God's eyes.

How do you feel when you read the words "You are perfectly made"?

Does hearing Nick's story change how you view yourself? Why or why not?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Some people are just born more perfect than others, and stories like Nick's are not normal. You probably have flaws, and that is proof that no one really created you.

Read Psalm 139:13-16.

How does this passage impact the way you view yourself?

ACT:

Go to lifewithoutlimbs.com and read through Nick's testimony. Think about the limitations you believe you have, and consider how you can rethink your own struggles and ask God to use you exactly how he made you. Tell three friends the unique ways you notice that they are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Read Matthew 10:29-31 and Ephesians 1:4-6.

What impact does it make to you that the one who knows all of your faults still chooses you to be his son or daughter?

Read Psalm 105:2.

How do you worship differently knowing that you are wonderfully made?

Transition to Junior Year

1 JOHN 1:9

WEEK

2

WHO ARE YOU WHEN YOU ARE ALONE?

There are different reasons why we desire alone time. It may be due to a long day at school or a weekend filled with activities and social settings. Being alone allows you to recharge, reestablish patterns and focus. You may wish you had more alone time, especially if you have brothers and sisters.

When do you enjoy being alone? What things do you like to do when you're alone?

When do you find that alone time is the healthiest for you? the hardest for you?

Being alone isn't always a good thing. When you are alone there isn't anyone around you to keep you doing the right things, encourage you to make good choices, or bring you back when you go astray. The negative side of being alone is isolation, and it's often during these times that your struggles come out. You may find that you struggle with things when you have too much alone time.

INTEGRITY IS MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES WHEN YOU ARE ALONE.

Are there things that you do alone that you would be ashamed if others knew about? You don't have to list them here, but how does your answer to that question make you feel?

God walks alongside you in all of your decisions and in the times you're alone, and he's ready to help you make the right choices, even if it's not always a struggle you win.

Do you believe God is always with you, or are there times you feel alone?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Ultimately, you need to worry about you and take care of you. What you do in your alone time is up to you. Who cares if you don't hurt anyone.

Read Mark 1:35, Mark 9:2, and John 6:15.

What did Jesus do during his time alone? How can you follow his model?

ACT:

This week, spend some time alone. Take a journal and find a large chunk of time to sit and think about how it feels to be alone. Ditch the phone and everything else that distracts you—just be by yourself. Ask God to teach you to be still.

WHO DO YOUR HABITS SAY YOU ARE?

We are all capable of developing good habits and bad habits. A good habit would be taking a shower every day and washing your hair. A bad habit would be taking a shower once every two weeks. Our lives are filled with numerous habits, and they say a lot about what is important to us and what we value.

What are some of your good habits? What habits in your life are bad? Which are easier to develop, and why?

In your Christian walk, what are some habits that help you draw near to God? How did you develop these habits?

Have you been trying to put in place any healthy habits that have been difficult to get going? What are they, and how might another person help you in this quest?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Do whatever you want, however you want. Yes, you are defined by what you do, but don't let anyone else tell you what habits are good or not.

Read Ephesians 5:1-2, Romans 12:2, and Hebrews 10:24-25.

How did Jesus model good habits that are contrary to what the world would have you do?

ACT:

Most healthy habits require time and effort; they don't happen overnight or automatically. Want a good strategy for starting a new good habit or stopping a bad one? Write out a detailed plan of action and share it with two people. Consider specific steps or choices that you will help you begin that healthy habit—or end that unhealthy one.

YOU ARE FORGIVEN

If you were God, how would you go about forgiving people?

Read Psalm 103:1-3, 8-12 and 1 John 1:9

What do these passages indicate that God does with our sin when we confess and repent of it?

You may find yourself treating different sins as being more of a big deal than others. Sometimes the worldly consequences are different. With God there is simply "holy" and "unholy," and sin falls into the second category. Through Christ, all sins can be forgiven and we can be freed.

THE WORLD THINKS:

You should be slow to forgive people because they will likely just hurt you again. Even if you forgive, definitely don't forget. That person probably will do the exact same thing to you down the road.

Read Matthew 6:12-15.

How hard is it for you to forgive people that have hurt you?

How does your limited perspective of grace and mercy impact the way that you would forgive others? How does that limit your perspective of God's grace and mercy?

ACT:

People have probably hurt you over time and maybe it's been tough to forgive them. This week, think about someone you're holding a grudge against because he or she has hurt you. It's time to do what God has done for you and forgive without any stipulations. Do this by telling that person that you offer forgiveness, or just offer that forgiveness in your own heart—let it go and forgive.

Transition to Junior Year

ROMANS 5:8

WEEK

3

WHERE DO YOU FIND YOUR SELF-WORTH?

It's an odd thing to admit, but many of us don't know how we are supposed to find our self-worth. We often get caught up looking for it in places where we likely won't find truth. We sometimes end up in unhealthy relationships because we buy into the lie that if someone "likes" us we must have worth. Sometimes we focus so intently on one particular thing—because people pat us on the back for it—we neglect all the other parts of our life.

What are three specific things you feel good about yourself?

Self-worth is a tough thing, and figuring it out can be a long journey. At times you will have a strong sense of it and how God sees you, but other times it will have a bit more of a struggle. Keep going and look to see how God affirms those things in you.

Where do you look for affirmation? Why?

What are some negative places you look?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Look in your bank account to find affirmation and self-worth. See how many people favorite something you post on social media to find your self-worth.

Read Genesis 1:26-27, Romans 5:8, and John 3:16.

How does God show you that you are his most precious creation?

ACT:

Sometimes we need to spend time preparing for when we feel down. Take a piece of paper and write out three things that you like and that help you feel good about yourself, and put it in a place you can read when you feel low.

WHO DOES YOUR PAST SAY YOU ARE?

It's easy to hang on to the past. Sometimes we do this because our past was great and filled with a lot of wonderful memories. We attempt to re-create these events over and over, instead of pursuing new opportunities and new dreams; we become hooked on reliving the past. On the other end of the spectrum, sometimes we hang on to the past because it was difficult and filled with painful memories that seem to hold us captive. We want to move on and leave those things behind, but we feel trapped; our mind plays them over and over and over.

What are some things from your past you wish you could forget?

What are some things from your past you wish you could repeat?

The truth is that much of our past follows us as we get older, but our past doesn't have to define us. We can move beyond the bad things (and the good things, too) and work to live in the present. Thinking about how you are shaped by your past will help you work through who you are today and who you can become tomorrow.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Who you are today is shaped by your past, and you can never get away from the things that happened there. If you messed up, that will always be with you. You'll have to deal with the consequences on your own.

Read Acts 22:1-29 and Philippians 3:7-9.

How did God use Paul's past?

God can heal and redeem the painful moments. God uses our past to shape us. God also can give us new memories that surpass the greatest ones from the past.

How do you think God might use and redeem the tough, difficult, painful things from your past?

When good and bad things happen to you, where do you think God is? Is God equally present during good and bad times? Why or why not?

ACT:

Write a list of five major things you remember from your past—both negative and positive things. What did you learn from each of those events or moments? If you have a trusted Christian adult in your life, ask that person to help you make sense of how God might be using some of your past—or how God might use those moments in the future.

YOU ARE HOLY

Many of us struggle daily with unholy or unworthy thoughts, actions, words, and deeds, making us feel like we aren't able to go to God. When people are struggling with sin they may stop coming to church because they don't feel right about being there when they are struggling with stuff. When you struggle, church is exactly where you need to be!

How does it make you feel when you do things that you know are against what God wants you to do?

The Bible proclaims God as "holy" in many places. God's chosen people, the Israelites, were constantly told in the Old Testament that they had to do things in particular ways in order to "be holy"—a big deal because God could not interact with an "unholy" people. So they had laws about everything, all set up to keep them from being unholy or impure. In the New Testament we see Jesus coming as a conclusion and answer to this law—through his death and resurrection we can be made holy.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Why do I need to be holy? I just need to be good and do nice things for others. No one is holy. Everyone fails.

Read Leviticus 11:44-45, Psalm 99:5, Philippians 4:8-9, and 1 Peter 1:13-16.

What is the common thought in each of these verses?

Read Colossians 1:21-23 and Hebrews 10:1-14.

How can you be holy?

What are some action steps you could put into place that would help you to turn away from things that you know are not good for you?

ACT:

Write down an action plan to making sure your speech, thoughts, writing, and actions are pure.

Transition to Junior Year

EXODUS 20:12

WEEK

4

WHO ARE YOU AT HOME?

Whatever your home situation may be, take time to value and invest in your relationships with your family. You have the opportunity to gain a lot of wisdom while you are at home whether your home life is good or bad. Down the road, you'll be happy that you did.

If you had to label your "at-home persona" in just a few words, how would you describe it?

Read Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:2.

What does it mean to "be present" with your family?

THE WORLD THINKS:

There is a high probability your family will disappoint you, so you should work to protect yourself from that happening. Parents don't really know what they are talking about.

How engaged are you with your family, and what things do you all like to do together?

What are some of the unique, specific things that you bring to your family?

Read Joshua 24:14-15.

How do you and your family actively serve the Lord?

ACT:

Take the time to actively engage one of your parents or another family member in a conversation or an activity. Take the time to really "be present" with your family.

WHO DO YOUR PARENTS SAY YOU ARE?

Thinking about your relationship with your parents may bring up some difficult and tough thoughts. Whether your relationship with them is strong or weak, frustrating or encouraging, you are still shaped by what you hear from them about who you are. Sometimes these messages are subtle; sometimes they're blatant. You might hear over and over again that you are the baby of the family, so they treat you like a child who will never grow up. You might be the firstborn who is considered responsible and has leadership skills—and your parents frequently remind you of this.

What things do you hear your parents say about you?

Chances are good that at least once you have heard your parents verbalize how they genuinely see you. Those may be special, life-giving moments as your parents speak truths about the gifts and talents God has given you. In their own brokenness and hurt, they may say things that aren't true and tear you down. As difficult as this next statement may be to read, it's true: God has put you in the specific family where you are—it isn't always easy, but as you trust God you can learn, grow, and mature.

What do you wish your parents knew about you—or what messages do you wish they spoke to you? Why?

How much do you believe your parents truly understand who you are?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Parents will disappoint you. They are hurting, selfish people just like you are, and you should expect to be hurt by them. Don't worry, soon you'll be out of their house and won't have to deal with them.

Read Psalm 127:3-5.

What responsibility do you have outside the home to continue to honor your parents?

How do you think God might want you to serve and love your parents?

ACT:

This week, flip things around and do something totally different with your parents. Tell them what good things you see in them. Pave the way for this kind of encouragement to flow both directions by doing it first. This might mean writing a letter, telling them in person, or leaving a long message on their voice mail. The goal is to share with your parents some of the good things you see in them.

YOU ARE LOVED

Even when you don't feel it, you need to know that Jesus loves you. You may be at a point in your life where you don't feel that many people love you. Well, Jesus does and always will. You may encounter a season of life when you are struggling to believe this simple truth.

This often happens for people when tragedy strikes and they don't know how to respond to God. At those moments, we often are best served sitting and being with our family and other brothers and sisters in Christ. So remember, God loves you, even when you don't believe it.

Read John 3:16.

How does it feel to say, "Jesus loves me"?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Many people learn the song Jesus Loves Me, but no one really believes that it makes any sort of difference in anyone's lives.

Have you experienced times when you haven't believed that Jesus loves you? How do you respond during those periods of doubt?

Read Romans 8:37-39.

How does knowing Jesus loves you change the way you view the world, your place in it, and your future?

How does the love of Jesus in your life influence the way that you honor your family?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.

How can you demonstrate God's love to someone in your family this week?

ACT:

Seek out a friend that you know is struggling with feeling loved and share with them the way that Jesus loves them.

Transition to Senior Year

ROMANS 12:9-10

WEEK

5

WHO ARE YOU WITH YOUR FRIENDS?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You need friends, especially at school because it is an unsafe and scary place. Don't do anything to ruin your friendships. Go along with what other people want because you need them.

What would you say is your role in most of your friendships?

How scared are you of being alone? How does that shape the way you interact with your friends?

What are some parts of your personality that you wish you could expose more to your friends?

How much of a role would you say your faith plays in your friendships?

When would you say you are guilty of compartmentalizing your faith away from your friends?

WHO DO YOUR FRIENDS SAY YOU ARE?

You may feel totally comfortable with your friends because they accepted you for who you are. You know that you can be open, honest, and real around them.

If this is your story, congratulations! It's great to have these kinds of friends—especially if they're followers of Christ, too. Invest in these amazing friendships. Value the people who accept you just as you are—your successes, your failures, your strengths, and your flaws.

It's likely some of you have a different experience: Either you don't have close friends or you don't feel like you totally can be yourself around them. It's hard for you to open up, and you struggle to be fully you. This may be your story today, but you can build better relationships starting now.

What would your friends say about you? Why do they say that?

The reality is that we are all concerned about what our friends think of us because those friendships really matter. Our friends play a large part in our lives and how we feel about ourselves. It's important to surround ourselves with people who truly know us and genuinely care about our best interest.

THE WORLD THINKS:

The world has a couple of thoughts on friends. On one hand we are cautioned to not get too close to anyone, and on the other hand we hear that friends are more important than family. Both of these extremes can be risky.

Do your friends think your faith and trust in Jesus is strong? Why or why not?

Read John 15:12-15.

ACT:

How can you be a better friend to people in your life? Think of three friends, and come up with a list of specific things you could do to help them out this week. Then do it.

WHO DO YOUR ONLINE FRIENDS SAY YOU ARE?

Social media provides so many opportunities to miscommunicate, er, connect with so many people. Your online friends may have a pretty different view of your life than how it is in reality since you only show them most of the good stuff!

WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF CONSISTENCY AND BEING THE SAME PERSON
WHEREVER WE ARE AND WHOMEVER WE ARE WITH.

What do you believe your online friends think of you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

It's OK to be a different person in different spaces. Everyone needs the freedom to be whoever, whenever and wherever they want to be it.

How do you portray yourself online? Is it an accurate depiction of who you really are? Do your social media friends see a side of you that doesn't show up at youth group, school or family time?

ACT:

Remove the items from your public profiles that do not represent Jesus well this week.

Do you sometimes find yourself spending more time with your online friends than your real-life friends? Why or why not?

How much do your online friends see of your faith in Jesus? Is that something that's important for you to share with them? Why or why not?

ADJUSTING YOUR FRIENDSHIPS

Read Colossians 3:12-14.

If you lived according to this passage, what impact would that have on your friendships?

Read Proverbs 13:20, Proverbs 22:24-25 and 1 Corinthians 15:33.

How have you experienced the truths embedded in these passages?

How would you handle getting out of a friendship that is harmful in any way?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10.

How do your friends see a difference in you because of your relationship with Jesus?

How can you start having more Jesus-centered conversations with friends?

Transition to Junior Year

PSALM 139

WEEK

6

WHO ARE YOU AT SCHOOL?

Most people have considered this question. It's somewhat foundational to how you manage to figure out the best way to navigate your high school years. At some point we all self-identify as something in school. Maybe you are an athlete and that's what defines you. Maybe you participate in band, drama, or other artistic groups. Maybe academics define who you are. The reality, though, is that most of who we are at school ends up being defined by what we do. This makes sense, but it's also a little bit of a daunting thing because being "labeled" can have some negativity associated with it.

Sometimes we are defined by others and not by our own choices. This can feel incredibly unfair—especially if the label is negative. The truth is, in general who we are at school is probably only a small piece of who we actually are.

How much of what people see of you at school is really who you are?

THE WORLD THINKS:

It's OK to be defined by what you do, and you should try to do as much as possible so you will have a better chance of figuring out what you really like. If you want to get into a good college, you have to be a well-rounded student, anyway. Do things even if you don't like them, because it will pay off in the end.

You will probably feel best, though, the more you are able to truly be yourself and not be defined by what you do or how others think of you. How do you do that? Well, I hope that during your junior year this starts happening more naturally as you spend more time doing the things that give you the most meaning, and discover and develop the gifts and talents God has given you.

Read Psalm 139:1-6.

What gifts and talents has God given you? How do you know, and how are you using those gifts and talents?

If you could choose a few parts of your personality that you really like and show those to people, what would you want them to see? Why?

Read 1 Peter 2:9.

ACT:

Express to someone this week about the work that God has done to bring you into his marvelous light.

WHO DO YOUR TEACHERS SAY YOU ARE?

All of us to a certain extent play some sort of role in the classroom. We decide that there are particular things we can do that will protect us and allow us to feel comfortable and safe. You might be the student who is always helpful and willing to answer questions, or you could be the exact opposite: the back-of-the-classroom type who just wants to get through the day without being noticed.

Do you ever wonder what your teachers think about you?

What are some things you have heard your teachers say about you?

How well do you believe your teachers know who you really are?

THE WORLD THINKS:

A lot of teachers don't care about you. They work tough jobs and can't wait for the day and the school year to be over. So don't expect too much from them. They just want to pile on the workload.

For the most part, teachers are aware of who students are and really do care about you. That's why many of them started teaching in the first place. Spend some time listening to what your teachers say to you (and to your classmates). They may be encouragers who say things that build you up. They may be pushers who know you could be doing so much more, so they push you to succeed.

Read Matthew 5:13-16.

What can you do to be a light to your teachers and school?

As a Christ-follower, you are called to be a light to the world, and that includes being a light to your school and teachers. Let your faith shine through as you spend time in their classrooms learning, discussing, interacting, and listening.

ACT:

This week, encourage a teacher. Imagine how it would make a teacher feel if you sent them a note thanking them for what they do and the way they do it to really care for you as a student.

YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL (OR HANDSOME)

Most of us struggle honestly thinking that we are beautiful or handsome. Maybe we're capable of seeing that on some days—but struggle with it on other days. The reality is that we often view ourselves as if we were looking at one of those super-magnification mirrors—the ones in which you can see every pore and flaw in your face. Those mirrors tend to distort your actual appearance and can make your face look pretty scary.

What is the first thing you think when you look at yourself in a mirror?

THE WORLD THINKS:

There are beautiful people, and then there are the rest of us. You know which category you fall into pretty easily. That's just the way it is (though you're welcome to spend all your money on clothes, makeup, surgeries, and gym memberships in an attempt to become more beautiful or handsome).

Our culture judges our beauty on how we compare against countless movie stars, magazine images, and billboards. Most of those images are an airbrushed, glamorized version of the actual person. We know that the photos aren't entirely accurate, but we still compare ourselves against what we see. The cool reality is that God has made us all beautiful in his eyes, and it's only the world that has perverted the truth about beauty and good looks. You deserve to be freed from the false reality the world has sold you and know that you are beautiful (or handsome).

Read 1 Samuel 16:7 and Proverbs 31:30.

How do the principles in these passages relate to both males and females?

How can you and your friends help each other to have a healthier and more biblical view of beauty?

ACT:

So this week, focus on other people. Spend time complimenting your friends and encouraging them in how God has made them. Move away from commenting on outward appearance and instead give compliments based on the whole person and character.

Read Psalm 139:13-14.

How does knowing that God created you and sees you as wonderfully made impact the way you represent yourself at school and with your teachers?

Transition to Junior Year

HEBREWS 10:24-25

WEEK

7

WHO ARE YOU AT CHURCH?

Depending on your personality and the size of the church, it can be easy to fade into the background and not really be known.

Describe who you are at church?

How is your persona at church different than at school?

Why do you go to church? What do you hope to find here?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Don't waste your time going to a church or youth group. You're just going to hear a bunch of rules about what you are not supposed to do. No one there really cares about you.

What is required for you to think that someone really knows who you are?

How many people in the student ministry or church truly know who you are?

What are some things you wish other students knew about you?

Read Hebrews 10:23-25 and 1 John 1:7.

How can you help create a climate that makes others feel welcome and feel involved?

Read John 17:20-23.

What is the purpose of Christians being united with one another?

ACT:

Take the time to engage in conversation with three people help them feel welcome, visible and loved.

**How much do you value the student ministry being a safe place where you can grow in your faith?
What can get in the way of growth happening?**

How has God used people in your youth group to speak truth into your life?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You will eventually get bored of going to church—and besides, you only go there because your parents make you. What do you really think you are getting out of it?

YOU ARE REDEEMED

What do you think about when you hear the word “redeemed”?

Throughout the Bible you see God doing redeeming his people when he steps in, changes the situation they're in, frees them from bondage, slavery, and struggles, and brings them back to him.

What are some stories of redemption you have seen in your life?

THE WORLD THINKS:

For the most part, redemption is not real. If you have messed up your life, there is a high probability it will just stay messed up. That's the harsh reality of life.

Read Romans 5:8 and Galatians 3:13.

Are your actions tied to whether or not Jesus was willing to die for you?

How is this message attractive to someone who is trying to earn his or her salvation?

We experience God's redemption when we place our faith and trust in Jesus. If you've already made that decision, you know it's the best choice you've ever made. You have been redeemed from the bondage of sin and are created new. If you haven't taken that step yet, be encouraged to do so to experience a new life and redemption from God.

Read Exodus 6:5-8 and Psalm 34:22.

Why is God in the business of redeeming people?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

How does being redeemed free you from your past?

What can you learn from a God who makes "all things new" with his people? How does that encourage you to live?

ACT:

Often we hear stories of redemption when people share their testimony. Write out your story of being redeemed and share that with a couple people this week.

Read Hebrews 10:19-25.

How does understanding the meaning of being redeemed impact your reasoning for gathering together with other believers?

Transition to Junior Year

WEEK

8

LUKE 16:10

WHO DO YOUR COACHES SAY YOU ARE?

Sports may be a huge part of your high school life but not everyone is an athlete. Perhaps you can identify because you've been on a team at some point in your life. You may find that it is on your teams and through your coaches and teammates that you have learned a lot about yourself and who you are. Maybe your coaches have helped you discover skills you didn't realize you had, or they've encouraged you to become a more disciplined athlete, which has allowed you to become a more disciplined person overall.

What have you heard from coaches (or P.E. teachers) that you think is true about yourself?

Do you think your coaches have accurately assessed who you are as a person from what they have seen at practice and games?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Sports are all about talent—and you either have it or you don't. If you have it, you will be successful and liked—and if you don't, no one will care.

Read Philippians 4:13.

With this passage in mind how can you handle circumstances when you don't get to play or think that the coach has it in for you?

Read Deuteronomy 31:1-8.

How have your coaches led you to a certain point and then encouraged you to take the next steps.

What are some things that you have learned from coaches about yourself?

How do you use the athletic talent you have to honor and bring glory to God?

ACT:

If you have a sport that you like to play, talk to one of your coaches this week and ask them how they think your skills can translate into other areas of your life.

Read 1 Timothy 4:7-10.

According to this passage to what is the most important thing to be devoted?

WHO DOES YOUR BOSS SAY YOU ARE?

Maybe you haven't had a job yet, so this is all about thinking how you want a boss to see you and how well you do your job. Perhaps you've had jobs and you've had bosses tell you some things that they see in you. If your faith in Jesus is important to you, then it ought to shape how you work with and relate to your boss. That person should be able to see something different in you than employees who aren't followers of Christ.

What have you heard from a boss about yourself? Was it good or bad?

What do you wish that your boss knew about you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Work is lame and we just do it because we have to make money and pay the bills. You shouldn't expect much from your bosses—in fact, you actually need to protect yourself from being too vulnerable because it could get you fired.

If you haven't had a boss yet, what are two key traits you would want to have and be rewarded for as an employee?

Read Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1-2, Hebrews 13:17, and 1 Peter 5:5.

How do you believe God wants you to relate to your boss and your workplace? In what ways can your faith influence how you act?

Read Colossians 3:23.

ACT:

If you have a job now, think about specific characteristics you would love to be known for as an employee. This week, making them your priority at work. If you don't have a job yet, take that your list and make them priorities in your everyday life.

YOU ARE TRUSTED

All of us want to be trusted more. You are probably at a place in your life where you are negotiating what trust looks like with your parents. This is the year of your life where a lot of trust starts being transferred as you have likely demonstrated that you are a trustworthy person. Maybe you have made some mistakes; some of that trust from your parents has been taken back and you feel like you have to earn it again.

How much do you believe your parents or guardians trust you?

What are ways you have worked to earn their trust? How have you lost their trust?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Trust is something that you have to be very careful with. People are out to just meet their own needs, so they generally are not very trustworthy.

A great resource for understanding how this trust thing works is your Bible. God is incredibly consistent in the Bible, and we can learn a lot about how consistency breeds more trust by following his lead.

Read Deuteronomy 7:9, Psalm 13:5, Psalm 28:7 and Proverbs 3:5-6.

In your Christian walk, how trustworthy has God been to you? How can you be trustworthy?

All of us want to be consistent and to have people know how we will respond in all situations. We feel good when people believe in us—and frustrated when we lose that.

Read Luke 16:10.

ACT:

One thing you can do to demonstrate trust is to show your parents that you can be consistent. You might want to put together a "you chart" that has chores, tasks, schedules, and other things on it and give it to them so that they know what and when you are doing things. You can update it weekly so they will always have an updated schedule. Try it for three weeks and see how they trust you.

Transition to Junior Year

LUKE 12:48

WEEK

9

WHAT GIFTS AND TALENTS DID GOD GIVE YOU?

Sometimes thinking about gifts and talents feels like we are patting ourselves on the back. The reality is that God has given all of us talents and skills, and when we become followers of Christ, we also receive spiritual gifts.

You may not have figured out what your gifts and talents are yet. That's OK. For some of us it takes a bit longer. You do have them and figuring out what they are is an important step in understanding how God wants to use you.

What are some gifts and talents you think God may have given you? How do you know?

How can you use those gifts to serve God and to serve others?

Do you have a sense of what God might be calling you to do in the future with those gifts and talents?

If you could pick gifts or talents different from the ones you have, what would they be and why?

All of us have received gifts from God. For some of us, our gifts are pretty clear and easy to see. We may be good at some particular thing and we're using that gift already to serve God and to serve others. Maybe you haven't figured out exactly what your gifts are yet. Maybe you know you have gifts that don't necessarily line up with who you are right now. If you don't really see what your gifts are right now or how God can use them, you might simply need to wait until it's time for you to fully understand and use them.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Some people have a lot of gifts and talents, and they will likely be wildly successful. However, that group is small. Most people aren't given anything and just have to work really hard just to get by. Everyone has talents. They don't come from anything or anyone.

Read Matthew 25:14-30.

What responsibility do you have to use what has been given to you well and for the glory of God?

Read 1 Corinthians 12.

If you know, what are your spiritual gifts?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

How are we to use our gifts?

ACT:

Chances are good you have some people in your life who know you pretty well. Ask two of them to tell you which gifts and talents they see in your life. See if they can give you some advice about what you could do with those gifts and talents.

WHO DOES YOUR WALLET SAY YOU ARE?

You may only have a little money from gifts, an allowance, or a part-time job. Chances are good, though, that how you spend your money says a lot about what you value. Jesus talks about money more than almost any other topic in the New Testament. That probably means it's something he cares a lot about. You may have a lot of money or very little of it, but regardless of how much you start with, how you spend it says a lot about your priorities.

What are the last three things you spent money on? What does that tell you?

If you had \$250 right now, what would you do with it? Why?

How much does money shape what you are thinking about for your future?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Money brings happiness—simple as that. When you have more of it, you are happier.

Read Mark 12:41-44, Luke 16:13-15 and Acts 2:45.

How do you think Jesus would want you to spend your money? Why?

HOW WE USE OUR MONEY REVEALS OUR HEART.

ACT:

For one week, write down an exact report of how you spend your money. Don't put anything into categories; just do a simple ledger with an explanation of what it was and how much you spent. At the end of the week, give that ledger to someone and ask them to determine what appears important to you based on how you spent your money.

YOU ARE GIFTED TO GIVE

Some of us are really good at giving gifts. We love to buy or make things for other people, and when they open their presents we feel a rush of excitement because that's what makes us tick. Others of us are really good at receiving gifts. We love to open presents, and it makes us feel good when others give things to us. On many occasions we are surprised at how the person who gave us a gift knew exactly what we wanted. Their "knowing" us is as meaningful as the gift itself because it shows they really care about who we are. Gifts make us feel special, valued, and appreciated.

Read Romans 6:23 and Matthew 28:19-20.

How are Christians asked to share the gift of God?

How do you share that the Gospel without being weird?

Read Luke 12:48.

How does this verse apply to how you spend your money?

Being a good steward of your possessions does not always mean that you have to give everything away. However, it does require being willing to part with them the moment God asks you to do so. It is in those moments that what you really trust in is revealed.

ACT:

Take stock of all of your possessions and abilities. Consider how you can utilize your possessions and abilities for God's kingdom. Consider tutoring someone or using your tools to help build something.

Transition to Junior Year

ROMANS 8:28

WEEK

10

WHO ARE YOU WHEN YOU FEEL PAIN?

Nobody likes to feel pain. You may have dealt with a lot of physical or emotional pain in your past. Pain, simply put, is not fun. There are times in high school when life gets painful. How we handle that pain in the midst of everything that is going on in life produces a tremendous witness to the world proclaiming the greatness of our God.

What's the worst physical pain you've experienced? How did you respond?

What's the worst emotional pain you've experienced? How did you respond?

Where did you learn how to respond to pain you feel?

Does pain cause you to give up, give in, or be incapacitated? Does it spark an inner desire to endure and grow?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Pain bites, and your goal should be to eliminate feeling it so you don't put yourself in any situation where you could potentially have to handle any negative or painful emotions or feelings.

Why do you think God allows pain to happen?

Read Genesis 3 and Romans 5:12.

What started pain and suffering?

How does pain point us toward God?

How do you relate to a God who allows pain to happen, and how does that experience affect your attitude toward God?

When do you feel discouraged and without hope? How do you change course in those situations?

YOU HAVE HOPE

Read Psalm 18:1-6

How has God heard you and answered you in your pain?

How can you use that story to explain the Gospel?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.

How does experiencing being hurt physically or emotionally help you handle other difficult circumstances? How does it help others?

Read Romans 5:15, Romans 8:18 and 1 Timothy 4:10.

How does keeping an eternal perspective of hope in mind help you handle painful circumstances?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.

When the pain cuts so deep at times in life it may tempt you sin. What is the promise found in this passage of Scripture?

Isaiah 40:28-31

How does this passage encourage you knowing that God can renew your hope even when difficult things happen?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Be careful to not hold on to something that isn't real. Hope can be fleeting.

Read Romans 8:28.

All things are not good. It would be mockery to say that they are. The death of a child is not good. Cancer is not good, drug addiction is not good, and war is not good.

IN THE CHEMISTRY OF THE CROSS GOD TAKES THINGS THAT, IN AND OF THEMSELVES, ARE BAD, AND HE PUTS THEM TOGETHER, MUCH AS A CHEMIST MIGHT TAKE CHEMICALS THAT, IN AND OF THEMSELVES, MAY BE HARMFUL AND MIXES THEM TO MAKE A MEDICINE THAT BRINGS HEALING. —ADRIAN ROGERS

Read Psalm 33:20-22, Psalm 62:5

How has God shown he is faithful to wait on?

Read Hebrews 11:1 and 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

How does your faith impact the way you handle difficult times?

ACT:

Step outside yourself for a bit, and see if you can help someone else who might be going through a painful situation. How can you best comfort and care for someone? Focusing on the needs of others can give us extra strength to endure the physical or emotional pain we're experiencing.

Pray together through the text of James 1:2-4, 12 as follows:

"Father, help me consider trials as joy because I know that they produce perseverance. Help me to allow perseverance to finish its work so that I may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Help me persevere through the trials that I am currently dealing with so that I may receive the crown of life that you have promised me. Amen."

LOOKING BACK

How do you feel now that you have completed this study?

In this study, you were first encouraged to define for yourself what you thought about you. Then you were asked to consider what people in your life thought about you—and finally you were given biblical truth to see some of the things God thinks about you.

So now you are thinking, okay, now that I've completed this study, I know everything I need to know now, right?

Discipleship isn't about completing a study. It is about a lifestyle of learning and living as you follow Jesus throughout your lifetime. What you have learned throughout this study will become more important to your Christian life in the months, even years, to come. Think about some of the major concepts that you have learned and lived out.

- Became more comfortable with who you are and how God created you.
- Knowledge that you are fearfully and wonderfully made.
- Ability to control who you are when you are alone.
- Considered creating healthy habits and removed destructive habits.
- Understood that through Jesus you can be forgiven.
- Found your self-worth in your relationship with Jesus.
- Learned about the dangers of compartmentalizing your life.
- Thought through the image that you portray to your friends about yourself.
- Examined the way that you represent yourself in each of your social circles.
- Understood that through Jesus you may be redeemed.
- Considered the trust that others give you and how to earn more trust.
- Examined the ways that you are gifted, talented and been given possessions to use for the kingdom of God.
- Considered how to handle pain and lean on God.

Wow! That's a lot! Now it's time to continue to live out what you have learned in this study.

Getting Started – Transition to Senior Year

INTRODUCTION

The senior year can feel a little bit bizarre. It is really broken up into three distinct parts. At the beginning of the year, you are excited to finally be a senior and have all the privileges and prestige of being the oldest kids on campus. At the same time, you are scrambling to figure out where you'll apply to college and getting those crazy applications and essays completed. Maybe you're thinking about a different path: the military, or a job, or vocational training, or a family business. Whatever your plans for life after high school, this can be a pretty stressful season of life.

Then things slow down considerably. You've reached the middle of the year, and there isn't as much to do. If you're going to college, you might be waiting for envelopes in the mail that will reveal your options for next year, but in general this period of time is a little more relaxing. Then near the end of your senior year, it ramps up again as you get ready to graduate and prepare to pursue your future plans—while also saying goodbye to so much of your past.

In all of this, your faith journey can get off track or take a little bit of a beating if you don't stay focused on the things that are most important. It's easy to get distracted and to feel like your faith doesn't matter as much anymore because you are getting ready to leave so much of your life behind. During this time, though, it is particularly important to lean into your parents, youth group, church, Christian friends, leaders, other family members, and your Bible because even if you've built a firm foundation, you need to keep building on it before you enter a world where everything is different.

Transition to Senior Year

COLOSSIANS 3:1-2

WEEK

1

WILL THIS YEAR BE GREAT?

Senior year, the time to figure out what to do with the rest of your life! You fill out what seems like an endless amount of applications and essays, and have the pressure to get it done as soon as possible so you can register early and get everything figured out quickly! At the same time, get ready for your "last" everything in high school and be excited that your future life is coming so quickly!

What are you most looking forward to your senior year? Why?

The beginning of your senior year can be really fun and really stressful at the same time. You may need to make one last push to get your grades up to get into that school you want, or you might be padding your resume with a few more volunteer opportunities so you can look well rounded. Maybe you're not even sure you want to go to college and you're struggling to find people to talk with who won't push you to go that way simply because it's "normal."

Emotions and stress run high during this part of the year, and you need to focus on your faith and on today's realities, and allow the future to come slowly without trying to make it happen sooner than it needs to. God has an awesome plan for you, but a lot of other people also want to offer input and suggestions—and you are finally at a place where you are going to be making choices, which can be incredible and scary.

Is there anything you are particularly nervous or worried about? If so, why?

Your senior year should be great and most likely it will be. You're at the top of the school and are finally a big man (or woman) on campus—for nine months, at least, and then it's over. While it lasts, it will be amazing. There is so much to look forward to this senior year, so enjoy every bit of it. Keep a journal. Take lots of photos. Do whatever it takes to remember all these incredible moments.

THE WORLD THINKS:

You are finally at the top. Take every opportunity to remind everyone younger than you how important you are. After all, that's what the seniors did to you, right? You are entitled to your desires and the world should answer to you.

Read Psalm 45:6 and Philippians 3:8-11.

How is being at the pinnacle of high school different than the throne that God has?

How do you think your relationship with God needs to grow or change this year?

ACT:

As you think about this school year, consider some specific things that you might want to accomplish. Get a piece of paper and write down several of those things and share them with two friends. See what they're looking forward to accomplishing, too.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A WHOLE YEAR OF LASTS?

The time has come for you to experience everything in high school for the very last time. For some of you, that's a good thing. You are glad dances, that test, concert performances, or that sport will be over. You're just ready for it all to be done so you can get out of here. Some of you might really mourn when you experience endings. What if you have played a sport your whole life and know you aren't going to compete in college? The last game or practice will have a whole different meaning for you. Senior year can be a series of disappointments if you struggle to say goodbye to people and things.

At the same time, though, you have the opportunity to fully embrace these experiences because you know that they are ending. What if you went all out for that last homecoming experience and created amazing memories? You have the freedom to push yourself on the playing field without regrets because it's the final game. There is a side of doing things the last time that can really be freeing when you know that you are moving on to something new and different. Enjoy it, embrace it, celebrate it, and allow it to shape you.

What is something you are looking forward to ending? Why?

What things are you not looking forward to doing for the last time? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Just get over it and move on. You will likely not remember any of this in the future anyway. Life is full of endings, so get used to it.

How do you feel knowing that this is your last year to experience all of this?

Where do you think God is in all of this for you?

ACT:

Your senior year is a great time to make sure you leave a godly legacy. Think about something specific you could do with your friends that would be lasting and would honor God. Share your idea with some adults, and invite them to help you accomplish it.

Read Isaiah 51:6 and Revelation 22:13.

How does knowing the eternity of God and his salvation effect how you approach this next year full of “lasts”?

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE?

I ended up getting into almost every college I applied to—both a good and a bad thing. It would have been nice if God had helped a little more by narrowing down my options, but he didn't. I had to choose among six different schools. It was funny at the time because I felt like I had so many possibilities and options ahead of me, but I struggled to make the decision.

Your post-graduation path may appear clear and obvious, but if you're facing lots of options—or seemingly no options at all—trust in God's ability to lead and guide you. Pray for God's wisdom, spend time studying Scripture, and seek input from trusted people in your life. Following God's plan may require a step of faith, but he certainly will bless you for taking that step!

When you've had to make hard decisions, what have you done? How have you made your decisions?

THE WORLD THINKS:

There are really two perspectives: 1) Don't stress; there isn't just one place you should go or just one thing you should do. Choose what feels right and go for it. 2) If you don't figure it out right now you will most likely waste a ton of time and end up failing or doing something you hate.

How will you ultimately decide what you will do next year?

Read Psalm 37:4, Psalm 119:30-32, and Colossians 3:1-2.

How does committing to make your plans based on God's desires helpful in making choices?

ACT:

Have honest conversation with your parents and ask them how they made these kinds of decisions.

Transition to Senior Year

PROVERBS 16:9

WEEK

2

DOES GOD REALLY HAVE A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE?

You may answer the question above with a no. It isn't that you don't believe that God has plans; you just may not be sure God has a plan specifically for you. You may think that you will have to figure it out on your own because God may not seem to be revealing it to you in the timing you feel appropriate. Often we spend so much time thinking about the plans we have for our own lives that we box God in and tell him we are happy to hear his plans as long as they fit in the categories we've created.

You may be struggling to understand or recognize the exact details of God's plan, but perhaps right now his plan is just that you would stay close to him and continue to listen to him as he shapes, molds, and prepares you.

Are you OK with not fully knowing God's plan for your life? Why or why not?

What are some things you feel like God is directing you toward, and why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You will likely have multiple jobs and careers and directions in your life. Just pick the one right now that feels the most right and do it.

How will you make decisions if you don't know God's plan for you?

Read Isaiah 30:1-5.

What is the danger of acting out your own plans rather than waiting on the Lord?

Read Jeremiah 29:10-14 and Acts 9:10-16.

It is important not to take these passages out of context. These verses speak to the ultimate plans and purposes of God to care for the nation Israel and the salvation of his people.

How does seeing God having specific plans for people in Scripture indicate that he has a specific purpose for you?

ACT:

Get together with your family or friends and pick a project that you want to do that will help people. If you have a shelter or soup kitchen nearby, volunteer to help out.

EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE THINGS FIGURED OUT FOR YOUR FUTURE,
YOU CAN BE USED IN YOUR PRESENT TO HELP THOSE IN NEED.

WHO ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE?

You probably feel like you have a distinct place at school. That may be in the band room, choir rehearsal, the gym, or in math club. At this point in high school you will probably find that people will gravitate toward something they feel comfortable doing and a place where they find a lot of encouragement coming their way.

What is your identity? Has it been defined by a sport, an extracurricular activity, or a group of friends?

Remember that who you are is so much deeper than what you do. Your value and purpose surpass any activity, club, social group, or job—not just now, but for the rest of your life!

What are some of the roles you think or know you will have as a senior?

Trying to figure out who you are supposed to be your senior year isn't always tough for everyone, but it does have pieces that can be difficult to walk through.

How can you figure out who you are supposed to be this year?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Your options are limited once you graduate from high school. Everyone has something that they are specifically suited for, and you have to figure that out now! Trying to be something different or unique or innovative will just cause you to fail.

Read Joshua 1:9 and Proverbs 3:5-6.

What role do you think your faith can play as you figure out your identity as a senior and how to handle the changes at the end of the year?

ACT:

Think about one thing you wish you had done in high school that you've never tried—a sport, a leadership role, an extracurricular activity, or maybe some kind of community involvement. Is now the right time to see if that is something you could do?

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

If you had to choose right now, what career path would you follow? Why?

What are some things you really like but don't feel you could do as a career?

You may not have a clue what you want to do with your life right now—and that's OK. Many adults would agree that if they had locked themselves into a career path too early they would have missed out on an incredible life of ministry in their current career area. It is great to have some dreams and ideas; just hold them loosely because God may totally change your plans.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Whatever you do make sure it pays and pays well. You'll have bills to pay, a home to maintain, and a family to support. Who cares if you don't really enjoy your job or find it fulfilling? Get your head out of the clouds and face reality.

What gifts and talents do you think God has given you that maybe you haven't fully figured out how to implement yet?

Read Proverbs 15:22.

ACT:

Find some people in careers that you might want to pursue and ask if you can shadow them for a few hours at work. Ask lots of questions: how they prepared for the career, what they enjoy most (and least), how they make a difference through their job, and what other advice they might offer.

Read Psalm 20:4 and Proverbs 16:9.

God's revealed will for us is to love God and to love people. When we do those two things we are within the will of God and our choices about the future will reflect our relationship with him.

Transition to Senior Year

PSALM 23

WEEK

3

HOW ARE YOU HANDLING OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS?

Jesus did a pretty good job of managing expectations. A lot of people expected him to be something different from what he was, but he simply went about doing what he was called to do. You may be in a situation where everyone else seems to have a plan for your life, and you have to figure out how to reconcile that with your understanding of God's plans for your life.

Your parents may have high expectations that you would go to a particular school and have a specific career so that you will make enough money and they won't have to take care of you.

What plans do you think your parents have for you? How have they communicated their hopes and dreams and plans—or have they?

How do your parents' desires line up with what you want to do?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You decide what to do—and if your parents don't like it, that's their problem.

Read John 6:1-15.

What did Jesus do to get away from the pressure of the people's expectations?

ACT:

The best way of managing expectations is to communicate honestly and frequently. Avoid springing something on your parents or other important people that they didn't expect. The responsibility rests on you to get this started. Pick a time with your parents to sit down and ask them what they expect. Then begin to share with them your heart and what you want and what you sense God revealing in your life.

Read Hebrews 4:12.

How can the Bible, which was written so long ago, still be useful in handling other's expectations of you?

WHO CAN YOU TURN TO?

It's important to have people around you who will support you, encourage you, help you process your questions, listen to your dreams, and pray for God's direction and strength in your life. Hopefully your parents or siblings can fill that role. Maybe your friends or classmates or people at church can. Seek out these kinds of people in your life—and if you can't easily find them, pray that God will lead you to them!

Who are some people you believe you can turn to for help, wisdom, or insight?

If you don't have those people in your life, how can you make wise decisions?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Ultimately you are going to have to make the decisions that feel the most right to you, so just do what you think you should. Besides, everyone has their own opinion, so if you ask lots of people, you'll get lots of different, confusing, contradictory advice. Who needs that?

What are some tough decisions you've had to make, and how has it been helpful to have others walk alongside you?

Read 1 Peter 5:6-7.

Ultimately, why can God be trusted more than anyone else to help you?

ACT:

You likely are thinking about some things that you don't know how to handle, or some decisions you don't know if you can make wisely. Write out a couple of those things; find an adult or friend you trust, and ask for advice.

WHAT IF YOU DON'T FEEL READY?

What are some of your fears about leaving high school?

Do you feel prepared for what will happen next?

THE WORLD THINKS:

No one is really prepared for life after high school. You just go for it and hope for the best. Things work out well for some people and not so well for others.

How do you think you can be better prepared for this big transition in your life?

Read Psalm 23 and Ephesians 2:10.

Do you trust that God has brought you to this point and won't leave you unprepared for the work that he has for you? Why or why not?

Remember that you aren't taking these steps alone; God is with you, and your family and friends will lovingly support and encourage you in your next season of life. Fortunately, you will find that God will use all of your senior year to prepare you for what is next.

ACT:

You'll likely need to learn some things before you enter your post-graduation season of life. That list could include simple things such as how to do laundry—or difficult things such as knowing how to fully resist temptation. Make a list of things that you want to be prepared for and start learning how to handle them.

Transition to Senior Year

PSALM 33:20-22

WEEK

4

DO YOU HAVE APPLICATION ANTICIPATION?

Few things bring more stress to the senior year than college applications. Everyone pushes you to get them in on time, and you have to figure out how to do them well while still juggling all the other pieces of your life. College essays tend to be even more stressful when you feel like you have to somehow share a story that will make an admissions counselor think you are a great candidate—even if your grades and test scores aren't as good as they should be. The frustrating thing is you may already know exactly where you want to go to school, but you have to fill out all these other applications just in case you don't get into your top choice. This can be a really discouraging and frustrating season.

One thing that also can be really hard is if you are solid in your faith and want God to direct your steps and your path, but you just don't feel like he's doing things in the timing you need. If God would just show up and tell you what to do, you know you'd listen—but he doesn't seem to be doing things on your schedule! So you fill out all these applications and hope to get back thick admissions packets to schools and not skinny rejection letters. Talk about a tough season where you need God.

What things are most worried about during this application season?

THE WORLD THINKS:

There are two common perspectives: 1) Why stress? College doesn't really matter anyway. It's a lot of money for a piece of paper that you'll never look at again. 2) If you don't get into the school you really want you will never get that perfect job.

What will you do if you get into every school you apply to? How will you decide where to go?

If God made it clear what he wanted you to do, but it was not at all what you wanted, how would you decide which path to follow?

Read Philippians 4:6-7.

ACT:

Take all your college applications and put them in a big pile and ask your parents and Christian friends to join you in a time praying over them. Ask God to let his path be known, and pray that you would be

open and available to God's will. Even if you sense God leading you in a direction that has nothing to do with college, it's still a great idea to gather with trusted friends and family members to pray for God's guidance!

HAVING PATIENCE

Our culture hates to wait for anything. Just waiting a few minutes on someone in order to leave the house can cause an argument for days. Waiting on answers can cause the same frustration. You may struggle with waiting on answers, but it's a skill set that we need to learn.

How patient of a person are you? What makes you impatient?

What decisions have you made that ended up being wrong because you were not patient or didn't wait for the proper timing?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Patience is an obsolete idea. Who has time to wait in our fast-moving, ever-changing culture? We all deserve answers now, and we shouldn't ever have to be patient.

Sometimes God wants us to wait and the answer might be "not yet." How do you typically respond in those moments?

What are some tools and tricks you've learned that can help you when you are being impatient?

Read Psalm 33:20-22 and 84:11-12.

Why can you trust God with your wait?

Read Galatians 5:22-23.

How does the Holy Spirit help you with patience?

ACT:

Being patient is tough. We all want information and direction—and we want it now. Patience doesn't simply mean sitting around and doing nothing. There is no reason why you can't be actively doing something valuable while you wait.

DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

Describe a time when you received a gift that you didn't really want because you thought you were getting something else.

I've had a few other major disappointments in life that have generally revolved around people. I had expectations that weren't met, and friends and family let me down. I think I have learned to handle things well, give grace to people, and have my hopes at the right levels, but it's still hard when something doesn't go the way you had planned.

You've likely encountered some disappointments from people or from situations that didn't unfold the way you had hoped. You will continue to encounter disappointment in your life. We are imperfect humans interacting with imperfect humans, so disappointments will happen.

What disappointments have you already experienced? How did you handle them?

What is your go-to response when something doesn't go your way?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Life is full of disappointments. You need to learn to get over it and move on. Find something else that will make you happy and forget about it.

How do you think God has used or can use these disappointments and frustrations in your life?

ACT:

Now is a good time to think about what you will do if your future plans don't work out as you have planned. Who can you turn to when you face these disappointments? Talk to them now and come up with a plan of how they can help you if things don't go as hoped.

Read Deuteronomy 4:30-31, 2 Chronicles 15:4, Psalm 31:9, and Psalm 55:17.

How has God shown you that he has heard your cries of disappointment?

Transition to Senior Year

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10

WEEK

5

STRENGTHENING YOUR FRIENDSHIPS

Many adults regret two things: First, missing out on some really great friendships in high school because they were not willing to invest time with people; and second, letting some friendships fade over the years that they should have maintained.

This year you have the opportunity to strengthen some of your close relationships and to even build upon some new ones. Seize that opportunity and build strong connections with classmates. Commit to specific ways you can stay in contact in the years ahead.

What are some ways you can strengthen friendships that you already have this next year?

What people at school do you wish you had become friends with but hadn't—and why? What has stopped you from doing that?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You will probably never spend time with these people again and will likely forget them after high school, so don't waste too much time. People are only useful for what they can offer you.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 and John 15:12-15.

Why do you think God has put the people in your life that he has? How do they help you grow closer to him?

ACT:

Look for specific ways to strengthen some friendships. Start by honestly approaching your friends and simply talking with them about it. Being straightforward and saying you want a deeper friendship will go a long way toward encouraging growth. Another challenge is to think about people that you wish you were friends with but aren't. If that's a genuine desire, find a way to make it happen.

FINDING MENTORS

Do you have someone that speaks truth with wisdom into your life? The kind of person who has the ability to look at things from a very different perspective from you, and because they know you well and cared for you, they are able to package their wisdom in a way that is perfect for you to hear. If you don't, you need to find someone like that.

The reality is that sometimes you need other people. Look for a few trustworthy mentors and wise people who can speak truth to you.

What people have you gone to for answers in the past? How have they helped you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Don't trust people because everyone has a hidden agenda and one of these days, you'll get burned.

Read Proverbs 3:13 and 27:17

What people has God put in your life already that might be key mentors and sources of wisdom for you?

What are some issues that you need someone to walk through with you?

ACT:

If you already have mentors in your life, go and talk to them about your future and ask them to help you walk through it. If you don't have a mentor, ask your parents, your trusted friends, or some wise people in your church to suggest someone who might be a good mentor for you.

KEEPING DOORS OPEN

You have to make some big decisions your senior year, but you can do it in a way that allows God to lead and to change your plans if he wants. For example, if you are applying to colleges, consider applying to more than just the one school you want to attend because that wouldn't leave many open doors if that college says no. In the same way, hold loosely to your own plans because they may change—or God may change them.

How do you know when you are making the right decisions? Where does your affirmation come from?

What door do you want to shut but haven't because God may be using it in your life?

Have you already shut some doors that you wish you could reopen? If so, what doors—and why do you want them reopened?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You need to do whatever you want and not worry about what anyone else thinks. Doors have to shut because there are just too many possibilities. It's okay you don't need worry about repairing relationships.

Be careful not to burn bridges in your relationships. The way that you treat others and how you mend broken relationships can have a tremendous impact on your future and your legacy.

Three reasons to maintain relationships:

- 1) You may need that person someday.
- 2) You might have been the one that was wrong.
- 3) Others are watching.

Read Matthew 5:23-24.

Describe some practical steps that you can make so that you keep doors open in your friendships?

ACT:

So, does someone have something against you? Do you have something against him? If you have burned the bridge of a relationship do your best to reconcile it. Go and seek reconciliation, right now—whether you are wrong or right! That is the way of Jesus Christ.

Transition to Senior Year

PHILIPPIANS 3:10-14

WEEK

6

KEEP MOVING FORWARD

There will come a point in your senior year where things just slow down; you'll look around and try to figure out what you are supposed to do. The fall semester is almost over and you are just waiting—waiting to hear back from colleges where you've applied, or from the military recruiters, or from the vocational training program. This can be a fun season because you may have less to do than previous years. However, don't become apathetic in your faith, family, friendships or your schoolwork.

Read Proverbs 1:5.

Name specific learning opportunities that you have now that you may not have in the future.

Even in this season, you can be reflecting on, praying about, and figuring out some important things. This is a great time to lean into the opportunities for you to grow in your faith. Fueling an authentic faith is a key to preparing yourself for handling difficult decisions about the next stage of your life.

THE WORLD THINKS:

Everyone gets senioritis. Senioritis, according to urban dictionary, is a crippling disease that strikes high school seniors. Symptoms include: laziness, an over-excessive wearing of track pants, old athletic shirts, sweatpants, athletic shorts, and sweatshirts. Also features a lack of studying, repeated absences, and a generally dismissive attitude. The only known cure is a phenomenon known as graduation.

How can an authentic faith be revealed when you just don't want to care anymore?

This is also probably a good season to learn (or improve) some important skills from your parents such as doing laundry, managing a budget, and making choices about what to eat. You will benefit from growing in those types of skills and habits before you graduate.

Name some specific skills that you need to learn before you graduate.

ACT:

Find an accountability partner that will encourage you in your walk with Jesus. Don't settle for only what you already know. Ask someone to teach you some new skills.

THINKING ABOUT YOUR STRUGGLES

We all struggle with things, and while some situations are as simple, others are major issues. You may have gotten caught up in a sin issue that you just can't seem to break free of, even though you want to change. There are so many different things that could have grabbed a hold of you, and you may really be having a difficult time getting past it. Now is a great time to work on these issues and learn tools to get past them before you graduate from high school. God likely has put people in your life and tools in front of you that will help—you just have to choose to use them.

Are there issues in your life now that you want to break free of before you leave high school and your current support structures? How can other people help you with that?

Do you believe you have a good support base of people and tools to help you work on struggles and issues? If not, how can you find that support?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Keep your issues hidden because if you bring them into the light, you will be judged. People aren't as loving and forgiving as they pretend to be.

Read John 8:34-36, Ephesians 6:10-18 and Hebrews 12:4.

What role does God play in freedom and recovery from issues?

Read Galatians 6:2 and James 5:16.

What role do Christian brothers and sisters play in your struggles?

ACT:

If you are dealing with any major issue or struggle, now is the time to work on breaking free. Pray and ask God to give you the right people in your life to help you. Find those people, and be honest with them. If you really want help and they are committed to you, they will help you. Ultimately, God is the one who provides freedom, but he often uses the people in our lives to encourage us and to open the doors to that freedom.

THINKING ABOUT YOUR GIFTS AND TALENTS

You may not really recognize the gifts and talents that God has given you, so be open to other people in your life who can help you see them. Commit to developing your gifts and abilities in ways that honor God and serve the people in your life.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.

What are some of the gifts and talents you believe God has given you?

How can you develop and use the gifts and talents that you have for the kingdom of God even as a senior in high school?

THE WORLD THINKS:

The only gifts and talents that are truly worthwhile are the ones that can make you wealthy, powerful, or famous.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

When do you most commonly wish you had someone else's gifts or abilities?

What are some of the gifts and talents you see in other people in your life?

How can you help your family and friends grow in their gifts and talents?

ACT:

Ask some people in your life if they can see the gifts and talents God has given you. Then ask them how you can best use those gifts to glorify God and to serve other people.

Transition to Senior Year

JOHN 15:5

WEEK

7

LOOKING TO GOD

Our culture today is really good at looking for answers, but sometimes you find yourself “Googling” things before asking God for help and direction. As a Christian we are a bit embarrassed to admit that, but it can often be true. We know that if we type what we need into a search engine, we will get immediate results, but if we pray or look for answers in our Bible, it seems like we won't always find what we are looking for.

What is the best way you've found for you to turn and listen to God?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Even if God really does exist, he certainly doesn't speak anymore, and the Bible was written thousands of years ago so that can't be a big help for you.

Read Psalm 120:1 and 121:1-8.

How often do you read your Bible and look for answers?

You may benefit from purchasing some Bible study tools—including programs on your computer—because you can use it like you use a search engine and often find a relevant passage of Scripture quickly.

ACT:

Look in your Bible for a concordance and look through it. Search for different words and phrases related to the issues that you often struggle with the most. Commit those Scriptures to memory.

Read John 15:1-7.

Describe the promise that Jesus speaks of in this passage. Also, what is required of you?

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD

Sometimes our faith feels like we are doing everything we can to draw near to God but all of a sudden something pops up that takes us off course and throws us totally out of whack. Fortunately, God is faithful to pursue us; he doesn't just sit around waiting for us to get to him.

The importance of establishing habits and patterns such as prayer, regular accountability with friends, more Bible reading, and connections to Christian adults cannot be over stated. These spiritual disciplines are essential in staying connected to God.

What are some specific ways that draw you near to God?

What things in your life seem to push you away from God?

THE WORLD THINKS:

It's good enough to go to church on the weekend, if that's your thing, but you don't need to do anything else during the week. Religion is just one piece to your busy schedule; don't let it consume every part of your life.

Read Hebrews 10:19-23.

How can you ensure that you do more "drawing close" and less "pushing away" this year?

ACT:

There are a lot of ways you can draw near to God. One idea: Spend a day in silence without a phone or connected device, and go to a place where you can pray, read Scripture, journal, and simply listen to God. If you don't know of a place, ask someone at your church to give you some suggestions.

LEAVING A LEGACY

All of us leave something behind. You may be passing off 1st chair in trumpet, handing off the football to the next quarterback, or inaugurating the next school president.

A lot of schools give seniors a chance to "leave a legacy" for younger students. In some cases it's a page in the yearbook where you dedicate things to others, and in other schools it's an entire wall where each senior has his or her own square to leave things. However it's done, this is a pretty neat practice.

What is some form of legacy you will be leaving behind?

Where is God in your legacy?

As a senior you have a place of influence and some power at your school. What if you took that influence and reached out to some younger students and gave them a place and a voice that they wouldn't normally have? How might you be able to change the lives of others by using the gifts and placement that you have as a senior? Oftentimes seniors just want to hold on to the power because they've finally gotten it after three years of high school—but what if your whole goal was to simply give it away and to bless other people with it? That would change things.

How might your legacy bless people and change their world?

What could you do as a senior to give away power and control to younger students now?

THE WORLD THINKS:

No one did it for you, so why should you try to help out younger students now? Make them wait in line like you did. That's how it's always worked.

ACT:

Think about the students who were ahead of you at your school—maybe even decades ahead. What were some good legacies they left behind that have blessed you? Think about how you might be able to bless other younger students—both at school and at your youth group or church—and then do it.

Read Joshua 4:1-7

What was the purpose of the stones?

Read Psalm 71:17-18.

What should be the focus of your legacy?

What do you need to change to make the answer to the question above take place?

Transition to Senior Year

HEBREWS 10:24-25

WEEK

8

STARTING THE NEXT CHAPTER

Yes, you are about to start over. If you are heading to college, you will be a freshman again. Fortunately for you, it's a different kind of freshman. You aren't going back to what you were four years ago. The first year of college is a time of firsts again, but you likely won't encounter the same stigma attached to being new.

What are some things you are looking forward to during your first year after high school?

One cool thing is that you will have the freedom to decide if you want to be someone different. That doesn't mean faking a new personality; it just means you want to be different. You may want to start college with the decision to be more outgoing and social. On the opposite side you may decide to focus in on just a few great relationships.

You may have some things you want to leave behind in high school, or a struggle that you are walking away from. The first year after high school is a great time to do that. You won't carry any of your high school baggage, and you'll have a chance to make first impressions on a whole new crowd of people. What a great opportunity to advance the Gospel!

Do you think that you will want to make any changes to your personality or attempt things that are new or different? Why or why not?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You have the freedom to be who ever you want. Take advantage of that. Live life to the extreme, and don't have any regrets.

How do you think your faith can better intersect with your life after high school?

ACT:

As you are deciding what to do after high school, you also have the great freedom of choosing who you want to be. Sit down with a few friends that have recently graduated high school and ask them to share about their transition.

BUILDING NEW HABITS AND PATTERNS

You are hearing a lot in this study about things that will be new next year and how to leave stuff behind. The key to success after high school and to having your faith continue is creating new habits and patterns. Maybe you have attended church on Sundays or youth group because your parents drove you or a friend picked you up. Maybe you regularly got a text or phone call from a small group leader. They helped your faith by keeping you accountable and in a pattern.

What habits do you currently have that you think are good ones? How can you take them with you?

Those patterns likely will no longer exist when you leave. You will have to figure out new ones that work for you. Maybe for the first time you have the freedom to skip church on Sunday mornings because you found one that meets on Sunday nights, and that just feels better for you. Maybe you join a small group that meets at a different time during the week that fits your schedule better than the one you had in high school.

When you leave high school, be prepared to quickly establish a transformational community and healthy patterns for yourself or else it is almost inevitable that you will struggle. Most college and young adult pastors will say that if you don't establish solid transformational community and faith patterns in your first three weeks of college, you will have a significantly harder time figuring that out. The same idea holds true if you're heading to the military or moving to a different place to begin your career. Wow, that's a scary thought—but it's a reminder of the power of healthy habits and patterns.

What are some faith patterns you want to establish that will work for you next year? How can you work on them now?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Do whatever you want—and if it doesn't work, just change it. You have the freedom to make all kinds of choices and live however you want.

Read Hebrews 10:24-25.

What are some things you know will be a struggle? How can you put some strategies or habits in place now to help you handle them?

ACT:

As you plan what is next for you start doing research to find a church, ministry, or community of other Christ-followers that you can join. If possible, find a way to get there and meet people now. Anything you can do before you get there is a win.

MAKING YOUR OWN DECISIONS

When you leave high school you have all kinds of freedoms that come your way really quickly. You will need to do a lot of self-reflection to consider what you will do in a variety of situations because it's often tough to make wise decisions in the middle of those moments.

How confident are you that you can make the right decisions?

THE WORLD THINKS:

We all make mistakes. You will make a lot of them, but that's OK. Do it and move on.

When you make a wrong decision, how do you feel and respond?

Read Psalm 119:9-16, Proverbs 3:5-6, and James 1:5.

Describe the role that God and his Word plays in helping you make wise choices?

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU MAKE A DECISION:

- 1) What Biblical principles should inform my decision?
- 2) Do I have all the facts?
- 3) Is the pressure of time forcing me to make a premature decision?
- 4) What motives are driving my decision?
- 5) How should my past experiences inform my decision?
- 6) What is the collective counsel of my community?
- 7) Have I honestly considered the warning signs?
- 8) Have I considered all the possible outcomes of my course of action?
- 9) Could this jeopardize my integrity or hinder my witness for Jesus?
- 10) Is there a better option that would allow me to make a greater impact for God's kingdom?

ACT:

Take some time right now and write down various scenarios that you might experience next year—tempting situations, opportunities for new experiences, times you feel overwhelmed or confused, and so on. Do a little bit of writing next to each potential scenario about how you want to respond. This simple preplanning can go a long way to helping you make good choices in the moment.

Transition to Senior Year

COLOSSIANS 2:6-8

WEEK

9

CHOOSING YOUR PATH

Picking the right path is never easy. As a Christian, you have access to the Holy Spirit to lead you in the direction that God wants you to go. The longer you follow God's path, the more clearly you'll recognize the signs, see the footprints of those who've gone before you, and get to the place you want to reach.

How do you know when you are on the path God has for you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

All roads of belief and faith lead to the same place and the same end result, so feel free to do whatever you want because you will eventually get to where you are supposed to be.

Have you ever gotten stuck jumping on a particular path in life and been unable to get back to your starting point? How did you deal with that situation?

Are you on any paths right now that you wish you weren't? How can other people help you to get back on the right one?

We are often told that the right path in life is narrowly defined for us. Yet, that is not the way it always is. For example, you probably face multiple choices for college and career—it isn't a narrow path at all. The narrow path is the way of following Jesus but we have the joy of making choices to follow his narrow path in our career and future.

Read Psalm 16:11, Proverbs 23:19, and Isaiah 40:14.

How can Jesus guide you despite not being in person with you today?

TAKING YOUR FAITH INTO YOUR COLLEGE YEARS

Depending on what your plan is after you graduate you will have different obstacles in front of you as you take your faith with you into your college years. You may be going to a Christian college that includes a mandatory chapel and all kinds of opportunities to serve and stay close to God on campus. On the other hand you may be attending a school that is well known for limiting opportunities to stand up for your faith in Jesus.

Both of the scenarios present difficulties. If you don't build the skills now to get connected to a local church you may really struggle to get connected to a local church and college ministry.

What steps have you already thought about that will help you take your faith with you? What else could you do?

You may have a really solid faith, youth group, and church in high school and may already have plans to get connected in college. If that's the case then that is amazing. If you don't have that it will be much harder. What you are going to have to do is decide to commit and make it a major priority in your life.

THE WORLD THINKS:

It's OK to take a break from your faith and come back to it when you have kids of your own. That's what everybody does.

Read Colossians 2:6-8.

THERE ARE PEOPLE ALL AROUND YOU TRYING TO TELL YOU WHAT IS WRONG, IS RIGHT AND WHAT IS RIGHT, IS WRONG, DON'T BE FOOLED. —JOSEPH MCMURRY

Do you think being known as a Christian will limit the opportunities and fun you might have after high school? Why or why not?

ACT:

If your faith is important to you now, write a letter to yourself explaining why. Seal that letter up and ask your parents to mail it to you two months after you have gotten to college (or entered the military or moved to another community). Also, before you go, work with your church leaders to help you find a church where you are moving.

Here is some advice: Attend one church instead of going to a new week to week or a new one each year. Invest in yourself in one and allow the church to invest in you. Serve, lead a small group, play your guitar, care for others and build great relationships.

What is your reaction to this advice?

DECIDING WHAT TO TAKE WITH YOU

During the days leading up to leaving home, you will probably do a lot of shopping. You'll buy things such as laundry baskets, shower totes, bedding, and other essential items. (Unless, of course, you're going into the military—and then you'll be selecting just a few things to take with you!) You will have to make your room a "home," and you'll need a bunch of those types of things to live.

It's a little bit harder to decide what things to bring from your house or your room. It's not easy to simply pick a few things that will remind you of home, your family, and all your valued childhood and teenage memories—some photos and other things. Trying to encapsulate a life in a small box of trinkets is hard.

What objects remind you of those highlights and are special to you? Which ones do you think you'll take with you once you leave home?

It's easier to think about bringing memories, values, and hopes. These things have been instilled in you for years, and they're an important part of who you are. When a new friend walks into your room, they'll look at the pictures and the knickknacks. However, your memories, values, and hopes are your truly cherished items.

What are some of the values, memories, and stories you want to take with you to your new life?

Do you have any objects that are significant to your faith journey that would give you opportunity to share with a new friend what you believe? What are they and how can the start a faith conversation?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Don't take too much junk with you because you don't need it. You are going to make new friends and leave behind much of your past.

Read 1 Samuel 7:1-13

You may have not gone out into battle like Samuel did but there are certainly times when God has done something incredible in your life and you received a t-shirt, have a journal, a bracelet, or maybe a poster that symbolizes a milestone along the path of your faith journey.

How can taking something that symbolizes the milestones in your life in Christ fuel your faith when times are difficult?

Transition to Senior Year

WEEK

10

1 JOHN 4:11

ADJUSTING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARENTS

Everything changes when you leave home—whether that's for college, the military, or a career. Your relationship with your parents is one of the biggest changes. You won't have to check in with them before every decision or direction you go. They probably won't be asking about your homework or checking that you get enough sleep or seeing if you're eating well near as often. No one will be doing your laundry, buying groceries, or making appointments for you.

How do you think this transition away from your parents will be for you and for them?

For some people this is an incredibly scary thing, but for others it's clear that the time is right. A lot depends upon how your parents prepared you for this change or how much you anticipated it. When you return home on weekends or during holiday breaks, things will be different, too. Going back into your home can also cause tension and struggles.

Do you believe you are ready for this change now? If not, how can you get ready?

What role do your parents have in your faith? Are you ready to really, truly own your faith for yourself? Why or why not?

THE WORLD THINKS:

It's time to break free of the bondage of your parents' rules. Now you can do whatever you want. Enjoy the freedom and take full advantage of it.

Read Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:2 and Colossians 3:20.

On a positive note, it is easier to stay more connected than ever. You can ask your parents questions via text, cell, social media or email. You can use technology to ask for help with the needs you still have, while at the same time creating space and boundaries.

How can you honor your parents in this major transition in life?

ACT:

Start writing a letter that you will give your parents or guardians when you leave. Put some significant time into it, thanking them for all they have done for you and listing what they have taught you and why it's significant. Share with them the legacy that they have built in you and the things that you will always take with you.

MAKING NEW FRIENDS

Without a doubt your college friends and community that you participate in will shape you. In particular, you have a tremendous opportunity for your faith to be strengthened a community of believers. Pray that God will put you exactly where you need to be and around the people you need to be with to help you grow.

What do you value about your current friends? How can you best find those things in new friends?

How can you best maintain friendships with your old friends while at the same time making new ones?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Most people don't have good friends. You're lucky if you have a couple in your lifetime. You shouldn't expect to make a lot of new ones after high school. Prepare to be alone.

Do you believe God can lead you to new friends? If so, how do you best think he can do that? If not, why?

ACT:

Before you finish high school, write out a list of what you value about your current friends. When you are heading off to your new life, keep this list close and look at it often for help, wisdom, and insight as you explore new friendships.

Read 1 John 4:11 and 3 John 1:2.

How can show that you care for your friends in a way that shows you really honor their friendship?

SAYING GOODBYE

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15.

It's never easy to say goodbye. Most likely you will always remember the moment your parents drop you off at college or you walk out the door. There will be a moment where you shut the door, sit on your bed, and just think about what happened. You will realize that everything is about to be different. It will probably be quite emotional, and you may need a few minutes to sit there and just think about it.

Who do you think is going to be the most difficult to say goodbye to? Why?

You may have already dealt with a number of goodbyes in your life. Perhaps you moved at some point and had to say goodbye to some special friends. Maybe you experienced a death in your family and faced the emotional experience of loss. We all deal with goodbyes in different ways. Some of us just want to get them over with as soon as possible; we can't wait for it to end. The opposite is true for other people, who draw it out as long as possible.

How much loss and change have you experienced in your life? How have those experiences affected you?

THE WORLD THINKS:

Just get over it and move on. Everyone deals with pain and loss.

One thing that's true with any goodbye, no matter what, is some sort of loss. When you leave home you are saying goodbye to family, friends, routines, patterns, safety, and security. You are embarking on a new journey where you will have to figure out all of those things on your own. Scary stuff, but this is exactly what you have been preparing for. This is where the adventure truly begins.

Describe some healthy ways of filling the void after the goodbyes?

ACT:

Write some goodbye notes—real ones with paper and pens, not electronic ones with text messages and social media. Tell people how much you will miss them and what their relationship means to you. Prepare them for the loss—you aren't the only one experiencing it.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:11.

LOOKING BACK

How do you feel now that you have completed this study?

So there you have it. You're a senior. You've spent a lot of time preparing for the future, and it is almost upon you. So now you are thinking, okay, now that I've completed this study, I know everything I need to know now, right?

Discipleship isn't about completing a study. It is about a lifestyle of learning and living as you follow Jesus throughout your lifetime. What you have learned throughout this study will become more important to your Christian life in the months, even years, to come. Think about some of the major concepts that you have learned and lived out.

- Thought through what the next year has in store for you.
- Discussed what it will be like have a whole year full of lasts.
- Examined how to make Biblical decisions.
- Began to ask the hard question of what God has planned for your life.
- Discussed the tension of what you want to do and God's calling for you.
- Learned how to handle the expectations of others for your life.
- Considered the people who you can turn to in a time of need.
- Discussed feelings of apprehension about the future.
- Learned how to handle disappointment.
- Considered the friendships that are most important to you and how to maintain them.
- Learned about the importance of strong mentors in your life.
- Considered how to use your gifts, talents and abilities.
- Examined the legacy you are currently leaving and what legacy you want to leave.
- Considered the importance of spiritual disciplines.
- Created a plan to thrive in your faith.
- Learned how to say proper goodbyes and maintain honorable relationships.

Wow! That's a lot! Now it's time to continue to live out what you have learned in this study.



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