



WHAT SENIORS NEED TO HEAR BEFORE THEY LEAVE

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For most recent graduates, life right after college is hard. I got an email from a recent alum, Devon, who described the transition as "the biggest beast he's ever had to go up against." And these words came from a guy who had nearly everything going for him – a nice paycheck, a girlfriend he loved, and a great community of friends. Despite what might have looked like the perfect life on the outside, Devon was struggling on the inside. He wrote with tears streaming, "Even with all of this great support, my first job and everything that comes with it has been more overwhelming at times...It's like nothing I've been through."

Devon is not alone in feeling this way. If you're in touch with alumni from your ministry, my guess is many of them agree that the first year or two out of college comes with challenges. While we cannot remove the obstacles, we can prepare our students by offering them timely wisdom before they leave. Here's what they need to hear from you:

Transitions are Tough!

As expert William Bridges notes in *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, transitions can be disorienting and distressing. Recent graduates need to know this is normal. Bridges likens the "in-between" time being in transition to tree without leaves in winter or a rest stop in music; it can feel fallow, life-less, and uncomfortably quiet. When they're in the middle of it, students may want to return to what was or run to what's next. They need reminders to not rush the transition, but to be fully present in it – grieving, reflecting, and paying attention to areas of potential character growth. God does some of his best heart work in us during transitional times.

Life is Not Linear

Students feel pressure to be on to the "next thing," and they often have fears about deviating from the cultural script (i.e. finish college, then get a 'good job' or go on for higher education). For example, last year I met with a senior, Eva, who was stressed about turning down an offer to graduate school. She wanted to learn more about herself and the program before committing, but she feared her deferral would set her back. She told her roommate, "I feel like I'm going to be behind if I don't go right way." Her roommate wisely asked, "Behind what?" Great question. Eva realized she didn't have to say "yes" for the sake of toeing the line or playing a part. In fact, her "no" freed her to pursue the Chattanooga Fellows Program – a decision she does not regret. While we don't want our recent alumni to wander through their twenties without taking steps forward, they need to know that life is not a linear progression from one thing to the next. There will be stops, set-backs, detours and delightful surprises!



Faithfulness Requires Intentionality

Students can avoid drifting for the next decade by being purposeful. While “intentional” has become a buzzword in Christian circles, we still pound it with seniors. If they want to connect to a local church, manage their money, make friends, find a mentor, live faithfully at work and so on, they will need to go after it. In contrast to college where almost everything is set up with their needs in mind, the next phase requires more intentionality. Students need to know that finding community may mean forcing themselves out of the rhythm of their week to attend a Bible study or company potluck. (Even if they’re exhausted and just want to binge on Netflix.) They need to know the onus on them now, and it’s go time!

Keep in Touch

While the responsibility to pursue faithfulness is theirs, students need to know they are not alone. They need to know we’re rooting for them and want to stay connected. To communicate this, we need to learn how to say, “Keep in touch” in a way that pushes beyond a cheap comment at graduation or an impersonal high-school-yearbook-type signature (like, K.I.T, Never change!) Our students will change after college. The need to know we expect the best of them, but also that they can reach out when they’re at their worst. Also, they need to know that our desire to stay in touch extends beyond our hopes that they will give back financially, valid as that may be.

It’s Going to Be Okay

If a student has a smooth transition out of college, they should give thanks. Those who don’t need to know it’s going to be alright. God is still God and they are still His. There’s no breakdown, burnout, or bad situation that’s too big for Jesus, the Redeemer. We can encourage our students with this prayer of Julian of Norwich, “...All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.” It really will be okay.

How do you encourage your seniors before they leave? What do you make sure you tell them?

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