

Will You Follow GOD After High School?

By Jeffrey Dean

Congratulations!

You are almost there! After years of fall breaks, Thanksgiving breaks, teacher in-service breaks, Christmas breaks, spring breaks, and summer breaks, the big break is finally just around the corner! School isn't just getting out for the summer; it's getting out for good. So get ready. It might not seem like it now, but soon you will shake your principal's hand, move that tassel, do your dance, and pose for the camera. Graduation will be here before you know it!

In the five years following high school, change will be inevitable in many areas of your life. You might move away from home, attend and graduate from college, choose a career and a spouse, develop life-long relationships, start a company, join a new church, travel or live abroad, purchase a house, buy a car, apply for a loan, and much more! More than ever you will have the freedom and responsibility to make your own decisions and set your own boundaries. During these years, big decisions that will affect the rest of your life and those closest to you will be yours for the making. Every choice matters!

Studies show that many teens, once leaving high school, often make the choice to leave behind their faith.

They stop praying. They stop reading their Bible. They stop going to church. The reasons? Rebellion. Uncertainty. Tragedy. The influence of professors, employers, and friends. Apathy . . .

If you are like most Christ-following teens, you are probably saying, "Not me. I'll never stop following Christ. I'll never leave the church." It's easy to say that now. But know this: More than anything Satan wants to bring you down. He would love for you to leave behind your faith post-graduation. And, he will work like mad to be successful. He knows that most everything in your life is about to change, and he would love to use this season of transition to get you off-course with God.

Of course, you can't control the unknown or unexpected, but you can position yourself so that, when change does happen, your response isn't to move away from God. As a heads-up on some of the potential challenges you will face post-graduation, here are five suggestions to help you remain a God-focused graduate:

1. Know What You Believe About God's Word

It is critical that you have confidence in what you believe. If you are not confident in what you believe and why you believe it, your belief system will be shaken by someone, something, or some circumstance. That's not to say your beliefs should never change. The fact is, each of us is wrong about some things. But one essential truth for us all is this: God's Word is true, real, and relevant for every area of life.

Second Samuel 22:31 tells us that God's way is perfect and that the Word of the Lord is flawless. Psalm 119:160 reminds us the entirety of His Word is truth and all His righteous judgments will endure forever. Everything begins here. If you don't believe the Bible is the inerrant (flawless, mistake-free) Word of God, then it's only a matter of time before you lose confidence in who God is and His ability to guard and guide your life post-graduation. You must know that you know that the Bible is the infallible (incapable of error) Word of God. Be confident in knowing the Bible isn't just a book of words. The Bible is absolutely the Word of God!

2. Know All Religions Aren't the Same

My English 101 professor in college really challenged my faith. She was not a Christian, and she believed we all were going to Heaven no matter what we believed. Her beliefs really forced me to solidify in my heart what Colossians 2:8 warns Christians about being taken captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy. This verse will be important for you after graduation.

Either in the classroom, in the dorm room, or at a future job, you too will be challenged. All religions are not the same. Some religious groups worship false gods. Some believe in God but don't believe that Jesus was His Son. Some believe Jesus was a real person but don't accept the fact that He died for us on the cross and was resurrected from the dead. Some don't believe the Bible is the infallible Word of God. Christianity accepts God as the only God and believes Jesus is the Son of



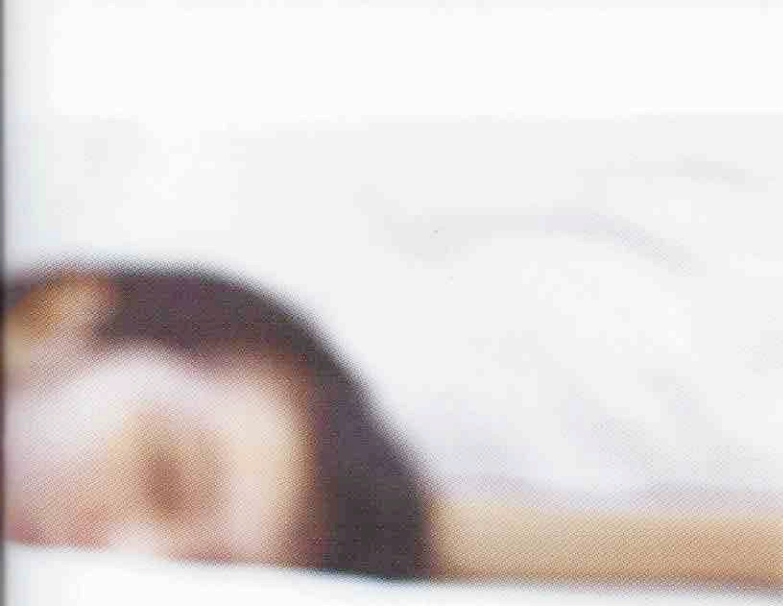
God, who came to earth, died for humankind, and conquered death by coming back to life and proving He is the one true Savior of the world. We believe the Bible is God's Word and the ultimate authority for everything we do. To be a Christian means one is a follower of Christ. Period!

3. Know That the Alarm Clock Won't Be Your Friend (Especially on Sunday)

My freshman year of college I found out Mom and Dad were no longer there to wake me up for church on Sunday mornings. I also found out it was a lot easier to keep hitting snooze (or not even setting the alarm the night before) than it was to get out of bed and go to church. My laziness really forced me to ask myself, "Is church really important?"

Have you ever considered why you attend church? People go to church for many reasons. Some attend out of a desire to know God better. Others attend church out of a sense of responsibility or guilt. Still others view church as a place to socialize or meet new people. There are many reasons you should go to church. The greatest of these is that you love God and desire to know Him more fully through worship, serving, growing in knowledge of Him, and fellowship with other believers.

You don't have to make the choice now of *where* you go to church after



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graduating, but you need to solidify in your mind the choice to go to church after graduating. Being confident in your beliefs about church will help make getting out of bed on Sunday mornings a priority and help you make the right choice about where and how often you will attend.

4. Know That It's All About Serving, Not Being Served

Worship style, attire, décor, and more are all issues you might want to consider when choosing a church. But more important than the question of "suit or jeans" or "organ or guitar" is your consideration of service. Get involved and serve!

Psalm 22:22 encourages churchgoers to declare His name and to praise Him in the congregation. What a great reminder not to fall into the trap of attending church for what church will do for you. One of the greatest privileges of going to church is to serve God and bring Him glory. As you plug in to a church to bring God glory, He will plug you in to places of service where you will impact the lives of others and honor Him.

5. Know That You Have to Focus on God to Be God-Focused

Think about this question: How much time have you spent with God in the past year of your life? Are you satisfied with the amount of time you give

Him each month? Each week? Each day? The more time you spend with Him, the more you get to know Him, His love, and His will for your life. It is impossible to stay God-focused if you are not spending time with Him.

Where do you see yourself in ten years? Where will you be working? What kind of car will you drive? What city will you live in? Who will be your spouse? What house will you buy? What investments will you make? What church will you serve in? How will you use your finances to support a family, give to church and charities, and save for retirement? These questions are just a few of the many big ones you will be asking post-graduation.

Do you have all the answers now? No, of course you don't. But guess who does? God *could* choose to give you the answers to all of your big questions today. But what fun would there be in that? There'd be no adventure, no surprises, and for sure no need for God if you knew it all ahead of time. This is why time with God matters.

Countless passages in Scripture give us proof that spending time with God works. The writer of Psalm 119:104-105 said that one gains understanding about God by reading His truths. Want to know the answers to the biggest questions about the rest of your life? A professor can't help you. Neither can your parents, your friends, your dates, or even Wikipedia. But God's Word can. Psalm 119 makes it clear that by spending time in the Word, you'll gain knowledge and understanding about what really matters most. With the potential of a new address, a new school, a new schedule, a new job, and new friends, your calendar might be a work in progress until you lock in your new rhythm. For a while, you will have to adjust your "God time" each day. But, the more you work to make a habit of it now, the more you will desire to spend time with Him post-graduation.

It is impossible to know what lies ahead for you. There will be moments when it seems there are no immediate answers to the questions you have about school, finances, marriage, a career, and more. This is where trust in God will be critical.

I wish someone had told me this important truth: You can't trust in the moment, the situation, or simply your feelings. But you can always trust that God has your best interests at heart. He has big plans ahead for you.

When you walk across that stage and finally wave goodbye to high school, do so with faith and determination to forever remain a God-focused graduate!



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