

College

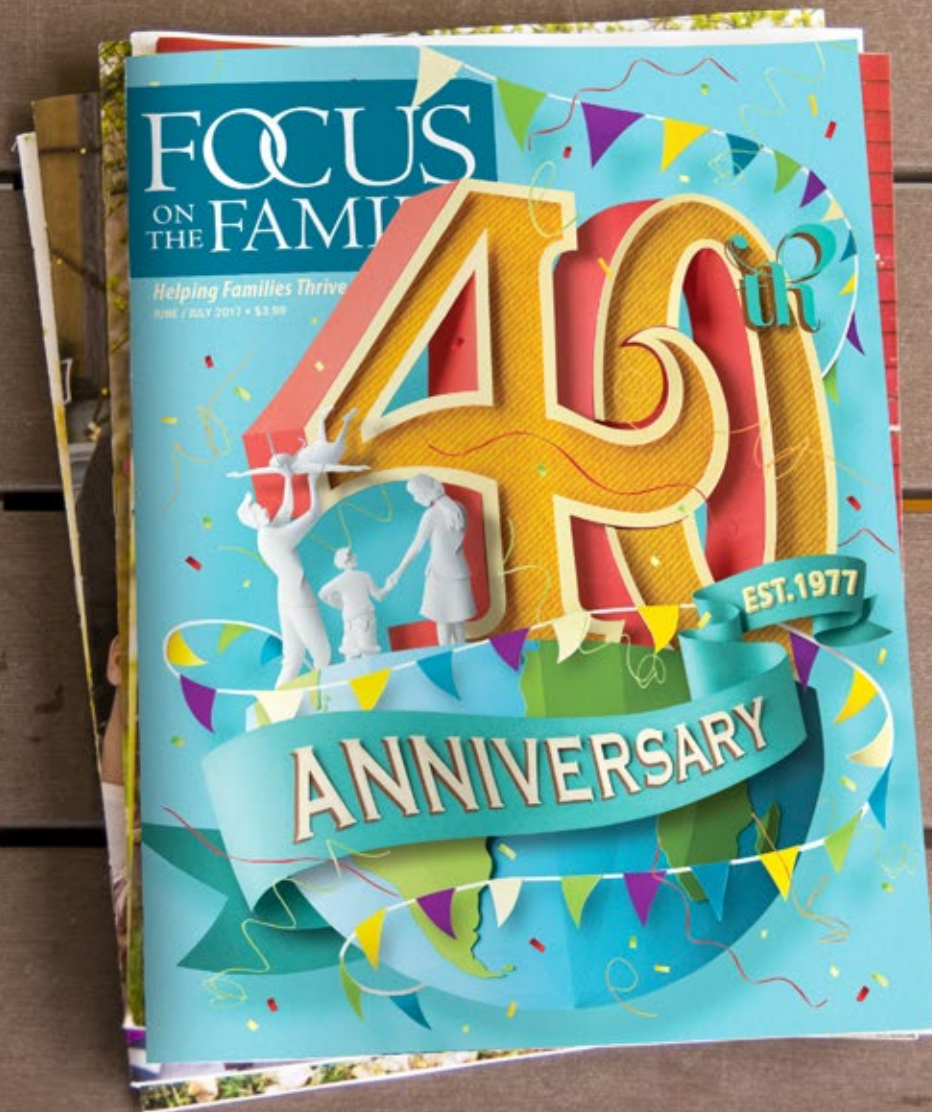
FALL 2017

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS & TEENS



The college
Payoff p.4

Getting
Ready
for college
p.15



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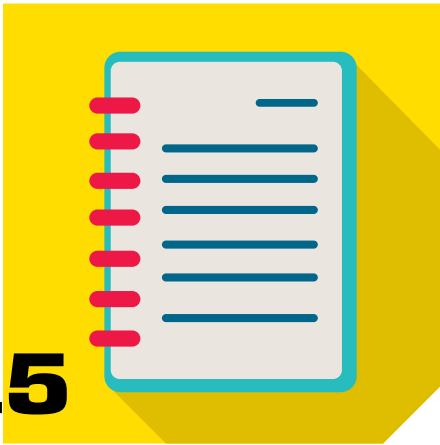
TOC



4

For Parents >>>

- The College Payoff **(04)**
- Choosing a Major While They're Still a Minor **(06)**
- Helping Teens Wrestle With Big Decisions **(10)**
- Letting Go **(12)**
- Junior & Senior Year Checklist **(15)**
- Life-Skill Training for High School Seniors **(18)**
- Help Your Teen Choose a College **(21)**
- Home-School Transcripts for 9th- to 12th-Graders **(22)**



15

For Teens >>>

- The College Maze **(33)**
- How to Survive College: part one **(37)**
- How to Survive College: part two **(41)**

U.S. Christian Colleges **(23)**



18



41

The College Payoff

by Jonathan McKee

What are the long-term benefits of a higher education?

“Why would I want to go to college and rack up \$40,000 in school loans?” Jake told his mom, after she mentioned—again—that he needed to get serious about filling out college applications. “I won’t make that much more than my friends who just got a job.”

Like Jake, many of today’s young people are pessimistic about their future. It’s no surprise, since all we read or hear about are the inflated costs of tuition, huge burden of debt and stories of 20-somethings with postgraduate degrees working at McDonald’s.

No wonder Jake doesn’t want to go to college. His understanding

about the rising costs and huge debt burden are right on the money (pardon the pun). Room, board, tuition and fees have increased significantly in the last few decades (by a total of 260 percent between 1980 and 2014). And the debt for college graduates has more than doubled in the last three years alone. The class of 2016 entered adulthood with their diplo-

mas and a hefty average of \$37,172 in student loan debt (compared to \$18,271 in 2013). These numbers can seem overwhelming.

But as former radio commentator Paul Harvey used to say, “Now for the rest of the story.”

The truth is most college grads are *not* working at McDonald’s, especially those who graduated with

a job-focused degree—teachers, engineers, accountants—and others who have the necessary education for a specific career. The Bureau of Labor Statistics recently showed a huge gap between incomes when you compare *current* educational attainment. For example, in 2015 a person with a bachelor's degree made an average of \$1,989 more per month than someone with just a high school diploma. (Pop quiz: How long does it take to pay off a \$40,000 school loan with \$2,000 a month in extra income?)

I recently met with two young people who were in their early 20s. One was a college grad working full time for a church, and the other was a high school grad who was complaining that he couldn't find anything but minimum-wage jobs. The college grad was recently offered a job for \$43,000 a year. The high school grad was barely earning \$20,000—if he could get 40 hours per week. His friend who dropped out of high school was making even less.

These are the dialogues we need to engage in with our kids. So when you encounter an article or news report offering insightful information that impacts their future, consider sharing it with your kids at dinner or at a time when you can engage with them. Then ask a simple question like, “Which of these roads looks better to you?” or “How relevant is this to your situation?”

These can be good conversation springboards as you help your teens figure out those important next steps into adulthood. ■

Jonathan McKee is the author of *If I Had a Parenting Do Over*.

Is College the Right Choice for My Teen?

While a college education often brings significant financial benefits, it's not necessarily the right choice for all teens. So how can you help your teen discover which path is best?

Ask the right question. To help teens explore their options, ask, “What are you interested in?” and not, “What do you want to be or do?”

Facilitate self-awareness. Do they like working with people or completing tasks? Are they happier indoors or out? Do they need variety in what they do? You may have noticed work preferences and skills that your teen never realized.

Introduce careers. Many teens have no idea about the broad range of careers available to them. Help your teen connect with people employed in different trades.

Research the options. Encourage your teen to visit the career counselor or resource center at school. Then set aside time to do online research together.

—Arlyn J. Lawrence

What Are the Options?

If college isn't right for your teens, or isn't right for them as a first step, help them explore other opportunities that fit their skills and interests.

Vocational schools offer training for skilled workers, such as mechanics, plumbers, electricians, surgical technicians, and more.

Apprenticeships are paid, on-the-job training. Teens learn the skills needed for a job from a master craftsman and receive certification.

The workforce allows full-time employees with a strong work ethic to gain experience before deciding on a career path.

Military service allows teens to discover their skills, serve their country and gain job training, though it includes the possibility of being placed in areas of danger. And the GI Bill will help with college costs in the future.

—Arlyn J. Lawrence

for parents



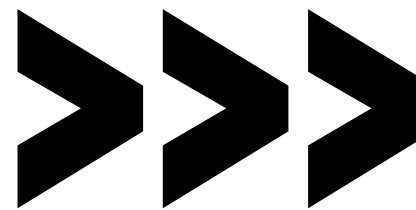
Choosing a Major



Help teens decide on a direction before starting college by Dr. John Townsend

Your teen is nudging up to the finish line of childhood and preparing to launch into early adulthood. It is a key point of development. Though your teen and her classmates may already seem to be independent, high school seniors need the guidance of their parents, especially when they are choosing their “initial” major in college. Although lots of choices are a good thing, teens often struggle in the process because there are too many possibilities.

While They're Still a Minor



Your job is to mitigate the risk of a poorly chosen major, as much as you can, so that your teen lands on an academic goal that fits him or her and can be useful in life. After all, it can be discouraging for a student to graduate from college with a degree that offers few job opportunities or that has little value to the young adult—a major that he never intends to use. Consider these six ways to help:

Draw a timeline

We all need to understand our past and prepare for our future. The past helps us see our patterns, strengths, successes, challenges and choices so we can maximize the good and minimize the struggles going forward. If we don't think deeply about our future, we move forward without a plan and quickly learn we're not ready for it.

That is why parents should take their teen through a timeline. Simply draw a line on poster paper, with a segment for each year of your teen's life so far. Then add 10 segments for the future. More or less, you end up with 28 years.

Ask your teen what he has learned about himself—his strengths, weaknesses and interests—in the first 18 years and what that might mean for the next 10. You'll be surprised by the conversations this starts, and your teen will begin engaging at a deeper level about what will really matter in college.

Discuss purpose

Before launching into an exercise in determining a major, help your teen think through the question of "Why college anyway?" There are many viable paths that lead to successful careers, so instead of assuming college, discuss why she should embark on this path in the first place. Ultimately, this path must provide some serious value: maturity, a broader view of the world, a way to earn a meaningful living.

Consider marketability

Once you've determined that college is the right path, discuss the very real possibility of earning an unmarketable degree. There are some sad stories about this, where a graduate had to start at the bottom of some industry with no help from his degree. Identify your teen's areas of interest and how each could be developed into a career. What education would it require? This brainstorm may help identify a marketable degree.

With some exceptions, the best reason for pursuing a degree with little marketability is that the student has a clear commitment to graduate training such as in business or medical school, which is built on a broader bachelor's degree. A degree that is interesting but offers no advantage in the workplace may not be enough to sustain the student.

Interview others

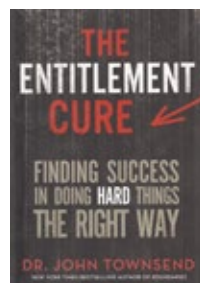
Have your teen interview people who are seniors in college and who are five or fewer years past high school graduation. They can provide great feedback on how they decided on their majors. Many of us, myself included, didn't get serious about this until our junior year in college. Your teen may be able to shortcut that process by hearing from those whose process is still fresh in their minds.

Give options, not recommendations

This is the hard part for parents: Resist the temptation to recommend majors. Your teen needs to hear options from you, but she also needs to feel some sense of ownership and discovery for herself. Otherwise, you run the risk of her not choosing a good path simply because you pushed a major too hard. So instead of saying, "You're so good with science; why don't you go pre-med?" say, "Let's look at all the majors that fall in your science strengths and even consider the ones that just seem interesting."

Allow your teen time to mature

I started this article with the term *initial major* for a reason. College does provide space and time to change majors as your teen matures. Don't let him fall into the obsessively anxious habit of thinking he has to get it right the first time. Remember that God has a plan for your teen that fits him perfectly, just as He does for you. Trust Him for that. ■



Dr. John Townsend is a psychologist, university professor and the author of *The Entitlement Cure*.

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Helping Teens

Wrestle With Big Decisions

by John Ortberg

Years ago, when I was a young man trying to choose a vocation, I prayed fervently for direction in that big decision. I remember being frustrated to the point of tears. I wanted a clear sign. “God, just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it,” I prayed. “I don’t even really care what it is. I just want You to tell me what Your will is.”



Cricket.

This wasn't the last time I'd face God's apparent silence on an issue. Rarely when I have faced one of life's big "which door" decisions has the choice been simple for me.

Having raised three children, and having met hundreds of other young adults wanting to seek God's will for their lives, I believe this is a common issue. Teens wrestle with choosing electives or sports, selecting a college and major, whether to date someone and what job to take. Many pray earnestly over these big decisions, believing that God should have—and should *give*—the final word. But I believe that often these prayers are not fundamentally about seeking God's direction, but about a desire that the decision itself will just be easier to make.

Indeed, for years after my "What should I do with my life?" conversations with God, I did not realize that what I had been actually looking for wasn't so much "God's will for my life." What I was really looking for was a way to be relieved of the anxiety that comes with taking responsibility for making a difficult decision.

God is a door opener, not a celestial enabler. And as we help children wrestle with life decisions, I think we need to help them understand an important truth: God's primary will for you is the person you become.

The apostle Paul says that God "chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Ephesians 1:4). In other words, we must help our kids recognize that God's primary will for their lives is not what they do or where they live or who they marry or how much money they'll make; it's *who they become*. God's basic plan for our teens' lives is that they become people of excellent character and divine love. That's what words like *godly* and *holy* (which too often become religious clichés) actually point to.

Making decisions is an indispensable tool in the formation of excellent persons. A big part of our job as parents is not to just make decisions for our kids, but to help them develop the capability to make those decisions themselves. Can you imagine if we always had to command our kids' life and decisions? (You may be thinking, *That sounds like my parents*, in which case you may need to see a counselor. Or you may be thinking, *That sounds like a great arrangement!* in which case your children should see the counselor.)

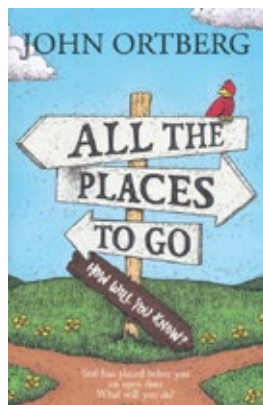
For parents whose desire is that their child become a truly good person, they will often *insist* that the child make his or her own decisions. Persons of excellent will,

judgment and character get formed no other way.

I think the same is true of how God works to develop character. Indeed, God's will for a person's life will often be "You decide." Sometimes you will ask heaven for direction, and God will say something that amounts to "I don't care." That doesn't mean God doesn't care about us. It means that God cares more about a person's character than colleges and cars and careers—which is of course what we would expect from a truly loving God.

Don't get me wrong here. Sometimes God really does have a specific assignment for someone—like Moses taking on Pharaoh—and God is perfectly competent to make this clear. When the burning bush is necessary, the burning bush will be there. But much of the time, wisdom itself will help our young people know the right course—if there actually is a "right" choice—in these big decisions.

A lack of guidance from heaven regarding which door to choose does not mean either God or someone has failed. Very often it is just the opposite: God knows we grow more from having to make a decision than if we were to get a clear, commanding memo from heaven that would prevent us from growing at all. ■



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But this is a different day. The relationship we have with our children is dramatically different from what many of us experienced with our own parents. Today we are more involved in our children's lives, and many families now function like a team. We are, after all, the minivan generation, shuttling from soccer tournaments to ballet lessons to birthday parties.

This team concept of family doesn't take a break when our teens begin their college search. We offer guidance about their field of study, geographic location, tuition and

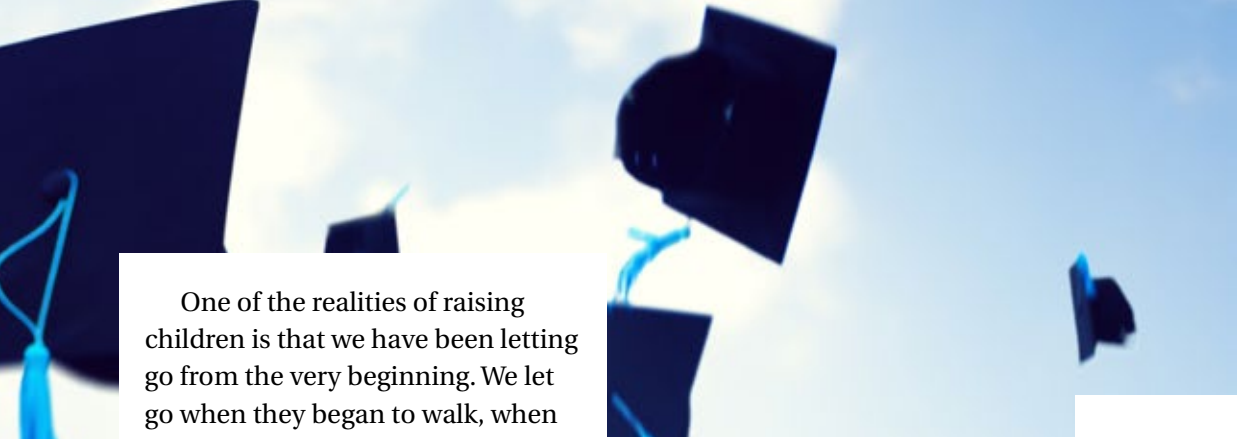
Letting go

by Dane Anthony


I joke that when I moved to college, I was thankful my dad actually stopped to unload my stuff. He attended college on the GI Bill, fully on his own, so the conversations we had about preparing for my own college experience were minimal. I felt I was on my own as much as he had been.

financial aid, even roommate preference—each decision becoming an extension of the shared “family hope.” As parents, we have a strong sense of what is important because we know this soon-to-be college student better than anyone else. That said, our commitment to making the college search a shared adventure includes learning to let go.





One of the realities of raising children is that we have been letting go from the very beginning. We let go when they began to walk, when they learned to ride a bicycle, when they started school. This process continues until we find ourselves sitting across the kitchen table from our teen with a stack of college brochures between us, wondering how we got here so quickly.



As a father and college administrator, I believe the key to letting go is found in changing the lens through which we see our kids. We need to see them for who they are: young adults on the verge of independence. It's not about literally letting go of our children, but letting go of our attachments. Think about the roles you have become attached to: confidant, adviser, personal assistant, alarm clock, nurse, ATM . . . the list goes on. Some of these roles will naturally begin to change as our teens prepare for college, but for our relationships with our teens to thrive, we must intentionally begin to release our hold.

Your job as a parent is never over, but your job description is changing daily.

To help you identify your attachments, be mindful of the ways you dialogue with your teen—beginning with the college search process and continuing with the actual college journey. Ask yourself: *Am I talking with my teen about her plan or to my teen about my agenda for her?* It's easy to speak from your attachments when they're born out of great hope and desire for your child to succeed—or at least not make the same mistakes you did. Potentially, though, these attachments may impede relational, emotional and spiritual growth for both of you.

I suggest sitting down with your teen to talk about the ways your relationship has changed since high school began. Then, I encourage you to compose your own lists of the ways you anticipate your relationship transitioning when she goes off to college. Talk about what you

discover. I've often found that issues causing tension or disagreement are rarely related to college selection or choice of a major. They are most often related to the attachments we just don't recognize. The longer we hold on to these attachments, the more difficult and tumultuous the transition will become.

I understand that parents are not designed to easily let go; I also understand that during the last years of high school, both parents and teens can be free to pursue who they are each designed to be. I believe it is our task to love our teens well by letting go.

Just think of it this way: Your job as a parent is never over, but your job description is changing daily. For your teen to thrive in college, and for you to thrive in his absence, he must move toward a new sense of self-competency, believing he is capable of taking care of himself. His ability to navigate this path with you now, as you give advice and direction rather than steering the ship, is an essential part of building the confidence needed to embark on this college adventure. ■

Dane Anthony's over-25-year career in higher education includes service as a faculty member, university minister and associate dean of students.



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During my son's junior year, he grew moody whenever someone mentioned graduation or college. After cautious probing, I discovered that he was overwhelmed by the college search and application process. And no wonder. The pressure to earn an impressive GPA, plus the community and extracurricular activities needed to "pad" a college application, pile enormous weight on a teen's shoulders. Fortunately, parents can help alleviate the stress.

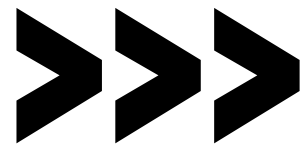
Junior & Senior Year Checklist

by **Bethany Macklin**

Coming alongside your teen is a powerful way to relieve his anxiety. After I realized the source of my son's frustration, I reassured him that we would tackle the college prep process together. His relief was palpable.

The first thing we did was create an action plan for his junior and senior years. I encouraged him to focus on one thing at a time, breaking everything into manageable chunks by listing items according to their due dates. This enabled him to see at a glance what was due and where he was in the process.

A teen's to-do list may look something like this:



Junior year

□ Make a list of possible colleges. Since your teen has to start somewhere, have him make a list of local, small, midsize and big-name colleges that he's heard about or might want to attend. Why a college is listed isn't important. Its sole reason for being on the list might be because a friend's sister once said that it was the best college ever. Making the list helps start the process.

□ Discuss strengths and passions—without forcing a career decision. Talking with teens about their strengths and passions helps them get an idea of which colleges to explore. Then focus on schools that feature those subjects. This alleviates the pressure of choosing a career while they are narrowing their college list.

□ Determine an academic plan. With a high school counselor's help, check your teen's class schedule against the required college admission basics and make any necessary adjustments.

□ Strategically choose extracurricular opportunities. Since many colleges expect extracurricular involvement, start with activities your teen is already involved in, such as church outreach and assisting elderly neighbors. Then consider additional opportunities to pursue that wouldn't pile too much on your teen. Keep a running list of these activities along with the contact information of the person with whom your teen worked. When the time comes to fill out scholarship applications, write résumés or acquire letters of recommendation, this list will be a handy, time-saving reference.

□ Take SAT and ACT exams. Some colleges have a preference, so encourage your teen to take the appropriate exams. Scores often go up when an exam is taken a second time, so discuss this possibility. Schedule the exam dates and choose the best resources to prepare for them. (Some resources can be found at local libraries, and friends can also swap their resource guides.)

□ Select a handful of colleges. Encourage your teen to shoot for one dream college and include a few other colleges easily within his grasp, such as community colleges and local universities.

□ For sports scholarships: Throughout your teen's junior year, compile enough video to create a DVD of his play. Once you and your teen fill out the recruitment form found on the college's athletic pages, have your teen email the coach to introduce himself, explain why he would be a good fit for that program and tell when he will be in tournaments the coach might attend.

Senior year

Gather a group of trusted advisers. Meet with his high school counselor and financial-aid officers to keep abreast of scholarships, opportunities and deadlines. Use additional resources online that the counselor suggests. Free online resources can provide handy to-do lists, career exploration and college financing options.

Narrow college choices to three or four and apply. This should be based on financial, social and educational considerations, along with whether your teen would like to go to the campus.

Visit college campuses. Most colleges offer special weekends for high school students to visit. Encourage your teen to take advantage of these.

For sports scholarships, register with the NCAA Eligibility Center. Although this process can't be completed until the end of your teen's senior year, you can start early so coaches can view your teen's eligibility to play college sports.

Request final transcripts. Once all the work is done, your student will need to request that his final transcript be sent to the college of his choice, some scholarship foundations and the NCAA Eligibility Center, if he's an athlete.

Make connections. After your teen receives his college acceptance, check out the school's Facebook page or student blog to connect with other incoming freshmen. It eases the transition by providing teens with the chance to make friends before arriving on campus.

Your teen doesn't have to have his entire life mapped out. Pray together throughout each stage of the process and remind your teen that God is in control and will take care of his future; he doesn't have to have all the answers now. ■

Bethany Macklin is a freelance author and speaker.





Life-Skill Training for High School Seniors

by Susan Alexander Yates

We had five kids in seven years, so after our oldest reached her senior year of high school, my husband and I felt as though we were constantly getting somebody ready to leave. Just as we were moving one into a dorm, we were looking through college catalogs with the next one.

And it all happened far too fast. I wasn't sure that I was ready or that they were ready. . . .

I've found that when a child begins his senior year, we begin a countdown. Our time with him is limited, and we wonder, *What do we need to do this year to get him ready to leave?*

4 goals will be helpful as you prepare your teen for the transition:

1. Turn over personal responsibilities.

By senior year, our teens should be doing their own laundry.

My friend's son called home during his freshman year at college, wondering, "Why did my T-shirt shrink and turn blue when I washed it?"

Because his mom had always done his laundry, my friend's son didn't know about separating colors or washing in cold water. Our kids will have enough adjustments on campus; they don't need to stress over small things like laundry.

High school seniors should be making and keeping all of their own doctor's appointments. If they get charged a penalty fee for forgetting an appointment, it's up to them to pay and to reschedule.

2. Train in financial management.

Our teens need to maintain a running balance of their bank account. If they have a credit card, they must pay it off each month and understand the ramifications of interest if they don't. The same is true of debit accounts; teens need to know their limit and not rely on overdraft protection. They also need to learn to tithe and save.

Parents should clearly define what they will pay for and what their teens will be responsible for during the senior year of high school and the first year of college. This will help to avoid misunderstandings.

3. Reinforce the importance of manners.

When our teens receive a job interview or a recommendation letter from an adult, they need to express their gratitude. The director of youth ministry at our church told me that he has written approximately 25 references for high school seniors this year. However, he received only six thank-you notes.

Good manners demonstrate the character traits of thoughtfulness and respect—crucial life skills.

4. Encourage your teen's faith.

Begin the college search with prayer. Make a list of possible schools, then pray as a family for His guidance. A rejection letter just might lead your child to God's best.

Encourage your teen to participate in youth ministries that will help prepare him for college. And while you're visiting schools, be sure to attend Christian fellowship meetings on campus.

Letting go is hard for parents. We have to remember that God is not letting go of our children; He is going with them, and He will continue to help them grow. Our job is to pray and to trust in a heavenly Father who loves our children even more than we do.

Approach this last year of high school with a sense of celebration and confidence. Yes, you will be sad when your teen leaves home—but try to share your teen's excitement about his next adventure. Communicate, "I am confident in you," even if you are scared and uncertain. Our teens need our encouragement. Independence and confidence grow gradually, but as we take steps this year to equip our teens, they will make great strides toward their future. ■

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Susan Alexander Yates speaks nationally and internationally on marriage, parenting and women's issues. She is the author of 13 books, including *And Then I Had Teenagers*.



Help Your Teen Choose a College

What you both need to know

by **Jeanne Gowen Dennis**

My daughter, Christine, didn't have a clear direction for choosing a college. Throughout her junior and senior years, she searched catalogs, discussed options with friends and admissions counselors, and attended college information days—but no school seemed right. She felt overwhelmed by the pressure of making a decision that would affect the rest of her life.

To help her make the right choice, my husband and I prayerfully guided her in three distinct ways: fostering an understanding of her gifts and personality, helping her match a college's focus to who she was, and assisting her in facing the realities of finances and other practical factors.

Discover a teen's unique talents

As a parent, I recognized that Christine would need a college that fit her spiritually, academically and socially because it would be more than just an education: It would be her final preparation for adulthood. We first considered her strongest school subjects—music, history and English—but she didn't seem to prefer one over the others.

To help her better understand herself, my husband and I gave her questions to answer privately:

- What have been your most fulfilling experiences?
- What did you enjoy most about them?
- Which skills or talents did you use most during these experiences?

- Do you prefer working alone or on a team?
- What ages do you enjoy working with most?
- Which have been your least-fulfilling activities?
- What made them unfulfilling?
- What ideas or activities excite your imagination and inspire you to make a difference for others?

Once Christine viewed herself through her activities and experiences, she was ready to discuss the strengths, talents and weaknesses that my husband and I had observed in her.

After much prayer, she realized that she loved working with teens, wanted to influence the culture for Christ and felt most fulfilled when she participated in drama, music or dance.

Match the school's strengths to the student's

College choices involve many factors. One is how a child will fit into a specific school. For Christine, we ranked what she wanted in a college from most to least important. The

most important ranked something like this:

- an atmosphere that would strengthen her faith and deepen her biblical worldview
- professors who wouldn't intentionally undermine her belief in God
- a godly approach to the teaching of the arts

Next we considered majors that matched Christine's strengths, which turned out to be theater, music and communications. Then we looked at each college's academic strength in those majors, along with its location, size, affordability, available scholarships, extracurricular opportunities, student-teacher ratio and graduate employment success rate. Much of this information was readily available online.

From all that, we were able to narrow our search to a handful of colleges. Before spending time and money on applications, Christine narrowed her choices to four schools that we could visit.

Sometimes visits reveal how a teen's perception differs from the school's reality. While prospective-student weekends are a good place to start looking at colleges, we found parent-child visits to the campus on regular days invaluable. During these visits, Christine stayed in a dorm and attended classes with students.

Face financial and other realities

Throughout her search, Christine remained aware of the realities she faced. My husband and I talked frankly with her about finances:

what we could provide and what she would be responsible for. Together we weighed the potential value of each college with its overall cost.

Christine also considered holidays she might miss at home and the cost of traveling back and forth from out-of-state schools. As she vacillated, my husband and I were tempted to make the decision for her, but I'm glad we didn't. (One of Christine's friends attended a college her father chose for her, and although she did well there, she confessed later that she was unhappy.)

Ultimately, the best strategy for

choosing the right college is early and continual prayer for God's guidance. Once Christine accepted the idea of leaving the state, her choice was obvious. She attended an out-of-state Christian college and became a high school theater director.

Recently, my husband and I watched a musical that Christine directed with her students. As we witness the impact she has on her students' lives and on her own children, I'm glad we took time to pursue God's plan for her college career. ■

Home-School Transcripts for 9th- to 12th-Graders

by Jeanne Gowen Dennis

If your home-schooled children plan to pursue higher education, you'll need accurate records of their high school performance. Some colleges and universities accept portfolios, but without a transcript, home-schooled kids might not receive equal consideration.

If your child is a student athlete, keep in mind that the NCAA requires traditional transcripts from home-schoolers—including grades, units of credit for courses and the grading scale used.


Writing a transcript isn't difficult, especially if you keep good records during high school. Begin the transcript when each child starts ninth grade and keep it up to date. When students apply to colleges, much of the work will be already done. ■

Jeanne Gowen Dennis is the author of *Homeschooling High School: Planning ahead for college admission*.

Simplify your home-school record keeping with our easy-to-use home-school transcript template. See page 46.


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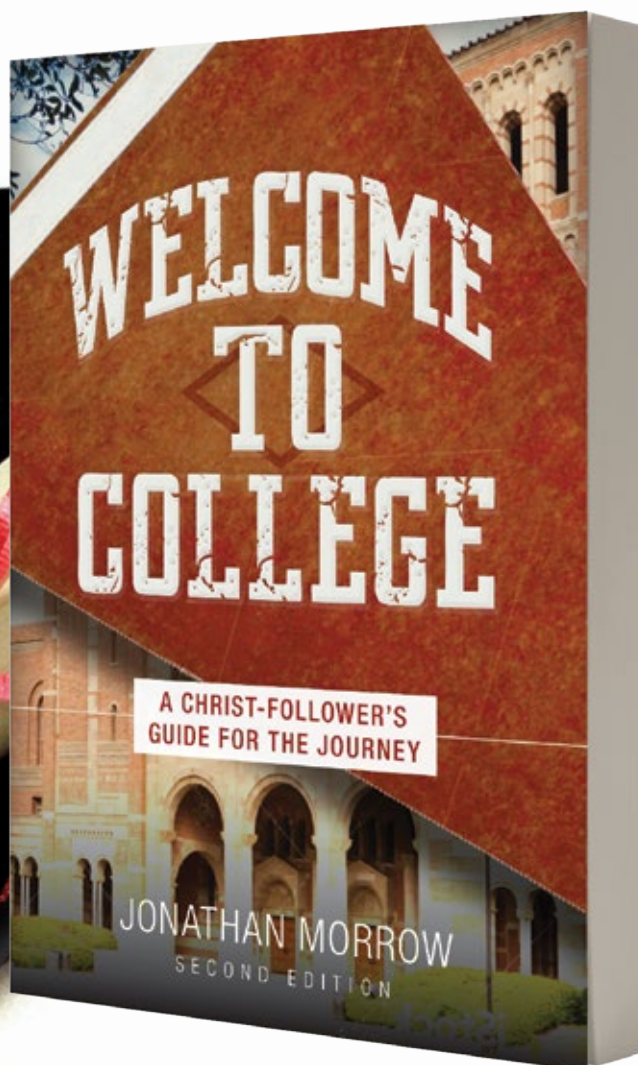
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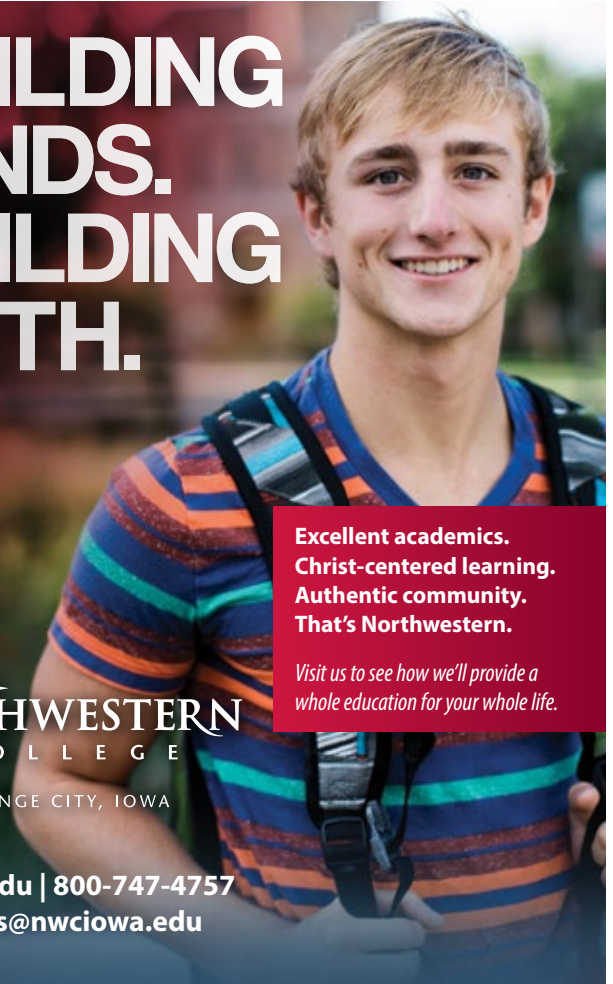
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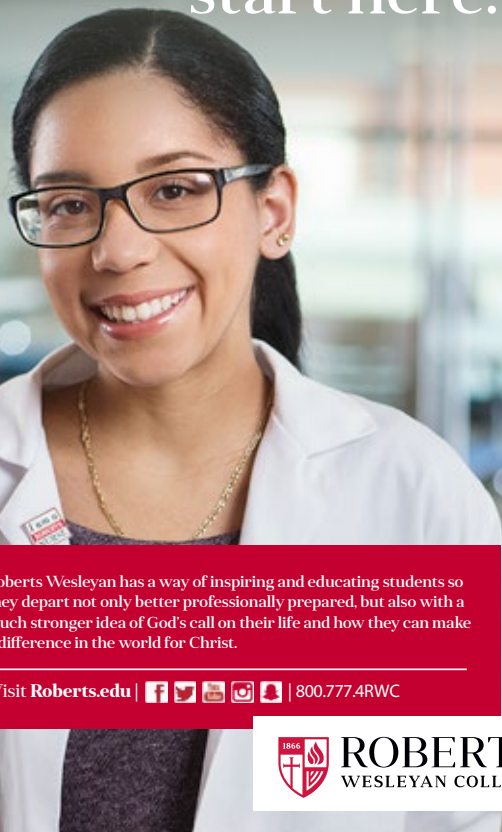
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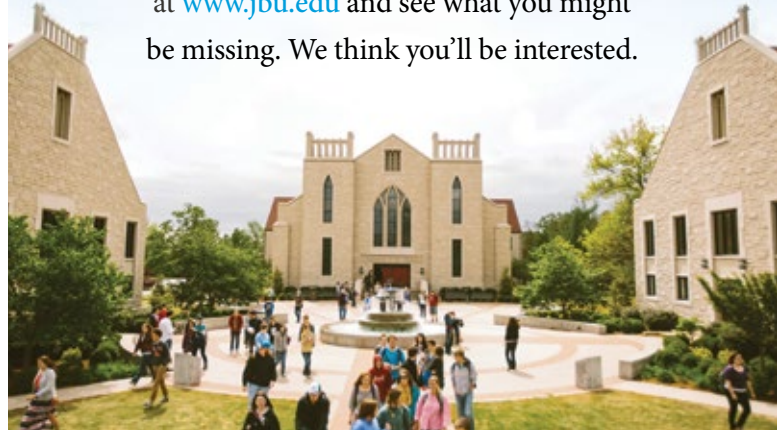
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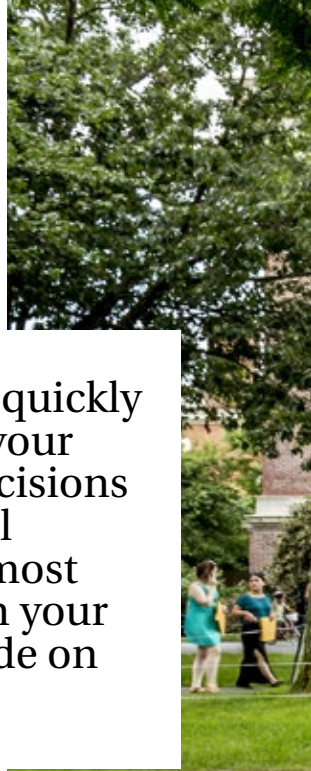
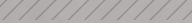


The College Maze

by Susie Shellenberger

Should you wear your Nikes or flip-flops to school today? Grab a burger or a salad for lunch? Go out for volleyball and basketball or just volleyball? Sign up for Computers I or Spanish II?





So many choices! Some things you can quickly decide by yourself, and others require your parents' input. There are even some decisions that are so major you don't have control over them. But guess what—the three most important decisions you'll ever make in your life are three that you can actually decide on your own!

Super-Important Stuff

The first most important issue you'll ever decide is:

What am I going to do with Jesus Christ?

This decision will affect not only the rest of your life but also your eternity. Here are the options:

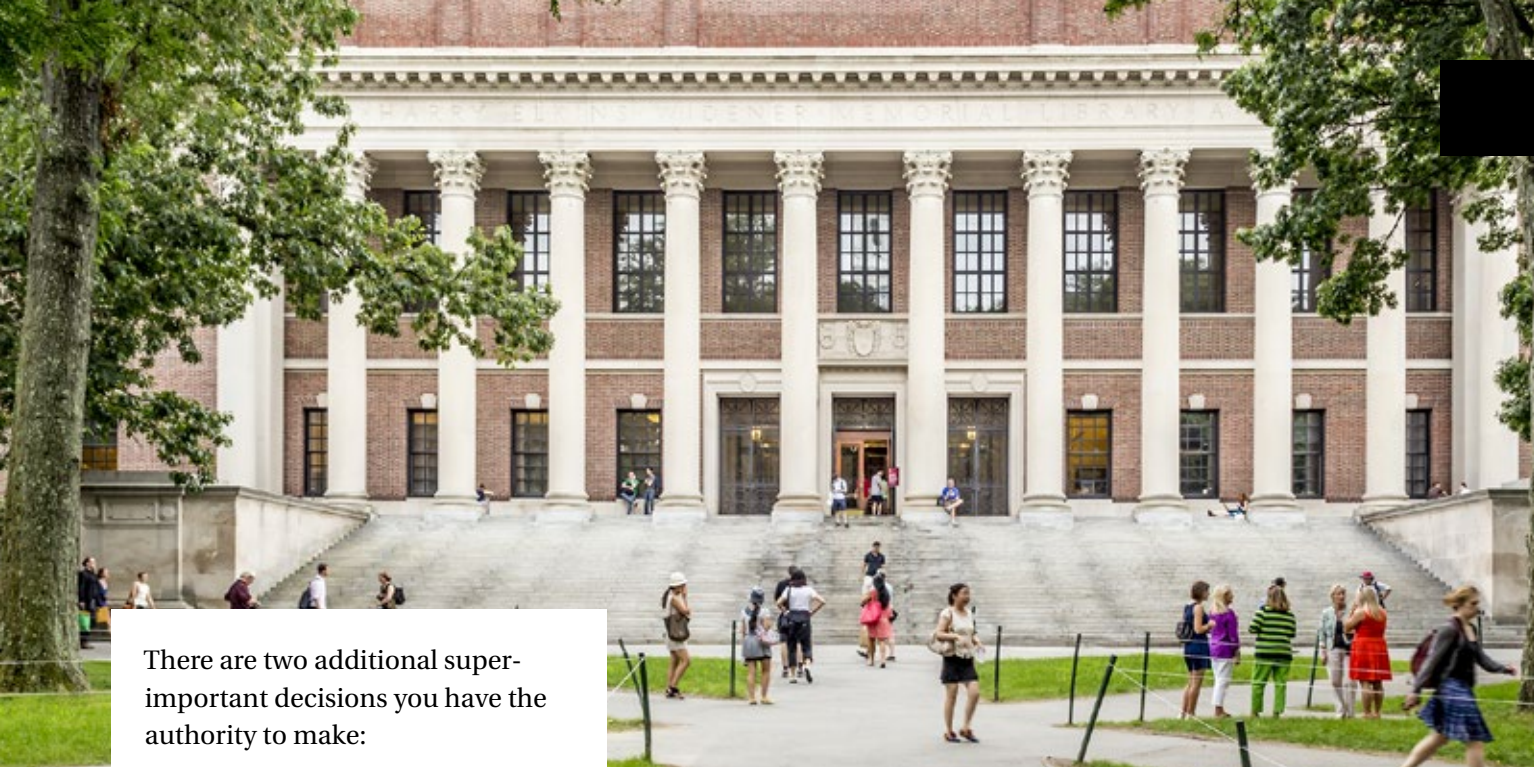
- I believe Jesus is who He claims to be—the Son of God—and that He died for my sins, rose from the grave and is alive right now, wanting to empower me to live a holy life. I choose to believe that if I repent of my sins and accept His forgiveness, I can have the free gift of eternal life. As I obey God daily, I will grow spiritually and deepen my walk with Him.
- I believe Jesus was a good person whose influence lives on today. Because I also want to be a good person, I'll go to church, read my Bible occasionally and do my best to treat others fairly.
- I will not submit control of my life to a God I can't even see. I choose to call my own shots, ignore Jesus Christ and face the eternal consequences.

No one else can decide for you how you'll react to God. You have complete power to make your own choice. But remember . . . your answer will affect everything that concerns you.



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There are two additional super-important decisions you have the authority to make:

What will I do with my life?

With whom will I spend the rest of my life?

How you answer these two questions will affect another major area of your life—and that is where you'll go to college. You may be looking at other options after high school—a trade school, joining the family business, etc. I realize not everyone wants or is able to go to college. And frankly, not everyone needs to.

Still, it's a good idea to go if you can afford it, and if you do, there are a few things to think about. But before we head off to a university, let's chat for a few seconds about these two questions.

When you're in high school, it's easy to think that God's plan for your life means what you'll do for a career. That's actually only a small part of God's plan for your life. Though your career is important to God, He's just as concerned about

how you live each day of your life as He is about how you earn a paycheck. But, if you're like most teens, you're already starting to think about your career. And that's OK. Just don't get so caught up in the future that you forget the importance of today. It's great that you're already thinking about your career because that makes up much of how you'll spend the rest of your life. Chances are, God will lead you in the direction of your interest and skills because He's the One who placed them inside you. But I hope you'll have a tender, willing, obedient heart—a heart that says, "Jesus, these are the things I'm interested in, but I place these areas under Your control. I'm willing to go wherever, do whatever and be whomever You call me to be. You are Lord."

SO WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH COLLEGE?

Oftentimes the career you choose will be greatly influenced by the college or university you attend. And where you spend the next four years of your life can have a major impact on whom you choose to spend the rest of your life with.

DOES THAT MEAN I SHOULD GO TO A CHRISTIAN COLLEGE?

Not necessarily. It means you should spend a lot of time praying about where God wants you to go—starting now—way before it's even time to select a college.

There's certainly a need for Christians to be God's salt and light on a secular campus. He could use you to influence nonbelievers. But there's also a lot of growth that occurs from being surrounded by fellow believers who can encourage and help you in your relationship with Christ.





What I did

I attended public school all my life but always knew I'd go to a small Christian university when it came time for college. I wanted to be more than a number to my college professors. And I wanted to be saturated in a Christian environment during the crucial four years when I would prepare for the career God had for me.

I loved being in small classes—anywhere from 10 to 70 students—where professors knew me by name and opened each class in prayer and devotions. They cared as much about my spiritual growth as they did my academic growth.

My university had an enrollment of only 1,300 students. Everyone knew everyone else. We had biweekly chapel services, won national titles in athletics and had a biology department that boasted a 100 percent acceptance rate of graduates applying to med school. In other words, we weren't lacking simply because we were small and a Christian university.

Other perspectives

On the other hand, Susan Stevens went to a small, private, secular university in the Midwest. She says, "Like Susie, I attended small classes in which I developed friendships with many professors.

"I decided on a secular school because I wanted to be in a place where the Christians stood out in a crowd," Susan adds. "I joined Bible studies and participated in a Christian singing group that performed on campus and around the community, influencing and even changing lives for Christ. My college years were a blast, and I made lifelong friendships with Christians who shared my beliefs and values. Yes, we were different from the majority of other students at the school, but we were excited by the challenge of being salt and light in such an environment."

Jan Aufdemberge also went to a secular university. "Looking back on it," she says, "I regret not making many Christian friends and not being a part of any ministry-related activities. If I had gone to my church's denominational college, though, I would have been surrounded with Christians who shared my same morals and theology. That would have encouraged me to remain spiritually strong during those four years."

Our friends

Our friends influence us. Whether we like to admit it, we are influenced by those we choose to hang out with. The friends you make during the four years you're in college will greatly influence all the important decisions I've listed so far in this article:

- What am I going to do with Jesus Christ?
- With whom will I spend the rest of my life?
- What will I do with my life?

It makes sense to surround yourself with godly friends during the four crucial years that you'll spend preparing yourself for the rest of your life—especially if you want to spend the rest of your life with a Christian mate. Most often, it's the friends you make in college that you'll keep for years.

Bottom line: Starting now, saturate your college future in prayer. Don't assume anything about where God will place you. He may have a Christian campus planned for you, or you may be headed for a secular campus that needs your Christian influence. ■

Susie Shellenberger is a speaker and the former editor of *Brio* magazine.

for teens

HOW TO SURVIVE COLLEGE

PART ONE
BY CHRIS YATES



Beads of sweat run down your nose. It's a hot, humid August afternoon. You've just wrapped up one final family beach fest, your friends are up to their own adventures a million miles away, and your little brother has already moved into your room back home. Now, your parents unload bags and boxes of your stuff from the minivan, hug you goodbye, tell you to call once you get settled and drive out of a parking lot full of other giant piles of stuff and their lonely-looking owners. Behind you is a six-story brick residence hall, and your new roommate is waiting in room 604. Oh, by the way, the dorm elevator is broken. Ahhh, college.

If you're at all like me, the idea of heading off to college starts to sound really nice about, oh . . . midway through high school. How I dreamed of a place where no one would force me to take chemistry, where there were no SATs or ACTs to worry about, where I could sleep late, skip class and get free tickets to all the basketball games! There'd be no nagging parents, no chores, no bedtimes . . . nothing but freedom and independence. Bliss.

College is sounding pretty interesting now, huh? But once it came time to finally set foot on the University of North Carolina campus, I had to undergo some serious breaking-in myself. Guess what—everyone does. You probably know older brothers, sisters, friends or cousins who have started the journey into the college world. Some may have gone to large state schools, others to small private universities or Christian colleges. Here is an insider's look at what you can expect—along with survival tips you can start practicing even now.

The Good

Once you get all your junk moved from the curb to your room, it's time to begin designing your fortress. That's right, set up the bed, desk, walls, speakers, computer—all of it—however you want. As long as it's cool with your roommate—and legal with the school—you can make your half as creative as you like. I knew a guy named Andy who built an elaborate loft-bunk system complete with a hammock and trapdoor. He was good with tools.

All those embarrassing moments in high school? Forget about 'em! The slate is clean. Nobody knows about all those homecoming rejections, the time you puked in gym class or your lip sync in the talent show. What if someone else from high school goes to your college? You're still safe. In most cases, by-gones are by-gones.

Larger schools have clubs for everything. I'm not just talking about Latin, chess and beekeeping. No one in high school shares your enthusiasm for Olympic-style pingpong? No problem. There may be a table-tennis society waiting for you in college. You can probably take your pick of everything from water-skiing to skydiving.

Clubs and fraternities often go out of their way to recruit members.

Upperclassmen wait at long lines of tables to entice you to join. The best part is that they get your attention by giving away lots of free food! But keep your guard up. Some fraternities can become real stumbling blocks.

You have power over your own schedule.

Don't want early morning classes? Don't take any. Certainly, your major will require core classes, but there is flexibility. If you don't like an elective course after the first week, drop it and pick up a different one.

Never again will you have to spend Christmas Eve filling out college applications.

Enough said.

The Bad

No one knows or cares about your feats of greatness in high school. The time you won the pie-eating contest—or your remarkable career in student government? Big whoop. That was high school, man.

You're a freshman again.

Boom. Just like that, you go from the top of the ladder to the bottom of a different one. You get lost on the way to class, and teachers mispronounce your name. There's no way to hide it: Everyone can tell you're a rookie.

Say goodbye to home-cooked meals.

There is some free food to be had, but getting good meals in college will take extra effort. At the very least, you'll have to walk all the way to the cafeteria and hope (and pray) the fish tacos are fresh. I set the most-consecutive-Philly-cheese-steak-sandwich-dinners-in-the-cafeteria record my freshman year. Not a good memory. But it was the shortest line!

You do have to go to class.

It's amazing how many college students don't realize this. My friend Alex had an especially hard time with this one. One professor told him he would fail if he missed another 8 a.m. class! Alarm clocks weren't helping; Alex was in trouble. There was only one solution: Sleep in the classroom. Not a great night's rest, but every morning at 8 a.m., Alex was right where he needed to be.

ATMs don't give away free money.

Many students open bank accounts at college. Makes sense. After all, you are technically an adult, so why not have a bank account? Banks even make things extra convenient by putting ATMs on campus. Just press a few buttons and voilà! Cash comes pouring out. But sooner or later, the amount coming out overtakes the amount going in and hence: "Transaction Denied." All that money you made mowing lawns over the summer goes adios faster than you can say "college sweatshirt."

Laundry doesn't do itself.

This is perhaps the cruelest of cruelties. You worked your pants off to get into the college; the least they could do is stay clean! But they don't, and at some point, people around you will notice. The only way the wash gets done is if you, ahem, buy some detergent, separate the colors and pop in quarters. Better get a crash course on this one from Mom while there's still time.



The Ugly

You mean it gets worse than going broke doing laundry? Remember that moment when Mom and Dad leave you standing on the curb? Suddenly you're on the brink of a whole new life at a whole new place. It will be exciting, terrifying and confusing all wrapped up together. In some ways, it will be a lot like starting high school, just a little more intense and possibly a lot farther from home. But here, at this moment, is what any Christian college student will tell you is the critical question: With all the new realities of the college world ahead of you, have you made a commitment to take your faith with you?

Are you ready to follow Christ into the dorm and onto the college campus?

We all know—or will know—friends who, for one reason or another, leave their faith in high school, making college a rough, sad and downright ugly time. But it doesn't have to be that way.

The Now

Here's the good news: Right now is the perfect time to grow closer to Jesus and lay a foundation for Him to build on when you go off to college—or on your own in general, if college isn't your thing. Middle school and high school are the times to get strong in the Lord and be brave enough to see what He will do through you. Why? Because

there's plenty of help nearby, even in your own family. Find Christian friends, youth ministers and Bible-study leaders who are ready to get busy training along with you. When the time comes to pack off to college, you'll know you follow a God who not only wants you to survive, but also has plans for you to thrive in the new world. You'll still look like a rookie—except where it matters most: your spirit. ■

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HOW TO SURVIVE COLLEGE

PART TWO
BY CHRIS YATES

Greg Smith is sort of a hero of mine. Not long ago in a university town far, far away, Greg zipped up his backpack and headed out for his first day of college. What made Greg different from the 21 million teenagers across America also getting ready for high school and college? Greg had a camera crew behind him every step of the way. You see, Greg was 10 years old. Yup, a little ahead of his age group. When a reporter asked this prodigy how he thought he'd handle the new peer pressures of college life, Greg replied, "As long as the other kids don't bend my morals, whatever they want to do I'll try to go along with." All right! And what wouldn't he go along with? Two things he mentioned were cussing and "recreational burping."



Not only is this kid smart (and funny), it sounds like he's solid. Right off the bat, he decided to stand by what he believes. That takes guts at any age.

Most of us don't have camera crews following us, but there is still a lot at stake. Will we be the solid men and women God calls us to be, or are we going to slip and slide toward what the world wants? It's a hard question. We all know that *saying* we'll be solid in Christ is one thing; *living* like we mean it is the real ballgame.

Whether you've just headed into middle school or your senior year of high school, this question gets in your face every day. And it'll only get bigger as you head out on your own. So how can you make sure your foundation in Christ is strong enough to stand—before you even get to college?

Get grounded—your identity, that is.

My first day at the University of North Carolina wasn't exactly like Greg's—I was 17—but it sure seemed newsworthy to me. Even as I moved into a dorm of 1,000 students, and met, oh, about 10 million people on campus that first week, I felt completely alone. I even ate most of my meals by myself in the cafeteria.

Being in a totally new place was overwhelming. No one really knew me or knew about my faith. I was faced with two options: I could get away with bending my rules and no one would care, or I could get serious about bringing my faith to college.



Bulk up— in the Word

After opting for the first route enough times to feel empty, I spent one late night sorting things out in my journal. *Who am I?! I blazed across the page. Then it became Who am I, Lord?* Suddenly I was praying, and it felt good. I found that incredible verse, 2 Corinthians 5:17. A new creation—that was the starting point! Why bother being “the old” when “the new” has come? The Lord put me back on track by helping me regain a sense of my identity in Him.

Just like most people try to establish their personality, style and friends in middle school and high school, they do the same at college—only it gets more complicated. People try to figure out how their identity from back home fits into the new scene. The wild and crazy things they try make it easy to lose sight of who they really are deep down.

Do it now: Set aside some time this month to write yourself a letter. Write out what being a Christian means in your life—how being a new creation really hits home. List the core values of who you are in Christ. Put the letter in an envelope labeled “To be opened the first day of college.” Trust me, you’ll thank yourself.

Later in college, my times with the Lord lapsed into little more than rushing through a few verses and a quick prayer before I fell asleep. Then one morning on my way to class, I noticed the gates to our football stadium—open. The place was empty. Hmm. A few weeks later, I was well into a great new routine: about an hour alone each morning reading my Bible and talking with God right there on the 50-yard line... best seat in the house!

So why is getting in the habit of studying God’s Word so important? Because Scripture strengthens your mind. That’s right, the Bible says, “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2). But thinking Christianly can get you in hot water in the college classroom. Ever hear the words *postmodernism* or *relativism*? They’re worldviews—ways that

people think and believe—and both deny any ultimate truth or absolute right and wrong, especially if it has to do with God. Unfortunately, these philosophies dominate today’s secular college campuses. If you don’t know what it’s built on, how can you defend your faith when students and professors—even current high school teachers—won’t take it seriously? School, especially college, is all about expanding the mind. Now is the time to get serious about loving God with your mind and defending His truth before a world that denies it.

Do it now: As you get into the habit of spending time in God’s Word every day, start asking Him for some great friendships with other Christians—both now and at college. Building a strong foundation takes help from others. Like David and Jonathan in the Bible, we all need friends who can sharpen us, encourage us and help us grow and stand strong in the Lord.



Get ready for the world . . .

My friend Brian became a Christian his junior year in high school and wanted to go to a college that would be a safe place to grow in his faith. I'll never forget talking to him soon after he went away to a small Christian college. He told me, "I was shocked to find the same characteristics I was trying to avoid by not going to a large secular college." Many students were using drugs and were sexually active. Even some of the "Christian" professors were teaching things that didn't follow the Bible. College wasn't the haven Brian had hoped for.

We never can be sure exactly what to expect, can we? Brian's experience may have been severe, and most Christian colleges do provide a Christ-centered learning environment. But challenges are always out there. Whether you head to a Christian or secular college, the question is the same: Will you be ready when your faith foundation is challenged everywhere from the social scene to the classroom?

Do it now: Remember that whenever your faith is challenged, it's also an opportunity to share your faith. Maybe you've already had friends, teachers or classmates mock you for being a Christian, but then later begin to listen and

even show interest in your faith. Be watchful and patient. Ask yourself, *What did I think of God before I really knew Him, and what did I think of people who claimed to be Christians?*

If the people around you now can see that you really live by what you believe, that you can explain your faith pretty clearly and that you love them with Christ's love, then you have a foundation that's ready for the college world. And I'm pretty sure you'll leave a mark on your high school along the way.

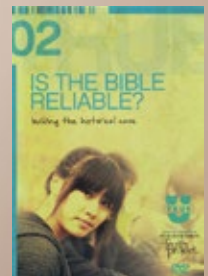
Still not quite there? It's never too late to do a little foundation firming. Now is a great time while you have family, friends and church nearby to help. Ground that identity, get strengthened in the Word through time with God and fellowship with friends, and you'll have a foundation that's ready for the world. ■



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Home-school Transcript Sample

Student: Richard Smith		School: Homeschool	Year: 2012		Class: 9th		
Class	Subject	Instructor	Hours*	1st Semester Grade	2nd Semester Grade	Final Grade	Credits Earned**
1	Social Studies: American History	Bill Smith (home-school parent)	180	B	C	B	1.0
2	English 9	Bill Smith (home-school parent)	183	B	B	B	1.0
3	Music	Tony Jones (co-op parent)	92		A	A	0.5
							2.5
							Total Credits

Grade Scale
A = 90-100
B = 80-89
C = 70-79
D = 60-69
F = 0-59

* 120-180 classroom hours are usually required for a one-year course. Check with your state department of education for specific requirements.
 ** If 180 classroom hours constitute one credit, 90 hours constitute .5 credits.

Subject Summaries

Subject	Textbook Title	Textbook Author(s)	Textbook Publisher	Key Topics Covered	Supplemental Materials
American History	Drive Thru History: American History Series	David Barton and Dr. Nita Thomason	Focus on the Family/Tyndale	Christopher Columbus, the Pilgrims, Founding Fathers, the American Revolution	Add-a-Century Timeline
Calculus	<i>Saxon Calculus, 2nd Edition</i>	Dr. Frank Wang	Houghton Mifflin Harcourt	Limits, functions, differentiation and integration of variables	n/a

Home-school Transcript

Student:		School:	Year:	Class:			
Class	Subject	Instructor	Hours	1st Semester Grade	2nd Semester Grade	Final Grade	Credits Earned
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							

Grade Scale
A =
B =
C =
D =
F =

Total Credits

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