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SENIOR
PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE
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Senior

Preparing for the Future

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Credits

Original Author: Lars Rood

Publishing Director: Kerry Ray

General Editor: Amber Warren

Project Manager: Hannah Solomon

Graphic Designer: Morgan Williams

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INTRODUCTION

The senior year can feel a little bit bizarre. I see it 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. But at the same time, you are scrambling to figure out where you'll apply to college and getting those crazy applications and essays completed. Or 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. But 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 youth group, church, Christian friends, leaders, 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.

HOW IT WORKS

This devotional includes 30 short things for you to think about. For each reading you'll find some sort of story and some follow-up questions to consider. You can do these by yourself, but you also can benefit from discussing them with a small group of people. This book might become 30 weeks of curriculum or simply provide 30 days of focus before the school year starts.

You'll find an action step for each devotion that is exactly what it sounds like: an opportunity to actually do something to discover and apply key truths. Often these are things that take some effort to accomplish and can help you grow. I want to encourage you to really put effort into doing them. There is also a notes section at the bottom of each page for you to write your thoughts and experiences! Did you try out the "Now What" section? Write about what happened in the Notes. Have a deep thought? Write it down!

Finally, I've included some Bible passages for you to look up—sometimes several, but usually just one or two. I want you to go deeper and explore other places in the Bible with more thoughts, stories, truths, and ideas that will help you.

SECTION 1

THE BUSY SEASON

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. Or 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.

No. 1 WILL THIS YEAR BE GREAT?

Your senior year should be great. And it likely 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. But while it lasts, it will be amazing.

I remember the first month of my senior year—everything changed. The cliques that had been around for years seemed to disappear in my senior class. All of a sudden, everyone was much more open and accepting of each other. Honestly, it was a little bit weird, but it got me thinking that this was what the next phase of life would be like! I remember thinking that in college there wouldn't be all the weirdness and insular groups of people—and that if anything felt weird like that, I'd just walk away and find new people to hang out with.

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.

Think About:

1. What are you most looking forward to your senior year? Why?
2. Is there anything you are particularly nervous or worried about? If so, why?
3. How do you think your relationship with God needs to grow or change this year?

Now What?

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.

Read:

Ezekiel 38:23, Luke 9:43, and Philippians 3:8

Notes:

No. 2 WHO ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE?

Like a lot of people, I wasn't fully prepared for my senior year. I'd become comfortable not being in charge and having people to look up to at school. For me it was a little different, too, because my older sister was just one grade ahead of me and I was close to many of her friends. So when they all left, I faced a void that I wasn't really ready for. Deciding how to fill that void and figuring out who I was supposed to be—it all was a little bit tricky.

I had a distinct place at school, though, because I was in band and was actually pretty good at my instrument. So my senior year that was my go-to place for feeling comfortable and having a lot of encouragement and praise come my way.

I was pretty sure that I would be doing something with music in college, too, so it didn't feel like I was going to lose that part of my identity. I can imagine, though, that if you are an athlete who isn't planning on playing any sports at the college level, your senior year might be tougher as you realize you are going to be leaving that behind. 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.

What about 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!

Think About:

1. What are some of the roles you think or know you will have as a senior?
2. How can you figure out who you are supposed to be this year?
3. 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?

Now What?

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? Ask some people you trust to help push you to try something new.

Read:

Joshua 1:9, Psalm 13:5-6, and Proverbs 3:5-6

Notes:

No. 3 WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

I recently told a friend that years ago I really wanted to be either a tow truck driver or a taxi cab driver. I had a lot of gifts that would have made me good at either of those careers. I memorize streets well, like working hard, can talk to people I don't know, and enjoy working alone and being my own boss. Sometimes I wish I hadn't walked away from those jobs because every now and then they sound more inviting than what I'm doing. But I know that neither of those jobs was what God had called me to do.

In college I started out studying computer science, then politics, then English, and finally became a teacher. God made it pretty clear to me through a series of people and opportunities that he had designed me to work with students.

You may not have a clue what you want to do with your life right now—and that's OK. If I had locked myself into a career path too early, I would have missed out on a life of ministry. But it's OK to have some dreams and ideas; just hold them loosely because God may totally change your plans. He did with mine.

Think About:

1. If you had to choose right now, what career path would you follow? Why?
2. What are some things you really like but don't feel you could do as a career?
3. What gifts and talents do you think God has given you that maybe you haven't fully figured out how to implement yet?

Now What?

Because you will probably have some free space and not be too busy this year, see if you can 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:

Psalms 20:4, Proverbs 15:22, Proverbs 16:9, and Ephesians 1:11

Notes:

No. 4 WHO CAN YOU TURN TO?

I didn't really have a very good support system of people I could turn to my senior year. My parents were always there and loved and cared for me, and they were certainly a big part of my decision-making process. But I never really shared my heart and my hopes with them. My youth group had fallen apart just before my senior year when my youth pastor and his wife separated and the church didn't hire anyone to replace him. My friends were in a similar place as me—trying to figure out a lot on their own.

My older sister was a big help for me as I tried to navigate my senior year and decide what I wanted to do after graduation. Because she graduated just a year before me, I saw a lot of her journey. She ended up going to college only about an hour away, so I went and visited her often because I liked her—and because I needed help with my math homework.

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. Maybe 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!

Think About:

1. Who are some people you believe you can turn to for help, wisdom, or insight?
2. If you don't have those people in your life, how can you make wise decisions?
3. What are some tough decisions you've had to make, and how has it been helpful to have others walk alongside you?
4. Where does God fit in all this for you?

Now What?

It's time to practice. 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.

Read:

Deuteronomy 30:10, Isaiah 45:22, Daniel 9:3, and Acts 14:15

Notes:

No. 5 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.

Ultimately I decided to go to the same Christian college that my sister attended. One reason I made this choice was because I had spent a lot of time visiting her and hearing about how much she liked it, and it just started to grow on me. Another factor was hearing that several friends from my youth group had all decided to go there as well. Those things certainly helped, but it still was a tough decision.

Financially it would have been so much better to go somewhere else because that school was really expensive. It put a major burden on my parents, and I also ended up with a lot of student loans. But it was the right place for me. I can say now with absolutely no doubt that God wanted me at that school and that He used it to pave the way for me to be in ministry today.

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, 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!

Think About:

1. When you've had to make hard decisions, what have you done? How have you made your decisions?
2. Have you ever made a tough decision that you now believe was wrong? What process did you use to make that decision, and what did you learn from the experience that might help you next time you're in a similar situation?
3. How will you ultimately decide what you will do next year?
4. Where do you believe God is in all of this?

Now What?

Find an adult (or a couple of them) and ask them how they made these kinds of decisions. Hear their stories and ask how they feel now about the decisions they made then.

Read:

Psalm 37:4, Psalm 119:30-32, Ephesians 1:11, and Colossians 3:12

Notes: