



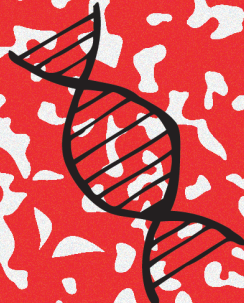
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S O P H O M O R E

STEPPING INTO MATURITY

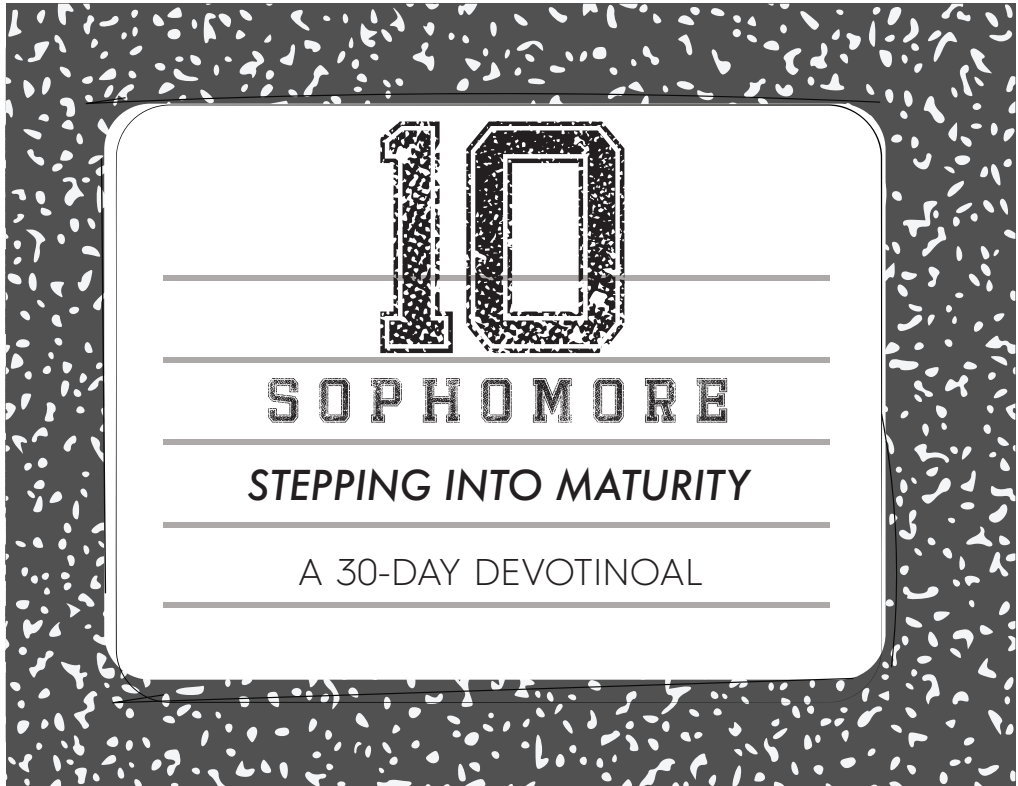
30-DAY DEVOTIONAL



SMALL GROUP
WEDNESDAY NIGHT!



YM360



A 30-DAY DEVOTINOAL
SOPHOMORE
STEPPING INTO MATURITY
BY YM360

PUBLISHED BY YM360

Sophomore: Stepping Into Maturity

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A NOTE FROM LARS,

When these Devotionals were originally published, I hoped that they would make a difference and would have some impact. I was honestly blown away by the positive responses and feedback from students, parents, youth workers, and teachers.

Before writing them, I remember all the times that parents would reach out to me and ask for a recommendation for a devotional or book they could buy their teens that would help deepen their faith and be enjoyable to read. I always struggled to come up with an answer. It's not that there weren't some great ones already written. The issue was that none of them followed the path that students would go through from 7-12th grades. I wanted to deal with the real issues that students would experience each school year, and help them think about their faith during it all. As I wrote, I shared actual stories from my life because I wanted to stay true to who I was and be real so students could learn from my good and bad experiences.

I've known the YM360 Team for a long time and have always been impressed by their faith and commitment to students and youth workers. When they approached me a year ago about republishing updated versions of these devotionals, I instantly knew that they were the right people to take on the project. It has been so fun to work with them and see how their vision has made the updated version of these devotionals so great!

Blessings,

Lars Rood
www.Larsrood.com



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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. But you still have to figure out who you are going to be. In this devotional, we are going to focus on what it means to step into maturity, something specific to pursue this particular year.

A friend once told me that the 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.

I fully recognize that 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 I don't currently think you are mature. I know that may not be true for all of you. Some of you are relatively mature and have a lot of your faith journey and life journey figured out. If that's you, I'm stoked because you are starting with a leg up on everyone else. But if you are like I was my sophomore year, you probably have some good maturing to do.

HOW THIS BOOK 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

A MATURING FAITH



It's my hope and prayer that these devotions will challenge you, encourage you, and put you in places where you will have the opportunity to mature in your faith.

What does a mature faith really look like? I'm going to go out on a limb and say that I don't really know. And that's not a cop-out on my part, because I am fully convinced that nothing is ever "mature," only "maturing." I can tell you what it looks like when you are growing in faith, so that's where I want to start.

A maturing faith, in my opinion, 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.

I can't offer you three steps that will mature your faith; I can only say that you will need to own your faith at some point and that your faith has to 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 will, I hope, be around people who allow you to ask difficult questions. If you read the Freshman devotional that's part of this series, you know that I believe doubt is OK. You need the freedom to talk about what you believe and don't believe. That's how you mature.

No. 1 WHERE DO YOU LOOK FOR TRUTH?

If you're like me, you don't always know how to find out if things are true. Recently, though, I've noticed an interesting pattern happening with my own kids: When we are in the middle of a discussion on a road trip and someone makes a statement about a fact that sounds like it couldn't possibly be true, someone else in the car will instantly say, "Dad, Google® that and check it out." Because 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.

But those aren't the only kinds of questions about truth that confront us, right? 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. I'm hoping that thinking this through will help you grow.

Think About:

1. What is something you wish you knew the truth about?
2. What are some resources you use to try to find truth?
3. How do you think your parents figured out truth when they were your age?

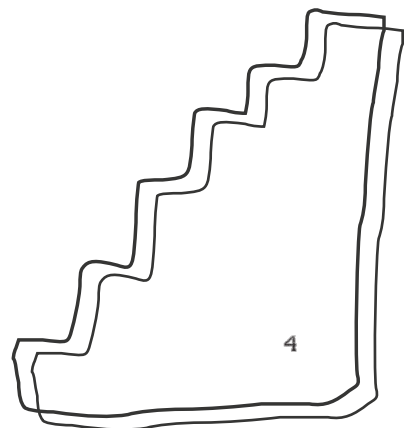
Now What?

Find an adult. It doesn't have to be a parent. It could be a coach, a boss, a youth leader, or a neighbor. Ask them this hard question: "When you were my age, how did you go about figuring out truth?" If you don't feel like you got a good answer from one person, go and ask another.

Read:

Psalm 25:5, Psalm 43:3, John 4:23, and Ephesians 6:14

Notes:



№. 2 WHAT PART OF YOUR FAITH IS EXCITING?

A few years ago on a mission trip to Mexico, my whole youth group bailed out on an evening meeting and drove to the beach to have tacos. Looking back I realize that both the drive to the beach and eating at a taco stand weren't probably the safest things we could have done that night, but it was a memory that all those students still talk about. We did it for one simple reason: I wanted to show them that 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.

Ask yourself this question: If your faith was 100 percent determined by how much you enjoyed getting up on Sunday mornings and going to church, would your faith be pretty boring? Mine sure would. 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. But I believe that even those things can be very exciting. You may have an incredibly busy and full life, and thinking about that upcoming retreat with your youth group 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.

Think About:

1. What specific things in your Christian life do you find the most boring and difficult to do? Why?
2. Are there ways that those things could become more exciting and give you more energy?
3. What specific parts of your faith are exciting and give you energy? Why?

Now What?

As you responded or listened to others respond to question 3, I hope it sparked something in you with at least a little bit of excitement. The goal with this action step is two-fold. First, take that thing and do it. Simple enough, right? If you are in a youth group or attend a church, see if you can get someone to help make it a reality. Second, look at the things that you find boring and come up with one idea that could give it a little more life. It could be as easy as donuts before service on a Sunday morning or lunch after church. Take time to figure this one out.

Read:

1 Chronicles 29:22, Ezra 6:16, Psalm 16:11, and Ecclesiastes 11:9

Notes:

No. 3 WHO ARE YOUR MENTORS?

Paul taught me to love people. Evan taught me to love life. Tom taught me to work hard. Tony taught me to enjoy music. Eddie taught me to start over. Dan showed me how to slow down. Shane taught me to let others care for me. John taught me to think differently. Jack showed me that I had value. Marko helped me see my future. Roger gave me a chance. My dad showed me how to work hard. My mom showed me how to stand strong. I've learned a lot of things from a lot of people.

That list isn't even complete; I know if I'd taken more time to fill it out, I would have added in a lot of other people. The question for you to think about here is 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.

Think About:

1. What people are you learning from now? What specific truths or lessons are you learning?
2. What does the word mentor mean to you? Why?
3. Is anyone learning from you? How are you helping that person (or those people) to grow?
4. Who in your life would you like to learn from? Why?

Now What?

Write down three things that you would like to learn. They might be new skills or characteristics, or they might be deficiencies you want to overcome. After creating that list, write a name next to each one and then go and ask that person to help you grow in that area.

Read:

Genesis 21:20, Exodus 17:12, and Hebrews 4:16

Notes:

No. 4 WHAT ROLE DOES JESUS PLAY IN YOUR LIFE?

When I was a sophomore in high school, my youth group was a pretty big deal in my life. One morning after Sunday school, instead of going to the worship service as expected, we decided to hang out in the youth room and play bumper pool. About 10 minutes into the worship service, the choir director came storming into the room and yelled, "Is this a church or a pool hall?" He completely called us out for skipping church and forcing us to make a quick decision about what was important. We all followed him to the service, and never again did we pull that stunt.

I tell that story to illustrate how I faced a defining moment that helped me decide I wasn't going to play around with this faith journey anymore. From that moment forward, I took my faith seriously for the rest of high school. You may be in a place right now where you go to church with your parents, or maybe the important part of church is your youth group and friends, like it was for me. That's an OK 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 the way you make decisions. I hope you don't end up getting shamed into making that decision like I was, but it worked for me and I'm still glad it happened.

Think About:

1. If your life was a car and Jesus was in it, which seat would he be sitting in, and why?
2. What role do you see Jesus playing in the life of your parents and family?
3. Answer truthfully: Right now, how important do you think Jesus is going to be in your life after high school graduation?

Now What?

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.

Read:

Matthew 9:15, Matthew 14:27, Luke 12:22, and Galatians 2:16

Notes:

№. 5 HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU WITH DOUBT IN YOUR FAITH?

I don't think I ever really doubted if God existed. But I do distinctly remember doubting if God actually cared about me. I was at a place of a lot of pain, and I felt like my world was starting to fall apart. My parents were going through a rough patch in their marriage, and I was asking questions about my future that I wasn't prepared to ask. During that season, I doubted if God really cared. Fortunately for me, I had a group of friends whose faith was stronger than mine—people who cared about me and built me up when I couldn't do it myself.

Doubt is an OK thing, so don't ever let anyone tell you that it's not. I'm convinced that God is OK with our doubts. Some amazing things have happened in my life when I was really wondering about things and God clearly showed up to open doors and meet my needs. Often in our doubts we can grow as we look to others or at least beyond ourselves for truth.

Think About:

1. What are some doubts you have about faith, God, or Jesus right now? How long have you been wrestling with those doubts?
2. Where are some possible places you think you could find answers?
3. How do you think God, your parents, your friends, or leaders at your church feel about your doubts? Why?
4. How might those people in question 3 help you work through doubts and questions?

Now What?

Take a piece of paper and write down five doubts you have about your faith. (It's OK if you can't think of five doubts—this is still a worthwhile action step.) Then ask someone else to do the same thing. Compare your answers. See if you can have a discussion where you both talk about your doubts and help each other. If you have a youth worker or small group leader, ask them about their doubts, too.

Read:

Matthew 21:21, John 20:24-29, and Jude 1:22

Notes: