

Knowing Who I Am and Whose I am

KICK-START WITH ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PARENTS

- Letting go is wonderful and painful all at once. Don't be afraid to enter into that discontinuity.

FRAMING UP OUR PURPOSE

It's possible to go a little crazy in your parenting during your teen's senior year. All the transition from dependence on you to independence within themselves comes to a jarring climax sometime during this year. And the reality that the baby you once held will soon live a life fairly separate from yours can be overwhelming. So we go a little crazy. First it looks a little like smothering. Then it can revert to parenting like we did when they were ten. It might have an extra dose of sadness or anger to it. Or it may look like an erratic attempt to cram in every lesson you haven't had the chance to teach. No matter what, chances are during your teen's senior year, they may think you've gone a bit loco!

No worries, though...as long as you recognize the insanity and realize all that unexplained behavior is often rooted in the fear of letting go instead of trusting God to get His work done in our teens' lives. If we see that, we'll be able to keep these truths in front of our seniors as they anticipate the thrill of the journey ahead!

Identity is about knowing whose we are rather than trusting solely in what we can do.

"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained; what is man, that you think of him? What is the son of man, that you care for him? For you have made him a little lower than God, and crowned him with glory and honor." --Psalm 8:3-5

The most frequent questions our seniors in high school will get are "Where are you going to college?" and "Have you chosen a major?" or "What do you want to do with your life?". And while none of these questions is inherently the wrong question, none of them is the most important question. What if we spend more time asking our teens, "Who do you want to become?" Chances are they won't even use their college degree in the same field or stay with the same career for more than seven years. So why set them up for an identity crisis that is based on what they choose to do?

Why not help them shape their plans for the future based on a truth of whose they are and who that makes them? If they know they are a child of God, created to do good works, no matter where their feet land, they will not question their purpose or identity. They will enjoy the adventure of living out that identity and purpose in creative ways.

God loves to surprise us with a different plan than we had in mind.

"Passing along by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, 'Come after me, and I will make you into fishers for men.'" --Mark 1:16-17

This may be one of the hardest truths for parents to walk out. We feel safer when our kids have a normal, safe plan for their lives and look like they can take care of themselves. But Jesus is not a "safe" Redeemer. He is dangerous and often unpredictable. He is dangerous because He calls us to step out of our comfort zone. He loves to challenge us to do a 180-degree turn.

God calls us to trust His plans, not our own. Sometimes His plans for our teens mean they won't go to college right away, or ever! Yikes! His plans sometimes mean they will need to live simply, because their income won't make them wealthy or even middle-class comfortable.

We can help them build a healthy identity if we help them answer the question, "Who do I want to become?". Help them make a list of answers to that question and then show them you aren't afraid to wade into the answers they come up with.

The final test has one vertical question and one horizontal question.

"Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." --Matthew 22:37-40

If you are having trouble coming up with words to share with your senior at this Rites of Passage Experience, you can't do much better than the words of the two greatest commandments. Remind your teen that if they don't do anything else in this life, there are two things you want to make sure they do.

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First, make sure their vertical relationship with the Creator and Savior is the most important love they ever give away. Second, be sure to give the same love that flows from their vertical relationship with God to their horizontal relationships with others. May they love others as God has fully and wholeheartedly loved them. That will just about sum up anything that needs to be said!

IDEAS FOR RELEASING A PERSON OF TRUE IDENTITY IN CHRIST

- Add an H to their name (symbolically) to represent God breathing His life into them.
- Make college visits and intentionally discuss what God can do in their lives there.
- Have dinner/lunch once a week together their senior year.
- Plan and pay for five adults who are significant in your teen's life to take them to lunch during their senior year and to pray for their future.
- Encourage your teen to find a mentor the first semester of college.
- Make sure your teen knows how to do laundry and knows how to change a tire (Really!).
- Ask your teen what they need from you during their senior year in order to finish well.