

# Is There Life After High School?

(Graduation/Summer Challenge)

## Introduction for Leaders

(Notes: **1** - Although this message targets graduates, I'd use it for the entire youth group. All your students are finishing a year of school, which signals a new start. Many will work new Summer jobs. Others will begin driving. Still others will move in with another relative for the summer. This message speaks to them all.) **2** - Unlike my other lessons, I've put my few exegetical comments at the end of the lesson, prior to the overhead/handout sheets.

Life changes after graduation. Students get full-time jobs, move to college communities, make new friends, and experiment with new freedoms. For many, church becomes an option rather than a requirement. Some will blossom. Others will crash and burn. What can we give our students to both warn them of impending dangers and challenge them to make the most of this time of life?

Imagine that you have a son or daughter graduating from high school. What would you want to say at this critical juncture? Think of your students. What opportunities do you want them to take advantage of? What dangers do you want to warn them about? Before you look at this lesson, ask God what *your* students need to hear.

Next, ask God what's the best way to communicate your message. Perhaps you could form a question and answer panel of sharp college students and non-college students who are a few years out of high school. Or, consider recruiting a panel of sharp adults to answer the question: "If you had your years just after high school to do over again, what would you do differently? What would you do the same?"

Although I lay out some serious warnings below, I try to couch them in a positive framework. Their moms and dads have almost certainly drilled them on the "Don't party!" theme. But to catch them from a different angle - how to make the most out of these years - might seem less preachy and more palatable.

**WARNING:** I've probably got enough material below for two messages. Either pick and choose or spread it out to two weeks. Don't skip the discussions and lecture in order to "get in all the material."

Consider presenting them with something, like a WWJD bracelet, a cross necklace, a book, or a bottle of Scope Mouthwash! I used to present each student with a wrapped copy of "Know Why You Believe," by Paul Little, a basic book of Christian evidences.

Consider also submitting your seniors names to <http://www.linczone.com/> to alert some fine Christian campus organizations that your student would love a personal invitation.

## Introduction

Charles Dickens opened his classic novel “Tale of Two Cities” with the sentence: “*It was the best of times and the worst of times.*” I believe that this can be said of many people after graduation. Since Jesus Christ said, “*I came that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly,*” (John 10:10) I believe God wants this to be the best of times. Tonight I'd like to give you hints from people's graduation experiences and observations from the Word of God to help you make it the best of times.

For those who are not graduating, let this be a challenge to you for this time of transition in your life. Some of you will work Summer jobs. Others will make new friends or begin to drive. Each year you get older and have new freedoms. Let's ask God to show us how to make the most of these transitions.

### **Prayer (Lead in a prayer asking God to speak through you and giving students the opportunity to pray that God will speak to them.)**

Although many of you won't be leaving home this summer, I think a suitcase well represents some of the changes you'll be going through. I've packed a few items that you definitely don't want to forget. (*Have a suitcase containing each of the items. Pull each out at the appropriate time.*)

### **Judge's Gavel – Good Judgment**

This judge's gavel represents good judgment. I'm not talking about being judgmental. Although you'll meet some really interesting...okay, some really *weird* people along the way, leave the judging to God.

I *am* talking about using wise judgment when people attack your faith. Let me introduce to you one of the people you'll run across: Meet “*Too Smart For God Tommy.*” You may see him outside the Philosophy department or on lunch break at your job. Whenever the conversation goes spiritual, he gets this intellectual look about him and says, “*You know, I used to believe in all that Bible stuff. But now I've got a lot of intellectual problems with Christianity.*” Often he's a professor or a boss. Tommy's older than you and sounds so sophisticated, so intellectually mature, that he makes you feel backward and immature for believing the Bible.

**Discussion:** *A friend of yours is in a Philosophy class where the teacher belittles Christians. Your friend is no intellectual match for the professor. How would you advise your friend to keep him from crashing spiritually?*

**1) Pray.** God values our seeking and promises us that if we seek Him we'll find Him. (Matthew 7:7,8) And that may be no casual search. (Jeremiah 29:13) Ask God for wisdom, even if you're doubting everything and your prayer is “God, if you're there, I want to know you. Lead me to the truth.”

*...seek and you will find.... (Matthew 7:7)*

*"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."  
(Jeremiah 29:13)*

**2) Keep in the Word and Christian Fellowship.** Why read the Bible and go to church when you're doubting everything? (Try to get an answer.) Because God reveals Himself through His Word (Psalm 119:105) and His people (Matthew 18:20; cr. Proverbs 15:22).

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:105)*

*For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." (Matthew 18:20)*

**3) Make sure your heart is open.** Most people don't reject the faith solely because of intellectual arguments.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A skeptic on a college campus said to a believer, *"I used to go to church and believe the bible, but now I have too many intellectual problems with Christianity."* The believer asked, *"If I could prove to you that Jesus was the Son of God, would you give your life to Him?"* The skeptic replied, *"I guess that's really the problem. I don't want to give up my partying."* God doesn't reveal Himself to people to satisfy their curiosity. He reveals Himself to those who are willing to follow. As Jesus said,

*"If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself." (John 7:17 NASB)*

**4) Read some strong Christian intellectuals.** Don't be blown away by the intellectual who has a personal library of all the deep philosophers and can quote Neitzche and Kant. Just remember that many Christian intellectuals, who can quote the same philosophers and have just as many books, believe the bible as truth. Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer knows over 24 languages. Many strong Christians head philosophy departments and hold multiple degrees from the world's top schools. You need to read some of their books to balance the criticism you're taking in. If Jesus used "many convincing proofs" to demonstrate His Lordship, don't imagine that it's somehow wrong to study evidence.

*"And after his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive." (Acts 1:3)*

**5) Get wise counsel.** If you come back one day and tell me that you're questioning your faith, I won't hit you. I promise! Most of us have been there! Talk to lots of Christians who have gone through the doubts.

*Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)*

## Energy Bar – Good Effort

Meet "*Too Cool to Work Carl.*" (*Idea! You could do a power point of Adam Sandler in the elementary school seat in "Billy Madison."* Find the picture at many movie sites.) You'll find Carl taking cigarette breaks at work - every 10 minutes. When the boss is away, Carl plays. The night before exams, Carl parties. How many of you know someone like Carl?

I don't know any people who say they're sure are glad they partied away their years after graduation. I've heard plenty say they wish they hadn't. The world's wisest man told us 3000 years ago about the importance of diligence in making this the best of times.

*The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied. (Proverbs 13:4)*

Use this special time before you get married and have to pay bills and raise children. You've got a rare chance to gather wisdom that can serve you the rest of your life. Don't let your brain rot this Summer! Take your bible and some great books and store up wisdom.

## Scope Mouthwash – To Help You Make the Best Friends

Meet "*Follow the Crowd Phil.*" You'll find him at church singing praise songs and doing his religious talk with the spiritual crowd. On Fridays you'll find him at the parties competing for the beer-guzzling prize. He stands for nothing, never swims upstream, always taking the path of least resistance. How many of you know "*Follow the Crowd Philip?*"

From now on, many of you will see very few of the people you hung around during the school year. For those graduating, you may run across only one or two. So how will you find your closest friends? This is how Philip does it. This Summer he's on a community baseball team. After one of the games he's invited out to eat with the team. He hits it off with some of the players because of their common interest in sports. He's invited to a swim party. He blends in and has a group to do things with.

Now that's the way most people make their closest friends. They have a common interest such as a style of music or a sport or a video game and it starts from there. But what's the danger of finding your closest friends this way? (Try to get some response here. They need to think this through.) These people Philip met, does he know anything about their spiritual or moral lives? (Probably not.) What's the risk here? (If they are into the wrong stuff, he'll be corrupted by them.)

God's very clear here. Your closest friends will make you or break you. Paul the apostle, one of the most spiritual guys the world has ever known, wrote, "***Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.***" (I Corinthians 15:33) You object, "But I won't let them drag me down." But Solomon, the wisest man in the world said,

***He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Proverbs 13:20).***

I challenge you to a different way to find your closest friends this summer and after graduation. Instead of unintentionally drifting into relationships, intentionally seek out the movers and shakers that God is using, the ones who are the most excited about God and the most intent on making an impact for Him. Then, intentionally build relationships with them. Those people will encourage you and keep you on track. Choosing the right close friends could easily be more important than choosing a college or career.

If you're going away, find the Christian groups and Churches where God is moving. Life's too short to spend it trying to resurrect a dead ministry. Visit lots of local churches to see what's happening. Don't miss the campus organizations like Campus Crusade for Christ, the Navigators, or InterVarsity, or the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Those single years are some of the most exciting times to be a Christian, because students go to Christian groups because they want to go, not because mom and dad force them. That makes some of the groups exciting. That's why thousands attend college-age Christian meetings like "7:22" in Atlanta. The worship's incredibly intense and you'll love it.

Lot's of students deceive themselves into thinking that they don't need a Christian group, like they've just got this personal thing going with God. But God says in His Word that you and Him aren't enough. The author of Hebrews writes,

***"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:24,25)***

So after you unpack your bags, immediately begin searching for where God is moving and get in the middle of it. Many, many students will tell you that this is what made college "the best of times" for them.

Clarification: Jesus' *closest* friends were God-followers. But He was friendly to a wide range of people and was called a "friend of sinners." I encourage you to be friendly to everyone and have lots of casual friends. Just make sure that those you spend tons of time with, those you call in time of need, those you laugh with and cry with, all have Jesus in common.

## **Umbrella – To Help You Weather The Storms**

Meet "*Too Bad for God Brandy*." Desperate to be accepted her first quarter, she was accepted by the party crowd, has tons of regrets, and is flunking out. She's afraid to talk to God and ashamed to show up at Church. She needs an umbrella to weather the storms.

Look at me. If you find yourself in Brandy's state, don't walk, but RUN back to God and His people. Your life's not over. Remember the prodigal son? This guy took his inheritance, partied until his money ran out, and ended up so low that he ate with the pigs. You can't get much lower than that.

So according to Jesus, how did the prodigal's dad react when he finally came to his senses and walked home? (Get a response.) Did he point a finger and give him the lecture he deserved? No. He embraced him and threw a party for him. Listen, if you blow it, come back to God. In First John we read,

***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)***

And if you really try academically but flunk, you're not the first. Success belongs, not to those who never make mistakes, but to those who keep bouncing back.

## **Soap - To Keep You Clean**

Meet "Animal House Al," the life of every party. He wears a toga to class and takes the dare to dive into the shallow end of the pool off the fourth floor balcony. (*Idea! PowerPoint of John Belushi, beer in hand, in the movie "Animal House."*) Movies make you think if could pass school and party like Animal House, you'd have the best of both worlds. I challenge you to think again. I want to warn you of two things your Fraternity brothers and Sorority sisters won't tell you.

**DISCUSSION:** *But first I'd like your input. In small groups, discuss what you think are the biggest regrets of people's single years. What are the things that make it the "worst of times" for them? (Discuss some of their best ideas. You're not just baiting them to get your answers.)*

## **The Two Greatest Party Poopers: Sex and Alcohol.**

**ILLUSTRATION:** *I'll never forget a Christian concert I attended near a large university. Thousands of people were rocking to the music of Petra. Afterwards, speaker Josh McDowell challenged the audience to wait till marriage for sex. In the middle of his talk, a student from the local university walked up and asked for the microphone. Josh controlled the mic nervously, not knowing whether or not to let the student talk. I'm glad he let him talk.*

*The student said that he came in as a freshman and joined a Fraternity. At a party, the "brothers" challenged him to have sex with a willing girl. Not wanting to be labeled a wimp, he went out with her. It was his first time to have sex; but that was enough to give him Herpes Simplex II, a sexually transmitted disease he will carry the rest of his life. Through his tears he poured out his grief. "One day," he said, "when I've found that one girl that I want to spend the rest of my life with, I'll have to tell her about this disease and how it will affect our relationship."*

For this student, because of this moral failure, his years became "the worst of times." Some of you are thinking, "Well, what's the odds of that happening?" Want to know the hard, cold facts? Pretty often. Sexually active teens have a one in four chance of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease. One out of four!

So why don't we hear about it? Think about it! Nobody's going to admit it in the locker room. What do you expect, to see hundreds of bumper stickers that say, "*Honk if you have Herpes!*" Even if AIDS had never come on the scene, sexually transmitted diseases would be considered an epidemic on most college campuses. If you want to risk turning "the best of times" into "the worst of times," premarital sex would be a great way to go.

**ILLUSTRATION:** *I'll introduce the second greatest party pooper with this: Are you infuriated at the masterminds behind the bombing of the twin towers? What if I were to tell you that there's another group of people that kill the same number of people every two years? Over the four years following graduation, they'll kill twice as many. Would you be infuriated at them? I'm not speaking of terrorists. I'm speaking of those that encourage others to drink in college.*

*A recent federally-funded study (1) found that college drinking contributes to 1,400 deaths each year. Drunk students fall off balconies, drown in swimming pools, die in auto accidents or from bingeing. But it also hurts the living, contributing to 500,000 injuries and at least 70,000 cases of date rape or other forms of sexual assault each year. Over 400,000 students end up having unprotected sex. (Side note: Especially for you girls. Date rape is extremely common in college. Spend time in groups with people you know.) That's millions of injuries every four years and thousands of deaths, tons of misery due to ignoring two biblical warnings: "Don't get drunk..." (Ephesians 5:18) and since you're not of legal drinking age in America, God's command to obey your authorities (Romans 13:1ff).*

Many students have no desire to drink, but can't resist a room full of people with a beer in each hand. Can I show a little emotion here? This burns me up! And who's to blame? People who encourage others to drink either by having a beer in their hands or offering it to others.

I challenge you to get alone at some time this week - just you, God, His Word, a notepad and a pen. Go to your bedroom or a park bench or to the woods, but get alone. Then, while you're thinking straight, write down some standards that you want to govern your life.

You see, tons of people make their most important, life-impacting decisions at a Fraternity party following the dare of some idiot upper classman. At the extreme end, some will die of alcohol poisoning or following some crazy dare or initiation.

In Romans 12:2 the Apostle Paul writes:

*"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

If you make your decisions while you're sober and thinking straight, you're more likely to make wise decisions when someone turns up the heat.

## **Conclusion**

I hope this doesn't seem trite. But to help you remember this, the acrostic spells out JESUS.

**J**udge's Gavel - Good Judgment

**E**nergy Bar - Good Effort

**S**cope Mouthwash - To Help You Make The Best Friends

**U**mbrella - To Help You Weather The Storms

**S**oap - To Keep You Clean

Whatever you do, take Jesus with you. He'll be with you when you're lonely, give you strength when you're weak, empower you when you're tempted.

The bottom line? The opportunity of a lifetime awaits those of you who are secure in Christ, have set your standards, and know where you're going in life. I'm not asking you to stand alone. One out of every five students doesn't drink at all. Many more than that never get drunk or binge. Thousands of Christians flood Christian organizations on college campuses. I'm not challenging you to merely abstain from destructive behavior. I challenge you to take advantage of perhaps the best opportunity in your life to reach people who may otherwise crash and burn.

Get your eyes off of yourself this summer. Make new friends. Especially look for those who everyone else is ditching. Invite them to Christian concerts and places where God is moving. Get alone with God to set your own course in life, so that you can stand on your own this summer. God never called us just to hold down the fort. He called us to storm the heights!

1) Study by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, reported in April, 2002. Found in the Atlanta Journal, April 10, 2002, p. A16, by Bill Hendrick.

## **Exegetical Notes**

**Matthew 7:7,8** - All three verbs (ask, seek, knock) are in the Greek present tense, which shows continual action. They could be translated "keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on keep on knocking," as opposed to a one time casual request. The tense points to continuous, persistent prayer.



**John 7:17** - Morris - "any really sincere person would know this. It is not something that can be learned only by those who are expert in the theological niceties. Any man who really wills to do the will of God (i.e. whose whole will is bent in this direction; it is the set of the life that is meant) will have the spiritual discernment required." ... "His hearers had raised the question of His competence as a teacher. He raises the question of their competence as hearers."

**Proverbs 13:4** - Bible Knowledge Commentary - sluggard = a "lazy, irresponsible person." Kidner - "Sluggard" occurs 14 times in Proverbs.

**Ephesians 5:18** - Foulkes - "Debauchery" = "uncontrolled action and wastefulness."

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Introducing... *"Too Smart For God Tommy."*

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*...seek and you will find...* (Matthew 7:7)

*"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."* (Jeremiah 29:13)

2) Keep in the Word and Christian Fellowship.

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3) Make sure your heart is open.

*"If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself."* (John 7:17 NASB)

4) Read some strong Christian intellectuals.

*"And after his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive."* (Acts 1:3)

5) Get wise counsel.

*Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.* (Proverbs 15:22)

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*"Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33)*

*He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Proverbs 13:20).*

*"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24,25)*

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*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)*

## Soap – To Keep You Clean

Introducing... *"Animal House AI"*

## The Two Greatest Party Poopers: Sex and Alcohol

*"Don't get drunk...." (Ephesians 5:18)*

*"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities...." (Romans 13:1ff)*

*"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:2)*

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## Is There Life After High School? (Making the Most of Your Summer)

Summer is a time of transition. You won't see a lot of your school buddies. You may make new friends, go new places, work a new job or graduate and move to another city. For some, it may be the best of times; for others, the worst of times. Here's an example of "The worst of times."

*I'll never forget a Christian concert I attended near a large university. Thousands of people were rocking to the music of Petra. Afterwards, speaker Josh McDowell challenged the audience to wait till marriage for sex. In the middle of his talk, a student from the local university walked up and asked for the microphone. Josh controlled the mic nervously, not knowing whether or not to let the student talk. I'm glad he let him talk.*

*The student said that he came in as a freshman and joined a Fraternity. At a party, the "brothers" challenged him to have sex with a willing girl. Not wanting to be labeled a wimp, he went out with her. It was his first time to have sex; but that was enough to give him Herpes Simplex II, a sexually transmitted disease he will carry the rest of his life. Through his tears he poured out his grief. "One day," he said, "when I've found that one girl that I want to spend the rest of my life with, I'll have to tell her about this disease and how it will affect our relationship."*

Had this student set some biblical standards before going to college, perhaps he could have simply said "No!" Instead, he lives with regrets that will always haunt him.

God's Word says,

*"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:2)*

This summer, the world will try to press you into its mold. Many get pressured into things they regret because they had never sat down in a cool-headed moment and decided what they will and will not do.

How can you keep it from happening to you? Take charge of your life! Set your course now, so that when others try to pressure you into their mold, you can stand on your own.

Find your bible, a notepad, pencil and paper. While there's no peer pressure, while you're thinking clearly before God, write down some standards that you want to live by. How far physically will you go on a date? (II Tim. 2:22, ) Many wise counselors

**say that you shouldn't date anyone you wouldn't be willing to one day marry. Why? Because you have little control over your emotions. It's easy to fall in love with someone you never intend to. In light of that let's set some standards! What kind of person are you willing to date? (II Corinthians 6:14-18, Proverbs 31:10ff., Galatians 5:22,23) What's your position on drugs and drinking? (Ephesians 5:18, Proverbs 20:1) Is it really necessary to meet regularly with a Christian fellowship? (Hebrews 10:24,25) What other standards would you like to set?**

**Now put your list of standards in a safe place so that you can find them later. They could make this summer "the best of times" for you!**