

# **INTRODUCTION:**

**FOR RECENT GRADUATES (OR SOON TO BE)**

I am a big Donald Miller fan. I think he is an incredible writer. There are few writers that I would give a full throated endorsement of, and he would be one of them. As I was reading his blog, I read something that really stuck with me. I was beginning this crazy project of trying to write a book, and the fact that I came across it at that particular point in my work was more than a coincidence. His blog post was entitled “The Best Writing Advice I’ve Ever Received.” His advice was simple: “Love Your Reader!”

At that point, it became my goal to write in a way that shows that I, in fact, care. I care that you are growing up in a world that is moving much faster than when I was your age. I care that the pressures that you will face are ever changing, but some concepts are constant. I write the way I do and present topics that may even be uncomfortable because of the fact that I want you to be prepared. To be prepared means that we might have to fight through some things that are as pleasant as a root canal. To be prepared is to understand what you believe, why you believe it, and to be able to effectively communicate this belief to someone else.

My hope is that this book covers everything that you will go through, but I am not so naive to think that it will. More importantly, my hope is that this book begins a conversation with people that you trust. My hope is that you begin to think critically about what you value, and how those things will be tested in the coming months and years. You will begin to understand why your parents, pastors, and teachers warn you against certain things.

As I began to talk about my ambition in writing this book, I encountered a couple of people that I have worked with in one capacity or another and told them of my desire to write and what I chose for my first project. One person in particular loved the idea of the book but asked one simply question. He said, “Phillip, at 18, I really didn’t give much thought to some of the topics that you are presenting, because frankly I didn’t care. All I cared about were my own personal desires.”

It’s a valid thought. Some of the topics that are presented here are uncomfortable to discuss at any age...not just as teenagers. You will glance over some of these topics and wonder if they apply to you. Why should you care about being wise in social networking, with money, in choosing relationships, sex, drinking, etc?

These are not topics that lend themselves to warm fuzzies, easy answers, or simple conversations. These are topics that have nuance and many moving parts, and for that reason alone you should care about what you believe and where you stand on each situation presented. Preparation beforehand will save a great deal of headache and heartache. I find that if I know where my convictions lie before entering into any situation, I make better decisions than if I fly by the seat of my pants.

The fact that you would spend your hard earned money on this book is very humbling. I wrote it to simply give you a heads up about what is going to come at you in the next

four years. Truthfully, this book goes beyond the next four years and addresses issues that you will face for the rest of your life.

You are standing on the edge of the cliff that is adulthood, ready to base jump into the next adventure. You have either recently graduated high school, or you are about to be a graduate. The next 4-8 years or so are going to be the absolute best of your life, and there is no denying that. However, if we learn anything from the first Spiderman movie, it's that with great power comes great responsibility. Scripture also teaches in Luke that "Much is required from those to whom much is given,..."<sup>1</sup>. Once you graduate high school and break out "on your own" you will have many things to address. Let me save you the suspense: you will not have a spotless record when you are done<sup>2</sup>. The only question is how you will handle the things that come at you, and whether Christ will be glorified through it all, even through your failures.

If you are a nerd<sup>3</sup> and understand statistics, then you know that it's a good bet that you will not be involved in any church at all, or working to advance your walk with Christ in any form the first year after you graduate from high school. For people involved in some sort of leadership role in a church, they know this is the weakest area of ministry that any church has. The biggest gap in any congregation demographics is that between the ages of 18 and 35. I have many theories regarding why this is, but the one that I simply can't shake and generally come back to is this: Satan isn't stupid.

What I mean is this: Satan knows the best time to attack is when you are most vulnerable. If you were honest with yourself, then you will admit that your most vulnerable time is ahead of you. You are young, perceive yourself to be invincible, not really a kid anymore, but not quite an adult, and are about to experience your first breath of life without anyone forcing you to do anything. Make no mistake, the attack is coming and there is no way to dodge it. Your only option is to be prepared to go through it.

This is the book that I wish I had when I graduated from high school. In some instances, it answers many "why" questions, such as:

"Why should I not have sex before marriage?"

"Why should I not get hammered drunk?"

"Why isn't it smart to post something about my boss/professor on Facebook?"

"Why should I not buy the entire Jack In The Box menu on a credit card?"

"Why should I get involved in a local church?"

I hope that you find that this book is practical. I hope you see some of the misconceptions, dangers, benefits, and pitfalls associated with the different aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 12:48

<sup>2</sup> Congratulations! You are human.

<sup>3</sup> Like me

life that you are going to face in the upcoming months and years. Most of all, I hope that you continue to pursue Christ with all that you have. Fides Quarrens Intellectum<sup>4</sup>!

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<sup>4</sup> Latin: "Faith Seeking Understanding"

# **INTRODUCTION:**

**FOR PARENTS**

I have not been a parent for very long, but I can imagine some of the emotions associated with sending your kid off to college. You must be asking yourself:

“Are they ready?”

“Did I warn them about the dangers of [fill in the blank]?”

“Will they come home on the weekends? On the holidays?”

“Do they know that they are not alone and that I will help them?”

“Why do college textbooks cost so much? How many editions of college algebra do you really need? Has math changed all that much from when I was in school?”

“What will I do with their room? Will I be able to fit a pool table in there<sup>5</sup>?”

“If I leave for a Hawaiian vacation the day they start classes, will I be back before they return home to ask for money and to have me do their laundry<sup>6</sup>?”

Transitioning from a guardian who is involved in their child’s day to day life, to someone who is more of a by-stander is not like flipping a switch. I hope that this book is comprehensive, but I know that it will not cover everything that your child will go through when they leave the nest.

Communication is the silver bullet when it comes to preventing some of the pitfalls associated with the first taste of freedom that a teenager experiences after high school. My hope is that this is another avenue that you can use and reference when talking to your kid. The worst thing you can do as a parent is to completely shield your son or daughter from what awaits them after high school. I will concede to you that the world is a dangerous place. However, not recognizing this or discussing it with your kid does not make the dangers go away. Sheltering your kid from some of the aspects of adulthood that I address in this book is a form of spiritual lupus<sup>7</sup>. Your immune system attacks any sort of danger on behalf of your kids with such veracity; it actually does more harm than good. I know as a parent that I want my daughters to stay the innocent and perfect angels that they are. Nothing would make me happier than if my girls stayed six and four<sup>8</sup> respectively where daddy can do no wrong, is more super hero than parent, and everything can be fixed with a “big squeeze” and a kiss on their boo boos. The steady and predictable passage of time prevents this from happening, so the next best thing is to build knowledge and wisdom in a responsible way. In order for them to know what the world will throw at them. Your kid is going to grow up, just like mine. Your kid is going to leave the house, just like mine. The only question that remains is whether our kids are well equipped to do both.

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<sup>5</sup> Pool table might be tough...but a foosball table would absolutely fit.

<sup>6</sup> The answer is yes to this one. Try to do the road to Hana on Maui. Absolutely stunning visuals.

<sup>7</sup> Lupus: Disease of the immune system where it inappropriately attacks healthy tissue. It can be described as an overactive immune system.

<sup>8</sup> The ages of my girls at the time of publication

If you haven't started a conversation with your kid about some of these things by the time they reach middle school, then odds are that when you do start the discussion, you will not be the first person to do so<sup>9</sup>. So the question really becomes this: do you want your kid's first impressions of sex, alcohol, social networking, drugs, and other potential land mines to be from their friends? Jersey Shore? Twitter? Or would you rather it be from you? This is a no-brainer.

The overall goal of this book is to start a conversation, to begin to prepare your kid and yourself for life without direct parental involvement. This book's goal is to serve as a spiritual vaccine before your kids break out on their own. Just like a vaccine, your kid needs controlled exposure to what awaits them on the other side of high school. Otherwise their first taste of freedom will completely blindside them and they will be ill equipped to face those challenges. They will get their first taste of a lack of direct parental involvement and completely fall off the deep end. They will become the cliched story of how they were sheltered in high school, got their first taste of freedom after graduation, and became a hedonist.

You are a different person than I am; your relationship with Christ is different than mine, your parenting style is probably different than mine, your convictions on some of the minor details of walking with Christ are probably different than mine. This book is not meant to be the final authority on each of these subjects, but rather a conversation starter between you and your soon to be graduate/adult/teenager/pre-teen.

I said in the introduction to your children, this is the book that I wish I had when I graduated high school. My goal is to present practical, reasonable, and balanced information. My goal is to help eliminate some of the mistakes that devastate young adults and to help them reach their potential that is only found in Christ.

From one parent to another, thank you for your support in buying this book. Thank you for supporting this ministry. Thank you for being a good parent and for being involved in your kid's life.

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<sup>9</sup> That is a scary thought, I know, but more than likely it is a fact.

**I.**

# **SPIRITUAL HEALTH**

**“THIS IS HOME NOW I’M FINALLY WHERE I  
BELONG (WHERE I BELONG)  
-SWITCHFOOT**

Sunday morning. Your alarm goes off. Okay, let's be real...the alarm on your phone starts to go off. You think, "You know what, I am on my own and getting up for church on a Sunday morning is simply not in the cards." You then turn the alarm off, roll back over, and reengage in sleepy time.

What will happen if you miss church? Will God smite you? Will your parents break into your dorm or apartment and throw you out of bed like a javelin? Did you just make reservations for a table in Hades?

The answer is a resounding and anti-climatic "no" to all of the above. None of those things will happen. The only thing that will happen is that you will probably sleep through the early kickoff of the NFL games<sup>10</sup>.

I understand. Believe me, I understand the desire to sleep through an alarm, especially since, as a freshman, you probably have at least one 8:30 a.m. class that you are rolling out of bed and going to...in pajama pants. I understand that you probably had some sort of social function<sup>11</sup> that you attended the night before, and your arrival in bed is probably closer to the sun coming up the next day than the sun going down the previous evening.

I understand. Believe me, I understand the awkward process of thinking about which church to go to. Thinking about whether there will be someone you know at the church. Thinking about whether or not the church has a young adult or college ministry worth going to. Not knowing anyone, one of two things will happen when visiting a church as a college freshman. You may fade into the background and get semi-awkward glances. The other scenario has you being inundated with people beginning semi-awkward conversations to get to know you and beginning the process of trying to get you to sign up to become a member. This feels very similar to hearing a recruiting pitch to be a Scentsy<sup>12</sup> rep.

### **Young adults in church**

I have worked in churches in some capacity for the majority of my adult life, so let me tell you a secret. Each church has different focuses, but there is one constant that seems to prevail throughout almost all of the churches that I have had the pleasure of working with. The common thread is that the young adult/college age ministry is the weakest ministry in the church. In any church, you will typically find that the least represented age demographic is 18-30. You will find that there are plenty of children, plenty of teenagers, plenty of parents, and plenty of grandparents, but someone who is

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<sup>10</sup> Or the start of the noon romantic comedy from 4 years ago playing on TNT, if football is not your thing.

<sup>11</sup> Party...it was a party

<sup>12</sup> Or other Multi Level Marketing business

single, 25, and regularly attends church is the duck-billed platypus<sup>13</sup> of most congregations<sup>14</sup>. The fact that the single 25 year old is so rare has no bearing on denomination. Every church of every affiliation is looking for ways to appeal to the 20 somethings.

Here is the reality of the situation. Every sociological study as of late indicates that young adults are becoming more and more spiritual, but less and less religious. Because of that, organized or institutionalized religion is a turnoff for them<sup>15</sup>. What this means for you is that you are not alone in having a desire to either walk away from the church entirely or never darken its doors in the first place.

There is plenty of blame to go around, but the fact remains that most churches weakest ministry is the young adult ministry. There are several reasons for this. Some of the faults lie with the church and some with the young adults.

## **Statistics**

Here is what I also know. I know statistics. I know that of young adults who were active in their church's youth group, who were considered leaders in the church, whom church members have hopes for, who were people with an expectation that that they will do mighty things to advance the Kingdom of God, 70% will stop going to church on any sort of regular basis. Keep in mind, this isn't 70% of people in high school that will stop going to church, but 70% of teenagers who attended at least two or more youth group functions per month. Roughly one-third of those who leave return to attend church at least twice a month, but most people will not return to church on any level<sup>16</sup>. If they do return, it is once they have started a family, and it is out of a desire to have their kids "raised" in the church. As time progresses, the numbers get worse. According to George Barna<sup>17</sup> 80% of those who grew up in church will be disengaged by the time they are 29. As for those who come back because they have a desire for their kids to grow up in church, most of them leave the church again once their kids are old enough to leave the house themselves<sup>18</sup>.

Roughly 84% of those surveyed admit that they have no idea how the Bible applies to their lives. It is not that people are leaving the church once they graduate, they have no

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<sup>13</sup> Very rare. It is a platypus that has a duck's bill, otter's feet, and a mammal's body, lays eggs, and is venomous.

<sup>14</sup> With some exception

<sup>15</sup> Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), pg. 21

<sup>16</sup> "Church Dropouts: How Many Leave Church between ages 18-22 and why?." Lifeway Research (2007)

<sup>17</sup> Founder of the Barna group, and regarded a leader in Christian research and statistical analysis.

<sup>18</sup> Dyck, Drew. "The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church." Christianity Today (2010)

grasp of how God plays a part of their life once they are out on their own. We have compartmentalized our ministries to the point where youth ministry is in essence an outpost of the church as a whole. The people of a youth ministry even use the term “big church” to describe the Sunday morning services, thus codifying the separation between the youth and the rest of the church. Our students graduate from high school and do not flow into the rest of the church because the rest of the church was not theirs to begin with.

I am not saying that church attendance is the final authority of spiritual health or growth, because going to church does not make you a Christian just as much as going to McDonald’s does not make you a hamburger<sup>19</sup>. There are numerous Christians who never step foot in a church in the traditional sense, just as there are a ton of people who go to church every time the doors are open who are not Christians. Church attendance is not the absolute authority when it comes to spiritual health, but it is a good barometer.

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<sup>19</sup> One of the more awful church cliches that I have ever heard.

