

## CGGC eNews—The First Two Weeks are Critical

August 19, 2016

As I was getting around yesterday morning, I noticed that my neighbors had a rental van and were loading it up with various items. I rightly assumed that this was the long-expected freshmen move-in day as their youngest child has been preparing to leave the nest. All across the country, this week and next, there will be thousands of young people who will leave home for the first time to begin their collegiate experience.



There has been a tremendous amount of ink spilled in recent years concerning the issue of young people walking away from their faith in their post-high school years; and rightfully so! Depending upon whose research you look at, it's been suggested that between 50% to 90% of young people walk away from at least the church or even their faith altogether during these critical post-high school years (there are a lot of variables in the different forms of research here, but some of the best, most reliable research I've seen suggests that 40-60% of "church" kids tend to exit the church during this life stage). This brings me to a couple of observations: 1) faithful church attendance as a young person doesn't guarantee faithful church attendance as a young adult; 2) faithful church attendance might not be the most reliable measurement of a deep and abiding faith; and 3) perhaps we're not doing as good of a job as we need to be doing when it comes to equipping our young people with a faith that lasts well beyond their high school years.

Over the years it's become clear to me that we need to do more to prepare our young people for post-high school life than just a "graduation Sunday" with a Bible, a prayer, a handshake and well wishes for the future. Those who will enter into a college experience will often be faced with a vastly different cultural experience than what they were accustomed to back "home". They'll be faced with a host of other worldviews, philosophies, temptations and new freedoms which can be difficult to navigate.

As I talked with my neighbors yesterday, I was reminded of the great research being done by Kara Powell at the Fuller Youth Institute (<http://fulleryouthinstitute.org/>) and the idea of sticky faith (<http://stickyfaith.org/>). Sticky faith is a faith that lasts. One of the things that the Fuller Youth Institute has helped churches understand is the importance of a college student's first few days or weeks of the college experience. The first two weeks are critical! A lot will be decided in those early days as far as what's going to be most important in a student's college experience such as: "what crowd am I going to run with, what's going to be my main focus and where does my faith fit into all of this?"

I'm going to guess that most of us may have a young person in our lives who's making this important transition to college or independent young-adulthood. While there's a lot that should be done long before this moment, I wanted to pass along a few suggestions of how you can help make a difference now in those early critical weeks of the college experience:

1. **Show you care from afar.** A student may choose to attend college far away from home. Take the time to send a note of encouragement, send a care package, touch base with a short email, text or phone call; and of course pray. Don't underestimate the power of these small acts of kindness and love. The early weeks of college can sometimes be very lonely or disorienting and your prayers and words of encouragement can play a huge role in bolstering a student's faith during those tumultuous first days.
2. **Show you care face to face.** There are times when a student attends college across town or in a community that's close enough that it wouldn't be hard to go and visit them during those early weeks of school. Take the time to catch coffee with them or offer to treat them to lunch or dinner and spend the time encouraging them in their life journey and their faith journey. Your investment of time and a meal now may pay substantial dividends throughout their lifetime and even in to eternity.
3. **Show you care by helping them make connections.** Many students don't know where to start when it comes to connecting with Christian fellowship away from home (it's probably always been dictated to them by their folks). Anything we can do to help identify campus ministries, local congregations with which to connect, or even other believers can make a huge difference. I'm convinced that many of our students aren't opposed to making these kind of connections when they arrive on campus, it's just that they don't feel prepared to do it on their own and that's where we can help.
4. **Let's commit to work ahead with the high school students we have now so that they're better prepared for this moment in the future.** All of the things listed above are good things to do regardless, but if that's all we're going to do, we're fighting a losing battle. There's much to be done in order to do a better job of grounding their faith in Jesus, preparing them to face some of the philosophical and worldview challenges that are prevalent in academia, and equipping them to find, build and develop Christian community away from home. There's a lot more to be said here, but that's a blog post for another time.

I have a couple of names in mind of first year freshmen that I need to reach out to during these next two or three weeks. Who are the names that the Lord is laying on your heart to do the same?

Let's step up and make a difference in this critical time in the lives of those young people that we care about so deeply.

Christ's Peace,

**Lance**

CGGC eNews—Vol. 10, No. 34