

A 30-DAY DEVOTIONAL FOR FRESHMEN

FRESHMAN

MAKING FAITH YOUR PRIORITY

LARS ROOD



simply for students



YouthMinistry.com/TOGETHER

Freshman

Making Faith Your Priority

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TO KYLE AND PRESTON:

God brought us together your freshman year in that small group. You both know you drove me nuts. But I wouldn't change those memories for anything. We did more wrestling and fighting than talking about Jesus, but somehow he showed up and did some amazing things in your lives. I am so proud of who you have both become.



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INTRODUCTION

OK, I get it—you are a little bit freaked out. The last year of your life, you were at the top of the school. You were the oldest class, high on the pecking order of power and privilege. You were a big eighth-grader. But now you are getting ready to start over. For some of you that's a welcome thing. You are excited to leave the painful years of middle school behind and start fresh in a new school with new people. Maybe the last couple of years have been rough and you didn't have a good time. This is a chance for you to make your mark and decide you are going to be someone different or do something different. But you are a little scared because you really don't want it to be like the last few years. Others of you may have had a great time in junior high and you are just hoping that high school will continue that. But how do you make sure that will happen? What if it doesn't? You are worried that you don't really know what you are getting yourself into.

And faith is something that is important to you. You feel that there is this piece of your life that just seems more right when God is involved. It's hard to explain, but you know deep down that you want to stay close to him.

But you are making this big transition, and with all transitions, some things come with you and others are left behind. If you've ever moved houses you know what this feels like. You have to choose how important all your stuff is and make decisions based on that. Some things go in the truck, and others just get sold at a garage sale or are donated to charity.



The goal of this devotional is to help you think about your faith. You may have a great and strong faith that has been nurtured for years by loving parents, youth workers, church members, friends, coaches, and many other people. Or maybe it's been the opposite experience for you: You don't have a big community of Christ-followers around you that have been helping you grow. You've been doing it all on your own. Whatever your story, I believe this devotional series is for you. This book contains 30 different things for you to read, think, and pray about—plus action steps aimed at helping these ideas solidify a little bit more in your brain.

Your freshman year is an important one. It sets the stage for the rest of your high school time. You're going to experience so many things for the first time, and you'll benefit from thinking through how you want to respond in situations. It's our hope (meaning the collective world of adults who pray for you and desire to watch you make great decisions) that you would really figure out this year how to make faith your priority.

I'm not going to lie to you: It will not be easy. With this new season in your life you are going to have to deal with so many different things. I didn't do it perfectly. In fact I was probably a great example of imperfection. But what I did do right was to try to always prioritize my life so that faith never was too far in my back seat.

So my challenge to you is to try it out. This book probably won't change your life all by itself. But I hope it'll point out to you some steps and things that will help you as you work on figuring out how to be a ninth-grader who is trying to make your faith a priority.

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.

Each devotion includes a section called "The World Thinks." Most often these are comments that I have heard from non-Christians about these particular topics or issues. I don't hold back, so they may come across as a little negative. That's OK. You'll hear negative things all the time about your faith. The point is to encourage you to think through what people say and work out how you might respond to the thoughts and reactions people have about your faith in Christ.

You'll also 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. 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.

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 make faith your priority.



SECTION 1

A WHOLE YEAR OF FIRSTS



Welcome to the first time you do a whole bunch of things! That's one of the great and scary things about your freshman year. You get to experience everything for the first time. Maybe this isn't a big deal because you handle change and transitions well. Or maybe you are a bit nervous about what this all means. The thing about firsts is that you only have one chance to experience them. For example, with a "first impression," you have really only one opportunity to show people who you are—and after that you are either reinforcing or trying to change what they think of you.

With all of these things you are stepping into brand-new territory. How will you respond? Do you have a plan? Are you prepared when things don't go the way you expected? Think and pray through these ideas. It's my goal to help you think about these "firsts" in the context of your faith journey. You might read that last sentence and say, "I don't have a faith journey." That's actually totally OK because the goal of this is to encourage you to consider things in a "new" way.

NO. 1 THE FIRST DAY

You wake up. You put on some clothes. You grab something to eat and then head to school. You might be walking, getting dropped off, or catching a bus. It's a new school and you are feeling a bit nervous. Even if you don't want to admit it to yourself, it's affecting you. We have all been there. That feeling you get walking on campus for the first time can be scary. And guess what? That's OK. You are supposed to be feeling these things. It's natural and normal. But that probably doesn't make you feel better.

So how can the words in this devotional help you prepare? I'm going to let you in on a secret: They can't. The words in this book by themselves aren't going to give you any secrets to making it a better day. That's not the point of this book. There is no quick fix to making this year amazing. In fact, if you don't already know it, this year is probably going to be tough. But that's actually OK because you are going to learn a ton and grow in the midst of it.

Of course, now you are wondering what you are possibly going to learn if I've already told you my words are pretty useless. Well, that's the deal. You have to choose to actually do something with these words. Why don't you try it out right now?

You walk on campus and you have a choice. Who are you going to be? I don't know the condition of your faith. It might already be super strong, and that's amazing. But even if you have a strong faith, you still have to choose what to do with it and what it means to you. So here's what I want you to do. Open your eyes really big and see if for a brief moment of that first walk on campus you can see things as

Jesus might. That's going to take really only one thing: You have to move beyond yourself and think about everyone else. Not what they think about you but what you imagine they might be thinking.

THINK ABOUT:

1. How might Jesus want you to reach out to hurting people at your school? (Yes, as a freshman you can still have an impact.)
2. Do you want your faith to be a part of your life at school this year? Why or why not?
3. What things do you want to "bring" with you from your last school, and what things do you want to "leave" behind?

THE WORLD THINKS:

I'm pretty sure the world just wants you to leave your faith at church and not bring it to school. The big way the world wants to discourage you from thinking about Jesus at school is by making it seem weird. The world wants you to think that the two things don't go together and that if you want to try, you'll have to carry around a big Bible with you and preach in the lunchroom.

ACT:

Guess what? You can be a teenager who has faith and trust in Jesus without coming across as “weird.” You don’t have to carry a big Bible or preach on campus. What you need to do is pretty simple. In the Bible, Jesus talks a lot about loving people. What if you just decided this week that you were going to work on doing that? You could be the freshman who decides to talk to people that others seem to forget or ignore. You could choose to not talk bad about people. You could encourage your friends and tell people what you like about them. Why don’t you go ahead and try that?

READ:

John 13:34 — think about how you could love people this week



NO. 2 THE FIRST TEMPTATIONS

One of the main differences between middle school and high school is the amount of freedom that you have. This might depend upon your school, but you likely will have more opportunities in high school to be in places where temptations are in front of you than you did in junior high. And chances are good, too, that you might at some point be around some older friends who have experienced those things before you. Trust me when I say that there are just a lot more opportunities to get in trouble and to have things pop up in front of you that you haven't experienced before. Your faith can be super strong and a priority in your life, but if you haven't experienced some of these temptations before, how can you possibly be prepared?

The goal of this book is to help you make your faith a priority in your life. Here's a quick tip, though: It's really hard to make the right choice in the midst of temptation. In fact, I will go so far as to say that you will often fail if you find yourself having to make decisions when temptation is presented to you. But don't worry; there is hope! How? I encourage you to make the right choices *before* you enter tempting situations. That's the only way I know how to help you. As a freshman you need to figure out what you will do in situations way in advance. I hope you have some people in your life at church, youth group, in a small group, or just some friends that you can talk about how you want to react to temptation. I promise you that the work you do to talk through this ahead of time will absolutely help. Here's a bit of wisdom from my own bad experience. I didn't do enough preparation in high school, and I found myself getting into bad situations pretty regularly. I wish I could go

back and think about how I wanted to respond in situations way before they happened.

THINK ABOUT:

1. How do you protect yourself from making bad choices?
2. What are some things that you know could potentially be major temptations to you?
3. How do temptations and struggle play into your faith journey?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You'll probably hear quite a few times this year that it's OK to experiment. The world will even tell you that many people make bad choices, but they all turn out OK, so you shouldn't feel bad if you struggle and stumble a little. *"Everyone is doing it,"* so it must be OK. You might even hear that your freshman year doesn't really matter, so if you are going to mess up, you should do it now. Adults might tell you that they all "experimented" a little, so it is OK if you want to do it.

ACT:

I don't want to be a major downer here, but if you want to really think about temptation and your faith, then you are going to have to ask people some hard questions. If you have some trusted adults in your life (yes, your parents can be in that category), I encourage you to ask them this hard question: "What did you do in high school that you wish you had never done or hadn't been tempted to do?" Yeah, I realize that's totally awkward and weird, but if your faith is something you want to grow, it's worth asking someone what he or she thinks.

READ:

Matthew 6:13, Luke 22:40, and 1 Corinthians 10:13

NO. 3 THE FIRST PARTY

I'm pretty sure you will end up at your first party because (1) you got invited and decided to go or (2) you were with friends and next thing you knew, someone wanted to go to a party so you went along. Either way, how do you make some good choices about the way you are going to act? I remember the first party I went to. It was not a great decision on my part to go, and the entire time I knew I was somewhere I shouldn't have been, and I was worried I would get in trouble. I did make some good choices, though, and didn't partake in any of the illegal activities that happened there. One tough bit in all of this is that you might have a good time and maybe nothing bad happens. You might even have a great time. But sin and struggles have a way of slowly taking over our lives.

THINK ABOUT:

1. What do you think about drinking alcohol and getting drunk?
2. How confident do you feel saying no to something you don't want to do?
3. If you had to choose between being "popular" and a partier or "unpopular" and sober, which would you choose? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

You don't have to watch TV for too long to see people fully participating in the party lifestyle. The world wants you to believe that you can do that for a while and then simply stop and become a responsible adult. Look at the *Jersey Shore* phenomenon, where the whole show is about a group of young people drinking and partying for an entire summer. Next thing you know they are instant celebrities.

ACT:

What if there was something else for students to do on a Friday night instead of partying? I'm fairly certain that not every student's goal is to drink too much and puke. They just want to have fun. So how could you (or you and some friends) be a catalyst for fun? Do some brainstorming here and see if you can get some other people (maybe even adults) to help you pull off something that might be a fun evening.

READ:

2 Samuel 11–12 — watch the sin of David start affecting his life