

TRANSITIONS

Finding
God's
Voice in
the Space
Between



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Between

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Introduction

Transition feels like a time when our schedules, commitments, and obligations carry us along at a faster pace than we'd like. Tasks of adjustment—moving our belongings (back home or to a new apartment), settling into a job, connecting with a church community, and saying “goodbye” to familiar people and places—take energy, intentionality, and openness.

In transition, we usually focus primarily on where we've been and where we've going; and because of that...and our fatigue... we miss the formative power of “the space between.” Another term for this space between is “liminal space,” space that's neither here nor there. Part of our role as a congregation is to accompany you through liminal space—to help you not just leave after your season in Marion, but to help send you, resource you, and give you things that help you thrive.

This book is one of our ways of doing that; within these pages are insights for living wisely in transition: for hearing God's voice, being a neighbor, and following in Jesus' way, so you can live your life in step with the Spirit.

One of our favorite things in young adult ministry is getting the chance to help people after they've left our midst... offering resources, relationships, and space to hear your story. A time will probably come when one or more of those things are useful.

Whenever that arises, call us at the office: (765) 674-8541, or email me at ethan.linder@collegewes.com.

For more resources on how to abide in the space between, check out Liminal—our resourcing website at liminalfoundation.org.

Holding space with you in transition,

Ethan



Ending Well

“Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end.”

John 13:1

Ending well is always a process (whether the ending is brought on by choice, finishing something, losing someone or something—expected or unexpected). As we journey through our “endings,” all of us feel a sense of loss, grief, and—even if the ending leads to a happy new beginning—an ongoing sense that something is gone that won’t be recovered in the same way again. Here are a few ways to engage in moments of “ending.”

Acknowledge it.

Allow whatever feelings you have to be what they are.

If you are ending a season that has been hard or even just complex and heavy, it is okay if the feelings that flood in are ones of relief and gratitude.

Allow your feelings to be complex and nuanced. They might be different in the morning than they are in the evening. You might think you are okay and excited and quickly realize you are also sad.

Change is sometimes uncomfortable and definitely stirs the “status quo pot”—do your best to embrace it and admit it to yourself. Try to offer a bit of extra grace to yourself as you navigate new territory (a new job, life without a person through death or heartbreak, the loss of a season or job that you wish were still here).

Prepare your heart if you are able.

Sometimes endings are abrupt and we cannot anticipate or plan for them. However, we can create space in our hearts and minds to process them, even if it isn't beforehand.

Ask yourself (and those around you) good questions as you process an ending:

- What are you taking with you from this role/season/person into the future?
- What's going to be hardest to 'leave behind'? How do you plan to process that?
- What are some relationships you've made that you are determined to invest in after this season is over? How will you invest in them?
- Are there people who intentionally or unintentionally hurt you in this season that you need to forgive? How can you release them to the Lord through forgiveness and ask for His blessing on each of you?
- What do you want to make sure you take with you from this season?

Saying Goodbye

John 13:1 states, "Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end." My friend and former colleague, Jess Fankhauser, taught me a lot about this verse in a blog post she shared on the "The Art of Saying Goodbye in a Culture of See You Later"... Jesus in this passage asks us lean in fully until the end of something like he did, but then to admit and truly say goodbye to his community. In her blog post, she says "In the church, we rarely, if ever, talk about saying goodbye unless we are at a funeral. The reality though is that goodbyes are a part of our lives long before we get to a funeral. Our lives are full of comings and goings, transitions—the changing of season both in na-

ture and in our lives and heart. Different seasons, with different people, roles and responsibilities.” She goes on to say, “And the more I encounter these different seasons and roles and relationships in my work and life, the more I am convinced that our inability to say goodbye well, is paralyzing us (me) from living fully into the abundant John 10:10 life that God desires for us.” My favorite lesson from her words is her belief that “to learn to leave well is to learn to live well” and I think she was right.

How do you want and need to say goodbye?

- Jesus teaches us (as my friend Jess reminds me) that “We are meant to live and invest fully until the very last day.” Lean into the experience—try not to withdraw or check out to avoid pain.
- If you can say thank you when needed, do.
- If you need to have a hard conversation, do that if that would be healthy.
- Try to say goodbye as honestly as you can.



Shelby Louvé

Shelby Louve has been living life in residence halls throughout Grant County for the last decade and her current role is as a Resident Director of Evans Hall at Indiana Wesleyan University. She and her husband, Stenway, love college students and living life in community. Living life on a college campus has taught her a great deal about transitions and how to prepare to end seasons well.



Putting Down Roots in a Brand New Place

“A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

John 16:32-33

No one ever teaches you how to transition into life post-college. You don't get to take an exit course right before graduation that addresses the big life changes coming your way and how to navigate them. Some exit with excitement and anticipation for whatever comes next, while others sit in uncertainty, fear, or dread. Either way, we all blindly walk into the next season of life, no matter how many things we think we have figured out.

That was the case for me. When I graduated from college, I had plans that I was holding loosely too. And thank God for that, because He quickly started to change things all around. Two months later, I moved to a completely new state, to start a new job, in a place where I knew no one. I was 12 hours away from any friend or family who could help me transition into this new season of life. All of a sudden I had to figure out how to open a bank account on my own, learn how to budget a paycheck, register my car and get my own car insurance, figure

out where to get my oil changed, where to get my teeth cleaned and my eyes checked. Thankfully, all of these things can easily be answered through a simple google search, and I was blessed with amazing co-workers who gave suggestions from their own experience.

But the one thing that was the hardest to learn, and that a google search can't really answer for you, is how to find or be in community. And I quickly began to see that no one ever taught me how to make friends. As a child you become friends with practically anyone and everyone. As a middle schooler or high schooler you narrow down those friendships to those people you have shared interests with—sports, band, theater, etc. And then in college, community is practically handed to you. Relationships are built around similar seasons of life, similar schedules, and proximity. First semester freshmen often cling to the first friendly connection they make. And then as the years go on, often friendships get refined down to those within your major, school of study, or extracurricular involvements.

But when you leave college and enter into the hypothetical “real world” this can all be incredibly different. Like me, you may be moving to a new place where relationships already exist among the people there. It may seem everyone already has “their people.” Now you have to navigate vastly different schedules. Everyone's work hours may not line up. The spontaneous late night ice cream runs are almost non-existent and time spent with people has to be scheduled out in advance. Many people have more commitments—spouses, kids, etc. Or sometimes, at the end of a work day you are just too tired to be social. Or maybe you don't even know how or where to meet people! Not everyone's community will come from their work place. So how do you meet people? Where do you go? All of these questions and conflicts can make finding community incredibly difficult in this season of life.

And that sucks—because we know we aren't meant to live life alone. Every single one of us needs others. We need relationships with individuals who will love us, challenge us, and live life alongside us. So here's my point in all of this: *You can't expect a community to simply be handed to you, even if it has been in the past. You have to work for it.*

Maybe you are asking, where do I start, or how do I prepare myself for this transition? Well, here are four encouragements I give you from my own experience of finding deep relationships and community in a post-college world.

- 1. Curb Your Expectations**—Your expectations can easily become stumbling blocks. So are your expectations about friendship and community helping you or hurting you? Are they empowering you to be a good friend to others? Or are they unfair toward those around you and setting you up for failure?
- 2. Check Your Own Insecurities**—Your insecurities and doubts about yourself will come out even stronger when you are feeling lonely or isolated. Realize that everyone else’s world doesn’t revolve around you, and that their actions or lack of actions aren’t a reflection on your worth or value.
- 3. Push Yourself Out Of Your Comfort Zone**—You have to work for your community. This often means being bold and putting yourself out there. You will never make friends if immediately after work you go home. Get out there! And don’t be afraid to invite others. Invite your co-workers out for coffee after work. Practice saying “yes”. One thing I did the first year was to always say yes when invited to doing something with people. If you don’t seem interested in spending time with people, they will stop inviting you.
- 4. Bring Your Full Self To The Table**—If your new friends only know a false you, it can be really hard to change that later on. Besides, people who want real relationships want to be friends with you, not the version of you that you think they will like.

In all this, be okay with the fact that developing a deep community may take time. Don’t lose heart or give up, and allow God to bring the right people into your life.



Jaena Gormong

Jaena Gormong is the Student Ministry Worship Pastor at GracePoint Wesleyan Church in Brookings, South Dakota, where she works with students grade 6th through college graduates. She is passionate about seeing young Christians develop a vibrant faith. Jaena enjoys spending time with her dog, Lucy, and learning new board games with friends.



Awe, Wonder, and Transition

*“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen,
since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

II Corinthians 4:18

“If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life.” -Rachel Carson

Grownup skepticism and cynicism gradually chokes the life out of wide-eyed childlike wonder; eventually hardening the heart and blinding the eyes to the miraculous invisible realm. Moses would have never seen the burning bush if he had not been open to awe and wonder. We are all surrounded with burning bushes, but so often we are blind to seeing them. Wonder lives outside words or description, it is unsayable and intelligible. A world without awe and wonder eventually sinks into a kind of despair that cannot resist fear.

Living in a way that keeps us open to awe and wonder makes us smaller, and everything else bigger. Wonder sees the treasure in the trash, and so, it becomes an advocate for the neglected, abused, and ignored.

Experiencing wonder enlightens the search for meaning and truth. It is an antiseptic to exclusivity. Wonder whispers in the quiet,

thrives on humility, and depends on innocence. Pride and arrogance cannot survive long in a heart full of wonder. In moments of wonder we brush up against the divine even in the most mundane, everyday experiences.

The ordinary, everyday parts of life can lead us into a kind of blind habitualization. In this state of being we easily lose a sense of awe and wonder and are blinded to the eternal and invisible miracles that surround us.

When the light dims, when hope is gone, when fear creeps in. Run towards the light of awe and wonder you can find in all of God's creation. There are miracles all around us, if only we have the eyes to see them.



Rod Crossman

Rod Crossman was born in South Dakota and raised in upstate New York he's been a farmhand, lifeguard, grocery carryout, factory worker, high school teacher and college professor. He recently retired after 40 years of teaching painting, printmaking and design for the Indiana Wesleyan University Art Department. He loves to spend his free time flyfishing. Another lifetime vocation has been nature and landscape painting. He and his wife, Dr. Judy Crossman, live in Marion, Indiana, and Englewood, Florida throughout the year.



Transitioning - Being Discipled to Discipling Others

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which The Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God which He bought with His own blood.... Now I commit you to God and to the Word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

Acts 20:28 + 32

What an exciting challenge lies before you! You have been chosen, since the foundation of the earth, for this very time and season. God not only sees you--He now entrusts you with the sacred role of shepherd. You are offered the privilege of walking with others with your eyes opened to their God-given capacity. God calls you to encourage, teach, feed and lead them into greater devotion to their Living Lord! You are invited to be an agent of God's goodness and grace to all that He brings into your life, from this day forward.

In order to live out this high calling, I pray that you will surrender yourself to God's loving provisions each day. He is THE GREAT SHEPHERD of all, and He holds the wisdom, love, power, care and courage that is needed to live an abundant life. These gifts are for you and for those you will be blessed to shepherd.

Open yourself to the many resources that God has already given you. Remember that His Word is alive. Faithfully bring the Word into your heart and mind. Be strengthened by prayer that is both listening

and speaking. As your ability to communicate with God deepens, peace that He has already given will become accessible to you and to those you shepherd. Cling to God's Bride – The Church. Submit yourself to the life and ministries of a local church. You will be strengthened, your faithfulness will be an inspiration to your sheep, and God will be glorified.

Let divine joy, peace, and kindness fill your being. You are now walking in the footsteps of Jesus, our ever-present Shepherd. May His favor rest on you as you shepherd faithfully those He entrusts into your care.



Dr. Judy Crossman

Dr. Judy Crossman has been an academic dean, a pastor, and a professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling; a licensed clinical counselor and a trained spiritual director, she has retired from full-time ministry and now splits her time between Marion, Indiana and Englewood, Florida with her husband, Rod.



When Your Job Isn't Your Dream

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

Romans 8:5-6

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Romans 8:28

My first job out of undergrad pushed me to a very “clock in/clock out” mentality. It was a job I could easily leave at the door when I left and not think much about until I came back. It was not unbearable per say, but it was definitely not my dream.

What about the four years of training and education I just completed? What about my plans?

My plans.

Many months I wrestled with discontentment and struggled with resentment towards friends who had landed their “dream roles.” It was exhausting. I thought I merely needed to push through this season before I got to my dream. But as I began to allow myself to feel my frustrations fully and completely, I slowly began to notice a work the Lord was doing in me.

As I was trying to cope with my circumstances, I knew I needed to re-evaluate my intentions. Did I want that dream job because I thought

I deserved it more than others? That I had earned it? Was I placing my identity in it? Was I worried about being left behind? I realized my answer was “yes” to many of those questions. Convicted with pride and jealousy, I asked the Lord to change my heart. Unable to change my situation at the time, I knew the only thing that could change was my position towards it.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

His plans. According to His purpose.

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” (Romans 8:5-6)

To set my mind on the Spirit is *life* and *peace*.

This is the promise that I am working with the Lord to train my heart to believe. But as I surrendered my “dream” and began to focus on listening to the Spirit, I was refreshed. I started to see the people I worked for and with, not as bothersome roadblocks to my dream, but children of God whom I had been placed beside to love and to encourage. I was put in a unique position to walk through life daily with them, able to show kindness, gentleness, and patience. This is the dream. To do the work of God, to love my neighbor as myself, and to set my mind on things of the Spirit.

I am still committed to my passions, and trust that as the Lord knows the desires of my heart, I may get to my “dream job” someday. But as I wait, I am choosing to trust the refining process of grace, allowing my wants and desires to be molded and changed. I pray we all continue to open ourselves up to the places God puts us, living ever fully into the now, and trusting Him with our future.



Anna Ortmann

Anna Ortmann is a recent graduate of Indiana Wesleyan University. She is currently working as a Communications Assistant, as well as remaining actively involved as a worship team member in her local church. She loves anything that has to do with art and music.



Navigating the Workplace as a Young Leader

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Corinthians 11:1

When Paul writes to the church-community in Corinth, he calls them to follow Christ not only with his words, but also by his example. Leading others, however, is never an easy feat, and leadership is not limited to those who occupy publicly recognized roles in an organizational hierarchy. As you are sent into your vocational context, you, like Paul, can lead others by example. Navigating your work context as a young leader, nevertheless, requires certain commitments exemplified by Christ himself.

In order to lead others, you must first lead yourself. Jesus shows us the priority of this first order of leadership by leading us all in the way of salvation. He is the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Jesus went first. He knew his commitments to the Father, and he kept them above all else. Navigating your work context as a young leader begins with building self-trust before trying to earn the trust of others. It begins with leading yourself before you traverse the challenges of leading others. Know your priorities to yourself and keep them. Wake up on time each day. Spend time with the Lord. Care for your body. If you make a commitment, keep it. Just as Christ kept his commitment to the Father, even in death on a cross, keep your large and small commitments.

In addition to leading yourself, navigating your work context as a young leader also demands that you value what Jesus values. Anyone can do excellent work, but leaders set the priorities. You have the opportunity to simultaneously undo and reestablish the culture you work within. Do not give an inch to workaholic tendencies or cultures that attribute value based on the tasks people complete. Be like Jesus. Value people over productivity and projects. Pray for each person you work with and their families by name each day. Check-in with your co-workers, even the difficult ones. Ask how their kids, or cats, are doing. Make time for them outside of work. They are each created in God's image. The Lord is at work in their lives. You set the pace and priorities through your example as a young leader. Regardless of your work context, you have the opportunity to reveal the radical love of Christ to all through revealing their incompressible worth to God.



Caleb Dunn

Caleb serves as the Assistant Pastor at Calvary Wesleyan Church in Harrington, Delaware. He is also an online Adjunct Professor in both Theology and Church History. Beyond these roles, Caleb enjoys spending time with his wife, Matlin, and their sons, Abraham and Joel, as they pursue God's best together.



The Family of God: Finding Community within the Larger Church

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.”

Romans 12:9

Whether you’ve been in your current church family for a matter of months or years, the simple fact is that transitioning to a new church is difficult. We bring our identity, our expectations, and our experiences to a whole new context, and this collision is often painful and confusing.

In my own personal journey, this wasn’t exactly a graceful transition. I had just spent four years becoming so sure of my calling and passions, only to realize that not all pastors and churches shared the same beliefs and convictions as me. So, how do I move forward in this new context while honoring both my calling and the leaders above me? Looking back, there are a few things I wish I had realized before entering this season.

1. Root your calling in the right place.

We all know the temptation to place our identity in our position. For me, I felt as if this new context now owned my identity and that I had lost all my newfound autonomy. In response, I clung to everything I could to reclaim my own voice. It’s easy to see why I thought this

would be the solution, but ultimately the solution wasn't in reclaiming my individuality, but reclaiming my calling to the global body of Christ.

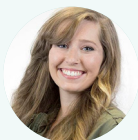
2. Cling to the good.

It is so easy to become jaded and pessimistic when you don't instantly fit well into a new church family. Thankfully, one of the lessons that continues to ring in my ears from my last semester in college was "cling to the good." Whether it's a person who you're struggling to get along with or a decision that just doesn't make sense to you, before giving into cynicism, choose to seek out and celebrate the good.

3. Find your people.

Community is critical to your spiritual and emotional survival. If you're going through a difficult transition, there is nothing more healing than a listening and empathetic friend. Wherever you're going – find the people you can trust, and intentionally build community together. I can't stress this enough.

Ultimately, we all know that transition is hard – especially transitioning to a new church family. My prayer is that God would go before you, providing the grace to navigate the messiness of church and the courage to find your unique contribution to that body.



Victoria Covington

Victoria Covington serves as pastor at 12Stone Church in Georgia, where she lives with her two dogs, and her husband, Steven. Victoria served on the Collegian Leadership Team when the current form of college ministry was just getting started.



Stewarding Your Discontent

“When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, ‘It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.’”

Genesis 29:31-32

If you read the entire passage above (beyond just the portion we can print in our format), you’ll notice that most of us work to meet our longings—for connection, for love, for affection—through the best means we know.

Humanity has the propensity to demand the best from life in both the meaningful and mundane. All around we are bombarded with pictures of what our life could be like if we just worked harder, slept less, did more; and in looking at these things, we often allow discontentment to rule our lives.

Towards the end of Genesis, we come upon the story of Leah, Jacob’s unloved wife. On the night of her sister’s wedding, Leah was given deceptively to Jacob in place of Rachel. Most people desire to be the aim of another’s affections. Yet Leah—having no say in her situation—was forced to marry a man who loved her sister. To say her arrangement is disappointing would be an understatement; yet she tried to love Jacob even when he loved Rachel more.

God saw Leah's pain and blessed her by allowing her to bear sons. Leah believed that by offering Jacob sons she would win his affections. Instead, bearing children became her worth, so when she stopped bearing sons, she became discontent and insecure. Leah's life became defined by her desire to satisfy her discontentment; her marriage was not what she hoped, and her relationship with her sister was strained. Each solution she tried only left her starving for affection.

When we allow our lives to be ruled by discontentment, we seek to resolve our discomfort through human means. God saw Leah in her circumstances, knew she was unloved, and wanted to provide a solution for her pain. In stewarding our discontent, we need to remember that we have a God who sees us in the midst of our pain. By casting discontentment on the Lord, we acknowledge that life is not what we expected, yet we believe that God will see us through.

I know that as you leave college, you may feel unprepared for your life ahead. You may feel disappointed or discontent with where you are in life. Remember, in those moments of uncertainty, you have a Father in heaven who seeks to provide for your every need. In studying the life of Leah, we see that feelings of discontent are nothing new to God. Even when life is out of control, we can choose to trust God to provide beyond what we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20), and believe that He is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28) even in the midst of our discontentment.



Patrick McLeland

Patrick works as an Area Coordinator over at Northwest University in Kirkland, WA. Patrick spent several years of his childhood in South Africa where his family served as missionaries. He attended CWC as a student at IWU, where he graduated with a Bachelor's in Psychology with an Addictions Studies focus in 2015, followed by a Master's in Student Development Administration in 2018.

In the past few years, Patrick has served as a camp director with SpringHill in Michigan. He looks fondly on his experience as a camp director as it, along with his student life experience and education, has prepared him for his present ministry within higher ed.



Transitions: Push and Pull

*“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”*

Psalm 32:8

Transitions from one season of life to another—be it from college to career, from singleness to married life, from young adulthood to parenthood, or even from one job to another—are intense life events. Even when these changes are joyful and desirable, they are still often fraught with stress. After all, change (even for those of us who love variety and newness) requires adaptation and is unpredictable, to some degree.

So, if transition brings about stress, why would we ever willfully engage in such change? The answer is usually a matter of push and pull.

Some transitions in life are motivated by a sense of push: a need to move forward, to get away from the present situation, or a sense of completion of one thing, and a need to do something else—something more or different.

Other transitions are motivated by a compelling pull coming from the what’s next. In this situation, there’s no real desire to leave the present situation or season! But there’s an undeniable feeling of calling coming from the unknown and the next season, beckoning an obedient response.

Obviously, a transition motivated by push is likely difficult. The pain that can be experienced in feeling pushed out often leaves a person feeling vulnerable, hurt, and uncertain of what's ahead. I've sat with countless people who are trying to make sense of their investment in one place or situation, while feeling unappreciated, misunderstood, or undervalued.

But not all transitions are rooted in push. Having recently walked through a professional transition myself, I can attest to the reality that sometimes, even when you're in a wonderful season of life, the future calls. In this situation, the pull of the next season can be so compelling, action seems necessary. These transitions, motivated by more pull than push are also challenging. They require a sacrifice of things held dear and a willingness to step forward in faith.

There are, of course, seasons where both push and pull are involved in transition. But taking account of the greater force may be a helpful method in discerning the right timing and motivation for making significant life changes and recognizing God's leading in your life.



Dr. Emily Vermilya

Dr. Emily Vermilya serves as the Assistant Professor for Christian Worship at Indiana Wesleyan University. Prior to her current role, Emily was on staff at CWC for around 15 years in various roles, but always occupying the role of mentor, coach, and developer for the people around her. She and her husband Jim live in Marion, and have two adult children, Silas and Aynsley.



To Build a Home: Loving those You Live With

“Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Matthew 22:34–39

“The second is like it,” Jesus says, letting his hearers know that whatever it means to love God, it’s bound up with our ability to connect with, hear from, and see the people God’s placed near us.

Where were you the last time someone **really** saw you? How often do you get the opportunity to sit across from someone who is there—not to use, change, convince, control, or recruit you—but to help you become more fully yourself?

At its best, the culture you create in your home will foster those kinds of spaces: spaces full of healthy celebration, challenge, conflict, and growth that helps each participant become more fully who God invites them to be. That kind of connection doesn’t happen effortlessly; and (much like anything that’s good for you), some of the habits required won’t feel fun at first. Developing a nourishing connection requires habits of strategy, conflict, and empathy—and it’ll demand emotional, spiritual, financial, and relational work.

Regular counseling for you, and maybe even together with those you live with—whether a spouse, a friend, or your roommates (best before a problem arises, and certainly after), consistent rhythms of prayer, nourishing friendships, a purposeful breakdown of household tasks, shared and individual hobbies, non-violent communication (that doesn't accuse, and doesn't offer defensiveness when receiving difficult feedback), and frequent encouragement of your shared and personal dreams/goals are all part of a healthy home.

But those are practical tips (which is for a different section). For now, the main question is: what does it look like—today, this week, this month, this year—to practice “loving God, and loving your neighbor as yourself”?

Here are a few reflection questions you can consider (for yourself, toward your spouse, or your roommates; and with the others in your home, for the neighbors you love together):

- What spaces do I/we feel most seen, known, and connected (with myself, with those in my home, with our neighbors, and with God?)
- What might I/we do to open up more of those spaces of connection?
- What habits might we need to stop, because they're out of alignment with love for God and neighbor?
- Who do I/we need to help us develop better habits of love for God and neighbor?
- When will we circle back and review our progress (literal time/date on the calendar).
- How will I/we celebrate progress?



Ethan Linder

Ethan Linder serves as Pastor of Connections, Collegians, and Young Adults at CWC.



Courage to Stay: Readjusting if You Return to Your Hometown

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18b–20

Growing up in the Midwest, I couldn't wait for the day that I would leave the Midwest. The mindset in my hometown was to grow up and get out. I felt a very real social pressure to leave my current home, and to go start a new one somewhere else.

In Matthew's account of the gospel, we receive the words of the Great Commission.

Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18b-20).

I always interpreted these final words of Jesus' as a conviction telling me personally to pack up and leave the Midwest. Surely, I was being called to go to the next big city, maybe even new country, to go and make disciples.

When Jesus says to go, what does he really mean? Over the years, I have had to adapt my mindset around the traditional idea of “going.” Yes, “go” might be an invitation to physically get up and leave, but what if “go” is an invitation to something else. Maybe “go” is my charge to change my current mindset. Maybe “go” is my cue to reset my routines and habits. Maybe “go” is a time and not so much a place. Maybe I can “go and make disciples” while staying where I’ve been planted.

As I was contemplating whether I should go or stay, a pastor I look up to shared this quote with me.

“The grass may not be greener on the other side, but, it’ll be greener where you water it.”

I never thought that my hometown could be a place of green pastures. I had assumed that I would be settling for less excitement and adventure by returning back home, but I was so wrong. Packing up my life and taking it somewhere else does not guarantee greener pastures. But, when I start investing in where I am at, I can begin to see new life come up from the dirt. Whether that is my community, my career, my routines, my spiritual walk, etc..... they will grow when I invest in them.

Maybe “go” isn’t about a destination, but it is about a direction. Jesus is inviting us to “go” in different facets. Whether you are returning home or starting a new one somewhere else, “go” whole heartedly. God has given you the authority to make his gospel known in whatever context you find yourself. Do not be discouraged by the location, but be encouraged by the opportunity.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.” Walk with confidence in the One who lights your path and directs your steps. Whether you go, or stay, do so loving the Lord our God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength.



Tyler Gates

Tyler is a recent graduate from IWU with a double major in Worship Arts and Music Ministry! Currently, he serves as the Pastor of Worship & Discipleship at Huntington First Church of the Nazarene.





SECTION 2:
**Things We Wish We
Would've Known**



Making a Budgeting Plan

Most of the decisions you face have a financial consequence. Stop for the third Starbucks drink this week? Sign another year's lease, or start house shopping? Enroll in your new employer's retirement plan? Commit to a monthly gift to your favorite non-profit? Avoid credit cards at all cost?

Let's answer a few questions that might be timely for you.

When should I start saving for retirement?

A couple of generations ago, a person would work for a company for 40 years, and then that company or industry would provide a pension to fund the employee's retirement. Other than in a couple of professions, those days are gone. If you want to retire, you will more than likely be responsible for funding the majority of your retirement expenses. So, when should you start saving for retirement? Yesterday. Consider this example of different savings scenarios to illustrate the power of compounding interest. We'll assume 10% annual investment returns for all three savers.

- 1) Started saving \$250 per month at age 22. Retired at age 65 with \$2,139,102.
- 2) Started saving \$250 per month at age 30. Retired at age 65 with \$948,180.
- 3) Started saving \$250 per month at age 40. Retired at age 65 with \$331,482.

Do I really need to create a budget?

How you spend the money that you bring in is a direct reflection of your priorities. The 50/30/20 Approach can be a good starting point. This framework calls for 50% of your income to be spent on needs

(housing, groceries, minimum loan payments, etc.), 30% on “wants” (eating out, shopping, vacations, etc.), and 20% “excess” (giving, savings, and excess loan payments). The more control you gain over your finances, the lower you can get your “needs” percentage and increase your “excess.” To get a clear picture of where your money is going, try tracking your spending on a budgeting site/app such as Mint or PocketGuard.

Are credit cards always a bad idea?

I’m going to tread lightly here, because credit cards, when used recklessly, can be a path to financial hardship and create a mountain of interest payments. But, when used responsibly, credit cards can be a tool to build credit and earn cash back. A healthy practice with credit cards is to pay off the balance each month. Doing this, you’ll never pay a penny in interest. Self-awareness is key here. If you know that a credit card will be a slippery slope for you, avoid them completely. If you know you are capable of responsible credit card use, look at a tool such as NerdWallet to compare your options.

There’s no doubt that how you answer some of these questions will have longer-lasting impacts than others, but it is important to take ownership in the fact that at this moment of transition in your life, you have the opportunity to define what your financial priorities will be moving forward.



Cory Powell

Cory Powell joined the Marion, IN office of Raymond James as a Financial Advisor in 2011 after graduating from Huntington University. Cory is a Grant County native, and he and his wife Katie currently live in Gas City with their two boys, Hudson and Blake.



Principles of Volunteerism, God's Way

Congratulations on arriving at the threshold of transition. The road through this season—whether of academia, work, or community—was not easy, but the lessons learned intellectually, spiritually, and socially will reap great benefits throughout your life. It may seem overwhelming yet exciting to expand your faith, trusting God in the process.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle once said that the essence of life is to serve others and do good. A critical element in transition is becoming connected in your new community. Of course, your job and church will play a huge role; however, finding ways to immerse yourself in volunteer opportunities can enhance your skill set, values, and network. Involvement in your community is two-fold; while you share your talent, time, and treasure, the community offers are vast. You get to come alongside worthwhile causes, people in need, and the broader community. Research shows that sharing time through volunteer work reduces stress, combats depression, and provides a sense of purpose. Moreover, it operates as a practice of love.

Theologian Henry T. Blackaby, author of *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, writes the Father is at work around you, and that is an invitation to adjust your life to Him and join Him in that work. This statement was a game-changer for me. I received it as a God Assignment in the work that I do in my community. God graciously invited me to join Him in the work that He is doing in Grant County, and I find it an honor, and so will you.

Your contributions and dedication will influence the importance of strengthening ties in your new homeplace. Even if you have decided to return to your former hometown, you probably are not the same person you were when you left. The college experiences have expanded your worldview, deepened your insights, and shaped your social diversity concepts.

The late Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) said, “When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, say something! Do something! Get in trouble! Good trouble! Necessary trouble!” As you move forward, take action and make volunteer involvement a high priority. Investing in your new homeplace and connecting with your community as neighbors will open your eyes to its assets and riches. And then, you will reconcile that you are part of the whole that is making a difference.



Cathy Weatherspoon

Cathy Weatherspoon is the Executive Director of Thriving Grant County, Mill Township, a collective impact initiative that orients cross-sector participants towards solving complex social or environmental problems collectively around poverty in Grant County. Before her appointment at Thriving Grant County, Cathy worked at Taylor University for 12 years, serving as assistant professor and director in Student Development. She taught biblical small groups for more than 20 years serves on the Community Outreach and Hospitality committees at CWC. She and her husband, Bruce, have been married for 34 years and have two adult children.



Things You Didn't Know You Needed After College

A hobby, because you need friends. A life without friends isn't much fun, and not exploring your interests and passions will make you a boring person, which isn't much fun. Whatever it is in life that you enjoy, no matter how obscure or mainstream it is, be vigilant in the pursuit of finding people to do it with.

I made a friend in Rexburg, Idaho after trading Star Wars Legos with him on a local Facebook page. He is a devout Mormon, a married man with three kids who works at a newspaper, and we couldn't have less in common other than Legos. He is a delightful friend and we've been in touch for years, no matter where I have lived. Three years ago in Portland, Oregon, I joined an experts-only adult tennis league, which might lead you, dear reader to assume that I actually know how to play tennis expertly. I don't. I was crushed utterly one day by a nice fellow who beat me three matches without one set won on my end. We enjoy grilling out every summer to this day and talking about the pleasure of raising ducks and chickens. In Vancouver, Washington I became intimately involved in the city Spikeball league, and it's how I made three of my best friends, one of which later provided the first round of funding for my new business. When I moved to the other side of town in Portland, I picked up free firewood from a neighbor, which turned into an hour long conversation, which led to him inviting me to adult kickball league the next day, which culminated three years of friendship later to us climbing Mt. St. Helens together.

It doesn't always work out that well. Say yes to everything just so you can find out if it's a no. You'll make a friend, or you'll find a place

where your friend isn't. I paid \$500 to take a mountaineering class to find out snow-bros and climbing dudes was not my crowd. I've played a lot of tennis and spikeball, swapped Legos aplenty, but it hasn't always worked out. But, it worked out a few times beautifully, and that's all that was needed. The thing to remember might be as simple as this: hobbies may be one of your simplest avenues into a community you didn't know you needed. And if you try something and discover it's not for you, the learning may have been worth it anyway.



Josh Grimmer

Josh Grimmer is an Indiana native who now lives in Portland, Oregon, where he leads a small business/social enterprise (check out mygoodneighborpdx.com) and works in community development. Josh and his wife, Jessie, were part of the CWC community during college at IWU. They love being neighbors, friends, and continuous learners with the people who live and learn around them.



Finding the Right Insurance

Welcome to Adulthood! As you make this next step in your life there are many big decisions you will need to make. One area that generally isn't fun to talk about is Insurance. You might still be covered on your parents policies (renters, auto, health, life, etc) and some of you might already be paying for this on your own. My advice is to find someone you trust, insurance is only as good as the person that sells it to you. You are buying a promise that someone will be there when something goes wrong and having a relationship will make that experience all the better.

If you are no longer living at home you will need to get your own auto policy. If you are renting a place or buying a home you will need a renters or homeowners policy. At the time of publication you are able to stay on your parents health insurance policy till age 26 so you may have sometime on this one. It's probably cheaper to stay on your parents health insurance as long as you can but just realize this is a significant cost when you come off and start paying for it yourself. Another consideration is life insurance, at your age you will be able to lock in a great rate for 20-30 years. You will be thankful you did!

If you need any help navigating what you need we are always here to help; reach out to us through Insurance Management Group at (765.664.2333) or www.insmgt.com.



Trent Dailey

Trent Dailey is the CEO of Insurance Management Group (IMG) and has been part of CWC for several years.



Navigating Your Taxes

There are many things I wish I knew about taxes before I started filing on my own; here are a few you can start with!

Learn your state: Every state is different when it comes to income taxes (some states do not have income tax!) and there are plenty of things that you can Google on the topic. Having recently turned 31 with over a decade of experience in accounting and doing my own taxes, here are my top tips to minimize what you might owe at the end of the year while maximizing your paycheck throughout the year.

Take the time to understand what income bracket you will be in. Do the math or phone a friend, to make sure that your employer is withholding enough taxes from your paycheck. Even I hate doing this but this is especially important when you get married or receive a large raise/bonus and your income increases. That 12% to 22% tax jump can drain your bank account on April 15th in a hurry. When in doubt, use the single withholding rate, even if you are married and take 0 exemptions. This will make sure that the max amount of taxes are withheld and reduce the likelihood that you will owe at the end of the year.

Maximize “above the line” deductions. Above the line means that amount is subtracted directly from your gross income. Less gross income = less tax you have to pay. Some common ones are IRA (individual retirement account) contributions, HSA (health savings account) contributions, and self-employment expenses. Yes, being your own boss to some degree is of benefit to you. :)

Some loan interest is your friend! Certain kinds of loan interest are considered above the line and can be deducted from your taxes. Mortgage and student loan interest are some of the most common but there are others out there.

Take advantage of the online tax software that is out there in 2021. Unless you have a really weird tax situation, save the money on paying someone to do your taxes. If you have to ask what a really weird tax situation is, you probably don't have one. For most of us (I work full time, run a business, 1099 contract with two other organizations and still use TurboTax) the computer will walk you through doing your taxes for much cheaper, than a tax preparer. In some cases, it is even free!

With recent changes to tax laws and the standard deduction going WAY up, some things I've mentioned are more moot than in the past, but it can't hurt to try, right?



Jordan Ashley

Jordan Ashley is the Director of Finance and IT at College Wesleyan in Marion, where he lives with his wife, Rachel, and their dogs!



How to Spot a Good Landlord

Whether you're moving to a new community, or looking for a new place in a familiar city, one of your first tasks will be finding a place to live. If you're renting, picking a property is difficult enough on its own; but to complicate matters, you'll also have to look for a landlord that can be trusted to facilitate a good renter's experience for you.

It's hard to guarantee a good landlord experience until you've occupied a property they own. There are some things, however, that you can look for up-front to see if your landlord is a good one.

The following are a few evidences of a good landlord.

1. Is the property located in a neighborhood that reflects your values (Safety? Diversity? Proximity to things you enjoy?) Does it reflect a comparable value to other properties in the area?
2. What is the condition of the house while taking a walk through the interior? Does the property appear to have been taken care of? Are the appliances updated? Does the property have gas forced air with central air conditioning, or electric baseboard? Electric is generally more expensive to operate; factor that into the monthly cost of the property.
3. Can the landlord give you some indication of the utility costs, particularly during the winter when the heat costs are the highest? Is the house well-insulated?
4. Does the lease specify the responsibility of the renter as it relates to repairs? How quickly does the landlord respond to repair requests? Is that written into any formal policy?
5. How is the rent submitted, and what constitutes a late penalty? Some landlords have a grace period of 2 days without assess-

ing a late charge; others want payment on a specific day of the month, with no grace for deviation.

6. What are the requirements for a security deposit? Usually, these are equal to the monthly rent fee. Most good landlords have a reputation of returning the security deposit within a short period after the lease is terminated. Most landlords will require a minimum of a one year lease; and they will also specify how long before terminating the lease the renter is required to notify the landlord (typically 30 or 60 days).
7. A good landlord will have a procedure for checking references of tenants. When I encounter a prospective renter, I ask the former landlord: (1) is the prospective renter current on their rent? (2) Did the renter take care of your property; or would you consider renting to this person again? A negative response to either question will cause a good landlord to not rent to the prospective renter.
8. A good landlord will develop a relationship with renters. For me, that includes personally picking up the rent on a monthly basis, listening to their circumstances so I know how to care for them. They may be going through a difficult time, layoff, cancer, family member that has committed suicide, divorce, etc. In those situations, empathetic landlords can be a listening ear, and offer a prayer if appropriate. Other landlords approach this in different ways, either initially (with a get-to-know session, or a conversation at the beginning of the renting relationship), or ongoing check-ins.

As always, do your best to do ongoing research about landlords, neighborhoods, and rent prices in the area you're renting; negotiate rent if possible, and don't jump at the first property you see until you compare with others in the area.



Terry Munday

Terry Munday served for 20 years as the Vice President for Advancement for Indiana Wesleyan University, and continues to consult with faith-based organizations for fundraising and development, also renovating and managing many rental properties around Grant County.



Transitioning to a New Church

Transitioning away from a tightly-knit community like College Church, where you have great opportunities to gather and connect with like-minded believers, can be very challenging; I certainly felt confused and daunted when I moved to Minneapolis, MN in 2017. How was I supposed to know how well I would fit into any particular local church sight unseen? There are so many variables to consider:

- 1. Denomination:** from what theological tradition does this church descend, and what practical consequences does that have toward the way people actually live?
- 2. Size:** What are the trade-offs between the resources and personnel pool of a larger church (2000+) and the layers of distance you might feel from the leaders? Likewise, while a smaller church naturally lends itself toward opportunities to connect with others, might the gatherings lack ‘production value?’
- 3. Priorities:** What does this church care about? Holiness? Production value? Branding? Social justice? Diversity? Inclusion? Community outreach? Liturgy? Theological accuracy? Some combination of the above, or others? And what should a church care about, anyway?
- 4. Atmosphere:** Do you feel welcomed? Unseen? Does anyone care that you’re there, or can you walk in and out the doors without anyone noticing?

I listed many questions above, and many of those cannot be answered by a single-Sunday visit, but a few can be. While I'm not sure what anyone should do, I can share my experience. I attended a large Reformed church for two years after moving to Minnesota and chose to get involved in their worship ministry fairly soon after. I enjoyed this ministry and made friends, but on the whole, I didn't connect with the theology or priorities of the church. I left each Sunday with a pit in my stomach after being reminded what a sinner I was but was given no path toward transformation.

After much prayer and careful thought, I realized that it was time for a change; but it was hard to know where to start. I had a few conversations with people who knew churches in the area and listened to sample services online, and soon attended a service at Grace Church in Roseville, and I immediately sensed a completely different atmosphere. Their priorities were centered on Christ-centered transformation—being formed, changed, and united with Christ and others—through the Church community, which naturally will extend into the city and the world. I joined the worship ministry as well as a small group.

One thing I know from experience: It's very hard to feel at home in a church in which you are not serving or at least participating. Once we take ownership—this is our church, after all—we stop being critics and start being disciples and members involved in shaping the culture of the community. Anything we want to see changed or born in our Church, we take an active role in fostering. We create—we shape—we love our brothers and sisters—we belong.



Ethan Gormong

Ethan is a 2017 graduate of IWU where he studied chemistry and participated in the John Wesley Honors College. He now resides in Saint Paul, MN, where he is a 4th-year Ph.D. candidate in polymer chemistry at the University of Minnesota. He enjoys a cappella music, drums, cycling, and coffee shops! Feel free to contact him at gormo001@umn.edu



How to Make a New Place Feel Like Home

“If you don’t know where you’re from, you’ll have a hard time saying where you’re going.” Wendell Berry

From.
and
Going.

From and going. Both of these words offer an invitation to reflect and imagine. In a time of transition, both are needed. Both at times hold sadness and hope. Sadness at what is coming to a close, and honesty in knowing that the future does not promise to hold the same people, things, and experiences that once were present. Hope also seems present that people, things, and experiences can be different in the future. Hope that the things that were a part of the past that were painful or bleak can somehow find a future of newness.

Each ending is a beginning.

Each beginning is an ending.

Yet, how are both experienced? How do we activate our senses as we experience the world?

As someone who has moved into a number of different locations, I have evolved into a minimalist. This was done with intention as a way to hold onto the relics that I have that hold meaning: the items that help me to remember. They hold the nuance of these stories with beauty, pain, art, and experiences. Sure, I still look back fondly on the history that makes up my life, and I hold space in my life for beautiful people and places that have been formational. Each has become a part of a never-ending show and tell.

The imagery of Scripture often seems like this as well: showing and telling. Passages and stories of ways the Triune God spoke love, reminded people provision would always be. I often wonder about how these people marked their endings and beginning. Did Adam and Eve use the juice from berries to paint a picture of the Garden of Eden before they ate the fruit? Did Moses gather up ash from the burning bush and put it into a jar to remember that encounter? Did Esther save jewelry from when she first became queen? Did the magi who came to meet baby Jesus gather sand as they traveled to see this infant? Did Joseph and Mary save the boxes that held the gifts from the magi? Did the woman who poured oil on Jesus' feet keep the jar with her to remember the scent of this gift? Did the believers in the early church have relics from generations that had gone before them?

What is tangible can help remind us of where we are from and create something tangible in where we are going. What relics do you have that will be helpful for you to carry with you to your next beginning? What imagery is helpful for you to remember where you are from as a way to launch your imagination to where you hope to go?



Dr. Julia Hurlow

Dr. Julia Hurlow is an avid traveler nationally and internationally, while currently residing in a rural neighborhood in Indiana. Creating spaces for people to gather, share meals, and explore the outdoors in all seasons are essential elements of her life's rhythms. With a master's degree in counseling as well as a doctorate in semiotics and future studies, she appreciates finding redemptive meaning through remembering, lamenting, and celebrating. Her current work as an assistant professor at a university entails educating, offering spiritual direction, speaking, and writing.



Checking in: Mental Health & Spirituality

“He always appears so happy and carefree.”

“I bet her relationship with God is so much stronger than mine.”

“She is so much prettier than I am.”

“I feel like I am not enough. I feel as if I am not worthy.”

“Can they see that I am struggling? Hurting? Pretending? Confused? Barely holding on to my faith?”

Regardless of the negative and destructive thoughts that you’ve heard in your head, rest assured you are not alone. Everyone has thought these exact same things; and some are currently experiencing these thoughts and feelings or similar ones.

There appears to be a lot of discussion on the importance of mental health and how much it influences our daily lives, but why? Why is checking in with ourselves and our mental health so important? And how does it affect our relationship with others and with God?

Just like physical health, mental health can be strengthened and conversely, it can be weakened. So much can impact our mental health and in turn, will impact our walk with the Lord. Things such as negative self-talk, comparison, unwarness, avoidance, and others are detrimental to our mental health and spirituality. One of the first steps to combat the feeling of being stuck, alone, hurt, or confused is to practice self-awareness and participate in a self-check-in.

Take a moment to yourself, wherever you may be, to first identify your feelings. Do you feel distracted? Angry? Distant? Anxious? Empty? Optimistic? Grateful? Next, try to analyze the severity of the feeling. Is it strong? Weak? Then, notice where you are feeling it in your body. What is that feeling trying to tell you? Then, what do you need to do in that

moment and what small steps can you take to meet your needs?

Maybe processing with a safe and trusted person is what you need. Perhaps you need to take a moment in solitude to pray or meditate on a passage of Scripture. Maybe you need to identify how you feel and communicate your feelings to someone. Everyone's journey is different and everyone's relationship with the Lord is different. Nonetheless, we can all experience similar feelings and thoughts. Actively participating in a self-check in can impact your relationship with others, your neighbors, your classmates, your coworkers, those you serve, and most importantly, your relationship with Jesus.

Be honest with yourself and with those around you. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it is proof of your strength. Allow yourself to feel without judgement. We may not understand everything or even know why we feel the way we do, but remember that you are only human. However, do not forget that you are a beloved child of God.

RESOURCES

Books:

Never Good Enough by Monica Ramirez Basco

Resisting Happiness by Matthew Kelly

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk

Social Media:

Instagram:

@myselflovesupply

@mentalhealthcoalition

@christianmentalhealth

Community Counseling/Therapy *(for those staying in Grant County):*

Indiana Wesleyan Graduate Counseling Clinic

The Otis R. Bowen Center

Family Service Society Inc.



Jaclyn Witte

Jaclyn Witte is a graduate of Indiana Wesleyan University with her Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. Jaclyn attends College Wesleyan Church and is often volunteering. She is a case manager at Family Service Society Incorporated in Marion, IN. Coming alongside individuals and families involved with DCS and Probation, Jaclyn desires to allow people to feel seen and heard regardless of what they have experienced. With a heart for the hurting and misunderstood, Jaclyn is dedicated to treating all people with kindness and grace



Re-Learning How to Study the Bible

Christians from all times and places have valued the practice of studying the Bible. But what does it mean to actually study the Bible? How do we re-find our way toward Scripture during parts of our lives where approaching the text feels confusing, daunting, or unmotivating? Here are a few ways to engage that are flexible and practical.

Read Curiously

The first step toward immersive reading of the Bible is to know the story well. Read and re-read a story from cover to cover aloud and in one sitting. For longer books, think about a main break (or main breaks) in the story, and read multiple times until you become familiar with the story. When you have familiarized yourself with the story, re-engage it with the journalist's best friends: Who, What, Why, When, Where, How? Use these to ask open ended questions for the text; they will help you as you begin studying Scripture.

Know the stories behind the story

The second step is to know the story (or stories) behind the story. This is about intertextuality. When a text says, "it is written" or alludes to another text, take time to learn the story that is being referred to. Pay attention to how the story is being used. The writer who is quoting an earlier text sometimes makes changes, contextualizes the earlier story to fit his contemporary message. Often the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, but the Old Testament also quotes/alludes the Old Testament (e.g., Isaiah alludes to Exodus). Familiarity with the Old Testament will help you better understand the New Testament. A reference or a study Bible can help with identifying intertextual issues and references. Use multiple English versions, too, to help you begin to identify nuances in the translations, as well as nuances in meanings.

Try on new lenses

A third step is to pay attention to narrative perspectives and story dynamics. There is the perspective of the author, and what he is trying to convey. There is the perspective of the characters. Read, and re-read the text through the lens of different actors in the narrative and try to walk in their shoes, how do they feel? How do you experience the story through different lens? For example: in Abraham's story with Hagar, how does one's understanding of the story change when read from Hagar's perspective, Sarah's perspective, or Abraham's perspective? What would it look like to read Joseph's story through the lens of his brothers? Finally, there is the reader's perspective. How does your own experience influence what you see, emphasize, or skip over?

When it comes to story dynamics, there is a difference between event time, story time, and narration time. Jesus' ministry lasted three years (event time). Mark condensed it to almost one year, while John signals a three year ministry [three passover celebrations] (story time). It takes about 2 hours to read Mark's Gospel (narration time). We sometimes make the mistake of thinking something happened as quickly as we read it. Slow down and reflect, e.g., on why John devotes a third of the Gospel to Jesus' final week.

Background information helps with immersive reading. Research about the geography and topography of the land to get a sense of the travel time and distance Jesus and his disciple, or Paul would have covered in their ministry. How does that impact your knowledge and interpretation of the story?

Remember:

Nothing replaces knowing the story. It takes time, a lifetime! It takes careful observation. It takes asking the right questions. Immersive reading invites readers to enter the world of the story. It is less about applying, and more about embodying the message of the text. Don't take the Bible for granted. Pray to the Holy Spirit to give you eyes to see and ears to hear each time to read the text.



Dr. Abson Joseph

Dr. Abson Joseph serves as academic dean of Wesley Seminary in Marion, Indiana; he and his wife, Dr. Lara Joseph, live in Marion with their two daughters, and serve regularly on the Worship Arts team.



(Un)Limited: When Obedience Stretches You

Faithful obedience. It seems simple when I type those two words, but I realize how difficult it is to live a life marked by faithfulness. Ever since we were little kids, we are asked about our dreams, and our hopes, and our plans. We ask preschoolers, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” We asked middle schoolers, high schoolers, and college students, “Where do you want to go in this world?”

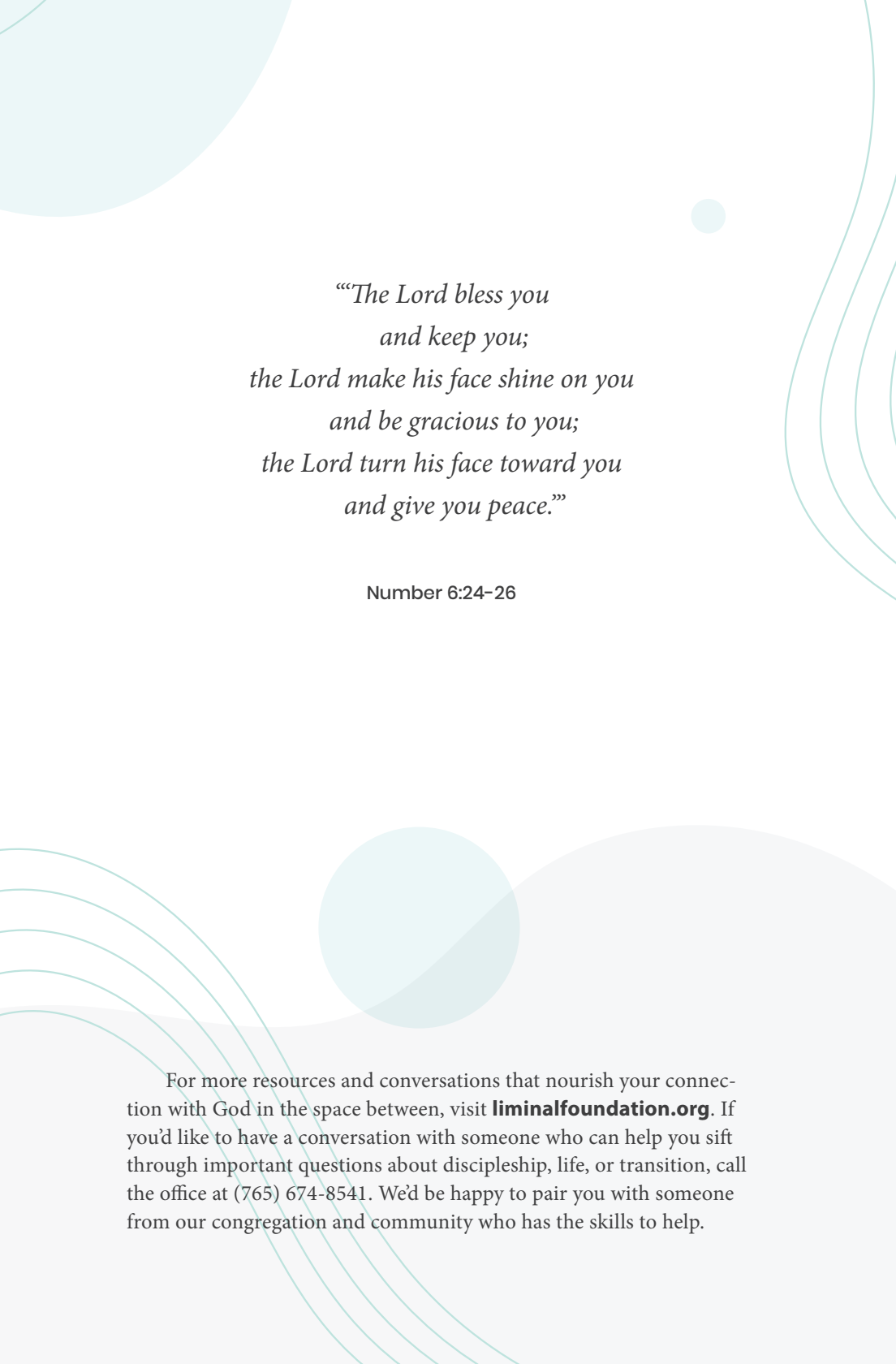
We ask questions that point us toward thinking about our own plans for our lives instead of asking questions pointed toward obeying God’s plans for our lives. It becomes hard for us to picture a life beyond what we can imagine in places we may have never thought of or been to. We put ourselves and our lives in a box instead of allowing the still, small whispers of the Holy Spirit to invite us into faithfulness. In 1 Kings 19:11-13, we see that it was through the gentle whisper that Elijah learned to hear the voice of the Spirit. When we choose to live a life that is in step with the Holy Spirit, seeking and pursuing all the Lord has for our life, we live a life that is no longer bound by our thoughts, hopes, and dreams. Day after day, moment after moment, we learn to listen closely to the whispers of the Lord, and our heart becomes transformed in the life-giving power of Jesus Christ.

As you venture into this new season, be careful to listen to the gentle whispers and seek to be a person who is marked by faithful obedience. The Lord may ask you to go to far from ordinary places, to meet with strangers, or to do work you never imagined. The Lord may ask you to engage with this world in ways you never thought were possible, but all he requires of you is to hear his voice and live in obedience with a willing heart.



Courtney Dunn

Courtney moved to Wilmore, KY after graduating from IWU; in Wilmore, she is finishing a Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary. After graduation, she plans to move to Eastern Europe as a Long-Term Worker. It is her desire to see all people have the opportunity to hear and know the Gospel and to then live a life fully transformed in the power of Jesus Christ. When Courtney isn't studying or traveling the world, she can often be found laughing in a coffee shop.



*“The Lord bless you
and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.”*

Number 6:24–26

For more resources and conversations that nourish your connection with God in the space between, visit liminalfoundation.org. If you'd like to have a conversation with someone who can help you sift through important questions about discipleship, life, or transition, call the office at (765) 674-8541. We'd be happy to pair you with someone from our congregation and community who has the skills to help.

