



# emerging adults

## PATHWAYS

Emerging adulthood is all about transitions. Some emerging adults leave high school and then continue with college, while some go straight into the workforce or choose other options. No matter which path is chosen, the time immediately following high school is one of incredible change. The world can feel totally upside down, which can be confusing because post-high school (particularly college) is often described as the best years of a person's life.

Of course, for some emerging adults, college is an incredible season of life, and we want to celebrate that. But we can't forget that many college students describe their college years as feeling like middle school all over again because so much is in flux, relationships can be confusing, and people are extremely transient. Couple these intense emotions with brand new responsibility, and it's easy to see why emerging adulthood can be one of the most exciting and challenging seasons of life.

The word we've chosen for this step is *Pathways* – since there are at least two paths that emerging adults are trying to navigate. The first is their personal path. Emerging adults are asking questions like: What will my future look like? What am I supposed to do with my life? What do I believe about myself? About God? About the world? And, how do all these beliefs intersect with my everyday life?

While working through all these personal questions, emerging adults are also trying to find their path into community. All people, but especially young adults, feel a deep need to *belong*. However, it can often be hard for young adults to find their place in church since they no longer fit in a youth group, but they might also feel excluded (or even worse, patronized) in the company of older adults.

The reality is that these are not two separate paths, but are intricately woven together. We find our personal path in the context of community, when surrounded by those who love us and who can speak to our gifts and provide support.

With emerging adults, we get the opportunity to explore where the sacred and secular intersect. If faith is something worth holding onto into adulthood, then it had better be something that has the power to change the world. As young people work to figure out their pathways in life and in community, the Church needs to create space for dialogue, complexity, and tension within our walls. When the Church creates this space for tension and dialogue, emerging adults discover that it is a community worth belonging to.

# two pathways

*(This devotion is based on Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son. If you'd like to refresh your memory of the story, it can be found in Luke 15:11-32.)*

In his book *Prodigal God*, Timothy Keller observes that the two brothers in Jesus' story represent two different pathways to finding ourselves:

- The older brother represents the path of "moral conformity." He defines his identity according to his ability to fulfill the expectations of the surrounding community. Indeed, he derives a sense of moral superiority by being able to fulfill those demands better than others.
- The younger brother represents the path of "individual freedom." This is the belief that the only way to discover oneself is to cast off the expectations of others. Those who follow this path might look down upon those who never question the norms and demands of society.

In the years immediately following high school, you can find many examples of people following each of these paths. Some throw themselves into their classes or school activities to define their identity by the success they achieve. You can also find individuals on the far end of the spectrum who revel in their new freedoms and cast off all responsibilities in the search for the "real me" that had previously been suppressed by expectation.

Unfortunately, Timothy Keller points out that, at least within Jesus' story, both paths are ultimately dead ends. After he blows his fortune partying, the younger son winds up starving in a pit with the pigs. The older son is just as lost at the end of the story, standing outside the big party and filled with rage at his father. The only path to true identity, Keller says, is the way of grace - discovering anew what it means to be loved by the Father, and remembering that there is always a place at His table for us.

Together as parent and young adult, discuss the following questions:

1. How is your family like the family in the Prodigal Son story? How is it different?
2. With whom do you most identify in the story? Why?
3. How important is "record keeping" in your family? Do you err on the side of responsibility or freedom?
4. What is the difference between expectation and hope? How do you see those two played out in the story?
5. Thus far in your journey, how have you discovered or experienced God's grace? What would it look like to pursue grace as a "path to identity" in the next phase in your journey?