

A 30-DAY DEVOTIONAL FOR JUNIORS

JUNIOR

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

LARS ROOD



YouthMinistry.com/TOGETHER

Junior

Making Sense of It All

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ISBN 978-0-7644-9004-0

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13

Printed in the U.S.A.

TO KAIJE:

One of these days you will be a junior. You're the kind of kid who is always wanting to figure things out and to learn more about things. You're a reader like me. Kaije, I love you, and this book makes me think of you.

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INTRODUCTION

If you've read the previous books in this series, you know that we've focused on growing in your faith and figuring out what maturity looks like. It's now time to start piecing it all together and seeing who you are and what that means for you. All of life is a process, and you don't have to have it all figured out right now. But this is the year when you have to start figuring out a lot of things.

Figuring out who you are doesn't mean who you are *going* to be, but simply who you are right now. This is a starting point as you begin doing a lot of self-evaluation. We're more focused on the past than on the future. Who are you right now? What do you believe? What do you care about? How do you look at the world? This is the year that a lot of those questions need to get answered.

Are today's answers the final ones you'll give in your life? Not likely. Your answers and your beliefs about things may change in the coming years, but you do need to figure out some of what you believe right now because you are on the cusp of making some major decisions about the future and charting your life's direction. You will need to base a lot of those decisions upon how you are experiencing and living life right now.

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 often 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 sense of it all.

SECTION 1

**DO YOU KNOW
WHO YOU ARE?**



My junior year of high school was the year I finally felt like I knew who I was. I hadn't reached my full potential, but it was the year I figured out a lot of what I liked, what I was good at, and some of what I thought I wanted to spend more time focusing on. Maybe you haven't had a lot of conversations about who you are, but this is the year to do that. You have the potential to offer a lot to those around you, so it's time to step it up.

It may not feel like the world really cares right now, but I want you to know how valuable you are. If you asked a lot of adults if they knew who they were as high school juniors, they might give you some answers about things they were involved in or things they liked. But as far as defining who they were, that question would be a lot harder. I don't remember my youth pastor asking hard questions like this, but I wish he had. I would have appreciated the opportunity to explore these real issues more because I needed to be pushed to figure that out as I was dealing with some tough relational, social, and spiritual situations where knowing myself better would have helped me with some answers.

NO. 1 HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU WITH YOU?

I bought a lunchbox my junior year of high school. Sounds geeky, right? Well, it was—but I was OK with that. I finally decided that year that I was just going to start doing the things I liked and not worry about what everyone else thought about me. So every day I went to school with a backpack on my shoulder, a saxophone case in one hand, and a He-Man® lunchbox in the other. That's who I was—and I was comfortable with it.

Curiously, no one ever made fun of me for that choice. I sort of expected it to happen, but it didn't. It seemed that as I learned to be comfortable with myself, others became comfortable with who I was, too. I'm not telling you to go buy a superhero lunchbox, but I do encourage you to start thinking more about the things that you like and the things that define you, and to start becoming more comfortable with yourself. God has made you exactly the way he planned, and your job is to figure out how to thrive with that reality.

THINK ABOUT:

1. How comfortable are you with what you know you really like and with who you are?
2. How well do you believe other people know you? Do they perceive you to be something or someone different from who you really are?

3. If you could do or try something that you really like, knowing that no one would make fun of you or judge you, what would you do?
4. Why do you think God made you the way he did?

THE WORLD THINKS:

This is kind of a weird one, because on one hand the world tells you to be yourself and do what you want, but the world also sends the message that you shouldn't push it so far that you don't fit in anymore. You are caught in a contradiction of feeling like you are supposed to be different but that you could pay a price because of those differences.

ACT:

Without judging people, take a few days to simply observe your friends' differences and unique characteristics. What things do your friends do that stand out to you as different? What things do your friends love that define them? See if you can encourage your friends in those differences this week. How might they feel if you both comment on and praise them for those things?

READ:

Psalm 37:4, Matthew 6:19, and Ephesians 2:10

NO. 2 WHO ARE YOU AT SCHOOL?

At some point, most people have considered this question. It's somewhat foundational to how you manage to figure out the best way to navigate your high school years. At some point we all self-identify as something in school. Maybe you are an athlete and that's what defines you. Or maybe you participate in band, drama, or other artistic groups. Maybe academics are more your bent and define who you are. The reality, though, is that most of who we are at school ends up being defined by what we do. This makes sense, I guess, but it's also a little bit of a daunting thing because being "labeled" can have some negativity associated with it. Even though most things have positive traits, some opposite things often are associated with them, too.

Sometimes we are defined by others and not by our own choices. This can feel incredibly unfair—especially if the label is negative. The truth, too, is that in general who we are at school is probably only a small piece of who we actually are.

You will probably feel best, though, the more you are able to truly be yourself and not be defined by what you do or how others think of you. How do you do that? Well, I hope that during your junior year this starts happening more naturally as you spend more time doing the things that give you the most meaning, and discover and develop the gifts and talents God has given you.

THINK ABOUT:

1. What gifts and talents has God given you? How do you know, and how are you using those gifts and talents?

2. How much of what people see of you at school is really who you are?
3. If you could choose a few parts of your personality that you really like and show those to people, what would you want them to see? Why?

THE WORLD THINKS:

It's OK to be defined by what you do, and you should try to do as much as possible so you will have a better chance of figuring out what you really like. If you want to get into a good college, you have to be a well-rounded student, anyway. Do things even if you don't like them, because it will pay off in the end.

ACT:

Is there something you wish you could do at school that you just are too scared to attempt or haven't felt like it's the right time to try? Step outside your comfort zone and do it. Tell three people about it, and ask them to keep you accountable and encourage you.

READ:

Psalm 139:1-6 and 1 Peter 2:9

NO. 3 WHO ARE YOU AT HOME?

Growing up, I was pretty much a hermit when I was home. I spent a lot of time in my room reading—and by “a lot of time” I mean like all the time. When I wasn’t eating or doing jobs around the house, I was in my room. Because of that I would say I wasn’t very present in my home, and my family jokingly called my room “The Cave.” And my other role besides “cave dweller” was that of being the only boy in my family. So I did a lot of traditional guy jobs such as splitting wood, cutting the grass, washing cars, and things like that.

Now that I look back, what I regret about my high school years at home is that I wasn’t really very present with my family. I don’t remember having a lot of deep conversations with either of my parents or my sisters. I think I missed out on a lot of wisdom and growth that would have come from those times. Whatever your home situation may be, take time to value and invest in your relationships with your family. Down the road, you’ll be happy that you did.

THINK ABOUT:

1. If you had to label your “at-home persona” in just a few words, how would you describe it?
2. How engaged are you with your family, and what things do you all like to do together?

THIS COULD BE THE MOST IMPORTANT YEAR OF YOUR HIGH SCHOOL CAREER—but it may not always feel like it to you.

As a junior, you'll qualify for varsity sports, lead roles in performances, and leadership positions on campus. You'll feel a new sense of significance. Yet because you're not a senior, things won't quite feel perfect or resolved.

Fortunately, Lars Rood understands the paradox of the junior year. As a pastor and a former teacher, he's heard students grapple with key questions: *Who are you, and where do you find your identity? What is your role at school? How does your faith lead your future? How do you make decisions?*

Lars has written each entry in this devotional to guide you through an important moment, issue, challenge, or opportunity that defines your junior year, along with solid suggestions on living out what you believe.

This isn't just a book you read—it's a book that leads to action.



LARS ROOD has been involved in youth ministry for 20+ years, and it has been an amazing ride. A featured writer/speaker, he loves to be with students and families, as well as teach youth workers and seminary students. Lars and his family live in Washington state, where he is an associate pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Bellevue. You can follow his life at larsrood.com, twitter.com/larsrood, facebook.com/larsrood.



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helping youth workers with what matters most

Printed in the U.S.A.

Group

ISBN 978-0-7644-9004-0



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Religion/Christian Ministry/Youth