

As You Enter High School

By ROD ARTERS

Dear Son,

Yesterday, we brought you home from the hospital as a newborn. Tomorrow you begin high school. Where did the time go? From my viewpoint, it is going faster than I like. From your seat, it is probably not fast enough.

You are entering a new world, a very different world than the one you know. It is a very exciting and, at times, a very cruel world. It is both a fun world and one that can ruin you, if you are not careful.

I am writing to you as a gift. I wish I had been given an opportunity to read something like this when I was your age. These instructions will serve you well, not just over the next four years of your life—but beyond.

First impressions. They say, you “do not get a second chance to make a first impression.” It is extremely difficult to change your reputation, especially in high school. So, decide today—what do you want *your* reputation to be when you graduate? A great student? A good friend? A nice person?

Decide who you want to be and then make the daily decision to become that person. Surround yourself with like-minded people as that will make it even easier for you to stay consistent.

Friendships. High school is largely about friendships. From this point forward, you will have the ability to meet and make new friends. Make lots of them but choose wisely. Some friends you make now will be with you the rest of your life. If you allow the wrong people to get close to you, they can take you down a path of ruin (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Family. Young men like you usually want to spend more time with your friends and less with your family. Though I understand this, remember that family is your anchor. Friends are important but family is “forever,” including your siblings.

You are the oldest and therefore they both look up to you. Remember to spend time with them, even initiating it.

School. Make your studies a priority. It is better to be in a position where you can go anywhere you want versus going to the only place that

will accept you. A college education is almost a prerequisite for any job you apply for beyond your college years. Even if you were flipping burgers for a living, they will hire a college graduate over a non-college graduate any day.

Make your studies a priority in high school and you will find that college will be much easier.

Learning. Never stop asking questions. Right now, you are forced to go to school, but there will be a time when no one will tell you what to read or study. Be a lifetime learner, not one who’s merely trying to get through the next test.

Never stop studying. Read everything you can. As our pastor once said, “Readers are leaders and leaders are readers.” You were meant to be a leader. Keep reading and learning!

Communicating. You have been blessed with the gift of communication. But as with any strength, there is always an accompanying weakness and the potential for the gift to be abused. Use that gift in moderation. Don’t talk too much.

“Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances” (Proverbs 25:11, *New American Standard Bible*). You were given two ears and one mouth for a reason. “Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19, *New International Version*).

You have also been given a great sense of humor. It has been fun to watch that develop over the years, but be careful as humor (like the tongue) can both build up and tear down. Never be funny at someone else’s expense. Self-deprecating humor is the best and most endearing. Sarcasm is the lowest form of humor so use it rarely and carefully.

The Golden Rule. One of the very first things I taught you as a small child was Matthew 7:12, “Do to others what you would have them do to you” (*NIV*).

High school is a place where people can do and say very mean things. Unfortunately, you have little control over how others behave. Regardless, you can control how *you* behave. Act like the nice young man you are and that you were taught to be. Speak respectfully to all people at all times, especially your elders. Open doors for everyone. Be kind to females. Look after the younger or weaker.

Temptations. High school is full of them. Avoid them. Avoid them all. Like that video game where the goal is to navigate a city while avoiding snipers and landmines, view high school in the same manner. Pay attention. Have fun but recognize that not everyone or every place is safe. Use your gaming skills in life. The following temptations are worse than being shot:

Drinking: If your friends are drinking, get new friends. I mean it. After seeing three of my high school friends die from drunk driving, I never found it worth the risk. Besides, alcohol is not as great as teenagers make it seem. A milkshake is more delicious than a beer. No one ever died for driving under the influence of a milkshake.

Smoking/drugs: If a friend encourages you to smoke or do drugs, he is not your friend. I have never put a cigarette to my lips or drugs in my veins—I am living proof that it is possible to say “No!” Both are *extremely* addictive and can kill you. After watching my dad die from smoking, trust me, it isn’t worth the risk. Don’t throw away your future.

Sex: A sexually transmitted disease (or getting someone pregnant) can ruin your future before it ever begins. In spite of what our culture tells you or what your friends think, your body is not ready for this.

Your heart is also not ready for this emotional and spiritual bond. It is a beautiful thing meant for the context of marriage. Save yourself for that special woman.

“Flee immorality... do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20, NASB).

Porn: Google, YouTube, Netflix, your cellphone—you have more access to it than I ever did. Please, for your sake, DO NOT look. I have personally seen porn ruin more men’s lives than all other vices combined. Some may accuse you of being gay but I promise you—if you look and it becomes a habit, it will take you years to overcome and you *will* regret it. It will also pervert how you view women and your future relationships with them. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word” (Psalm 119:9, NIV). Like Job, make a covenant with your eyes (Job 31:1).

Peer pressure. Peers put pressure on you because they want you to be like them and to

approve of what they are doing. Often the greater the pressure, the worse the activity. Decide *now* how you will handle it. If you wait until it is upon you, you have already given in to it.

Blame me every time if you need to (“My Dad won’t let me”). Do not cave in. Be your own person and live before an audience of One. “His eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step” (Job 34:21, NIV).

Your own faith in Christ. My high school years were very turbulent. The *only* reason I made it through unscathed was because I read my Bible and attended a good church.

You have been raised in the church all your life, under great Bible teaching, surrounded by strong believers, and guided by Christian parents. This foundation is a blessing. But you now have to have your own relationship with God.

Read His Word daily. It will serve as a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (Psalm 119:105). I know I have not been the best Christian example at times. Learn from my example, both good and bad. “Come near to God and He will come near to you” (James 4:8, NIV).

Lastly, no matter what happens, I will always love you. No matter what you have done, you can always call me or talk to me—at any hour. There may be consequences to face, but I will always be your dad and I will always love you more than anyone at that school. You may not agree with every decision I make, but I promise you, every decision has your best interests in mind—whether you recognize it or not.

Remember, I walked this path before you. I know the pitfalls. I am here to help you through them.

*Love,
Dad*

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