Build lasting faith in your students.

You work so hard to plan events, lessons, experiences, studies, and interactions that will help teenagers learn who Jesus is, and what it means to follow him. A lot of the time, your efforts actually connect with your students, and kids end up excited about living out their faith. But studies show that up to 50 percent of students who graduate from youth ministries like yours drift from God and the church after graduation. The team at the Fuller Youth Institute saw the research, and experienced that statistic in their own youth ministry contexts, so they went to work to find out what it takes to help teens embrace a faith that sticks long after high school.

By following high school seniors into their first three years of college, they found their answers.

This 10-session book and DVD gives youth workers what they need: organic conversation starters with high school juniors and seniors that are grounded in Scripture and take an authentic look at life after high school. In addition, the accompanying DVD helps students learn from both the advice of experienced youth leaders as well as short, vivid stories of the real-life experience of students. Road-tested by youth workers like you, the Sticky Faith Teen Curriculum is designed to help you develop in your juniors and seniors a solid foundation that endures through the faith struggles they will face in college, in the workforce, and beyond.

DVD includes:
• Poignant video clips for teaching sessions
• Reproducible student handouts for each session

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Brad M. Griffin is the associate director of the Fuller Youth Institute, where he develops research-based training for youth workers and has coauthored Sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition and Deep Justice Journeys. A native Kentuckian, Brad now lives in Pasadena with his wife, Missy, and their three children. After more than fifteen years in youth ministry, he now volunteers in student and worship ministries.
You’ll Need:

To wear two layers of shirts (i.e., a T-shirt plus an outer shirt or sweatshirt)
Pens or pencils
Have More Time? Items: Crayons, markers, or other art supplies
Index cards
Copies of the God’s Vision for My Identity handout on page 31
Copies of the Identity That Sticks handout on pages 32–33
A small safe or lockbox, or if that’s not possible, a suitcase or briefcase you can seal with a buckle, zipper, or button snap
A mailing envelope for each student
Bibles

The Big Idea:

Having a scripturally informed view of our identities will help us keep our faith at the center of who we are and what we do.

how do i see myself after graduation?
More Worship and Prayer: Copies of the **Naming** handout on page 34
Optional: If you decide to watch parts 1 and 2 of the video “Karis’ Story” found on the resource DVD, be sure to figure out ahead of time how you’ll show the video (laptop, projector, etc.) and set up accordingly.

**NOW**

- Start by having students pick two words that help describe who they’ve been in high school, and briefly share why they picked them. For example, “baseball and friends, because I played baseball a lot and my friends mean the most to me.”

- Transition to a deeper level of conversation: I’m glad we’ve gotten to know each other a bit more. Now I want to take us to a deeper level. I want you to think about how you view yourself—beyond just what you do and what you like.

- Distribute an index card and pencil/pen to each student so that students can write their own thoughts on their index cards. Explain: I’d like you to write “I am” at the top of the index card, and then I want you to make a list of the words that come to your mind that help you complete that thought as quickly as you can. As students are writing, you should also write your own list of “I am” words.

- After students have finished their lists, continue by asking rhetorically: I’m curious where your faith fell on your lists. Was it toward the top? Somewhere in the middle? Toward the end? Or maybe even left off your list?

  As we learn together about Sticky Faith, today we’re going to spend some time thinking about our identities—meaning a mix of what we think about ourselves and what others think and portray to us about ourselves.

- Ask: How do you think we who follow Jesus view our identities differently than folks who don’t?
how do i see myself after graduation?

Research shows that right after seniors graduate high school, they often encounter new situations that seem to clash with who they were in high school.\(^1\) As a result they often place important parts of their identities—such as their family, their friends, and even their faith—in an “identity lockbox.” Those important parts of themselves end up sealed away, separate from their day-to-day lives.

Demonstrate the “identity lockbox” by explaining: I’m wearing two shirts. For many graduating seniors, faith is like my exterior shirt. It hasn’t become the core of who I am. And if it hasn’t become the core of who I am, I can take off my faith and put it in a lockbox. At this point, demonstrate by taking off your shirt and putting it in your safe or suitcase.

Real Reflections from Real Students

I think what hit me right off the bat was a sense of “the fence is down” . . . the fence of your school, community, family, church, friends that was once around you. The fence of people saying “this is the type of person you are,” or “this is what you are allowed and not allowed to do,” or “this is what is and is not appropriate”—drops way down as soon as you get to college, and I saw that instantly. I mean, the first day on campus, your parents drive away, and no one knows you. So, suddenly, I was faced with this situation in which I could literally have re-created myself in some ways if I wanted to, and nobody would have known that I had ever been any different.

Optional: Play Part 1 of “Karis’ Story” here, asking students afterward to respond to the experience Karis shares about stowing away her faith.

Ask: How, if at all, does the identity lockbox help describe what you’ve seen in other high school students, college students, or adults?

NEW

Continue: The good news is that God intends much more for us than the identity lockbox. In fact, our relationship with God has the potential to dramatically change our identities.
At this point, distribute the God’s Vision for My Identity handout. Go around the group, asking students to read aloud, one at a time, the names God intends for us.

Ask students to silently reread the list of identity statements on their own and take a few minutes to draw a star next to any of the names or phrases that have made a difference in their own lives.

Next, invite students to take a few minutes to draw a question mark next to any phrases that they’ve only somewhat experienced—or perhaps not experienced at all.

Finally, give students a few minutes to circle the specific names or phrases on the handout that they believe will be most important for them in the future. They won’t know for sure, but they can make educated guesses.

When the labeling exercise is over, ask students if they want to share any of the terms they labeled—and why they did so. Feel free to share one or two of the identity terms that you labeled as well—and why.

NOTE: You may want to collect these handouts to mail to students during their freshman year of college, perhaps at the same time as the handout in the next section.

Optional: Play Part 2 of “Karis’ Story” here, asking for students’ reflections on the ways Karis’ transformation and reconciliation with God stirs thoughts about how they want to live out their faith now as well as in college.

Have More Time?

Feel free to distribute paper and crayons, markers, or other art supplies to your students and have them draw images related to the identity statements that
how do i see myself after graduation?

they’d like to focus on in the future. Students can take their artwork home after the session, or you can collect the artwork in order to mail to students later.

HOW

Explain: Have you ever heard this phrase, “Begin with the end in mind”? How is that suggestion relevant as you prepare to finish high school?

At this point, distribute the Identity That Sticks handout and explain that today students will take a first stab at writing a few sentences to describe who they want to be a year from now.

NOTE: Assuming you want to follow our suggestion and give students time during future sessions to modify and add to this Identity That Sticks handout, let students know that today is their first step toward a vision of who they want to be, and that they’ll be clarifying and adding to that vision in future sessions.

Give students plenty of time to complete the handout. If you want to give students a chance to edit and expand upon their Identity That Sticks handout in future sessions, collect them now. If not, they can take them home.

Explain that to help “make sticky” their visions for their identities, you’ll mail them their Identity That Sticks handouts in the future. Give each student an envelope and have them address the envelopes to themselves. (NOTE: Decide beforehand if you want their summer addresses or fall addresses; keep in mind that many of your students might not know their fall addresses yet.) Ask them to stuff their Identity That Sticks handouts into the envelopes and hand them back to you. (ANOTHER NOTE: Be sure they leave the envelopes unsealed as you’ll be giving these back in subsequent sessions; plus you may want to include your own note later).

Next, remove the second, exterior shirt from the safe or suitcase in which you had placed it earlier, explaining that having a clear sense of who we want to be in a year and embracing these identity statements can help keep us from sealing our faith in an identity lockbox.

Collect the envelopes and place them in the

Real Reflections from Real Students

I think holding on to some of who you are can be hard in that process. So maybe write a little letter to yourself about what you regard as the most important parts of who you are and don’t want to lose track of. Realize that those things might grow or change somewhat, but be aware of the parts of yourself that are important to the person you want to be always.
center of your group. Invite a few of your students to pray over the envelopes, that God would help each of you avoid locking up your faith and instead have a clear vision for who you want to be and that each of your visions would place faith in the center of all you are and do.

**More Worship and Prayer**

**Naming**

You may want to plan for time in silent prayer focused on centering our identities in Christ. Consider using the following exercise either as a guided prayer that you lead out loud (and students respond silently), or as a handout for students to use in quiet reflection.

Introduce this exercise by saying something like: *As we begin our prayer time, think for a few minutes about the importance of names.*

Names are at the core of our identities because they’re the symbols we use most to identify ourselves to the world. The Bible makes a big deal about names—the name of God and names of people who follow God are really important, and often names mean specific things. In fact, on more than a few occasions in Scripture, God changes someone’s name as a result of a significant encounter.

In the God’s Vision for My Identity handout we looked at some of the names Scripture gives us that call out different aspects of our identities with God. Now we’re going to reflect on one of those names: Child of God.

Distribute the Naming handout and invite students to read 1 John 3:1 (printed at the top of the handout) several times and then reflect on the questions.

As students seem to complete the handout, help them bring their prayer time to a close by giving them a one- or two-minute notice then voicing a closing prayer or simple “Amen.” If you have time it may be helpful to debrief this prayer by asking a few questions:

- **What was that prayer like for you?**
- **What kinds of images or feelings stood out during this prayer time?**
- **What was uncomfortable for you?**
- **What was life-giving or renewing for you?**
- **What do you want to remember about this time with God?**
GOD’S VISION FOR MY IDENTITY

Below is a list of names from Scripture that describe God’s vision for your identity. Some may make you uncomfortable; some may make you laugh. Good. Take time as you’re reading to hear God reveal aspects of your identity—and the church’s identity—in God.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image of God</td>
<td>Genesis 1:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s Delight</td>
<td>Isaiah 62:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Redeemed of the Lord</td>
<td>Isaiah 62:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sought Out/Desirable</td>
<td>Isaiah 62:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Forsaken</td>
<td>Isaiah 62:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt of the Earth</td>
<td>Matthew 5:13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Light of the World</td>
<td>Matthew 5:14, Ephesians 5:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beloved</td>
<td>John 15:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple of the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Creation</td>
<td>2 Corinthians 5:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chosen</td>
<td>1 Peter 2:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Priest</td>
<td>1 Peter 2:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Holy People/Nation</td>
<td>1 Peter 2:9, Isaiah 62:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child of God</td>
<td>1 John 3:1, Galatians 3:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bride of Christ/God</td>
<td>Revelation 19:7-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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IDENTITY THAT STICKS

Imagine yourself a year from now. Write down words or phrases that describe who you hope to be in the following areas . . .

In my relationship with God, I want to be . . .

In my relationship with my family, I want to be . . .

In my relationship with friends now, I want to be . . .

In my relationship with new friends, I want to be . . .

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In the way I think and feel about myself, I want to be . . .

In my job or studies, I want to be . . .

Based on the words and phrases you’ve jotted down, write a three-to-five sentence description of who you want to be a year from now:

A year from now I want to be . . .
NAMING

See what great love the father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

What do you think it means to be God’s child? How might living as a child of God shape other parts of who you are?

For a few moments, imagine God as a loving father. Whatever your own father has or hasn’t been like, imagine what God as father might be like. What kinds of things does he say to you? How does he embrace you? How does he say your name?

Now imagine God “lavishing” his love on you. What kinds of images does that bring up for you? What kinds of emotions rise in you? How do you respond to that love?

Now imagine God as Father speaking these words to you before you close your prayer. Imagine him speaking your name in the appropriate places:

“See, _______________, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.” (Isaiah 49:16)

“_______________, you are my [child], whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11)

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