



ARTICLE

How Christians can care for displaced college students

COVID-19 through the eyes of a college senior

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We are all shaped by the events that we live through. I was born in 1998; I've never known a pre-9/11 world. I felt my parents go through the 2008 financial crisis. I graduated high school in the national turmoil of the 2016 presidential election. And now, I graduate college, without a ceremony, into a world that feels like it is collapsing around me. I'm looking for a job in a world of tremendous illness, uncertainty, fear, hiring freezes, and soaring

unemployment. Young people today, just like those before us, have known tragedy and loss—we grew up in it. But this feels unprecedented, and brings a different kind of grief.

My friends and I were given days to evacuate our campuses. Student-athletes' careers were instantly over. The internships, study abroad programs, and things we've worked so hard for were suddenly gone. We were sent back to places that, for many, no longer feel like home and prematurely said goodbye to the people that have become our families. We can't help but feel like important lasts went unnoticed and meaningful goodbyes went unsaid.

In addition to the very real emotional losses we are facing, our futures feel especially uncertain. Some students had already moved out of their homes before college, and now, they have been evicted from their schools to return to a "home" that no longer exists. As they were forced to leave, many college students lost the part-time jobs they relied on to meet their needs. While paying down crippling student loans and continuing to pay rent and tuition, college seniors are trying to find jobs in a world where no one is hiring and pre-existing offers are being rescinded.

It is natural and right to grieve the loss of the time we were supposed to have and the incredibly difficult circumstances we are facing, but Christian college students must not stay there. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 reminds us that we do not grieve as those without hope. We have confidence that, although we may not walk across a stage, God sees and knows the work that we've done. We can reflect with gratitude on the gift that our college experiences have been. We can remind ourselves that God has always been in control and will remain in

control in the days to come. As our circumstances seem more uncertain and our comfort has been stripped away, let us lean into the Comforter and trust that none of this has taken him by surprise.

So, what can the church do? How should Christians care for the college students among us?

1. Pray: Ask God to reveal himself in a new way to college students as they are forced to recognize dependence on him more completely than before. As I said before, college seniors are facing a daunting job market. Many were forced to leave or laid off from their current jobs at their schools. Some go home to financial uncertainty or scarcity. All are losing their community and will face loneliness. Pray that God would provide in tangible ways with jobs, finances, friends, and peace.

2. Extend grace: In times of tragedy, it is easy for us to minimize the experiences of others and count their feelings as less valid than our own. As young people, there is the temptation to say, “Well, I’m not vulnerable—who cares what I do?” As older people, there is the temptation to say, “You’re not even at risk—why are you complaining about your loss?” While we all have seen our fair share of tragedy, none of us has lived through a pandemic and done this before. It is a weird time for us all, and we are all doing our best with what we have to make it through this. Love your neighbor by extending grace to each other, genuinely listening and seeking to understand the pain we are each feeling in our own ways.

3. Give: Reach out to a local church or university and see if they know of any college students in need. Giving financially, providing temporary housing, storing items, or helping with transportation are practical ways to love college students well. If you order takeout from a restaurant, consider tipping above your normal amount. If you are working from home, ask a college student in your neighborhood to help you with childcare as a form of employment. If you want to look further, check out this [spreadsheet](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1m4wdJCbOQqHJ_jzPJ6xAYfXF5Lt6uJnw/edit#gid=0) (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1m4wdJCbOQqHJ_jzPJ6xAYfXF5Lt6uJnw/edit#gid=0) that Jefferson Bethke created where people are posting needs and others are meeting them.

4. Celebrate: Think of creative ways you can celebrate and champion the accomplishments of the college seniors in your life. Send them a card in the mail. Give them a call. Even if there are no ceremonies to attend or parties to throw, let them know that you are proud of them and love them.

As we journey through these tragic days and grieve all of the things that should have been, cling to the one whose ways are higher than our ways (Isa. 55:8) and who is in control yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). In him is our trust and our hope.

Hannah Daniel

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