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DETOUR

CREATIVE CAREER PATHS

BY LARRY STEPHENS

Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do. —Ephesians 5:17, NLT

So you graduate this year. You've been on the educational path ever since you can remember, and now suddenly that's all about to change. You've got all the freedom in the world, so how will you start the next chapter? Will you move right into your planned career, or will you decide to do something radically different?

Have you even given it much thought?

I didn't. I graduated in May and started my career in June working for a software company in Dallas. My friend Melissa chose a different path. She traveled across the globe to Turkey and immersed herself in the adventure of living and sharing in another culture. Another friend, Rob, graduated from Yale and road-tripped across the country with his college roomies in a Volkswagen van. What experiences they must have shared together!

Here's some advice. Before you become prisoner to a cubical from eight to five, and mortgaged up to your eyebrows, do something unconventional and experimental. Try things you might never have the chance to do again—and I can assure you, the chance is not likely to come again.

But remember one thing: *You are not your own. You were bought with a price.*

The apostle Paul reminds us where we came from: "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ ... But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:12-13). So as you review your options, then, remember that you belong to God. Adventure is great, but adventure for the sake of adventure will always feel hollow. Remember that He has transformed you from your past and that He will continue to transform you in your future. So, as you ponder what you want to do next, ask yourself, *Are my desires and dreams aligned with the desires of God's heart?*

When else in life will you have such freedom to do something for Christ? I mean, we're not talking about being a missionary for life, but simply having a year of adventure, a year with a purpose.

The *Jesus* film is the most influential evangelistic tool of our age. This film on the life of Christ—shown in towns, villages and cities all over the world—has exposed more than five billion people to the gospel. Maybe you're among the few who could handle a year of rugged travel around the world recording the *Jesus* film in new languages and showing it in locations where the gospel has never been. Or maybe you'd prefer crossing the ocean on a Mercy Ship

delivering humanitarian aid to war-torn villages or disaster victims. Or maybe you'd like to return to your campus as a ministry intern to disciple students as somebody disciplined you. From working at Yellowstone National Park on a summer project to living in Paris for a year building relationships with other international students, you have such a rich variety of options that you won't know where to start.

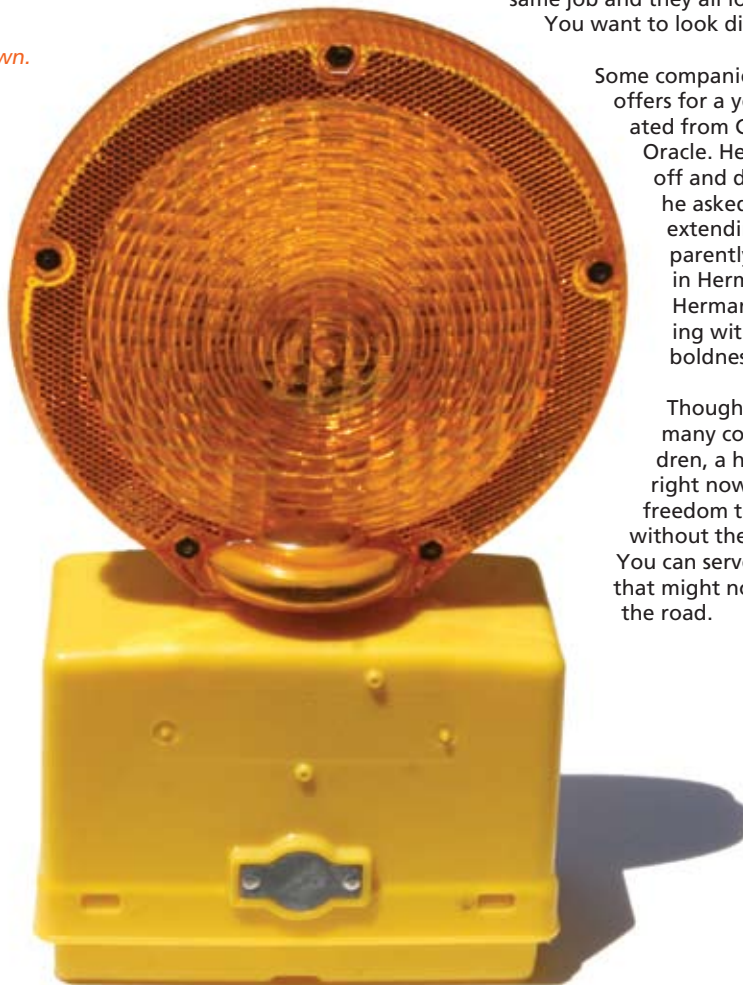
Options and opportunities go far and wide of Campus Crusade for Christ. The stories and opportunities I mention will often be from Campus Crusade for the simple reason that this is the organization I am most familiar with, but research for yourself, and research broadly.

THERE'S NO RUSH

Even though you may be nervous about "taking a year off" while your friends dive into the "real world," you will find that you didn't miss a thing. In fact, did you know that it looks better on your résumé to show a diverse array of experiences? Being able to include the year you spent helping inner-city children in New York City certainly makes your résumé stand out. Here's what Colleen Kinder, author of *Delaying the Real World*, has to say: "If you apply for a job on Monster-Trak there are hundreds of other people applying for the same job and they all look exactly the same on paper. You want to look different."

Some companies will even extend their job offers for a year. When Herman Yau graduated from Cornell, he took a job with Oracle. Herman wanted to take a year off and do something for the Lord, so he asked Oracle if they would consider extending his job offer a year. Apparently Oracle liked what they saw in Herman, because they said yes. Herman spent the next year traveling with the *Jesus* film. I admire his boldness.

Though later in life you may have many commitments—marriage, children, a house, a career—your future, right now, is wide open. You have the freedom to try something nontraditional without the worry of being tied down. You can serve the Lord right now in a way that might not be possible further down the road.



TAKE THE GLOBAL ROAD

If you've never gone abroad, now is the time. You may never get the chance again to live in a foreign country. Imagine yourself sitting in a café in Florence, walking the streets of Argentina, or perusing a city market in the Middle East while getting to know university students and talking with them about your relationship with Christ. You have the opportunity to take the life-changing message of Christ to students around the world. You'll be amazed at the similarities you find with others as you engage in conversation about your lives and become gripped by the spiritual need of the students you meet.

I befriended several students from Saudi Arabia this summer. After hearing about their home in Jidda, a port city near the Red Sea, I now have the itch to go. So I've thought, *What's holding me back? Well, probably getting a visa. But why not try?*

What's holding *you* back? Don't go alone. Join a group of others and go. You'll eat food you didn't know existed, visit sights you have seen only on postcards, and make friends you will never forget. You're just a ticket away from traveling anywhere.

I recommend traveling with a purpose. When I say purpose, what I mean is that you should find a reason to visit a country beyond just to see some exciting place. Get a job teaching English, take some classes, be an *au pair*, pick grapes off the vine—anything that gives you the opportunity to weave your way into the local fabric.

—Roger Loughney, 24, taught English in China and worked as a white-water rafting guide

Every so often I stand in Red Square and think to myself, *Wow, this is where I live!* But it's more than the location that makes me love being here. I love the interaction with students—having coffee or tea and discussing the gospel. Holding an English Club where we ponder deep and difficult things rarely discussed in their culture. Meeting students who welcome our arrival to their city and cry at our departure. This year I've experienced personal growth and dependence on God that is nothing short of life altering.

—Michael Swanson, 25, traveled to Moscow

GO BACK TO YOUR OLD STOMPING GROUND

Are you leaving a thriving ministry back on your campus? Perhaps you're a resident assistant in a dorm leading a Bible study. Maybe you're an athlete still trusting God for your teammates. Or you're a member of a sorority or fraternity who's seen God move in incredible ways. So, why leave it? Why not stay and hang with your friends? Interning on your campus might be the right thing for you. Classes won't be in the way. You can pour all your time and energy into your ministry.

I really felt that Campus Crusade invested so much in my life that I wanted to take some time before going to the real world and invest back into the ministry that changed my life. As an intern, I just gained such a great perspective on what it looks like to serve the Lord.

—Rachael Heald, 23, interned at Ohio University

As a student, I never could throw myself completely into discipling my girls. So after graduation I decided to take a year aside and jump in and try ministry full time back on my campus and see where God would direct me. I spent the year discipling and developing my evangelism skills.

—Jen Cameron, 25, interned at Kent State

YOUR OPTIONS ARE LIMITLESS

If you've wondered about serving in the States but not on a campus, there are a ton of organizations, ministries, and missions you could sign up with. Within Campus Crusade for Christ, you could put your professional skills to use at Lake Hart (Campus Crusade's world headquarters) or you could help to meet the needs of the inner-city community with Here's Life Inner City. Another option is to reach government, military, and diplomatic leaders for Christ through the Christian Embassy in D.C. The opportunities are vast and the harvest is plentiful.

I spent the summer in New York City with Here's Life Inner City. The Lord gave me a heart for the poor. He taught me that you don't just pray about people in need, but you go and you help them. God humbled my prideful heart and crushed my stereotypes; I have learned that everyone is truly equal in His eyes.

—Alissa Pelphrey, 21

I was planning on getting a job in business but decided to be open to the possibility of doing ministry. I was fearful of letting go of my career plans but couldn't ignore God, so I signed up for a one-year internship with Student Venture. Immediately, I had opportunities to see high school students radically changed for eternity. Now I'm leading a movement to reach 1,200 teenagers at the local high school. My experience with Student Venture exceeded my expectations; the year I thought I was sacrificing ended up being a blessing.

—Chris McClelland, 25

TAKE THE FIRST STEP

It's a big decision and a lot to think about. It will change not only your life but also the lives of people you will meet and build relationships with.

We have been "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10, NIV). The Scriptures affirm that God has a plan for you.

Read over the following stories and experiences of recent graduates, begin praying about where the Lord may want you to go after graduation, and take steps of faith to discover His amazing plan for your future. Each moment of the day is a gift from God. It's up to us to choose how we use it.

*This article was inspired by Colleen Kinder's book **Delaying the Real World** and by the lessons I learned from not going for it after I graduated. I had no idea there were so many opportunities there for the taking. Larry Stephens gives leadership to evangelism for the Campus Ministry and lives in Orlando.*