



# POST GRAD

NAVIGATING

LIFE AFTER

GRADUATION

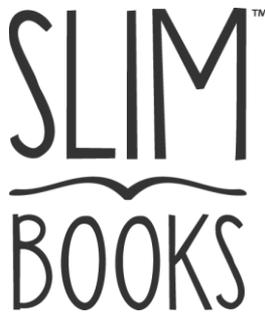
BY JESSIE DAVIS

SLIM  
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# Post Grad

*Navigating Life After Graduation*

Written by **Jessie Davis**



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***Dedicated to Shawn & Jill Johnson.***

*Thank you for believing in me, the kingdom,  
and the next generation of post grad world changers.*

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# Introduction

## *Wide Open Seas*

*It is not as much the ship so much as the skillful sailing that assures a prosperous journey.*

*– George William Curtis*

It was late fall, and I had driven across town to meet with two young ladies that I had met through the Young Adult ministry at Red Rocks Church. The meeting was set up due to slight urgency; one of the girls was feeling panicked about life, her friend similarly. We nestled into a café, our jackets still on, coffee in hand, and they began to explain their current distress. These were bright women. Focused women. Four months prior, they were both in college, enjoying friends and finishing finals. They graduated, moved back to Colorado where their families were, and set about to do what's next. "What's next" was why we were getting coffee.

Neither of the girls felt sure about what was next. One had originally taken a job in a mountain town managing a coffee shop, but then moved back home when it didn't work out. The other girl was teaching at a local school but was deeply unsatisfied, and felt like she needed a change. What that next thing was, neither of them knew. It felt unknown, unexpected, and visibly uncomfortable. The problem here was NOT talent. These girls had that. The problem was this new season that neither of them had ever been in. The problem was - neither of them had sailed before. These women weren't alone. They aren't alone. I've heard this story lots of times from a lot of people. If I'm honest, I've told this story myself.

The years after graduation are some of the craziest, most exhilarating, most important years of your life – which is why they

are desperately difficult. And which is why I wrote this book. The years after graduation are vastly important. You may choose a spouse. You may choose a career. You may start a family. You might go back to school. During this season, you will continue to decide who you want to be for the rest of your life. That's a lot of pressure.

### **Life on Rails – The “This or That” Era**

Let's get honest about the first couple decades of your life. In the first quarter of your life, your decisions are generally not your own: teachers, coaches, and mentors, all have a say (or more) in your life and what happens in it. Your decisions, therefore, are minimized to a “this or that” kind of decision.

Let me give you some examples. In kindergarten, you are given choices by mom and dad and teachers. You will either choose this kind of shoe or that kind of shoe. This backpack or that one. You can choose vanilla or chocolate. Goldfish or Saltines. In grade school, you become a little more self-aware and start choosing things you like such as soccer or football, dancing or acting, and archery or video games. You can choose blue shirts or gray. Nike or Puma. Stacey's house or Lexi's. You get it.

As you get into high school, your decisions may seem to have more weight – and they do. *Substantially* more weight. However, they still fall in the “this or that” category. By high school, you can choose to focus on the state track meet or your AP classes. You can choose to go to Prom with this girl, that girl, or not go at all. You can choose to skip class with your friends and smoke, or actually show up to gym. And then college decisions start rolling around. You can choose Yale or community college. Out-of-state or in-state. A Bachelors degree in Psychology or Business. Delta Phi or Gamma Rah-Rah Alpha. (I've never been in a sorority, but you know - *Rah*).

The decisions here are larger, heavier, and more important. You're choosing summer jobs, and summer internships. You're choosing girlfriends, boyfriends, where you spend your time, and with whom. But they are *still* "THIS... or THAT" decisions. This kind of "life on the rails", if you will, leaves life somewhat predictable. After pre-school it's kindergarten, grade school then middle school, high school then college. Whether you realize it or not, your life has consisted of pre-determined systems. *It is like a train on a track. You can go slower, you can go faster, or hit the brakes if you want, but the destination, for the most part, is locked.*

And then, your college graduation comes. The moment you've waited for (and your parents have hoped for) is finally here. You get a diploma and a gown and pictures and high-fives. Some awesome dude from a big business somewhere that invented something gives an inspiring speech. Everyone remarks that you will change the world, and change the world you will indeed. It's graduation. Pictures and Instagram posts abound.

Then, the train tracks end. Suddenly, and violently, the tracks you've known for the last 20-some-odd years are ripped out. No one warned you. No one said it was coming. No one explained the sheer *jolt* of it all. The tracks are gone. And just like that, you aren't on a train car anymore. You are on a ship in a wide-open sea. It is vast, it is expansive, and it is uncharted.

If it feels like you can't breathe, that's understandable. Wide open seas should take your breath away. The course you make now is all your own. I'll say that again – the course you chart now is solely navigated by YOU. No more "this or that" decisions. No pre-determined next steps. Just you. Your decisions. Your life. How you live your life now is *completely* up to you.

### **The Thing About Oceans**

Years ago, I dug my feet into a volcanic black sand beach in Hawaii. The beach was below two huge mountain peaks, filled

with lush green foliage. My then-boyfriend, now husband, and I were there together (not alone, people – get your mind out of the gutter), scoping out the beach and playing in the water.

I've been in oceans before. I had been in the gulf and the West coast. I grew up on lakes, so in general, I'd say my swimming is adequate. The conditions were perfect. Sunny and just warm enough. The waves were rolling, and calm. Jon and I waded out into the water and began diving into the waves. The swells were anywhere between 10 and 15 feet, and we kept diving through them, one by one. It was glorious out there. At some point though, I realized I was further out from the beach than I wanted to be and the ground was harder to touch. And the waves were getting bigger.

And, all of a sudden, a tiny fear pinged in my heart. I kept swimming, and to my left I saw Jon closer to shore, still hooting and jumping through the water. I was tip toeing the ground, watching him, when I turned around to meet a huge crashing wave. The force of it was incredible. My body was immediately pushed to the ocean floor, and then I was flipped, legs over my head. And then I was flipped again. I was disoriented. And then I felt the undertow.

Within 5 seconds I was another 20 yards from shore. Jon was yelling for me when my head popped out of the water. Heart pounding, I began the swimming back to shore. But another wave hit. And another. And another. The undertow kept pulling, and my body kept getting pulled out further to sea. When my head popped up again Jon was screaming and motioning for me to swim – not toward shore, but diagonally. I did. I swam hard paralleling the waves. Slowly, ever so slowly, I found a way to swim closer to shore. Jon met me and helped me to the beach, both of us gasping for air.

That day I left the ocean with a deep awe for the sea. I had a respect for what the ocean was, and what it was capable of doing. It was stronger than I was. Bigger than I was. Vast. Powerful. Awe-inspiring. (And, a bit terrifying).

The thing about oceans is that they are quite wild. Unlike the tame, predictable train tracks, an ocean is unpredictable. It's giant and strong. One of the best vehicles for adventure, and one of the best ways to die young. It's not predictable, to be sure, but it's probably the best way to travel – only if you know how to sail.

### **Sink or Swim**

You'd think that a young, creative mind would totally dig wide-open seas. That Post Grad (the crazy time after college) would be the pinnacle of life. Anything is possible, everything is imaginable, and most things seem somewhat doable. When you think about it, this should be the best thing that's ever happened to you! But we all know the real story here. Most will graduate and see the wide-open sea for what it is: overwhelming.

When I sit with folks in the Post Grad season, the question that gets asked a lot is "what?" What should I do? What job should I take? What apartment? What Bible study should I join?

People walk away from our conversations frustrated because I never give them what they want – the perfect answer. But then again, they are still thinking like a train. Trains look for "what." What turn? Turn right at Albuquerque or forge forward? But if you try that now, at this stage, you're toast. There are too many turns. Too many options. After thinking about the wide-open sea of your life for five seconds, you might as well take a vacation. It is that intense.

That inspiring graduation speaker should have prepped you for the massive confusion ahead. While you know that there are big goals and big dreams to be had, the next step seems a little blurry. You

receive advice from everyone and anyone, but the signposts don't get clearer. If anything, they get foggier. Sometimes they don't appear at all.

If you keep thinking like you are on a train, and you keep looking for a what, this season will be terribly frustrating for you. You must realize, and fully grasp that you are on a sailboat.

To think like a sailboat, you never look for right "whats". Instead, you look for smart "hows". This season is not so much about knowing the *right* choices. There are too many choices for that. Instead, it's about learning the principles on which you can *sail well*.

### **My Hope for You**

The following chapters are the heartfelt, prayed through, talked-about, and sweated-out principles that build great sailors. God has done a masterful job at helping us navigate this life according to His word, for the sake of His glory. We just have to know how to look, and have the patience to listen. God loves everyone, and is proud of everyone equally – regardless of what you or I could ever do or say. However, I believe He gets pretty excited to see men and women who are brave, adventurous, and sailing new paths for His name's sake. Sailing takes *massive* amounts of courage. God's only promise to you through this season is that He will be with you. He won't fail you. He'll sail where you sail.

For twenty-some years of your life, you were a train conductor with a pre-determined path. Running the tracks, working the rails, and feeding the engine. You've conducted the train; you've known its inner workings. But the tracks have ended. It is done. The train is no longer operable for the journey ahead. And now you stand at the sea's edge with a sailboat ready to sail without a clue how to sail it. Yes, it is overwhelming. Yes, it will take trust. Yes, you'll make some mistakes. But the choice is yours. You can trust God deeply, and push forward into the sea or you can cower to the

vastness and never leave the shore. John A. Shedd once said, “A *ship is safe in harbor, but that’s not what ships are built for.*” It is not what you are built for either.

This is the story of the Post Grad. My hope is that you jump on board, cut the ties, and start your adventure. And, use this book to give you some principles on how to sail well.

Let’s sail,

Jessie Davis



# Chapter 1

## *God's Classroom*

*The only people who achieve much are those who want knowledge so badly that they seek it while the conditions are still unfavorable.*

*Favorable conditions never come.*

*- C.S. Lewis*

I could tell he was frustrated. He was called to ministry, had attended a Christian university, and had high hopes for the future. But at that moment, he was working 40 hours a week in retail – stocking items on shelves, clocking in, clocking out, dealing with crazy customers, and reporting to a boss who regularly forgot his name. He had moved back in with his folks after graduating and now made just over minimum wage. He sat in traffic on the way to work; he sat in traffic all the way home.

This wasn't the plan.

This wasn't even plan B.

This was hell.

### **The Commencement**

At graduation, you may have had an incredible feeling of accomplishment and freedom. A successful person gets up on stage to tell you the value of your education, the joy and fulfillment that lay before you, and all the ways you can change the world. The message at these events is pure encouragement-elation. *You can succeed. Every failure has a lesson. Find the path less traveled. Take chances. You will change the world. You and only you can do what only you can do. You are the next generation of entrepreneurs, of creators, of business owners. YOU ARE. YOU CAN. YOU WILL.* And on that day, you feel invincible. *I really can do it all.*

The books *finally* get put away. No more brain crunches. No more all-nighters. No more classrooms. The problem here is that the post-grads (myself included) treat commencement like it's the end. We've arrived. Look at *this*, world.

The word, "commencement," however, means something completely different. To commence means to *begin*. Commencement is hardly the end. To graduate from something is to begin something else. We would be wise to treat graduation less like an arrival. If anything, it's a pit stop. Because the next journey is the real deal. It's the big deal. Get out the books again. Because *now*, you begin.

### **Your Future is So Bright, You Gotta Wear Shades**

Nestled in the book of 1 Samuel is a story of maybe one of the most successful men in history. It's about a man named David. He's young, the youngest of his family. He's "ruddy," which I think is a hilarious way of saying he isn't ugly. He's able-bodied, a good worker, and life is just getting started for him.

In 1 Samuel 16, this young David is brought before a prophet. This prophet, Samuel, is choosing the next king of Israel as directed by God. Samuel meets David one afternoon, and knows he's it. God speaks clearly: This is the next king.

In front of David's dad, and his brothers, Samuel anoints David as the new king of Israel. The *king*. Can you imagine? One day you are cleaning and brushing sheep, and then next day you are told that there is a kingdom – and it's yours, technically. The world *truly* is your oyster.

Have you ever had this kind of experience? The dream-defining moment where God speaks and you understand a bit of why you were put on earth. It's a moment where you realize your "call". For David, this moment was realizing that God had built him and created him to be a governing king.

Maybe you've never been told that you'd be a king, or anything close. But, my guess is that you've likely had a moment where you felt a strong sense of God's call on your life. If you haven't, that's okay. You'll be prepared for when you do.

My David moment came eight years ago. I was in college, and in a season with God where I felt he was incredibly *near*. I felt alive in Christ, and was consuming books, Scripture, and literature at a rapid rate. During time in prayer, I would sense His presence fall like a blanket. Obedience became a new obsession. It was a good season. God was moving. One Tuesday, I sat in college chapel, listening to a teacher. At some point, while reflecting on a bit of Scripture the room seemed to go silent. God spoke clearly to me. *"Dig in Jessie, I'm preparing you."* My heart about exploded with gratitude and reverence. I knew immediately that He was preparing me for ministry.

I sat wonderfully excited and in awe. I knew what my future held. In Scripture we are told "the Spirit came powerfully upon David."<sup>1</sup>

My David moment came at a chapel church service. For other folks, this defining moment comes in an internship where they realize what they are passionate about. It might be a conversation where they catch a glimpse of their true passions. For some folks these vision moments come more subtly, when a job doesn't fit the way they thought, or when they change majors as they discover more about themselves. Someway, somehow, God gives us a look into our future – about who we could be, what our purpose is, what we were created for. Like David being anointed king we all have glimpses where God says, "see, this is what I created YOU for."

I hear about these moments weekly from the young adults I get to serve. They were teaching Sunday school to four-year-olds and sensed suddenly that they would always work with youngsters.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 16:13

They were interning at a company and felt God tug them further into a project. They were in prayer and knew God was calling them to marry a young woman. They knew God was sending them into medicine. They had dreams of a job, a spouse, starting a business, or starting a non-profit organization.

David moments, I believe, are important parts of our stories. God gives us seasons of intense clarity and vision for a reason. The terrible and wonderful part about David moments is that they don't last. And, they aren't meant to. They're only the beginning.

Immediately after David finds out he's the next king, he gets to work... as the *assistant* to the king. You can hear the record scratch to a halt. He's an entertainer for Saul. A musician who gets summoned to calm the king. He brings king Saul food. Tends to his needs. Saul mistreats him, but David sticks it out as the king's personal assistant.

And while we read about David being quite a good musician for the king, and being a faithful servant, you have to believe the man was human. There is no doubt that he had moments where he looked to the sky and grimaced – this *wasn't the plan*. This isn't even plan B. This is hell.

### **God's Classroom**

The frustration of Post Grad years is unprecedented. Never have more dreams been seemingly thwarted. Never have more efforts come to a dead end. Never have so many hearts been dismayed. Is this a terrible job? A detour from destiny? Or is this part of the plan?

God is in the business of creating people of immense character and powerful resolve. He's a character-first God. Yes, He's hoping you go forth and make disciples. And yes, He has plans that give you a hope and a future. But first, He needs you to have concrete integrity. First, you are made ready for that call.

In Malachi, we are told about God's role in the process of refining us: "*He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness.*" – Malachi 3:2-3

Refinement is a long and crazy process in which the metal is made more pure, and more valuable. The metal is heated. As it heats, impurities float to the top where they are skimmed off. Then, it starts all over again. Heat. Skim off the top. Heat again. Skim off the top. When the process is complete, the metal is pure, refined, and valuable.

God, in the same way, refines His people. The thing is, this happens in the most covert ways. For example, He'll give you a weird roommate. Or a terrible boss. A job that isn't your plan A. A circumstance where you aren't valued as much as you'd like. A hard season. A difficult relationship. These circumstances aren't there to make you uncomfortable *without reason*. They are there to make you into the person you need to be. They are there to make you into the person who has the *character* to handle the task ahead.

The David Moment sets the vision. God's Classroom prepares the student.

### **The Hardest Class You've Ever Taken**

Far beyond any other classroom you've been in, God's classroom will require everything you have in order to transform you into who God wants you to be.

*"Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom."* – Psalm 51:6

God first and foremost is interested in our *innermost being*. Isn't it interesting that the "hidden part" of us is what gets attention? Not the outward trappings. The *insides*. In Galatians we learn about

what our insides should look like. God maps out the character He is aiming for:

Love

Joy

Peace

Patience

Forbearance

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness

Self-Control

God's tool for shaping this type of character is going to shock you. I know it shocked me. God uses scenarios that are *less than ideal* to make you into the man or woman He wants for Himself.

I'm guessing you picked up this book for a myriad of reasons. Maybe you hate (ok, "hate" is an un-Christian word. We will say, "strongly dislike in some terrible way") your roommate. They don't clean, and they leave their underwear on the floor. And you have ZERO patience with him or her. Maybe you're graduating, and you've been offered a job, but it's not totally ideal. In fact, the only reason you're taking it is *you have bills*. And that's it. Beyond that, it offers you little. Maybe you've been in said job for six months. A year. Maybe longer. And it's *wearing on you*. The reality that you're still in a dead-end job is depressing.

Maybe you're looking for a job promotion. You applied. You waited. And suddenly, it got handed to another guy. And, lo and *behold* – it's the guy you've already felt jealous of in the first place. So there's another reason. Or maybe there isn't a job at all. And in all of these things you can't help but wonder. Is God *in this*? Is He even paying attention?

These scenarios, nicely put, are less than ideal. Based on Scripture, however, these scenarios are *exactly* what God uses to shape our calling. Little do we know that roommate is God's classroom. That boss who demands much and listens little – that's God's classroom. That job that requires more patience and more forethought – that's God's classroom. Your less-than-ideal circumstance just may be the best classroom you ever had.

### **Before They Were Kings**

At church we love telling stories of magnificent men and women of God. Stories of *glory and honor*. We love that stuff on Sundays. Moses leading people out of bondage, David slaying a giant, Paul debating the Athens philosophers, and Esther saving a nation. These people are incredible, and for good reason, they are the foundations of many books and sermons. For each of these heroes, though, there was a *substantial* amount of time in their lives that we don't like to talk about. Not *really*. If Moses spent 40 years in the desert, I would love to hear a pastor try to teach on a sermon called "Year 27: Navigating Well Through The Wilderness." And then the next Sunday, "Year 29: Still Goin' Strong." But these seasons for our Bible-favorites are long. *Long*. Huge stretches of the character's life that we pass over in a paragraph to get to the good stuff. Blah blah blah, and then Moses parted the RED SEA.

Good movies aren't made from years of hiding in caves. Good movies are made of kings and kingdoms. But before David was king, before Esther was chosen, before Caleb took paradise they spent decades in the wilderness, they spent years in service to another king. They spent lifetimes waiting for God's go-ahead. And these seasons, as un-glorifying as they were, are actually amazing soil for God's best work. These people were in God's classroom.

### **Graduating God's Classroom**

But, dear friend, there is fabulous news here. Because God truly DOES intend for you to graduate from His classroom. Philippians

gives us both God's handshake and word: "*He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*"<sup>2</sup> God has plans for us, and with our cooperation we will lay hold of each of them. So, what now?

As far as I can tell, graduation in God's economy isn't so much based on how much time a person spends in a class as it is based on how quickly they learn. God in his love and perfected timing will allow you to stay in a classroom until you have learned what it is you need to learn. If you have a pride problem, God will let you stay in a humbling environment until you have learned that you don't deserve anything at all. If you have an authority problem, God will let you have terrible boss after incompetent boss until you learn to honor and serve.

Whatever the character issue, God will give you a unique classroom *just for you*. And most likely, it will be uncomfortable. But, if you are willing, and you commit to the process, God will use your circumstance to mold you and fashion you. He will use it to ready you and make you into the leader, servant, and disciple you were meant to be.

### **Successful People Submit**

One afternoon I was rock climbing with a good friend. He was the type of guy who was a thinker, and recently had began researching various world religions. Buddhism had caught his attention in recent months, and so today was less about climbing and more about religious Q & A.

"One Buddhist principle I agree with a lot is 'yielding to overcome'," he said, "What do you think?"

I thought about the principle. Yielding or submitting to overcome. "Of course," I said. "That sounds a lot like Jesus to me." Jesus, after all, yielded everything to overcome death. If Jesus submitted in

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<sup>2</sup> Philippians 1:6

order to succeed the same must be said for us. Success in God's classroom looks different, see? It's the yielders who overcome. Not the most powerful. But the ones who yield and embrace their circumstance. The more you *embrace* this season, the more God can work in you.

And so this season of the Post Grad is about submitting to the process. About soaking up every lesson that these years have to offer. About embracing your job, your season, your place, so that God can work through you, grow you, and graduate you in due time.

So, are you ready to learn? Even if it's difficult, are you ready to stand firm? These next few years are packed full of wisdom and character formation if we would only allow for it. This season is about your character. Your beginnings. Your perfectly tailored classroom. Take notes, He has much to impart.

