



# THE GREATEST GIFT: THE SENIOR EXPERIENCE & THE PLAN

The culmination of the Grounded for Life plan for students is the Senior Experience, which serves as a final preparation and launching pad for life beyond high school. The greatest gift CATM can give graduates is a Senior Experience that grounds them in their faith and produces an individualized plan to help them experience God's best in college and beyond.

At Church at The Mill, the culmination of our comprehensive spiritual growth plan for students (called Grounded for Life) is the Senior Experience. The Senior Experience serves as a final preparation and launching pad for life beyond high school. Through a co-ed Senior Small Group experience, students begin the first semester studying Revelation (its themes and promises are so appropriate for students preparing for an unknown future) and a student version of Financial Peace University (we get the most positive feedback from parents on this).

In their final semester of Small Group, students are led to write a practical and actual plan for how to succeed beyond high school. We've learned that most students don't plan to fail; most just don't plan not to. That is why we lead them in writing a plan that is based on our nine Grounded for Life biblical principles.

## THE PLAN

Each student is given a customized Senior Experience journal where students take notes as each biblical principle is taught and Scripture is discussed in smaller groups. Young Adults are invited in to share their post-graduation experience and suggest practical steps to implement the principles in ways that will benefit their life beyond high school. Students develop personal action steps for each biblical principle identified in The Plan, and together as a group the students decide on the most practical and helpful action steps for each principle. At the end of the semester, we take their action steps and have them professionally printed into each class' unique version of The Plan as a physical reminder to carry with them into their next stage of life. We encourage students to keep The Plan somewhere they will see it often and review the wisdom and ideas they took time to craft into their plan.

## THE FIVE

Before students graduate, we also encourage them to identify a circle of five people that can hold them accountable to their plan during their first year of college. A number of studies have shown that students who have accountable relationships with 3-5 adults while in college are significantly more

successful at thriving spiritually than those who do not. We suggest their “5” include a parent (or two), a senior adult, a past or current mentor (Small Group leaders), as well as a peer that they admire spiritually. These 5 have the ability to greatly impact and encourage a student’s successful transition to college. We connect these “5” to the student and the plan at a special celebration.

### **THE CELEBRATION**

Another way we celebrate this period of transition is by making a big deal of High School graduation at CATM. We have a special Graduate Recognition Sunday where students are celebrated and encouraged by their church family. As a part of this special day, graduates invite their families, close friends, and their “5” to a special meal where they are further celebrated by our whole Student Ministry team. At this meal, graduates share The Plan booklets with their “5” and begin the process of receiving encouragement to thrive as they enter the post-high-school world. This event puts the exclamation point on our preparation of students to be Grounded For Life!

### **THE GIFT**

On Graduate Sunday, students will be presented with special Challenge coins that are custom minted for the SATM graduating class. Challenge coins are a long-standing tradition in the military that serve as a



symbol of identity, a source of pride, and a reminder of the support that life: grounded has behind them. We will give these special gifts to our graduating class to serve as a constant reminder of their identity, values, and the army of support they have behind them in their church family. (Some students put these where they can see them daily and some carry them in their pocket when they are having a tough day.)

Through a special Senior Small Group, the writing of The Plan, the formation of accountability circles, the celebration and commissioning service, the banquet, and a special gift, the Senior Experience serves as not only a celebration, but also a launching pad for High School graduates. By making such a big deal of this important milestone, we encourage families, we further unite students to the church, and we empower students to be Grounded for Life! Our prayer is to give students a purpose, a plan, and the people to help them live God’s best for their lives!

We are honored and privileged to be a part of giving them what we believe is a pretty great gift!

