

* welcome to
ADULTING

NAVIGATING FAITH, FRIENDSHIP,
FINANCES, AND THE FUTURE

JONATHAN “JP” POKLUDA
WITH KEVIN McCONAGHY



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Jonathan "JP" Pokluda with Kevin McConaghy, Welcome to Adulthood
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2018. Used by permission.

© 2018 by Jonathan Pokluda

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Pokluda, Jonathan, 1980– author.

Title: Welcome to adulting : navigating faith, friendship, finances, and the future /

Jonathan “JP” Pokluda with Kevin McConaghy.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Publishing Group, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018008438 | ISBN 9780801078101 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Young adults—Religious life. | Christian life.

Classification: LCC BV4529.2 .P65 2018 | DDC 248.8/4—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018008438>

Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Some names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

The author is represented by The Gates Group of 1403 Walnut Lane, Louisville, Kentucky 40223

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Jonathan "JP" Pokluda with Kevin McConaghy, *Welcome to Adulting*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2018. Used by permission.



To my wife, Monica,
for patiently adulting with me.
To Christ-following young adults,
you are the future of the church.
The future is bright!
To our church, Watermark,
and the leaders there,
thank you
for displaying Christ
to me.

Contents

Introduction 9

SECTION ONE:
ADULTING WITH PURPOSE

1. Life: *Don't Miss It* 15
2. Purpose: *The Reason You're Here* 25

SECTION TWO:
ADULTING LIKE A BOSS

3. Authority: *Who's in Charge Here?* 39
4. Work: *Career Counseling* 55
5. Money: *It's Not All about the Benjamins* 71

SECTION THREE:
ADULTING WITH FRIENDS

6. Community: *Your Playmates and Playgrounds* 93
7. Conflict: *The Right Way to Be Wrong (and Vice Versa)* 111
8. Dating: *Happily Ever After?* 125

Contents

SECTION FOUR:
ADULTING FEARLESSLY

9. Worry: *The Only Thing We Have to Fear . . .* 159
10. Recovery: *Leaving the Past Behind* 173

SECTION FIVE:
ADULTING FOREVER

11. Eternity: *Life in Perspective* 191

- Acknowledgments 213
Notes 215
About the Author 221

Introduction

***adulthood** (noun; mass noun informal): the practice of behaving in a way characteristic of a responsible adult, especially the accomplishment of mundane but necessary tasks.

I had just walked across the stage in my cap and gown in Waco, Texas. Not at Baylor, the Baptist university you might have heard of, but at a small technical college just outside of Waco. My girlfriend came in from out of town. She was sitting beside my proud parents, who drove across the state of Texas to witness the occasion. They had financed the possibility of graduation over the years, and I'm confident the event meant much more to them than it did to me. In fact, I was a little distracted from the diploma I was holding, because sitting behind my girlfriend was another girl I had been secretly dating in Waco. And she had driven over with another girl whom I was also interested in. So my mind was stuck on how I was going to keep those two away from my girlfriend while still appropriately expressing appreciation to everyone for coming to my graduation. This "mess" was a microcosm of my life.

My mother was a school counselor, and she was the one who had found this technical college where they would teach me about graphic art and help me find a job upon graduation. Well, today was that day, and I was still waiting tables at Johnny Carino's with no other job opportunities in sight. I didn't mind it, though. Having to do art for a grade in all those classes pretty much taught me to hate art. Now that I was finished with college, I still wasn't any closer to knowing what I wanted to do. I imagined I would do just about anything, as long as the job paid me enough money so that I could eat and party.

My life at this point was nearly void of faith. I went to a Catholic school from kindergarten through the eighth grade, and during sober nights in college (which were the exception) I'd usually go to sleep saying the prayers I had learned there. Outside of that, God and I were at odds. It wasn't his fault, it was mine. I spent college doing whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted. Sometimes that included going to class and sometimes it didn't. It never, however, included going to church.

Somehow, though, I had made it to this day. The last day I would ever have to attend school. The first day of the rest of my life. All I could think about, other than managing my relationship problems in the audience, was *Now what? What am I going to do now?*



It's been sixteen years since that day, and my life has taken some very interesting twists and turns. I've gone from small-town kid to big-city adult, gotten married, become a father, and worked my way through several jobs. The most

unexpected plot twist is what I do now: I'm a pastor at a large church (Watermark Community Church in Dallas). There, I lead The Porch ministry—a weekly gathering of thousands of young adults, both in Dallas and through live-stream services around the world. With over a decade of ministering to tens of thousands of young adults, I've learned so much about what some do to succeed at this crossroads and how some fail. Besides having my own experiences as a young adult, including making mistakes and having failures to learn from, I've also walked alongside and counseled literally thousands of other people in their twenties or early thirties. I've seen what works and what doesn't work, what brings happiness and what brings pain. I've had the opportunity to study the Scriptures and to be mentored by Bible experts older and wiser than I am, and I have seen how following (or ignoring) God's wisdom leads to very different outcomes in life.

Through it all, I've found that these young professionals and recent graduates are almost all asking the same question I was. *Now what?* Some of them are asking a more hopeless version of that question: *Is this really it? Is this all there is?* I've learned that college, and school in general, doesn't prepare anyone for life's biggest challenges. The darkest days for many are those years following college. This is where someone goes from the one routine they'd known since age five—attending classes, obeying teachers, and taking tests—to another routine that is full of a freedom no one is really ready for.

I believe the pages ahead will help you plan for the rest of your life. You might think it's arrogant that I could claim to know the plan for your life. However, what I've realized is that God has a plan for everyone's life, but most people

ignore it. They know the basic things God wants everyone to do, but they choose not to do them. And if you ignore the general plan God has already made clear, why should he bother to give you more specific instructions? But when we choose to walk in his basic plan for our life, we can unlock his greatest plan for our life.

The following chapters provide a sort of map. They cover the biggest challenges that I see young adults facing in the real world. Whether you were a valedictorian with a perfect GPA or felt that classes only got in the way of your college experience, I believe you will benefit greatly from the contents of this book. My hope is that this will be one of the greatest gifts you've ever received because of how it prepares you for the next season of life and saves you from the pain of the mistakes that many make at this crossroads.

I hope you don't read this book alone. While you could do so and still benefit from it, I've written this book so you can discuss the chapters with a small group of people who know you well and who are working through the book alongside you. I believe the discussion will help the ideas sink in and help you plan to make any necessary changes to your life.

SECTION ONE

Adulting
with
Purpose

1 Life

DON'T MISS IT

“I’ve tested the warnings of God and found them true. Now, I am trusting his promises.”¹ I heard someone say that once, and it resonated deeply with me. To trust the promises of God is to live life as it is meant to be lived. It’s an adventure with purpose. Faith is not a by-product of life; it *is* life, as it was meant to be lived. It seems most of my life I’ve been asking:

What is life all about?

I grew up on a farm in South Texas. We lived on twenty acres outside a small town of six thousand people in the middle of nowhere. I often describe my childhood as an extended identity crisis. People usually respond to that with, “It’s normal to try to figure out who you are as a child.” I get that. However, I was a member of Future Farmers of

America, an agricultural program in our school, and I showed hogs, sheep, and cattle competitively. Unlike your typical “future farmer,” though, I also had my ears pierced, got my first tattoo at fifteen, rode a skateboard, and drove a 1979 Mercedes Benz with a sticker on the rear windshield that read “Superfly.” That was me: your superfly future farmer. I was very involved in church—three churches, actually—but I was sometimes high when I was there.

Like I said: identity crisis. I had no idea who I wanted to be. And that continued beyond my childhood, when I was officially supposed to start adulthood.

College was a blur of parties, girls, and fights, with classes mixed in there somewhere. Somehow I graduated and found myself in the big city of Dallas, Texas. As a twentysomething first setting out on this journey called adulthood, I wanted it all. I was on a search for stuff, status, and success. You only live once, right? And I wanted to make the most of it.

Money? I went from one sales job to another, looking for a bigger paycheck. I sold everything from clothes to gym memberships to real estate, until I landed in the highest-paying job I could find, which was being a global account manager for a large telecom company. I spent the money I made on clothes, watches, cars, and a high-rise condo in Uptown. I thought I was rich.

Success? I worked hard to climb the corporate ladder and managed to make it up a few rungs. I craved respect and power. I wanted to be important and be treated as someone important.

Women? From the fifth grade on, I was never without a girlfriend. Most of those relationships overlapped; I’d start seeing someone new before breaking up with my existing

girlfriend, a strategy more commonly known as “cheating.” As an adult, I went from one one-night stand to another and usually had a girlfriend on the side. I thought the real goal of dating was pleasure. Of course, I didn’t have to have a real woman for that. I was also addicted to online pornography, just like pretty much every other guy I knew.

Fun? Of course I went after fun. For me, that usually involved some excuse to be stupid, such as drinking and drugs. Bars were fun. Bottle service was fun. Parties were fun. Even getting outdoors and going to the lake was fun, primarily because I could sit on a boat with friends and get drunk.

In all of that, my goal was to enjoy life. To be happy. And it worked, sort of. It just didn’t last. The happiness didn’t stay. I was getting what I thought I wanted from life, but it continued to leave me feeling discontented. It’s kind of like when I was a kid and really wanted a remote-controlled car I’d seen on a commercial at Christmastime. Do you remember really wanting a particular gift? When Christmas came around and I actually got the exact gift I wanted, I was happy—for a couple of hours. That’s about how long it took for the excitement to wear off, and for me to realize this greatest-toy-ever wasn’t really as much fun as they made it look on TV. I’d been lied to.

That’s what the world does. It lies to you. I had searched for significance in the wrong things and only realized that after having them and still coming up empty.

The Lake House

I spent a few years in the dull cycle of working all week and living for the weekend. We’d start partying on Thursday, so

that the weekend could last longer, and basically did the same things every time. Wash, rinse, repeat. It wasn't very creative and soon ceased to be that interesting. I chased away boredom with the next thrill, but boredom continued to find me.

One typical Saturday night, I was at a bar on Lower Greenville, the center of Dallas's party scene. There I ran into an old friend I hadn't seen in a while. I asked what she was up to that weekend, and she unexpectedly responded that she would be visiting a church the next day. "Great," I said. "My church sucks. Pick me up."

At that time, I went to church only on occasion. For me, it was a place where I daydreamed for an hour and occasionally asked for forgiveness for the events from the previous night. That girl did pick me up the next morning, and the church she took me to seemed different. I started going there regularly and began to make friends there. Soon, a few of those new friends invited me to join them at their lake house for a weekend.

I was used to spending weekends at the lake. As I drove out there, I had a couple hours in the car to think. I wondered what it would be like to go to the lake with "church friends." I pulled up to the lake house as the other guys had just finished playing golf. I took note that none of them were drinking. That was a different kind of golf than I was used to, and it didn't sound fun. As the evening started, I also noticed that there were no girls. I knew it would be a guys' trip, but when I had been on guys' trips before, usually our objective was to get girls there or talk about the last time we were with girls. Here there wasn't even a conversation about girls.

Most of these men were happily married. Some of them were very successful. I couldn't help but notice the size of

the lake house. A three-story lakefront home, with cathedral ceilings, big-screen TVs, and million-dollar finish-out. It was something I could only dream of affording someday. But nobody seemed to care about that; everyone treated everyone else (including me) as equals.

That night was extraordinary to me. We began the evening by grilling steaks, and after an incredible meal, we played poker. I don't think we even played for money, but I can't remember. The game was just an excuse to talk. We had meaningful conversations, not the normal drunken-slurred talk I was accustomed to. We talked about changing the world, and I was convinced that the men at the table could pull off the plans they had.

One of the guys was a pastor. But he wasn't the normal over-polished, posing kind of pastor I had seen before. He would hold the attention of the other guys there. He wasn't careful and guarded with his words—but he also wasn't reckless. He was just real. He asked me thought-provoking questions. Questions about why we were there and what life was really about. That pastor was Todd Wagner of Watermark, who has since become my dear friend and mentor. We talked, we ate, we played cards, and we literally laughed until we cried several times over. I couldn't believe how much fun I was having!

That night I couldn't sleep. I couldn't reconcile the joy I had just experienced when it was so different than my usual weekend activities. It seemed to be a normal time together for these men, but it was different for me. There was a depth and purpose to what had just happened. It was so much better than what I was used to. I couldn't help but wonder if I had been doing life all wrong. I couldn't help but wonder if I had been missing it.

I laid awake all night in the bottom bunk in an oversized room, deep in thought and in and out of prayer. I left early the next morning, and I called my best friend, Matt, as soon as I thought he would be awake. But since he had been partying the night before, I ended up waking him up. Matt answered the phone in a groggy voice and asked me if everything was OK, and I told him it had never been better. I hadn't even slept but I felt great. I didn't feel guilty or have the foggy feeling of a hangover. I told Matt we had been missing out on life.

Don't Miss It

The purpose of this book is to make sure you don't miss it.

Unfortunately, most people do. They spend years, or sometimes their entire lives, pursuing things that don't ultimately bring life. And it's more than just a waste of valuable time; these pursuits usually end up causing real pain, both to themselves and the people they are close to. I know that pain well, through my own life and the lives I've observed from leading in ministry.

Why do so many people get it wrong? Well, we've been sold a lie that sets us up for failure. The world, the media, and even our own internal desires tell us that the way to be happy is to pursue things like money, sex, fame, power, and material possessions. The United States' economy is even built around it. Fact is, we have more of these things than anyone in the history of the world before us. We're richer, we have more cool stuff, and we have the ability to do almost anything we want with almost anyone we want and not even be judged for it. Yet studies show we're statistically less happy and more depressed than ever before.² We've pursued

happiness and found ourselves sadder than any generation that has ever lived.

Some people eventually figure it out, but only after many years of making poor decisions and seeing the consequences that come from that. Experience is a hard teacher, and its main lesson is regret. Though it's never too late to change, it is also never too early. And far too often, the longer you wait, the more difficult change is.

Maybe you've been reading and waiting for the moment in my story when I "get what I have coming." Maybe you've kept all the rules and can't wait to see what happens to someone who has broken them. Well, you don't win, either. You're no better off than the drunks or the prostitutes. Your self-righteousness has kept you from finding life as it was intended, and at some point in your journey with Jesus, you've found yourself in maintenance mode. Not doing anything too bad—but not doing anything too good either. As you read, I hope you find a reset button for your adulting journey.

This is why I spend so much time around young adults who have recently come to understand what God desires for them. These people are just setting out in the world, leaving behind the structure of parents and school and becoming fully responsible for the direction of their lives. It's a unique time, because life is still an empty canvas stretching out in front of them, and they get to choose where to go and what to do with it. It's a point where every decision, and every action, can have a huge impact—either good or bad. Choices here are more important than they are at any other time in their lives. But it's also the first time they've gotten to make such decisions, so they're not very good at it yet.

That's why I'm trying to help—and also partly because of my own experiences and the things I wish I had done differently. Though my life now has completely changed (and I'll tell you how), I still had to work through some consequences, and I'd like to spare you from that. Learn from my mistakes.

Beyond just avoiding some negative consequences, I want you to find life and experience it to the fullest (John 10:10)! I cannot tell you how amazing it is to begin to live your life as God intended it to be lived. When you wake up and know you have been placed in time and space for a purpose, you begin to realize that every aspect of your life matters. You begin to see yourself as part of the solution to the problems you see in the world. There is something inside all of us that desires to be a vigilante superhero like Batman—fighting evil and doing good. I have seen young adults get this and begin to make war with evil, not outside the law but within it.

Besides my own life, I've been able to observe the lives of thousands of young adults over the past decade or so that I've been in full-time young adult ministry. I've celebrated and served alongside people who have gotten it right and counseled those dealing with the aftermath of getting it wrong. I've seen what consistently works and what never ever seems to work. Most importantly, I've been able to study what the Creator has to say about how to live a full life, which—no surprise—matches up with the results I've seen in today's world. So many of these young adults have traded in the American Dream for something much better. They are changing the world, saving lives, solving problems, and making a difference.

Hopefully, this can serve as a kind of how-to book: how to “adult,” how to navigate through life, and how to live a life that really matters.

Reflection

- What is the most fun you've ever had?
- When have you really looked forward to something only to find yourself disappointed after it actually occurred?
- Where have you been "missing it"?
- What changes would you like to make in your life?