

# Helping Others at Life's Transitions

*By Ben Peterson w/Ethan Bosch*

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We've all faced discouragements and difficulties in our lives. Sooner or later, hard times come to everyone. Most people understand that a helping hand or a word of encouragement can make all the difference to someone going through hardship. Left alone, we can easily stumble and lose heart.

What might not be as commonly understood is our duty to help people through some of life's other changes. We all face times of transition, key turning points in our lives, when doors need to be opened. We're presented with choices where decisions must be made. These potentially difficult junctures can become great stepping-stones when others offer their perspective, encouragement, and – perhaps most importantly – some time and effort.

High school seniors are preparing to go through one of these great transitions. They have to make important life decisions, and often feel much uncertainty in their ability to make these decisions effectively. They need people with more life experience to help them through this unknown territory. These thoughts are again fresh in my own mind because I have a daughter just starting college this fall. She wanted to determine the exact place she would be able to play volleyball and study. After much searching and evaluating, she has found that place and is enjoying it, but only time will fully verify her choices.

My own transition from high school to college was greatly affected by the encouragement of my family. I consulted my Dad, Mom, 4 Brothers, Sister, Coaches, Teachers and Pastor at various times for their perspectives. In Scripture, the Book of Proverbs tells us several times of the safety in establishing our plans with the help of “a multitude of counselors.” I can confirm the wisdom of this advice.

But in this article, I want to explain how one man – my high school coach – made a key difference in helping me through my transition from high school to college. I believe he did something that too few people see through to the end.

About October of my senior year Coach Jack Walsh approached me, asking about my college plans: Did I want to continue football and wrestling? Yes! What would I want to major in? Architecture. He then prepared a letter telling of my interest in playing college sports and studying architecture. He brought that letter to me and let me read it and comment on it. Also, he had a list of colleges and universities that had wrestling, football and architecture. He gave me that list. There were 15-25 schools from all over the country on that list! Again, I remember him asking if it was okay to send the letter to the coaches at those schools. I gave my approval.

Soon, I was receiving letters, catalogs and some phone calls from those schools. My confidence grew. My sights were expanded as I learned of the different options that were becoming available to me. Obtaining more and more information, I was able to clarify and solidify my goals. Invitations to visit campuses began to come in. To a very inexperienced senior from a little town in northern Wisconsin, getting ready for one of the biggest transitions in his life, this exposure was invaluable.

As the year progressed, Coach Walsh reminded me that college coaches were now watching for my results. He urged me to attend “extra” tournaments where coaches might be watching. Now it was up to me to work hard, to be in shape, and to attend the meets and perform well.

I believe God used all of this to put me in contact with Coach Harold Nichols the legendary coach at Iowa State University. Because of the letters sent ahead and a match where he saw me wrestle at one of those “extra” open tournaments, he offered me a partial wrestling scholarship. (Incidentally, I lost the match quite badly, 9-3) The rest, as they say, is history.

Proverbs 25:25 says, “*As cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country.*” In Matthew 10:42, Jesus talks of the benefit of giving “*one of these little ones only a cup of cold water...*” Let’s help the young and those at key transition points in their lives. A helping hand and an encouraging word may open a door and keep them pursuing their wrestling goals and life goals. A little extra effort is a small price for so great a reward in the life of a young person.

Thank you, Coach Walsh, for your foresight and extra work. And thank you God, for adding your blessing to the entire process. Truly His hand was in it.

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