

As some of you may know, I have a certain knack for documenting the funny or (sometimes) stupid things people say. Although, as Katie Grace once put it, they don't say stupid stuff, they just say what's in their brain. Last summer I had the privilege of being the scribe on the summer Faith Adventure, and because of this I have collected loads of embarrassing quotes from SLAQers, and even some inspirational ones, like Kezia's motto: Cook or be cooked! We even have a personal testimony that, on the SLAQ trip, crap tastes pretty good. So! If you ever want to know what *actually* goes on on a SLAQ trip, you know who to talk to.

All this being said, I don't only collect funny and embarrassing quotes, I've also gathered some "wisdom pearls" over the years. I am lucky enough to have been surrounded by wise people, wise people who love nothing more than to share that wisdom with the young people around them.

So, for this, my Wisdom Capstone, I want to share with all of you--especially my fellow SLAQers--what SLAQ has taught me over the years, and how that has impacted my life.

1. Faith and Science - Jeff Lindeman

For the second semester of Cohort #1, our Crucial Conversation was on Faith and Science. We had several professors and speakers from the community come talk, and then took a day trip up to D.C. to see the Bible Museum's Scripture and Science exhibit. One of the speakers we were fortunate enough to hear from was Jeff Lindeman, an author from the area. He talked about the intricacies of science and nature, and the precise function of each part of our bodies and all living things. These are two of his points that jumped out at me.

First, **"The world is so complex, but there is order, a design. If there is a design, there has to be a designer."** This felt almost matter-of-fact to me, yet so profound. It was like every argument I had constructed in my head about how to prove God is real went out the window, and this simple statement took its place. Yes, if there is so much order in the natural world, so much complexity and detail, if there is a *design*, it is no question that there must be a designer.

The second thing he said was maybe less wise and more eye-opening. He said, **"Beauty isn't necessary. God has given us so many things we need, but He also gave us something we don't need, to enjoy. A gift."** I had never thought about that before. God gave us beauty as a gift. Yes we need plants to live and for animals to eat, but he didn't have to make them beautiful; He could have made flowers without the bright petals! Yes we need the sun to go down and come up to have days and bring us light and darkness, but he didn't have to make the rising and setting of it so incredible that we wake up early on occasion just to watch it happen. All of this is a *gift*. Something to point us back to the Creator and to be thankful for.

2. Cohort #3 F.I.R.E. Weekend

There was a lot of wisdom shared at this year's F.I.R.E. Weekend. For those of you who don't know, this is our kickoff to the SLAQ year. We go out and stay the weekend at Corhaven, where we eat together, work together, do team building games, worship around a campfire, and of course, hear wise people speak. The person that talks focuses on one of our four core values: Faith, Integrity, Resilience, and Empathy. Hence, F.I.R.E.

The first piece of wisdom I gathered was in Ken's opening "speech" before the weekend began. He gave the analogy of a padded room, full of food and comforts, surrounded by people who love us vs. the show "Alone" where you're trying to survive in the wilderness, alone. He said, **"We need support and a place to belong, but we need challenge as well."** Meaning, we need aspects of both settings. I think his main point was that SLAQ tries to find the balance between the two--and believe me it does--but lately I've thought of it in a wider sense. As a senior, I'm stepping into the great unknown. I have the chance to do just about anything in this world! However, it would be very easy for me to say, "I'm just gonna stay home and work, I'll live at home and save as much money as I can, I'll never have to be out on my own." Now for one thing, my parents wouldn't even consider me living at home for two seconds, but for another, where's the challenge in that? How am I going to grow if I choose the padded room? Now I shouldn't choose the show "Alone" either, but I'll get to that later.

The last speaker we had was Mindy Schwartz, and she talked about empathy. For those of you who don't know Mindy, I'm sorry. She is a wise, strong, powerful woman, and is always willing to share her wisdom, strength, and power. She said several impactful things that night, but my favorite was this: **"Be peculiar! We're supposed to be different and weird!"** I'll be honest, at surface level I think I've pretty well mastered the art of peculiarity. The amount of times I get called weird is kind of funny to me, but I've become very proud of this "label" if you will. However, the kind of weird Mindy was talking about isn't surface level. As Christians, we are supposed to stand out. Our pastors at Eastside often remind us that 'holy' means 'set apart' or distinct. But, not just set apart because of our style, or how we talk, but by who we are because of Christ. So. Be peculiar! Be weird! Stand out! But not just because that's who you are, but because that's who you are *because of Christ*.

3. THINQ Next Gen Summit in Nashville

This fall the seniors had the opportunity to take a road trip up to Nashville with Ken and the Serving Leaders to help with the THINQ Next Gen Summit. It's basically a weekend of sessions led by authors and teachers and speakers from all over coming to talk to young adults. Though we were helping run the event, we also got to sit in on some of the sessions.

One talk I got to hear was by Grant Skeldon, an author and speaker ministering to young adults. The wisdom I gathered from him was in this question he asked: **"Do you want to impress Christians more than you want to look like Jesus?"** See, I think it's very easy for the younger generation --especially those in a public high school--to try to be Christian enough for

the world, rather than faithful enough for Jesus. We don't want to be known as "that one Christian kid," we don't want to scare people off with our faith. We want to be Christian enough that people like us and admire us for our faith, but not so Christian that we actually have to sacrifice ourselves and/or our happiness for the Lord. Now, these are broad and maybe exaggerated statements, and I'm not speaking for everybody. I know several people even within SLAQ that are confident in their faith and aren't afraid to share it, I'm only saying that in my experience this is what I've seen as the norm. And unfortunately this is what I've seen in myself as well. So, in our everyday interactions and experiences, we need to make sure that we are trying to look like Jesus, not impress Christians or others around us.

4. Faith and Sexuality

Well, for our final Crucial Conversation this year, Ken decided (with our input of course) that it was time to tackle Faith and Sexuality. I think I can speak for everyone involved when I say we were very curious as to what this would look like and how it would go. Thankfully, it has been an amazing conversation and I am so thankful for the chance to have had it.

One of the quotes that has been playing in my head a lot is from Jackie Hill Perry, an author and poet as well as one of the speakers on the videos we've been watching. She said, **"Sometimes we think that we have to feel obedient to be obedient, and that's just not Christianity."** This hit me hard, because it's something I've struggled with my entire faith journey; this idea that I have to feel faithful and feel God close to me all the time, otherwise I'm not actually being faithful. But what Jackie said proved to me that this is a lie, Christianity is so much more than feelings. There are going to be seasons in my life when I don't feel obedient. There are going to be times when I don't *want* to be obedient, or when I'm grumbling toward God. *And that's okay.* I can still be a faithful servant in those times, and I can still be obedient whether I feel like it or not.

And finally, last but definitely not least, the quote that sums up just about everything SLAQ has taught me: **"If God is not alone, why should Adam be? (56)."** This quote is from *Loveology*, by John Mark Comer, which we read together as a cohort (and is an amazing book I'd highly recommend). Now, this quote is in reference to marriage, but it applies to all of life. Comer says, "God exists in a web of life-giving relationships [the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God says let *us* make mankind in our image], but Adam is alone" (55). This then leads God to say that "It is not good for the man to be alone" in Genesis 2:18. It is not good for us to be alone! Man or woman, humans were not meant to be alone! I said earlier that we shouldn't choose the show "Alone" and this is why. We need people, we need support, we need friends to talk and laugh and cry and be peculiar with! If SLAQ has taught me *anything*, it's the importance of community. These people have walked alongside me for 3+ years. They have encouraged me, laughed with me, cried with me, and have certainly been peculiar with me. Because of them I know that no matter where God sends me, I'll have a foundation back here, people to call when I



just need to talk, people to pray for me and people to pray for, people to love me and people to love. Thank you, and thanks be to God.

So, I don't know what God is sending me into in the next year. I don't know who I'm going to meet or what He's going to have me do, and that's scary for me. But what I do know is that, because of SLAQ, because of all of you, and because of God, I am ready. Thank you.

Ken, thank you for giving this community a place to share and gain wisdom. Devin, Nevin, Dara, and Hannah, thank you for taking time out of your busy lives to spend long Saturdays on hikes with us, lead bible studies, and spend hours in a van with us.

My first official year in SLAQ we started out the cohort with a Crucial Conversation on Faith and Wisdom. We read Brett McCracken's book, *The Wisdom Pyramid* together, and talked about how, in all of the information we have access to in our world today, very little of it could be considered *wisdom*. At one community conversation Ken invited Harvey Yoder to speak to us, and while I honestly don't remember a ton of what he talked about (Sorry Harvey), I do remember him saying two points that have stuck with me to this day.

First, he said, **"God has a will/plan, it's our job to fit into it."** Now, I've never quite decided where I stand when it comes to free will versus divine determinism or predestination or whatever you may call it. I'm still figuring that all out. However, I do know this: God has a plan for my life. As a church mentor once said in prayer, God has a *beautiful* plan for my life. He has somewhere for me to go, something for me to do, someone to connect with. But I'm not going to get to that plan if I'm not working toward it, and waiting for the Lord to show his plan to me. In his book *Loveology*, John Mark Comer writes, **"Waiting for the Lord doesn't mean sitting around, working a dead-end job, watching TV, or hoping Mr. or Mrs. Right falls into your lap. It means beginning to do good right where you're at, and then watch your story unfold"** (165). So, God has a plan for me, but we aren't supposed to just sit back and wait for all the answers to appear to us in a vision (although that would be totally awesome). Our job is to "do good right where [we're] at," to join in the work of the kingdom, and when the time is right, God will reveal his will for our lives.

The second thing Harvey said that has stuck with me is this: **"Christians aren't superior - We can still learn things from our enemies."** I think -----



The last thing Jeff said that stuck out to me was this, **“We need limits - Without the limitation of gravity nothing would work. Limits have a purpose.”** Now, as humans we don’t like to think about our limitations. We don’t like to think that some things are simply impossible, or that there are things we can’t do. However, Jeff’s point was that these limits on our bodies, on our minds, on the world around us, they all have a purpose. We might wish that there was no gravity and that we could just swim through the air like in space, but gravity keeps things together, it grounds us. Jeff’s other example was that he cannot be a basketball star because that’s not his calling. That’s his limitation, but it has a purpose. Because he’s not a basketball player, he can be a gifted public speaker and author. The point is, we all have limitations, and it wasn’t a mistake that God put them there. They keep us in check, ground us, remind us that we’re human, and remind us that God has a different plan for all of us based on these limits and giftings.

The second day of the F.I.R.E. Weekend, Jesse Mercer came as always to run team building games with us. Now, I’m going to brag about us for a moment, SLAQ is a team pretty well built. We’re able to communicate and help each other and be encouraging, though sometimes we do need some outside help. What was challenging though, was Jesse’s talk after the games were over. Jesse’s word he was speaking on was Integrity. He said, **“Integrity means being whole, or same on the inside as on the outside. Do you wear a mask or are you integral?”** I immediately thought of how I act at school vs at home vs at church vs at work, and even how I act depending on who I’m with. Later that evening a friend asked if I ever wore a mask, and unfortunately I had to answer yes. See, as a human--and especially as a self-conscious 17 year old girl--I care a lot about what other people think of me and how they see me. It’s easy for me to act differently with different people based on how I think they want to see me. And once I wear the mask once, it’s hard to bring it down and reveal what’s underneath. So, I’m working on being integral, on being whole. And I challenge you to think of the masks you put up, the difference between you on the inside and you on the outside.