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Man on a mission *Local teacher Colin Creel publishes second book*

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Staff Photo: Jason Braverman
Colin Creel teaches a class at Wesleyan School in Norcross. Creel's second book, "Crossroads," comes out next week.

As a student at Wake Forest, Creel had a little trouble honing in on a career path. He majored in business and minored in theater, but wasn't sure where either skill set would take him, or if he would end up using them at all.

It wasn't that long ago that those "issues" were his own.

"At the time, I really didn't know what I wanted to do," he said. "I started to think about the things I really enjoyed doing - I really enjoy to encourage people, I enjoy to inspire people - and at that point I really decided to explore the field of education."

Having chosen to become a teacher, Creel also began dispensing spiritually influenced advice to friends and colleagues, almost out of happenstance.

"I always kind of journaled," Creel said, "and that process helped to start it."

While working in the admissions office at Wake Forest (and simultaneously pursuing a master's degree in communication), Creel sent out weekly e-mails filled with words of encouragement - stuff he'd written, plus helpful tips he'd heard from others in the past.

For a guy who's taken it upon himself to help disaffected twentysomethings find their true calling in life, Colin Creel seems to have found plenty of his own.

He is at once a teacher, an administrator, a spiritual leader, a swim coach, a husband and, most recently, a published author two times over.

But Creel, a St. Louis native and Wake Forest graduate who now works at Wesleyan School in Norcross as the dean of junior boys, will be the first to tell you that he doesn't have it all figured out yet, either.

"I'm a work in progress," he said. "It's definitely more of a journey that you continue just to look back at."

But that's what's so unique about Creel's Christian-themed words of wisdom, found on the pages of his latest tome, "Crossroads: Navigating Your Calling and Career," which hits shelves Wednesday. Unlike the Dr. Phils and Tony Robbinses of the world, the 33-year-old is not that far removed from those he seeks to help.

"For lack of a better term," Creel said, "I'm a normal person. I'm not a pastor. I'm not a person who does this 100 percent of the time. I'm first a teacher and a coach, but at the same time, I really enjoy exploring these issues."

If you go

- What: Colin Creel book signing and discussion

- When: 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesday

- Where: Barnes & Noble at the Forum, 5141 Peachtree Pkwy., Norcross

- For more information: Visit www.colincreel.com

"Through that process," he said, "people just kind of encouraged me over the years to write a book.

"I'm the type of person who, I really love to build things and create things," Creel said. "And it really doesn't matter whether it's a book or a swim program ... it's just the whole process of catching a vision that God has, and being able to bring it from start to close."

The groundwork for "Crossroads" was actually laid on the pages of Creel's successful first outing, 2005's "Perspectives: A Spiritual Life Guide For Twentysomethings." One section in particular dealt with the post-college career path quandary.

"I heard a lot of feedback from people that they really wanted me to explore that in much more depth," Creel said.

So by popular demand, he surveyed what was already on the shelves and decided to take a fresh approach.

"Most the books kind of dealt either from an academic perspective, or a very practical side," he said. "So what I tried to do with this book is to marry the two."

The first half of "Crossroads," Creel said, deals with "the layperson's idea of what it means to work," while the second portion is dedicated to practically applying those principles. The idea, he said, is to help people identify what God put them on this planet to do.

"I think that in our generation," Creel said, "I think that there are a lot of people that are more concerned with just the next rung of the ladder, as opposed to doing things that they really enjoy doing."

Creel said a pastor he spoke to from New York broke the big "What do I do now?" decision into three separate categories.

"He kind of talks about that when you're trying to discern your call," Creel said, "that you need to look at your affinities, your abilities and your opportunities."

Affinities, Creel said, are simply activities that you enjoy taking part in, while abilities are the endeavors for which others affirm your giftedness, and opportunities are the doors that actually open to you.

"When you kind of look at those three aspects of it," Creel said, "I think those kind of help to clarify where to go a little bit."

He included the pastor in his book, along with advice from scores of others - "people who are just a little bit older and wiser," Creel said.

Fans of "Perspectives" should be able to jump right into "Crossroads." Creel said the two are similar in style, both in terms of length and content.

He also said that he's already started on his next book, but this time, he'll take things a little more slowly.

"I want to kind of explore an idea that's of interest to me, and just kind of share what I learn," he said. "I don't want it to be something where I continue to just write and crank out the same kind of book."

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