ON THE ISLAND

A FRESHMAN SURVIVAL GUIDE

True Jesus Church

TRUE JESUS CHURCH
National Youth Ministry
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VICTORY ON THE ISLAND

A FRESHMAN SURVIVAL GUIDE

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PREFACE

College is a mere four years in a person's life, but it proves to be a crucial time that makes or breaks a young believer's faith. May it be a springboard for your journey of faith and not a stumbling block.

Let's begin with your very first survival tip. You're hiking in the wilderness, the sun is quickly setting, and you have no wristwatch. How much time do you have left before daylight runs out?

It turns out, if you tuck in your thumb, extend your arm, rotate your hand, and measure how many palm widths fit between the sun and horizon, that's how many hours of daylight are left. In fact, to be even more precise, each finger counts for approximately 15 minutes of daylight.

Interestingly, this tip seems to have been known for millennia—including the time of King David. Check out this wonderful biblical connection:

LORD, make me to know my end,
And what is the measure of my days,
That I may know how frail I am.
Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths,
And my age is as nothing before You;
Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor.
(PS 39:4-5)

Daylight hours measured by handbreadths — there is a frightening frailty in mere handbreadths. What a beautiful metaphor.

And so the first tip: You are a sojourner in this world; your time is brief. As you take your first steps onto your college campus, may you not forget how frail you really are (CF 1 COR 10:12). You really need all the spiritual support you can get.

What lies within are the true testimonies and experiences of members in the True Jesus Church when they were in college. We sincerely hope you can learn from, relate to, and be inspired by what you read. May it aid you to navigate the temptations and trials many college students face. The first year is certainly the hardest to adjust to and establishes many habits and behaviors. May we not make the same mistakes others have made, may we learn from the good examples others have set, and may we always cultivate our spirit to glorify God.

CONGRATULATIONS AND PRAISE GOD FOR GETTING INTO COLLEGE! NOW, GOD WILLING, GO AND CONQUER YOUR ISLAND.

Gasping for air, you frantically scan the surrounding sea. How did I wind up in the middle of the ocean? Panic sets in.

As the waves pound, you notice there are islands all around you, the closest about half a day's swim away. Some are larger than others. All seem inhabited, as you notice rising smoke in the distance. But which one should you choose? Do you follow the current? Do you pick the bigger one? The greener one?

Sometimes preparing for college can feel like swimming towards an exotic island. You haven't quite reached ground yet, and you can't wait to get to there, but the process is both trying and tiring.

What are the key factors to consider? Prestige? Rank? Proximity to a church? A school with a campus fellowship? As you start to form your decision, we hope the testimonies in this chapter can give you a taste of how other church members dealt with their anxieties and ultimately chose to rely on God and find His will.

WASHING ASHORE

FINDING GOD'S WILL AND DECIDING ON COLLEGE

Before I began the college application process, I had already decided to mostly apply to schools where campus fellowships or local places of worship existed. By the beginning of my senior year in high school, I had already heard plenty of advice from older brothers and sisters about the dangers and uncertainties of attending a college without a local church or fellowship. I followed the safer route and looked for schools where I would be able to attend weekly services. This process was not as difficult as I thought. There are churches, houses of prayer, or fellowships in most major cities in the country, so deciding on which schools to apply to was not much of a predicament. Looking back, I know that observing the Sabbath and living a godly life without a campus fellowship or church nearby would have taken great determination and much grace from God. Though not impossible, it would have been a big risk for me.

As expected, the difficult part came after I had received responses from the schools I applied to. The factors that influenced my ultimate decision were local places of worship, financial aid, and academic rigor. Of course, there are many examples of students whose campuses are not near churches and have still been able to stay spiritually strong. I also thought about whether or not I would be able to do what they did and felt fairly confident about my chances. Looking back now, a senior in college, I am certain that I would not have been able to. Pray for God's guidance, that He may reveal His will, and that you can properly measure your spirituality and determination.

MY APPLICATION PROCESS

When I started my college applications, I was quite nervous. For the first time in my life, I did not know where I would be the next year. The possibilities seemed endless. In retrospect, after applying for college, jobs, graduate school, and jobs after graduate school, I realized that God's guidance was obvious throughout the entire application process. If God doesn't want you to go to a particular college, you won't get in no matter how smart or qualified you are. If God wants you to go there, no matter how unqualified you are, you will get in.

During the fall of my senior year, I started considering what I wanted to major in and which schools I should apply to. I had an awesome physics teacher who inspired me to become an engineer, but my parents really wanted me to study medicine. I was an obedient daughter and applied to schools with seven-year medical programs, and I also applied to schools with better-than-average engineering programs. Did I consider the locations of churches with respect to the schools? Yes. Most of the schools I applied to were located within an hour of a church, but there were others that weren't located within 2 hours of a church. Even though I had a perfect grade-point average in high school, played multiple instruments, had a good SAT score and participated in sports and clubs, I somehow knew that I was not Ivy League material, so I applied to just one Ivy League school. Why pay $65 to get rejected? I also applied for early decision to another. Then, I applied to my state school and several schools in between.

At first, I agonized over each application and continued to worry even after I sent them in. But was there any cause for worry? Not at all! In April, admission letters went out, and as I expected, I was not admitted to the Ivy League school or the early decision school. Thank God, none of those rejections bothered me much. I had friends who wept for a week after being rejected from their top choice, and I thought I would respond the same (I am a very sore loser). God gave me peace in my heart during that topsy-turvy week. Oddly enough, a great engineering school accepted me but rejected my friends who were far better at math and science, which surprised me. Years later, that school rejected my younger friends with perfect SAT scores. I was greatly humbled, because even though I was not as qualified as other candidates, God wanted me to go to that school. In any case, by mid-April, God clearly showed me where He wanted me to be.

I often think of the application process as a tree: branches reach up and out, stretching in all directions, seeking sunlight. God, the gardener, comes and prunes the branches, guiding them in a direction that they should grow. So now, whenever I need to apply for anything, I do so without excessive worrying. College acceptances are in God's hands; whoever is first will be last, and the last will be first. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise…but time and chance happen to all" (Eccl 9:11). So whenever I am faced with an

impending application, I prayerfully reach out and apply for everything I am interested in and let God do the pruning in the form of rejection letters. Over time, this tree will be shaped to God's liking and will grow taller and taller, reaching higher and higher.

MAKING THE BIG DECISION

When choosing a college or university, putting God first and praying to Him is essential, especially in leading you to the right school. During my senior year of high school, I decided that I would only go to a university that was close to a church. I prayed to God to let me get into the school that He wanted me to go to—the one that He had planned for me. I applied to several schools and found one that I liked. My parents and I went to the university's orientation and found the school to be very clean, quiet, and nice. It was at least a two-hour commute from home, but I was willing to make the commute because I really wanted to go to that school. However, around this time I received an invitation in the mail to a school that didn't require an application fee. I didn't want to go there because it was an all girls' campus. My parents pushed me to apply anyway, to see if I would be accepted. A few weeks later, I was, and my parents were ready to visit the school. I still did not want to attend the school or even consider it. However, we went to the orientation, and it turned out that I really liked the campus. It was small, quiet, beautiful, and homey. Now I had to choose between these two schools—the only two that I liked and had offered me scholarships. My mom encouraged me to choose the all-girls' school because it offered a larger scholarship and was also closer to home. I continued to pray about which school to go to. Although I liked both schools and their campuses, I had this feeling that the school my parents encouraged me to go to was the school that God wanted me to attend.

When I finally decided on the school, I knew I had to pray for my roommate to be understanding of my faith and daily routines, like praying each day. I had heard many horror stories about not getting along with roommates and those who were out to get you, which I definitely did not want. So I continued to pray until the day I moved in. My roommate that year was very understanding of my faith and wasn't scared or bothered

by the way we pray. We got along very well and are still good friends until now. By God's grace and mercy, He heard my prayers.

From this experience, I learned how important it is to put God first in everything you do—especially when it comes to major decisions in life. In my dorm that year, I was able to pray and read the Bible every day and return home each weekend for Friday night and Saturday services. God kept me from many temptations while I lived away from home. I didn't have to worry about boys, of course, since there were none. All the parties were on the weekends, when I was home. So when friends asked me to attend parties, I refused because I had to go to church. I really thank God for keeping me safe and away from temptations, and for keeping me strong and firm in the faith. Without prayer and trust in God to guide me through this process, I would not have enjoyed my first year of college as much as I did. May all the praise, honor, and glory be unto His holy name forever. Amen.

LIVING AT HOME: SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

To many freshmen, living in a school dormitory is the way to go. I had the opportunity to live at home for two years and at school for two years. I hope my experience can help you consider your options before deciding what works best for you.

Some programs are comprised of several electives, so you're not likely to share many classes with the same students. In that case, living at school may make it easier to get to know other students. If you're living in a dorm, you would at least get to know your roommate(s) and neighbors. Living at school also allows for more time flexibility. You might be constrained by a bus or train schedule if you live at home. These constraints may discourage or limit you from attending social events and participating in clubs or other student organizations. You might also have less time to do work, and it may be more difficult for you to participate in campus fellowship. Of course, you can still participate in those activities; it will just require more effort.

The program I was enrolled in required all the students to take the same courses in the first three years of college, so I didn't have any problems

getting to know the people in my class. I still lived in a dorm for the first two years, but I later discovered that living in dorms isn't necessarily always better than living at home. My roommate and I got along well for the most part, but we had different bedtimes, work habits, and attitudes toward studying. As someone who adapts to change slowly, I found it difficult to focus on work and cope with a new school, a new environment, and living with another person. I was also often kept awake by the noise in the hallways at night. So although living at school saved me a lot of commuting time, most of that benefit was offset by a lack of sleep and the inability to concentrate. As a result, I decided to move home and try commuting to school.

My experience of commuting to school was mostly positive, although commuting to school would only work for those who are blessed to be going to a college that is close to home.

One thing I immediately noticed upon moving home was how much money I saved. This is very practical and something to consider when you decide whether to live at home or at school. For some students, living at home may be a very good option, or even the only option, since room and board will almost always cost more than commuting every day.

Another benefit of living at home is being able to eat home-cooked food, which I found to be much tastier than cafeteria food. I'm sure some schools have pretty good food, but most schools do not; it's rare to hear people say that they prefer eating dining hall food over food cooked by their parents.

Home may be a better study environment as well, though this may vary from person to person. I became much more productive and efficient after I moved back home. At home, I knew what the study environment would be like. Even though it was not ideal, I had already learned to study in that environment since I went through elementary, middle, and high school living there. If anything, I enjoyed the higher predictability that came with living at home.

Another advantage of living at home is that it gives you more time to spend with your parents. You might think this is crazy right now, but in a few years your thinking might also change. I came to this realization in my final year of high school. I realized that going away to college might mean I would never live permanently with my parents again:

After graduating, I might go to graduate school or start working away from home, then get married and have my own family. So I thought it was great to spend a few more years living with my family—something I might never get to do again.

Lastly, living at home taught me discipline and time management. My commute was one and a half hours each way, so in the beginning I felt like I was losing a lot of time. But later on, I found ways to make the commute meaningful. Because the commuter train I took left at the same time every day, I was forced into a very strict routine. I was able to set aside the first 20 minutes of my commute for Bible reading and the rest of the time to study or catch up on course readings. I then used the commute back to review the entire day's lecture notes and take a quick nap. Because of the rigidity of the train schedule, I learned how to manage my time to maximize my efficiency. At the same time, I learned to sleep and wake early, which is a very healthy way to live.

In general, what works for each person will be different. But I highly recommend that anyone who lives in relative proximity to his or her home to at least consider commuting from home. I'm certainly glad I got to live at home for two years during college.

ENTERING COLLEGE

Close to the end of high school, I finished my standardized tests and was waiting for the replies to my college applications. All of my difficult classes were over and senioritis was in full effect. The only things on my mind were the plans I had made with friends for that week. I was breezing through my last year of high school and having as much fun as I could. But I was lost.

Throughout my years in high school, I slowly lost sight of God. I had become a Sabbath-day Christian. I fulfilled my obligation to go to church on Saturdays and that was the only time I ever thought about God. During the rest of the week, I spent time with my school friends or with my girlfriend, who was a non-believer. On the nights I could leave my house, I spent my time playing poker or partying. Worst of all, and against all that

my RE teachers and SSC counselors had warned, I was in a very physical relationship with my girlfriend.

There were many times when I tried to change my ways. Every so often, a spiritual convocation or SSC would remind me that my actions did not please God. But every time I tried to change, I found myself back in the same sketchy situations, making the same bad decisions. The bad influences that I had kept near me were still in every part of my life. The environment in which I had so willingly immersed myself kept pulling me back in, and each time I failed, I lost even more hope of ever succeeding. Though I was willing and eager to change, I was trapped.

Then, as the school year came to a close, I found an escape that God provided. Through my admission to college, He gave me a way to leave my old self behind. I remembered a Bible verse taught by so many teachers in so many lessons: "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim 2:22). A pastor once commented on that verse, saying, "The Bible doesn't say to 'fight youthful lusts' or 'resist youthful lusts'; it says to 'flee youthful lusts!' You have to flee! Run!" Through God's mercy, I found my chance to flee from the deep hole in which I had dug myself, and so I determined to seize the opportunity.

Praise and thank God that the process of choosing my university was not very difficult. The school I chose was my ideal refuge. It was near a church, so I could attend services. My older sister, who was also in the area, could watch over me and help me. There was a healthy campus fellowship with several brothers and sisters who were also incoming freshmen. These people would become my new family and be the greatest influences in my life throughout college.

I accepted the admission to college with a renewed hope in God's providence. Under the guidance of a faithful counselor and with some determination on my own part, I broke up with my girlfriend. I repented for my deeds and found peace with myself and God. When I started college, I made the determination not to go down the same path I had taken during high school. I found friends that would be positive influences on my life instead of hindrances to my faith. I was no longer trapped by old surroundings and bound by past mistakes. By guiding me to college, God had given me a clean slate and a fresh start.

RECIPE FOR SELECTING MAJORS

When it was time to choose my major, I was completely overwhelmed by the abundance of options. I felt as if I were standing before a buffet bar lined with dishes I loved, those I thought I liked, some that I was not quite sure about, and others I did not even want to look at sideways. The major I selected would direct me to a certain set of courses. As in a buffet, I wanted to try tasting a little of everything, but I feared that I might get too many of the dull and boring items and not have enough space left for the really grand and fascinating delicacies. I was anxious about making the wrong choice and being stuck with a bad decision for the rest of my college career.

Thankfully, I was eventually able to find a major and a minor that I not only enjoyed but was (surprisingly) quite good at.

What was my secret recipe?

1. **A nibble of general education/humanities courses**

   Most schools require everyone to take a set of general education courses before beginning a specific option or concentration (major). These courses span a great range of subjects, such as English, math, science, social studies, arts, etc.

   I took a class in astronomy that truly threw open the gates of my mind. The stars, constellations, planets, and galaxies became an intellectual feast. Even though I did not choose to become an astronomer, astrophysicist, or astronaut, I derived great pleasure from the concepts I learned in that class.

   During this period of time, I also took a course on public speaking, which (unknown to me at that time) took me one step closer to my marketing major. I realized how much I enjoyed conducting extensive research, preparing project papers, and practicing for the presentations.

   In addition to taking classes you are drawn to right off the bat, push yourself to take courses in areas that you might not know much about. You may be surprised how much you can learn. You could also be astounded by what subjects may spark a new passion within you or lead you towards your major.

2. A dash of research

Knowledge is power. The more information you can gather regarding your areas of interest, the clearer a picture you will have when the time to make your selection finally arrives.

I sought information from library books, school handouts and brochures, and academic publications. I browsed through the course descriptions. I examined the variety of jobs that would be available to each specific major. I studied the expectations and benefits for these majors and their corresponding jobs. I asked people I knew about their experiences working in their particular fields. I wrote lists of pros and cons for each major and for the jobs that piqued my interest.

The Internet truly is a gateway to a wealth of (instantaneous) information. The data you find during your exploration will aid you in making a more fact-based choice when the time comes.

3. A spoonful of exposure

Although information is valuable, it can only provide a somewhat limited view of the final result. In the real world, things may not be as positive (or as negative) as you may have concluded based on your research.

I had always been interested in business, but I was not sure how my highly creative, word-oriented mind could be encased in a world of numbers. I decided to spend some time as an intern at a couple of local companies. My first-hand experiences brought me to certain key realizations. I learned that although there is an innovative side to business, it is closely tied to figures and statistics. I also discovered that I was proficient at numerical tasks and did not mind them as much as I thought. I did not look forward to tedious, routine tasks, but these were bearable as long as I could balance them out with creative endeavors.

Find ways to get more personal experience in the areas you are interested in. Aside from internships, some companies offer tours or job-shadowing programs (where you are partnered with an employee in the organization, and you follow them around and observe their activities throughout the day). You can also participate in free

workshops or seminars at school or in your community that are relevant to your potential field of study.

4. **Secret (well, not so secret) ingredient: A cup of daily prayer**

   An essential point to keep in mind is that God intimately knows who you are and what you are capable of, even when you are still uncertain. He will be the one providing opportunities in both the school and work settings. Therefore, it is essential that you bring this important decision before Him. If you trust and rely on God and show it by committing your plans to Him in prayer, He will surely guide you and help you succeed (Prov 16:3, 9). Remember that the key is to be consistent in your daily communication with God, so that you can be tuned in to His instruction.

After selecting my major and graduating from college, I have come to understand how God's will quietly coursed beneath my path. I have learned that by offering up my decision in prayer, God shaped my choice so I would be prepared to offer more valuable contributions to His work (Eph 2:10).

Trust your loving Father to look after your best interest. Let God open your eyes to the good you can do through your choice of major.

HOW I FINALIZED MY CAREER CHOICE

I am the kind of person who likes to make long-term decisions and stay with the same decisions for as long as possible. Even if my parents did not pressure me to do well, I would pressure myself to study hard and set challenging goals.

During the second half of my high school years, I was confident, knowing what I wanted to accomplish in college, after college, and well into my twenties. I knew what majors I wanted to have, what job title to pursue, and what city I wanted to live in. One of my main goals was to earn a decent income and enjoy worldly luxuries. If I met all those goals, I would be considered successful. But if I chose this path, I would need to spend more years in school and eventually work long hours that could hinder my desire to serve as a wife and mother. Furthermore, this path would

most likely hinder my will to devote time to serve God. Thus, I decided to pray to God about the matter and take a few courses in a different major to see if it would be a better fit. Thank God, in just one semester, I realized that I had made the right choice to change my major and took a 180° turn.

I settled on a completely different career path, which led to a different future and a different mindset. After taking the prerequisite courses and conversing with friends, I realized that the path I had once chosen was not the right fit and required too much time and attention that would eventually pull me further away from God. Although my new career choice would not place me on the Forbes 500 list, or anywhere close to that list, I would be rewarded in other ways. My job is very stressful, but I have summer vacation. I do not travel as much, and won't have to relocate as often, as other fields of work. I have found exactly what I wanted in a career: a stable income to keep me content, enough free time to be more involved in church, and a chance to quit whenever I decide to focus more on family. To some friends and even my parents at first, this choice seemed like I had decided to take the easy way out for a job not nearly as well-paying or well-regarded as the one I had previously preferred. However, as more time has passed since I decided on my current career, the more I hear sermons, news articles, and professors praising it. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21). My treasure used to include a posh apartment to match a six-figure salary. Now, my heart would rather put God first and have a job that makes for a humble yet joyful life.

GOD WILL MAKE A WAY

I'm not sure why I picked biological sciences as my major when I entered college. Maybe it was because I thought it would give me more job options after college, or maybe it was out of a naïve determination to disprove evolution.

In any case, studying biological sciences was no walk in the park. There were countless vocabulary words and jargon to memorize, difficult concepts to grasp, and plenty of biological pathways to understand. For undergrad research, I had to kill mice (which was pretty traumatizing for me), spend hours in the lab dealing with chemicals, and even work in

subzero-degree conditions for long periods of time. I was often exhausted and frustrated during and after the experiments, which demanded a lot of concentration.

Even though the journey was pretty tough, I could often feel God walking beside me. By the end of freshman year, about a third of the bio majors had been kicked out due to the curve system. At the end of second year, many more gave up on their own and changed majors. I really thank God for guiding me through those tough periods. Although it might seem like I should have been living and breathing bio, making time for campus fellowships and church services were really worth my time. To me, the campus fellowship and church became like a harbor for a storm-wrecked ship; I could renew my strength and remind myself of the goals that I had in God. What King David wrote in Psalm 23:4 really comforted me: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

I am not very gifted academically, but God gave me the ability to understand, and I eventually became a peer tutor hired by the school. Seeing this as a new opportunity to bring others to our campus fellowship and eventually to church, I tried my best to help my students out and looked for opportunities to spread the gospel. Despite the tedious work, I tried to be an exemplary and responsible Christian. There is a verse that really encouraged me: "having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet 2:12). Although I have not successfully brought anyone to church yet, I still have one more year in college, and am patiently waiting for God's timing.

I'm still not sure if I have chosen the right major; in fact, I'm pretty sure that I didn't. But in the last few years I noticed that as long as I kept God in my mind and made an effort to do His will, He was there, blessing and guiding me through all difficulties.

COMMITTING YOURSELF TO CHRIST—MAINTAINING GOD'S GUIDANCE AND ABIDANCE THROUGHOUT YOUR COLLEGE YEARS

ANGEL MARIE SOLGOT—SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, USA

MANNA ISSUE 32

It wasn't easy making it into the school of her choice, but Danielle did it. The Ivy League school she had always dreamed of attending would take her a couple of thousand miles away from family, church, and friends, but the invitation to this school was her dream come true, and she wasn't about to turn their offer down. Her parents, though very proud of their daughter's accomplishments, couldn't help but feel concerned about her future. They worried: "Will she be safe on her own? Will she have to face loneliness? Will she end up finding a boyfriend, and will they be able to keep their relationship pure? Most important, will she still be able to hold onto God and her faith through all the temptations and stresses of college?" Sending their daughter off to a place so far from church and home gave them a feeling of total helplessness. All they could do was hope that their daughter would hold steadfast to her faith in God, and pray that He would keep their daughter in His tender care throughout the spiritually critical four years to come.

COLLEGE: THE GREAT EXPLORATION

The above story is one that Christian parents know and fear very personally, and it's one that many of us who have made it through our college years understand only too well. College is a tremendous exploration in so many ways. It's an exploration of the world around us that we make through our studies of science, language, history, mathematics, humanities, and so much more. It's also a terrific study and exploration of mankind that we engage in for better or worse, depending on the people we encounter. It's an exploration of a newfound freedom, especially since our parents don't have as much control over our spending, our curfews, our daily activities, and our friends as they once had. It's an exploration of our abilities to take care of ourselves financially, physically, and emotionally. And, most seriously, it's an exploration of ourselves in terms of who we are and where we really stand with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet if we aren't careful, in just four years of college study a lifetime

of learning and growth through religious education classes, church participation, and daily communion with God can wind up placed in the attics of our hearts, becoming long forgotten and unused. We know this danger very well, but how can we make sure that it doesn't happen to us? How do we keep our faith, love, and service in Christ at the forefront of our college lives?

THE KEY TO HOLDING ON

Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. (Prov 4:25–26)

While we're exploring and making our way through college, the key to maintaining and increasing our relationship with our Lord and Savior is to strive to maintain purpose and balance in our daily lives. As we prepare to enter the college world, there are three critical commitments we must make to ourselves and to our Lord Jesus Christ:

1. Select a college or university that will best affect our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Build up a support group of brothers and sisters in Christ.
3. Give first priority to our faith in, relationship with, and responsibilities to Jesus Christ, regardless of the obstacles and distractions that may come our way.

When we strive to uphold these three commitments to ourselves and to Jesus Christ, we are able to view situations and make decisions with strong spiritual insight and discernment.

Commitment #1: Choose Your School Wisely

In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. (Prov 3:6)

Here are some typical questions that college-bound students usually consider when deciding on a college:

- How does this school compare to other schools in terms of its reputation?
- What is the tuition, and will I be able to afford to go to this school?
- How far is it from home?
- Will I be able to afford housing and other expenses?
- What kinds of programs does this school offer, and is my major one of them?

All college-bound students generally have to consider the above questions when deciding on the

right college or university to attend, but Christian college-bound students have additional issues to consider:

- How far from home and church is this school? And will I be able to make it to Sabbath services every week?
- Is there a campus fellowship established by our members there?
- Are there other brothers and sisters that I can regularly meet up with at school, or will I be pretty much on my own for the next four years?
- What could happen to my faith should I become distanced from Sabbath worship and brothers and sisters in Christ?
- Are there things that I can do to prevent myself from slipping in my relationship with Christ while I'm at school?

Making the decision to attend a school away from home and church is difficult. After much prayer, and after weighing all of the answers to these questions, we may decide that, while the school we originally had our heart set on offers much in terms of academics, it does not offer much opportunity to receive spiritual companionship and guidance through the church and its members. As careful Christians, we may have to make the tough decision to narrow our search to schools closer to a church. In other words, we may seriously need to make a conscientious sacrifice in order to benefit our relationship with our Lord and Savior. And as careful Christians, we need to keep our commitment to God first and foremost when making this decision.

As we all know, however, it's not always possible to study at schools near our churches or its members, especially when such schools don't offer the programs we need or want to pursue. In this case, it is even more important for us to entrust our cares to God and to make our decisions about attending a far-away school through a deep reliance on God's help. We also need to begin searching for ways to keep God in our daily lives, even though our circumstances might distance us physically from His fold.

Commitment #2: Build and Maintain a Strong Support Group

...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:25)

I grew up in Tampa, Florida, and ended up attending the University

of South Florida—a school just thirty minutes from home—for my undergraduate studies. I wouldn't say that I chose USF because it was the best school to attend to earn my degree in elementary education. And I can't say that I never considered moving away from home in order to gain greater experiences at being on my own. In fact, during my high school years, I had thought quite a bit about moving away for college and gaining my independence. But in the end, though my friends were all going to colleges out of state or out of town, I decided to stay in Tampa and be close to my family and church. After all, I had a four-year-old brother I couldn't bear to leave; our worship group was just beginning to form there, and was in strong need of workers; and, well, my mother told me that I couldn't go away....

Although I sometimes wished I had gone away for school, I also knew that it was indeed best for me to stay at home with my family and the new worship group. Looking back, I realize that I truly wasn't ready to go away for college—my faith was much too young to handle the temptations and stresses. After growing up away from our churches because of our highly mobile life as a U.S. Air Force family, I had very limited exposure to our faith and a very limited knowledge of God and the Bible. How could I have handled the pressures of college at the young age of seventeen, and without a very strong background of faith? If I had moved far from a support group of believers, how could I have kept myself strong in Christ? My mother knew what was best for me, and I am so thankful to our Lord Jesus for giving her such a strong spiritual love for me.

My family and the local believers in Christ became my support group during my years of college, teaching, and then graduate school in Florida. I believe that the experiences in Christ that I was blessed with during my days with the church in Tampa are what sustained me through my years of studying.

Whether you choose to go away or stay home for college, it's important for all believers to establish their own support groups during these critical years. If you go to a school close to church, be sure to remain active in worship services and church activities—make that commitment. If there are other members of our church attending your college, establish a campus fellowship—make the commitment to your group and to God to work

together to keep each other strong in faith. And if you find yourself at a college far away from church, make the commitment to maintain contact with other brothers and sisters through the Internet, letters, or phone calls.

Commitment #3: Give Greatest Priority to Your Relationship with God

And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 Jn 2:17)

The final commitment we must make to ourselves and to our Lord Jesus Christ is the commitment to keep our relationship with Him first and above all else. It's not easy, but it is always the most beneficial commitment to make in the long run.

In Matthew 16:25–26, Jesus teaches us:

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

This is a teaching that we always have to hold onto, especially when we face those extremely difficult college exams, struggle through those challenging and rigorous classes, meet our new groups of friends, take on that part- or full-time job as a student, or find that special someone. It's so easy to accidentally set God aside when we become so busy with everything that campus life involves. Much too often, without even knowing it, we find ourselves drifting further and further away from God because of our preoccupations with our studies, work, and friends. That's why, from the very beginning, we must plan a course of action to maintain a healthy relationship with Jesus Christ. We must make the determination to carry out the following preventive measures to ensure the stability of our faith:

Remember to pray to God at least two times a day: once before you begin your classes, and then once before you turn in. Use this time to really communicate with God your trust, thankfulness, and openness to what He has set before you. Ask Him to open your heart to feel how much He is a daily part of your life. Place your concerns on Him, and acknowledge that He is your heavenly Father, wanting only the best for you, His child.

Remember the Sabbath, and keep it holy. If you are near a church or other brothers and sisters, make a deep commitment to keep the

Sabbath by attending services or gathering for Bible study and fellowship. Don't allow other activities or distractions to pull you away from keeping God's holy commandment. Schedule that dentist appointment, make those camping plans, and postpone that shopping spree to the local outlet's big sale for another day or for later in the evening. Your commitment to God comes before Eddie Bauer's big half-off sale or that trip to have your hair cut.

But while most of us know to avoid these obvious distractions, there are a couple of others that commonly pull us away from keeping the Sabbath: working and studying. Too often, we become trapped in our weakened fleshly bodies and give in to the pressure to go to work or to study for that huge exam on the Sabbath, rather than attend church or Bible study. Hebrews 4:9–11 warns us:

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

We must try to avoid working or studying on the Sabbath — it is a holy day to be set aside for God and for our own spiritual rejuvenation.

Establish healthy and godly relationships around you. Be very cautious about the friends you keep, relying on the Holy Spirit to guide you into friendships that will benefit your faith. By establishing ourselves as Christians, and by presenting our values and beliefs to others through our daily actions, it will become almost automatic for us to weed out common temptations and pressures from peers. And it will be almost automatic for Christians, or those seeking Christ, to be drawn to us.

We must live in the world, but we must not be totally like those of the world. If we find that our relationships with others are causing us to sin or become distanced from our beliefs, we must learn to pull away from these friendships immediately. At times, it's really difficult for us to realize that our actions are becoming ungodly or that we are drifting further and further from Christ; that's why we must rely on regular Sabbath attendance and sermons, daily prayer, and the believers we keep around us. These critical components of our faith can draw us back to God through self-reflection as well as through loving corrections by brothers and sisters in Christ.

IN CONCLUSION

Wherever we go and in whatever we do, we must always remember to keep our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ at the forefront of our lives. We must make this commitment to ourselves and to God, so that we are always able to discern God's will in our lives, and so that we may always remain in Christ's love and salvation. In Colossians 1:9–14, Paul wrote to his brothers in Christ at Colosse:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and long-suffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Let us consider this message from Paul as every Christian parent's prayer for a college-bound child and every believer's prayer for a college-bound brother or sister. May you be filled with the knowledge of God's will through spiritual wisdom and understanding. May you may live a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in every way. May you bear fruit for the Lord. May you endure and patiently walk in your studies with Christ. May you always remember to honor and give thanks to Him. And when all is learned and done, may you receive your inheritance in the kingdom of light.

SEEKING GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR STUDIES — AND ULTIMATELY YOUR LIFE

ANGEL MARIE SOLGOT — SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, USA MANNA ISSUE 33

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (Prov 3:5–6, NIV)

YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY — BUT TO WHERE?

So, you've made it into your college or university — praise God! By now, you probably realize that one of your top priorities for the coming four years is to earn your degree. There's no doubt about that — you have to make it to graduation. The working world is increasingly calling for those with higher degrees, and you know that without one you'll have a very difficult time finding a job that will provide you with a comfortable lifestyle. But what kind of career will you prepare yourself for?

This is often a very difficult question for young people to answer, as there are so many careers and so many avenues to success that we can take. With so many choices, though, come plenty of issues to consider when deciding on a career path. These issues include knowing your potential financial needs; understanding your skills, abilities, and talents; considering the commitments involved in a particular career; and obtaining a sense of personal fulfillment through the one you choose. To complicate matters even more, some young adults also need to keep in mind the wishes of their parents. And on top of all this, we need to seek God's will for our lives. We need to know what He has planned for us, so we can be sure that we're on the right course, according to His will.

So just how do we go about deciding which career and life path to take? Would you believe me if I told you that it almost doesn't matter what you do, as long as you do it with God? Would you believe that all it really takes to be successful is to have the Lord on your side?

CREATING A VISION FOR YOUR LIFE

According to the Bible, the precious word of God, we don't need to stress ourselves out about where we're heading in life. We just need to set our eyes on God and trust Him to make us successful in His own way. And just how do I know this? Well, from personal

experiences, but, more important, I know it because this message is taught again and again throughout the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Wise King Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs, tells us: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov 3:5–6, NIV). In these verses Solomon so simply gives us the key to success through God: first, trust; then, look to God; and finally, walk onward with God.

Trust the Lord with All Your Heart

When we put all of our trust in God, we don't need to worry—we know that He is in control, so we are able to relax and have a strong sense of peace inside. Those who don't trust in God, though, spend much of their lives worrying about whether they chose the right major, whether they've made the right career moves, and whether they will be a success or a failure. But this tendency to worry is so unnecessary, according to the Bible. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:30–34:

Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

We have to trust our Lord Jesus Christ completely, even when we feel that nothing could possibly help us through our situation in life. We have to know that He is our Almighty and All-loving Father, and He is always ready and willing to carry us through whatever comes our way.

Acknowledge God in Everything

King Solomon tells us that we should acknowledge God in all that we do, and Jesus tells us the same thing when He says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." True success is the continuing ability to lose yourself to Jesus, and to offer all your hopes and wishes, as well as your entire being, to His purpose. It is not measured by the amount of money you have in your investment account, or by the value of your home, or by the status you've achieved in your career. True success comes from a heart and a life devoted to loving our Lord

Jesus Christ and loving and serving those around us.

Set a Goal for Your Life

In order to become successful, we have to set goals for our lives, and these goals must include the Lord. They must acknowledge Him and must be developed through the Word of God. Proverbs 15:21 tells us, "Folly delights a man who lacks judgment, but a man of understanding keeps a straight course" (NIV). How do we keep that straight course? It all depends on whom we turn to as our guide.

What does God want you to be? What special talents and abilities has He given you that you can use to benefit others? Do you have the ability to provide emotional comfort to others? Do you have special writing talents? Are you an eloquent speaker? Do you have a heart to teach and lead children? Do you have any other special talents that can spiritually or emotionally benefit others? If so, then use your talents as best you can.

If there is a career out there that will make the most of your God-given talents, then consider working toward that career. You will find that the positive emotional and spiritual returns from a career based on helping other people will vastly outperform the positive financial returns offered by most business-minded careers.

But whether you choose a career based on helping others or one based in the business world, you are called to seek God's kingdom first in your life. Keep in mind Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:27–30:

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

Not every Christian is called to become a teacher, a minister, or a social worker. Many Christians are very talented and successful business professionals who have found a way to bring Christ into the business world. And many Christian business professionals have made Christian service a first priority in their lives, finding ways to serve God both inside and outside the workplace. These individuals are able to bring their personal offerings into the church through their gifts of administration, financial

management, public-speaking talents, and so much more.

Christians who spend their lives utilizing their God-given talents for the benefit of others understand that they were created to contribute to the loving plan of God. They know that they are here on this earth to tell others about the God who loves them and longs to bring them home. This should be the goal of your life as well. So whether you choose a life of public service or a life of business, just keep in mind the lesson that King Solomon learned and wants us to learn: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed" (Prov 16:3, NIV).

Acknowledge God's Will through Those around You

Part of seeking God's help in making decisions in life involves listening to the spiritual people around you. This may mean listening to the advice of your parents, the brothers and sisters in church, or maybe the pastor serving your church. While they may not know exactly what career you should choose, they will probably be able to provide you with some guidance through their own experiences in and knowledge of the various careers out there today. More important, they know you and your talents, and they really love and care for you.

Proverbs 15:22 tells us, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed" (NIV). So when making decisions, remember to listen to the advice of the godly people in your life. After searching your heart and God's Word, as well as listening to those caring and spiritual people in your life, you are very likely to find yourself on a path directed by God.

Walk Onward with Him

So at this point you've put your trust in God, and you've searched His will. The next step is simply to walk onward with God. This is where you let our Lord make the path straight for you. Remember Proverbs 3:6: "And He will make your paths straight." Notice that this verse doesn't say, "And He will take you to the right paths." Instead, it says that regardless of what path you've chosen in life, as long as you've put God first and you've chosen with a humble and trusting heart, He will straighten out the path for you.

This idea reminds me of a contemporary Christian song, performed by a brother-and-sister group called *The Martins*. The key phrase of this song is that God's will can never lead you where His grace

can't keep you. That's something we always have to remember as we make important decisions in life, and that's exactly why we don't need to worry.

SERVING GOD REGARDLESS OF WHERE YOU ARE IN LIFE

The most important thing to remember is that we must serve God no matter where we are in our careers. God has given all of us various gifts and talents that we need to use to lead others to Jesus Christ.

For example in my own teaching career I can easily use my God-given abilities to benefit others—public service and outreach is simply the nature of teaching. For as long as I can remember, I was called to this career. My grandfather served God through the private kindergarten he built, and my mother always told me stories about the students she taught at his school. Although I knew that I would probably not make a lot of money as a teacher, I knew that I could not resist this calling. So now, after nearly ten years of teaching elementary-aged children, I can truly say that I have received so much from God through all that I've been able to do and learn in my career. And I've never really struggled financially—things just kind of fall into place. Maybe that's because God has worked to straighten my path a little for me.

Still, public-service careers aren't the only avenues to serving God, so don't think that you absolutely have to lay aside all hopes of succeeding in the business or technological sectors. The world needs a careful balance of careers in order to sustain itself, so understand that almost all careers have some merit. I'll give you an example of two guys I know named Steve, who have each found ways to serve God in their careers.

The first Steve is a very talented individual who seems to be able to learn from and adjust to almost anything. Having joined a hugely respected nationwide company, he has his share of difficulties to face at work. But he faces these difficulties with his eyes on his heavenly prize. He knows what matters most in life, and he tries his best to put God above his career in business. He teaches, he writes, he encourages, and he laughs—all for the glory of God.

The second Steve is my older brother. I never truly realized what a loving and tender heart he had until I was able to witness him working in the wholesale business that my family once owned. I watched him go out of his

way to try to help out some of our financially struggling clients, who were local business owners. I saw the expressions on his face as he listened to their stories of hardship, and I saw the true compassion he had for them. There was one time when I saw my brother leave the room crying after he had interviewed a potential employee whose appearance was upsettingly disfigured and whose life was full of tremendous emotional and financial struggles. Although this person had very little work experience and was not a very socially well-adjusted individual, my brother and my parents hired him on the spot.

My brother used his position in business to help out a needy person, and my parents used this opportunity to witness the love of God to this person. These two stories illustrate what God wants most from us, as told in Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" In whatever you do in life, remember these words of goodness, mercy, and humility through Christ.

IN CONCLUSION

So now you know that to find the road to success you need to follow God. Once you place the things of God first and foremost in your life, you won't need to worry about what career you choose. He will provide you with success throughout your lifetime. Genesis 39:21–23 affirms this by reminding us:

But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

The Lord was with Joseph, and that was all he needed to be successful. Our Lord Jesus Christ is all you need as well, so walk onward with complete trust and obedience to Him. Enjoy your studies, and use your time in college to glorify God in all that you do. Learn, laugh, teach, pray, listen, love others, and follow God. Cherish the wisdom that you'll gain through your years in school and, more important, cherish the wisdom that you'll gain with your eyes set on Christ. "Wisdom is good with an inheritance, And profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a

defense as money is a defense, But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it" (Eccl 7:11–12).

MY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

JENNIFER LEE — DALLAS, TEXAS, USA

MANNA ISSUE 40

HOW I GOT INTO COLLEGE

The screenwriter of a movie makes certain that the hero meets the right people, does and says the right things, and is always in the right places. That is the only way for the hero to come out triumphant against all odds.

During these three years in college, I've come to appreciate God more as I see His guidance from the big events in life to even the smallest ones. I really believe that God can be the perfect screenwriter of our time in college if we are willing to let Him lead.

The Right Place

I applied to three schools as a senior in high school: two were out-of-state and the third was the University of Texas (UT), which is a three-and-a-half hour drive away from home. I received all the documents from the other two schools but was lacking one document from UT.

Because my mom encouraged me to pray for God's will in this matter, a group of us fasted and prayed for God to clearly show me which school I should attend. Even though I preferred the other two schools, we prayed that if it were God's will for me to go to UT, then I would receive their financial package notification letter on a certain Monday.

That Monday finally came, and I stood by the window at two o'clock in the afternoon, when the mailman usually came. I waited until two-thirty — no mailman. Not willing to give up yet, I stood there until three, four, then eventually five o'clock — still no sign of the mailman.

Feeling disappointed and unanswered, I went back to my room to do homework. At six, my mom knocked on my door and held out a package — it was the notification letter from UT.

Initially, the feeling was bittersweet, because UT was not my first

choice of school. However, awe and then peace quickly took over and settled in my heart. I knew that God heard and answered our prayers. I was assured of where God wanted me to go, and knowing that was the best feeling in the world.

There has not been a day that I regretted going to UT. God will never lead you where His grace cannot keep you. I know that I am living in His blessings, because everything has been much better than what my abilities could ever have achieved. I really thank God.

The Right Time

After two morning classes on a typical Monday at 10:10 am, I sat in my building doing homework. I must've had massive brain failure because, for the life of me, I could not do a single problem on that homework.

At 11:10 am, after an hour of frustration, I shut my book and went upstairs to the computer lab to check email until my next class at noon. Most were junk mail, so I didn't bother reading them. The clock read 11:15 am and only five minutes had passed. I had nothing better to do so I went back to look at my emails—something that I have never done before.

An email with the subject "RSVP IMMEDIATELY!" caught my attention. It said that I had failed to reply to an earlier email concerning a scholarship that I had won and that I was required at a luncheon at 11:30 am that day! I looked at the clock; it was 11:20 am. I closed all the windows, logged off, and ran downstairs.

Suddenly I remembered that I had homework due for my class at noon. Luckily, I saw my friend standing as if she were waiting for me! I mumbled a hasty, "I got a scholarship. I need to go. Can you turn my homework in for me? Thanks!" and ran off.

Sitting in the luncheon grossly underdressed in my t-shirt and jeans compared to others in business casual, I felt awestruck. Had I stayed downstairs doing my homework, had I decided to surf the web instead of rechecking my email, or had I ignored that email again, I would not have made it to the luncheon.

There was no doubt in my mind that every minute was perfectly timed by God. It was better than the movies.

NOW THAT I'M HERE, WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?

Getting into college is one thing, but what we do in it is what

matters. I've heard people saying that the college years are a time to find ourselves—a time to try new things and stretch our potential.

College indeed opens many doors of opportunities. However, the opportunities that come our way are not censored to be only Christian-friendly. We are suddenly immersed in freedom with the reins of life dropped into our two hands.

Unfortunately, with freedom comes the possibility of losing discipline and succumbing to the temptations that Satan devises to level our faith in God. We now have the ability to do whatever we want, stay up as late as we want, befriend whomever we want, go wherever we want, and the list goes on.

If we are not careful, we may surprise ourselves by doing things or going to places we would have shunned without flinching back when we were more spiritually sound. Slowly, whether we mindfully condone it or not, we may lose God.

The truth is, we were not meant to tear ourselves in half while we strive to balance between our academics and our spirituality. On the contrary, the spirit within us serves as a backbone to support our physical lives so that we can achieve our goals and aspirations with God as an active participant.

Faith and school are not two opposing forces in a ceaseless game of tug-of-war. Together, they actually work beautifully to fabricate the quilt of a successful life as a college student and spiritual soldier that ultimately glorifies God.

Fix Our Focus

Keeping focus on God does not come by nature. It requires an active effort, because we are predisposed to look at what is in our immediate line of vision. Schoolwork, friends, TV, and the Internet—though neutral—may work together to drive our focus off-track.

Spiritually, we are actually really fragile and much weaker than we think. Paul warns, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12). Months of spiritual awareness may disappear simply after a hectic week of school. It is frustrating when the hard-won zeal from spiritual seminars evaporates so quickly with time.

Usually, we can feel when we begin to slip spiritually. Sometimes it starts innocently with watching a PG-rated movie or listening to a five-minute song. Other times it

may start with our hesitation to say "no" or with satisfying our curiosities.

Regardless of what, our Bibles suddenly seem to bolt shut, refusing to open, and our legs become stiff, refusing to bend. The standard of the world is different, and at times contrary, to the standard of God. It is typically the small, subtle things that have the potential to snowball into a spiritual crisis.

To keep focus, it becomes imperative to put God in the center of a day and to touch back on His words for direction (Ps 119:105). Pastors may sound like a broken record when they remind us to read the Bible and pray.

The habit is indispensable in a successful Christian life because it keeps our steps in check; whenever we encounter a challenge, it reminds us to turn to God. We then would not chance to wander too far away from Him and then gradually lose Him completely.

We must be watchful and "resist [the devil], steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet 5:8–9).

Be Spiritually Persistent

Ever tried to diet but couldn't say "no" to a warm, moist, chocolate-chip cookie? Here is the breakthrough: if you are on a diet, then don't browse the cookie aisle. This same principle also makes sense spiritually; by going out of our way to avoid eye contact with temptation, we will save ourselves from many broken determinations.

We cannot afford to let God go without a fight! Usually, our conscience will react when we are exposed to things that will be detrimental to our faith. It then becomes our choice whether we want to try to persist spiritually or mute that voice inside. Do whatever it takes to keep God as an active participant.

The strength of my day comes in the morning when I read the Bible while eating breakfast. I have heard others starting strong with a prayer before they take on the events of the day.

Try keeping a journal of the times when God has touched your heart or dedicate a time of the day for God. Go back and read what you wrote to remind yourself of God's love. It is the small, habitual additions in the day that help build our faiths and instill God's voice inside our hearts.

It is impossible to detect when temptation will come, in what form, or how severe it will be. However, we know that while Satan is strong, God is stronger; and while "with

men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26).

Two Are Better than One

It is hard to succeed alone; there must be times when we have become too depleted in energy and too weak to help ourselves. This is when God sends us help.

Good friends in the Lord can hold our hands and lead us when we suffer spiritual blindness or revive us from a spiritual coma. Attending spiritual seminars, joining Bible study groups, and praying with our family are avenues that take us closer to God.

For me, my mom is whom I turn to for spiritual guidance and help with prayer. King Solomon keenly observed, "Two are better than one, for if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls" (Eccl 4:9–10).

Even when friends can't be there, God is always there to pull us through, because He desires us to "make straight paths for [our] feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed" (Heb 12:13). Turning to God is not an abstract concept because God exists and He hears our prayers.

My mom tells me, "You will always find the time for the things that are important to you." The reason is simple: things that are important become a natural part of life and no longer compete for your time. Drawing closer to God and acknowledging His presence help keep our steps in spiritual rhythm (Heb 10:22–23; Prov 3:6).

Faith that lasts is faith that slowly becomes indistinguishable from life.

GLORIFYING GOD

Many of my college friends say, "Christians talk the talk, but they never walk the walk. They are just a bunch of hypocrites." What they say reminds us that we are God's walking advertisements, and people are looking at us as His reflection.

Through Our Conduct

Paul exhorts, "Let your conduct be worthy of the gospel" (Phil 1:27) and "seek those things which are above… not on things on the earth" (Col 3:1–2).

What we do can persuade or dissuade our friends from getting to know God better. Paul says, "The sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus" (Phm 6).

In a mad rush to finish a project, one of my classmates commented, "You always seem so calm!" People

can see the difference because God is inside us, and we can use that as an opportunity to tell them more about Him.

Through Our Life

Another time during lunch, two of my friends were taking turns telling me all the stupid things that the other did while she was drunk the night before. Out of curiosity I asked them, "Why do you guys get drunk then?" They giggled, "So we can forget all the stress from school and lose ourselves!" If the point of life is to be numbed from consciousness and reality, then why bother living?

Life is meant to be lived. Jesus lived a beautiful life of love for us, and we, too, can live a beautiful life glorifying Him. The Bible says that not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from God's will and that we are of more value than many sparrows (Mt 10:29, 31).

Each of us made it to this world despite the odds against us; God definitely has a special purpose for each of us here on earth.

CONLCUSION

These years in college sitting through classes after classes, I learned many things that will earn me a degree. However, the most important thing I learned is that I must to hold onto God and never let Him go.

God gives many priceless gifts to hearts that seek for Him and walk in Him (Heb 11:6). In good times, I experienced the quiet strength that only God can give. His peace makes a world of difference, because without it, I feel like I am doing everything alone (Phil 4:7; Col 3:15).

We need to make God an active participant and let Him be the perfect scriptwriter of our lives.

GROWING UP AS A REMOTE AREA TRUE JESUS CHURCH MEMBER

CHRISTINE LIN — RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA, USA

MANNA ISSUE 60

When you first step into the chapel on Sabbath morning, what crosses your mind? For many of us, it is simply another Saturday at church. But what if you didn't have a local True Jesus Church to go to each week? What if you couldn't attend Bible studies or youth fellowships with your brothers and sisters and could only see them a few times a year?

As a remote area True Jesus Church member, I have learned to treasure activities that seem normal or routine to others.

Before I was born, my parents moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, almost 400 miles away from the nearest church. I was baptized when I was two, and my family and my mother's family were all believers.

In Raleigh, there were three or four families that would join us for service. However, my mother's family later moved to California and the others left church. Even though joining a non-True Jesus Church church in the area would have made our worship lives easier, we stayed in True Jesus Church because we sincerely believed that this was the true church.

Ever since I was a child, our Sabbath family service has been the same—one hour of watching a sermon tape in our own home. Because I didn't have a religious education class, my dad taught me everything I knew. I didn't have religious education teachers to look up to or brothers and sisters my age to support me.

At first, I complained about my circumstances, and I considered leaving church many times. After all, I didn't have a physical church to go to.

But I learned that as long as we have faith in God's plan, He will reveal His purpose for us. And in the meantime, He provides us with everything we need to overcome our struggles, which I have personally experienced.

ASKING QUESTIONS

When I was about ten years old, my parents felt it was time for me to start attending church events, so I went to my first Student Spiritual Convocation (SSC) at Elizabeth

Church in New Jersey. It was a new experience for me because it was my first time in a church since my baptism.

To actually step into a chapel, hear sermons in person, and sing hymns with a crowd of people was amazing for me. I felt that I had found my true home, filled with family and friends. It was there that I learned about the importance of the Holy Spirit and how He could help me.

I went to SSC every chance that I had, but year after year, I went home without the Holy Spirit. I was very frustrated with God and felt it was unfair that He put me in a place without a church. Everyone else had a church to go to, and they had the Holy Spirit. Why was it that I had neither?

By the time I started my first year of high school, I had been attending SSC for several years. I made a lot of friends at school, but because my closest friends were from church, I still felt very lonely.

I had dealt with depression throughout my life, and I reached my lowest point during my last semester of high school. I was still praying for the Holy Spirit, but I began to think that perhaps God had forgotten or didn't care about me.

During those six months, I learned that depression was not simply a mental condition. It had everything to do with my low spirituality, and it also affected my health. I sought comfort from my church friends, but they could only pray for me and talk to me over the phone or Internet. I knew that the majority of them couldn't empathize with what I was going through.

I began to think about what I had to do to get out of this endless cycle. My high school years were almost over, and I would soon begin a new chapter of my life. Perhaps this would be my chance to make a fresh start.

I only applied to two schools: Rutgers University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). Although UNC was much closer to home (only thirty minutes away), I had every intention of going to Rutgers in New Jersey if I was accepted.

At Rutgers, not only was there a church nearby but also a campus fellowship with most of my closest church friends. I felt I needed to surround myself with people who could help me keep up my faith. I didn't want to feel lonely anymore.

When the winter SSC came that year, I prayed for the Holy Spirit and told God I wanted to go to

Rutgers because it would help my faith. Rutgers seemed like the obvious choice, and my parents supported my decision.

However, when I arrived home after the convocation, my mother simply told me, "You're going to UNC." It wasn't His will for me to go to Rutgers, and it wasn't time for me to receive His Holy Spirit yet. But I couldn't understand why God wanted me to stay in North Carolina.

After moving to college my first year, I was not only away from my church peers but my family as well. Because of my busy school schedule, I didn't see my parents for weeks or months at a time.

The hardest part about college was facing the loneliness. I cried myself to sleep most nights. I kept asking God, "Why am I here? Why didn't you let me go to Rutgers? How can I possibly keep up my faith if no one is here with me?"

FINDING ANSWERS

The first lesson I learned on my own, without friends or family around, was to find motivation through God. I thank God that, at some point, I realized I had to pray harder and longer every day in order to survive spiritually. This isn't to say that I had stronger faith or that I was better than others. This was just something I had to do.

After finding sermon recordings on the True Jesus Church e-Library website, I put together a schedule for myself on weekdays and Sabbaths. On weekday nights, I sang a hymn, prayed for thirty minutes, and read three chapters of the Bible. Sabbath day was more flexible, but I usually listened to a sermon in the morning and afternoon and wrote reflections on the week.

I spent my first year of college adjusting to this schedule. I often fell asleep listening to sermons or reading the Bible, or I didn't have the motivation to pray. Other times, I became so busy with schoolwork that I forgot to make God my first priority.

Nonetheless, after many months, I gradually grew so accustomed to spending time with God every day that it felt wrong if I didn't. Through little things every day, He reminded me that He was watching over me. He guided me through my schoolwork and gave me a reason to wake up each morning and start again.

I began to understand God's will for me when He gave me the opportunity to attend the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS) for three consecutive summers. The

second time I attended, like the first, I spent most of my prayers asking God, "Why?"

Only this time, rather than complaining about my situation, I wanted to know His will for me. After many prayers, a verse came to me:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa 55:8–9)

With this one verse, God answered all of my questions.

In the journal I kept during the seminar, I wrote down these realizations:

1. I am in North Carolina for a reason. I am physically away from brothers and sisters so that my faith will grow — my own faith, and not that of my parents or my church friends.
2. I am in North Carolina because God wants to train me. Ever since my first NYTS, God has been training me to serve Him.
3. I have not received the Holy Spirit yet so that I will first learn a few things and strengthen my faith. God wants me to stay strong and set an example for others — that through Him, they may see that my life is a miracle. It is a miracle that I can stand here today.
4. God has a special purpose for me. He wants my life, my background, and my circumstances to strengthen and encourage the people around me.

All this time, I had done nothing but complain to God. I couldn't see past the things I didn't have in order to see that God had a bigger plan for me all along.

A PRECIOUS GIFT

My third NYTS in 2008 was the most memorable because God gave me what I needed to overcome my struggles. During those two weeks, I felt as though each day was a spiritual battle.

In some prayers, I felt I had reached a spiritual high, but at the same time I knew Satan was doing all he could to pull me back. But, thank God, I had many brothers and sisters praying for me each day, and it was enough to encourage me.

After praying for over ten years, I received the Holy Spirit at the age of twenty. God had given me something so precious and fragile, and I felt it was my responsibility to cultivate it and make it grow.

In the following months, the Holy Spirit helped me to change into a

different person. I began to take on a more optimistic approach to life and was gradually able to overcome depression.

Now, as I apply for graduate school, whether God wants me to stay in North Carolina or go to a school near a church, I have no doubt that He will continue to guide me in the right direction and give me the strength to overcome future trials.

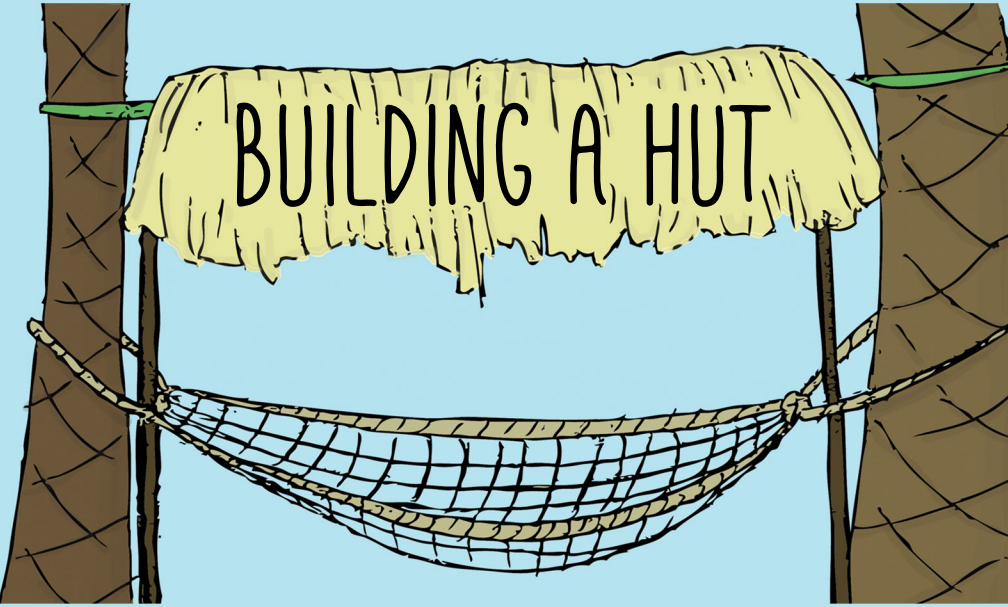
One thing is for sure—living in a remote area means experiencing various trials that are different from what most brothers and sisters face. We may feel that no one understands what we're going through or that we don't know if we can overcome our struggles. Or perhaps, we don't know if God is listening to our prayers.

Though we may not understand God's will at first, within every circumstance is the hope of God's promises and His guidance. What seems to be a discouraging situation at first can turn out to be full of hope.

In some areas, your need for shelter may take precedence over your need for food and possibly even your need for water. For example, prolonged exposure to cold can cause excessive fatigue and weakness (exhaustion). An exhausted person may develop a 'passive' outlook, thereby losing the will to survive. —US ARMY SURVIVAL MANUAL

As a general rule, it is said that humans can survive three weeks without food, three days without water, but only three hours without shelter, particularly in freezing temperatures. So in many cases, building a suitable shelter is the first priority of survival.

Likewise, your dorm life and roommate present the first challenge of spiritual survival. Certainly we hope that none of you "lose your will to survive." A good living situation will help tremendously in keeping your faith. How can you build solid relationships with your roommates and hallmates to help you thrive in your faith while in college? In particular, how do you handle the important issue of prayer (in the Spirit), the breath of our spiritual life? How should you shine for Christ in your dorm life?



When you look at how Isaac moved around and set up camp, you will see a wonderful example: Every time he moved, the first thing he did was to set up an altar **(GEN 26:25)**. Therefore, whenever you move into a new dorm, follow Isaac's example to set prayer as a priority. Pray for an understanding roommate and a good living situation, and ask God to bless your year and your studies. God surely blesses those who place Him first in their lives **(CF. GEN 26)**.

Let's see what else we can learn from other members' dorm experiences.

SURPRISE – I PRAY!

In the middle of my sophomore year, one of my quadmates walked in on me praying in tongues in the common room. I usually prayed in my own double, but that day my roommate was studying for an exam and I didn't want to bother her. The quadmate who walked in on me knew that I prayed in tongues. We had talked about it before, but that was the first time she had ever seen me praying. She was shocked. When I finished praying, I found a post-it note that read, "Hey, can we talk?" That turned out to be the beginning of a long conversation about religion, True Jesus Church, and the Holy Spirit, and I thank God that it took place. It was great to be able to share my faith and personal testimony with a friend I cared very much about. We also became closer after sharing our respective stories with one another.

This experience shows that there are definitely ways to facilitate prayer with unbelieving roommates. First, it is essential to keep the doors of communication open. From the very beginning, try to communicate honestly and openly. When we spoke on the phone during the summer before freshman year, I made sure to ask my roommate whether she would mind my praying in tongues. I asked her again before the first time I prayed in our room. "If you have any questions at all, please let me know," I said.

Second, be flexible, considerate, and patient. It took me some time to find a schedule that worked for both of us. Now I wake up, get ready for school, read the Bible while eating breakfast in my room, and then spend time in prayer. Mornings are a great time to spend with God because my roommate is usually asleep or awake but not working on any homework.

Finally, be confident and unashamed of your faith. Your roommates may ask questions about praying in tongues, usually out of simple curiosity. Take advantage of their questions as an opportunity to share the gospel. They will respect you for being clear and straightforward about your beliefs. Do not be afraid of a potentially uncomfortable conversation regarding the Holy Spirit. It can lead to a greater understanding between you and your roommate.

I am still rooming with my quadmate next year. Together, we look forward to laughs, midnight snack runs, and 3 am conversations.

I love that she is a person who understands that I pray to God silently, out loud, and in tongues, and who will pray for her when she asks me.

BIBLE READING

I did not tell my roommates that I was Christian or that I prayed in tongues because I wasn't an exemplary Christian. Eventually, my roommates found out I was Christian since I went to church every Saturday, yet I tried my best to keep my faith to myself and away from my roommates—I tend to be non-confrontational, avoiding uncomfortable situations at all costs. I knew their class schedule, so I purposely prayed in tongues for short periods while they were gone. Right after my prayer, I would read a chapter or two of the Bible.

My system worked out for a few weeks, but one morning, my roommates unexpectedly came back to the dorm room early and walked in on me reading the Bible! I wasn't mortified, but rather relieved when they paid no attention to what I was doing and went about their business. From that time on, I read the Bible every morning, and they became familiar with my habit.

Sometime later, one of my roommates commented, "You're so good about reading the Bible, I'm going to bring my Bible to read too!" and the next time she came back from her weekend at home, she had brought a Bible with her! Although we never read the Bible together, I've seen her read it on her own. Even though we didn't openly discuss our faith, or have Bible study, thank God my roommates didn't deem my persistent Bible reading peculiar, and one of them even started reading the Bible again!

PRAYER LIFE WITH UNBELIEVING ROOMMATES

Before I moved into college for my freshman year, I thought a lot about how to approach my roommate regarding prayer. After attending my first National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS) the month before starting my first semester, I heard several accounts of praying from brothers and sisters with unbelieving roommates. Some of these testimonies included not sharing their beliefs with roommates and suitemates and thus having

to pray in the bathroom or when no one else was home. On the other hand, I also heard of brothers and sisters whom God blessed with having roommates who were completely understanding of our beliefs and were able to pray without the fear of being walked in on when praying alone in the bedroom or bathroom.

After hearing these experiences, I decided it was definitely better to gather up what courage I could muster and approach my roommate about prayer the first day we got to school. The few weeks before moving into college, my soon-to-be roommate and I chatted a bit online to get to know each other. After coming to an understanding that both of us were Yankees fans, I decided that he must be a pretty cool guy. Joking aside, he seemed friendly and understanding during our conversations, so I decided to stick to my plan.

The night we moved into college for orientation, I approached him and asked if he minded if I prayed every day. After explaining to him the manner in which our church prays, he seemed completely fine with it. Of course, I encouraged him to ask questions if he was ever curious about it and also told him that I would always let him know before I prayed so that communication was always open between us. This lifestyle continued throughout all of my freshman year. Whenever I wanted to pray, I would let him know, and out of respect and understanding he would turn off his speakers and plug in head-sets. This was the way we operated for a year. Although he never did ask questions or seem in the least bit interested about learning more, he did eventually start to remind me to pray every day before I went to bed. That year, I really thank God for giving me such an understanding roommate.

Although I did not have this roommate my sophomore and junior years in college, I did live with another good friend of mine. Though he was not a member of our church, he was very interested in learning more about God and church. This gave me the opportunity to share the message with him and to continue praying as well.

Not every roommate situation concludes as smoothly as mine. However, regardless of the circumstances, it is important to not wait before telling your roommate about prayer. The sooner you speak up, the easier it will be. Keeping a secret prayer life only creates difficulties later on. It is important to always keep the channel of communication open to your

roommates in case they ever have any questions. God willing, their curiosity may lead to even greater things.

ON QUITTING PIRACY

We all know that pirating software (as well as music, movies, and other copyrighted media) is against the law. We also know that the Bible instructs us to be good citizens, submitting to the authorities because they are established by God (Rom 13). Unfortunately, in this day and age, software piracy has become a commonplace activity that seemingly everyone participates in without any negative consequences and, for some reason, this apparently justifies and permits piracy.

Because piracy is so common and easy to participate in, it's easy to become dependent on it. In college, people download cracked versions of professional software because they "need" them for homework assignments or other projects but cannot afford or do not want to spend the money to buy the licenses. Although money may be a real issue, necessity is in reality just an excuse, especially since universities often have computer labs loaded with software with academic licenses.

Like many people, I did not used to take piracy seriously. During my freshman and sophomore years of college, I used a file sharing program that allowed me to obtain pretty much anything I wanted for media entertainment or school work. In the back of my mind I knew it wasn't right, but I kept thinking, "How could it be so wrong if everyone is doing it and being so open about it?"

This insensitivity towards piracy continued until I heard a testimony that a brother shared at NYTS. He talked about how he was famous among his peers for knowing how to get pirated versions of anything. But upon realizing it was wrong, God gave him the power to quit and to throw away all his CD's and archives of pirated content. He emphasized that piracy is illegal and against the law, and there is absolutely no justification for it, especially for Christians. The Bible clearly states that we are to submit to the laws and authorities over us. At the time I thought, "If I continue in piracy, how can I manifest the glory and righteousness of God in front of

my peers? How can my conscience be clear before God, knowing that I am breaking the law?"

Thank God that after that NYTS, I was able to resolve to quit piracy. I uninstalled all my cracked software and deleted any movies or music I downloaded illegally. Then I uninstalled the file-sharing program. If I needed a specific program to do my homework I would go to a computer lab. I realized that doing so was not as inconvenient as I thought it would be. One thing I was worried about was what my friends and peers would think of me, but after talking about it a few times, I realized I had been worried for nothing. Now, whenever I'm talking with my peers about not having certain software or never having seen some movie, and they ask why I don't just get it through a file sharing program, I simply tell them that I don't have it anymore because piracy is illegal and I'm a Christian. Thank God, no one has given me a hard time about it. Furthermore, I feel like my response causes people to at the very least reconsider their actions because it's a response that they seldom hear and don't expect.

To me, this is just one way that a Christian can be different and sow seeds. If people perceive us—including our values, habits, speech, and actions—as being no different from everyone else, we are probably not shining the light of Christ in this world of sin. Only when we make determinations for Christ, resolutions that will make us different from the world, can others begin to see what it means to be a true Christian.

Bottom line: piracy is wrong, and as Christians, we shouldn't participate. Uninstall file-sharing programs, delete pirated content, and make use of the computer labs or buy legitimate software. After you do, you'll realize that living without piracy is not hard, and you won't lose any friends. But most importantly, our conscience can be clearer before God.

CONFESSIONS OF A SOFTWARE PIRATE

When I was in college there was a student-run file sharing network on campus. You could find anything you wanted on it: music, computer programs, movies, etc. Because it was on the school local area network (LAN), downloading times were fast. Even though it was (and is) illegal to download files, it didn't stop anyone.

I'll admit I've download pirated software before. Programs like Adobe Photoshop or the Macromedia set of tools were my primary targets. Ironically, I downloaded these illegal programs to do holy work. I always wanted the latest and greatest programs. At a church seminar I attended, I noticed many people brought their laptops for "note-taking." Unfortunately what they were really doing was showing off their newest (and dubiously acquired) programs.

One time when I was at home during a break from school, I attended service at my local church. During one of the Bible studies, a sister asked the preacher about his thoughts on pirated software. She mentioned that members were even distributing illegal software to friends at church. It was the first time I really thought about the issue and it really hit home. I finally acknowledged that illegally downloading copyrighted programs was no different than physically taking something from a store—I was stealing.

Even if I could justify that I had a good reason for making copies of music or computer programs, I had to ask myself, "Is it edifying to do holy work using a program I didn't pay for? Could I honestly offer my servitude as a holy sacrifice, pleasing and acceptable to God?" (cf. Rom 12:1). At that time, I couldn't. I had been overtaken by the idea of FREE stuff whenever I wanted.

At the end of the Bible study, the following two verses were cited:

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful.
All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (1 Cor 6:12)

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful;
all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. (1 Cor 10:23)

I wholeheartedly agreed with these two verses. After I came home, I made a determination to seek out alternative open source programs and found that plenty were available. Secondly, I found that my university (along with many others) offered huge student discounts on the commercial programs that are frequently pirated. Third, the computer labs had all of these programs available for use. With all these points in mind, I found that it was possible to live a "pirate"-free life if I wanted to, and I did.

When Jesus was crucified, there were two other men who bore a cross—both were robbers. In the end, all three died and received their reward, but only Christ resurrected and ascended to heaven.

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. (1 Pet 4:14–16)

When Jesus comes again, which cross will you be bearing?

NO PIRATES IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

Pirating software (or any other type of material) is not something a Christian should do: 1) it brings shame to God's name, and 2) it hurts yourself. For a long time, I did not believe either reason. However, by the grace of God, I came to understand how incompatible this practice is with Christian principles.

When I was in high school, the prices of CD burners finally dropped to an affordable level and my brother purchased one for the family computer. That was also when the Internet became a full-blown reality and every kid in school had an instant messaging account.

With a little curiosity and a lot of unchecked covetousness, I began to discover that I could download pirated music, games, software, and movies from the Internet for free. Through mediums such as a peer-to-peer client, an IRC channel, or a website, I was able to download many, many things that would have otherwise cost me a lot of money (which I did not have). Moreover, with a CD burner, I was able to archive everything I downloaded, clean space off my hard drive, and download more.

By the end of high school, I earned a reputation as the "go-to" guy for free things. Whether it was a music album, movie, software, or game, I probably had a copy of it. Proud of my reputation, I saw myself as a modern-day Robin Hood, taking from the big, evil corporations and giving to poor students like myself.

As I downloaded things every day, I became very skilled at pirating. I knew by heart the web addresses of forums that would lead me to pirated sources. With little or no knowledge of computer science, I was very proficient at finding and applying cracks or serial codes, and finding ways to bypass CD/DVD protection mechanisms.

When I went to college, I brought the stacks of CDs that contained all the items I had downloaded in high school. They were my work, my sweat, and my love. I had two or three stacks of 50 CDs. Less than a year into college, I was able to greatly multiply the size of my collection.

With the help of a T1 Internet connection in college, I was able to download more in less time. Every day, I checked the pirating websites and FTP servers for new programs, movies, music, or games. When I saw a new item, I would add it to my download manager. I would leave my computer on 24/7. I could not have enough of it. By then, I did not even use or know how to use a lot of the things I downloaded. I just wanted it. I wanted new things all the time.

Yet I also began to seriously think about my faith during my time in college. I wanted to know what this "truth" was that I had heard about in church since my childhood. I wanted to understand more about the Holy Spirit and why so many Christians from other denominations speak about it so off-handedly. I wanted to know if the True Jesus Church was indeed the one true church God established for salvation and not a cult as other Christians claimed.

Thus, it was during college that I first began to read the Bible regularly and pray more than five minutes a day. After attending NYTS, I started to understand my faith and the importance of salvation. During this time, I also realized that I needed a clear conscience before God if I wanted to draw closer to Him and worship Him (2 Tim. 1:3). After all, it is those who are pure in heart who will see God (Mt 5:8).

Furthermore, I knew that the sixth commandment says, "You shall not steal." Even though I wanted to justify my pirating by claiming that it was as harmless as jaywalking, it was still stealing. Nearly every piece of software, movie, or game that I had downloaded included a clear notice saying something along the lines of: "This material is copyrighted. Do not distribute without permission."

In order to have a clear conscience before God, I needed to stop pirating. I wanted to change, but I could not. I was addicted to pirating, which was deeply rooted in my everyday life. Every time I prayed, my conscience rebuked me, and I resolved to clean up my life. However, after each prayer, I would quickly shut out my conscience and avoid thinking about the fact that I might be sinning.

Finally, during the third time I attended NYTS, I made a determination to quit pirating. It was during that time that I realized that there was no greater meaning in life than to serve God, and there was no way I could serve Him if I could not face Him with a clear conscience. I knew what to do, but I was too weak. My willpower was useless when it confronted my desires. Thus, I prayed to God for strength throughout the two weeks.

Praise and thank God! By the end of NYTS, God gave me the strength to quit pirating. When I returned to my apartment, I immediately took all my stacks of CDs and DVDs and threw them in the dumpster. I completely removed the obstacle that had blocked me from God. At that time, I was filled with peace and joy because I knew I had done something that pleased God.

When I told my siblings and my friends, some were amazed that I had actually quit pirating, while others lamented because I could no longer supply them with materials. One friend even responded in bewilderment, "The sun has risen from the west!"

After I had thrown everything away, I began to find more strength to draw closer to God. For the first time in my life, I had the strength to read at least a chapter of the Bible every day and to keep this habit going for months without interruption. Similarly, I also began to taste the sweetness of prayer. It seemed as if the channel of communication between God and me had been fixed. Rather than being garbled and full of static as before, it was now audible and clear. The more I prayed, the more peace and joy filled my heart, and I could sense a power within me that changed and renewed me.

Through this experience, I realized that my pirating not only hindered my relationship with God, but it also put God to shame. My friends did not see me as a Christian; they saw me as a pirated software supplier. I was often their only "Christian" friend; yet my conduct hardly exhibited any Christian qualities. God helped me overcome my pirating habits, but there is still much for me to work on. If we have the heart to draw near to God, I am confident that He will give us the strength and guidance to do so.

May all the praise and glory be unto God.

PRAYING IN FRONT OF UNBELIEVING ROOMMATES

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THE PRAYER THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

One afternoon during the first week of college, I was sad when I heard that some of my fellow True Jesus Church college peers were too busy to attend our campus fellowship Bible study. It was only the first week of school. Perhaps they had more school assignments than I did, but their workload couldn't have been so heavy that they already couldn't spare an hour or two in their schedule to come before God. To me, it was a reflection of their priorities.

My heart was heavy and I wanted to pray. However, my roommate was in the room doing homework. Although I had already explained our prayer to her and she nonchalantly consented to my praying whenever I needed to, I still tried to pray when she wasn't in the room. But that afternoon, I no longer cared if she would be surprised at the sound of prayer; the only thing on my mind was that I needed to cry out to God to lift the burden on my heart.

I quickly asked my roommate if she would mind if I prayed, and she shrugged and said "Go ahead," so I thankfully knelt down to pray. As soon as I was before God, I started to cry in my prayer because I was worried that my fellow brothers and sisters would gradually push God further away in their new-found college freedom, forget Him, and pursue after the world.

I was also anxious that our campus fellowship would fall apart, as it did during previous generations, because the members became busy with their own lives. During my prayer, I desperately asked God to watch over us and to not let us forget His grace.

Suddenly, I felt warmth around me, as if someone were really hugging me. In shock, I opened my eyes to see my roommate praying beside me in silence with her eyes closed and her arms around me. I was so touched that she could look past the different way I prayed and show her concern by stopping what she was doing to pray with me. I felt God comforting me through her gesture of compassion and love. Then I cried even harder because I knew that God understood and that He was with me.

During that spontaneous afternoon prayer, I had my first experience with God in college. Since then, I have learned why continual prayer is so important. I would like to share with you three points why I believe that a consistent prayer life is necessary in every Christian's life.

WHY WE NEED A CONSISTENT PRAYER LIFE

One: Because the Holy Spirit helps us not to enter temptation and helps us in our weaknesses

As humans, we are created flawed, with weaknesses in God's design to allow us the chance to experience His love and power when we ask Him for strength. Lord Jesus encouraged us in Luke 22:40 to "pray that you may not enter into temptation." He spoke these words when He lived among us and experienced the weaknesses of the flesh. He warned the disciples to beware of the tendency to follow one's fleshly desires. How? Not through awareness, intelligence, or strength, but through prayer.

Romans 8:26 explains that the Holy Spirit "helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

We do not know what is to come or even what weaknesses we may have. God, however, knows and is willing to aid us when we turn to Him.

Two: To continue to grow and to experience God on our own

That afternoon prayer was the beginning of closer friendships with my roommate and with God than I could ever have imagined. I really thank God that He allowed me to cross paths with my roommate. She was one of my closest friends throughout college and remains so today, even after we have both moved home.

From my relationship with my roommate, I see parallels with how my relationship with God grew. My roommate and I spent countless hours talking about everything. Not only did our personalities complement each other, but talking about God, our faith, and our struggles also drew us closer.

Likewise, I put in more time and effort into talking to God. As I began to treasure my time in prayer, I began to understand Him first as a father who provided for me and then as a friend who walked with me day by day. I began to turn to God not only in times of trouble but in everyday events.

For example, I no longer had the help of my sister to correct my essays in college, so I learned to pray about my anxieties with writing essays. God heard me and helped me by bringing to mind different ideas to write about. There was one specific essay I fervently prayed about, and that was the time I received my first "A" on a college essay. That experience allowed me to see that I could tell Him everything, even the mundane, in prayer, and He would listen. He became a faithful friend who supported me time and time again.

Three: Because intercession is powerful.

Right after the moving prayer with my roommate, I had the courage to call my peers again and ask them to come to Bible study, not allowing myself to be discouraged if they were unwilling. Thank God that, beyond my expectations, they agreed without making any excuses and came regularly. From that day on, I witnessed the power of God changing their hearts and moving them to seek after Him. Remembering others in prayer is simple yet effective.

Looking back now, it is hard to believe how helpless and alone I felt a few years ago. In our campus Bible studies on Paul's letters, I learned from Paul how to consistently intercede for others. In Colossians 1:9, Paul demonstrates the way he and the apostles prayed for members when he said,

[W]e also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Our supplication on behalf of others may move God to grant them the strength they need or even save their souls.

OVERCOMING YOUR FEAR

Often, to have a consistent prayer life means praying before unbelieving roommates. There are many ways to approach the subject of how we pray with our roommates. The most direct and perhaps easiest way is to tell them you are a Christian and that it is a common practice to offer daily prayers. It is then very easy to explain to them exactly how we pray.

Other ways include turning a conversation onto the subject of religion by asking them about their religious beliefs, talking about the week and what you do on Sabbath, or sharing your past and including how God has guided you. Whichever method you choose, the best time to tell your roommate is

as early as possible. It allows them time to grow accustomed to the idea that you pray regularly and to expect the way you pray.

Of course, we need to be considerate of our roommates and try to make the situation comfortable for everyone. Some tips to consider: schedule your longer prayers when your roommate is out of the room so that you can pray openly and enter deeper into the Spirit in the prayer, and get up earlier or sleep later so that you can offer thanks before and after your day.

Even so, there will come a time when we must face our fears and pray before our roommates. Whether it is before we sleep, before a meal, or in times of great distress, we cannot put aside or postpone our prayers because prayer is simply vital to our spiritual survival.

Some people may not understand, others may be curious, but they will come to respect it as our way of living out our Christian faith. God will also see the desire in our heart to pray to Him and will open a way so that we have the opportunity to talk to Him heart to heart. He has already promised He will be with us in our lives. It is now up to us to respond and accept His offer.

Hear Him calling to us today:

Fear not, for I am with you;
Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with
My righteous right hand.
(Isa 41:10)

After building your hut, you'll start to notice evidence of other inhabitants on the island: footprints scattered across the sand, smoke rising skyward, noisy villagers off in the distance. For the most part, you'll feel a little curious—what are all the natives doing? *What are all these weird behaviors and customs I'm seeing? Tribal dances, intoxicating firewater, mass hysteria....* But with time, they start to become commonplace and regular occurrences.

The social aspect of college life will probably contain the greatest number of challenges to keeping the faith. As humans, we are naturally influenced by our friends and peers (CF. PROV 27:17). Many things that we may have been sheltered from in high school may become extremely attractive to us when we're first exposed, especially now that our parents aren't around to keep us accountable. Most of the time, we cannot control who our freshman roommates will be. Social interaction is unavoidable, but ungodly assimilation isn't. For this reason, in order to survive the temptations and enticements of college, we need to have a determined heart, exactly like how

TALKING WITH THE NATIVES

Daniel and his three friends *purposed* their hearts not to be defiled. *Purposed* **(CF. DAN 1:8).**

This attitude is vital. A youth member who proceeds carelessly, desiring to try everything, even toying with the lines of sin will most surely be maimed by the roaring lion **(CF. 1 PET 5:8)**. On the other hand, a youth member who proceeds with caution, knowing full well that the heart deceives beyond all measure **(JER 17:9)** and that Satan desires to snare

God's people, will be all the more able to survive his attacks—no matter how subtle. And indeed, many attacks will be subtle.

As you begin to establish and choose your routines and social circles in college, you should consider these three things Paul mentions to the Corinthians:

It is helpful or is it addicting (1 COR 6:12)**?** We shouldn't do things that may control us, like drunkenness, pornography, and drug use, which are all frequent tenants in college social life. These will suck the vitality out of our spiritual lives. We must cut off anything that will disqualify us from eternal life (MT 5:29-30).

Does it edify others or will it cause them to stumble (1 COR 10:23)**?** Even if something that is not sinful may be OK for you, it could cause others to stumble in their faith. We need to watch out for this too, especially if we're Religious Education teachers at church. Through our actions and choices, what kind of example are we setting for everyone else (1 TIM 4:12)?

Does it glorify God (1 COR 10:31)**?**
Ultimately, our lives should exude the fragrance of Christ. We are the salt and light of the world. Let us not be bound by the suffocating darkness around us. Rather, let us influence our peers and win them for Christ.

Finally, as you talk and interact with the natives, when temptations arise, don't forget that God always provides an exit plan. Many times it just requires our determination to flee our lusts and submit to God. Indeed, "no temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 COR 10:13).

Let's take a look at how other members lived with the natives.

PARTIES

Parties are a mainstay of college social life, but they do not have to be the foundation of yours. For example, I'd rather hang out with some good friends and watch a movie, snack on popcorn, and talk late into the night. I love the fact that I found an on-campus community that shares my preferences. We go out for dinner or concerts. Once in a while we hop on a train to explore the city.

You must be clear about your principles. You should never feel pressured to go to parties just because your new acquaintances invite you. Instead, search for those whose interests match your own. Be proactive about meeting people, whether through classes, clubs, or propping your door open so people can stick their head in and say hi.

I do have friends who party, and I'll go out with them once in a while. My friends understand that I don't drink and that I don't want a potential hook-up. Because they respect my wishes, we are able to have a ton of fun together. Parties, nevertheless, aren't the most edifying environments. There is often alcohol, irreverent music, and lots of sexual foreplay. This environment can wear you down, poking holes into your spiritual armor. For this reason, I rarely attend parties and am always prepared to say no to inappropriate situations.

I suggest, instead, that you offer fun and healthy alternatives. For example, you can go to the football stadium, lay in the grass, and look up as meteors course through the night sky. When you have a free afternoon, sit down and write funny stories together. Another option is to compete in a midnight three-legged race. You could try and explore little known parts of campus or try climbing that new rock wall. I have had a blast doing all this and more. There is so much to do on campus other than partying!

DRUNK ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

Drinking is a social lubricant that lowers inhibitions and allows people to bond quickly, but only at a superficial level. Although most of my friends and I don't drink, a few do. Despite this fact, mutual respect allows us to have fun together. There are times when I need to establish that I do not drink, especially when I meet new acquaintances, but I have never let myself feel pressured into drinking.

Ultimately, you decide who controls your life. I want the Holy Spirit—not some substance—to guide me. I want to edify God in my actions, not to dishonor His name in a moment of bad decision-making. Although drinking responsibly is acceptable (e.g. with a meal), for college students, abstaining is best.

A HEART COMPLETE

My former J2 classmates got together for a reunion the summer after my freshman year of college. The high schoolers asked us college underclassman several questions. Then we got to this one:

"What is the greatest challenge to your faith in college?"

"Relationships."

"Relationships."

"I have to agree, relationships."

We turned to each other and laughed. Interestingly enough, even though all three of us college students attended different schools, had had different experiences, and have extremely different personalities, some parts of our college experience remained the same.

I had chosen not to date during my first years in college. I hardly had enough time to do all that I did already—eat, spend time with friends, study, serve as an R.E. teacher, sing a cappella, volunteer, pray and read the Bible, sleep—a relationship would have been too time-consuming. I was also not ready. I was still learning about myself, still exploring, and not ready to step into the "real world" just yet. Most importantly, I wanted to completely give my heart to the man I marry, which would

be impossible if I carelessly gave it away time and time again. I also wanted my future husband to be able to give his heart completely to me.

At times, sticking to this resolution was difficult. College can be an isolating place. When I felt lonely, I wanted to have a boyfriend who could be there for me. However, if this was my motivation for having a boyfriend it was clearly selfish and wrong. I learned during my college years that feeling lonely is okay and that we can acknowledge this feeling and reach out to God. His love is sufficient for us.

On one occasion, I became too close to someone emotionally. This may seem like a harmless situation, but it could be as dangerous as a close, physical relationship. It hurt to say no to a good friend and then grow apart, but I know that I made the right decision. I am convicted that when it comes time to date and finally marry, he will be a brother in the Lord with whom I can serve the Lord. With God as the master planner, I need not worry.

FINDING PEACE IN AN UNLIKELY PLACE

As the resident advisor (RA) of a dorm who is Christian, I have been judged as being narrow-minded, especially when carrying out duties such as counseling individuals about intimacy or handing out contraceptives. I have even sat alone in the dining hall in order to avoid residents' accusations of favoring residents who are of my same race.

During my first year as an RA, my dormitory split into two cliques, which made my job increasingly difficult as one clique often harassed the other. Furthermore, even with earplugs, my rambunctious residents often woke me up before my alarm rang at 7 am, deliberately laughing and clapping loudly outside my room. While I was at church, they would have weekend parties. You can imagine what the residence hall looked like afterwards. Picture frames would be broken, couches covered with vomit, the dining hall a mess, cars keyed, and fire alarms set off. In spite of such occurrences, I tried to view the situation positively. An older sister once shared a wise saying with me: "You either pass the test the first time or you fail and have to repeat it." Naturally, I wanted to overcome this tribulation the first time, aiming to learn what God wanted me to. The process

was not easy, but with longer prayers and consistent Bible reading, I learned important life lessons and did not suffer in vain. Although other RAs may not encounter the same challenges, this was my experience.

I prayed for God's abidance because the ringleader of one of the cliques in the dorm had characteristics similar to the gunman from the Virginia Tech tragedy. He crafted morbid stories and openly shared his profound dislike for his parent. I was afraid that the resident, who happened to live across the hall, would shoot me in my sleep. I requested a room change, but the professor residing in the dormitory insisted that the resident was harmless. Still uncomfortable, I shared my situation with a church sister, who reminded me of God's protection. After that sister's encouragement, I determined to pray for God's protection and thank Him for spiritual friends to help me through this trial.

"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Rev 2:10)

Sometimes, I prayed for God's mercy to help me bear the resident's passive-aggressive, cult-leader behavior. Both fear and frustration from the resident did not go away immediately. In spite of the fact that he was once again my resident for another academic year (which was against my will) and I still disliked confronting him, the fear gradually subsided with longer prayers and Bible reading. When I saw him, usually for incessant noise violations, God gave me the courage to confidently speak with him. Truly, the wisdom and courage needed to face him came from God. As a result, I now try to set apart time for longer prayers, whether individually or collectively, such as with another church member.

"And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD." (Deut 8:2–3)

In addition to praying, daily Bible reading enabled me to rely on God amidst trials. The resident first began his series of attacks with a petition

to fire me. He collaborated with and peer-pressured other housemates to sign the petition, which resulted in more than half of my residents signing it. The professor at the dorm dismissed the petition and met with the ring-leader resident personally. Later on, some residents secretly apologized to me about signing the petition. In order to avoid awkward interactions with their roommates and other housemates, they joined the movement for solidarity in firing the RA. Needless to say, I was not fired. Another attempt to fire me manifested itself in e-mails sent to the entire house, stating that I was a racist RA. One of the residents claimed that I documented noise violations only for their clique while other noisy residents, of my same ethnicity, were not held accountable for violations. Consequently, the public slander influenced a few residents to question if I was fit to be an RA. Furthermore, that clique began to alienate and create an uncomfortable environment for students who seemed to be of my same race, making racist remarks at the other group. I was truly awed at how the ring-leader manipulated gullible or desperate-for-friends residents. The drama overwhelmed me sometimes, but I stuck to praying and Bible reading.

Several times, I had insomnia unless I read the Bible and prayed. One night I turned to a passage about the Israelites in the wilderness and how manna sustained them on the journey toward Canaan. For Christians today, spiritual manna, such as God's words, provide spiritual nourishment and sustenance. I had the manna, but I did not always fully take advantage of it. I generally read God's word, but as a Christian, I needed to live on and digest the Word of God in order to calm my spirits. So I thought about what I needed to "digest" in order to reconcile with the resident's previous attacks. One verse I often read was James 1:12: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." Even if I told God I was tired from a day of putting up with this resident and desperately wanted to sleep, only God could provide the peace for me to sleep soundly and have hope for a new day.

God gave me peace of mind and wisdom in times of suffering. The two and a half years with this resident finally came to an end. Meanwhile, I recalled one particular National Youth Theological Seminar in which a pastor repeated, "pain is a blessing." Even though I could not bear the suffering anymore, God taught me to rely on Him and remember that

He always has my well-being in mind. Looking back, I find James 1:2–3 to be a source of encouragement: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience". Originally, digesting this verse was hard because I was not joyful with RA matters. Still, through the encouragement of a sister, I realized that if my life were smooth, I would have no inclination to grow spiritually. Yet, through painful trials and lessons, God cultivated me.

Rather than change me directly, God gave me opportunities to mature spiritually and professionally. For example, in my final semester with this resident, his clique evaluated my RA performance negatively. According to the professor residing in the dormitory, that resident and his friends deliberately and strategically tried to hurt me. My first reaction was self-loathing because the residents' comments were harsh, but after praying to God and debriefing with the professor, I felt comforted. Of course, I could improve upon my job as the RA, but the evaluation was for my benefit, to reflect on my demeanor and mindfulness. Even today, I consider how I can better glorify God through my actions, such as being a better listener and a more patient person. I have also learned not to take unconstructive feedback personally. As a result, this long, drawn-out trial has taught me to faithfully endure and trust in God's guidance. In a way, I was forced to grow thicker skin.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Rom 8:18)

Finding peace in a chaotic place required a more concerted effort in praying and treasuring God's words in my heart. Especially as an RA, I could not have survived without our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was an example of one who would courageously confront wrongdoing, yet patiently correct others. In a secular place, I found it hard to be a Christian without consistent prayer and Bible reading because I could easily sin in my anger towards my residents. Thank God, with His mercy and grace, I was able to experience peace in college as an RA.

WAIT UNTIL YOU ARE READY

College years are a great time to meet people and make new friends. However, it may not be the best time to start a relationship. I witnessed many relationship dramas during my freshman year in the dorms; yet, I started dating during the summer before junior year. I spent hours on the telephone and online in a long-distance relationship. In retrospect, I wasted two years of my life because not only did my grades suffer, but I also didn't marry that person anyway.

Growing up in church, I have always been taught that you should not date until you are ready for marriage. I always brushed it off as old-fashioned advice. I think differently now. My spouse had never dated until we met, and I can tell that he came into the marriage without any emotional baggage. I wish I could say the same about myself. After my first breakup, I struggled for two years. Each relationship is a commitment, which means that you made room in your life and in your heart for this other person. After the breakup, there is a void left to be filled; so either you sulk or you pursue someone else to fill that void. Neither is pleasant nor optimal.

So, I hope you can learn from my mistake. People truly speak from experience when they say not to date unless you are ready for marriage. It may feel cool to have a significant other, and being in love is a wonderful feeling. However, the risks outweigh the benefits by far. I have known very few people who are determined enough to not let their grades suffer because of a relationship. The danger of committing sins is real (whether it is crossing the line of purity or, even worse, committing the mortal sin of breaking the seventh commandment). As the Bible encourages in Hebrews, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure" (Heb 13:4). It is far better to save yourself for marriage and enjoy love as husband and wife.

ON DATING IN COLLEGE

I had a high school boyfriend, and even though we went to colleges that were thousands of miles away from each other, we were both determined to run up our phone bills and keep our relationship going. Unfortunately, he did not accept my faith, and after two and a half years, he broke up with me in the middle of NYTS the summer after my second year in college. Needless to say, I was devastated, but I was relieved and thankful that God had guided me out of that relationship since I was powerless to break up with him. I was determined not to date again until I was ready to consider marriage, and realistically, that meant holding off on the dating scene until after college. Furthermore, after struggling with my non-believing boyfriend for more than two years, I made up my mind that the next guy I dated would be a True Jesus Church member.

After I returned to school in the fall, unexpectedly, a brother at the campus fellowship I attended caught my eye. We had been attending fellowship together since I started at that college, and there was never any attraction between us. Initially, I resisted my feelings for him because it was probably a rebound. However, my feelings for him continued to escalate and it started to become more and more obvious that I was distracted at fellowship. I didn't know what to do about my feelings. Focusing on my school work also became harder since I spent excessive time agonizing over whether he liked me or not and wondering if he would show up online so that we could chat. I don't remember if I prayed to God to help put this behind me, but I was able to find a way to cope. I first considered the reasons for liking him so much and decided to cultivate those traits in myself. For instance, he always managed his time carefully, making time to help out at church and campus fellowship; his time management inspired me to keep track myself so I could help out at church more also. He was also a very talented violinist, and since I also played violin, I spent more time practicing. Being bilingual, he also interpreted at church fluidly and accurately, which motivated me to read the Chinese Bible on my own and practice writing biblically-based phrases in Chinese. While my feelings for this brother didn't change, I channeled my anxious energy into something productive that enriched myself and contributed to church work.

Thank God, through His guidance, we eventually did get married. In retrospect, I realized the college years were a valuable time to grow in faith and cultivate spiritual virtues.

SPORTS AND PARTIES

From the beginning of college, I was a student-athlete on an NCAA varsity sports team and an intercollegiate club team. After two years, I decided it would be better to concentrate on academics, so I relinquished my status with the NCAA. However, I continued to participate on the club team, since practices and tournaments were not as time-consuming. During team parties, I would often find myself in situations where alcohol was easily accessible. In such situations, there are at least two obstacles to overcome. The first is your own desire to drink. The second is the pressure from your friends or peers to drink.

Concerning the former, I am blessed with not having a taste for alcohol, and even find the taste of it unpleasant. Thus, I never found the idea of drinking that appealing. However, for others who do not see eye-to-eye with me on this, the question then becomes, "What is the purpose of drinking?" "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify" (1 Cor 10:23). However, many people point out that Christ drank wine too, and thus was called a winebibber when He came eating and drinking (Lk 7:33–34). Additionally, the Bible rebukes drunkenness but not the consumption of alcohol. In understanding this, one must come to see that drunkenness is not a sudden onset that occurs after consuming a certain amount of alcohol, but a gradual process starting with drinking smaller amounts. Therefore, preventing drunkenness depends on each individual's self-control and awareness of what he or she is drinking. As we have been taught, the best way to not fall into temptation is to never encounter it in the first place. Following this reasoning, the best way to not mistakenly get drunk is to not drink in the first place.

Concerning the latter, I was not fortunate enough to be on athletic teams where my teammates felt the same way as I did, and I do not think that most people are. However, from my experience, people are much more understanding than we expect. At the beginning of my first semester,

both teams were having parties to welcome the freshmen. I was initially anxious about what would happen when I told everyone that I didn't drink. Of course, I thought that they would make me the topic of many jokes for a long time, but I found the opposite to be true. From their reactions, I found most people to be very understanding. The most challenging step was gathering the courage to stand firm instead of trying to sneak by with drinking a little bit or just completely folding. It also helps to befriend other students who feel the same way as you about drinking. I have found this to be a very effective way of avoiding the temptation to drink.

However, no matter what the circumstances are, we must always remember that we must rely on God's strength. Alone, we have no power to overcome temptations or stand fast in our beliefs. It is only by the grace of God that He strengthens us.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON GREEK ORGANIZATIONS (PART I)

MANNA ISSUE 54

In the United States, many college students are intrigued with joining fraternities and sororities. Often, the secretive nature of these organizations may arouse curiosity or lend it the façade of exclusivity.

But what is the reality of life as a "fraternity brother" or "sorority sister," and what are the spiritual consequences one encounters?

Although the exact types of temptations may not exist in each country, every student faces the same pressure to join activities that may lead us away from God. Two of our church's working youths, who were once fraternity and sorority members in college, share their insights in hopes that their experiences will help brothers and sisters make more informed decisions when considering which extracurricular activities to participate in.

Here, a brother shares his experience; a sister will share her perspective in the next issue.

What is a fraternity?

A fraternity is an organization where members focus on common interests, typically long lasting friendships, academic support, social networking, and community service. Along with sororities, they are also referred to as Greek organizations.

Why do people join fraternities?

The impression many people have is that college should be a time to party and enjoy their freedom. Greek organizations promise their members the most fun-filled college experience possible through meeting hundreds of people at parties each week, and many people are drawn to such claims. They want to explore beyond the boundaries that existed when living with their parents.

People may also believe that joining a fraternity or sorority allows them to become part of a family away from their family. While students relish their newfound independence from their families, they also seek acceptance by developing meaningful long lasting friendships with fellow students. Fraternities and sororities often describe the bond between its members as family, calling their members brothers and sisters.

Why did you want to join a Greek organization?

I wanted to join a Greek organization to meet people with the same goals. Also, joining a fraternity seemed to give me the perfect opportunity to network with those who had succeeded in the challenges that I was about to encounter in college. The fraternity members seemed extremely successful and in all honesty, it felt as if I would be joining an elite group of students.

How did you first hear about your fraternity?

My first exposure to the fraternity was through people I met in my classes. Through mutual friends, I became acquainted with members of the fraternity who seemed very intelligent and nice, which was contrary to the image of a stereotypical fraternity member that I had in my mind.

The fraternity was also very reputable across the country and well-respected by other organizations. What struck me was that the members attributed a large part of their individual success to the fraternity. In addition to their friendliness and enthusiasm, I felt I couldn't go wrong enjoying my college life with people who would help me to build up my academic career at my university as well as pave the way for my professional career in the future.

What are rush and pledge like?

Through rush, I quickly became acquainted with each fraternity member. In terms of the stereotypical perception of fraternity functions, during rush there weren't as many instances of excessive alcohol consumption or inappropriate activities as I had imagined.

Many of the events illuminated each member's passion about the things that he did for the organization and his ultimate goals after graduation. Each seemed so well rounded, goal-oriented, and driven. The graduating members all seemed to pursue graduate studies at top-notch universities around the world. I felt like I could really benefit from being around them.

I received a phone call from the fraternity on the last day of my local church's spiritual convocation. I was accepted as a pledge and asked if I was willing to accept. I was absolutely ecstatic that they had accepted me. Thinking that pledging the fraternity would not negatively affect my spirituality or my life in general, I immediately accepted the pledge invitation.

What happened during your pledgeship?

Besides the frequent social events, pledges had to attend two meetings every week, each lasting from one and a half to three hours. We were given time-consuming tasks to complete, such as planning social events for the fraternity, performing community service, and organizing professional development events. There were also events that occurred on the weekends, such as mandatory scavenger hunts and community service functions that lasted the whole day.

On top of this, during the first meeting, I was elected pledge class president, which placed additional pressure on me to lead my pledge class and dedicate twice as much time to my fraternity as my fellow pledgemates.

Although it crossed my mind that I was not managing my time well, I firmly believed that I would be able to balance the collective responsibilities of school, fraternity, family, friends, and spirituality without compromising any of them. However, I quickly realized that all of my free time was being dedicated to the fraternity. I even rationalized that this was such an important chapter of my life that my other responsibilities would have to accommodate my fraternity responsibilities. This was a reflection of my priorities being reshuffled at that time, with the fraternity being the most important aspect of my life.

Not surprisingly, my spirituality quickly took a backseat to my fraternity duties. Although I still attended Sabbath services on Saturday, I had a difficult time attending Friday evening services, weekly Bible studies, and campus fellowship. There was no chance that I could juggle God, family and friends, a part-time job, schoolwork, and fraternity without any of those responsibilities being ignored or mishandled.

What expectations did the organization have of you? How did they affect your other commitments?

Once you're in a Greek organization, no events are optional. You must dedicate your time to attending events to represent your sorority or fraternity and your pledge class. It's an endless commitment that encompasses the rest of your college career once you decide to join.

The fraternity took up an average of ten hours per week for me, which included only the mandatory events and not the "voluntary" events that I was expected to

attend. Prior to rushing my fraternity, I made the determination that after crossing over, I would not compromise my Sabbath attendance for fraternity events.

Sabbath worship was an integral part of my faith and because of all the stereotypical negative activities associated with fraternities, I was very sensitive to any activities that clearly compromised my faith. All the community service events were held during the day on Saturdays. A few times, I volunteered for the earliest possible time slot on Saturday mornings, 9 am–11 am In order to make it to Sabbath services, I would rush from volunteering to church, arriving late and with an unsettled heart.

When the events could not accommodate my Sabbath worship, I was stuck between a rock and a hard place. While I was able to decline events that directly conflicted with Sabbath worship, doing so was an arduous process. I would need to explain and justify to my pledge parents why I was not giving the fraternity my full dedication. The fraternity was not receptive to its pledge class president being absent from Saturday fraternity events.

Due to my repeated absence from fraternity events during Sabbath services, I was forced to attend all other fraternity events outside that timeframe. I was able to get away with making brief appearances at parties and other social events on Friday and Saturday nights. However, the burden of having to adjust my entire schedule around fraternity events was difficult to bear.

Review sessions with teaching assistants and classmates, meetings for group work, and other academic events would frequently come in conflict with fraternity events. Not surprisingly, my grades went down.

With the burdens continually increasing and the "fun" diminishing, I began to question the true value of the fraternity in my life. Due to the seemingly endless cycle between my classes, fraternity events, part-time job, familial responsibilities, church, schoolwork, and even more fraternity events, I didn't have even a moment to think deeper about whether this fast-paced lifestyle fit in with the real priorities in my life.

Did you feel any regret after you joined?

I enjoyed pledging and crossing-over into the fraternity because everything was new and fresh to me. After two semesters of involvement with the fraternity, that excitement disappeared. After

I officially crossed and became a "brother," I had expected that the time commitment and participation requirements would diminish, but no relief was in sight.

What was once fun became a terrible burden. I regretted placing too high a value on being a part of the fraternity. It didn't seem worth all the trouble and effort after becoming a member of the fraternity. Much of the benefits advertised to me were hollow.

I regret not being able to explore my university and all it had to offer. I missed out on a number of activities and organizations that I would have joined had I not committed myself to the fraternity. There are plenty of organizations that would have enabled me to pursue the same "benefits" — such as networking, job placement, and academic support — offered by a Greek organization without requiring the same commitment level.

There just isn't enough time in a given week for a pledge to fulfill his duties of spiritual cultivation, school, and the Greek organization, let alone the optional or leisure activities that he may wish to pursue as part of the "college experience."

Is it possible to remain pure and holy? What challenges did you face?

By participating in fraternity social events, I unnecessarily subjected myself to temptation simply by allowing myself to be put in an environment conducive to sin. Although I remained firm in abstaining from the alcohol and sexual immorality that my fraternity brothers often indulged in, there was still a strong temptation to become curious about those activities.

I was certainly putting myself at tremendous spiritual risk with the dangerous combination of poor time management, bad spiritual cultivation habits, and subjection to temptation. Despite remaining firm in abstinence, exposing my eyes to activities unwholesome to Christians defiled the purity of my heart.

The plain truth is, being in a sorority or fraternity consumes all aspects of your life, especially your spirituality. It created a vicious cycle where I would have less free time and less time to think about and draw nearer to God. I lost focus in all that I did.

I found myself drifting away from God and from one of the purposes of my college life: Instead of utilizing the golden opportunity that

God gave me during college to participate in my campus fellowship and the evangelical opportunities on campus, I was devoting far too much time to what I perceived to be of value.

Rather than developing a solid bond of spiritual friendship with my fellow brothers and sisters, I found myself often making excuses for why I was unable to attend any of the campus fellowship events. The campus fellowship would have provided me with a renewed mind and spirit through the study of God's word, the sharing, and praise sessions. Such peace and joy cannot be found in any other campus organization except the campus fellowship. The spiritual bond with brothers and sisters would have been very helpful when facing struggles in my college life.

What are your concluding thoughts about your experience?

Based on what I went through, I believe that college does provide students with the opportunity to truly experience the world. But it is also a journey of faith that can bring spiritual growth. We get to choose what kind of a college experience we have. It is important to reflect: Is my college experience full of eating and drinking or things of righteousness, peace, and joy? (Rom 14:17–19).

If the possibility of pledging a fraternity or sorority has reached your mind, take a moment to ponder and understand who you are, what God's will is for you, and what your ultimate goals on earth are.

Consider these questions:

- Why do I want to join a Greek organization? Is the Greek organization truly the appropriate channel for me to devote myself to?
- Will subjecting myself to impure environments and worldly influences be beneficial to my spirituality?
- Do I have commitments which already take up a majority of my time? Are there other campus organizations, part-time jobs, internships, volunteer opportunities, or church roles that I wish to pursue? Is adding a substantial time commitment detrimental to my existing responsibilities?

For many brothers and sisters entering college, much effort has been placed upon building up their spirituality. We have studied the Bible for years, we have prayed so hard for the fullness of the Holy

Spirit. Elder John encourages us to not lose these things we have worked so hard for (2 Jn 8).

God wants us to be able to receive the full reward. At the end of our college experience, we want to be able to receive our diplomas knowing that we've "fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7).

May all the praise and glory be onto our Father in Heaven.

GREEK LIFE TERMINOLOGY

- **Crossover**, or "crossing-over," refers to the special ceremony a Greek organization holds for new members (or pledges) to become initiated members of the chapter.
- **Pledge:** Upon receiving an offer to join a particular Greek organization and you commit to it, you become a "pledge." As a pledge, you are not a full member, but more of a probationary member. Pledges learn about the history and purpose of the organization and perform community service. Some pledges do not complete the pledgeship and do not join the organization, while those who complete it crossover.
- **Pledge Parents:** older "brothers" or "sisters" who take you under their wings to guide you as a new member.
- **Rush:** the name given to the somewhat involved recruitment process that anyone interested in joining the Greek system goes through in order to find the right affiliation for them. Rush occurs during the beginning of the semester or school year where fraternities and sororities recruit other students to participate in parties or events to draw people to want to join. Rush can be considered an open invitation to all who wish to know more about each organization.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON GREEK ORGANIZATIONS (PART II)

MANNA ISSUE 55

In the last issue, a brother recounted the spiritual consequences of his decision to join a fraternity during college. Now a sister shares her experience and perspective.

Why did you want to join a Greek organization?

I'm sure I am not the only person who feels I have lived a somewhat sheltered life. Coming from a conservative family, I felt I never had the chance to properly explore what the world had to offer the way my school friends did. Joining a sorority was an outlet to express the side of me that I thought had been "trapped" for the past 18 years.

Everything changed when I was accepted to a major university. An abundance of freedom was placed into my hands. No parents, no rules, no curfew!

At the time, I had just adopted my newfound faith in Christianity after receiving the Holy Spirit at the True Jesus Church. I had been baptized for one year when I started university. Not knowing how my world was about to change, I met a couple of nice sorority sisters during welcome week who invited me to attend an orientation session. At a school with a large student population, I wanted to start meeting people. The extremely friendly sorority sisters successfully persuaded me to participate in rush.

What was rush like for you?

I attended a "ladies night out" event at a hotel. After a nice dinner, there was a party for all the girls rushing the sorority. I felt a little apprehensive about joining the event but decided to give in since I enjoyed dancing. Without realizing what I had gotten myself into, I started down the path of becoming a "sorority sister" that night.

I was not comfortable with the fraternity brothers who were invited and felt as though the sorority was very much geared towards drinking, partying, and boys. I also saw something quite disturbing: a few rushees were subjected to uninvited groping by some of the fraternity boys while dancing with them. After expressing my concern to a few of the sorority sisters, they assured me that this was not normal

and that partying was only one aspect of the sorority among many other great things such as sisterhood and everlasting friendship.

I got a little closer to a few of the sorority sisters that night. They were all so well put together and seemed so confident and successful. Before I knew it, I was filling out an application to join the pledgeship program.

What happened during your pledgeship?

In the beginning, I enjoyed it. There was a continuous stream of fun events during which they showered me with gifts and love. I became more social and made a few friends. Then after about two weeks, the reality of sorority life began to show itself. With the fun came excessive drinking, partying, and meeting boys. I soon realized that this was the "networking" the sisters who recruited me were talking about.

I clearly remember nights when I would willingly take shots of hard liquor to represent my pledge class and to demonstrate how capable I was of holding down my liquor. Even the way I dressed completely changed. All of this new behavior meant changing my values and beliefs in order to belong to this new world that I was now a part of. I feel that for those three years, I gave up God for the world (Jas 4:4).

Week after week, there were endless "exchanges" (parties) with other Greek organizations in the surrounding areas. These "exchanges" soon became monotonous while negatively affecting my schoolwork. Because the sorority consumed so much of my time, I was forced to make my studies a secondary priority.

These parties were also on Friday nights. Being newly baptized, I did not realize the importance of Sabbath evening worship service. I often came home at 2 am in the morning and woke up around noon. In addition to Friday night "exchanges," almost every Saturday there would be some sort of community service work or another social outing.

I explained that I needed to attend church on Saturdays. They told me that they understood but still made me feel guilty about missing sorority events. I was told that if I was not there, it would negatively affect my pledgemates.

I was lucky if I made it to Sabbath morning service even once a month. When I did have the opportunity to make it to Sabbath, I felt uneasy because I knew in my heart

that I was living two separate lives. Six days a week, I lived in a world of darkness. One day of the week, I struggled to hold onto my faith. At this point, the cycle seemed endless and my spiritual well-being already lost. It was hard to have the heart to serve God with a sorority pulling you the opposite direction.

What effect did the sorority have on your spiritual life?

When you're in a Greek organization, you undergo tremendous pressure to adapt yourself to your environment. You choose to engage yourself in a fierce spiritual battle, effectively jeopardizing your spiritual life. When you join a Greek organization, temptation lurks around you 24/7. You will often be in an environment filled with raucous music, foul language, and unedifying activities of this world.

Sin does not occur randomly. James 1:14–15 tells us that,

each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; when it is full-grown, brings forth to death.

The bottom line is, no matter how strong our spirituality is to begin with, the social environment we place ourselves in will have a direct effect on our values and our spirituality.

We first place ourselves in the situation, and then we come to accept those around us and their actions. After that, we are slowly enticed by our own desires to participate and explore. No matter how we look at it, when we are surrounded by evil, sin will be born.

I once heard a story about how to kill a frog. Rather than placing the frog in boiling water, place the frog in a container of cool water. The frog will be happy in its new and different environment. As the water becomes warmer and the frog adapts to the temperature, it loses its sensitivity to the rising heat. Before the frog knows it, the water boils and it is too late to jump out.

In the same way, the warm water of a sorority or fraternity becomes a part of your life and you reach a boiling point where you can no longer distinguish what's right and wrong in the eyes of God. This is the same situation that I faced, but because of God's mercy and guidance, I was able to leave this lifestyle before sin led to death.

What finally made you decide to leave the sorority?

The thought of leaving the pledge program crossed my mind several

times. However, leaving is actually very hard. First, the pressure to stick it through comes from your pledgemates, who want you to continue the program with them. Second, there is pressure from the active members. Third, I was curious whether it would be as great of an experience as they promised. Lastly, even though I knew I was not on the right path in terms of achieving my ultimate goal of salvation, I led myself to believe that it was only for a year. Next year, I could strive to be "holy" again and try to make it up to God for how I behaved this past year. This attitude is not pleasing to God, as recorded in James 4:13–17:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

I figured that things would be different after I crossed and that the expectations to attend meetings and events would end. But it didn't. In a sorority, you spend all day planning for social events and going to parties. I was starting to see that these events were a complete waste of time and took me back to a world without purpose and meaning.

After crossing, the events continued and the following years held the same commitment level, if not more. Now, I was expected to take care of a pledge family of my own. I had absolutely no time for my family, friends outside of the sorority, and especially God. I left during my third year because it was clear to me that my sorority had nothing to offer me but a life full of sin.

CONCLUSION

I know that joining a sorority was not the right choice, and I thank God that I can share my experiences today with those who are curious about joining a Greek organization. Most people join a Greek organization thinking that they will be in control of what they want or do not want to do. They believe that they will be affected only if they allow themselves to be. However, I would discourage any sister from joining a sorority because when you do, you become someone else. You compromise

your identity whether you intend to or not.

In the end, I can only wholeheartedly and humbly thank God for pulling me away from the darkness. For three years, I was not living a Christian life in the way I dressed, acted, and supported unedifying activities. During that time, I was covered in sin and felt I could not face God.

Thank God that through my university's campus fellowship, He slowly brought me back to His fold. By His grace, He arranged for caring brothers and sisters to nurture my spirituality during my last year in college. Having lived the sorority life allowed me to truly realize how empty my life would be without God and how much I need Him. Like the prodigal son, I did not realize how precious it was to be one of God's children. We are each precious vessels of God whom He chose to be sanctified (1 Thess 4:4), and we should cherish our position.

May all the praise and glory be unto our Father in heaven.

CHOOSING FRIENDS WISELY

MANNA ISSUE 36

Once we move on to college, we have to make a lot of decisions for ourselves. We have to decide what bank to open an account with, what major to study, and who to spend our time with. That last decision may be the most pressing when we first enter the college scene. As Christians, we ought to include God in our major decisions, such as choosing what kind of people to be our friends. How do we choose our friends from such a diverse student body? Is it really important to find a friend in the church close to school?

When we think about these questions, let us see what advice God has given us in the Bible.

He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thess 5:10–11, NIV)

One of the goals of friendship is to build oneself up in character and integrity, pleasing in the eyes of God. What better place to find a friend than in a place where all the people your age are striving toward

that goal? The first place you should look for friends is in your local church.

DO I REALLY NEED FRIENDS THAT SHARE THE SAME BELIEFS?

Yes, you do. Why? Well, ask yourself, do you want to hold onto the values you have learned from studying the Bible and attending church? Do you want to keep yourself pure from the unwholesomeness in this world? If the answers are yes, then you need to find friends that share similar Christian beliefs.

Despite what we may think of ourselves, we are influenced by the environment we live in and the people we deal with. If a person constantly exposes himself to an environment where morals are lax and godliness is of little importance, very slowly, he will begin to think that certain things are okay to do, for "evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Cor 15.33).

The Bible was not written in the 21st century, and does not specifically address issues that are present in our daily lives. Questions like, is dating in college acceptable? Are we allowed to drink alcohol? Is it okay to go to a gathering where people might get rowdy? Is it okay to go to a review session instead of going to church? The Bible doesn't give us clear-cut answers. These kinds of situations sit in the "gray" area between right and wrong. Think of it like a delicately balanced scale: on one hand, the Bible doesn't explicitly say that skipping service to attend a much needed review session is wrong, but on the other hand, attending church service helps us to build our relationship with God. Depending on your faith, the scales may seem equally balanced, and your choice of friends can tip the scale ever so gently in one direction or the other. Hanging with a crowd of people who are determined to do what is pleasing to God will definitely help tip the scale in the right direction. If evil company can corrupt good habits, then surely virtuous company can nurture good habits. The church community is a great place to begin looking for "good company."

It's one thing to say you'll make some friends at church, and another thing to actually do it. In reality, sometimes there are obstacles to that ideal. For example, you may find that some church youths get on your bad side, or very simply, you don't feel a connection to the youths at the local church.

WHAT IF I CAN'T FIND ANYONE IN CHURCH I CAN RELATE TO?

If this is the case, you first need to examine yourself. Do you have a tendency to avoid people that don't share the same interests and activities? Do you have expectations of Christians that the church people you come in contact with don't seem to fulfill? Are you an "initiator," or do you wait for someone else to initiate a relationship?

After some reflection, you may notice that you say "yes" to some of the questions above. This doesn't mean that there is something wrong with you; rather, it presents something that you can do to get to know people at church. We can't demand that people be our friends, so the only thing we can do is to demand from ourselves that we be friendly.

If you are disillusioned with the people at church, you need to realize that spiritual perfection is a goal that takes an entire lifetime to pursue. In all likelihood, the people at church, including you, are "works in progress"; we all have imperfections that need to be ironed out. Since this is the case, try to be understanding, and not judgmental, of one another's shortcomings. Instead of shunning a group of imperfect youths, be united and encourage one another to pursue spiritual growth. In short, spiritual imperfection is not to be treated with disdain but, rather, with love and understanding.

Next, make a conscious effort to try to get to know people at church. In the same way that your character cannot be fathomed after one meeting or conversation, it takes time and effort on your part to get to know other people. When I first arrived at the local church near my university, I often kept to myself and avoided situations with people that could be potentially awkward. I thought to myself, *I'm new here, how come no one seems to notice me or show that they care about me?* There were also some habits in the youth group that bothered me beyond words. I would get upset at church people in my heart, and wish that I could return to the church I grew up in. As a result, I almost never attended youth fellowship or any after-service activities; every Saturday I'd go back to the dorms and do my own thing.

After a year of being disillusioned with the youths at this particular church, I found out that many of them were going through tough episodes in their lives: some had not received the Holy Spirit and were discouraged, and others were having family problems.

It suddenly occurred to me that in the duration of that year, I did not make an effort to know the people around me. Apparently, I wasn't the only one with problems; other people had issues in their lives, and I was so caught up with myself, I didn't even take the effort to address their needs. After that, I made an effort to attend fellowships and choir practice and got to know some of the youths better. From these simple church activities, I made some friends, and those friends got me through some of the toughest times of my life. And all I had to do was to decide to focus less on myself and more on other people.

"He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend" (Prov 22:11). A friendly, considerate person is more likely to have friends than a person who isn't. It'll take some effort to open yourself up and take the initiative towards friendship, but it is definitely worth your while. Having a few brothers and sisters as close companions will help you grow in your faith in God and be a source of encouragement for you when you feel discouraged.

DO I NEED FRIENDS OUTSIDE OF CHURCH?

Even as you build up friendships in church, it is also necessary to make friends outside of church. Making friends in the campus environment helps you gain an understanding of people from all around the world and from different backgrounds. Ultimately, having that understanding will shape how you, as a Christian, relate and communicate your beliefs to those around you. The Lord Jesus did not pray to the Father that He should take us out of this world (Jn 17:15); rather, He commanded that we go into it to share the good news with other people (Mk 16:15). The friendships you make will broaden and deepen your understanding of people's struggles, their needs, and how faith fits into the picture. In the end, they can give you the opportunity to touch others' lives.

In all likelihood, you will spend more time with your friends at school than those at church — which means that you have to choose them all the more carefully. There are many people out there who can be positive role models by showing you how to work diligently towards a goal, or be dedicated to a worthy cause. In the same way, there are people out there who won't be good influences. In either

case, we need to acknowledge that we are influenced to some degree by the people we befriend, and that they may shape our values or views. So what should your approach be? How can you keep your footsteps pleasing to God while mingling with people whose lives are not necessarily oriented around Him?

CHOOSING FRIENDS FROM AMONG CLASSMATES

First, you need to decide for yourself what kind of person you want to be. As a Christian, you want to preserve the values and principles set in the Bible, and pursue worthwhile goals, such as being charitable or acquiring knowledge to help improve the world around you. Look for people who are like-minded and strive for similar goals. There are plenty of non-Christians out there whose lifestyles do not contradict Christian values and who work to improve the environment around them. Befriending them can become a positive influence on your life and help you to achieve your goals.

While I was in college, I really wanted to learn how to use my time efficiently and constructively and to avoid laziness. I was fortunate enough to meet people who knew how to squeeze the most out of their day; they studied, volunteered with the honor society, and even played sports or instruments. After seeing how they could divide up their time so carefully, I was able to divide up my time in a more streamlined fashion to do schoolwork, church work, and other extracurricular activities. Being around people who weren't lazy really helped motivate me to make the most of my day.

Undoubtedly, you will encounter people on campus who have grown up in environments quite different from your own. While you ought to be open-minded towards other lifestyles and cultures, you must also be cautious. You need to choose friends who will respect your Christian beliefs and allow you to be the individual you want to be, as opposed to shaping you to be like them. Remember to stick up for yourself, while respecting the beliefs of your peers. Mutual respect is one of the things that keep two friends together for the long run.

NEVER COMPROMISE WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN

When you first start interacting with your peers, there is a period of time when you find out about each other and discover what kinds of

things you would or would not do. During this initial phase of your friendship, be sure to set forth your values and beliefs with surety and without flinching. It is much easier to be frank at the beginning about something that could become awkward than to wait a long time before addressing the issue.

I had two roommates my first year in the dorms. I liked them a lot because they were very friendly and easygoing; however, they had some not-so-good habits, like clubbing Friday night until the wee hours, drinking, and having the occasional joint. They weren't "bad" people, but the things they did were not "beneficial," as Paul would put it. The interesting thing was, even though the three of us were pretty open with each other, they never asked me to go clubbing with them or drink or smoke with them. We did go out for ice cream and candy together, shop for CDs, and celebrate special occasions together.

Why the distinction? They knew I was Christian. They saw the Bible on my desk and knew I read it and knew that I was a consistent churchgoer. Because of these things, it went without saying that I would not go clubbing with them, nor would I drink or smoke with them. Simply by setting down my religious beliefs and life principles right from the beginning and sticking to them consistently, I avoided situations in which I would be presented with an opportunity to do something that would be displeasing to God. In the same way, if you establish your boundaries clearly with your school friends right from the start, you can avoid being tempted to do things you wouldn't otherwise do. Avoiding temptation is a lot easier than dealing with it when it hits you head-on. Picking the right friends in school helps you avoid facing temptation all the time.

CHOOSING FRIENDS WISELY

Choosing friends is a life-changing decision. Many things that happened in my life were a direct result of the people I chose to be my friends. The wise choice ultimately come from knowing who you are, realizing how you have anchored your life, and recognizing what is its core. "He died for us so that... we may live together with Him." If we keep this as our purpose, then in every new situation or every new encounter we will never really stray from that goal.

KEEPING YOUR IDENTITY

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MANNA ISSUE 37

I caught myself talking the other day and, to my horror, I realized that I sounded like one of my middle school students. Spending time day in and day out with thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds is somehow rubbing off on me. I'm also losing my Scottish accent little by little and acquiring more of an American accent. This isn't a bad thing, but losing my accent makes me feel like I'm losing part of my identity. I've been trying very hard to maintain my accent, but it's been a struggle.

Likewise, as Christians, we spend most of our day with friends and classmates. We need to constantly examine our speech and conduct so that we do not adopt worldly attributes and lose our Christian identity. Here are a few tips on maintaining our Christian identity at school or at work.

KNOW OUR ROOTS

We all have an identity. We know who our parents are, what our nationality is, and where we come from. Some people, to better understand their lineage, delve even deeper into their roots and study the genealogy of their family.

Knowing our lineage helps us understand who we are today. As Christians, it is vital that we know our roots and spiritual lineage. So what is our spiritual lineage?

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Pet 2:9)

Our spiritual lineage stems from being "a chosen generation." We have obtained mercy, we have been justified and purified, and we are now the temple of God (1 Pet 1:12; Gal 4:7; 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19–20). Our spiritual lineage was established when our Lord Jesus Christ turned us from "darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" so that we may "receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in [Him]" (Acts 26:18).

Our spiritual lineage makes us Christians today. It is important that we know what our spiritual lineage stands for and that we live up to our identity as Christians.

Nehemiah 7 records how God asked Nehemiah to register by family those "who came back from

the captivity" (Neh 7:6). Among those who returned were three families of priests who were unable to identify "their father's house nor their lineage" (Neh 7:61). As a result, "they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled" (Neh 7:64).

Not knowing our heritage may cost us our spiritual priesthood, as it did these three priestly families in the Old Testament.

When I finished high school, I was very excited because I was about to embark on the next stage of life—university. To my dismay, my exam results did not permit me to go to the university of my choice, so I took a "gap year" and spent that time working and studying.

In retrospect, I realize that it was God's will that I did not go to university that year, although it took me a while to grasp this. The extra year allowed me to understand my relationship with God better and pinpoint the state of my faith. At eighteen, my faith was still immature and I wasn't ready to handle life away from home. God knew better, and He kept me at home another year to establish my faith and to clearly identify my spiritual roots. Without that year, it would have been extremely difficult for me to uphold my faith at university.

KEEP OURSELVES PURE

Nowadays drugs, sex, and alcohol seem to be the norms of student life and of society in general. Many people use these addictions to drown their sorrow, seek happiness, or escape the emptiness of their lives. They have lost their identity, not knowing who they are and what they are doing.

As Christians, our beliefs and values often run contrary to society's norms. But we cannot allow the diminishing values of society to make us compromise our faith. Instead we need to firmly fix our eyes on Jesus and keep ourselves from evil.

I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness. (Ps 101:3–4)

While Joseph was in Egypt, he held firm to his beliefs and stayed true to his spiritual lineage. Although he was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he did not give in to physical gratification. He knew that the temporary satisfaction would eventually lead to his spiritual demise.

Daniel also lived in a foreign land filled with delicacies and all things

pleasing to the eye, but he did not conform to their indulgences. Instead, he determined to keep himself pure and refused to defile himself with the king's food.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, not with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. (Dan 1:8)

Daniel dared to be different, to stand out. In order to keep ourselves pure, we also need to have this daring attitude—to stand out, to be different, and to uphold God's principles.

There are some youths I know who have mixed in with the wrong crowd. If I did not know them personally, I would not have known that they were Christians. They have adopted the worldly ways of their friends—they smoke, dye their hair, and date around. Many of them do this because all their friends are doing it, and they don't want to be different.

It is vitally important that we choose our friends wisely and that we do not end up in the wrong crowd. "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray" (Prov 12:26). Our friends could be the weight that tips our balance in the right or wrong direction.

BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE

I notice that my colleagues never curse in front of me, and when they do, they apologize for doing so. Knowing that I am a Christian and that I do not curse has somehow rubbed off on them. They respect my beliefs and principles, and they do their best to act likewise when I am around. I'm sure that many other Christians have experienced similar situations.

We need to uphold our identity in a way that glorifies the Heavenly Father. We should never allow worldly identities to rub off on us. Rather, we should allow our Christian identity to be a positive influence on the people around us. Jesus teaches us, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

To ensure that we are not compromising our Christian identity and instead shining the light of Christ, we need to constantly examine ourselves. Do wholesome words come out of our mouth? Do we use our mouth to bless or to curse?

Does our conduct reflect Christ? Do we dress modestly or provocatively? James says,

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.
(Jas 3:10–13)

There was a sister whose spiritual life was revived through the positive influence of church brothers and sisters. This sister had a very busy social life when she was in high school. Wild parties, loud music, bad company, and a flashy dress sense ruled her life. She was caught up in a life where her true identity in Christ was slowly withering away.

When this sister entered university, she began to change. She started to attend church services more frequently and established close friendships with church youths. They reflected Christ in them, which slowly rubbed off on her. This sister now truly lives for Christ and continues to bear much fruit for Him. During her university years, she stood her ground as a true Christian soldier. This ultimately allowed her to hold on to her faith and keep her spiritual lineage.

Another sister used to stand at the door after lectures to see if anyone was interested in studying the Bible with her. Most people weren't interested, since they were rushing off to a party or some other social event. But this sister was persistent. She had determined to share the gospel with others, and she stood firm in her determination. She knew her identity, understood her beliefs, and appreciated the value of her life.

Jesus said, "Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves" (Lk 10:3). We are indeed lambs among wolves. We need to be as pure as doves and wise as serpents. We need to show that we belong to Christ.

Do not conform to the world. Instead, dare to be different.

In order to cling to our Christian identity, we might need to break with the norm and even make some sacrifices. It definitely isn't

easy upholding our beliefs in a crooked world. But since we know our heritage, it's important that we uphold our spiritual lineage and stand our ground. "It's not always easy to fight the good fight, but it is always good, and it is always right" (Glenda Fulton Davis).

May the Lord continue to guard our hearts and minds and guide us all in our endeavors to cling to Him, and to leave behind a beautiful Christian legacy.

MAPPING THE ISLAND

CARTOGRAPHY 101
DR. F. MAGELLAN

An introductory survey course of map-making. Longitude and latitude, Cartesian map representations and projections, surveying basics, historical approaches, modern approaches, satellite imagery, and digital techniques. PREREQUISITES: NONE

Exploring and mapping your island may be the most challenging but also the most rewarding portion of thriving on it. There are so many unknown territories—each day's explorations uncover new treasures and new resources. You definitely won't be able to explore and map it all before you have to leave. New species of flora and fauna highlight each day's expedition. One day you may discover a waterfall, the next, a natural fruit orchard.

College courses have the same adventurous and enlightening effect as an explorer on an unknown island. A wealth of new ideas and philosophies await your eager mind. Surely, with each course, you start to master your field of concentration. With each professor, you gain fresh perspectives for looking at the same subject. You will acquire new techniques and skills. Your analytical, verbal, and writing skills will all improve.

Of course, this does not come with ease. There will be times of stress, confusion, anxiety, and of despair. Circumventing the island may cause you to become and feel lost at times, just like your studies may. There will be times where you may start to question everything: your school, your major, your goals, even your faith. Academia will call you to question and deconstruct societal norms to determine your own truth. But what is truth? Remind yourself of Paul's encouragement here: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through

philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (COL 2:8-10). Remind yourself that the Holy Spirit who lives in you is living and personal.

As Christians, how do we handle our studies and also live a balanced life? How do we go about relying on God in our academics? How do we face unbiblical "truths" that are taught in class? There are so many ways to get lost! Let's learn from the experiences of our peers.

RELYING ON GOD IN OUR STUDIES

I have a reoccurring experience every semester. By the fourth week, some classes already have exams. Then, exams after exams continue before the final exam arrives. Every semester, I find myself in the same situation, sitting deep in the library, cramming, wondering if this is worth all the trouble, wanting to give up. Every semester, I go through the same struggle. Yet, every semester, I find that God pulls me through and makes it all worthwhile.

It is so easy to study for and take exams by relying on our own strength. It is even easier to look at the outcome of the exams and think that it was through our own strength, and in doing so build up our pride. But the truth is that I have no strength. By myself, I am nothing but an empty vessel. Time after time, when I find myself struggling to go on, the answer again lies in the object of my trust. Do I trust in God? Am I relying on His strength? My thoughts are often clouded with arrogance and pride, leading me to not realize that every exam that I take must be completely surrendered to God.

Conversely, does this mean that we don't have to study at all? If so, we have forsaken our God-given identity as students. Even though this lesson of relying on God seems so simple, it is something I needed to relearn many times, and in the future, both near and a bit more distant, I will most likely need to refresh myself of this again. It is difficult to break out of this cycle of studying and seeking God since our minds are consumed with studying. However, something that can help us escape this pattern is simply to remember that everything, even our academic lives and exams, is completely in the hands of God. He is in control of our lives, and knowing that God is in charge, we should wholly rely on Him.

A LESSON IN PERSPECTIVE

Though I know this experience will not apply to everyone, I think it may strike a chord with students who have excelled and over-achieved in all they have done—high SAT scores, valedictorians, Ivy Leaguers, honor programs, full scholarships, and the like. On the other hand, if those don't

apply, whenever you do feel over-stressed with projects, papers, or exams, I hope you can relate and be edified:

Entering my junior year (fifth semester) in university, thanks to God's blessings, I had achieved a 3.99 GPA (out of 4.0) and was feeling really good about my grades and my engineering studies. However, as junior year started, the coursework seemed to get a lot harder. For the first time, I struggled with multiple classes and could tell I was below par. Up until that point in time, I had always done well in school. I was confused and annoyed with myself because I wasn't slacking or neglecting my studies. I started to feel an immense pressure to keep my near-perfect grades up. I was also not used to being below the curve. Suddenly, it was as if losing a 4.0 was the only thing I could think about that semester.

As the semester progressed, my grades got even worse, and with each exam, I realized that the 4.0 was now an impossibility. Consequently, I started to feel stressed and depressed. Looking back, though I didn't start college this way, four semesters of academic success made me obsessed with my perfect grades. Grades were the world. Grades were the meaning of life. I demanded perfection from myself.

Rather than first seeking the kingdom of God, my prayers also became mostly about school and grades. I had lost sight of what the purpose of education was. I had lost sight of glorifying God in my university life and only sought to glorify myself.

During the last weeks of the semester, we started to take final exams. I felt a lot of worry and stress because of my grades—C's were real possibilities in two of my classes. My only hope was to do well on my finals to boost my grades and hope for B's.

In this period of finals stress, we all were saddened to learn that a beloved young church brother passed away suddenly at the age of 14. What sobering and shocking news! And what a rude awakening I had! In the shadow of death, suddenly life came back into perspective. I realized life isn't just about grades—when I am on my death bed, I'm not going to be worrying about how I got a C in my 300-level course back in my junior year and how that messed up my GPA forever.

Rather, I'll be worrying about how I will be able to face God. I'll be wondering, *Am I ready? Will God receive me?* The death of a beloved young

church brother taught me the proper life perspective. Sometimes it really helps us to see the end of the journey in order to know how to properly make the journey.

Suddenly the stress of finals did not burden me any longer. I knew I already tried my best and "this too shall pass." I knew I could entrust the rest to God; His grace is already sufficient for me. I really thank God for this lesson I learned in college.

STUDY AND PRAYER

As a conscientious student in high school, I determined to be the same in college. As it turned out, college was significantly harder than high school. Even the subjects I excelled at in high school, such as math and physics, were challenging for me.

During my second semester, I was taking a computer science class that forced me to rethink programming in ways I had not before. I would re-read paragraphs in the textbook for 15 minutes, and still not grasp the programming concept. I remember one Sunday morning, I was reading in my bunk bed, and was utterly confused and frustrated with a chapter in the computer science textbook. The following day I was going to be tested and I still did not understand the chapter. So, I knelt down and made a short prayer, asking God to help me understand this one concept. After I prayed, I fell asleep, and the moment I woke up, I understood the chapter that I had been reading over and over again.

That was not the only time in which God helped me survive the exams in college. I often prayed, asking God to help me identify which concepts were important out of the many that we were expected to know. Amazingly, exams would include more concepts I studied in detail, as opposed to ones I did not study as thoroughly. After all, only God knows what is going to be on the exam, and by relying on Him, I let Him guide me on what to study. Even though a college exam may seem insignificant compared to other events going on around the world, God cares about each of us and will look after these insignificant things as well. "For His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He cares for me" (His Eye Is on the Sparrow, Civilla D. Martin).

DUSTING THE MIND

Who could have imagined that going to college would be like opening Pandora's box? As I walked into the classrooms, my mind was suddenly and completely flooded by a tsunami of new ideas. Some were intriguing and inspiring. Others were threatening and disturbing. They pushed me to question values I had upheld since I was a child. I noticed that concepts which were at odds with my beliefs were strangely alluring.

One of the first classes I took as part of my General Education (GE) requirements was an astronomy class. I was fascinated by the way stars are formed and how they eventually die out. I was intrigued by the idea that humans are made of the same element as stars—carbon. Facts about planets, comets, satellites, and black holes helped feed my awe at God's astounding creation. At the same time, many of the underlying scientific theories confused me. They seemed to contradict Christian views of a universe created and sustained by God. I enjoyed the class but struggled to accept many of the concepts. I asked myself how I could reconcile the Big Bang with Genesis chapter 1. Was it ignorant to hold on to Scripture? Was agreeing with science a betrayal of my faith? Was there a middle ground?

As time passed and I took more college courses, I realized that the flood of new ideas was an ongoing process. Some ideas validated the worldview and habits I had due to my upbringing as a Christian. Other concepts transformed my perspective. And yet other ideas forced me to make a critical choice between what I believed and what was generally accepted by society or the scientific community.

When you come to this stage of your college life, should you readily accept ideas that are part of the mainstream intellectual current, or should you filter the flow?

Let me share some of the ways I learned to manage the avalanche of ideas.

1. Examine the nature of your thoughts (Ps 139:23–24)

You can start with a series of reflective questions: What are you thinking? What does it say about you? What does it say about others? What does it say about the world around you? What does it say about the God

you believe in? What does it say about the course of your life? Is it bringing you closer to God or distancing you from Him?

Our thoughts are the drivers for our actions. What the mind proposes, the body puts into practice. If our minds are filled with resentment and anger, our behavior will naturally become contentious and unforgiving. If our minds are filled with kindness and gratitude, our conduct will be gentle and appreciative.

One preventive measure against a dirty, cluttered mind may be to examine your thoughts more closely. Pay attention to ideas, emotions, or actions that seem questionable or make you feel uncomfortable or even shocked. You may have heard a striking assertion made by a professor, or seen a classmate's addictive behavior. The discomfort that you experience could be warning signs that these are in conflict with your Christian values.

At times, it may be difficult to see our own thoughts objectively. We may justify them rationally or overlook their impact. God, however, has soul-sight. He can look through our callous façade and observe our anxious thoughts and offensive ways. The Lord can see our desire to be faithful and our fear of not fitting in. Let God show you the true composition of your thoughts.

2. Forsake your evil thoughts (Isa 55:6–8)

Once you have identified and captured thoughts which are not in line with your Christian standard (which is based on God's law), you must exile them from your mind. Of course, this is easier said than done.

One way to expel unhealthy thoughts is by physically blocking the stimulus. For example, if a certain image spurs an onslaught of inappropriate thoughts, you can turn off the TV or close the webpage. If someone is expressing a statement that may be offensive, walk away. A second way to banish unclean and unwholesome thoughts is by replacing them with a Bible verse or a hymn. This not only prevents you from going down the wrong path but also lifts you to a higher state of mind.

3. Make room for God in your mind (Ps 10:2–4)

When your room is cluttered, there is little space to access what you really need or to bring in an essential piece of furniture. In the same way,

when your mind is filled with secular subjects, God can barely set foot past the door.

The evil desires of our heart are strewn everywhere like dirty laundry. Our greed and selfishness are the stale slices of pizza underneath our bed. Our complacency hangs like cobwebs in the dusty corners. Our pride is the pile of boxes blocking the doorway.

How can this mess be cleaned? The process begins through acknowledgment of what is wrong. Hold evil desires to the bright lamp of righteousness. Throw greed and selfishness into the bin of contentment and conscientiousness. Dust complacency away with a willing heart for service. Put pride out on the curb of humility. Clear out past shortcomings and fill yourself with Christ's qualities.

One way to get rid of the unhealthy clutter is to take one action a day. In the same way that a room is not filled with garbage overnight, it may require more than one day to clean out the bad and make room for the good. If you struggle with anger, the next time someone says or does something that upsets you, try to remain silent and consider things from the other person's perspective. If you struggle with laziness, put away something that enables that behavior, such as a TV remote lying close to the sofa. If you struggle with pride, reflect about the downfall of Bible characters who failed to be humble and give glory and thanks to God.

4. Know God's thoughts through the Bible (Heb 4:12)

The room is clean and now we are ready to redecorate. We place a new dresser here, a small ottoman over there. Once our mind has been purged of its pollutants, we can begin filling the available space with God's presence.

One way to know God's thoughts is by studying the Bible on a regular basis. There is no general standard that applies to every person. Some may read three chapters a day, others may read one chapter, and still others a few verses. Some may read and reflect early in the morning, others during lunch, still others right before going to sleep. The key to success is consistency. When we come back day after day to see ourselves through the mirror of God's word, which penetrates every fiber of our being and judges our thoughts and attitudes, we will gradually see God's

thoughts mingling with our own. Eventually, if we continue this beneficial practice, our thoughts and His will become one.

5. Adopt God's thoughts through the Spirit (1 Cor 2:9–12)

Knowing without doing is useless, in the same way that having faith without following through with actions is worthless (Jas 2:26). We may know what we ought to do, but do we actually do it? How do we breach the divide between thought and action? We do it through God's Spirit.

God has presented us with a supernatural resource, His own Spirit. The Holy Spirit reveals God's mysteries to us. This same Counselor shows us how to make God's truth an integral, real part of our lives. He sparks the drive we need to do what is right. He provides the determination to persevere in the face of opposition. He supplies the helpers that will defend us and support us. He offers opportunities to fulfill our dual duties as servants and beloved children of God.

The Spirit has two requirements in order to abide within us. First, we must maintain a pure, tidy abode within our bodies, hearts, and minds. Second, we must keep an attitude of humility in order to follow His instruction. By yielding to the Holy Spirit in daily prayer, we will gradually grow more grounded in godly principles and practices. As we engage with the Holy Spirit, we will find worldly thoughts and practices less captivating and engaging.

6. Guard your mind against attacks (2 Cor 10:4–6)

The abidance of God within us does not guarantee that we will not suffer any assaults from the world. If anything, it might even intensify the violence of such attacks against our minds.

We are not without any defensive and offensive mechanisms, however. With God's power, we "demolish strongholds," as well as "arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." Not only do we strike against these adversaries of our minds, but we also "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" and "punish every act of disobedience."

As true Christians, we do not simply sit back and hope that God will raise a fortress around us and miraculously keep us safe from all harm. Instead, we must take up spiritual weapons, equip ourselves with God's armor,

and wage war against the foes of our faith. We must learn to exercise self-control and develop critical thinking skills. We must be selective about who we associate with, what we spend free time on, and what classes we take.

Our time in college is an excellent opportunity to explore new intellectual avenues. Nevertheless, we must remain alert and cautious of ideas and thoughts that may not please God and which may push us far from the truth. In order to protect our mind and our faith, we should try to implement one or two of the suggestions mentioned above.

MAKING TIME FOR GOD

ELAINE SHEK – BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, USA

MANNA ISSUE 35

It's 3 pm on Friday. Liz has just finished a full day of classes, and she rushes back to her dormitory to pick up her gear for swim practice. After swim practice, she grabs a bite to eat before preparing for her religious education lesson tomorrow. Bible study is at 7:30 pm, but she is nowhere near ready to teach her lesson. Perhaps she'll skip Bible study tonight…

It's now midnight, and Liz has managed to complete her preparation for tomorrow's lesson, but she's missed Bible study in the process. Exhausted, she gets down on her knees, mumbles a few words of thanks, and climbs into bed. She notices her Bible lying on the nightstand and decides that she'll read it tomorrow. After all, it is the Sabbath, and she'll be spending most of the day at church.

How many of us can relate to a situation like this? Many times, we feel that there isn't enough time in the day to get everything done. Time – it is something we all treasure, something we wish we had more of, but it just seems to slip so quickly through our fingers.

As students, we are often burdened with so much work that we tend to let go of things that are vital to our well-being: God and our faith. How many times have we pushed God away because of our busy schedules? How many times have we missed services because we had to write a paper? How many times have we rushed off to school without first giving thanks to God for another day to live and just mumbled a few words of thanks seconds before jumping into bed?

When we follow such a busy and hectic lifestyle, it is no wonder that God is often left out. We have lectures to attend, papers to write, and exams to take. How are we supposed to put it all together and find time for God in our busy lives?

This article will address the importance of making time for God, how to do so, and the results of making time for God.

WHY MAKE TIME FOR GOD?

To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven. (Eccl 3:1)

According to the words of wise King Solomon, there is a time for

everything: a time to study and a time to play, a time to learn worldly knowledge and a time to gain spiritual wisdom. But it is up to us to set out that time, to use our time wisely and devote part of it to God.

Imagine that, week in and week out, our days begin at 8 am and end at 12 am, with no time to talk to God except for a few seconds before bed. What would our faith and our relationship with God be like? It would probably be weak, if not nonexistent. Like any other relationship, we need to spend time with God in order to develop a closer and more personal relationship with Him.

In addition, setting aside time for God allows us to keep sight of what is important—our ultimate destination of the heavenly kingdom. Our faith has a direct impact on whether or not we can enter heaven—and this is definitely worth making time for. Spending time with God not only impacts our ultimate goal, but it also makes a great difference in our daily lives. The following poem entitled "The Difference" illustrates how important it is for us to come into God's presence daily in order to gain strength and peace from Him. The busier we are and the larger our tasks, the more important it is to pray to the Lord.

I got up early one morning,
And rushed through the day;
I had so much to accomplish,
That I didn't have time to pray.

Problems just tumbled about me,
And heavier came each task;
"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered,
He answered, "You didn't ask."

I wanted to see joy and beauty,
But the day toiled on gray and bleak;
I wondered why God didn't show me,
He said, "But you didn't seek."

I tried to come into God's presence,
I tried every key in the lock;
God gently and lovingly chided,
"My child, you didn't knock."

I woke up early this morning,
And paused before starting the day;
I had so much to accomplish,
That I had to take time to pray.

HOW TO SCHEDULE GOD IN OUR LIVES

Make an Appointment with the Lord

A good way to put God in our lives is to make an appointment with Him each day. We should examine our lives and determine when the best time is for us to communicate with Him and to meditate on His words. For King David, it was in the morning and in the evening:

O God, You are my God:
Early will I seek You... (Ps 63:1)

When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the night watches. (Ps 63:6)

In the morning, before we start our busy day, we can thank God for giving us another day to live, ask Him for guidance and protection, and ask for His help to make the day a fruitful and God-pleasing one. In the evening, before bed, we can review our day with the Lord, thank Him for the guidance and protection He gave us, and reflect on issues we encountered during the day.

Offer the Best Time in Your Day

For some people, morning and evening meetings with God may not work. The morning may be too early — we're tired and grouchy, and it's hard to kneel down to pray. At night, we may be too tired after a long day's work, and all we want to do is just climb into bed.

We need to choose a time when we're not too tired and when our mind is clear to offer our best to Him. Just as Abel offered the best of his flock to the Lord, we need to offer the best time of our day to the Lord.

I finally managed to figure out the best routine for myself by my second year of university. Although I prayed morning and evening, they were usually short prayers. I felt that I needed to find a better time when I could really pray in-depth and meditate on the words of God.

I discovered that the best time for me was around 8 pm. I studied and ate dinner, and then it was time for God. Even if I was working on a paper, I would drop everything and give an hour to God. During that time, I would sing hymns, read the Bible, and then end with a prayer. It was time well spent, and I truly treasured it.

RESULTS OF MAKING TIME FOR GOD

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Mt 6:33)

Once we place God first, we will experience an immense difference in our lives. I noticed that when I made time for God by scheduling a period of time with Him each evening, I always completed my work within a shorter amount of time. I would often receive inspiration from Him when I was stuck on a paper.

Moreover, the time that I set out for God also became a stress reliever for me. For that hour, I would forget about my studies and concentrate on the Lord. Amazingly, during the most stressful days, the lyrics of a hymn or a Bible verse would always touch me and lift my burdens. I truly felt immense peace and joy in my heart during those times. During my final year of university, whenever I was completely overwhelmed with work, God provided me with the sanity I needed.

Jesus encourages us in Matthew 11:28–30:

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and My burden is light."

I encourage you to give it a try, even if you can only afford to give up twenty minutes. Use that time to meditate on His words and to tell Him what a stressful day you've had. You'll definitely feel the difference in your life. As long as we put God first in our lives, we truly don't have to worry about anything — everything will fall nicely into place.

The world around us is always trying to invent novel ways to get things done more quickly — from fast food to instant messaging. In such a fast-paced society, seeking God seems like the last thing on our minds. However, making time for God could mean the difference between being a stressed-out, harried student and being a successful, peaceful Christian student. The choice and the time are yours.

STANDING YOUR GROUND— CONFRONTING CAMPUS CHALLENGES THROUGH CHRIST

ANGEL MARIE SOLGOT—SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, USA

MANNA ISSUE 34

When you browse through a university's welcoming brochure, or check out the websites for various institutes of higher learning, what do you typically see? Smiling, wholesome students and friendly, caring instructors, right? University catalogs and brochures can be incredibly deceiving, much like those travel brochures that promise you a charming bed-and-breakfast inn by the beach, when they're really providing a hideous shack by a murky swamp. Like the deceiving travel brochures, what the university catalogs don't show you are the all-night cramming frenzies, the disorganized and disenchanted professors, and especially the constant spiritual challenges that await a Christian student at every corner of the campus. While it's true that college life can be, and most often is, a terrific growth experience for many young adults, it is also quite often a devastating turning point for many vulnerable young Christians. Let's meet Caroline and take a look into a day in the life of a young Christian away at college. Let's examine some of the spiritual issues she faces daily, and let's consider some of the options she has when it comes to standing her ground and keeping her Christian beliefs and standards throughout her years of college.

A DAY ON CAMPUS

A Chronicle of a Typical Christian's Day in the World of Academia

8:00 am
(Friday Morning Wake-Up)

Caroline realizes that she's over-slept *again*, and she's going to be late to her biology class for at least the fifth time. She reminds herself that she's got to stop staying up so late hanging out with her roommates and get to bed at a decent hour.

8:30 am (Biology Class)

Caroline shamefully slips into the only remaining chair, which is at the front of the class, and Dr. Payton makes sure that she's aware of his annoyance at her tardiness. She's arrived just in time to hear her professor's lecture on the *Theory of Evolution*. Apparently, there's going to be an exam on the subject, so she really needs to pay close attention to the lecture.

10:00 am (English Class)
This is an easy and enjoyable class for Caroline, because the instructor, Dr. Schmidt, is such a talented teacher, and he genuinely seems to care about his students. Today, while the class is enjoying a break and Dr. Schmidt is socializing with the students, he begins to talk a little about his partner. It's at this point that Caroline realizes that this teacher, whom she really respects, is, in fact, living a homosexual lifestyle. She knows what the Bible says about this issue, but everyone seems to be so accepting of it, and this instructor is such a great person. She just doesn't know what to think.

12:00 pm (Lunch)
It's been a fun year, and Caroline's enjoyed meeting a great group of friends. Although they don't have the same religious beliefs as Caroline, they get along wonderfully and spend a lot of time together. Today at lunch, her friend Rebecca jokingly tells the others about her romantic experiences with a guy she's been pretty intimate with lately. The conversation lasts a while, as the others chime in with their own humorous experiences in dating and intimate relationships. Caroline, meanwhile, smiles and laughs with them, even though she realizes deep inside that these sexual relationships they're all joking about are sinful in God's eyes. Not wanting to correct, separate herself from, or sound like she's preaching to the others, she keeps her silence and acts as if she doesn't mind the topic at all. Later on during lunch, Caroline's friends invite her to go on a canoeing trip on Saturday morning. Instead of telling them about her Sabbath commitment, she tells them that she's got some work to do this weekend, and she's sorry that she can't go with them.

1:30 pm (Calculus Class)
Since calculus isn't Caroline's favorite subject, she's been unable to finish the take-home exam that the professor gave her to work on. It's due today, and Caroline feels that since she really needs a couple of extra days, she'd better go ahead and skip this class. She decides to leave a message on Dr. King's answering machine to let him know that she's come down with a really terrible flu, and that she won't be able to drop the exam off at his office until Monday morning.

3:30 pm (Philosophy Class)
Required readings lead Caroline to wonder if Absolute Truth is even a possibility.

* *

What we've just read is not far from reality. Although it may seem that Caroline is facing an awful lot of temptations and confusions in one day, she is really dealing with things that we all deal with on a daily basis, especially in the campus setting. Along with the newfound independence that many college students are granted comes much freedom. But, as we all know, freedom opens up many doors to temptations that may be very difficult to resist.

Quite often there are temptations to become lazy or irresponsible, to lie or deceive others in order to protect ourselves, to hide our values and beliefs in God from others, or even to question the validity of our beliefs in God and His Church. Eventually, these temptations are so intertwined in our daily lives that they become almost invisible and unnoticeable to us. What's frightening is that we may unknowingly fall to these temptations in the most subtle, subliminal ways, placing our salvation in jeopardy.

As we look into Caroline's day at school, we see someone who is experiencing various tests of her faith. How Caroline sees these challenges, and how she ultimately decides to handle or confront them, will determine the quality and status of her faith at the end of her four years of college life.

TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT YOUR FAITH

A prudent man foresees evil
and hides himself,
But the simple pass on and
are punished. (Prov 22:3)

Looking into Caroline's day at school, and even into our own days at college or in the working world, shows that we need to take action in order to stand our ground as Christians bound for eternal life. If we don't take action, we will find ourselves falling further and further away from our faith and our Lord Jesus Christ. There are three actions that we, as Christians, need to take:

1. Read the Bible and other Christian literature on a daily basis
2. Develop a healthy Christian lifestyle
3. Publicly acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ

By carrying out these very important actions, the temptations that come our way each and every day will become less appealing to us. These temptations to doubt our faith, to lie or deceive others, or to hide our beliefs and our convictions in Christ will no longer cause

us to stumble along this bumpy path in life. Instead, we will be able to face and overcome these temptations, while standing our ground as Christians capable of bringing souls to Christ and worthy of the calling we have received.

Immerse Yourself in Christian Literature and the Bible

Your testimonies are wonderful;
Therefore my soul keeps them.
The entrance of Your words gives light;
It gives understanding to the simple.
(Ps 119:129–130)

Looking back at Caroline's day, we see how easy it can be for a person to slip into a life where the main focus becomes mere survival in the academic and social world. Instead of keeping their salvation and Christian duty at the core of their lives, what happens is that college students may begin to see their studies and campus life as the central part of their existence. How can we keep this from happening to us? Well, one action we can take is to make Bible reading, along with the reading of many other kinds of Christian resources, a daily part of our lives. Without the teachings of the Bible, how will we be able to know where we stand as Christians? Where else will we find a mirror as clear and powerful as the Bible to help us view ourselves truthfully, to tell us whether we are indeed reflecting God's light or, in fact, the darkness of the earth? We need to remember to fill ourselves up with God's words, because they will constantly help us to decipher right from wrong and to deal with the many temptations to our faith that we encounter.

As we saw in the chronicle of Caroline's day, she's dealing with some classes that lead her to question her own faith, causing her to start doubting the truth she has been taught all her life. The same thing can happen to any of us if we aren't careful. When we read the Bible on a daily basis, the Holy Spirit will work to reveal God's Truth to us, equipping us to handle the various questions we may be asked by others who want to know about our beliefs. Without a developed knowledge of the Bible and God's Truth, how will we be able to stand our ground as Christians?

Also, it is vital that we continue to read the various Christian publications that are made available to us. The written testimonies and encouragements of our brothers and sisters in Christ are absolutely precious, as they provide us with so many spiritual insights and they work to strengthen our faith in the power and love of God. Without the knowledge of

these testimonies and experiences in our Lord Jesus Christ and the True Gospel, we are left spiritually vulnerable and sometimes unable to handle the questions, criticisms, and doubts that other people direct at our beliefs. But through these amazing and moving testimonies of visions, healings, rescues, and personal transformations, we find our faith preserved, and we become equipped to handle almost anything that comes our way, especially when dealing with philosophical arguments or even arguments of science. These testimonies help to give us a cushion of faith to fall back on when questions can't be answered with mere science, philosophy, or earthly reasoning.

Develop a Healthy Christian Lifestyle

As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him. (2 Sam 22:31)

Who am I? What does God want me to do with my life? And, what will be my legacy when I leave this earth? All Christians must ask themselves these questions, and they should try to figure out the answers before they even set foot onto a college campus. Who are you? You are God's precious creation. You are the very soul that our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross to save. What does God want you to do with your life? In John 15:9–11, Jesus tells us:

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that your joy may be full."

And He also tells us in Matthew 5:14–16,

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

These verses tell us that a Christian's duty in life is to strive to abide in God's love by keeping His commands, and to strive to shine God's light to others, that He may be glorified and that others may be guided to our Father in heaven. If we follow these commands, we will have very touching and beautiful legacies—legacies of saved souls, forgiven sinners, and joyful lives. This is what we will leave behind

on this earth when we pass on to the eternal life ahead.

To lead this kind of life, though, takes careful thought and dedication. We have to constantly consider our actions and our words, our hearts and our motives, and we must evaluate our surroundings. In order to keep yourself in Christ, you will have to decide for yourself, on a constant basis, whether your actions are Christ-like or if, in fact, they are worldly and leading you away from God.

Are you living a life in Christ, or are you beginning to engage in sinful actions that have the tendency to lead souls to drunkenness, sexual immorality, laziness, rude language, and lies? Is your heart filled with the love, happiness, contentment, and peace that Christians are easily recognized by, or is it filled with anger, jealousy, malice, bitterness, resentment, depression, fear, and worry? And what type of environment are you surrounding yourself with? Is it an environment of purity, peace, goodness, and Christian friendships, or is it an environment of godlessness, shifting values and morals, disorder, strife, and worldly friendships? These are the things you have to constantly monitor and evaluate in order to live your life as a Christian, saved and bound for your eternal home.

Looking back at Caroline's situation, we can see that she's beginning to lose her ground as a Christian. Her daily life is becoming overwhelmed by her carefree surroundings. She's living an undisciplined life—which is pretty evident by the fact that she's been oversleeping in the mornings because of her late nights out with her friends. And the fact that she wasn't able to finish her exam shows that she's not prioritizing the various aspects of her life correctly.

This reckless attitude may be a result of the fact that Caroline has surrounded herself with too many non-Christian friends and has spent too little time alone in spiritual evaluation and reflection. This chaos happens to all of us at various times in our lives, and it's something we must learn to overcome and prevent. It's not okay to lie to our professors to cover up for our irresponsible actions, and it's not okay to become reckless individuals, staying out late and forgetting the behavioral and spiritual standards we have as Christians. When we see such things beginning to happen to us, we must resolve to make major changes in our lives.

It may seem difficult, but we must make the determination to work on establishing for ourselves a healthy Christian lifestyle. But how do we create this kind of life for ourselves, especially when we are so busy with school, jobs, church, family, and friends? How do we find the time?

Would you believe me if I told you that there is one very selfish act you are allowed and encouraged to make a regular part of your life, and that this act has God's stamp of approval? You'd probably wonder, *When was God ever selfish?* Well, whenever our Lord Jesus Christ went off to be alone to pray, He did it to build up His own strength — He did it for His own good, ultimately benefiting all of mankind. He knew the importance of separating from this world, and He knew that this was the only way He could keep His life's mission straight.

Do this one thing for yourself: Set aside time for yourself on a daily basis. Clear away all of the noise and clamor around you, and just spend time with yourself and God. Isaiah 30:15 tells us, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." Use this time to pray, to meditate, to read Christian literature, to explore all kinds of edifying classical or contemporary Christian hymns, or to write in your journal. It's amazing how powerful these activities are when it comes to keeping your faith and actions in check. Remember to do this one selfish thing for yourself, and set aside time for your own spiritual evaluation and growth.

Publicly Acknowledge Your Lord Jesus Christ

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven." (Mt 10:32)

After reading the account of Caroline's day, do you get the feeling that Caroline's friends don't even know that she's a Christian? If they did, would they talk so casually about their intimate relationships around her? Would they even bother to invite her on their canoeing trip, knowing that she keeps the Sabbath? Probably not. The fact is that Caroline is most likely a quiet Christian, and keeps her faith to herself. This practice can lead to several problems.

First, by not letting her friends know about her beliefs and convictions, Caroline is keeping the door of temptation open for herself. Not knowing that she is a Christian who keeps the Sabbath, Caroline's friends will continue to invite her

on weekend outings that involve neglecting the Sabbath. And their invitations will remain a great source of temptation for her. It's extremely possible that Caroline will succumb to their constant requests and slowly begin to break her Sabbath commitment. Also, because her friends don't know about her religious beliefs, they will continue to discuss their intimate relationships with her, which may slowly and unnoticeably entice Caroline into following in their sexually immoral footsteps.

Second, by not letting her friends know about her beliefs and convictions concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, Caroline is missing out on great opportunities to lead souls to Christ. She is letting these good friends of hers miss out on God's salvation and blessings, simply because of her need to fit in. In fact, she is neglecting her duty as a Christian, which is to shine God's light to others.

The last problem concerns what Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:32: "'Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.'" How sad it would be for Caroline to be turned away from the eternal rest that our Heavenly Father has promised us, because she chose to keep quiet about His incredible sacrifice for mankind. When I was younger, I never really understood how a person could simply deny Jesus before men. But now I think I can understand how easy it is to deny our Lord Jesus Christ without even realizing that we're doing such an awful thing.

When you are among a group of friends at lunch, do you quickly gather your hands, nod your head, and blink your eyes, considering this brief action a thanksgiving prayer for the food you're about to receive? Or do you solemnly fold your hands, bow your head, close your eyes, and meaningfully offer a prayer of thanksgiving to our Lord? What about situations when your friends are discussing their religious beliefs or arguments? Do you offer your personal testimonies and your beliefs, or do you quietly keep your faith to yourself, hoping to avoid their criticism and ridicule? Believe it or not, this is a denial of our faith and our Lord Jesus Christ, and for many of us it happens all the time. The apostle Paul encourages us in 2 Timothy 1:6–9:

Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not

be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

Realizing God's calling, let's make the determination to publicly acknowledge the love, power, faithfulness, and truth of our Lord Jesus Christ to the many people who surround us on a daily basis.

CONCLUSION

The apostle Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 10:12–13:

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

And in 1 Corinthians 16:13, Paul urges us, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong."

In our daily lives on campus, we must always remember to carry out the three critical actions of reading the Bible and other Christian resources daily, working to build healthy Christian lifestyles for ourselves, and making the determination to publicly confess our beliefs and our Lord Jesus Christ to others. By doing so, we will steadily build a powerful and enormous fortress that will work to guard our spirits and help us stand our ground as Christians bound for our eternal home with our Heavenly Father.

As you walk the campus of your university and gather with your college friends and study groups, may you always remember to stand your ground as a Christian, and may you shine your light to others, that they will see Christ through you.

CAN YOU TRUST THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF CREATION?

STEPHEN KU – PACIFICA, CALIFORNIA, USA

MANNA ISSUE 42

Brought up in a Christian family, I always accepted without question what I was taught about the Bible and about God. But my faith began to meet some serious challenges during my college years. One of them was the study of science.

THE AGE ISSUE

During my first semester I took a geography class. Geological evidence of the age of the earth often came up in lectures, readings, or discussion sessions. Based on fossil records and radiometric dating, which measures the radioactive decay of rocks and meteorites, scientists estimated that the earth is about 4.6 billion years old.

This clearly contradicted my belief that the universe was only a few thousand years old. Without even attempting to weigh the evidence, I simply dismissed the information as an unreliable claim founded on an inaccurate dating method.

The issue of the age of Earth and the universe surfaced again a year later when I took an astronomy class. This time, it smacked me right in the face.

In a discussion session, our TA talked about the size of our universe. He started by saying, "The universe is so vast that it is way bigger than you could possibly imagine!" Then he introduced the concept of the light year, a unit of measurement with which astronomers estimate the distance of objects in space. Light travels at 3x108 kilometers per second. A light year, then, is the distance light can travel in one year, i.e. 9,500,000,000,000 kilometers.

Just to give an idea of the scale that we are dealing with:

- Alpha Centauri, the closest star to us besides the sun, is 4.3 light years from us.
- Our galaxy, known as the Milky Way, is about 100,000 light years in diameter. (This means it would take light 100,000 years to travel from one end of our galaxy to the other!)
- Our nearest neighboring galaxy, Andromeda, is 2.2 million light years away.
- The distance to the galaxy M87 in the Virgo cluster is 50 million light years.

- The distance to the most distant object seen in the universe is about 18 billion light years (18×10^9 light years).

Because it takes time for light from stars to reach Earth, we are actually looking back in time when we look at the stars. For example, in 1987, scientists observed a supernova in a nearby galaxy called the Large Magellanic Cloud. Since this galaxy is 190,000 light years from us, they were looking at an event that actually occurred 190,000 years ago.

The most distant objects that astronomers can see now are about eighteen billion light years from Earth. This means that the universe must have existed eighteen billion years ago, which is, incidentally, the current estimate for the age of the universe. In other words, when we see these objects in space, we are literally looking back in time at things that existed at a time when the universe was just formed.

When I learned of these facts, I was blown away. I was amazed at the vastness of the universe we live in, and I suddenly realized how tiny and insignificant human beings are. At the same time, I was forced to confront the fact that this universe is billions of years old. This time around, I couldn't run away from the evidence; it was all too real.

THE SEARCH FOR ANSWERS

As I learned more and more from the astronomy class, I became increasingly uneasy. I couldn't help but question the beliefs I had taken for granted: What about the biblical account of creation? Didn't God tell us in the Bible that He made everything in six days? Did this universe really begin with a huge explosion and expand to the current state over billions of years? And if it did, where was God in all of this?

I became afraid to know more than I wanted to know, and I was apprehensive at the thought that the Bible I had believed in all my life could possibly contain such a gross error. And if the biblical account of creation cannot be trusted, what in the Bible can be trusted?

I could have ignored the facts and held firmly to what I believed. But I would be fooling myself; my belief would be nothing more than a superstition. On the other hand, if it turned out that the Bible was wrong, I would be completely lost! What would I do if I found out that my faith in God had been nothing but an illusion?

I went to the school library and picked up books on the Big Bang

theory and the origin of the universe. I also visited the library of a nearby union of divinity schools and found a handful of books on science and creation. I tried to be as open-minded and objective as I could and made a point to see the issues from different points of view.

After some extensive research and deliberation, I was able to resolve many of the questions I had. My mind opened up to a much wider horizon. On the one hand, I had to reshape some of my former prejudices. On the other hand, I became more convinced of my faith in God and in the Bible.

I do not have any degree in science, and I do not presume to speak as someone who is well versed in it. But I will share with you, from a lay-person's perspective, a few of the things I learned in the process of my search, in the hope that they will also help readers who may have little knowledge in science.

Science and Faith Differ in Scope but Are Mutually Complementary

Science and faith explore two different kinds of realities. Whereas science studies the physical realm, religion helps us understand the spiritual. Science explains the mechanics of things, but religion inquires about the meaning and purpose of things. Science makes deductions from things that can be observed and tested, but faith is based on God's direct revelation through His word.

Scientists can tell us that the universe is expanding, but they do not have the authority to claim that it wasn't God who caused the expansion. On the other hand, Christians do not need to fear that new discoveries in science might undermine their faith and thus reject scientific explanations on the mechanics of how this universe originated.

Albert Einstein commented, "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind." Although science and faith are concerned with different realities, they must complement each other.

Science seeks to understand God's general revelation through nature. Faith seeks to understand God's special revelation through Scripture (see sidebar). It would be foolish to think that science has made religion obsolete, just as it would be narrow-minded to think that scientific discoveries can pose a threat to our faith.

When we are willing to open our eyes to God's general and special revelation, we gain a much fuller understanding of God and His works.

GENERAL REVELATION AND SPECIAL REVELATION

God is infinitely higher and greater than human beings, and our minds are too limited to grasp the existence and nature of this Supreme Being. The only way for us to know God is through His revelation of Himself to us. The Bible teaches us that God reveals Himself to us in two important ways.

First, He reveals Himself to us through nature. This is usually called the "**general revelation**." Paul writes about this kind of divine revelation, "Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Rom 1:19–20). Because science explores the physical universe, the study of science can help us better understand our Creator and His creation.

The second kind of revelation is known as the "**special revelation**." This refers to Scripture, the written word of God. Through Scripture, God reveals to us who He is, His relationship to us, His works, and His will for us. By studying God's word, we may know Him and obey Him.

Because God is the Creator of this universe as well as the author of Scripture, His general revelation and special revelation to us do not conflict with each other. Rather, they complement each other. The study of science and the study of Scripture together help us gain a fuller knowledge and appreciation of the one true God.

Faith helps science students gain a spiritual perspective on the physical things they observe. It answers questions such as, "Who brought this universe into existence?", "What is His relationship to us?", and "What is His purpose for us in this physical existence?"

On the other hand, science helps believers in God gain a greater appreciation and understanding of God's creation. Astronomy, for example, gives us insight into the vastness and complexity of this universe.

When we continually discover the wonders of God's creation, we cannot but stand in awe of the Almighty God and praise Him for His greatness.

Belief in an Old Universe Does Not Entail Belief in Atheism

Some Christians reject the old age of the universe outright or look at it with suspicion because they believe that it is an attempt by atheists to deny the Creator. But such an attitude is unfounded.

Physical sciences make observations, gather empirical data, and arrive at physical laws or theories without any personal prejudice. In this sense, science continually helps us understand the physical existence.

But it does not and cannot draw conclusions for us about things beyond the physical existence — that is where faith comes in. Therefore, scientific findings are neutral as far as spiritual implications are concerned. It is up to the individual to interpret the scientific finding according to his personal faith.

The discovery of the old age of the universe was not the result of an atheistic agenda. Neither is the Big Bang model an attempt to discredit faith in a creator. In my search for answers, I came across books by Bible-believing scientists who believed in the old age of the universe and the Big Bang model. To me that speaks volumes.

These scientists did not compromise their faith to accept the old age of the universe. They were individuals who were sincere in their faith and well respected in the scientific community.

I came to the conclusion that if these scientists could openly embrace the old age of the universe without compromising their faith in God, I had no reason to fear.

There is also no need for Christians to be on the defensive, for a billion-year universe would not threaten our faith at all. We just need to

resolve the apparent conflict between science and our beliefs.

Scientific Facts Help Us Re-Evaluate Our Understanding of God and His Word

When scientific facts seem to contradict the Bible, the problem does not lie in the reliability of God's word. Rather, it is often the result of our own misinterpretation of the biblical text.

We ought to humbly acknowledge that our understanding of God's word is limited and be open to a more accurate interpretation. We should not defend our interpretation as if it were the absolute truth.

We have learned from history the mistakes some Christian leaders in the Middle Ages made of condemning scientists as heretics in order to defend the view of a flat Earth.

One major objection to the old age of the universe is that it implies that the universe evolved naturally. People who are in this position argue, "If the universe took billions of years to form, then that would mean that there is no creator!"

They firmly believe that God must have created things instantaneously. When God said, "Let there be…," things just appeared in a split second as if touched by a magic wand. Billions of years to form the universe simply rules out a Creator, they claim, because that is not how God does things.

I bring up the above example not to argue for or against an old universe. But it just shows that we tend to interpret the Bible with our own preconceptions. Those who hold to the idea of "instantaneous creation" question how God could have possibly taken THAT long to create the universe.

But if we think about this position critically, we can just as well ask, "But who is to say that God couldn't have slowly formed the universe the way a craftsman carefully works at his masterpiece?"

God's word is eternal, and it stands firm in the heavens (Ps 119:89). The eternal truths of God's word, such as God's love for the human race, His redemption through Jesus Christ, His everlasting dominion, and His commandment to love the Lord and our neighbors, can never be changed.

But our reading of the historical records or the cultural references in the Bible may be subject to change as scientific or archeological discoveries shed new light on these passages. So when scientific facts do not seem to reconcile with our reading of these records, they should not call into question the reliability of the Scripture.

This is not to say that whatever scientists tell us is always right. Empirical data may often be indisputable, but theories based on scientific facts are not absolute. As science continues to develop and scientists make new discoveries, theories of the past may be rejected and replaced with more accurate models or physical laws.

Since theories will be tested with time, we will do well to take them into consideration and reserve our opinions about them for the time being.

LOOKING AT THE ACCOUNT OF CREATION

With the above principles in mind, how should we resolve the apparent contradiction between an old universe and the six-day creation? Many solutions have been proposed, which we do not have time to analyze one by one. The table below summarizes three common interpretations of creation:

Interpretation	Summary of Interpretation	Position on the Age of Earth and the Universe
Gap Theory	God first created the heavens and the earth, as recorded in Gen 1:1. Then there was a "gap"—an unspecified duration of time in which Satan and his angels rebelled and ravaged God's creation. Starting with Gen 1:2 is the record of the creation week, a period of restitution in which God restored His creation.	Old
Calendar-Day	God created all things in six twenty-four hour days. The exact length of day is an essential part of the creation account.	Young (Thousands of years-old)
Day-Age	The word "Day" in Scripture can be a period of indefinite length (e.g. Isa 11:10–11). Some who hold this view also understand the narrative of Genesis 1 as written from the perspective of the earth as it was being prepared for man rather than an account of the creation of the whole universe, which is very briefly stated in Gen 1:1.	Old

If you are interested in the arguments for these interpretations and others not listed here, I encourage you to do some reading on your own and draw your own conclusions. I personally find the Day-Age position most satisfying exegetically and scientifically, but this does not mean that other views are definitely wrong.

THE CREATION AND OUR FAITH

Through my research on the issue, I have come to understand that there needs to be no conflict between science and faith and that the creation narrated in Genesis can be explained in view of scientific facts.

In fact, recent discoveries in science, not just in astronomy but also other fields, have provided more and more evidence that point to intelligent design in the universe by a loving Creator. Although Christians may not agree on the exact mechanics and duration of the creation event, we can agree that science attests strongly to the biblical account of creation.

However, I have also come to realize that, ultimately, our faith does not rest on the creation alone. The issues surrounding the Creation pale in comparison when we consider the overwhelming number of scientific discoveries that have confirmed the reliability of Scripture over the years.

The fulfillment of prophesies in the Bible, the impact that the Bible has had on human history, the confirmation of archeological findings on the historical accuracy of the Bible, and so forth, have all served to strengthen our faith in God's unchanging word. Perhaps most important of all, our personal experience in the life-transforming power of God's word is the best testimony to the truth in the Scripture.

While we continue to gain a greater knowledge of God and His creation through studies of science and the Bible, we can rest assured that science and faith are not on a collision course and that we do not have to choose between the two. Further insights into both the general revelation of nature and the special revelation of Scripture will only bring us closer to God's eternal truth.

5

KINDLING THE FIRE

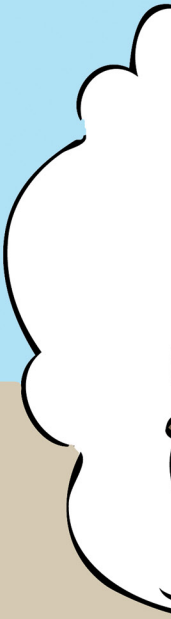
6

SHARPENING YOUR TOOLS

7

GONE FISHING

KINDLING THE FIRE



It's a skill that separates man from beast: building a fire. If you've ever learned to build a fire from scratch, you know that you need three materials: tinder, kindling, and fuel. Each is progressively less combustible than the previous. Tinder is dry material that will catch fire by a mere spark. Sawdust, straw, birch bark, and lint all fall under this category. Kindling is readily combustible material that you add to burning tinder—things such as small twigs, cardboard, and small strips of wood. Fuel is the least combustible of the three, but burns slowly and steadily once ignited.

As with building fires, so is keeping the faith in college. A steady fire can burn only if we take progressive steps and feed the flame. There is a

reason why those who were lagging in the wilderness fell to the hands of the Amalekites (DEUT 25:18). Ultimately, a vibrant faith hinges on continuous prayer, Bible reading, and acting on the words of God. If we have a local campus fellowship and church, then we should take advantage to meet with other members for worship and encouragement (CF. HEB 10:25).

Similarly, serving God is also a life-long commitment, one that usually buds and blossoms during the college

years. Often, this is the time that we start leading Bible studies regularly. How do we lead a Bible study? How do we remain fervent in holy work without feeling burned-out or discouraged? Why are the college years such a precious time to learn to evangelize? What should we do when we feel weak?

We are up against the elements. Excessive wind or rain will put out most fires. What we need is a good, strong fire, so we can be like the man who built his house on the rock **(MT 7:24)**.

Let's take a look at the tinder, kindling, and fuel that helped college youths in their faith and servitude.

HONORING THE SABBATH

Because the school I went to had no local True Jesus Church nearby, I had nowhere to go for Sabbath services. Fortunately, I had a single, so I didn't have to worry about roommates when it came to having Bible study or praying in my room. I was worried, however, about how I would tell my friends that I couldn't go out on Friday nights since, at home, I could simply say, "I have to go to church tonight." After making a few friends, it wasn't long before they asked me to go out with them on Friday night. I think the first couple of times, I tried to avoid mentioning Bible study and God altogether, saying, "I have other things to do tonight, and I want to sleep early." Of course, that wasn't a very satisfying answer, and I knew that by not telling my friends about Sabbath and Bible study, I was not acknowledging God in front of men, and was being ashamed of the gospel.

However, thank God that over time, whenever my friends invited me, I was able to eventually gather the courage to explain to them what I did on Friday nights and Saturdays, worshipping God and studying the Bible. Thank God that they were all accepting and open-minded about it, which was a huge relief. They didn't give me any shocked reactions or stares of disbelief, but rather showed much respect for my beliefs, not inviting me out as much and sometimes scheduling outings and get-togethers at other times.

One time while my friends and I were studying together in a lounge, they invited me to a birthday dinner and told me it was probably going to be on a Friday night. I was caught off-guard and not bold enough to explain to everyone in our study group, many of whom didn't know me that well, about how I observe the Sabbath. Afraid that I would make the atmosphere awkward, I took the easy way out and said, "Sure, I'll go." Later that evening, however, my conscience kept rebuking me and I kept thinking to myself that I had been unfaithful to God. Unable to be reconciled with myself for accepting the invitation, I wrote an email to my friend, who was organizing the dinner, and explained that I could not make it on Friday night because I observe the Sabbath, and that I could not go to the birthday dinner in good conscience. Thank God, she was understanding and changed the time to Saturday night to accommodate me.

Continually staying in my room on Friday nights and Saturdays during the day wasn't always easy, even after I had told my friends, especially because I was by myself and often felt lonely. There were times when I skipped Bible study because a dinner with friends lasted longer than anticipated and I didn't want to leave in the middle of it, or because I simply didn't feel like I was getting much out of it. But thank God, I always remembered Isaiah 58:13–14:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,
From doing your pleasure on My holy day,
And call the Sabbath a delight,
The holy day of the Lord honorable,
And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,
Nor finding your own pleasure,
Nor speaking your own words,
Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD;
And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,
And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.
The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

My friends almost never asked me to go to parties or bars and clubs to drink. Whenever they invited me out, it was usually to just chill, get a late dinner or bubble tea, go to an orchestra concert, or attend some other event held by university-sponsored groups. In short, they invited me out to just relax and have clean fun. I knew in my heart, however, that even though they weren't asking me to do anything wrong, I would still be dishonoring the Sabbath, going my own way, doing as I pleased, and most likely speaking idle words. I often reminded myself, and still do so, that God promises us joy if we observe His Sabbaths, and that this joy in the Lord is much greater and more precious than a night of enjoyment with friends.

CHERISHING CAMPUS FELLOWSHIP

My college years were dark since I was several time zones away from home, spent countless days and nights in engineering labs, and had no friends. I wasn't antisocial, and I did have a few acquaintances and classmates, but I couldn't confide in them regarding my homesickness

and emptiness. We only worked on solving engineering problems, not emotional problems; though I was surrounded by people, I was spiritually and emotionally alone.

The one saving grace was campus fellowship. Campus fellowship took place once a week, and my memories of spending a couple of hours with brothers and sisters brings about feelings of warmth and security. Since none of the fellowship members had the same major, we never discussed coursework—a relief and escape from all things school-related. When we were together, we learned new praise hymns. We cooked random things and ate whatever came out of the pot, for better or for worse (mostly for better). We prayed together and shared our confusions about the meaning of various Bible passages. Though fellowship was slightly burdensome during busy weeks, they were, for the most part, the highlight of my week.

If fellowship seems like a huge drain of time, let's break down the time it takes per week. A week consists of 168 hours. Time devoted to church on Saturday is approximately 8–9 hours including preparation and transportation time. That's just 5.4% of our week. If we include an additional 3 hours per week for fellowship, that brings our grand total of time-spent-with-God to 12 hours, which is 7.1% of the total hours in a week. If we profess being Christian, and we love God, how can we spend less than 7.1% of our time per week with Him? If we ought to tithe 10% of our income, shouldn't we at least tithe close to 10% of our time? We certainly spend more than 10% of our time browsing the web, chatting, emailing, gaming, and watching TV/movies/soap operas. Furthermore, those 3 hours we spend in fellowship are more refreshing than any other kind of media, because they renew and enrich our spirits. Thank God for campus fellowship and for the fond memories that strengthen my faith to this day.

Even though our lives diverged after we graduated, at one point in time and space, we convened in happy fellowship, and when we meet now, we always cherish our fellowship days.

THE CORRECT ATTITUDE TOWARD SABBATH WORSHIP

Sometimes, when the going gets tough, the tough don't feel like going. When I was in college, whenever I felt fed up with the people in campus fellowship or felt a need to escape from church, Friday night socializing and worldly fun began to look extremely attractive. The activities were not dreadfully sinful. I reasoned other church members often didn't show up for Friday night service or fellowship anyway. All I wanted was to hang out with other people—nice and harmless friends. Moreover, I was beginning to grow tired of the old, Christian ideals I previously stuck to.

When I found myself thinking along those lines, I realized I needed to re-evaluate my purpose in observing the Sabbath: What was I observing Friday night Sabbath for? Was it for myself, or was it because I had an obligation from the fourth commandment?

I recalled that I originally held steadfast to Friday night worship because I loved God and wanted to draw near to Him, not because it was a routine duty. And while worldly friends would always be around after the weekend, each Sabbath would not. If I valued God above the world, I would keep the Sabbath, which begins Friday night, since it was my special time with God. Not going out with friends may seem like a small sacrifice, but it shows determination and proves one's love for God.

Moreover, I remembered my special status. Even if the rest of the world is out partying on Friday night, we are different: God's children, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). College only lasts 4 years; faith is for an eternity. Giving up Friday night activities is really nothing in comparison to renewing our love for God once a week. The joy in discovering God's love each week far surpasses the happiness I could feel with worldly friends, as one runs much deeper than the other.

Once I changed my attitude and remembered my purpose for observing Friday night Sabbath, I found it much easier to forego the Friday night socials and enjoy Friday night Sabbath. A stronger fellowship with bonding and laughter helped, giving me even more support for my Christian decisions.

GROWING IN THE LORD THROUGH CAMPUS FELLOWSHIP

Campus Fellowship Experiences

Because I grew up in a smaller church, I never really had spiritual buddies growing up. In fact, at times the church environment had adverse effects on people's faith. So, to me, establishing a firm spiritual foundation was more important than going to a top-tier college. When the time came to choose a college, I picked one that was near a stable church. By choosing the college that I eventually went to, I turned down some scholarship money, the comfort of having my family nearby, living at home, and school recognition. However, what I gained in return is irreplaceable.

What I will always remember most from my four years in undergrad is being part of a campus fellowship. Many times when I think about it now, I wish I could go back to those years because having a fellowship is perhaps the closest thing to what is recorded in Acts 2:44–47:

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Perhaps the reason why I look back so fondly at my campus fellowship experience is because it helped me learn and grow in my servitude towards God. I'd like to share some of them with you.

Learn to Share the Word of God

At the Bible studies at my home church, people always shared, whether they had deep insights or just opinions. So what distinctly stuck out to me during my first on-campus Bible study was how little people contributed to the discussion. Many people didn't even speak, at all. To some degree, this was a problem throughout my four years in the campus fellowship. We even had what we called the notorious "10-minute silences." I was always amused when, after a quiet Bible study ended, everyone all of a sudden had a lot to say.

I learned that you get what you put in to Bible study. When you go to Bible study with the hope of sharing the Word of God with each other

you will always leave edified. One time, I went to a Bible study in a bad mood. What this meant was, even though I had read the chapter in advance and found things to share, I didn't feel like saying anything. However, as we studied the chapter I couldn't resist the urge to share my thoughts, so I spoke up. At first, it was just a straight faced remark here and there, but soon enough I was really excited about the discussion. My whole demeanor changed and by the end, my heart was joyful and full of God's Word. Engaging in the discussion opened my heart to God. If I had kept my mouth shut, I would have left the Bible study right after it ended, talked to no one, and been worse off spiritually than the beginning. To me, Bible study was a blessing; I hope you can cherish it too.

If you're not able to read a chapter and share on the spot, study it during the week. Prepare as if you were going to lead the Bible study. The information you gather on just your own studies can greatly edify others.

Learn to Care for Others

As an out-of-state student, I had many needs. I needed to feel that I belonged. I needed to adopt a new family to fill in for the one that was thousands of miles away. I needed rides to the supermarket and patient people to show me the ropes. Thank God, I got all of that and more. Even before I arrived, the members of the local church and campus fellowship welcomed me. They prepared a welcome package with messages from everyone. They even bought snacks for me. I probably took their gesture of love for granted at the time, but it's something I won't forget.

During one winter when I had moved off campus, we had a snowstorm and I had to drive home after class. As I sat in traffic for over 2 hours, I received a phone call from a member of the campus fellowship who was calling just to see if I made it home safely. It was unexpected, very thoughtful, and very humbling.

Everyone in the campus fellowship has different needs. Some people's needs are more obvious than others. I encourage you to reach out and help others and not to wait for others to reach out to you first. Manifest the love of God in your life. If you can't manage to love your brothers whom you can see almost daily, how can you love God whom you cannot see (cf. 1 Jn 4:20)?

Learn to Speak the Truth in Love

Since I was studying out of state, everyone I met was new. Even though everyone in the fellowship was a believer, it didn't mean we automatically knew each other or were close.

One weekend at church, a member who was part of the campus fellowship approached me and said, "You need to learn to take off the mask sometimes." What he said didn't offend me, but it caught me by surprise. I responded, "Yeah, I don't always show my true feelings." He wasn't humiliating me or speaking ill of me on purpose. Actually, he was helping me.

This was just one of many instances when someone spoke honestly to someone else in our fellowship. Living on a campus near church members allows us to learn to speak the truth in love and to keep each other in check. If there are issues in the fellowship, we should learn to speak up and voice our concerns. This promotes good communication, which helps prevent misunderstandings. It's important to remember that it's not about attacking anyone or making anyone look bad. If you can, pull them aside to talk. Don't ever speak about others behind their back, even if you're venting.

Learn to Intercede for Others

We had a prayer network in our campus fellowship. On a certain day of the week, some people would take time to call every single member of the fellowship to update prayer requests. It took a lot of time, but they were dedicated and made the phone calls enjoyable. What was even more enjoyable was that you knew someone was praying for you.

With a campus fellowship, everyone eventually gets comfortable with each other to the point where they're willing to share their joys and sorrows. We had that comfort, and so we shared our prayer requests regularly and kept prayer charts. Thank God, I knew people prayed for me even when I gave up on praying for myself.

During my senior year I asked people to pray for me because I started job hunting. In reality, the reason I asked for prayer wasn't just to find a job but to find God's will. I kept wondering, "Should I move back home? Should I go to graduate school?" Thank God the prayers were answered! I was one of the few people in my graduating class to find a job that was

actually relevant to my major. Furthermore, the process of how I got the job is a testimony in itself. After all my frantic searching using my own will and understanding, this job was ironically found on a day when I could not physically see.

Take time to pray for others. Your prayer can help that lonely out-of-state student regain strength. Your prayer can help comfort that member who has three exams in one day. Your prayer can give strength to that brother or sister who is falling into temptation. Jesus said to Peter:

"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." (Lk 22:32)

Pray for others, because somebody is praying for you.

Learn to Appreciate Others' Talents

During my last year in school I gained a true appreciation for the abilities of the brothers and sisters around me. In the beginning, I might have felt some competition with other church members. However, after two seniors graduated, I saw how necessary and how much of a blessing other talented brothers and sisters are. Throughout my first three years, these upperclassmen generously gave me rides to church and took me out on the weekends. Because we happened to be in the same major, they gave me tips on picking courses and helped me with homework. I distinctly remember that one of them was always great at sharing his insights during Bible study. The other was great at greeting visitors.

When senior year started and a fleet of new freshmen joined the fellowship, the one brother wasn't there to share his insights and the other wasn't there to greet all the newcomers. As an upperclassman, it was my turn to step up. I'm not the most social person and it takes effort to approach people and to show genuine concern. When I tried to be friendly to visitors, I realized how much I missed the brothers who graduated.

The Bible says that we can't all be eyes or ears. It also says that the eye can't say the ear is not necessary because it isn't an eye (cf. 1 Cor 12:14–22). You'll find that being in a campus fellowship may be like throwing rocks into a bag and shaking it. There will be conflicts and personality clashes. There may even be jealousy. Just remember to work for the good of the fellowship, and you may eventually appreciate the talent you coveted or despised in the past. Slowly, God will allow you to learn from and be

molded by the people whom He has placed you with. As long as you keep in mind that God is everyone's God, and God loves everyone else just as much as He loves you, then dealing with competitive feelings, jealousy, and other interpersonal issues becomes easier.

NO NEED TO BE PERFECT, BUT TO BE PRESENT

As a freshman, I asked myself, "How do these college youths do it?" Not only did they keep the Sabbath, work hard at school, and pursue their hobbies, they also served as R.E. teachers, hymn leaders, and campus fellowship coordinators. Most importantly, they were willing to drop everything at the slightest sign of a brother or sister in Christ needing help. I learned, however, that their servitude was not entirely effortless. It required strength to put aside resumé-building and success-seeking in favor of faith-building and God-seeking. Moreover, these college youth were not perfect. They had frustrations, slip-ups, and moments of discontent. Yet, they were able to find their balance again, not because they were inherently "better" people, but because they accepted their own limitations and looked to God for inspiration and strength.

Now that I'm one of those college students, I realize what a blessing it is to be able to serve. Not only has serving God solidified my own faith in the Lord and kept me grounded at such a crucial juncture in my life, it has also brought great joy into my life. There may come a time when it will be a challenge for me to schedule taking a week off to be an SSC counselor, or staying up late to make a church flyer for the next Spiritual Convocation, or writing long articles for the literary ministry, but thank God that that time has not yet come. Nonetheless, I am careful not to take on too much. I know when to say "no" to a new church project. Doing a few things well is better than spreading myself too thin doing too much. Most importantly, in order to maintain our zeal for godly service, we should remember that we ultimately serve for the sake of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I CAN'T COME, I'M WORSHIPPING GOD

Being able to keep the Sabbath is a great blessing during college. I drop everything starting on Friday night, spend it with my campus fellowship, and get a full night's rest so that I can enjoy Saturday services. I do not let thoughts of schoolwork or extracurricular activities bother me during this period of time. Sabbath has been set aside by God, for the sake of man—for my sake!

I cherish this period of rest at the end of every week. Even though my friends may invite me out on a Friday night, I decline in favor of going to my church fellowship or a Friday night service. My best friends try not to schedule events on Fridays so that I can participate. There are times when I feel left out because people will make plans and not invite me since they already know I will turn them down. However, there have also been times when friends asked to attend a Friday night service with me. Therefore, make it known that you're hanging out with God this Friday and every Friday, and that there's an open invitation for anyone to come along.

BECOMING THE CAMPUS FELLOWSHIP

Growing up, I used to hear about how TJC kids in other parts of the country all went to the same school, and I thought about how cool it would be if, one day, all of the brothers and sisters in my church could go to the same college. That dream came true as, one by one, most of the people in my grade decided to go to the same college. The summer leading up to that fall was filled with anticipation. We were the largest class of TJC youths to ever enter that school at the same time, and everyone in church was excited for us. Our RE teachers told us that there was so much that we could do for God together, and it felt like the sky was the limit.

That fall, a church brother and I moved into our dorm, which was on the same campus as several other brothers and sisters. From day one, I felt how great it was to have others who were more or less like me.

The first night after we moved in, when the RAs dragged everybody out for a traditional march down the school's main street, it was great to have a roommate who agreed that it was dumb and would rather go to Friday night church service instead. In the following days, our campus fellowship would gather for meetings, to eat, or just to hang out and play games. It was like a long sleepover fellowship that would never end.

But I soon wanted it to.

I don't remember one specific event that made me feel that way, and it was probably a mix of little things that added up over time. Things like how my fellow campus fellowship members had other friends that they would often eat with or spend their free time with. Or how I began to notice their character flaws or annoying habits more because I saw them so often. Soon, I simply lost interest in joining them for the weekly campus fellowship Bible studies, and by the second semester of my freshman year, I had pretty much stopped going altogether. When people asked where I was on Friday nights, I would tell them that I had to go home for the weekend to do my laundry for free, saving a whopping $1.75.

You might have already noticed that I was as much a part of the problem as anybody else. Because I'm a shy person, I had trouble making friends, but it was wrong of me to resent my brothers and sisters who didn't have the same problem. Some of them really did have character flaws, but no more than I did. We were all still figuring out who we were, and we all made bad decisions (some more than others). But that should have had nothing to do with the fact that we were one family, and it was no reason not to at least try to act like one.

Thank God, in my sophomore year I was given responsibilities in the campus fellowship that pretty much forced me to get involved. I had to actually spend a lot more time with my fellow campus fellowship members besides my roommate. Something weird happens when you have to spend a lot of time with people, especially when it's to serve God and each other. Once again, I don't remember one specific event that turned me around 180 degrees. But slowly, day by day, experience after experience, everyone began to feel more like my brother or sister. Their flaws mattered less and less to me, as I'm sure mine did to them. And "as iron sharpens iron" (Prov 27:17), we started sharpening each other, something that I never gave an opportunity to happen before.

The rest of my college years were nothing short of amazing, not because I hung out more with my brothers and sisters, but because we began to truly learn how to treat each other like siblings. The campus fellowship was no longer an unfulfilled childhood dream of an endless sleepover with childhood friends. It became so much more, and the best part was how the next few years saw both ups and downs. During those years, we organized all kinds of events together and had way too much fun, while standing together to deal with challenges from both outside and within the campus fellowship. I also saw brothers and sisters cry for the first time, and I'm willing to say that they saw me cry too. To say that we grew closer is an understatement. Just as importantly, we grew because of each other, becoming unafraid to point out each other's flaws while learning to accept being shown our own.

Still, what they say is true: You don't know what you have until it's gone. Even as I watched many of us become the campus fellowship (as opposed to simply *being in* the campus fellowship), I never truly appreciated what we had until after I graduated. When I was at school, I still had to deal with the realities of studying, papers, exams, choosing a major, and all the other things that take the fun out of college. So, while I continued to enjoy the things that we did as a campus fellowship, I was often distracted by school. Looking back, I realize that this entire experience was a lesson on how to live a godly life in an ungodly world. For the rest of our lives, we will have to balance our service to God with the other things that we have to do, and learn to let God carry over into all other facets of our lives. Only then will we be able to have strength for all difficulties, peace in all tribulations, and joy in all circumstances.

It starts now with you and your campus fellowship, which is essentially a mini-church. If you can't learn to work with your campus fellowship members, don't expect to be able to work in church. And if you can't learn to love your campus fellowship members, don't expect to be able to love God. God puts us among different people for a reason, and it's up to us to find out why. We aren't meant to walk the journey of faith alone, and at a critical time like the college years, we can't afford to isolate ourselves, no matter how much we might want to. Of all of the youths that graduated from J2 with me, it was during our college years that half of them disappeared from church, and I haven't seen them for

years. You will make it through college with a diploma. But will you also leave with your faith?

Furthermore, how about the faith of your fellow brothers and sisters that God has put within your reach? In case you haven't noticed, my original concept of a campus fellowship was a very immature and selfish one. It was about how great it would be for me to have people around. In the end, I didn't get my dream. I got something ten times better. As Jesus once told Peter, "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." Perhaps that is what campus fellowships are really about.

STEPPING OUT OF THE SPOTLIGHT

The first time I was asked to lead a Bible study, I was elated. I thought someone had finally recognized my insightful contributions to the discussions and that I could finally show everything I knew and what I could do. I prepared twenty to thirty pages of notes based on information from whatever online and printed resources I could get my hands on.

I walked into Bible study feeling as if I were stepping into the spotlight, the star of the show. An hour later, I left the stage a devastated failure. I could not understand what had gone wrong. I had given a very thorough introduction and conclusion. I had come up with a diverse list of questions. I had researched interesting facts about the passage. I had engaged a person or two in the discussion. Yet, I felt as if all the hard work I had put into preparing for the Bible study had been wasted.

It's Not About Me

The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom,
And before honor is humility. (Prov 15:33)

In my rush to prove myself, I had failed to take into account the most basic element of any holy work: humility. The more important a job is, the more humility is required. The attendees were not there to see what a wonderful job I could do, but to learn something that would draw them closer to God or deepen their understanding of our Savior.

Humility is closely tied to meekness, gentleness, and selflessness. Christians are called to be servant-leaders. A servant-leader provides guidance by humbly setting an example and by considering others' needs. The needs of the Bible study members are to examine the Word and to gain spiritual insights that can be applicable in their daily lives.

The main purposes of a Bible study are to edify, educate, and encourage the participants. It is *not* a one-way street where knowledge originates in the facilitator and moves toward the participants. It *is* a two-way avenue where everyone has the opportunity to ask questions, share experiences, and build each other up in the knowledge of God.

According to dictionary.com, a facilitator's job is simply "to make easier or less difficult," "to help forward," "to assist in the progress of (a person)." Therefore, a facilitator is supposed to assist, not to lecture; to listen, not to rebut. A facilitator's duty is not to show off how much knowledge he or she possesses, but to help others deepen their understanding of God. A facilitator does not need to have all the right answers but should be willing to work with others to discover the biblical answer.

This type of edifying interaction is also about revering God and bringing glory to His name through the study of His Word and the fellowship in His love.

It's About the Truth

Show me Your ways, O LORD;
Teach me Your paths.
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day. (Ps 25:4–5)

We are fortunate to have instant access to digital concordances or commentaries, as well as a number of useful church publications. However, it is even more important to ground ourselves in the truth that can only be found by careful and deliberate study of the Bible. We cannot take shortcuts, such as hurriedly glancing at the Bible study guide right before the session is about to start, or depending on our own ideas to carry on a good discussion. Our observations must not be based on our own subjective opinions or even on mainstream concepts, but on what is right and

"in accordance with the truth" (Lk 20:21). The truth is the standard against which we must measure all ideas and concepts.

1. Dig Deep

Understanding comes about by first admitting a *lack* of understanding. In order to uncover the underlying teaching, we must dig beyond the surface. Any given Bible passage is like an onion, with layers hidden underneath other layers.

Ask yourself, What are the verses *really* saying? Are you relying on any assumptions based on past sermons you have heard or on your own interpretations? Is there a specific context or setting that must be taken into consideration? Who are the characters? What are their relationships with each other? What are the underlying motives for their actions? How does God fit into the picture?

2. Limit the Focus

After you understand the passage to a reasonable extent, pick a small number of main points (usually three) that you will be emphasizing during the allotted time (usually forty-five minutes). Although the time limit should not be an inflexible constraint for the discussion, it gives participants a specific framework, and the main points give them a clear picture of what will be covered. It may also help them retain the information after the discussion is over.

3. Reveal a "Secret"

Through your extensive investigation of the passage, you should have come across one or two points that moved or enlightened you. Help participants share in the process of reaching these "secret" revelations. They should come away feeling satisfied that they learned something, instead of disappointed that they wasted their time.

It's About Walking the Talk

Finally, the true lesson starts after the Bible study. Do you make use of what you learned from your preparation and the actual discussion? Or do you let it gather dust in a forgotten corridor of your mind? As followers of Christ, we are to actually walk in God's truth, not merely listen to His Word (Ps 86:11). After all, those with a weaker or younger faith may

look up to you as a model to follow. Consider for a moment: What type of example are you setting?

Being assigned to facilitate our first Bible study is indeed a great honor. Let us keep in mind that what makes the Bible study truly valuable is the edification of the participants, the revelation of God's truth, and the subsequent actions we take. If we learn to perform this holy work with humility and reverence toward God, He will reward us in time with honor and life from above (Prov 22:4).

SHARING OUR BELIEFS

I'm naturally a pretty shy and timid guy, so I was never able to muster up the courage to preach explicitly. I was worried about what to say, how to say things without offending anyone, and, most of all, how to naturally bring up the subject of the gospel in the first place and then find the confidence to talk about it. From more recent experiences with evangelism, I've learned that God provides us the opportunities to preach, so it's not a question of how to bring up the topic of church, but rather whether or not we grasp the opportunities before us.

Going to a college with no nearby church meant that I had to keep Friday night and Saturday services on my own. "Service" on Friday night often consisted of having Bible study alone or participating over Skype with the campus fellowship back home. During dinner one Friday, I was eating in the dining hall when one of my friends came by, saw me eating by myself, and sat down to join me. We chatted a bit and then he asked me, "So, what are you doing tonight?" I told him that I was having Bible study in my room via Skype with some church friends at home, starting at 7:30 pm. He said, "Oh I see; that's interesting," and then we transitioned to another subject.

Around 7 pm, we finished eating and left the dining hall. My friend then started following me back to my room. I thought to myself, "Hmm... I did tell him I have Bible study later, but maybe he just wants to hang out for a bit."

We talked a little more and soon, it was almost time to start Bible study, but my friend still wasn't leaving. Then I thought, "Oh what the heck,

he's already in my room; it would be a shame to pass up such an opportunity." I asked him, "Hey I need to start Bible study now; want to stick around and hear what it's like?" To my surprise, he replied, "Uhh...okay."

Bible study was on the Book of Acts, which turned out to be good for preaching and introducing the apostolic church and the Holy Spirit. The sound quality of the Skype call was actually very poor that night and we had a hard time hearing what people were saying, so I spent a lot of time explaining things in the chapter and relating them to today's True Jesus Church. My friend was atheist and knew nothing about the Bible, but he still found the relationships and similarities between True Jesus Church and the apostolic church intriguing.

When it came time to pray, I started to tell him about the Holy Spirit and praying in tongues, since he was about to hear what our prayer sounded like. As my church friends on the other end of the call prayed, I told him why people have to pray for the Holy Spirit and how our church teaches people to pray by kneeling down, closing their eyes, repeatedly saying Hallelujah, and talking to God with our hearts and minds. Understandably, he was a little overwhelmed with everything I was telling him, and said that he didn't want to try praying at that moment, but might try on his own later. A few days later, I gave him a USB drive with a few testimonies from our church and encouraged him to listen to them when he had time.

I really thank God that He gave me this opportunity to preach to someone, and was amazed at how easy God made it. I didn't have to bring up Bible study because my friend asked me what I was doing that night, and I didn't have to invite him to my room because he just followed me back after dinner. God set up everything for me—the only thing I had to do was to find the guts to ask him if he wanted to stay for Bible study.

This experience also reminded me that we should never abstain from preaching because we think that people won't care or listen. The fact is that we don't know. If we don't seize a God-given opportunity to preach, we prevent another soul from finding the truth and thus fail to fulfill God's commission to us: to make disciples of all nations.

SOW A SEED OF HOPE

She had seen the sign announcing an evangelical fellowship and joined the event. After munching on a few snacks and chit-chatting with a couple of believers, she headed back to her car. I watched her as she walked away, thinking I should do something, anything, to make use of that opportunity. Despite my sense of urgency, I was hesitant. She was a stranger, after all, and I knew nothing about her. What could I possibly say? I was no preacher. What if I couldn't find the exact Bible verse to back up a doctrine? I would have to rely on paraphrasing instead of direct quoting. How would she react? She might be uncomfortable or even annoyed. Would I be making a fool of myself? Probably.

I reached her as she stood by her car door. To my surprise, her first comment was that she had liked the event. I told her the dates and times for our weekly services and invited her to join us. She explained that she suffered from diabetes and other physical ailments and asked me to pray for her.

Before that very moment, I had been clueless about what to say, yet I suddenly found myself sharing testimonies about believers who had received healing. I also shared the testimony of how my mother had been resurrected from the dead by the grace of God. I did not know how she would take it. Maybe she would think I was making it up on the spot. Perhaps she would think I was out of my mind. Amazingly, her eyes glistened with hope, and her immediate response was to praise God. She believed that God was capable of such miracles and was drawn by the fact that these miracles occurred at our church. Before she left, she mentioned she would be interested in attending our services.

As I watched her drive away, I was grateful to God for the opportunity to share His works, despite my own doubts and shortcomings. I did not have lofty theological concepts or a plethora of Bible verses, only stories about God's miracles. I was glad that she had not left empty-handed.

Evangelizing is one of the most challenging, yet one of the most rewarding, commissions we have as Christians. In college, you will meet many people who will defy your convictions, or even go as far as persecute you for holding on to your principles.

You may have limited Bible knowledge. You may be afraid that someone else will know more about religion than you do. You may not even be quite sure of what you believe in. So how should you go about preaching?

Share What You Have Seen and Heard

There is no intellectual, financial, or social requirement for an everyday evangelist. All you need to start off is a heart that loves God and a willingness to share your own experiences.

The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us — that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 Jn 1:2–3)

How did your family come to believe? How did you come to believe? Was there a turning point in your spiritual walk? Are there any testimonies of healing, signs, or miracles among your relatives? Are there any stories about experiences you had at church events (such as SSC, NYTS, etc.) or in your daily life? Have you been touched by a hymn or enlightened by a Bible passage? How has God reached out to you through nature, other believers, or even trials?

What have you seen and heard about God?

Practice What You Preach

Aside from sharing your personal testimony, it is paramount that you actually stand out from the crowd through thoughts and actions that are pleasing to God. What words do you speak? What motivations do you have? What actions do you practice? Are these in line with biblical teachings? If not, why is it so?

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:8–9)

Your life is an open book that everyone you come in contact with will read. Who you are as a Christian is not limited to what you do at church

on the Sabbath. What words do you say when you are not in church? Do you encourage or criticize? Do you gossip or curse? Who and what do you spend time with outside of church? Do you stay out late with the pretext of studying when you are really doing something your parents might not approve of? Do you have close friends who engage in risky behavior, like drinking or promiscuity?

You must endeavor to align your life with God's standards in order to preach through your actions. When others look at your life, will they see the beautiful façade of a heavenly palace hiding a shadowy cemetery within? Or will they see a humble, clean home that is dedicated to God inside and out?

COLLEGE: THE ARENA OF EVANGELISM

College can expose us to many philosophical ideas from the people we meet, the events we go to, and even the classes we take. In college, most people are trying to search for a belief system to call their own — something that they truly believe in and support. Perhaps this is the reason that we often find a smorgasbord of religious clubs and associations on campus. These organizations range from Christian to Muslim to Buddhist. Those who are searching for the truth are thirsting for something that can provide them some type of satisfaction or fulfillment. As Christians, it is our job to help these people find their way to God. In college, we come into contact with a huge influx of diverse people, and it is a great arena for us to evangelize (or at least, to gain experience in evangelizing).

In my experience, preaching and evangelism have always been touchy issues. My journey in evangelism began in high school, when I brought one of my high school friends to church for a formal gospel event. My friend was a pretty devout Christian from a mainstream church. He had a lot of questions regarding our church doctrines, primarily those relating to the Holy Spirit and the Sabbath. I tried my best to answer these questions, but like many young evangelists at church, I struggled with issues such as discerning between right and wrong and being confident enough to stand by my beliefs.

These same struggles persisted as I entered college. I was not afraid to let others know that I was a Christian and that I went to church on Saturdays. People in college were generally understanding and respectful of my religious practices and beliefs. Getting through the first step of establishing my status as a Christian was not a problem, but taking the next step of preaching was.

I preached to several people I met. Many of these were free-spirited individuals were drawn to philosophical thought and were not attached to any organized form of religion. Some of them even called themselves "atheists." They wondered what mighty power ruled over them, how fate or coincidence influenced their lives, why bad things happen to good people, and where life would lead them. They had a vague concept of God, but no concrete beliefs stemming from personal experience. I could not usually begin with a doctrinal introduction of our church because they were not aware of any of the usual religious tenets, but I tried my best to explain.

Once, our campus fellowship organized an on-campus evangelical service. A couple of weeks before the event, I started praying about who I could invite. It was a source of great internal struggle because I did not know whom I should ask. I had a bad habit of occasionally stereotyping people, hypothesizing who would accept or reject my invitation based on what I knew and observed about them. However, I knew that this was the wrong attitude because the gospel of Jesus Christ is a treasure that can be found by all. Moreover, as ambassadors of Christ, we must always be ready to preach in and out of season to all of mankind (cf. 2 Tim 4:2).

I started talking to one of my classmates, who had always been curious about God. He did not associate himself with any one religion and preferred to think of himself as a realist who explained phenomena using science, math, and logic. Although he was an analytical person, he had many questions about God and Christianity. We would often talk about general subjects such as why bad things happen to good people. This is a question that many truthseekers ask. My response was that God wants us to learn something from the trial and gain something good out of the bad. I also told him that human beings suffer so that we can grow mentally and spiritually. He felt most of these answers were strange because he had never heard of them before. Our conversations continued, and they

seemed to spark an interest within him. However, he was never able to fully grasp the meaning of it all. Despite the slow progress, our conversations exposed him to new concepts and beliefs.

Thank God, he and seven other people eventually decided to attend the gospel night. While none of them stayed in the church, I believed that this was a good example of playing a role in evangelism. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor 3:6). I had prayed and made an effort to explain the truth to my friends, and God made it possible for them to be willing to attend the event. To this day, I still pray that I can successfully bring a person to believe in Christ and to join our spiritual household. For "[h]ow then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10:14). By preaching, we start a good work; it is up to God to open up our friends' hearts. Although we are limited in what we can do, we should pray continually because we never know what God has in His plans.

A SUMMER AT THE BATTLEFRONT

My most memorable time serving God was being an SSC counselor one summer during college. When the SSC coordinator asked if I could help, I was really excited because I respected my SSC counselors and RE teachers and wanted to follow in their footsteps. Furthermore, I wanted blessings from God.

However, I still signed up for two summer classes because I didn't want to be idle for the rest of my summer break. I decided to take a week off during summer school for SSC. I knew it was a great risk, since summer courses are really condensed. I immediately contacted the instructors and told them about my situation. One instructor said it was fine as long as I made up my work afterwards. The other suggested that I not do it.

I decided to do both because I didn't want to miss out on the opportunity to be a counselor. I also believed that God would provide for me—that if I worked for God, I would not do badly in my classes (actually, my faith wasn't that strong; I chose to take the second class pass/no pass).

On the first day of classes, I realized that God does provide. I ran into a really good friend in one class, and in the other I quickly made new friends who told me that they could take notes for me during the week that I would be gone.

After SSC started, I realized that counseling was much more difficult than I thought. There was an ADHD child that required a lot of attention and special care. And the family backgrounds of the students were not nearly as simple as I had imagined. By the third day of SSC I felt overwhelmed by the students' family problems and the bad behavior of one student in particular.

Thankfully, I had a co-counselor who was older and more experienced, and he was able to handle the issues better than me. When I felt the most upset, God comforted me and put me back on my feet after prayer. Through serving as an SSC counselor, I really experienced God's providence. I also realized that I needed to pray for more patience and love, both of which I previously thought I had enough of.

When I got back to school after SSC, God blessed me abundantly. I actually received better grades on my makeup work than the work that I had done before SSC. By the time the final grades came out, I realized that my biology grade was the highest that I had gotten in any bio course that I had ever taken, despite missing 20% of the course. As this verse says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt 6:33).

MAKING SERVITUDE A PRIORITY

During college, it is easy to feel overwhelmed with schoolwork — there is definitely more work than in high school and, at times, putting holy work aside seems like the best option.

I felt that way during the first two years of college, often wanting to stop serving as an RE teacher because I believed that the time I spent preparing for an RE class was taking away precious time for studying. But thank God, He gave me the faith to know that if I put the things of God first in my life, then He would take care of the rest. By the time I reached my third year of college, thank God, I had become comfortable with balancing schoolwork and holy work.

The first year of college can be really exciting. There are many things you can get involved in, but you will probably soon realize that it is almost impossible to get good grades, participate in extracurricular activities, and serve God all at the same time. Although I had some difficulty finding a good church-school balance at the beginning, a couple of basic principles helped guide me throughout my time in college. I hope that they can be helpful in guiding your college years as well:

Serve God During Summer and Winter Breaks

Since summer and winter breaks are typically longer in college than they were in high school, they are good opportunities for spiritual cultivation and serving God.

In college, I knew that it was important to keep increasing in spiritual wisdom and faith, so I decided to not take any summer classes and go to church events instead. Every summer, I was able to attend either NYTS or CYC or both, either as a student or as a counselor. Although I did take up summer jobs every year, I made sure that my employers knew when I was going to be away for church events even before I started working. I believe that God arranged all these good jobs and flexible employers for me because He knew that I wanted to serve Him during summers.

So before you decide to sign up for summer classes or agree to take a summer job, it is good to think about how much time and energy you will have to commit to it, and whether or not you will still be able to serve God.

Also, consider whether it is absolutely necessary for you to take summer classes. For example, if you are only taking them so you can finish college in three years rather than four, weigh that against being able to serve God in the summers and try to determine which one is more important to you.

Prioritize

After the first couple of years of college, I decided to come up with a list of the things that I wanted to do and ranked each one with respect to how important it was. Prior to making such a list, I had struggled with whether I should continue being an RE teacher. There were times when I really wanted to quit because I would often study late on Thursday nights and then find out that I had to teach RE on Sabbath. But after consulting with my parents, I decided to still put church work at the top of my priorities list. Church work was followed by family and then school. After the list was set, I felt more comfortable spending time and effort doing church work as I was often reminded that it was more important to me than school.

Through creating a list ranked by priority, I learned that it is necessary to really know what is important in your life before you decide how to divide your time. You can do this by talking to your parents or your brothers and sisters at church, then creating a list of priorities. What is essential is that you stick to your list. For example, you might say that you want to put church work first, in which case you will want to set aside some time each week for church work. After that, you can do your school work or spend time with your friends and family. Basically, it just requires discipline and self-control to stick to the list.

I found that having other extracurricular activities on the list is good as well, but you should be realistic about how much time you will have to do everything. I ended up not having any time to participate in extracurricular activities at school, but that was not at the top of my list.

When I look back at all the things that have transpired in my life since college, I am really glad that I did not stop serving God. My grades did not suffer. God helped me accomplish as much academically as the other students despite less time and effort. But more importantly, had I stopped working for God during college, my relationship with Him would not be as close as it is today. Since college, I have been blessed to have the

opportunity to do more work for God. Furthermore, I have been able to see very clear, step-by-step guidance in my work, family, and life. As it is written in Psalm 100:2–3:

Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before His presence with singing.
Know that the LORD, He is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

COMPELLED TO SERVE THE LORD

I hadn't really served God before I went to college. I had just started teaching RE classes and had only translated for a sermon once. This changed once I started college — not because people began asking me to help with holy work or because I saw everyone else working, but because I felt compelled to serve the Lord.

Your college years are a great time start serving God. Because you're impressionable, you can learn things the right way, and because you're young, people will be patient with you. Yet I learned that, in order to serve, you need to be equipped — equipped not only in ability, but in attitude, motivation, and spirit.

During the first few years of college I attended as many seminars and spiritual convocations as I could and tried to learn the spirit of servitude from role models. In the end, I found that it's easy to do the work assigned and imitate the form of servitude but difficult to capture its true essence. When viewing others, it is easy to see who is truly serving the Lord out of a pure and humble heart and who is just going through the motions and fulfilling a checklist of work to do.

I found that if you take the work seriously (such as letting people know when you can't make it) and do everything to the best of your abilities, the older generation will trust you more. Because the holy work in church is passed from generation to generation, trust needs to be established between generations. It's not a matter of doing the work or showing your capabilities; there is trust and faithfulness involved.

Another thing I learned is from what Jesus said to Peter in John 21:22:

Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."

After Jesus resurrected, He asked Peter three times if he loved Him and then told Peter to follow Him. However, Peter's reaction was to ask Jesus about what would happen to the disciple whom Jesus loved instead of proclaiming, "Yes, I will follow you."

One Sunday, while in the apartment that I shared with several church members, I answered a phone call from a deacon. He asked me if I would be willing to participate in a pilot program for RE teachers to accompany ministers visiting remote regions and teach. I agreed and was about to ask him if my roommate was also going, but I caught myself. I realized that it wasn't my place to ask because he had already told me who else was going to be part of it. I felt bad because I knew my roommate would feel hurt if he found out I was part of something and he wasn't asked to participate.

God has a different plan for each person. Everyone has different talents because God works in each person differently. Even though we may feel envious of others for what they are called to do, we must remember that we're all one body and God is the head. It's important to learn to accept what is given to you and be a good steward for God regardless of what others may or may not be doing.

Ultimately, if you have the heart to serve God, then your college years are a great time to start. Focus on quality and not quantity. Learn to serve with faithfulness, sincerity, and truth. Pay attention to what you've been given and not what you feel you have not been given. Be patient, be humble, and be submissive. Learning to serve God the right way will not only lead to being entrusted with more responsibilities (c.f. Lk 19:17), but will also allow your servitude to be a joy and blessing to you and not a source of burden and conflict.

Jesus said, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Lk 10:2). Jesus has work for all of us to do. If we really put the matter in prayer, He will train and equip us for every good work. Now is a great time to start.

THE BLESSINGS OF A CAMPUS FELLOWSHIP

SHAMMAH MANNA ISSUE 58

A WARNING FROM GOD

It was the summer of 2005 and things were going great. I had just spent two weeks close to God at the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS), so I was in high spirits.

I was recently accepted as a transfer student at the university of my dreams. Thank God I was able to find a cheap room to rent in a house close to campus, and I was now on my way to sign the lease. When I got there, my housemates showed me pictures of people laughing, dancing, and drinking at a housewarming party earlier that summer.

The pictures weren't of anything I hadn't seen before and, by worldly standards, were fairly tame. However, when I saw them anxiety came upon me. It's the feeling you get when you're in a situation that you really don't want to be in.

During the drive home, I realized that NYTS had heightened my spiritual sensitivity. Prior to NYTS, I would have had no problem being in environments like those in the pictures because I was far from God and did not realize when I was in spiritual danger. I was glad for the warning from God because it told me that I needed to be cautious as I began my schooling at the university.

When the semester started, I immediately became aware of the reason for God's warning. It didn't truly become apparent that I was the only True Jesus Church member in a house of seven until I spent my first night there. I felt very lonely but found it difficult to pray because I had a roommate. I realized that spiritual battles could happen anywhere — even within your own room.

The second challenge I faced was the environment. I lived down the street from all the off-campus bars. From Thursday night to Sunday morning, it was normal to see people walking back from the bars drunk.

My house was also about a few hundred feet away from a hospital. Ironically, this only added to my stress because every couple of minutes, ambulances zoomed by with their sirens blaring.

A SPIRITUAL FAMILY

However, thank God my university's campus fellowship had become stable eight years earlier. One of the reasons I dreamed of attending my school was because a lot of the brothers and sisters I grew up with were there.

We had a prayer meeting every Wednesday night, when we'd come together to share about our week and our prayer requests, then pray for thirty minutes. From these prayers, I felt that there was something in this campus fellowship I couldn't find in any other group or club—a family in Christ.

During my third year, I felt conflicted while choosing a career. It was down to two different possibilities, and I needed to make the decision soon in order to graduate at a reasonable age. There were friends who would listen to my concerns, but I didn't feel like they had the heart to sympathize.

However, when I brought this up during a prayer meeting, I finally felt that there were people who sincerely cared about my situation. They offered me words of encouragement from their own experiences, which I cherished. But it was their willingness to pray for me that really touched my heart.

How many people are there who honestly intercede on your behalf to the heavenly Father when you go to them with an issue? All the words and ideas in the world can only do so much, but truly it is only prayer that can bring about a resolution.

Through the prayer and support of my fellow brothers and sisters, I received the strength from God to overcome the spiritual and physical loneliness I felt. I developed the courage to pray in my room no matter who or what was around me.

I distinctly remember one evening when my roommates walked in while I was praying and were very accepting and even respectful of it. One of my roommates shushed the other one, saying, "Shh! Be quiet, he's praying!" Thank God!

From that point on, though I was still the only believer, I felt the spiritual peace and confidence I would have in a house of believers. And although all the drinking going on down the street didn't stop, I realized one very important thing. If I didn't have those brothers and sisters on campus, there was a good chance that I would have been one of those people walking to the bar on Thursday night, drinking and partying as a result of loneliness.

A SPIRITUAL SIBLING

I now realize that God provided the campus fellowship not only to help me but also so I could help others. A year after I arrived on campus, a younger brother entered as a freshman. Instead of living in the dorms, he rented a room off-campus.

I had to commute that year because resources were tight. However, the Lord provided for me because that brother invited me to stay over whenever my travels got tiring, which became most of the week. In time, I came to see the Lord's plan for us to be roommates.

I was mentally transitioning from late adolescence to early adulthood that year, and being around him helped the process. Since I was older, I felt compelled to set a good example, which refined my spiritual and physical life.

I developed a more rigid schedule of Bible reading and prayer and took better care of my body by sleeping earlier. I came to view our relationship as that of two brothers who benefited from each other — the younger being guided by the older, and the older learning a lot about himself from the younger.

We shared almost everything with one another: our trials, our joys, and our aspirations. I remember a few times when we experienced God's mercy during exams. One of us would burst into the room sharing how awesome God is. It's one thing to experience this on your own, but when you're able to edify someone else, it becomes so much sweeter.

More importantly, we shared some of the most touching prayers together. I remember times when one of us felt weighed down with burdens and unmotivated to pray. The other would take note of this and automatically start praying, eventually moving the other to pray. We would keep praying until we felt satisfied and peaceful, a beautiful experience I believe would have been difficult to attain on our own.

Two are better than one,
Because they have a good
reward for their labor.
For if they fall, one will
lift up his companion.
But woe to him who is
alone when he falls,
For he has no one to
help him up. (Eccl 4:9–10)

The spiritual siblinghood I experienced those two years is one of the sweetest and most important relationships a college youth can have. Being connected to brothers and sisters, especially during turbulent times like college, is a blessing and

providence. It enhances our college experience, and, more importantly, it's something that every one of us needs in our spiritual journey — someone to help us up when we fall.

SERVING GOD IN MY YOUTH: SELF-DOUBT OR SELF CONFIDENCE?

PCC — USA

MANNA ISSUE 39

Youth. Youth plus college. Youth plus college plus church work. Does this sound familiar? In an ideal world, laboring for the Lord is smooth and victorious. In reality, unfortunately, being entrusted with holy work usually creates stress.

The life of a student often is a constant struggle to balance the demands of schoolwork, friends, and activities. The life of a Christian student carries with it the added requirements of setting aside time for spiritual cultivation and holy work.

There are times when we may find ourselves hesitant to accept certain responsibilities, not because we are too busy (although we might claim as such) but because there is something within ourselves that is holding us back. What is that something?

SELF DOUBT

Before we answer this question, let us first examine some commonly held stereotypes about youths.

On one extreme, college students are seen as lost souls — filled with uncertainty about what they like and who they are, and riddled with doubt about their own self-worth and capabilities.

On the other extreme, students are portrayed as overconfident know-it-alls, who, regardless of whether or not they really do know it all, have no respect for the advice of elders or those in authority.

When I started college, I began to attend youth Bible studies held every Friday night. An informal list of names was put together, and those less-than-a-dozen youths would each take a turn to lead the Bible study.

Although I was a religious education teacher and had had some other teaching experience, I was filled with fear at the thought of having to lead a Bible study for the first time. Since most of the youths

were taking turns to lead, I was soon asked to also take part.

My first reaction, fortunately not expressed aloud, was, "yeah right!" My attitude stemmed not from laziness or defiance, but rather from a "who, me?" type of mindset. What right did I have to tell other people, some of whom were several years older than I was, what to do?

I didn't even know what to do myself sometimes! However, after awkwardly resisting several gentle requests to add my name to the schedule, I finally agreed, realizing that this was a duty that the other youths had willingly and even joyfully accepted.

For some, leading an informal youth Bible study might not seem like such a big deal, but for others, the mere thought of it can be enough to set off the butterflies in our stomach. In my case, public speaking wasn't particularly a problem, but I had little faith in myself and doubted that I could edify others.

Although I don't quite remember the specific details about what leading Bible study for the first time was like, I do know that, despite my concerns, things ran relatively smoothly.

The week leading up to my turn to lead a Bible study, I found myself becoming more worried. Yet, instead of letting my inabilities inhibit me, I found myself drawing closer to God as I asked Him for help.

What I came to realize through this small but not insignificant experience was that self-doubt could hinder our spiritual progress if we allow ourselves to be consumed by worries over our inadequacies.

Depending on God

If we channel that self-doubt into dependence on God, we can actually be quite successful. In fact, many great figures in the Bible who were called by God did not possess extraordinary gifts or talents. Some even possessed certain traits that we would think might hinder their work.

For example, Moses himself was reluctant to lead the Israelites because he was "slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Ex 4:10). A person who characterizes himself right off the bat as an ineloquent speaker hardly seems like the ideal choice for someone who would be expected to persuade well over a half-million Israelites, excluding women and children, to risk their lives to follow him and who had to first convince the Pharaoh to set them free (Ex 12:37).

Similarly, when chosen to be the leader of the Israelites, both Gideon

and Saul replied that they were from the smallest tribes of Israel, of the least important clan within those tribes, and, as Gideon himself stated, was the least within his own family (Judg 6:15).

Choosing an unlikely candidate to assume an important role seems illogical, but God's methods are profound. When we are aware of our own limitations, we rely on God to make up for our deficiencies — in essence, when we are weak, we are strong.

Furthermore, others can see God's work and glorify His name. If God had chosen a fearless, charismatic leader to save the Israelites from their bondage, it is quite possible that many might have put their faith in that person and not in God.

By choosing workers whom the majority of people would consider to be the least likely, others can see that subsequent victories are clearly the result of God's almighty power and not that of man. As 1 Cor 1:27–28, 30 explains:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty... that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Having Faith in His Power

If we do not know to turn to God with our insecurities and continue to doubt ourselves, we actually doubt God. While we may have faith in God's existence, if we cannot believe that God can help us, we, in effect, doubt that God's almighty power can change us.

For instance, when Peter stepped onto the water to meet Jesus, he began to sink when he saw the boisterous wind and waves about him. Jesus then rebuked him, saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

However, Peter did believe in Jesus' saving power, for as soon as he began to sink, he immediately cried out, "Lord, save me!" So why did Jesus scold Peter for his lack of faith? Because without the confidence that God's abidance makes all things possible, our faith is incomplete.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

So let's say that we've pretty much gotten over our self-doubt and are ready to take on some more holy work. Does confidence in our own abilities to serve God mean that we are being proud? Again, that all

depends upon what we decide to do with that self-confidence.

Relying on My Own Effort

After having become more comfortable with leading Bible studies on Friday nights and occasionally with a small group during Sabbath services, and also having been given the opportunity to lead various types of religious education activities, I began to recognize that I had certain capabilities that could be used to serve God.

At the same time, I began to question whether this assurance in myself meant that I was proud. Well aware of the fact that pride leads to destruction, I began to wonder whether my newfound confidence might instead be cleverly concealed pride.

To find out, I decided to try my best to "act humble." Unfortunately, it turns out that I had a misconception about humility as well. Not known as an outwardly shy person and at times probably considered to be quite the opposite, I began to force myself to become quieter.

I knew that on occasion, well-intentioned youths could be a bit too headstrong in that their fervency to serve God causes them to become easily frustrated with what they perceive as the inefficient efforts of older members. Therefore, I wanted to try extra hard to please and submit to other church workers.

I remember leading one Sabbath Bible study in particular and was so caught up in worrying about coming across as a pretentious youth that I wound up sounding completely unsure of myself.

Very few people were edified during that session, and I realized that I couldn't expect others to be assured of what I was saying if it didn't seem like I was completely convinced, either.

Counting on God

I soon realized that no matter what, I could not please everybody. What really matters is pleasing God first and foremost. The apostle Paul possessed a similar attitude: "I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16).

While we must try our best to get along with others, we must not lose sight of the fact that pleasing God is more important than pleasing man. Paul, too, recognized that we must make every effort to not offend others, but note how he clearly placed having a clear conscience in front of God before having a clear conscience in front of men.

My failed attempts to appear humble only resulted in me finding myself right back where I had started — filled with self-doubt and still somewhat confused.

While meekness and knowing when and what not to speak are invaluable qualities, outward quietness does not necessarily mean that one is more spiritual or humble.

After all, it is quite possible to have an outward appearance of modesty while still feeling rather self-righteous inwardly. Through these trial-and-error processes, I've come to learn that self-doubt does not and should not be equated with humility.

What, then, is the difference? Self-doubt can cause one to place too much emphasis on our own human efforts, or lack thereof, while true humility makes one recognize that, in strength and in weakness, we must always count on God.

Putting God First

So then what about that other question of whether or not self-confidence equals pride? Again, the key to that answer lies in where we place God in all of this. We can and need to have an awareness of our own abilities. If we didn't recognize our own talents, how would we know how we could best serve God?

However, it is essential to recognize that God gives those talents to us for a special purpose — to glorify Him and not ourselves. To prevent that ever-present threat of pride from sneaking in, we need to simultaneously have confidence in God to help us use our abilities wisely.

As 1 Cor 4:7 reminds us, "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you have not received it?"

CONCLUSION

As we become entrusted with church work, it is only natural to want to do the best job possible. But we must constantly ask ourselves whether this need arises from a desire to protect or boost our own reputation, or whether we seek solely to exalt God's name.

While I have made some embarrassing mistakes since learning these lessons, I tell myself to look forward to the ones I will surely make in the future, for mistakes are channels through which I can learn how to better serve my Lord.

"BEHOLD, NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME..."

PCC MANNA ISSUE 44

You and a partner have just finished working on a class presentation, and you think about how nice it would be if he could come to church. You suddenly remember that there's an evangelical service at church this weekend. What do you do?

A million thoughts run through your head—most of them a series of "what if's." *What if he thinks I'm weird? What if he's already a Christian? What if this puts a strain on our "working relationship?" What if people at church think he's my boyfriend? What if he's scared by the way we pray?*

Within seconds, the train of doubt-ridden questions gives way to more definite assumptions. *He's probably not interested anyway. He's probably an atheist, and he's probably busy, too—it is Friday night after all.*

Do you:

1. Silently pack up your books as you internally lament the tragedy of the situation, tell your classmate you'll see him in class next week, and head back to your dorm; or
2. Swallow your nervousness, nonchalantly ask your classmate what his plans are for the weekend, and prepare to turn the conversation into an invitation to Bible study.

For many of us, it's probably less of a hassle to pick 1.

WHAT'S HOLDING US BACK?

When I was little, I would occasionally read those choose-your-own-adventure books where you could pick to read from a number of different scenarios. Depending upon your choices, you could wind up with a completely different story and ending than someone else who read the same book.

Admittedly, I always cheated whenever I read those books. If it seemed like the story was heading in a bad direction, I would go back and carefully re-read as many different choices as I could until I ended on a brighter note.

When it comes to spreading the gospel, we don't always have the luxury of being able to sit back and debate the pros and cons of a certain situation, or the ins and outs of how to go about preaching.

A lot of times, we need to make decisions on the spot, which we,

more often than not, have no way of reversing.

Of course, we can try to comfort ourselves after missed preaching opportunities with the thought that there's always the possibility of a second chance. For instance, you might run into an acquaintance you weren't able to preach to before and whom you never thought you would see again.

However, instead of consoling ourselves for bygones, it's better to remind ourselves that we must make the most of our present opportunities.

So if hesitation is preventing us from spreading the precious gospel, we should try to think in terms of what we are going to do in the here and now. As 2 Corinthians 6:2 states, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

If we dwell in the hypothetical past or the future while neglecting the urgency of the present — if only I had done this, tomorrow I'm going to do that — no action occurs.

We must also be honest with ourselves, since excuses often unconsciously masquerade as legitimate reasons. For example, we could and should try to use judgment and discretion when it comes to finding an opportune time to share the gospel.

But we must also be careful that the desire to come across a better moment isn't just an excuse not to preach. If we keep waiting for the "ideal" preaching conditions, odds are we'll end up waiting forever.

Distinguishing between reason and excuse takes a hearty amount of self-reflection and the spiritual wisdom that comes from none other than God.

GO FOR IT WITH GOD'S SPIRIT

If there's one thing I've learned over the years in terms of trying to preach to classmates, it's that no matter how hard I try, I can never predict God.

"'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord" (Isa 55:8). Knowing God's sovereignty, it seems almost shockingly irreverent that one would dare to predict or second-guess the thoughts and plans of the Creator of the entire universe.

Yet, we do it all the time.

Oftentimes, before we've even spoken a word of God's grace and salvation aloud, we've already said something in our hearts like, "Oh, she'd never accept the truth"

or "Why bother, no one ever believes anyway."

Such defeating assumptions not only place doubt on God's power to make possible the impossible, but also place human logic above God's. Whether we mean to or not, we are sending God the message: I know better than You do.

Once, in my freshman year of college, I was eating in the dining hall with two other classmates, and they started talking about their plans for the coming weekend. Since it was the beginning of the school year, none of us knew each other very well, and I wasn't sure what they thought of Christianity, let alone whether they'd be interested in coming to church with me.

I mentioned how I was planning to go to Bible study and church that Friday and Saturday. I hesitated for a split-second before I went on, and then I decided just to go for it.

"You're both more than welcome to come with me," I continued. Then, I gave a brief spiel about how our services are usually run.

Neither of them was scared off by my proposal, but they didn't seem particularly interested either. Oh well, I thought, maybe some other time—at least I tried. To my surprise though, as we were leaving the cafeteria, one of my classmates suddenly turned to me and asked, "Hey, can I come with you to Bible study this weekend?"

Follow His Lead

Preaching about God to others helped me to learn more about Him myself. The more I tried to invite my friends and classmates to church, the more I realized that God indeed works in mysterious ways and often in ways that are contrary to what human reasoning would prescribe.

For instance, last semester, a church worker from out of town was scheduled to give a sermon during one of our Sabbath services. Hoping to use this "special" occasion as a means to plug our church, I decided to email some of my classmates with an invite.

However, there were a few people on my email list I wasn't sure about. Two of the girls had been unable to come to Bible study several times, and eventually I assumed that their busyness was a polite way of saying, thanks, but no thanks.

Another potential prospect was a classmate whose email address I so happened to have, but whom I had just recently met.

As I was debating about whether or not I should include them as part of the informal list I had drawn up,

it occurred to me that maybe I should kneel down and pray. My first thought, though, was whether I should bother praying about something so seemingly trivial as sending out a few emails.

Why not just boldly shoot those invites out across the waves of the internet and not look back? Right away though, I realized that I should put my trust in Him with even with the "little" things, since anything we do for God is never really trivial to begin with.

Freshly humbled, I knelt down and prayed for God to let His spirit work in the hearts of those who had not yet received the true gospel. I also prayed that I could remember my own role—as an unworthy vessel merely planting the seeds of the gospel. Without God, those seeds could never grow.

Interestingly enough, the only ones who were able to make it to service were the ones I had been most unsure of. What's more, the classmate I had been almost positive wouldn't be interested actually brought a friend with her as well!

Be Bold

Just as much as we need God to help us overcome our timidity, we also need God when we are feeling bold. Being a person who's usually not too afraid of coming across as "different" in the eyes of my peers doesn't make me any less in need of God's assistance.

As Paul writes in his epistle to the Romans:

So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes... (Rom 1:15–16)

Paul was obviously an apostle who preached the gospel without fear or shame, yet he was careful to recognize that spreading the news of salvation was possible not because of his own courage but because of the power and mercy of God.

Furthermore, I've learned that regardless of the outcome and whether or not any friends or classmates ended up visiting or joining our church, I should still continue to do my part.

If there are times when I feel discouraged and it seems like no one is interested in the gospel, I think of Daniel's three friends before they were thrown into the fiery furnace. They were able to proclaim that they could accept whatever fate God had in store for them.

Regardless of whether this meant their deliverance or their death,

their faith never wavered. How much more, then, should we be relentless to proclaim the truth no matter what the possible return or lack thereof!

TELL OF THE WONDERFUL THINGS HE'S DONE

When we're under potentially nerve-wracking or pressure-inducing circumstances, clinging onto our own logic often gives us a momentary, if not false, sense of safety amidst confusion. Yet, God wants us to do just the opposite.

He wants us to take that leap into the unknown, so long as we don't forget another crucial step—trusting in and asking for His guidance along the way. In other words, we must have faith.

Although easier said than done, preaching shouldn't be a high-anxiety experience. Just as with other types of holy work, sharing God's words with others should be a natural and pleasant extension of our genuine desire to repay His love.

Just as with serving God and others, spreading the gospel should not feel like something we do because we have to, but something we do because we *want* to.

What's usually our first instinct after, say, hearing something interesting on the news? Witnessing something during the day that was absolutely hysterical? Experiencing a random and unusual act of kindness?

Most of us would probably go and tell someone. Awe, laughter, thanksgiving, and other forms of joy are often best when they are shared. In the words of Jesus, who lights a lamp to put it under a basket? Doesn't it make more sense to put it on a lampstand so all can benefit from its light?

Let's say a complete stranger saved you from an awful death by pushing you out of the way of a moving train but, in doing so, lost her own life. I'm sure we would not only feel indebted to this individual for the rest of our lives, but we would also be singing her praises to anyone within earshot.

Compelled and Convicted

Now consider the gospel, which literally means "good news" and is actually the greatest news in the world: that we have been saved from the most horrible of deaths—eternal suffering in hell.

Shouldn't we not only feel grateful but also compelled to proclaim the news of Jesus Christ our Savior to anyone and everyone?

I must admit, there have been times when an opportunity to

share God's message has come up and I didn't act, not out of fear but because I was spiritually weak.

Worse yet is talking about God while feeling low in spirit and in heart. Each word sounds more and more hollow as the minutes drag by, and you think, *this must be what God hears when we pray to Him half-heartedly*.

On the flip side, there are the times when I reflect upon all the blessings in my life, when I feel that closeness to Him in prayer, when I experience the joy of fellowship, and I cannot but help wish that others could taste that same sweetness.

This must be what David felt when he wrote Psalm 9:1, "I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works." Not only is testifying of God's grace a way of preaching, but it is also a way of praising Him.

We need many things when we preach the words of God, from a sound understanding of the truth and the knowledge that we are merely God's instruments to the boldness to speak out.

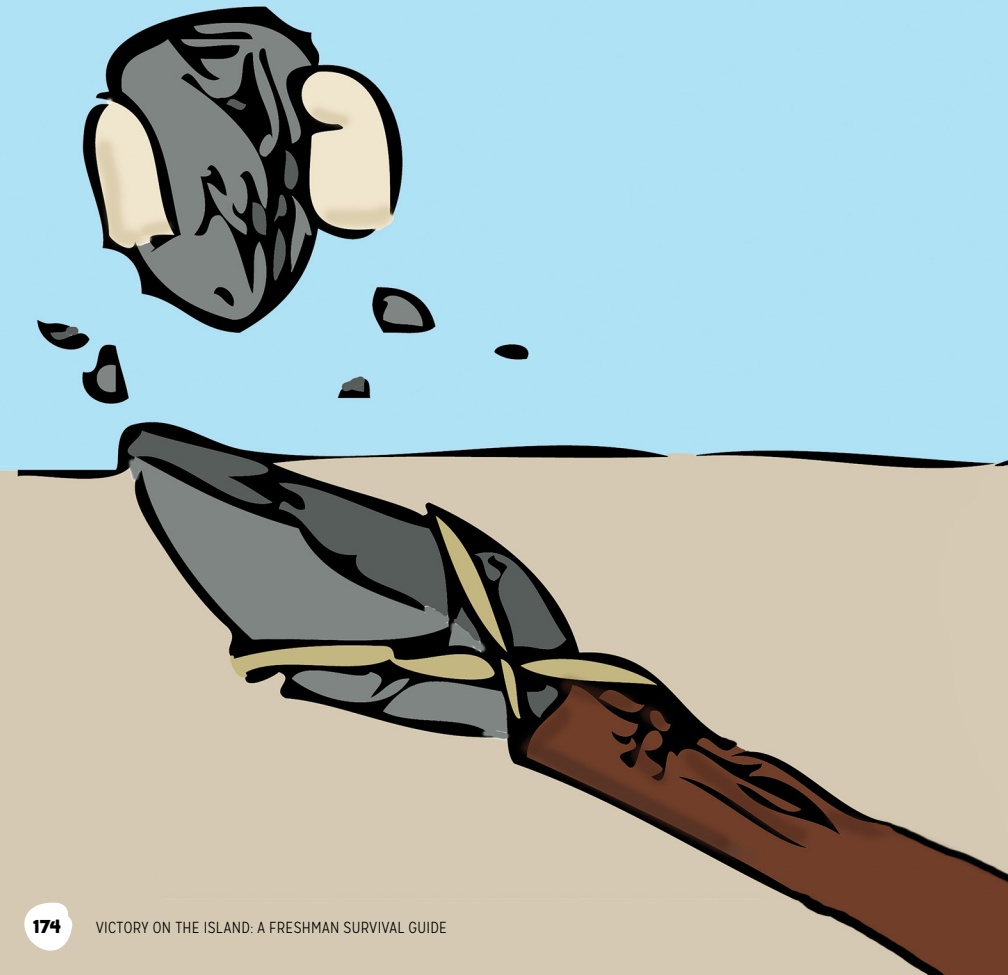
However, all these qualities are useless if we do not also speak with true conviction. As Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance..."

We can have all the biblical knowledge in the world, and maybe insults harmlessly roll off our backs like water, but if we do not possess that full assurance of what Jesus has done and will continue to do in our lives, our words may have about as much impact as silence.

Spreading the gospel is not an easy task, as even the most seasoned of evangelists will attest. And no matter how hard we may try to find one, there is no exact formula we can use to ensure the best results. Yet, it can be made a less stressful and more pleasant experience when we try to reflect upon not only how we preach but also why we preach.

Surely, the sound of such heartfelt testaments of God's grace must be music to His ears.

SHARPENING YOUR TOOLS



As a soldier you know the importance of proper care and use of your weapons, tools, and equipment. This is especially true of your knife. You must always keep it sharp and ready to use. A knife is your most valuable tool in a survival situation.

—US ARMY SURVIVAL MANUAL

A knife is the most important survival tool not only because it can protect us, but because it can be used to construct and improvise other survival tools. Clubs, spears, bowls, forks, and spoons can all be fashioned using a sharp knife and some wood. With use, these tools will wear out and need sharpening and tuning. Therefore, keeping the knife sharp is vital—otherwise, many necessary items cannot be made or maintained.

This is the same as our personal development. When we enter college, we are at the age when we are starting

to mature into independent young men and women. Certainly, as we mature, there will be a number of areas for personal growth and self-improvement — some of which have steep learning curves. Many times, we can only grow by experiencing pain. Ultimately, we have to learn how to apply God's word in our daily lives. This includes staple college lessons such as managing our time, living a balanced life, and avoiding all-nighters. Similarly, our relationship with our parents will evolve as we mature — how do we navigate through these changes? We must learn how to manage our personal finances with God's principles in mind. We also have to maintain a healthy lifestyle, avoiding the freshman 15 if we don't really need it. Independence surely comes with its lessons.

Just as all kinds of other tools are made and maintained with a sharp knife, our personal development and growth thrive only with a spiritually sharp knife. This knife is none other than the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (EPH 6:17). For this reason, when we think about the personal growth

and challenges that await us, we are not powerless if we are full of the Spirit and full of God's words. However, if we are dull in the Spirit and in the Word, our personal growth will be stunted. College will pass, and we will still be "kidults"—physically grown, but still immature emotionally and spiritually. We can only graduate from milk to solid food by relying on God and asking Him to teach us life's many lessons.

Let us learn from others who have gone through these experiences so that we can maintain our tools and keep our knife sharp, always ready to use.

A NEW SPIN ON FREEDOM

Going off to college is to become free like a bird. To throw off the shackles of high school schedules. To cast away the confinement of tedious chores. To toss aside the imprisonment of house rules. To fling away everything that is keeping you from being who you really are (even if you are not quite sure who that is just yet).

Freedom heralds new opportunities and challenges, new sights and sounds, new friends and foes. In some ways, I felt as if, by going off to college, I had acquired superpowers and was nearly invincible.

Unfortunately, things are not as simple as they seem at first glance. For a Christian, the superhero called Freedom comes with a sidekick called Responsibility. Consequently, when I stepped into college life, many of my preconceived ideas hit the wall of reality.

When I went to college, I thought I was the boss of me. I was not. I thought I could do whatever I felt like. I thought I could concentrate on my own ambitious academic pursuits and not devote too much time on others. I was sadly mistaken.

When I began college, I suddenly had greater power over what I did with my time, activities, and health. My high school schedule had been jam-packed with assignments, projects, AP classes, team sports, and other extracurricular assignments. Consistent assistance was a given. I was at school from 8 am to 5 pm on most weekdays. Once I got home, 3 to 4 hours would fly by as I ate dinner and worked on homework. In contrast, my college schedule had a lot of down time. Some classes were only held in the mornings, or twice a week. I was left with a lot of free time between classes. I would wander over to the food court or chat with classmates in the courtyard. As the weeks progressed, I also realized that I could skip a class or two and many professors would not care or notice. I began to sleep late (after all, the next class wasn't until noon). I also paid little attention to what I ate (junk food, and lots of it).

I had obtained freedom, but I was far from invincible. Things felt out of balance, empty, and boring. I found myself feeling lonely, even in a room filled with college students who seemed to be having a blast. I discovered

I needed guidance. And I found some very useful tips in God's principles on how to manage my newfound freedom.

1. Submit to Authority (1 Pet 2:13–14)

Freedom does not eliminate the need to respect our superiors. Our superiors include our parents, teachers, elders, and God Himself. Why should we choose to respect their authority? We defer to them because it is a way to show our reverence for God. As a soldier defers to his commanding officer, who in turn yields to his superior, so must we obey those in positions of authority, as they too are under God's dominion (Mt 8:8–9). We show proper obedience and submission to them because we hold God's sovereignty in high regard. Deference is not a sign of weakness or limitation, but of maturity and strong moral character.

In college, we will acquire a great amount of knowledge. We will learn many concepts and practices that may be foreign to our parents. We may gradually know more about science, politics, technology, or language than our parents. However, we should not let this knowledge puff us up to the point that we ignore our parents' instruction or words of caution. Consider our tone of voice, our comments, and our attitude, especially when we disagree with their perspective.

Submitting to authority also includes listening to their advice with an open mind, abiding by their rules (even if we may have to give up some fun in the process), and finding ways to be of service to them.

2. Hold on to Our Principles (1 Pet 2:15–16)

Freedom does not mean indulging in practices that may be harmful to our body, mind, heart, and soul. It is not a license to sully God's name by giving in to debauchery and depravity. Freedom is not an unlimited right, but a privilege to be exercised with care.

In college, there are many factors that will challenge our integrity and principles. For example, maintaining academic honesty becomes difficult when we know that others are cheating on tests or buying papers online. Rejecting invitations to wild parties becomes difficult when we know that all the "cool" people will be there and we want to fit in.

In actuality, a Christian's freedom is the opportunity to set ourselves apart from the world through our speech, behavior, attitude, spirituality,

and social interactions (1 Tim 4:12). It is an instrument to magnify God's name and His amazing works, not our own.

How can we hold on to our inner principles of faith? Does our lifestyle indicate to our friends and classmates that we are a Christian? Do we stand by our beliefs when none of our peers share the same values? Do we forego certain seemingly fun activities because they may push the limit prescribed by our faith?

3. Serve with Love (1 Pet 2:17)

Freedom is not all about you (surprising, isn't it?). We do have a choice as to what we do, whom we befriend, where we go, and when we go. However, our Christian commission is to love God, the believers, and our neighbors. Freedom is about looking beyond what we want and what we need, and seeing what we can do for *them*.

Are we spending our freedom on things that fulfill our own desires, or are we investing it in another's well-being and happiness? Are we hoarding God's love, or are we distributing it to those who need it? The right answer is found in one of our essential Christian duties—to offer acts of service born of love (Gal 5:13).

In college, we may be tempted to engage in activities that help us further our own goals or that make us feel good, even at others' expense. There is nothing wrong with being driven and focused in our academic pursuits or being friendly and sociable. Yet, we must remember that there is more to life than achievement or popularity. It takes a conscious effort to consider other people's needs, especially when we are busy with school work. God is pleased when we show love to other brothers and sisters, or to those in need, whether it be with a kind word or a gentle gesture.

Going to college is a liberating experience. However, keep in mind that as Christians, we adhere to a higher standard. We can explore the new avenues ahead without neglecting our responsibilities to God and to others.

STOP STUDYING AND SLEEP

All-nighters are terrible. On average, it takes a person three days to pay off the sleep debt from one all-nighter. Furthermore, studying all night for a test the next day doesn't help. One, you might miss the exam because you're so tired you fall asleep anyway. I've done this. Two, you might blank on the test because your memory needs sleep to consolidate new information. I've done this as well. Three, sleep is a wonderful, necessary, and sweet component of your mental and physical health. Don't buy into the "work hard, play hard" mentality of college. Work hard, play a little, and sleep, a lot.

JOIN A CLUB SPORT

There is no secret to staying healthy in college—you can simply join a club sport. What I love most about being in my club sport is the team spirit that comes with traveling to tournaments, spending time together, and training with one another. Joining a team is a great way to get or stay in shape and have fun, too! If you have never tried sports before, club sports are great ways to start.

Even when you have a paper due the next day, you may find you are even more productive after a brisk workout, which gets your blood pumping and clears your head. Remember that your health comes first, so try to eat healthy and get enough sleep as well.

SLEEPING WELL

Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman stays awake in vain.
It is vain for you to rise up early,
To sit up late,
To eat the bread of sorrows;
For so He gives His beloved sleep.
(Ps 127: 1–2)

Sunlight crept in through the curtains, gently and joyfully greeting a new day. I looked at my alarm clock (yet to go off) and realized it was still early. For the first time in months during my second year as a full-time undergraduate student, I had actually slept for a full eight hours. Group projects, midterms, finals, and reading assignments had eroded my periods of repose. I lay quietly on my bed, savoring the effects of a good night's sleep. A sense of contentment filled my being, replacing the overwhelming dread of having to face a new day without enough rest.

Our lives in the 21st century are usually filled with hectic hyper-tasking, pressing projects, exasperating assignments, endless meetings, urgent deadlines, avalanches of phone calls, and floods of e-mails. Twenty-four hours are simply not enough for all the tasks we need to cross off our list. We find ourselves double-booking (and sometimes even triple-booking) every waking hour of the day. We constantly and willingly sacrifice slumber on the altar of busyness.

However, this unhealthy habit is not without consequences. The monster of sleep deprivation rears its hydra heads throughout our day. We find ourselves nodding off or zoning out during class. We are cranky and tend to snap at others for no reason. We get sick quite easily. We forget assignments and instructions. We make less of an effort to complete projects than we would under well-rested circumstances. We secretly hate the hole we have dug ourselves into, but we tell ourselves that there are no viable alternatives. The vicious cycle of non-sleep continues.

God knows our limits, even if we try to ignore them. Getting a good night's sleep is a blessing from God. He seeks our best interest, desiring that we receive enough rest during the night so we can perform to our full capacity during the day. If we take care of God's temple—our body—by rewarding it with sufficient slumber, God will help us accomplish all we need to do, and more. He grants us the assurance that if we can trust Him with our nights, He will provide enough opportunities, strength, and wisdom to meet our goals during our days.

You have put gladness in my heart,
More than in the season that their grain and wine increased.
I will both lie down in peace, and sleep;
For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.
(Ps 4:7–8)

Tips for a Good Night's Sleep

1. Make a list of five tasks you must complete by the end of the next day and allot the projected amount of time needed for each (get them off your mind and onto paper).
2. Set a specific bedtime, and stick to it.
3. Stay away from activities that may prevent you from sleeping on time, such as watching TV, surfing the web, chatting online, texting or talking on the phone, and working on non-priority assignments.
4. Spend at least half an hour before bedtime winding down with calm activities, such as quiet reflection, reading a devotional or Bible passage, or maybe a slow stroll around the house.
5. Pray before you sleep.

Questions for Reflection

1. Name one trigger for your disrupted sleeping cycle. How often does it go off on a weekly basis?
2. What good habit or activity can you use to replace the trigger listed above?

BURNIN' THE MIDNIGHT OIL — A REFLECTION ON TIME MANAGEMENT

By definition, time management is the process of making the most out of one's time. When I first went to college, I thought that it was something reserved for managers and working professionals.

On the first day of my freshman year at college, I discovered a new sense of independence in which I suddenly had absolute control over my own time. The first night was ethereal. I stayed up to the early morning hour of 3 am. What was I doing during that time? Mostly, I was meeting new hallmates, surfing the net, playing games, and watching movies. This was every college student's dream — to have fun, and lots of it without any concern for what time it was. I thought how amazing it would be if I could sleep less, which would give me more time to do what I really wanted. This was a novel and intriguing concept.

When the school year started to ramp up and assignments hit me one after the other, I continued to stay up later and later to keep up with my studies.

I had a serious addiction to procrastination; you could say it was my best friend. Every day, I would return from a hectic day of classes, waste some time on the Internet, and then have dinner. I would not usually start working on my homework until after dinner. Even after I started working on my homework, I would take breaks and then go on to take what I would call "breaks from breaks." Hours would pass by, and then it would be 4 am before I actually finished my assignments.

As the years passed, I continued to operate in the same way. By junior year, my courses were extremely demanding and I would often go to sleep at 6 am. I was severely jeopardizing my sleep pattern and health based on a barrage of work and frequent distractions over the course of the night. Although I felt fine, I knew that my sleepless routine would be harmful in the long-term.

Thank God! In my senior year of college, I started to make some changes. Although most students experience senioritis during this period, I felt it was my most productive year in terms of time management. How did this happen? I took a few baby steps that made a world of difference. I became

more organized by using my student planner more, slept earlier, and took advantage of every block of time during my busy days. Most importantly, I prayed to God and asked Him for guidance and strength. I was able to find a healthy balance in juggling my priorities such as studying, making time for God, and pursuing my hobbies. This transformation was not overnight, but I believe God moved me to gradually understand the value of time. I thank God for being able to come to this realization and for helping me to lead a more stable life.

Ecclesiastes 3:4 states that there is "[a] time to kill, [a]nd a time to heal; [a] time to break down, [a]nd a time to build up." God wants us to use our time wisely and know that there is a time for everything. I learned that it was not right for me to waste His precious resource on meaningless activities. There is a time and place for everything—a time to do homework and a time to play. God wants us to be wise and understand that we must do these things in moderation and have self-control. I now realize that all of the time I had squandered away could have been used more productively to draw closer to God in prayer, Bible reading, or praise.

When we are blessed with the gift of time, we may feel like it is an abundant resource with no end. However, we must ask God to teach us to use it wisely to glorify Him. As we take up responsibilities in church, school, and work, our tasks will often swamp us. It is then that we are reminded that our time is limited and our stay in this world will not last. Thus, we should be prepared to honor God every day, hour, minute, and second of our lives.

EVERYTHING IN MODERATION

Before college, we live at home and abide by our parents' rules. But at college, we are no longer under the dominion (and protection) of our parents. We can do whatever we want, whenever we want. The key to dealing with this newfound independence is to remember what Paul said: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Cor 6:12).

I was not a party animal in college, but the culprits for me were television and internet. My parents retired early (before I entered junior high) and they were home all the time. Even though they never limited my TV or computer privileges, their mere presence was a deterrent. Then I went to college, where all my roommates had TVs and cable. In the dorms, we also had a T1 internet connection. The TV would be on from 7 in the morning until late at night, and my computer would be on almost all the time, even when I had gone to bed. There were just too many channels and shows to watch, and there was always someone to chat with online. Sometimes there wouldn't be any good shows on, but I would still channel-surf out of habit and boredom. I had become mastered by the television. I believe that my grades during freshman year would have been a lot better if I had just exerted some self-control over watching TV and using the internet.

The other part is to recognize that not all things are beneficial for us. The Bible does not state that we cannot surf the web or chat online. However, when these habits interfere with our spiritual life or normal human interaction, then we have a problem. As I mentioned before, I was not a party animal in college. So other than going to classes and having meals in the dining hall, I would stay online while watching TV. I had become so dependent on chatting on line that I once IM-ed my roommate to ask if she wanted to go to lunch, rather than turning around to ask her in person. That is not a healthy way to establish interpersonal relationships.

By junior year, I finally regained control over the TV. The key is to do everything in moderation.

LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE

Although I cannot say that I had the best, or even a great, relationship with my parents during my college years, there were nevertheless many lessons and things that I would have done differently. Throughout my entire life, my relationship with my parents has been less than ideal. Due to the busy and different schedules of my parents and brothers, we rarely found time to actually do family activities. However, when there is a great physical distance between family members, this relationship can be even more strained.

Beginning in my first year of college, my parents and I tried hard to strengthen our relationship. This required substantial determination from both parties, and a commitment to fulfill each others' needs. These needs may differ from relationship to relationship. For example, some parents may need a daily phone call or a call every other day. With my parents, we aimed for a weekly phone call. In these conversations, we updated each other with what was happening in our lives and at our local churches. Of course, my parents would also always remind me to eat properly, study hard, and pray every day.

Although there were some weeks when I forgot to call, the minimal amount of effort that such a commitment required yielded immense results. Prior to college, my relationship with my parents was a typical parent-teenager connection. We spent a very minimal amount of time talking to each other. From my improved efforts to communicate with my parents, we became more willing to share with each other. This didn't just occur over the phone, but in person as well. What is important is that you and your parents communicate to find each others' needs and to commit to a plan. As parents, they have put a great deal of love and investment into us by raising us and, in many circumstances, putting us through college. Keeping a healthy relationship with them and honoring them is part of God's command. "'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise" (Eph 6:2).

A RENEWED RELATIONSHIP

I always had difficulty getting along with my parents. Even when we were on cordial terms, there was always a gaping hole between us in a way I cannot really describe. Talking to them at home was awkward, and I'd always mumble the same few words, essentially shutting down conversations and shutting them out of my life. Even if I wanted to, I wasn't sure how to open up to them. Our abrupt conversations were a break from my ordinary, routine life. We lived private and separate lives in the same house, unable to talk frankly and constantly arguing. There was an invisible wall that neither side knew how to approach.

Those were the circumstances when I left for college. Yet a few months into college, things between us changed drastically. Enter the advent of

new technology: the telephone. It was the only thing that connected us over the miles that separated us, yet somehow, the phone became my portal home.

At first, our phone conversations were still short and awkward, like before. Beginning like a weekly check-up, they then morphed into living exchanges of our experiences and thoughts. I needed their help often as I sought their help for homework and Chinese class, yet as pressure from school, work and relationships built up, I found myself coming to them more and more often. I would complain and get help, vent and find support. Sounds silly, right? Perhaps this was not the best way to treat my parents, yet in this ridiculous way, my parents and I slowly grew close and began understanding each other. Something else happened as well. If we argued over the phone, I would mull over it and eventually muster the courage to call back and apologize (or at least text my sibling to apologize for me).

Perhaps the phone was just the medium I needed to change the way we communicated with each other. And perhaps that is all you need to change your relationship with your parents, as long as both sides are willing. College is a chance to renew the way you interact with your parents, and it doesn't take much more than a willing heart and honest voice to establish a better connection.

Some lessons learned:

1. College is the perfect chance for you to renew your relationship with your parents.

   Take advantage of an easy opportunity to change your life.

2. Treasure your parents and talk to them. They'll listen.

   Support is crucial to your college experience—even if you think you do not need it. Parents are a great resource, with their reams of knowledge, experience, and eagle-eyed views. When I encountered difficulties, whether with classes, professors, roommates, or friends, they supported me, reminded me of my Christian identity, and helped me face my problems. No matter how ugly or embarrassing the situation, you can always count on your parents to listen and help. They may not agree, but they can be your best advisors.

3. They love you, and if you reciprocate, both sides gain.

   After devoting years to raising you, you're suddenly gone, grown up and changing out of their sight. Keep in contact with calls, mail, a webcam, etc. lest you bring their gray head down to the grave in sadness.

4. If your relationship has grown sour after leaving for college, contemplate what happened. Perhaps your parents found that you changed for the worse. They have your best interests in mind, and as a Christian, keep their advice in mind.

5. Thank God for loving parents who have supported you to where you are now. Behind that great and amazing love that your parents have for you is God, who is ultimately supporting you.

Lastly, it is always a nice treat to listen to their voicemails, so unmistakably filled with love. They will help remind you that your parents are your number one fans on Earth.

DEALING WITH HOMESICKNESS

I never thought I would become homesick. And for the entire first semester and most of the second, I never really did, despite almost never returning home. I was happily engaged in new learning experiences, classes, and friends. Time flew by and I had a great time in my new place, never looking back.

Yet, sometime around the end of my first year, very slowly and unknowingly, homesickness crept in. In fact, it caught me by surprise, especially since I had been away from home before.

At first, I only caught myself missing the food. I really missed the good Asian cooking back at home, now a luxury since I was so far away. I wanted to return to eat all the delicacies I had taken for granted in the past. But then, I began missing the comfort of home: simply being able to get away from campus and spazz out on a couch in the living room in pure, quiet privacy. How ironic, since I had left home to become stronger and more independent.

It wasn't long before I really began missing the people: friends and family who had now progressed with their lives, changing and similarly

experiencing new things. It was wonderful to see people move on with their lives, but suddenly, I felt so distant. I felt isolated from everybody else and, before I realized it, I became really homesick.

But homesickness stems from some form of discontentment with our current situation. We feel left behind by people back home, perhaps in part because we are constantly comparing their situation with our own. We feel unsatisfied with our surrounding food, clothing and environment, even though they may be perfectly acceptable to others. We are unable to fully accept our current circumstances; otherwise, we would not be hard hit by distress. Homesickness in moderation is wonderful: evidence that we are capable of feelings of attachment, love and yearning to be with beloved people and things at home. But in excess, long-term homesickness is unhealthy, harboring bitterness, complaint and depression.

How I overcame homesickness was to recall the grace afforded me and to be content with just that. Instead of constantly recalling what I had back at home, or instead of feeling bitter about my current, dire circumstances, I took a step back to remember where I was, what I had, and what my purpose was in my new environment. Is my current situation really so bad? Those back at home probably miss you too, even if they are now living their lives without you. The opportunity to return *will* come, so instead, make the most of where you are now. Fight homesickness by helping out with holy work and remembering to be content with what God has given you. Undergrad only comes once, so take a deep breath, grit your teeth, and live your new life. Also keep in mind that many out there, including our Almighty God, are constantly watching out for you and cheering you on as well.

O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways...
Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.

If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall[a] on me,"
Even the night shall be light about me;
Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,
But the night shines as the day;
The darkness and the light are both alike to You.
For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
(Ps 139:1–3, 7–13)

GOT LEISURE?

Growing up, I never truly understood the meaning of being independent. I never had to worry about doing the laundry, getting a ride to school, or having food to eat. But at the same time, I also felt that I didn't have the power to make any decisions in my life, especially in choosing what to do with my free time.

When I got to college, things became really different. I felt that I had gained freedom from my parents. No one was there to tell me to study, when to go to sleep, or what to eat. I played games with my friends on LAN and hung out with dorm-mates until very late, watching dramas instead of going to class. Out of curiosity, I also checked out a few college parties and fraternities.

Soon, I realized that the independence and freedom I gained were not really that great. Not having enough sleep became a big problem, because I couldn't function well. I was also scared by how people can really lose themselves during college parties, like how I saw this one girl get so drunk that she just fell on the floor and started sleeping. I also saw some of my dorm-mates get arrested and kicked out of the dorms because of underage drinking.

I know leisure is an important component of our lives, especially in a society that puts a lot of stress on our shoulders at times. However, what

is your definition of leisure? And what is the purpose of leisure? I've been thinking about this for a long time, and I believe that leisure is supposed to restore you and put you back on your feet, so that you can continue to work towards your goal in life. Just like what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:12 (and similarly in 10:23), "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Some "leisure" activities are clearly harmful to our personal well-being. Another biblical principle of leisure can be found in Ecclesiastes 10:17, "And your princes feast at the proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness!" When we have leisure activities, we should know that our goal is to regain strength, not finding something to waste our time on.

I am very fortunate that my college already had a campus fellowship, and all the alumni were very enthusiastic about keeping the fellowship fire alive. Having fellowship with brothers and sisters is truly joyful. Even simple fellowship activities such as eating together or playing card games at someone's place can be very fulfilling and fun. After a while, I understood that leisure does not mean sitting in front of the computer for the whole day, and that partying and loud music does not restore your wellbeing. Indeed, various kinds of fellowship activities such as dumpling fellowships, bonfires, visitations, multi-campus fellowships, Bible studies, and similar gatherings are the best form of leisure.

Nevertheless, you can't always depend on others for leisure, especially if you don't have a church or fellowship close by your campus. If you're fortunate enough to own a car, use it to visit places, particularly in nature, where you can observe God's wonderful creation and catch a breath before going back to your demanding city life. If you don't have a car, there may still be a lot of places worth visiting within walking distance, such as a park or coffee shop. The key is not to be lazy and to get out of your dorm. Studies show that the best way to overcome an addiction is a change of environment. Maybe that's also why so many people study in the library instead of in their dorms.

Other than leisure, we should not forget that our free time is a wonderful gift given by God. Countless people in the world work very hard throughout their lives, yet they can barely feed their family. For them, there's no such thing as free time. When we have the power to control how to use

our time, shouldn't we spend some time to thank and worship the God who created us and gave us this free time? We should really treasure our time and freedom, for who knows what tomorrow will bring?

SLEEPING IS MUCH BETTER THAN COFFEE

All-nighters

When you go off to college, especially if you're living on campus, nobody is around to tell you to go to sleep. You decide if you want to stay up late to do homework, to study, or to hang out.

During my freshman year, I roomed with another church member in the school dorms. Neither of us stayed up late on a regular basis. In fact, we typically prayed together and then went to sleep. The only times we stayed up past 1 am were the nights when we shared about our faith. I liked my sleep.

The first time I remember pulling an all-nighter was when I took an expository writing class in the spring term of my freshman year. I found that, when writing, it was easier for me to focus at night when distractions were at a minimum. Moreover, the added pressure of having to hand in my paper the next morning helped boost my creativity.

That time, after I handed in my paper, I felt tired and wanted to get some rest. Unfortunately, since I had other classes throughout the day I couldn't just go back to my dorm—especially since some were small classes that took attendance and required participation. Since I could not go back to my room and sleep, I had to fight on through the day. I decided to have some coffee to give myself a boost and help me focus in class, otherwise it would have been pointless. I had never had coffee before, and I secretly looked down on people who needed it, but I gave it a try anyways. It tasted terrible! It burned my tongue, and I did not like the feeling it gave me. I felt as though I was being artificially kept alive and I just was not myself. It felt like an out-of-body experience. On top of that, my nose started bleeding. I quickly learned that staying up late and drinking coffee resulted in nosebleeds.

Later that night, when it was actually time to get some rest and make up for lost sleep, sleep wasn't as pleasant as it normally was. It hurt to sleep, and when I woke up, I did not feel refreshed.

There were other times throughout the rest of my college years when I had to stay up late at night. However, I made it a point to only stay up if I was pressed to finish a project — never to study, never to play games or hang out, and never just for fun. I learned that a can of Coke was all the caffeine I needed to keep me up and that coffee was not my friend. With proper time management, everything else I needed to do could be accomplished without sacrificing sleep.

Thoughts on sleep

If you have to stay up late, avoid relying on consumables to keep you awake. Habitually drinking coffee minimizes caffeine's effectiveness over time, and you may have to seek out stronger drinks. I had a friend who took prescription medication that was not prescribed for him to stay awake and to focus during finals. That's illegal and dangerous. Do not be tempted to misuse prescription medication. It's habit forming and will destroy your body, which is the temple of God (cf. 1 Cor 6:19). College is not about competing against others or having an edge over everyone else. Just do your best.

Good time management and planning are paramount. If you take time to write all of your assignments down in your planner, you'll get a good bird's-eye view of which weeks are going to be busy and which weeks will be free. It helps to minimize lost time.

Try not to make staying up late a habit. Sleep cannot really be "made up," and loss of sleep impacts every other aspect of your life, including spiritual cultivation. When you don't get enough sleep, it's easy to fall asleep spiritually. I know someone who would stay up until 4 am for no reason. He did this regularly, even on Friday nights. When Saturday came around, he slept through all the sermons. It can become a difficult habit to break and may lead to a greater sense of emptiness in your life.

From my experience, pulling an all-nighter to cram the night before an exam usually doesn't end up being as effective as hoped. It's better to get enough rest, be refreshed, wake up early, and prepare in the morning.

But it's even better to pray to God regularly for wisdom to help understand the class material.

Being able to stay up for three days straight is nothing to boast about. Sometimes, for example, you may tell yourself that since you have already been up for two days, you might as well do it another day. At that point the issue isn't about taking care of your body anymore. You really have to question your motivation and ask yourself why you're doing it. The Bible says that "all things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify" (1 Cor 10:23). This could be one of those times to really reflect on that verse.

In the end, sometimes we really are just too busy. It may often feel like there isn't enough time in the day to accomplish everything that needs to be done. If you have to stay up late, make sure you eat well and stay hydrated. Vitamins can be helpful too. But no matter what, just remember that God is a caring and loving God. He will not cause us to endure things beyond what we're capable of, and our toil is only temporary. With the power and abidance of God, we can do all things!

MASTERING OUR SURFING HABITS

MANNA ISSUE 46

"THE WORLD IS YOUR OYSTER"

The Internet: the world's greatest source of information and entertainment.

Indeed, the moment we are connected, the "world is [our] oyster." The advancement of the Internet has enabled us to chat with someone thousands of miles away, take part in a cyber auction, download the latest software or movie, read up on current affairs, book a flight, and even order a pizza! The list is almost infinite.

Just type a word in a search engine and you will have an endless list of the closest matches. Download a program and you can immediately chat with someone, sign up to this and that, receive offers and discounts, play games, get updates and e-mails, and so on.

It's fun. It's satisfying. It's addictive.

Since it's so enjoyable, we begin to get pleasure out of it. We realize it makes us feel good, so going online becomes second nature to us. We could say it becomes a habit.

The definition of a habit is "a settled way of behaving; something done frequently and almost without thinking; something that is hard to give up."

The latter part of the quote may be applicable to most of us. We may find the Internet hard to give up because it has become integrated with our everyday lives. And if our need to use the Internet develops good habits that keep our lives in order, there is nothing wrong with that.

But the question is when does using the Internet become a bad habit?

FROM HABIT TO PROBLEM

I've never owned a personal computer or laptop, but it was still possible for me to access the Internet at most times of the day. In hindsight, I suppose having only one computer in the house was beneficial for me and my siblings.

Having one computer would also mean having to compete with my siblings. The fact that the computer was situated in my mom's room should have given me more self-control and discipline. Most times it did; other times it didn't.

When we first connected to the Internet, it was like Alice in

Wonderland! Click on this and that and you begin to explore another avenue. Type in the keyword and the magic begins! Sign up here and the curiosity deepens. What was a simple exploration became habitual surfing.

At what point does our habit of using the Internet become a problem? You may casually think to yourself, "I don't spend that much time on the internet. Why should this question affect me?" From my experience, the point when I realized I had crossed the fine line between a mere habit and a serious problem was when I was able to type without having to look at my hands.

This wasn't a result of attending typing classes or doing so many assignments during my university years but more to do with the time I had spent chatting with friends via the Internet. If I were to total up the amount of time spent on the Internet versus the amount of time praying and reading the Bible, it wouldn't take much brain power to know the answer to this equation.

It became a problem once it started to interfere with my body clock, family time, studies, and, most importantly, my relationship with God. For others, it got out of control when they found themselves sleeping during the first Sabbath service, after a marathon of online games and futile chatting the night before.

Signs like these are a good indication to us to change the way we use the Internet.

As James 1:14 states, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." Before you know it, your habit masters you, not you mastering your habit. As Peter teaches us: "For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him" (2 Pet 2:19, NIV).

So what can we do when we come to the realization of such a habit?

WEIGH IN OUR BAD HABITS

When we recognize that we have bad habits, we need to take a good hard look at our situation.

We can use a pair of weighing scales as an analogy to illustrate this point. When we have too many bad habits, they will outweigh the good ones and cause an unequal balance. In order to have more good habits you need less of the bad.

Some people might have the misconception that, by adding good habits to the bad, the scale will balance out. Having a balanced scale is not always the most effective solution; especially when it comes

to the way we live our Christian lives. And it doesn't resolve our problems if our bad habits still linger with us.

Sooner or later, they will seep their way back into our lives. The only way to do this is to remove the bad habits completely to give more weight to the good ones.

If, whenever we notice bad habits, we just try to balance it out with good ones, the entire scale actually gets heavier; our inner self will eventually become even more burdened by the contradictory way in which we live our lives — having good habits yet cyclically succumbing to the bad habits because we did not get rid of them.

The problem with such a scale is that we did not remove the bad habits; rather, we compromised with them. For example, you may use the Internet for educational or academic purposes, but if you continue to engage in long-hour chats and video games, the bad habit remains.

The key is to remove the bad habits and not compromise with them. Let the good habits take root and develop them. And when the good habits outweigh the bad ones, our inner self will get stronger at facing the temptations of this world. The stronger and more steadfast we are, the less likely the bad habits will tip the scale.

Bad habits are easier to follow than good ones and it is difficult to break bad habits, but it doesn't mean it's impossible. Even Paul had this inner struggle.

But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. (Rom 7:17–18)

This is not to suggest that the use of the Internet is a sin. But there is a chance for our bad habits to turn into a sin. Once our bad habits interfere with our time with God and our relationship with other people, we will need to weigh our habits and think, "What is it that compels us to find more interest with the Internet rather than with God?"

We need to acknowledge that we have this weakness. If we cannot be honest with ourselves, can we examine ourselves effectively with a sincere heart? By adding good habits to balance out the bad, this shows that we are not honest with ourselves to really break the bad ones.

Being honest with ourselves and examining our actions is the first

step. The second step is to break the Internet wave.

BREAK THE WAVE

If you find yourself reaching for your computer mouse to click on the Internet icon again, ask yourself, "Is there something I can do that is more productive and worthwhile?" What are some of the practical solutions to control our habit of using the Internet too much?

Remove the Cause of the Problem

This doesn't mean to disconnect the Internet from every computer or laptop in your household. If there are more than a few computers or laptops, one suggestion is to have only one computer connected. Place the computer in a public room. For those who take their laptop to-and-from work, is it essential to bring it home?

Occupy Yourself

Take up an unusual hobby. If you find your fingers itching, take up an activity that will keep them busy. Maybe you'll want to explore something you've always wanted to learn: arts and crafts, pottery, journal writing, or anything that doesn't require a computer.

Set a Time

Set a time when you can use the Internet and stick to a certain time limit. This will exercise your self-control and will become part of your routine rather than an addictive bad habit.

Exercise

Take up a sport or go for a brisk walk. Exercise can be very empowering and satisfying, and it is good for your body, mind, and soul.

Make a Concerted Effort with Fellow Surfers

Sometimes, it is very difficult to stay away from the Internet if all our friends continue with the bad habit while we are the only one making the effort. This is really the time that we can help each other improve ourselves. Make a pact with fellow brothers and sisters to break the wave. Encourage and support one another to spend our time on healthier activities.

Prioritize

Organize your life so you know which things are more important. Place God in the center of your life rather than revolve your life around the Internet. I still like to chat with friends online, but I've managed to do this in a more effective and conventional method. Writing letters by hand prove to

be more meaningful and personal. Even though you don't receive an instant reply, you have a chance to express your true character rather than chat impulsively without much thought. Though owning a computer is essential to our studies, I've managed not to own one and just use the university's facilities or share the computer at home. It is a struggle, but it has improved my organization skills and punctuality, and it has helped me keep my time on the Internet to as brief as possible.

SPIRITUAL DIAL-UP

Paul makes a very good point in 1 Corinthians 6:12: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."

In other words, we have everything available within our reach but not all things are beneficial. It's like seeing a huge dinner table with many different types of delicious foods. We can choose to eat anything from that table but not everything is healthy.

It's good to treat yourself to a chocolate cake but do you seriously want more chocolate cake knowing it just expands your waistline and will never feed your cravings?

He also reminds us, "Set your minds on things above, not on things in the earth" (Col 3:2). If we can place our mind and thoughts on things that really matter, the things of the world will not matter so much.

We, as children of God, have been given the Holy Spirit to aid us and guide us. We have such a wonderful gift that we can distinguish right and wrong; a good habit from a bad one. We will know how to use the Internet moderately rather than excessively.

Break the habit that hinders us from spending time with God. If we can set our minds on Him, He will surely help us overcome our shortcomings.

Living in a constantly changing society is not easy. We become exposed to new technological advances, and the application of the Internet is vast and wide. It will bring us more temptations and desires, and we can be enticed by them.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom 12:2)

One of the key words is "renewing." We need to give ourselves a

constant spiritual refill of the Holy Spirit. The only way to do this is by constant self examination. Through constant self-examination and spiritual cultivation, we are able to realize that there is more to our lives than the Internet.

We will be able to step away from the edge of temptation and step out of our bad habits.

Only then we can truly say, "I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Cor 6:12).

GROWING TOGETHER WITH MY PARENTS: HOW COLLEGE IMPROVED OUR RELATIONSHIP

PCC – USA

MANNA ISSUE 41

A strange thing happened to me after I left home and went to college – I started getting along better with my parents.

Not to say that I had a horrible relationship with them to begin with, but over the course of my college years, I definitely noticed a change in both the quality and the content of our interactions.

Even funnier still, I found that the freedom I had once fought so hard for in high school was no longer the hard-earned result of parent-child warfare. Rather, by the time I graduated from college, my wish to be treated as a mature adult gradually and naturally came true as I learned to behave like one.

What brought about these differences in the way I treated my parents and the way my parents treated me? A number of reasons can be identified, but most noticeable among them is the fact that, as my relationship with God improved, so too did my relationship with my parents, especially with my mother.

SOMEWHERE FAR FROM HOME

During my adolescence, I used to assume that beneath my parents' setting of rules and limits and behind their demands to know my every whereabout was their actual intention to demonstrate control.

Never one who liked being told what to do, and never one to give up without a fight, you might guess that arguing with my parents was not an uncommon occurrence throughout my adolescent years.

Regardless of whether or to what extent they were trying to make clear their authority over me, I was known for firing back full force with a "you can't tell me what to do" attitude.

Thank God that halfway into my junior year of high school I received the Holy Spirit during a student spiritual convocation. But by that time, I still had not developed a consistent or lengthy prayer habit.

Yet with God's Spirit living in me, I was able to receive the strength to gradually tone down my behavior, which, truth be told, had long ago crossed over the border of proper Christian living into rebellion and sin.

As my senior year of high school and the prospect of college neared, I formed several ideas of what I was looking for in a university: somewhere near a True Jesus Church, somewhere near a city, and somewhere far from home.

While I was definitely drawn toward the thought of a fast-paced, crowded city life, I recognized that I was also pushed toward that direction by what I saw as my oppressive home environment.

After I had been accepted into a couple of schools and debated over which one to attend, thankfully, God helped me to realize that choosing the school closest to my home would be best for me because it would allow me to attend the youth Bible study nearby.

While that university also met my requirement of being located near a large city, my dream of moving far from home turned into the reality of a fifty-minute commute from my parents' home.

PROVIDING FOR ONE ANOTHER

While away at school, my parents would call me every few days to see how I was doing. Since they usually worried if we hadn't spoken for over a week, I was obligated to call and check in with them as well.

Because my dad isn't much of a phone person, my mom and I usually did most of the talking. While my father and I were by far not the best of friends, putting my mom and I in the same room could be the most deadly of combinations.

Throughout my teenage years, my mother and I fought often, and we fought hard. Shouting matches that resulted in tears and slamming doors were a painful but common occurrence.

Needless to say, I hardly ever spoke to my parents about personal problems. Therefore, topics such as

feelings and frustrations, faith and friends, were strictly off limits.

Regardless, the phone calls to and from home continued. At first, the conversations between my mom and I consisted mostly of what we had done that day, but they eventually evolved into discussions of how we had been feeling that particular day.

After a while, I found that I missed our talks if we hadn't had the chance to speak to each other. After a few semesters of living in the dorms, I realized with some shock that my mother and I had begun to communicate with and depend on each other as (gasp) friends.

My faith during this time was slowly building up with the help of attending the youth Bible studies and my own spiritual cultivation. It dawned on me that the fledgling friendship between my mother and I was also helping to strengthen my faith.

What's more, my mom's spirituality was improving as well. While we weren't necessarily always discussing specific Bible passages as such, we did start to speak openly about our own problems.

For the first time, my mother shared with me the many struggles and trials she encountered in marriage, church, and work life. No longer was she just filling the role of my mother; I came to see her as a person, complete with human needs, weaknesses, and emotions.

As we began to discuss our problems openly, we also began to address these problems through prayer. Oftentimes we would end our long-distance talks by praying together afterwards.

On some mornings or before I would go to bed, I would make a quick call home and ask my mom to pray with me, and she often did the same.

Curiously enough, it often wound up that when my faith was weak, my mother's was strong, and vice versa. Consequently, there would be weeks when my mother would be the one lifting up my spirits, and the next month, I would find myself trying to encourage her.

In this manner, God miraculously provided a way for each of us to receive spiritual support by having us provide for each other.

Our prayers and makeshift testimonies helped me not only to see my mother as an individual, but also as a fellow sister-in-Christ. As stated in James 5:16, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

Helping to bear one another's burdens through sharing and prayer strengthened our relationship with each other and our individual relationships with God.

ACCEPTING DISCIPLINE

Of course, my parents and I still engage in the occasional argument. After all, perfect endings and perfect people are only the works of fiction, and I was reminded of this sobering truth on many weekends or school breaks spent at home.

During those not-so-pleasant instances, the makings of an argument usually went something like this:

Scenario One: Parent asks daughter in a stern tone of voice to do something. Interpreting this as an attack on her newfound adulthood and independence, daughter responds back with an irritated tone of voice. Fight ensues.

Scenario Two: Daughter makes known her frustration with parent's seeming ineptitude. Taking this as an assault on parental authority and ability, parent responds back in frustration. Fight ensues.

The possibilities are endless.

Usually, what sets off an argument is not so much what is said but the way it is said. King Solomon was right on the mark when he wrote in Proverbs 15:1 that "a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

Yes, sometimes our parents may be wrong, but many times, they are in the right. And when our emotions get the better of us in an argument, it's hard for us to tell who's right and who's wrong.

What's more, no matter what the situation, we still should not act disrespectfully towards our parents. If we cannot even treat our earthly parents properly, how can we expect to please our heavenly Father? As written in Hebrews 12:9,

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

The same chapter of Hebrews also teaches us that God disciplines those He loves. Verses 6 and 7 read,

"For whom the Lord loves
He chastens,
And scourges every son whom
He receives."

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

God sometimes trains us in painful ways. Likewise, we may think that parental discipline is too strict at

times, but it is usually for our own benefit.

And if parental efforts seem less than perfect to us, we need to remember that our parents are, after all, only human. They are not God, but they are trying. Therefore, we must also try our best to repay their efforts with obedience and respect. Patience helps, too.

Finally, we need to examine the reasons why we're so offended by our parents' comments in the first place.

Most people don't like being told what to do, and most people dislike criticism even more. Unfortunately for them, our parents are the ones stuck with the job of having to dole out the bulk of these hard-to-give and hard-to-receive comments.

When we do hear these types of remarks, we must ask ourselves if our desire to retaliate against our parents is actually a result of wounded pride. Proverbs 13:1 tells us that, "A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke."

Let us not be foolish, but wise children.

ALWAYS A CHILD IN THEIR EYES

Despite the fact that I'm now a college graduate and supposedly all grown up, I've realized that I'll always be a child in my parents' eyes.

No matter how old we are, whether we're working or starting families of our own, our parents will always be our parents. As a result, regardless of age or abilities, we will always be their children.

In Paul's epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians concerning how to treat parents, he addressed the believers as "children." For example, in Ephesians 6:1, Paul writes, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

While Paul's letters apply to believers of all ages, he probably wasn't directing this message solely toward toddlers and teenagers. As the apostle who guided them into God's truth and the one who nurtured their spiritual growth, these believers would always be Paul's spiritual children.

In the same way, God gave our parents their status as caregivers and guardians. And according to His will and the measure of love He has put in our hearts, we must strive to honor our parents throughout our lives. This is also how we are to honor God.

Four years of living on campus also showed me that the longer I lived away from home, the more I looked forward to going home.

Yes, absence does make the heart grow fonder, and I've found truth in the saying that we often don't appreciate what we have until it's gone.

However, the fact that I no longer minded but enjoyed going back home was also because my home was no longer the same as it was when I had left it. My lifestyle has calmed down considerably since my high school days, and I did some necessary maturing in terms of my behavior, my emotions, and my faith.

My parents saw these changes and did some adjusting of their own. Ironically, my parents actually encourage me to get out of the house more, whereas in high school, they seemed to be doing everything in their power to keep me at home.

During these four years, you might say that we all grew up together. Now that I've graduated and am living at home again, I really thank God for the changes that He has made in my life and in my relationship with my parents.

At the same time, my parents definitely still do treat me like a child in some ways, but I've learned that that's not necessarily a bad thing. While parents sometimes do need to ease their grip a bit, we shouldn't expect them to completely let go, either.

Sometimes, it feels good to be held onto.

LIVING A MEANINGFUL COLLEGE LIFE

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To keep up with the increasing pace and demands of our current society, students are studying harder and placing greater emphasis on extracurricular activities on campus, often sacrificing and putting their social and family life on hold.

An overload of work may cause some people to neglect a well-balanced and healthy diet, as well as foregoing the luxury of any regular exercise. In general, life gets more complicated with age, and many struggle to find meaning in their busy lifestyles.

As Christians, our spirituality is an additional dimension to our life. More concretely, it should be a part of our daily living in which we allocate time to cultivate and nurture

our faith. As a religious education teacher, I see and hear about many youths struggling with the same issue of seeking spiritual meaning in their student life.

Having been through this same issue, I have learned that it is crucial to understand basic biblical concepts early on to help guide, shape, and discipline our lifestyle. When youths can fully grasp and gradually put these principles to practice, their faith will steadily take root and mature.

The following are five major concepts and tasks that have guided me toward a more fulfilling Christian lifestyle in my college years and beyond:

- Recognize our commission from our Lord Jesus Christ
- Evaluate our goals and values
- Manage our time effectively and efficiently
- Entrust our burdens to God
- Give all glory to our heavenly Father

RECOGNIZE OUR COMMISSION FROM OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

As the "chosen generation, a royal priesthood" of God, we are commissioned by our Lord Jesus Christ to spread His gospel to all and pastor His sheep (1 Pet 2:9, 5:2; Mk 16:15; Jn 21:15–17). This is the first and foremost commission we must recognize as His chosen people.

Since we have received the grace of His salvation so freely, it is only natural for us to proclaim His name, His salvation, and the boundless grace and blessings that follow when we believe.

This does not mean that we all have to become full-time pastors to complete God's mission. If we can be reminded of this commission in our everyday lives, however, our lives would be more meaningful.

For example, during our studies, whether we are in junior high, in college, or in graduate school, we can seize every opportunity to testify for our Lord Jesus Christ to friends, teachers, or even strangers on our campus.

We should not dwell solely in our studies for the sake of achieving a higher education or obtaining a good career but think of school or our job as avenues of opportunity given by God for us to sow the seeds.

I can never forget an encouragement that a brother gave me before I entered college. He told me to remember two things: (1) evangelism is not very difficult — we just need to pray and ask God to bring His sheep to us, and (2) students can

do a lot of evangelical work within college campuses.

I kept his words in mind and prayed accordingly, and his words miraculously came true! God brought many of His sheep to me and allowed me to share the complete gospel with them.

God helped me sow some seeds and, under His guidance, a few seeds blossomed into diligent and devout brethren in our church. Praise the Lord!

Through all this, I learned that, as long as we have the heart and determination to spread the gospel and know to put it into our daily prayers, God will surely help and guide us.

EVALUATE OUR GOALS AND VALUES

Once we recognize our commission from our Lord Jesus Christ, it should help us establish a clearer goal for our life. This allows us to center our priorities around God, which in turn helps us focus and find meaning in all we do.

As Apostle Paul reminded us, let us "glorify God in [our] body and in [our] spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 6:20). Therefore, our goals and value system must not be conformed to this world, which only gratifies the lust of our eyes, the lust of our flesh, and the pride of life.

All these are transient, but "he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 Jn 2:17). As we reflect on our own goals and values, we can ask ourselves this question: Do our goals and values glorify God and edify men?

For example, we should examine the motivation behind choosing what we are planning to select or have selected.

Our motivation may be valid, positive, and beneficial to our society, but does it include the glorification of God? Would the major and/or career path chosen (i.e. work environment, time commitment, nature of the work, etc.) negatively affect our spirituality?

And would it be an obstacle to our faith and/or overload us with too much work that we do not even have enough time to cultivate our spirituality?

MANAGE OUR TIME EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY

Time management is an important key to an enriched Christian lifestyle. This is often a very difficult challenge for youths and even for mature adults.

Learning to manage our time effectively and efficiently requires our sensitivity to time, recognition of our priorities, and discipline in our lifestyle. For example, we should have some daily "spiritual habits" (i.e. reading the Bible and praying for a set time) and "secular habits" (i.e. regular bedtime hours, brushing before and after bedtime, eating regularly, etc.).

If we just live from day to day with a whatever-goes or whatever-happens attitude, it is very unlikely that we can achieve a victorious Christian lifestyle that pleases God.

Let us not slumber and idle around, for poverty will "come on you like a prowler" and "casts one into a deep sleep" (Prov 6:9–11, 19:15). But just as Jesus told His disciples, we must "watch and pray, lest [we] enter into temptation" (Mt 26:41).

Moreover, Apostle Paul exhorts us to be diligent in our pursuit of spiritual maturity, "to make [our] call and election sure, for if [we] do these things [we] will never stumble" (2 Pet 1:5–7, 10).

ENTRUST OUR BURDENS TO GOD

We all can admit that our flesh is weak but our spirit is willing. By the same token, we may have biblical knowledge but lack the power to follow the will of God. This is why God promised to direct our path if we trust in Him and consult Him before every decision we make (Prov 3:5).

God wants us to learn to cast our burdens on Him so that we may find peace and rest in Him (Mt 11:28). But in order to cast our burdens on God, we must learn from the humility and gentleness of Jesus Christ (Mt 11:29).

Only when we realize that everything comes from God can we humble ourselves to rely on Him. And only when we have the gentleness that accompanies patience can we wait on the Lord. As a result, our strength shall be renewed.

But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with
wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.
(Isa 40:31)

Therefore, let us learn to trust in Him and cast our cares upon Him, so that we may not grow weary in our spiritual pursuits.

I once was involved in a campus fellowship group, of which I was very honored to be a part. All the students in the group were zealous in doing holy work. However, some local believers who were not part

of the campus fellowship were weak in faith at the time, and we, the students, tried to find ways to help them.

After some time and numerous attempts at encouragement, things had not improved nor moved forward for these local believers. Gradually, we began to complain to one another about the situation.

But one time, a sister stood up and reminded everyone to remain humble and to entrust this matter to God in our prayers. After she said this, I immediately realized that the Holy Spirit was awakening our hearts from self-righteousness and pride.

From that time on, we began to put this matter into our daily fasting and prayer. Slowly, we began to see the wonderful work of God evolve before our eyes. This was truly a vivid and valuable lesson I learned during my college years. Praise God!

GIVE ALL GLORY TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

When the work is done, whether great or small, let us remember to give all glory to our heavenly Father. Again, we should acknowledge Him not only at the beginning but also at the end of each completed work.

This way, we are constantly reminded that it is through God that we are able to do anything. So, how can we give glory to God? One simple way is to give thanks to God in our prayers or to make more offerings (e.g., our time, money, talent) to show our appreciation.

Let us check and balance our priorities with the lifestyles we lead. Does the secular part of our life outweigh our spiritual life? The Bible warns us that if we put our emphasis in this world over our eternal salvation, we are considered to be the "most pitiable" among the believers (1 Cor 15:19).

Be comforted in knowing that if we seek God's kingdom first, He will bless us according to our physical needs.

May we all continue to encourage and help one another in our path towards the heavenly kingdom. And may we strive diligently to submit to the Holy Spirit and rely on its power so that we can lead a meaningful Christian life.

So, after washing ashore you've successfully built a hut, talked with the natives, mapped the island, kindled a fire, and kept your tools sharp. The bulk of the survival stress is gone. Yes! You've survived! But now what? Time to enjoy some leisure — fishng, anyone?

Despite grueling semesters, one of the great pleasures of college life is having extended vacation time. Winter breaks are usually three to four weeks long, and spring break and summers are also long and meaty. We can travel, we can just relax, we can work, we can study. As a Christian, how should we utilize this precious time? What about internships? What about church events?

Let's take a look at how some of our peers spent their college breaks.

GONE FISHING

ESTABLISH YOUR FAITH AT NYTS

The college years either make or break a person's faith. Before college, our faith is often based on the faith of our parents. They drive us to church every Saturday, so we are obliged to observe the Sabbath. They also push us to go to SSCs and attend RE classes. However, once we are in college, this changes. The control our parents once had over us is no longer there. So, it is important to establish our own faith before entering college, and there is no better place to do that than at NYTS.

No one told me about the importance of NYTS in high school, so I made no effort to attend the summer before I started college. I had a bumpy freshman year in terms of my faith. I was annoyed by the youths in my campus fellowship, so I skipped a few Sabbath services because I didn't want to see them.

In the following summers, I used summer school as my excuse to either not attend NYTS, or only attend on the weekends. The problem with attending NYTS part-time is that you are not really there spiritually.

In 2005, I finally attended NYTS as a full-time student. That was my most rewarding NYTS. It took many days of earnest prayers to finally remove the high brick wall of sins that had blocked me from God. After that, I enjoyed days of sweet prayers, feeling the grace and mercy from God. At the end, I made the determination to be zealous for Him.

The fellowship experienced and friendships formed at NYTS are undeniable. There is a sense of belonging to our groups and rooms. We share our weaknesses and intercede for each other. It truly feels like we are one body in Christ. Although each part has different functions, we all work toward the same goals, to obtain salvation and to glorify God. I still keep in contact with some of my NYTS group members (I eventually married one of them) and keep them in my prayers. It is wonderful to have spiritual companions. God knows we need all the help we can get.

MAKE TIME FOR CHURCH SEMINARS

In my experience, I have never regretted in the slightest bit going to a church seminar, whether it be SSC, NYTS, or CYC. Instead, I have always regretted not going to a church seminar, especially when I could have.

After my high school graduation, I spent the entire summer in Taiwan studying Chinese. Consequently, I couldn't attend NYTS with many of the spiritual friends that I had grown up with. When the summer ended, I was actually quite sad that I had missed NYTS, not because I felt left out and couldn't see my church friends, but because when I saw all their reflections and pictures, I realized how much spiritual edification and love I missed out on. I felt that if I had gone, I could have been much better prepared to face my freshman year of college, especially since I was going to go to a university that did not have a local TJC.

Determined to attend NYTS the next summer, I made sure that I kept the dates of the seminar free. Thank God, my first NYTS was indeed very beneficial to my spiritual life. I brought back many long term resolutions and spiritual friends that shaped my lifestyle for the following years of college. I kept in touch with my group members every week while at school and wrote a list of resolutions and changes that I wanted to make in my life. Because of the regular communication with church brothers and sisters and the resolutions that I made, I was able to maintain a much more stable faith during my sophomore year than I did my freshman year. Although the communication with brothers and sisters could not replace going to Sabbath service at church, I thank God that my personal Sabbath worships were meaningful and productive.

Although the communication with brothers and sisters could not replace going to Sabbath service at church, I thank God that I could still reflect and share my thoughts, feelings, and struggles with spiritual friends as if I were still with them at NYTS or at home. Doing so also helped me to pay more attention to my spiritual life so that I kept the Sabbath, studied the Bible, and prayed for others.

By the second half of sophomore year, students begin to frantically search for internships, research positions, or classes for the summer. By the grace of God, I was offered an internship position that was scheduled to end in late August. I accepted it almost immediately because it was

such a good opportunity, but I was also torn because I felt that I wouldn't be able to take any time off for NYTS, since internships are generally only about ten weeks long and taking one or two weeks off is a significant portion of that period. With this doubt in my mind, I was unable to muster the courage to even ask for time off to attend NYTS and instead accepted that I wouldn't be able to go.

As the date for NYTS drew closer, I was feeling more and more ambivalent because many people were asking me if I was going. I would tell them, "No, I can't because I have work and I don't think I can get time off." But every time I said this I felt my conscience prick me since I did not even make an effort to see if I could go. This continued until registration was finalized and no more full-time participants could sign up. Finally, I realized that by not asking my manager for time off, I wasn't even giving God a chance to prove Himself faithful. After all, the worst thing that could happen was that my manager would say "no" and that would be that. With this mindset, two weeks before the start of NYTS, I mustered the courage to ask my manager for a week off and to my surprise, he said, "Sure." Since I would be auditing NYTS, I even offered to work from home in the evenings, but my manager said, "Don't worry about it; just take a vacation." It was that simple and I felt that if I had asked for two weeks off at the start of the internship, he would have given them to me. Still, I was able to attend the second week of NYTS as an auditor, and of course, I didn't regret it. Even though I wasn't assigned to any group, the other auditors and I were able to have good fellowship, sharing reflections, struggles, and resolutions. NYTS that year was held at my local church so my mom offered our house to provide lodging for out-of-state auditors. Every evening before going to bed the auditors and I would talk and discuss prayer requests, worries, and what we needed to change in our lives. We would then pray together. Thank God, one of the auditors who did not have the Holy Spirit received it during that week of NYTS. At the conclusion of NYTS, I realized that God indeed is faithful—my internship was ten weeks and God allowed me to offer one tenth of it to Him without any trouble at all.

Never rule out NYTS as a part of your summer plans if you are considering an internship, a research position, or summer classes. It is truly possible to participate in both an internship or research and NYTS. You will find that many internship programs require commitments

of at least 10 or even 12 weeks, but don't let that discourage you. Every manager and position is different, and God can make things work out very easily — you just have to give Him a chance.

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF SUMMER

Thank God, because of my major and career choice, I do not need to worry about obtaining an internship. Work experience can be helpful, but it's not required. During winter and summer breaks, I can focus on personal interests, relaxing, and attending church seminars. Even before I plan my trips or events, I try to make sure my schedule does not conflict with church seminars that I would like to attend. During summer breaks, I have been able to study abroad and take summer classes as well as attend NYTS. I am very grateful for a supportive family that allows me to attend these events and thank God that I can still meet up with friends in between various summer activities. I value seminars highly because if they did not exist, I know that my spirituality would change and I would not have the opportunity to meet and learn from other brothers and sisters.

WHY I PASSED ON MONEY TO GO TO CHURCH

During senior year of high school, I took part in a school-sponsored business internship, where I worked at a large company for several hours a day. In addition to getting exposure to a business environment and earning high school credit, I enrolled in the program because the company often hired the same people for a paid internship in the summer. I was hoping to get hired and make a little bit of money before going to college.

When school ended, the company offered me a position with an attractive salary. Thank God that although thirty people were interested, and only two were positions available, they wanted me. I was excited at the opportunity to make some money, but I also faced a dilemma: I was planning on attending my first NYTS as well as participating in a church volunteer internship that summer. Personally, I doubted the company would give me over three weeks off from a three month long internship.

But since I'd heard testimonies of things like this working out for others in the past, I asked anyway.

They decided to hire someone else. My school friends thought I was crazy to pass on such a great opportunity. Even my business internship teacher, who had been in charge of the program for years, thought I didn't have my priorities straight.

In the end, I participated in the church internship, attended NYTS, charged up my spirituality before I headed into my first year of college, and made a bunch of new church friends.

It was tough choosing between earning money and attending church events. From a practical perspective, the money would have helped. I could have attended just one of the church activities and kept the business internship. I asked myself, "Not attending NYTS does not make me less spiritual than others, right? Does choosing to earn money over going to NYTS mean I do not have faith?" My dad helped me not to be so narrow-minded about the situation. Such an assessment would have been too superficial, essentially seeing things as black and white. In the end, I based my decision on what I truly needed.

I did not go to NYTS because it was what a good Christian should do or because everyone else my age was going. I wasn't afraid that others would think of me as loving money more than God if I chose the internship. I went because I saw it as being more beneficial to me than the money I would have otherwise earned. I was going out of state and embarking on a new journey in my life. I had to ask myself, "In preparing for this journey, would money or a closer relationship with God be more helpful to me?" Though I did not want to ask my parents, I knew that they would give me money if I needed it.

On the other hand, my faith could not depend solely on attending a church seminar. I had to cultivate my faith on a regular basis, independently of whether I was participating in a seminar or not. Therefore, I viewed NYTS as an opportunity to draw nearer to God, not a short-term way to keep my faith afloat. Having the correct perspective on my situation helped me be at peace with my decision, even though others did not agree.

SUMMER INTERNSHIPS CONFLICTING WITH NYTS

In my major, internship experience was important for securing a job after graduation. The struggle every summer was to find a summer internship that would accommodate a 2-week leave towards the end of July for NYTS. Of course, I did not bring up this proposal with my prospective employer during an interview. I was also reluctant and afraid to discuss this issue with my employers even as I began working there for the summer. However, I mustered up the courage and explained to my boss that I wanted to attend a two-week youth church conference at the end of July; I would be willing to make up for the time. I braced myself for a prolonged negotiation session and I was shocked when he said, "Sure, go ahead. It's rare for young people to want to go to church anymore."

As a Christian, and a True Jesus Church member, we are often hyper-sensitive about what people think about us and our beliefs, but the truth is, most people really don't care about your religious affiliation as long as you respect their religion (or non-religion) as well. Most employers are willing to accommodate your religious practices as long as you give them advanced notice and propose a solution in which your project will be minimally impacted by your absence. In fact, they may even secretly admire a young person with actual principles upon which they stand. Just think about the people you have worked with, or your classmates. Essentially, you accept others' beliefs and values, even if you don't agree with them. The same standard is applied to us as well, so what and whom do we have to fear? For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline (2 Tim 1:7). Our fear stems from the insecurity that God won't always provide the best for us, so we might lose our internship opportunities if we ask for time off for NYTS. We can set our insecurities aside because Jesus promised us that if we seek Him first, then everything will be given to us. I can testify that I stood in pleasant surprise as my boss actually encouraged me to go to NYTS. Thank God!

GOD OPENS THE DOORS TO UNEXPECTED ROOMS

My summer internship options were limited after my sophomore year in college for several reasons. First, I did not started searching early enough. Competitive application processes for many internship opportunities had deadlines in January or February, long before I even started searching. Second, I wanted to be close to home. After going to college, I hadn't spent more than a week at a time at home, so I wanted that summer to be different. Third, I was completely paralyzed by a sense of uncertainty about my future. I had no idea what major to choose, what career to pursue, and how my summer plans should fit into all of that. I was stressed out just thinking about making plans for the summer while I still had to deal with the usual academic and extracurricular workload. All three reasons limited many of the opportunities that I could have pursued.

My attitude changed sometime in March, not because any of the three issues I mentioned were resolved, but because the process of planning was put into better perspective. As I fretted over the future, I started to reflect about my past. Shockingly, I realized that every significant event in my life occurred outside of my own planning. These events were the kind I could point to and say, "Look, if I had not experienced this, I would be a fundamentally different person today." I did not anticipate the seemingly random events that would end up having a major impact in my life. For example, I did well in school because of a fourth grade teacher who helped me excel at learning. I was not even supposed to attend that particular school in the first place. Life after my father's stroke was tough, but it strengthened me and I matured. What I valued most about my college was the TJC campus fellowship nearby, even though I had not known that this fellowship existed when I applied to that school. I realized that all I had to do was try my best, and God would provide the rest. Shortly after I came to this conclusion, I told a church sister, "You know what, I'm not going to worry. I'll just trust that something will fall out of the sky and into my lap." One week later, that's exactly what happened!

I was a campus tour guide for my college. One day before I began my next tour, I saw a group of middle school students, their principal, and teachers enter the admissions office. As soon as I saw them, I told the other tour guides, "That's my tour group." The tour was very entertaining and I enjoyed sharing my college's history, activities, academics, and traditions.

The kids were impressive, asking numerous intelligent questions and being attentive the whole time.

The surprise came at the end of the tour. The principal of the middle school group asked, "What are you doing after graduating?" I laughed and said, "I'm a sophomore; I'm not graduating anytime soon." My response did not keep him from handing me a business card and saying, "Look us up when you do."

Immediately after the tour, I went online to look up the middle school and found out that it was a public charter school only six hours away from my home. Moreover, it was part of a national network of schools that served low-income students. Since I am very passionate about the issue of public education, I thought to myself, "How great would it be to intern here over the summer?" I shot an email to the principal proposing my idea and his reply was immediate: "YES." Because I had proposed the internship, I was able to negotiate plenty of weekends off so I could go home and attend NYTS. I then applied for funding from my college so that I would not have an additional financial burden. Within a month, I heard that I was one of thirteen out of over ninety applicants who received funding from the organization.

The internship was an extremely fulfilling experience. I asked all the questions I wanted, received answers, learned abundantly, and felt like I contributed significantly to the organization. This experience also taught me a few things. First, we should trust God to open doors. Second, we should walk through those doors when they are opened. Third, once we're through those doors, we should work our very best. Who knows which door God will open next? We need to be ready for anything, starting with that summer internship.

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RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

YALE UNIVERSITY

We are also thankful for all the wonderful peer editors and volunteers who spent their valuable time on this project—especially all the volunteers at MVP 2008 and our wonderful illustrators.

Though the first edition of *Victory on the Island: A Freshman Survival Guide* is a great first effort, there are still many college topics and experiences that have not been covered and would be extremely beneficial to our church's youth members. If you have a college experience, lesson, or testimony you would like contribute to future editions of this survival guide, please do not hesitate to contact the National Youth Ministry at nym@tjc.org, or visit our website at www.nymtjc.org. Alternatively, please take a look below to see if any of the topics pique your interest.

Freshman Survival Guide Topics (not all-inclusive):

The ones in boldface have not yet been (fully) covered

CHAPTER 1: WASHING ASHORE
(Pre-Admissions/Community College)

- Deciding on a college
- Choosing your majors and minors
- **Community college experiences**
- Choosing a college without a local TJC, or other remote area experiences
- **Transferring**

CHAPTER 2: BUILDING A HUT
(Room & Board)

- Pirating software
- Roommates
- Prayer life with unbelieving roommates
- Commuting to college (living at home)
- Learning self-control
- **Dealing with co-ed dorms/bathrooms**
- **My roommate brings his/her boy/girlfriend to our room**

CHAPTER 3: TALKING WITH THE NATIVES
(Social Life)

- Fraternities/sororities
- Dating and relationships in college
- Parties
- Drinking
- **Drugs**
- Choosing friends
- Choosing activities and clubs
- Social events on Friday nights
- Leadership positions in other organizations
- **Sports and intramurals**

CHAPTER 4: MAPPING THE ISLAND
(Academics)

- Studying (and relying on God)
- **Working while attending college**
- **Personal finances in college**
- Stressed out with projects, exams, papers
- How to deal with an explosion of new ideas
- **Taking philosophy/religion classes**
- **I'm a super-senior**
- **I'm transferring**
- **I'm studying abroad**

CHAPTER 5: KINDLING THE FIRE
(Spiritual Life)

- Campus fellowship experiences
- Serving God during the college years
- Leading my first Bible study
- Preaching and evangelism
- **Questioning the Bible and/or the existence of God for the first time**

CHAPTER 6: SHARPENING YOUR TOOLS
(Self Improvement/Character Building)

- Dealing with new-found independence
- Relationships with parents during college
- All-nighters/thoughts on sleep
- My freshman 15 (and staying healthy in college)
- Dealing with homesickness
- Time management
- **Media addiction**
- **Gaming**
- Living a balanced life
- **Building good financial habits in college**
- **Financial Aid/Scholarships experiences**
- **Handling tragedy (death of a family member or of a close friend)**
- **Learning to cook**

CHAPTER 7: GONE FISHING
(Breaks)

- **Spring Break**
- Spending summer/winter breaks
- Summer internships
- Attending NYTS and/or CYC

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