



THRIVING SPIRITUALLY IN COLLEGE

Introduction:

It is no secret that statistically there is a huge percentage of young adults who were once active in a church during their teen years who check out spiritually during their 20s.

Likely if you are reading this, it's because you don't want to be a statistic. You love Jesus and four years from now you still want to be on His team. So how do you pick a college that won't leave you spiritually shipwrecked? Do you need to go to a Christian university? Maybe. Maybe not. There is no "one size fits all" solution. I have seen young people thrive at Christian universities and I have seen some that came away from those same institutions broken and bitter. What about a secular university? There are pastors, missionaries, and spiritual heroes who have received their education at a secular university. But there are also a lot who have just become spiritual dropouts.

Ask God where He would have you get your education. Bathe the whole decision process in prayer. Cling to James 1:5-8 and trust Him to give wisdom. Jesus knows you better than you know yourself and He has a plan and a place to develop you spiritually. So ask Him to guide and close any doors that are not from Him.

College is merely a proving ground that will reveal what is already in your heart and the foundation that you are relying on. A student with a solid faith foundation will do just fine in a hostile environment and in an easier one. Read the book of Daniel chapters 1-3 in the Bible. Daniel and his companions were taken to Babylon as young men and spent three years being trained and educated in a secular culture. Yet they thrived spiritually in an environment hostile to their faith!

They succeeded before God and men because they depended completely on God despite how that might put them at odds with those in authority over them. To them, God was their highest authority, and they would worship nothing less.

In this booklet you'll discover 12 principles that will help you thrive in college whether you are going to a Christian college or a secular one. You'll read quotes from young men and women who used to be in your shoes. And you'll look at the Scriptures for Biblical principles that will undergird their advice.

Principle #1 Cultivate your soul.

“START EVERY DAY WITH JESUS. NO EXAM, PAPER, ALL-NIGHTER OR FRIEND SHOULD COME FIRST. THE COLLEGE YEARS ARE SUCH TRANSFORMATIVE YEARS...SATURATE THEM WITH THE WORD OF GOD FIRST THING EVERY DAY!” – EMMA

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1-2).

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 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?’” (Matthew 16:24-26).

Cultivate your soul. It is every bit as important to your future success as cultivating your intellect and job skills. The choices that you make now and the experiences that you gain will set the trajectory for your life for years to come.

Nearly every big decision in life (faith, career, spouse, lifestyle) will come at you in the next ten years. You are going to need a lot of wisdom for all those decisions. Fortunately, Jesus is the Source of all wisdom.

So you will want to deepen and strengthen your relationship with Him now. You'll want to take the time to develop your spiritual life so that when the storms come, you'll know where to go. If you wait until after college to get in touch with Jesus, you may find yourself so far from Him that you'll have a lot of collateral damage to overcome.

Don't let your GPA become the god that you worship. Jesus determines the path of your life, more than your GPA. He can open doors for you that even a 4.0 can't open.



**Principle #2: Yield to the Holy Spirit.
It is His job to make you a holy
follower of Jesus.**

“WHEN I TRY TO LIVE UP TO THE ‘RULES’ I’M NOT GOING TO EVER BE ABLE TO MEET THEM. AS SOON AS YOU TRY TO LIVE UP TO IT, IT BECOMES ABOUT YOU – NOT ABOUT GOD. WHEN YOU LET THE HOLY SPIRIT WORK IN YOUR LIFE, IT’S GOD DOING IT THROUGH YOU AND THAT’S WHERE YOU FIND PEACE AND JOY. I USED TO QUENCH THE HOLY SPIRIT. IT WAS THE BIGGEST MISTAKE OF MY LIFE. BE VULNERABLE AND LET HIM GUIDE YOU.” – NATE

“THE HOLY SPIRIT IS ALIVE AND MOVING, AND AS CHRISTIANS WE NEED TO NOT FORGET THE REALITY OF HIS PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES. HIS DESIRE IS TO HELP US IN EVERYTHING, INCLUDING THE TOUGH DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND THE EVERYDAY MOMENTS THAT WE FACE. DON’T BE AFRAID TO RELY UPON HIM AND ALL THAT HE HAS TO OFFER YOU.” - BETH

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:7-8).

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

God lives within you in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s role is to develop you spiritually. What you can’t become on your own by following a list of do’s and don’ts, you can become by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit infuses your life with His character (Galatians 3:22-23).
- He sanctifies you (Titus 3:5).
- He gives you victory over sin (Galatians 5:16).
- He comforts (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).
- He guides (John 16:13 and Romans 8:14-17).
- He teaches you the Scriptures and reveals Jesus to you (John 14:26-27; 1 John 2:20,27).
- He strengthens you (Ephesians 3:16).
- He gives you at least one spiritual gift for the service of others and equips you to serve (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).
- He prays for you (Romans 8:26-27).

Do not resist, grieve or quench the Spirit by leaving Him out of your spiritual life. Rely on Him to keep you in the faith and walking in a way that honors Jesus.

Principle #3: Develop your squad. The people who have your back need to share your faith, your values, and your direction. Good friends make all the difference.

“THE PEOPLE YOU HANG OUT WITH HAVE SUCH A MAJOR IMPACT ON YOUR LIFE. MY FRESHMAN YEAR, I WAS NOT EXACTLY SPENDING MY TIME WITH CHRISTIANS, AND IT TOOK A HUGE HIT ON ME SPIRITUALLY. MY SOPHOMORE YEAR, I ADJUSTED MY FRIEND GROUP AND MADE MY CHRISTIAN FRIENDS MY CLOSEST FRIENDS AND SPIRITUALLY I REALLY, REALLY GREW. IT’S EASY TO FORGET JUST HOW MUCH OF AN IMPACT THE PEOPLE AROUND US HAVE ON EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES.”

– MIKA

The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Proverbs 12:26).

“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...Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10,12).



When choosing your best friends at college, you are going to want to find people that will draw you toward Jesus, rather than away from Him. You want people speaking Biblical truth into your life. Find someone who will pray with you and who will give you that spiritual kick in the pants when you’ve blown it. Do those things for your friend as well. Ruth had Naomi. Elijah had Elisha. Paul had Timothy, Silas and Luke. Even Jesus had His band of brothers.

That is not to say that you should only associate with Christians. Heaven forbid that you would not also be cultivating genuine friendships with unbelievers. How can you be fulfilling the Great Commission if you had no unsaved friends and no genuine interest in people outside of Christ? You will be most vibrant spiritually when someone is pouring into your life and when you are pouring into someone else’s life. Make sure both are happening.

Principle #4: Find a good on-campus Bible study group and a good church and commit to them.

“GET INVOLVED IN A GROUP SUCH AS CAMPUS BIBLE FELLOWSHIP. ATTEND BIBLE STUDIES AND ACTIVITIES. MAKE THEM A PRIORITY...NOT JUST IF YOU HAVE TIME AFTER HOMEWORK” – LAURA

“FIND A BIBLE STUDY AND HANG OUT WITH THOSE PEOPLE. GO TO CHURCH EVERY TIME THERE IS A SERVICE. NEVER SKIP FOR SCHOOLWORK. GOD WILL BLESS AND EXPAND YOUR TIME IF YOU HONOR HIM.” – JULIA

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 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” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).



We are meant to do the Christian life in the context of community. You need to find people who you can lean on and be encouraged by during the week. There are probably several Bible study groups on your campus – find one that has sound doctrine and good leadership and then commit to being a part of it. The ones that are led by an adult staff member tend to have more consistency and deeper teaching. That staff member can also be a great source for wisdom and encouragement.

Campus groups will usually do more than just study the Bible – they usually have prayer groups, retreats and other activities to build community and give opportunities for students to develop in faith and leadership.

A Bible study group can't replace a local church. God has said He will work through His church so be sure you are a part of one. Find some ministry in a church that you can be involved in; that way you'll get to know the people and feel like you truly belong. Consider going to a church with both older and younger people in it so that you can develop cross-generational friendships that can be your family away from home.



Principle #6: Pray about everything.

**“I PRAYED A LOT BEFORE EXAMS AND JOB INTERVIEWS. I TRUSTED THAT HE WOULD GUIDE ME THROUGH ALL THOSE. HE ALWAYS ANSWERED MY PRAYERS.” –
BAIXUE**

“REMEMBER THAT GOD CARES ABOUT EVERY ‘CRISIS’ (BIG OR SMALL) THAT YOU’RE HAVING, AND HE WANTS YOU TO TELL HIM ABOUT IT.” – SHANA

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting...” (James 1:5-6).

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Pray about anything and everything that concerns you – decisions to be made, financial needs, something difficult you have to do, a roommate who is messy, friends who need salvation and that upcoming chemistry test. Confess your sin to the Lord and receive His cleansing and forgiveness.

In the Bible we are told to pray without ceasing. We do that when we put Jesus into the details of our day. We carry on a conversation with the Lord as we do life. When you are stressed, pray. When you need wisdom, pray. When you don’t know where your keys are, pray. When you get an A on your test or found \$20 in a coat pocket, praise Him.

Rather than being annoyed at your dependence, God is pleased. He cares about all of you – not just the “spiritual” part of you. He cares about your schedule, your grades, your relationships, your questions and your bank account – so pray about it. Your faith will grow as you see small answers to prayer throughout your day.



Principle #7: Saturate yourself with the Word of God.

“MEMORIZING THE BIBLE VERSES! FOR ME, THAT REALLY GAVE ME A HOPE AND ENERGY DURING TIMES OF TROUBLE.” — BORAH



“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:21-25).

The Bible gives you wisdom when you need it. It is a source of comfort and encouragement for a weary soul. Get into the habit of reading a portion of Scripture every day or nearly every day. Get a Bible on your phone and read a bit of Scripture while you are waiting for your class to start or for the bus to arrive. Read slowly and ponder what you are reading. Take some time to think about what you are reading.

Expect God to communicate to you personally through His Bible. When He does, act on it. Scripture is to be responded to.

Principle #8: Learn to really worship.

“WORSHIP IS DAILY. WORSHIP IS YOUR EVERY ACTION AND ATTITUDE. IT’S NOT JUST WHEN YOU ARE UP FRONT SINGING. IT’S THE WAY THAT YOU LIVE AND BREATHE. IF YOU ARE LIVING FOR CHRIST, YOU ARE INHERENTLY WORSHIPPING.” - NATE

“Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:2).

“All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name. For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God. Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name. I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore” (Psalm 86:9-12).

“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” (Psalm 95:6-7).

God is worthy of our praise when things are going the way we want them to and when they aren’t. When we cultivate a thankful, worshipful attitude we can have joy in the middle of the stress of college life. The Lord daily pours out His blessings on His children and because of that we should desire to worship Him daily.

Worship is far more than just singing some songs before a sermon. Our entire lives should be an act of worship. When we are worshipping Jesus, we are ascribing worth to Him. We elevate Jesus and subordinate ourselves. When we worship, only God is great. It’s all about God’s magnificence, God’s power, God’s graciousness. If God is not the focal point, it isn’t Biblical worship.



Obedience to God and His commandments is an act of worship as I affirm by my actions that God’s ways are superior to my own. Jesus told His disciples bluntly, “If you love Me keep My commandments.” It’s not genuine worship for me to sing songs to Jesus about how great He is and yet refuse to do what He tells me to.

Worship is a lifestyle of obedience and submission. True worship has more to do with my lifestyle Monday through Saturday than it does with how I sing on Sunday.

Principle #9: Find a spiritual mentor.

“SOMEONE TOLD ME ONCE THAT IT’S HARD TO GET PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU ARE THE ONE LIVING IT. THAT’S WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO HAVE SOMEONE WITH MORE LIFE BEHIND THEIR BELT WHO CAN HELP KEEP YOU GROUNDED AND FOCUSED ON WHAT REALLY MATTERS.” – JOSH

“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17).

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:1-3).

“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9).

Christian discipleship is meant to be done life on life. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:8: “We were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” If you are intent on growing spiritually, ask God to give you a spiritual mentor who can be a visual aid for you of what it looks like to be a mature man or woman of God.

Christian maturity is not designed to be a “just-try-harder” proposition. It’s

The Holy Spirit’s role to develop you spiritually, so you and your mentor will want to overtly include Him in the process.

A good spiritual mentor will help you get below the surface and deal with the underlying heart issues. Find someone who will be real with you. Prayer and Bible study should be essential elements of your time together.



Principle # 10: Don't overcommit.

"IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO LEAVE ROOM FOR JESUS. WITHOUT SETTING ASIDE TIME TO TALK WITH HIM DAILY, WE LOSE FOCUS ON WHAT IT IS THAT WE ARE STRIVING FOR. WHEN WE WALK WITH HIM DAILY, HE HELPS US FOCUS ON THE IMPORTANT THINGS, AND HE GIVES US PEACE IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS. IT IS EASY TO PACK OUR SCHEDULE AND FORGET HIM, BUT WHEN WE DO THAT, WE ARE LOSING SO MUCH MORE THAN WHAT WE ARE GAINING. HOW MUCH HOMEWORK ARE YOU ACTUALLY GOING TO ACCOMPLISH IN 15 MINUTES? NOT AS MUCH AS YOU THINK. SOMETIMES 15 MINUTES IS ALL THAT IT TAKES TO RECONNECT WITH OUR FATHER." — MIKA



"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" (Psalm 127:1-2).

"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" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Don't commit to doing too many things – if you are working two jobs, taking 18 credit hours, doing an internship and are involved in several student organizations, you'll have an impressive resume and a barren soul. Your time with Jesus and your ability to get really involved with your Bible study group and church will be the first things to suffer because Jesus doesn't demand your involvement as loudly as your professors, your boss, and your lab partner. You need margin in your schedule for things that will come up later in the semester.

Consider taking summer classes or taking some credits at a community college if expenses are what is causing you to cram too much into your life all at once. Remember, Jesus is Jehovah Jireh. He is able to provide for your education in a multitude of ways. Invite Him into the struggle. If it is just your ego that is causing you to overcommit, admit it and stop it.

Principle #11: Develop humility.

"BE HUMBLE ENOUGH TO ADMIT YOUR MISTAKES AND WISE ENOUGH TO LEARN AND CORRECT THEM. TAKE ADVICE FROM OLDER ADULTS." – MCKENZIE

"By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life" (Proverbs 22:4).

"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:6-8).



All of us are fallen, finite and fallible people. We will make mistakes. We will inadvertently hurt others with our words and actions. Our tendency is to try to hide our mistakes and protect our image, but a wise person will admit their mistakes and seek forgiveness from God and from those they have hurt.

When you blow it, own it. Confess your wrongs and make amends. The Bible says that God gives grace to the humble but resists the proud. In the New Testament, Jesus' harshest words were for the Pharisees who

portrayed themselves as righteous and condemned others. Be a giver of grace when others fail.

When we admit that we do not know everything, we create superb opportunities to learn and flourish. Choose to be teachable and you will grow more than the individual who pretends to know it all.

Principle #12: Lead. Do hard things.

“BEING IN LEADERSHIP MAY AT TIMES REQUIRE YOU TO DO THINGS THAT ARE OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE AND TEST YOUR SUBMISSION TO THE LORD. HOWEVER, IN A UNIQUE WAY, IT TEACHES RELIANCE AND SUBMISSION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT TO EMPOWER YOU TO CARRY OUT WHAT GOD HAS SET BEFORE YOU ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.” – MATT



“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

Ephesians 2:10 says that God has prepared good works for you to do. He didn't design you to be a spectator in the walk of faith. Jesus intends for you to be part of the solution to the problems in the world that hurt your heart. Are you concerned about social justice? Then ask God how He would have you address that issue. Are you burdened for people to hear the gospel? Take the initiative to share your faith and give courage to others to do the same.

As you lead, God the Holy Spirit will reveal to you the spiritual gifts He has given you to enable you to serve Him with humility and confidence.

The challenge of leadership will enhance your prayer life and make you dependent on the Lord. God will use you, teach you to lead, and deepen your faith walk. He will enable you to do more than you ever thought was possible.