

Preparing for a College Education: Advice for Parents and their Children
Rev. Edward D. Seely, Ph.D.

Many parents and their children are becoming increasingly aware of and concerned about the high cost of post-high school education. Moreover, these concerns are superseded for Christians when considering the very liberal, including anti-Christian, bias of the majority of professors on most secular campuses. These questions are of the greatest importance, for they can affect their children's eternal destiny. How can Christian parents and their children make the best decisions on whether college is necessary, and if so, what college the young people should attend, and how to pay for that education? Here are some thoughts that should help which have come from over half a century as a student, pastor, parent, and college and grad school professor.

Begin Early.

As soon as they have children, parents should implement, or preferably add to, their family financial plan. Talk with a trustworthy financial advisor, who has a good reputation and a successful track record, and preferably one who is a Christian. A Christian will understand, be supportive of, and have the wisdom to advise you according to the principles in God's Word.

Establish a financial plan that includes a good life insurance policy for the main breadwinner in your family. Obtain sound investment advice that will include a savings plan to cover unforeseeable emergencies as well as college education and retirement.

Implement a family plan that will facilitate each member of the family maturing in Christ Jesus. (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 4:11-16) Read a portion of God's Word and pray together each day as a family. Worship at least weekly in a church that faithfully teaches the Bible and proclaims Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, connecting with the eternal resources God provides in and through the church, the body of Christ, that enables each member of the family to grow in Christ Jesus

until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:13-16)

Thus, as each of us in our family matures in Christ in connection with the church, we will also help the church to accomplish God's purposes. We and our family will also develop a Christ-like worldview and mentality that enables us to discern right from wrong, good from evil, and the strength from the Holy Spirit to choose that which is good, right, and of God rather than that which is demonic.

In that process, as parents we need to help our children to develop the ability to think with discernment. We need to regularly assist them to think critically, i.e., to not automatically accept what a teacher says but to compare and contrast what he or she says with what God says in his Word, the Bible. To think critically is not at all the same as to think negatively. Critical thinking is the development of the ability to naturally always hold God's Word as the standard and subject all that is heard and read to God's standard: that which compares with the Bible is acceptable, and that which contrasts with God's Word is not acceptable. With this skill, our children become ready to serve God most effectively in the world when they leave our home to go off to work and have their own family or to go to college.

Of course, all the above requires knowledge of God's Word. That means daily reading the Bible. Develop the desire to stop and study certain words and passages. It means reading the whole Bible. Great and continuing blessings will result!

Consider Whether a College Education is Necessary.

Many occupations today do not require a college education. Not a few hire good students right out of high school and offer them on-the-job training and/or the opportunity to attend seminars and other learning experiences when needed to help their employees learn specific information and develop essential skills to upgrade their ability to function as desired in their work.

Talk with your son or daughter a lot about what he or she is interested in doing, and then talk with fellow church members, neighbors, relatives, and friends who are already employed in that work; seek their advice and counsel as to how to prepare a successful application for such work. Set up meetings with leaders in that field for you and your child, and ask the leaders what is required for being hired. Many outstanding leaders will be willing to meet with you and your son or daughter. They view such help as a contribution to their company's and country's future; Christians will see such opportunities as a service to the Lord.

Consider a Community College.

When a college education is required, community colleges have a lot to offer over, and in preparation for transfer to, a four-year college. To begin with, they are much less costly, not only in their lower tuition than a four-year college or university but in the very significant savings due to your child(ren) being able to continue to live at home, thus saving room and board.

Another very helpful feature of a community college is that many, and usually most, of the professors are adjunct professors, which means they are not full-time professors. Typically, their full-time vocation is in a business, profession, or other occupation that allows them to have the time to teach at the college. Here the students are blessed to be taught by someone who can cite the principles, the following of which have made the professor successful in his or her field. The principles are not just theory, and the professor/practitioner is able to authentically demonstrate these keys to success in his or her work.

This ability is superior to most full-time professors, many of whom have little or no actual experience in the field, who are simply espousing theories they've studied in their own college and university education. That education usually has been at the feet of liberal, even very liberal, often anti-Christian, professors who've let it be known their students have to subscribe to their theories in order to successfully pass their course.

The exposure to the liberalism of full-time professors on the college and university campuses begins early. A review of the summer reading books incoming freshmen and women were being asked to read reveals they are mostly liberal. *The New York Times* reported that the subject matters were largely on immigration, race, "transitioning genders," economic injustice, the perils of technology, diversity and tolerance, and social activism. Only one conservative writer was included in the readings, which even the Times admits, does "go against the liberal trend." (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/01/us/college-summer-reading.html>)

The preceding is not to say that there are no liberal or anti-Christian adjunct professors. There are, but in my opinion not as many as on four-year colleges and universities. Since the community college adjunct professors' primary occupation is off campus, they are not so ensconced in the biased, elitist, and heavily enforced liberal milieu of the major colleges and universities. Many are members of and active in a local church, often a church committed to the faithful teaching of God's Word, which helps to keep their perspective more aligned with their Biblical theology in both their workplace and on the community college campus. Their primary identity and the source of their economic and professional reputation and other well-being is not at the mercy of and shaped by conformity to the peer-judging political correctness of academe.

Keep in mind the very important difference between knowledge and wisdom. I know personally professors on the university campus, and know of many others, who possess extensive knowledge, especially on certain subjects, but they don't have a shred of wisdom! Why? Recall this teaching from God's Word: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Proverbs 9:10) Remember also, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." (Proverbs 1:7)

Your children who are attending a local community college, will recall your teaching over many years to think critically, and especially as you talk with them about what they're learning, they'll be able to discern when professors err. Since they'll still be living at home, they'll have your additional help in discerning and thinking through those errors and arriving at a correct evaluation and conclusion. This parental help is especially valuable for younger college students as they make the transition from high school to college.

Another reason to consider a two-year community college is that the first two years of college are when students make up their minds about what they want to do in their working life. Statistics show that over 80% of college students change their minds about what they want to do between the time they enter college and the end of their second year. This is why colleges and universities typically do not require students to declare a major until the end of their sophomore year. Why not let them do this sorting out of courses (and thus careers—e.g., if they find they don't like the course, "Fundamentals of Accounting," they can likely rule out a career as business manager or banker) in a college where the courses are significantly less expensive?

Also, many courses can be taken online and all while living at home—a lot less expensive than at a dorm or any other living accommodation hundreds or thousands of miles from home. Living at home also saves the cost of such transportation. It's also safer, especially when teenagers and twenty-somethings try to drive all that distance, sometimes with faculties that are challenged by lack of sleep, alcohol and other drugs, to say nothing about inclement weather being navigated by inexperienced and easily distracted drivers, including those who are also on the road with your son or daughter.

Community colleges offer a lot of other advantages. Since many fine occupations do not require a four-year college education, many community college students can learn what they need at the local college and then go directly into a job, often near home. Parents may want to keep in mind research showing that about 80% of students tend to live within 100 miles of the college from which they graduate. That can be a long way from home. If it is necessary in order to accomplish what your son or daughter understands to be God's will for his or her life, that may be what he or she should do, but that decision does affect family time together and the development of family relationships. Since family is so important, the closer the college is to home has many benefits.

Students can come to know the respected and successful business man or woman who is teaching a course they like and develop a relationship with that professional. Such a relationship has many benefits, including a valuable reference for the résumé, a respected name for connecting with others in the field, and a possible job with the adjunct professor's company or firms the professor knows.

My daughter, Janet, reminds me of the importance of using social media for developing such relationships. LinkedIn is especially designed to provide and facilitate these valuable connections. In an email message she said,

I would add one more point to the community college choice and having a professor who is also in the work force—networking!...[I]n the case you are taking classes and getting to know someone in the workforce, he or she can become a good contact for networking for jobs in the industry in the future. Even if you don't get a job through them, potential employers will see you are connected to them in your LinkedIn account which can be helpful.

Community colleges provide valuable experience in learning the skills required for success in college level course work. Some community colleges have an exceptionally good reputation among the colleges and universities. As such, having an acceptable two-year record of course work in a community college facilitates acceptance into a four-year college or university for the remaining two years of baccalaureate education.

Carefully Select a Four-Year College or University.

Whether transferring from a community college or planning to go directly from high school, much care should be given to the choice of the college or university. First consider a Christian college. Advantages include teaching from a Biblical perspective, and, if the college is part of a

Christian denomination the teaching will typically include instruction from that denomination's theological perspective. Depending on the denomination, and if its theology is well-grounded on the Bible and in historic Christian theology, a superior education will result.

Some cautions need to be taken into account in the decision as to choosing a Christian college. Many colleges that began as fine Christian institutions have lost their original Biblical and theological moorings as their subsequent boards of trustees and the administrations have lost sight of or rejected the founders' principles and have become lax in the hiring of their professors. Standards have been lowered or ignored, which has resulted in the hiring of professors who do not adhere to the standards, who have and thus teach a liberal worldview, and depending on the college, some of these professors are not even Christians. Parents and students need to remember also that even professors who are conservative theologically can and do hold liberal social and political views that can conflict with what the Bible teaches, e.g., abortion, homosexuality, transgender issues, climate change, immigration. Thus, parents should advise their children to always employ their ability to think critically even on a Christian college campus.

Many Christian colleges are expensive. Therefore, if cost is a factor, rather than put oneself in a financial situation that is an unnecessary and counterproductive burden that will remain so for many years, it may be wiser to choose a secular college or university. But do so carefully!

Consider that state universities are typically less expensive than their more private counterparts, e.g., the University of Michigan costs more to attend than Michigan State University, and the University of Colorado is more expensive than Colorado State University. State universities usually receive more state funding than the other schools. In either case, don't forget to exhaust all possibilities for scholarships. The admissions office at the schools you are considering will be glad to help you identify these sources.

Many colleges and universities offer student employment either for pay or for credit against their tuition. Off campus jobs are often available. To the extent your son or daughter can manage a part-time job in addition to his or her course load (be careful to not put him or her under too much stress, which is unhealthy), such a job plus summer and other vacation work, does look good on a curriculum vitae when applying for a full-time job upon graduation. One executive with whom I talked on several occasions emphasized how he carefully examined the résumés of his job applicants to see what percentage of their college education they paid for themselves! The ones who paid for most of their education had his attention and an advantage in the application process. Employment with a reduction in course load is one reason many students are now taking five and six years to complete their baccalaureate education.

The secular college or university should offer the course work that will enable your son or daughter to have the academic credentials required for being hired by the business or profession in which he or she wants to work and which will enable him or her to succeed in that work. In the process of deciding upon which school you, or depending on who's paying, your son or daughter, want to "hire" (a good perspective to have, for academe has lost its original sense of being a public servant, that concept having been replaced with the current expectation to be

served—contrast Matthew 20:28—losing the understanding and appreciation that they wouldn't even exist if it weren't for their students) be sure to inquire as to which Christian organizations are strongly represented on that campus. Once accepted by that four-year school, even before arriving on campus, contact the Christian organization(s), e.g., InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Cru, Young Life, on campus and obtain contact information. As soon as possible attend chapter meetings, decide on which organization to be a part of, and commit to meeting regularly with that Christian ministry in order to have strong Christ-centered support to help withstand the negative and demonic non- and anti-Christian forces at work on the secular campus, in the administration, on the faculty, and in the student body.

From this Christian organization find a close-by church, that faithfully teaches God's Word, with which to meet and worship each week. Encourage your son or daughter to participate in one of the church's Bible study groups. If that is not feasible, suggest also that he or she invite Christian friends to form a Bible study group of their own. When well-established with Christians who are maturing in their relationship with Christ Jesus, invite non-Christian friends to join the group. Engaging in weekly worship and in at least one of these other Bible studies, will help your son or daughter to maintain and develop his or her relationship with the Lord, which will be his or her most vital and important source of strength to withstand the demonic influences that will both subtly and overtly be attacking him or her on a secular campus. (Read again Ephesians 6:10-18 and discuss it with your son or daughter.)

In the college selection process, ask local Christian business persons and teachers (high school, community college, members of your church) to advise you as to what college offers the courses your son or daughter needs in his or her chosen field and if they know any professors on that campus who are Christians. Try in this and any other ways you can, e.g., from Web searches, to find a professor on the campus you are considering who is a Christian, especially one who is a strong and maturing Christian. Ask to meet with him or her. Ask if he or she will become at least a temporary advisor for your son or daughter. Using the principle on secular campuses of taking people more than courses, ask the Christian professor which professors he or she advises your son or daughter to take. Of course, include your son or daughter in this search, even asking him or her to make these inquiries.

When the decision has been made, as parents, pray in Christ Jesus daily and earnestly for your son or daughter. (Ephesians 6:18; James 5:16) When classes start, keep in close contact via text, video or audio phone, email, other Web-based communication, however he or she prefers. Discuss with him or her how often you'll visit in this manner and in person, then faithfully follow through on your agreement. That loving, prayerful, and continual contact he or she can count on (and truly desires, even though not admitting it), will provide a solid support to help him or her encounter and overcome the spiritually negative and destructive forces on campus. The strong continual connection with the Spirit-filled and faithful church that adheres to God's Word, will help him or her grow "in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13)