

Once They Leave Home

Covering College Students in Prayer

By Joyce Godsen

Ben was the poster child of a college-bound student. He was homecoming king of his high school class and gave the opening address at his graduation. His fellow students and teachers loved him. Ben loved Jesus and was a shining light for the Lord in his public school. He was kind to both the popular and unpopular kids in his class and exuded the confidence of a secure child of God.



Similar to the families of most of his peers, Ben's parents divorced when he was a young child. He grew up with the uncomfortable, familiar routine of traveling back and forth between two homes and two sets of parents. While he excelled in math and science and had even considered becoming an engineer, Ben's deepest desire was to become a youth pastor. He was thrilled when he was accepted to the Christian college of his choice. With a track record of success, a generous scholarship, and utmost faith in God, he left home to begin his college freshman year.

Two months later, Ben made a phone call that halted his higher education pursuits. He couldn't explain everything over the phone, but he asked his dad to come and take him home. The exact circumstances seemed unclear, but it finally came out

that he had dropped out of the collegiate band and lost his hefty scholarship. He didn't believe the college professors were teaching the Bible correctly, and he adamantly claimed there was spiritual warfare on the campus.

Ben returned home, full of anxiety. Clearly something had gone wrong, and he had gotten involved with a strange religious group that targeted young Christian college students. His mother took him for a psychiatric evaluation. His father read through Scriptures with him and counseled his son in the truth of God's Word. A year later, and after a time of rest, Ben began attending a local two-year college, pursuing a technical degree.

Ben's story is all too common. Many of today's college students are overwhelmed with issues they are not prepared to handle on their own. Our prayers can mean the difference between a student remaining faithful to Christ or straying onto a path that leads to destruction. Our prayers can help students graduate and move forward in life, rather than struggling aimlessly and giving up, perhaps missing God's calling. But how, specifically, can we pray for them?

1. Pray that God will give them wisdom.

Considering all the new responsibilities of these burgeoning adults, pray that God will daily grant them wisdom. James wrote, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (1:5).

With the advent of technology and online schooling, today's college students are inundated with information that they need to interpret and understand correctly. God's wisdom is a gift greater than human intelligence alone. College professors are responsible for teaching the latest research and discoveries and have authority to administer tests and give grades. They

are not, however, able to make the mind understand. That is the responsibility of the student—and ultimately the objective of the Lord.

At times students hear arguments and theories that do not line up with the truth of God's Word. Graduating at the top of my class in both high school and college, I was led to believe I was in charge of my future and "the sky is the limit." I received a rude awakening when the great recession of the 1990s left no jobs for educated and intelligent young graduates. My generation was labeled Generation X—and since we had not found our place in the American workforce, we were encouraged to stay young and never grow up. Now in my 40s, I see how detrimental that mindset was for me.

When we ask God to give our students wisdom, He will equip them with the power to distinguish between God's truth and false philosophies. John 16:13 says, "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

College classes present various popular opinions, theories, and historical information that students are required to study and comprehend—much of it crucial to their preparation for the future. However, not everything taught in college should be received as an absolute standard of truth. We must pray that the Holy Spirit will lead college students into His knowledge. Discernment is a gift that comes from God.

2. Pray that God will protect their minds and hearts.

Many freshmen experience what we know to be "homesickness" and may even fall into depression as they adjust to living in a new environment. Even students who do not move far away or choose to live at home during college still go through a

transition into adulthood that can produce great stress and anxiety. They desperately need prayer for their psychological and emotional development—protection for their minds and hearts.

Some students may not understand or be able to talk about their emotions and feelings. We must intercede on their behalf, assured that God knows their hearts and understands their needs. Acts 15:8 reminds us, “God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.”

As in Ben’s example, sometimes students who seem most likely to succeed are the ones who end up struggling the most. We expect high-performing students to continue their climb up the ladder of success, unimpeded. When they don’t—or can’t—the emotional and unexpected plot twist can leave minds and hearts open to spiritual attacks.

3. Pray for the development of their character.

Jesus left us with the warning that we will have trouble in this world (John 16:33). Even so, our response to difficulties should be different from the world’s because Jesus tells us to “take heart” in His victory over the world.

When we pray for college students, we are praying for our future leaders. Leaders must be tested so that they develop true character and strength. Here are a few areas of character we can pray for:

- perseverance and endurance during tests and trials
- steadfastness, not growing weary or feeling defeated
- humility to accept correction and guidance when needed
- obedience to Christ when challenges and temptations come.
- Character matters at this crucial juncture!

4. Pray for purity in their relationships and for direction regarding a future spouse.

College students are also making decisions about marriage partners. The relationships they develop during college play a formative role in adulthood. False friendships can lead to broken hearts. Poor choices about intimacy will have far-reaching consequences. We should continually ask God to guide, protect, and keep His children on a right path.

5. Pray for a deep understanding of who they are in Christ.

Above all, these young people need to understand their identity in Christ. Ephesians 1:16–21 is a powerful Scripture worth committing to memory and praying on behalf of students. Paul's prayer for the Church models the way we can pray for college students in all these areas:

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Other ways to pray for them to understand their identity in Christ include:

- Child of God (John 1:12)
- Accepted by Christ (Rom. 15:7)
- No longer a slave to sin (Rom. 6:6)
- Set apart (Jer. 1:5) • Chosen as a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).

Partnering in the Battle

While we may not understand exactly how God is at work on college campuses or what battles these students are fighting, we can ask them how to pray for their crucial decisions. If we at least ask—whether they answer us or not—we are letting them know that we want to partner with them and support them on their journey.

Today's universities are a battleground, where true faith in Christ is targeted and attacked. Students are vulnerable to many temptations from both peers and professors. 1 Peter 5:8 reminds us, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

In response to the real threat of persecution, many shrink back from the fight and forego the opportunity to overcome the enemy through God's limitless power. When we recognize the opposition today's college students face, we can ask God to give them strength to defeat the enemy and bring God's light to dark places.

Appealing to the Higher Authority

Although the vain philosophies and arguments of the day appear to be the controlling force on college campuses, as intercessors and people of prayer, we know we can appeal to a higher authority. When we pray for college students, we can pray with faith and confidence that God is ready and able to

meet every need and rescue His children from harm. Let us call upon God's authority to tear down enemy strongholds in Jesus' name (2 Cor. 10:4).

In doing so, we will bring great blessing and hope to a young generation stepping into God's call.

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