



Make
the *Most*
of it

*a guide to loving
your college years*

FOREWORD BY RUSSELL MOORE

Barry H. Corey

PRESIDENT OF BIOLA UNIVERSITY

Make the Most of It



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To my wife, Paula

My standard for all things excellent, lovely, and good

————— *and* —————

To the memory of my brother-in-law Ossie Mills

A university leader and an inspiration to friends and strangers

————— *and* —————

To Robert E. Cooley

My mentor

Contents

Foreword by Russell Moore *ix*

Introduction: For You, College Student *1*

- CHAPTER 1 College Is the Long Game *7*
- CHAPTER 2 You Are Not Alone *17*
- CHAPTER 3 Loving Liberal Learning *25*
- CHAPTER 4 Your Major *33*
- CHAPTER 5 College and Money *39*
- CHAPTER 6 Internships Are the Ticket *47*
- CHAPTER 7 Write Notes and Thank *53*
- CHAPTER 8 The Fartleks of College *61*
- CHAPTER 9 Embrace Boredom *71*
- CHAPTER 10 Fill Space with Substance *81*
- CHAPTER 11 Manage Anxiety *93*
- CHAPTER 12 Got Sleep? *103*
- CHAPTER 13 Fail Well *109*
- CHAPTER 14 Reach Out to Strangers *117*
- CHAPTER 15 An Ethnic and Cultural Mosaic *123*

CHAPTER 16	An Anointed Social Justice	133
CHAPTER 17	Be Gentle as Doves	141
CHAPTER 18	Be Wise as Serpents	151
CHAPTER 19	Professors as Mentors	161
CHAPTER 20	The Student as Teacher	167
CHAPTER 21	The College Romance	173
CHAPTER 22	Hook-Up and Bingeing Irritainments	181
CHAPTER 23	College Standards	189
CHAPTER 24	Arts Appreciation	197
CHAPTER 25	Ideas Have Consequences	205
CHAPTER 26	It Takes More Than Passion	217
CHAPTER 27	Parting Exhortations	225

A Postscript for Parents 229

Gratitude 233

Notes 237

About the Author 241

Foreword

If you're in college right now, you're in crisis. If you're looking to start college, you're facing a crisis. But maybe it's not a crisis in the way that you might think of that word.

Several years ago, someone explained to me the concept of Rumspringa, or “running around,” which is practiced in some communities of Amish and other religious groups. Late in adolescence, young men and women leave the community of faith in which they've grown up and experience life “on the outside.” Sometimes that includes experiences as benign as watching television or moviegoing, maybe smoking cigarettes, and in other cases, it could include the sort of “riotous living” Christians associate more with the prodigal son in Jesus' parable. The idea is that, after all of this, these young people know what it is to commit, out of their own free will, to the life of holiness and world-denial that makes up their religious tradition's way of life. The Rumspringa concept made immediate sense to me because it reminded me of what in my own southern evangelical tradition was called the college and career Sunday school class.

The college and career Sunday school class was reserved for those who were now out of high school and thus out of the traditional evangelical youth ministry, whether they went to college or not. In many congregations, the college and career class was actually less an evangelical Rumspringa and more a Protestant version of limbo. That's because the group was a sort of holding pattern: too old for youth group but too young for the newly marrieds class. Although this category did technically exist, there was either no one in the class or no clear purpose for it.

And that, in essence, left high school graduates in Christian churches in a type of limbo, a period in their lives when they'd drift out to sea and hopefully learn to swim back to shore. For a long time, some sectors of North American Christianity—with many blessed and effective exceptions—almost expected students to drift away from Christ and the church for a few years after high school.

It seems to me those days are over. That's both bad and good news.

The bad news is that churches cannot expect that those who drift away will come back. For one thing, what usually prompted such a homecoming to the church was a pattern of life changes related to family formation, like getting married or having children. These decisions are now happening much later in young people's life span, after habits are more clearly formed.

The good news is that the gospel is no longer assumed

FOREWORD

as part of a life cycle, which means the gospel can be the real gospel, a union with Christ that reconciles sinners to God and then transforms them into his likeness. And where churches at one time worried that those going off to college would lose their faith, it seems to me that the place where the Spirit is most at work right now is often on college and university campuses.

Graduating from high school can begin your “crisis years,” and crisis is not necessarily negative. Crisis is a time of sorting out what really matters to you, who you really are. Many students come to know Christ during this time, and many who know Christ come to see the implications of what it means to follow Jesus with the rest of their lives. That should elicit from all of us—students and parents alike—excitement and gratitude.

That’s why the book you hold in your hands is important, not just to a college student like you and to those who know and love you, but to the entire church. I can think of no one more in touch with both the deep wells of Christian thought and practice and the lived realities of university students than Barry Corey. Barry Corey is one of the most thoughtful leaders among global evangelical Christians, and he also has built one of the most dynamic Christian college campuses in the world, where students are intellectually equipped and also spiritually formed. On this campus, students are clearly growing in mind, skill, heart, and psyche toward a holistic vision of following Christ.

In this book, President Corey invites you, in whatever setting you find yourself, to benefit from his wisdom and experience in how to navigate the crises—the “turning points”—of college life. Some of those crises are seemingly monumental and others seemingly microscopic, which can be difficult even at the level of telling the one from the other. So read this book slowly. Think about the counsel you receive here. Pray about it, and make notes for yourself. Whether college exhilarates you or terrifies you, you are in a time of crisis that can deeply change you, setting you free to seek first the Kingdom and to point to the life found in Jesus Christ. That’s a crisis worth having. Make the most of it. We’re counting on you.

Russell Moore
President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission
of the Southern Baptist Convention
August 2019

Introduction

For You, College Student

Confident and on a mission, a new student came to my office when I was an academic dean. She was ambitious and calculating. And she had an idea. “I plan to load up my semesters with extra courses and limit anything I do except studies so I can graduate in about half the time.” Period. Actually, it was more an exclamation point. It was certainly not a question mark.

Like an efficiency consultant, this new student laid out her plan for each semester. She worked every angle to accelerate her educational “rite of passage” to get to graduation as fast as she could. Higher education was for her both a degree and a ticket: a degree to earn and a ticket to a career. Then her life would begin.

She told me all this while standing and fidgeting. I invited her to sit and take a breath. That was the first thing she needed. I let her know I appreciated her calculated drive, but I suggested she might want to think about her education more fully. The way she talked, it sounded as if her degree was

more about transacting a deal than transforming her mind. It sounded as if her education was going to be parenthetical rather than integral to her life.

Of course, logistically, she could fast-track and hurry from orientation to graduation, from A to Z. She had every right to scramble.

Or, as I suggested, she could amble. I asked her if she might want to take her time. Be part of a student organization. Savor her courses. Be mentored by a professor. Go on weekend retreats. Enjoy long conversations with students in her residence hall. I encouraged her to consider a service project or a study-abroad experience. I suggested something other than tucking syllabi under her arm like a college running back and rushing toward each next semester as if it were another first down. She could choose inspiration over efficiency, discovery over velocity.

A few years later we talked again, just before her graduation. To my surprise and delight, she was on the same timeline as the classmates with whom she began. She had taken my advice, which doesn't always happen. She sat relaxed in my office to thank me for inviting her into an educational experience that had shaped her in more ways than she had thought possible a few years earlier when she was barreling for the end zone.

I get it. There are good reasons to streamline college. It's expensive, and I fully understand that getting through sooner is economically prudent. But my counsel is to breathe in

INTRODUCTION

college more than bolt through college. As a bright, soon-to-be-finished college student named Noah told me about what shaped him in college, “Only about half of those activities related to my courses.”

I am a parent and university president who wants you, as a student, to get the most out of college. These pages are the accumulation of wisdom from nearly four decades in higher education, from my life as a college student *then* to my life as a university leader *today*, to all the years in between.

But to say that all the thoughts in this book are my own isn't accurate. *Some* of the ideas on these pages are mine. Some have come from my colleagues at Biola University. But most of my thoughts have come from decades observing students like you, who are creative, hilarious, adventuresome, loving, compassionate, occasionally mischievous, and increasingly wise.

Some chapters will help you if you are just getting ready for college. Others will be better if you've already got a few semesters behind you. I've tried to give you nuggets of practical wisdom, tips for survival, virtues to embrace, disciplines to practice, ideas to think about, and habits to cultivate for a flourishing undergraduate journey.

Researchers in human development far brainier than I have amassed boatloads of data to confirm that from your late teens to your early twenties you will mature more than at any other time during your eighty or so trips around the sun. You may not notice it happening, but your college years lived well will transform you for the good. Most college graduates I

know tell me they grew more in college than at any other time in their lives. I know I did.

You will discover that college years lived well will form patterns that shape the rest of your life. Lived not so well, unhealthy patterns will take root.

How will you discipline your sleep, your study habits, your money (or lack of it)? What will you eat, and how will you spend unscheduled time? Who will be your closest friends? What habits will you adopt? What habits will you abandon? How will you choose a major? What will be your vocation's purpose? Will you develop a life passion?

I care about your generation. And I care about you. Being a college president is one of the most fulfilling jobs imaginable. Those like me who run universities have the amazing responsibility to serve you. I say "serve" intentionally. It's a reminder that *you* are why we wake up in the morning, get ourselves out of bed, and go to work. You are why we build leadership teams and raise scholarship money and advance educational excellence. You are the reason we attend plays and scream our guts out at soccer games and write congratulatory notes for your exemplary accomplishments. We know you have the potential to do things you never thought you could do, to influence your world way beyond your wildest imagination and way beyond my generation.

Regardless of the size or kind of college or university you attend, I wrote this book for you as a Christian. Maybe yours is a new faith or you're from a long family-faith tradition. Maybe

INTRODUCTION

you go to church all the time or seldom attend at all. Maybe you know the name of your particular denomination. Maybe you don't know, don't have one, or really don't care.

It's for you if you're from a long line of family members with college degrees. It's for you if you are the first generation in your family to attend college. I've written this for you whether you come from a city, from a rural community, from a whole family or a broken family or a blended family. It's for you whether you are a physics major or a philosophy major, an accounting major or an anthropology major, an education major or an economics major. Whatever your ancestry or ethnicity, I wrote this for you. If you are a global student with an I-20 visa, this book is yours.

If you're an introvert like me, I've got you in mind. If you're an extrovert, this book is also yours. If you're a Mensa genius or an average Joe or learning challenged, I want you to be encouraged by these pages. I believe in *you*. I've kept you in mind as I've thought about what it takes for you to love college and make the most out of these years you'll never have again. If you don't want to plow through the book start to finish, look over the chapter titles to find the ones that might scratch your college-curiosity itch. Whatever way you want to explore this book's subjects, my hope is you'll benefit from its nuggets of practical wisdom, tips for survival, virtues to embrace, disciplines to practice, ideas to think about, and habits to cultivate. I want you to believe your undergraduate journey can be even more life-forming than you ever imagined.

CHAPTER 1

College Is the Long Game

After my junior year in college, I traveled for a chunk of the summer through Europe by train. I was on the cheap, carrying Arthur Frommer's *Europe on \$10 a Day*.

After three years in college, I was becoming more self-aware. I could see that my world was changing, maturing, expanding. My freshman timidity was long gone. I began to emerge as a risk-taker, a deeper thinker. My conversations were meatier. Strangers weren't as intimidating. My introversion had moved a few degrees toward other people. Lessons I'd learned through mistakes and failed attempts were making me more confident. The ways I'd grown through interaction with demanding professors and stimulating classmates made me more intellectually astute. I was on the growth curve both in confidence and intellect. I began to write more thoughtfully, keeping a journal for the first time. Discussions with adults came more easily, and I was able to keep up with current issues and topics of a fairly wide range. College was making a difference.

Near the end of my travels that summer, I boarded a ferry from Stavanger, Norway, to Newcastle, England. There I would buy a train ticket for London, where I'd fly home—nine countries later—returning to college for my senior year.

The train was quickly filling when I stepped into the coach-class car. Only a few seats were left. I settled in beside an older Englishman, tweeded, balding, and bespectacled. On his lap was the day's edition of the *Times*, Britain's most-respected daily newspaper. Feature stories that summer were of political tensions between the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, tensions that were escalating into hostilities.

We hadn't been traveling long before this gentleman turned to me. It was the first either of us had talked. He directed my sight outside the window beside him. East of us, and spanning a good part of the hillside, was a giant horse carved in stone. It looked like it could have been the length of a football field, European *or* American.

Pointing to the headlined political disputes above the fold on the front page of the *Times* and then looking at the sandstone horse, he said, "Isn't it a shame how we worry and fret over these petty matters when that horse has remained on the side of that hill for one hundred years, and one hundred years from now that horse will still be there?"

I think I responded with something like "Yeah, what a shame" or "Good point." The conversation ended soon afterward. Then we went back to our solo routines.

That night, in my rented room, I thought about life and college and how I spent my time. I thought about the bespectacled man and his words.

College was giving me a bigger picture of life. I was tracking with the basic thoughts of ancient philosophers and modern science and discovering the patriotism of the early American colonists. My course reading lists included anthologies of British literature, and during my train rides through Europe, I read as much John Updike as I could. Late nights with college friends had mutated from our early years talking about high school mascots and favorite fast food restaurants to talking about economics and the poor and what it would take to make friendships endure the calamities we'd inevitably face.

That night, lying in my bed thinking of the man on the train and the horse on the hill, I began to see that the things I was thinking about in college over the past few years had matured from the petty to the enduring. This happens in college—you begin to see your life as part of something bigger.

A dad from Boston wrote to me as university president after his son graduated and headed to graduate school in Philadelphia. Here is what he wanted me to hear:

After four years . . . David is more than simply smarter. He's become learned. His education has been both broad and deep. His thinking has been sharpened.

His knowledge expanded. . . . When I came for his graduation [he told me his] rigorous academic work did not squelch his devotional life, but rather made it richer and fuller. I think there could be no greater testimony for . . . faculty than that, . . . disciplined to know that it is more important to persuade than to prevail. He has been nurtured to make his case in a way that is not about winning arguments for ego's sake, but winning people for Jesus' sake. He still has a passion for the Truth, but now much better tempered with Love and Grace.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that college is about preparing you for a job two years after you graduate. It's about preparing you for life decades after you graduate. College is far more the lasting horse than the daily headline. Your years as an undergraduate should form you into a wise and responsible citizen, capable of making thoughtful and mature decisions. Think about college as the time in life when you develop the internal character for the long game rather than the external image for the short game.

Joan Jacobs Brumberg taught for many years at Cornell University in upstate New York. Her field was social history, and her specialization focused on adolescents and the changes within this age group over the decades. About boys, she researched and wrote on the place of violence in their lives. On girls, she researched and wrote about body image.

In *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* Brumberg looked at changes to teenage girls' diaries over the past century. Her research in many ways unpacked how self-perceptions and character formation have changed over the years. In the early 1900s, for instance, young women rarely mentioned appearance as a source of identity. By the end of the century, bodies—rather than character—came to define the good life or the essence of self.

Consider the New Year's resolutions of two adolescent diaries, nearly a century apart. "Resolved," one girl wrote in the 1890s, "To think before speaking. To work seriously. To be self restrained in conversation and actions. Not to let my thoughts wander. To be dignified. Interest myself more in others." A girl's resolution written nearly one hundred years later was "I will try to make myself better in any way I possibly can. . . . I will lose weight, get new lenses, already got new haircut, good makeup, new clothes and accessories."¹ These resolutions sound like the train man's comparisons of petty headlines and timeless hillsides.

When I was a kid, my father would often recite this axiom about friendships: "Choose not your friends for outward show, for feathers float where pearls lie low." His point, though it took me a long time to figure it out, was that when friendships value the stuff of the soul, they are more precious than surface friendships that never go deep.

Nurture the deeper life in college by thinking about how you are developing the skills and grit for life's long road.

Spend more time on the inner life, and it will make your outer life more beautiful. Try not to be lulled into believing that life is made up of patching together superficial highs. College is more about internal depth.

You'll learn a lot of content in college, and at times you'll grapple with mind-bending thoughts. You'll gain professional competencies. But your time in college is about far more than developing skills for a job or a ticket to graduate school. Your education is more than knowledge. In college, you do more than become "degreed" or learn new proficiencies or assemble a killer résumé.

College is a unique time in your life when you will sit under the tutelage of some extraordinary faculty. They will challenge you in mind and character, expose you to deeper ways of thinking, and introduce you to books you may have never contemplated or otherwise read. College will challenge you in your science labs with questions you may pursue the rest of your life. Your world will expand in ways you'll be grateful for. College is about the long game, not the short game. It's about developing the inner life way more than the outer life.

If your college education fails to cause you to ponder your character and how to live the virtuous life, college will be one-dimensional. College is more than grasping what you are learning. It's about being grasped by it. It's not just capturing your learning, but it's your learning capturing you. College is about developing habits of the heart that form you and shunning habits that cause you to decay. It's about flourishing in who you

truly are as made in the image of God. It's not about what a time-stamped culture wants you to be. Think long game.

Harry Lewis, former dean at Harvard, asked hard questions of his university and others in his book *Excellence without a Soul*. For instance, he sensed that a compromised, patchwork core curriculum emerged because faculty could come to no consensus on what the ideal graduate should look like. He wrote that universities “have lost their sense of how to fit their problems into an encompassing educational mission.”² This, he implied, results in a curriculum with little cohesive meaning. In Harvard's neighboring state of Connecticut, Yale professor Anthony Kronman lamented the same loss in his book *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*. In many colleges today, he pointed out, questions about the meaning of life have been largely abandoned or excluded from the discussion.³

Both these Ivy League profs seem to be saying that a college education needs to be more concerned with the “why” of life than the “what” of life. Whys more than whats prepare you to be a contributing adult in society.

“Isn't it a shame how we worry and fret over these petty matters when that horse has remained on the side of that hill for one hundred years, and one hundred years from now that horse will still be there?”

In college you will be developed as a whole person for the long game. Don't lose sight of this fact. You are not simply being developed as a pastor or a screenwriter or a public

relations professional. As you go through college, take stock every once in a while of the sustaining traits and virtues being formed in you. If you learn a marketing principle in your business administration major or a teaching technique in your elementary education major, that's good. But remember that principle or technique may be obsolete five years after you graduate. Spend as much or more time on that which will not be obsolete. To maximize the long-game benefits of college, here are some questions you should ask yourself, and then ponder how to answer them:

- > How can I work to be a more persuasive writer?
- > In my public speaking, am I confident and articulate? If not, is there a course that can help?
- > How are my skills as a critical thinker and problem solver being cultivated?
- > Do I have the cultural competencies and humility to live and work in an increasingly globalized world or culturally diverse America?
- > What values will shape my decisions on stewarding money and living generously?
- > Am I developing my team-building abilities to achieve a common goal?
- > What will guide me through difficult moral situations (internal principles of right and wrong) and ethical situations (external sets of rules of behavior) I will face?

In college, it's worth it to study scientists and philosophers who have shaped generations. It's worth it to think about how your moral foundation is more defined when you graduate than when you started. It's worth it to try to understand how all of the disciplines hold together. It's worth it to ask the big questions about the meaning of life. It's worth it to wrestle with your ethical reasoning and spiritual formation through your college conversations. Take the time. It's worth it to make principled decisions long before you are faced with those moral choices, like sexual boundaries with others or harmful comments about others. It's worth it to tap the brakes and ask God the big open-ended question: "What are you inviting me into today?"

In college, it's worth it to understand that reading the Scriptures to check a box is not the same as reading the Scriptures to check your soul. In college, it's worth it to avoid speed-reading a great work of literature when you can absorb it in slow motion. It's worth it to pause long enough to ask honest questions of the heart, to work through what you believe. It's worth it to be wonderstruck at the beauty around you and to ponder the Creator's artistry.

College is a time when you'll grow in ways that mature you from the inside out. Whether you are at a faith-based college or not, my hope is that you will graduate with a faith that will carry you through life and uphold you until death. That's the ball game.

