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## How to Stay Christian in College

Britney N. Graber  
*Taylor University*

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## *How to Stay Christian in College*

Budziszewski, J. (2004).  
Colorado Springs, CO: THINK.

Reviewed by Britney N. Graber

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Recently, emerging adulthood stepped to the forefront of Christian student development conversations. A rising number of college students reared in Christian homes retreat from the faith, but why? College is a time of exploration and independence. However, what about the college environment causes students either to reject Christianity or become indifferent to it? J. Budziszewski, a professor of government and philosophy at the University of Texas, delves into the challenges Christian students face on college campuses and offers suggestions to take action in response. Being a former atheist, Budziszewski writes from first-hand experience and wisdom in dealing with the conflicts that emerge at the intersection of the Christian faith and secular educational environment.

*How to Stay Christian in College* divides into three core sections sandwiched between introductory and concluding chapters. In his introduction, Budziszewski intertwines empathy and hope for the college or almost-college student. His personal experience with the struggle to reconcile faith and educational circumstance lends itself to resonate with students facing similar challenges. The first core section of Budziszewski's book concentrates on worldviews, providing information about what students may encounter and how to begin integrating faith in an environment of opposing worldviews. Myth(s) encountered on college campuses is the focal point of the second core section. Specifically, Budziszewski targets myths surrounding academia, relationships, and politics. The third and final core section delves into the practical application of coping

socially, religiously, and academically on a secular college campus. Budziszewski believes coping with life on campus in these three areas is the most challenging for students of faith. The book concludes by focusing on life's meaning and how students can glorify God through the college experience, despite the challenges and oppression they may face.

Due to his faith and career background, Budziszewski speaks skillfully and knowledgeably concerning the challenges Christian students face in the collegiate setting. Yet, while providing a dose of reality, Budziszewski continuously interjects moments of hope. He writes, "Higher education doesn't have to be a wasteland. With a little help, Christian students can find college a means of God's blessing instead of a spiritual snare" (p. 15). Budziszewski's heart and compassion for Christian college students remains evident throughout the book as he attempts to remind his readers about their purpose in life. Not only does he write for Christian college and almost-college students, but also for their parents, communicating the struggles their child will face in college and, hopefully, elicit support.

The central theme that emerges from *How to Stay Christian in College* is the question often begged of students: "Who are you going to be?" Budziszewski provides practical examples of appropriate Christian responses when specific situations arise, but all of it boils down to personhood and development of character based on faith. College is a time when most students become independent, are exposed to new ideas and beliefs, are pressured to adopt new beliefs, and/or may prove to be embarrassed by their own. For example, Budziszewski discusses Naturalism and how, because it contains "a grain of truth," it is extremely dangerous (p. 57). Discernment is a practice to be developed and turned into a reflexive habit. Budziszewski encourages students to seek Truth, study the Bible, and grow in their faith.

In various portions of the book, Budziszewski offers tangible examples of questions and responses for students encountering other students seeking to learn more about faith, what Budziszewski calls "plain questions" (p. 64). For example:

Question: Is "Christ" a last name, like "Jones"?

Answer: *No, it's another word for Messiah. It's a title. "Jesus Christ" means "Jesus, the Chosen One of God."* (p. 64)

Although Budziszewski provides good, basic questions and answers, some students may not find it easy to apply these examples to their own lives. He provides one conversation as an example that flows directly from one question into another seemingly-perfect subsequent question. This exchange leaves the reader to glean what is possible from Budziszewski and apply similar concepts to their own situation(s). While what Budziszewski offers seems black and white, reality is many hues of gray. Every conversation does not proceed, perhaps, with respectful dialogue.

When students encounter behavior(s) that are in conflict with their morals or beliefs, Budziszewski offers this encouraging and expert advice: “Don’t Argue, Don’t Apologize, Don’t Back Down, and Don’t Get Trapped” (p. 73). Often Christian students feel belittled when challenged by competing lifestyles or behaviors; however, Budziszewski urges Christian students not to compromise their beliefs. Appropriately, he advises students to seek professional advocates to act, if necessary.

Budziszewski, in my opinion, provides an inclusive overview of common myths encountered in a secular college setting. For example, one of the myths he addresses is: “God belongs to your [political] party” (p. 112). Budziszewski clearly sees through the common, legalistic way of thinking so many Christian students possess, having never challenged or processed what they were taught. Instead, they blindly adhere to beliefs their parents held or beliefs taught by their church. Indirectly, Budziszewski challenges these students to reflect and develop their own faith through what they sincerely know to be true.

Practically, Budziszewski offers many suggestions throughout his book regarding Christian practice, including finding a Christian community and spending time in worship, prayer, Bible study, encouraging and supporting one another, and reaching out to non-Christians. Personally, I appreciate Budziszewski’s challenge to the reader to befriend non-Christians in addition to building a solid community of Christian friends, as we are called as Christians to minister Christ’s love to those around us. Furthermore, he promotes the continuous development of discernment to guide one through relationships. For example, Budziszewski discusses that by submitting to Christ, one’s “mind is renewed” (p. 145). Thus, Christ’s presence will develop one’s ability to discern, act, and speak to His glory.

Budziszewski speaks of the reality in encountering difficult and oppositional people, even professors in the collegiate setting. However, Budziszewski effectively makes a case, therefore, for surrounding oneself with Christian mentors, a small group, a church, and even a Christian intellectual group in order to combat frustration and despair when feeling under attack. Through various communities, one can experience support and encouragement, despite difficult situations and environments.

While writing skillfully for Christian college students at secular universities, Budziszewski does not explicitly discuss the struggles Christian college students face at faith-based institutions. It may seem counter-intuitive that students at a Christian college would experience a crisis of faith; nonetheless, lack of commitment seems to be a reoccurring theme among today’s emerging adult demographic. Budziszewski, perhaps, excludes this sector of the college-age population that needs to be included now more than ever before in order to aid Christian college students in growing in their faith, rather than turning from it.

Additionally, Budziszewski writes that his book is targeted for upcoming college students. However, the struggles high school students face could parallel the struggles of

the Christian college student – especially moving from a public high school to a public university. I imagine some overlap would exist that might strengthen Budziszewski's argument(s) as well as build more connections to the reader who shares in that experience.

Budziszewski effectively solidifies his arguments in the final chapter. He begs the question: "What is it all for?" Throughout the entire book, he provides examples and scenarios of encountering opposing worldviews, combatting myths, and coping in various settings. However, he discusses the reasons and implications for doing so in the conclusion of his book. Through his own faith journey, Budziszewski writes with expertise, compassion, and love for the Christian student enrolling in or attending college, and provides hope while doing so.

Related books:

Budziszewski, J. *Ask Me Anything: Provocative Answers for College Students*

Budziszewski, J. *Ask Me Anything 2: More Provocative Answers for College Students*

Morrow, J. *Welcome to College: A Christ-Follower's Guide for the Journey*

Nye, A. *Fish Out of Water*

Smith, A., Editor. *Can You Keep Your Faith in College?: Students from 50 Campuses Tell You How – and Why*

Wheaton, D. *University of Destruction: Your Game Plan for Spiritual Victory on Campus*

Britney N. Graber is a Master of Art's student in Taylor University's Higher Education and Student Development program. She holds a Master of Arts in Teaching from Morningside College.