



Reaching the Campus Tribes

(an opening inquiry)

Benson Hines

**mobile version
part three: chapters five,
six, and the conclusion**

Dedication

*To the 300 who gave of their
time, space, wisdom, and resources.
The firstfruits are in this book.*

&

*To Steven H. & Audrey M. T.
who first helped me
become a minister to the campus tribes
& were there in this most recent adventure.*

Reaching the Campus Tribes by Benson Hines

www.reachingthecampustribes.com

This version was originally made for mobile users. All the original text has been “remastered” for smaller dimensions, with smaller pictures. Visit the site above for the primary version, other resources, or for ways to join in the cause. Important information and interesting tidbits can also be found on [the back pages](#).

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REASONS TO SHARE REACHING THE CAMPUS TRIBES

1. It's free!
2. It can get Christians talking about a really important issue.
3. It's got some great pictures.
4. A lot of people won't read something unless it's recommended by multiple pals, right?
5. This whole ebook trend could be really useful for Christian ministry...
6. This book impacts best only if it spreads beyond the campus tribes to other Christian leaders.
7. It's free!

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This beachside Bible study designed for the local surfing community is the product of partnership between First Baptist Church in Jacksonville and the local chapter of Christian Surfers International.

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the harvest is plentiful

If American Christians ministered to college students really well for the next five years and then completely

stopped, we would still change the world for the next fifty years.

I recognize that it does no good to ask American Christians to use greater means to reach college students if I can't argue for the importance of the task itself. Is college ministry worth the cost and effort required to participate in this unique missions engagement?

The truth is, I can't claim that ministering to college students is *always* a better use of time, energy, and resources for every Christian and every Christian organization. It isn't. The same is true with any ministry area, including even international missionary work – which may be why William Carey didn't elevate missions *above* other forms of ministry in his *Enquiry*. He simply pointed out that missions:

- ⊕ Is vitally important

- ⊕ Is worth the effort and cost
- ⊕ Should be a priority for the whole of Christendom (even though individual people and churches will be involved in different ways)

My goal is to make the same case for college ministry.

ministry at the hinge

When I have opportunities to talk to youth about the difference between high school and college, I point out that college is, in a word, BIGGER. Everything about the college experience seems like a more crucial, more dramatic time of life than any that has preceded it. But this period also sets the stage for what's to come, because the college years require making choices and taking paths that affect the rest of one's life.

In other words, college is a “hinge” moment in many people's lives, a drastic, decisive pe-

riod between the preparation that has come before and the “real world” that lies ahead.

So, while it makes perfect sense to invest heavily in preparing students during their years as children and youth (as Christians already do), it doesn't make sense to halt our investment at the exact moment the stakes are raised.

make it or break it

Everything about college puts individuals in a “make it or break it” season of life. Suddenly, dating matters more and means more in college than it has before – in no small part because it may lead to marriage. Friendships made during this time are likely to last for years or decades. College school-work, grades, and learning have far greater meaning than they did in high school. Decisions during college are both *plentiful* and have sweeping effects, as a student often decides life-altering things like his career

path, spouse, lifestyle, church membership, denominational ties, spending habits, and future plans.

In college, the buffers of high school – family, authority figures, church, community, etc. – are often gone altogether. Sadly, that means that in this “make it or break it” season, college students regularly “break it.”

College students don't have to look too hard for ample opportunities to wreck their lives – and not just on the well-known crags of premarital sex and alcohol abuse. Emotional issues – from eating disorders to depression to self-mutilation to suicide – are familiar on college campuses. Freshmen (and others) regularly flunk out of school. Debt from extravagant purchasing often accrues at an enormous rate for college students – on top of the debt brought on by the education itself. Drug use and other physically and mentally harmful activities

flourish. Homosexuality is common and is often celebrated. Even more unique sexual activities are sometimes tried, as well. For Christians and non-Christians alike, these dangers often lead to deep emotional scars and other consequences that will be faced for a lifetime.

Dangers in the specifically spiritual realm also confront students during their college careers – and not only at secular schools. Students may be met with atheism, agnosticism, and criticism of their beliefs – and many Christian students are sorely unprepared for this. They can also be drawn to other religions, unhealthy Christian ministries, and cults. Pride, zeal-without-wisdom, and other spiritual maladies are quite common, even among the “good kids.” For many other students, the spiritual downfall comes simply by way of a creeping apathy; by the time they finish college, large numbers of students are far removed from

the passion and purity they knew in high school. And though Christian colleges do seem to provide a slight buffer from some dangers, certain temptations can be even *greater* at Christian schools.

I could go on and on about the “perils of college,” as could plenty of parents and pastors. While the dangers of higher education are sometimes overestimated (or at least too often focused on), it is true that college is a rigorous journey, and the adventure quickly turns nightmarish for many, many students.

an opportunity to “make it”

But that’s not the only reason college is a hinge moment. In this “make it or break it” time of life, there is also ample opportunity for college students to “make it” – because in college, students’ decisions and actions have bigger consequences, for bad *or* good.

This magnificent collegiate opportunity is why parents and other mentors, both Christians and non-believers, continue to encourage high school students to pursue a college education when possible. We recognize that this is a unique moment for academic, social, and personal development. While there might be ways higher education can be improved, we are not wrong to recognize its immense value.

College is a time when students learn about themselves and take on their individual paths like never before. Students' talents and skills are often discovered and honed during the college years. They discover new passions –



The Eagle tribe of Asbury College has a history of several spiritual revivals that have involved a large percentage of the student body. Some of these revivals have drawn national attention and have spread to other campus tribes.

and often discard old hobbies. Leadership opportunities are widespread, as are opportunities to be part of large-scale, student-driven projects that might touch the entire campus, city, region, or world. The college campus possesses vibrancy and excitement found in few other places, and students often benefit from the incredible opportunities for academic, social, and emotional growth. What a place!

This new season of independence is also when many Christian students fully make their faith their own. For some of these students, college is a time of rededication to a faith that had long been ignored. Many other college students meet Christ for the first time. For both these new believers and longtime Christians, college can be a time of deepening intimacy with God and other Christians, far beyond what was known during the high school years.



Vegetation is one of the striking aspects of the property enjoyed by the Warriors of Westmont College. But neither natural beauty nor pairs of pants randomly hanging from clotheslines are particularly surprising sights when visiting a campus tribe.

Finally, the spiritual opportunity in college extends to ministry undertakings; students are often capable of leading important ministries, making large commitments, and exerting unique levels of energy for Christ's cause. They also are in close relationship during college with numerous individuals – Christian and non-Christian – with whom they can make one-on-one impact on a daily basis.

College campuses are small cities, full of life and energy, full of potential being realized right before our eyes! It is a profound blessing to have the chance to live and work and minister among these campus tribes.

the great door before us

As just mentioned, one key reason the college years are so important for ministry is because of the immense opportunity to lead people to Christ. Obviously, many of the students who enter college aren't Christians. So one of the primary reasons for valuing college ministry is the immense opportunity it presents to obey the Great Commission.

While God always works as He sees fit, it does seem that many college campuses provide particularly fertile soil for sharing Christ. Not only are college students still young, but much like the citizens of Paul's Athens or the interested Europeans reached

by Francis Schaeffer, these individuals are often primed and willing to engage with deep things.

Even the very “hinge” nature of the college campus affords numerous occasions to help students find Christ. Major decisions, setbacks and crises, relationship concerns, and worries about the future all provide chances to share truth to listening ears. If we aren’t seeking the lost on college campuses, we are missing a unique opportunity we won’t have again.

And college ministry actually gives us the chance to share Christ with the whole world. With each new freshman class, the nations arrive on our doorstep, even from places not easily accessible to American Christians. We have the opportunity – just by engaging in local college ministry – to serve citizens of those nations. What’s more, many of these U.S.-educated stu-

dents will be future leaders in their home countries.

Of course, all this evangelism must be practiced “with gentleness and reverence,” loving and respecting students enough to find out what they need and how best to proclaim the beauty of Christ to them. As college ministry gets better, our work in evangelism will, too.



Campus tours, like this one at Boston College, are perpetual occurrences in the life of a campus tribe. Each tour presents a vivid reminder of the life-altering choice about to be made by each of these future college students.



This uniquely botanical student center belongs to the Grizzlies of the University of Montana. The table on the far right is part of Pride Week, a series of forums and activities discussing and celebrating the LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Intersex, and Queer) community. Such events are extremely common on college campuses.

a time to build

While certainly not every person chooses to attend college, over 17 million people are enrolled in American campuses at any one time. A large percentage of our population faces this powerful, four- or five-year hinge of life, with all its potential for both enormous success and devastating disaster.

And we get to connect with these people *right then*, in the middle of all this BIG-

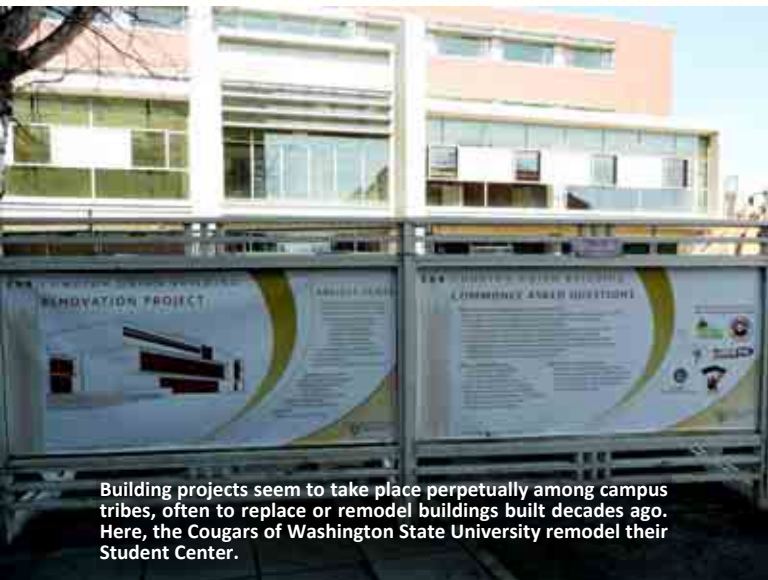
ness. We can help bring spiritual clarity, God's direction, and Christ's empowerment to the middle of bufferless independence, life-changing decisions, and enormous opportunities!

That's why it's so disappointing that Christians have left a wide gap in our attention and ministry to people at just this season of life. We set our sights mainly on *preparing* people for the rest of life (in youth ministry) and then "catching back up with them" on the other end, once they settle down a bit.

In other words, as we begin building young Christians, we spend money and energy for excellent foundations, using superb materials and maintaining abundant oversight. Then many of us use very standard (or even sub-par) materials for the building itself, with few expert builders on site during that process. Finally, only once the building is

substantially completed, we go back to work, strengthening the house as best we can – even though our bricks and mortar and beams are already in place.

Why not make the beams strong in the first place?



Building projects seem to take place perpetually among campus tribes, often to replace or remodel buildings built decades ago. Here, the Cougars of Washington State University remodel their Student Center.

while the fabric is woven

When we reach people during the college

experience, we're not simply impacting them *earlier* rather than *later*, though that alone is a great reason for college ministry. This is also the period when the very fabric of people's lives is being woven. This is our single best chance to pair who they will be – as people, as spouses, as parents, as workers, as citizens, as church leaders – with God and the story God has written for them. At no other time will these people be growing so extensively, questioning so much, or deciding so many important life matters.

By ministering to college students, we proclaim truth in the middle of the weaving. So as students are learning to be bankers, they're learning to be *Christian* bankers. As students are deciding to take Poli Sci 101, majoring in Engineering, or preparing for law school, they're doing it in light of God's direction and with the counsel of wise Christians. When students are studying the

Arts or the human body or agriculture, they're getting to know the Creator behind these things. While students are navigating dating opportunities and fraternity parties and difficult roommates and non-Christian friends, they have God's word as their map and God's people as their prophets. And in all these things, we aren't simply providing "good tips" or devotional thoughts for students' college experience; we're connecting them to the gospel and its drastic implications for their lives.

Evangelical Christians are rightly concerned about portions of society that lack godly wisdom and influence. But where else can faith best be integrated with calling, except in the very spot in which calling is being hashed out, being developed, being learned? Yet at the exact time people are becoming skilled in every other way, we have largely ignored our duty to train them to follow Christ.

Perhaps these people will find this spiritual training later through churches, adult Bible studies, godly friends, or good books. But by then, spiritual progress may be so long delayed (while people have progressed in every other area of life) that their spiritual stunting and compartmentalization may be grave. By that time, some will be in jobs and marriages and cities they should not have chosen; worse yet, *most* may lack a fully biblical mindset and worldview. Not all Christian students who remain untouched by college ministry will emerge at cross-purposes with the gospel. But they may not be partaking in *Christ's* purposes by the time they enter the adult world, either.

We urge our children to attend college but haven't always followed them there. Do we really believe that reaching people ten years after this experience will provide just as much impact?

what if?

If American Christians ministered to college students really well for the next five years and then *completely stopped*, we would still change the world for the next fifty years.

Remember, there are over 17 million college students in the United States at any one time, with millions of new students replacing the newly graduated each year. What if, over the next five years, we helped college students radically connect with Christ like never before? What if our ministry was effective enough that whatever their profession, whatever their location, whatever their background, Christian graduates were ready to impact the world with purpose and passion?

Even if we only reached students really well for five years, wouldn't that "mini-generation" do remarkable things for the

next fifty years or more?

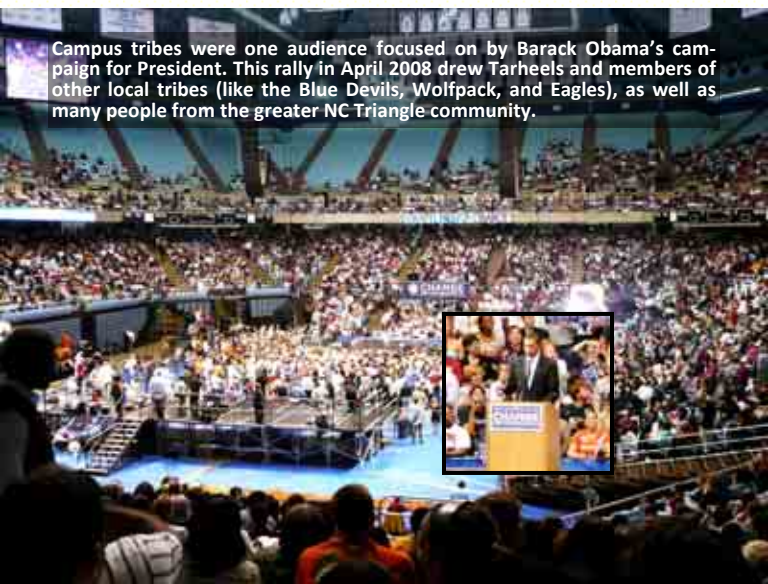
Maybe it's easier to look back.

If the field of college ministry had been better developed a decade ago, Christianity as a whole would be better prepared to engage culture *right now*. What effect might millions of additional disciples have on major cultural discussions like abortion or homosexuality, if they had been taught *back then* to think biblically and act lovingly? What effect could those millions of passionate young adults have on world issues – hunger, disease, war, justice – if in the midst of college their hearts had been turned to serve the whole world both zealously and wisely? What effect would all those new, excited God-followers have in our churches?

Some of those former college students would be CEOs, analysts, and policy-makers in the midst of difficult financial

periods. They would be politicians, analysts, and strategists in this interesting political time. They would be pastors. They would be professors. They would be media members, musicians, actors, athletes, and other celebrities. They would also be new moms and dads, community opinion leaders and community builders, school teachers and Sunday school teachers and youth ministers and foreign missionaries.

Campus tribes were one audience focused on by Barack Obama's campaign for President. This rally in April 2008 drew Tarheels and members of other local tribes (like the Blue Devils, Wolfpack, and Eagles), as well as many people from the greater NC Triangle community.



Even now, we see fruit from the college ministries that did serve students in the past decade. Many church leaders and other Christians can point to *college ministry* as a driving force in their spiritual development.

If American Christians ministered to college students really well for the next five years and then *completely stopped*, we would still change the world for the next fifty years.

What if we ministered to college students really well for the next five years... and then never stopped?

the influence of college students right now

My hope isn't simply to push us to "do a little more college ministry." We need to develop our entire ministry field, growing the breadth, depth, and health of the practice of ministry to students. And if we do, the blessings we receive won't only come in the

future.

Students can have a phenomenal effect on organizations and churches as a whole, as I will discuss below. But three key ministry pursuits will particularly benefit from using greater means for college ministry: youth ministry, young adult ministry, and missions.

better college ministry, better youth ministry

One way college ministry will bless us is through its impact on ministry to our youth. American Christians have for several decades placed a high priority on youth ministry. But if we will also begin increasing



Two reasons for college ministry investment are the important role colleges play in society and the immense opportunity to serve international students. At top, the Wildcat tribe celebrates its key involvement in the U.S. Space Program. At Cal Poly, a ministry to Chinese students advertises on campus.

our efforts in college ministry, youth ministry will get even better.

First, a strong college ministry field will allow us to better structure and evaluate our present work with high school students. If we want youth ministry to produce lasting change, it is vital that we look to college ministry to help us understand what youth need for their next steps in life. Experienced college ministers can help us discern how best to prepare our kids to prosper after high school graduation.

Second, strong college ministries prepare the best youth ministry leaders – both for now and for the future. Churches and parachurch groups that have invested in college ministry have seen this fruit, because well-disciplined college students can fill their needs for youth ministry volunteers. These younger adults often connect with youth in a unique way, and they can speak with au-

thority about the life stage high school students will soon enter.

The spiritual development of future youth pastors is also performed by college ministry. In many cases, youth pastors' first jobs come during or immediately after college. Don't we want those future youth pastors to connect deeply with Christ and Christian ministry during their college years? Without strong college ministry, solid youth leaders are much harder to find – so we risk having less than the best to offer our kids.

Third, the presence and strength of college ministries affect how well youth transition to college. Even specific choices like the college to attend, a church to join, and ways to get involved can be aided by college ministers' wisdom. College ministers can also help high school seniors and graduates get ready for the college world through Bible study, counsel, and resources.

Campus Crusade's ministry among the Wolfpack tribe in Raleigh is one of their largest in the nation. During this final meeting of the school year, leaders had graduating seniors rise. They then asked anyone who had been impacted by those seniors to stand with them, followed by others who had been impacted by those students and still others impacted by *that* group. The standing crowd provided a powerful visual illustration of the impact of those individual seniors – and the impact any younger student could have in the years to come.



better college ministry, better young adult ministry

As I've traveled, I have been pleasantly surprised to find many churches newly focusing on ministry to young adults, a life stage that generally includes post-college individuals (single or married) in their 20s and early 30s. Christians do need to form better connections with this age group, and I'm glad some are already doing that. However, it is a mistake to aim for strong ministry to

these young adults without also working for strong college ministry.

The reason successful college ministry is crucial for building strong young adult ministry is clear. Without purposefully *preparing* students to follow Christ in their 20s, it will be hard to find God-following college graduates to help build individual young adult ministries. 20-somethings often live in a new location, perhaps have a spouse or family, generally have an adult occupation, and face the other pressures of adult life. If we expect them to commit to Christian community after we have left a “gap” for them in the previous years, we may be disappointed. And even those who do seek community will lack the spiritual maturity they might have gained from strong ministry during their college years.

If instead we work now to produce college graduates who love God and love people,

our young adult ministries will never lack for attendance, vibrancy, and maturity. Christians should be about the business of preparing students for “the real world” that follows college graduation, and we have that opportunity as college ministry is prioritized.

Another reason strong college ministry will help young adult ministry thrive is through the crossover of activities and resources; some of our work in college ministry will be useful in reaching young adults as well. By combining college ministry and young adult ministry efforts at appropriate times, we steward our investment wisely, help achieve “critical mass,” create environments for young adults to minister to college students, and may even increase the energy level and effectiveness of both ministries.

**better college ministry,
better missions elsewhere**

As discussed throughout the book, I believe

we should understand college ministry as *missions*. However, I never want to downplay the importance of our mission work around the world. (In fact, it is within college that my own love for missions was set in place.) The good news is that stronger college ministry will actually *strengthen* local and foreign missions efforts.

Development of college ministry provides the *best* chance we have of deploying thousands of people to missions efforts in the coming years. It is young graduates who often have the most passion, availability, and willingness to spread God's fame among the nations. And even before graduating, many students who are not (presently) called to lifelong missions have opportunities to engage in short-term missions projects.

We already see phenomenal missions deployment from some college campuses and college ministries. I was fortunate to attend

one of these colleges, and many of my former classmates have participated in long-term international mission work. Our efforts and investment to make college ministry stronger throughout the U.S. will only help add to the cause.

Spring Break mission trips are a staple of college ministry. While many of their friends flock to the beach, stay home, or otherwise relax, many college students serve locally, nationally, and internationally each spring. On this trip to Seattle, Cowboys from Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, partnered with local ministries in various projects. The above activity involved promoting social justice issues among the Huskies tribe.



It is in the present generation *particularly* – the Millennial Generation – that we have an opportunity to draw students into this ad-

venture of world missions. As the most service-minded generation in decades, this group of people may even have much to teach *us* about effectively impacting the globe.

But how will they go, unless they are sent? We have the opportunity to raise up Kingdom-advancing

Christian young people during that period of life-preparation called “college.” Skipping ministry to these college students while we serve more “settled” Christians clearly undermines our goal to see missionaries sent all around the globe. If we use greater means in college ministry, we will have greater means for missions.



It is actually common to find college bars named like this establishment, located near the University of Minnesota. Among other things, this label allows students' visits to remain hidden from parents.

a farm team and far more

Of course, the same is true for other areas of Christian ministry, too. College ministry is a wide-open opportunity – probably our best opportunity – to build a strong supply of future pastors, worship leaders, elders, deacons, authors, speakers, educators, parachurch leaders, denominational leaders, and other Christian leaders for the generations coming behind us. Do we want young people to grow up sharing our beliefs while even *surpassing* our effectiveness? Then investing in them *now* is vital.

And not only does strong college ministry provide an effective ministry “farm team” for the future, it also provides Christianity with an *immediate* reservoir of passion, drive, and talent.

Right now, individual churches, our communities, and the worldwide Church can see amazing blessings from collegians. Col-

lege students are capable of handling huge commitments and exerting astounding amounts of energy. Obviously, they can also be quite passionate. Plus they often have



While church-based college ministry is still comparatively rare, some churches, like First Presbyterian Church of Evanston, Illinois, do heartily welcome students.

more “margin” to devote to causes they care about – with more free time, more disposable income, greater physical resilience, more flexible schedules, and fewer attachments and responsibilities than they may ever have again.

As some churches and other Christian organizations have already noticed, these ingredients allow college students to be an inordinate blessing to whomever will welcome them. Consider

your own church and other Christian organizations you are familiar with. Imagine the potential for college students to impact these places. What would the influx of even a *dozen* dedicated, passionate, flexible, teachable college students mean to your group? What if you received far more over the next several years?

Many churches see this benefit even today. College students fill volunteer spots and even staff positions. These students impact our kids. They serve on committees or other ministry teams, providing a special sort of insight. When taught to do so, they give to the church financially (often more than we would guess). They appreciate our families and our senior adults, they yearn for deep teaching, they bring their friends, and they sing – loudly. They can be passionate, attentive members (and leaders!) in our body, and that involvement can encourage a church more than we expect.

Besides church, other Christian organizations – from the local to the worldwide – would also do well to see the potential in this group. College students can be amazing participants, volunteers, brainstormers, catalysts, and advertisers. They want the truth we offer, the resources we create, and the services we present – as long as what we give them is relevant and authentic. Of course if it's not, these college students can help us change for the better. Their involvement *will* help us change for the better.

There is a reason that secular companies target these college students, aiming to win them to their products and their brands long before these students make a splash in the “real world.” Shouldn't we, who look with spiritual eyes, at least notice the level of potential that those companies see? Shouldn't we, who have so much more to offer, at least reach out to college students as much as those companies do?



The Aggies of Texas A&M might have seen the most extensive college ministry success of any campus tribe over the past two decades. Most well-known is the weekly, on-campus Breakaway worship service, which often draws several thousand students. But many other local ministries have seen great success during that time, too. Numerous recent graduates of Texas A&M have participated in international missions, seminary training, and other ministry avenues.

R&D

Finally, strong college ministry doesn't only bless us today and prepare individual college students for tomorrow, it provides a window into what the future of American Christianity will look like.

Many Christian leaders work hard to “know the times” and discern how we can best prepare for future influence. Fortunately, we have highly accessible laboratories to aid in

this pursuit. They reveal both the approaching advantages for the Kingdom cause and the difficulties our faith will face in the near future. Both the future of society and the future of Christian ministry are on display each year at thousands of locations around our nation – college campuses.

Well-developed college ministry can truly be “R&D” for the Church.

R&D, shorthand for “research and development,” describes an organization’s investment in its future activities and products. R&D in any industry seeks to gain new understanding, or to better develop the understanding already attained. So organizations’ future effectiveness and significance often *depends* on R&D.

For Christendom, college ministry is one of the best possible “focus groups” for our future, because there is no better opportunity

to gauge where both our faith and the culture are heading. We all recognize that the college campus is on the cutting edge of many aspects of society; it is college ministries that live out Christ's Kingdom at that cutting edge.

If we make college ministry a priority, we stand to be always at the front of the curve in our ministry efforts. With our support and attention, college ministers will be ready and able to tell us of the battles and beauties ahead for the Church at large, just as international missionaries often inform us of changes approaching from the rest of the world. Further, college ministers can also share ministry methods they have found useful for surfing these new waves.

Even now, the Millennial Generation has begun to flood the workplace and marketplace. (The oldest of this generation is around 25 years old.) And while youth min-

isters and even children's ministers have been able to give some description of the Millennials, it is only recently that we have been able to see this group outside the protections of the teenage years. College ministers are on the front lines of connecting with this newest, *largest* American generation, and these pioneering leaders have wisdom to share with the church at large. The same will be true with the next generation, as well.

Ultimately, the attention Christians give college students and college ministry reflects our determination to be ready for our future – just as a company's R&D investment helps indicate its preparedness for the days ahead.

the obligation

If we choose to place greater priority on college ministry for no reason other than to “catch up” with Christian work in other ar-

eas, that might be reason enough. We have clearly left an enormous gap in our efforts here, while we continue to place great emphasis on other areas: church worship services, cultural battles, technology, worship music, youth ministry, missions, and other important areas. At the very least, it would make sense to put college ministry “on the radar screen” for American Christianity.

But as we pause to think about the role college plays in the lives of so many individuals – and in the culture at large – we realize that ministry at this “hinge” could make an impact that resounds through all areas of Christian ministry. In fact, strengthening college ministry will impact *each* of the other areas mentioned in the paragraph above: worship services, cultural battles, technology, music, and so on. By serving college students, we lay a foundation for growing stronger in all sorts of ways.

But even though using greater means for college ministry will ultimately bless the American Church in many ways, college ministry is not only *for us*. We don't adopt these mission fields simply to fill in the gaps in our programming or to locate some great volunteers. We don't even reach the campus tribes only to "invest in our future."

We position ourselves among the collegians because God wants to be glorified there and because He loves the "natives" of these tribes. We work to bring college students the love of Christ in a scary and awkward and exciting moment of life. We offer Christ's abundant life when students still have most of their years ahead of them. It is not only our future that is our concern, it is theirs.

We have an obligation to use greater means for impacting collegians. There is great opportunity in the fields before us, a chance to

win students to Christ, to serve campuses with His love, to claim extensive ground for God's Kingdom, to prepare for the future of Christianity, to hold back those staggering to slaughter, to strengthen those who are growing, and to see young people transition well from the nest of high school to the skies of the real world.



The scenic, mountain-base location of Northern Arizona University helps foster a particularly nature-loving culture for the Lumberjack tribe. A specific niche ministry, the Lifelines outdoor experience ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, reaches the tribe in a special way.



Fighting abortion remains a social justice pursuit for many college ministries. At Louisiana State, Students for Life presents a memorial to boys and girls killed by abortion (main picture and left). Among the Vikings of Portland State University, a more graphic display requires ample notice in the middle of a busy campus.



This graffiti tunnel painted by the Mountaineers of Appalachian State serves as an excellent metaphor for the creativity, darkness, and wildness that exist in the campus tribes.

6 practical concerns

Even though there may be strong reasons to prioritize college ministry, it still must be *practical* for the many churches, denomina-

tions, and parachurch groups who will be involved. So it's very important to address common concerns about taking on this task.

The most common objections to pursuing college ministry arise from the following areas:

- ⊕ The short time frame and transitory nature of the college years
- ⊕ Past difficulties experienced in trying to impact college students
- ⊕ Not enjoying the fruits of our labors, because students graduate and move on
- ⊕ The unspiritual or uninterested nature of collegiate culture
- ⊕ The financial cost involved, without receiving financial return from the students

We might assume these objections most of-

ten come from pastors and churches. But they can apply just as much to those in campus-based and Christian college settings, as well as to denominational leaders and members, parachurch participants, and anyone else who might consider connecting to the campus tribes.

I'll address these concerns in the following pages.

Why should we use greater means for college ministry, when students will be with us for only a few years (and somewhat sporadically even then)?

Additionally we might question if it makes sense to spend time developing *strategy* for our efforts. By the time a strategy is determined, won't the very students we hoped to impact already be nearing graduation?

Hopefully I can answer each of these ques-

tions.

First, the concern over only having a few years with students places undue focus on the *length* of the time period rather than the *intensity* of those college years. During those four or five years, students often see spiritual, academic, emotional, and social growth to a far greater degree than in the several years prior to or following college. That means the college years provide a unique canvas in which spiritual training affects people deeply in a limited amount of time. Those who *have* been impacted by strong college ministries (like myself) can point to drastic growth in even *one* year's time – let alone four or five years.

This is also a hinge moment in a person's life, in which actions and decisions carry particular import for years or decades following college. So whether we encounter college students for a year or two or a bit

longer, what we do during *these* years can affect them for a lifetime.

Notably, Christians rarely use this same concern as a reason to devalue high school ministry, though our students spend only four years in high school (which is shorter than many college careers).

Meanwhile, the concern about possibly wasting our efforts on strategy-building misses the fact that we are reaching entire *tribes* and not only individuals. While it is true that students themselves do turn over rapidly, the context and culture of a campus are much slower to change. An effective, developed strategy doesn't have to be recreated for each new freshman class. Instead, the mission is carried out with new students, who both fill the shoes of those who have gone before them and connect to the mission in their own unique ways.

The limited time available shouldn't make us discard strategy, nor should it lead us to abandon the cause altogether. Our short time with students should highlight the importance of seeking God's brilliance for building college ministries that impact deeply and extensively in this hinge moment.

What if we have tried college ministry and failed?

It isn't surprising that Christian colleges, campus-based groups, or church-based groups may consider college ministry a "lost cause" – or at least only worthy of limited investment – because of the difficulties of the past. Denominations and other networks may also shy away from collegiate efforts because of past struggles.

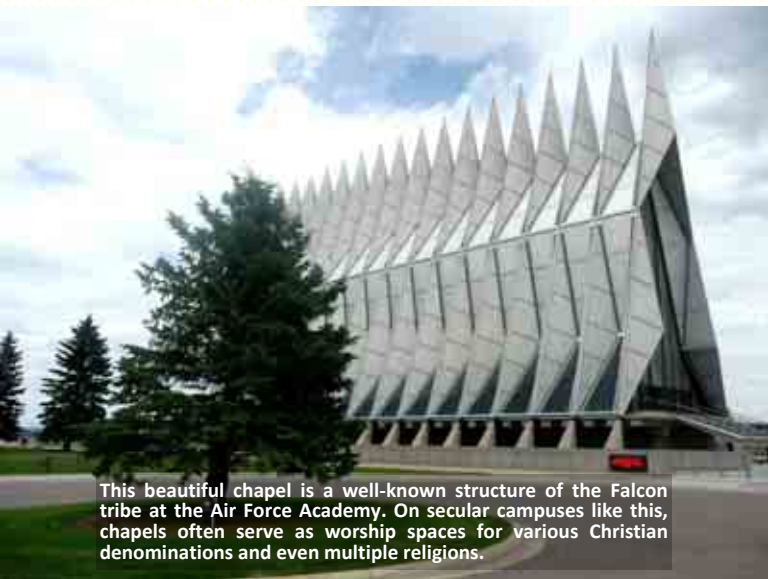
While history should be taken into account, the *reasons* for our failures must be prop-

erly assessed. I would encourage any of these groups to consider whether they truly approached college ministry in the missiological ways detailed in this book. These missions principles are not only prescriptive for greater success but are *descriptive* of what actually seems to work best. A large number of turbulent college ministry histories are likely a result of lacking these missiological practices – allowing time for growth, emphasizing strategy, investing properly, continually progressing, and so on. Realizing that college ministry is best understood as *missions* is a key to changing our results in the future.

Yet past difficulties should also open us to the possibility of using *nontraditional* college ministry models. In fact, it's my suspicion that many of us will find greater success only through partnership, niche ministry, or other forms not abundantly prevalent now. (Several possibilities are discussed in

the “Road Map” chapter.)

Hopefully this book will give any person, church, parachurch group, or denomination new hope for reaching collegians – whether they have already seen success, have tried and failed, or have never tried before.



This beautiful chapel is a well-known structure of the Falcon tribe at the Air Force Academy. On secular campuses like this, chapels often serve as worship spaces for various Christian denominations and even multiple religions.

Why should we invest in people who will

bear fruit for somebody else?

A common concern about college ministry is that we are preparing people for lives of impact and service... *somewhere else*. While we may sow and sow into college students' lives, the "harvest" will regularly be gained by others.

The response to this concern has three parts.

First, the assumption that college students will disconnect with our ministry after their time in college is not automatically correct. Students regularly stay for years or even decades in the city in which they attend school, and they're often able to connect with the ministries that formerly nurtured them. And national groups – denominations or parachurch ministries – can see long-lasting, far-reaching connections with former students, even as those individuals

move from place to place.

Second, we should remember the unselfishness with which we view other ministry efforts – including both youth ministry and missions. Ministry to youth is very much concerned with preparing kids to bear fruit in the years to come, though that often takes place beyond their present churches and communities. And our work in missions – whether across the state or across the world – continues with gusto, even when churches and parachurch ministries may see absolutely *no* tangible “return” on that investment. (Is anyone expecting their mission to a tribe in Africa to produce deacons for their own church?) In these areas, our desire to fulfill God’s Kingdom purposes has overruled any need to see *local* fruit from our ministry efforts. The same standard should be applied to college ministry.

But a third response to this concern is a call

to recognize that college students *can* in fact dramatically impact us *right now*.

Numerous churches, campus-based ministries, Christian colleges, and other organizations already reap great benefits from the students presently involved – particularly if those students are shepherded and trained well. Regularly, college ministries that have impacted students during the early years of college see those same students begin to serve and lead skillfully as they continue to progress through school.



One part of leading a college ministry is regularly sharing its progress with overseers and supporters. While the need to “justify” the ministry can at times be tedious, this also allows a wide variety of people to recognize and connect with God’s work among the campus tribes. Here, Stacey Wideman, Coordinator for the Collegiate Church Planting Community in the Boston area, shares the group’s activity with members of the Greater Boston Baptist Association.

Will college students really respond to us?

There are many reasons we may be intimidated by college students and the environment they inhabit.

First, it's easy to feel our efforts are only wasted by trying to reach students in the middle of what can be a hedonistic and sinful culture. It may even seem dangerous to our own spirits to immerse ourselves in college campuses, where God's name and truth are so often rejected and defamed.

Second, even when students aren't drawn to the "darker" side of college life, they can seem distracted, uncommitted, and engrossed in a campus culture busy with activity. They often appear uninterested in spiritual matters as they instead develop and enjoy other parts of their life. We also may wonder if they will really respond to

older people, whether those are college ministry leaders, church pastors, church members, or others. This all makes the prospect of “breaking in” with campus missions daunting indeed.

Third, college students can be intimidating to us because they are *college students*. Such people represent a large percentage of America’s smartest individuals. They are presently in the learning process, meaning their minds are active and sharp and questioning. It may seem difficult for a common college ministry, church, or any other group of well-meaning Christians to reach this distinct audience.

Yet I would argue that the intimidating nature of the campus and its students in fact *calls* for using even greater means for missions to these tribes. William Carey rightly noted in *An Enquiry* that “the uncivilized state of the heathen, instead of affording an

objection *against* preaching the gospel to them, ought to furnish an argument *for* it.”

Meanwhile, the busy, distracted nature of students simply argues for greater strategy and better, more effective means. Christians often fail in these environments not because students don't want our service but because we don't realize how to serve them best. We should also recognize that college students, who may live as “practical orphans” in their new campus home, are quite interested in connecting with older adults. This Millennial Generation is particularly apt to desire relationships with those older and wiser than they.

And yes, many of these students are both intelligent and inquisitive. But that, too, should be an *incentive* to reach them, while it also requires us to work hard to strengthen our college ministry abilities. Why would we not seek to introduce Christ

and His Kingdom by every possible means and with all possible efforts into these unique college environments? Wouldn't we want the centers of our nation's education – and in many ways the whole world's education – to have unceasing contact with skilled Christian ministry? Don't we want to reach the “brilliant and barbaric” collegiate tribes?

If we're willing, there is great potential for Christendom in the very qualities that now intimidate us.

Is college ministry worth the financial investment, when college students aren't able to give back financially?

To many readers, this may seem like a fairly crass concern. But this is the most common concern about college ministry I hear.

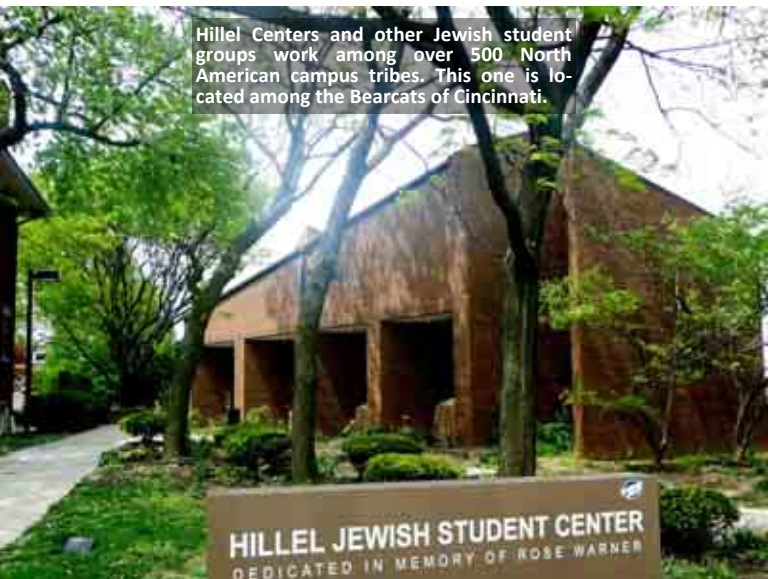
It is of course not wrong for Christians to

consider how to steward the money God has provided. And participating in college ministry does require a willingness to have a “negative balance ministry,” because it is rare that an organization’s investment will be fully financed by the students themselves during their time in college. However, there are a few answers to this concern.

First, our financial objection to college ministry is rebutted by our own involvement in missions. Our work among the worldwide unchurched doesn’t always “support itself” financially – yet that fact doesn’t cause us to quit. For numerous Kingdom-minded reasons, Christians give perpetually to international missions efforts – often in far greater amounts than it would take to build solid college ministry in our own local areas.

We should also recognize that college ministries are far more sustainable than we gen-

erally realize. Often college ministries do not need the budgeting or staff levels required by other ministries; even a large and active college ministry may still be far cheaper than work in other areas.



Hillel Centers and other Jewish student groups work among over 500 North American campus tribes. This one is located among the Bearcats of Cincinnati.

Meanwhile, college students have more disposable income than many other segments of the population. When they are presented with needs they care about, they are willing

to give. Believe it or not, in a larger college ministry where students have been trained in the biblical command to give, it is quite possible for student donations to equal the investment required, or at least to provide a strong financial foundation.

Finally, we should remember that college students *grow up*. There will be a day when the students presently in our college ministries do have steady income streams. And just as they often consider donating to their universities and their high schools, these graduates will often gladly consider giving to a college ministry that shepherded them during those years. Many campus-based groups already depend heavily on alumni donations, and this is an area in which church-based college ministries and ministries at Christian colleges could see similar funding help.

Again, I recognize that some will see discus-

sion of these financial issues as crass or mercenary. By providing practical responses, my hope is simply to help remove all possible roadblocks to participating in missions to our campuses.

our love for missions and youth ministry

As reflected in the thoughts above, *many of our reasons for hesitating in college ministry could also be used against youth ministry or international missions.* Yet Christians have come to see that both of these efforts are absolutely worth our attention, our investment, and our labors.

And even the very reasons we love these ministries can help drive our love for college ministry, too.

Regarding youth ministry, college ministry is our chance to *finish the job.* In ministry to junior high and high school students, we have devoted ourselves to raising up adoles-

cents in the Lord. But it's clear that adolescence does not end with high school graduation. Spiritual formation continues in the post-high school years, as students are both more independent and are thrust into new communities, new situations, and new moments of decision. Without strong college ministries to greet them, we run the risk of wasting the progress gained. But if we teach students to continue to live their faith in this new, independent world of college, our earlier teaching and discipleship actually gets solidified.

When it comes to our love for international missions, college ministry allows us to practice that same sort of outreach closer to home, with the students and campuses most dear to us. We know the value of traveling throughout the world to reach the neediest people, and we have learned the value of impacting groups who can help us reach even more people. College students –

including both American-born and international students – are some of the neediest among us. They are also some of the most strategic for a future of spreading God’s glory in the United States and beyond.

My hope is that as we examine our devotion to youth ministry and missions, we might see that our reasons for loving these areas compel us – even obligate us – to use greater means for college ministry, too.



These sorority sisters gathered outside DePaul University provide one example of the many organizations that draw new college students’ interest. Clearly, involvement in campus activities like this can turn out to be enriching, time-consuming, relationship-building, harmful, discouraging, encouraging, or all of these things.

greater means, better means

We have a duty to use greater means for reaching college students. Of course, “greater means” won’t always lead us to do *more*; in some cases, we may need to combine efforts, remove inefficiencies, or otherwise do “less.” But overall, our greater means will indeed involve *more* – more attention, more prayer, more time, more leaders, more money, more oversight. Yet it is hard to deny that this is a worthy sacrifice – because it’s also hard to deny that impacting college students could impact the whole world.

But without taking severe measures to improve the field of college ministry, there is no reason to believe that we will even continue to see the effectiveness of college ministry’s past. Yet if we do somehow maintain the status quo, we are still far from realizing the impact we could achieve among these students. Meanwhile, as more and more

students progress through college with little or no lasting Christian impact, we face a bleak future in American Christianity.

Yes, there are honest practical concerns about using greater means to reach college students. Our investment in finances, time, energy, and other resources will require sacrifice and risk. But there is a much larger risk if we *don't* use greater means to impact collegians.

As William Carey sought to call Christians to the task of missions, he delivered a sermon that would later be described as “deathless” because of its continuing impact on the world. Carey’s main points were summarized with a line that is as appropriate for our piece of the worldwide missions task as they were back then:

“Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.”

We would be hard pressed to declare that most American Christians, churches, or denominations have truly been expecting or attempting great things in reaching the campus tribes. But if we lift up our eyes to the fields before us, I believe we will find God ready to provide an astounding harvest.

We can see a day in which students are consistently confronted with the claims of Christ during their college years. We can have a future in which Christian young adults regularly emerge from college ready to serve and live and lead in ways we haven't even imagined. There can be a time – not long from now – when college is no longer the “high point” in the lives of so many but is simply the springboard to the great story God has written for the people of these tribes.

We call these tribes college campuses, and

we desperately need to use greater means to reach them.



Within the Blue Devils tribe, carnival-style food booths, live music, and costumes grace the campus during the closing days of the school year. Many tribes celebrate the end of the year with special events, providing relaxation and enjoyment while students prepare for final exams and graduation.



New Student Orientation for the Mountaineers of West Virginia University...

orienting

(a conclusion & vision trip)

written at Jacksonville University,
campus #137 · June 19

In the last week, I've had the opportunity to visit two campuses – West Virginia University and George Mason University – which

happened to be holding New Student Orientation activities during my visits.

For the uninitiated, NSO is a summer event when freshmen make their way to campus, often with parents in tow, in order to (presumably) get “oriented” for the year to come. This event often involves registering for classes, touring the campus, learning traditions and other school “rules,” and perhaps even moving in to the dorms.

Orientation also brings recruitment by countless organizations. Depending on the school, this can include extracurricular activities (frats, clubs, ministries, etc.), but it very likely also includes community establishments...

...such as banks, with their slick cups and pens and checkbook holders, recruiting students and their (parents’) money. You’ll also find newspaper subscription-hawkers,

cell phone companies, and the ever-present bookstore, who will remind you from the beginning of your college experience that its convenience and support of the school make higher prices worth the cost.

Each business recognizes that this is a fresh crop, a group of pre-freshmen ready to be served! After all, a whole bunch of customers just graduated in May, and while their faces are long forgotten, their patronage is certainly missed.

(The credit card companies are probably absent at this point; they will instead show up within the semester, when parents aren't around, with lots of free T-shirts or other flashy giveaways.)

This is Orientation.

But as missionaries, we look closer.



...for the Trojans of Trinity International University

This is a land of fresh, wide-eyed potential. 18-year-old men and women walk these halls with maps they won't soon need. Over the next four years, they will encounter a sort of life they haven't known, with freedoms to do and be and become. The skin of high school, often so restrictive with its cliques and malformed "cool" and Babel-like, single-language culture, will be shed. New friends, new acceptance, new opportu-

nities are here, whether this place is 50,000 people strong or much smaller.

A college is bigger than its numbers.

The hustle and bustle that will soon be found daily on campus will be a great visual metaphor for the life, the energy, the haphazard but steady progress that happens in this place.

Successes in the next four years will lead to the greatest joys imaginable, with experiences that last a lifetime or even lead these beautiful people to a new sort of life altogether. Reinventing oneself is not an uncommon event on a college campus.

These men and women will “find themselves” in all the best ways: within majors they didn’t know existed, within communities they didn’t know *could* exist, within new routines and challenging schedules

and the *maturity* that makes life breathe easier. Leaders will rise up, either realizing the potential we always knew they had... or shocking everyone with ability we never knew existed.

Some of these men and women will find husbands and wives over the next four years, and many others will have their “antes upped,” as co-ed friendships help raise the bar on what they’re looking for in a significant other.

In even the *first month* of school, many of these guys and gals will join clubs that will “stick.” Many will start a friendship that will last forever. Many will be invited to a Bible study. Many will find their church – or at least start looking with intentionality. Many will reflect on this new experience after a few weeks, grin, and look forward to an amazing four years.

In those next four years, plenty of these men and women will get a leadership position. Or two. They'll get in shape. Get a kiss (even their first, in some cases). Get engaged. Learn to schedule. Get a 4.0. Get honored. Make 2,000 Facebook friends. Find a career. Study abroad. Let go a little, loosen up a bit, mature a lot, and laugh nearly every day.

Some of these nearly-collegians will be back smiling next year at Orientation, happily representing the glories they've found to a new batch ready to be influenced and trained. Many of those glories would pleasantly surprise them today.

And some of those booths will be ministry booths, because the college ministry communities will have welcomed in Christians and non-Christians for discipleship and fellowship and conversion and love. Lots and lots of love. Boys and girls will come to

school uncommitted and will leave vibrant, wide-eyed Jesus followers, and the whole world will be different because of it.



As missionaries, we look.

This Orientation also presents a land of unspeakable danger. 18-year-olds walking these halls at Orientation don't realize the changes about to take place, and there are

few good maps. Over the next four years, they will encounter a sort of life they haven't known, with freedoms to fail and waste and destroy. The buffers of high school and family, often places of unappreciated coziness and naiveté and ever-present *help*, will be long gone. New kinds of pain, new temptation, new *harshness* are here, whether this place is 50,000 people strong or much smaller.

A college is bigger than its numbers.

The hustle and bustle that will soon be found daily on campus will conceal much of the death, the hurt, the haphazard and steady decay haunting this place.

Simple “mess-ups” in the next four years will lead to the deepest pain imaginable, in some cases pains that last a lifetime or even lead these beautiful people to take their lives altogether. Collegiate suicide is not an

uncommon event.

These boys and girls will “find themselves” in all the worst ways: within temptations they didn’t know existed, within relationships they didn’t think *could* exist, within new routines and schedules and the *stresses* that can color days gray. Cults will rise up: cults of personality, cults of pleasure, and even real religious cults.

Many will “play house” over the next four years, and even today at Orientation the girls flaunt bodies, and even today the boys muster courage and methods to take them up on it. Many boys and girls will lower their expectations, willing to do much and accept many that they wouldn’t have only a year or two before, in hopes of touch and friendship and love and promise.

In even the *first month* of school, many will be invited to parties that get them in over

their heads. Many will get drunk for the first time. Many won't be invited to a Bible study. Many will attend church for the last time for many years. Many will reflect on this new experience after a few weeks, shudder, and walk forward into four long years.

In those next four years, plenty of these men and women will make a life-changing bad decision. Or three. They'll get in heavy debt. Have a homosexual encounter (even their first, in some cases). Get an eating disorder. Get depressed. Reject their faith. Abort their education. Abort a child. Bring shame to themselves, their family, or their student organization. Masterfully learn "the world," in all its selfishness and evil and temporary gratification. Lose friends. Let go of too much, loosen up too much, mature too little, and cry on many, many days.

Some of these nearly-collegians will be back smiling next year at Orientation, happily

representing the “glories” they’ve found to a new batch ready to be influenced and trained. Many of those glories would repel them today.

This is the brink called Orientation, as men and women walk the halls of campus with their soon-tossed maps and their soon-absent parents and their fearful hope in tow.



...and for the Patriots of George Mason University.

Thanks for reading these chapters of *Reaching the Campus Tribes*!

The final part of the book is entitled “Into the Harvest: A Road Map Forward from a Road Trip’s Findings.” It describes some strategies for how we *all* can support and practice college ministry better, based on what I learned from my trip.

To read the “Road Map,” go to reachingthecampustribes.com/mobile.

The next pages contain important info from the back pages of the full book.

The Back Pages

About the author. Benson Hines started serving college students in 1999, while attending Texas A&M University, and he has been involved in college ministry ever since. Following the research trip (August 2007 to August 2008), he continues to research college ministry, meets regularly with college ministry leaders, speaks to college ministers and college students, and blogs daily about college ministry at www.exploringcollegeministry.com. Ben received his M.A. in Theology from seminary.

The book site. Updates, new versions, corrections, and other goodies are located at the book site: www.reachingthecampustribes.com.

Acknowledgments. This trip could not have been accomplished without the hundreds of amazing people who gave their time, hospitality, finances, and wisdom during the trip. A special thanks also goes to the several “editors” who gave great suggestions and helped this book become much better. And I praise the God who gave me an amazing adventure and the opportunity to see my heroes in action as they labor among the beautiful campus

tribes.

Provision. I took the yearlong research trip believing God was calling me to it, and that call has been confirmed as I've seen the impact this kind of exploration has for college ministers and for college ministry as a field. But I'm still watching to see how God wants to provide the money the trip required. Finances will also help me continue to serve college ministers in other ways. If this book or my research is helpful to you, donations are always appreciated! Or, if you know someone who might like to invest in the future of college ministry in this way, please consider passing on this need. (All my contact information can be [found here](#).)

Why an ebook? Why did I put this in a free ebook rather than talking to publishers about a standard book? Three considerations were key: availability, time, and creativity. I wanted this book to be as widely available as possible, so if cost might be a barrier to it spreading among Christians... then free is better! Also, I wanted to pass along these findings as soon as possible, and a self-published format allowed for that. Finally, I loved the opportunity to present pictures and

other contents that might not make it into a traditional, “formal” book.

I do hope to publish (in standard book form) other findings and adventures. If you’d like to help that happen, one of the best things you can do is share this ebook with others! As more people value college ministry and want to learn about it (especially those outside of college ministry – like pastors and other Christian leaders), we’ll *all* have more chances to share our ideas.

Joining the cause. The best way to receive updates is to join the “[Exploring College Ministry with Benson](#)” Facebook Group. If you need to receive updates via email instead, let me know and I’ll add you to the list! Either way, I won’t spam you... you’ll get *occasional* updates as this project continues, as I take more trips, and when there are ways you might be able to join in! We’re all in this together, and we really can change the world as we help college ministry become better valued and better practiced.

Specific help. Let me know if there’s any way I can help as you think about college ministry in your context. I’m always glad to answer questions

or point people to resources. Be sure to check out my daily blog about college ministry, too, at exploringcollegeministry.com. Certainly, I'm also open to paid opportunities; if you'd like to ask about speaking, consulting, ministry work, or other jobs, all my contact information can be [found here](#).

The lurking X. At nearly every campus, I took a picture of a red "X" (as in, "X marks the spot.") A few of those pictures ended up in this book, and the particularly observant might find them! Through the year, the X also got filled with stickers from the various campuses, so be sure to check it out sometime. It's pretty neat.

The facts. Clearly, college ministries and campuses themselves can change rapidly. All facts in this book are included as reported to me during the trip (between August 2007 and August 2008). Please let me know about any inaccuracies. All photos were taken by Benson Hines on the year-long trip. A complete itinerary of the trip's activities can be found at www.exploringcollegeministry.com/itinerary.

The cover and final page tribal photos. The

cover pictures are from the following tribes, beginning with the top left: Row 1—University of Wyoming, Stanford University, Judson University, University of Oregon; Row 2—Saint Louis University, Furman University (larger middle picture), Houston Baptist University; Row 3—Vanderbilt University, University of California Berkeley; Row 4—University of Kentucky, Connecticut College, Multnomah University, University of California Santa Cruz.

The pictures on the final page, beginning at top left: Row 1—University of Illinois, Oral Robert University, New Mexico State University, University of Colorado; Row 2—Reed College, Colorado School of Mines, Indiana University, Pepperdine University; Row 3—University of Nebraska, University of Louisville, Minnesota State University Moorhead, California Baptist University; Row 4—George Washington University, Furman University, University of Arizona, Baylor University.