

I have written this article as an insight into the last four years of my life. As a Bible-believing Christian going to University I was faced with many challenges and several choices to make, many of which some of you may be going through currently or are just about to. Hopefully my experiences, as detailed below, will shed some light as to what to expect, and possibly be of help and encouragement with your own personal lives and decisions. The most important things to remember whilst reading this article however, is the fact that the Lord's will should be the centre of everything – what He wants for one person may not be the same as another. Secondly it is important to remember that we all have different characters and personalities, and some of the experiences I have gone through may not happen or be relevant to you, but I pray that it may do some good somewhere.

Introduction

Before the start of a new chapter, there is always a feeling of anxiety, curiosity and oftentimes excitement, as to what lies beyond the next page of our lives. Whilst visiting various campuses in the build-up to selecting two Universities, I walked around each one of them eager to start a new era and with the strong desire to make a difference in people's lives on a big scale. Before starting University I envisaged myself for instance participating in the netball and badminton teams, building up relationships with people my age in order to present the Gospel to them as I did at school, and for them to see the Lord through the way I acted, spoke and lived my life. I also wanted to pass on the things I had learnt, and was learning, through the DG and Tft! to those at the Christian Union and other Christians I met, opening up new things that they might not have been taught before and firing them up to serve the Lord and reach the lost.

I always had the intention of attending a University close to home, not only to live off-campus to escape the folly and sinfulness of student nightlife but to stay close to Tft! and the work we were doing together in the Lord as this I certainly didn't want to leave. People at Uni who lived on campus told me of the loud music that would often be playing from people's bedrooms as they were attempting to revise and I could only but imagine the drunken frivolity that went on too, so I was thankful to the Lord that I did get in to Aston, allowing me to live at home.

The week before starting in September 2008, the University held a fair for first years which allowed us to sign up for sports, societies and activities during the year. Additionally you could also meet other students with similar interests and beliefs (i.e. Christian Union) however this fair was on a Sunday morning through to the afternoon and immediately I was presented with a predicament. Despite this however, I went to church and Bible Class as normal in the morning and decided to sign up some other way later on and meet people on the first day of lectures.

I was very optimistic and excited before starting.

First Year

During first year I met many new people in the Business School and became part of a 'group' with four other girls, three of which were also home students living off campus. Whilst leaving sixth form, the majority of my class all moved to Universities across the UK and only a select few of us stayed in Birmingham, as most considered living at home to be a hindrance to the 'University experience' and

a hindrance to getting to know new people. Whilst this is true on many levels, to me it certainly was the right move to make particularly as a Bible-believing Christian, helping me to avoid any sort of temptation the world, the flesh and the devil tried to throw my way. Many of my 'old' friends from school, who were Christians and ended up moving away from home, either eventually went off the rails losing their testimony or became very superficial Christians.

Second Year

Second year was a lot harder for me than first year, not necessarily due to the content of the work but in terms of friendships and hardships. The girls that I had befriended during first year (as they lived away from campus) would sometimes work from home, some commuting from a distance, which left me sitting in lectures with people I didn't know and building new bridges which was harder still a year on when everyone had their own 'friendship groups'. To give you a bit of an insight into my course, there were about 800 students enrolled on it (so the lecture halls were vast) and finding someone you knew well in such large rooms could be quite daunting if your friends weren't there. This was also the 'problem' with living at home, and even though I knew other people in my lectures, I didn't want to be 'using' them for a time simply to make it easier for myself! In addition to this, one of my friends ended up leaving Uni that year to attend a University closer still to home (Wolverhampton) and the one who lived on campus became a lot closer to her flatmates which meant that we didn't see her as much.

The other two remaining girls also started getting closer and had been on days out together during the summer holidays (which I ended up not participating in due to clashes with either church, Tft! outreaches and badminton that I played twice a week outside of Uni in Bromyard) so this also caused somewhat of a drift.

Looking back it is evident to me that as a Bible-believing Christian attending University I had two options - the first being to build-up and firmly develop my friendship with the Tft! team and the work we were doing or befriend those around me at Uni.

James 4v4 – '...know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.'

I am certainly not saying that Christians who have non-Christian friends are anti-scriptural, but one must remember not to compromise and instead think very carefully with regards to choices and sacrifices. For instance, do you meet with your team on a Saturday to go tracting or do you go out for a meal with friends? Of course you could do both if the timing was right, but for me personally I was not in a situation in which I could have the best of both worlds.

The team that we have at Tft! is very unique and I am thankful to the Lord for it! It has required a lot of commitment and dedication from all parts to get to and build up what we have and for me the option was simple; I didn't want to jeopardise anything and I wasn't interested in having the best of both worlds! If I had chosen differently, things would not be the same within our team as they are today, and I would have missed out on the great journey we've had together (with many more to come if the Lord tarries!)

Many of you reading this article and thinking about applying to University may not be able to relate to this directly per se, but the same can be said for close family units and church fellowship. You do not want to gain one thing and lose another. Life is very short and it is important to make the right decisions quickly with regards to what really matters. Many people take futile paths that they may wish they hadn't at the Judgement Seat of Christ.

I John 2v16 – 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.'

Third year (Placement)

Having a year out was a compulsory part of my course and 10% of my degree overall, but it was something I enjoyed and experienced for the first time. I managed to be able to witness to those I worked with during my time there and Lord willing, was a good example and ambassador for Him.

As in any secular workplace, (and in this day and age as in any secular place) there is often innuendo and bad language that is spoken by others which a Christian has to deal with – and the best thing for anyone to do, as John has mentioned previously, is to declare that you are a Christian from day one. After doing this, it will become obvious to others that you aren't participating with certain things due to the fact that you are a Christian and as you are sitting with others for up to nearly 40 hours a week there are always opportunities to witness.

Over Christmas in 2010 the team produced a Christmas CD with songs, carols, readings and a message to distribute to others which I wrapped up along with a Tft! mug, pen, coaster and chosen tract for 28 people in the office. I was also able to give out a Bible to one of my managers (as a wedding gift) and two others to workers within the Trust who were Christians looking for cheap KJV's. Occasionally I would also have good conversations with other placement students working alongside me and was in contact with a Christian via email after I had sent him our sample pack. He also printed out a copy of my testimony and read it to his church one Sunday, which was a great encouragement to hear! The following Christmas after leaving work to return to University, I posted our Tft! calendars to the Trust, which went up around the office (and hopefully are still up now)! I also pinned up a 'He Loves You' tract on the noticeboard in the entrance foyer which stayed up right until I left.

Even though I was temporarily out of the University environment for a year, I was still presented with the similar challenges regarding work outings, Christmas meals and evening sports activities etc. which are situations I think we will all face regardless of where we are.

Final Year

Final year was certainly the hardest year of them all and was a real struggle from start to finish, oftentimes an experience I really didn't enjoy. The workload was more intense, as could be expected, and again for me personally I was faced with certain predicaments that were testing, challenging and very demanding, adding to the emotional expedition. Even other non-Christians

going through final year felt the strain of deadlines and exams, and it was often hard to get motivated particularly after having a year away from revision and exams.

Now that I am out of it looking back, and reflecting upon my own personal experiences and circumstances, and the fact I have such a strong unique team around me, it has made me question if I would have made the same choice to go to University altogether. During the first three years I didn't really feel like this, but during final year I did start to question it all. It is easy to reflect on things you would have changed or different courses that perhaps you should have enrolled on, but it is harder still to know what is right in the first instance. Coming from a background where I have been pushed in my education in a positive sense, and being the first in my family to go to University, this is probably easier said than done, however I am very, very thankful to the Lord for bringing me through still fighting on and willing to serve Him. I am also so grateful for my great team who have been a fantastic help and support during coursework and exam time particularly. Thank you to everyone else too for your most-valued prayers for me during this time.

Other experiences

Christian Union

It was a while before I actually ended up attending the Christian Union at Aston, due to the fact that it clashed with the Wednesday service at Hope Chapel (as I was still there during part of my first year) and due to the transition to Oaks Community Church. When I did attend however, the meeting was very weak (as anticipated) and the Christians just seemed to follow along with it – I was also told that many of them were missing that evening as they were attending a secular music concert! Any Bible-believer in this world today, already knows of how many lukewarm Christians there are – Bible-believers are few and far between. For those of you attending a Christian Union or hoping to do so, don't go with high hopes that the doctrine will be right and the Christians sound and be careful that they don't lure you into things that you stand against and that you know to be wrong.

In addition to the usual Wednesday meeting, Aston CU also had house groups on designated days of the week depending on what year you were in etc. Here people would take it in turns to give a message and there was a delegated male and female team leader for each group. When hearing about this during first year it was something I wanted to do the following year to teach some depth to others and fire them up, but in the end it never materialised as I didn't enjoy the Christian Union as the Christians were not like-minded and didn't want the same things I did.

One thing that we did see eye-to-eye on however was outreach work, and during the second term of year one the Christian Union had organised a day (one day in the whole of the year!) of leaflet distribution to the accommodation blocks with the Gospel of Mark. I joined them in getting out there and reaching the lost and we all prayed together and spoke to students around campus.

In my second year, Dee joined me for the first Christian Union of the term and we were both disappointed with the outcome yet again! From the songs to the message, and from the conversation to the atmosphere, the meeting was riddled with modern-day Christianity. Since that day I never went back right until I finished University.

For me, and being the character I am I was not comfortable or happy in that environment, however I would advise if you are in a similar situation, to endure the situation a little longer than I did. Be it as it may that many of the Christians that attend meetings as such are very “pink-and-fluffy” they at least share a common denominator with you and in hindsight I maybe shouldn’t have given up so easily. I too quickly destroyed my vision of firing them up and passing on the knowledge and teaching I was learning, and who knows maybe some of them could have been involved in Tft! and been a help and support to us if I had put more of an effort in.

Sport

My initial intentions about joining certain sports teams as planned at the start of Uni also didn’t materialise, again due to other commitments and choices I had made. During my second year however I did play badminton twice socially on a weekday and trained once with the University badminton team, wearing my Christian Time for Truth! top each time with I Corinthians 15v3 written on the back. ‘**...Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures**’

I was also offered to play in a match with the girls’ doubles team.

Witnessing

If I were to base how worthwhile my time at University has been upon the sharing of the Gospel, I would definitely say it was worth it for that at least. Many of the students during the four years I spent there may not have had the Gospel presented to them so clearly and directly, and the Lord surely opened up many doors for me. For others in a similar situation, what follows below may be a few ideas to help you to witness and testify for the Lord and I also hope that it will be an encouragement to you too...

From the beginning of first year through to finals I wanted to and tried to be the best witness I could for the Lord. In the first week of Uni I had a conversation with three girls about Christianity, beliefs, the Bible and religion which was a great start, and at Christmas I managed to give out invitations for our Carol service at Oaks (as well as our tracts and Life then Eternity booklets which stirred up conversations about Evolution with one of the girls in the group). This same girl also was given the ‘Late One Night’ DVD which she watched and commented on.

I also had the opportunity of witnessing to a group of Muslim girls I saw quite often in lectures, who were challenged by my own commitment and discipline in comparison to their ‘religious’ routines. Here I had good conversations with them about things such as church, the ministry, the alcohol issue and Christianity vs. Catholicism etc.

One of the best ways of witnessing is also through tracts, as people cannot argue with a piece of paper and it can often be a good way to reach people through various means e.g. leaving them in phone boxes, pinned up on noticeboards or inside library books. After each academic year I passed on my textbooks and notes to students in the year below me and would leave tracts and verses of Scriptures with them.

Gospel CDs are also a great way of attracting students and I stood on campus offering 'free CDs' to those walking by which seemed to go down very well indeed. In addition to this, I put CDs and tracts into each letterbox of the accommodation blocks and received an encouraging response from one flat who gathered together and listened to the LIFE CD in their kitchen one afternoon.

Another way of reaching the masses is through email, and one thing I did during my time at Aston was to locate the email directory and send the Gospel to students via their University email account. I managed to send out 10,000 emails in total before I was brought before the Director of the Undergraduate Programme, and had several replies both good and bad (more can be read on this in Tft News! Issue 50).

As a word of warning for anyone attempting this however, "BCC-ing" recipients is the best way of handling the situation and replying to everyone may take you away from sending out more emails so just leave them with the Gospel! It is worth bearing in mind that it is more than likely against your University policy to distribute such emails, so make sure you are willing to accept any consequences.

Finally, it is also a great idea to wear Christian tops with verses on them for those sitting behind you in lectures and in exams, which also reminds people of your stand for the Lord.

Exams & Revision

I'm sure every single one of us has something to say about exams and revision through our own experiences and it can often leave people finding little time on their hands, worried and a whole lot more. Some of the textbooks I had to read for the course were ridiculously big and from speaking to friends from school enrolled on various courses, the reading requirements are pretty much the same across the board. One thing to mention here then is Bible reading, which although I still did every day, it became obvious that I spent more of my time reading notes for revision than the Scriptures during exam time. Some things to ask yourself if you are contemplating attending University is - Will the Lord be happy with how I spend my time? Will my walk be affected? Am I able to discipline myself? Are there certain things that I will be restricted with? Will I lose sight of what really matters?

My advice

For any recently saved, young in the faith or not very strong Christian, in my opinion, I would not recommend going to University (unless of course the Lord is telling you otherwise) due to the fact that you will very easily be led astray, not being grounded in the word, and will be more susceptible to compromise and backslide as a result! I am certainly not saying this is the case for everyone as each person is individual, however not many Christians that go into University come out the same way or better for it!

Bible-believing Christians wanting to take a stand for the Lord in this environment be warned, and make sure that it is definitely the Lord's will for you and not your own! If you do not want to compromise on one single thing and want a faultless testimony throughout, there certainly is a cost

and it's not an easy path. Oftentimes when you are in the midst of it all, it can be a very lonely time and it is only you and the Lord battling through many things together whilst you are there. People need to mix in with other people for help, support and friendship, but don't let that jeopardise the things that matter most! As a Bible-believing Christian, built-up and rooted and grounded in the Scriptures my advice certainly would be to think carefully – am I willing to give certain things up for the Lord if needs be? Am I willing to take a stand on all things or only some things? Do I have other Bible-believing Christians that I can lean on? There are so many questions and points that could be raised similar to these.

Thanks to the Lord, the pure unity of our team and the constant studies and fellowship I had all the time, I was fired up to keep on going and was kept in check when I needed it most. I cannot express enough how important it is to keep your motives pure and honest, to dress appropriately, to keep your conversation chaste and not entertain this world's folly. Going through University as a Christian is not only a test of knowledge but a test of character.

II Corinthians 5v20 – **'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.'**

Graduation

'And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not..' - Jeremiah 45v5

After finishing University completely, usually what follows for most is a graduation ceremony, in which students pick up their degree certificate in front of family and friends. In order to finish well and to give the Lord all the glory I decided not to go to my graduation, instead receiving my certificate through via post, and the following points detail why.

- The ceremony itself is about congratulating 'your own achievement' and yet if it wasn't for the Lord I would not have achieved anything. He has given me the ability, health and strength to make it through life so far.
- Walking up on stage to receive the certificate draws all attention to 'you' instead of the Lord and He should be the one to be glorified. The Lord has been removed from the academic world and is no longer in it as He used to be.
- The praise of God is better than the praise of men – **'For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.'** Galatians 1v10
- Ceremonies as such are all about 'self' oftentimes, and most people who attend to watch the ceremonies 'worship' education and success. Galatians 6v3 – **'For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.'**
- The cap and gown worn at Graduation ceremonies often represents pride and loftiness which reminded me of the scribes and Pharisees in Scripture... Luke 20v46 – **'Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts.'**
- The Lord gave everything up for me that I might live and there should be nothing too great in my life that I can't give up for Him to show how much I love Him.

- Also, by not attending, it is a witness to my family and those I went to University with that I put the Lord in the pre-eminent position in my life and a testimony of how much I love the Lord.

Ephesians 6v6 - **‘Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.’**

What is the will of God for your life?