

FINDING FAITH

IN THE FORUM

BY JAYNE GOODMAN
INCLUDING AN INTERVIEW
WITH DR. J. BUDZISZEWSKI

Geneva alumni and a professor take the time to advise you on the dilemma of churches in college.

When students think of college, most of them tend to think about parties, papers and power. Not many of their minds linger on the vitality of prayer, praise and pastors. University life is becoming more and more of a worldly thing, which makes the task of finding a church in college even more important.

The task of finding a church is never simple. Sometimes it takes a few tries before finding one that suits you. A recent graduate of Auburn, Haley Hawkins ('13), visited four to five churches before discovering one she connected with. "[Going to church] frames my week. It corrects me when I need correcting," Hawkins said, "We spend the beginning of our time [at church] in prayer and worship. That sets the tone for the rest of the semester."

It is essential, however, to find a church that suits you and not just one that suits your friends.

Emily Shelton ('16) a freshman at the University of Texas at Austin said, "Don't just go where all the other students go; find the church whose liturgy and mission statement you agree with the most. Church is not meant to be cool and like a big college party. It is meant for worship, so find the place where you can do that best."

While it may seem tempting and much easier to go to a church where all your friends are going, the truth of the matter is it will not give you the same experience as going to a church you connect with. "The question 'where do you go to church?' is asked as frequently as 'what is your major?' here. Either you are rooted and involved in a local church community or you are in the throes of the infamous non-committal 'church-hopping process,' said Delaney Young ('16), a freshman at Wheaton.

"Church-hopping" is fine for a little while, but once you find the right church, commit to it. Don't be scared by the lack of friends that attend the church with you or the fact you have to get up on a Sunday morning. "I would say to take the first two months to try churches and then stop searching," said Hawkins. "There is no such thing as a perfect church so once you find a place with a great community, solid teaching and a place you feel welcomed, stick with it!"



Most students advise to not let the idea of “church-hopping” scare you. Finding a local church for the first time without your parents is a very important decision, but you don’t have to decide right off the bat. It does require time but don’t let that short searching period become too long. “Don’t fall into the trap of ‘church-hopping’ indefinitely. It is March and some of my friends are still looking for a home church,” said Young.

Once you’ve found a church, it can become extremely difficult to wrench yourself out of bed on a Sunday morning. But once you make the decision to skip that one service it can become easier and easier to skip church altogether. Jack Clifford (’13) a graduating senior at A&M said “There was actually a period when I stopped going to church in college. I was not very proactive in searching for a church my freshman year, so I ended up going to the same church with my friends.”

Clifford realized later that year that there was a void in his life. He had been dealing with a few problems and figured out that this void was due to his lack of spiritual ac-

tivity. “To be honest, what drove me to keep going to church was that I would be completely lost in college without God. There have been quite a few instances throughout college when I have had to deal with anxiety and even depression, but God helped guide me through those times, even if they were incredibly difficult to deal with,” said Clifford, “Moreover, the home group I became involved with at my church has been supportive of me and was always willing to pray for and talk with me.”

Once Clifford found the church that suited him, he could really enjoy and experience the fellowship his Christian friends had to offer. He made the decision to attend church and found that this was the key to surviving college.

Not only do students that go to church in college find themselves in a happier place, they look forward to each service. Emma Ingram (’16) a Baylor freshman said, “Going to church in college was different for me because it was 100% my choice and I was going because I wanted to go. I found that my faith got stronger because I had to really decide for myself what I agreed

with and what I didn’t.”

Hawkins also said “College brings a lot of different options as to how you spend your time. I knew that God and our relationship was really important so I made the commitment to make that a priority because if that relationship isn’t right then literally nothing else matters.”

The college experience cannot be lived out to the fullest without having a solid foundation and making sure it stays rock solid. Shelton said, “I cannot emphasize enough the importance of a strong church foundation in your college life. If you go to church, and continue to do so, your friends will start to see that you are not only a Christian, but you are one who firmly believes in the truth and the power of the God they serve. Others will respond to it, even if you think they are not looking.”

Young sums it up well when she said “Find a church that worships with reverence and speaks truth and challenges you to be Christ’s hands and feet everyday. If a church checks these boxes, all other quirks or flaws, in my opinion and experience, are irrelevant.”

INTERVIEW WITH DR. J. BUDZISZEWSKI

Professor of Government and Philosophy, UT-Austin
Author of *How to Stay Christian in College*
and *On the Meaning of Sex*

HOW MANY CHURCHES WOULD YOU RECOMMEND STUDENTS TRY OUT BEFORE CHOOSING ONE THAT SUITS THEM?

Not many! It’s all too easy to become a “church tourist,” always visiting new congregations and never becoming a part of one. You can reduce the number of churches you need to visit by doing a little research first, for instance by asking Christian friends whether they know of good churches. Sometimes you can find out what they believe at their websites. Careful, the churches closest to campus are not always the best. Sometimes -- not always -- churches right next to a university are more interested in being trendy than in living and teaching the gospel.

IF STUDENTS HAPPEN TO FIND A CHURCH THAT THEY LIKE ON THEIR FIRST TRY, SHOULD THEY TRY A FEW MORE OR SETTLE FOR THAT ONE?

If you find a church you like, what’s the problem? Just make sure you like it for the right reasons!

HERE ARE SOME STRENGTHS TO LOOK FOR IN A CHURCH:

It should openly acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It should accept the Bible as both true and authoritative. It should understand both that we depend on grace, and that we must cooperate with grace. It should hold members to high and clear standards of moral conduct. Its members should have sacrificial love for each other, rather than being quarrelers. It should have a balance among worship, prayer, learning, encouragement, and outreach. It should both strengthen old members and draw in new ones. It should exhibit mutual respect between the pastors and the rest of the members. Finally, it should challenge you to grow in love, trust, and obedience to Christ.

HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO AVOID:

Avoid churches that twist, reject, demean, or dilute the Bible. Avoid churches that treat exotic or emotional experiences as the core of Christian life. Avoid churches that idolize their human leaders. Avoid churches that try to cut you off from your family. Avoid churches that try to mix Christianity with other religions. Avoid churches that try to mix Christianity with occultic practices.

HERE ARE SOME THINGS NOT TO WORRY ABOUT:

Don't worry if it takes a while to fit in. Don't worry if you don't feel fond of every single member. Don't worry if the church does things a little differently than the way you like. Don't worry if not everyone in the church has equal commitment and understanding. Don't worry if other people don't think the group is cool.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY THE IMPACT OF GOING TO CHURCH CAN BE TO A STUDENT'S COLLEGE LIFE?

Regular worship in church is enormously important. You see, God made us social beings; that's why we respond so readily to peer pressure. Peer pressure is good if it's the right kind of pressure from the right kind of peers. Your true peer group is the fellowship of the saints; the household of God. This is a great secret. I don't mean that God hides it; I mean that not many Christian students know it. They try to live their faith alone, and find themselves losing heart. No wonder! That's not the way God planned it. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian, and if you go into the world alone, you won't be Christian for long.

WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS OF GOING TO A CHURCH WITH YOUR FRIENDS?

Do you mean with faithful Christian friends? Then the advantage is that you will draw still closer together

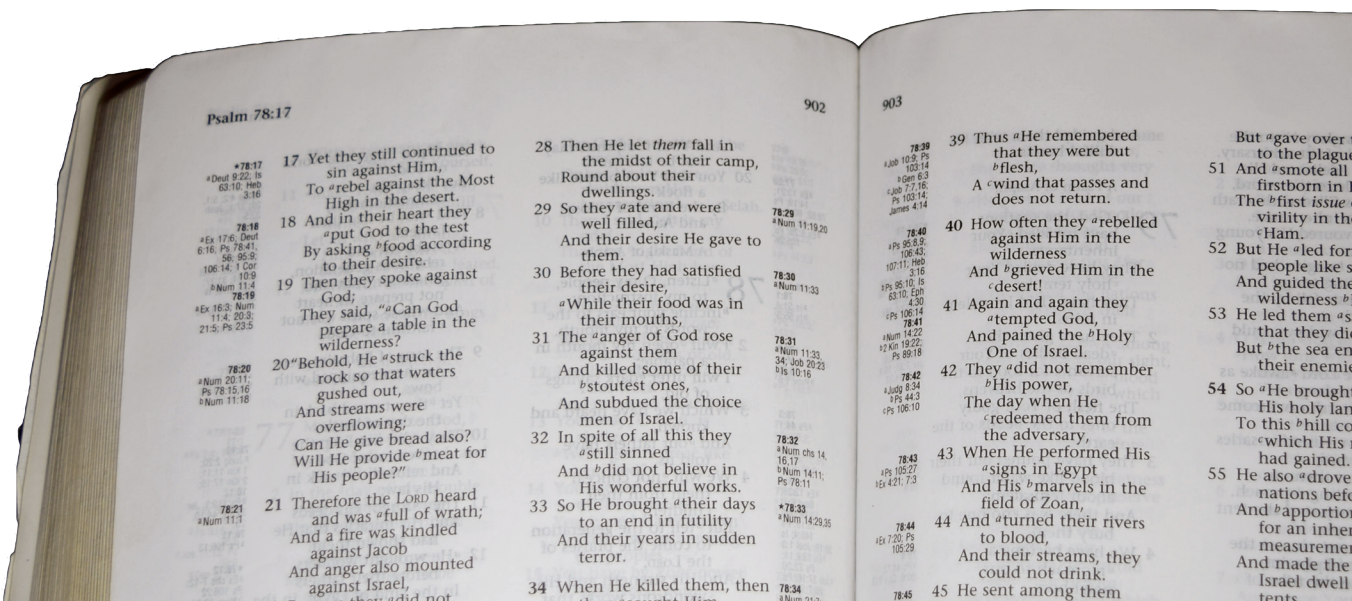
in Christ, and since you see your friends outside of church too, you can all encourage each other in the Christian life. The disadvantage is that looking for a church your buddies like may lead you to the wrong church.

WHY GET INVOLVED IN A CHURCH IF YOU ARE PART OF AN ORGANIZATION LIKE YOUNG LIFE?

Student Christian fellowship groups are important -- in my view, crucial -- but please don't think that if you're in a student Christian fellowship group you're having all the Christian fellowship you need. You also need to be in a real church. "But I'd rather just be with people like me!" That's just it: we'd all like to be with people like ourselves. It's a selfish impulse Christ wants to help us overcome. A student Christian group is like a club, but a church is more like a village. It has old and young, knowledgeable and naive, easy to get along with and hard to get along with. Learning to love all those people is just the kind of practice we need! So find a good student fellowship -- but find a good church too.

WHAT IF IT SEEMS THAT EVERYONE YOU MEET IS A NON-CHRISTIAN? MIGHT GOD WANT TO USE YOU TO WITNESS TO THEM?

Of course you should witness to your non-Christian friends when the opportunity arises -- sometimes with words, sometimes with deeds. But if everyone you meet is non-Christian, you aren't looking hard enough for Christians! Sure, we are in the minority. Sure, we are the counter-culture. You may not meet any Christians in your classes or you may meet them and not know that they're Christian. Even so, there are so many different Christian fellowship groups that Christians are easy to meet. Really.



17 Yet they still continued to sin against Him, To rebel against the Most High in the desert. 18 And in their heart they put God to the test By asking food according to their desire. 19 Then they spoke against God; They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? 20 Behold, He struck the rock so that waters gushed out, And streams were overflowing; Can He give bread also? Will He provide meat for His people?" 21 Therefore the LORD heard and was full of wrath; And a fire was kindled against Jacob And anger also mounted against Israel,

28 Then He let them fall in the midst of their camp, Round about their dwellings. 29 So they ate and were well filled, And their desire He gave to them. 30 Before they had satisfied their desire, While their food was in their mouths, 31 The anger of God rose against them And killed some of their stoutest ones, And subdued the choice men of Israel. 32 In spite of all this they still sinned And did not believe in His wonderful works. 33 So He brought their days to an end in futility And their years in sudden terror. 34 When He killed them, then He said to the

78:29 Num 11:19,20

78:30 Num 11:33

78:31 Num 11:33, 34; Job 29:23; 9:10-16

78:32 Num 14:14, 16,17; Num 14:11

78:33 Num 14:29,35

78:34 Num 21:3

39 Thus He remembered that they were but flesh, A wind that passes and does not return. 40 How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness And grieved Him in the desert! 41 Again and again they tempted God, And pained the Holy One of Israel. 42 They did not remember His power, The day when He redeemed them from the adversary, 43 When He performed His signs in Egypt And His marvels in the field of Zoan, 44 And turned their rivers to blood, And their streams, they could not drink. 45 He sent among them

78:39 Job 10:9; Ps 105:14; Job 7:7; Ps 103:14; James 4:14

78:40 Ps 95:8,9; Job 6:3; Job 7:7; Ps 103:14; James 4:14

78:41 Num 11:22; 12; Job 29:23; Ps 89:18

78:42 Job 8:34; Ps 44:3; Ps 106:10

78:43 Ps 135:27; Job 42:1,7,3

78:44 Job 20:23; Ps 106:23

78:45

But gave over them to the plague, 51 And smote all the firstborn in Egypt The first issue of virility in the to Ham. 52 But He led forth people like sheep And guided them in wilderness like a flock. 53 He led them safe that they did not But the sea engulphed their enemies. 54 So He brought them to His holy land, To this hill country which His right hand had gained. 55 He also drove out nations before them And apportioned the land for an inheritance by lot, and made the tribes of Israel dwell in tents