

Voices: College is a strategic time for ministry

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Over the next several weeks, 1.7 million college students will descend on campuses across Texas. Many will be nontraditional or virtual, but most will be young, impressionable 18- to 25-year-olds.

Over the next month, many students will determine their friend groups and what they will be about during college and afterward. Walking a college campus during this season, the raw potential is almost palpable.

Students gather with their peers, asking the basic questions of life: What will I stand for? Who should I marry? What am I going to do with my life? How am I going to pay for this? Is there a God, and does he care about me?

They speak the common language of TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram, and they stay up late and live on Student Standard Time. In many ways, they are their own people group within our culture—living in the same place, on the same timeline, in the same stage of life.

These four years of college are a threshold, like the pinch in the hourglass. Like the sand from the top of the hourglass, students come from varied places and backgrounds. Once they finish college, they will be scattered like sand after it falls to the bottom of the hourglass. During these strategic few years, they are accessible and open.

It's in this season—this pinch—where something as catalytic as the gospel can impact such a wide variety of groups and sectors in our culture.

A gospel injection during the college years changes the trajectory of a life. Christian leaders tomorrow happen when college students are engaged

with the gospel today. Now more than ever in their lives, college students are open to spiritual things. Some would even argue this generation is more open to spiritual things than before.

Strategizing at the pinch point

Relationship is the currency of the gospel. The gospel travels quickest in close proximity. When God moves in the life of a college student, it can be passed on quickly and impact an entire people group in a short time. The college campus is full of gospel potential because of the speed the gospel can travel among a group of students.

College students are accessible and open. When the gospel takes hold on a college campus, it can spread like a fire. It is not uncommon to see a college student accept Christ and then share with friends, resulting in several generations of believers in only a few short years. It is no wonder so many movements of God have started on college campuses.

Imagine what it would take to share the gospel with the U.S. president or another government official? Door-to-door evangelism probably wouldn't work at the White House.

Even if someone wanted to share the gospel with the president and could get through the security detail and news reporters, the likelihood of sitting down with the president to talk about Jesus is not high, nor is it likely the president would be receptive to the gospel in that setting.

But many years before, the current president and other government officials went to college. They were freshmen with big questions like any other college student. They were accessible, approachable and still forming their values.

Almost certainly, a future president, government official or supreme court

justice is moving into the dorms this fall. The future mayor of your city, the officer who will pull you over in 10 years, the teacher who will teach your children or grandchildren, the nurse who will help you navigate your aging parents' failing health are walking campuses right now asking what their life will be about and who they will spend their life serving.

Wouldn't it be amazing if the gospel intersected their lives at this crucial time, and the lens they begin to see the world through is a Christ-centered lens instead of a self-centered lens?

The college campus is the pinch in the hourglass where culture passes through, and students are the most open and accessible they will be before being launched into adulthood and careers spanning the globe. What could God do if every student on every campus had the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel?

What if they graduate, not as professionals to a job, but as Christians to a calling? What if they leave campus, not apathetic towards religion, but passionate about Jesus? What if they see their vocation as their mission field? How could that change entire families, towns, states and nations?

First weeks are key—three prayers

The first several weeks of the semester are the most crucial in a student's life. This is where they determine their friends and what they are going to be involved in. It is not uncommon for more students to come to Christ the first month of classes than the entire year.

1. Lost students are looking for something new and lasting. Often during the first few weeks, when someone shares the gospel with them, they are open and will respond. Would you pray for them?

2. Statistics indicate the majority of students raised in the church walk

away from their faith while in college, often because they don't plug into Christian community early on. The next several weeks are pivotal in the lives of Christian students. Would you pray for them?

3. This month, college ministries on every campus are putting in long hours to connect with as many students as possible during this strategic window and season in their lives. These next several weeks, college ministers will leave the house while it's dark and won't come back until after their families are asleep. They will be poured out like drink offerings for the sake of the gospel on their campus. Would you pray for them and their families?

The college campus has the potential to change the world. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, saw it and said, "If we reach the campus, we reach the world."

Now more than ever, the world needs the good news of Jesus Christ, and one place where the nations and all walks of life come together is the college campus.

Clayton Bullion is the Texas Baptists' Center for Collegiate Ministry evangelism, discipleship and mobilization catalyst.