

# Conversations for the College Bound

**Derek Melleby**

I remember calling my future roommate the summer before my freshman year of college. As you can imagine, I was excited, but nervous. It's hard to meet anyone over the phone, let alone the person you'll be living with for the next year. We covered the basics: our names, high schools, majors, interests, yada, yada, and then we got down to business: Who has the bigger TV? Who has the most recent video game system? Who has the better stereo? Who has nicer furniture? The average dorm room size is 12'x19' so this was an important conversation to have. Of course, there were many other important questions to ask (Do you tend to stay up late? Do you have early morning classes?), but they could wait until we met on campus. Talking to your future roommate before heading off to college is an essential step to transitioning smoothly to college life. And, I'm sure you can come up with better questions to ask! Reminiscing about this phone call with my first college roommate (and now one of my closest friends) got me thinking about other important conversations that students should have before entering their freshman year of college. Here are 10 other topics students should consider:

**Talk to your parents.** I'm sure you have already had all kinds of conversations with your parents about your future, but it's not a bad idea to have at least one more. Ask your parents about their own hopes and fears concerning your college years. Most importantly, be sure to discuss their expectations for when you come home on breaks. Transitioning back to "family life" after being away can be difficult and sometimes stressful. You will be going through many changes, meeting new friends and learning new ideas. Be open and honest about your own expectations and concerns when you are home on break: What will your family responsibilities be? Will you have a curfew? Is it okay to sleep in until the early afternoon? You will be on your own and developing new habits and ways of living. Make sure they don't conflict too much with your home environment.

**Try to have a conversation with yourself.** This may seem a bit strange, but it's a good idea to take an honest look in the mirror. You could actually stand in front of a mirror and talk to yourself, or you may find it easier to write some things down in a journal. However you do it, pay close attention to the kind of person you're becoming. The years between 18-25 have been called the "critical years" because during this time you will be making decisions that will be formative for the rest of your life. College professor and author of *How to Stay Christian in College*, J. Budziszewski explains what's at stake during this transition:

*You really are grown-up in one sense (you have full adult responsibilities) even though you really aren't grown-up in another (you haven't finished developing). What kind of person are you going to become? I'm not talking about the courses you want to take or the kind of job you want to get someday; I'm talking about the qualities you want to have. Do you desire to be wise, fair and honest—or foolish, unfair and crooked? Kind, loyal and reliable—or mean, backstabbing and unreliable? Brave, faithful and pure—or cowardly, weak and stained? Maybe you've thought about the kind of person you want to become but not about how to become that person. Every act, every decision, every thought will move you either a little closer to being that kind of person—or push you a little further away.*

**Pursue counsel from a pastor or spiritual mentor.** Hopefully you have someone in your life who has brought you along in the faith, someone you can talk to about issues of life and faith. This would be a good person to talk to about transitioning to college. What are your biggest concerns? How do you think your faith will be challenged in college? Ask them what they have observed in your life. What are their concerns for you? What do they think are your strengths and weaknesses? And, most importantly, set up a time to get together during one of your breaks to follow up this conversation.

**Seek advice from someone 20 years removed from college.** It would be best if this person isn't one of your parents. Ask him or her a few questions: What did you value most and least about your college experience? What would you have done differently? What were the most important things

you learned while in college? What were the biggest challenges you faced? Hearing from someone who has “gone before” will help you to make the most of your own college experience.

**Take some time to listen to Solomon.** This “conversation” will take some imagination. Solomon has been dead for quite some time. But he still speaks through two indispensable Old Testament texts that are very appropriate for this stage in your life: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Proverbs is about a young person leaving home in search of wisdom. Sound familiar? And Ecclesiastes, while admittedly difficult to follow at first (it takes time ... read it again and again), will keep you honest as you learn “new” ideas. Solomon is a valuable conversation partner you don’t want to miss. He will do most of the “talking,” you just need to listen and take his advice to heart.

**Have a discussion with a current college student.** You may think you know everything there is to know about college, but you may be surprised. It’s always good to talk to someone who has recently gone through the transition so you know what’s ahead. Ask him or her about what to expect during your first semester. What surprises did he or she find? What mistakes were made? Talking to a current student should provide a clearer picture of what’s ahead.

**Converse with a college professor.** You could do this through e-mail, but it would be more effective if you were able to talk to a professor in person. Some students aren’t prepared for the differences between high school and college academics. Knowing what professors expect from students will be extremely helpful. Ask professors probing questions like: How can I prepare for the academic landscape of the college curriculum (to impress them, try to use big words like I did!)? What kind of study habits should I develop? What is the workload like? What do you hope to accomplish through your classes? Not only will this conversation prepare you for the academic pressures ahead, it will remind you to keep academics at the center of your college experience.

**Call or e-mail a campus minister.** Being connected to a Christian community is essential. You can begin to make some of the needed college connections now, before you go to college. Check the college Web site to find contact information for campus ministers on your campus. Talk to him or her about how to get connected to the group when you arrive on campus.

**Pray.** Having a continual conversation with God through prayer is an important spiritual discipline to develop. So, God would be another crucial conversation partner before heading to college. The following prayer is from *The Book of Common Prayer* and gives you a good place to start:

*God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Part of the difficulty in transitioning from high school to college is uncertainty. Students need a clear sense of what to expect in college before they get there. Conversations like these can begin to paint a clearer picture of what’s ahead and help to alleviate anxiety caused by this transition.

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For more information about the College Transition Initiative visit:

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