

CAMPUS LIFE: How do you interact with teachers and professors, especially when they seem hostile to your faith? Seth Y. Ablordeppey, Adams Basement Room 1

Presentation

1. Background and my experience in academia and how that may influence my perspectives in life.

- Born and raised in the country of Ghana. Have lived in three states in the US and taught in 5 different universities
- Have been in FBC for over 20 years. **Warning: My thoughts may be influenced by that background**

2. We are commanded to be witnesses wherever we are: Matthew 28: 18-20 ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." It does not matter where we are, campus or off-campus, this is the command.

a) Remember that you are God's creation and God has chosen to place His image in you. Gen 1:26-28: ²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."]

b) God expects us to reflect that image and glorify Him: I Corinthians 10: 31. John Fifer, the founder of desiringGod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary puts it this way in a sermon titled: "God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him". We cannot cover His shiny image in us, irrespective of where we are, on campus or off-campus: Ps 16:11 *You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

c) God uses people who are prepared to be used. A prepared individual is one who knows God and who has an on-going relationship with Him. He/she is in tune with God. Remember when God was about to do something different in Israel, that He was no longer going to use the Levite pastor, Eli and his children and instead will be using Samuel? **Where was Samuel?** Samuel's parents had given him up to serve the Lord in the Temple for the rest of his life under Eli. He was sleeping near the Ark of God, when God came three times before Samuel will respond appropriately (after being instructed by Eli): **How did Samuel respond?** "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" It was only when Samuel was ready, and listening that the Lord would reveal Himself and instruct Samuel. When we are prepared, in the right place and waiting to hear God, God speaketh!

1 Samuel 3:9-14 [⁹So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." ¹¹And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. ¹²At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. ¹⁴Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.']

3. How does living in a relationship with God look like in practice? We become aware and we live in the full awareness of His presence at all times. Let's think about this for a minute, you are driving around, you remember your seat belt is not on, or you were going over the speed limit and you get that feeling this is not right, the Lord may be sending you a gentle reminder to do otherwise. When, you are living in the full awareness of His presence, you respond and do what is right, right? But that would not be the case if you are not living in the full awareness of God. Essentially, living in a relationship with God transforms us to a place where you live as if Jesus is right there with you at every moment, because He is actually right there even in your car or on **Campus**.

4. How does a campus environment differ from other places?

- a) Campuses are structured places
- b) Broadly there are three groups of people you would interact with on any Campus

- i) Students
- ii) Administration and staff
- iii) Professors

5. Where might we interact with each of these groups and what opportunities might that offer?

A. Students:

- i) In a formal setting, such as a classroom, there is little opportunity to openly talk about faith if you teach science like I do. However, as a teacher, I am very much aware that the way I present my lesson is an opportunity to witness to my students. I try to be very well prepared for my lessons because my Lord will be listening in. I try *very hard* to be patient even with that student who has just asked me the same question I have answered 5 minutes ago with the thought that he/she may have difficulty catching up with the rest of the class. I believe that creates my opportunity to reach students and serve as a witness in my classroom. I would like my students to feel that this guy doing all he could to reach me. That I believe prepares the students to listen to my testimony at an opportune time.
- ii) As a student, you may find a fellow student struggling with a concept which you have clearly understood, and that may be your opportunity to offer some help and begin a friendship the Lord can use.
- iii) When preparing for exams, students become a little more anxious and you may be the calming agent to step out and help as much as you can. May be you could help a student under a concept or share what was helpful to you in preparing for the exam. People tend to remember times like that for a long time.
- iv) Social events such as games: Look for an opportunity to offer help to that student who does not have a friend to go to the game with or a means of transportation. When you offer help in this manner, you are setting yourself near the Ark of God where the Lord can find you.
- v) Take a struggling student to lunch and take advantage of the opportunity in saying grace before eating pray specifically him/her. Tell him/her you sometimes pray for him/her, i.e., if you do. Send them a note or e-mail, and say I prayed for you. I still remember a card one of our church members send me while I was in graduate school almost 30 years ago. And yes, you can have that lasting impact!

B. Administration and Staff

Just like any other environment, except that taking unusual interest in a student who is not clear about a process or helping that student get the library book she is looking for could go a long way to put you where God can use you.

C. Professors

- i) These are people who are generally your "superiors" and your reason for being on campus depends on them and thus, there is a feeling that they are different. Look, they are just humans like you and I, and you would be pleasantly surprised when you meet them outside the lecture hall. They are often willing to talk to you especially if they are not meeting some deadline like a grant proposal that must go at 5 pm.
- ii) Most professors I know will not be hostile to your faith even if they are atheists and you should feel free to discuss your faith at an opportune time. Some people think arguing with a person can win people to the Lord. It is not impossible, but your best chance to win anyone to the Lord is to be in prayer for them and to look for opportunities to serve them.
- The other day, I saw my students passing a card around to welcome back a professor whose father had a stroke and he went to spend time with him. *How do you think that professor felt when he received that card?* You can witness to your professors by praying for them and looking for opportunities to share your faith in expressions such as that demonstrated by these students.

- Before exams, I'll sometimes see some of our students gather together and pray before they enter into the exam room. What a wonderful expression of their faith. It may not mean much, but someone may be drawn to the Lord as a result and you may be indirectly witnessing to your professors in that manner.

6. What if the professor openly expresses hostility to your faith?

Consider them as just one of those in opposition to the Lord [there are so many in our world today] that you have come to know. Put him/her on your prayer list, and pray for them as long as you remember them and look for an opportunity to witness through positive interaction.

7. So should we engage openly in a debate with those hostile to our faith? This past Tuesday, the science guy, Bill Nye and Ken Ham of the Creation Museum fame had a well publicized debate about evolution and creation. In as far as it drew attention to the issue for folks to talk about it may have created an opportunity for you to share your faith. Indeed, God uses just about any opportunity to reach out to folks.

And so, yes, you and I should be prepared to defend the faith in appropriate venues [*1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be **prepared** to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect*] but it is better to avoid open hostility as much as possible. You could use your time more productively elsewhere. Remember when Jesus sent the seventy-two out (you are one of them) He said about the towns which would not welcome them : Luke 10: 10-11 [*¹⁰But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ¹¹'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The Kingdom of God has come near*]