WHEN YOUR BELIEFS ARE BELITTLED

I started Junior Kindergarten when I was 4 years old. I graduated from Ontario Theological Seminary with my second master's degree when I was 26. That means that I spent 22 years of my life in school. More than 2 decades! Education is important. The Bible says we are to love God with our minds. How do you love God with your mind? By using it. That means using it, developing it and educating it. By learning all you can. Today we are continuing our series No Compromise.

Daniel 1:17-21 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. 18 At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. 20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. 21 And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Have you ever heard the expression 'knowledge is power'? That comes from the Bible.

Proverbs 24:5 A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength

Knowledge brings strength and wisdom brings power. I am going to talk about the difference between wisdom and knowledge later but for now let's just say they are different but both are important.

Daniel and his three friends were chosen for a special program. They were taken from their homes when they were just teenagers and put into a special school. I am sure they felt both excitement and fear. Anyone here remember what it was like when you went off to college? A little bit of excitement, a little bit of fear. The problem was that the school they were sent to was totally pagan. The Babylonian culture was filled with polytheism. It was a pagan education system.

Daniel 1:4 (MSG) young men who were healthy and handsome, intelligent and well-educated, good prospects for leadership positions in the government, perfect specimens! -- and indoctrinate them in the Babylonian language and the lore of magic and fortune-telling.

The Babylonian school system was totally ungodly. It was based on myths and all kinds of superstitions. It involved all kinds of occult practices, false science and mysticism.

That is not to say that everything in the Babylonian culture was bad. The Babylonians were the first to discover the planet Jupiter. They were great at studying the stars. However, along with astronomy came astrology. The Babylonians believed in many different gods. They invented the Zodiac, believing that the gods spoke to us through the stars. The Babylonians thought the number 60 was a magical number so they divided up the hour into 60 minutes, and each minute into 60 seconds. We still use this today. They invented the idea that a circle has 360 degrees, that means 6 times 60.

In any education, it is only as good as the content you learn. You can go to school all your life but if what you are learning in untrue then that content is not going to help you. In America in 1963 the Supreme Court took the Bible and prayer out of schools. Up to that time for over three hundred years the Bible had been the primary textbook in public education. Someone once said that education without God is like a ship without a compass.

Almost all the Ivy League schools in America were started by pastors to train pastors. Harvard, Yale and Princeton were all started as bible colleges. Over time, they removed God. The problem was that they didn't just remove Christianity. They took out Christianity but replaced it with another religion called secular humanism. The founder of modern education was John Dewey and he was a secular humanist. He called humanism our 'common faith'.

Most people in the world today are not atheists. They make up only a very small percentage of the world's population. In the last 20 years the number of atheists worldwide has actually shrunk by 2%. The one place you will find atheists is on college and university campuses and in the media.

So how do you excel in your education even when the underlying foundation behind that education goes against your faith? Let me give you six things.

1. Stand for God – decide in advance your focus

It is important that you decide ahead of time that you are going to stand for God. You have to make the decision before the test. Whenever I speak with youth about purity and not having sex before marriage, I tell them that the time to decide how far is too far is before the relationship starts, not when you are with the person in the dark and your hormones are raging. Likewise, you have to make the decision to stand for God in advance of the test.

2 Timothy 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

Count on it. It's a guarantee. If I am not suffering any persecution in my life, guess what – it may mean that you are not living a godly life. It may mean that I am living such a chameleon life that people around me do not even know I am a Christian.

If you are a Christian and you are planning to go to University or College you can be sure that your faith is going to be challenged and tested. The biggest test you will face is not in one of your classes, it is whether you will remain true to Christ.

In Sept of 1983 I started at the University of Guelph. I had been at camp the week before, I was on a spiritual high. I arrived at the school ready to meet my new roommate. I was so tired I fell asleep and woke only to the sound of a closing door. My new roommate had come in and sat down a box. Then he had wrote a note and stuck it to the door with a huge hunting knife. The note read "Dude, gone to get beer. Back soon to get blitzed. Your new roomy, Guido." I did not know what to do. I decided that when he returned, I would tell him I was a Christian, so I left my bible out on my bed. He returned, and the first thing he said was "I hate Christians! I was just walking through the University Center and I saw this table for a group called Navigators and I thought is was a canoeing club, but turns out they are Christians! I hate that…" I calmly slid my bible under my pillow. That was the beginning of a very difficult year. Every person on my floor made it their personal mission in life to make fun of me because I was a Christian. In the end, I almost gave up my faith.

That story is unfortunately far too common. For most Christian young people, University either causes them to lose their faith, or go against their faith or grow in their faith.

Daniel and his friends excelled at their education because they were prepared. They did not allow the false teaching to influence their thinking. It is like eating a whole fish. You eat the meat but then you throw away the bones. Education is a lot like that. You have to be discerning.

You accept the parts that are true but then you avoid the parts that are not. That is also true of the media. You hold to your worldview and use it to evaluate everything that is happening around you.

Daniel 1:8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine …

He resolved himself. He decided in advance what he would and would not do. How do you excel in education? It starts be recognizing that, like everything else in life, God comes first.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

You can know a lot of things but not know the most important thing. You can have a lot of education and a number of degrees, but you can still be ignorant of the truth. Decide in advance to stand for God and His truth.

2. Study – never stop learning

As believers it is important that we never stop learning. The moment you stop learning you stop leading. All true leaders are learners.

Proverbs 18:15 (MSG) Wise men and women are always learning, always listening for fresh insights.

There are two important words here, learning and listening. There is a connection between them. Generally, you are not learning when you are always talking. Listening is important. The better listener you are, probably the better learner you will be.

I spent 20 + years in school, but the day I graduated I did not say "glad that is over. Now I never have to read another book or take another test ever again." I think the real value in education is not simply the information you gain while you are in school. I took 4 years of courses in biology during university and I can hardly remember anything I actually learned during that time. The value of education is that it teaches you to learn, and that is something you carry with you through life.

Proverbs 19:20 Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.

What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? They are both important, but they are different. Knowledge is information that you gain from education or experience. Wisdom is seeing and responding to that knowledge from God's viewpoint. Do you understand the difference? Knowledge is knowing the road system, wisdom is navigating the best path to your destination.

Some people have a lot of knowledge but very little wisdom. They know lots of facts and figures, but they are not wise in how they live their lives. A lot of people get degrees but never ask themselves the important questions of life. Who am I? What is my purpose? Where am I headed? Those questions are not answered with knowledge, they are solved by wisdom.

3. Steep Yourself in God's Word – be a student of the bible

As Christians we are called first and foremost to study God's word. We are to be students of the bible.

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

What does it mean to steep yourself? Do you know what it means to steep a tea bag? That means that when you put the tea bag in the hot water it has to sit there for a while. You have to stir it and let it sit until the water has had a chance to pull al the flavour out of the tea. You cannot rush the process.

That is what it means to be a student of God's word. We have to spend time in it. There is no fast track or shortcuts. You need to spend time in it until you have had a chance to become saturated by it. That means not only spending time in God's word but spending time with God while you are in His word. You have to allow the Holy Spirit to move and illuminate truth to you.

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

If you want to be successful in life you need to meditate on God's word. We have talked about meditation before. It means to ruminate, to spend time allowing God's word to roll around inside you.

How does the U.S. Treasury Department train their agents to spot counterfeit bills? There are thousands of different ways counterfeit bills are made, and people invent knew ways all the time. You do not learn what a counterfeit bill is by looking at counterfeit. The way they train agents to recognize counterfeit bills is they give them fresh, clean, crisp bills and tell them to study them. The more they understand the genuine article the better they are at recognizing counterfeits.

The more you learn the truth the better you will be at recognizing the lies. The reason why so many Christians today buy into the lies of the devil and the philosophies of the world is because they do not know the truth. They do not see the fake because they have never experienced the authentic.

Psalms 119:104 I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

When you know the real thing you can spot a phony from a mile away.

4. Surround Yourself with Believers – you need their encouragement

One of the reasons Daniel made it through his three-year indoctrination program was the fact that he was not alone. He had three good friends who were helping him. He had a small group. He surrounded himself with other believers. God wants us to have non-believers as friends too. God wants us to share the Good News with everyone. If you have no non-Christian friends then who can you share that Good News with?

However, your best friends, the ones you spend the most time with and who influence you the most should be strong Christians. Why? Let me ask you a simple question. If I walk over to you and you are sitting on the floor, is it easier for me to pull you up or for you to pull me down? It is always easier to pull people down than to pull them up. In your life, who is pulling you down spiritually and who is pulling you up spiritually?

Who do you want to be as a person 10 years from now? That is an easy question to answer. Just look at the people you are surrounding yourself with. Tell me the people you are surrounding yourself with and the things you are feeding your mind with and I can tell you the kind of person you are becoming.

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

This especially true of young people. You need to have spiritually mature people in your life. You need to seek out friendships with spiritually mature peers. That is the power of youth ministry. I am always amazed at parents who do not send their kids to youth group. For my kids, attending youth group was not an option. It was an expectation. There were times they struggled with that.

I had a terrible first year at the University of Guelph. I determined that my second year would be different. I joined the Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship group. My second year I lived with a guy from that group. We did devotions together. We went in to the school for morning prayers together. I spent my lunch times in the IVCF office. I got involved. It provided me the support I needed to not only live out my faith but to be bold in sharing my faith with others. Studies show that for most students if you do not connect within the first few months you probably never will.

By the way, I will just throw this in for parents. The Bible tells parents not to waste money on getting an education for student who do not want to learn.

Proverbs 17:16 Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?

It is better to wait until they have a heart for learning then to send them off before they really know what they want to do or have a heart for wisdom and want to learn. If you are not going to college to learn then you are probably there for things that are not good.

5. Stay Connected – to a church, small group and ministry

There are three things that are essential for Christian growth; a church, a small group and a ministry. All three of these are important. You need input, you need output and you need support.

The first thing you need is you need a church to attend. This is so important. You need input, and not just something you watch on TV or online. You need to be part of a corporate worship service and in a church that preaches the word of God. You need Christian education classes.

You also need to be part of a small group. You need accountability and a place to connect and be able to ask questions.

You also need a place to serve. You learn the most and grow the most through serving.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

This passage talks about encouragement. Spurring one another forward. It is in this context that we read ‘let us not give up meeting together.’ Why? So many students lose their faith because they have no one encouraging them to stay strong. They give up on church, they do not go to a small group or a place to serve and therefore loose the encouragement of other believers.

Why go to church instead of just staying home at watching something online in your pyjamas? There are so many things that happen when you come to church that do not happen when you don’t.

You take a coal from the fire and put it aside by itself and it will quickly go out. Put it back in the fire and it begins to glow again.

6. Stand Firm – remember that God will reward you

Matthew 16:27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

The bible is clear that some day we will give an account of our lives to God, and He will reward each one of us according to what we have done.

Matthew 5:11-12 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Freud and Nietzsche and Marx and Darwin, all bowing down before the Lord. Every person you have ever known. One of my favourite verses in the bible is this;

Ephesians 6:13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Daniel and his friends refused to allow themselves to be conformed into the Babylonian culture. In the midst of pressure they not only survived but learned to thrive and excelled in everything they did.

University was a difficult but rewarding time in my life. It helped make me the person that I am today. Whether you are a student or not, it is important to be prepared. As Christians we have to be ready for the challenges that lie before us. We need to be informed. We need to be solid in our foundation and have a proper Christian worldview. As believers we have to be ready to face the challenges that our changing culture is throwing at us. We need to always keep learning.

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether this happens at twenty or at eighty. Anyone who keeps on learning not only remains young but becomes constantly more valuable, regardless of physical capacity -- Henry Ford

According to a news report, a certain private school in Victoria recently was faced with a unique problem. A number of 12-year-old girls were beginning to use lipstick and would put it on in the bathroom. That was fine, but after they put an their lipstick they would press their lips to the mirror, leaving dozens of little lip prints. Every night, the maintenance man would remove them and the next day, the girls would put them back. Finally the principal decided that something had to be done. She called all the girls to the bathroom and met them there with the maintenance man. She explained that all these lip prints were causing a major problem for the custodian who had to clean the mirrors every night. To demonstrate how difficult it had been to clean the mirrors, she asked the maintenance man to show the girls how much effort was required. He took out a long-handled squeegee, dipped it in the toilet, and cleaned the mirror with it. Since then, there have been no lip prints on the mirror. There are teachers, and then there are educators...