



LEADER'S GUIDE

THRIVING at COLLEGE

HOW TO EXCEL IN SCHOOL AS A CHRISTIAN

College is about finding your place in God's world—not fitting God into your plans, but finding your place in his—so that you can be a blessing to others.

—Alex Chediak

Going to college can be exciting, anxiety inducing, and expensive! You want young people to get the most out of their college experience but they have lots of questions. So where do you begin? Consult an insider.



Alex Chediak, a seasoned college professor and student mentor, wants students to do more than matriculate—he wants them to grow through their experience at school. *Thriving at College* covers the ten most common mistakes that college students make—and how to avoid them! Whether a high school student is just beginning to send out applications or a college freshman has already met his or her new roommate, Alex offers sound advice in choosing a major, discerning one's vocation, balancing academics and fun, and cultivating relationships with peers and professors.

Most important, Alex encourages students not only to keep their faith in God but to build a vibrant one, becoming the people God created them to be.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS BOOK

You can help guide the young people in your sphere of influence become godly leaders as you look at *Thriving at College* together. Consider studying a chapter at a time and using the discussion questions at the end of each one to get students thinking seriously about this new exhilarating world called college. Each week, ask the participants to share what they found interesting or what information impacted them the most in the reading. Their observations can direct your discussion. If your time is limited, you might ask for general thoughts on the chapter for that week, and then focus on specific questions such as the following suggestions.

INTRODUCTION: SURVIVING OR THRIVING?

Why did you choose to go to college? What were your motivations? Your goals?

Common Mistake #1: Chucking Your Faith

Have you ever talked to a non-Christian friend who said you were “intolerant”? How did you handle that? Have you ever met people who speak of “tolerance” but who aren't very tolerant themselves?

Common Mistake #2: Treating College as If It Were High School

Facebook has forever changed the way we view “friendship.” Yet having one thousand Facebook friends can sometimes be a distraction from having a few really true friends. Have you ever replaced friendship with distraction?

Common Mistake #3: Not Being Intentional

Are you in any relationships now that bring you down or pull you away from God? What do you plan to do about it?

Common Mistake #4: Distorting Dating and Romance

How have your previous dating relationships (if any) gone? How did they start? How did they end? Looking back, what can you learn from these experiences?

Common Mistake #5: Refusing to Grow Up

Are you growing in financial responsibility and independence? Are you living within your means? What is helping you or hindering you from achieving that goal?

Common Mistake #6: Being a Flake

Have you ever had someone flake out on you about something? How did you feel? What do you wish the person had done instead?

Common Mistake #7: Living Out of Balance

How do you approach your work? Do you see it as drudgery? How much time do you spend on recreation? What things really refresh and recharge you?

Common Mistake #8: Being Too Passive or Too Cocky

Do you have any expectations about your abilities or future prospects that may ultimately prove unrealistic? Would it leave you devastated, or could you trust God to create other avenues for you to serve him?

Common Mistake #9: Living for Grades

Have you been jealous of others who seem more academically gifted than you? Have you battled a feeling of pride toward those who seem less academically gifted than you? What are ways to curb those feelings?

Common Mistake #10: Wasting Opportunities

What extracurricular activities have you chosen to pursue and why? How do these activities impact your academics?

DO YOU OWN YOUR CHRISTIAN FAITH?

Alex Chediak writes,

I pray college will be the time in your life when God really gets a hold of you, solidifying your faith and empowering you to make great strides toward godliness in your actions, thoughts, and motivations.

THINKING ABOUT THRIVING

- 1. Ask the group for a definition of “getting saved.”**
- 2. Would anyone like to tell us about when he or she got saved? What were the obvious changes in your life?**

Continue with Alex’s observations below. For the verses Alex mentions, either write them on a white board, prepare them in advance as an overhead or PowerPoint, or ask different participants to look up the verses and read them aloud.

“Getting saved” means escaping (or being saved from) the consequences of our disobedience to God. It also means being freed to obey God from a new heart, from an internal desire to love and please him—to do his will with the right motivation, not to earn his favor but in response to having already received it for all eternity. We’re told it requires a new birth (John 3:3, 5; 1 Peter 1:3), because we’re born into this world dead to the things of God (Ephesians 2:1-3). The Old Testament speaks similarly of our need for a “new heart” and a “new spirit” (Ezekiel 36:24-28), namely, one that is responsive and warm toward God rather than lifeless and cold.

THINKING ABOUT THRIVING

- 1. What steps have you taken to maintain godliness in your actions, thoughts, and motivations? Are these steps easy or difficult to maintain in college? Why is that the case?**

Alex writes,

If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Good works don't save us, but those who are saved always produce good works. We're not talking about perfection here. We're talking about direction—the tenor, the thrust, the overall aim of your life. Is your deepest desire to please God? We can't become God's children by performing good works. But if you trust him, then you'll love him because you'll regard him and what he did to be precious. And if you love him, then you'll obey him. A Christian is not ashamed of Jesus. We identify with him and with those who are his.

THINKING ABOUT THRIVING

1. Do any of you struggle with trying to be a “perfect” Christian? Why is that an impossible goal?
2. Are you willing to undergo ridicule for believing in Jesus? Has that ever happened to you?
3. Have you ever chickened out in a situation because you knew that if so-and-so realized you were a Christ follower, that person would laugh at you?
4. Do you identify with God's people? Or are all of your closest friends people who want nothing to do with Jesus? If so, why is that so?

Alex points out that most people gravitate to people who share their actual values, “those things you personally cherish and hold dear.” He writes,

I'm not saying Christians shouldn't have friendships with non-Christ followers. We should be salt and light wherever God places us, seeking to influence others toward God by our words and actions. But if we truly belong to God, we will seek connections and friendships with those who share a desire to live in a way that pleases God.

THINKING ABOUT THRIVING

1. Do you notice an obvious change in your behavior when you are hanging out with Christ followers or non-Christ followers? Has anyone been surprised to find out that you follow Christ or have you been surprised by anyone?

Either read or display on an overhead or PowerPoint slide, 2 Peter 1:3-6:

In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness.

2 Peter 1:3-6, NLT

By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

A CLOSING WORD AND ACTION PLAN FROM ALEX

Come to own your faith during your college years. Don't be content to coast on your parents' faith or to do what's right just to keep up appearances with your friends. Make Jesus Christ the treasure of your life, your highest priority, so that others can see you walk to the beat of his drum. Pray for the character qualities in 2 Peter 1:3-6.

1. Ask the participants to find the character qualities in the passage and list them.

Live from the inside out. And you'll find deep rest in the knowledge that you belong to him and will never fall away, having been born again “not of perishable seed but of imperishable” (1 Peter 1:23).

Make your college years a time to

- Dig deeper than you thought was ever possible.
- Discover your calling.
- Cultivate lifelong relationships with those who most provoke you to trust and love God, to put away childishness, and to make wise choices.
- And in the words of missionary William Carey, “Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.”