

A Special Time

Sometimes people talk about their “good old days”... the time in their lives that to them was golden. The memory of those days seems to sweeten with the passing of years, and perhaps there is even a subtle longing to somehow return to that time -- though they know they cannot. We all have special times in our lives like this that we fondly remember.

I can say that I have enjoyed something about every phase of my life -- but my college years were truly special. For the first time in my life, I was away from home. I was flying solo! I was putting into practice (or not) the many life-lessons my parents and others had instilled in me in my growing-up years. I was making my own decisions, and I was making my own mistakes! But looking back, I now know the college life was not “real” life. Not really. My only responsibility was to attend classes, do homework, complete projects, and take tests. Other than that, my time was my own. No one was really depending on me to do anything. I had no children to support, and I had no other mouths to feed (not even a pet). These were indeed special days!

I attended a state college -- Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee. During the first week at college in the Fall of 1982, not having a lot to do, I made my way over to the University Christian Student Center (UCSC) which was just a block off campus from TTU. The UCSC was a ministry of the Collegieside Church of Christ. On this particular night, the UCSC was having a free hamburger supper for any and all TTU students, and since I have always loved hamburgers, I decided to stop by and check it out. As I munched on a burger, I met several of the students that “hung out” at the UCSC, and I was instantly impressed with them. They seemed to be interested in me and in how things were going for me as a new student -- and I was impressed that they were living out their faith. They were not afraid to walk up and talk to me -- a complete stranger -- and to welcome and invite me to join in the activities of their group. These people were real, happy, and super friendly! I had some good friends from my hometown that also attended TTU, but I was excited about what I had seen at the UCSC and wanted to know more!

Before long I was a “regular” at the UCSC. We had activities going on all the time! There were student-led devotionals (or “devos”) just about every night of the week! Some of the most beautiful singing I have ever heard was at our singing devos. (In fact, during one of the first singing devos I ever attended, I remember hearing one particular girl sitting near me singing beautifully... and I thought to myself, “That cute girl has a beautiful voice!” Well, a few years later, I married that cute girl!). We had intramural teams in every sport and competed with other organizations on campus. We had Bible Studies that met in the dorms at TTU to reach out to the students there. As a result of outreach on the TTU campus, we would often have late-night baptisms as college students at a tender phase in their lives made the decision to turn their lives over to Christ (Acts 16:29-34)! We had retreats quarterly where we would spend an entire weekend at a beautiful park like Fall Creek Falls and would enjoy great lessons, singing, games, and time together. There was always something going on at the UCSC, and I was excited to be a part of it!

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I remember being amazed at the talent and dedication of so many of the upperclassmen that were part of the UCSC. These guys (and gals) were my “heroes”! They really inspired me to want to grow and be more like Christ! And it was exciting to see -- really for the first time in my life -- many people my own age who were actually fired up about serving Christ and making an impact in the world for Him! The more I hung around this group of Christians, the more I loved them! Over time, the people at the UCSC became some of my closest friends during my college years, and I still keep up with many of them (especially via FaceBook).

I do not know what would have happened to me if I had not gotten involved at the UCSC in my college years. There were lots of “voices” calling to me during those years pulling me in many different directions -- and many of those voices were evil (although I may not have known it at the time)! The college years are so critical -- they truly are a time of decision. During these years, many people make some horrible decisions that lead them down a dark, dangerous path. But also during these years, many make decisions that bring them closer to God! Looking back, I can say that I was truly blessed to have been a part of the UCSC, and I am thankful for the positive and long-lasting impact it had on my life.

Just about every day, I think back on those days with a smile -- lots of good stories, lots of laughter, and even some tears! Oh, I made some huge mistakes back then, and I did some really stupid things -- really stupid! But at the same time, this group of college Christians -- imperfect as we all were -- helped me to grow closer to Christ during my college years... and in fact, it helped set the trajectory for my continued growth and service to Christ when my college days were done.

College was a unique time in life. A special time. And the UCSC was a big part of why this time was so special for me.

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