

SURVIVING DORM LIFE

**TRUTH
ON
CAMPUS**

Surviving Dorm Life
Text by Brian Weed
© Truth On Campus

This booklet is part of the *Living Series*, a set of publications from Truth On Campus which aim to cultivate Christian living on college and university campuses.

Please freely share, copy, and distribute this document, but please don't change any of the content or charge money for it.

To request printed copies for your use, email talk@truthoncampus.com

To download this document visit www.truthoncampus.com.

Dorm life... Christian style.

*Can you live as a Christian
while living 24/7 with others?*

*Even others who don't share
your faith?*

Even others who oppose your faith?

*What about the challenges
...and the temptations?*

It can be done.

It is possible for you to live as a Christian in a college dorm.

Admittedly, there are many special challenges that come with it—living in close quarters with people from all different backgrounds; working out personality conflicts and differing schedules; participating in activities; unexpected late-night room discussions; unique opportunities for (and temptations to) sin... But if you know God, that is, the God Jesus revealed, are there any challenges dorm life presents that he can't handle?

This booklet contends that the answer to that question is no. There's nothing dorm life can throw at you that is bigger, more powerful, or smarter than God. Maybe that's kind of obvious to say, but doesn't it help just to get it out on the table?

If you're already living in a dorm, thriving as a Christian, this booklet might provide some further encouragement, or thoughts to share with friends. If you're new to dorm life (or maybe newly Christian in a dorm), this booklet is to help you get your head in the game, early in the game. If you feel like you've already failed to "survive" as a Christian in your dorm, these thoughts are designed to help you figure out where you went wrong, and get back on track.

We'll start at the beginning.

WHAT IS DORM LIFE, FOR A CHRISTIAN?

Sometimes we don't stop and ask ourselves the most basic questions about what we're doing. Maybe you're sitting in your dorm room right now. Or maybe you can just picture it. Look around—bed, desk, microwave, closet, T.V., whatever else you pack in there—and ask yourself this question: What *is* this? Take a walk down your hall, (maybe the day you move in), and ask yourself, "What does it mean that I'm here?" Simply pondering the question can help you in so many ways.

Of course, the quick answers are true. You're there because you live too far away from your school, so this is just a place to live. You're there because you wanted out of your house, maybe. Or you wanted to experience the "college life." Some people even think that dorm life is a way to finally be independent.

But if you're a Christian, these obvious answers can't really be the end of the issue. We're *Christians*, which means we define things in reference to the big, eternal issues of life, like the Kingdom of God and life beyond the grave—and even more than that—we think about how things are defined in reference to God Himself.

Now, before we go all cosmic here, maybe we can give a very simple answer and then explain a little more. Here's a way to say it:

Your time in the dorm is a unique opportunity to live out your faith before non-believers.

WHY ARE YOU LIVING IN A DORM?

If that's the case, how would we answer the related question, which is: *why* are you living in a dorm?

Let's be careful of answering too quickly here. We just said that as Christians we define everything in reference to God himself, and the things he says are most important. So what if we helped ourselves think through this by flipping the question around and saying that we aren't looking for *our* answer to the question first, but *God's* answer. How does God answer this question?

*As Christians,
we define
things in
reference to the
big, eternal
issues of life.*

We could fill a whole book with answers to this question, and I invite you to do more exploring to flesh out what you find here, but for the sake of space, here are four reasons we can safely bet God has you living in a dorm.

1. God wants to conform you into the image of Christ.

As Paul says in his letter to the Romans: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."¹ In other words, God is seeing to it that everything in our lives works towards his goal of giving Jesus many *siblings*, many sons and daughters of God

who share the likeness of the Father that Jesus displays. If that's true of *everything* in life, it's true of your dorm life. God wants to use it to make you more like Jesus.

2. God wants to work in others through you, as he works in you.

Isn't this principle all over the New Testament? "You are the salt of the earth,"² Jesus said; and we know he meant that he was making us to be a certain type of people, so that our environment would taste a certain way. It's the same with, "You are the light of the world."³ Or how about this—"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit"⁴ That's what Jesus said to his disciples, and surely he says it to us. He chose you to live

He wants other Christians to be strengthened because you're living there.

in a dorm so that you could bear fruit. "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."⁵ We can bet he wants other Christians to be strengthened because you're living there. He wants people helped. And, of course, he wants our next point...

3. God wants people to be saved in your dorm.

God, says Paul, "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."⁶ He wants people in your dorm to be saved, because you're living in it.

4. God wants Jesus to be glorified in your dorm.

That's really the point of this whole thing, right—glorifying God by glorifying Jesus Christ? God wants Jesus to seem more important, more weighty, more compelling in your dorm, because you live there.

So we have our marching orders. Our response, if we want to live as Christians in our dorms, is to make God's aims *our* aims. We make it our aim to see Jesus glorified in our dorm.

HOW CAN YOU DO THIS?

If you've stopped and thought about these things, you've taken the first steps towards practically living this out. Here are some more thoughts to help you put these things into action.

1. Cultivate your personal intimacy with God.

This is going to be right at the heart of your entire Christian life, and life in a dorm is no different. If you're not growing in your affection *for*, interest *in*, and excitement *about* Jesus *himself*, you're probably not going to thrive as a Christian in the dorm. If you're not regularly (even constantly) interacting with him, talking to him, depending on him, worshipping him—other things will end up feeling more attractive and interesting than him.

There's just no substitute for regular, serious times with him reading your Bible, meditating on it, and praying over your day and your life. Learning to live off God's word and promises, day in and day out, is simply a necessity. Knowing how to live in dependence on Christ all day is equally essential. If you feel you're deficient in this area, pray and seek help from other believers.

It's also crucial that you be mature in your Bible reading and study. There's just no sense being college-level for your degree and second-grade for your God. It won't work.

One note here: you must guard against the tendency to let this part of our life slip. It's the easiest thing to neglect. You're not being graded on it. You don't have to hand it in by 7:00 AM Friday. Your roommate's not going to bed early to help you get up early. The college doesn't have special devo-nooks set aside for Christians to grow. You know? But I wonder if all the Christians who depart from the faith or fall into sin in college could trace the problem back to a lack of time spent cultivating personal intimacy with Christ.

So if you wake up and realize you haven't cracked your Bible or spent more than 3 consecutive minutes in prayer in a few weeks, don't despair or give up, just get to it. If you want more practical help in this area, see the TCSI booklet "Planning Your Time With God."⁷

Intimacy with Christ is going to be at the heart of your whole Christian life.

2. Find and cultivate relationships with other Christians.

This is key. Generally speaking, the Lord doesn't intend for Christians to live the Christian life alone. You should try, as soon as possible, to find and join yourself to other Christians on campus. This means, most obviously, seeing what campus groups are active, alive, and helpfully biblical in their focus.

It also means seeking out and cultivating real Christian friendships. This may present a particular challenge, because you might not be able to figure out who the Christians on campus are. When that happens, too many students sit back and blend in with classmates and dormmates. May I suggest a different path?

Be a leader and a gatherer.

If you take the lead, you might find other Christians coming out of the woodwork.

What I mean by being a “leader” is simply that when someone takes a strong, loving stance in their Christianity, and is up front and vocal about it, it has a way of prompting others to be more up front and “public” about their Christianity too. If you take the lead, you might find other Christians coming out of the woodwork and being drawn to you.

Along with being a leader, be a “gatherer” too—be someone who actively seeks out other believers. Where are they? Don't sit around saying they're not there. Go *find* them. Are they doing anything together? Are they scattered and alone? You could start a Bible study on Thursday nights at 10:00 PM in your room. Coffee and discussion. *Voila!* Instant group of friends. Instant rallying point for believers in your dorm.

Finally, one last crucial thing is to find and connect yourself to a local church, probably off-campus. Nothing can help strengthen your Christian walk *on* campus like regularly getting *off* campus to get the teaching of the Word and worship and prayer with other believers. Plus, the church is definitely part of God's plan for your life, always.⁸

3. Guard your heart against private, and public, sin.

Maybe you moved to school from an environment that encouraged you in your Christian walk more, and now you're less watched and more able to find your way into tempting situations. Dorm life presents unique challenges. But even if you've never had much oversight or external encouragement in your Christian walk, you need to guard against sin in your life, both privately and publicly.

Giving in to temptation privately will cripple you publicly. Even though you may feel like you have unlimited opportunities to sin, and an unending battle with it, seeking God's power to live in private holiness before him is part of the process of being conformed into the image of Christ. If you've already allowed compromise into your life, you might consider seeking out a trusted Christian friend or leader to pray with and get counsel for moving forward. "Guard your heart with all diligence," the wise man said, "for out of it flow the issues of life!"⁹

Ditto for public sin. Most likely, unless you're at a very buttoned-down school, everyone is getting drunk and stoned with, sleeping with, fighting with, and cheating with everyone. The current of that river is very strong in the dorm, and it's easy to feel swept away. But God is stronger. Your testimony as one who does not join in will be one of the most powerful tools you'll have with which to serve God. A reputation for Godliness (even if it's a recent change in your life) will prompt all kinds of conversations about why you are the way you are.

A reputation for Godliness will prompt conversations about why you are the way you are.

4. Be ready to stand alone.

Point three leads naturally into point four. If there's two things most of your dorm is probably not doing, it's resisting sin and living lives of holiness. Which means that if you want to live that way, you're going to be in the minority. You should be ready to stand alone. If you're not willing to spend a Friday night alone in your room sometimes while everyone in the universe is at The Big Party, you might need to rethink whether dorm life is for you.¹⁰ If you're not willing to be misunderstood, gossiped about, slandered, argued with, and targeted for special temptations, you're probably not being realistic about where you're really living.

Trust Christ. Remember all the saints who...well...even *died* for their stand. Show your fellow students a different quality of life. Risk it.

5. Be prayerful, generous, tactful, patient, and hopeful with your roommates.

Dorm life isn't just about the hall or the building, it's also a lot about room life. That's where the rubber really meets the road, because that's where you're in the closest contact with others. That's where who you are really gets lived out.

One friend who gave input for this booklet said, "It is hard being around people at all times and living in tight quarters, but it is easier *loving* on them instead of being selfish and easily angered. *Praying* for your roommates and asking for a greater love and desire to serve and bless them also helps you see the situation in a new light—and helps you take on Christ's love for them. *Sharing* is important as well. At school you have to go without a lot of things, but by sharing your things with others you receive a ten-fold blessing back in return! Instead of being stingy and hoarding all of your belongings, for example food, clothing, medicine, etc., I've found that by sharing and giving of yourself, your belongings and your time, it is much more beneficial and rewarding. It is more blessed to give than receive!"

Room life is where the rubber really meets the road.

Doesn't that sound Christ-like? I summed it up in that bold heading above: Praying for your roommate, being chill and giving with your stuff, tactfully appreciating their space and their way of doing things, patiently bearing with them, and loving them with a love that "hopes all things" will help you be a creator of a different kind of room.¹¹

If that sounds like a tall order (it is), go back to the first item in this list. Read Galatians 5:13-26 to see a list of the kinds of qualities you'll need to be a good roommate.

6. Pray for a "holy space" in your room.

By "holy space" I don't mean some sort of mystical "territory marking" or anything like that. I mean "holy" in the sense of "set apart." Everyone's situation is different, but if I could share an experience...

When I arrived as a freshman at Heinz Dorm at Beaver College,¹² I had two roommates who were not believers, and a hall full of non-Christians. (In other words, a normal situation.) After the first couple nights, when everything seemed to explode in a frenzy of sex and drinking, I realized I would need some sort of sanctuary—some place where things were different. I remember sitting on my bed when my roommates were out, and asking God to set my room apart as a place of peace, a place apart from sin, and a place where others could come to find the same thing. He granted the request. My roommates honored my request to not bring partners to sleep with into the room, and not to drink in the room. People came to sit on the beds and talk about God. I had a place I could study, think, and often even pray. It worked.

Your situation may be different, and God might work things differently, but praying about your room can only help you connect God's power to your situation.¹³

7. Go on the offense.

Some people attempt to maintain their Christianity in a given situation by just battling away temptation and trying to avoid sin. Won't work! You can't live the Christian life negatively.

Instead, attack! Talk about the Gospel with everyone who will listen. Start spiritual conversations. Talk about church. Love people. Love the most unlovable people, the people other people don't like. Love people that the culture tells us Christians don't love. Pray for roommates and hallmates, specifically, regularly, by name. Pursue God's kingdom in your halls and from room to room. Openly gather with other Christians and talk about spiritual things. Worship in song in your room.

I have a friend who got tired of not having anything to do on weekend nights, so he gathered the Christians he knew, and they spend Friday and Saturday nights together, outside of the biggest party spots, handing out hot chocolate and talking about the Gospel with people going in and out. Instant way to beat the temptation to join the party.

*Praying
about your
room connects
God's power
to your
situation.*

Another friend offered this insight: “Sharing Jesus with other classmates and professors gives an automatic accountability for living for Christ on campus.” I concur. Bringing Jesus into the situation changes everything. The Gospel can become your guard.

REMEMBER, DORM LIFE IS ONLY A SHORT SEASON.

There’s more that can be said, but one final note may be helpful. Don’t forget that this time in life is only for a short season. In fact, it’s a good metaphor for *all* of life. You aren’t living in the dorm permanently. You aren’t building your life there. It’s not your home. It’s just a temporary stop on the way to larger things. Along the way, God has people he wants to affect through you, work he wants you to do, and things he wants to do in you. There will be trials and victories, but graduation day is coming soon. It will all be behind you, never to be repeated.

Keeping things in perspective like this can help during those lonely nights, tempting struggles, tiring interactions, and confusing situations.

The potential for God to use you is huge.

There are people there who need to see Christ in you.

So trust Christ for the sprint, and go for it.

Notes:

1. Romans 8:28-29. Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.
2. Matthew 5:13
3. Matthew 5:14
4. John 15:16
5. John 15:8
6. 1 Timothy 2:4. If you struggle with this verse, and how it could mean that God wants all people to be saved, maybe you could just at least think, God wants some of the people in my dorm to be saved because I live there. But while we're at it, shouldn't we pray for all to be saved, anyway (see the previous three verses). Wouldn't that be awesome?
7. Free downloads at <http://www.truthoncampus.com>
8. Hebrews 10:25 has something to say about this.
9. Proverbs 4:23
10. Different Christians have different ideas about parties, of course, and God may use Christians in different ways to reach different situation. Parties could have been a whole section of this booklet. Seriously though, you should commit your attendance at parties to some prayer and scripture searching to discern God's will if you should be there at all. One friend gave this input I couldn't resist including: "The temptation of 'checking out' a party just to experience and understand what the 'typical' college life looks like is easily available, but can definitely trample a Christian's witness and conviction in the future. There is not anything fun about being tightly crammed in a gross apartment with other students getting wasted and whatever else with a background noise of cursing. I remember seeing and hearing about the effects that parties had on students in my classes and dorms that were just disheartening and disturbing."
11. 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, anyone?
12. Now Arcadia University.
13. One other twist on this is to pray about and seek out another place on campus which the Lord could give you as a sanctuary. As my rooming situation changed through the years, I found a student lounge that was unoccupied in the early mornings, a commuter lounge which was almost always empty (a total score) and the writing lab, which was empty when not being used, and to which, since I was a writing aid, I had a key. That lab was clutch, and I spent hours there studying the word in comfort and solitude.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

If any of the ideas in this booklet got you thinking, here are some excellent books to further assist you in cultivating a healthy personal spiritual life while you're in school.

If you want to read **more about fighting temptation**, **John Owens book *On the Mortification of Sin in the life of the Believer*** is still one of the best things you could spend time with.

K.P. Yohannon's book *Learning to Pray* is both short and helpful. A little longer, but very practical, is **Paul Miller's book *A Praying Life***.

Robert West's tiny book *How to Study the Bible* will take you almost no time to read, yet he somehow packs in loads of help for learning how to read scripture by yourself. (You should be able to get it for under \$2. Search ISBN # 159789706X)

Also, don't forget to **see the Truth On Campus booklet *Planning Your Time With God*** if you want practical help in that area.

If you want to start a conversation directly, speak to the leader of the campus group you're a part of or the person who gave you this booklet, or get in touch with us at talk@truthoncampus.com

TRUTH ON CAMPUS

Who we are:

Truth On Campus seeks to equip students on college and university campuses, to cultivate Christian thinking and living in the academic environment, and to spread the gospel. Working with existing campus groups, we aim to help you with free resources discussing the issues Christian students face, as well as addressing the “big questions” that all people ponder. Truth On Campus is based out of Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia, online at www.ccphilly.org.

Get Resources for your Campus:

Would you like to see our literature on your campus? Let's talk.

Email us at talk@truthoncampus.com for more information, or visit www.truthoncampus.com to download resources in a variety of formats.

TRUTH
CAMPUS

www.truthoncampus.com