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### CHUCKING COLLEGE

*“ Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding. ’ ”*  
*(Job 28:28)*

What will it profit a girl if she gains the whole world but loses her soul, her lifetime financial freedom, her purity, her love of reading, her unique individuality, her entrepreneurial momentum, and four peak years of her life? A college degree may no longer be worth the world to us when we see what we have to surrender for it. The costs for that piece of paper—financial, emotional, spiritual, and temporal—rise higher with every graduation.

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36) was one of the verses that helped me decide it was time to leave college. As a cellist, I had the opportunity of traveling to

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Vienna with the college symphony orchestra and playing in the world-famous concert hall where the Vienna Philharmonic televises their annual New Year's Eve concert. But I realized that most of the students would drink heavily in Europe, where the legal drinking age is lower. In fact, I could not even find two acquaintances who would agree with me not to drink on the trip in order to visit historic sites instead. By going on the tour, I would have been under constant peer pressure while immorality ran fast and loose at night in the hotels.

So there I was that April—my freshman year coming to an end. I knew my choices: gaining “the whole world” and losing my soul (which the whole college environment was wearing down), or chucking college and finding a path of success where my faith could thrive. The faith-eroding atmosphere at college was too calculated for me to hope to keep both Vienna and my soul. (Imagining now what would remain of my faith if I had endured another year or two or *three!* of college frightens me. I know that I would have been on shaky ground at best. But, praise the King, He had other plans for me.) I gradually realized the seriousness of my remaining in college, and began my exodus.

Doug Phillips has said, “College is a trip through Babylon. If the academics don't get you, the dorm life will.” The Creator's forbearance toward all the immorality rampant in dorm life and the misinterpretation of His Word prevalent in classrooms will eventually come to an end. He is a righteous Judge, and like He did with Sodom, He will judge those who are immersed in a culture of law-

lessness. So, when Scripture states, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4), let us not be like Lot and his daughters who had to be dragged out at the last minute by the angels.

Proverbs 16:17 declares, “The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; he who keeps his way preserves his soul.” Righteous people depart from evil environments and evil teachings. According to Scripture, the descriptive characteristic of the righteous is that they are set-apart and holy—not loitering and trying to survive in the midst of those who habitually practice sin.

“I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. ... Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way ... and take only ways that are firm.”

(Proverbs 4:11, 14-15, 26 NIV)

## **The Question of Needing a Degree**

When we really think it over, a degree may not be necessary to equip us for each of our life purposes. Many college graduates discover (after the fact) that a degree was not a prerequisite for their success.

For example, one twenty-two-year-old young man majored in finance, but then went on to start his own business selling precious metals. His real-life experience

was more helpful to him than his actual degree, and, of course, in running his own business, he did not need to have that degree in order to become highly successful.

In another example, a musically inclined young lady realized that she would not need a music degree in order to be a successful professional musician. Skilled musicians can teach lessons and make \$20-\$30 an hour, with no one concerned about whether they have a degree or not. Skill is what is most sought-after—a well-performed audition will land a musician a job in a symphony orchestra, while a degree in music performance alone will not guarantee the position.

Or, for the would-be English major, a well-written essay with a resume listing all the instances where her works have been published carries more weight in a job application than a college degree with no work experience accompanying it.

In the great majority of cases, possessing skills can carry one farther than having earned a degree. Proverbs 22:29 does not mention the need for a university degree, but rather states, “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before obscure men.”

Therefore, we need to think hard and think creatively to analyze if there is some way to fulfill our callings without dragging ourselves through Sodom simply for a costly piece of paper that declares, “You did it!” In his article, “For Most People, College is a Waste of Time,” Charles Murray discusses the arbitrary and questionable value of college degrees:

First, we set up a single goal to represent educational success, which will take four years to achieve, no matter what is being taught. We attach an economic reward to it that seldom has anything to do with what has been learned. We urge large numbers of people who do not possess adequate ability to try to achieve the goal, wait until they have spent a lot of time and money, and then deny it to them. We ... stigmatize everyone who doesn't meet the goal. We ... call the goal a "B.A." ... Outside a handful of majors—engineering and some of the sciences—a bachelor's degree tells an employer nothing except that the applicant has a certain amount of intellectual ability and perseverance. Even a degree in a vocational major like business administration can mean anything from a solid base of knowledge to four years of barely remembered gut courses.

The solution is not better degrees, but no degrees. ... The model is the CPA exam that qualifies certified public accountants. [It is standardized across the nation, rigorous, and shows how much the person really knows about accounting.] ... Why not present [students] with certifications in microbiology or economics [instead of diplomas]—and who cares if the applicants passed the exam after studying in the local public library. ... Under a certification system, four years is not required, residence is not required, expensive tuitions are not required, and a degree is not required. Equal educational opportunity means, among other things, creating a society in which it's what you know that makes the difference. Substituting certifications for degrees would be a big step in that direction ...

Certification tests would disadvantage just one set of people: students who have gotten into well-known

traditional schools, but who are coasting through their years in college and would score poorly on a certification test. Disadvantaging them is an outcome devoutly to be wished. ...

The demonstration of competency in business administration or European history would, appropriately, take on similarities to the demonstration of competency in cooking or welding. Our obsession with the BA has created a two-tiered entry to adulthood, anointing some for admission to the club and labeling the rest as second-best. ... Getting rid of the BA and replacing it with evidence of competence [would eliminate that stigma].<sup>1</sup>

Europe already employs this system of certificates for job-specific training such as apprenticeships. However, before the United States realizes what an improvement certifications would be over degrees, we can individually seek similar alternative routes of advanced education that result in competence rather than necessarily a diploma.

Colin Campbell (husband of Nancy Campbell, the founder of *Above Rubies*) shared with me his perspective regarding biblical alternatives to college. He mentioned that as a shepherd boy, David did not study harp under a humanist professor. He practiced and practiced out in the sheep pasture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His diligent autonomous practice on the harp brought his skill to such a level that it prepared a place for him in the king's palace. Likewise, turning from college does not imply that we are to also give up on advanced education or perfecting our talents. Skills are vitally important to bring glory to the Name of God. Excellence is a work's glory. So we must look for unique ways to develop our skills without

necessarily conforming to the college cookie-cutter pattern. Training and education do exist outside the liberal college package.

As daughters at home, this often means switching our priorities from one specific goal (such as majoring in English, Biology, or music), to becoming capable in many areas, like a skilled First Lady in the White House. Jackie Kennedy was an exemplary First Lady. She was known for her strong communication skills and social graces. She worked at restoring the interior of the White House, and decorating it with skill. She is remembered for her excellent organizational skills, and she is said to have personally tasted meals before important dignitaries arrived—instructing the cooks on how to improve the flavor of a dish. As one news article stated, “Jackie elevated presidential entertaining into occasions imbued with culture. She personally choreographed every detail of state dinners so they would project the Kennedy image of vitality and sophistication.”<sup>2</sup> She was intelligent, and loved history, which was advantageous in her conversations with dignitaries.

This is the type of all-around excellence to which we should aim as daughters at home. It should be our goal to become confident and well-versed in hospitality, sewing, and cooking, to be knowledgeable about alternative health, well-read in history and biographies, and, in addition, to pursue individual areas of academic prowess in any free time. Being at home should appear no narrower to us than it did to First Lady Jackie Kennedy in the White House.

Having to spend all one's time jumping through an institution's contemporarily-hip course hoops makes it very difficult to find the time to master domestic skills we will need as first ladies in our future homes. If a young woman spends four to eight years debating worldly philosophy and studying for a career, she is simply not going to possess as much competence in running a home and living a life of self-sacrifice for her man and her babies as the young woman who has been practicing those skills daily. College saps valuable time from preparing for the life many of us hope to live someday—that of a wife and mother.

Economists use the term “opportunity cost” to describe this type of loss. They underscore the importance of evaluating opportunity cost when making a decision. Simply put, if a person spends money or time on one thing, he or she cannot spend the same on another thing. Opportunity cost is the cost of not being able to do something else with that time or money. We need to consider the opportunity cost of spending the four peak preparation years of our lives in college. If we truly aspire to be homemakers one day, the opportunity cost of not being able to invest time and preparation into skills we will need daily may be more than we want to sacrifice.

Being a stay-at-home daughter in the twenty-first century brings with it a weight of pioneering, even though there have been only a few recent generations in which daughters sought careers. Before that, the norm for most of history involved daughters being productive from their home base. Breaking away from our culture's current

expectations and returning to the biblical model is a challenge, though it can bring great fulfillment.

Successful role models are beacons of the joy of stay-at-home daughterhood. Two such examples come from the lives of the Botkin sisters, authors of two excellent books: *So Much More*, and *It's Not (That) Complicated*. Their bio at [visionarydaughters.com](http://visionarydaughters.com) includes the remark that “they delight in discovering ... and in investigating the glorious and diverse opportunities open to young women at home.” May that increasingly become our delight as well.

### **What Will People Think?**

One of the primary reasons it is so hard to take any route other than college after high school is the fear of what people will think. Ego. Peer pressure.

“Education may be the only thing people still believe in in the United States. To question education is really dangerous. It is the absolute taboo. It’s like telling the world there’s no Santa Claus.”

—PETER THIEL, cofounder of PayPal and  
founder of the *20 Under 20 Thiel Fellowship*

As one author pointed out, “If Harvard were only about learning, very few people would be willing to pay a quarter of a million dollars [to go there]. The knowledge and training certainly could be obtained for a fraction of that cost.”<sup>3</sup> So it is not just the promise of an education