

foreword

When we first sat down and discussed this idea of a new resource for Salvation Army students I must confess there was part of me that felt a little jealous. If I'm honest I wasted my three years at university. I came away with a degree but not a lot else. I kept my faith private, I kept my friends at arms' length and had it not been for one or two very loyal and godly people I probably wouldn't have lasted the course. I wasn't prepared for what was coming. I'd been okay up to that point and so I started my uni life with the sense that nothing much would be different and I would just get on with it. I was wrong and for three years I trod water and watched the world go by. Looking back, I realise the opportunities I wasted to thrive and grow, to experience new things, to go deeper with God and to move on in my discipleship. I wish this resource had been around in the summer of 1999.

Well, ten years later, here it is. If you are a young person connected to or part of The Salvation Army and you're starting university or even already part-way through I would encourage you to read this guide. Ben Parker has written from both his own experiences and those of others he's met to give a glimpse of what can be expected at university. He also asks questions that we hope both challenge and encourage you in your uni life.

Enjoy the read. I said that part of me felt jealous and that's true. Most of me, however, felt incredibly excited. Excited for a whole bunch of Salvo students and the impact their lives could have on a whole bunch of universities all over the country.

Matt White

introduction

Coming home is going to be difficult. He's been away for a long time and he knows what his friends and family have been saying about him. Going to parties, hanging out with the wrong sort of people, throwing away the profession offered to him by his father and the money that came with it. But there's nothing for it, he's here now and he needs to at least try.

Arriving, and starting to see people he knows, he thinks maybe this is a mistake. He had a secret hope that everyone would just be glad to see him, but everyone's looking at him with suspicion. As he gets close to his home he can feel some people giving him burning looks. They've all heard the stories, he realises. There won't be any secrets here after all they all know where he's been, what he's done.

Home is a bit of a mixed bag. At least one parent is glad to see him; the other, he's not sure about. The sibling situation is going to be difficult too. It's been a long time, there's a lot to explain, to try and make everyone understand. The places he's been, the people he's met, the new sort of semi-family of friends he's been hanging around with. He's changed a lot, he knows that much.

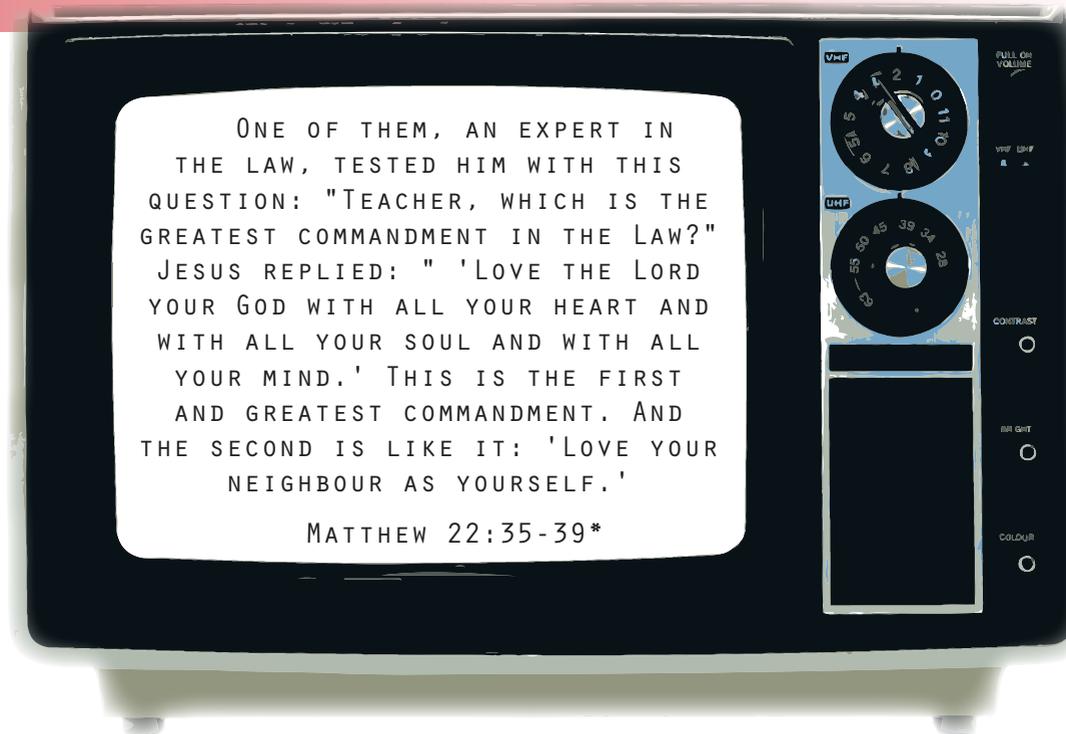
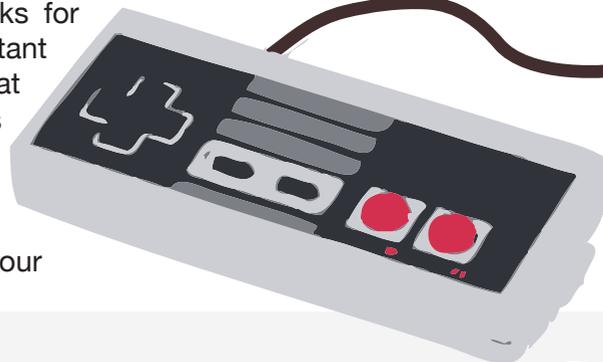
Many students will identify with some of the above. Whether you leave home to go to university or not, sometimes you may face preconceived ideas about what a university experience consists of, and coming home, whether it be at the end of the day, the end of the term, or the end of three years can be



a real challenge. You may have moved on in your thinking, met a new group of people, tried a new experience for the first time or been taken completely outside your comfort zone by something, and suddenly the 'home' world can seem a little different.

However, it is useful throughout our university experience to keep this idea of 'coming home' in mind. There are two stories in the New Testament which fit the paraphrase above. Luke 15:11-24 tells the story of the prodigal son in which a young man, setting off into the world gets distracted by the things the world has to offer, eventually running out of money and fair-weather friends, and returning to his home, thinking he has to explain himself to his father. In Matthew 13:53-57, however, there is a different homecoming. Jesus, having left his home town to deliver God's messages to the people in the surrounding areas, returns to try and share these messages with those who knew him best.

There are a number of lessons we can learn from these passages. However, in short, the Bible paints two types of homecoming, and if we can keep these in mind it will help shape our university experiences. The prodigal returns, having spent and squandered the investment which has been made in him up until he leaves, forgetting the hard work which has gone into teaching him good lessons and providing him with all the money he needs. Jesus on the other hand returns confident in his own calling, assured that he can justify, even to this tough audience, what he's been up to whilst he's been away. For most people, their university homecoming will lie somewhere between the two extremes, but as this guide attempts to put forward some truths, tips and tricks for university life, the important thing is to remember that fundamentally your choices will define which kind of university experience you will have, and how high you will hold your head at your homecoming.



OPEN-MINDEDNESS

'Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?' (Romans 2:17-21)

'Test everything. Hold on to the good' (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

Things I wish I'd known...

If I went back in time I would just tell myself to be a bit more relaxed, to go more with the flow, and to be more confident being me

Steve, Finalist

One of the most important things to embrace when you attend university is open-mindedness. You may have preconceived ideas of what you expect it to be like, which people you will get on with, what you will enjoy doing, and who you are yourself. These preconceptions will be challenged during your time at uni almost without fail, and the more open-minded you can be when you arrive, the better. The flip side is that you may find that people at university are often far more open-minded than those you may have encountered at school, work or home. Things which may have marked people out as 'weird' in other environments tend to become 'interesting' or 'individual' at university, and sometimes even have a student society or two devoted to them! If you have made promises to God about your lifestyle then university is often a place where you can feel most proud of them and live them out to the full. The idea of 'popularity' tends to fade away as people realise how many people there are in the world, all of them with completely different ideas of what this means. This can be an unnerving experience, but if you approach it with an open mind yourself, it can also be a very freeing one.

TOLERANCE

'Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God' (Romans 15:7)

University is full of people from a vast array of backgrounds, the majority of whom will arrive assuming, consciously or unconsciously, that everyone has had the same experiences as them, and therefore has a pretty similar social code and set of beliefs. For once, religious belief is the least problematic, because through our education we know that there are different religions in the world. What we don't necessarily know, however, is that some people believe it is right to do the washing up before you eat the food you've cooked, that others think it is completely unacceptable to put your feet up on a sofa, and that still others have been trained that it is a crime worthy of prison to leave the light on when you're the last one out of a room. These might seem like little things but you will find they can very quickly wind you up if you're not careful. We can quickly fall into the trap of thinking that whilst our little quirks are simply things we forget, or honest mistakes, similar offences committed by others are clearly purposeful malicious attacks. Before you know it you can find yourself taking things as personal insults, gossiping, seeking revenge and eventually in full-on confrontations about such things as whether the last person to put something in an already overflowing bin is the one responsible for emptying it out. The key to this is tolerance. Whilst it is important to make sure that your views are heard so that you ensure you don't become miserable, there are constructive, helpful ways of doing this. Working out whether the issue at hand is one

Things I wish I'd known...

1) If you take everything you own it probably won't fit in your room

2) You need to separate fun time and work time

3) Don't be judgmental or intolerant towards people from backgrounds different to yours

Anonymous, Graduate

myths

which needs addressing or one that really doesn't matter in the wider scheme of things is a key balancing act. If you can act in a wise way in this you will find you have a much more pleasant and enjoyable time, with far fewer confrontations.

HELPFULNESS

'Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

'Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."' (Luke 10:36-37)

In your first few months at university you may well feel completely at sea, but try to remember that everyone around you is feeling exactly the same. If you can offer to help someone out, to carry their shopping, lend them some printer paper, hand an essay in for them or remind them where a lecture is, you will very quickly see how the moral of the Good Samaritan story above is one we can take to heart every day. More than just being a moral, though, it is a practical tool for building the kind of friendships you will need to make life at university easier.



'EVERYONE AT UNIVERSITY IS SKINT'

'Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."' (Hebrews 13:5)

Things I wish I'd known...

- 1) Everyone gains on average five pounds in the first term
 - 2) Stereotypes are often wrong.
 - 3) The loan isn't interest-free
- Lara, finalist

You will quickly find that university is full of people in a whole range of financial situations. This can depend on almost anything: how much money their family has, the amount of student loan or government support they get, what time of life they have come into university at, and how much they have to pay in terms of fees to be at university (foreign students for instance can have to pay as much as four times the fees!) being just some of the factors in play.

The only real response to this mish-mash is to do your own budget and stick with it. This is easier to say than it actually is to do, especially once those with a bit more cash start to throw it around, but it's vital to understand that however it might feel at the time you are not the worst off financially at your university. Similarly, if you find yourself in the fortunate position of having a bit more money than the people you're closest to, try to keep this in mind and be sensitive when you're planning things like evenings out or weekly shopping lists. Doing your own budget doesn't have to be a long-drawn-out task. Just working out how much money you have left to spend after you take away the cost of accommodation and tuition fees is a great start and will help you to make sure that money doesn't end up running your life.

'EVERYONE AT UNIVERSITY GETS DRUNK ALL THE TIME'

'Who is always in trouble? Who argues and fights? Who has cuts and bruises? Whose eyes are red? Everyone who stays up late, having just one more drink' (Proverbs 23:29-30 Contemporary English Version)

The risks of excessive drinking haven't changed much since the writer of Proverbs set down these words, and it's probably fair to say that it would be unusual not to come up against this issue whilst you are at university. However, the idea that 'everyone is doing it' is very much a false one. Many people at university do not drink alcohol for all manner of reasons: religious, ethical, cultural, medical, financial and simply because they don't like the taste. If you have made a commitment not to drink alcohol you definitely should not feel alone in this at university. By its nature drunken behaviour can be loud and in your face, but don't let this convince you that it is necessarily more widespread than it is.

For those young Salvationists who have made a commitment not to drink alcohol there can be a tendency to either be intimidated by or alternatively look down upon anyone who does drink, even in moderation. This comes back to our initial point about open-mindedness, the fact that we are called to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to see people as Jesus sees them, not as we think they must be.

If you do drink alcohol, or even if you don't, it can be easy to get caught up in the kind of behaviour the writer of Proverbs speaks about. You should be on your guard against anything which might get in the way of the greatest commandment, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' However, this should not have to mean isolating yourself. Whilst engaging in 'drunken' behaviour is denounced strongly in the Bible, socialising with people without prejudice is promoted with the same amount of force.

'EVERYONE IS HAVING SEX ALL THE TIME'

'God wants you to be holy, so don't be immoral in matters of sex' (1 Thessalonians 4:3 Contemporary English Version)

The world around us is becoming more and more sexually explicit and it would be wrong to pretend this isn't the case at our universities. Many Student Unions hand out welcome packs in their freshers week and these often contain condoms and advice on ways to stay safe when having sex. In the majority of cases sex is used for advertising at least as much inside uni as it is outside, if not more. However, as with alcohol above, you should not let the in-your-face nature of this convince you that 'everyone is doing it'. For a number of reasons many people choose not to engage in sex at university. At first this may not seem to be the case, but decisions such as these are very private ones and it may take some time for the truth to become clear.

Things I wish I'd known...

- 1) I could have started up the Teddy Bear society in my first year rather than waiting until my last
 - 2) You have to go to at least one event run by the cheese and chocolate society
 - 3) Don't overload on carbs
- Stephen, 4th Year

However, the kinds of messages about sex which universities often put forward can impact not just on whether people actually engage in sexual activity, but more importantly on the underlying beliefs about sex. The Bible teaches us that 'anyone who even looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart' (Matthew 5:28), and that we should 'give honour to marriage' (Hebrews 13:4) by reserving sex for when we have tied the knot. However, these messages can very quickly seem foreign when we are at university and very different messages are being imposed upon us. Think about how you can best make sure that the right messages stay at the forefront of your mind.

your first week

'YOUR FIRST YEAR DOESN'T COUNT'

'Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute.'

(Romans 13:12-14 The Message)

Many university courses require that you merely 'pass' your first year (often by getting a certain percentage), with this grade not contributing to your overall grade. This can lead to the belief that 'your first year doesn't count'. In the first instance this is untrue because in the first year of your course you build a base of knowledge which you then add to in your second and third years. If you are content to scrape by in your first year, your second and third years will be a lot tougher.

However, this message goes deeper than this. The first year of university is seen by many students as a chance to waste a year. The general consensus seems to be that you are not accountable for things you may do during this year, that the normal rules are suspended, and, if you are staying in halls of residence, that you can do what you want to the place because you'll be gone the next year. Be careful about this. Whilst it's good to be free, try a lot of things and meet loads of new people, very quickly you have to start doing things like looking for housemates and a house, and start thinking about your future. More to the point, God doesn't want us to waste a moment of our lives by being apart from him. Making sure you set out what you believe is a lot easier if you do it right at the beginning of your time at university. Your first year at uni is not a break from your faith.

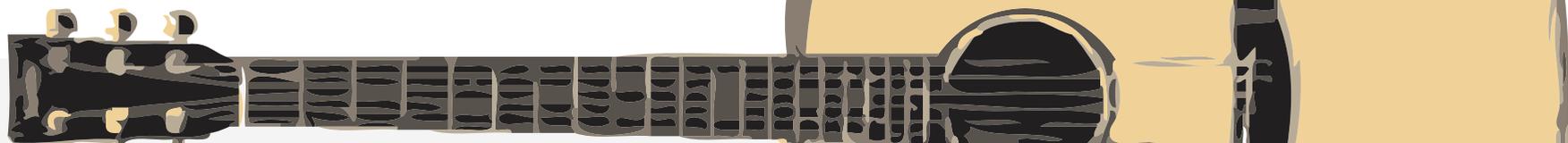
Most universities have a 'freshers week' or 'freshers fortnight'. The form varies depending on your university of choice, but normally ingredients include a lot of parties, a lot of drinking, and a lot of people trying to get you to sign up for societies, campaigns, events and publications, as well as a number of fairly mundane but pretty vital forms to fill out. Whilst this can be a fun time it can also be very daunting so here are a few top tips:

BE ORGANISED TO MAKE SURE YOU DON'T END UP FORGETTING WHAT'S IMPORTANT.

'But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:40-42)

You will be bombarded by huge amounts of information in your first week, most of which will be rubbish, but some of which will actually be very important. Making sure you know what's happening, and where you should be when, will help you feel a lot more secure. It will also mean that important things like your Bible study and prayer life don't end up taking second place to things which might seem important then and there. Most universities have a welcome checklist to help you know what you need to do in your first week, so be sure to follow this through.



DON'T WORRY IF YOU DON'T LIKE CLUBBING OR PARTYING.

'But someday you will hear happy voices and the sounds of parties and wedding celebrations. And when people come to my temple to offer sacrifices to thank me, you will hear them say:

'We praise you, LORD All-Powerful! You are good to us, and your love never fails.' (Jeremiah 33:10-11 Contemporary English Version)

'A party gives laughter!' (Ecclesiastes 10:19 New Living Translation)

Whilst for many, university represents a chance to step out of their comfort zones, you should never feel pressured into doing anything you don't want to. It may seem that everyone is out all night at parties, but if this isn't your cup of tea then you are definitely not alone; lots of people end up worrying that they aren't 'proper' students because they don't like partying but this simply isn't the case! There are loads of other people out there feeling exactly the same as you, and you will find them - it just might take a little longer.

DON'T WORRY IF YOU DO LIKE CLUBBING OR PARTYING.

'Let us live and conduct ourselves honorably and becomingly as in the open light of day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in immorality and debauchery, not in quarreling and jealousy.'

(Romans 13:13 Amplified Bible)



Things I wish I'd known...

It's OK to hate clubbing. You probably will be obliged to take part to some extent, but no one cares if you don't get drunk.

Charissa, Graduate

It's also OK to love clubbing if you're a Christian

Sinead, Graduate

It is important to know that socialising and having fun is in no way unbiblical! If you do like a night out clubbing you shouldn't feel guilty or let anyone else make you feel guilty. Jesus seems to have been very pro-parties in fact, provided of course that you heed the Bible's advice on how to behave. Going out with friends to pubs and clubs is a great way to meet new people, get to know others better and generally unwind and have a good time (whether you're drinking or not).

GET TO KNOW YOUR COURSEMATES AND HOUSEMATES.

'You can trust a friend who corrects you, but kisses from an enemy are nothing but lies' (Proverbs 27:6 Contemporary English Version).

'If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!' (Ecclesiastes 4:10).

These are the people you will have to spend most time with over your first year so try to get to know them. You're all in the same boat so don't be embarrassed if you forget people's names or make gaffes - everyone does. Try and get people's mobile numbers or email addresses (offering them yours first often makes things easier), or make friends on Facebook. It will make life a lot less scary if you know you have someone you can text or email if you get lost or forget what you're meant to be doing.

Things I wish I'd known...

1) Housemates can either be your best mates or your worst enemies depending on how tidy they are

2) The basics food range is not all bad

3) God follows you even when you leave home

Simon, 2nd Year

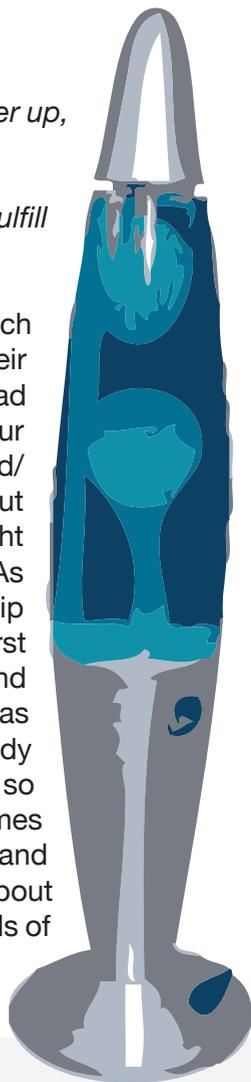
These are also the people you will probably spend the most time with so invest time in getting to know them and their stories. Try not to make snap judgments, and think twice about diving into anything romantic. You have a whole year to find out more about these people and, on the romantic side, it can get awkward pretty quickly if things don't work out in your first week for some reason!

LINK UP WITH FELLOW CHRISTIANS.

'Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing' (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

'Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ' (Galatians 6:2).

Almost every university has a Christian Union which is dedicated to helping Christians to live out their faith whilst at university. Even if you've had bad experiences of CUs in the past, or just don't think it's your kind of thing, it's worth finding out about the CU before and/or going along in your first week to get information about local churches in the area and meet Christians who might be on your course, in your faculty, or even in your halls. As always, try to stay open-minded about forms of worship and people's beliefs. For many people university is the first time they are exposed to a church other than their own, and as such nothing else will match exactly what they see as the right way to do Christianity or be a Christian. Everybody is also at a different stage on their journey of faith, and so what might seem obvious to some is new and sometimes difficult to others. This is a great opportunity to learn and develop, as long as you don't make snap judgments about what is right and what is wrong. Also be prepared for loads of questions about The Salvation Army and its beliefs and practices. Just remember, if you don't know the answer



you can always contact your CO, Youth Leader, DY0 or ALOVE UK and find out.

Try to find a church to go to on your first Sunday, either by doing research beforehand or by talking to the CU. Establishing a pattern early will get you, and any housemates you might have, used to the idea of you going to church under your own steam and will make doing so for the rest of the year much easier. More about finding or choosing a church is included below.

BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR MONEY

"The silver is mine and the gold is mine," declares the Lord Almighty' (Haggai 2:8).

'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it' (Psalm 24:1).

Things I wish I'd known...

- 1) There are always people who will listen to you
 - 2) Learn how to budget
 - 3) God is faithful, and bigger than every problem
- Hayley, Graduate

In your first week you will probably be mobbed by people trying to get you to sign up for and buy things, often offering you reduced rates or introductory offers. This can range from fellow students trying to get you to join campaigns, through Students Union and academic societies, to mobile phone companies trying to get you to sign up to a contract, all of which can be challenging when trying to be a good steward of whatever money God has blessed you with. Some of these offers are actually good deals but if you're not careful you can end up seriously out of pocket. Get into the habit of asking, 'Do I have to pay now or can I try it first?' and 'How long will this deal last?' before making a decision, but also don't be frightened to speak to your housemates, coursemates, or even your parents to see if they think it's a good idea.

Also be aware of the potential risks of debt and credit cards. Most students leave university with a sizeable student loan so it's wise not to have any other debts on top of this. Credit cards can feel very appealing but they can also be very dangerous. If you are going to have one, consider getting one with a low credit limit and keeping it for emergencies only.



'You should not stay away from the church meetings, as some are doing, but you should meet together and encourage each other' (Hebrews 10:25 New Century Version).

The first question is, why bother to find a church? The answer is simple: You'll need one. University can be a very demanding time in terms of your faith, you may be asked questions to which you don't have an answer or put into situations where you don't know how to respond. Churches can help you to work through these issues. More importantly, without an environment to help it grow, our faith can easily wither and die, and whilst it is important that we are able to worship God every day in everything we do, there is something special about coming together to praise God as a church.

If you're moving to a completely new area to go to university, finding a church can seem a daunting task, especially if you have perhaps only been in one or two churches before. If you can start this process off before you start university it will make settling in much easier.

In finding a church the most important thing is to be honest with yourself; firstly, about why you want be involved in a church; secondly, about what specific things are most important to you. Try to think more widely than just things like what time the services are or which particular songs are sung, as these are liable to change.

Some ideas for important elements in a church are:

- + A sound biblical basis and good biblical teaching
- + People that are warm and accepting
- + A congregation size that you are comfortable with
- + An understanding of the specific needs of students

A yellow sticky note with two red pushpins at the top. The text on the note is handwritten in black ink.

Things I wish I'd known...

1) People are grown up and nicer and will probably think it's cool you're a Christian and then have massive debates about it as a result.

2) If particular Christian societies/local churches aren't your cup of tea, don't just leave. Work out why they're not your cup of tea. Then leave.

Hazel, 4th Year

study

- + A purpose and goal you can join in with
- + A focus on prayer
- + Worship which you can engage with
- + Discipleship which you will be able to join in with
- + A heart for the local community

Once you've decided what's important to you then you can start looking for your new church.

1. Firstly pray! And keep praying as you go through the whole process. Make sure God is helping you in this decision.
2. If you're from The Salvation Army it's likely you might want to give the local corps a go. To find out which Salvation Army centres there are in the area you can go to www.salvationarmy.org.uk and put your university's postcode in the 'find a centre' box.
3. If you're looking for something different or the local corps isn't for you start by doing a bit of research and finding out which churches are in the area you could feasibly get to from your university. The university Christian Union can often help you here and may offer 'Church Crawls' to give students a chance to see what's available. You might want to just start by typing in the area you're going to and 'church' in Google maps! Take the time to visit the churches you find, before you start uni if possible. Keep looking back on what you've decided is important to you and see if you've found a match.
4. It is good to have a look around, but try to get settled in a particular church as quickly as you can. At Uni - away from home and family - you need the support of a church family more than ever.
5. Pray again to make sure you're where God wants you to be!

'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men' (Colossians 3:23).

Whilst there are a lot of jokes about students not actually doing any work at university your course will take up a large amount of your time, so it's important to find a way of offering up your academic study as worship to God. More than anything else this is about a way of thinking. When you start a piece of work you might consider praying and offering up the effort and time you are putting into this piece of work as an act of worship. If it helps, try imagining that alongside your student number and the title of your work you have written 'to the glory of God' in big letters. This might seem a little silly in some ways, but it works by allowing you to check that what you are putting your effort into is in line with what God would want you to be doing. It's much harder to bring yourself to cheat or write something you don't believe to be true if you imagine it'll be an all-knowing God who's marking it at the end of the day.

Things I wish I'd known...

- 1) Do not get stressed out about your house for next year and end up panic buying
- 2) Don't get put off if it's hard work in term one
- 3) Don't try and bring everything to uni, you won't need half of whatever you end up bringing anyway.

Alex, First Year

'Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?' (Matthew 6:27).

When it comes to essay time and exam deadlines try to make sure you don't lose sight of Jesus. Commit time to prayer that doesn't get pushed back or forgotten no matter what, and try to keep in mind all of God's promises and wisdom concerning worry and anxiety. Even focus on these in your Bible study time if it helps. Also, pray for others, and let them know you are doing so. You'll tend to find that people are



friends and relationships

anxious for all the help they can get at this point, and you'll be surprised how many doors can be opened when people aren't filling their time with so much stuff, as tends to happen in these periods.

'So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own'
(Matthew 6:31-34).

FRIENDS

'A friend loves you all the time, and a brother helps in time of trouble'
(Proverbs 17:17 New Century Version).

It is no understatement to say that the friends you have at university are your family there. You will probably live with some of them, and you'll need to rely on them to help you out. If you are willing to commit to and invest in your friendships they can last for many years after university. However, whilst you may have grown up with your family and home friends for many years, university friendships are formed over a relatively short space of time. Because of this you do need to spend time getting to know your friends, whether they are housemates, coursemates, people from clubs or societies or people you just meet out or about. You also need to understand that they may have come from a completely different background to you. They may hold completely different opinions on any number of topics, and in the majority of cases, there is no reason that this should get in the way of a long and lasting friendship.

Things I wish I'd known...

- 1) You will change as a person whether you want to or not
 - 2) You will probably become great friends with people you would not usually even speak to
 - 3) Budgeting is SO important
- Gemma, graduate

This includes issues around faith. Just to lay it out clearly, there is absolutely nothing wrong with having non-Christian friends. Whilst this may seem obvious in principle to some, it will be a real challenge to others and it can throw up difficulties in practice for everyone. The example Jesus sets is that wherever possible we should be there with our friends in what we might see as the most dangerous and difficult situations for faith, whilst at the same time ensuring that we do not, in any way, compromise our love for and relationship with God. To return to the greatest commandment, we must first love God, then show this



by loving each other. This is a very challenging balance to maintain. There is sometimes a temptation, especially at university, to retreat in to a Christian bubble by filling our lives with activity for the church or Christian Union. On the other hand there can also be a temptation to convince ourselves that we are simply investing heavily in our friends when really we have become so caught up in other things that we cause damage to our relationship with God. There is no easy solution to this, and everyone has to make their own decision about where to draw the line. To make this decision we have to spend time praying about it, and allowing God to show us the answer.

Things I wish I'd known...

1) When you buy a printer it normally doesn't come with a cable to link it to your computer
 2) It's possible to get on to the roof of almost every building somehow
 3) Once you leave uni you'll be a grown-up, probably with a job and a car, so there's no good reason friendships you make at uni can't last for the rest of your life, wherever you end up.

Anonymous, Graduate

RELATIONSHIPS

Many books, leaflets and websites have been written devoted to the subject of conducting Christian relationships, so if you're thinking about starting a relationship it pays to seek out the information which is already available. You might want to start with the relevant pages on the ALOVE website. University, though, does present some particular challenges when it comes to relationships.

1. BE AWARE

'So don't be like a horse or donkey, that doesn't understand' (Psalm 32:9 New Century Version).

'So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled' (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

First of all you should think about whether a romantic relationship at university is right for you. University tends



to be a bit of a 'bubble' culture, where you are cut off from the outside world. This can lead to intensified emotions and feelings for those around you and to getting to know others very fast through spending disproportionate amounts of time with people you'd otherwise get to know slowly over a much longer period. It is also very easy, in a place where you don't know many people, to latch on to any sort of affection and comfort, which, if you are not careful, can lead to a skewing of your decisions about whether to get into a romantic relationship, and/or isolation from the other people you could be getting to know as your friends. This is not to say, of course, that a healthy relationship is unobtainable at university - many uni relationships go on to be strong, lasting ones afterwards - but it is important to recognise the intensity of the situation and to keep a tight leash on how quickly and intensively you are getting to know someone.

Things I wish I'd known...

You have to be so careful when you're getting involved with girls. Things can get out of control REALLY quickly, and if you've not got Christian housemates there's no one to see it and stop you

Anonymous, 2nd year

2. BE CAREFUL

'Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry' (Colossians 3:5).

The emphasis on sex and sexuality discussed in the 'myths' section can also be a serious threat to any attempt to conduct a Christian relationship. Very few of the messages you might see around you at university start from anywhere near a godly perspective, and it is vital that you put in place the support networks you will need to speak the truth to you about what God sees as a healthy romantic relationship (see 'Faith' section below).

To be candid, the layout of the average student room doesn't help. It is difficult to find privacy anywhere else sometimes, and with no sofa, usually no television and a bed as often the only soft furnishing you will need to be careful about how much time you spend with someone of the opposite sex here. A top tip might be to take enough cushions and blankets to be able to turn your bed into an adequate sofa for sitting and watching films on.

It is also an undeniable fact that many young people go to university expecting to have a lot of sex, or to have sex for the first time, and/or are looking for short-term, quick and easy relationships. If you are thinking about engaging in a romantic relationship it's vital to make sure that the person you are thinking about is someone who you know has compatible priorities, expectations and beliefs for their relationships.

3. BE PICKY

There are a lot of people at most universities. Simply by virtue of the maths, if nothing else, this means that a lot of people, at some point in their university life, will come across someone who shows an interest in them. For some this may be old news, and they will know how to deal with potential suitors. However, for others this will be uncharted territory and there is a serious danger of simply falling for either the first, or for every person who shows an interest. If you are interested in a romantic relationship at university it is important to keep in mind that the maths works in your favour too. There's no need to dive straight in. Take your time and make sure that the person you are considering meets all the criteria for someone you'd want to be in a relationship with.

Particular care should be taken at the end of each year at university

Things I wish I'd known...

- 1) No church is perfect, no church is even necessarily that good, so just find somewhere you feel at home and don't church hop too much.
- 2) Try not to be naive and you'll save a lot of heartache.
- 3) Everyone has different experiences so don't feel like a failure if your experience is different to your friends or siblings.

Laura, Graduate

and, to a lesser extent, before each holiday period. A disproportionate number of people seem to get into relationships during this time. This can be for any number of reasons: increased emotions around leaving your friends over the summer, a sudden belief that if you don't get into a relationship now things might change over the holiday, or even just a desire to fully make use of the freedom which comes after finishing exams. Again, this is not to say that solid relationships cannot be formed during this time, but it is much more difficult, and it is important to be aware of these extra pressures. Just keep in mind that it is very rare indeed that you can't keep in contact with people over holiday periods, and that university isn't like school, you are an adult now and in control of your own life, so seeing people over the holidays isn't nearly as difficult as it was. Some people in fact find the holiday periods a good test of how they truly feel for someone, and whether that feeling is reciprocated.



'We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God' (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Whilst university can potentially be an incredibly positive experience, with opportunities to make new friends and do and learn a huge number of new things, it also has the potential to damage us and leave us disillusioned if we are rushed into things we are not prepared for. This also goes for our faith. Whilst we can learn an awful lot during these very intense years, if we are not careful, university also has the potential to be a very damaging time for our faith. More than anything else, the reason behind this is that we often do not realise that going to university is more akin to becoming a missionary than it is merely moving schools. Some students end up living, breathing, eating, working, and spending all their time in an environment which is entirely inhospitable to the gospel and the Church. This isn't meant to be as damning as it sounds; it is unlikely that it will be as challenging as this for most, but with very little control over the situation you are entering it is most sensible to prepare much in the same way as a missionary might.

Firstly, before going to university it is vital that you are honest with yourself about your faith. Once you get to uni your faith will be tested, banged around, explored and stretched. Believing things because your parents, your friends, or your church believe them will not be enough once you're put into a situation where you have to justify them to other people. This process can in fact be a very helpful one. The Bible describes it like gold being refined in the fire (1 Peter 1:7) and says that it produces perseverance (James 1:4). Many people find that when their faith is tested at university they realise which parts of it are really their own faith, and which parts they have simply gone along with. However, in order for this to be a positive experience, of our faith being refined and not simply burnt up, you must

establish what it is you actually believe, and why you believe it.

There are many clever ways of doing this, but perhaps the simplest is simply to imagine yourself in a conversation about God and religion, as will undoubtedly happen at some time at university, when someone you don't know turns to you and asks 'What do you believe?' What would your response be? Once you have an answer to that question (which may well take some time) imagine they followed it up with 'And why do you believe that?' If you can achieve an answer to these questions you

will have gone further than many people do in their whole lives towards understanding your own faith. If it's helpful you might want to write your responses down and keep them safe somewhere. Over your time at university your faith may well take a battering, but if you have an answer to these questions that you can hold on to, it will help enormously.



Secondly, it is vital that you maintain a prayer life and Bible study time of your own. To start with at university you will not necessarily be able to rely on your church or Christian Union to help you with this; you need to know what works best for you, how and when you find praying easiest, and what you can do to make sure you are reading and learning from the Bible.

Thirdly, establish 'support networks'. No missionary goes out into the world without ensuring that they have a number of people committed to praying for them, asking them how they are doing and keeping them accountable to any promises they have made. The same should be true for us at university. Whether it be family, friends, your home church, your new church or anyone else willing to commit to it, your support networks are vital to make sure your faith



conclusion

stays strong at university. You will need them to fall back on when times are tough and to go to when you are asked questions to which you don't have an answer.

By now you may be a tad disheartened, but don't be! If you can get the above in place, university has the potential to help your faith grow in ways you might not expect. Take all the opportunities you can to learn from fellow Christians and to talk with people about faith. If and when you do find yourself in conversations about faith try to refrain from thinking about these conversations as confrontations or two sided debates with the 'Christian' view on one side and everyone else on the other. We rarely do this with any other conversation, but for some reason it is common when talking about our faith. It is interesting to note that of the few times Jesus talks with people in this way it is with the so called 'religious' types that he tends to pit himself against. If people are at university the likelihood is that they are interested in learning and developing so think of these conversations as opportunities to learn from each other. You are more likely to build lasting relationships in this way and will probably discover some new ways of thinking about Jesus and your faith.



'But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect' (1 Peter 3:15).

Remember, because of the general openness towards learning and new ideas, university offers some fantastic opportunities for you. Whether you do find them through the Christian Union or the Student Union, through your church or off your own back, try to use every opportunity and consider stepping outside your comfort zone on a regular basis.

Remember to have fun! It's a great time to meet new people, try new things and go deeper in your discipleship as you learn so much new stuff, not just academically but about yourself as well. Enjoy your uni years as much as you can, and make many memories.

Remember that it's going to be tough. You'll be faced with loads of tough choices every day. Sometimes you'll get it right, sometimes you'll get it wrong and sometimes you'll feel like you're making it up as you go along.

Remember we follow a God of grace and forgiveness. You're going to make mistakes and you're going to get it wrong. Find people you trust and can help you be accountable to. If there are specific areas in which you struggle, be honest with people you trust and allow them to help you.

More than anything, though, remember that Jesus is there with you. He was at your university before you got there, he'll still be there when you leave, and for the time you are at uni you have the opportunity to join in the plan that he has for that particular area. So don't waste a minute in going deeper with him and finding out where he wants you and what you can do for him.

About Salvo Students

'SALVO STUDENTS' IS A FANTASTIC IDEA GIVING GOOD, WISE AND SENSIBLE ADVICE TO THOSE WHO FACE MASSIVE CHANGES AND NEW CHALLENGES AS THEY GO OFF TO UNIVERSITY. BEN PARKER HAS BEEN AMAZINGLY INSPIRED TO SHARE LESSONS LEARNT THROUGH THE GOOD AND NOT SO GOOD EXPERIENCES THAT HE AND HIS FRIENDS HAD TO FACE UP TO.

I RECOMMEND THIS GUIDE AS AN INCREDIBLY HELPFUL TOOL TO ALL YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE AT THIS STAGE ON THEIR LIFE'S JOURNEY.

+ MAJOR MARK SAWYER - DIRECTOR ALOVE UK

GOING TO UNI IS A MAJOR TIME IN ANYONE'S LIFE AND SOMETIMES IT'S DIFFICULT TO KNOW WHERE TO LOOK FOR ADVICE, BUT THIS RESOURCE IS REALLY HELPFUL, IT LOOKS AT LOADS OF DIFFERENT ELEMENTS OF STUDENT LIFE AND GIVES A FAIR AND RELEVANT INSIGHT INTO THEM.

+ BETHANY HAMPEL - STUDENT

IF YOU ARE A YOUNG PERSON CONNECTED TO OR PART OF THE SALVATION ARMY AND YOU'RE STARTING UNIVERSITY OR EVEN ALREADY PART-WAY THROUGH I WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ THIS GUIDE.

+ MATT WHITE - ALOVE UK

About The Author - Ben Parker

BEN STUDIED ENGLISH LITERATURE AT WARWICK UNIVERSITY BETWEEN 2005 AND 2008. HE ATTENDS STAINES SALVATION ARMY AND CURRENTLY WORKS FOR THE DEPARTMENT FOR ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE. HE IS A FAN OF ALL-NIGHT WII MARATHONS, MR KIPLING MINI-BAKEWELLS AND ANY BOOK ADDICTIVE ENOUGH TO MAKE HIM MISS HIS STATION.

