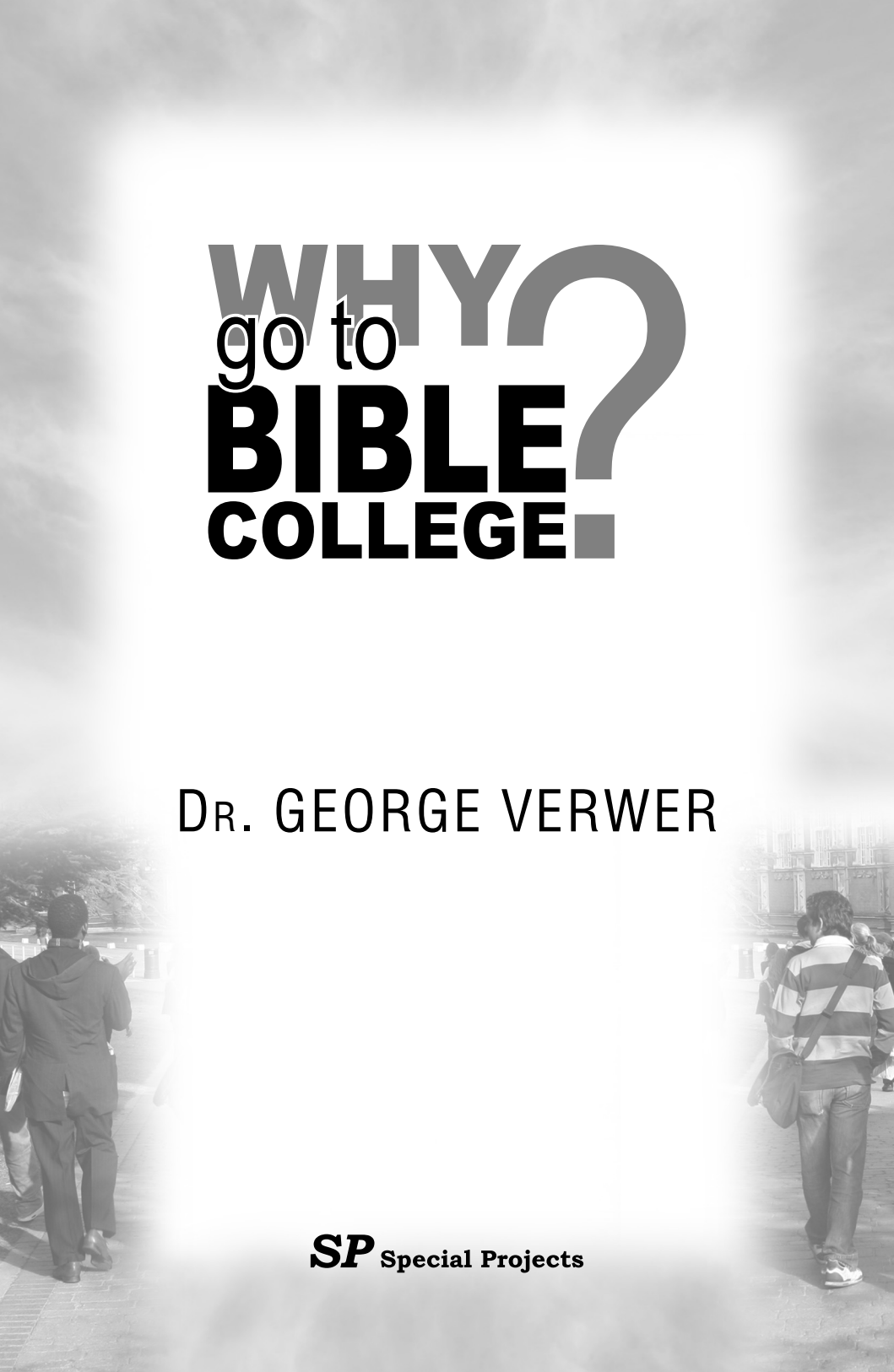


WHY go to **BIBLE** **COLLEGE?**



DR. GEORGE VERWER



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SP Special Projects



Why Go to Bible College?

by Dr. George Verwer

Edited by *Tony Sargent*

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Why Go to Bible College?

I count it a privilege to be able to share a burden that the Spirit of God very much has put upon my heart on why I feel many more young people today should consider going to Bible College, or a Christian college or an equivalent.

I was in Switzerland ministering at a Bible College a few months ago that had a tremendous program. They shared with me that the number of people actually coming to that college was decreasing. Here in Europe I have heard that there is almost a crisis in terms of the number of students who are enrolling in Bible College. In North America the situation is very different from Europe. Many Bible Colleges have evolved into universities where they give degrees that are much more acceptable in their culture. They offer a much wider range of subjects. There are also more traditional Bible Colleges in North America. Some of them are doing very well in enrollment – I think of Briar Crest and Moody Institute. However, others are struggling. Sheer number of students of course is not everything; it's only one factor.

God has very much put the burden on my heart to share with people some of the reasons – and I've listed twelve – why a young person today, and maybe even someone not so young, should consider spending a couple of years or more at a Bible College or Training Institute.

There have been situations where I have given the impression

that I was not even in favour of people going to Bible College. Perhaps the message I shared *Seven Things they didn't teach me at Bible College* gave a false impression, though whenever I have shared that message I have generally brought out very positive points. The fact that I graduated from Moody Bible Institute speaks pretty loud and clear to most people. I would like to believe that somehow through the Holy Spirit OM and I have been instrumental in seeing thousands go to Bible College. As far as I know that's true. At the same time there were those occasions when perhaps I gave that impression (and probably on certain occasions I felt that way). One or two years actually out on the job, putting into practice the things that we say we believe, seemed to be better than giving two years to a more academic environment! When I shared that, however, I often pointed out that many people, through one or two years out on the job in something like OM, frequently decided after that they needed to go to Bible College! So I see very clearly today, looking back over more than thirty-five years of ministry, that it is not an either/or situation, nor do I put aside those people who feel very much led to go to a secular university or college. We need both, and God, by His Holy Spirit, will lead different people in different ways. Our present culture, however, especially in some countries, very much leans against people having a Bible College experience. This is just one of a number of reasons why I feel burdened to share these thoughts at this time.

I have written down twelve reasons why I would like you to consider going to Bible College. I realise that there are quite a few other very unique training institutes and discipleship schools that have been raised up in the last decade or two. Some of what I say will certainly be relevant for people wanting that kind of short-term experience as well. However, I am tending in my mind at this point to think in terms of a Bible College where you have at least two or three years of training and experience. Generally at the end the student receives some kind of diploma, some kind of qualification, that is accepted by missionary agencies and by other Christian organizations that are looking for recruits.

My own testimony is that God led me to leave a more secular kind of liberal arts college that did in fact have a religious background to go to Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. I was a young Christian. I was catching the vision for world evangelism. I especially was very much involved in local evangelism. The college I went to, Marable College, was out in the country in the foothills of the Smoky Mountains. I ended up hitch-hiking into the city of Knoxville to do some of my evangelism. I believe God led me to that college and I don't despise the year and a half I spent in a liberal arts education. And quite a few Christian colleges today, like Wheaton College, where I have just come (1998) from taking their missions conference, of course, specialise in giving people what they would call a Christian liberal arts education. It was there at Marable that I met Dale Rhoton. Many of you have heard this story, how I was warned about Dale. I was told that he was a fanatic – he was baptising people in the showers! Our friendship now has gone on some thirty-eight years. We went to Maxico together, and I guess it was going to Maxico that confirmed that I should get into a Bible College. I'd only just begun to hear about such an institution – in order to specifically prepare for going to the mission field. We have to acknowledge that the Bible College and Bible Institute movement has been one of the greatest institutions that God has used to prepare people for the mission field. And if we are to see the workers that we are longing to see go out into the harvest field then simultaneously we must emphasise the importance of Bible training and the importance of missionary training. Some colleges are actually called missionary training colleges.

✦ Reason 1

My first reason, however, why I want you to consider Bible College is because it is a place where people are God-focused and God-centred. With all the weaknesses, with all the struggles, which will always be true wherever human beings are, there is a great move in these colleges – and I've spoken at them all over the world – for people to know God. Surely with all the things that are required of us in this world, getting to know God is the most important. And



to be exposed for a couple of years to men and women of God, to be sitting in a chapel service where godly people share their vision and preach from the Word of God, is a very valuable experience. How many young people going to some purely secular institution would have had the opportunity that Wheaton's students had just a few weeks ago when I was there for four days to focus on knowing God and on World Missions. Each morning there were 2,000 in the chapel. It's true maybe some of them would have preferred not to have been there but they *were* there, and it was a rich opportunity for me to open my heart and share from the Word of God and about World Missions! About 700 responded with some kind of written feedback. I have gone to colleges all over Europe, which is in many ways a different situation. Even England would be quite different from Germany or Switzerland. I have seen what God can do in this environment where priority is given to the Word of God, to knowing God and so spiritual things in general, including the challenge of world evangelism.

✦ Reason 2

Secondly, another reason is to be in an environment where there are men and women of God who are willing to be mentors, who are willing to give pastoral care, who are willing to give instruction and oversight. I think of some whom I had the privilege of meeting when I was a student at Moody Bible Institute. Not only those who were teaching, who had a long-term impact on my life, but also those who just came as visitors. Then there were those who were in nearby churches like Alan Redpath, who was the pastor of Moody Church where I went as a student. He became a longstanding friend and a partner in Operation Mobilisation from its very early days. To meet men and women who believed in nights of prayer and encouraged us in our early prayer meetings, to meet men and women who built their whole life on the Word of God is an enormous challenge. It has remained an enormous inspiration that helps set one's whole pattern for future living. The environment we live in impacts us in a tremendous way and I personally feel that before we enter into some of these heavy, secular environments, even anti-Christian

universities, it is important as much as possible to be grounded in our faith. We need to be able to answer tough questions that will be thrown at us by atheists, by agnostics, by people who are against our Christian faith. With all the pressure for people to go to university and get degrees and qualifications, we have to acknowledge that there is an amazing percentage who seem to either lose their faith in the process or who become very, very confused and are unable to be effective for Christ. I have always spoken positively about students who go to Cambridge and Oxford where also I often minister. It's partly because of the strong Christian Union movement at Cambridge and Oxford that men and women come to Christ and that all kinds of other things take place. Praise God for that, but there are many universities, many institutions that don't have that same, strong Christian environment. Again, the Lord leads different people in different ways and I clearly believe that both paths can be from Him.

✦ Reason 3

The third reason I want you to consider Bible College is because of the men and women that you will actually meet and get to know including qualified teachers. We need to be taught the Word of God. We see that as a model in the Old and New Testaments. What a privilege it is to really get to know some of these people and to be able to share their lives. Of course, there is a great difference between a small college and a very large college. In Europe almost all of our colleges are relatively small. Even in the larger colleges in North America and other places, the teacher/student ratio is quite encouraging. With a little bit of initiative on the part of the student the possibilities for personal long-term friendship and mentoring are very real.

✦ Reason 4

The fourth reason is the tremendous emphasis that most Bible Colleges and Christian colleges have on world missions. Now here's where we really need to be honest to face the reality that many churches today no longer give much emphasis on World Missions. The ignorance



on the part of the average young person about World Missions and what God has done and what is happening right now is really quite tragic. Therefore, one of the great factors in the whole Bible College movement is the emphasis on World Missions. If you go to a Bible College you are going to meet missionaries. You will probably have some courses connected with World Missions and other related subjects. If we really believe that the Bible is God's Word then we will value this particular aspect of Bible College ministry. The fact is that mission conferences often take place in Bible Colleges; people in movements like OM are often invited to Bible Colleges to teach or to share. Sometimes we are invited to Bible Colleges more than to local churches, though there are, of course, many outstanding missionary-minded local churches. We see clearly from Acts 13 the local church is the key in sending out missionaries. Committed local churches often work very closely with Bible Colleges. Many of their pastors have had Bible College education. That's a beautiful thing but it is diminishing, especially in some situations. I don't think we can begin to estimate the importance of the mission conferences and other missionary exposure events that take place in Bible Colleges. This is something that is so often missed when people don't have that experience. I hope it will continue in the future. I know that in OM our partnership with literally hundreds of Bible Colleges, big and small, and other training institutions is incredibly important.

Now we live in a day when some larger churches that do have a degree of mission vision are tending to bypass Bible College training. This may be a mistake though if they have their own training program and if they are really loyal and faithful to the Word of God I am sure they can accomplish in the local church some of the same things that can happen in Bible College. I was just reading a new manuscript by Michael Griffiths on the whole subject of the local church and missions. On one page he shares about fifteen different points where a Bible College can provide something that cannot be so easily offered in the local church. We know we live in a day when God is going to lead different people in different ways. My burden, rather than criticizing somebody else's way of doing something or

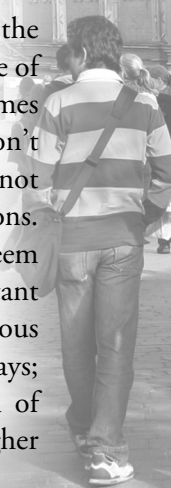
criticizing some local church, is that we will be more grace-awakened and more open towards one another and the way the Holy Spirit works, so that there is unity in the midst of great diversity.

✿ Reason 5

When someone is in Bible College they have the opportunity to really be exposed to a wide range of Christian organisations. Not only missionary organisations, not only people that emphasise going to the ends of the earth, but often organisations and churches that are involved locally. In most Bible Colleges and Christian Colleges there is an increasing emphasis on the practical—getting out in local churches, getting out into prison ministry, getting out into the streets, developing skills to communicate. This is why, of course, so many during their summers when they are at Bible Colleges come and serve with organizations like Operation Mobilisation, and provide often the leadership for various short-term and summer activities. Many people would have never known about OM and other mission agencies if they hadn't gone to Bible College, where these things at least get some exposure. In some cases of course across the world today ex-OM people are teaching in Bible Colleges. In some cases they are the principals; this speaks louder than words of OM's commitment to college training.

✿ Reason 6

The sixth reason is because of the emphasis in the Bible on the whole area of prayer. I am sure many of you know that this is one of my greatest burdens for the church. Prayerlessness so easily comes in; even some ministers in various surveys have indicated they don't really have much of a prayer life. Personally I feel that there is not enough emphasis on prayer in our greater academic institutions. This results in men and women entering leadership who don't seem to know the reality of prayer and spiritual warfare – those important aspects of personal Christian life. Most Bible Colleges have various kinds of prayer meetings; many of them have prayer emphasis days; some even have days of prayer and fasting. The general level of spirituality at many of these institutions and colleges is a bit higher



than one would find in the average church and other organisations. There are beautiful exceptions, and of course there is a tremendous pressure on Christian Colleges and Bible Colleges to de-emphasise prayer and to maintain a strong academic level. The latter is needed in the world today, but at the same time, the emphases on spiritual life, prayer, evangelism and other basic aspects of discipleship needs to be maintained. It will be no easy task.

✿ Reason 7

Another reason I think you should consider Bible College is the emphasis that is given to actual evangelism. As I have already mentioned, quite a few Colleges have their students go out in evangelism. Sometimes you can't even graduate from one of these institutions unless you have had a summer, or even a year, of experience overseas. I think it is important to mention at this point that there is such an amazing range of different colleges and institutions. Before you decide to go to one you can arrange a preliminary visit; you can read their literature. It is possible and important to know what you are getting into and what is the particular emphasis of that College. I especially always like to know: what do they do in terms of practical Christian ministry? The highlight of my own time at Moody was the opportunity I had to get out into the streets, into prisons and involvement in door-to-door ministry and evangelism, and to actually see people come to put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That made the study, the academic side, so much more important. It made a lot more sense. The whole challenge today of accountability is emphasised at these colleges. The whole subject of mentoring is increasing, and in many colleges there is definitely a programme in which each student has some degree of individual mentoring. I believe it is a great mistake if we just with one sweeping evaluation consider Bible Colleges out of date or old-fashioned, or not something that fits in to society today. Some people say the same thing about the Bible, and certainly about prayer, so we need to be careful, especially with the tremendous emphasis today on syncretism and universalism where people are trying to say that ultimately everybody will go to Heaven. Naturally

a Bible College that teaches the Word of God, that speaks clearly about Heaven and Hell and about the lostness of people, that trains men and women to go out and rescue the perishing and care for the dying is going to be written off by certain people in our humanistic and secular society! They are considered old-fashioned! My own experience is that many of these colleges have made important changes and are remaining at the cutting edge of what God is doing in the world today. Personally, I am more concerned about what God is doing than what man is doing with all of his creativity in the world in which we live!

✦ Reason 8

Furthermore, the Bible College experience is important in connection with the church. Many people only receive good teaching for the first time about the church when they go to a Bible or Christian College. The Church should not see the Christian College as some kind of alternative to what they are attempting to do, especially in the pluralistic age in which we live. Many people especially in the pluralistic age in which we live. Many people have come to Christ in a campus experience; many people today have come to Christ outside of the confines of a particular local church. It has often been in Bible College that they acquired an understanding of the church and got involved in a nearby local biblical church. Quite a few people who got linked with a church during their Bible College time remained linked with that church the rest of their life. My own experience was that I was converted in a Billy Graham meeting. I never really, before I went to College, had any kind of in-depth local church experience. It was at Bible College where I began to meet men and women who were involved in the church. I went around Chicago ministering in churches, getting to know churches, and came under the teaching of Alan Redpath at Moody Church near the Institute.

✦ Reason 9

The ninth reason, of course, is the emphasis in Christian Colleges on cross-cultural training. Most colleges today have students from

all over the world. That in itself is a valuable training exposure and life-preparing experience. To be able to go out with an international group into evangelism, to be able to pray together, to sit down and adore Him, and have fellowship with people of other cultures and other nations is just so valuable! I know, of course, that this can take place also on a secular campus and in many other situations in the world in which we live. When we meet with other Christians we are having fellowship in Christ. This helps us lay a foundation that we will need later on when we are attempting to reach out cross-culturally to the non-Christian and to those who even oppose the Christian faith.

✦ Reason 10

My tenth reason, of course, is that through a time at a Christian College or a Bible College a person develops relevant and important skills. We need certain skills to be effective in ministering—preaching, teaching, and communications in general. Of course, spiritual skills such as having a biblical balanced view of spiritual warfare and subjects such as demonology, eschatology and healing are vitally important. All these things are in the Word of God. There is too much ignorance today concerning the basic doctrines of the faith. Doctrine is important. We are seeing in so many parts of the world extremism, false doctrines and the growth of cults. We are seeing people who one minute are attempting to witness for Christ and the next minute they have lost their faith! They were not able to stand up against the powerful, persuasive arguments of false cults or just agnosticism, atheism, New Age, and other philosophies which are sweeping the world. We need men and women today who are grounded in the Word of God. We need men and women today who know the Bible. Just the opportunity to get to know the Bible to me is so important and shouts out so loudly the importance of a Bible College education. Whether you go into a marketplace ministry with a bank or a company, or whether you go out into ministry of a mission in some distant country, to have a knowledge of the Word of God is extremely important whatever your future may be. There are some colleges that still mainly train people for full-time ministry, which

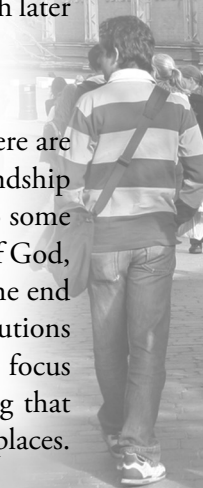
I think in some cases has created confusion because in one sense every Christian needs to be full-time for Jesus! Most colleges today now acknowledge the importance of ‘marketplace ministry’; they acknowledge the importance of people going back into their own town and working in so-called regular jobs and yet being a powerful witness in that job. The kind of training a Bible College can give is as important for that kind of ministry as it is for training a missionary to plant churches in Central Asia! Relevant skills and qualifications that are also recognised by mission societies or organisations who are looking for personnel are taught at Bible Colleges. It’s not easy for organisations and missions societies to know who to accept. Yes, mission organisations all need more people, but they need the right people. Often it’s the Bible College qualification, the reports and the testimony that comes with that, which helps such organizations to make a decision about appointing personnel.

✦ Reason 11

Keep in mind that in these colleges there is often a tremendous library and other facilities that help a person get a good education and develop a solid foundation. I know in my time at Moody it was in the library, picking up books that were not even necessarily part of my assigned course, that helped revolutionise my life. It was in the library at Moody that I read about Turkey and I read about Iraq. That reading set the whole course of the movement which later became known as Operation Mobilisation.

✦ Reason 12

And then my twelfth and final reason (though I am aware there are more reasons) is the whole opportunity for fellowship and friendship with people of like mind. People who are thinking at least to some degree along similar lines in regard to evangelism, the Word of God, the uniqueness and supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the end of the day one of the most beautiful things about these institutions is that they acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The focus is upon the Lord Himself. That is unique. This is something that a person will not find often in other institutions and other places.



I believe tied into that is the fact that we often, in such a college, learn how to fellowship with people of other denominations and other churches.

Now I know there are denominational colleges. They have their positives and negatives like every other institution. Often even in denominational colleges today there will be quite a sprinkling of people from other denominations and that always helps maintain a biblical balance. It's such an eye-opening experience and it can often help deliver us from extremism when we meet people from different backgrounds who think differently and may even have some different doctrinal emphases and yet they love the Lord. We can often see the reality of Jesus in them, maybe even more than we see in ourselves. For some, of course, when they are first thrown into this kind of environment, more questions and more struggles and more difficulties come as the simple answer sometimes slips out of the window! I think we need to constantly remember that great faith is not in the absence of doubts and struggles and questions but great faith is often built in the midst of that environment. Most Bible Colleges today don't just throw out one viewpoint about various controversial subjects but allow people to read and to think about different viewpoints and then make a decision for themselves before the Lord and the Word of God. It's a stretching, motivating, life-transforming experience.

Negatives

Probably some people reading this will ask, "what are some of the negatives?" Everything in life has positives and negatives. Every environment will have built into it certain weaknesses, whether it's Bible College, a university, a local church, your own home, or Operation Mobilisation! I have listed four of the weaknesses or negative points that often come in connection with Bible College and Christian college education.

✂ Unrealistic Expectation

I think the biggest problem is unrealistic expectation. Maybe we are just a young Christian, we might be leaning a bit towards

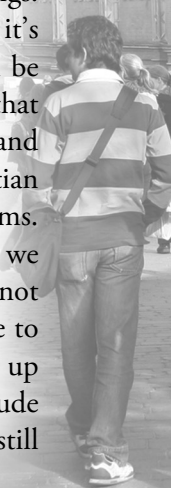
extremism or super-spirituality. I certainly was when I went into Bible College. My unrealistic expectation about how Christian teachers should be all living, how many fellow students should be behaving, caused a lot of deep anxiety and stress as I attempted to battle my way on in reality. But I am convicted that if we deal with unrealistic expectation then we are going to experience great blessing and receive an enormous amount, as I have shared in listing my twelve reasons.

✂ **Open Doors**

I think another negative, of course, is that often a Bible College diploma can give someone the idea that now automatically doors are going to open into Christian ministry. I don't think the world was ever that way but it's certainly less that way than ever. It's difficult to get a job in the world today: even in so-called full-time Christian ministry. Having a Bible College education or even a university education doesn't guarantee a job; that's why we have to make sure we are developing the right skills. We have to know how to go out and knock on doors and find the job, or find the ministry; it's not a matter of just sitting back. Nothing is automatic any more. I'm not sure if it ever was.

✂ **Over – familiarity**

A third danger is, of course, over-familiarity with spiritual things. Studying the Word of God all day, going to various meetings: it's easy to become overly familiar with spiritual things! There can be a sense of unreality that comes into it all, because we know that basically spiritual life is a personal thing between us and God, and we have to deal with sin each day. In a Bible College or Christian College environment we will be dealing with one set of problems. Later on working in a bank or working out on the mission field we will have similar problems and other new problems, so we cannot assume that just being in Bible College will cause us to become to spiritual. We will still, as Jesus taught, have to deny self, take up the cross every day and follow Him. And that's why the multitude of people who never had the opportunity for Bible College are still




fully required to live one hundred percent for Jesus Christ. They have the Bible, they have Christian books, we have cassette tapes and videos. None of us who know the Lord Jesus have any excuse for not living in daily personal revival. It's all available in Christ and through the Holy Spirit who lives inside each one of us.

Marriage

Finally, I guess I should say a word concerning Operation Marriage! Bible College is often considered a place to go to find a Christian wife or a Christian husband, and that's true and we praise God for those who are brought together in Bible College! I met my wife in Bible College, though she was going to night school and I mainly only met her when I went up to rent a Moody science film as she was responsible for that department. At the same time I would urge people who go to Bible College or who are in Bible College right now not to just rush into marriage simply because you get some nice vibrations and a little pitter – patter in your heart about a particular person. Often in a Bible College environment, without exposure to other situations, we have to confess we don't really know one another. It's best to have some time out in the field. It's best especially to get to know one another's different environments, especially if it's a cross-cultural marriage, before tying the final knot and getting married.

There are many other things that I would love to share. We are dealing with a huge subject. I can only hope that these few thoughts from my heart will enable you to pray more intelligently about your future and to make a decision as to whether you should get involved in being trained in a Bible College or Christian College. It's also my prayer that many others who read this will pray for Bible Colleges, not only in your own country but around the world and support them so that they can continue in their vital ministry.



WHY go to BIBLE COLLEGE?

Having a Bible college degree does not guarantee a job opportunity or ministry. Nevertheless, with 12 convincing and 4 invalidating reasons, Dr. George Verwer who had been instrumental in seeing thousands of people go to Bible college motivates youth to consider going to Bible college.

This booklet encourages one

- ✠ to become more God-focused and God-centered
- ✠ to get connected with people who give pastoral care
- ✠ to be more informed of World Missions
- ✠ to pray for Bible colleges to continue in their vital ministry



Dr. George Verwer is the Founder and former International Director of Operation Mobilisation, which is a ministry of evangelism, discipleship, training and church planting. He led this work from its inception in 1957 through to August 2003. He is still heavily involved in missions mobilisation around the world as a leader/minister at large with OM. He and his wife Drena, make their home in London, England.