

# The Place of the Bible in a Total Campus Ministry Program

Milt Hughes, Consultant, Bible Study/Discipleship, NSM

There are probably as many approaches to campus ministry as there are individual campus ministers. The style of ministry varies from state to state and from region to region. A given campus minister may give major attention to a particular aspect of programming while another may ignore that aspect completely. For example, consider evangelism. On one campus you could enter the front door of the Baptist Student Center and be accosted by two or three tract-bearing students before you got to the coke machine. On another you might be present for every general meeting of the BSU for four years and never find out how to become a Christian. Both of these two extremes should be avoided. A healthy balance must be achieved.

That healthy balance is clearly illustrated in the Baptist Student Union Symbol: The journey inward and the journey outward. Bible study is a vital part of that balance. I personally maintain that it should be clearly visible in all that we do. It shouldn't take a stranger very long to figure out that the Bible is the basis of both our theology and our practice. Regardless of the particular style of campus ministry chosen, the Bible must hold a central place in our programming if we are to remain true to our heritage.

I discovered at an early age, while still in high school, that the Bible was a vital source of power and enlightenment for my life. This discovery has been amplified many times in the thirty plus years since then. The Bible became the basis for my pastoral preaching and ministry and later my campus ministry. I have never escaped the conviction that Jesus Christ changed and is continuing to enrich my life and that my basic authoritative source of information about Christ is the written word, the Bible. That same conviction leads me to believe that I must be faithful to expose students (and others under my ministry) to the word of God. It is not enough to let them see my life and to develop ministries and programs based on what my experience with the Bible has been. I must take them to the source. It is not enough to study about the Bible. I must reveal the text, the content.

If we share with them only our own opinions and conclusions about the Bible, we have failed to equip them adequately for a living. They may soon forget what we teach them, or they may live to see us actually change our opinions and conclusions. We might even misdirect them. But, if we lead them into a systematic, life-long study of the Bible itself, they will constantly be brought back to the unchanging, foundational source of their faith. By the time of graduation they should have been thoroughly exposed to the importance of and the authority of the Bible, how to study and interpret it, and how to apply it to daily living. The overall BSU program should have dealt with the major themes and concepts of the Bible.

A common error of many campus ministers in planning the BSU program is to assume too much about the average student. We tend to begin them where we are rather than where they are. We might be trying to show them how to build a house when they are not sure they have a foundation. We already have the foundation, since we studied it while in college and seminary, and we tend to get ahead of the average student by assuming that he already has the foundation, when in reality he is still working on it. We get too interested in the finish carpentry work and the color of the carpets instead of securing the forms and pouring a level and solid foundation. We teach advanced calculus to students who haven't passed Math 101. We can handle Bultmann and Pannenberg because we know where we are building, but we must help the student have a firm foundation before introducing the more sophisticated and sometimes confusing concepts of modern theologians. The way to do this is through simple, basic Bible study and a comprehensive BSU program which reveals the word of God clearly in every possible way.

I'm not suggesting that we avoid critical problems and contemporary theology. There may very well be a time and place for this with more mature students. But always the prerequisites are Bible Survey 101, Life of Christ 102, How to Study the Bible 103, etc.

I remind you of the classical response of Karl Barth to the question of what he thought to be the most profound theological truth: "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." It seems to me that he is saying we should be given to the task of being sure that students know Jesus Christ profoundly and that they are unmistakably bound to his profound teachings in such a way as to revolutionize the rest of their lives. Serious, well-planned Bible study



will undergird this possibility.. Think with me now about how to give Bible study high visibility in the total campus ministry program.

The focus of our ministry is the student. As I look at that student I need to determine what it is I can do to help him/her to become a mature, ministering disciple of Jesus Christ. I want to help him to understand what it means to know and follow Jesus Christ. I want to equip him for a total life ministry under the Lordship of Christ. I want to lead him to apply the implications of being a Christian to the ethical and moral aspects of his life.

The major sources of achieving these desired outcomes in the life of the student is the Bible. The question is, how to get a significant part of the message of the Bible into the life of that student during the time he is in BSU.

While serving as campus minister-BSU director at the University of Southern California during the 1960's, I was actively involved in the ecumenical Chaplain's organization. Frequently our discussions would center on "the changing needs of students," "the changing scene of student causes," or "the changing role of the campus minister." Usually they would be latching onto some new crisis to rally student support. When the crisis passed, they would have to find some new purpose and reason to exist. On one occasion, I sensed the insecurity of some of the men and their apparent inability to know exactly why they were there. My response must have sounded shallow and simplistic as I told them "my reasons for being here have remained unchanged during these years. I am here for two reasons: first, to introduce students to Jesus Christ, and second, to lead Christians to become mature disciples." I felt that these two reasons were, and still are foundational, unchanging and comprehensive. We did evangelism, discipleship training and became involved in civil rights and other ethical concerns. The Bible and Bible study were at the heart of all that we did.

The Bible is timeless. Issues change. Our main concern should be to saturate students in the timeless message of the Bible so that they can discern how to apply the timeless message to changing issues. If we deal only with issues as they come along, and fail to teach them the biblical truths necessary to apply to issues, then we will have failed our students. It is not the purpose of this article to outline a comprehensive plan for developing a Bible study program for the BSU. This is covered elsewhere in the National Student

Ministries Strategy Documents. <sup>1</sup> We will deal rather with methodology and motivation.

There are four basic approaches for getting biblical content into the minds and hearts of students.

The first is through individual initiative and study. We should encourage students to develop the discipline of personal Bible study. We can provide suggestions for tools and approaches to study and seek to continually motivate them to do it. This approach is indispensable. If we give them only group study and "lecture" without leading them to study on their own they will lack motivation to continue after college. One of the most important contributions we can make in the life of a student is to lead him to love the word of God and to become involved in a lifetime study of it.

A second approach is the one-to-one study/instruction. This approach is much more concentrated and time consuming. The idea is to spend some quality time with key individuals leading them into disciplined study while actually studying with them. The leader passes on to another individual his own love for the word of God, his own example of commitment and discipline and his own skills in Bible knowledge. The leader is able to check the progress of the student on a regular basis and develop a highly individualized study plan for him. I would suggest this kind of relation with only two or three students. Time would prevent doing this with many more. These few students could be trained to lead the same kind of study with other individuals thus multiplying this particular ministry.

This approach will enable you to key on personal needs and tailor make a plan which will meet those needs through Bible study. It enables you to capitalize on those individuals who are ready to move ahead of the group and go deeper in their study of the word of God.

A third approach would be through small group study and sharing. This approach is probably the most widely used and one of the most productive. These groups can meet any time or any place and be lead by any qualified person. Some BSUs have reported as many as 130 groups going on in a given semester, most of them in dormitories. In a multiple group situation, a student can choose a convenient study group and become involved. His choices may include options of time, location and subject matter. The more the

options, the more the possibilities of involving more students in serious Bible study.

The small group situation encourages personal preparation and participation in discussing the text being studied. The participants benefit from the insights and experiences of others and have opportunity to thrash out points of their own theology.

A fourth approach is through the large group and classroom situations. Far too many BSUs use only this approach. The main thrust of their Bible study program is the lectures or vespers method. Whatever Bible is learned is done so while sitting in a row of chairs in a crowd of students listening to a lone speaker behind a lectern.

Since most BSUs do have large group meetings and place a lot of emphasis on these meetings, attention must be given to getting the maximum from them in terms of Bible teaching and learning. One approach would be to deal with a series of related topics throughout the year rather than having invited speakers select random topics. Give it continuity from week to week. Let the students see that it is moving in some significant direction. The large group and the formal classroom can be excellent methods of conveying certain aspects of biblical truth to large numbers of students.

A creative campus ministry will develop a healthy balance of all the four approaches, and utilize each of them to communicate the biblical message to students during the school year.

If the Bible is to have a strategic place in the total campus ministry then it must have such a place in the life of the campus minister. I firmly believe that the single most important characteristic of leadership is example. If we are to teach the Bible and seek to involve others in a study of the Bible, we must set a worthy example. The campus minister needs to set aside a good block of time each day for personal Bible study in areas other than preparation for leading a study that evening. Students will recognize that you are walking with Christ in the fellowship of his word and will be open to going to the same source which has marked your life.

If Jesus Christ is the focus of our campus ministry and the Bible becomes our major point of reference in terms of study and response we will be building the right kind of foundation for dis-



ciple making. And, after all, that is exactly what Jesus told his early followers they were to do.

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<sup>7</sup> National Student Ministries is currently at work developing an overall strategy for Bible study on campus. Input has come from a special design team, from state directors and many local directors. The strategy will be comprehensive and hopefully usable on practically any campus. It will be fully introduced at the 1981 Director's National Workshop and at Glorieta and Ridgecrest. Major thrust for student ministries in 1981-82 will be Bible study.