

Live in the Dorms

by Max Barnett

While you attend university, if at all possible, live in the dorms. Certainly it is not possible for everyone. Some cannot live in the dorms due to parents' desires, health reasons, finances, etc. Some are on commuter campuses where there are no dorms and this, of course, requires a different strategy. But on a campus that has dorms, it is often the best strategy on reaching those who live in on-campus housing – even if there are far more students who live off campus. Certainly you need an approach to ministry that includes commuters. But, because people have to be available in order to disciple them at a deep level, it is wise to concentrate on those who **are** most available. Those who live on campus are often more available and easier to train in ministry, since ministry opportunities are all around them.

If you are one of those who cannot live in the dorms, ask God how you can best grow and be involved in making disciples while being in school. But, if you have the opportunity to live on campus, take advantage of it. You can have a far greater ministry just by living in the dorms than you could ever have while living at home or in a nearby apartment.

Who you have as a roommate is very important. 2 Corinthians 6:14 (NAS) says, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers: for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" Usually this verse is used to support dating or marrying only a Christian. It certainly applies there, but the context of the verse is not talking about marriage. This verse is speaking of a general principle that applies in many situations and can apply to a roommate situation. The atmosphere in your room helps to set the tone of your ministry. You want a roommate who is committed to the Lord and eager to use your room for ministry purposes.

If you are just entering a university and haven't made arrangements for a roommate, you may not have any control over your living situation at first. But you certainly can in a few days, weeks, or at least for the second semester. If you get involved in a solid Christian ministry on campus, you will likely meet someone who has the same desires you have. Ask God to give you a roommate who is also serious about being used of God to impact the lives of others. Team up with that person who is committed to using your room as a place for ministry.

While you are in the university, be committed to walking with God and seeking to win and disciple other students. Lamentations 3:27 says, "It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke of his youth." As a university student, your primary concern should be making disciples on the campus. Now is the best time to learn about discipling. You are not in the university just preparing to live. You are living now. Become deeply involved in a relationship with Christ and do what He commanded you – "Go therefore and make disciples ..." (Matthew 28:19). Literally, the "go" in that verse is best translated "as you are going" – so "as you are going to school, 'make disciples.'" Making disciples is a command from God and is to be a serious part of your life while you are at the university.

Paul wrote in Timothy 4:12, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe." You are now, as a young person, to be an example. Godly lives are needed as examples on the university campus.

If you want to be used by God in the lives of others, you need every advantage you can get. By living in the dorms you are strategically placing yourself to have a ministry. Even your specific room in the dorms can be strategic.

Every year at Oklahoma University some students involved in the ministry of the Baptist Student Union try to strategically place themselves so they can have the greatest ministry possible. On the floor where they plan to live they ask for the room nearest the elevator. All the students who live on that floor must pass that room to reach their own rooms. Those students who have strategically placed themselves in certain rooms for ministry have an open door policy. Anytime they are not studying, they leave their door open, providing an excellent opportunity for building relationships. Students often gather where there is an open door and some meaningful conversations take place.

It is also a good idea to arrive back at school early and get settled so you can help others move in. Stock up on refreshments (cokes, chips, etc.) and invite students and their parents in for a break. This will enable you to meet your floormates right away. Having already begun to build a relationship, you can, when it is appropriate, invite them to a dorm Bible Study. Year after year we have seen students become Christians and many who are already Christians begin to grow as these "floor ministers" spend time with them, pray for them, get them in a non-threatening floor Bible study, invite them to BSU activities, and invite students to go to church with them.

At the University of Oklahoma, most freshmen are required to live in the dorms. By their sophomore year most have moved out into apartments for mostly selfish reasons that they make sound reasonable. One reason they offer is, "I can't study due to noise." Please don't adopt this or other poor excuses. You can go to the library to study. But living in the dorms could be the greatest ministry opportunity you will ever have. Be careful not to throw it away. You will never again live with so many young people on so few acres. God has gathered them, so why run from them to a secluded apartment?

We encourage students to get vision for their dorm. Believe God can use you to make a difference in some lives. Since you will be one of only a few upperclassmen living in the dorms, select a strategic room and live among the freshmen. There you can find those whom you and your roommate can begin to influence and disciple. There are a number of students at Oklahoma University who are beginning to walk with God because committed upperclassmen have stayed on their dorm floors with the purpose of discipling freshmen. Other floors may not have a single student involved in our BSU ministry. No one lives on that floor who has decided to lay down his life to make disciples.

Every year in late spring we have a Baptist Student Union banquet that honors the Seniors. This is one exciting banquet. Each Senior is honored with a framed quote by Jim Elliot – "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Another student shares what the Senior has meant to him or her. Many times a student will say something like this: "When I was a freshman the first person who met me and reached out to me when I moved onto the 4th floor of Walker Tower was _____. I often went to his room, and he began to share his life with me. We did fun things together. He invited me to a Bible study in his room. He also began to take me to the Baptist Student Union and church. I became a Christian. I didn't know it at the time, but he was discipling me and now my whole life has changed because he lived on my floor."

Why live in the dorms? Consider these reasons:

1. You are far more available to those who need your ministry. As students face problems, most want to talk to someone. As things go wrong, which they will, they need a listening ear. Many times at night when they are tired of studying, they are very open to talk about their desires, dreams and frustrations. Now the door begins to open to share Christ and what He can do in their lives. You can be there for some students during those crucial times when they open their hearts.
2. Living in the dorms requires no time in food preparation. If you live off campus you have to plan meals, shop to purchase the food, cook it, then clean up – all time away from studying and ministry. So what usually happens? You go get a pizza or other fast food or you snack out of the refrigerator and eat far less than a balanced meal. So if you do not live in the dorm, you will likely not eat right.
3. You can also use your meal times to a greater advantage. Going to the cafeteria with another student is a very natural way of building a relationship. Meal times can be great times of ministering to others and you have many choices of people to eat with.
4. In the dorms, it is much easier to change rooms or roommates. In an apartment, students often become frustrated with their living situation. Maybe their roommates are sloppy in the way they keep the apartment, loud with music, or have friends over when they need to study. Due to the lease contract, it is not easy to move out. In the dorms, if you don't like your roommate situation, there is usually someone else you can move in with, or perhaps there is a room that becomes vacant. These kind of changes are easier to arrange in the dorms.
5. Students who live in the dorms tend to make better grades than those who do not. The head of Housing at Oklahoma University told me the results of studies they have conducted that proved this. While living in the dorms, you are closer to the library and you are more accessible to helps such as university computers. There are other students in the dorm who can help you, who have already had that course or that professor who is giving you problems. Old test files and other resources are more available. The resident advisor and other university officials can also be quickly accessed when needed.
6. For those who live off campus, transportation and parking is often a hassle. By the time you drive to campus, find a parking place, then go where you need to go, valuable time has been consumed. When the weather is bad, the difficulties are even worse. Living in the dorms saves precious time.
7. Living on campus, you get in on many aspects of university life that those living off campus do not. You will learn a lot about people by living around them. Also, there are many social functions that take place in a dorm. Much of your education will take place in your living situation. You are preparing for life, not just studying certain courses. Dorm life is a great education in itself.
8. You have a better opportunity to build lasting relationships in the dorms. When our son Brent was in college, we lived one mile from the campus. It would certainly have been less expensive for him to live at home. But he lived for five years in one dorm. He was much more a part of the university life than if he had lived at home. He lived there in order to be a minister of Jesus Christ. And he was. I know a young man in a very strategic place in the university today who my son led to Christ. Brent also built some lasting relationships while living in the dorms. Five years after graduation, he and some other guys still keep each other accountable to walk with God. Those guys are all married now

and have great relationships today. They started as freshmen involved in the Baptist Student Union ministry and living in the dorms.

9. Living within your ministry area, you can use short periods of time for ministry more easily. Ephesians 5:16 says, "Making the most of your time, because the days are evil." As a university student you have limited time for ministry due to classes, labs, studying, possibly working part-time, etc. So when you do have a few minutes to spare, you have a far greater opportunity to minister to someone in a dorm than if you are living off campus.
10. It is easier to have spontaneous ministry opportunities while living in the dorms. Situations arise that present great opportunities for you to share Jesus Christ.
11. Your life can be more easily observed by others. You are more accessible to non-Christians who need to see how a Christian lives. You can also be an example to Christians who need to see your life.
12. You can be around other Christians in the dorm or on the campus who can encourage and help you. A Christian network begins to build in a dorm and there is help and encouragement for you, which at times you will desperately need. As you seek to minister, you will sometimes be discouraged. Or need a word from another Christian who can help. You can get to those who can help you much more quickly if you live around them.
13. You can begin to build a team of like-hearted people in your dorm. A team can accomplish far more working together than you would ever accomplish working alone. Accountability is more realistic since they live close to you and can observe your life. Your teammates can be a great help to you.
14. You are more available to your ministry leader. It is much easier for me to go to the dorms and visit a number of students in one dorm than to drive all over town visiting in apartments. I am able to see the students who live in the dorm much more than I do those living off campus.
15. It is much easier to have a ministry from inside the dorm. It is very difficult in most situations to come in from the outside to lead a bible study, etc. In some situations, due to campus "locked door" policies, it is almost impossible. A university, even if its leadership is hostile to Christianity, cannot keep you from having a ministry in the dorms where you live.
16. You have a more concentrated target area in the dorms. Those you are seeking to influence are in close proximity. You can help to create an atmosphere in which the Gospel can penetrate.
17. Opportunities to pray with another individual or group are readily available. Small groups of Christians gathering to pray is extremely important for effectiveness in ministry.

I have often heard the arguments for living off campus. The one most commonly used is that it is less expensive. Many students insist that three or four people living in an apartment costs less than living in the dorm, and "costs less" are two words that parents love to hear. But, due to the cost of eating out, more gas for the car, the apartment furnishings, etc. it is not always less expensive. And even if it is, and there is any way you can live in the dorms, it may be well worth the extra cost. It costs to have a ministry. It costs time, and it costs money. For example, last night my wife and I had a fantastic opportunity with a young couple about to be married. We took them out to eat and had a good five hours ministering to them. But I paid for the meal. It cost money to have that opportunity, and I believe it was a worthwhile investment.

So what if it does cost you more to live in the dorm? Are you willing to sacrifice in other ways to have the money you need to live where you can have the most effective ministry? How badly do you want to have a ministry? Having a ministry on a college campus today is tough. You need every advantage you can get. Give yourself a fighting chance – live in the dorms if at all possible.

If you want to be of God then strategically place yourself for ministry. The rest of your life you will probably live in an apartment or a house. So, during your undergraduate years especially, live in the dorm. Chances are, you will never have a greater opportunity to influence people to become followers of Jesus Christ.

I have been on one campus working with students for almost 28 years and I have seen the proof: those who have had the greatest ministry on that campus are those who have lived in the dorm.

I will never forget the days I spent as a student living in the dorms. I am grateful to God that I had that opportunity. I know men walking with God today that I was able to minister to during my time in the dorms. I know others who didn't live in the dorm and missed opportunities that I had. Don't miss the greatest opportunity you have ever faced – life in the dorm as God's minister to that floor. All your life you will be grateful that you did seek God's best in your life. Team up with a buddy and go after the lives of students.