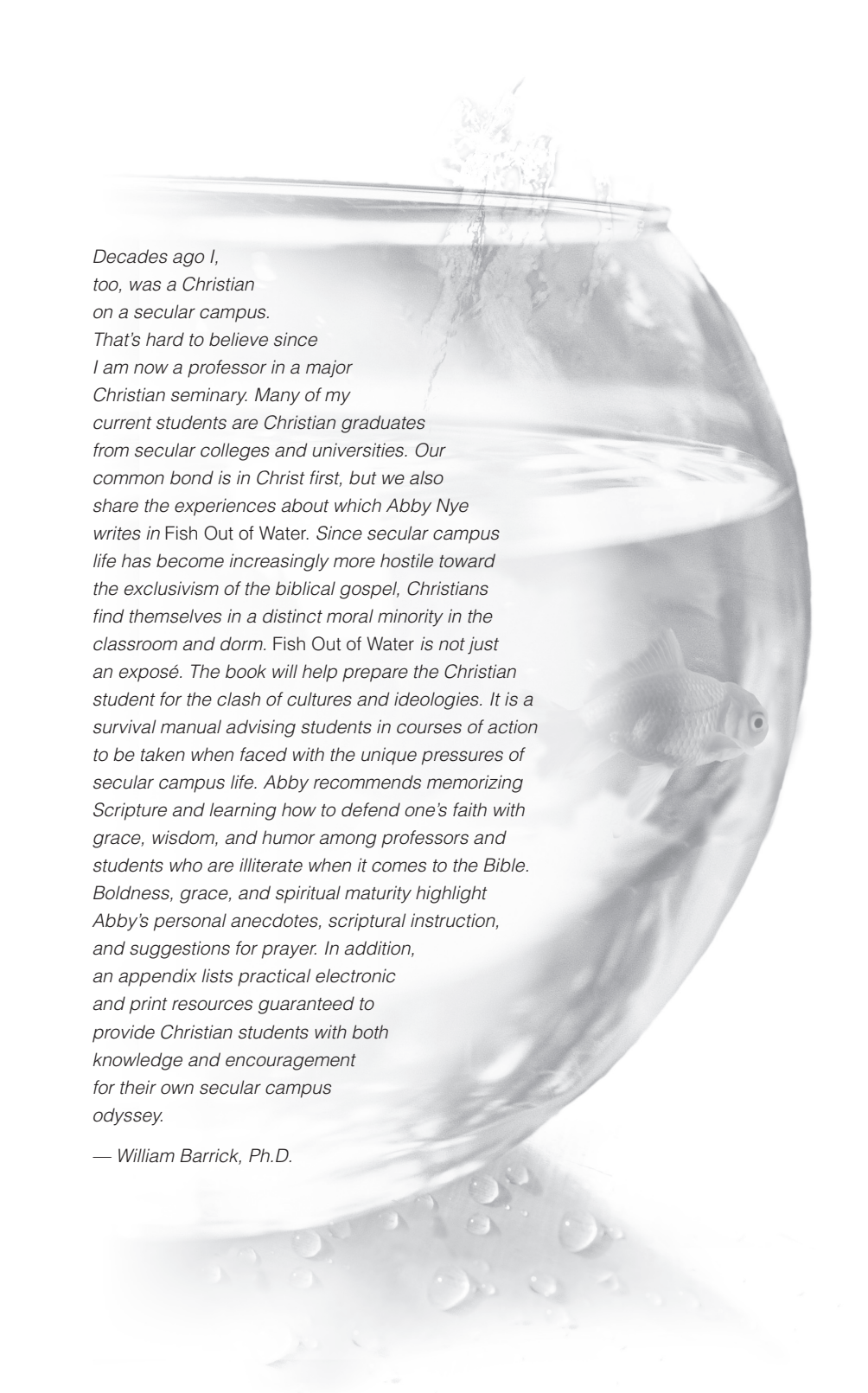




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*Decades ago I, too, was a Christian on a secular campus. That's hard to believe since I am now a professor in a major Christian seminary. Many of my current students are Christian graduates from secular colleges and universities. Our common bond is in Christ first, but we also share the experiences about which Abby Nye writes in *Fish Out of Water*. Since secular campus life has become increasingly more hostile toward the exclusivism of the biblical gospel, Christians find themselves in a distinct moral minority in the classroom and dorm. *Fish Out of Water* is not just an exposé. The book will help prepare the Christian student for the clash of cultures and ideologies. It is a survival manual advising students in courses of action to be taken when faced with the unique pressures of secular campus life. Abby recommends memorizing Scripture and learning how to defend one's faith with grace, wisdom, and humor among professors and students who are illiterate when it comes to the Bible. Boldness, grace, and spiritual maturity highlight Abby's personal anecdotes, scriptural instruction, and suggestions for prayer. In addition, an appendix lists practical electronic and print resources guaranteed to provide Christian students with both knowledge and encouragement for their own secular campus odyssey.*

— William Barrick, Ph.D.



1 CHAPTER

Welcome Week

As modern philosophers go, Dr. Seuss isn't bad. A popular high school graduation gift these days is a book written by the master of rhyme titled, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* The book, a graduation speech Dr. Seuss once delivered, begins like this:

Congratulations!
Today is your day.
You're off to Great Places!
You're off and away!

Dr. Seuss is right. College is just the beginning of the many places you'll go, the beginning of many firsts. College is the first time you're free from the regimented schedule of high school. You begin making more and more decisions for yourself — whether to go to class, or roll over and stay in bed. Whether to wear those jeans for the third day in a row, or do laundry. College is an exciting time, one more open door beckoning you



Fish Out of Water

further down the pathway of life. It's a time when decision-making and responsibilities truly become your own.

You have brains in your head.

You have feet in your shoes.

You can steer yourself
any direction you choose.

You're on your own. And you know what you know.

And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.

I was so excited about going to college that I jumped in with both feet. Like Alice in Wonderland, I found myself in a strange and unfamiliar place, but this one was called Welcome Week. I understand that some years ago, Welcome Week used to be when you went to campus to walk your class schedule, buy books at the bookstore, find the good places to study among the library stacks, and meet other students in your dorm. You know the commercial that says, "This is not your father's Oldsmobile"? Well, likewise for Welcome Week. This is not your father's Welcome Week.

These days, on most college campuses, Welcome Week is a not-so-subtle indoctrination into moral relativism. Moral relativism is the belief system that says there is no right or wrong. Right is what's right for you. When followed to its logical end, moral relativism leads to anarchy, but when it's cloaked in skits, games, group activities, mandatory lectures, and free pizza, it passes for freshman fun. Welcome Week is also an initiation into the drinking and partying scene, with ample opportunities for hooking up, which for you moms and dads is slang for a one-night stand. So much for finding out the library hours.

J. Budziszewski, author of *How to Stay Christian in College*, and a faculty member in the government and philosophy departments at the University of Texas, Austin, wrote that his first two years at college were among the most stressful in his life. *Years?* For me, the *first week* of college was the most stressful in my life. While some regard college as an intellectual adventure,

preparation for a career, or a four-year party, Budziszewski said he regarded it as a trial.

“The trial most parents and incoming students don’t expect is indoctrination,” Budziszewski wrote in a magazine article that I’d read my senior year in high school.¹ After going through Welcome Week, I believe that Budziszewski had put it mildly.

Welcome Week was billed as four days of festivities where students make new friends, build meaningful relationships, and grow oriented to college life. A little fun here, a little fun there, a little fun everywhere.

Events kicked off with all the freshmen milling about on the grassy quad. We swatted away the mosquitoes as the sun cranked up the heat. An upperclassman began yelling instructions into a megaphone. It was an icebreaker, a way to meet new people. Our directions were to spread out and break into groups of three. Each group of three would then interact with other groups of three spread across the quad. Each group was to choose a leader. Our leader was a buff fellow with a generous crop of dark hair. So far, so good.

As our designated leader, his job was to assign a task to each person in the group. For example, he would say, “Go shake the hand of the guy wearing the Abercrombie and Fitch shirt and sunglasses standing by the bench.” Once the task was completed, as fast as possible, you were given another silly assignment. We had three minutes to complete a round and then we traded off for position of the leader. The game grew increasingly hectic as we rushed to follow the commands while other people were running across the quad trying to follow their commands.

Fortunately, I ended up in a pretty tame group. We stuck to directives like running up to people and asking for their birth dates, intended major, and what their favorite color was. The game was pretty fun, but as I looked around, I was shocked at what some of the students in the other groups were doing. In the group next to ours, girls were running up to kiss boys they’d never met, guys were doing a vulgar pelvic thrust, and girls stood three inches from the guys, gyrating like Britney Spears.



Fish Out of Water

From there, we moved on to additional icebreakers. We assembled on the grassy quad once again, this time realizing that it would be a good idea to use that SPF30 suntan lotion buried back in the dorm somewhere.

In this new, getting-to-know-you round, the orientation leader gripped a megaphone and shouted a question that everybody answered simultaneously.

“What state are you from?”

“What’s your favorite TV show?”

“What’s the name of your pet?”

I suppose, theoretically, when you shout that you’re from Chicago, your favorite television show is *Friends*, and your dog’s name is Spot, you will hear someone 200 people away shout the same thing, seek them out, and build a lasting friendship. Or not. Perhaps it was not intended as a way to meet other people, but to become more self-aware of who we were, and where we came from, as our answers echoed in our ears. I guess it was something along the lines of writing your name in your shorts when you go to camp. It seemed more like something middle school students would do at track and field day, but it was too early to write the whole thing off. After all, it was only day one of Welcome Week.

Later that afternoon, as everyone’s energy was draining, we broke into assigned orientation groups of about 20 students. The Welcome Week schedule said attendance at these meetings was mandatory. Here’s something I didn’t think to question until Welcome Week was over. If Welcome Week is voluntary, how can a meeting be mandatory? A voluntary mandatory meeting? It’s a classic oxymoron. Tip No. 1 for Freshman Orientation: If there’s not a grade involved, it’s probably not mandatory. Being new to the college scene, and being one who was taught to play by the rules, I dutifully attended the “mandatory” meeting.

In the first group I attended, we introduced ourselves, one at a time, and began getting to know each other. These groups have their downfalls, which I’ll get to in a minute, but you should also know that these groups are the prime spots where

you actually have enough time to connect with other students and form some friendships that will last throughout the year.

Over the next couple of days, we spent a lot of time together in these orientation groups. One of our first group activities was to fill out a little two-page survey.

This orientation leader, another friendly upperclassman, was asked what the survey would be used for. She smiled and said she didn't know. She did know that we didn't have to answer any question that made us uncomfortable. More smiling. We didn't have to put our names on it either.

Oh, but would we please fill in our Social Security numbers? This on a campus that prides itself on rigorous admission requirements. No names, but give us your Social Security number. Hmmm. Would you like a VISA card number, too? Being that I felt a touch uncomfortable giving my social security number to . . . wait, that's right, I had no clue to whom I was giving my Social Security number! I left it blank.

I moved on to the questions, which I assumed would be the usual fluff about your intended major, whether you plan to one day attend graduate school, how many hours you plan to study, and the number of beers you plan on drinking on an hourly basis. I poised my pencil, ready to fill in the little bubbles, then did a double take. The first several questions asked for my parents' occupations, level of education, and income. I immediately looked for the bubble that said "nobody's business." Not there. I marked the answer furthest from the truth. I read on. Additional questions asked my religion, my family's religion, whether or not I believed men and women are equal, if my religion believes men and women are equal, if I go to church, how often I go to church, and if abortion should be allowed under any circumstances.

The questionnaire went on to ask if I thought homosexuals should be able to adopt, if homosexuals should have marriage rights, and if I am friends with a person of a different race. It then asked political questions: How do you define yourself? Far right, Republican, neutral, Democrat, or far left? I wondered