



the **One Thing**

Whatever it is, it had better be worth it.

When I browse through eBay, I often wonder how I shopped before this innovative website came into existence. Before eBay, where could I find a Mr. T. t-shirt with the words, "I Pity the Fool" plastered across the front just a couple of clicks away from the original Duck Hunt version on the 8-bit Nintendo? Only here can one find the finer things of life.

Currently, this company has an advertising slogan that says, "Whatever it is, you can find it on eBay." It's probably true. Whatever the "it" is in your life that you could be possibly be looking for, this site is the best possible place to find it.

Just like we all have an "it" that we want to buy, we all have an "it" for which we are living our lives. It might be a person that you just can't get out of your mind. Maybe it is the ever-elusive American Dream. Approval may be the one thing that you spend your whole life pursuing. You might desire to make a significant impact on the world before you die. We all have our specific "it."

Whatever "it" is, "it" had better be worth it. Because if you spend your whole life pursuing it, the value of your pursuit had better be worth the price of the only life you've got to spend.

Your college life will be strikingly similar to eBay. Whatever it is, you can find it in college. If you are looking for unadulterated freedom from your parents in college, look no further. If you are searching for a party that starts your freshman year and will not stop until you graduate (four, five, or six years later), look no more. If you desire to find the love of your life one

week and find another love of your life the following week because your first love of your life turned out to be a tad too clingy with a touch of unstable tendencies, the dating options for you will be plentiful. If your heart's desire is to graduate with honors, you can do it with just the right amount of cramming and lack of sleep. Whatever it is, you can find it in college. But whatever it is, it had better be worth it.

Just take a trip into your school cafeteria and you will see the division of people separated by the ambition that drives them. You will see a table of jocks brimming with testosterone. Each individual player's one thing is to be the greatest student athlete who sets the school record and gets drafted in order to get paid tons of money to play a sport he would gladly play for free.

Then there's the table with the computer geeks. They commit identity theft simply because they can. They can hack into any account. They can write any program. It's hard for them to carry on an intelligent conversation because they can't type it to the other person. The ambition at this table might be to get a well-paying job developing websites or video games.

A good many tables over, you find the sorority girls. They are wearing matching shirts and carrying the same line of bags. Their hairstyles are strikingly similar to one another. They not only look alike, but they talk alike. Each girl's ambition is to be the most popular girl on campus, and with the right amount of behavior and exposure, she could easily succeed at that goal.

Whatever it is, you can find it in college. And whatever it is, it had better be worth it because you only have one shot at college. You also only have one shot at life, so how are you going to spend your one life?

I entered college unsure of my answer. I eagerly anticipated a fast-paced college experience filled with doing whatever my heart desired. Serving in many different organizations in high school, I also desired to be a leader known on my college campus. For the first time in my academic career, I actually wanted to succeed in my classes because I understood my performance would dramatically affect my job opportunities after I graduated. I also was hoping that by the time I graduated, I would be

1: the One Thing

dating a girl that could stand me long enough in order to marry me some time in the near future.

However, I also entered into college as a Christian. I committed to follow Jesus when I was seven years old. The following eleven years were full of advances and setbacks, but I was entering college still desiring to love Jesus better. The problem was that if I chose Jesus to be my one thing, the “it” for which I was going to live, he was going to affect all that other stuff.

I knew I couldn’t live for a few of those things. It would be impossible. I had to choose. But whatever I decided to make my one thing, everything else in my college experience was going to have to submit to that priority.

The Gift

I learned about the need to make a decision concerning the one thing even before classes started my freshman year. Recently, more colleges have chosen to bring in the freshman class a week before classes begin to indoctrinate them to the systems of campus life. Most freshmen feel as if they are at summer camp. Some programs divide the students into random groups hoping they will bond with one another through icebreakers, ropes courses, and other random activities. Freshmen have to attend seminars on how to check out books in the library, make an identification card, wash laundry, and tie shoes and such.

As many freshmen do, I slipped away towards the end of the week from attending all the activities. I was actually looking forward to classes beginning so I would have something to do! On the Friday before classes began, I borrowed my roommate’s bicycle to take a nice afternoon stroll through a nearby golf course. Not until the golfers began to tell me I was number one with their middle finger did I realize that bike riding was frowned upon on this elite golf course. As the expletives began to resonate within my ears and the golf balls began to whiz past by my head at an impressive velocity, I decided to stroll back to the main road.

As I approached the highway at an increasingly fast speed, I heard an eerie clicking noise underneath me. The bike came to a screeching halt. My

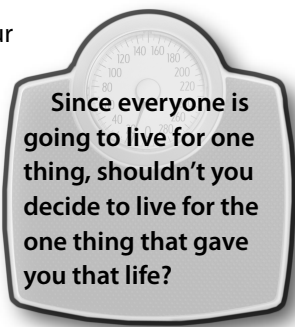
body flew over the handlebars at the speed formerly held by the bike. As I slid across the concrete onto the highway, I decided to find a new hobby.

After the mile hike of limping alongside a bike with a broken chain, I finally arrived back at the dorm. When my sweet roommate saw my bloodied condition, his thoughtful words emerged gracefully from his mouth as he asked, "What did you do to my bike?"

Our freshman year was starting out just right. As soon as I got into my dorm room, I tragically realized that my watch was missing. This watch was special. My girlfriend at the time (soon to be my wife) had given that watch to me as a graduation present with an inscription on the back. Attempts at finding it were unsuccessful, and for the first time since we started dating, I dreaded seeing her that weekend. Don't get me wrong, I wanted to see her, but I was afraid of having to face someone I loved and tell her I had lost the gift she had given me.

That encounter made me think of another possible dreadful situation. Imagine having to face God and tell him that you lost the precious gift of life that he gave you. Imagine reaching heaven and encountering Jesus and admitting to him that while you made the wise decision of becoming a Christian to ensure entrance into heaven, you never really did anything beyond that decision. You went to church occasionally. You helped out someone in need when you felt really guilty. You obeyed the easier commandments, but you never really went after it. I feared saying, "Jesus, thank you for the gift of that life on your world, but to be honest with you, I truly lost it. I wasted my life, and I will never be able to get it back."

There has never been a better time in your life to decide to make Jesus your one thing. Since everyone is going to live for one thing, shouldn't you decide to live for the one thing that gave you that life? Why not make the commitment that your life is going to be characterized by the one who gave it to you? If you want your life to count, then deciding to follow Jesus exclusively in college is your best shot.



1: the One Thing

In college, you are removed from your parental influence. You don't have to go to church anymore. You don't have to be good because you are afraid your parents might find out. You can decide to follow Jesus because that's what you sincerely desire. It's one thing to obey Jesus because you feel guilty. Jesus' heart is that you follow him and obey his commandments and that those commandments are not a burden to keep (1 John 5:3), but they are actually a delight to keep (Psalm 119:35).

One Ambition

After graduating college, I served as college pastor to my home church. As we began to develop a strategy for college ministry, God used a specific passage of Scripture to impact my life and to guide the direction of our church's emphasis. In 2 Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul is trying to help this church at Corinth understand the difference between the temporal and the eternal. He is trying to educate them that they will not live forever on this earth. They will live forever but not in their current location and not in their current state. He is also attempting to teach them that how they live in this life has significant impact on the life hereafter.

As we live on this earth, as you live on your college campus, we always need to be mindful that our present reality isn't it. There is more to life than our tiny perspective as we see it in the here and now. Above anyone else, Christians ought to long to live for things of eternal weight rather than temporal insignificance (2 Cor. 5:2). While we are on this earth, we are to remain faithful to Jesus (2 Cor. 5:6-8).

After that verse, Paul teaches this incredible statement in verse nine: "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him." Did you catch that? Whether we are at home (heaven) or away from home (earth), our goal is to please him. What is our driving force in life? What is our ambition? What is the obsession for which we wake up in the morning? What's the lingering thought that keeps us up at night? Our ambition is to please Jesus. He is our one thing. Above any costly treasure or tempting pursuit, our goal is that in every area of our lives we can bring Jesus Christ glory.

Paul follows up that thought with the reason that we are to have that one ambition: we make Jesus our one thing because he made us *his* one

thing. Paul stated, "The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

I love the fact that Paul states that Christ's love controls us. It is not Christ's commands, though that should be enough. It is not Christ's power as he beats us into submission. When we truly grasp the love of a sacrificial Savior who would die in our deserving place, that love controls us. We cannot be the same. If we truly grasp the deep love which Christ has for us (1 John 3:1), that understanding compels us to live accordingly.

We no longer desire to live for ourselves. We want to please him. If my sins were punishable by death (Rom. 6:23) and someone took that punishment upon himself (Rom. 5:8), then I should be so compelled by love that I want to please him with everything I have.

Doggie Boxes

As a college student, you will begin to understand the necessity of the Waffle House in your life.

When you have procrastinated studying so long that you must find refuge in a place open at three o'clock in the morning, you normally end up at the Waffle House. For whatever reason, the smell of scrambled eggs with a side of prolific cigarette smoke helps the mind focus for a long night of studying.

I would normally order the newest breakfast special when I ate there. No matter what was on the plate, I normally would stir it into a makeshift pile of breakfast casserole. For some reason, it always seemed better to me when I combined it that way.

Some of you are grossed out at the idea. I understand you completely. You are a food isolationist. You can't stand the thought of eating a meal where the food is touching. If the green bean juice creeps over to the macaroni and cheese, you might as well call it a night. Even when people show you anatomy diagrams of how the food all ends up in the same place, you can't stand the thought of eating that way.

I can empathize with you. I am a recovering food isolationist, but over time, I came to endure when my food touched. In some cases, I even

1: the One Thing

liked it. I didn't even require one of those doggie boxes that had the separate compartments.

Many college students treat their spiritual life like a compartmentalized doggie box. You have your relationships in this big section. In the side section, you have your college major. Your leisure time is in another compartment. You finish off your box with a side of Jesus, and life as you know it is great.

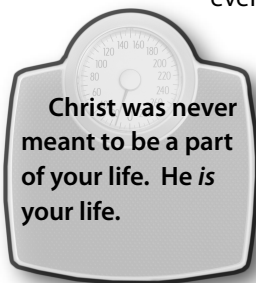
Its great as long as everything stays in its proper place. You probably are aware of Jesus' reputation that he likes to try to move into other sections, but you are making your best attempts at keeping him at bay. You love Jesus. When you need Jesus, you call on him. In reality, he is a part of your life, and you don't intend him to be anymore than that.

There's just one problem: Christ was never meant to be a part of your life. He *is* your life (Col. 3:4). He desires to take every compartment of your life and mix it together into one gigantic casserole where he has reign over every area. If you truly desire him to be your one thing in college, you give him complete freedom to do as he wishes in your life. Your time, relationships, school work, activities, date life, religious activities, and everything else you can think of comes under his influence.

As social networking sites have transitioned from a fun outlet into the current cultural phenomenon of community, I have learned more and more about collegiate Christianity. In college students' profiles, I am overwhelmed with the conflicting messages. So many college students post how important Christ is in their lives. Statements like "Jesus is everything" or "I'm nothing without God" or "faith is the

most important thing in my life" are seen so much they almost lose their meaning. They truly lose their meaning when other areas of a student's profile celebrates promiscuous sex, irresponsible nightlife activities, or blatant rejections of God's standards. Students desiring hell insurance apart from expected obedience fill the halls of every college.

A few years ago, I knew a lady who uttered the words I think many college students inwardly feel. When discussing the expectations of a



disciple of Jesus, this person stated, “Whatever happened to just being saved?” By this statement, she tried to justify her carefree behavior and negligence of obedience to Christ. Whatever happened to saying a prayer, getting a promise of eternity in heaven, and then just living however you wanted for the rest of your life?

Many college students desire to have the benefits of Jesus without the commitment to Jesus. If Jesus is your one thing, you have to begin to surrender every area in your life to him.

The Restraints

If you decide that you want to make Jesus your one thing in college, you are going to face some obstacles. In fact, you are going to have distractions come at you from every angle trying to veer you off course. While the distractions come in many forms, normally they appear in the following categories:

Unhealthy Relationships. I never understood why my mom made such a big deal about my friends when I was growing up. But as I entered college, I noticed something about all college students: the quality of the people around them determined their own quality. From the people you hang out with, to those you live with, to those you date, these relationships will do more to form you spiritually than you can possibly imagine.

Unclear Boundaries. College students who don’t merely survive in college but thrive in college are students who established boundaries in critical areas. They resolved to be intentional concerning how they spent money. They were careful about what they allowed to impact them and shape their minds. They didn’t cut themselves off from the world, but they did get practical concerning boundaries. For if you don’t set up clear moral boundaries, you will go too far every time.

Unintentional Development. Past praying a prayer with a minister, most college students don’t intentionally nurture their relationship with Christ. By neglecting spiritual development, students not only find their walk not progressing, but they actually back away from convictions they once had. Growth doesn’t happen by accident. If you want to make Christ your one thing, you had better make sure that you don’t fall prey to assuming you will grow spiritually devoid of any intentionality.

Potential vs. Kinetic

The next time you have a bottled soft drink, I encourage you to try a scientific experiment that shows the difference between potential energy and kinetic energy. Take the bottle full of a carbonated beverage, shake it up for a very long time (put it in the washer, drag it behind your car, throw it down the stairs, etc.). If you look closely, you will see potential energy displayed within that rumbling bottle. The fizz that is displayed through that clear container is telling you one thing: open the lid on this bottle and get sprayed in the face. If that lid is never removed, the drink will always remain as potential energy.

If you dare to remove the lid, you will experience the power of kinetic energy all over your face and all over your dorm room. The potential energy has turned into kinetic energy and the results are obvious.

The same is true for you. Most collegiate Christians are like a bottle full of potential energy. God has given them so many passions, abilities, and opportunities to do so much for the Kingdom when they are in college. The problem is that they never tap into it. God has stirred them up on the inside to do great and mighty things, but they never allow that to happen. They stay bottled up and struggle with the tension of living for Christ on a godless campus all their years in college.

I have a buddy who is the poster child for that type of living. Josh truly loves Jesus. He got saved in high school and really saw God do some amazing things in his life. Even though he messed up a bunch after becoming a Christian and struggled with certain areas of obedience, he was growing. When he got to college, he was at the best place of his life to grow. He had the foundation, the skills, and the people around him to help, but he got sidetracked.

He actually got sidetracked quite often. His rededication cycle was more frequent than his changing of majors (and that is saying a lot). He lived for other "its." He sought happiness in girls, sports, fraternity parties, and everything else college had to offer. About every six months, his pursuits would lead him to another dead end; he would feel convicted, seek counsel, rededicate his life to Christ, progress for a few weeks, and then he would start the cycle again with some moral lapse on his part.

His story is a lot like the story of Solomon. He enjoyed every type of pleasure the world had to offer and found out that it led nowhere (Ecc. 3:9-11). At the end of his experiment in attempting to find satisfaction, Solomon eventually stated that the whole duty of man should be summed up by fearing God and keeping his commandments (Ecc. 12:13).

I tried to tell Josh that fact over and over. If he could only grasp that to make Christ his one thing in life is not limiting him. It is not taking away his fun. If anything, making Jesus your one thing in college is the only way to truly experience the abundant life God promised (John 10:10). He has such potential energy, but he has never truly learned how to harness all that God wants to do and watch God at work within him.

Freshman 15 is an attempt to help you make the most out of college. The following fourteen principles won't work apart from this one. If you truly believe that you have been ransomed by Jesus Christ, you must resolve to make him your one thing. When questions about relationships or jobs or majors or morality come up, everything gets filtered through this first step. You must decide to put on weight here. If you truly want to live for Christ in college, you must decide to make Jesus your one thing. If you get that down, everything else becomes very simple.

Second Chances

Remember my watch that I lost? Amazingly, the Friday when I was going to visit Amanda, I received a call early that morning. As I picked up the phone, the caller identified himself as working for public safety. As I began to confess innocence to the prank that happened to their van the night before, the caller assured me that was not his purpose in calling. He was calling to tell me he had found my watch and wanted to know if I wanted to get it back. Of course, I wanted it back. It was a precious gift and I wanted to make sure I used it to the fullest.

Here's your chance. Your college experience is before you. If you are starting college, you have a great chance to start. If you have lived some years in college and already messed up, welcome to a second chance. The gift is being presented to you. Now what are you going to do with it?

Group Questions

Chapter 1: the One Thing

Whatever it is, it had better be worth it.

1. Name some of the “one things” that you see students living for on your campus.
2. What are the main areas in college students’ lives in which they try to “keep Jesus out?”
3. Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-10. If you decide to make your one thing pleasing Jesus, what are some of the possible obstacles that will come your way?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-15. What would it look like to live for Christ during your college years in such a way to honor his sacrifice on the cross?
5. To truly make Jesus your one thing, what other things are you going to need to remove from your life?

Pray that you ruthlessly eliminate any other things that compete with Jesus being your one thing.