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# BEING A PROVERBIAL STUDENT

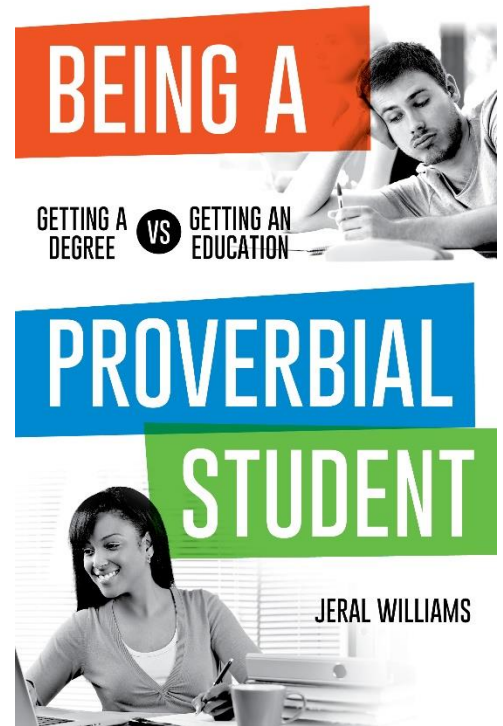
GETTING A DEGREE VS. GETTING AN EDUCATION

Jeral Williams

A *proverbial student* is interested in gaining an education rather than simply pursuing a degree. A quick scan of Proverbs shows that God is more interested in a student's pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom than easy courses, convenient times, grades, majors, or careers.

Parents and other support groups are understandably concerned about preparing Christian students for the temptations of university life. Many books are written, and extensive advice is given, to prepare for campus living. However, the academic preparation for Christian students is often ignored or, at best, underrepresented. The book of Proverbs makes it clear: God intends for students to pursue wisdom.

Drawing from over 35 years of experience, author Jeral Williams presents a variety of fun ideas that will guide Christian college students in the pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.



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B O O K S

# About the Author

## JERAL WILLIAMS



**Jeral Williams** began higher education at Hutchinson Community College with dreams of a basketball career. He attended Washburn University in order to work at the Menninger Clinic, and his future in psychology was cast. He completed his graduate work at the University of Iowa and then taught at Illinois State University and the University of South Alabama.

In retirement, he continued to be around young people by working as a volunteer sport psychology consultant to various university athletic programs.

Throughout his career in higher education, he and his wife opened their home and their lives to Christian college students, hosting a variety of denominational and nondenominational fellowship groups. They reside in Mobile, Alabama.

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*What Others Are Saying About*  
**Being a Proverbial Student**

Anyone with an interest in higher education will find Dr. Jerry Williams's book a hidden treasure. I found his use of illustrative material from his personal life to be especially helpful. I wish I could have had him as a professor.

— Dr. Thomas W. Shane, D Div.

Overall I found the book very clear and practical in nature. I really like the directness for each chapter and the questions that are posed to the reader. I would purchase this book and give it to every student going to college in my church.

— Richard Carroll, Pastor of Discipleship at Emerald Bible Fellowship,  
Eugene, Oregon

I used *Being a Proverbial Student* in our First Year Integration course. It added a key missing dimension to the course. I highly recommend this book.

— Dr. Gary W. Ewen, Dean of the School of Business and Leadership,  
Professor of Management and Leadership Studies, Colorado Christian  
University

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# Suggested Interview Questions

For Jeral Williams, author of  
*Being a Proverbial Student*  
*Getting a Degree vs. Getting an Education*

**Q: Were you always a *proverbial* student?**

**A:** No! Any success I had with my grades, from kindergarten through my undergraduate degree, came because I was a very competitive person. I went to class, took decent notes and crammed for exams. I retained facts if I was interested in the topic. In graduate school and then as a university professor, I began to understand the importance of ideas. Rather than just memorizing facts about Gettysburg, I began to understand how different our world would be if the battle had been won by the Confederate army. Rather than just memorizing the formula for a mean I began to see how understanding statistics enabled me to make decisions. I began to see many ideas were important across several academic disciplines. I gradually became a Proverbial student.

**Q: What do you think led to your strong interest in the development of *proverbial students*?**

**A:** My particular concern for Christian students developed from my concern for all first and second generation college students. I was a second generation college educated student. My teaching career was primarily with first and second generation college students. Most were not from homes that valued an education over a degree. I enjoyed helping students start to understand and achieve an education. Because I had a similar background, I was empathetic to their situations. I gained so much from becoming a *proverbial student*, that I wanted to pass it on. Because I am a Christian, I have a special heart for Christian students to be educated.

**Q: Do you have specific concerns for the present generation?**

**A:** I have several. Aside from spiritual concerns I have a deep concern for the effects of technology on our modern generation.

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For example, I come from several generations of farmers. My father was raised as a dry-land wheat farmer in Western Kansas during the depression. He learned to get up early, ride a tractor until the sun went down -- without air conditioning, a cell phone, the internet, or music through headphones. I truly believe he learned to be comfortable with himself because of that experience. Today, young people are constantly bombarded by stimuli that distract them from self-reflection. We have a generation losing personal insight. As I read the Great Commandment, the last part is to love our selves properly. I believe an examined life helps that process. Too many students, including Christian students, are too busy with busyness to examine and accept themselves. If they do not accept themselves, it is very difficult to accept and love others. I see this as one of the major problems I hope my book addresses in some way.

**Q: What are some ways you think being a *proverbial student* will help a person of faith?**

**A:** I believe self-righteousness to be the major stumbling block to righteousness. Self-righteous people believe they are superior to others because of some trait or possession. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ warned us about self-righteousness when he asked: Why do you look at the sawdust in your neighbor's eye and ignore the plank in your own? He went on to warn against praying on the street corners and fasting for attention. These are but a few of the many, many warnings about self-righteousness found in scripture.

An education makes a person aware of the geography, history, art, language, music, politics, and other knowledge about other cultures. An education makes a person aware of class distinctions, poverty, and many more social issues. The knowledge of other cultures and social issues should make a person of faith humble and less self-righteous, as well as broaden their understanding of another great question Christ asked: Who is the good neighbor?

**Q: In your book you draw the distinction between dialogue and diatribe and make it clear you believe this to be a big problem in America. Would you expand on that reasoning?**

**A:** Many areas of education stress rhetoric: the art of persuasion. Debaters are trained to argue to win from either side of an argument. Advertising students are trained to persuade buyers to buy a product. Public relations majors are trained in

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how to win an election or make a company look good. Lawyers are trained to win arguments. We are bombarded by persuaders.

A particular area of personal concern is politics. Politics is dominated by lawyers. Very few lawyers have been educated in dialogue. They are not trained to listen, to admit weaknesses in their own positions, and to acknowledge strengths in others. They are trained to argue vigorously for their client's positions. The focus on winning has contributed to the extremes in our political parties not working on public service, problem solving, shared solutions, or compromise; rather they do all in their power to cut down the other side and elevate their own. We need problem solvers and public servants.

**Q: Your book focuses on academic issues for Christian students, do you have any supplemental practical advice for student living?**

**A:** In my experience, too many Christian students are focused on what they should not do. They are too worried about taboos. The real advantages of the Christian life are the benefits. We can experience freedom from fear, the fruits of the Spirit, and bring love, joy, and peace into a very needy world. Focus on what we can do, not the taboos.

In addition, students need to understand forgiveness. A student will make mistakes. Errors should not keep students from relationships with God, their family, or their church.

**Q: After reading your book, it's clear you value asking interesting questions. How did you develop that process?**

**A:** When I worked at the Menninger Clinic as a child care worker, my supervising psychiatrist was educated in Britain. He practiced the Socratic Method with us in our meetings. As frustrating as it was to be faced with continual questions when I thought he could just tell us what to do – it made me think and take ownership of my thoughts. I realized how powerful a learning method it is.

I would have used the Socratic Method more in my classes, but students have the ability to drop classes and I did not want to teach an empty room; so I usually began my classes with questions, pushed as long as it seemed interesting, and then would engage in more standard lecture techniques.

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**Q: The trend in higher education seems to be toward online classes. Do you support that trend?**

**A:** In my opinion, a course that is completely online is not highly conducive to *proverbial learning*. It is hard to practice the Socratic Method in an online course. As a supplemental way to gain information, online activities are efficient and can be effective. I favor their use as a supplement. As an entire course, the ability to gain an education from them is less likely.

From talking with students who take on-line courses, I think it is fair to say, online courses are better suited for the attaining of a degree than for gaining understanding and wisdom. If an online course includes a webinar where a teacher interacts with students then the development of a student's thinking skills can happen.

Also, I am not overly enthusiastic about AP courses. They have value, but all too often they are used by students to get through their "basics" without having to develop their thinking and the integration of ideas.

**Q: What was the impetus for writing this particular book?**

**A:** When I retired from my academic position, I felt called to move my thinking and writing from academic psychology to my faith. I was not sure anything would lead to a book. I was privileged to have several small devotional statements published, and that encouraged me to write about broader topics.

I have written essays on several topics, but this is the first one I have taken to the level of a book. The book combined my long interest in getting students to think, and my particular concern that we need educated Christian leadership in many areas of our needy world.

I cannot point to a time that the book of Proverbs became central to my presentation, but I do know the moment I was encouraged to seek publication. I showed an early draft to one of my former students who taught at a Christian College. After he read it, he asked permission to use it with his class. The reports were good; students enjoyed the book and they gained interest in the pursuit of knowledge. When I heard those reports, I sought to publish the work. Since the information helped some students, I hoped publishing to a broader audience would help even more students.

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**Q: In *Being a Proverbial Student*, you introduce three big ideas to show students the importance of being educated. Do you have other ideas you believe are critical for an educated person in today's society, especially a Christian student?**

**A:** I have many. My present intent is to give sufficient examples to hopefully convince students to begin the process of gaining an education on their own campuses. My hope is that the three big ideas I present accomplish this. I could easily write a book consisting of the many ideas I would like to be understood by everyone.

One such example, is that in today's era of social media and mass communication, every educated person should have a good understanding of what I call scope. Unless a person has this understanding of scope, the representation of an event in the media can mislead even a good person. One event can easily appear to represent an entire category of people or events. This misrepresentation often leads to stereotyping.

We need Christians to be leaders in understanding the scope of a problem before they react and also to engage in dialogue. For example, if a minority person commits a crime that is shown on social media, anyone who stereotypes minorities in reaction to this crime of one person needs to be more educated. Similarly, the approximately one million law enforcement officers in America properly handle millions of situations each day. When one bad policeperson is caught on camera making an honest mistake or one from ill intentions and it is shown on social media, we should not stereotype from that event all law-enforcement officers. Christians have a great opportunity to bring wisdom in conflicts deriving from stereotyping and ignorance, and understanding scope promotes that wisdom.

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