

## Introduction

*“I am so stressed! Every advertisement for a college says it is the best, my friends are going to different places, and I feel like dad and mom are just as confused as I am. The costs all seem so expensive and I’m scared to make the wrong choice and end up with a lot of debt and no future or freedom. How am I supposed to know which college to choose?”*

Questions like these are part of the many disruptive experiences on life’s journey. In my role as a college president, pastor, and parent, I’ve had this and similar conversations many times. Each time, someone is searching for the right and best answer to a question that seems freighted with destiny and uncertainty all at once.

I’d like to help you make a good decision about where to go to college. And, I think I can help you with a process that you can then use for other important life decisions as well. Along the way, my hope is to share my experience and that of hundreds of others who have made their choices and are happy with the results of their decision. This book will not take the stress out of the decision-making process, but it will give you some highway markers and guardrails to protect you on the journey. In the end, you’ll make a good decision for you that your family and friends will understand and hopefully support.

Let’s start by acknowledging a few things about choosing a college: First, it is one of life’s most important decisions. I think that faith and marriage are more important, but college has got to be right up there with them. Second, let’s be honest when we say that there is likely no one “right” decision, but what we actually are doing is choosing the option that seems the best for you and your family. Finally, because college is so expensive and the financial impact on future

earnings is large, the decision seems more critical than any other you have made at this point in your life.

I also want you to know that you are not alone. You, family members involved in the conversation, friends who are at the same place in life, and a host of people who have gone on before you are all participants in the drama of choosing a college. You can learn from, lean on, and be challenged by their experiences and knowledge to help you make your ultimate choice. This book will give you lots of tips and tools as part of that conversation.

I see you down the road. Years from now, after you have had a wonderful college experience where you made 3-5 great friends that stick with you for the rest of your life and had one or two professors who imprint your worldview and skillset. I see you down the road when you may have married someone you met in college, got your first job based on an internship, or changed your entire career trajectory based on your experience in college. I see you down the road. You are full of peace and joy because you are living out who you were made to be. Choosing a college well can be a life changing choice, and this book will help you make that decision (and many others!) so that you are a person of peace down the road.

## Chapter 1

### **The Conversation Continues**

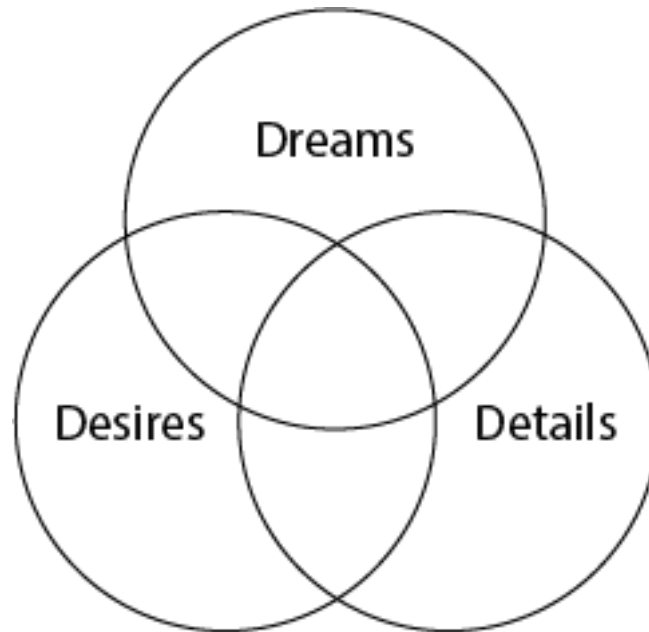
*A young woman, seeking my advice and with her parents leaning in, began our conversation by saying, “I’ve been accepted to attend Stanford University. But I’m not sure if I should go there or come to your school. What should I do?”*

As you might imagine, that was a weighty question. The answer might affect her future in ways nobody can fully understand. That conversation is a model of what I’d like to share with you. I’d like to engage you in a narrative discussion that you might have with your parents as you look at the brochures (they all look the same after a while!), the websites (they all look the same too!), and use the various college calculators that exist (and of course, those get confusing after a while as well). Along the way, I want you to understand some of my bias, so I thought I should tell you about me.

At the time of writing, I am serving as the President of a faith-based private college. I have 5 kids, 4 of whom went to faith-based private schools and one who went to a major public university. I have been a pastor for almost 40 years, so literally thousands of students have come through churches I’ve led and made college decisions with their family members. I’ve seen the sheets of paper explaining the “net cost” for the student and their families and I’ve had the agonizing conversations about careers and community and context of people and places. No doubt about it, the college decision journey is a challenge.

My fundamental bias about the college decision process is that it is weighty, important, should be made in partnership with people who care about you (the student) with input from

experts and friends, and never based on a single factor. I like to think about the college choice conversation as a Venn diagram with intersecting circles based on Dreams, Desires, and Details.



**Dreams** are all about your personal hopes for the future. Career, calling, sense of mission. This is where you start thinking about your life at age 30 (yikes!) and maybe even at 50 (double yikes!). If you have not done any career assessments or inventories, you can obtain one at [Monster.com](http://Monster.com) to benefit from that information.

**Desires** are what you have dreamed about when you thought about college. Perhaps you have always wanted the urban alternative to your rural upbringing, the remote college setting to contrast with your suburban or city life. Did you attend a huge public high school and long for the intimacy of a tight college community? Did you long for more variety, diversity, breadth of experience and travel opportunities? Each of these desires will likely shape your choice of your college.

**Details** include realities like tuition costs, financial aid and scholarship offers, housing costs and options, chosen major availability, and club/intramural opportunities. These details can seem mind numbing to wade through, but they affect your total cost and your experience more than you might imagine.

The convergence of your college dreams, desires, and details will provide a helpful decision matrix. Further, the remainder of this book will equip you to make this decision and others by hearing from God, clarifying your own thinking, and receiving input from trusted family and friends. This is a decision that can change your life and the process can be exciting! Let's start the journey and explore all we can together.