A NEW BEGINNING WITH GOD

Putting God First, Pursuing Excellence, and Trusting Him for a Fruitful Academic Year

<u>NOTE:</u> This Bible Study Guide is designed to take approximately 60–75 minutes to complete and may be divided into two fellowship sessions.

Theme: In the Beginning, God Created, and God Saw That It Was Good

Primary Scriptures: Genesis 1:1–4; Matthew 6:33

Supporting Scriptures: Proverbs 3:5–6; Psalm 90:17; Colossians 3:23–24; James 1:5; Philippians 1:6; Jeremiah 29:11

CENTRAL MESSAGE

Just as God initiated creation, brought light into darkness, and declared His work good, we can begin a new academic year by putting Him first, trusting His guidance, working diligently, and pursuing outcomes that honor Him.

1. Opening: A New Academic Year, A New Beginning

Every academic year represents a new beginning. It brings new opportunities, responsibilities, relationships, challenges, and possibilities. For students, it may mean new courses, professors, friendships, academic goals, career aspirations, and decisions about the future. For faculty and staff, it may mean new students to mentor, new knowledge to impart, and new opportunities to make a difference.

A successful academic year requires more than academic preparation, financial resources, personal ambition, or hard work. It also calls for spiritual direction, wisdom, discipline, and a commitment to honoring God.

- "In the beginning" — Every new beginning is an opportunity to acknowledge God and establish the right foundation.
- "God created" — God is the source of life, wisdom, creativity, purpose, and productive work.
- "God saw that it was good" — Pursue excellence, meaningful accomplishments, and outcomes that reflect God's goodness.
- "Seek first his kingdom" — Place God's kingdom and righteousness above competing concerns.

2. Scripture Reading and Biblical Foundation

Genesis 1:1–4 (NKJV)

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness [a]was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.
3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV)

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Relationship between the passages

Genesis 1:1–4 reveals God as Creator, who initiates, brings light, and evaluates His work as good. Matthew 6:33 calls Jesus' followers to seek God's kingdom and righteousness first. In context, Matthew 6:25–34 addresses anxiety about material needs. The promise is not that believers receive everything they desire, but that they may depend on God's care as they pursue His will.

3. Lesson One: "In the Beginning" — Start with God

Genesis 1:1 begins with "In the beginning God." Before the description of creation, Scripture introduces God. This invites believers to make God central to their own new beginnings.

Spiritual principles

A. Spiritual renewal: A new academic year invites examination of priorities, attitudes, relationships, habits, and commitments (Lamentations 3:22–23).
B. A sound foundation: Jesus' teaching about building on rock illustrates the importance of hearing and doing His words (Matthew 7:24–27).
C. Prayerful dependence: Trust the Lord and seek His guidance without abandoning preparation, study, or personal responsibility (Proverbs 3:5–6).

Practical application

Begin each day with prayer; set spiritually grounded academic and personal goals; develop a Bible study routine; seek godly counsel; and establish healthy study and work habits.

Reflection: What must I change in my priorities, habits, or relationships to ensure that God is central this year?

4. Lesson Two: "God Created" — Creativity, Purpose, and Work

God's creative activity demonstrates His power, wisdom, intentionality, and sovereignty. Human creativity is not identical to God's unique act of creation. Yet people made in God's image have capacities for reasoning, imagination, learning, innovation, stewardship, and meaningful work (Genesis 1:26–27).

Spiritual principles

A. Develop entrusted abilities: Cultivate intellectual, social, practical, and spiritual gifts.
B. Treat learning as stewardship: Use knowledge to solve problems, serve communities, and contribute to society (Colossians 3:23).
C. Ask for wisdom: Bring unfamiliar challenges to God while attending classes, completing assignments, seeking help, and making informed decisions (James 1:5).

Academic applications

Area	**God-honoring application**
Academic studies	Pursue knowledge with diligence and intellectual honesty
Creativity and innovation	Develop ideas that address meaningful problems
Career preparation	Strengthen skills for responsible service
Leadership	Influence others through integrity and humility
Relationships	Build supportive, respectful communities
Technology and AI	Use digital tools ethically, critically, and responsibly

Reflection: What abilities, opportunities, or resources has God entrusted to me that I should develop more intentionally?

5. Lesson Three: "God Saw That It Was Good" — Pursue Excellence

In Genesis 1:4, God sees that the light is good. The creation account speaks to the goodness and fittingness of God's work. By application, we can reflect on the quality and purpose of our own work without equating human achievement with God's perfect creation.

A. Excellence matters: Approach academic responsibilities diligently and honestly (Colossians 3:23–24).
B. Character matters: Good grades cannot replace integrity, compassion, humility, or service.
C. Evaluate progress: Reflect on academic goals, spiritual growth, time management, relationships, honesty, and campus contribution.
D. Avoid perfectionism: Mistakes and setbacks can become opportunities for correction, perseverance, and growth.

Reflection: What achievements and qualities of character would make me grateful that I honored God with my opportunities?

6. Lesson Four: "Seek First His Kingdom" — Put God First

Matthew 6:33 calls believers to place God's kingdom and righteousness ahead of competing concerns. Seeking His kingdom means submitting values, decisions, relationships, and ambitions to His authority; seeking righteousness means pursuing a life consistent with His will and character.

Spiritual priorities

Make prayer, Scripture reading, worship, fellowship, and obedience part of daily life.

Academic priorities

Attend classes, study diligently, manage time, pursue understanding, and practice honesty.

Relational priorities

Treat classmates, faculty, and staff with kindness, fairness, respect, and forgiveness.

Ethical priorities

Choose integrity over shortcuts; reject plagiarism, cheating, and misuse of technology.

Personal well-being

Steward physical and mental health, finances, rest, and relationships; seek appropriate support when needed.

Understanding the promise

"All these things" in Matthew 6:33 refers, in context, to necessities such as food, drink, and clothing (Matthew 6:25–34). Jesus does not promise perfect grades, unlimited money, or freedom from hardship. He invites trust in the Father's care while His followers seek the kingdom first and act responsibly.

Reflection: What most strongly competes with God for first place in my life?

7. Integrating the Four Biblical Principles

IN THE BEGINNING — Start with God: establish the right foundation.

GOD CREATED — Develop your gifts: pursue purposeful work.

GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD — Pursue excellence: evaluate work and character.

SEEK FIRST GOD'S KINGDOM — Keep God first: align every pursuit with His righteousness.

Seeking God's kingdom is not merely the last step. It is the guiding priority throughout the academic year.

8. Group Bible Study Discussion (15–20 minutes)

Divide participants into groups of three to five. Read the passages before discussing their applications.

1) **New beginnings**

   What does "In the beginning God" teach us about establishing priorities?
   Leader guidance: Emphasize intentional renewal, wise priorities, and dependence on God.

2) **Creativity and purpose**

   How can students use academic abilities and professional interests to serve God and others?
   Leader guidance: Discuss stewardship, innovation, and service.

3) **Excellence and integrity**

   What does God-honoring excellence look like in coursework, research, examinations, and teamwork?
   Leader guidance: Highlight diligence, honesty, compassion, and learning from mistakes.

4) **Kingdom priorities**

   What does seeking God's kingdom first mean in college life?
   Leader guidance: Explore choices about time, values, money, relationships, and decisions.

5) **Faith and responsibility**

   How can students balance prayer, faith, study, financial planning, and responsibility?
   Leader guidance: Faith motivates preparation and wise action; prayer does not replace effort.

6) **Anxiety and trust**

   How does Matthew 6:25–34 address worries about tuition, grades, work, and the future?
   Leader guidance: Distinguish trust in God from promises of guaranteed outcomes.

7) **Personal commitment**

   What specific change will you make to strengthen spiritual life and academic effectiveness?
   Leader guidance: Encourage one measurable and realistic action.

9. Personal Commitment Exercise (5–10 minutes)

Invite participants to write one concrete commitment in each area:

- My spiritual priority for this academic year: _____
- One academic habit I will strengthen: _____
- One gift or skill I will develop for service: _____
- One integrity or relationship commitment: _____
- One concern I will entrust to God while taking responsible action: _____

Invite volunteers to share one commitment. Encourage participants to revisit their commitments monthly.

10. Key Takeaways

- Begin with God, not merely with a schedule or personal ambition.
- Recognize that your abilities and opportunities are gifts to steward.
- Pursue excellent work alongside honesty, humility, and compassion.
- Put God's kingdom and righteousness first in every area of campus life.
- Trust God's care without assuming that faith removes hardship or responsibility.

11. Closing Challenge and Prayer

Challenge: At the end of this academic year, do not measure success by grades or achievements alone. Ask whether you grew closer to God, developed your gifts, acted with integrity, served others, and made wise use of your opportunities.

Closing prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of a new academic year. As we begin, help us to seek You first and build our lives on Your truth. Give students wisdom, discipline, courage, and integrity. Strengthen faculty and staff as they teach, mentor, and serve. Guide our decisions, bless our efforts, and help us use our abilities to serve others. When we face uncertainty, remind us of Your care. May our learning, relationships, work, and character honor You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Suggested closing Scripture

Psalm 90:17 — Pray that the Lord would establish the work of our hands.