

January 2024

Book Review: Prepare to Thrive: A Survival Guide for Christian Students – Part 1

By Dan W. Reynolds, PhD

Prepare to Thrive: A Survival Guide for Christian Students (Answers in Genesis, 2021) by Patricia Engler¹ is a must-read book for any Christian student bound for a secular university. Engler discusses what students will likely encounter in the culture and classes of college and how to keep the faith despite the opposition. She explains in detail how students can grow strong spiritual, intellectual, and interpersonal foundations against anti-Christian propaganda, faulty assumptions, logical fallacies, and self-defeating secular philosophies promoted on campus. She explains how to develop critical thinking skills for analyzing false claims about Christianity, the Bible, and evolution. She shows how students can separate fact from interpretation. Engler interweaves her own college experience into the book. The book consists of fourteen chapters and five appendices spanning 308 pages.

Engler works for Answers in Genesis (AIG) in the US as an apologist, speaker, and writer. She earned a BSc from a liberal university in Canada.

This article will summarize the book, chapter by chapter.



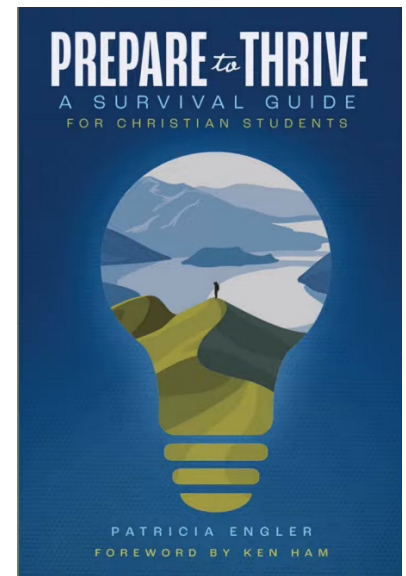
Patricia Engler

Part 1: War Stories: Uncovering the Realities of Humanistic Education

Chapter 1: The Foundation of Our Faith

Engler became aware that Genesis is the bedrock of Christianity at the age of fourteen while attending a Ken Ham seminar. She saw that the moral decline in the West is traceable to attacks on the credibility of Genesis. She decided then to become an apologist, revealing the fallacies of evolution and truth of creation. She saw that the whole grand materialistic paradigm—including the cosmological, geological, and biological evolutionary stories—was unbiblical, unscientific, and contrary to the Christian faith.

After college, Engler went on a tour of colleges around the globe to learn first-hand how Christian students in various cultures and institutions maintained their faith while immersed in secularism and anti-Christian teaching. As in her own college experience, she found most colleges promoted all forms of sexuality, endorsed communism, and had professors who mocked Christianity. Classes in religious studies taught that God used evolution to create humans, that Adam and Eve never existed, and that Paul was wrong about Genesis. Western culture's fall from a



¹ Patricia Engler (<https://answersingenesis.org/bios/patricia-engler/>) has blogs (<https://patriciaengler.com/>, <https://answersingenesis.org/blogs/patricia-engler/>), Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/penglerAiG/>),

and is on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/pengleraiG/?hl=en>). She has hundreds of short videos on YouTube covering many critical thinking and apologetics topics especially geared for students.

biblical worldview is evident in current views on sexuality, marriage, abortion, and euthanasia.

Engler then discusses AIG's iconic Seven C's of History²: Creation (Gen. 1 and 2), Corruption (the Fall), Catastrophe (the Flood), Confusion (Babel), Christ, the Cross, and the Consummation (the second coming). Engler explains all seven Cs. For Creation, she explains the Bible says God spoke everything into existence in six literal 24-hour days just thousands of years ago. Organisms were created after their kinds (no evolution). Humans were created in God's image. All that God made was very good. Because of Adam and Eve's disobedience (Corruption), humans came under a curse and were separated from God (the Fall). As a result, death (physical and spiritual) entered into the world. The entire creation was affected by the curse. All humans are descended from Adam and Eve and inherited their sin nature. Humans became so sinful that God destroyed the world with a worldwide Flood (Catastrophe) but spared Noah, his family, and the animals with him on the ark. Humans continued in their rebellion against God, so He dispersed them at Babel into various people groups with different languages (Confusion). Eventually, God sent a Savior, Jesus Christ, to rescue people from sin and death (Christ). Jesus lived the life we could not live and died in our place under the judgment we deserved (Cross) but was then raised from the dead. Christ will return to Earth someday to judge the world one last time and take his bride, the Church, home to heaven (Consummation). He will create a new heaven and a new Earth. This historical framework is a complete history of the universe and the basis of the Christian worldview. All the major doctrines of scripture trace back to the validity of Genesis.

Chapter 2: The Assault on Scripture

Biblical writers considered Genesis as history.³ Engler explores what happens when we try to insert millions of years into Genesis in an attempt to make it conform with the secular interpretations of scientific facts. All the data imply the universe had a beginning. Logically, the universe could not have created itself. Engler says we have God's infallible Word versus fallen man's word and reasoning to choose from when considering origins. If we accept man's reasoning on origins, we may accept many things contrary to Genesis such as the Big Bang theory, biological evolution, human evolution, geological evolution,

etc. This acceptance would mean God got it wrong on cosmology, geology, biology, the fossil record, and the order of creation events. In this case, the Bible is reduced to a collection of stories instead of a record of historical events. Engler asks if the Bible can be trusted for spiritual truth if it is wrong on origins.

Engler discusses the differences between observational and historical sciences. Observational science is science in the here and now. Observations can be made and testable hypotheses for explanations created. Experiments can then test the validity of the hypotheses. New hypotheses can be made, and so on. Observational science is true science that is subject to the experimental method. Our technology comes from observational science. Historical science, in contrast, makes inferences (speculations) about what may have happened in the past based on current knowledge and is not subject to direct experimentation.⁴ How one interprets data in the historical sciences depends on one's worldview and epistemology. If the Bible is the infallible Word of God, then it bears eyewitness testimony to what happened at the beginning of the universe, the origin of life, the origin of humans, and the rise of civilization.

The secular view of geological history says the Earth formed 4.6 billion years ago from a solar nebula, geological features formed over millions of years, and the fossil record is a record of the evolution of life on the Earth. These ideas are unbiblical.

Theologically, if the Earth is millions of years old, then the fossil record means there was physical death before the fall of man, contrary to God's "very good" creation (Gen 1:31). It would mean God allowed millions of years of suffering for animals. The fossil record has evidence for carnivory, disease, starvation, and extinction—events inconsistent with the character of a loving God in a world without sin. Some believe Adam and Eve were the result of evolution or never even existed. Both of the ideas are foreign to sound biblical teaching and are problematic for the gospel. Without Adam and Eve and original sin, there is no need for a savior; the truth of the gospel depends on the historicity of Genesis. Atheists understand this very well.⁵

² Ham K, McKeever S (unknown publication date) Seven C's of history. <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-history/seven-cs-of-history/> Accessed 2023 Dec 18

³ Morris HM (1993) *Biblical Creationism: What Each Book of the Bible Teaches About Creation and the Flood*, Baker Pub Group, Ada, MI. Morris surveys every book of the Bible for creation-related passages and shows how they neatly fit the young-earth interpretation of Genesis 1–11.

⁴ The historical sciences include historical geology, cosmology, evolutionary biology, paleontology, archeology, and others.

⁵ See the quote at the top of p. 37 in the book. The entire quote can be read at <https://answersingenesis.org/blogs/ken-ham/2011/06/01/i-agree-with-the-atheists/> starting at "Chances are...."

Engler stresses that one does not need to believe in a literal Genesis to be saved. However, she asserts that a literal and historical Genesis is the view most consistent with scripture. Since Genesis is the “root of the gospel,” creation is a gospel issue. If we don’t trust Genesis, the rest of the Bible may become suspect eventually eroding our moral judgment.

Chapter 3: The Attack on Youth

Engler believes there is a conscious and concerted effort to brainwash students in public education with secular humanism. That effort includes teaching new values through school, redefining the family, providing alternative bases for morals, etc. The principles of education—truth, logic, scientific reasoning—depend upon an honest and omniscient Creator. A rational God made rational creatures able to comprehend a good creation. Modern science arose in Christian Europe because Christianity provides the correct presuppositions about reality that make science possible.

Engler discusses seven facts about evolutionary education. Fact 1: Humans evolved by an unguided process and are therefore free to choose the values that will give meaning to their lives. Man’s word, not God’s, has the final authority. Fact 2: Evolution is linked to other man-made religions such as Eastern mysticism, which says man can evolve into God. Fact 3: Evolution is now taught in many Christian universities. These schools may take unbiblical views on the age of the Earth and whether Genesis is literal history. Fact 4: The teaching of evolution can explain why so many of our youth are leaving the church. Fact 5: Evolutionary thinking impacts many subject areas: biology, geology, cosmology, social sciences, anthropology, etc. Fact 6: Evolution is now taught at all grade levels. Having a basic knowledge of evolution is now part of the standards for 71 percent of public schools. Fact 7: Evolutionary teaching impacts students worldwide. Many educators now consider the teaching of creationism a form of child abuse and a threat to human rights.

Engler intends to show how a Christian student can survive an evolutionary education.

Chapter 4: Memoirs from the Front Line

In this chapter, Engler shares her experiences at a secular university. She relates how she did enjoy some of her experiences. She met many good people, had some nice professors, had fun, and drew closer to God. She connected with a local Christian PhD biologist she could bring questions to from time to time. Engler had been reading creationist books, attending creation seminars, and browsing creation websites from her homeschooling days up to entering college. She visited several colleges before making her selection. She spoke with Christian leaders on campus. Once she had made up her mind, she

spoke with a local pastor and found a Christian home to live in.

Engler soon found that she had more homework than ever before. She did not have much time for apologetics research, and she was glad she had prepared beforehand. Her biology professor said there was no evidence against evolution, and her textbook echoed the same. In her anthropology class, she was taught humans were a product of evolution as were all religions. Religion was a survival crutch to help people through tough times beyond their control. She was taught that Galileo showed that science was a better way to obtain knowledge than religion. One of her professors derided creationism and intelligent design, doubted Jesus ever existed, and rejected biblical geology and a young Earth. Her books taught that evolution is science and creation is mere religion and myth. One of her books showed two female chimps engaged in a sex act which was described as the natural evolution of sexual behavior.

She took a philosophy class in critical thinking from a left-leaning professor. Her book attacked creation, not with evidence but by quoting evolutionary authorities. Ironically, she was able to see through most of the propaganda with the critical thinking skills she developed.

She took an evolutionary biology class where the textbook spent a chapter critiquing creation and intelligent design. The textbook said that evolution was as certain as the existence of gravity and atoms.

She noted a trend in her secular education: evolutionary origins science (historical science) was conflated with observational science. Her evolution classes conflated variation within kinds (microevolution) with molecules-to-man evolution (macroevolution). She already knew that this was a fallacy; there is no evidence for macroevolution.

She took a course in molecular evolution which turned out to be mostly about population genetics. The material explained how a mutation gets established in a gene pool. There was no explanation for how novel biological information was created. She was taught that new genes evolved through gene duplication, mutation, and natural selection. However, she realized that this mechanism does not account for new biological information. The professor did not address macroevolution until the last lecture and then the answers given were purely speculative without experimental or observational support. *She was finding that the more biology and evolution classes she took, the stronger her faith in creation became.*

Engler handled test questions looking for evolutionary answers by providing what she had been taught without compromising her integrity. She would word her answers in a way that showed she knew the material without saying she agreed with it. She would use phrases like “it is commonly believed that...” in answering questions. She

occasionally confronted professors in class with whom she disagreed but with humility and love.

Engler found that the most important things for survival in school were her spiritual, intellectual, and interpersonal foundations. The spiritual foundations included prayer, Bible study, and scriptural literacy. She learned to take her problems to God when faced with challenges. The intellectual foundation consisted of knowledge of apologetics and critical thinking. The interpersonal foundation consisted of a strong Christian support network including family, peers, her church, and a mentor. Her support network helped her realize she did not have to face the opposition alone. She attended campus ministry events and student Bible studies. Her parents prayed for her before many of her exams. She wondered how other Christian students had been able to keep their faith intact during college.

Chapter 5: Global Problems, Global Solutions

After graduation from college, Engler decided to take a trip around the world to learn how Christian students in various cultures and institutions successfully navigated secular education. She referred to her trip as “360 in 180,” around the world in 180 days. She visited Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Japan, Thailand, two unnamed countries (unnamed to protect students’ identities), the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Greece, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, and Great Britain. She often slept in airports or stayed with friends of friends. She interviewed students, campus ministers, university chaplains, pastors, and retired Christian professors. She asked all of them four questions:

1. What are the challenges of being a Christian here?
2. What are the opportunities?
3. What advice would you give a first-year Christian student?
4. How can churches effectively support students?

She found that answers to the first two questions varied widely depending upon the location, but the answers to the last two questions were very similar and boiled down to the *building of strong spiritual, intellectual, and interpersonal foundations*.

Engler reports the responses by location. Responses in the West including Canada, Oceania, and Europe formed one group of responses. In these countries, Christianity was assumed to be wrong and long since discredited. There were few Christian professors and many of those were either silent or liberal. Few people took the Bible seriously.

All truth was seen as relative and equally valid (except for scripture). There are no absolutes and no exclusively correct religion. Immorality was common. In these countries, a Christian student can expect peer pressure, ridicule, and abuse for their faith. Ironically, other religions are celebrated: Buddhism, meditation, yoga, Eastern mysticism, palm reading, Wiccan, etc. Many of these religions teach that the divine nature is within us. Engler found universities in these locales were growing cold to Christianity. Students said that classes in geology, anthropology, and social work were where they had the most difficulty. Engler says, “Christians are perceived as a politicized band of power-hungry patriarchal oppressors who love nothing more than victimizing innocent minorities.”⁶ This is a Marxist attitude. Some say that evangelism is merely a “white man’s agenda.”

The next group of countries was located in Asia and included the Philippines, Japan, and Thailand. Engler found universities in the Philippines to be much friendlier to Christianity, perhaps due to Catholic influences. The cultures in Japan and Thailand are based on Buddhist beliefs. They are akin to the cultures encountered by Paul in Acts 17. These cultures have a collectivist mindset where you are expected to conform and please your group instead of yourself. There is much pressure to practice religions other than Christianity.

The next group of countries were the restricted access nations. These were communist countries. In these places, Christian students are not allowed to hold government jobs and are forbidden to preach the gospel. Some are kicked out of their villages and go to live in the mountains as outcasts. Pressure is put on students not to share their faith. Students can lose course credit for sharing their faith after being warned to stop. In some cases, students are forced to leave the university.

The next group of countries included Islamic nations. There are few Christian students. Christian students are lonely. There are campus ministry groups in a few places.

As already mentioned, Engler found that regardless of the challenges Christian students faced, the best strategy in all cases involved building strong spiritual, intellectual, and interpersonal foundations. The spiritual foundation consists of daily prayer and Bible study. Students need to be focused more on the Gospel and less on entertainment. Students need to know the Bible thoroughly.

The intellectual foundation includes apologetics and critical thinking skills. Students need to be exposed to the fallacies of other worldviews before attending college.

⁶ Engler P (2022) *Prepare to Thrive; A Survival Guide for Christian Students*, Answers in Genesis, Petersburg, KY, 86

They need creation apologetics and to know the problems with evolutionary theory. Many Christian students enter the university without a solid intellectual foundation to enable them to withstand the inevitable attacks on their faith. Engler's advice to students is not to fear challenging questions to their faith that they can't immediately answer. Instead, start looking for answers. Having questions is not a bad thing. Keep reading Christian material.⁷ Discuss your questions with other Christian students and trusted mentors. Chances are that most of the questions raised by skeptics have received careful consideration from competent Christian scholars.

The interpersonal foundation includes attending a solid local church, having a Christian peer group on campus, and having older adult mentors. Many Christian professors said one of the biggest mistakes Christian students make is neglecting to find and attend a good local church. One of the Greek students that Engler interviewed during her travels said, "Students need to talk about the things that matter to them without keeping those questions inside and overanalyzing them alone."⁸ Students need older Christians with whom they can pray and be encouraged. Older mentors can listen to students, help them with questions, be an example, give advice, and even hear confessions of sin. Some Christian students drift away from the faith—no one seems to be caring for them. Students need to be mentored by someone who is living proof God is faithful.

Part 2: Boot Camp

Chapter 6: Developing Spiritual, Intellectual, and Interpersonal Foundations

Apologetics shows us why the Bible is true, thereby affirming our faith. Testimonies from Christians as to God's faithfulness inspire us to pray, study the scriptures, and trust God. Our spiritual foundation is the same as our relationship with God. Good relationships require constant communication. God communicates through His Word. We communicate with God through prayer. We fall in love with God as we get to know Him. We get to know Him by treasuring His Word in our hearts. Engler cites Ps. 119:9–11 as an example of what it means to keep God's Word. We know from 2 Tim. 3:14–17 that the Bible is the Word of God. Our relationship with God must be intentional; we must seek the Lord.

Research has shown that Christian youth are more likely to keep their faith through adulthood if they pray frequently, have parents who are committed believers, make

their faith important in everyday life, and read scripture frequently. The research showed the importance of building a strong spiritual foundation early and having mentors. According to a study done recently by Barna, only 10 percent of church-raised American young adults have a thriving biblical worldview.⁹ Five major traits defined this group. First, they identified with Christ and prayed and read scripture often. Second, they had cultural discernment developed from trusting the scriptures, having a Christian worldview, and applying critical thinking. Third, they had close relationships with other Christians. Fourth, they attended a church where they were mentored and disciplined to find their calling in ministry and vocation. And fifth, they had a countercultural mission to live God's way against cultural norms. A close daily walk is required for a strong and enduring faith. Disciples hear and obey the Word, building upon the Rock (Matt. 7:24–25).

Engler recommends seven ways to build a strong spiritual foundation:

1. **Daily Prayer:** Engler suggests setting aside a time each day. Prayers may consist of thanksgiving, rejoicing, praise, petitions, etc. We need prayer to influence our culture. We should take everything to God in prayer (2 Cor. 10:5).
2. **Worship:** We worship when we give thanks, pray, and recognize our life belongs to Him. Worship keeps us in tune with God. Engler suggests writing out the lyrics of your favorite hymn as a way to worship.
3. **Biblical Literacy:** We need to know what the Bible teaches and how it applies to our lives. Knowing the Word will help us detect lies, deflect temptations, protect our hearts, correct our thoughts, and help us fully connect with God. We should develop a Bible reading plan and then stick to it.
4. **Scripture Memorization:** Knowing scripture will help counter the indoctrination with secular values and thinking. Memorization may be facilitated by reading scripture, listening to it, saying it, or singing it.
5. **Wisdom:** Biblical wisdom is more precious and profitable than wealth. Wisdom teaches us to fear God and hate evil. One should read Proverbs, seek godly mentors for advice, and read books by wise Christians. Ask God to give you wisdom in prayer.
6. **Identity:** Engler reminds students that the support groups they had to reinforce their faith in high school will probably be gone when they attend college.

⁷ Engler provides a list of resources in Appendix A of *Prepare to Thrive* on page 271.

⁸ Engler P (2022) 93

⁹ For a summary of this study, see <https://access.barna.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Faith-for-Exiles-Barna-Access-version.pdf>.

Students need to have their identity in Christ before they attend college. If a student knows who they are in Christ, he/she will have less of a need to follow the crowd, compromising their integrity along the way. Engler says students need to make sure their self-talk aligns with scripture.

7. **Boundaries:** There are doctrines and behaviors Christians should not compromise. Doctrines such as inerrancy of the scriptures, the divinity of Christ, the exclusivity of Christ, and others are in view. Students should anticipate temptations and have a plan already in place. Students need to decide beforehand, based on scripture, what they will and will not participate in.

Engler says students should manage their time by spending it on what matters most. Satan's strategy may be to slowly chip away at a student's faith instead of suddenly and overtly. She says to approach education as a form of worship that will facilitate serving God.

Chapter 7: Intellectual Foundations: Apologetics and Critical Thinking

Engler says students need to be prepared to make a defense for their hope in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15). Christians should be able to provide reasoned and respectful answers for why the Bible is true. The purpose of apologetics is to prepare Christians to give reasoned answers. Apologetics touches upon the Bible itself, history, science, other worldviews, the nature of God, Jesus, and other topics.

Critical thinking concerns evaluating messages for truth, to see if they are worth believing. Critical thinking focuses on faulty logic; sorting facts from opinions, interpretations, and assumptions; and poor arguments. Critical thinking helps identify false teachers. Engler observes that truth, logic, and reason are inconsistent with an atheistic worldview because it has no basis for these concepts. In contrast, Christianity provides a basis for all of these ideas.

The Bible will always stand up to scrutiny. In order to build and strengthen intellectual foundations, Engler recommends using free apologetics resources available on the web, making a routine of increasing your knowledge base, listening to podcasts while doing other things, learning little by little consistently, planning what apologetics to study in light of your secular class schedule, honing critical thinking skills, avoiding using bad arguments, being careful who you are learning from, learning about other worldviews, learning from skeptics arguments, and finding a biblically minded mentor. Engler suggests students start with the basics, including being able to talk about/address: why there is death and suffering in the world, the fact that Christians have done evil, that there are hypocritical Christians, issues concerning gender and sexuality, the belief that science has disproved the Bible,


the claim that all life evolved from a common ancestor, and the claim that the Earth is millions of years old. Engler says we should not bank on any specific apologetic argument but rather on God's Word.

Next Engler discusses observational and historical sciences. As mentioned previously, observational science is science that can be done in the here and now and is repeatable and testable. In contrast, historical science uses facts in the present to make inferences about past events based on assumptions. Materialism assumes everything can be explained in terms of chemistry and physics and so will only seek and allow materialistic explanations. Hence, historical science practiced with the assumption of materialism must conclude life evolved, regardless of how improbable this may seem.

Engler then discusses micro- and macro-evolution. Micro-evolution, or variation within kinds, is part of observational science while macroevolution, or molecules-to-man evolution, is part of historical science. Microevolution has been observed in real-time and fits well within the biblical worldview. Materialists conflate micro- and macroevolution, but they differ more than in scale. There is *no gain* and potentially even *a loss* of genetic information in microevolution, but there must be *a gain* in genetic information in macroevolution. Engler provides examples of microevolution such as polar bears and grizzly bears and long- and short-haired dogs. She points out that natural selection has no creative ability whatsoever; all new useful genetic information must be generated by mutations. Mutations are known to destroy information, not create it. Recent advances in genetics have shown that a given stretch of DNA may code for numerous proteins due to post-transcriptional editing governed by regulatory RNA. Hence, there are multiple codes contained in the same sequence of DNA nucleotides. How could a random mutation process generate a sequence of nucleotides that just happened to code for multiple proteins simultaneously? Because of the overlapping codes, mutations can inflict damage to biological information on multiple levels. Even if one layer of information was somehow improved by a mutation, chances are that the other overlapping layers would suffer damage.

Studies have shown that most mutations are only slightly deleterious and are therefore below the detection limits of natural selection. Hence, slightly deleterious mutations gradually accumulate until the damage done is irreversible. This process has been referred to as genetic entropy.

Two misconceptions evolutionists have are that nature has function but no purpose and that the history of life is like a tree.

Part 2 of this review will be published on the TASC website in the first quarter of 2024. 

COMING EVENTS

TASC Zoom Meeting, January 11, 7:00 pm EST

Dan Reynolds, PhD, will discuss the recent book *Prepare to Thrive: A Survival Guide for Christian Students* by Patricia Engler. Engler provides Christian students bound for a secular university with the tools they will need to keep the faith. She explains how to develop strong spiritual, intellectual, and interpersonal foundations based on scripture and her own experiences. We will discuss many of the fallacies presented in the secular classroom. This talk will be especially important for students in junior high school, high school, and college, as well as their parents and grandparents.

Join Zoom meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4490299372>

Meeting ID: 449 029 9372

Find your local dial-in number:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kH4mqoXap>



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