

Beginning Well: Podcast Guests Give Their Best Advice

Podcast Transcript

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Hello, everyone and welcome to the Women's Scholars and Professionals podcast. My name is Anne Boyd and I'll be your host.

We at Women's Scholars and Professionals are here to support women in their God given callings into the university and beyond. So, if you're a graduate student or a faculty member, an administrator or a student in professional school, a scholar in between jobs or simply a person who supports women in the academic world, then this podcast is for you.

We're looking forward to a fresh school year and thinking especially about those of you who might be looking for some tips and tricks from women who have experience with university life and rhythms. Perhaps you're a first-year graduate student preparing yourself for a course of rigorous study or maybe you're easing into life as a faculty member at a new institution or perhaps you've been around for a little while, but you're looking for some fresh tips and energy to help you start the year. Well, for this special podcast episode, we've combed through our interviews from the past year and curated a series of conversation moments that address the question: What advice do you have for women who are new grad students or faculty?

We invite you to settle in and receive these words from women who have been there and have hope for your future. We're going to dip into six different podcast conversations for this episode. I won't offer lengthy introductions of each of these guests or their books. But if you'd like to follow up and listen to the full conversations with them, you can find links to all the featured episodes in our show notes. So, let's dive right in. We're so glad you're here to begin.

I'd like us to start with a clip from my conversation with faculty ministry director, Dr Kathy Tuan-MacLean and educator, Dr Tara Edelschick. These two women offer advice that brings us back to solid foundations, recommendations about rest and community and living life fully in the present moment whether or not you are in an academic setting, these guidelines offer solid direction for a faithful life.

Kathy Tuan-MacLean: So, I probably have two main pieces of advice. Maybe the first is an overarching vision - faithful in little you can become faithful in much. And so, at any stage of your life it feels big, right, to be faithful to God with your time, your money, your talent, taking a Sabbath involving other people, all the healthy rhythms can feel, "No, I'm in grad school. That is impossible. I can't do it." And yet what we see over and over and over - especially from where I sit since I get to see many, many faculty members - what you see over and over and over is those people who made the decisions younger as young as possible, to love Jesus, to love other people, to work on themselves, to take Sabbath, all of the disciplines, the more they're able to hold on to that throughout their lives. And the more experience, the more money, the more power, the more prestige you get, which you hopefully will get in your career, the less able you are to actually give it up unless you've learned that young. That's probably my first thing that I feel strongly about. And then the second piece I would say is community -just choosing Christian community, choosing to be in relationship with others making that a priority. Because as you know, we just said with these stories, so much in academia can push against that and yet we cannot make it as believers alone. We need the community who will help us think well, who will help us love, well, who will help us when we are really, really, really struggling, which almost everybody in academia will really struggle.

Tara Edelschick: Yeah, those are so good and so powerful. And, you know, I met Kathy early on in my grad school - the doctoral program. And so, she's been telling me those things for a really long time and I'm so grateful for the ways that

that has shaped me. So, if I have anything that it's, it's small, it's that a lot of times you'll hear people in the academy grad students talk about how they want to get at, get through the program so they can get to their real lives. We're gonna get out and get to our real life. And I, I think that's a profound misunderstanding of life and who God is, wherever you are, is your life. And there are people to love. There, there are things to learn. There, there are spiritual disciplines to grow. There, there are struggles, there, there are really hurt people. There, there's incredibly missional things you can do there. And again, I think this sort of goes with Kathy's thing, like trying to, to live into that deeply when you're in grad school means then you don't have to spend the rest of your life saying well, when I get tenure, then I'll be in the real world and when I get my kids off to school and when I get married and there's all these things that we can be waiting for that, then that is somehow the life we've been working toward. But why not just enjoy the life you have right now?

Next up, let's hear from professor and author Dr Sandra Glahn, who offers advice that comes from a different angle but is remarkably similar to the words we heard from Kathy and Tara. And honestly, it's advice that we hear over and over for academics, the wisest people we know are constantly urging us to remember that we're just human beings with human needs rather than superhero scholars.

My advice is if you are in a long-term education to savor the education, don't have the mentality of as soon as I get out of here, I can do my real life. You are in real life and how the habits that you develop as you're a student or the habits you're going to need as a professor, you're gonna need the boundaries, you're gonna, you're going to need the free time. You're going to need how need to know how to do Sabbath. You can't say, "Oh when I get out, I'll do it, do all that." If, if you have somebody who's taken their own life, you can't say, yeah, I'll, you know, I'm gonna skip that and take a break later. Like the demands that come with ministry don't allow you to just rearrange. But if you already have those habits built into your life, then when different kinds of pressures then deadlines that you, you'll, you already have the habits.

I loved my education, and I see some of my students in a hurry to get through so they can get out and do something. And I think the students that thrive better over the long haul and do better in ministry over the long haul are the people who say I'm already a ministry - my ministry is studying.

In our conversations with women in our audience, we hear of common challenges they face both internal and external. Our next clips speak to two of these first up scholar, Dr Grace Hamman reminds us of the importance of perspective when imposter syndrome creeps up in our lives. Listen in on her grounding wise advice to us all.

Another thing is that you are not the dumbest or the smartest one there. And I was so worried. I think a lot of people share this with me in grad programs that I - you know, imposter syndrome, right? - I didn't belong. And I think it took me a long time to get to a point where I was like, "Grace, you, you might not be the smartest person in the room, but also you, you're here and this is good, and you belong here." And I think that that's something that a lot of graduate students, especially women really struggle with and need to be reminded of.

And I know that was, that was a huge thing for me. So those are kind of the two things of, of moving forward when you're at those very beginning stages that I would say were really important for me.

But imposter syndrome isn't the only challenge we face in this next segment. Professor and psychologist, Dr. Shaniqua Walker-Barnes offers practical advice about finding clarity in our interests, looking for ways to contribute meaningfully to an institution and setting boundaries for yourself.

Along the way, I would say, get very clear about, especially when it comes to teaching and research, get very clear about what your interests are and think about the ways in which your interest can also serve the interests of the institution, right? But there's always that balance between what am I really interested in doing and what does the institution need and be a team player in trying to make sure you're meeting the needs of the institution so that you can also ask for more space to meet your needs. So I, when I design, I designed my classes, my overall teaching portfolio, there are classes I'm really interested in teaching. There are classes I know my institution needs me to, to, to teach and I'm, I'm gonna volunteer to teach those, right? Like you can put that on my schedule every time because I know that gives me some, some grace to be able to say, "And over here I want to teach this."

So, I would say that - getting clear about that - and then be clear about what is required of you and learn to say no to everything else. The saying no is really hard for women in higher ed, right? And, and I mean, I've been in higher ed over

20 years and I'm still often surprised at the degree to which my male colleagues are saying no, right? Things that often the women will think, oh, everybody has to do this, I just have to take on this assignment. And then I learn from a male colleague, they're like, "I don't do that. I've told them I don't want to do that." I'm like, "Wait, that's an option? I didn't have to be doing this?" So, I think learning that we have a lot more choice in and not only higher ed, but these professional positions that often require these advanced degrees, we often have a lot more choice and freedom that we make use of as women because we have these invisible voices in our heads, right? These people, invisible people that we think are telling us, we have to do things a certain way.

So, for me, it's really been a about learning how to see where I have choice and freedom and then how do I live into that freedom? So, no, I, I need straw and I need really good quality straw and I need good working hours to do this. And this is the type of support that I need to really be clear about what, what that is and and what you need to do.

Another experienced voice comes from Dr Lynn Gill, the director of intervarsity graduate and faculty ministries. She brings a story from her own season of academic training that highlights the importance of Sabbath and spiritual friendship.

So, in graduate school, I had to make the decision that Sabbath was going to be important. I worked for an advisor where everybody in my lab -there were about 22 graduate students - worked seven days a week. My adviser did as well. 80 hours a week was the expectation. And I just had this sense, I think, as a new believer and this trust, that God wanted something different. Part of that retreat in the upper peninsula of Michigan was to experience a retreat of silence. And that started me thinking more about Sabbath. And so, I felt this pretty distinct voice, I think from God really, like, "Will you trust me and take a Sabbath?" And so I, I worked six days a week, but I didn't work seven. And I, and I said to God, "If you, if I can't do this PhD in six days a week, then maybe it's not from you and then you have something else for me." But I also felt like following God's ways, I would be more creative and do better work than if I was there seven days a week. And so I think my advisor let it happen. And by the end, I think he actually honored it. We had a funder who was coming in on a Sunday – that was the day that I took a Sabbath. And they were the major funder for my project for his research. And he's like, "I know you take Sunday off. But I'm wondering, could you come in in the afternoon?" And I said, "It's not legalistic for me. I'm happy, I am happy to come in and do that." I understood he needed me to report on the research because this is how he got his funding. And I said I can come in the morning and he's like, "No, no, no, no, you go to church first. Other people can present and then you can come in in the afternoon and share what you're doing." And so, he respected me and honored it. I think he saw how important it was and the fact that I ended up doing good work that was used in other people's projects later on. But I also felt like God honored it too because he was the one that yeah, just provided a way for my research to move forward even in the midst of being faithful to taking a Sabbath. And so it can feel hard and scary and like a risk and, and when you start it, you don't know the ending because it could have been that my advisor said no. And, but God was gracious in the midst of it.

In addition to Sabbath, I would probably say like having a spiritual director or a mentor or a coach is another way that I think there's somebody else that can be helpful. But I also think just having, who's the friend that you call, that you share life with like this woman that I mentioned who was an English PhD student when I was a chemistry PhD student. We ended up going the whole five years together and we continued to meet And at different stages, at the beginning, it was like praying for the fellowship or last year, it was, we would meet for breakfast every Monday morning and check in with the one another on how's your writing going? What are, what are your goals for your dissertation? This week? I would say, "OK, this is what I need to do" And then we would ask each other the next week, "How did that go? Did you get there?" We prayed for one another. And so that having that kind of friendship, whether you're a grad student or you're a faculty, who's that person that you can do life with and encourage one another along the way?

Lynn speaks to the importance of finding your people. We at women scholars and professionals can help with that. So let us know if we can connect you with folks, we know in your local and we invite you to join our virtual communities as we gather for various things during the semester. Check out the show notes for specifics on our prayer meetings, book clubs and other ways to gather with like-minded faithful people. These gatherings in person and online often bring focus to questions like how does our life in Christ influence the way we think about and do our work? What does it mean to step into our offices or labs or classrooms as those who love Jesus and are his people in the world? The following

excerpt from our conversation with Dr Jean Porter King expresses this beautifully as she talks about the work of the Holy Spirit in every part of our lives.

Let me just take us back a moment to one of the, well, before I went to graduate school, I was an organizational development consultant for a major corporation in Dayton, Ohio, traveling about 60% of the time. And I remember one time and at the same time, I was very active in my home church. I was gravitating up the young adult youth leadership of our state organization. So, I had these two parallel paths, church and corporation and unintentionally, I didn't realize it. I had kind of two personas. I never denied my faith in the corporation. I just did what I did and operated out of that ethic, right? And then in the church, I was this up and coming a leader one day and I was on my way out and I never forget, I would always pray before I left and I was on my way out my door, walked past my couch and I heard the Holy Spirit say, "The anointing - don't leave home without it." And I remember thinking of that American Express commercial and I'm like, what I know, right? And what the Holy Spirit was dealing with me was, "You have a tendency to bifurcate your life that." The Holy Spirit... You know, I'm third generation Pentecostal. We, we traffic in the whole the spirit, right? We traffic in the gifts of the spirit and, and, and being led by the spirit. But it was a very practical heartfelt revelatory way of reminding me that the Spirit accompanies us wherever we are. And it's not just relegated, the work of the Spirit is not just relegated to church and to our worship and being able to hear. And that was the beginning of, oh Lord, I get it. So, I have these tools for decision making, but I have discernment from the spirit that you intend for me to use wherever I am. And it was then a beginning of a lifelong journey that gets unpacked in that chapter.

What I've learned in my own spiritual growth and development is worship opens us up to the realm of the spirit. And again, it's not just to be opened up for the times we're in church, but for our work in the world and our life in the world. And Jesus intended when he said, "I send you another comforter." He said, "I'm sending you another one like myself who will walk with you in the world to be that witness, to be that light." And so, as a leader, that light for me comes forth from spending that time in worship and being able to really hear, you know, so I give some strategies on even intentionally asking for what we need from the Holy Spirit. I share a story as you know, we won't go into it but about to go into a health challenge for myself and just the Holy Spirit gave me strategy on what to do. One of my friends I tell in the, the book that says, every meeting she goes into, she begins to pray, "Holy Spirit, show me what I need to know." And the wisdom that can come forth from that is just phenomenal. So, I am so blessed that you were blessed by that chapter because I'm a worshiper at heart. But in some ways, in my early days, I kind of relegated that worship and that role of the Spirit to like just the church life. And it's just been so expansive just to see what God does and through the Holy Spirit to open up so much in our professional arenas, graduate school you're talking to, you know, you have graduate students and professors. I remember in school having to ask the Lord, "Now open my understanding. There's some of these theories I'm not understanding quite yet, so open my understanding," and God was so faithful. He did that and more and more again, as we worship, we get attune to the voice of the Spirit and to what I call a download of the Spirit into our hearts that carries with us and that becomes the lens through which we can live and interpret the world that we're in.

And for our final excerpt, seasoned Professor Dr Jennifer Holberg shares practical advice about knowing ourselves, connecting with the mentor, learning about a new institution and the joy of growing into our chosen career paths.

Well, I will preface this by saying that if any of my friends are listening to this, they'll know that I'm better at giving advice than to give it, taking it. I'd give excellent advice. I just have not always want to do what I, what I think is actually correct. So just, just know that they, that, that I understand that going into this question, I would say one of the things I think is, is hard when you begin is people would like you to do a lot of things.

And it's exciting you have opportunities to do things you have to do and there are new classes you can teach and all of those things. But I think it's really important to think about what you really enjoy doing and what you're really good at doing and what you need to get done. So, in other words, if you're on, if you're on a 10-year line, you know, you know, there's gonna be some things that need to happen. And so, what at your university is really important to happen? Is it getting that monograph finished? Is it whatever? And at Calvin, I would say you have to have excellent teaching. We still expect to see, you know, scholarly progress. But if you're not teaching well, you're probably not going to do well with us. So, and if that's a place that you need to have some help, we really are there to help most departments really do want to meet people. And even if they don't figure out who will help you, even if they're not in your department, I think a lot of us feel like we have to sort of gut it out or already know how to do it and you don't and every place is new and it's a, you're

having to learn. And I think that that understanding the culture is really important. So, the woman who was assigned to me is so I was assigned a formal mentor when I went to Calvin and she was for me in a lot of ways. But one of her big things was we had a faculty dining room at the time and she was like, you have to get out of the department and go meet people and she would take me, we would go and eat lunch. And that was a great way for me informally to meet lots and lots and lots of people to understand the history of the place. I wasn't an alum of the place and at that time, a lot of people came to Calvin. That's not so true now, but a lot of Calvin alum. So, they already had networks, and I was moving from Seattle, the west coast to the, to a state I've never even been in to a place that had a very strong culture. And so, it was really important to understand how that culture worked and who these folks were and appreciate kind of what also had happened. So, I think finding mentorship outside the department, Calvin now actually assigns you someone outside your department. And I've worked at in that capacity and that's been really great. I've had people from chemistry and engineering and I have no, no knowledge of their discipline, but I'm really there to help them learn about our culture and help them become successful and have them be the place that you can ask the dumb question that you don't want to ask your own colleagues. So, I think that's really important, finding some kind of all campus person.

I also think thinking about what you can do and what you can't do and you may be someone that has young children. You may be someone who is navigating, you know, a long-distance relation, like there's all kinds of things that people also bring. So, think about what you can and you can't do and then try to be as much of a stepper upper without being an overstep, right? And that's the hardest thing I have the worst. This is why I'm saying I have the worst thing. I, I always sort of want to do more than maybe I should. On the other hand, this is one thing I say to some of my students who get told maybe to not do as much do what your capacity is. So, in the book, I, I talk about how it was very irritated for a long time when I would hear colleagues who I didn't feel like did as much as they might always talking about how busy they were. And I really did not bring out my best Christian personality, shall we say? I would think really seriously you are not doing. And then I started thinking, you know, what if I believed them, what if I believed that they do feel filled up? And so I came up with this kind of corny little thing about how everyone is a glass and, you know, sometimes you just want a shot glass and that's fine. No one wants to drink more than that and that's delicious. And, and so trying to understand what your capacities are. So, if you're someone with high capacity, like, do, do the things you want to do. But that's the other thing I would say is, you know, as I've gone through my career, I tend to take on lots of little side hustles little. I like, I enjoyed running Faculty senate and I enjoyed, but they were huge jobs on top of my other jobs. And so then people would say to me, well, do you want, would you like to be a dean? Do you wanna be a provost? Do you wanna, you know, we'd like to recruit you for this, that or the other. And I would think about it and because I do enjoy that work and I'm good at it and I think you really should also start to say to yourself, what am I good at and be unapologetic about that. But one of the things I think I'm good at is I'm a good teacher. Even though I go to a lot of meetings, I really love the minute I have to say, I'm sorry, I gotta go teach.

And I like, walk in my classroom and have that hour with my students. Even if it's not the greatest hour, it's still a great hour. And every time I've thought about drifting into something else, full time administration, which I could do, I've just thought that wouldn't give me joy. In fact, it would rob me from joy and so I don't mind doing other things. I like being chair for example, but I wouldn't want to do it all the time. And there are some people as their career goes on that they say, you know, I love this being a provost is just something where I can fix problems and set agendas and wonderful. And I think one of the joys of the academic career is that you can do so many different things. You can run centers and edit journals and you know, do conferences and, and that can evolve over your, over your career. But I also be confident in who you are and what you want to do and figuring out the opportunities to get better at it. And of course, there's all the things we have to do, teaching scholarship service, right? So, we have to do some of them, but some of them were really gonna excel in and figure out which things are giving you joy and making sure that you're giving yourself joy in your, in your work life. And not just everything seems like a terrible drudgery and draining you of energy.

I loved going through these episodes to find these pieces of advice for you, dear listeners. I hope that you've found solace and encouragement through these snippets of conversation. But most of all, I hope that you can find some time to search your own heart and find the habits and practices that help you to draw closer to God as you pursue your work. We at women scholars and professionals believe that God is calling you into the academic and professional worlds you're in and that your involvement in this calling will bear fruit in God's Kingdom and in your lives, we are excited for you and we are praying for you. Let us know if there are particular things you'd like us to pray for by sending an email to WSAP@intervarsity.org. We hope you'll share this episode with your friends and colleagues. And if you listen to the end

of the credits, you'll hear a bonus from our podcast with one more beautiful piece of encouragement from Professor Jennifer Holberg.

The Women Scholars and Professionals podcast is hosted by me Ann Boyd and is a production of intervarsity Christian Fellowship. We acknowledge that the opinions of our guests may not necessarily represent the ministry doctrine or policies of InterVarsity. You can find more information about our podcast and the other cool things we are doing at thewell.intervarsity.org. Our work is funded solely through the donations of our listeners and supporters. So, if you enjoyed this podcast, you might consider joining our support team by donating even \$10 per month, you can find out how to do this at our website. To ensure others will find and enjoy our podcasts as well, please consider rating and reviewing our podcasts and sharing it with others. And as we close, listen to this excerpt from my conversation with Jennifer Holberg.

This is something I think a lot about because one of the things I talk about in the book is how I see people who don't think they're enough and, and I really see this in talented young women so, so often, first of all, they don't know how good they are and how smart they are and how amazing they are. And they just can't seem to, to own that. What they hear is what they haven't done what they should be doing. And it's a whole life of shoulds and a whole life of anxiousness about how they're not living up. And so often as their professor or their colleague, I just want to say, "Oh, baby, you're doing such a good job!" And you gotta find some people in your life that can say that to you and you need to believe them. And that's not to say we can't keep doing better and striving. But you know what? It's, it's, it's amazing what you're already doing and to live into that piece of like, hey, I'm, I'm doing a good job today. I always say to young teachers, you know, I've done teacher like lots of teacher training over my life and I would say, you know, think about baseball, you can get in the hall of fame with like a 400 is considered good. Well, that's hardly a home run ever. So, if your class is basically a single, single, if you can get on base every day, hey, even a walk is walks as good as a rug, baby. It's about consistency. It's about, hey, today's class was a double. Ok. You know, I'll still get in the hall of fame that the average pretty good. Just enjoying the fact that you're getting to do what you, what you like to study and you get to do it in a place with lots of other people who are super smart and are, are getting to do fun stuff too. I would hate to have to work in an office. So many jobs I don't want to do and God bless people that do them.

But I just think man, I'm just like here I sit in my little library and yeah, but, but that people need to like, remember how, how talented you are, like you're in grad school for a reason. You're someone who's smart and who's capable and God has plans for those gifts and know that the, the the opportunities will be there for you to use them in all kinds of ways.

That is, that's a beautiful word for all of our listeners to hear. Thank you for that.

