

Spiritual Formation and the Christian School

Dr. Roger Erdvig / Dr. Maggie Pope

Christian school personnel often struggle to determine and communicate how the different facets of Christian spiritual formation relate to the school. The purpose of this resource is to help clarify this issue so that leaders can align their school's efforts with the most impactful roles that Christian schools can have in their students' spiritual formation.

Spiritual formation is the Spirit-driven process of forming a person's inner being to become like the inner being of Christ himself (Galatians 4:19; Willard, 2002). This formation results in a faithful reflection of the Christ's likeness to others (II Corinthians 3:18).

The Holy Spirit often uses the family, the church, and the school to draw students to a saving knowledge of Christ and then to transform them into the likeness of Christ over time. In Scripture, five tools can be identified as facets of this process: discipleship, biblical worldview formation, spiritual disciplines, suffering, and Christian community. These tools are distinct and yet highly interdependent.

Applying these tools will look different in the family, church, and school, all of which contribute to a student's spiritual formation. The family and church bear more responsibility for and are more conducive to some elements of spiritual formation of students, such as individualized discipleship and support and opportunities to practice spiritual disciplines. As academic institutions, Christian schools are ideally suited for a primary focus on biblical worldview formation, a tool that can be utilized seamlessly within every academic subject and all areas of school life.

The image and descriptions below explain how Christian schools can partner with the Holy Spirit in the spiritual formation of their students. This partnership involves a primary focus on biblical worldview formation, while still implementing elements of the other tools that are also appropriate for an academic context.

*my little children,
for whom I am again in
the anguish
of childbirth until
Christ is formed in you!*

Galatians 4:19

*And we all, with unveiled
face, beholding the glory of
the Lord are being
transformed into the same
image from one degree of
glory to another. For this
comes from the Lord
who is the Spirit.*

II Corinthians 3:18



DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship is the process of giving willing followers of Christ the assistance they need to live out what Jesus taught (Anders, 2015, p. xiii). While limited availability, training, and experience can make it difficult for Christian school personnel to formally disciple all their students, they can engage in discipleship “moments” with many students in the course of their work. These moments can include such activities as praying with students for needs, providing limited individualized spiritual counsel, and encouraging students in their walk with the Lord. On a more formal level, Bible classes, chapel services, and small groups can provide much of the systematic teaching on biblical truths that healthy discipleship requires. In addition, individual school personnel may be able to establish in-depth discipling relationships with a few students.

SUFFERING

Humans experience the painful and difficult effects of the fall of man as first described in Genesis 3 and then documented all throughout Scripture. While often viewed as negative, pain and difficulties can be used by the Holy Spirit to encourage spiritual growth in the lives of followers of Christ. Christian schools can provide a measure of support for students while teaching a biblical perspective of suffering.



CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Christian community is the relational context in which followers of Christ live out Jesus’ command to love one another and use their spiritual gifts to build one another up. Christian schools can nurture such community in many aspects of school life, including creating a positive and life-giving school environment. Additionally, they can provide teaching and modeling for developing biblically-based relationships.

References

- Anders, M. (2015). *Brave new discipleship*. Thomas Nelson.
Willard, D. (1998). *The spirit of the disciplines: Understanding how God changes lives*. Harper One.
Willard, D. (2002). *Renovation of the heart: Putting on the character of Christ*. NavPress.

BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW FORMATION

Biblical worldview formation is the life-long process of conforming how one sees and functions within the world to the principles, values, and ideals of the kingdom of God. Christian schools are ideally suited to focus on biblical worldview formation in every subject area through the four teaching commitments of biblical worldview immersion (shaping students’ desires, using engaged learning, helping students to process experiences, and teaching biblical worldview truth claims). Additionally, through co-curricular opportunities, schools can create environments and experiences that align with the biblical worldview formation process.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Spiritual disciplines—the activities of mind and body that Christ himself practiced—are key to the transformation of followers of Christ. When practiced consistently, these disciplines position individuals to be recipients of God’s grace of transformation (Willard, 1988). Christian school faculty and staff can serve as living examples for students as they practice these disciplines. Bible classes can reinforce this modeling with direct teaching about spiritual disciplines and provide some opportunities to practice them.