

Why Should I Consider a Christian Education for my Child?

Often times when I, or one of my staff, meet with perspective families or people in the community, we are asked that very question. It's a great question, one I hope you have given much thought and prayer about. The following is most of the content of a paper I had to write as part of my ACSI Executive Director certification. Some of you may have already read it since it has been shared over the course of four newsletters, for others of you it will be new material. I hope it will provide some context for the answer to the question of why a Christ centered education is important. Later on in the booklet, our Spiritual Life Director, Mrs. Dana Rollins has expanded on an article she shared at a high school informational meeting. It's a great article that addresses concerns parents have about Christian education. I hope you enjoy the article and find it beneficial as you evaluate your own decisions or help friends and relatives as they go through the same decision process you have gone through. What we are trying to accomplish here at NHCS is very important...often times of eternal importance. These children are our future and we are mandated to train them up in the way of the Lord. Now, and in the future, we need Christian leaders to be a part of our community. Our students will be those leaders! We all have to be a part of giving our children a well-rounded education. Many parents can't provide that training alone. Churches can't provide it alone, and schools can't provide it alone. We are part of a three legged stool, all working in concert to provide our children with a stable foundation.

During the first couple of years at North Hills, with the help of an awesome staff I intuitively recognized that what we had here at North Hills must be different from what was offered elsewhere. As a staff, we recognized that a Christian education was more than the training of the mind. Our God did not create just a mind and he certainly didn't intend for us to only focus on the mind. Just as God cares for all of his creation, even knowing the number of hairs on our head, we must care for the whole child; the body, mind and soul.

Historically, a Christian education was the norm. Classically educated Christians were the renowned scientists, artists, writers, mathematicians of the day. In his book, *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, J. P. Moreland points out,

"From the arrival of the pilgrims to the middle of the nineteenth century, American believers prized the intellectual life for its contributions to the Christian journey. The Puritans were highly educated people who founded many of the great universities...studied art, science, philosophy, and other fields as a way of loving God with the mind."

Notice the last nine words of Morelands statement, "as a way of loving God with the mind." That is precisely what God commanded in Matthew 22:37; "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all of your soul and with all your mind." Even a less than critical reading of this command from God does not discern a differentiation of one area being more important than another. Like almost everything in life, the Bible seems to indicate a balanced emphasis on all three aspects of our being. Unfortunately, the current education system has segmented the approach to education with public schools emphasizing the mind and many traditional Christian

schools overemphasizing the heart and soul with less rigor placed on the mind. The seeds of this change seemed to have been sowed out of the good intentions of some Christians. Again, quoting from Moreland,

“During the middle 1800’s, three awakenings broke out in the US. Much good came from these movements but their overall effect was to overemphasize immediate personal conversion to Christ instead of a studied period of reflection and conviction. Historian George Marsden notes, “Anti-intellectualism was a feature of American revivalism.” Moreland goes on to say that conservative American Christianity responded to intellectual attack by withdrawing from public discourse and developing an anti-intellectual view of the Christian faith. This response created both a marginalized church with a softened impact for Christ and a secular culture.”

This is the exact opposite of our mission statement which I paraphrase, “to have a BOLD impact for Christ in our CULTURE.” In my opinion, this is where we risk losing our youth. Again, Moreland writes,

“When religion is handed down among us by hereditary succession, it is not surprising to find youth of sense and spirit beginning to question truth of the system in which they were brought up. And it is not surprising to see them abandon a position which they are unable to defend.”

Sadly, I have seen this abandonment too often. Children strong in their faith through high school confronted by knowledgeable skeptics later in life are unable to defend their position with an argument any stronger than “that’s what my parent’s believed” or “that’s what the Bible says.” In shame, they abandon the faith they have inherited never to return. The empty cathedrals of Europe are contemporary proof of a failed system. In general, the Christian education system, which includes parents, church and school, have failed to provide our youth with the tools to transition them from the faith of their fathers to a faith they own and are able to defend. It doesn’t have to be this way!

The Bible overwhelmingly commands and supports an intellectual curiosity into the ways of God. Scripture reinforces the need to study, analyze and learn about the world in which we live. Scriptures such as,

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of YOUR MIND, so that YOU MAY PROVE what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2)

or from 1st Peter,

“Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, ALWAYS BEING PREPARED TO MAKE A DEFENSE to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” (1st Peter 3:15)

and from Philippians,

“Finally, brothers, whatever is TRUE, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, THINK about these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

Christians should be highly concerned about developing intellectual lives. One of the ways God reveals himself to us is through the order and beauty of his creation. It's only through studying that creation that the true nature and awesomeness of God is revealed. Read the words of David from Psalm 19,

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard”

David realized that the beauty and order of the created world are truly God's oldest testament. When he wrote: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands”, he was implying that an observation and study of the world we live in does in fact reveal to us the glory, character and divine nature of God. He also realized that the revelation of God is continuous, “Day after day...night after night.” Pastor Mark Adams notes, “Unlike the prophets God would send one year and then let many silent years go by before sending another, the world in which we live reveals the glory of God every single night of the week, every week of the year, year after year, and they have done this nonstop since the dawn of creation. There has never been a moment in the history of the human race when the heavens were not testifying to us about God's infinite power and wisdom. The stars and oceans and mountains and animals and fish and birds and insects never tire of saying, “The hands that made us are divine” Pastor Warren Wiersbe writes, “Nature preaches a thousand sermons a day to the human heart.”

It is clear from scripture that we are to educate ourselves and prepare ourselves to defend our faith. This only happens through disciplined learning. In particular, concerning our students, it only happens when our administration, our curriculum, our teachers, our philosophy all align to a rigorous pursuit of God's truth.

As I have read and studied the different books about Christian education, I have become even more inspired and appreciative of the simplicity, yet truth, of our mission statement. While in many respects, equipping the mind is self-evident in a Christian school, equipping the heart is equally important. From the book, Foundations of Christian School Education, author Kenneth Gangel writes,

“Christian educators teaching from a biblical worldview desire to affect the whole student, not just the intellect. We need to see our students as more than empty minds waiting to be filled. Students are fallen but redeemable people needing to live out their redemption in relationship to one another. In short, we as educators must translate our theology and philosophy into “street sense”, enabling our students to live a Christlike life in the real world. They must learn not only what the Scriptures teach but how to live daily in accordance with a biblical worldview.”

I think it is significant that our mission statement says nothing about teaching students to follow rules. I also think it is reflective of God's word where at the most basic level there are only eight "Thou shall nots..." Overwhelmingly, scripture teaches us about the importance of relationships, respect and thoughtfulness. I think as an institution, the way we operate should be reflective of the proportion of various topics in scripture. Much more emphasis should be placed on relationships than following rules. Author Milton Uecker writes,

"A moral community that leads to character is not militaristic. Rigidity, harshness, and fear are not marks of moral excellence, and the stress they cause prohibits both cognitive and affective learning. A moral community is not legalistic. A legalistic environment elevates personal desires and behavioral expectations to the same level as biblical imperatives. Rules about not chewing gum, not running in the halls, and dressing appropriately may be important in the functioning of the school, but they are mere preferences and should be justified as such. Not every rule and its appropriateness should be defended biblically. When a biblical defense is inappropriate, the outcome may be a legalistic mindset and lifestyle. A moral community is authoritative. Love and control are balanced. When love dominates, the environment can become permissive and when control becomes dominant, the school is legalistic."

I firmly believe that one of the primary methods for allowing a child to develop and excel at their God given talent and abilities is by showing them respect and trust. 1st Peter 2:17 commands us to show respect to EVERYONE.

"Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor."

In his book Discipline: Philosophy and Trust, Jerry Haddock writes,

"A nationwide survey of Christian school teachers reveals that STUDENTS ARE GREATLY CONCERNED that they are treated with respect by their parents, teachers and peers. Respect demonstrates honor or consideration of someone else. When others are honored, trusting relationships develop. A teacher's manner of classroom discipline provides opportunities to develop a relationship of trust not only with students but with parents as well. The concern is to meet student needs. The teacher's first priority in building relationships is to demonstrate personal interest in the lives of students and their families. When relating to parents, teachers should make every effort to identify and focus on the parents' perception of their children's needs. Healthy relationships develop through a constant process of affirmation and involvement. Goethe once said, "Treat a man as he appears to be, and you make him worse. But treat a man as if he already were what he potentially could be, and you make him what he should be". Young people are fragile and easily scarred by careless or critical remarks. Such comments destroy trust. Christian educators should pray for sensitivity and wisdom in dealing with students. Rather than shattering a child's confidence and sense of worth, the effective Christian school teacher seeks opportunities to build up by praising and affirming."

Finally, I think it is important to realize we are not alone in this endeavor, and in many cases we may not even be the primary influencer of a child's development. We are partners with the

child's family. It is critically important to enlist our parents in our philosophy and methodologies as it relates to a Christian education. Author Richard Edlin writes,

"Parents need adequate nurture in a biblical pattern of schooling before their students are enrolled. Without such pre-enrollment nurture, the Christian values and worldview of the school can be overtaken by middle-class mediocrity. Too many "Christian" schools in America, Australia, and New Zealand are becoming mere "cheap" versions of the elitist private school across town. Biblical faithfulness is giving way to a socially acceptable, materialistic success mentality."

Frankly, that statement does not apply to parents alone. It applies to everyone associated with the school. It is important that parents, teachers, administrators and staff understand the why and how of "equipping the heart and mind of students..."

So with all of that being said, I think I would summarize my philosophy of Christian education as follows:

I think a Christian education should be an education that causes a child to seek God's truth in all aspects of life, to discover the character of God through the magnificence of his creation. I think it is an education that gives a child the opportunity to discover the God given abilities they have and then gives them the opportunity to excel in their own unique gifts. I think it is an education where the child feels loved and respected, where they know beyond a shadow of a doubt they are a special child created in the image of a loving God. I think it is an education where they gain confidence in their own abilities in order that they may impact the world for Christ. I think it's an education where a child feels comfortable and even encouraged to respectfully question the faith they have inherited as they strive to make it their own. I think a Christian education should give a child the knowledge and ability to defend their faith with the brightest minds they encounter. I think it's an education where they are first shown by example and then taught to serve others with a Christ like love. I think it is an education where they are taught that the creator of the universe is equally concerned with a personal relationship with them.

My vision for the future is that when asked by prospective parents the question, "Why a christian education at North Hills?", the response is, "Because I look around the community and I see former North Hills Christian School students who are knowledgeable, caring, curious and well-informed. They are leaders of the community. They seem to be excelling at their God given talent. They are confident in their faith. They are able to get along with others, showing Christlike love to all they encounter. They are impacting the world for Christ!"

by Maria Lowder, Executive Director