



FORMATIONAL CHRISTIAN TEACHING PRACTICES

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS & TEACHERS

Know God. Love Others. Live Purposefully.

By extension of our deep hope for our Christian learning community, our K-12 Bible curriculum is designed to help students Know God, Love Others, and Live Purposefully. More than ever, Christian schools need to be future-focused on Kingdom and Gospel hope, not fear. We are teaching students to a greater immersion in the Word to be able to see the Living Word more clearly. As students come to know God more by journeying from K-12 intentionally through our scope and sequence, they will better understand themselves, know how to love others, and participate in the world by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

How then do we teach as a Christian learning community?

By extension of the question, “Who are the learners in our learning community?” we have taken our learner attributes and designed formational Christian teaching practices (FCTPs) that help to reorder the liturgies, habits, and desires that shape who we are as followers of Christ (Smith, 2016). Our FCTPs reach back and bring forward the rich Christian tradition of ways that people come to know God. We know that practices of the head (liturgy, fixed hour prayer, Bible study, scripture memory, and journaling), of the heart (centering, examen, lectio divina, confession, reconciliation, sabbath, and healing), and of the hands (nature walks, serving, evangelism, prayer, fasting, celebrating, hospitality, silence, and mentoring) by the faithful presence of the Holy Spirit have transformed communities. We intend to evoke the imagination of how these practices can take shape educationally in our Bible classes.



FCPTs pertain closely to a “kind of attentiveness to embodied practice that does not let go of our more common focus on good thinking but expands its context” (Smith, 2018, p. 10). Our framework is about moving beyond reducing teaching to a set of techniques or strategies and instead working towards designing learning experiences that invite students to engage in dynamic and experiential learning spaces that facilitate discussion about the world in light of what the Bible has to say. As James K.A. Smith acknowledged, “The orientation of the heart happens from the bottom up, through the formation of our habits of desire. Learning to love

[God] takes practice” (p. 23). Christian teaching is part of the habit-forming work that God is doing and we intend to help our teachers develop in their own formation as well.

It is our intention that our curricular experiences evoke the learner attributes in our students in an environment of engagement. As we think about designing learning using school or community-based approaches to shaping learning, Smith (2018) reminded that the quality of our teaching and learning does not depend on “individual gifts and dedication, but on the degree to which we can foster sustained, open, engaged conversation about teaching and learning, conversation that is genuinely invested in figuring out how to renew our teaching” (p. 137). We believe that our learner attributes extend to all learners in our community, from the students, to our families, and our K-12 staff.

What should teaching look like?

In our “Education with Impact” instructional guidelines, we outline what education “for every child, in every classroom, and every day” looks like. Our FCTPs expand upon some of the ideas using our learner attributes as a framework to characterize what our distinctive K-12 Christian competency-driven and concept-based curriculum looks like. We are not starting from a place where we have made assumptions about a child’s faith journey, but approaching the work that we do from an understanding that regardless of where students may be at from seeker to skeptic, that God can use their learning experiences to encourage them in their journey as a learner.

We believe that Christian learning communities are tasked with the responsibility of inviting and exploring questions. We are teaching students how to think, engage, and live in a world impacted by sin, but filled with hope in rich dialogical spaces. We acknowledge the enormous potential it is to teach in an eccumenical community where no particular Christian denomination is prioritized, but that the rich history and traditions are understood, honoured, and brought forward to understand as students come to Know God, Know Themselves, and Love Others. Where possible, our classroom practices in our Bible courses are relational, discussion-based, and involve experiential learning opportunities for faith-formation and reflection. One of the structures that we introduce in our planning for learning is the 4As: *awareness, acknowledgement, atonement, and action*. This process encourages rich text-based discussions, experiential conversations, and facilitates putting our learning into practice in real life contexts.

We define success, achievement, and flourishing in our Bible classes as something more than the qualitative or quantifiable, but on holistic assessments that invite students to reflect on their understanding and beliefs in relation to the perspectives of others under a foundation of Christian perspectives on the world. In this next part of this document, we outline what some of these teaching practices look like for our educational staff:

FORMATIONAL CHRISTIAN TEACHING PRACTICES



PURPOSEFULLY DISCIPLINED

1. Scaffold activities that invite students to read the Bible, explore questions of identity, and understand identity in Christ.
2. Create learning opportunities that encourage students to uncover hidden biases held about self, others, and the world.
3. Design opportunities for students to assess messages that are presented about identity, the role of the Bible, spiritual practices, and how to participate in Christian community.
4. Model how to participate in practices that promote wholeness, wellbeing, worship, spiritual formation, resting in Christ, and healing.
5. Practice and model how to embody commitment to personal goals, values, and discipleship by learning to know God, love others, and living purposefully.



GRACE-FILLED INTEGRITY

1. Create learning opportunities that invite students to share ideas with grace, empathy, love, respect, and honesty.
2. Model a posture of listening, learning, and non-anxious presence while engaging with difficult conversations and topics.
3. Scaffold learning that encourages students to articulate ideas truthfully and convincingly.
4. Manage conflict and promote peace, cooperation, and mutual respect through respectful and honest conversations.
5. Model dialogue with others and equip students with the capacity to disagree humbly in love.



ENGAGED & FAITHFUL

1. Understand how diversity is part of God's design for the world.
2. Invite students to explore narratives that promote an understanding and empathy of others.
3. Scaffold opportunities for students to practice being change agents who strive for peace, justice, and reconciliation with Christ.
4. Model compassion for and humility to learn from the stories of vulnerable and marginalized peoples.
5. Invite students to understand diverse theological perspectives and traditions on topics that are meaningful to them.



HOPEFUL & THRIVING

1. Create a classroom culture that invites students to take courageous risks by relying on what they know and observe and also learn to trust faithfully in the unseen.
2. Engage students in discussions that explore patterns, make connections, and uncover beauty and complexity in creation.
3. Embody a posture of hope, joy, wonder, and worship in the classroom and in relationships with students.
4. Design opportunities for students to cultivate themselves as creative and independent thinkers and creators who are unique image-bearers.
5. Model thoughtful and reflective inquiry about personal belief in God and the presence of God in all things.



SERVANT STEWARDSHIP

1. Involve students in recognizing the consequence of their actions in the present and in the future of their communities.
2. Scaffold opportunities for students to collaboratively learn about and generate solutions for real problems, real needs, and real people.
3. Model restorative practices that build Christ-like community and relationship.
4. Create learning opportunities that encourage students to put aside self-interest for the well-being of the greater good.
5. Provide opportunities for student leadership and equip students to actively serve and participate in their communities.



FAITH-INFORMED DISCERNMENT

1. Scaffold discussions that help students evaluate and compare knowledge and truth claims that emerge out of ethical issues.
2. Design lessons and case studies where students consider how Biblical principles might apply to real life situations and decision-making processes.
3. Model for students how to formulate good questions about creation, identity, and the nature of God.
4. Practice and model for students the habits of effective critical thinking that engages with scripture and is slow to judgment.
5. Gather and encourage students to consider a range of diverse perspectives, experiences, and solutions, including those that are Biblically informed, involving important community and social issues.

REFERENCES

- Smith, D. (2018). *On Christian teaching: Practicing faith in the classroom*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Smith, J.K.A. (2016). *You are what you love: The spiritual power of habit*. Brazos Press.