

Christian values and virtues

What Does This Mean?

How we live matters, but a lack of consensus in the world concerning values leads some to try to sidestep this issue by labeling certain areas of life as “value free.” As Christians we recognize that there is no such thing. There is no neutral ground. All of life is God’s, and Christian values affect every area of life.

This is a moral universe, and you’ve got to take account of the fact that truth and lies and goodness and evil are things that matter. Bishop Desmond Tutu

The term *values* is used in many schools, but it can be a bit abstract. Virtues are values expressed in character, and character affects how we treat those around us. Character is as much for the sake of others as for our own sake. The perfect expression of this was Jesus, whom Christians are called upon to imitate; he is the “measure” of what humanity could be (1 John 2:6). It is all about the people we become.

The fruits of the Spirit are examples of Christian virtues (love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; Galatians 5:22-23). 2 Peter 1:5-7 contains another list of Christian virtues.

The safe landing of US Airways flight 1549 on the Hudson River on January 15, 2009, was the result of the pilots’ long training that made certain actions second nature (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/US_Airways_Flight_1549). Similarly, virtue and character involve acting out of habits of heart, mind, and life. Virtue is not just natural goodness; it is the result of a thousand small choices that require effort to begin with until they are second nature.

As we pursue growth in virtues, we discover that we fall short and need God’s grace to transform our character. We pursue virtue not to impress God or declare ourselves good, but to seek to live as God intends in response to his grace to us.

Character is made in the small moments of our lives. Phillips Brooks

What Does This Mean in School?

Values create our context for teaching and learning across the curriculum. We communicate values in all subjects by how we teach and learn, usually without knowing it. We can choose the values we communicate by our pedagogy, and all subjects can be part of character formation. In teaching and learning we can

- think about the issues and values/virtues each subject raises and design teaching and learning to highlight them (consider with students how the skills and knowledge that they gain from a subject area need to combine with virtues for them to serve others well);
- use stories of people who pursue the virtues in their lives in subjects such as English, history, modern languages, art, and drama;
- model the pursuit of virtues and honesty about falling short ourselves;
- look at the structure of lessons we teach (do they encourage the exercise of virtues such as patience?); and
- look at what we reward.

Think of a time when a values issue arose in class. Who initiated the issue, you or the students? Did you feel able to discuss it, or did something stop you? If something inhibited discussion, was it an internal factor or something exterior (such as curriculum pressure)? In light of this, what could you do to make discussing values across the curriculum possible?



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