

Nate Flasher
Dr. Geisler
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Integration Paper

Introduction

My immediate response to the question, "What does it mean for me to be a Christian?" is to explain that it means that as a broken and sinful human I am saved and rescued by my one and true savior, Jesus Christ, and therefore I am called to live a life that honors and glorifies the Lord.

Being a Christian and living a life of faith demonstrates to the Lord that I acknowledge what He has done for me and therefore feel called to respect His desires for how I live out my life. There are two large reasons why this matters to those who I both know and don't know in this world. First, it would be selfish for me to keep this news to myself. I desire to share the news of the gospel with others out of love and to give them the chance to understand what Jesus Christ has done for them. Secondly, God has called me to share that news with others, so not only do I have a personal desire to share the good news, but that desire to do so is also something the Lord calls me to do. This has numerous implications on how I need to live my life.

All of my actions, words, thoughts, and manners should represent the Lord. When others interact with me or observe me, my goal is to lead them to the Lord through how I behave. As I have grown from a toddler to who I am now, I will reflect on what it has meant for me to be a Christian and how I have integrated my faith into my life over the years.

Past experiences (before college)

My understanding of what it means to be a Christian began immediately after being born. Both of my parents were and still are Christians and raised me to the best of their ability in a Christ-like manner. Although I do not remember hardly anything about my childhood except for what my parents tell me or show me through family videos, I know that they played a large role in shaping my view of what I believe a Christian looks like today. They did this by putting me in a private Christian pre-school where I was taught the basics of who God is. They raised me according to the standards the Lord held my parents to.

By the time I neared the end of my years in public elementary school, I felt as though there was something separating me from other students. I began to get made fun of a little bit and was excluded from some activities my friend group would participate in. I had no idea why.

Around the same time, as I became old enough, I was allowed to visit my friends' houses. During these visits I could definitely pinpoint some significant differences in how my friends acted around their families in contrast with how I acted around mine. The main difference was the lack of respect they showed to their parents. I was too young to understand why there was such a large difference between my behavior and my friends' behaviors around their families.

Middle school experiences

Eventually my parents put me in middle school and the bullying that I experienced began to worsen. I blatantly became the laughing stock of my friend group, of whom I was beginning to realize were not my friends after all. They would try to exclude me from every single activity they did together. I was desperately trying to fit in with them, but never did, and eventually ended up never wanting to.

This led to the idea of looking at other options for high schools, rather than the public city high school I would have naturally attended. Without much hesitation, my parents and I decided it was in my best interest to attend a private Christian high school.

As I reflect on how I was treated worse and worse starting in elementary school and lasting through the end of middle school, I am realizing that I was significantly different from the majority of my friends and peers. However, when I was younger, I thought it was purely because I was weird, messed up, and ugly. I can see now that that was never the reason. I was “persecuted” for how I lived out my faith. I was always quite nice, respectful, and kind, trying to represent the Lord with my actions. I believe this made me an easy target for others who didn’t understand why I acted in such a way.

I realize now that being a Christian during the years I was in public school meant that I was unintentionally opening myself up to harassment for others because of my belief. Throughout my four years at high school, I made friends much easier, and not just any friends, but best friends. I bonded with others, received love, felt appreciated, and felt as though I “fit in” at the Christian institution. To summarize, throughout my education before college, I learned that to be a Christian meant to be treated differently, potentially bullied, by others that did not share similar beliefs. I however, also learned that it meant that I had a family in Christ, a group of people who loved me and cared for me. This set the foundation for my choice of where I wanted to go to college, hence why I am at Taylor.

Current experiences (during college)

My first year at Taylor flew by. I was not intentional about pursuing relationships and did not have much of an interest in anyone but myself. I was not pursuing making friends with others in a way the Lord would have desired me to. Academically, I did not care about my education much at all. I was not completing my school work for the Lord, in a way that would glorify Him. Rather, I was trying to get the work finished as fast as I could to get done because I did not care for school. My view of my education was dishonoring to the Lord. As I look back on this year I can see how this is not what it should look like for me to be a Christian, however God used this year of my life to reshape who I am in Christ over the course of the next few years.

Due to my lack of intentionality in not just my relationships, but also my education my freshman year, I went through a year of anxiety after realizing I did not understand basic information in my major that I should have known. I was at the risk of adding on an extra semester at Taylor. Worries such as paying more money to be at Taylor longer, dropping a class, and not knowing what I needed to know for my classes, were all thoughts that brought me deep worry for a solid year. This worry extended not solely in my academic life, but it seeped into my life as a whole. Through this year I learned to lean on God more than I have in my entire life. I realized what true suffering felt like in a broken world. After this period of my life came to an end, I was so much closer to the Lord than I had ever been before. I learned from this year that to be

a Christian meant that I had hope and could lean on the Lord during every bit of suffering in my life, and He would always comfort me and provide peace.

My peers over the years at Taylor showed love to me even when I did not show love to them. They have taught me what it looks like to love unconditionally, just as God loves us. In understanding this, I do my best today to love others in a way I was loved by upperclassmen my freshman year. I can see myself in many of the shoes of freshmen currently on my wing who I live with. I have such an intrinsic desire to comfort them and lead them the way the Lord led me out of such a pit my freshman and sophomore year. As my anxiety came to an end, and as others demonstrated to me how to be intentional in loving others at Taylor, I wanted to be a friend that loved others with intentionality as well. I became closer to people that I lived with more than ever before. Over my junior year I learned that for me to be a Christian means to love others with intentionality and understand how to do this properly.

The practice of loving others unconditionally and with intentionality has carried over into my senior year. I have friends who I have never been closer with than right now. There is specifically one person who I have befriended where we absolutely love each other. We hug each other every time we see each other during the day and get along extremely well. I have not had such a close friendship with another man in about 4 years. I truly feel like this friend is a blessing from the Lord. He is an answer to countless prayers from my parents, fiancée, and myself. During my senior year so far, I have learned that to be a Christian continues to mean to love others unconditionally and with intentionality, but also that God blesses us and rewards us for our work in His Kingdom.

Between my junior and senior year at Taylor I obtained an internship I never imagined myself having. My work experience in my internship over my junior year summer was a place where I was able to share my faith with a few other co-workers. The company was not a Christian institution, but the institution held values that resembled many of the values Christ holds us to. When Professor Ben Roller came to visit and analyze the work I was doing, my supervisor took him and I on a tour around the office. Towards the end of the tour Ben and I met a graduate from Taylor that was a Christian. This says a lot about the Fusion Alliance and explains why I felt as though the company embodied a lot of the morals and values of what it means to be a Christian. My work experience taught me that to be a Christian means to live out my faith not just in a school setting, but in a professional work environment as well. I learned what this looks like this past summer.

Many of the topics that have been covered during my current senior capstone class have been helpful in determining how I will live out my faith after graduation. There was specifically one week where we talked about how life after college is subject to change drastically. I have plans to get married after college, and I have an unofficial job offer from a great company that I know would pay well. Therefore, I don't feel as though I should be in a place of struggle after graduation. I say this, but I also understand that even though getting married and receiving employment are amazing accomplishments, they also instill a very large amount of change in my life. I know my expectations coming out of college can all change though and because of this my ultimate plan is to let the Lord have control with what my life will ultimately look like after college.

Another subject for class one week was that our relationships with our families are most likely going to be strained in some way, shape, or form when my life changes after I graduate.

The testimony Dr. Geisler gave during class was extremely impactful to me because my relationship with my parents growing up was amazing just like Dr. Geisler's. However, he shared that due to the nature of how we separate and live independently of them, conflicts and disagreements will inevitably come up that were never a foreseeable conflict before. Dr. Geisler's testimony was a helpful caution flag that has, in a way, helped prepare me for potential unforeseeable conflict to come with my parents and family after I graduate.

As I look back on the years of my life since I gave my life to Christ I can see how God has used me for His Kingdom and how I have better understood over time what it means to be a Christian. As I head into my unknown future after I graduate, I pray that I will continue to grow in my understanding of what it means to be a Christian. I dislike having expectations because I believe ultimately any expectation I have has the potential to never be met if it's not in the Lord's will for me. However, as long as I understand that, I believe planning should be something I practice to be responsible for my future.

Going Forward

In the future, when I am married, I plan to look to the Lord for guidance in my marriage. I plan to have the Lord be who I look to for wisdom in all aspects in my family and home. I know there is going to be conflict, arguments, and issues that will need to be resolved. By leaning heavily on the Holy Spirit and the commands the Lord has for me, I know that the conflict will be resolved in a healthy manner that will then lead to growth in our love for one another. I plan to do everything possible to love my wife better as each day passes. I know I am called to love her the way my Father loves me. Just as He has forgiven me hundreds, if not thousands of times. I want to have that same level of love and attitude of forgiveness towards her. I will make sure that we are doing Bible studies almost every day, pulling on the wisdom and commands that the Lord has given us. The ultimate guidance for a healthy and sustaining marriage comes from the Bible, so I will make sure we pull from God's word for what our marriage should look like. I desire for my future wife's and I's marriage and relationship to be one that abides by the Lord's will and desire for us. One day, God willing, we will have children of our own. As far away as that day is, or at least seems to be, I want to be as solidified in my faith as possible to be the best possible father to my children. I don't want to be the "best" father just because I may be kind, nice, or fun. I desire to be the "best" father because I am a father that loves my children how the Lord loves me.

To be a Christian means to me that I have hope and strength for what the future is to bring. I believe God is in control of my future and God's will is good. The knowledge that I have that God's will is good comes from how He has fought for me, stood by my side, and comforted me in my past times of need and struggle. He has always been there for me when I needed Him the most and as well as when I don't feel a need for Him. He is constant and consistent in my life. Therefore, as I graduate and eventually proceed to live with my wife, I know that for as long as my wife and I allow Him to work and operate in our lives, He will always provide for our needs. I trust that He is going to use our marriage for the good that He deserves. I may lose my job in the future, have to move around to countless jobs, struggle to love in my marriage, and face countless unexpected trials. Through these struggles I may very well experience, I plan to stay in the word, pray constantly, and fill my mind and heart with Godly thoughts. And with this practice, I know the Lord will sustain my wife and I and help us to grow tremendously in our

relationships with the Father. I also understand this is a lot easier said than done. However, I plan to create a future as described for my wife and I by relentless prayer and pursuing the Lord, starting today.

Conclusion

Over the course of my life I have learned countless meanings for what it means to be a Christian. Early in my life I experienced that being a Christian meant being bullied for what I believed because it meant that I lived out my life for a purpose that other students and peers did not have. I then went on to learn that being a Christian means that I automatically have a community of believers “around” me that are there to support, encourage, and walk with me throughout life where we all have the same goal of honoring and glorifying the Lord. As I near the end of college, I have learned that being a Christian means to be intentional with my interactions I have with others around me on a day to day basis. I have learned how to love others better in the way our Father loves us. Lastly, I have learned that to be a Christian means to trust in the plans the Lord has for me going forth in a future that is completely unknown to me and everyone else except for my Father in heaven. Being a Christian has completely changed how I live my life every single day, knowing that I have a new purpose because I am saved by Jesus dying on the cross for me. That purpose is to live out my life honoring and glorifying Him in every possible scenario with everything I do.