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Avoiding Getting Lost in the Weeds: A Few Thoughts on Teaching Christianly

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I am a terrible golfer. Honestly, I really shouldn't call myself a golfer. I golf so rarely—almost never—that it's no surprise at all that I am dreadful at it. If you were to describe my golf game, the phrase “lost in the weeds” could certainly apply. The last time I golfed, I spent more time in the rough than on the fairway, and much of that was way, way in the rough. At least three little white balls were lost in the weeds that day. But here's the truth: If I am unwilling to practice, it's no wonder that I never get better at golfing.

Perhaps we could make a similar statement about teaching? Teaching, too, is the sort of thing that we get better at with practice! There is a kind of deliberate refining process most teachers go through in their first few years in the profession. We try things, experiment, sometimes make mistakes, learn from errors, get coaching, lean on support, and hone our craft to get better. We might find ourselves lost in the weeds from time to time, but with attentiveness and care, we find ourselves hitting the mark more and more regularly.

And how about teaching *Christianly*? Do we sometimes find ourselves lost in the weeds when it comes to faith-informed educational practices? I want to encourage you, dear colleague, to take a little time and attention here and now to think this through and commit to practicing, so as not to get lost in the weeds!

What do I mean by teaching Christianly? A little language lesson might be helpful here.

Recall that nouns are people, places, things, or ideas. “Christian” is certainly a noun! And I think the word functions best as a noun: “Christian” literally means “little Christ.” This calls to mind the lovely story of the early Church recounted in Acts 11:19–30, which includes this important detail: “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” The believers in Antioch were so Christ-like that the people around them gave them a deliberate name: Christian. And I, too, claim that name—when I call myself a Christian, I am making a profession of faith; I am saying, “I'm trying to become a little more like Jesus every day!”

But “Christian” can function as other parts of speech as well. For instance, “Christian” can also serve as an adjective, which is used to describe nouns. Thus, we might talk of a *Christian* church, a *Christian* book, or a *Christian* carpenter. Perhaps we also might describe a *Christian* school, a *Christian* teacher, or a *Christian* education.

I wonder, however: just what do we mean when we describe something as “Christian?” For example, just what do we mean when we describe a school as a *Christian* school? Does this mean the school is owned by a church or denomination? That the teachers are all Christians? That the curriculum is aligned with a biblical worldview? That devotional

activities, Bible classes, and chapel services are part of the rhythm of the school day? That the primary aim of the school is to shape students as disciples? Perhaps several of these descriptors are in operation simultaneously in a “Christian school.”

We might ask similar questions when we apply “Christian” to describe the teacher or the teaching happening in that school. What makes a “Christian teacher?” What makes “Christian teaching?” The challenge is that the adjective form of Christian is descriptive, but because there might be many possible ways to use “Christian” as an adjective, the meaning might be a little muddy.

Which brings me to think about adverbs. Recall that adverbs describe verbs, and tell when, where, or how actions happen and often end in -ly. And so, we can consider the adverb form of the word “Christian” by appending -ly: *Christianly*. Doing something *Christianly* means doing it in a way that illustrates that you are seeking to be like Jesus.

This is why I love the idea of *teaching Christianly* so much: it points me in a direction, saying that my work in teaching is part of living out my discipleship, an essential application of a way that I am striving to be like Jesus. Teaching Christianly is a matter of the heart, a deep conviction that my work, as I am teaching, is a way for me to love the Lord with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love my neighbor as myself (see Mark 10:28–31).

There is a real challenge here, however. It’s a relatively easy thing to say, “I am going to follow Jesus in my work as a teacher.” Truly, it is *much* harder to actually do this! Let me offer three words of encouragement for those dedicated to this kind of teaching Christianly.

First, teaching Christianly means recognizing that Christ is sovereign over all things, including your classroom. If Jesus is Lord, He is Lord of all, and we must be about building His kingdom, even in our daily work as teachers. Jesus cares about how you arrange the desks in your classroom, how you assign grades, and how you interact with students, parents, and colleagues. Being intentional and deliberate in all these small, mundane actions is a tangible expression of your commitment to live out your faith.

Second, teaching Christianly means living out our discipleship day by day. Our calling as disciples is a daily calling; Jesus Himself said it: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). We will not do this perfectly, but the good news is that we get to keep working at it.

Finally, let us remember that teaching Christianly is not a “have to” kind of thing; rather, we *get to* do this! We have the joyful opportunity to live out our love for Jesus through our

daily adventures in pedagogy. In practical terms, I think of this as using the gifts and talents God has given us to the best of our ability, to His glory, every day.

Teaching Christianly is an awesome, fearful thing. Truly, it is a high calling! It can be easy to get lost in the weeds when we begin thinking about how much our faith can and should impact our teaching; but be encouraged, friends. The daily work of teaching Christianly is an opportunity to live our faith and to practice following Jesus. Praise God that he invites us to participate in the work of building his kingdom day by day!