

“SINE DOCTRINA VITA EST QUASI MORTIS IMAGO”

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VOLUME XXVII NUMBER II

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# CLASSIS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE  
ASSOCIATION OF CLASSICAL & CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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APRIL, 2020

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INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE CHURCH

*by Dr. Rosaria Butterfield*

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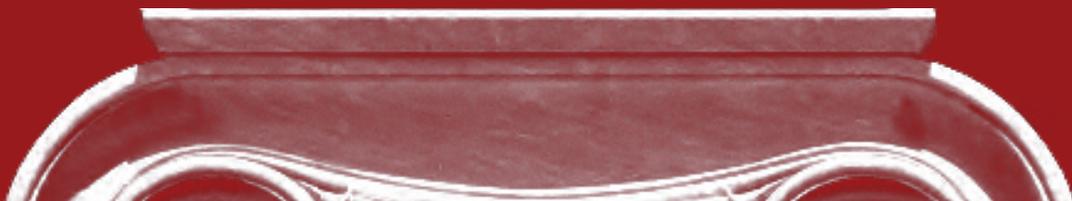
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FATHER, I KNOW THAT ALL MY LIFE

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### CONTACT

Association of Classical & Christian Schools  
PO Box 9741  
Moscow, ID 83843

Phone: (208) 882-6101

Email: [DGODWIN@ACCS.ORG](mailto:DGODWIN@ACCS.ORG)

Web: [WWW.CLASSICALCHRISTIAN.ORG](http://WWW.CLASSICALCHRISTIAN.ORG)

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# INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE CHURCH

*by Dr. Rosaria Butterfield*

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A few years ago, during an open question and answer session on a college campus, a student accused me of hate speech. She referred to something I described in my lecture, when in 1998 I was in my kitchen confessing to my transgender friend Jill that I was starting to believe that the gospel was true, that Jesus is alive, and that we were all in trouble.

This student approached the microphone and blurted: “That’s hate speech! When you described your transgender friend putting her hand over yours as you shared your new faith in your kitchen, you mocked her! You actually said that your transgender friend had large hands!”

I paused, perplexed, and asked, “So . . . it is hate speech to say that Jill’s hands are large?”

The student practically exploded off the floor: “Of course it is!”

“Jill stands six foot two without heels,” I explained. “I’m five two. My hands barely cover an octave on the piano. Compared to mine, Jill’s hands are large. Large is a descriptive adjective.”

The student tossed her own hands in the air in exasperation and declared: “Transgender women are hurt by such insensitive observations. It’s hateful.”

Me: “Why is it hateful to say Jill’s hands are large?”

Her: “This is what leads LGBTQ+ people to suicide!”

Me: “But the size of Jill’s hands is a measurable, objective truth.”

Her: “Who cares about truth? Your truth isn’t my truth. Your truth hates my reality!”

How did we get to a place where it makes sense for a person to reject truth not because it’s false but because it hurts? How did we get to a place where we label people—image bearers of a holy God—as knowable primarily by their political and social group, as if that is their truest and most indelible virtue? Under what worldview could my words cause suicide but the genital mutilation that allows a biological man to masquerade as a woman cause celebration and affirmation?

This exchange grieved me. It still does. This college

Intersectionality confuses justice, a command of God to defend the poor and the needy, with a conception of justice not defined by Scripture.

student is the fruit of my life as an unbelieving professor. I had been a university professor living in serially monogamous lesbian relationships during the 1990s. This student’s response calls to mind Jesus’ famous exchange with Pilate after His arrest. Jesus said: “I have come into the world that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice,” to which Pilate dismissively responded, “What is truth?” (John 18:37–38, NKJV). Pilate audaciously stared Truth in the face and walked away, but he didn’t deny its reality. How have we arrived at a place where students on elite college campuses perceive objective

*Dr. Rosaria Butterfield is a pastor’s wife, mother, homeschool teacher, and author of The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert and Openness Unhindered. This article is reprinted by permission of Tabletalk, where it was originally posted on March 4, 2020, at <https://tabletalkmagazine.com>.*

truth as a threat to personal safety and authentic selfhood?

The answer is intersectionality, an analytical tool introduced in humanities and social science departments in U.S. universities in the 1990s. Intersectionality creates a metanarrative (grand story) out of oppression. It maintains that the world is made up of power struggles, and that white male heterosexual patriarchy must be destroyed in order to liberate those who are oppressed by it. It understands the biblical complementarity of husbands and wives as perverted and “weaponized.” It believes that if we can expose the myriad ways in which people suffer down to the smallest detail and then rearrange the power-oppressions, we have the ability to reemploy a person’s history (of oppression) and destiny (of liberation). Suffering in this worldview includes both material and perceived suffering: the “dignitary harm” clause of the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision, the 2015 Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage in all fifty states, expanded the concept of harm to include harm to one’s dignity and identity. Thus, any perceived rejection of personal identity based in LGBTQ+ affirmation constitutes harm. Harm, then, is both material and psychological, both real and perceived.

Under intersectionality, liberation depends on the power of voice—or re-voice—of material and perceived harm. It works like this: when we allow those with a hefty load of intersections (perhaps a transgender woman of color who is deaf and poor and incarcerated) to have a larger voice in a culture and simultaneously require those who have white male heterosexual “privilege” to remain silent, we supposedly tear down the walls of material violence. Indeed, intersectionality maintains that who you truly are is measured by how many victim statuses you can claim—with your human dignity only accruing through intolerance of all forms of disagreement about your perceptions of self and world.

Let’s be clear: unjust violence against all image bearers of a holy God is condemned in the Bible as sin. And God knew that certain groups of people would need greater protection than others—widows, orphans, the poor, the

prisoner—and He commands our immediate care of them (Heb. 13:1–3). God warns us against committing the sin of partiality (James 2:6). The most horrific forms of betrayal and sin are those committed within families and churches, when the very people who are called by God to protect the small and weak become their captors and predators. God hates this.

The question at hand, however, is this: Can intersectionality serve the gospel? Can we add intersectional teaching to the gospel to arrive at a better way of loving our neighbor? A number of churches and parachurch groups say yes. Intersectionality has found a home in many of our Reformed churches, notably in sensitivity training to make the church a friendlier place for “sexual minorities.”

Denny Burk has helpfully identified the two most prominent ways that intersectionality works at cross-purposes with the gospel: first, by fostering an unbiblical view of human identity, and second, by producing social fragmentation.

Intersectionality fails to distinguish between morally neutral descriptions of people’s lived experience (ethnicity and class) with morally charged descriptions (sexual orientation and gender identity). Because intersectionality does not have a biblical category of sin, it does not have a biblical category of repentance, redemption, or grace. Because it does not start with a robust understanding that human identity is an image-bearing reflection of God—that all people are made in His image (Gen. 1:27)—it has no concept of what it means to grow in the knowledge, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.

Intersectionality produces never-ending social division and fragmentation. This is ironic, because when intersectionality first appeared in U.S. universities in the 1990s, it was hoped that it would challenge the idea that dominant and oppressive social groups are easily identifiable. Instead, it multiplied social groups and attributed to them an invented reality, leaving us with a culture of identity politics on steroids.

For example, intersectionality demands that you “honor

someone's pronouns" even while knowing that those pronouns can change tomorrow. We are told that good neighbors lie to each other like this, pretending that women can be men and men can be women. We are told that a homosexual orientation is indelible and permanent, but biological sexual difference is a matter of personal opinion.

These contradictions to the creation ordinance violate both love of neighbor and common sense. Intersectionality claims to create community, but the community it creates is fractured, victim-minded, angry, and inconsolable. This is the exact opposite of the community created by the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; Gal. 5:22–23). When intersectionality joins efforts with the gospel, it leaves us with an immature faith, a false hope, and a deceptive vocabulary.

Intersectionality confuses justice, a command of God to defend the poor and the needy (Mic. 6:8), with a conception of justice not defined by Scripture. Biblically speaking, sin causes suffering, and even oppressed people need soul care in addition to body care because oppressed people are sinners in need of a Savior too. Sin produces suffering, both our own sin and the sin of others that hurts us. The order between sin and suffering matters. Miss this point or change the order and you have bypassed the entire gospel.

As Elizabeth C. Corey has pointed out, the departure point for intersectionality is a debatable but never-debated set of ever-expanding personal qualities that constitute identity and personhood: age, race, class, sex, sexuality, gender identity, weight, attractiveness, feelings, phobias—the list goes on. Heading out in the wrong direction guarantees arriving at the wrong place, and that is the unintended fruit of intersectionality in the church. The church's embrace of intersectionality as an analytical tool was intended to give voice to the voiceless. But the victimized identities that emerge from intersectionality are perpetually immature and in constant need of therapy and affirmation. Because of the nature of the beast, a number

of false positives are emerging. Breakouts of "rapid-onset gender dysphoria" among college women prove this point. Gone are the days of empowerment; intersectionality requires life support.

God-fearing churches take violence and oppression seriously. A God-fearing church takes church membership, personal accountability, and church discipline seriously, too, because these things are connected. An oppressed person's best defense against true violence is membership in a Bible-believing church, one that practices both hospitality and church discipline, one that protects the sheep from the wolves by driving the wolves out the door. Intersectionality banks on the power of human words, but justice for the oppressed comes by the power of the gospel.

Churches and parachurch organizations should be aware: intersectionality will not serve the gospel. It will not help you become kinder, more aware of the world around you, or better able to deal with diversity. Rather, it will introduce a new set of false virtues and false vices into your ministry. Take heed to your ministry. Paul's first epistle to Timothy tells us how: he calls our pastors and elders to be examples of righteousness (1 Tim. 4:12), to "give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (v. 13, NKJV), to not neglect the gifts of teaching (v. 14), to "meditate on these things [and] give yourself entirely to them," and to "take heed to yourself and to the doctrine" (v. 15).

# SUDDENLY ONLINE: SEVEN KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL (SHORT TERM) TRANSITION TO REMOTE SCHOOLING

*by Tom Vierra, Wilson Hill Academy*

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Education in the time of coronavirus means, of course, remote education in some form or another. Like many educators who have been online for years, I once taught and served as an administrator in bricks and mortar classical schools and eventually made the transition to remote education (albeit for very different reasons) In this article, I outline seven keys to making that transition well, bearing in mind that the goal is a short-term transition that is as seamless as possible. So, as you and your school move forward through this uncertain time, I encourage you to remember . . .

## FIRST, THAT YOU CAN DO THIS, BUT IT IS GOING TO TAKE PRACTICE.

By “this” I mean offering robust, classical, Trivium-driven teaching, especially in a live/synchronous virtual classroom – and yes, you can do this. But the how-hard-can-this-be attitude will lead inevitably to frustration and most likely to frustrated parents. The various providers of virtual classrooms (Adobe, Zoom, etc.) offer basic training. But learning the basic mechanics is only necessary, not sufficient. Teachers need to be afforded at least some time to practice the virtual room and give its main features a good test drive. I would recommend multiple opportunities for teachers to “teach” each other short sample lessons before loading the room with actual students and hoping it all goes well.

## SECOND, CONSIDER USING SOME KIND OF LMS (LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM).

You will have assignments, quizzes, tests, reading materials, grades, and emails. You may choose to handle all of these discretely, having a separate “system” for each one, e.g., using Dropbox for handling documents, the already-existing school email system as the primary means of communication, etc. But there are LMS options that are either free or relatively affordable that handle all or nearly all of the asynchronous aspects of education in one system. The advantage of this kind of integrated technology is that you will likely want to consider keeping the system beyond your days of being a remote school.

## THIRD, CONSIDER “FLIPPED CLASSROOM” SOLUTIONS.

Even with the various options for meeting in live online classrooms, you are likely facing significant scheduling questions and challenges. How often should our classes meet? And for how long? Should all of our students have live classes online or just the middle and upper school students? I cannot answer these questions for you, but I can suggest you consider the “flipped classroom” approach as part of your mix of possible solutions. The basic idea is to have the teacher record a video on a lesson or concept that requires

*Dr. Tom Vierra is director of academics and a teacher of humanities and senior thesis in the school of rhetoric at Wilson Hill Academy, a fully online ACCS school. Learn more at <https://www.wilsonhillacademy.com/>.*

primarily didactic instruction, which allows for the live/synchronous time for discussion of the recorded content. This makes for a more effective use of synchronous time and cuts down on the scheduling burden by allowing students to watch recorded content on their own time.

#### FOURTH, HEED CHARLOTTE MASON'S DICTUM, "NO TWADDLE!"

The temptation will be to give busy work—something for these students to do while being cooped up in their homes. Do not give in! Classical pedagogy is built upon the non-negotiable commitment to meaningful engagement of content that reinforces the fundamental tools of learning. This can be done online and resources are available (for one, Ambleside Online is a Charlotte Mason-oriented resource that my own family has found to be invaluable, especially for grammar-level children). Do more with less. Poems can be recited, memorized, rewritten (in cursive), analyzed, and imitated. Dynamic science labs can be accomplished through a well-positioned camera. For real-time Socratic discussions of great books, have each of your students turn on their webcams to capture the feel of the Harkness table.

#### FIFTH, THIS IS NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL, BUT NEITHER IS THIS A SALVAGING PROJECT.

Should you proceed with your plans for the rest of the year with as few changes as possible? I hesitate to make any kind of blanket statement (there is a world of a difference between a grammar-level literature class and, say, AP Physics), but I suspect in many cases—perhaps most cases—the goal of minimal change is probably unwise. But this should not lead you to think of the rest of the year as a kind of search and rescue mission. Your school year is not over and your plans are not dead. But you do need to step back from your original plans and look at them from a different

angle. Ask yourself, from what I have to work with—the books/materials that my students already have, the technologies our school will make available, etc.—what are the best things my students can and should be doing? As long as genuine learning is possible (and it is!), what you do from here on out to pursue that end will not be wasted.

#### SIXTH, DO NOT GIVE UP MEETING TOGETHER (VIRTUALLY).

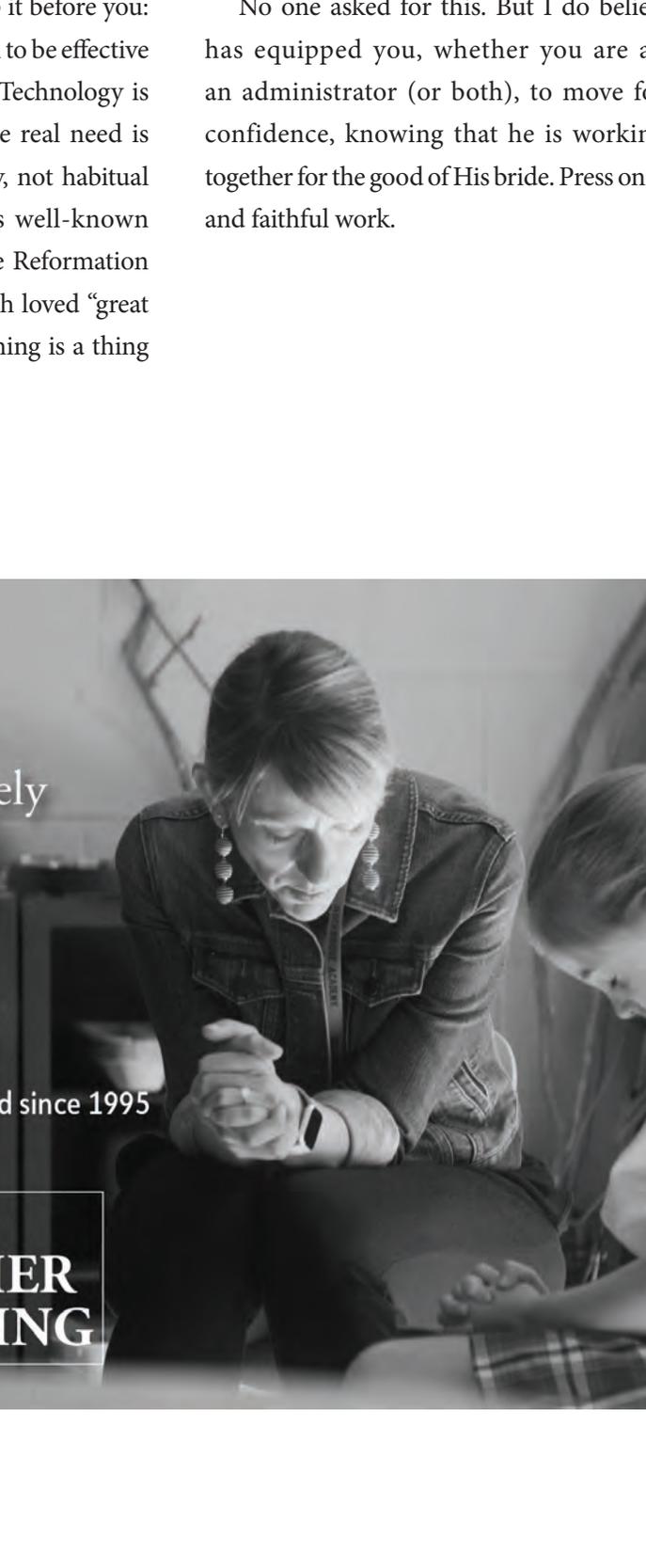
With all the major adjustments your school will have to make, and the demands that those adjustments will entail, it will take a concentrated effort by the school's leadership to ensure the non-academic aspects of the life of the school do not become collateral damage. At a time when your students will already be cut off from the ordinary interactions they are used to and depend upon, some of which were occurring by way of your school (e.g., clubs, house system, athletics, etc.), failing to seek out alternative virtual means of continuing at least some of those opportunities for interaction would be unfortunate indeed.

#### LAST, GUARD AGAINST NEEDLESS AND UNHELPFUL LUDDITE TENDENCIES THAT EXIST EITHER IN PRACTICE OR IN POSTURE.

Again, you can do this; and again, it will take practice. But accomplishing all the points above will also require consistent creativity and adaptability from your entire faculty and staff. You will need energy and commitment from all involved, and Luddism will not help. Of course, there are various forms of technology that are either not helpful or downright problematic. But there is nothing anti-technological about classical pedagogy—quite the opposite, in fact. (And to be clear, this is no argument for or against such things as "ebooks" or laptops in the classroom—now is not the time.) The

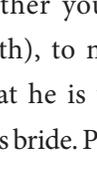
key is to remember the goal and to keep it before you: we are equipping young men and women to be effective for Christ in the contemporary world. Technology is simply a means to that end; and so the real need is for connoisseurs of effective technology, not habitual technophobes. Recall Martin Luther's well-known use of the printing press to advance the Reformation (which is itself a reminder that the much loved "great book" available for mass-market publishing is a thing of technological beauty).

No one asked for this. But I do believe that God has equipped you, whether you are a teacher or an administrator (or both), to move forward with confidence, knowing that he is working all things together for the good of His bride. Press on in your good and faithful work.



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# CREATING MATHEMATICIANS

by Lucy Nolan, *The Oaks: A Classical Christian Academy*

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## THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Have you ever hoped that your math students would demonstrate true mathematical thinking during class? My students and I can easily treat math like a list of to-do items or a recipe to follow. When I teach mathematics that way, I have found that students cannot do a problem that is slightly different than the example given to them because I have not taught them to think mathematically! Though I've tried to move away from a "plug-and-play" method of teaching mathematics previously, I am currently trying a brand-new approach. My aim in this article is to give you a window into my current pedagogy and see if you want to join me in developing a curriculum aimed at teaching students to think mathematically.

The approach I am using is based on the pedagogy utilized by Philips Exeter Academy which is a problem-based, Harkness-style curriculum. It is definitely challenging, and I have gone through various stages of "What am I doing? Why am I doing this? Can I please go back to that plain old textbook? It is so much easier and less stressful!" Yet, even in the midst of the challenges, I

can already see a noticeable difference in the way these kids are thinking. They are thinking mathematically!

## LEARNING FOR THEMSELVES

"Telling is not teaching" has rung in my mind since the first time I read Gregory's *The Seven Laws of Teaching*.<sup>1</sup> The whole point of a Harkness-based approach is that the student is the one doing the thinking. The student's mind is the focus at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the process. Rule six in Gregory's laws states: "Learning is thinking into one's own understanding a new idea or truth." For example, in the past, I would need to make sure that we derived the distance formula as a class since I did not want my students to blindly follow a formula. And then, whenever a student was having difficulty finding the distance between two points, we would graph the points and use the Pythagorean theorem to find the distance. Contrarily, Exeter Mathematics 2 does not provide the distance formula to the student. It trains a progression of learning. First, students discover one derivation of the Pythagorean theorem. Then, students create right triangles on a coordinate graph and use the Pythagorean

*Lucy Nolan has taught math for 21 years at the Oaks: A Classical Christian Academy in Spokane, Washington. The Oaks is an ACCS-accredited school. Learn more at <https://theoakssca.org/>.*

theorem to find distances. They discover that solving for a distance is a necessary stepping stone to solve other kinds of problems, none of which simply ask “find the distance between these two points.” These problems do not look like distance formula problems. Students might be asked to find the speed of a particle with a position described by a parametric equation, prove two triangles congruent by SSS, determine how far a triangle was translated by vector [5,4], or decide which point is closer to a given line. Because of this approach, in no time at all, students are telling *me* the distance formula. Additionally, in the process, they are discovering connections between many ideas: slope, the Pythagorean theorem, rates, distance, congruence, perpendicular bisectors, and angle bisectors. These connections cause students to be more creative when solving new problems.

## CREATING MATHEMATICIANS

What is wonderful about a problem-based approach is that no prescribed method is given to solve each problem. Instead, students have to learn to ask the right kinds of questions. They learn that problems can be solved multiple ways, and they begin to ask themselves, “Is there a more effective way to approach this?” before taking a particular path. As an example, last year my geometry class tackled this review question:

*You are one mile from the railroad station, and your train is due to leave in ten minutes. You have been walking at a steady rate of 3 mph, and you can run at 8 mph if you have to. For how many more minutes can you continue walking, until it becomes necessary for you to run the rest of the way to the station? (Exeter Mathematics 2, 2017, #196).*

One student solved the problem by trial-and-error and another created an equation. An eighth grader decided to graph. He said, “I started graphing a line from the origin

with the person’s walking rate as the slope. Then, I graphed another line starting at the point (10 min, 1 mile) and worked backwards using the running rate as the slope. Where these two lines intersect is the time and place at which the person must start running.” There are benefits to talking through all three solutions in class. One is that the students are given a review of the three methods. Another is the exposure to the connection between the three solutions. For instance, speed is seen in the terms of the equation, in the slopes of the line, and within the trial-and-error data. Additionally, students often realized there might be a more effective method which, in turn, prompted them to ask that question of themselves more often. When students must decide the method to solve a problem, they are becoming mathematicians.

## CONVERSING AROUND THE TABLE

Gregory’s Law of the Language says, “Not what the speaker expresses from his own mind, but what the hearer understands and reproduces in *his* mind, measures the exact communicating power of the language used” (70). “Secure from him as full a statement as possible of his knowledge of the subject, to learn both his ideas and his mode of expressing them, and to help him to correct his language” (77). “That teacher is succeeding best whose pupils talk most freely upon the lessons” (78).

I have learned over the years that there are ways of teaching math that stifle purposeful questions and dialogue. Students generally want to know if they got the answer right or wrong. Exeter math counters that tendency. Having students present their work to other students on a daily basis reveals the gaps in their thinking. We can think students understand us since they are able to “do” math, but we are often mistaken. An example from my seventh-grade algebra class early this year reminds me of this fact. The seventh-grade algebra class spent forty minutes discussing an answer to this problem while

I watched:

*Tory goes shopping and buys pencils and notebooks. If Tory buys a total of 8 items,  $p$  of which are pencils, write an expression for the number of notebooks Tory buys” (Exeter Mathematics 1, 2018, #34).*

My only input was relational such as, “Sarah, when someone makes a comment to you, it is important for you to respond. A thank you is sufficient.” If my ten-year-younger self were watching this class, I would think I was a little crazy. This problem is simple. There are ways to teach this concept such that students understand and are able to apply their understanding but in a much faster way. We could get through so much more material! As I observed their dialogue, however, I realized how much misunderstanding abounded. Students had the meaning of a variable and the meaning of a label mixed up. Many had a hard time realizing that  $8-p$  represented a number. In the end, their discussion brought the entire class to a complete understanding not just of this particular problem, but also the meaning of a variable, the best way to use labels, and appropriate mathematical notation. I also got a glimpse into their insightful questions and ideas. Forty minutes felt much too long to spend on this. However, it is saving five minutes here and there which will add up to much more than forty minutes over the rest of the year. Classroom discussion also gives the much needed opportunity to teach our students how to interact with each other truthfully and graciously. Learning how to disagree, defend an opinion, and ask difficult questions are very important skills. This cannot be taught by lecture; it must be taught by example and practice.

## COURAGE AND HOPE

As I speak with a logic student who is exhibiting the traits I am describing, I wonder to myself what would happen if we could continue this kind curriculum all the

way until her senior year? What if we could rewrite our curriculum so students created a proper biblical view of mathematics along the way? What if the students became like Kepler who gave great praise and thanks to God when he discovered that the planets moved along the path of an ellipse? Though this curriculum may not be the exact way to go, I believe that it is pointing in the right direction. In these last few years, I have been given hope that we can create an excellent classical Christian math curriculum. I see glimpses of what is possible. I also see that there is a big mountain to climb between where we are now and where we could be without clearly seeing the path. God provides and directs. There IS a better curriculum for classical Christian schools waiting to be written. Will you join me in forging this path?

## ENDNOTES:

1. John Milton Gregory, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, Veritas Press, 2004.

# TAKING THE TEMPERATURE OF YOUR SCHOOL'S CULTURE

*by Harold Naylor, Advance Christian Schools*

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## SUMMARY

Classical Christian education is having a national and international impact on the educational landscape. New schools are starting, and existing schools are growing. As schools grow and mature, the family culture that started the school can be challenged and subtly changed. Leaders who see this will “take the cultural temperature” and use this insight in their future planning.

### “I THINK WE MAY HAVE AN ENROLLMENT PROBLEM”

Enrollment consists of two things: retaining existing students and recruiting new ones. School leaders too often focus on one but not the other. Most leaders will focus on a new promotion technique to add more students—but these efforts may be too little and too late. The experts will tell you that marketing and promotion is a year-round effort that must be well coordinated and filled with rich content that continually draws potential families into a deeper relationship with their future partner. On the flip side, retention is the summary of all experience and attitudes: is the existing

parent still convinced that your school is positively the best of all possible choices? This is where culture is a critical factor.

A school that has been faithful to its call to be classical and Christian has an equally faithful core group of families that establish the culture. This culture conveys God's love and His desire to see the next generation trained to bring Christian influence to the world.

In this way, others are added to the core and the school grows numerically while simultaneously building a faculty that buys into the vision. The board and the administration are synchronized in mission and approach. The school grows, adds grades and programs; everything is as it should be. The transition from grammar to logic goes well, and then comes the challenge of rhetoric.

Building the rhetoric program is more than adding teachers and courses, of course. The “upper school” has its own set of challenges because parents and students are thinking about college, and what they often desire is to get into a “good” school. Will the house system help students become more attractive college applicants? How about a more robust and competitive athletics program? What about dual enrollment with a nearby

*Harold Naylor has been associated with classical Christian schools since he joined The Christian Academy in Pennsylvania as director of advancement in 2009. Harold has spoken on biblical stewardship at the national conference of the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS). He is a member of Faith Presbyterian Church (PCA) where he is an elder, Sunday school teacher, men's ministries coordinator, community group leader, and choir member. He is married to Cynthia and they have four children.*

college? debate, mock trial, or both? How about a service requirement for graduation?

The school pushes on, and it proudly marches its first graduates across the stage. “Okay, we made it this far—let’s just keep the lower school feeding the upper and we’ll grow again.”

But not everyone got the memo, and some families leave for a larger private school or for a public school. They all have their reasons: “We’re letting our son make his own decision,” “Our daughter’s interests are not well served here,” “The tuition is impacting what we can do for college,” etc. Because the stated reasons are fairly subjective and personal, they are hard to argue against. But the board that lacks a thoughtful macro view might see simply a plateau, or the beginning of a slight turndown. This is the point at which greater insight and wisdom are critical.

Proverbs 15:22: “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”

## WE NEED TO BETTER UNDERSTAND OUR FAMILIES AND THEIR CONCERNS

The wise leaders know that something is happening. Everyone has a theory and an anecdote but consensus is missing. “It’s not the same as when we started, but I can’t put my finger on it.”

A simple and objective assessment of culture can be helpful. We use a two-step process: a written survey followed by an on-site interview process. We have applied these techniques twice in the last six months alone, at two different schools, and the resulting insights have helped those boards separate the wheat from the chaff.

The survey questions were designed to get parents and staff thinking about their original experience and what they have experienced since then. Here they are:

1. What is the primary reason you chose “Faithful Classical”?
2. Did you come to a tour or an open house?
3. How did you hear about the school?
4. Are your expectations for your children being met in the following areas:
  - a. Spiritual health—is their faith being nurtured by teachers and other leaders?
  - b. What is the spiritual orientation of the teachers and other leaders?
  - c. Academics—are they too rigorous or not rigorous enough?
  - d. Culture— do you feel a sense of belonging and connectedness? Does your child?
  - e. Are resources managed and stewarded well?
- f. How are your children’s relationships with other students? Are the teachers keeping you informed?
5. In what areas do you think Faithful Classical could improve the student’s overall preparation? Academic preparation? Life preparation?
6. What changes would you hope to see in a future Faithful Classical?
7. Are you comfortable with and clear about the direction of Faithful Classical?
8. School family—what does it mean to you, and does Faithful Classical embody it?
9. How would you explain the distinctives of Faithful Classical to someone—what makes it different from other private or Christian schools?

Well over 50% of the families took the time to respond, and they did not hesitate to write very specific answers. The answers were compiled, and we reviewed and analyzed them before the on-site interviews.

The interviews were with individual parents and one or two consultants. The parents were promised anonymity so that they felt comfortable sharing openly. We ensured that enough time slots were available so that everyone who wanted to be interviewed could be scheduled. In that sense, parents self-selected. We made

sure, however, that every division was represented and that we had new families to interview as well as ones who had been part of the school for a longer time.

Spanning two full days, we conducted over forty interviews with parents and teachers (the latter both as parents, where applicable, and in their teaching role). Each interview lasted about thirty minutes, following this format:

- What brought you to Faithful Classical and how have your expectations been met?
- Is your child (or are your children) thriving as you hoped? If so, how? If not, what are the issues?
- What about the school gives you hope and confidence about the future?
- What are your concerns or questions?

## THE PROCESS IS THE PRODUCT

We prepare a final report, debrief the leadership, and hold a town hall for all constituents of the school. By the time of the town hall, the leadership should have had time to digest the work and have drawn some conclusions about near-term actions and longer-term planning. Generally, the consultants will not uncover something at that final stage that has not already been mentioned or thought of. The survey and the interviews will help the leadership understand the depth or trends of the concerns, providing focus on the most critical issues first.

As important as these tactical steps are, don't overlook the process itself. Parents and teachers frequently told us how grateful they were for the opportunity to express their concerns in an honest and confidential setting. Their consistent message was, "The board must really care about the families and our future if they are going to the effort and expense of bringing in outside counsel to hear us."

## A LEARNING AND ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

The board and administration then have some questions to process and pray about as they plan next steps.

- Do we agree with the findings? Are there some people who don't understand what we are trying to do?
- Do the suggestions strike at the core of the mission? If not, what can we implement sooner than later?
- What are the communications issues?
- Are there underlying leadership or organizational issues?
- How do we use these insights in our future planning?

Great leaders are courageous, humble, and passionate about improving their partnership with parents. They lay down their presuppositions and lower their guard in service to a genuine desire to hear the truth as expressed orally and in writing.

The resulting implementation plan should be specific and well communicated to the stakeholders—they need to know, and they need to help. Turning the ship requires a high degree of cooperation and trust. It is often helpful to keep external advisors involved to aid in holding the board accountable for the promises being made.

## EPILOGUE

Taking the temperature of the culture can be a scary thing. It implies that you might learn things that you wish were not the case. Worse, you may have to change things, which is hard. It is expensive and takes time. "Can't we do this survey and assessment ourselves and

save the expense of bringing in outsiders? Consultants don't even know our school, and the process seems straightforward enough."

All of this is true (although it's also true that "outsiders" can often draw out insights that stakeholders might not reveal to "insiders"). But leaders who invest in a serious process will be open to the changes that need to be made. Theodore Roosevelt is quoted as having said, "In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."

Bless your stakeholders by taking the temperature of the school's culture.



# USING STUDENT INPUT TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION

*by Ryan Evans, Providence Classical Christian School*

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Many years ago, I took an immensely valuable post-grad class called “Private School Leadership.” The course was designed for current or aspiring school administrators (I was the latter at the time), and taught by a former high school principal from a large Christian school in the Seattle area. Many ideas proved to be worth their weight in gold as I plunged headlong into my first year as a junior high principal at a Christian school.

One of the most beneficial takeaways was an unorthodox method of observing teachers. The premise is based on gathering collective and individual student input on classroom learning. Of course, this method can make even the veteran teacher skittish, conjuring up all sorts of questions.

- To what degree do we trust student input?
- Does welcoming student input lead to an entitlement mentality?
- Can I trust the person who is soliciting the feedback?
- How do you avoid this resulting in a gripe session?
- What can I learn that I don’t already know?

Soliciting student feedback can be risky. However, by following a prescribed format, clearly stating the expectations of the method, and facilitating a tightly-executed dialogue, teachers are afforded a unique

opportunity to allow the most informed classroom audience an appropriate voice for authentic feedback. Establishing, communicating, and following a detailed plan is essential. Below is a step-by-step outline of how to communicate the plan to students. Included are times for each portion of the activity, as staying within stated time guidelines is also important.

## EXPLAIN THE FORMAT (6–10 MINUTES)

1. State the objective: Like any good lesson plan, the objective should be clearly stated to students on the front end. “Mrs. Smith has asked me to come in and get your feedback on eighth-grade history this year. This is an opportunity to provide input on what has been most helpful in learning history.” It’s important that students don’t view this as a time to evaluate or criticize a teacher; rather, they are evaluating what helps them learn. Naturally, the teacher is a part of that but not the sole focus.
2. Three key questions: Students answer three key questions, all centered on their learning in the class:
  - a. What are five or more things you really like about the class?
  - b. What are three things to evaluate for change in the class?
  - c. What is a specific idea you have for making the change in each area?

*Ryan Evans is the headmaster at Providence Classical Christian School, an ACCS-accredited school in Bothell, Washington. Learn more at <https://www.pccs.org/>.*

It's important to convey that the more specific the responses, the better. You may provide an example of a good response and a poor response ahead of time so students have a clear understanding of what you are asking of them.

### 3. Communicate expectations

- a. This is a small-group exercise. Put the students ideally in groups of three (four will work if necessary). To save time, assign groups prior to class, and do not allow students to choose their own groups.
- b. Small group assignments: Each group must appoint a recorder to write down all their responses. They also will assign a reporter, who will share their small group responses with the class after groups have finished meeting. Provide a graphic organizer with spaces for each question and blank spaces for their responses.
- c. Requirement of group consensus: This is key—only responses having unanimity of opinion by all group members are considered valid and may be recorded. If group consensus on a response is not reached, then students should move on to another idea.
- d. Timing for each question: Inform the students that this process is strictly timed, so they need to keep the discussion moving and stay focused.

## **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION TIME (15 MINUTES)**

The bulk of time will be spent in small groups discussing among themselves responses to the three questions. During this time, the facilitator is actively proctoring each group, walking around and ensuring groups are on task. Specific areas to monitor: are they answering the questions asked? Is everyone actively participating? Is consensus reached before recording an answer? Are responses specific enough to be helpful for the teacher?

Have students provide responses for the first question before moving on to the second and third questions. Students find it helpful to link the second and third questions, as the area to evaluate for change (e.g., preparation for tests) is connected to the idea for change (e.g., providing a written study guide a week in advance of the test). Give about six minutes to generate responses to the first question, and then about eight minutes for the second and third questions.

It's helpful to assign each group a designated meeting spot in the room and remind students to speak quietly to ensure responses are uniquely theirs (to avoid being overheard by another group). For large classes, consider sending a few groups to the hallway to reduce noise in the classroom.

## **LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION TIME (15–20 MINUTES)**

At the conclusion of small group discussions, bring everyone back to the classroom and have each small group sit together. Starting with group one, the reporter in each group will share their group responses. The facilitator will write a composite list of all the responses for the class to view (typically on the white board). If another group shares a response already written on the board, the facilitator will add a check mark to that response, indicating equivalent responses. As mentioned, combine questions two and three, as the responses are connected (area to evaluate for change and idea for making the change). Give every group an opportunity to present their responses. Depending on the size of the class, column one normally comprises around fifteen different responses, and columns two and three around ten. Have a responsible student copy word-for-word what is written on the board as a master copy.

If time allows, have students vote individually for which responses in each column they feel are most

essential to their learning in the class.

This is typically the most challenging portion of the observation, as students in other groups often have difficulty staying focused. At times you'll encounter disagreement between groups (e.g., one group may list something they really like that another group lists as something to evaluate for change). This indeed can prove to be a valuable teaching moment.

## TEACHER FEEDBACK CONFERENCE AND TIMING

The final piece requires the facilitator meet with the teacher and share student responses. Photocopy the master copy of the feedback for the teacher and walk through each data point. It's best to meet with the teacher within a day of the feedback session to maximize recall of specific student comments and to convey the importance of the feedback to the students. Teachers are encouraged to share with their students how they plan to use the feedback.

This format is best when conducted about six to eight weeks into the start of the school year for a few reasons:

1. Doing so allows sufficient time for students to gauge their own progress and reflect on the classroom learning.
2. It gives the teacher an opportunity to hear feedback and make any necessary corrections early enough in the year to improve the learning experience.
3. The administrator can use the information as a point of encouragement and is informed on any necessary areas of improvement.

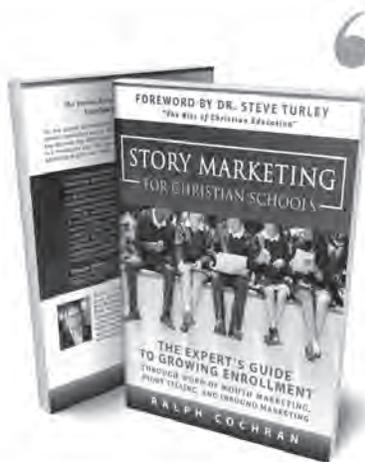
## CLARIFICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A "growth mindset" school culture, where feedback is encouraged and welcomed rather than simply tolerated and endured, is vital to this exercise.
2. Student feedback sessions are conducted on an annual basis, and for one class per teacher.
3. The observation itself requires a full-class period, usually 45 minutes. If a group is doing this for the second or third time, explaining the guidelines will require less time and opens up more time for discussion.
4. No teacher should be present during this student session.
5. The ideal facilitator is an objective person such as the headmaster or principal and requires objectivity, teacher and student advocacy, and professional diplomacy.
6. This method isn't recommended for any grade lower than seventh. Particularly for middle school students, it's helpful to convey a belief in their ability to provide appropriate feedback.
7. Avoid using this method with teachers who are experiencing obvious challenges in the classroom. In such situations, the facilitator's role of maintaining a positive ethos is nearly impossible.
8. Ideally the teacher can use the feedback to set at least one specific goal based on a common theme discovered and discussed in the feedback conference.
9. This method is best utilized alongside other important supervision strategies such as formal and informal classroom observations, and yearly goal setting.
10. An ideal class size is about fifteen students. Small classes reduce the ability to spot trends, and large classes can prove unwieldy and require brisker pacing.
11. I typically allow the teacher to select the class

from whom feedback will be solicited. I also seek to avoid soliciting a grade level for more than two or three of these observations a year, as too many reduces the novelty of the exercise.

Having used this format for almost twenty years, I and the teachers I've worked with have found it uniquely helpful and a win-win proposition: the teacher gleans helpful information, and the students are able to provide valuable input in an environment with appropriate boundaries. When managed carefully and precisely, the feedback offers teachers real-time input from the audience in the best position to provide it.

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# PARENTS, TAKE NOTE OF THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES COMMON TO KIDS WHO FLOURISH AS ADULTS

by Trevin Wax, *The Gospel Coalition*

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Parents, don't take the biblical proverb "train up a child" and treat it like a promise, assuming that if you do everything right in your parenting, your children will turn out right. Proverbs are general truths, not specific promises. Besides, when we consider the overall context of the Bible, we see how counterproductive it is<sup>1</sup> to try to train our kids to trust in God if what we model for them is that we trust in our training.

But even though we place our hope for our children in God, not in our training, we recognize how this proverb teaches us to take our training of children seriously—both where we guide them and also how we shepherd their hearts. And part of that shepherding and guidance includes the effect of a family's culture.

A new LifeWay Research study<sup>2</sup> commissioned by LifeWay Kids<sup>3</sup> surveyed 2,000 Protestant and non-denominational churchgoers who attend church at least once a month and have adult children ages 18 to 30. The goal of the project was to discover what parenting practices were common in the families where young adults remained in the faith. What affected their moral and spiritual development? What factors stood out?

You might expect that family worship services would play a major part, or the simple habit of eating meals together around the table. Perhaps you'd expect

a Christian school kid to be more likely to follow Jesus than a public school kid. Everyone has ideas about what practices are formative on children.

The research (compiled now in the new book *Nothing Less*<sup>4</sup>) indicated that children who remained faithful as young adults (identifying as a Christian, sharing their faith, remaining in church, reading the Bible, and so on) grew up in homes where certain practices were present.

## BIBLE READING

The biggest factor was Bible reading. Children who regularly read the Bible while they were growing up were more likely to have a vibrant spiritual life once they became adults. This statistic doesn't surprise me. God's Word is powerful. The Bible lays out the great story of our world and helps us interpret our lives and make decisions within the framework of a biblical worldview. Bible reading is a constant reminder that we live as followers of God. Our King has spoken. He reigns over us. We want to walk in his ways.

## PRAYER AND SERVICE

Two more factors follow close behind: prayer and

*Trevin Wax is senior vice president of theology and communications at LifeWay Christian Resources and a visiting professor at Wheaton College. He is the general editor of The Gospel Project, and the author of multiple books, including This Is Our Time, Eschatological Discipleship, and Gospel Centered Teaching. This article is reprinted by permission of the Gospel Coalition. It originally appeared on January 22, 2018, at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/parents-take-note-spiritual-practices-common-kids-flourish-adults/>*



service in church. The practice of prayer did not specify whether it was private or corporate, before meals or before bedtime, or in the morning. But prayer was present.

Note that the church-related factor is about *service*, not just attendance. It wasn't just that parents took their kids to church (where "professional clergy" could feed them spiritually), but that the children were included and integrated into the church through the avenue of service. The habit of serving others in the church and community likely formed these young adults in a way that kept them from identifying merely as a churchgoing "consumer," but instead as a contributor to the building up of God's people. Down the list a little, church mission trips show up, another indicator of the power of active service.

## SINGING CHRISTIAN SONGS

What may surprise you is how high up on the list was this factor: listening primarily to Christian music. Christian contemporary music gets a bad rap these days,

usually for being more inspirational than theological (although I believe this stereotype is not true<sup>5</sup> across the board). Still, we shouldn't dismiss the truth behind Augustine's ancient observation that *we sing the truth into our hearts*. When we sing together as congregations and when we praise God on our own or sing songs that fortify our faith, we reinforce the beauty of our faith. (Also noteworthy was the finding lower on the list, that listening primarily to secular music was an indicator that negatively affected one's spiritual life.)

## CULTURE, NOT PROGRAMS

For decades now, many Christians have assumed that certain church programs are the key factors in a child's spiritual development: Vacation Bible school, youth group activities, Sunday school, and so on. But the research study shows that these programs make an impact when they are connected to consistent habits of prayer, Bible reading, praise, and service. It's the culture of the family and church, and *that* they integrate children and young people into spiritual disciplines, not the *how*

that matters most.

Also notable is the impact of the parents' example of reading Scripture, taking part in service projects, sharing their faith, and asking forgiveness after sinning. In other words, the more the repentant, joyful Christian life was modeled, the more likely children were to remain in the faith.

## THE POWER OF IMITATION AND ENVIRONMENT

Research shouldn't be misused in a way that transforms children into blank slates. There is no perfect parenting formula, and as I mentioned above, no one should assume there's a surefire formula or method to bring about the result of a faithful kid. Don't overestimate your power. The Holy Spirit saves, not you.

But don't underestimate the Spirit's power to work through the environment you create for your home either. *Nothing Less*<sup>6</sup> shows that there's power in faithful, Christian imitation.<sup>7</sup> Children are more likely to repent and ask forgiveness when they've seen parents do so, and when they've experienced grace in human relationships. Children are more likely to aspire to faithful Christianity when they see joyful service as a virtue modeled in the home.

1. What kind of culture do we want in our homes and churches?
2. What space are we creating for our children to flourish?
3. How are we rooting our families in God's Word?
4. How are we modeling prayer and repentance?
5. What does faithfulness look like in our home?
6. What are the songs that are in our hearts and on our lips?
7. How are we fulfilling the Great Commission?

Let's ask these questions and beg God to work in us and through us, for his glory and our families' good.

## ENDNOTES:

1. [https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/train-up-a-parent/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/train-up-a-parent/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_)
2. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/10/17/young-bible-readers-more-likely-to-be-faithful-adults-study-finds/>
3. <https://www.lifeway.com/en/ministries/kids>
4. <https://www.lifeway.com/en/product/nothing-less-P005799608>
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# FATHER, I KNOW THAT ALL MY LIFE

by *Anna Laetitia Waring*

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Father, I know that all my life is portioned out for me,  
And the changes that are sure to come I do not fear to see;  
But I ask Thee for a present mind intent on pleasing Thee.

I ask Thee for a thoughtful love, through constant watching wise,  
To meet the glad with joyful smiles, and to wipe the weeping eyes;  
And a heart at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathize.

I would not have the restless will that hurries to and fro,  
Seeking for some great thing to do or secret thing to know;  
I would be treated as a child, and guided where I go.

Wherever in the world I am, in whatsoever estate,  
I have a fellowship with hearts to keep and cultivate;  
And a work of lowly love to do for the Lord on whom I wait.

So I ask Thee for the daily strength, to none that ask denied,  
And a mind to blend with outward life while keeping at Thy side;  
Content to fill a little space, if Thou be glorified.

And if some things I do not ask in my cup of blessing be,  
I would have my spirit filled the more with grateful love to Thee,  
More careful, not to serve Thee much, but to please Thee perfectly.

There are briers besetting every path that call for patient care;  
There is a cross in every lot, and an earnest need for prayer;  
But a lowly heart that leans on Thee is happy anywhere.

In a service which Thy will appoints there are no bonds for me;  
For my inmost heart is taught "the truth" that makes Thy children "free"  
And a life of self-renouncing love is a life of liberty.



*Anna L. Waring. [Resignation.] First published in her Hymns and Meditations, 1850, No. 1, in 8 stanzas of 6 lines, and headed, "My times are in Thy hand." (Enlarged edition 1863-1871.)*



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