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The Teacher as Self-Leader: Building Missional Competence in Christian Public School Teachers

Dr. Valerie Keaton

Introduction:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”- Matthew 28:19-20

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”- Matthew 5:13-16

These verses make up central admonitions and commands that animate the Christian desire to evangelize. Matthew 28:19-20 provides the goal and means of evangelism: making disciples through teaching and baptizing. Amid the work of making disciples, there is also a promise-- that Jesus, God incarnate, will be with his disciples as they are making disciples. Earlier in Matthew, Jesus taught his disciples how to live in the world in a way that would cause non-believers to glory in God. It is the Christian’s good works, done to preserve and brighten their spheres of influence, that will cause non-believers to give glory to God. Often, these good works are most visible through a Christian’s vocation and how a Christian will engage with the culture in which and the people with whom they work.

The biblical mandate to be “salt and light” in the world and to “Go, therefore into all the nations,” predisposes Christians to look for opportunities to evangelize. Since the Reformation, much work has been done to capture the nuances of how Christians can engage in the cultures in which they live. The foundational work done by Martin Luther regarding the relationship between work and the gospel has been extended and applied because of thinkers like Abraham Kuyper, Gene Veith and Sebastian Traeger.¹ These thinkers teach Christians how to leverage their work and vocation as a means for evangelism. Even though much has been written and published regarding how the nuanced relationship between Christianity and culture affects how Christians work, the application of Christian principles through cultural engagement in vocation is still hotly debated among Christian thinkers. Christian scholars, ethicists, and philosophers are still trying to

¹ Vincent Bacote, “Beyond ‘Faithful Presence’: Abraham Kuyper’s Legacy for Common Grace and Cultural Development,” n.d., 11. Abraham Kuyper articulated his cultural engagement strategy through the idea of personal sovereignty. The sphere over which the Christian has sovereignty is the sphere through which they exact the greatest amount of influence.

answer questions about what Christian cultural engagement looks like.. Even so, Christians do not agree on their degree of responsibility within the sphere of culture. These disagreements frequently turn into a demonization of one “side” of the debate. This contentious atmosphere can leave Christians, particularly those who work in a field over which there is much debate, wondering how to best leverage their Christian witness in their workplace. One such field is public education.

For many reasons public education is one area of cultural engagement that sparks much debate among Christians. Christian parents are concerned about the curriculum taught and advocated for in public school systems. Other Christians may be concerned by the way the social climate of the day has seeped into public education. Even still, many Christians have difficulty with public education because of the way it removes, or at least sidelines, parents and caregivers from having active roles in their children’s education. Then there are Christian public school teachers who endeavor to navigate the difficulties of public education because of the verses mentioned above: they are called to display their good works before men and to make disciples. For these teachers, their calling is lived out in their classrooms through teaching and ministering to their students and colleagues. In the current environment, where districts are hemorrhaging teachers and students are at their most difficult and needy, Christian teachers, who believe they are to be salt and light, must be equipped to faithfully engage with culture.

To see Christian public school teachers be that salt and light in their schools, this paper will discuss the historical reasons why Christian teachers face difficulties in the public school system, provide an overview of current research regarding Christian public school teachers, and propose a method for building missional competence as a Christian public school teacher.

Christianity and Public Education

Historically, education and Christianity were deeply related with one another. At the founding of American education, a school experience void of religious teaching and moral guidance was inconceivable. The Puritan view of education was one that touched the heart and the mind. Richard Baxter argued against anti-intellectualism and antinomianism, saying that “education is God’s ordinary way for the conveyance of his grace, and ought no more to be set in opposition to the Spirit than the preaching of the Word.”² Education was a central focus of Puritan life because it was the vehicle through which the mind was cultivated and nurtured. Theological education and liberal arts education led the individual to greater Christlikeness. From the time of the Puritans to the 21st century, much has changed within the educational enterprise. However, there are two major shifts that have affected the ways Americans, especially American Christians,

² Richard Baxter and J. M. Lloyd Thomas, *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter.*, Everyman’s Library, Ed. by Ernest Rhys. Biography. [No. 868] (London: J.M. Dent & Sons., 1931), 12. Baxter was not the only Puritan to defend education against seventeenth century anti-intellectualism. Ryken notes that John Preston, John Cotton, Samuel Willard, and William Hubbard all defended learning to center and ground one’s Christian faith. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 159-60.

have been educated. To understand these changes is to understand part of the reason why public education is currently such a fraught place for Christian teachers to be.

The first major shift in public education that has contributed to a fractured relationship between Christianity and public education today is the Common School movement lead by Horace Mann.³ During the mid-1800s, Mann advocated for a separation of religious and academic instruction where the course content was no longer scriptures and theology, but liberal arts.⁴ While this made public education more accessible to the public and therefore a greater benefit to society at large, this initial separation paved the way for moral education, separated from religion, to enter the classroom. Speaking in 1886, A. A. Hodge argued that if a nominal, non-sectarian form of religion was taught in schools, then “the United States system of national popular education will be the most efficient and wide instrument for the propagation of Atheism which the world has ever seen.”⁵ Eventually, Hodge’s prediction came to fruition.⁶ As the ideology of American society moved away from traditional Judeo-Christian values and began to embrace a more progressive, subjective view of reality, public school systems followed suit. The content of moral education, because it was not tethered to an immovable theology, mirrored and parroted the fruits of the Enlightenment that began the march towards relativism.⁷ Therefore, what is valued and celebrated in public education today is curriculum and behavior that is rooted in identity politics, virtue signaling, and intersectionality. Because these ideas have trickled out of academia, teachers are being trained with an awareness and acceptance of these ideologies. As these ideas continue to be valued in the public square, students and teachers alike are being rewarded for adhering to and behaving in accordance with these systems. Ironically, because of the development and progress of moral education as Mann saw it, what was moral in his day is now seen as oppressive and is taught as such.

The second major shift that has contributed to a complicated relationship between public education and Christianity is school integration. Once *Brown v. Board of Education* was passed in 1951, more laws were enacted that further legalized integration.⁸ During the 1970s, when schools

³ B. A. Hinsdale, *Horace Mann and the Common School Revival in the United States*, The Great Educators (New York: C. Scribner’s, 1900), 2-10.

⁴ Horace Mann and Massachusetts. Board of Education., *The Republic and the School: Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men*, Classics in Education ; No. 1 (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1957), 4-8.

⁵ Archibald Alexander Hodge, *Evangelical Theology: A Course of Popular Lectures* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 242.

⁶ Warren A. Nord, *Religion & American Education: Rethinking a National Dilemma*, H. Eugene and Lillian Youngs Lehman Series (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) 4-7.

⁷ J. Gresham Christian Schools International. and Machen, *The Necessity of the Christian School* (Chicago : National Union of Christian Schools, 1934), 79-82.

⁸ *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States, The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2005). *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*, stopped short of articulating how states should implement desegregation in the schools. *Brown II*

across the United States were mandated to integrate, an interesting phenomenon occurred. At an unprecedented rate, Christian private schools began to open and educate students. There is a direct correlation between the rise of the private Christian academy movement and desegregation.⁹ During the height of school integration, churches were sponsoring and funding schools that were more lucrative and appealing to parishioners than the local public school option. The net effect of this massive period of social and cultural change, specifically in the southern United States, was that public schools were dealing with a group of students that were from “disproportionately disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.”¹⁰ Jim Crow segregation laws had crippled black families from flourishing and growing. *Plessy v. Ferguson* had created legal precedent for separate schools that were anything but equal to their white counterparts. From the textbooks to the facilities, segregated schools were not equal schools. In many ways, teachers are still dealing with the realities of school integration. And while a full explanation of these things is not within the purview of this paper, it is worth noting that many churches chose to support an exodus from public education because of integration. Instead of bringing the reconciliatory power of the gospel to bear on an already fraught situation, many churches chose separation. The attitudes which dominated this time are the attitudes that dominate today: public education and its pursuit of progress are enemies to the Christian church.

The reality is that truly integrating schools has been a difficult task that has created dynamics and issues within schools that Christian teachers must interact with. Christian teachers cannot ignore the racist history that churches and educational institutions participated in when they segregated schools. When legislation was passed that made segregation illegal, the ramifications were far reaching. The process of segregation, integration and the rise of Christian private schools all served to build implicit structures and biases within teachers, families, and students across the country. All the issues that society faces infiltrate the classroom because the students and the teachers are products of their society. Integration and the battles that ensued because of it are no different. This is important to keep in mind when Christian teachers are considering how to engage their students and their fellow colleagues.

This history is important to remember because these are the dynamics that affect and influence how Christian teachers engage in their vocations today. No one stands in a vacuum, and

(1955) ordered all lower courts to desegregate schools “with all deliberate speed” (111-13). Plaintiffs in *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968) argued that “freedom-of-choice” plans only “perpetuated the racially dual school system” (403) because White students were not choosing to attend all-black schools, and only minimal numbers of black students were electing to attend all-white schools. Only busing would cause the level of integration that the law required. Significantly, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) used busing as a tool to achieve segregation (992). In 1973, desegregation cases moved North with *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1*. Because of the precedent set by both *Green* and *Swann*, *Keyes* aimed to address issues of de jure and de facto school segregation (558).

⁹ Valerie Jillson, “Missional Competencies of Christian Public School Teachers: A Quantitative Study” (Thesis, Louisville, Ky., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 27-32.

¹⁰ David Nevin and Robert E. Bills, *The Schools That Fear Built: Segregationist Academies in the South* (Washington: Acropolis Books, 1976), 21.

to assume that Christian public school teachers are coming into a system *tabula rasa* is negligent when thinking of how to equip them for this role. Not only have they been exposed to concerns about public education because they are human beings in a social context, but they have also been influenced by secular and progressive ideologies in their university settings. The influence of Horace Mann provided a framework for a public education separate from any sectarian root. The influence of segregation and Jim Crow laws provided a framework for White Christian families to remove themselves from public education. Both the rise of Christian academies and the removal of sectarianism in public education have had dramatic effects on how Christians think about public education. Considering these realities, how then are Christian public school teachers supposed to be equipped to leverage their Christian witness? And if Christian teachers are equipped, within this new secular context, what behaviors are they expressing in their classrooms?

Research on Missional Competencies

In 2020, an empirical research study was conducted to examine the missional and behavioral activities that Christian public school teachers participated in. The purpose of this study was to better understand Christian public school teachers and what they were doing to leverage their Christian witness. To best study this group, participants were given a survey that consisted of six demographic questions, twenty-two survey questions, and six free-response questions. The aim of these questions was to determine what Christian behaviors teachers participated in, how they behaved to leverage their Christian witness, and how their respective churches interacted with public education.

The behaviors were broken down into two major categories: missional competencies and Christian behaviors. In the context of this study, missional competencies “are actions that a teacher takes when they are trying to leverage their Christian witness in their workplace.” There were four major competencies studied, which were then broken down into smaller, observable behaviors. The four competencies assessed were: 1) consistently and effectively sharing faith in a manner understood by non-Christians, 2) building and having meaningful relationships and rapport with non-Christians, 3) seeing lives impacted and changed through relational engagement and 4) understanding the cultural context of public education. Through a series of observable, behavior-based questions, respondents were asked to identify how frequently they participated in each of the observed behaviors in the last 90 days. Based on the findings of this research, teachers exhibited behaviors in each of the four competencies. Figure 1 shows the correlation between the competencies and the behaviors assessed.¹¹

Identified Competency	Assessed Behaviors
Consistently and effectively shares faith in a manner understood by non-Christians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How often did you share the gospel with a coworker?

¹¹ Jillson, “Missional Competencies of Christian Public School Teachers: A Quantitative Study,” 48-50. See pages 48-50 for an explanation of how these competencies and behaviors were determined.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How often did you share the gospel with a student? ● How often did you have gospel conversations with a non-believing coworker? ● How often did you have gospel centered conversations with a non-believing student?
Building and having meaningful relationships and rapport with non-Christians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How often did you socialize, outside of work, with non-believing coworkers? ● How often did you seek to build a friendship with any of your coworkers? ● How often did you seek to build a personal relationship with any student? ● How often did you have coworkers in your home for any length of time?
Seeing lives impacted and changed through relational engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How many times did you pray for new relationships with non-believing coworkers? ● How many times did you pray for current relationships that you have with non-believing coworkers? ● How many times did you encourage a non-believing coworker? ● How many times did you attend an extra-curricular event in which a student participated?
Understanding the cultural context of public education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How frequently did you participate in school-wide committees with the hope of shaping the culture of the school? ● How many times did you refrain from discussing your Christian worldview with your students? ● How many times did you refrain from discussing your Christian worldview with your colleagues?

Figure 1. Missional Competencies and Assessed Behaviors

Additionally, participants were asked questions about how frequently they attended church and how regularly they participated in small group and personal Bible study.

The overall findings of this survey indicated that teachers who displayed these competencies were typically over the age of 40, teachers of 10+ years, elementary school teachers, and regular church attenders and Bible study participants. While all the missional competencies were observed, an older, experienced, elementary school teacher was more likely than their younger and less experienced counterparts to display these missional competencies.¹² This information is helpful because it sheds light on a bigger, more endemic issue for Christian public school teachers; younger teachers, who are new to their careers, are less likely to display these missional competencies even though they feel called to their vocation just as much as teachers over 40. This issue prompts some significant questions for further research to address. Will young teachers grow in the next 10 years to have the competence of their older counterparts to aid them in leveraging their Christian witness in their classrooms? While the research indicated that younger teachers were displaying missional competencies as well, there should still be a desire to help younger teachers, who are less likely to exhibit these behaviors, build these competencies sooner rather than later.

Given the realities previously outlined regarding Christians and attitudes toward public education, it is even more critical that younger teachers be equipped to interact meaningfully with these dynamics. Since they are statistically not displaying these missional competencies at the same rate as their older counterparts, a method must be developed to help them. How can these missional competencies be developed and built? How can younger Christian teachers, who desire to leverage their Christian witness in their classrooms, become more and more faithfully Christian in a workplace that is more and more opposed to anything remotely Christian? One way missional competencies can be developed in younger teachers is through explicit teaching and training on the idea of self-leadership.

Self-Leadership Defined

Self-leadership is a term that comes from the world of organizational and leadership development. Simply defined, self-leadership is, “[the] individual’s capacity for improving their own performance through self-regulatory processes comprising of cognitive, motivational and behavioral strategies”.¹³ Self-leadership focuses on the internal locus of control: the reasons why a worker behaves in a certain way in tandem with self-motivational strategies for facilitating said behaviors.¹⁴ Because self-leadership originated in a corporate organizational context, the purpose

¹² For an in depth analysis of the results of this study please see Jillson *Missional Competencies of Christian Public School Teachers: A Qualitative Study* Chapter 4.

¹³ CC Manz, “Self-Leadership: Toward an Expanded Theory of Self-Influence Processes in Organizations,” *Academy of Management Review* 11 (1986): 585–600.

¹⁴ Manz, 588, 591.

of self-leadership is to increase workplace efficiency and production. Additionally, a self-led person can more effectively manage stress and difficult life situations.¹⁵ There are typically three major categories or dimensions that self-leadership encompasses. These are cognitive dimensions, which include thought-pattern strategies; motivational dimensions, which include natural reward strategies; and action dimensions or behavior-focused strategies.¹⁶ In terms of organizational dynamics, public school settings do not fit the common mold of self-leadership; however, much can be learned and applied from the field of leadership development. For instance, unlike a privately owned organization, public education has federal, state, and local bodies that govern and dictate how schools operate. National leaders and organizations influence state-level offices, which then have an impact on district-level decisions. Unless schools are looked at as individual organisms, the educational system does not neatly fit into the traditional hierarchy of business organizations. Interestingly, teachers, who have the greatest amount of interaction with students have the smallest amount of influence over how the system is developed. Within their own classroom, teachers are the leaders for their students until the bell rings and the next group of students comes in. Outside of their classrooms, teachers are often at the mercy of the quality of their administrative team and the resources that their district can provide. This often leads to workplace stress and burnout because teachers feel undervalued and unheard. There is a direct correlation between how teachers think about their jobs and how well they will perform their duties.¹⁷ Job satisfaction is linked to many different variables within a school environment. Given the stressful nature of a classroom and the impersonal nature of the school system, the self-leading teacher can build within themselves the cognitive, motivational, and behavioral strategies necessary to work toward missional competence. Additionally, it was found that individuals who engage in self-leadership practices will have higher levels of commitment to their jobs and organizations than those who do not practice self-leadership.¹⁸ Since research now exists that show which competencies Christian teachers engage in, younger teachers can now begin to engage in self-leadership practices that will aid them in performing the naturally motivating and unmotivating tasks of being a teacher.

Teachers, who have influence over whatever classroom space they are in, can use cognitive, motivational, and behavioral strategies to help them increase job performance and

¹⁵ Sarah A. Myers et al., "Relationships Between Self-Leadership, Psychological Symptoms, and Self-Related Thought in an Undergraduate Sample," *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 142–50, <https://doi.org/10.24839/2325-7342.jn25.2.142>.

¹⁶ Harun Sesen, Akif Tabak, and Ozgur Arli, "Consequences of Self-Leadership: A Study on Primary School Teachers," *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice* 17, no. 3 (June 2017): 945–68, <https://doi.org/10.12738/estp.2017.3.0520.947>.

¹⁷ Yusuf Cerit, "The Effects of Servant Leadership Behaviours of School Principals on Teachers' Job Satisfaction," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 37, no. 5 (September 1, 2009): 600–623, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143209339650.602>.

¹⁸ K Jooste and J Frantz, "Self-Leadership Traits of Academics to Conform to a Changing Higher-Education Environment," *African Journal Health Professions Education* 9, no. 4 (2017): 199–202, 199.

enjoyment. Christian teachers, likewise, can use self-leadership to aid them in becoming more missionally competent at an earlier age and an earlier point in their career. Through the utilization of these principles, as they are informed by prior research, Christian public school teachers can feel some level of agency over themselves in a way that would empower and embolden them to leverage their Christian witness in their workplace.

Cognitive Strategies. Cognitive strategies are those intellectual strategies which influence the way that classroom teachers think about their vocation. How a teacher thinks about their job and the dysfunctional or functional thinking processes that they exhibit are foundational factors to job satisfaction and performance.¹⁹ With this in mind, the classroom teacher must prepare themselves to think positively, yet effectively about their jobs. This positivity should never negate the realities of the job that a teacher encounters. Rather, this positive thinking is a way to reframe the negative and difficult experiences that teachers have so that they are able to endure the daily difficulties of public education. For the Christian teacher, this means that in the difficulty of teaching, all their experiences should be filtered through a gospel worldview so that they are not disordered in their thinking. Only then can they begin to apply the cognitive strategies of self-leadership with a gospel orientation.

One way to do this is for them to think about the type of teacher they would like to be. Beginning with the end in mind is a pedagogical tool used for curriculum planning that can also be used for younger teachers when they are trying to build missional competencies. Instead of just merely writing a personal education philosophy paper, students should be required to think through the implications of actions and behaviors that they could encounter in the classroom. Beginning with the end in mind, or rather, the expectations these young teachers have for themselves as classroom teachers, sets the cognitive foundation for the motivational and behavioral self-leadership strategies that will follow.

For the Christian public school teacher, this cognitive foundation must also include biblical truths and realities about teaching. James 3 discusses the responsibility of the teacher-- that they are more responsible because they are leading and instructing. The Christian teacher should think about teaching in a way that is weighty and not trite. They are instructing hearts and minds, not just merely transferring knowledge. Additionally, it is instructive for Christian teachers to observe how Jesus taught his disciples and those who disagreed with him. Finally, Christian teachers should reflect on the way that God teaches us. In line with Hebrews 12, God disciplines and instructs those who are his children because he loves them and has redeemed them. When Christian teachers think about how they are taught as Christians, they should remember the example that God the Father exhibits and model that to their students.

In addition to beginning with the end goal in mind, teachers can also cognitively build self-leadership by thinking through their responses to various challenges that they could experience in

¹⁹ Sesen, Tabak, and Arli, "Consequences of Self-Leadership," 949.

the classroom. If self-leadership enables an individual to handle stressful situations more appropriately, then thinking through the various types of stressors in a classroom should be a foundational skill. One way that this could be done is with teacher mentorship. Younger teachers can be partnered with older, more experienced teachers to learn about the different stressors of the classroom that they have endured in their career. Then these teachers can have discussions about helpful and unhelpful cognitive patterns that may have led to the different reactions in the given scenario.

Finally, reflection can be used as a cognitive strategy to build self-leadership in younger teachers. While teachers are frequently asked to reflect on their practices, one way that younger teachers can build self-leadership is to reflect on their own experience with teachers and how they would have done things differently in that given situation. When teachers reflect on their own experience as a student, they can feel and understand the varying levels of emotion. If they remember their own experience and how teachers responded to them, they are better equipped to understand how their own students could feel in each situation. This brings humanity and dignity to the interactions between a student and a teacher. Since the students that teachers encounter are often not from the same cultural background as they are, reflection can help teachers understand where cultural or generational dynamics could have affected a student/teacher interaction. Most teacher education programs have built in curricular frameworks that include education in culturally responsive teaching. This type of pedagogy can also help build the cognitive frameworks that teachers can leverage when trying to self-lead. By thinking through their own upbringing and educational experiences as students, along with reflecting on what was beneficial and harmful about that situation, a younger teacher should empathize with their own students.

Motivational Strategies. Because of their union with Christ, a Christian educator can be motivated to continue leveraging their Christian witness in their classroom. It is from this union, the very life-blood of the Christian life, that a Christian teacher can continue to press on amid the difficulties of the public education. Christian leadership, according to Michael Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones, is animated by this union with Christ. The Christian leader is first and foremost a follower of Christ. It is from this position of followership that Christian teachers learn how to lead and are lead themselves.²⁰ Since teachers are leaders in their schools and classrooms, Christian teachers can appropriate this definition. Many respondents in the 2020 study said that they felt called to the vocation of teaching. This was an almost ubiquitous response to the question of “why” these individuals became teachers. As one who is called to a position of leadership, the Christian teacher must first be motivated and compelled to follow Christ and His commandments before looking to any other motivational force. The only thing that can truly motivate a Christian to continue doing the good works that have been set before them is being grounded in the identity they have because of their union with Christ, regardless of educational environment. Younger teachers who are seeking to build missional competence must understand that they are leaders in

²⁰ Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones, *The God Who Goes before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2018), 6.

their classrooms. As they lead, they can look to Christ and follow Christ as the one who has gone before them to model how to lead truly and sacrificially. This motivation is spiritual and is kept alive through consistent prayer and communion with the Father.

One way that teachers can build this motivation is by consistent and regular times of prayer. Prayer is the primary means by which Christians communicate with God. While hearing the Word preached and fellowshiping with other believers is also central to the maturation and growth of a Christian, prayer is a private, personal, and primary way for Christians to be motivated and sustained. For the Christian teacher, prayer can be a place where they lament the works of lawlessness that they see around them, rejoice in the small providences of God, and find courage to continue pressing on in a secular, anti-Christian environment. A tenant of motivational strategies in the area of self-leadership is that an individual becomes intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated. If a Christian is unmotivated to do something that may look like greater faithfulness, prayer is the means by which they are encouraged and helped to “get over” the lack of motivation. Furthermore, a Christian can gain courage and discipline from prayer to the Lord about an unmotivating task. Prayer is a primary impetus for building the motivational strategies that the Christian must have to self-lead.

Behavioral Strategies. Within the world of self-leadership, behavioral strategies are intended to make individuals more self-aware and help encourage and enhance their ability to complete tasks that are neither attractive nor motivating.²¹ This self-awareness then allows individuals to further manage their behavior to complete a task. Self-regulation strategies are one type of behavioral strategy that Christians can employ as they seek to grow in self-leadership. As a behavioral strategy, self-regulation should align a Christian teacher’s values of education with their behaviors in their classroom. When discussing self-thought leadership and spirituality in the workplace, John Milliman argues that “employees who bring their self-defeating internal verbalizations to a level of awareness, and who rethink and reverbitalize these inner dialogues, may be able to enhance the spirituality of their work.”²² Self-defeating verbalizations lead to self-defeating behaviors. By reframing these verbalizations to align with their values of education, a Christian teacher can begin to behave according to the truth rather than living out of alignment with their values. This is different from the cognitive strategies involved in self-leadership because it moves the teacher beyond mere thought and into action. Surely the two cannot be separated, but self-regulation is one behavioral strategy to apply in tandem with cognitive strategies.

It is possible that for the Christian, self-regulation strategies are just intentionally building and growing in the fruits of the Spirit, namely self-control. This includes waiting before speaking, taking deep breaths in tense situations, and removing themselves when appropriate from situations

²¹ Sesen, Tabak, and Arli, “Consequences of Self-Leadership”, 947.

²² Christopher P. Neck and John F. Milliman, “Thought Self-leadership: Finding Spiritual Fulfilment in Organizational Life,” *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 9, no. 6 (November 1994): 9–16, <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683949410070151.12>.

that will bear no fruit. These patterns of self-regulation can cause a different behavioral response. If a teacher is struggling with a class or is having difficulty in some aspect of their work, they can acknowledge that difficulty then reframe those thoughts appropriately.

For Christians, memorizing scripture is one way to reframe those thoughts and difficulties. Having scripture on hand to defeat and overcome thoughts of discouragement is a unique gift to the Christian. This should not be a tool that Christian teachers neglect, but rather cultivate so that they are able to reframe and reverbalize their experiences correctly. Teachers can also recall basic truths about their salvation and their identity in Christ. Remembering that their worth and value is not found in what their students or coworkers think, allows teachers to stop the emotional response when faced with students who present challenges outside of the normal scope of their role. Similarly, remembering that their worth is not found in their job or in the number of hours that they put into their job allows teachers to work with freedom and joy rather than fear and performance.

All these strategies for self-leadership, which are intertwined and cannot be easily separated, when informed by the Gospel, can equip teachers to engage in the frustrating and joyful nuances of being public school teachers. In this way, they can then leverage their Christian witness with their students and coworkers because they are not beholden to their emotions or their reactions. This enables teachers to interact with their students in loving and compassionate ways that will be remembered and hopefully leveraged to build relationships that lead not only to gospel conversations, but greater vocational fulfillment as teachers live out the commands of our Lord in the Great Commission.

Conclusion

Self-leadership is not the only method that can be used to help Christian public school teachers build missional competence, but it does provide helpful categories for Christian teachers to latch onto as they seek to grow in faithfulness in their schools. Christian public school teachers are in difficult situations because of the nature of the environment in which they work. The difficulties come from all directions, and they face them at every turn. Social stigma infects every aspect of teaching- student relationships, curricular expectations, classroom conversations. While dealing with all these difficulties, young teachers can begin to build strategies toward self-leadership so that they can combat these difficulties with the power of the gospel. Equipping younger teachers to be self-led will only embolden them to align their worldview with their call to minister in public education. If the promise of Jesus' presence until the end of the age in Matthew 28:19-20 means anything, it must mean that Christian teachers can boldly do the good works set before them as they labor for the gospel in the field of education. If man will witness the good works of Christians and glorify God because of those good works, then Christian teachers should be actively looking for ways to "do" good works to their coworkers and students. They should be engaging meaningfully with their non-believing coworkers. Both truths can drive Christian teachers to faithfully engage in a social structure that is mired in sociological and religious

difficulty. To self-lead, the Christian public school teacher must have the truths of Matthew 28:19-20 and Matthew 5:13-16 at the forefront of their minds. Only with the gospel at the center can Christian public school teachers leverage the behavioral, cognitive, and motivational categories to self-lead to greater missional competence and fulfill the good work the Lord has laid out for them.

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