

Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care

2018, Vol. 11(1) 53–73

© The Author(s) 2018

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1939790917753171

journals.sagepub.com/home/jsf



# From Worldview to Way of Life: Forming Student Dispositions toward Human Flourishing in Christian Higher Education

**David Setran**

Wheaton College, USA

## Abstract

While Christian college students often develop a worldview that emphasizes both individual and social flourishing for the Kingdom of God, there are a number of barriers that may prevent them from living lives committed to others' flourishing. In particular, many of their regular practices generate dispositions that lead in the direction of personal advancement, material security, and devotion to a narrow sphere of family and friends. The development of an others-focused Christian worldview may not be enough to combat these deeply rooted and self-focused dispositional tendencies. Instead, faculty, staff, and mentors must recognize the importance of students' spiritual practices and the ways these can develop inclinations that both foster commitments to others' flourishing and combat the self-focused dispositions that block such commitments. This article highlights some of those practices and addresses the ways in which these can help bridge the gap between students' worldviews and their concrete "ways of life."

## Keywords

college students, dispositions, flourishing, worldview

---

## Corresponding author:

David Setran, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, USA.

Email: david.setran@wheaton.edu

Such habits and dispositions are not “natural” in the sense of being inborn capacities or abilities; rather, they are “second nature”: acquired dispositions and inclinations that are absorbed over time by participating in the routines and rituals of a tradition, as well as by imitating the models upheld as “exemplars” by the tradition. On this account, moral “education” is not just a matter of getting the right information about my duties, obligations, and responsibilities; rather, moral education becomes a matter of formation—the inscription of good habits (virtue) as the construction of character. And such moral formation happens by means of practice.<sup>1</sup>

In his writings on Christian higher education, philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff claims that the purpose of such education is “shalom,” defined as right, harmonious, and joyful relationships between individuals and God, fellow human beings, the self, and the created world.<sup>2</sup> This vision of shalom therefore includes not only a concern for one’s own personal flourishing but also a clear passion for the flourishing of others—spending oneself for justice, harmony, and beauty in the larger social order.<sup>3</sup> Such a mission entails both a “liberation mandate” and a “cultural mandate,” releasing the captives from oppression while also releasing “the enriching potentials of God’s creation” through various vocations.<sup>4</sup> Attentive to the “wounds of humanity,” it calls upon students to utilize their gifts, passions, and educational resources to foster human flourishing in all of its dimensions, to pray for its realization (“on earth as it is in heaven”), to celebrate its manifestations, and to mourn its shortfalls. For Wolterstorff, the end in mind is the development of students who not only understand the nature of biblical shalom (cognitive learning) and who gain some capacity to work for its realization (ability learning), but who also have strong dispositions to live their lives for these purposes (tendency learning).<sup>5</sup>

There is some debate as to whether such dispositions exist among Christian college graduates. Some have argued that broad social concern has been on the rise among young evangelicals, rivaling and in some cases surpassing traditional emphases on personal morality. The “new evangelicalism,” these authors contend, highlights such issues as the environment, racial injustice, immigration, economic development, and human trafficking, recruiting Christian young adults to seek social flourishing as intrinsic to a full-orbed gospel message. Challenging the “great reversal” of early twentieth-century fundamentalism, which promoted separation

---

1. David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 8.

2. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning*, ed. Gloria Goris Stronks and Clarence W. Joldersma (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 91–143.

3. Wolterstorff, “Teaching for Justice: On Shaping How Students are Disposed to Act,” in Clarence W. Joldersma and Gloria Goris Stronks, eds., *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 141–42.

4. Wolterstorff, “Teaching for Shalom: On the Goal of Christian Higher Education,” in Joldersma and Stronks, eds., *Educating for Shalom*, 23.

5. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 7–15.

from the world in the name of both moral and doctrinal purity, this new vision calls for a more holistic gospel that involves the redemption of both individuals and social structures as expressions of God's expansive Kingdom agenda.<sup>6</sup>

Sociological research on young adults, on the other hand, seems to call into question the practical impact of the new social consciousness. Some have argued that contemporary emerging adults are highly narcissistic, concerned only for their own advancement and investing little in causes beyond the self.<sup>7</sup> Christian Smith notes that the pervasive rhetoric of young adult social engagement is seldom matched by lifestyles devoted to others' flourishing. While events such as the 2008 presidential election seemed to indicate increasing civic interest, Smith suggests that this fervor did not necessarily evolve into a widespread or enduring trend. In reality, on indicators of civic involvement, volunteering, and financial giving to social causes, Smith found that emerging adults are relatively "disengaged."<sup>8</sup> Though they are largely optimistic about their personal lives, he argues, most are resolutely pessimistic about the broader society and doubt their ability to make any durable difference in the social order. "They are so focused on their own personal lives," Smith contends, "especially on trying to stand on their own two feet, that they seem incapable of thinking more broadly about community involvement, good citizenship, or even very modest levels of charitable giving."<sup>9</sup>

While Christian college students are likely more socially engaged than the broader emerging adult population, there are a number of barriers that impede the development of actual lifestyles committed to social flourishing. For Christians, some of these barriers may be theological, reflecting a purely individualistic view of sin, an escapist eschatological vision, or an unhelpful dualism that focuses on the soul to the exclusion of bodily and material needs. However, in this article I would like to focus more on the mundane and embodied realities of life, what James K.A. Smith calls "liturgies."<sup>10</sup> Students' everyday activities are not just things they do;

- 
6. See, for example, Brian Steensland and Philip Goff, eds., *The New Evangelical Social Engagement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Marcia Pally, *The New Evangelicals: Expanding the Vision of the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002). On the "great reversal," see David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism and Social Concern* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1977).
  7. See, for example, Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007); Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Atria Books, 2009).
  8. Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 210.
  9. *Ibid.* This general perspective is also affirmed by sociologist Tim Clydesdale, who notes that first-year collegians are chiefly concerned with "daily life management," juggling personal relationships, personal economics, and personal gratifications. See *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens After High School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 205.
  10. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Liturgies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 37.

these practices are doing something to them, forming their dispositions in ways that are powerful in part because they are hidden within the normal flow of life. For Christian collegians, these liturgies may contribute to the formation of inclinations and tendencies that work against the very Kingdom vision of human flourishing communicated in the classroom and affirmed in their assignments. In other words, an others-focused Christian “worldview” may not translate into a commensurate core identity and “way of life” because daily practices shape the heart in ways that weaken commitments to other’s flourishing.<sup>11</sup> It is imperative, therefore, that Christian college faculty, staff, and other mentors consider the potentially deforming power of these practices and the need to counter their influence with practices that foreground “love of neighbor” not only in the mind but also in the affections.

### **Practices, Dispositions, and Barriers to Social Flourishing**

Indeed, some of students’ regular practices have the potential of forming dispositions that inhibit lifestyles committed to a broader shalom. For example, emerging adults are bombarded on a regular basis with images of the good life that run counter to the pursuit of other’s flourishing. Daily exposure to social media sites, stores (both brick and mortar and online), television shows and movies, popular music, and various forms of entertainment provide visions of the good life—material prosperity, sexual gratification, family safety and security—that can coopt and constrict the social imagination. James K. A. Smith goes as far as to say that these visions offer alternative “gospels” that elevate false kingdoms of success focused on the self rather than others.<sup>12</sup> Sin is depicted as material lack, sexual privation, and personal/familial risk and vulnerability. Redemption is therefore offered through consumer purchases, romantic experiences, and financial security that insulates from social blight. For most emerging adults, the American middle-class dream—defined by Christian Smith as “Get a good job, become financially secure, have a nice family, buy what you want, enjoy a few of the finer things in life, avoid the troubles of the world, retire with ease”—is absorbed visually on a daily basis and therefore serves as a powerful “default” for personal aspirations.<sup>13</sup>

Marketers are especially adept at idealizing such a picture. Apple, for example, doesn’t simply sell features of iPhones and iPads in its advertising; it sells alluring stories of success that elicit the heart’s desires. It provides, quite literally, a “call to worship,” a longing that is normalized and intensified through repetitive images and

---

11. Identity theories related to college students demonstrate that individuals have a variety of social identities that are more or less salient in the person’s life. A variety of factors, including communal practices, influence how close these identities come to the “core” sense of identity that influences one’s chosen path in the world. See, for example, Susan R. Jones and Elisa S. Abes, *Identity Development in College Students* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013).

12. On this theme, see Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 52–55.

13. Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 236–237.

practices. As Christian Smith indicates, such rituals of mass consumer materialism can serve to erode commitments to social flourishing:

What is important is not civic life but shopping, not good political decisions but smart consumer choices, not a more fully realized common good but higher consumer satisfaction, not enhancing public life but increasing purchasing power . . . In the end, there is no such thing as a commonwealth, a public square, a common good. All that exists are income-earning workers, commodity producers, service suppliers, markets, regulators, and sites for satiating consumption.<sup>14</sup>

James Côté indicates that the repetitive practices of mass consumer capitalism lead most emerging adults to a process of “default individualization.” Rather than a developmental path to identity through broader communal and civic contribution, many look to private consumer purchases (clothing, gadgets, vehicles, body sculpting) as the primary means of defining a sense of self through “impression management.”<sup>15</sup> The Kingdom vision of human flourishing taught in the Christian college classroom can easily be obscured as imaginations are captured and redirected by these practices. While love of God and neighbor may serve as students’ professed ultimate life purpose, in other words, these deeply rooted, self-oriented visions of the good life may actually drive the majority of life choices and commitments.

Along these lines, Bradford Hadaway suggests that college students often develop the disposition of *pleonexia*, the desire to “outdo others” in wealth and attainment through social climbing.<sup>16</sup> Formed both by captivating media images of success and by competitive social practices (in academics, athletics, popularity hierarchies, etc.) during childhood and adolescence, *pleonexia* leads to a sense of aspiration and entitlement that can diminish altruistic desires. All of life becomes an attempt to put oneself in the best position to secure the best college, the best internship, the best job, the best home, and the best neighborhood, rarely considering the relationship between self and social need. In addition, if such competitive, resume-building dispositions are deeply formed, altruism itself can become a means of personal social climbing within the newly internalized social hierarchy of Christian higher education. Social concern can become, in other words, a tool of upward (Christian) mobility and the good (Christian) life. While immediately fulfilling and reinforcing, such self-oriented dispositions are unlikely to continue once the collegiate applause dies down.

---

14. Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 217.

15. James Côté, *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

16. Bradford S. Hadaway, “Preparing the Way for Justice: Strategic Dispositional Formation through the Spiritual Disciplines,” in David I. Smith, John Shortt, and John Sullivan, eds., *Spirituality, Justice, and Pedagogy* (Nottingham, UK: The Stapleford Centre, 2006), 153.

Furthermore, while technology can expose students to broader social issues, its pervasive ritualistic nature seems to promote individualism, autobiographical self-presentation, and inveterate social comparison.<sup>17</sup> Daily social media use, in particular, promotes what Christian Smith calls “total submersion of the self into fluidly constructed private networks of technologically managed intimates and associates.”<sup>18</sup> The focus is on maintaining the relationships of one’s private world, a network of connected friends and family members, rather than broader civic participation. Thus emerging adults are highly *socially* engaged in their spheres of “technologically managed intimates” but less *publicly* engaged beyond these “lifestyle enclaves.”<sup>19</sup> In biblical terms, it seems that many are increasingly unable to see and attend to the “neighbors” (Luke 10:29) beyond their immediate social network.<sup>20</sup> In addition, as Sherry Turkle points out, social media creates a context in which people define their social roles in terms of “likes,” small monetary contributions, and polemical social commentary. This may be efficient, but it generates short-term and impersonal responses that often curtail deeper investment in these causes.<sup>21</sup>

The loss of shalom-oriented lifestyles among Christian collegians may also relate to the extended practices of schooling. Many grow up in educational environments where they imbibe an epistemological perspective that highlights knowledge acquisition and recitation rather than responsible action. In this sense, students are taught through repeated educational practices that learning does not require a personal obligation to act upon what they have learned. The extension of formal education in contemporary emerging adulthood lengthens this epistemological socialization while also delaying a sense of adult responsibility. They may dream of an others-focused life in the future, but most of their present practices form dispositions directed toward passive receptivity and a focus on self-development.<sup>22</sup> While much of this is of course developmentally predictable, Christian colleges must recognize the centrifugal pull of such forces in students’ lives.

Linked closely to this, many Christian collegians internalize clear messages communicated by families, institutions, and the media about the meaning of

- 
17. Donna Freitas, *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect at Any Cost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Howard Gardner and Katie Davis, *The App Generation: How Today’s Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).
  18. Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 74.
  19. Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 71.
  20. On this theme, see Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 36–56.
  21. Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015).
  22. Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13–14.

adulthood. Fifty years ago, perceptions of adult status were most often linked to sociological role markers such as marriage, parenting, and career. These represented milestones in which emerging adults gained a desire and an ability to take responsibility for others. In more recent years, however, adult status is perceived more in terms of personal interior factors: taking responsibility for oneself, making independent (“self-authored”) decisions, and becoming financially independent.<sup>23</sup> These achievements point less to an obligation to care for others (which is often delayed for as long as possible) than to a growing sense of independence and self-reliance. “Becoming an adult today,” Jeffrey Arnett comments, “means becoming self-sufficient, learning to stand alone as an independent person.”<sup>24</sup> Rather than attaching adult status to a sense of “responsibility for” others, adulthood is more often connected to a “freedom from” others who might limit personal autonomy. The very definitions of normative and appropriate developmental growth, therefore, can actually push in a direction antithetical to an other-directed posture.<sup>25</sup>

### The Limitations of “Worldview”

In confronting these daunting challenges, Christian educators often fail to recognize that the communication of a worldview that highlights human flourishing may not be enough to tip the scales when it comes to generating lifestyles committed to shalom. Developing students who take responsibility for human flourishing requires, in Wolterstorff’s estimation, the formation of dispositions—“tendencies”—that motivate life commitments.<sup>26</sup> They need, in other words, to be formed as the kind of people who are inclined to live for others’ flourishing. While a robust Christian worldview is absolutely essential to this task, it may not be enough to simply ask students to “decide” and “choose” to follow the kingdom blueprint they receive in their courses. Since many of their long-enculturated dispositions are moving in opposing directions, their second-nature tendencies may act to slow or block these cognitive commitments.

---

23. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 208–13; Arnett, “Learning to Stand Alone: The Contemporary American Transition to Adulthood in Cultural and Historical Context,” *Human Development* 41 (1998): 295–315. See also Arnett, “Are College Students Adults? Their Conceptions of the Transition to Adulthood,” *Journal of Adult Development* 1 (1994): 231–24.

24. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 209. Arnett suggests that a number of emerging adults do mention “becoming less self-oriented” as a helpful factor in achieving adult status. However, he is quick to note that “emerging adults who place concern for others at the center of their conceptions of adulthood are relatively rare.” When they speak of “taking responsibility,” this generally means responsibility for themselves rather than for others (214).

25. This shift may be especially important for men. Male adolescents tend to see altruism as something that can develop in adulthood, whereas females see it as inherent within personhood rather than indicative of adult status. A. L. Greene, S. M. Wheatley, and J. F. Aldava, “Stages On Life’s Way: Adolescents’ Implicit Theories of the Life Course,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 7 (1992): 364–81.

26. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Responsible Action*, 14.

As N. T. Wright contends, the Christian character is formed through (1) aiming at the right goal (a *telos* or worldview of human flourishing), (2) determining the “strengths of character” necessary to reach that goal, and (3) entering a process of training that deepens these strengths until they become second nature.<sup>27</sup> The first of these steps is an important worldview project, cultivating a knowledge of the biblical narrative and its relationship to both personal and social flourishing. Yet this must be accompanied by another project: the formation of dispositions that incline believers to treasure and fulfill their roles within this larger story. When Wright proposes that Christians participate in the “virtuous circle,” engaging with Scripture, stories, examples, community, and practices, he is suggesting these as strategic means by which the Christian worldview is gradually woven into the very fabric of life. “Only then,” he notes,

when you are suddenly faced with an emergency demanding a creative, reconciling act of healing and hope, will you be ready to perform it. Only then, when there is a choice between campaigning for justice for people being unfairly treated by the government and saving our popularity by turning a blind eye, will we have all our instincts turned, not to what the newspapers say, but to what the gospel says . . . Only then will we know in our bones what we should be doing “after we believe.”<sup>28</sup>

These practices, in other words, help translate a Christian worldview into a Christian identity that can then be concretized as a Christian way of life.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, as James K. A. Smith argues, Christian higher education should seek to form students who not only develop a kingdom worldview but who also *desire* the Kingdom. Moving beyond anthropological definitions of humans as “thinkers” or “believers,” Smith contends that humans are “lovers” at their core. Such loves represent ultimate desires that are aimed towards certain visions of the good life, visions of flourishing that capture the imagination and therefore drive action. Our loves, he suggests, incline us to live in such a way that we do all we can to actualize our envisioned pictures of flourishing.<sup>30</sup> As Steven Garber has often noted, Augustine’s wisdom still rings true: “For when there is a question as to whether a man is good, one does not ask what he believes, or what he hopes, but what he loves.”<sup>31</sup> Faculty and staff at Christian colleges, of course, hope that students develop a potent love for the Kingdom of God, a vision of personal and social flourishing under the

---

27. N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2012), 29.

28. *Ibid.*, 284.

29. This is similar to Meg Jay’s concern that young adults develop what sociologists call “identity capital” by investing deeply in certain practices until they become “a part of who we are.” See *The Defining Decade* (New York: Twelve, 2012), 6.

30. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 54.

31. Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior*, rev. ed. (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 35.

gracious rule of Christ. The alarming reality, however, is that students may develop and profess a particular worldview, even the kind absorbed through a Christian education, while their loves, imaginations, and practices are oriented in very different directions. As educators, Wolterstorff notes, we may develop students who “talk the Christian mind and *live* the mind of the world.”<sup>32</sup> This reality at least partially explains the intractable gap between worldview and way of life.

For both Wolterstorff and Smith, a chief problem here emerges from the fact that college leaders assume that the development of a kingdom worldview will naturally—perhaps even automatically—express itself in the development of dispositions to live for God’s kingdom purposes in the world. “The naivete,” Wolterstorff suggests, “was in supposing that setting abstract sociology and physics and economics and mathematics and so forth before the students would make them inclined to live a Christian life in the world. The naivete was in supposing that this would influence their tendency to live in such a way. It won’t . . . We all know the phenomenon of people talking a better line than they live. We as Christian educators have to address that issue head on and not try to walk past it.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Smith notes that we often talk in Christian higher education about the importance of cultivating Christian “perspectives” on different disciplines, the cumulative process resulting in the development of a “Christian worldview.” However, he suggests that this may be inadequate:

Could it be the case that learning a Christian perspective doesn’t actually touch my desire, and that while I may be able to think about the world from a Christian perspective, at the end of the day I love not the kingdom of God but rather the kingdom of the market? By reducing the genius of the Christian faith to something like an intellectual framework—a perspective or a worldview—we can (perhaps unwittingly) unhook Christianity from the practices that constitute Christian discipleship. And when that happens, we end up thinking that being a Christian doesn’t radically reconfigure our desires and our wants, our practices and our habits . . . To be blunt, our Christian colleges and universities generate an army of alumni who look pretty much like all the rest of their suburban neighbors, except that our graduates drive their SUVs, inhabit their executive homes, and pursue the frenetic life of the middle class and the corporate ladder “from a Christian perspective.”<sup>34</sup>

Both Wolterstorff and Smith highlight the fact that Christian educators can fail to account for the ways in which bodily practices and rituals shape students’ loves, generating dispositions that often work directly against the kingdom-oriented

---

32. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Life*, 82.

33. *Ibid.*, 116.

34. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 218–19. As Christian Smith notes in his research, “it was clear in many interviews that emerging adults felt entirely comfortable describing various religious beliefs that they affirmed but that appeared to have no connection whatsoever to the living of their lives.” *Souls in Transition*, 154.

worldviews they espouse. As Wolterstorff suggests, “we are creatures of habit and disposition, creatures prone to imitation. These all shape our flow of action . . . I fear that you and I have fallen into the habit, characteristic of the modern philosophers, of thinking of the self as some sort of imperial entity, defined by thought and volition, floating unencumbered above the world of body and history. That view will have to go.”<sup>35</sup> At times teachers can miss this potent reality, treating students as “brains-on-a-stick” or disembodied souls and missing out on the ways in which students’ daily habits and routines shape their dispositions (and therefore their future lifestyles) in powerful ways.<sup>36</sup> The passionate teaching of the Christian worldview is foundational in stirring students’ minds in the direction of human flourishing, but, as Dallas Willard once observed, “Our mind on its own is an extremely feeble instrument, whose power over life we constantly tend to exaggerate. We are incarnate beings in our very nature, and we live from our bodies. If we are to be transformed, the body must also be transformed, and that is not accomplished by talking at it.”<sup>37</sup>

## Spiritual Disciplines and Social Flourishing

If the deforming of the heart’s loves takes place through practices, then the reforming of loves will typically require counterformational spiritual practices (not just ideas) that foreground the narrative of the Kingdom in the heart’s affections. It is important to recognize here that these practices should be vehicles by which the Spirit shapes students to prize both the personal and the social aspects of flourishing that constitute a broad kingdom vision. The Christian call to flourishing and shalom includes active participation in Christ’s redemptive purposes in the world, a work

---

35. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Life*, 82.

36. James K. A. Smith, *You are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 3. Some of these ideas are also reflected in the disciplines of neuroscience and neuropsychology. Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, for example, point to the importance of embodiment in our understanding of transformation, noting that change takes place not merely in private “soul” experiences but also through physical and communal liturgical practices connected to the Christian story. See *The Physical Nature of the Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

37. Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life With God* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1998), 322. As Willard also suggests, one cannot separate the inner life and external actions if we recognize the critical role of the body: “The outcome of spiritual formation is, indeed, the transformation of the inner reality of the self in such a way that the deeds and words of Jesus become a natural expression of who we are. But it is the nature of the human being that the ‘inner reality of the self’ settles into our body, from which that inner reality then operates in *practice*.” See *The Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 165–66.

that encompasses all domains of life marred by the fall. All human relationships—with God, with others, with the self, and with the created order—have been tainted by sin.<sup>38</sup> If this is true, the larger vision of human flourishing must constitute a pursuit of deep intimacy with the Lord, just and loving relationships with and for others, care for people’s inner worlds, and cultivation of the physical and material resources of creation (including human bodies). As Cornelius Plantinga puts it, “To be a responsible person is to find one’s role in the building of shalom, the re-webbing of God, humanity, and all creation in justice, harmony, fulfillment, and delight. To be a responsible person is to find one’s own role and then, funded by the grace of God, to fill this role and to delight in it.”<sup>39</sup> Flourishing at both the personal and the social levels are inextricably intertwined within this broad Kingdom vision.

Yet as Amy Sherman has indicated, Christians often lack a concern for others’ flourishing because of their individualistic approaches to discipleship. While the proper biblical call is to serve as the *tsaddiquim* (the “righteous”), those who “are willing to disadvantage themselves for the community,” many practice a privatized faith that is confined to a personal relationship with God and close, interpersonal relationships.<sup>40</sup> The spiritual disciplines are viewed as tools for drawing closer to Christ without consideration of the others-focused dispositions they can foster.<sup>41</sup> Even when the social aspects of such disciplines are acknowledged, they can be described in such a way as to separate the personal from the corporate dimensions of flourishing. Richard Foster, for example, categorizes the disciplines as inward (meditation, prayer, fasting, study), outward (simplicity, solitude, service, submission), and corporate (worship, confession, guidance, fellowship, celebration). While helpful as a scheme for categorization, such distinctions can obscure the ways in which all disciplines can (and, according to Scripture, *should*) serve aims of both personal and social flourishing, both love of God and love of neighbor.

Scripture is actually quite clear in condemning spiritual practices focused on personal spiritual performance and devoid of a broader concern for other’s flourishing. In fact, God condemns the whole array of personal and corporate liturgical forms—prayers, fasts, festivals, sacrifices, and music—when they are not accompanied by social righteousness. Isaiah 1:13–19, for example, speaks of God’s rejection of the Israelites’ spiritual practices of offerings, new moons, Sabbaths, convocations, and prayers. Because they did not couple these with attempts to seek justice for the oppressed,

---

38. On this theme, see Ronald Habermas and Klaus Issler, *Teaching for Reconciliation: Foundations and Practice of Christian Educational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992); Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God’s World*; Perry L. Glanzer and Todd C. Ream, *Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

39. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 197.

40. Sherman is here quoting Tim Keller. See *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 16.

41. On this theme, see Kyle David Bennett, *Practices of Love: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life of the World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2017).

the fatherless, and the widow, God claims that he cannot bear their “spiritual disciplines” and that he will hide his eyes and close his ears to their prayers. Amos 5 makes a similar claim, rejecting the people’s festivals, songs, and offerings because of their unwillingness to see to it that “justice roll on like a river” (v. 24). Isaiah 58 likewise mentions the practice of fasting and God’s apparent failure to “see” their attempts to practice self-denial for him. God claims that though they “seem eager to know my ways” and “seem eager for God to come near to them” (aspects of personal spiritual flourishing, to be sure), their fasting is inadequate because it cloaks a larger dismissal of other’s flourishing as they exploit their workers and oppress the weak. As Foster helpfully notes, “Because social righteousness is a mandate, liturgical life can never be divorced from it.”<sup>42</sup>

These biblical writers are obviously not denigrating the importance of spiritual practices designed to draw the heart to communion with God. Instead, they deem such practices incomplete without an associated appeal to flourishing for others. To take part in spiritual practices is to draw near in intimacy with God, but this is inseparable from the development of a concern for the things (and people) God cares about. If Christian spiritual formation is a matter of being conformed to the image of Christ, this entails not only growing in Christ-like personal character but also embracing a commitment to Christ’s mission (as “man for others”) to proclaim and demonstrate the Kingdom in all areas of life.<sup>43</sup> If that is not happening, one can question the legitimacy of one’s practices. As John Piper has claimed with regard to God’s perspective on fasting in Isaiah 58, “The fast that (God chooses) is not that you religiously make yourselves hungry and afflicted, but that you make the poor less hungry and afflicted. If you want to fight sin by taking bread away from your own mouth, then put it in the mouth of the poor. Then we will see if you are really fasting for righteousness’ sake.”<sup>44</sup> All of this points to the larger appeal of Micah 6:8, which enjoins believers to pursue both personal intimacy with God and the flourishing of others. This both/and life represents the fullness of the gospel, and spiritual practices should incline us to love and live for this comprehensive vision.

## Practicing for Flourishing

For Christian college students, spiritual practices can foster commitment to social flourishing in a number of ways. Hadaway posits a helpful scheme along these lines in which he articulates the importance of “helping,” “uprooting,” and “bulwark” dispositions.<sup>45</sup> Spiritual practices can, through the work of the Spirit, generate “helping” dispositions that promote postures committed to other’s flourishing.

---

42. Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 151.

43. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 382.

44. John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 137.

45. Hadaway, “Preparing the Way for Justice,” 148–51.

Repeated acts of serving others, for example, can foster attentiveness to other's needs and tendencies to look beyond the self. Yet many spiritual practices also foster dispositions toward flourishing by working to displace or at least weaken our ingrained anti-shalom tendencies. Hadaway found it surprising that many students did not gain a disposition toward serving others merely by taking part in service learning activities. What he discovered was that service, in and of itself, often had limited effect because of deeply entrenched dispositions toward personal advancement and material success. Students, he noted, often failed to commit to social flourishing not because they lacked knowledge or opportunities but because they possessed long-habituated dispositions that ran counter to the often costly pursuit of shalom. What is needed, he argues, are dispositions that work either to "uproot" or at least set up a "bulwark" against competing dispositions that block the good work of flourishing.<sup>46</sup>

While a comprehensive analysis of the practices that promote such dispositions is beyond the scope of this article, it may be beneficial to consider a few as illustrations. For example, celebration and lament may help students bolster both helping and uprooting/bulwark dispositions that heighten commitments to social flourishing. Scripture draws a direct relationship between remembering God's goodness in one's own life and living a life of commitment to the "good life" of others. In his mandate to free and materially bless Hebrew servants after six years, for example, God couches his command in the language of remembrance: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you" (Deut. 15:15). As they held their own God-ordained flourishing before their eyes, they would be compelled to offer that same flourishing to others. If remembering expands a sense of one's blessedness, it can also furnish a desire and disposition to bless others. This is the logic of grace. If students perceive their lives in terms of scarcity—something reinforced through regular consumer images and practices—they are apt to live in a fearful desire to control and hoard their time and resources. If, on the other hand, they view themselves as favored and blessed, they are more apt to graciously give out of that overflow to bless others. Our consumer-driven culture reinforces a sense of continual deficit. Celebration of God's mercies, however, can foreground gratitude in the heart's affections, a disposition that often heralds compassion for others.<sup>47</sup>

Paradoxically, the practices of remembering and celebration must be coupled with the intentional practice of lament. While a recognition of one's own blessings can serve as a powerful agent of seeking shalom for others, it is also true that students need practices that connect them to suffering. Despite its exclusion from the "functional canon" and from most church prayer and music, lament is prevalent

---

46. Ibid., 154–57.

47. Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1978), 101–102.

in Scripture, both within individual narratives (i.e., Jacob and David) and within the poetic books such as Lamentations, Job, and the Psalms.<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Hall suggests that the typical lament pattern of the Psalms includes five components: an address to God, a complaint about the situation, a description of God's motivation to intervene in light of his character, and an expression of confidence in God's intervention.<sup>49</sup> Walter Brueggemann speaks of this pattern as a general movement from "plea" to "praise."<sup>50</sup>

In terms of social flourishing, lament is a critical means by which Christian students can form dispositions to join with others who are suffering, entering into their painful cries and thus also beginning to corporately join the chorus of those longing for shalom. Those experiencing personal flourishing tend to foreground celebration and praise as their native language of godward interaction, but those experiencing pain and suffering draw on lament in their cries for deliverance. The exclusive use of praise in worship and prayer, therefore, can blind students to the realities of suffering brothers and sisters, disposing them to reinforce the status quo rather than alerting them to the absence of flourishing in other's lives. As Soon-Chan Rah suggests, lament is something like a funeral, a painful admission that something good has died. When we neglect lament and offer only celebration, we close our eyes to suffering and lose sight of the lost shalom elsewhere in the world.<sup>51</sup> Brueggemann is again helpful here, noting that

Where the lament form is censured, justice questions cannot be asked and eventually become invisible and illegitimate. Instead we learn to settle for questions of "meaning," and we reduce the issues to resolutions of love. But the categories of meaning and love do not touch the public systemic questions about which biblical faith is relentlessly concerned. A community of faith that negates laments soon concludes that the hard issues of justice are improper questions at the throne (which is a conclusion drawn through liturgical use) . . . Justice questions disappear into civility and docility.<sup>52</sup>

If celebration rightly praises God for examples of shalom around us, lament allows us to mourn its absence and thereby stirs up longings and appeals to God

---

48. Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 111. Glenn Pemberton notes that lament characterizes 40 percent of the Psalms but only about 19 percent of Presbyterian hymns and 13 percent of Baptist hymns. Of the 100 worship songs utilized most frequently in local churches, only five would qualify as lament. Cited in Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (Downer's Grove: IVP Books, 2015), 22.

49. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, "Suffering in God's Presence: The Role of Lament in Transformation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 219–32.

50. Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 282.

51. Rah, *Prophetic Lament*, 47.

52. Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," 107.

for its realization.<sup>53</sup> According to Wolterstorff, “Christian education must exhibit and teach for lament. The cry, ‘This should not be,’ so far from being smothered, as all too often it is, must be allowed, even encouraged.”<sup>54</sup>

Two of the “corporate” disciplines—guidance and fellowship—also serve important purposes in the formation of helping and uprooting dispositions. The spiritual discipline of guidance speaks to the importance of adult mentors, models, or spiritual directors who can offer students a concrete visualization of lives devoted to these ideals. Dispositions against social flourishing are often generated by recurring images of exemplars who point in the direction of personal consumer power and upward mobility. According to both Wolterstorff and Garber, helpful altruistic dispositions are fostered by living in the presence of mentors committed to an other-directed way of life, especially if those mentors are loved and admired.<sup>55</sup> Narrative identity theorists like Dan McAdams speak of the fact that adult identities are always plagiarized, cobbled together and borrowed from friends, family members, faculty, staff, church members, and other adults within students’ sphere.<sup>56</sup> As imitative beings, they learn to love by watching what others love and feeling pulled to walk in similar paths.<sup>57</sup>

If students fail to locate such visible ideals—or if mentors are limited to those elevated within the entertainment, sports, and financial industries—they may experience disillusionment, lethargy, and diminished expectations, the *acedia* that some say characterizes many at this time of life.<sup>58</sup> When they lack “real” models of their worldview “ideals,” students may fall prey to cynicism, resignation, and pusillanimity (shrinking back or smallness of soul) at the very time when they should be launched forth into Kingdom work.<sup>59</sup> These dispositions can surely block commitments to social flourishing, prompting students to reduce aspirations and settle into more limited and narrowly circumscribed patterns of personal ambition. As Paul J. Wadell has pointed out, mentoring serves as a critical practice for the development of magnanimity, the hope-filled pursuit of excellence in all areas of students’ lives.<sup>60</sup>

---

53. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom*, 143–44.

54. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Life*, 263.

55. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom*, 150; Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 141.

56. Dan McAdams, “Life Authorship in Emerging Adulthood,” in Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, ed., *The Oxford Handbook on Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 438–48. See also McAdam, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997).

57. Brown and Strawn, *The Physical Nature of the Christian Life*, 78–82, 115–18; Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 234.

58. Paul J. Wadell and Darin H. Davis, “Tracking the Toxins of *Acedia*: Reenvisioning Moral Education,” in Douglas V. Henry and Michael D. Beaty, *The Schooled Heart: Moral Formation in American Higher Education* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 133–54.

59. Rebecca DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 9–11.

60. Paul J. Wadell, “An Itinerary of Hope: Called to a Magnanimous Way of Life,” in David S. Cunningham, ed., *At This Time and in This Place: Vocation and Higher Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 193–215.

As a disposition to help uproot *acedia*, magnanimity becomes a critical force for inclining students to maintain hope in their pursuit of shalom, especially as they transition to the sometimes jarring challenges of post-college life. As Sharon Parks suggests, “To varying degrees and in differing forms, mentors worthy of the name embody and inspire the possibility of committed and meaningful adulthood. On the other side of the formation of critical awareness, a good mentor is an antidote to mere cynicism.”<sup>61</sup>

In addition to guidance from a mentor, the discipline of fellowship (spiritual friendship) also looms large when it comes to forming dispositions toward other’s flourishing. Garber suggests that those who form a way of life consistent with their Christian worldview are able to do so in large part because of their ability to live in close relationship with those who continually confirm, reinforce, and support them in these ideals.<sup>62</sup> These individuals form close ties with others who espouse common values and hold them accountable to live within shared commitments. Such community itself becomes what Peter Berger once called a “plausibility structure,” an important means of sustaining countercultural beliefs and practices.<sup>63</sup> Following college, many students will enter school and work environments that discount or reject the plausibility of Christian beliefs and practices. Without weekly, embodied friendship with like-minded believers, it will be easy for them to doubt the legitimacy of their worldviews and loves and to lose hope when facing both internal and external obstacles.<sup>64</sup> In this sense, the standard Christian practice of fellowship becomes a crucial vehicle for maintaining dispositions to pursue social flourishing as an overflow of gospel commitments. In his study of recent college graduates, Garber indicated that those able to secure a coherence between belief and behavior were those who “forged friendships with folk whose common life offered a context for those convictions to be embodied.” They collectively seek other’s flourishing by working out these lifestyles “face to face and side by side.”<sup>65</sup>

Of course, regular acts of service are also critical in disposition formation. Service work, as Wolterstorff has argued, has the benefit of stirring up empathy within students, an important concomitant of other-directed ways of life. In a very personal way, Wolterstorff speaks of how knowledge of the plight of Palestinians and South Africans made very little practical difference in his life until he found himself looking at the faces and hearing the voices of those in suffering.<sup>66</sup> While he knew

---

61. Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 131.

62. Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 142–46.

63. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Random House, 1966), 158.

64. Wadell, “An Itinerary of Hope,” 213–14.

65. Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, 146.

66. Wolterstorff, *Journey toward Justice: Personal Encounters in the Global South* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 3–10; *Educating for Life*, 139; *Educating for Shalom*, 151–52.

a great deal of information about the injustices faced by these groups, he was not motivated to action until he was confronted through physical proximity with their plight. It was only in this form of direct contact that he “felt anger with their anger, humiliation with their humiliation, hurt with their hurt.”<sup>67</sup> Works of service at least have the potential to bring students into contact with the oppressed, to heighten embodied exposure to the real needs and circumstances of the “other.” While hearts can still be hardened even in the midst of such work, service does provide a ripe context for situated learning that fosters a sense of being united with others in empathetic understanding.<sup>68</sup>

In addition, when all tendencies are moving in the direction of self-sufficiency, personal development, passive receptivity, and submersion within closely circumscribed intimate relationships, the practice of service can play an important “uprooting” and “bulwark” role in shifting the gaze outward. God has lavished emerging adults with gifts, passions, and unique opportunities not for personal gain but so that they can steward what Amy Sherman calls their “vocational power” for the common good.<sup>69</sup> Strong love formation in the direction of social flourishing will not be cultivated on campuses and in churches that treat students as passive learners or consumers. Instead, they must be entrusted with genuine responsibility to teach, to serve, and to mend the world’s broken places. We need what situated learning theorists call “legitimate peripheral participation,” apprenticeships in which students contribute to God’s kingdom purposes by working alongside more experienced mentors.<sup>70</sup> Service of this kind helps to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to promote social flourishing, but it also helps to direct their loves to the neighbors around them.

Furthermore, some spiritual practices foster the uprooting and bulwark dispositions necessary to combat the self-oriented postures created by repetitive practices of consumerism and social climbing. They do this indirectly by “clearing the path” for an other-directed life, generating dispositions that leave one more open to God’s call to the pursuit of other’s flourishing.<sup>71</sup> Fasting, for example, can loosen the grip of continual self-indulgence in ways that leave students more open and responsive to God and others. Likewise, Foster has indicated how the practice of simplicity freed up those in the early church for “exuberant caring and sharing” with others because they had entrusted their possessions to God.<sup>72</sup> While fasting and simplicity may not

---

67. Wolterstorff, *Journey toward Justice*, 157.

68. Wolterstorff also notes that empathy can be generated through vicarious experiences, powerfully communicated visually or through story. Images that depict altruism or highlight the suffering of others can elevate countercultural visions of the good life in keeping with a desire for other’s flourishing. *Journey toward Justice*, 156–57.

69. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 143–50.

70. See J. Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

71. *Ibid.*, 154.

72. Richard Foster, *The Freedom of Simplicity* (New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1981), 66–69.

directly lead students to relinquish their possessions or fight for other's access to such goods, it is likely that these practices will leave them less encumbered by the constant gratification that often blinds them to love of neighbor. It is in this sense that they begin the gradual work of uprooting unhelpful dispositions that block or obscure the path to Kingdom living.<sup>73</sup>

While fasting and simplicity fulfill this role through practices of abstinence, giving and hospitality serve similar purposes through active, others-focused engagement. By releasing possessions and freeing them for other's use, students can begin to recognize and practice their roles as stewards rather than owners of God's good gifts. Students often delay financial giving and tithing, perceiving this as something that will be engaged in the future when they have a more steady income.<sup>74</sup> However, the formation of habits in this direction becomes a critically important means of disposing students to continue to give of time and resources both liberally and sacrificially in the future, battling the deeply rooted (and practiced) tendencies toward private accumulation. Likewise, hospitality serves as a core practice in forming strategic dispositions in the direction of social flourishing. The Christian tradition emphasizes the practice of hospitality as a means of welcoming others, particularly the most vulnerable, and providing for their physical, relational, emotional, and spiritual needs. Students may not have homes to share with others, but there are many ways in which their lives can be characterized by welcoming and making room for those on the fringes, including the poor, the lonely, the ostracized, refugees, international students, racial and ethnic minorities, and many others.<sup>75</sup> Such practices can help students develop "eyes to see" their vulnerable neighbors, uprooting self-focused dispositions while generating dispositions to cultivate such attentiveness in the future.

Of course, the practice of Sabbath can serve important purposes in resisting the anxious productivity of the "rat race" that highlights personal advancement while diminishing care and concern for one's neighbor. Sabbath resists the worship of commodities and the coveting of other's goods, thus assisting in the keeping of the first and tenth commandments. In so doing, it opens the door for Christians to oppose "restless acquisitiveness" and to recognize the burdens of others who are unable to rest.<sup>76</sup> It opens up spaces for service and hospitality that can uproot the self-focused agendas that easily dominate on the college campus. Again, Sabbath does not always

---

73. Bennett, *Practices of Love*, 39–58, 77–94.

74. Smith, *Lost in Transition*, 210–11. According to Smith, only the most devoted emerging adults gave more than fifty dollars in the last year to charitable causes (and only 75 percent of these did so). See Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 262.

75. Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 159–76.

76. Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

constitute direct movement towards other's flourishing (it can be used for purely self-serving purposes), but it does set up bulwarks against the dispositions of endless productivity and anxious striving (along with idolatry and greed) that often close the door to such work.<sup>77</sup>

As students engage in these practices, it is essential that they recognize the centrality of the Holy Spirit in this process of transformation. Appeals to the importance of habituation and disposition formation can at times appear overly Aristotelian, articulating the process of change in terms of mere habituation and socialization. By contrast, Christianity asserts that these practices are spiritually formative not only because they aim at the kingdom vision of the good life but also because they actually engage students with God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>78</sup> As "habitations of the Spirit," these practices do not guarantee predictable results through renewed habits derived from repetition (i.e., "If I serve others, I will grow less self-focused and gain a love for the downtrodden").<sup>79</sup> Instead, they are ways in which students offer themselves to God, entering into the "with God" life and allowing him to shape their hearts and dispositions according to his purposes.<sup>80</sup>

## Disposition Formation and the Christian College

While there are many other disciplines that could be mentioned as forming student dispositions toward social flourishing, this sampling is meant to demonstrate the critical role spiritual practices can play in inclining students to live in ways that reflect their emerging beliefs and commitments. Worldview is absolutely essential, but desires must also be shaped through habitual practices that invite the Spirit to transform the heart's loves and inclinations. This appeal is not without its challenges, of course. The language of worldview still reigns supreme in most academic circles, while practices may more typically be associated with church and private life. In addition, academic purists may resist such approaches within the classroom sphere, relegating them to co-curricular or congregational settings. Furthermore, many students fail to recognize the relationship between their present spiritual

---

77. On this theme, see Mae Elise Cannon, *Just Spirituality: How Faith Practices Fuel Social Action* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 127–49; Bennett, *Practices of Love*, 147–66; Lauren Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to a Life of Spiritual Discipline* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007).

78. James K. A. Smith himself makes this point in *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), his sequel to *Desiring the Kingdom*. With regard to rituals and practices, he notes that "As the Son is incarnate—the Word made flesh meeting us who are flesh—so the Spirit meets us in tangible, embodied practices that are conduits of the Spirit's transformative power. . . . The material practices of Christian worship are not exercises in spiritual self-management but rather the creational means that our gracious God deigns to inhabit for our sanctification" (15).

79. Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999), 63.

80. See Foster, *Life with God*, 7.

practices and their future vocational commitments. Particularly on a Christian college campus, they may see their academic training as sufficient for their future vocational roles.

Several campus postures are therefore critical. First, the importance of love-shaping practices reveals why a Christian college campus must devote itself to a broad ecology of spiritual formation that includes both curricular and co-curricular venues. Our historically inherited divisions between sacred and secular spaces (or theoretical and practical spaces) don't really hold when we consider that love shaping practices occur in all contexts. Our students are in class a very small percentage of the time and yet disposition formation is taking place in all settings: in the dining hall, on the athletic fields, and in the dorms. All of these domains represent areas of student learning and formation, and all will play significant roles in determining the student tendencies to live out their worldviews. Faculty and staff must collaborate to think hard about the larger campus curriculum of student learning and how practices in all areas are shaping students' desires to live out the worldviews they receive.

Second, this can indeed inform classroom pedagogy. Faculty can work to develop counterformational classroom practices consistent with their particular fields. I know a professor who has students keep a prayer journal as part of the class, designed to document both praises (for signs of flourishing) and laments (for the absences of flourishing). Another integrates service projects into the course, placing students into direct contact with marginalized populations as they read about their social challenges. Another requires students to take notes on other students' comments simply to gain practice in putting others before the self. Yet another invites students to engage voluntarily in practices of simplicity and fasting in a course on global poverty. Each class will have a different rhythm, but all professors can raise the relevant question, "Can we be more intentional about our academic liturgies and the loves that are shaped through them?" If we really believe that practices shape dispositions and that dispositions shape ways of life, we will be more attentive to the rituals, not just the content, of our shared academic work.

Third, we must help students understand the influence of their present practices on their future ways of life. In many cases, students do not recognize the gradual changes taking place in their desires and loves as they engage in the liturgies of everyday life. They imagine that their everyday practices and communities will have little impact on their future ability to live out the worldviews they are working so hard to formulate. In reality, however, habitual patterns produce real dispositional changes that shape decisions and chosen lifestyles. So while it is tempting for students to argue that they can just flip a switch to pursue social flourishing in the future, the reality is that by the time the future arrives, those adult men or women may no longer possess the desire to engage such work because their loves have been gradually reoriented in self-focused directions. Therefore, we must help them see

that their present practices are shaping dispositions that will make it either easier or more challenging to live out their worldviews in the future.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, we must also highlight for our students the ways in which they must continue to integrate formational vocational practices in their work lives after college. In other words, since dispositions are continually formed throughout life, this call to practice is one aspect of the life-long learning that must accompany alumni through the years. For those in medicine, law, business, education, ministry, homemaking, and a host of other occupations, the practices mentioned here can serve to sustain godly intentions when typical occupational practices may lead in other directions. As former students seek mentors, cultivate spiritual friendships inside and outside the local church, take part in service activities, and engage in fasting, simplicity, Sabbath-keeping, hospitality, celebration and lament, they can continue to form dispositions aimed at social flourishing, resisting the pull of self-actualization, material success, and family insularity that is so common to the Christian American dream.

It is easy enough to elicit a cognitive rejection of the self-focused visions of the good life that characterize our cultural norms. Yet students (and faculty) can just as easily embrace ways of life that reflect these entrenched patterns. The task of Christian colleges is to provide a vivid, countercultural picture of Kingdom flourishing and a clear pathway to help students recognize and love its real-world manifestations. To do so will require not only a worldview but also the formation of dispositions that can anchor, motivate, and sustain lives committed to the common good. And this will require practice. The integration of faith, learning, and living will be necessary if we desire Christian students to move toward a greater consistency between worldview and way of life.

---

81. For a more detailed discussion on this theme, see my book, co-authored with Chris Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 40–44.

### **License and Permissible Use Notice**

These materials are provided to you by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) in accordance with the terms of ATLA's agreements with the copyright holder or authorized distributor of the materials, as applicable. In some cases, ATLA may be the copyright holder of these materials.

You may download, print, and share these materials for your individual use as may be permitted by the applicable agreements among the copyright holder, distributors, licensors, licensees, and users of these materials (including, for example, any agreements entered into by the institution or other organization from which you obtained these materials) and in accordance with the fair use principles of United States and international copyright and other applicable laws. You may not, for example, copy or email these materials to multiple web sites or publicly post, distribute for commercial purposes, modify, or create derivative works of these materials without the copyright holder's express prior written permission.

Please contact the copyright holder if you would like to request permission to use these materials, or any part of these materials, in any manner or for any use not permitted by the agreements described above or the fair use provisions of United States and international copyright and other applicable laws. For information regarding the identity of the copyright holder, refer to the copyright information in these materials, if available, or contact ATLA at [products@atla.com](mailto:products@atla.com).

Except as otherwise specified, Copyright © 2016 American Theological Library Association.