

Integrating Faith and Learning in the College Classroom

Part II Course Design and Content

By Bill Walthall

In pondering the difference between expertise and experience, I have concluded that an expert is one who speaks much about theory but has little to say about practical application. On the other hand, the experienced person tends to practice all the right things but isn't sure why, other than because "it works." In integrating faith and learning, surely there must be some middle ground between these extremes. As college teachers, we need to pursue this area more fully.

In Part I, I shared some of my successes in attempting to integrate teaching and ministry. I discovered very early that setting a spiritual tone changed the students' perception of me and their subject matter. Whether interspersed with faith principles or not, the course syllabus took on a different meaning for the students. I attribute this response to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as He gives meaning and purpose to the students.

In Part II I would like to share some of my efforts to integrate faith and learning in course design and content. In tackling this aspect of faith and learning, I immediately ran into problems for the

following reasons: (1) the required course content had already been predetermined without an integration of faith and learning; (2) a required volume of material had to

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be covered within an established period of time, so tampering with content was risky; (3) content was already fairly condensed; (4) many students saw a dichotomy between faith and academic life—feeling that the two should be kept separate and not overlap; (5) the literature offered few specifics on ways to integrate faith and learning in the field of allied health; and (6) I wasn't sure just what to integrate.

With that introduction, let me now share some ideas I have found helpful in integrating faith into learning. As an allied health

Instructor, Department of Physical
Therapy
School of Allied Health Professions
Loma Linda University
Loma Linda, California

teacher, I found that my course content provided fertile ground for such an integration.

Biblical Knowledge and Understanding

Since the knowledge of God through the Scriptures is central to my life, I began seeking ways to integrate the Bible into course content. In each of my teaching areas I inserted information relevant to the Scriptures. For instance, in covering "Burn Management," I used a Bible dictionary and encyclopedia in putting together a two-page outline on the significance of fire and burning from a Biblical perspective. The insert included the domestic, religious, penal, and figurative uses of fire and served as a launching point for brief discussions of such subjects as the Lord's power and presence, purification, the symbol of the lake of fire, and Gehenna. More importantly, however, the outline opened the door for deeper insights into the psychological reactions that may occur in burn victims. Combining Biblical and psychological facts

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offered new insights into both, as well as the area of medical management.

I have found this method to be helpful in another area—"Evaluation of the Hand." Using a Bible dictionary, I found many references to the hand, both literal and figurative. Once I have given basic groundwork in terms of

physiology and movement, a discussion of Jesus' healing of the man with the withered hand becomes more meaningful to the students.

One of the most exciting aspects of this topic comes when the class as a whole researches the effects of Roman crucifixion on the hands of Jesus. This involves not only practical learning, but also offers new insights into the miracle of the resurrection.

A ¼- to ½-inch nail driven into the distal forearm just behind the wrist (nails were never driven through the palms, since they would tear out from the weight of the body) would result in severe damage to internal structures (nerves, tendons, vessels, et cetera). Add to this the probable dislocation of the shoulders and associated nerve damage, and without a miracle, it would have been impossible for Jesus to have used His hands for many of the postresurrection activities listed in the Gospel narrative. A careful study of this subject helps many students gain a better grasp of the reality of the miracle.

Beyond Licensure Requirements

As I designed my course curriculum, I had to struggle with a basic question: What was to be my emphasis in terms of course content—Bible knowledge or allied health? Actually, the answer was decided for me because State board exams test allied health knowledge, not Bible information. But students' knowledge needs to go beyond the requisites of qualifying examinations; thus, they need a sound Biblical philosophy mingled with their book knowledge. My approach then was to insert Bible principles into health information wherever possible, while still meeting the standards of accountability.

Practical Applications Through Case Studies

The second area of integration, and certainly a most crucial one, is the application of practical aspects of Bible knowledge and Christian living in real-life situations. Here

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again, the Scriptures serve as the central focus.

For example, the book of Job offers a case study in grief reaction and suffering. Although this is an important area for students to know about when they enter the field of allied health, it is even more vital for them to work out their own philosophies on the subject.

There is a simple method for accomplishing this. Stopping at convenient points in the syllabus, I interject typical case studies. After I elaborate on the physical aspects of the problem, I challenge the students to relate the case study to the spiritual realm. Such questions as, "Knowing what you do about this patient and his disability, how do you think he is reacting to God?" Or, "To what portions of Scripture would you point this patient if he asked, 'Why did God let this happen to me?' or 'Why is God allowing my child to suffer like this?'"

Although this area borders on Christian philosophy and theology, it also encompasses practical

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issues that should be dealt with by allied health students.

Another method that can be helpful is the use of illustrations. This easy-to-implement method involves comparing or contrasting Biblical principles with the subject matter. For instance, in "Manual Muscle Testing" we discuss the relationship between the agonist and the antagonist muscles. Sometimes they balance each other and sometimes they work together, but other times one has to relax while the other contracts. This is a beautiful illustration of the rela-

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tionship between our own minds and the mind of Christ.

In another unit dealing with muscles, I discuss the principle that any loss of muscle strength or joint integrity makes walking more difficult and results in greater energy drain on the body. The spiritual parallel is this: If our spiritual lives are out of joint or are weak in some area because of sin, then our walk as Christians is more difficult and draining.

From there, I go on to illustrate the difference between strength and endurance in a muscle. A muscle may have the appearance of strength, but when given an endurance test, it fails. So it is with the

Christian. He may appear to be strong on the surface (knowledge, savvy) but fail the test if it is prolonged and he becomes discouraged. Therefore, we must be consistent in strengthening the spiritual life just as we would build endurance into a muscle—by repetition with a moderate amount of resistance (Make it work!).

Classroom Applications

The illustrations relating to the body are so numerous that endless examples could be cited. But how are these to be applied in the classroom? My method is to ask a lot of questions. Sometimes these questions come spontaneously; most of the time they require a lot of preparation, especially if I want to quote a verse with the illustration.

The above material offers a brief overview of some of my discoveries in integrating faith and learning in the college classroom. Most discoveries have come by trial and error; some through the help of my friends. I feel strongly that the Holy Spirit is the Prime Mover in this integration process, for He brings out that complete integration and seeks to achieve a perfect unity of creation. I am convinced that any Christian teacher who desires to integrate faith and learning can do so if he determines to make his teaching a ministry and seeks wisdom and help from the Holy Spirit.

I would like also to suggest open communication among college teachers, through journal articles and other means, in order to share specific, practical ways of integrating faith and learning. Surely there must be an abundance of knowledge and experience in the field that can be shared. Such communication could open exciting avenues for the integration of faith and learning that would benefit both teacher and student. □