

Character Training in the Christian School

Character training is one of the supreme goals of Christian education. God says, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). Children must be faithfully *trained*, line upon line, precept upon precept, day after day after day. It is not enough to merely present a list of character traits and definitions for students to memorize and then suppose that the job of character training has been accomplished.

Character training through biblical discipline

To train means to exercise, to discipline, to teach and form by practice. When a person is trained, it becomes part of his character to do what he has been taught. It is built into his spirit, and he has to go against his own spirit to do the wrong thing. Training builds habits that are right, and training must take place all through the day, not merely in a “character lesson” taught once a day or once a week.

Every subject area, every teaching method, every attitude, every action of student or teacher is a means of training character. Character training *is* taking place throughout the day, no matter what else is being taught. The sobering question each teacher must ask is, “Am I teaching right character or wrong character?” The teacher who maintains an orderly, structured classroom and expects the students to work hard to learn content, whether they *feel* like it or not, is teaching them to

1. respect authority
2. pay attention
3. obey willingly and immediately
4. apply themselves to the task at hand
5. learn rules and apply them
6. do their best
7. learn to love hard work
8. understand how things work together
9. finish the job
10. do right because it's right to do right
11. work hard to get the right answer
12. know that there is a right answer
13. love wisdom
14. choose things that are excellent

Character training through biblical discipline (continued)

15. develop *habits* of orderliness, carefulness, alertness, obedience, persistence, honesty, accomplishment, cooperation, faithfulness, accuracy, industry, perseverance, self-control, attentiveness, fairness, thoroughness, confidence, responsibility, decisiveness, effort, steadfastness, discipline, endurance, helpfulness, reasonableness, neatness, patience, judgment, loyalty, and respect.

There may be a place in the curriculum for teaching character traits in the abstract, and it is certainly important to give students a wealth of reading material in which good character traits are acted out, but it is not enough to simply *talk* about doing right. The child must be *expected* to do right, and even, so to speak, be forced to do right time and time again by means of godly discipline until the time comes that he has learned to choose the right on his own based on right teaching, common sense, and the Word of God.

Character training through traditional teaching methods and curriculums

A teacher who is faithfully teaching by the traditional methods of lecture, reading, memorization, drill, recitation, and oral and written examination will be doing much to build habits of good character. A school that emphasizes respect for authority trains the student to hearken wisely unto counsel (Proverbs 12:15) so that in time he may be a just authority for future generations. A curriculum that teaches the traditional subject matter of language (correct reading, writing, and speaking), content (Bible, history, literature, science, and mathematics), and biblical character training strengthens and enriches the child's character through every word, every thought, every example, as the child learns that all truth is God's truth and that for the Christian there is no difference between the secular and the sacred. (To see how character is taught in every subject throughout the day in the *A Beka Book* curriculums and texts, see chart beginning on p.4.)

Traditional teaching methods, Biblical discipline, excellence of content—all work together in the Christian school to produce students with outstanding character.

Character training through Bible teaching

The most important area of the curriculum for character development is, of course, actual study of the Bible itself. It cannot be stressed enough that Bible study is the main means of building character—not the study of some man's distillation of the Scriptures by means of notebooks, workbooks, or systematic theology—but a study of the Bible itself in the way that God wrote it. Such study should begin in the lower grades with the concrete stories of the Old and New Testaments. In high school it should gradually progress to the somewhat more abstract statements in the New Testament epistles and the wisdom books. Doctrines should also be taught at appropriate times.

The teacher should clearly teach the students that it is not enough to merely hear the Bible taught in school and in church, but that it is their privilege and responsibility to read the Scriptures for themselves that God may speak directly to them through His Word. Indeed, the principle of each person reading the Bible for himself is the core, the essence, the key to individual liberty, responsibility, and character.

Character training through the formation of habit

The final aim of Christian education is the production of individuals who will habitually choose to do right because it is right to do right. Christians have a standard of right and wrong, the Word of God, and we must train students to habitually choose to act upon the teachings of that standard.

This goal is accomplished by carefully and clearly laying down rules and principles, and through biblical discipline, getting the students to 1) act in accordance to these principles time after time and 2) learn how to carefully think about the principles and consciously choose to apply them. Finally, by force of habit, each student will on his own be able to deliberate and choose to do right because the faithful training of his teachers and parents has allowed him to choose the dictates of reason rather than the dictates of the passions. It is at this point that God, through Christ, enables the individual to serve the law of God rather than the law of sin (Romans 7:25). God does the work, but it is the responsibility of the parents and teachers to lay the foundation, and it is the responsibility of the individual to *choose* to do right.

Teaching character through reading

The following guidelines were used for the selection of the stories in the *A Beka Book* readers:

1. **They must be good literature.** Literature is a way to understand people better and broaden one's life. The best readers are not those written to order by two or three modern educators, but those that draw from the vast storehouse of the best literature of the ages. God says, "Whatsoever things are true...honest...just...pure...lovely...of good report...think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).
2. **They must develop character-building themes in a natural, nonpreachy way.** Children are developing their character now. They need to see in the lives of great men and in the lives of children like themselves the great virtues of Christian character lived out. We need to give them, through books as well as through our lives and words, ideals to reach for and examples to follow.
3. **They must be true biblical principles.** "The Bible spells out precepts, the teaching of God's plan for man. It also tells us about real people—their faith, their sins, their courage, their disbelief—and we see the fruit of each in what follows in their lives. Good books fulfill our human need for adventure and wider experience, but they also provide support for the kind of character development of which the Scriptures teach!" —Gladys Hunt, *Honey for a Child's Heart*

Teaching character throughout the school day

Traditional Christian textbooks and traditional Christian teaching methods work together as one important means of building traditional Christian character traits. The teacher who faithfully teaches the traditional subjects in an orderly, structured way will be training students in the following character-building habits and attitudes.

Teaching character throughout the school day (continued)

Subject	Character is—
<p>Phonics</p> <p>“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.” —<i>Isaiah 28:10</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening carefully. • obeying willingly. • respecting authority. • applying myself. • developing habits of thinking, analyzing, and organizing. • building a background for confident reading. • learning to memorize and apply important facts and rules. • learning to wait my turn, help others, listen to my classmates, recite when called upon, speak so others can hear and understand me, and cooperate with other people in a kind, orderly way.
<p>Reading and Literature</p> <p>“Thy words were found, and I did eat them: and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts.” —<i>Jeremiah 15:16</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doing my best. • building a foundation for independent learning. • learning to read the Bible on my own. • applying myself to the task at hand so I can comprehend what I read. • learning about great people who did right. • learning about people like me who did right. • learning to know and base my life upon eternal values. • forgetting myself and being wrapped up in the lives of others. • learning to understand, love, and appreciate other people. • rejoicing in the richest expressions of human language. • appreciating excellence. • learning important guidelines for choosing future reading material. • patterning my life after those who show qualities of loyalty, honesty, dignity, love, and humility. • focusing my mind on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Philippians 4:8). • forming habits of searching diligently for the truth on a matter.
<p>Penmanship</p> <p>“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” —<i>Ecclesiastes 9:10</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working slowly and carefully and keeping my pencil busy. • having a standard to follow and working diligently to meet it. • being thoughtful enough of others to write to them in a script that can be read quickly and with ease. • learning to be careful, orderly, neat, clean, responsible, thorough, exacting, and persistent.

Subject	Character is—
<p>Grammar, Spelling, Vocabulary, and Composition</p> <p>“How forcible are right words!” —<i>Job 6:25</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning rules and following them. • learning that there is a right way to do things. • doing right because it is right to do right. • seeing patterns and working analytically. • learning how to use words effectively to express God’s love to others. • seeing the structure and orderliness of my language and learning to do things according to pattern. • developing the ability to apply my knowledge of grammatical structure to my own thoughts and words. • developing a body of thought in an intelligent and orderly manner. • evaluating what I read, hear, and observe. • communicating my beliefs clearly, forcefully, and persuasively. • working up to the standards set by my instructor at the pace established by my instructor.
<p>Mathematics</p> <p>“Let all things be done decently and in order.” —<i>I Corinthians 14:40</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paying attention. • doing my best. • learning to love hard work. • learning to be fast and accurate in my thinking. • seeing how things work together. • being prepared. • finishing the job. • working at the pace set by my teacher. • doing right because it’s right to do right. • learning to believe in absolutes ($2 + 2$ always equals 4). • participating in healthy competition. • working hard to get the right answer. • knowing that there is a right answer. • learning to see the addition and multiplication tables as part of the truth and order that God has built into reality. • studying one aspect of the order of the real world, and indirectly learning more about the God Who created the world I live in. • establishing the extremely important skill of learning things by rote.

Mathematics (continued)

Subject	Character is—
Mathematics <i>(continued)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning to go from the concrete to the abstract, from the particular to the general, from content to concept. • learning to be thorough, orderly, careful, alert, obedient, persistent, cooperative, and honest. • learning to see relationships between one truth and another. • learning to be precise and exact in my thinking. • learning to apply mathematics skillfully in order to function in my daily life. • learning to master a received body of knowledge and apply it as one way to obey the command of Genesis 1:28.
Science “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.” <i>—Proverbs 25:2</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeing the orderliness and reasonableness of God’s universe. • using the mind that God has given me to find out about the physical universe. • following God’s command to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it (Genesis 1:28). • realizing that I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). • learning how to classify, analyze, and quantify. • learning to work in a systematic way.
History and Geography “The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord’s, but the earth hath he given to the children of men.” <i>—Psalm 115:16</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowing that there is a difference between right and wrong (absolutes), and learning to choose the right. • using my reading abilities to learn new material. • using my mind to concentrate on the work before me and to select, analyze, memorize, review, and reorganize material. • knowing that there is an objective meaning to the events of history. • knowing that man’s history began with God’s creation of Adam and Eve. • seeing that God directs or permits all things. • seeing the centrality of Jesus Christ in history. • learning to love other people and treat them with dignity. • learning to love freedom under God. • learning the basis of individual freedom and responsibility. • learning to love my country and obey its laws. • understanding that history is the story of what man has done with the time God has given him and that the Bible is the story of what God has done in history. • understanding that geography is the description of the earth in relation to God’s purpose for creating it: man’s habitation and dominion.