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"Choosing Wisdom"

As a first-generation college student and a follower of Jesus, one may find irony in a childhood that lacked great emphasis on higher education and faith in general. However, accepting Christ and a love for academics, despite the absence of these influences, marked one's identity from an early age. Furthermore, research shows that one can achieve educational success through self-determination, instructor support and autonomy, extracurricular involvement, and faith in God. Accordingly, this paper will discuss the various elements that define an "education" and what influences a person's identity academically, socially, and spiritually.

Reflecting on preschool and primary grades, "education" fundamentally began at home and followed in the classroom. In that order, Yi confirms autonomy, self-esteem, logic, and deductive reasoning develop from interactions with family, peers, and teachers (26). Moreover, as an only child, socialization proved essential to learning as the playground and ballet became an individual's classroom. One's identity forms early to find a place academically and among peers; it feels meaningful, fun, and satisfying to get good grades and participate. Lease and colleagues confirm that amiable, well-liked children exhibit "prosocial assertion and high academic performance" among those of the same age (95). Finally, faith was introduced with a father of the home involved in local politics and the development of area infrastructure, though not emphasized. Sporadic attendance at the church provided some spiritual "education," a sense of God, and community on Sundays. As a result, "education" in the formative years was the

culmination of family and public school dynamics as building blocks, with some belief that God provided and protected them.

Throughout middle school, "education" adopted a different meaning. Due to redistricting in the area, a shift occurred to attend the private magnet school across town. Naturally, one identifies strongly with one's rooted academic surroundings and peers from childhood, which often helps one perform well as one advances. However, this abrupt change presented social challenges throughout the first year. Suddenly, struggling with peer pressure, intimidation, and poor self-esteem, even the best students can flounder. Teachers, however, can provide far more training than their stated curriculum, and one can receive renewed purpose with help from a truly invested instructor.

For example, an instructor's concerted efforts in mapping an academic future through time, love, and encouragement redirected one's "education" identity positively and profoundly. Wang and Holcombe of Harvard University agree that through teacher support, emotional engagement, real connectedness, and promoting mastery goals, students can experience their "education" with fulfillment, good grades, and an eventual strong personal and school identity (652). In addition, because this instructor invested in an individual's passion for writing and the humanities, one began to participate more fully with their peers and community due to a renewed identity at school, which also led to attending a new church nearby. Regular attendance is where one's relationship with Christ begins.

High school proved a pivotal identity change, as returning to the public school and grade school peers brought challenges. Considered "elitist" after returning from the private magnet middle school, some were not overly accepting, especially of one's faith in God. Readjusting was stressful, and a desire to fit in and prove oneself often took hold. However, pouring into

advanced placement and honors courses, team sports (track, softball, and volleyball), cheerleading, chorus, and debate were fulfilling and beneficial. Throughout high school, these activities continued to build a robust academic career, self-esteem, life skills, and strong connections with peers and teachers.

To that end, high school can be a time of great confusion for many teens; oneself included; however, self-determination and continued support from instructors and coaches provided stability and a positive identity. Deci and Ryan's research indicates that one's ability to self-motivate inside and outside academics comes from a "self-determination" theory (188). This theory bases itself on one's perception of how psychologically satisfying an activity or subject will be in conjunction with the instructor involved. For example, students with high competence and performance showed advanced emotional intelligence and had positive and lasting teacher-student relationships when given autonomy or included in the overall process (Deci and Ryan 189). Finally, advanced placement courses prepare a person to enter college. Sports, clubs, and volunteerism prepare one with "developmental academics," a social "education"; however, despite these educational successes that bring worldly fulfillment, it is a belief that one cannot identify fully without education in the wisdom of Christ. One can have social and educational success but feel something is missing within their spirit.

College matriculation brought full-time study at the local state university and early marriage at 19. Although one qualifies for more prestigious and challenging institutions, economics often prevents top choices. Moreover, with a full-time paralegal job in the city during the day and full-time college studies at night, "education" within being a working, married college student at a very young age proved difficult. Nevertheless, were it not for two critical connections, one instructor during tenure at the state university and a colleague at the law firm, a

goal realized as an attorney and a recommitment to Christ would not have been possible. In addition, through regular attendance at church and strong mentors in life, a person can identify with academic strengths from God's viewpoint instead of from man's perspective. Wood and Hilton support this notion, suggesting that students who pray regularly and profess a relationship with God are high academic achievers and exhibit increased resilience, purpose, and confidence (9).

Coupled with a growing relationship in Christ, a new Godly marriage, and starting a family, an individual's "education" then applies life's challenges within God's Word and dynamics within your job. Of course, a person's initial traits related to education remain (motivation, resilience, self-esteem); however, God prepares us through the foundations and people woven into our lives. Derailed by five back-to-back, life-threatening health challenges that lasted for two decades, legal "education" took a backseat. Health was now a new "education" field: IVs, chemotherapy, radiation, immune response; the list is long. One's identity then shifts from a student to a graduate to a professional to a working mother to a patient - where does identity lie? Fifty-two years of "education" has taught a person that Christ-followers show a consistent relationship between "possessing an internal locus of control and performing well in school" (Jeynes 40). If we are fortunate enough to receive the message of the Good News of Christ, we have a choice to educate ourselves in wisdom.

Therefore, one can attest that faith and spirituality fall squarely under the "education" umbrella. Whether directed by God's influence or not, a person will eventually receive spiritual instruction. However, identifying ourselves first as Christians, then being wise, seeking the truth, and being academically sound, is challenging when the world desires to alter a person's identity to match its view.

A poignant example from the Bible is King Solomon, recorded as the wisest man to live, albeit considered among the most foolish. However, his position as a ruler of the Jewish people afforded him great power, as did his "education," which yielded him eloquence in prose for the Kingdom of God. In particular, within Solomon's Book of Proverbs lies a key verse on Christian influence and education: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (*The Bible*, English Standard Version, Prov. 22:6). Many parents stand on this verse as a promise from God that Christian influence or "education," guarantees children will remain in their faith as an adult or rely on it as comfort from guilt feelings a prodigal of the faith brings. However, the original Hebrew translation and context tell us this was not God's intent through Solomon. For example, the "'Hebrew' word for training or 'education' (*chinmich*), [translates to] 'in the way he should go,' lit. 'according to his way' (Owens 146; emphasis added). Hebrew grammar permits either of these interpretations. For verse context, most young men of the time followed their father's trade, and any special training would begin early in life. It became necessary to prepare them in their formative years to be productive adults.

Further, "'train' (Heb. *hanak*) means 'to dedicate' or 'give over for guidance'; and 'in the way he should go' is literally 'according to his way' to mean 'according to his own personality, temperament, responses, or stages in life'" (*Dr. Constable's Notes on Proverbs* 2006). Therefore, interpreting the proverb as a spiritual guarantee takes away an individual's freedom to choose, which is inherent in the gift given to us by God. Giving a child "education" and training toward wisdom and proper living within any context is the duty of any caregiver. Therefore, it is the child's duty upon coming of age to choose a relationship with the person of Christ, living by faith and God's wisdom or one's self-guiding will. Finally, the definition of a proverb can solidify this understanding best. Owens and Constable state, "A proverb is a literary device whereby a general

truth is brought to bear on a specific situation" (953). The difference, therefore, lies in educating to be wise and well-equipped to choose and educating as a force of will.

Finally, as an adult learner, academics go through a biblical worldview. A person's resilience, "grit," determination, and identity can change over time and circumstance as their "classroom" of life pivots. Thus, a person's identity changes through the different elements of education through self-determination, instructor support through autonomy, and extracurricular involvement. Finally, by defining "education" and what influences a person's identity academically, socially, and, most importantly, spiritually, we can conclude that it is not merely the classroom that equates to learning.

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