

Keynote Topics for schools, churches, faculty, parents, and students

Daily Bread

Everyone ate bread. In ancient and medieval times, bread drove the economies of countries. Soil, seed, harvest, milling, baking, trade—life was marked by the season and cycle of grain. But bread also bore a central meaning in the faith of many—the bread of life. Jesus’s words held the greatest significance in the prayer he taught his disciples. As teachers and students, asking God for his daily bread for us is such a simple yet profound practice that enables us to give every part, every care, of our day to Him. This same simplicity is much like how God supplies our daily bread as we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” As teachers, what would change if we saw our callings and needs in this simple way? What would change if we taught our students to pray the same?

On Teaching Tragedy in Tragic Times

In life or literature, tragedy is not so simple. The word itself can be used in many ways. In light of a spiritual world view, Dante Alighieri asserted that his trilogy was comic because he knew the reality of eternity in spite of a life of suffering. A subject was considered tragic, however, when the man depicted had lived a life with some measure of pleasure but without hope of eternity with God.

But that does not mean we can’t learn from the tragic worldview. Tragic heroes may appear flat in Greek tragedies, but their characters show the consequence of choice. In *Poetics* Aristotle writes “decent men ought not to be shown changing from good to bad fortune since this is neither frightening nor pitiable...” This context among other elements in *Poetics* is often missed. Let’s examine what Aristotle really said about the nature of tragedy so we too can ask along with Dante and the Greeks, “What is our purpose? What is our human response?” And ultimately, how do I teach this?

The Roots of Classical Christian Education

Partial truth is a weed, and those weeds are often sown throughout the fields of classical Christian education. We know to pursue knowledge to nourish virtue, for what benefit is our knowledge if we don’t know how to live? Oftentimes this idea is meshed with that of happiness. Seneca, for example, believed the virtuous life could be attained and that it could produce happiness as its fruit. His account of liberal learning is highly prized by classical educators, but could his concepts be weeds of partial truth? At what point could it lead us astray? This talk considers Augustine’s definition of happiness while contrasting Stoic philosophy in Seneca’s writings with the life and words of Christ.

Why Do You Think You're Here? Learning to Learn

I have heard it said that to talk or write about education is to reflect on one's own. According to Mark Twain, education consists mainly in what we have unlearned. I know for me and my family, the journey of classical education has involved a lot of unlearning. Or maybe you could call it learning to learn again. This talk provides a foundational definition of CCE using the seven liberal arts. Through nourishing the soul on the good, the true, and the beautiful, in Christ the student is better able to know God. These are things we need to know for living life—educating all of man, not just his mind.

Teaching Gems from C.S. Lewis

C.S. Lewis's works are woven with bits of anecdotes and commentary on the teaching life, many times through the eyes of a student. Through his experiences, Lewis speaks of several processes: unlearning, irrigating, knowing less, stirring the imagination, and humbling ourselves as teachers. Through an inspiring array of his fiction and nonfiction, Lewis's gentle manner brings encouragement to all of us in our teaching journey.

War and Imagination

What if our imagination was stunted, having never really grown? What stressors inhibit creativity in the young? What about the old and all of us in between? War, or perceived war, affects our imagination. I share the war-time story of Jack and Warnie Lewis and the London evacuees at the Kilns. If the brothers told a story on a long walk or at bedtime, the girls hardly knew what to do other than listen. Their imaginations had suffered, but they were not dead. Lewis's theory about limited imagination in wartime proves true. The imagination can shut down to protect itself from grief, from imagining too vividly what happened. It will try to prevent itself from reliving trauma. The mind and spirit protect themselves, but there are proven ways to help our children and our students. Dr. Karyn Purvis says that we help trauma victims by rewriting their brains with new safe experiences. Some psychologists call this imprinting. Some call it bonding. But all of it relates to resurrecting the imagination.

Work Saints and Work Martyrs: How Do We Understand The Work We Do?

The ideal that motivates many Americans to work to the point of exhaustion is the promise that we will live a good life: not just a life of material comfort, but a life of social dignity, moral character, and spiritual purpose. But does this idea hold true in the world of Christian education? How do we balance how we teach and how much we do with the reality and culture of the work system? Having a biblical understanding of vocation, relationship, and wisdom can strengthen our perspective and rescue us from the fires of burnout. This talk considers ideas from Jonathan Malesic, Mortimer Adler, Dorothy Sayers, Amy Wrzesniewski, Os Guinness, and Solomon.

Figs and Vines

Those who tend sycamore-fig trees like the prophet Amos have a humble vocation. He says, “I’m no prophet. I’m a common herdsman, a sheep breeder. I pick sycamore figs.” In our humble positions as learners, teachers, and administrators, we are also fig-pickers, perhaps even fig-piercers, if we break through the tough skin to allow maturity to come in our students. We don’t need a prophet label or wealth or great title to do our work well, to hear from God and obey Him in our everyday walk. But we do need to see our work as those who tend and prune because we are first tended and pruned. In John 15 it is because we remain in the vine that Christ calls us to love each other as He has loved us. In the same breath, Christ bids us to bear fruit that remains, fruit that regenerates much like the sycamore-fig.

Individual Workshop Topics

ALL LEVELS K-12

Teaching Expression: Learning To Read Aloud

Reading aloud well can bring beauty to the reader and their audience. Spoken words can bring life to the written word on a page. Because words reach our classes through our voice and our students’ voices, a disciplined voice and ear are vital to good reading in every subject. Using cues from what we read, this highly interactive workshop will review pitch, inflection, monotone, word color, quality, and timbre. We will practice techniques of vocal and physical projection using stanzas from popular poems, providing concrete training for teachers looking to improve their own reading voices and their students'. K-12

Tales within Tales: Nested Stories as Teaching Tools

G.K. Chesterton believed stories are needed because they awaken us, even startle us, when our lives feel too familiar. But nested storytelling is not the same as spinning a tale from our own lives. It is sharing a known story within another one for the benefit of understanding, to lead our students towards realization. My hope is that whether impromptu or prepared, we would learn to nest stories in what we study now, whether it is a part of a story or the whole. We will explore examples of nested storytelling in classic literature, analyzing how they work, then practice applying parables, fables, and fairy tales to our own curriculum. K-12

High and Low Brows: A Little Known Lewis Essay

In “Learning in Wartime”, Lewis writes, “If you attempted to suspend . . . your whole intellectual and aesthetic activity, you would only succeed in substituting a worse cultural life for a better. You are not, in fact, going to read nothing. . . . If you don’t read good books, you will read bad ones.” What makes a book good or bad? Is that a fair distinction? How do we define these labels and determine what is worth reading? In his 1939 essay “High and Low Brows,” C.S. Lewis explores all the ways we talk about books, weighing many categories

and definitions. This workshop is an interactive book club. No advanced reading required. Copies provided. K-12

Screwtape Proposes A Toast: A Glimpse into Lewis's View of Education

"Screwtape Proposes a Toast" is a veil of fiction that satirizes the American and British education systems in the 1950s. It also reveals Lewis's philosophy of education. In this workshop we will read several pages of Lewis's as it appears in the *Saturday Evening Post* as we identify his education ideas as well as our own. This workshop is an interactive book club. No advanced reading required. K-12

**Companion workshop: Clarifying Your Personal Philosophy of Education

Classroom Missionaries: Spreading the Word about CCE through Our Students

Our students can be our greatest ambassadors, so how do we explain classical Christian education to them? Do we? Maybe we hope CCE will come up naturally in class. Maybe we hope our students absorb the lingo in the day-to-day. I know I want to be more than hopeful. This workshop explores using scripture alongside historical and contemporary biographies to help our students better understand and explain classical education. K-12

How Not To Teach Poetry

I've frustrated my own students who were positive that teachers knew the secret formula to dissect meaning. I began teaching in public high school the way I had been taught. Read a poem and pull it apart. Textbook questions were all about parts and themes and which theme applied to their lives. Done. Homework assigned. My students did it or they didn't. No one cared if they understood the poem. None of us talked about whether we enjoyed reading it. Now I wonder if we were really reading. I'm thinking we were the unliterary C.S. Lewis refers to. Using Lewis's *An Experiment on Criticism* (1961), this talk provides practical tips for leading students in to poetry through first receiving the poem, focusing on fewer parts, and writing imitations. 6-12

Five Ways To Lead A Discussion: The Seven Laws' Blend

John Milton Gregory describes discussion as "waking the questioning spirit," so how are we doing in our classrooms? Are we arousing and maintaining interest? Are we letting the known explain the unknown and deepening the thought process? Are we leading young minds to truth? From teacher-led review and Socratic dialogue to student-led discussion, this workshop explores five techniques to enhance and supplement our everyday routines. 6-12

Teaching Grammar in Context: The Beauty of the Five-Minute Lesson

It's all in the philosophy. When we isolate grammar, we pull it from its natural context, its relationship to the words a student writes. By fastening grammar instruction to writing and immediate need, Constance Weaver's *Teaching Grammar in Context* (1996) broke ground by smashing the routine use of stand-alone grammar exercises. She advocated short bites,

immediate application, and no books. At two to three times a week, this strategy is effective and flexible for any subject at almost any grade level that requires writing. Any subject teacher can adapt grammar review and new material by noting patterns with the first writing assignment of the year. Are students missing how to use possessives or homonyms? Are commas everywhere but where they need to be? The teacher's evolving review list is not based on a textbook but what the students need now. Grammar does not need to be a chore. Join me as we learn the art of the mini-lesson and help our students consistently apply it in their own writing whatever the subject.