

## Southland Connect October 2009

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you! As I write this I am in India having the wonderful privilege of assisting with teacher training for the Good Shepherd schools. I will pass on more about this adventure later on, but in the meantime, please continue to pray for the thousands of students who are in these schools that are designed to assist introduce them to freedom in Jesus – and in India, when we talk about freedom in Jesus, it is a spiritual freedom that flows into a social release from oppression.

In this Southland Connect, there are two main sections:

1. A response about making room for Biblical Studies type subjects in Senior School – and thanks to Lynnette Hester who is currently ministering in Thailand who took the time to respond to our last Southland Connect where this question was floated; and
2. A reflection from a current student – this is an extract from a student newsletter at St Philip's Christian College Cessnock (yes, I am on their mailing list – and enjoy it consistently!). Ally is a year 9 student who agreed to let me publish her thoughts for our mutual encouragement (please be free to send in any encouraging stories or student thoughts from your place).

Stay in touch – and please continue to pray also for our Grad Dip Ed / M Teach application. DET have indicated they will proceed to approve it, and we are now finalizing things with the NSW Institute of Teachers.

### Part 1 – The Question and a Suggested Response...

*The Question that was put: How do we maintain our Christian focus and spend time on Biblical Studies in the Senior School, when there are so many demands academically on both staff and students?*

Christian schools would generally have it as their goal that students grow in their knowledge of the God through Jesus and the guidance of His Spirit, and the knowledge of His Word. They would want students to know learn to use the Scriptures as their foundation for life. They would seek that their students know God as Lord and Saviour and learn to depend on the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth as they know, understand and meditate on God's Word.

The problem is that in the day to day life of the school this stated priority is actually not always the priority we intend. There are several intentional decisions that have to be made to bring this about more fully.

1. Staffing: If it is true that the teaching of the Bible is the most important part of school life, then this should guide the process of staff employment and allocation. School need to employ / use the teachers gifted in sharing God's Word with the students and make this a financial priority.

A strong devotional life needs to be maintained at staff level. Professional development, which is inspirational in terms of continuously motivating all teachers to be disciplers and to teach with strength from a Biblical world view, needs to be used to support and encourage teachers in their ongoing and deepening discipleship of students.

2. Curriculum. Is it time, with the number of great Christian schools we have, to develop an accredited course in Bible that gives the student academic credit at senior school level? With the gifts and experience the Lord has given us, this should be a challenge that is taken up.

Until that time, schools can make it a requirement of their own school graduation that students have studied a course in Bible and fulfilled a certain number of hours in 'community service' / ministry. Our suggestion is that you consider how this can happen and work toward it. The processes used to develop the program options will be important as a staff development opportunity.

The other area of curriculum is, of course, what is already prescribed for us to teach. There are boundless opportunities for teaching God's Word deeply as we engage in the various areas of His kingdom that form our curriculum. Teachers need to prayerfully use God's Word as the foundation of senior school studies. Yes, we fulfil the requirements of the state curriculum but we often have more freedom and opportunity than we take. Ongoing teacher professional development from a Christian perspective needs to be undertaken in subject specific areas. God has given the Christian school movement many wise and able teachers who can and do share their insights in these areas with others. Leaders need to provide both the finance and the time for this to happen on a regular basis, so that all teachers in Christian schools are faithful in this area.

3. Time Demands. Yes, senior school has high demands on time academically. It is often the case, however, that the top students still manage to be involved in a range of other activities.

One thing that schools need to do is to prioritise 'extra' time. There are always a number of extra-curricular activities, outings etc. Some are educational, some are cultural, some are sporting, some are spiritual. Too often the weighting of this time happens by default. That is, it is often driven by the enthusiasm of specific teachers and sometimes parents and students.

The alternative is to take more time to think and plan about the appropriate balance for you as a Christian school in terms of the spiritual, intellectual, physical and social spheres of life.

Again the school needs to make intentional priorities for this time and then balance it well. Weightings for each domain should be made for the time given in each of these areas. These weightings then determine which activities are approved so that a balance of spiritual, academic, cultural and sporting activities are offered to the students.

4. Excellence. One common error that schools make in the rush to plan and do something is that the quality of the experience is not as good as it could be. This is particularly important when there is not much time to spend in the delivery of the course.

If we believe that the teaching of God's Word is so important in preparation for life, then what we offer needs to be better than a good program – it needs to be a great program. We therefore need to consider how seriously we consider all of the points above, including our own level of Biblical understanding as leaders.

## Part 2 – A Year 9 Reflection...

### Is your name a good name?

*'A good name is more desirable than great riches' Proverbs 22:1*

There's a difference between wanting to please others and making sure you have a good reputation. God tells us to ensure that we have the respect of others in the way we live our life. We will gain much more from leading a life that gets you a good reputation than living a life not caring about anything, constantly trying to get to bigger and better things. When someone hears your name, you don't want them to automatically think about all the bad things you've done. You want them to think good, godly thoughts about you. Make sure your name is a good name!

In Thessalonians 4:11-12, it says, 'Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anyone.' This verse was basically my theme verse for one particular season of my life, not too long ago. When I was struggling with leading a life that was focused on God, this verse really woke me up. We need to be always thinking about what God would want us to do. If you do that, then in the end, your life *will* win the respect of outsiders.

I have often wondered, when I leave this world, what will my legacy be? I don't know. But I know that if I live according to God's Word, be fully focused on Him and trust Him with everything, then I know that my legacy will be a good one. Everybody wants to be known for something that they have done well. How others view you will determine that legacy. Don't let it be a bad one; instead, make sure you are

leading a life that others will respect, the one that was intended by God for you to live, and one that is completely God-focused.

*Ally Burston, Year 9 SPCC Cessnock*

### Some More Questions...

1. Do you want to add anything to Lynette's response above?
2. What do you think about her comment in section 2 about the need to for an accredited Bible course for our senior schools? *A further question from SJF – perhaps we at Southland may need to explore this more deeply – for example, a certificate II or III course could be written by Southland with input from our Connect friends to be provided for our Christian schools?* Please email us on your thoughts about this...

May God's grace sustain you as you move into the end of year busy-ness and planning for next year. In this, may you be given the discernment between what is important and what is urgent.

Shalom,

Stephen

PS – Morling College is having an Open Night this Thursday – the information is below...



**OPEN NIGHT**  
Thursday, 5th November 2009  
6.30-8.30pm

Introductory Presentation at 6.45pm

Morling College, the Baptist Bible & Theological College of NSW & ACT  
120 Herring Rd, Macquarie Park E: [events@morling.edu.au](mailto:events@morling.edu.au)  
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