



GENEVA SCHOOL OF BOERNE

PHILOSOPHY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Summary Statement

Every Christian is called by God to be a mature follower or disciple of Jesus Christ (*Eph. 4:11-16*). Geneva School of Boerne has determined that discipleship is a critical component of the education each student receives.¹ The school disciplines by teaching, mentoring, encouraging and assisting students. A necessary component of discipleship is discipline (*Heb. 12:5-11*). Discipline is conducted at Geneva with an eye toward developing disciples of Jesus Christ. The biblical authority for making disciples rests with parents who are admonished to teach diligently God's word to their children (*Deut. 6:4-9*) and churches who are commanded to make disciples of all nations (*Matt. 28:18-20*). Geneva is neither the family nor the church and as such does not possess the parental or ministerial authority vested in those institutions. Geneva does, however, have an obligation, rooted in the authority delegated to it by parents, to come alongside them and the church to help disciple students who will leave this place as more mature followers of Jesus Christ. During the school day, faculty and staff stand *in loco parentis* (Latin for "in the place of a parent"), temporarily taking the role of the student's parent. This delegated authority is the basis for the partnership between the school and the home; a partnership that keeps responsibility for the student's upbringing with the parent. Therefore, successful resolution to behavioral problems requires school and parental cooperation. For the school personnel to stand *in loco parentis*, the school and the home must be in agreement regarding values, goals and desires for the child. When the school and the home do not agree, the relationship between the two is strained and the child misses out on important discipleship opportunities and is ultimately not well served. The purpose of this document is to explain Geneva's Philosophy of Discipleship and to give practical suggestions as to how parents and the school can cooperate to help students grow in Christian maturity. These practical suggestions are found at the end of the document.

What is Discipleship?

A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ and discipleship is the process whereby one learns to follow Christ. How does one know they are following Christ? Are there tangible evidences of discipleship? The Apostle Peter answers these questions in 2 Peter 1:5-11:

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

According to the apostle Peter, discipleship requires adding to one's faith certain virtues that are consistent with the new life one has received in Jesus Christ. Geneva seeks to disciple students in a number of ways:

¹Geneva's *Portrait of a Graduate* states, "A Geneva graduate is a disciple of Jesus Christ..."

- Teaching students the Word of God (*Matt. 28:18-20*)
- Giving students opportunities to serve (*James 2:14-17*)
- Mentoring students and giving them an example of godliness to follow (*Phil. 3:17*)
- Encouraging students to live lives of integrity, truth, humility and love (*Eph. 4:1-3*)
- Supporting students as they face demanding, adult-like situations in competitions and performances (*I Cor. 9:24-26*)

Discipleship is hard work and an essential, non-negotiable component of discipleship is discipline. Discipline is the process of training toward obedience and righteousness. Discipline is motivated by love and focuses on training the heart to follow Jesus, turn from sin, and embody the virtues of godliness. Geneva's discipleship-oriented discipline aims for students to become self-disciplined. Self-discipline is a habit that is acquired through the joy and peace that comes to children when loving and wise authority figures train them to live obediently. Parents do this for their children just as God does it for His (*Heb. 12:7b-11*). While discipline is often painful, the goal of all discipline is the same: growing in maturity and holiness.

The apostle Peter is clear that there are certain external behaviors which must accompany real discipleship, but outward conformity is not enough. Outward conformity must be the result of a heart that has been transformed by grace. As it relates to discipline and discipleship, too great a focus on behavior to the neglect of the heart may lead the student to believe that the Christian life is simply one of outward conformity to a set of rules. Teachers provide a safe and predictable classroom environment. Instruction is ineffective when order is lacking. Therefore, classroom discipline is an absolute necessity. But classroom discipline, built on rules and conformity, cannot completely address underlying heart issues that contribute to problematic behaviors. Training the heart takes time and sustained focus. In the classroom, teachers cannot always give the time and focus necessary while also teaching history, math, Latin, etc.

Therefore, it is essential that parents address the heart issues at home. Enrolling children in Geneva does not release parents from this responsibility. The school exists to assist parents in their life-long duty of instruction. Parenting requires time-consuming, daily, diligent and caring interaction that results in a lasting influence.

Understanding and Applying *In Loco Parentis*

Scripture teaches us that parents have the responsibility of educating their children:

Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. – Deuteronomy 6:4-7

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. – Ephesians 6:4

The school does not have such a biblical mandate. Instead, the school derives its authority from the parent. During the school day, the faculty and staff stand *in loco parentis*. For school personnel to fulfill the role of working *in loco parentis*, there must be shared desires and goals between the school and the home. While there

cannot be a perfect fit between every family and the school (i.e., the school works *in loco parentis* with an established set of desires and goals, not with each individual family's desires and goals), there must be a core set of desires and goals about which all are in agreement. These are expressed in the school's admissions materials and discussed in the parent interview.

A healthy relationship between the school and the home begins with a foundation built on shared goals and desires. There also needs to be a firm commitment between the school and the home whereby each commits to do their part while graciously allowing the other to fulfill their own obligations. Biblically, this kind of relationship is called a covenant. In Scripture, covenants are solemn, unbreakable vows between two or more parties which requires a level of commitment that is far greater than a simple promise. To illustrate, one makes a covenant with their spouse but not with their date to the prom. This does not mean that the covenant tie between the school and the home cannot be severed, but it does mean that this relationship requires real commitment and cooperation by both parties. Given that the work entails educating minds and nurturing souls, a serious commitment to one another is essential.

Geneva commits to honor parental responsibility by not usurping a parent's authority. A school can be guilty of this offense in a number of ways. For example, school personnel administering corporal punishment is a usurpation of parental authority. So too is having an overly strict attendance policy. While regular attendance is a must for a child to be successfully educated, it would be an overreach of authority for the school to punish a student because the parents chose to take the student away for a few days. Along with not usurping parental authority, Geneva also commits to keeping parents informed as to school policies, standards, goals, etc., and engaging with parents when discipline occurs (or needs to occur) so parents can take the appropriate steps.

In turn, parents commit to take seriously the biblical admonition placed upon them to train up their child in the Lord as well as appreciating and graciously accepting the rules put in place at Geneva. This is not blind faith in the school. If the school is in error, this covenant relationship requires parents to address the issue in an appropriate and biblical way. At times, this means overlooking the failing of another (*Prov. 19:11*). Other times, it means going to the appropriate individual while diligently avoiding gossip and divisiveness (*Matt. 18:15*).

Toward Discipleship: What are the Aims of Discipleship-Oriented Discipline?

Some schools adopt a non-biblical approach that views education as a commodity. In such schools, discipline is nothing more than a tool for maintaining order, often relying on punitive measures or behavior modification techniques. Attempts at discipleship are negated as a result of a dependence on rules and an emphasis on outward conformity. Schools gravitate to these as they are immediate and assessable. However, rules and conformity applied without heart acceptance can produce an empty rigidity. Under such systems, heart issues do not go away. Instead, they have a tendency to express themselves in other, often more insidious, ways.

A discipleship-oriented approach considers difficult events (relationship problems, failures in the classroom, defeat in competition, etc.) as essential for spiritual growth and maturity. This approach provides a process for dealing with heart issues. It does so with the expectation that through partnership with parents, the matter will receive necessary attention. This approach does not expect perfection. Children are given freedom to interact with one another, make choices and face the consequences for those that are poor. They are properly supervised but not oppressively so. Geneva is not a good fit for students who need a heightened level of supervision because of their behavior. To increase the level of supervision to meet the

needs of these students is to manage their behavior while depriving those who don't need it opportunities for growth.

At Geneva, discipleship-oriented discipline:

1. Addresses outward behavior with the goal of transforming the heart. Children require correction when they have sinned. While some don't like talking about sin, Christians must do so if discipleship is the goal. The remedy for sin is a heart changed by Jesus Christ. Since discipleship-oriented discipline is aimed at changing hearts, students need to acknowledge that their bad behavior is a consequence of a sinful heart. Once sin is acknowledged, then actions can be taken to address the underlying heart issues.
2. Values biblical confession and repentance. The condition of one's heart can often be gauged by contrition and desire to repent. Punishment at Geneva isn't unduly punitive or absolute. Rather, it takes into account how the student's heart is being moved toward discipleship.
3. Seeks to restore relationships. Too often, issues are allowed to fester and go unresolved. At Geneva, we seek to live in fellowship with one another and discipleship-oriented discipline allows this to happen by helping to restore people to one another.

With discipleship as the goal, the direction discipline takes is dependent, to a certain degree, on whether or not the student and parents are committed to the student growing in Christ, repenting of the sin committed, and seeking to restore the relationship with those hurt by their sin. Discipleship-oriented discipline does not eliminate the consequences of sin. Students may still experience detention, suspension, loss of extra-curricular privileges, etc. as a consequence for their actions. Eliminating consequences is not the goal of discipleship-oriented discipline. Christian maturity is the goal.

It is normal for parents to feel embarrassment, disappointment and exasperation with their child's misbehavior. However, if viewed properly and handled correctly, an offense and subsequent disciplinary action can become an important point of growth for the child. When the school and the home are united in their efforts to help the child grow in maturity, the behavior and underlying condition are likely to be corrected and the partnership between the school and the home strengthened.

Practical Suggestions for Parents

Here are a few suggestions related to the school's Philosophy of Discipleship:

1. Re-examine your goals and desires for your child. Are they biblical? While it is natural to want your child to be happy, successful, popular, smart, etc. (that is, to have it all), at what price are you pursuing these on behalf of your child? If your desires and goals do not line up with the school's, then discuss with the school administration.
2. Understand and embrace the educational mission of the school. *In loco parentis* requires that you delegate authority to Geneva so it is essential that you understand and embrace how Geneva is going to exercise that authority. Read the Geneva handbooks as these documents give details as to how disciplinary matters are handled by teachers and administrators.

3. Participate fully in the life of a local church. Join a local church that preaches the gospel and is serious about helping believers grow in Christian maturity. Make sure your children participate in the life of the church and understand the importance of the local church. God has granted the church unique ministerial authority and as such possess gifts that cannot be found anywhere else. The church is essential to discipleship.
4. Understand that discipline is for the sake of the child and is motivated by love. Prayerfully move past any embarrassment, anger and fear that parents naturally feel when children misbehave so that you can be a source for change in your child's life. Excessive parental embarrassment, anger and fear stifle necessary actions and often make matters worse.
5. While praying that your child will resist sin, grow and mature, also pray that your child is caught when he or she does sin. This is not to wish pain upon your child but rather with the understanding that some issues are better dealt with earlier in life than later.
6. Resist the temptation to judge parents based on the misbehavior of their child. It is bad enough when a child sins (Pr. 29:15: “. . . a child left to himself disgraces his mother”). To sit in judgment is to miss the opportunity to help another. Also, keep in mind that “all who live by the sword die by the sword,” including the sword of judgment. A better, more humble and honest response is, “There but for the grace of God go I.”
7. Develop healthy relationships with your child's teachers. They are your partners. Cultivate open channels of communication between your home and the school. Listen and fact-check before reaching conclusions. Address matters in a timely fashion in order to avoid the buildup of frustration.
8. In addition to attending to your child's academic progress, pay attention to her or his participation and behavior in class. Many office visits can be avoided with early detection and intervention. Understand that Geneva has a high standard for behavior. In Grammar School, a grade of “M” (“Meets Expectations”) is a desired mark. On the other hand, grades of “N” (“Needs Improvement”) or “U” (“Unacceptable”) alert you to struggles and require action.
9. Treat an office visit with a proper level of attention. This is not a call to panic but a call to action. Find out what is contributing to the behavior and address it. If the student perceives the matter as inconsequential, then additional office visits are likely. Additional office visits may lead to Behavioral Probation and expulsion (see the Geneva handbooks for information about office visits).
10. Don't expect perfection from your child, teacher, or yourself. Perfection only comes after Christians have been glorified with Christ in the new heavens and new earth. Realize that discipleship-oriented discipline is an imperfect pursuit in which sinners (parents and teachers) guide and instruct smaller sinners (children). Take hope, though, that God's Spirit is at work, producing good fruit in our lives as well as the lives of our children (*Galatians 5:16-26*).