



Joanna Meyer: Hello and welcome to the Faith and Work podcast where we explore our everyday work in God's world. The Faith and Work podcast is produced and hosted by Denver Institute for Faith and Work. I'm Joanna Meyer, the director of events and sponsorships at Denver Institute. I'm joined today by Dustin Moody, our director of communications. Hi, Dustin.

Dustin Moody: Hi, Joanna. How's it going?

Joanna Meyer: Oh, it's great. Oh my goodness. Summer has arrived here in Denver and we were having so much fun just looking out at the mountain view outside our windows. It's beautiful.

Dustin Moody: Yeah. For full disclosure, Joanna and I are both coming back from separate vacations, so we're diving into some fun topics today.

Joanna Meyer: Yeah. We had to reignite our brains and we're ready to go. Today's an awesome brainy topic because we're talking about education. In fact we're talking about character formation and education. I'm curious, Dustin, who are some teachers that you remember from school that might have had a role in shaping your character?

Dustin Moody: Yeah. There are lots of teachers who come to mind when you and I were talking about this yesterday. I was fortunate to have a lot of great teachers growing up, but there are two from high school that I continue to think about to this day that made me smarter academically, but also made me a better person. One was Mrs. Pain. She was my math teacher for three years. One was my band director from my first year of high school, Mr. Kaminsky. Both of those teachers, the reason they come to mind, they were very demanding. They expected a lot of us and they brought out a lot in us. I just think back to the content of their teaching. I've never used the Pythagorean Theorem from math in my professional world. That's just not what I do.

Joanna Meyer: Thank goodness-

Dustin Moody: Yeah. There's a lot that I can point back to in the way that they taught and the way that they managed their classroom and their high expectations of us as students that really helped us live up to being better people. What about you?

Joanna Meyer: Yeah, I was thinking about two AP advanced placement history teachers I had at Cherry Creek High School. Shout out to the Bruins-

Dustin Moody: Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: Of Cherry Creek. Mr. Angle and Mr. Benson, if you're listening, you guys were life changers for me. They helped connect some very global concepts of thinking for the first time critically about American and European history. They

translated them into daily life. I felt like I was better equipped to deal with the complexities of what I've been seeing every day in my life as a result of what they taught me. Boy, they were rigorous. My freshman year of college was a cake walk compared to my senior year of high school.

Dustin Moody: Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: I have had to earn my living at times by writing and I'm convinced it's because those two men taught me how to write. No one else has taught me how to write the way that they did and how to think critically. I love how their lessons they taught trickled down to making me the person that I am.

Dustin Moody: Yeah, so let's talk a little bit more about that before we get to our guests today. Joanna, what do we mean by character formation? Because it's one thing to be a good teacher academically and skills based, but the people that we've talked about have ... we've both shared a little bit about being better people.

Joanna Meyer: Yeah.

Dustin Moody: What do we mean by character formation in education?

Joanna Meyer: Wow. That is a question for the ages, Dustin, and I mean that literally. Since schooling has exist, the question of the purpose of education and the role that it plays in shaping the character of students has been up for debate. You think about from the time of the ancient Greeks to sometime in the mid 20th century, education's larger purpose was to shape character, to make men and women better people. That is especially poignant in the American experiment with democracy. Think about early Americans expected their schools to make their children both smart and good. It was essential to be able to maintain this social experiment that was democracy for every citizen to be thinking and engaged, to be living out a core set of values in the choices that they made for the government. We saw some amazing things come out of that philosophy.

Joanna Meyer: In the mid 1800s we saw the common movement ... schools movement start, which put this value into motion by establishing public education for every student. It's amazing to think of a time existed when education wasn't a given right for-

Dustin Moody: Right. Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: Any citizen. You see that idea of civic and moral formation being woven into the foundations of American education, but in the last 60, 70 years that's changed dramatically. In the 60s, the social upheaval that we saw in the 60s also-

Dustin Moody: Sure.

Joanna Meyer: Played out in education this emphasis on self expression. Individual rights changed how people thought about character formation in schools. I wanted to read a quote. If our listeners will humor me, I'm going to get academic. Here's a quote from research project on character formation that took place at Rice University under the leadership of the researchers Totman, Edmondson, and Slaten.

Joanna Meyer: Here's how they describe this profound transition that took place in character formation. They said, "Public schools retreated from their one central role as moral and character educators because of three strong forces that weaken schools' character education efforts: personalism, pluralism and secularization. Personalism emphasized individual rights and freedom over responsibility. It delegitimized moral authority, eroded belief and objective moral norms and turned people inward towards self-fulfillment. Because it weakened social commitments, pluralism surfaced the question as to whose values would be taught in public schools. Secularization fueled the debate on whether moral education violates the separation of church and state." You begin to see this questions of how can we imply that one set of beliefs is true for every individual, doesn't to ... quash individual rights? Pluralism said, "Well, yeah. We're a diverse country. We can't agree on a common common core set of values."

Joanna Meyer: Secularization said, "Hey, we can't have religious values playing out in the public school." We began to get this idea that schools should be a values neutral environment, which makes it really hard for today's educators to think about what character formation means. You have the philosophical conversation going on and you also have movements like the No Child Left Behind Act in 2004, which was powerful. It had very noble goals. It wanted to see schools achieve 100% proficiency in reading and math over a 10 year period. One of the consequences of that was that it forced schools to track academic achievement. As a result, it narrowed curriculum and it elevated-

Dustin Moody: Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: The importance of standardized testing. You may have heard that phrase teaching the tests. Today's teachers face that challenge of high pressure to achieve academic performance. Sometimes it's even correlated with their salaries, and then a sense of lack of clarity and how do we pursue a common moral line for what we teach our students. I'm not surprised teachers are frustrated and confused.

Dustin Moody: Yeah, that's a lot of demands when you look at the work of ... the expectations set by the government and the state and rubrics for achievement. Also, when we introduced conversations around teaching character, well then you get into things like, well, what's the prevailing worldview? Why is the character development important in a pluralistic society? Why do we even care about that? If we've establish that we care about that, how do you actually do it?

- Joanna Meyer: Yeah, and I think the challenge for Christian educators, especially those in the public sector, is to say, "Okay, how do I winsomely and effectively live out the values of my worldview in a way that's respectful, of course, of the diversity of today's modern educational system? Also how can our faith inform the choices we make as we go about that?" That's what we'll be exploring today on our podcast.
- Dustin Moody: Yeah. Those are great questions for our guests today. Our guest is Matt [Honer 00:07:21]. Matt works with Open Sky Education in Saint ... in one of the St Louis regions. Open Sky is an entrepreneurial nonprofit that has built a national network of college preparatory charter schools, Christian schools, and other educational add-on programs that focused on underserved communities. Matt also contributes to Open Sky's character formation project, which is a classroom strategy that forms internally driven character and equips students to serve and lead their communities. This is astounding, but the project currently serves 25,000 students each year.
- Joanna Meyer: Amazing.
- Dustin Moody: In addition to his role as an educational administrator, Matt served in church leadership as a pastor for 14 years. We are excited to have met on the Faith and Work podcast today.
- Joanna Meyer: Matt, welcome to the podcast. We are thrilled to have you here. We'd love to know a little bit more about Open Sky Education. Tell us how the organization was founded.
- Matt Honer: Great. Yeah, it's a pleasure to be with you today as well. Open Sky Education is that not for profit organization that is seeking to provide a fun, lasting education for all children. It started back in 2002 up in Wisconsin where a few gentlemen said, "We've got to do something better for our kids in the cities." Seeing some failing schools in the cities and with a lot of the Christian schools fading for a number of different reasons, access to high quality education, character formation and a Christ-centered education, those options were limited. They began with Hope Christian Schools with 41 children and the voucher program up there in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Then over the last 17 years have grown to have 16 schools over three states, serving about 6,000 children and continuing to grow and to serve even more in making those three C's: Christ, character and college if you will, a high quality education, accessible for all kids.
- Matt Honer: We have Hope Christian Schools in Milwaukee. We have the Eagle Public Charter Schools that we help manage in both Phoenix, Arizona and also Saint Louis, Missouri. Where we have the Eagle Charter Schools, we run an afterschool program called Compass and that's where children's would choose to go to the after school program, learn about Christ and grow in their Christian character. We also, over the course of the last few years, have developed what

we call the character formation project. That's used in both public schools and Christian schools. Obviously we have a civic program for the public schools, a biblically based one for the Christian schools. This character formation project now serves over 20,000 children and maybe even more. We just worked with a group in India as well, touches kids' lives after school for about 10,000 kids a year. It's become global over the last couple of years and we've seen success in both public schools, like I said, and Christian schools and children growing in their character.

Joanna Meyer: I'm fascinated as we talk about character formation, Matt, to realize that the principles that you're talking about in the model that both Open Sky Education and the character formation project have developed can serve such a wide variety that it could be global, it could be cross cultural and that it could also work in both a public charter school setting and a Christian education setting. It's pretty amazing and it reminds me-

Matt Honer: Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: That there are some very timeless universal principles that we can bring to any classroom.

Dustin Moody: Matt, I'm curious if you could just talk a little bit about the role that Christian faith and worldview plays in the work that you guys do. Why is education a common good? Maybe kind of broaden it beyond Open Sky. Why does it matter to God?

Matt Honer: Yeah. Well I think we start with the question, what kind of education when God wants for his children? As we look out in our communities, these are God's children. He dearly loves them and as stewards of community resources and the children we serve in our community, we ask the question of what kind of education would He have His children have. Now, of course skills like math and reading are really important because they prepare us to fulfill vocations that God calls us to. That's just a basic skill set that, again, God uses to provide needs for all sorts of people and to serve families and different things. I think also it's just that worldview of seeing children as children of God and as creators and not consumers, realizing that the children are the foundation of the future.

Matt Honer: If we don't focus on the foundation, there's no point in working on the building, if you will. Right? From that lens we say, "Okay, well, what would God want his children to have?" Obviously a high quality academic program where they're growing in all those skills to be efficient and effective in any calling they have, obviously growing in their character to love one another and care for each other and love and respect, and then finally to have a deep rooted relationship with Christ. We use different delivery systems to provide that education and make it accessible for all kids.

- Joanna Meyer: That's so cool. I'm curious to know, in a pluralistic environment as so many public schools are, how do you infuse Christian values in your approach to education without being heavy handed or disrespectful of the diversity of students that are there?
- Matt Honer: Yeah, so it kind of gets back to what is character and how we look at it. When we decided to work on this character formation project, some of our schools in Milwaukee had already been recognized for strong school culture. We sat down as leaders and said, "What is really character are all about?" It's, it's intrinsically motivated. It's not just action steps. As we looked at a lot of character projects out there, a lot of them were just basically words on a wall, like, "Here's respect. Be respectful. Here's the story, now you go be respectful."
- Matt Honer: What we wanted to do is get deeper into it and say, "Okay, well how did we get our character in the first place?" We sat and we asked ourselves. Well, first of all, there were people, there were adult influencers in our lives that helped us grow in our character. Character's more caught than is taught. We thought about the people that help grow our character. I've traveled around and I've spoken to a lot of different organizations and groups. It's interesting. If we were to play Family Feud and I were to ask you, "Who is the number one character influencer?" The number one answer is parents and grandma. Okay.
- Joanna Meyer: I love it. Grandma.
- Matt Honer: Number two, which is unanimous in any context I've been in, is teachers. To think about that-
- Dustin Moody: Yeah.
- Matt Honer: Besides parents, and we would expect that. Our teachers are the number one character growers in our nation. Sometimes I think we overlook that. We don't appreciate them enough for their service, but they spend so much time with our children that they are helped growing the character for the next generation. First of all, people.
- Matt Honer: Second thing is characters grown through pain, struggle and sacrifice. Again, with a lot of groups that have them think of a time when they grew their character, and once they do, I ask them, "In that experience was their pain struggle and sacrifice?" Unanimously almost ... in large groups, everyone says yes, there was something about the pain, struggle and sacrifice that helped them grow in their character.
- Matt Honer: Now we're not going to take the kids out and put them in the woods, in the cold to make them grow their character or make them suffer purposely, right? The point is, is we recognize that through struggle, we grow in our character and God uses those times. We look for opportunities in those moments to help

them grow in their character, whether it be diligence, focusing on their work or respect, honoring other people, responsibility of being accountable. Those are two aspects. Also, we talk about greater purpose. If I'm diligent to make myself wealthy, that's not really a character trait. There's got to be a greater purpose. Our founding fathers had a greater purpose for this nation. There's lots of examples of people who did great things for a greater purpose. That's another key factor or essential element, if you will, to grow in character.

Matt Honer: Then finally, practice. We've learned through practice. As we practice these character traits and we have a common language, it becomes who we are and what we do. Those are the four P's, if you will, people pain, purpose, and practice that ... we see those as essential elements to growing character. As we built the character formation project and the narratives and the lessons, we thought about those things. We bring adult influencers in throughout the history, real people throughout American history or biblical history, to teach these lessons so that the children and the staff can grow in their character and see it. We talk about the pain struggle, the vexing moments of these peoples' lives where they grew in their character. We're real about it. Then the greater purpose, we unpack the why behind the what beyond our character. It's not just about the action. It's about the purpose behind the action.

Matt Honer: Then, of course, we give opportunities for our kids to practice. That's the how we get our character, if you will. Then we talk about character from a lens of identity, purpose, and action. In a lot of character formation programs it's just about action. "Here's respect. Be respectful. Let me give you an illustration of respect. Here you go." What we try to do is back up and talk about identity first. Who are we? If we pick a protagonist in history or we pick a protagonist in the Bible, say David, we talk about who David is. Let's dive into who is this person at this moment. David and Goliath, he was just anointed the next king in the chapter before. He's a shepherd boy. He's an Israelite. All these things. Who is David? Then we talk about his purpose.

Matt Honer: Why is he doing what he does? There are so many times where we look at stories and we focus on the how are we focused on the what, but rarely do we talk about the purpose behind the why.

Dustin Moody: Yeah.

Matt Honer: I give us an example, I can go into any group and ask how to David kill Goliath and I'm pretty sure almost everyone will get the answer right. He used the slingshot, but is that really the most important part of the story?

Dustin Moody: Well, it's the one we sing about.

Joanna Meyer: Yeah. Exactly.

- Matt Honer: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It is a part of the story. Think about this. Why did David kill Goliath? I've asked that question to, again, many groups of people and there's only one person who gave me the right answer and it was my friend in India.
- Matt Honer: We see the text actually tells you why he killed Goliath. He actually says, "I'm going to kill Goliath," it's paraphrased, but basically "so that the ends of the earth know that there's a God in Israel, and so that the Israelites know that the Lord doesn't win with swords and spears." Now think about that. That's a powerful why. He's doing this action. It doesn't matter if he uses a slingshot, a sword, or a plastic fork, but the why behind it is so much more powerful to make God known and to let God's people know He doesn't win with swords and spears. That's why purpose is so important. The character, it's the why behind our what as others have been using recently. Then, after we have our identity and after we have our purpose, then we move to action and say, "Okay, well how did he do it?"
- Matt Honer: He didn't hide behind a bush. He ran at him. After we experience it through the life of a protagonist, this identity purpose in action, we then internalize it to ourselves. I'm not David, but who do I shepherd? I'm not David, but I have a Goliath. It's not a nine foot person, but what is it? Then we also use that to think about our actions as well. I'll give you an example here about internalizing it. I was in Uganda and I was speaking to a village of ... the men in the village in one of the schools that use it. We went through the David [inaudible] story and this is the first time they had heard the story.
- Joanna Meyer: Oh. Wow.
- Matt Honer: Yeah. It was a lot of fun because they had never heard the story. The gentleman in the back, really big, strong guy, seriously, he wasn't nine foot tall, but he was big and strong, he says ... I asked the group, I said, "What is your Goliath?" He said, "My Goliath is I don't know how to take care of my family."
- Joanna Meyer: Wow.
- Matt Honer: You see, because in his context, here's this super strong man and you wouldn't think he would have any Goliath. In that context, you can work all day on the road and make \$1. A lot of the men are struggling with, "How do I take care of my family," and all those challenges. That's how this translates to everyone's life. Every one of us can relate to this story in one way or another because we have an identity. We have a purpose and action flows from that too. How can we be courageous like David knowing that our purpose is to make God known and that we are a child of God just like David was? Once we experience it and internalize it, then we activate it.



- Matt Honer: A lot of Bible studies or even character lessons outside of the Bible, they tell a good story and they'd say, kind of in general terms, "All right. Now go love your neighbor." We try to be very concrete with action steps and activate this and say, "Okay, well how are you going to show courage today? Is it going to be a difficult conversation you have? Are you going to do that task that you keep putting off? Where are you going to do it? When?" So that we can start practicing this character of virtue and then also make God known through out service to others. If you can envision a triangle, the first leg is experience ... or the first corner's experience and then internalize and then activate. We believe that when we live out our character, we live it out and fulfill a greater purpose. From a biblical perspective, it's making God known through serving leadership. From a civic standpoint, we can't ... we don't go to that point. We talk about freedom and living in freedom and really respecting human ... other human beings and so forth.
- Dustin Moody: I've got two questions related to character formation. Let's start with the one in the context of non Christian schools or secular settings. The David and Goliath example is great. I'm guessing that might not be what you use in a public charter school. How do you communicate the how and the why about character in a setting where you can't be overtly Christian?
- Matt Honer: Exactly. Obviously in public schools we don't do any faith based teaching. We respect the separation there and that's why we have the Compass programs afterschool that are able to go into Biblical teaching for those who choose it. To your question, how do you do it in a public setting, well, let me back up and you just kind of give you the theology behind it. As Christians, the way we see the world enables us to do this. There's three types of righteousness, being right with God. There's the pass of righteousness that's our identity. We're children of God. 1 John 3:1 says, "How great is the love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God? And that is what we are." We're children of God because God says so. That it's passive. We don't do it. He does it. He does it through His love.
- Matt Honer: Now if we go to 1 John 4:10, one chapter over, it tells us what that love He lavished on it is. It says "This is love, not that we love God, that God loved on us and sent His son. It's an atoning sacrifice for our sins." We're children of God because Jesus did so not because we do so. That's passive righteousness. That's our identity as children of God. Once you have your passive righteousness, then the scriptures speak about active righteousness. That is the Holy Spirit is acting through us to do good works. We say, "By grace through faith we are God's workmanship created to do good works," Ephesians 2:8-10. If you read all Paul's epistles he'll start focusing on the identity part, really nail that and say, "Nothing can separate you from Christ."
- Matt Honer: Then he goes into the activity where the Spirit is working through us and the spiritual gifts that [inaudible] spirit and so forth in the second part of every

epistle. You establish the passive righteousness, which is the gift from God or identity. Then you go into the act of rightness, which is God working through us through the Holy Spirit. Now, public setting, clearly that's different. The question is always, "Well, how can this person who doesn't believe in Jesus, has never heard about the Bible do the same thing, respect their teacher the way this other person would respect your teacher by the power of Spirit working through them?" Paul answers this in Romans. In Romans 2:14 he talks about how the gentiles that are nations are a law to themselves if they do the law by nature. We have passive righteousness, or you could call it alien righteousness simply because it's foreign to us and God .... something that God gave us.

Matt Honer: You have active righteousness, that which God works through us through the Holy Spirit, and then you have apparent righteousness. That is it's apparent to everyone in this world that respect is a good thing, because if you don't respect other people, the world will teach you respect is a virtue. I say it to my kids all the time. I say, "I'm teaching you respect that I love because if you go out on the street and act this way to other people, the world's going to teach you that respect needs to happen. It either comes through maybe a fight, maybe a police situation, but if you don't respect and there's consequences."

Matt Honer: Benjamin Franklin talks about diligence. He says, "If you're not diligent, you're going to serve other people." If you're not diligent doing your homework, you're going to lose your free time. There's all sorts of ways that the virtues that we live out in love directed by the Spirit are apparent to people in the world just by their interactions in this world that God created.

Matt Honer: We can use all sorts of civic examples, whether it be Martin Luther King Jr, it could be Benjamin Franklin. We've got a long, diverse group of narratives and protagonists who demonstrate all these key virtues like respect and responsibility and self sacrifice and justice. We recognize all these virtues simply because they're apparent to us in this world. In the civic side, we don't talk about a greater purpose making God known. Again, if you want to live in freedom and liberty as a community, you have to have respect. You have to have responsibility. You have to make sacrifices. There has to be justice. You got to be courageous at times. That's the way we share it with students and staff in a public setting. Again, still using identity, purpose and action, but from a civic lens with civic examples, sharing this apparent righteousness, internalizing it to themselves and then activating it.

Joanna Meyer: That's really cool. As I was looking into your materials, Matt, I was intrigued by the example of Thomas Jefferson. I think in scholarship and in academic circles in the last 20 years or so, people have been increasingly uncomfortable with aspects of Thomas Jefferson's life. He was an amazing thinker, founding father, a cultural leader, but he also was a slave owner. That raises some deep tension of how do we view a historical figure when their life is not maybe 100% squeaky clean or their life of character may not be perfect. I was so impressed that the

principles in the character project empower you to deal with the reality of both the good and the bad in an individual. I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about that, how the principals in the program help us accommodate both the beauty and the brokenness in any individual.

Matt Honer: Yeah, no, that's a great comment and question. You're absolutely right. Here's the thing. When you start talking about character, the conversation is getting deep in a hurry. Whether you're talking about historical figures who are involved and did some good things and did some bad things, or it's just internalizing as people are internalizing these principles and these virtues to their own lives. It gets very deep and very emotional, sometimes quickly. I appreciate the ... bringing the topic up. Yeah. As you mentioned, there is no one in this character formation project that we lift up as being perfect, save Jesus himself. What it allows us to do is talk about character as a fluid thing. It is not a just David's courageous all the time, because if you read the scriptures, he's not.

Joanna Meyer: Yep.

Matt Honer: He makes some bad mistakes too. There's times when he's not diligent and he's anything but responsible and all sorts of things. Justice is definitely not his attributes in one of the the texts, but we also see that even flawed people and to be err is human can demonstrate these character futures at time. What we want to do is highlight the positive and talk about the positive and how we can make the positive part of our lives. Moreover, there are times when we'll take a character narrative and we'll actually show the opposite. We'll show them where someone wasn't respectful, and we'll talk about the consequences to that as well because there's lessons to be learned there for all of us too. You're talking about historical figures and yes, there's pros and there's cons and no one's perfect, again, we're not holding anyone up as being the perfect character except for Jesus himself, but in a public setting, that's not the conversation.

Matt Honer: I think it also opens a conversation to let's be real and bring context into every conversation we have. We live in a world with sound bites and people with opinions and they use soundbites, and a lot of times context is left out of the conversation. That's just not life. Life is messy. Life is fluid. As I mentioned before, character is fluid for all of us. Our identity is never fluid. Failure's an event, but our identity is eternal because of what Jesus did. You see, that's the assurance, certain hope, and that's why this character project from the Christian standpoint is Gospel driven because it always starts with your identity. I can show a lack of courage any day. Maybe I don't have the difficult conversation I want to, but that doesn't change my identity. The child might have a off day and just disrupt the classroom, but that doesn't change his identity, because that identity is grounded in what Jesus did for him.

Matt Honer: That's the power of the Gospel, too, because if you read Hebrews chapter one, verse three, and it's laying out who Jesus is, it talks about Jesus being the exact

imprint of God. If you look at that word translate ... the Greek word that's translated exact imprint, the word literally is character. You think about that as we're developing character, again, from a biblical standpoint and from a biblical worldview, all we're talking about is how God forms and fashions us to be Christ like. Again, we're sinners in a sinful world and whether we're talking civic side or biblical side, we do recognize the flaws of all of us.

Joanna Meyer:

I love it.

Dustin Moody:

Matt, I want to get a little practical before we end our time together. There's two things that I'm thinking about of the audience that listens to the Faith and Work podcast. Let's speak first to people who work in education, who are teachers or administrators. I think one of the things that I hear from friends who are teachers is the amount of demands that is placed on them and ... whether that's standardized testing, whether that's parent teacher conferences, whether that's activities both inside and outside of the typical workday, I'm imagining this talk about character. They're probably thinking "This is great stuff, but it feels like more to add to my already full plate." How do you guys integrate this into the curriculum so it's not necessarily an add on, but for an educator who might be listening, it's something that they could actually take into the next school year coming up this fall and say, "This isn't an extra thing to do. This is more part of my approach to teaching." How do you guys balance the demands?

Matt Honer:

Yeah, great question. Our teachers, like every other teacher out there in different networks, has a lot to do. One, practically speaking, we built it out to be kind of a pull and play type material. Obviously we piloted it with our schools when it began. There was a lot of content and they were kind of working through all the content. Now we have it in a digital platform where, on an app, they can just click the button and it comes up. The whole lesson's prescriptive. They can go through the script if they want. They can contextualize it. Every teacher's going to contextualize it. We know that. There's links to videos. All the material's there. We've put it into the 15 minute staff meeting mini lessons. That's something I used to do with our principals. We'd meet once a week and we'd go through a character lesson.

Matt Honer:

We'd watch a video, two or three minute video. We discussed the topic, answer and ask a couple of questions and then reflect on it. What I'm trying to say is the material is created in a way that it's very user friendly and low prep for the teachers on both the civic and the biblical side. Moreover, I would say this, even if you don't have that material all laid out for you, if you can just understand the concept and the process, you can apply it to anything you're doing.

Matt Honer:

You can be teaching social studies and say, "Hey, we're learning about the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln, I want you to run in a paper on who he was, his purpose, why he was involved in this, and give some examples of what he actually did." There's identity, purpose and action. "Then I want you to follow that up with

who are you? You're not Abraham Lincoln, but who are you? What do you see as your purpose? What lessons can you learn from Abraham Lincoln that can help you and what you're going to do? Then finally, in conclusion, what are you going to do? We studied this information. What impact is it going to have on your life?"

Matt Honer: That's basically what we're talking about and it's just processing your life and who you are that will help you grow in your character. Moreover, it's a common language throughout the day. It's not just 15 minute character lesson. We take this as we're always talking about it. Two children get in a scuffle and I go up to him, I say, "What's going on here guys?" "Well I was disrespectful to him," and this and such and such. It's a common language now. They know it. Moreover, that's the civic side.

Matt Honer: Moreover, on the Christian side, it's so powerful because I'll give you an example. There was one boy got in a little scuffle. He was in tears and I took him aside and said, "What's going on here? Why are we fighting and everything?" He said, "Well, he called me trash." Well, if you call me trash it's probably not going to cause me to have a big reaction, but this young man was probably ... he's an underserved child and in the city. That really hurt him. You can see the tears coming from his eyes.

Matt Honer: I said, "Well, timeout. Who's calling you trash when the God of the universe, the God who created everything, this beautiful world we live in, created you and calls you His child?" You're God's child. You know that. You come to Compass every day. You hear this. That's who you are. You're not trash. You're God's child. The world can call you anything they want, but it can't change the fact that you're a child of God, loved and saved by Jesus." Then, all of a sudden you see his eyes light up in a smile and he's like, "Yeah, you're right." It sounds so simple, but it's so profound. Our children need to know who they are, who they truly are, because when they have an identity, now they have purpose because they have hope. Without hope, you can't have a purpose. Then that's what ... really what we're struggling with, the identity and the purpose part, because once you get that figured out, the actions will follow. I hope that illustrates something that helps to that point.

Dustin Moody: Yeah, absolutely.

Joanna Meyer: Yeah, and I love that you can translate these principles to someone who isn't working in education. What you've described is a beautiful picture of a journey that a parent could take their child on. Matt, I'm guessing that you're a parent.

Matt Honer: Yes.

Joanna Meyer: Am I right?



- Joanna Meyer: How have you applied some of these principles to your own parenting?
- Matt Honer: Yeah, so I'll give you two examples. Actually I apply it and they apply back to me.
- Joanna Meyer: I love that.
- Matt Honer: My son, Joel, he's going in high school now, but back third grade when we were launching this and we were using this in this school he attended, we had a baseball game and he was on deck. They brought in a relief pitcher. This is third grade, but this guy was throwing hard and I can see it on his face. He did not want to hit. I called Joel over to me and said, "Joel, come over here." I said, "Define courage for me." He said, "God's power to overcome fear. That's our definition." I said, "Good. Go hit." That was a moment where I could take that lesson of God's power to overcome fear and put it in a real life moment. He got up there and he hit. That's the common language that you can use all the time. I could give many other examples. That's one that I use with my son Joel.
- Matt Honer: Fast forward a couple of years. I'm actually down in Phoenix, Arizona, speaking on the character formation project. My son Joel loves to fish, so I took him up to Sedona where they have some rivers to catch trout.
- Dustin Moody: Beautiful spot.
- Matt Honer: Yeah. We pull off and if you've been there, they have these parking lots. It's off season, so there's no one there. You can imagine in high season there's people trying to get in there and it's crazy. Anyways, we drive in and there's this booth and there's this a little envelope slot and there's a sign that says how you pay for it. There's no one there. It's the winter. No one's there. I'm trying to read all this stuff and I'm reading up on it. I'm like, "You have to pay? How do you do this? You put it in envelope?" Finally I say to myself, "Do I even have to pay? There's no one here." From the back seat I hear, "Integrity. God's power for you to be true to Him and yourself."
- Joanna Meyer: Love it.
- Matt Honer: I'm like, "Okay, got it." I write the check and fill out the [inaudible] and paid it. Again, it's that common language of who are we? Children of God loved and saved through Jesus. What's our purpose? To make God known through serving leadership. How do we do that? We Love God. We love our neighbor and that's conveyed in seven virtues in our program.
- Joanna Meyer: This is a wonderful conversation. It's just a taste of the conversation we'll be continuing on July 18th at the education event we're hosting called Character Formation in K-12 Education. We are going to have a blast. Matt will be our keynote speaker. We'll also be joined by his colleague Ellen Bartlett, who is one of the key minds behind the character formation project. She'll be talking about



how we translate these principles into action in the classroom. We would love to invite our listeners to join us. There's information at [denverinstitute.org/education](http://denverinstitute.org/education) to learn more about the events. It'll be a half-day event morning through early afternoon and it's going to be a blast.

Dustin Moody: Yeah. Matt, thanks again for joining us for the Faith and Work podcast. For those of you listening, as always, leave us a comment, subscribe on your platform of choice so we can continue bringing you great conversations like the one we had today with Matt. Matt, enjoy the next few weeks of your summer. We're looking forward to seeing you in July in Denver.

Matt Honer: Thanks so much, Dustin and Joanna. It's been a pleasure.

Dustin Moody: Thanks.

Joanna Meyer: See you soon.