

MELISSA BURT-MILLER: INTEGRATIVE PAPER

Integrative Paper

Melissa Burt-Miller

Alliance University

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PROFESSOR Kwi Yun

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PURPOSE AND MEANING OF LIFE AS A PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORKER WITH CHRISTIAN FAITH

Growing up, I faced many unforeseen circumstances that shaped my behavior and social interactions during early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. During those stages of my life, I lacked spiritual discipline, guidance, and an intimate relationship with God. However, as I got older, God orchestrated relationships that led me to a place of renewal, personal and spiritual transformation, and maturity. With this restoration, I was able to self-reflect and look back at my previous lifestyle and understand that everything I went through was preparing me for where God was taking me. This realization has now contributed to my purpose and meaning of life as I embark on this new journey as a professional social worker with Christian faith.

Social work, from my lens, is an act of service that is an extension of kingdom duties that God assigned to his people to fulfill his commandment in Matthew chapter 22, which instructs us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Therefore, in upholding this law, as a Christian social worker, I must respond as a follower of Christ to serve the marginalized, displaced, and oppressed with love in a way I would like to be treated. This is my purpose as a Christian social worker; to be a compassionate catalyst that promotes change, tearing down strongholds and oppressive systems that have kept people in captivity.

THE INTEGRATION OF CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL WORK

The social work profession is diverse and consists of various parts that serve different functions to meet one primary goal; enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, which sums up the profession's core values. Interestingly, Christian values,

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principles, and the Ministry of Jesus exemplify the very core values the social work profession promotes. There has been a tug-of-war between the ideology that social work originated from Christianity. In fact, in Scales et al. (2020) book entitled; "Social Work and Christianity: The Integration of Christian Faith and Social Work Practice," they highlight that accounts of social work history appear to be limited by an invisibility bias which religion, particularly Christianity is minimized, ignored or regarded as only peripherally relevant (Scales et al., 2020, pg. 65). However, despite the invisibility of Christianity's contribution to the social work profession, it is widely understood that Jesus was the first social worker. From his Ministry of healing, service, opposition against injustice, and setting the captives free from demonic oppression, it is apparent that he laid the foundation on which social work values are built.

In addition to Jesus's work, Christians were seen at the forefront of activities that offered help and assistance to those who were suffering and facing diverse social problems (Scales et al., 2020, pg. 69). Additionally, Christians and other religious organizations were also known for their substantial role in addressing social problems (Scales et al., 2020, pg. 65). An example of such is Christianity's presence in settlement houses and Charity Organization Society founded by Christian men. Having recognized Christianity's contribution to social work, along with my Christian faith, I understand the integration of Christianity and social work practice to be; being present to others, offering comfort and consolation through best practices, and showing solidarity by entering uncharted spaces to help others discover new hope and direction.

Some may argue that the social work profession is secular and that Christians cannot exist in such space, while others may view a Christian social worker as one who will project their Christian Faith onto others. But, throughout this course: Social Work and Christianity, I have come to understand that integrating my Christian faith into social work practice does not mean I

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am directly evangelizing to people but simply that I am stepping into the office of servanthood to show up and serve God's people with integrity, compassion, and love with the mind of Christ.

COMPATIBILITY OF THE NASW CODE OF ETHICS WITH SCRIPTURE

According to the National Association of Social Work (NASW), six core values set forth the ideals all social workers should aspire to and embrace. These core values are; service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW). In identifying scriptures compatible with the NASW code of ethics and visa-versa, the Book of Luke chapter 4, verses 16-19, came to mind. Luke chapter 4, verses 16-19, reads, "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."-New King James Translation.

The key verses in Luke 4:16-19 that are compatible with the NASW code of ethics and the social work mission are:

- Preach the gospel to the poor
- Heal the brokenhearted
- Proclaim liberty to the captives

In addition, when it comes to the six core values, the following scriptures go hand-in-hand:

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- **Service:** Matthew 20-26-28- "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant" (NKJV).
- **Social Justice:** Psalm 82:3 - "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute" (NIV).
- **Dignity and Worth of the Person:** Genesis 1:26-27 - "And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (KJV).
- **Importance of human relationships:** 1 Corinthians 1:9 "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (NIV).
- **Integrity:** Proverbs 21:3- "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice" (NIV)
- **Competence:** Colossians 3:23- "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (NIV).

CHALLENGES OF CONFRONTING ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN SOCIAL WORK

Facing ethical dilemmas in social work practice is unavoidable and comes with challenges that require sound ethical and professional judgments and practical decision-making skills. Some difficulties one may face when it comes to ethical dilemmas are conflicts of interest, conflict in prima facie duties, and relationships with clients. To resolve ethical dilemmas while I practice social work, I will utilize the ethical decision-making framework and the NASW code of ethics to guide my decision-making process.

UNDERSTANDING OF COMPETENT, COMPASSIONATE CATALYST IN CHRIST

To be a competent, compassionate catalyst in Christ, one must be willing to fully submit to God and allow Him to take them on a transformative spiritual journey. Competency comes

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from the fruit of knowledge that only God can give, likewise being compassionate. By reading the book "Compassion" by Henri J. M. Nouwen, I understood compassion differently than when I started my social work journey. Compassion, according to Nouwen, means "to suffer with" (Nouwen et al., 2005, p. 9). This statement helped me understand that compassion is more than just an act of kindness, but a command that asks us to show up where it hurts and become displaced by moving from the ordinary and proper place to enter into places of pain. I am also encouraged by Nouwen to share in other people's brokenness, fear, and confusion and be powerless with the powerless (Nouwen et al., 2005). I believe this perspective will shape my social work practice. Also, through learning more about compassion, I developed a more profound love for Ministry and serving within my church community.

WHAT I DISCOVERED ABOUT MYSELF THROUGHOUT THIS COURSE

This course has helped me grow spiritually and deepen my relationship with God. Through this course, I engaged in self-assessment activities that gave me insight into areas of my spiritual life that I needed to work on. Below are the results and feedback from the assessments (that were previously submitted).

PART A: General Formation and Discipleship

1. I feel confident of my adoption as God's son/daughter and rarely, if ever, question his acceptance of me.
2. I love to worship God by myself as well as with others.
3. I spend regular quality time in the Word of God and in prayer.
4. I sense the unique ways God has gifted me individually and am actively using my spiritual gifts for his service.
5. I am a vital participant in a community with other believers.
6. It is clear that my money, gifts, time, and abilities are completely at God's disposal and not my own.
7. I consistently integrate my faith in the marketplace and the world.

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PART B: Emotional Components of Discipleship

Principle 1: Look beneath the Surface

1. It's easy for me to identify what I am feeling inside (Luke 19:41 – 44; John 11:33 – 35).
2. I am willing to explore previously unknown or unacceptable parts of myself, allowing Christ to transform me more fully (Rom. 7:21 – 25; Col. 3:5 – 17).
3. I enjoy being alone in quiet reflection with God and myself (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12).
4. I can share freely about my emotions, sexuality, joy, and pain (Ps. 22; Prov. 5:18 – 19; Luke 10:21).
5. I am able to experience and deal with anger in a way that leads to growth in others and myself (Eph. 4:25 – 32).
6. I am honest with myself (and a few significant others) about the feelings, beliefs, doubts, pains, and hurts beneath the surface of my life (Ps. 73; 88; Jer. 20:7 – 18).

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Principle 2: Break the Power of the Past

7. I resolve conflict in a clear, direct, and respectful way, not what I might have learned growing up in my family, such as painful putdowns, avoidance, escalating tensions, or going to a third party rather than to the person directly (Matt. 18:15 – 18).
8. I am intentional at working through the impact of significant "earthquake" events that shaped my present, such as the death of a family member, an unexpected pregnancy, divorce, addiction, or major financial disaster (Gen. 50:20; Ps. 51).
9. I am able to thank God for all my past life experiences, seeing how he has used them to uniquely shape me into who I am (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28 – 30).
10. I can see how certain "generational sins" have been passed down to me through my family history, including character flaws, lies, secrets, ways of coping with pain, and unhealthy tendencies in relating to others (Ex. 20:5; cf. Gen. 20:2; 26:7; 27:19; 37:1 – 33).
11. I don't need approval from others to feel good about myself (Prov. 29:25; Gal. 1:10).
12. I take responsibility and ownership for my past life rather than blame others (John 5:5 – 7).

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Principle 3: Live in Brokenness and Vulnerability

13. I often admit when I'm wrong, readily asking forgiveness from others (Matt. 5:23 – 24).
14. I am able to speak freely about my weaknesses, failures, and mistakes (2 Cor. 12:7 – 12).
15. Others would easily describe me as approachable, gentle, open, and transparent (Gal. 5:22 – 23; 1 Cor. 13:1 – 6).
16. Those close to me would say that I am not easily offended or hurt (Matt. 5:39 – 42, 1 Cor. 13:5).
17. I am consistently open to hearing and applying constructive criticism and feedback that others might have for me (Prov. 10:17; 17:10; 25:12).
18. I am rarely judgmental or critical of others (Matt. 7:1 – 5).
19. Others would say that I am slow to speak, quick to listen, and good at seeing things from their perspective (James 1:19 – 20).

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Principle 4: Receive the Gift of Limits

20. I've never been accused of "trying to do it all" or of biting off more than I could chew (Matt. 4:1 – 11).
21. I am regularly able to say "no" to requests and opportunities rather than risk overextending myself (Mark 6:30 – 32).
22. I recognize the different situations where my unique, God-given personality can be either a help or hindrance in responding appropriately (Ps. 139; Rom. 12:3; 1 Peter 4:10).
23. It's easy for me to distinguish the difference between when to help carry someone else's burden (Gal 6:2) and when to let it go so they can carry their own burden (Gal. 6:5).
24. I have a good sense of my emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual capacities, intentionally pulling back to rest and fill my "gas tank" again (Mark 1:21 – 39).
25. Those close to me would say that I am good at balancing family, rest, work, and play in a biblical way (Ex. 20:8).

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Principle 5: Embrace Grieving and Loss

26. I openly admit my losses and disappointments (Ps. 3; 5).
27. When I go through a disappointment or a loss, I reflect on how I'm feeling rather than pretend that nothing is wrong (2 Sam. 1:4, 17 – 27; Ps. 51:1 – 17).
28. I take time to grieve my losses as David (Ps. 69) and Jesus did (Matt. 26:39; John 11:35; 12:27).
29. People who are in great pain and sorrow tend to seek me out because it's clear to them that I am in touch with the losses and sorrows in my own life (2 Cor 1:3 – 7).
30. I am able to cry and experience depression or sadness, explore the reasons behind it, and allow God to work in me through it (Ps. 42; Matt. 26:36 – 46).

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Principle 6: Make Incarnation Your Model for Loving Well

31. I am regularly able to enter into other people's world and feelings, connecting deeply with them and taking time to imagine what it feels like to live in their shoes (John 1:1 – 14; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:3 – 5).
32. People close to me would describe me as a responsive listener (Prov. 10:19; 29:11; James 1:19).
33. When I confront someone who has hurt or wronged me, I speak more in the first person ("I" and "me") about how I am feeling rather than speak in blaming tones ("you" or "they") about what was done (Prov. 25:11; Eph. 4:29 – 32).
34. I have little interest in judging other people or quickly giving opinions about them (Matt. 7:1 – 5).
35. People would describe me as someone who makes "loving well" my number one aim (John 13:34 – 35; 1 Cor. 13).

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Principle 7: Slow Down to Lead with Integrity

36. I spend sufficient time alone with God to sustain my work for God.
37. I regularly take a 24-hour period each week for Sabbath-keeping — to stop, to rest, to delight, and to contemplate God.
38. Those closest to me would say that my marriage and children take priority over church ministry and others.
39. I am not afraid to ask difficult, uncomfortable questions, to myself or to others, when needed.
40. I do not divide my leadership into sacred/secular categories. I treat the executive/planning functions of leadership as meaningful as prayer and preparing sermons.

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SWB Scale

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SWB Scale

For each of the following statements circle the choice that best indicates the extent of your agreement or disagreement as it describes your personal experience:

SA = Strongly Agree
MA = Moderately Agree
A = Agree

D = Disagree
MD = Moderately Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. I don't find much satisfaction in private prayer with God. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 2. I don't know who I am, where I came from, or where I am going. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 3. I believe that God loves me and cares about me. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 4. I feel that life is a positive experience. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 5. I believe that God is impersonal and not interested in my daily situations. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 6. I feel unsettled about my future. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 7. I have a personally meaningful relationship with God. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 8. I feel very fulfilled and satisfied with life. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 9. I don't get much personal strength and support from my God. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 10. I feel a sense of well-being about the direction my life is headed in. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 11. I believe that God is concerned about my problems. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 12. I don't enjoy much about life. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 13. I don't have a personally satisfying relationship with God. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 14. I feel good about my future. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 15. My relationship with God helps me not to feel lonely. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 16. I feel that life is full of conflict and unhappiness. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 17. I feel most fulfilled when I'm in close communion with God. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 18. Life doesn't have much meaning. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 19. My relation with God contributes to my sense of well-being. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 20. I believe there is some real purpose for my life. | SA MA A D MD SD |

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LIFE ADVANCE, INC.
81 Front Street
Nyack, N.Y. 10960

THE SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING SCALE

SCORING INFORMATION

There are three primary scores you can obtain from the Spiritual Well-Being Scale: Spiritual Well-Being, Religious Well-Being and Existential Well-Being.

TO OBTAIN YOUR OVERALL SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING SCORE:

The Spiritual Well-Being score is a measure of overall well-being.

Each Spiritual Well-Being Scale item is scored from 1 to 6 with a higher number representing greater well-being.

The positively worded items are numbers 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 19, and 20. For these items, an answer of "Strongly Agree" is given a score of 6, and "Strongly Disagree" is given a score of 1. For example, if you circled "Strongly Agree" for item 3 you would assign a score of 6 for that response. (Scores of 5, 4, 3, 2, are assigned to responses of "Moderately Agree," "Agree," "Disagree," "Moderately Disagree," respectively for positively worded items.)

The negatively worded items are numbered 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 16, and 18. For these items, an answer of "Strongly Agree" is given a score of 1, and "Strongly Disagree" is given a score of 6. For example, if you circled "Strongly Agree" for item 1 you would assign a score of 1 for that response. (Scores of 2, 3, 4, 5, are assigned to responses of "Moderately Agree," "Agree," "Disagree," "Moderately Disagree," respectively for negatively worded items.)

Total the scores for the positively and negatively worded items and this will give you the total score for your spiritual well-being (SWB):

If you scored in the range of 20 - 40, this means low spiritual well-being.

A score in the range of 41 - 99 means moderate spiritual well-being.

A score in the range of 100 - 120 means high spiritual well-being.

TO OBTAIN YOUR RELIGIOUS WELL-BEING SCORE:

The Religious Well-Being Score is a measure of how you view your relationship with God. It reflects your sense of satisfaction and positive connection with God.

The odd numbered items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, and 19 give you your score for religious well-being. Using the values of 1 to 6 that you gave these items, add the total for religious well-being (RWB).

Quality of Life Assessment and Resources

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If you scored in the range of 10 - 20, you have a basically unsatisfactory relationship with God.
A score in the range of 21 - 49 means you have moderate religious well-being.
A score in the range of 50 - 60 means you have a very positive view of your relationship with God.

TO OBTAIN YOUR EXISTENTIAL WELL-BEING SCORE:

The Existential Well-Being score measures your level of life satisfaction and life purpose.

The even numbered items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 give you your score for existential well-being. Using the values of 1 to 6 that you gave these items, add the total for existential well-being (EWB).

If you scored in the range of 10 - 20, you have low satisfaction with your life and aren't very clear about your purpose in life.

A score in the range of 21 - 49 means you have moderate levels of life satisfaction and purpose.

A score in the range of 50 - 60, means you have a high level of satisfaction with your life and a clear sense of purpose.

EXAMINING INDIVIDUAL ITEMS:

Another way to use the Scale is to look for extreme scores which indicate low spiritual well-being. For example, if you answered "Strongly Disagree" with statement 3 "I believe God loves and cares about me" that would be an item you would want to pay attention to. If you answer "Strongly Agree" with statement 6 "I feel unsettled about my future" this would be a possible indicator of low existential well-being that you'll probably want to reflect on.

These individual items will help you to pinpoint some of the major sources of lower well-being.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the two questions emerging from this course that I hope to pursue as I grow into a competent and compassionate catalyst in Christ are:

1. How do we begin to hear the call to community?
2. Is there a specific compassionate way to be practiced daily?

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