Formed to Flourish:
Integrating Career Readiness with a Christian Philosophy of Life in Business Education

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ABSTRACT: **As business schools prepare students for an ever-changing workplace, Christian business educators have a unique opportunity to shape both skill and soul. This paper proposes a Christian philosophy of life framework, rooted in Scripture and expressed through formative habits, such as calling, humility, compassion, and wisdom, aligned with four of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career readiness competencies. Drawing on career readiness literature and Christian formation scholarship, the framework demonstrates how durable skills can be cultivated alongside character through intentional pedagogical practices. Submitted as a creative instruction article, this manuscript presents a conceptual teaching model offering strategies that faculty can readily implement. Rather than advocating curricular overhaul, this paper invites educators to rethink daily pedagogy through small, intentional shifts that integrate career competencies with spiritual formation. The goal is to help students develop durable skills and spiritual maturity as part of a coherent philosophy of life, equipping them to live with purpose.**

KEYWORDS: career readiness, philosophy of life, spiritual formation, faith integration, career competencies, durable skills, soft skills

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive and ever-changing workplace, business schools face expectations to graduate students who are not only technically proficient but also personally grounded, thoughtful, and mature. Across higher education, employers are shifting priorities from job-specific abilities to broader, more transferable qualities, often referred to as "durable" or "soft" skills that include leadership, communication, teamwork, and critical thinking (Hutson et al., 2023).

Christian business educators, therefore, face a dual responsibility: developing professional skills while also attending to students' formation. Scholarship across virtue ethics, moral psychology, and higher education affirms that universities inevitably shape students' character through both explicit curriculum and implicit practices, making intentional character formation pedagogically important.

This paper proposes a pedagogical framework that pairs four National Association of Colleges and Employers (National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2024) competencies (leadership, communication, critical thinking, and teamwork) with four corresponding Christian philosophy of life habits (calling, humility, wisdom, and compassion) along with classroom-ready pedagogical exercises, in Appendix A, that operationalize each pairing through observable skill practice and guided reflection.

PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE DEFINITION

This use of philosophy of life aligns with established scholarship in Christian formation and virtue ethics that frames moral development as the cultivation of stable habits and dispositions rather than the transmission of abstract beliefs (e.g., Biggar, 2022; Brant et al., 2022; Palmer, 1983).

Guthrie (2018) reminds us that Christianity is not merely private devotion but a "point of view" that shapes how believers inhabit public life and pursue the common good.

This paper adopts a working definition of a Christian philosophy of life as a coherent set of lived convictions expressed through durable habits that shape purpose, judgment, and relational practice within professional life. Specifically, it refers to the embodied practice of faith through stable habits that orient how professional competencies are exercised.

Building on this understanding of Christian formation, this manuscript offers a framework pairing the following NACE competencies with corresponding Christian life habits drawn from Scripture. While NACE identifies eight competencies, this paper focuses on four foundational skills that are relational, cognitive, and broadly applicable across disciplines. This selective focus prioritizes instructional clarity and depth rather than comprehensive coverage.

Together, these pairings illustrate how career competencies and Christian life habits can be intentionally developed together. In this framework, professional competencies remain the assessable outcomes, while philosophy of life habits function as formative lenses shaping how those competencies are practiced. This approach is consistent with scholarship that affirms Christian life habits be embedded within rather than appended as supplements, treats leadership and communication as inseparable from character formation (theological education) (Cardon et al., 2024; Magezi & Madimutsa, 2023), frames Christian higher education as cultivating an integrated life of purpose oriented toward the common good (Guthrie, 2018; Schutte, 2008), distinguishes between talent cultivation and vocation as a response to a call that transcends self-fulfillment (Van Crombrugge & Debusschere, 2017), and emphasizes vocation as a communal process of discernment rather than a purely individual or emotional experience (Perrin, 2022).

To move beyond conceptual alignment to classroom implementation, this manuscript includes four sample pedagogical exercises (Appendix A), one aligned to each competency-habit pairing. Each exercise includes a NACE aligned objective, a concrete student task that requires demonstration of the competency, and a short reflection component that makes the Christian philosophy of life habit visible as a lens for practice. The appendix, therefore, serves as a toolkit that supports faculty adoption and provides assessment.

FOUNDATIONS

Readiness in Higher Education

Despite challenges in public confidence, shifting demographics, and rapid disruption in higher education, the value of a college degree remains widely affirmed, especially by employers seeking adaptable, well-prepared graduates. As Chan (2016) notes, higher education must balance career preparation with the cultivation of skills that enable graduates to contribute responsibly to their communities (p. 26). Career readiness has evolved from narrow technical preparation toward durable skills that help graduates thrive across industries and over time (Hutson et al., 2023).

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2024) defines career readiness as "a foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management" and outlines eight such competencies: career- and self-development, communication, critical thinking, equity and inclusion, leadership, professionalism, teamwork, and technology. Institutions must intentionally embed these competencies into curriculum and equip faculty to cultivate them (Hutson et al., 2023). Without faculty intentionality and engagement, even the most robust career frameworks risk being aspirational rather than formative.

According to "The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say About the Difference College Makes," a 2023 survey of 1,010 employers conducted by the American Association of Colleges and Universities in collaboration with Morning Consult found that while employers continue to value a college education that delivers broad and deep knowledge and skills, fewer than half of the respondents

Table 1: Pairing of NACE Competencies and Christian Philosophy of Life Habits

Career-Readiness (NACE Competencies)	Christian Philosophy of Life
Leadership	Calling
Critical Thinking	Wisdom
Communication	Humility
Teamwork	Compassion

Figure 1: Proposed Formational Pathways Between Christian Philosophy of Life Habits and NACE Competencies

Christian Life Philosophy	Formative Influence	NACE Competency	Proposed Outcomes
Calling	Purpose Orientation	Leadership	Ethical, mission-driven influence
Wisdom	Moral Discernment	Critical Thinking	Judicious, value-aligned decisions
Humility	Self-awareness	Communication	Clarity, active listening, respect
Compassion	Relational Empathy	Teamwork	Trust, collaboration, service

report strong confidence that graduates are highly prepared in essential areas, such as communication, critical thinking, and complex problem-solving (AAC&U, 2023, p. 2). While these frameworks clearly articulate what graduates should be able to do, they are largely silent on how the formation of character and moral orientation shapes the practices. This gap presents a strategic opportunity for Christian business educators to integrate durable skills with spiritual formation, not as competing aims but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of vocational development.

Christian Philosophy of Life in Higher Education

Virtues are not innate but cultivated through sustained practice (Brant et al., 2022). Williams (2022) similarly argues that they must be "learned and developed" (p. 64), reinforcing the claim that higher education plays a meaningful role in moral formation. While NACE's career readiness competencies offer a helpful framework for developing employable graduates, Christian business educators must ask deeper questions as we work to develop each of our courses, such as "what kind of person are we helping form?" This question moves beyond outcomes to the calling upon Christian education.

Across many faith-based institutions, faculty often pursue disciplinary excellence while seeking clearer ways to integrate faith intentionally into classroom practice. Biggar (2022) reminds us that theology can offer a crucial lens for understanding moral formation that often goes unnamed. He warns that "when moral silence prevails in universities, not only is the promotion of virtue patchy and the unchallenged promotion of vices possible, but adolescent students receive the general impression that real adults do not care about values and virtues and many of them resolve to grow up accordingly" (p. 110). For Christian universities, these

insights are especially important as it demonstrates that explicit integration is not merely permissible but pedagogically strategic.

Christian formation, then, is not to be considered a side goal; it is foundational to all we do. As Parker Palmer (1983) notes, we should "teach more than a body of knowledge or a set of skills.... [T]each a mode of relationship between the knower and the known, a way of being in the world" (p. 30). The way we teach forms students in ways far beyond content mastery. This influence becomes even more effective when supported by small, intentional practices that make faith learning connections visible. Building on this idea, Smith (2025) argues that teaching practices inevitably shape how students relate to one another and to the world, making moral and relational formation an inescapable dimension of educational responsibility.

Recent scholarship in Christian business education converges around shared insights that reinforce this formational responsibility. Wong et al. (2015), Stolze (2024), Naughton (2024), and Finn (2024), from distinct disciplinary perspectives, underscore that business education is not neutral but formative, shaping moral agency, vocational orientation, and practical wisdom over time.

Taken together, this body of scholarship underscores the need for pedagogical models, such as the framework proposed in this paper, that intentionally integrate career preparation with spiritual and character formation. This scholarship suggests that Christian business education must help students intentionally cultivate durable spiritual habits—what is referred to herein as a Christian philosophy of life—that guide how leadership, communication, decision-making, and teamwork are practiced. These skills and habits, drawn from Scripture and Christian thought, enrich rather than compete with career preparation. Simple class-

room structures, such as pairing a NACE competency with a corresponding spiritual habit during a case discussion, allow students to practice both dimensions side by side.

When paired intentionally, NACE career readiness competencies and a Christian philosophy of life offer a powerful, integrated model of vocational formation. These pairings are not symbolic parallels; they are pedagogical mechanisms that guide competency development toward spiritual and/or moral maturity. NACE competencies remain the primary learning outcomes, with the Christian philosophy of life habits functioning as lenses that shape how the competencies are practiced. Taken together, this structure ensures that career readiness remains the assessable outcome, while Christian philosophy of life provides the formative orientation through which those outcomes are pursued.

To clarify the developmental logic of this framework, Figure 1 illustrates the proposed formational pathways. The following sections illustrate how each competency-habit pairing functions pedagogically, using leadership, critical thinking, teamwork, and communication as examples.

INTEGRATION: CAREER-READINESS (NACE COMPETENCIES) AND CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE LEADERSHIP (NACE) TO CALLING (PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE)

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2024) defines leadership as "recognizing and capitalizing on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals" ("Leadership" section). Sample leadership behaviors include inspiring others under a shared vision, applying innovative thinking, and building mutual trust (NACE, 2024, "Leadership" section). Within this framework, leadership remains the primary learning outcome while calling functions as the orientation shaping how leadership is practiced.

Leadership development within business education is increasingly understood as inseparable from deeper questions of identity, character, and purpose. Scholarship on leadership formation emphasizes that effective leadership does not emerge solely from the acquisition of competencies, but from formative processes that shape how individuals understand their role, responsibilities, and influence. Magezi and Madimutsa (2023) describe leadership development and character formation as a "solid interlocking relationship" and a "symbiotic bond" in theological education (p. 1). They argue that leadership competencies are grounded in prior character formation and that it is not possible to produce effective leaders without intentional character development. In this framework, calling can be understood as the formative disposition that shapes how leadership behaviors, such as initiative and influence, are enacted in professional contexts.

Within Christian higher education, this formative orientation is articulated through the concept of calling, which frames leadership as a response to vocation, responsibility, and service rather than merely authority or managerial skill. Van Crombrugge and Debusschere (2017) distinguish between cultivating talent and responding to a call. Similarly, Guthrie (2018) situates vocation within a broader vision of Christian higher education oriented toward the common good rather than just individual advancement. In this framework, calling functions as the interpretive lens through which leadership competencies are understood and enacted, shaping not only what leaders do but why and how they lead others.

While the definition of leadership, in the secular sense, often emphasizes persuasion, motivation, and even charisma, Christian leadership begins with a deep awareness of one's calling and purpose—the belief that one's work and opportunities are entrusted by God for a greater purpose. Scripture reminds us that we are created to do good works (Ephesians 2:10) and to bring God glory (Isaiah 43:7). This understanding of leadership redirects the focus from self-promotion to relational service.

As business educators, we have both the opportunity and responsibility to cultivate leadership in our students. Leadership is not confined to titles or organizational roles; it is the ability to influence others positively, take initiative, and serve with integrity. Faculty can foster this by assigning group projects that require collaboration and initiative, reflecting on case studies that highlight moral courage or simply modeling servant leadership in the way we teach, advise, and support students. Such practices make visible the connection between competency development and vocational identity.

Kelly and Stuebs (2021) argue that Jesus provides many leadership and discipleship examples that are applicable to today's business students. Drawing particularly on the Sermon on the Mount and His lived examples, they present a model of leadership grounded in character, humility, and spiritual formation. Their article, "Disciples Discipling Disciples: Implementing Examples of Jesus's Leadership Lessons," presents instructional strategies that help students cultivate these characteristics. This work supports the pedagogical claim that calling can function as an ethical mechanism, shaping initiative, influence, and trust, all behaviors that are directly observable within NACE leadership outcomes.

Equally important is the way we frame leadership in our teaching, such as the language we use, the values we highlight, and the connections we make between skill and spirit. As Smith (2025) notes, "[F]rames matter for how we perceive things" (p. 75). When we spotlight the spiritual dimensions of leadership, we offer students a new lens through which to see their growth. Smith reminds us: "[W]hen we teach course content, the way we name it, the facets we hide or make visible, the connections we make or fail to make, all serve as frames, inviting our students to relate to the content in particular ways" (p. 75). Christian leadership is not about power but about faithful stewardship of one's God-given calling that is rooted in purpose, discernment, and service to others (Ephesians 4:1; 1 Peter 5:2–3).

The NACE competency is not replaced but is oriented by the Christian philosophy of life habit. When leadership is framed and openly discussed as both a career competency and a spiritual practice, students begin to see themselves not only as professionals-in-training, but also as influencers in the Kingdom of God. In this way, leadership, viewed through the lens of calling, becomes not just a transferable skill but a philosophy of life.

The appendix includes a leadership and calling exercise that asks students to analyze a faith informed leader and connect observable leadership behaviors to vocational purpose through a reflection and discussion prompt.

Critical Thinking (NACE) to Wisdom (Philosophy of Life)

NACE (2024) defines critical thinking as the ability to "identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information" ("Critical Thinking" section). Sample behaviors include the ability to "make decisions and solve problems using sound, inclusive reasoning and judgment"; to "proactively anticipate needs and prioritize action steps"; and to "effectively communicate actions and rationale, recognizing the diverse perspectives and lived experiences of stakeholders" (NACE, 2024, "Critical Thinking" section). Within this framework, critical thinking remains the primary learning outcome, while wisdom functions as the orientation shaping how judgment and discernment are exercised in professional decision-making.

Critical thinking is widely recognized as a foundational professional competency, yet it is often presented as primarily an analytical skill. Naughton (2024) argues that education often neglects the moral dimensions of judgment resulting in graduates who lack practical wisdom. From this perspective, critical thinking involves more than evaluating information. It requires developing "practi-cal wisdom" through relationships and moral formation. Backfish (2019) describes wisdom as "theological, practical, integrative, and transformative" (p. 382). Importantly, she emphasizes that wisdom is not just based on knowledge or intellect but shaped by a reverence to God and integrated "into all endeavors" (p. 394). Wisdom, therefore, functions as an integrative way of knowing that brings understanding, moral judgment, and experience into conversation. Framing critical thinking through wisdom underscores the formative dimensions of analysis and decision-making, acknowledging that professional judgment is shaped not only by cognitive skill but by the values and narratives that inform how problems are understood and addressed. Within this framework, wisdom operates as the formative lens that shapes how critical-thinking skills, analysis, and judgment are applied in ethically complex situations.

While NACE emphasizes analysis, interpretation, and prioritization as hallmarks of workplace critical thinking, Christian education should seek a deeper transformation. Wisdom, in the biblical sense, is not merely the ability to think clearly. It is the capacity to discern rightly and to align one's decisions with God's purposes. Christian wisdom is grounded in truth, guided by the Spirit, and oriented toward the good of others (Proverbs 4:7; James 3:17). Romans 12:2 calls believers to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind," suggesting that discernment is not just cognitive but also spiritual. Critical thinking becomes wisdom when it is paired with spiritual maturity and ethical discernment.

Rabon (2024) writes within the seminary context in "Integration of Spiritual Formation in Higher Education Courses," a premise increasingly echoed in Christian higher education, that Christian educators must move beyond the transfer of knowledge to engage the whole person—"mind, heart, soul, and strength" (p. 382). She further emphasizes that, for students to develop skills, such as critical thinking, professors "must move from the pedagogy (teacher-centered) approach to a more andragogical (learner-centered) practice" (p. 388). Students should be invited to "take responsibility for their education" (p. 388), owning it as a process of growth. Instructors who integrate this holistic model of education help students become not only sharper critical thinkers but more Christlike in their reasoning.

Rather than treating critical thinking as a purely intellectual task, Christian business educators can nurture this kind of wisdom by designing assignments that ask students to grapple with real-world moral dilemmas, reflect on biblical teachings, and explore how their knowledge applies to issues within the curriculum. This approach aligns with Naughton's argument that professional education must recover the moral purpose embedded within judgment. In

practice, this distinction can be assessed through case analyses, ethical justification rubrics, and reflections that require students to describe not only what decision they made but why their decision reflects wisdom—sound judgment informed by moral discernment. In so doing, critical thinking, viewed through the lens of wisdom, moves beyond analytical proficiency toward the formation of morally discerning decision-makers, and it becomes a philosophy of life.

The appendix provides a wisdom-critical thinking case-based exercise in which students articulate situational analysis, impacts, and decision rationale and then explicitly justify how their judgment reflects wisdom.

Communication (NACE) to Humility (Philosophy of Life)

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2024) defines communication as the ability to "clearly and effectively exchange information, ideas, facts, and perspectives with persons inside and outside of an organization" ("Communication" section). Sample behaviors of communication include the ability to "understand the importance of and demonstrate verbal, written, and nonverbal/body language, abilities"; "communicate in a clear and organized manner so that others can effectively understand"; and "ask appropriate questions for specific information from supervisors, specialists, and others" (NACE, 2024, "Communication" section). Within this framework, communication remains the primary learning outcome, while humility functions as the orientation shaping how information is exchanged and received.

Business scholarship increasingly recognizes that communication competence is shaped by character dispositions that influence listening, responsiveness, and openness to others. The article, "Competencies Needed by Business Professionals in the AI Age," emphasizes that effective communication depends on more "human" competencies, such as compassion, authenticity, and sincerity, and we should pay "attention to the unique ways oral communication provides value in interpersonal, team and leadership contexts" (Cardon et al., 2024, p. 238). Viewed through this lens, what the Cardon et al. define as "humanity" may be understood as aligning with the Christian virtue of humility. Here, humility functions as the formative orientation that shapes how listening, feedback, and message delivery are practiced in professional relationships. Cardon et al. (2024) similarly argue that communication effectiveness in organizations depends upon dispositions, such as relational awareness, suggesting that communicative competence and humanity are inseparable from the character traits that shape how messages are delivered and received. This

scholarship reinforces the claim that strengthening communication requires attention not only to technique but to the moral orientation underlying communicative practice.

In Christian formation, communication is more than just speaking well or transferring information. It is marked by active listening, grace, and restraint. As James 1:19 urges, believers are to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry." This posture reflects the humility modeled by Christ, who used His voice not for self-exaltation but to value others (Philippians 2:3-8). Humility frames speech not as self-promotion but as bridge-building (James 1:19; Philippians 2:3).

Smith (2025) invites educators to note the importance of humility as a teaching practice, describing how educators can intentionally incorporate it into their pedagogy to foster learning and collaboration. Drawing from interdisciplinary research at Calvin University, he describes how science educators began to treat humility, and other practices of Christian communities, not just as a virtue to be admired but as a pedagogical practice necessary for learning, communicating, and collaborating (pp. 60-64).

In these classrooms, students engaged in practices such as "asking for help instead of pretending competence, listening to others with the expectation of learning from them, and being honest and realistic about one's capacities" (Smith, 2025, p. 62). They practiced "humility tasks" that were outlined for them (p. 62). And, in conclusion, they were invited to reflect on and discuss their experiences (pp. 62-63). These humility-based communication practices can be assessed using existing measures or classroom evidence, such as peer evaluation data and reflective writing, allowing instructors to track growth in humility related communication behaviors.

Students reflected on their experiences with humility practices, noting benefits such as greater appreciation for others' perspectives and enhanced collaboration in the classroom (Smith, 2025, p. 63). As Smith notes, faith-formed goals need not compete with learning; they enhance it. "Seeking communion in one another's gifts and graces," he writes, "is not rival to the task of learning science, but rather a way of framing and pursuing that learning" (p. 63).

In practical terms, this could mean structuring classroom norms around values like humility, patience, and openness. It could involve assigning peer-feedback projects requiring active listening or analyzing communication failures through business and spiritual lenses. Case studies, reflection prompts, or group discussions that focus on humility as a communication value can help students internalize its importance.

These research findings are especially relevant for Christian business educators. When communication is viewed through the lens of humility, it becomes more than an exchange of information; it reflects a formative posture toward others. Finn (2024) contends that business practices form moral agency and that trust within business is sustained through virtue. From this perspective, humility strengthens communication not merely as technique but a trust-forming disposition that shapes relational credibility. Faculty can help students see that humble communication brings openness, fosters trust, and builds credibility—whether in a team meeting, a client pitch, or an ethical debate. In this way, the NACE competency of communication, reframed through the lens of humility becomes not merely a career skill, but a philosophy of life.

The appendix offers a structured listening and restatement exercise that allows instructors to evaluate communication clarity and listening behaviors while students reflect on humility as a posture that shapes how communication is received and practiced. While these exercises are not exhaustive, they demonstrate how small pedagogical shifts can make the formative dimensions of career competencies visible within Christian business education.

Teamwork (NACE) to Compassion (Philosophy of Life)

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2024) defines teamwork as the ability to "build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities" ("Teamwork" section). While teamwork, in a professional context, focuses on effective collaboration and goal achievement (NACE, 2024, "Teamwork" section), Christian formation calls educators to consider the moral orientation shaping that collaboration. Within this framework, teamwork remains the primary learning outcome, while compassion functions as the orientation shaping how collaboration and responsibility are practiced.

Teamwork is often framed in business education as a functional competency necessary for productivity. Within Christian higher education, however, collaborative work is often shaped by commitments to community. Guthrie (2018) describes Christianity as a public "point of view" that shapes how individuals look toward the common good—shared responsibility, neighbor love, and participation in collective flourishing. From this perspective, collaboration is not morally neutral but is embedded within a vision of neighbor love and shared responsibility. Compassion, therefore, may be understood as the relational virtue that shapes how individuals support one another within collaborative work, moving teamwork beyond efficiency toward mutual accountability and collective well-being.

Wong et al. (2015) argue that education shapes the moral agency of students through practices in the classroom, including collaboration. Similarly, Finn (2024) links trust and virtue to developing moral agency, which is shaped by the common good. Taken together, this scholarship supports the claim that teamwork practices are areas where morality can be formed. Within this broader scholarly conversation, compassion functions not as sentimental addition to teamwork but as a virtue that orients collaborative practices toward trust.

In this framework, compassion shapes how teamwork behaviors, such as shared responsibility and mutual support, are enacted. In His work with the disciples, Jesus modeled this. He was not a solitary leader, but a leader who relied on his team. He formed that team, mentored them, gave them responsibilities, corrected and encouraged them, and ultimately, he entrusted them with His mission to go (Luke 5:1-11; 9:1-6; 10:1-20; 22:7-38; Matthew 28:18-20). Colossians 3:12 calls believers to "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." As Christian educators, we are called to do likewise. Compassionate teamwork becomes not just about working well with others but about embodying relationships toward them.

Rabon (2024) emphasizes that relational connection serves as a catalyst for spiritual formation, reinforcing the idea that collaborative learning shapes not only cognitive development but communal and moral identity. She notes that in this age of digital isolation, "allowing students to connect with classmates achieves a more holistic approach to learning. Classmates are valuable assets to encourage spiritual formation in one another" (p. 388). She further reminds us that "all connections are essential for learning" (p. 388), especially in a Christian educational context where community reflects the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5). This insight strengthens the pedagogical rationale for treating teamwork as a site of both skill development and moral formation.

Educators can cultivate this compassionate mindset by structuring assignments and interactions around mutual care. To help students practice compassion as part of teamwork, instructors can incorporate structured peer assessment tools commonly used in teamwork instruction, such as anonymous peer evaluations that measure task distribution, support, communication quality, and conflict resolution. Adding a brief reflection prompt asking students to identify one act of compassion they extended to a teammate or received from another helps connect observable behaviors to the spiritual habit of compassion. Group projects should not only measure task outcomes but also evaluate how team members supported one another, managed responsibilities

fairly, and demonstrated patience or empathy. These practices create accessible indicators of compassion-related growth.

The NACE competency of teamwork is not replaced but reoriented through the lens of compassion. Rather than viewing collaboration as competitive positioning, students are encouraged to see their peers as image bearers of God. In this way, teamwork, shaped by compassion, becomes not merely a career competency but a philosophy of life.

The appendix includes a teamwork exercise with assigned roles and peer evaluation that measures behaviors while inviting students to identify moments of compassion that strengthened team functioning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN BUSINESS EDUCATION

Christian business programs have long straddled two expectations: to prepare students for success in the marketplace and to shape them into leaders of character. The model proposed in this paper—pairing NACE competencies with Christian philosophy of life—offers a practical framework to do both. As such, it also calls for a shift in how we view the role of formation in business education. Rather than adding more content, it suggests reframing instruction with intentionality, theological insight, and purpose to make it intrinsic to competency development.

This framework is intentionally designed to scaffold across courses, disciplines, and departments, with introductory courses introducing students to these competencies and Christian life habits, mid-level courses providing practice through case studies and decision-making exercises, and senior-level courses inviting deeper application through internships and projects.

The Urgency of Integration

Research continues to support what many faculty sense intuitively—that many students are entering adulthood with a desire for purpose beyond mere professional success. Yet students are not always equipped to connect their faith with their professional aspirations. The disconnect highlights the urgent need for integration across curriculum, not just in the extracurricular. As Otto and Harrington (2016) emphasize, spiritual formation is not merely an add-on or extracurricular benefit of Christian education; it is a "responsibility" requiring "a coordinated commitment that should be engaged holistically" (pp. 253, 260). If Christian business education fails to articulate how professional excellence and spiritual formation belong together, students may implicitly conclude that faith and work occupy separate domains.

Faculty Resistance

Faculty may feel unsure about integrating spiritual language or practices into a business curriculum, particularly when navigating professional boundaries. Such hesitation reflects the real tensions in faith-integrated teaching. Such hesitation is understandable, but it should not lead to pedagogical silence. Universities must respond by offering practical tools, shared vocabulary, and faculty development that build confidence and foster a collective commitment to Christian formation.

Faculty as Christian Philosophy of Life Leaders

Scholars increasingly recognize that formation is already happening in every university classroom. Brant et al. (2022) remind us that

> [w]ithin universities, courses and curricula are structured with a body of knowledge, a set of practices, and a list of learning outcomes and led by instructors who, whether intentionally or not, model particular thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors in the classroom, thereby shaping the character of their students (p. 5).

Moreover, a survey of more than 20,000 undergraduate faculty teaching at 143 colleges and universities, reported that more than 85% agreed or strongly agreed that it is part of their role to help students "develop personal values and moral character," with more than 90% belief from Catholic and other religious colleges (Stolzenberg et al., 2019). Even institutions that do not explicitly discuss virtue nevertheless participate in shaping it. This reality highlights the urgency for intentional frameworks, such as the one proposed in this paper, that connect career preparation with thoughtful, ethically grounded formation.

As noted by Otto and Harrington (2016), "Christian higher education has to create an atmosphere in which the faculty and administration intentionally seek ways to integrate spiritual formation into the full educational experience of students attending these institutions in order to provide the full measure of spiritual formation" (p. 253). Faculty are central to this formation. It happens not just through what we teach, but through how we teach—how we talk, how we frame learning, how we build community, and how we incorporate the Christian philosophies of life into our everyday classroom practices.

This does not require every professor to become a theology professor, but it does invite each to become a philosophy of life leader—someone who intentionally helps students see how vocational skills and spiritual/purpose maturity grow together. The pairing model presented in this paper seeks to encourage and equip faculty to incorporate the Christian philosophy of life, not through drastic curricular overhaul

but through small, intentional pedagogical choices—a reflection question here, a restructured group project there, a humble tone in feedback everywhere.

CONCLUSION

When intentionally implemented, formation becomes the shared goal not just of the religion class, the extracurricular club, or the campus ministry but of the business classroom as well. Christian business faculty can help students grow in both career competency skills and character.

Many students express a desire for purpose beyond technical skill acquisition. Christian educators have a distinctive opportunity to integrate vocational preparation with theological purpose. The framework offered here invites business educators to help students flourish so they step into their careers not only as professionals but as people with a philosophy of life that informs their relationships, decisions, and leadership.

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APPENDIX: SAMPLE PEDAGOGICAL EXERCISES

The pedagogical exercises that follow operationalize the framework described above by translating the proposed NACE competency-philosophy of life pairings into classroom practice. Each exercise is aligned with one of the competency pairings. The exercises are designed to support faculty implementation and provide accessible assessment assignments.

Leadership & Calling Exercise

Objective

To help students explore the intersection of leadership and personal calling by analyzing the leadership traits of a faith-based business leader. Students will consider how their own sense of calling might shape their future leadership decisions. This activity develops NACE leadership competencies through the Christian life habit of calling emphasizing purpose driven influence and integrity. This exercise operationalizes the leadership-calling pairing by inviting students to examine how leadership competencies are shaped by vocational identity and purpose.

Assignment

Choose one of the following individuals, originally discussed in Kelly and Stuebs (2021) for their faith-informed leadership, or select a different leader known for faith-informed, ethical leadership. Research their leadership role and how their faith informed their decision-making.

Write a 2-page personal reflection that includes a brief summary of their background; specific example of (1) how they influenced others toward a greater purpose, (2) how they took initiative grounded in value, and/or (3) how they led with integrity; along with a personal reflection. Cite at least one Scripture passage or faith-based leadership principle that aligns with the leader's action.

- John Tyson—CEO of Tyson Foods
- Cynthia Cooper—auditor and whistleblower in the WorldCom fraud case
- Sam Walton—Founder of Walmart
- Truett Cathy—Founder of Chick-fil-A

Class Group Work

Discuss in small groups: How does knowing someone's "why" shape their "how" in leadership.

Instructor Notes

- Provide a short set of faith-integrated leadership examples to help students differentiate calling from personality traits.
- Encourage students to cite publicly documented information.

Assessment

- Assess using a simple decision-making rubric evaluating clarity, ethical reasoning, and scriptural integration.

Critical Thinking (NACE) to Wisdom (Philosophy of Life)

Objective

To help students practice critical thinking shaped by spiritual wisdom by analyzing a business dilemma where the "right" answer is not obvious or easy. Students will evaluate the situation (limited facts), explore the ethical tension, apply Scripture, and decide what they would do and why. This activity reinforces the NACE critical thinking competency through the Christian life habit of wisdom. This exercise guides students to practice wisdom and discernment as they analyze complex professional scenarios and consider ethical and vocational implications.

Assignment

Choose one of the following dilemmas:

- Tax Loophole Use—A CFO discovers a perfectly legal tax loophole that would reduce the company's tax burden but could be viewed as ethically questionable.
- Influencer Controversy—A brand ambassador makes public comments offensive to many. Your marketing team is unsure whether to publicly cut ties or stay silent.
- Allergen Recall—A snack product that has a potential cross-contamination issue. It is not legally required to recall the product, and doing so would be costly.
- Pay Inequity Discovered—You notice a gender-based pay gap among equally qualified employees, but your supervisor asks you not to raise concerns right now.
- Unethical Overseas Supplier—Your supplier delivers fast and cheap but is rumored to exploit workers. Cutting ties may harm your margins and timelines.
- Artist Branding vs. Personal Conviction—You are a manager for an emerging artist who is gaining traction quickly. A major brand offers a sponsorship deal that could elevate the artist's visibility, but the brand's values or past campaigns conflict with the artist's personal convictions (e.g., faith, political stance, or ethical concerns). Accepting the deal would be a career breakthrough; declining may close future doors. As the manager, how do you advise the artist, and how do you balance integrity, influence, and opportunity?
- Wildcard Option—Propose your own ethical dilemma from a real-world example.

Write a paper to include:

- Situational Analysis—What are the applicable facts to your decision (students may have to build them out), who are the stakeholders, and what are the potential options?
- Critical Thinking—What decision-making factors matter most (cost, risk, values)? What are the short- and long-term consequences of each option? What does sound judgment tell you?
- Biblical Wisdom—What scriptures may apply and how does faith impact how you approach this issue?
- Decision—What would you do and why?

Class Group Work

In small groups, present your dilemma and decision in a 60-second "boardroom summary" and discuss among the group.

Instructor Notes

- Assign dilemma 2-3 days before class
- Students write individual analysis; discussion occurs in groups of 3-4
- Instructor Facilitates a short debrief connecting critical thinking behavior to spiritual wisdom (humility, discernment, justice).

Assessment

- Assess using a simple decision-making rubric evaluating clarity, ethical reasoning, and scriptural integration.
- Include a reflection prompt, such as, "Describe how your decision reflects spiritual wisdom."
- Instructor may also track growth through short pre- or post-reflections or rubric scores

Teamwork (NACE) to Compassion (Philosophy of Life)

Objective

Students will complete a short collaborative task with pre-assigned roles reinforcing the importance of recognizing, respecting, and supporting defined responsibilities within teams. This activity reinforces the NACE teamwork competency through the Christian life habit of compassion. This exercise seeks to engage students in collaborative reflection on shared purpose and mutual accountability to the common good seen through compassion within team-based work.

Assignment

Work in a team. Choose one of the following dilemmas/projects:

- Market entry pitch for a new product. Your team represents a startup launching a new eco-friendly beverage brand. You have been asked to prepare a short pitch to a panel of potential investors. Your deliverables include a slide overview of the product concept, a two-minute spoken pitch, and key market insight.
- Social impact campaign. Your team has been hired by a rising independent artist who wants to partner with a nonprofit for a meaningful cause, such as mental health or homelessness. Your job is to develop a social impact campaign that aligns with the artist's brand. Your deliverables include a one-page campaign, overview (goals, visuals, and artist fit), an example of a social media post or slogan, and a statement on why this cause matters to the artist.
- Internal conflict resolution plan. You have been hired by a mid-sized company experiencing frequent communication breakdowns in cross departmental meetings. Your task is to design a conflict resolution and communication improvement plan. You must identify three common teamwork problems, create a simple team-values guide and meeting protocol, and share a two-minute pitch explaining your plan.

In your group, you will have the following team members, to be determined by the instructor. Note that all roles are equally important. Your goal is not only to complete the project but to collaborate with compassion while recognizing and supporting one another's contributions. As you meet, consider how each team member's role mirrors real-world job titles or organizational positions.

- Project manager—responsible for setting timelines and keeping the team on task.
- Research—lead responsible for gathering key background or market data.
- Communication—coordinator responsible for organizing presentation or written output.
- Quality control—reviews work, checks details, and ensures group consensus.

Upon completion of the project, write a reflection addressing the following and share it with the class.

- What was your assigned role and how did you approach it?
- How did your role contribute to the group's success?
- What challenges did you face in fulfilling your role? How did your team members respond to each other's roles? In other words, was each person's contribution respected?
- Were there moments when someone struggled, and if so, how did the team respond?
- As it relates to Colossians 3:12-14, identify one phrase that connects to your team experience and describe how it might look to "clothe yourselves with compassion" in a team environment?

Instructor Notes

- Assign teams of four and roles before the activity.
- Provide 20 to 30 minutes for task completion and 5-8 minutes for group presentations.
- Instructor observes interactions, noting examples of support, patience, problem solving, and task sharing.

Assessment

- Assess using a peer evaluation rubric to measure task distribution, communication quality, and support.
- Include a reflection prompt assessing compassion in action.
- Instructor may score teamwork behaviors using a rubric, including supportiveness, communication, patience, and collaboration.

Communication (NACE) to Humility (Philosophy of Life)

Objective

Students will communicate by engaging in intentional listening, giving and receiving feedback, and reflecting on how these interactions shaped their growth. This activity reinforces the NACE communication competency through the Christian life habit of humility. This exercise prompts students to reflect on how humility and relational awareness inform professional community

Assignment

Work in pairs, as determined by the instructor, to speak to one another on one of the following prompts. Each partner is to take no more than four minutes to speak.

- Speaker—Business class reflection prompt:
  - o What is one concept, chapter, or module in this course that you have found especially difficult or confusing?
  - o What is one business-related topic from this class that you are interested in but still unsure about?
  - o What is one moment in class that made you think differently?

- Speaker—personal reflection prompt:
  - o What is one challenge you have faced that shaped your character?
  - o What motivates you to pursue your major or career path?
  - o What is one value or conviction that you hold strongly and why?

- Listener
  - o Actively listen.
  - o Do not interrupt.
  - o Take brief notes on what your partner says.
  - o After the speaker has shared, spend two minutes repeating back what you heard, focusing on accuracy, clarity, and empathy.

Upon completion, write a reflection addressing the following:
- What was it like to listen without speaking? In other words, what challenged you?
- How did it feel to have your words repeated back by someone else?
- What did you learn about humility through this experience?
- Reflect on James 1:19 and Philippians 2:3-4. Write about what insights they provide about communication as a spiritual practice.
- How might this kind of listening help you communicate better in a business or leadership setting?

Instructor Notes
- Pair students intentionally, such as across different personality types or work styles.
- Allocate 12 to 15 minutes for paired conversations and 5-7 minutes for debriefing. Make certain to model listening before students begin.
- During the activity, observe pairs and take note of listening behaviors, body language, and effort to understand.

Assessment
- Assess using a short rubric evaluating active listening, accuracy of restatement, respectful tone, and evidence of humility in communication.
- Students complete a self-assessment or inventory.
- Collect the written reflections and assess for insight, integration of scripture, and practical application.