

Beles Christian Education Fund - The Five Priorities of Life

The Beles Christian Education Fund exists to provide financial partnership to Christian organizations that lead programs and teach curriculum in a manner that aligns with *The Five Priorities of Life*. This fund believes that God has called people to live in a way that honors and worships him. *The Five Priorities of Life* provide five significant concepts that help people honor and worship God. Organizations applying for a grant from the Beles Christian Education Fund must find themselves in agreement with and energized by these five priorities.

Grants from this fund will most often be established for organizations like Christian schools, Christian based homeschool programs and co-ops, churches, Christian camps, and other organizations that are best served by providing a strong Christian curriculum to people of all ages and life stages. Organizations that receive a grant commit to include teaching on the five priorities. The exact way these are taught may vary depending on the organization or context but the commitment to focus on these priorities remain.

The Five Priorities of Life:

- 1. God - We commit to placing God as the center and priority of our lives.**
- 2. Family - We build strong families because strong families honor God.**
- 3. Work - We work hard to provide the best care and support for our families.**
- 4. Church and Charity - We worship regularly and participate in a faith community.**
- 5. Freedom & Liberty - We strive to maintain and respect our freedoms.**

We believe that God must be the first priority of life. Nothing else works without God as our priority. The remaining priorities fold under God in a specific order. The family is our second priority because it is in the family where we first learn about God and about the other priorities. A healthy family life will lead to a commitment to work. Productivity and a commitment to a vocational calling provide the resources to live as a charitable member of society. Lastly, following the first four priorities creates the space for us to be engaged with the fifth as wise, thoughtful citizens and advocates for the freedoms we enjoy as a nation.

How to Apply:

Download a copy of the Beles Christian Education Fund Grant Application through the DuPage Foundation website. For more information please click on the link below or contact the DuPage Foundation directly at 630-665-5556.

<http://dupagefoundation.org>

Priority One: God

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” - John 1:1-5 (NIV)

Belief in God and a commitment to live according to God’s will is the foundation for everything we do. Without God we would be lost, lacking direction, moral grounding, meaning and purpose. Scriptures remind us that this world started with God and the human story ends with God. From the first words of Genesis to the closing chapter of Revelation, the one constant throughout the human experience is that there is a God who ordains life and who chooses to love his people.

Living a life of faith is significant and challenging. Christians believe in God because they are called into a partnership with the divine, not because the Christian faith provides an easy life or extra perks. We are invited to know the God of the universe, the one through whom all things are made. This is a high and mighty calling. To place God as the number one priority for our lives means that we make a conscious decision to set aside our own selfish desires and distractions and focus on the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

When we live with God as the priority of our lives . . .

- We find that we experience peace and strength even in the most difficult situations.
- We can face the hardships of life knowing that the God of the universe is loving and caring for us along the way.
- We experience healthy communities and families because we are focused on the needs of others instead of ourselves.
- We have a moral compass to guide us in our decision making processes at every stage of life.
- We enter into a relationship with the divine creator of the universe who knows more about us than even we know ourselves (Psalm 139).
- We live with hope knowing that God is all-knowing and never changing. God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

A commitment to love God and live out his Kingdom purposes for our lives will always be the number one priority of life. A relationship with God is the umbrella under which all other priorities fall. Without God we will never be the parents, spouses, co-workers, or citizens we were meant to be. We will never be more than a shadow of ourselves if we choose to live without God. It is our great joy through the Beles Christian Education Fund to encourage and support those organizations who teach others that God is the number one priority in life.

Priority Two: Family

“Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court.” — Psalm 127:3-5 (NIV)

God is a master of order and structure. When God created the world he set into place a plan for community life, marriage, and family life. Children are one of the great gifts that come from God’s plan for families. We respect and honor the fact that some people who wanted to be parents did not receive that opportunity. We also respect that some people choose to remain single and honor God with their lives in marvelous ways (like the Apostle Paul). One does not have to have children or a family to serve the Lord.

However, we live in a world where the majority of adults do eventually marry and raise families. Children can be a source of tremendous blessing. With each new baby born into this world we celebrate another soul, another new life to love and serve God. We also celebrate the passing on of our faith and the community of God to the next generation. Families must make quality time with one another their second life priority. A strong family will help build a strong community and witness. Healthy families model faith, commitment, and love to a world where family life is in jeopardy and often mocked or neglected by our media and dominant culture.

When we make family life a priority . . .

- We help build strong and healthy communities by sharing with them the peace and comfort we have because of the time invested in our families.
- We help build up the church of Jesus Christ by supporting the work of God and the service of the church as a family.
- We trust that God will bless our decisions to place our family life over our pursuit of career, education, financial security, and any other desires for worldly success.
- We enjoy the benefits of the hard work it takes to make family a priority as children grow and grandchildren and extended family enter our lives.

We believe that parents are the primary faith educators of their children and that the most important lessons in the Christian faith and in serving God come from the parents. Churches, schools and other institutions are partners with parents but the primary providers for love, education and structure in the life of a child comes from Mom and Dad.

Healthy families are also the product of healthy marriages. Mothers and fathers should seek to love one another as they provide the first and best example of love for their children as they grow. Together, parents and children bring God’s love to the world through the blessing of staying present with and for one another.

Priority Three: Work

“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

“Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. — Genesis 1:28-30 (NIV)

From the very beginning of time, God created vocation as part of the design for humanity. After creating man and woman he provided purpose. They were to act as stewards over the earth God created, to increase in number, to subdue the earth, to take into account all the animals and the plants and the food God created. Adam and Eve, one might say, were busy.

A vocation is a gift. God provides all his people with a set of gifts and talents. To live in a time in history that affords the opportunity to use those gifts fully for the Common Good is a marvelous gift. When we work hard and pursue the educational opportunities before us, we are able to accomplish the tasks that God has set before us. In these times we experience a holy moment. Hard work honors God. Hard work does not mean we place our profession before God or before our family, but it does mean we take seriously the opportunities we have received to use our gifts and earn an honest living.

When we make work our third priority . . .

- We set an example for others that we take seriously the vocational calling God has placed on our lives.
- We are able to contribute to the food, shelter, and resources that our families need to thrive.
- We understand that our work does not define us but our commitment to our work defines part of our character.
- We develop a greater understanding of God’s world as we work with others and develop a sense of camaraderie and teamwork with those who might have different ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds.

Proverbs 14:23 says, “All hard work brings a profit.” This may not always be in the form of financial profit. Hard work creates profit in the form of life-satisfaction, honoring our supervisors, co-workers, or employees. Hard work profits the communities and organizations within which we work. When work is a priority of life we understand more about the great God who created vocation and invites us to participate in his creation through meaningful work.

Priority Four: Church and Charity

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” — Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)

One of the earliest examples of worship and charity comes from the community of early Christians in the Book of Acts. Here, the believers met regularly, they discussed God’s word, they prayed, they shared meals, and they participated in charitable acts for those who were in need. The result of their powerful fellowship and worship was that God blessed them by sending more and more disciples to them. People were saved on a daily basis.

When we place church and acts of charity as a priority in our lives we create a space to participate in worship and fellowship with other Christians. Throughout the week we interact with our families, spouses, neighbors, friends, and colleagues. These are meaningful interactions but none provide for us the corporate opportunity to learn and grow in our faith like the gathered assembly of believers in the church.

When we make church and charity a priority . . .

- We commit to a group of people for and with whom we pray, study, grow, worship, and learn more about God together.
- We provide a place for our families to be nurtured further in their faith alongside mentors, friends, teachers, and pastors.
- We follow through on a commitment to a community that expects us to serve, participate, and contribute our gifts (financially and spiritually).
- We receive opportunities to serve others.
- We experience a place where we can bring others to faith.
- We practice giving of our treasures and see the benefit this provides for others.

To make church and acts of charity a priority is to regularly set our own agendas aside and line up behind the needs of others. This can be a difficult task in our dominant culture that prizes individuality and success. Regular engagement with church and charity ensures that our lives will remain open to God’s leading and God’s clear directive that we share our resources and treasures with those in need.

Priority Five: Freedom and Liberty

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.” — Galatians 5:13-15 (NIV)

The fifth and final priority is that of freedom and liberty. As a nation that stands a little over 200 years old, we cannot draw direct stories of our history from the Bible. However, we can lean on the word of God to guide this priority and remember that the United States was founded on many Biblical principles. In Galatians, Paul invites the followers of Jesus to remember that they are free and that they do not have to live as slaves. But, immediately following this statement he reminds them that their freedom is to be exercised for the benefit of their neighbors and others. Freedom comes with responsibility and we must pray for the wisdom to exercise it well.

The United States grants religious freedoms to its citizens and we want to be a people who maintain those freedoms. As the dominant culture becomes less religious it is important for the Christian to maintain his/her religious freedoms and to remind our political leaders that these freedoms are part of our national heritage.

When we make freedom and liberty a priority . . .

- We use our freedoms to help foster the well-being of others rather than for self-promotion or personal gain.
- We remember the faith on which our nation was founded and we honor the prayers and the God those who came before us worshipped.
- We remember that our contributions to the political process should honor God and Biblical teachings rather than our own “pet projects” or current trends.
- We teach our children that the freedoms they experience do not come easy and it is the responsibility of each generation to pass this awareness and responsibility on to the next.
- We remember that God comes before nation (see priority number one) so while we seek to honor our nation; our reason for doing so is to honor God.
- We seek to serve our nation when opportunity arises (military, political office, etc.).

God has blessed the U.S. in uncommon ways. There is no other nation in modern history that has experienced the abundance, blessing, and global influence that the U.S. experiences today. It is the priority of the Christian to give thanks to God for this gift and to help this nation maintain a focus on God and a commitment to the religious freedoms and national liberties that brought us to this place. Scripture tells us to pray for our leaders and so as we serve our country we also pray for it and for those who lead it. Freedom and liberty are the fifth priority and one that significantly shapes the future of our nation when others make this a priority as well.