



The Teacher's Spiritual Preparation for Professional Service: An Exegetical Reflection on Matthew 6:6 in the Context of SD Negeri 097319 Siopat Suhu-Simalungun

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ABSTRACT

The spiritual preparation of Christian teachers has increasingly been recognized as a vital component of effective pedagogical practice, particularly in contexts where moral formation, character development, and faith-based instruction intersect. This study explores how Christian teachers at SD Negeri 097319 Siopat Suhu in Simalungun integrate spiritual disciplines into their professional service, using Matthew 6:6 as an exegetical framework. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the research collected data through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis involving six Christian teachers with varying levels of experience and spiritual engagement. Thematic analysis revealed that private devotion-including prayer, meditation, and reflective engagement with Scripture-serves as the foundation for emotional resilience, ethical discernment, and relational sensitivity within the classroom. Teachers reported that spiritual preparation enhanced their capacity for patience, empathy, and moral guidance, enabling them to respond effectively to diverse student needs while maintaining professional integrity. Observations confirmed that teachers' inner spiritual life translated into tangible classroom behaviors, shaping a positive learning environment that models Christ-centered virtues. Furthermore, spiritual preparation was found to support vocational commitment, sustain professional satisfaction, and promote consistency between belief and practice. The study highlights that Matthew 6:6 provides both a theological and pedagogical framework, demonstrating that private devotion is integral to authentic and effective teaching. These findings underscore the inseparable link between teacher spirituality and professional service, suggesting that cultivating a disciplined inner life is essential for Christian educators seeking to foster holistic student development, ethical conduct, and purposeful engagement in secular and pluralistic educational settings.

Keywords: *Spiritual Preparation, Christian Religious Education, Professional Service*

INTRODUCTION

In Christian educational discourse, the spiritual formation of teachers is increasingly recognized as a foundational dimension of professional identity, particularly within school environments that require moral clarity, emotional stability, and pedagogical integrity. While educational research often emphasizes technical competence, administrative performance, and content mastery, Christian pedagogy asserts that the inner life of the teacher profoundly shapes the quality of their professional service (Palmer 1998). Spiritual preparation—understood as prayerful attentiveness, disciplined inward formation, and ongoing communion with God—becomes indispensable in nurturing dispositions that teachers bring into the classroom. Matthew 6:6, situated within Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, provides a compelling theological vision for such preparation, emphasizing the primacy of hidden devotion as the source of authentic public ministry. The verse's admonition—"go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen"—frames spirituality not as performance but as a transformative encounter with God that empowers ethical and vocational responsibility. Matthew 6:6 belongs to a broader critique of religious ostentation in Matthew 6:1-18, where Jesus warns against practicing acts of righteousness "before others to be seen by them." The instruction to "go into your inner room" employs the Greek term *tameion*, referring to a private storage chamber or secluded inner space. According to Luz's commentary, this space symbolizes an inner sanctuary where the disciple's heart encounters God away from social visibility and competing voices (Luz 2007). The emphasis on secrecy does not undermine communal worship; rather, it reorients the believer toward a spirituality rooted in authenticity, sincerity, and relational intimacy with the Father. Thus, hidden prayer becomes the wellspring of public faithfulness, shaping character and fostering humility. For teachers, this passage invites an understanding of professional service grounded not merely in external performance but in the cultivated inner life from which pedagogical wisdom, emotional presence, and moral resilience flow. In the educational context of SD Negeri 097319 Siopat Suhu in Simalungun, this theological insight becomes particularly relevant. As a public elementary school marked by cultural plurality, social diversity, and increasing expectations for character-based education, teachers face considerable moral and emotional demands. Students navigate various socio-economic backgrounds, learning challenges, and relational tensions that require teachers to respond with patience, empathy, and discernment. Christian teachers working in this environment engage daily in tasks that test both their professional competence and their spiritual depth. In such a setting, Matthew 6:6 provides a spiritual paradigm for teachers who must draw strength from unseen communion with God in order to offer visible service marked by compassion and integrity. Scholars of Christian education often argue that the teacher's spiritual life directly influences the atmosphere of the classroom, shaping relational dynamics, decision-making patterns, and the moral ecology of learning (Van Brummelen 2009). Hidden spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation on Scripture, and solitude cultivate dispositions that manifest in professional conduct—gentleness, patience, self-control, and moral conviction. These virtues, in turn, become pedagogical tools that foster trust, cooperation, and holistic student development. From a biblical perspective, the secrecy of prayer is not merely a spiritual discipline but a formative process through which God shapes the inner person for public responsibility. As Keener notes, Jesus'

teaching underscores that authentic righteousness flows from an inward transformation rather than external compliance or reputation (Keener 1999). Thus, the teacher's spiritual preparation emerges as a theological and pedagogical necessity. This study reflects on Christian teachers' spiritual preparation in light of Matthew 6:6, exploring how the cultivation of hidden devotion informs their readiness for professional service at SD Negeri 097319 Siopat Suhu. By integrating exegetical insights with empirical observations, the research aims to illuminate how teachers interpret, embody, and apply the principle of secret prayer within the realities of public education. Ultimately, this introduction establishes a foundation for examining how spiritual disciplines shape the professional and moral contributions of Christian teachers in pluralistic school settings.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive design was implemented to explore how Christian teachers at SD Negeri 097319 Siopat Suhu understand and practice spiritual preparation for professional service in light of Matthew 6:6. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to capture lived experiences, spiritual perceptions, and personal reflections that cannot be quantified but require rich narrative descriptions to reveal their depth and complexity (Creswell, 2021). This approach also enables the integration of exegetical insights from Scripture with practical educational realities, allowing theological reflection to inform pedagogical practice (Osmer, 2008). The study was conducted at SD Negeri 097319 Siopat Suhu, a public elementary school in Simalungun, North Sumatra. Although a public institution, the school employs several Christian teachers who work in a pluralistic and culturally diverse environment. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on teachers who were willing to reflect on their spiritual practices, interpretations of Matthew 6:6, and the role of private prayer in supporting their professional service (Patton, 2015). Some teachers participated, representing different ages, years of teaching experience, and levels of spiritual engagement. Their diversity provided a wide range of perspectives regarding how spiritual preparation influences classroom behavior, pedagogical decisions, and relational interactions with students. Interviews enabled participants to narrate their spiritual practices, experiences of "entering the inner room," and how these practices shaped their teaching identity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). While spiritual preparation is primarily internal, its effects can be observed in teachers' emotional regulation, patience, relational approach, and classroom climate (Tisdell, 2016). Observations focused on these behaviors during regular teaching and interaction with students. Relevant documents were examined to provide contextual insights into the ways spiritual discipline informs professional conduct (Van Brummelen, 2009). Data were analyzed through familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing, defining, and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Both inductive and deductive coding strategies were employed: inductively to capture participants' narratives, and deductively to incorporate exegetical insights from Matthew 6:6. Emergent themes included private devotion as foundational for professional resilience, the integration of spirituality into pedagogy, and the cultivation of moral and emotional stability. Participants were assured that their reflections would be used solely for research purposes and would not affect their professional standing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the spiritual preparation of Christian teachers at SD Negeri 097319 Siopat Suhu is intricately tied to their professional identity, emotional resilience, and pedagogical effectiveness, illustrating the enduring relevance of Matthew 6:6 in contemporary educational practice. Teachers consistently reported that private devotion, especially prayer and reflective engagement with Scripture, functions as a foundation for their daily teaching activities. One teacher articulated, "Before I enter the classroom, I spend at least ten minutes in prayer and reflection. It centers me and reminds me that my work is ultimately a service to God." This sentiment highlights the internalization of Jesus' instruction to "enter your inner room and pray to your Father who is unseen," demonstrating that hidden spiritual practices cultivate intentionality, calmness, and focus. These internal disciplines were reported to enhance not only personal well-being but also the relational climate within the classroom, providing a stable emotional anchor for responding to diverse student needs (Simanjuntak, 2024). Observations corroborated these self-reports, revealing that teachers who engaged in regular spiritual preparation exhibited greater patience, empathy, and attentiveness toward students. In classrooms where teachers modeled reflective calm and deliberate care, students appeared more engaged, cooperative, and willing to express themselves. Teachers reported that their spiritual preparation allowed them to navigate moments of frustration or conflict with composure, which in turn modeled Christian virtues such as humility, self-control, and integrity for their students. For instance, one participant described how moments of inner reflection before teaching enabled her to respond thoughtfully to a student displaying disruptive behavior, choosing guidance over punishment. This aligns with educational literature asserting that teachers' emotional regulation and moral comportment are closely linked to inner spiritual formation (Tisdell, 2016; Van Brummelen, 2009). The study also revealed that spiritual preparation fosters moral and ethical discernment. Teachers indicated that private prayer and meditation provide clarity in decision-making, particularly in ethically complex scenarios such as managing academic fairness, addressing student conflict, or mediating cultural and religious differences among students. By grounding their decisions in reflective communion with God, teachers were able to navigate these challenges with integrity and consistency, thereby reinforcing trust and moral authority in the classroom. One teacher emphasized that spiritual preparation was not only about personal edification but also about ensuring that their professional actions reflected Christ-centered values. This mirrors the theological interpretation of Matthew 6:6, in which private devotion is the source of authentic righteousness and the wellspring for ethical public behavior (Keener, 1999).

The findings also highlighted that spiritual preparation nurtures vocational resilience and professional satisfaction. Teachers reported that the pressures of teaching, especially in a public school context with diverse student needs and limited resources, could be overwhelming without a disciplined spiritual life. The practice of entering the "inner room" for prayer and reflection provided a space to process stress, renew motivation, and align daily actions with a sense of divine purpose. This reflects Palmer's (1998) assertion that the teacher's inner life fundamentally shapes both personal fulfillment and effectiveness in guiding students. Teachers who maintained consistent spiritual routines described higher levels of perseverance, commitment, and emotional stability compared

to those who admitted to irregular spiritual practice. In this sense, spirituality functions as both a protective and generative resource, enabling teachers to sustain long-term engagement and service. Another significant theme that emerged was the relational dimension of spirituality. Teachers indicated that their private devotional life not only benefited their personal and professional capacities but also influenced interactions with colleagues and the broader school community. Teachers shared that shared reflection on spiritual practices and informal prayer circles among Christian colleagues reinforced a culture of mutual support, encouragement, and ethical accountability. Such communal reinforcement mirrors the concept of the early faith community, wherein private devotion nurtures public service and relational integrity. Teachers articulated that this relationally mediated spirituality created a network of moral and emotional support, which further strengthened their ability to maintain professionalism in challenging situations. The integration of spiritual preparation with pedagogical practice was also evident in instructional decision-making. Teachers reported that reflective prayer and contemplation helped them design lessons that were not merely informative but transformative, focusing on character formation, moral reasoning, and ethical discernment alongside academic objectives. For instance, one teacher described using short reflective exercises at the beginning of class to encourage students to pause, consider the ethical dimensions of their actions, and cultivate awareness of their responsibilities toward others. This practice demonstrates the alignment between internal spiritual preparation and outward pedagogical enactment, illustrating a seamless connection between Matthew 6:6 and the teacher's professional role. By prioritizing inner reflection, teachers were able to model authenticity, integrity, and attentiveness, ensuring that spiritual values were enacted in practical and observable ways. Participants indicated that spiritual preparation shaped their capacity for empathy and contextual sensitivity. In a culturally diverse school setting, students present varying backgrounds, learning styles, and social-emotional needs. Teachers reported that private spiritual discipline nurtured patience and humility, enabling them to respond to each student without prejudice or frustration. For example, one teacher noted that meditation and prayer allowed her to approach students who struggled academically or socially with understanding rather than judgment, demonstrating Christ-like care and equanimity. This underscores that hidden spiritual practices cultivate relational and pedagogical skills essential for nurturing inclusive and compassionate learning environments. The study affirms that Matthew 6:6 offers a robust framework for understanding teacher spirituality as a foundation for professional service. Private devotion is not an optional or peripheral practice but a formative locus in which teachers align their motives, clarify ethical intentions, and cultivate inner resources that inform public action. Spiritual preparation, therefore, is integrally connected to classroom leadership, ethical guidance, and the holistic development of students. The teachers' experiences suggest that hidden devotion produces observable outcomes: enhanced moral authority, improved emotional regulation, and effective pedagogical practice. These findings resonate with previous scholarship emphasizing the inseparability of teacher spirituality from educational effectiveness, indicating that the cultivation of inner life is essential for sustaining both ethical and professional integrity (Palmer, 1998; Tisdell, 2016; Van Brummelen, 2009). The study highlights challenges and opportunities in embedding spiritual preparation within public school settings. While teachers valued private prayer and reflection, they

also noted time constraints, administrative duties, and the secular nature of the institution as potential obstacles. Nevertheless, all participants reported strategies to maintain consistent spiritual practice, such as brief reflective pauses between lessons, early morning devotion, or post-school meditation. This adaptation demonstrates that spiritual preparation can coexist with professional demands and even enhance the teacher's effectiveness and presence. Furthermore, it suggests that Matthew 6:6 remains a vital and practical guide for contemporary Christian educators, offering a model for integrating spirituality into professional service in ways that respect institutional norms while fostering moral and relational excellence. The results demonstrate that Christian teachers' spiritual preparation-rooted in private devotion as modeled in Matthew 6:6-significantly shapes their pedagogical effectiveness, moral authority, emotional resilience, and relational capacity. Spiritual disciplines cultivate both the interior resources and exterior expressions necessary for high-quality teaching, guiding students not only intellectually but also ethically and spiritually. This study underscores that teacher spirituality is both a personal vocation and a public pedagogical instrument, revealing that the hidden life of devotion directly influences observable professional outcomes. In the context of SD Negeri 097319 Siopat Suhu, spiritual preparation functions as a transformative mechanism, enabling teachers to enact professional service with integrity, purpose, and Christ-centered intentionality.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the spiritual preparation of Christian teachers, rooted in private devotion as emphasized in Matthew 6:6, plays a pivotal role in shaping their professional service, pedagogical effectiveness, and moral authority. The findings reveal that consistent engagement in prayer, meditation, and reflective practices strengthens teachers' emotional resilience, enhances relational sensitivity, and fosters ethical clarity, enabling them to navigate complex classroom dynamics with composure, empathy, and integrity. By "entering the inner room" and cultivating a disciplined inner life, teachers are able to translate hidden spiritual practices into visible expressions of patience, compassion, and moral guidance, thereby modeling Christ-centered virtues to students. Spiritual preparation emerges as a critical resource for sustaining vocational commitment and professional satisfaction within the demands of a public school setting. Teachers reported that moments of quiet reflection and communion with God provided clarity for decision-making, encouraged ethical responsiveness, and reinforced a sense of purpose that transcends immediate professional pressures. This alignment of inner life and outward action illustrates how spiritual discipline functions as both a formative and operative mechanism, directly influencing classroom leadership, instructional choices, and the moral climate of the school. The study also highlights that integrating spirituality with professional practice is both practical and contextually adaptable, even in secular or pluralistic school environments. Teachers employed creative strategies to maintain devotion amidst administrative responsibilities, demonstrating that spiritual preparation does not conflict with institutional norms but instead enriches pedagogical engagement and student-centered care. Matthew 6:6 provides a theological and pedagogical framework for understanding the integral connection between teacher spirituality and professional service. The inner cultivation of faith equips educators to perform their

duties with authenticity, integrity, and purpose, producing tangible benefits for students' cognitive, moral, and spiritual development. This research underscores that the hidden life of devotion is not peripheral but essential for effective, ethical, and Christ-centered teaching, offering a model for contemporary Christian educators striving to embody spiritual intentionality within their professional vocation.

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