



2025 CSA State Conference

Living Well:

A Christian approach to wellbeing & flourishing

**Participant
Guide**
on demand package

About the theme

Living Well: A Christian approach to wellbeing & flourishing

In a time when wellbeing is a pressing concern, this conference invites Christian school staff to reflect on how we understand and promote true biblical flourishing.

Drawing from both cultural and theological perspectives, the sessions will explore how the Christian narrative provides hope and meaning amidst life's challenges.

Participants will also examine practical ways school practices can foster resilient, hope-filled wellbeing in staff and students, aligned with a Biblical vision of flourishing.

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Icons Explained

Icons are in use throughout this guide and help to provide a snapshot of activities, actions and program items



Watch Video



Worksheet



Bonus Video



Reading



Discussion or Group Activity



Brainstorm and Discussion



Reflective Questions



Discussion as a whole group or at tables

How to use this Guide

This guide is provided for participants attending the 2025 CSA State Conference, facilitated at their school or as an individual.

Throughout this document, there will be mention of resources required for the day. All of these are included in this guide in the applicable section.

Your facilitator will point you to the correct sections and activities to participate in the program.

Speaker Information



Dr. Brian Harris

Dr Brian Harris is a sought-out speaker, teacher, leader and writer. A widely respected theologian, after 17 years as principal of Perth's Vose Seminary, in 2021 he became the founding director of the AVENIR Leadership Institute, an initiative of the Carey Group committed to fostering leaders who will make a positive impact on the world. He is also a co-founder of the Centre for Faith and Life. It's byline, "Spacious Hearts, Curious Minds" reflects much of Brian's own approach to faith, life and leadership.

While directing the work of AVENIR and the Centre for Faith and Life, Brian continues to do some part time teaching at the Vose Campus of Morling College, is a Director of the Australian College of Theology and a Distinguished International Visiting Scholar of Spurgeon's College, London. He has also twice served as a visiting Professor of Religion at Carson Newman University in the USA. Brian is the author of 7 books, some of which have been used in theological colleges and professional development days in Christian schools. His most recent book and podcast - *Stirrers and Saints* (Paternoster, 2024) - explores the important area of spiritual formation for leadership.



Dr. Darren Iselin

Darren has over 3 decades leadership experience within Christian education in both Australian and international contexts and has served in a wide range of CEO/executive and senior leadership roles within both K-12 schooling and higher education sectors.

He is currently Director of Research and Innovation with Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and is the Australian Project Coordinator for the Student Flourishing in Australian Christian Schools Research Project with researchers from the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard and Research Schools International. Darren was also the coordinator for the landmark Cardus Education Survey Australia Project.

Darren has completed extensive formal study, including doctoral studies through the University of Queensland where his PhD explored "How Principals are cultivating Sustainable School Cultures Within Christian Schools During Changing Times". Darren's thesis was awarded the Grassie-Basset prize for best thesis in Educational Administration from The University of Queensland and also won the Research in Educational Leadership Management Award from the Australian Council of Educational Leaders (ACEL).



Jon Eckert

Dr. Jonathan Eckert is the Copple Professor of Educational Leadership at Baylor University. He taught outside of Chicago and Nashville for 12 years.

After completing his doctorate at Vanderbilt University in 2008, he served at the U.S. Department of Education in both the Bush and Obama administrations on teaching quality issues.

He has won multiple teaching awards in higher education and is the author of three Corwin books: *Just Teaching*, *Leading Together*, *The Novice Advantage*, as well numerous other articles and books.

Sessions Overview

Session 1

Beyond the Buzzword: A Biblical Approach to Wellbeing

Wellbeing has become a popular buzzword in our contemporary culture, as we deal with unprecedented issues related to our mental health.

As Christian school staff, invested in the flourishing of our students, we must consider how we got here, how our culture is seeking to tackle these issues, and whether the Bible offers a better imagination of what true wellbeing entails.

This session will explore cultural and theological perspectives and examine how our Christian story offers true hope amidst the complexities of life.

Morning Tea Break

Session 2

From Vision to Practice: Advancing Student Wellbeing in Christian Schools

Our school practices have the potential to make a significant impact on the wellbeing of young people. The challenge before all of us is to embody school culture and practice that is consistent with a Biblical vision of flourishing, and which contributes to student wellbeing that is both resilient and hopeful.

This session will begin by providing an overview of CSA's Student Flourishing in Australian Christian Schools Project which was conducted in partnership with Harvard.

The session will then explore stories and initiatives from our schools, highlighting approaches that are making a real difference.

Lunch Break

Session 3

Joy > Happiness: Engaging a more joyful generation through gritty optimism

Joy is not freedom from struggle; joy is the fuel to struggle well. In fact, the depth of our struggle determines the peak of our joy. If learning is productive struggle, how do we move students toward gritty optimism that they can become more of who they are created to be based on evidence and experience?

In this session, we will unpack the elements of 'gritty optimism' and then explore ways that we might integrate Jon's wellbeing strategies with staff and students – without adding extra workload.

Session 1

Beyond the Buzzword: A Biblical Approach to Wellbeing



Beyond the Buzz Word: A Biblical Approach to Wellbeing, Dr. Brian Harris

This session will explore cultural and theological perspectives and examine how our Christian story offers true hope amidst the complexities of life. Watch the video.



Table Discussion

1. How do you respond to the image in Genesis 2:7 that Adam is made from the dust of the earth and the breath of God? In what way does it help you to see yourself, and others, differently?
2. The video speaks of a posture of compassion that is sparked from Gen 2:7. In practice, what do you think this posture looks like?
3. How has this thinking impacted the way you view your actions on a daily basis as a staff member in a Christian school?



Self-Reflection Activity: Biblical Wellbeing

This is a quiet time for self-reflection. You will be given 10 minutes to journal your response to this activity. These responses are personal and do not need to be shared or discussed

See page 6 for this activity



Group Activity: Celebrations and Opportunities

This group activity provides an opportunity to reflect on how your school is contributing to student flourishing and explore areas for improvement.

See page 7 for this activity

Notes:

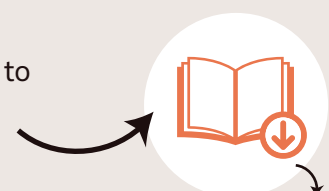


Additional Resource - What does it mean to Flourish?

Click here to access this blog, which explores what it truly means to flourish from both philosophical and Christian perspectives.

Harris, B. (2023). *What does it mean to flourish?*

<https://brianharrisauthor.com/what-does-it-mean-to-flourish/>



To view, see Appendix A

Session 1: Self Reflection Activity

Biblical Wellbeing

This is a quiet time for self-reflection. You will be given 10 minutes to journal your response to this activity. These responses are personal and do not need to be shared or discussed.

In the video, Brian Harris suggests that Genesis 1-2 points to a four-step sequence in wellbeing:

Step 1: A relationship with God

Step 2: A relationship with place (your physical surroundings)

Step 3: Relationships with other people

Step 4: Relationship with yourself

Questions to consider:

1. Do you think the sequence matters? And why?

2. Are any of the four optional?

3. What happens if one part is missing?

4. Is there an area in your life that you want to focus on in relation to what you have heard today?

Session 1: Group Activity

Celebrations & Opportunities

This group activity provides an opportunity to reflect on how your school is contributing to student flourishing and explore areas for improvement

For this activity, you will need:

- » 2 sheets of A3 paper for your group
- » Writing implements

Ensure one person from your group records the responses. Spend 10 mins on each section below.

Q1: Celebrations

In what tangible ways do you think our school contributes to the wellbeing and flourishing of our students?

Q2: Opportunities

Reflective practice involves thinking, 'this could be even better if..' What are some 'even better if' opportunities in our school?

Conclusion

Appoint someone in your group to share your table responses with the whole room.

Session 2

From Vision to Practice: Advancing Student Wellbeing in Christian Schools



Student Flourishing in Australian Christian Schools, Dr. Darren Iselin

This session presents key findings from one of Australia's largest adolescent flourishing studies in Christian schools, offering insights into the flourishing practices that help students thrive in today's society.



Session 2 Group Activity - Flourishing Futures: Build Your Dream School

Work through the Session 2 Group Activity Worksheet:

1. **Group Work:** Design your Dream School in groups (20-30mins)
2. **Pitch:** Each group has 2-3 minutes to pitch their ideas and stick their poster to the wall (15mins)
3. **Gallery Walk:** Each staff member places their sticky dots next to their favourite ideas (5mins)
4. **Debrief:** Finish with a group debrief session (15-20mins)

See pages 9-10 for this activity

An Example from our schools...



Belonging, Engagement and Wellbeing: A Whole School Approach

Bethel Christian School in Albany, WA, has spent the past four years fostering student flourishing through a strong emphasis on belonging, engagement, and a whole-school approach. Their work has led to measurable success and a positive impact, offering an inspiring example of what can be achieved within CSA member schools.

Notes

Session 2: Group Activity

Flourishing Futures: Build Your Dream School

Purpose:

To creatively explore how your school could better support student flourishing across five key areas. Think boldly and collaboratively as you design a visionary dream school.

Task:

In teams, you'll design a dream school where student flourishing is the highest priority. You'll imagine how your school could better promote flourishing across five key areas.

This is your chance to think boldly, creatively, and without limits—blue sky thinking encouraged!

Dream School Design: (20-30 minutes) in small groups:

- Use the poster paper and materials provided to design your dream school.
- You may draw, write, diagram, use metaphors – whatever works best
- Be imaginative! What spaces, programs, relationships, or rhythms make your school a place of true flourishing?

Flourishing Measures to Address:

Your dream school should support flourishing in each of these five areas:

1. Physical and Mental Health

- How is health integrated into the school day?
- What supports student and staff mental wellbeing?

2. Close Social Relationships

- How are friendships and connections nurtured?
- How is community built among students, staff and parents?

3. Meaning and Purpose

- How do students find purpose in their learning?
- What connects students to something greater than themselves?

4. Good Character and Virtue

- How are Christian values modelled and taught?
- What shapes and strengthens students' character?

5. Happiness and Life Satisfaction

- What brings joy and belonging to school life?
- How do students and staff experience hope and contentment?

Session 2: Group Activity cont...

Flourishing Futures: Build Your Dream School

Helpful Prompts:

- What does a typical day look like in this school?
- How is the physical environment designed?
- How are students supported socially, emotionally, and spiritually?
- What makes learning deeply meaningful?
- How is Christian faith integrated into every aspect?

Pitch (10-15 minutes)

- Each group will give a 2–3 minute pitch or presentation of their dream school.

Gallery Walk (5 minutes)

- Walk around and view the ideas!
- Using the 3 sticky dots you've been given, place your dots next to the ideas you'd most like to see brought to life in your school.

Whole group debrief discussion (10-20 minutes)

- Which ideas were bold or surprising?
- What practices or innovations could be implemented now?
- What would it take to move toward one of these big ideas?

Notes

Session 3

Gritty Optimism: Nurturing Joy and Resilience in Students and Educators



Joy > Happiness: Engaging a more joyful generation through gritty optimism, Jon Eckert

In this video Jon explores how we might foster the kind of gritty optimism that will contribute to wellbeing in both students and staff. Watch the video.



Session 3 Reflective Workshop Activity - Gritty Optimism

Follow instructions from your facilitator to complete this activity.



Whole Group Discussion

Gather again as a whole group and discuss the following:

- » Participants to share insights from each station and/or nominate a team member to read some out to the group for sharing
- » Question: How can we apply gritty optimism to the challenges we face as a school community?



Session 3 Workshop Activity - Wellbeing in Action

This activity helps school staff integrate Jon Eckert's wellbeing strategies with staff and students – without adding extra workload. The goal of this activity is to make these strategies practical and actionable for both staff and students. Your facilitator will guide you through this activity.

Examples from our schools...



Values in Action: You Belong Week

You Belong Week at Mueller College is a vibrant, positive celebration that brings the entire school community together. It's a dedicated time where students are reminded that everyone has a place and that we can all be equal, valued, and respected.

The week highlights and affirms student culture, formation, and wellbeing through fun, inclusive activities and meaningful moments. It reflects the school's commitment to creating a Christ-centered environment where belonging is central to every student's experience.

In this video, we see the powerful expression of Mueller College's values in action through the "You Belong Week". Watch the video.



Student Leadership, Culture and Flourishing

Mandurah Baptist College and Beechboro Christian School in WA are leading inspiring initiatives that empower student flourishing through student leadership. Their innovative and responsive actions to identified needs within their school community demonstrate the meaningful impact that intentional leadership opportunities can have in strengthening student voice, facilitating opportunities for student growth and service while simultaneously building culture and community. Watch the video.

Bonus Session

Flourishing through Service



Introduction to Global Connect

Your facilitator will outline a little more about Christian Schools Global Connect.



Global Connect Opportunities Video

In this video, you will learn a little more about Christian Schools Global Connect, in particular about their focus on student learning, relationships, vocation of flourishing.



Table Discussion

Discuss the following questions:

1. What does the Bible say about serving others? Outside of your job and regular church, how do you serve others and what does this look like?
2. Why should I look globally to serve others in Christian Education – what could this look like for me?



Bonus Session Workshop Activity - Flourishing through Service

In small groups, discuss the questions on the activity sheet and record the responses.

For this activity, you will need: paper for each group, writing implements, whiteboard for the facilitator, whiteboard markers.

See page 13 for this activity

Notes

Further Readings & Resources

For further readings and resources, please click on the links or head to the webpages displayed below



Effective School Partnerships

<http://csglobalconnect.org/SchoolPartnerships>



Sample International Risk Assessment

<https://csglobalconnect.org/RiskAssessment>



Sample School Partnership Agreement

<http://csglobalconnect.org/PartnershipAgreement>

Appendix A

What does it mean to flourish?

Posted by Brian Harris on Feb 12, 2023 in Blog | 7 comments



It's become a bit of a catch word – one you find in vision and mission statements which commit to building flourishing communities of hope or whatever. It's a noble and inspiring sentiment, but what does it mean to flourish?

We could immediately dash to definitions. Depending on your source, you will be told that to flourish is to prosper, to thrive, to be in a state of activity or production.

If you go to the Greek philosophers you might well come out at Aristotle and his idea of *eudaimonia* (roughly translated as flourishing) by which he was pointing to the life well lived. According to Aristotle the flourishing life is one where we reach our potential. To do so requires us to live according to virtue, which Aristotle thought had four key building blocks, prudence, justice, temperance and courage. We shouldn't assume we know just what Aristotle means by each of these. For example, while we might think of prudence as being cautious and perhaps a little timid and unwilling to take risks, for

Aristotle prudence is about practical wisdom – knowing what to do in specific situations. **Courage is not about being without fear, but being able to moderate it so that you act without compromise and do the right thing, even though your heart is pounding.**

In Christian thought, the idea of flourishing often links back to Jesus' statement in John 10:10 "I have come that you might have life, and have it in all its fullness." Put differently, I have come so that you will flourish. It connects back to the Judeo-Christian concept of shalom which is often translated as peace, but more accurately points to fullness or wholeness of life. A common Hebrew greeting is "Shalom aleichem" (peace be upon you) the reply to which is "aleichem shalom" (unto you peace). But what is meant by "shalom"?

[Nicholas Wolterstorff](#) suggests that in the biblical vision, **"To dwell in shalom is to enjoy living before God, to enjoy living in one's physical surroundings, to enjoy living with one's fellows, to enjoy life with oneself."** That four fold vision of a rich enjoyment of God, place, community and self is rich. I am glad Wolterstorff starts with God and finishes with self, for it seems to me that this is a helpful order. It certainly reflects the teaching of Jesus who instructed us to seek first God's Kingdom – for when we do all manner of other things will be added to us (Matt 6:33).

Let's pause briefly and think of each of the four blocks in Wolterstorff's understanding of shalom or flourishing.

There is relationship with God. I can't remember who wrote it, and the language is gendered in a way that is no longer acceptable, but I still find this prayer beautiful: "Help me to remember that truly to be man is to be man aware of Thee, and unafraid to be." **Aware of Thee, and unafraid to be.** They belong together. Without awareness of God the exploration of our humanity starts at the wrong point and ends in confusion. A part of any invitation to flourish is an invitation to the deepest quest of all – the quest for God. Without that, our perspective is muddled and confused.

There is relationship with place. I love the tangibility of shalom in the Bible. It is about a land flowing with milk and honey. It is not an abstract concept – it is about life in a particular place, with all the richness and beauty that brings. And place invites belonging. A connection with the earth is an integral part of human flourishing. Place is not exclusive. It is my place – but as God is the Creator of all, it is your place as well. And it is a place for future generations that we must steward well. Because place is so central to flourishing, it is always devastating when people lose their place, or have it taken away as a result of injustice or war. It is why Christian people should always have a special heart for those who have been dis-placed.

There is relationship with others. The first not good in the Bible is found in Genesis 2:18 “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Despite Adam being in wonderful relationship with God and enjoying the beauty of the Garden of Eden, absence of relationship with other human beings was an unacceptable deficit. **A radical individualism is not part of shalom or flourishing, for me, myself and I are not enough. The Christian God is Triune** – even God in God’s own being is in community and not alone. We, God’s image bearers, will not flourish if we are alone. Being in community means risking vulnerability and being misunderstood. It is to live in truth, without pretence. It sometimes goes wrong and when it does, it hurts us greatly – but there is no full humanity without it.

Last **there is relationship with self.** Known by God and being part of a place and a community I can begin the inward journey and ask, “And who am I”. I am a child of God, located in this place, and part of these people and with these idiosyncrasies that help make me, me. Supported by God, place and others, I can be genuinely curious about my own being. There is no need to be defensive – because come what may, I belong. But just as I own the way my story is like every other human story, I can also explore the way that my story is like few or no other human story. I can delight in being me. And in being me, I will bring delight to you, and to you and to you...

If I am able to breath deeply and embrace each of these four – God, place, community and self... well I am rich indeed – part of a flourishing community, able to own the peace of shalom.

Source: <https://brianharrisauthor.com/what-does-it-mean-to-flourish/>



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