

Manners & Morals

It was late in the afternoon on what was a busy Thursday at IPC. It had been raining most of the day. I rushed over to Candler, parked in their new parking structure, and hurried down the stairs on my way to the emergency room. To my annoyance I found large, unavoidable pools of water on the steps and especially on the landings in the stair well. As I began tipping around the puddles, I could hear a female voice among others in front of me cursing "like a sailor," as they used to say. I quickly caught up with them. They stepped aside as I went around and beyond them. But my presence didn't inhibit the cursing at all. They continued on as though foul language were the most normal and acceptable form of expression in all the world.

It is almost unbelievable to me how crude America's public life has become. It has become so bad that even secular commentators are concerned (e.g., recent issue of *U.S. News and World Report*). Perhaps we have been newly sensitized to vulgarity by the recent spate of Jane Austin movies, which portray life in a more restrained, genteel, well-mannered era. Indeed life then was so different from our life today that one commentator likened it to a visit to Mars, to a culture utterly unlike our own.

Does the Christian community have an interest in promoting a more polite society, or is this a matter of indifference to us? I would argue that "manners" and "morals" ultimately cannot be separated. Indeed the Victorians referred to what we might call "moral renewal" as the "reformation of manners," and under that banner fought all manner of vice. They understood what we have forgotten: manners are society's moral kindergarten. Manners are the means by which children and immature adults are taught to do the right thing before they know the reasons why. Manners employ the principle, "do right and you will come to think right," or even, "do right and you will begin to feel right." Manners are symbolic gestures or actions that teach one critical lesson: you first, me second.

Let me try to provide some examples. Let's begin with the language issue just introduced. What happened to the informal profanity codes that governed public life in America just a few decades ago? Back in the 1960's someone decided that one ought to speak one's mind. Somehow one was "authentic" if one did not blurt out whatever happened to come into one's head. The old code said, you will control your tongue because those around must not be subjected to your verbal pollution. When you are angry, the impulse to curse surges powerfully within you. Release that impulse, they say today, suggesting that I may even be harmful psychologically for you to leave it unexpressed. No, suppress the impulse, the old code said. Moderate your language. Exercise self-discipline, not because you don't feel like cursing, and not because it won't *feel good* to get it off your chest, but because it would be impolite. To use the language of morality, it would be wrong to subject others to your crude language.

Consider the way we dress. Several years ago our family went to Disney World for a day. Of course we had a wonderful time, almost magical one might say. But I'll never forget how appallingly dressed many of our fellow tourists were. There were big-bellied men wearing undersized tee-shirts, disheveled women wearing tight polyester pants, or worse yet, shorts. Most of the teenagers looked like they had been dressed at Goodwill—binfolded! Young women were wearing next to nothing. The whole display was to me nothing short of disgusting. "This is the slopping of America." I told Emily, I can't imagine what people are thinking about when they go out in public dressed as they do. But I do know what they are not thinking about. They are not thinking about the visual pollution to which they are subjecting their neighbor.

The rigid dress codes of the 1950's collapsed in the 1960's. The old philosophy was, maintain decorum. Maintain the neat, clean, polished standard of the group. The new philosophy is, dress the way that you want to dress. Don't worry what others think. Please *yourself*. This was part and parcel with everything else being said in that decade of consummate self-centeredness. The "grunge" look may be the ultimate expression of an "who cares what you think" outlook. Suit your own needs and (ironically) draw attention to yourself. Place yourself at the center of your universe. But surely the old philosophy was right. Why do we dress up to go to weddings? Because it is a way we show respect for others. We trouble *ourselves* in order to look our best for the sake of others. Show up in shorts and sandals and you will insult the wedding party and guests. By the same logic, by the way, we dress up for church. We don't dress just to please ourselves. What we actually mean when we say we are actually no longer wants to make is that others come first, and more important, not to be very clear on this, I come first. My clothes are the means by which I express *myself*. It is very personal. This philosophic and fashion trend is one to be resisted by Christian people. Sloppy, unkempt, unclean appearances may be all right for the world. It should not be for us.

The same principles apply to all matters of etiquette. Why should you not, excuse me, burp in public? You feel like it, don't you? It may even be for some a means of self-expression. So why not? For the sake of others. Why teach children to say, "Yes sir," when it is easier to say, "Yeah?"

Why teach them to wait for their mother to sit down before they eat when they feel like eating *right now*? Why teach them to open doors for others when it is easier to walk through, let the doors go, and not look back? Why teach them to stand when a lady enters the room when it is easier to remain sitting? All of these are the way in which our society traditionally said, "you first, me second."

The Christian community has a great interest in the dissemination of the old ethic, if only for the sake of teaching our own children to think of others first. But also, a widely accepted code of manners puts the general population in sympathy with Christian teaching in a general sense, and as a consequence more open to Christian specifics of sin and grace in Christ.

Manners & Courtship

The typical criticism that is leveled against our discussion of "manners and morals" is that we are locked in a Victorian time warp, absolutizing customs that are culturally relative. The rules of etiquette that dominated Western (European, and especially Anglo-American) civilization over the last several hundred years are to be found in no other culture on earth. Why should we as Christians fight for their preservation when they are merely quirks of history, and more important, not to be found in the Bible? Is it really important that we say please and thank you, stand for a lady, open doors for others, wait for our hostess to sit before we eat?

The 1960's generation said no, it is not important. In fact, the facade of politeness was seen as a barrier to authentic living. So the walls came crashing down. Some Christians stood on the sidelines and cheered, vowing to become as "real" as the next guy. Some pulpits became as graphic as the newspapers, and as crude as the tabloids (though of course avoiding profanity). The idea that some conversations might be inappropriate in a public setting became passe. Being relevant meant dealing openly with the "real world," however intimate one might become in the process.

In concealing this trend, the church became over smart. In actual effects, the loss of consensus regarding etiquette was a serious blow to the Christian community. It is true that Muslim, Eastern, and tribal cultures have differing concepts of good manners. No single culture's customs represent an absolute standard. But the fact that different cultures have differing rules is not as important as the fact that they all do have rules. The details may differ with respect to courtship, language, meals, and respect for those in authority, and so on, but the underlying principles for the most part don't. What the 60's generation and trendy churchmen failed to ask was why the rules came to be established in the first place. With typical late-20th century arrogance they never bothered to find out the purpose served by the Victorian standards that we inherited, or what would be lost in discarding them.

They other day I was talking to Mrs. Edwin "Peg" Manner, Sr., about these things. Get this. When she was a girl, her parents taught her never to let a boy touch her until she was engaged. That's right, touch. That was typical. That was the generally accepted standard when Woodrow Wilson was in the White House. But she was allowed to go out on dates. A generation before, young people of marriageable age were not allowed to go anywhere together unchaperoned. "Dates" amounted to chats in the family parlor or on the family porch. But there's nothing extraordinary about this. In traditional societies (Muslim, Eastern, tribal), marriages

are arranged. Predatory teenage boys aren't allowed anywhere near girls. As Gerald Chan Sieg (with whom I also discuss these things) said (with some hyperbole), "Chinese girls didn't even know what a boy was."

Are any of these customs absolute by biblical standards? Probably not (though Paul says that "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Corinthians 7:1), whatever that means). But were they "common grace" provisions of God's providence for the suppressing of evil in our civilization, and therefore to be cherished by all who wish to see sin restrained? Yes, they were. Think of the hurdles one had to leap in order to get into trouble. First, there were all sorts of restrictions on *language*. It was impolite to speak of intimate things with anyone. Married couples hardly did. In my lifetime Lucy and Ricky slept in separate beds. Why? Because a married couple in bed was thought to be a private matter unsuitable for public viewing. In the world of my youth and the century before one never even used the word "pregnant," and hardly the word "expecting" in public. Today we may think that some of this was silly and unnecessarily reserved. We may be right. But it is exceedingly difficult to get physically intimate without first becoming verbally intimate. If society frowns severely on breaching these and other verbal barriers, if no "decent" person would tolerate crude jokes or suggestive comments, merely because such are impolite, society's rules thereby restrain the evil inclinations of fallen human beings and prevent untold human suffering in the process.

If, second, there is a series of additional rules governing the behavior of young people of marriageable age (which has been the case in every civilization known to man, except perhaps our own), if young unmarried women are required to dress modestly (as they are in all traditional societies), may only be approached by young men through their fathers (ditto), and if young men and women may only be in the presence of each other in a supervised environment (as has always been required), sin can hardly start its engines.

Again it is hard to say any of these standards are biblically required. Instead they are the result of the common grace of God which acts to bless as well as restrain all peoples through these or similar customs. We were the heirs of the standards of Western civilization through the Victorians. Perhaps some of your customs were excessive. No doubt there was much hypocrisy, especially amongst the upper classes (as was true of the late-Victorian English aristocracy). But their customs did restrain sin. Foolishly we gave them up in the 60's without having anything with which to replace them. Today we are paying the price, rearing children in an environment where there are no generally accepted rules restraining their behavior—they say what they want, dress how they want, and are left alone to do what they want, with predictable results.

We can't recreate the Victorian era, even if we wanted to. But the church does need to consider how it can rebuild the broken barriers that once restrained the license that now threatens to engulf our families as well as the world's.

Cultural Alienation

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.
(Philippians 4:8)

Three weeks times three meals a day equals 63 meals. That's how many we ate in California during a recent vacation there. Of those, half were eaten out-of-doors. Well maybe not half, but nearly every dinner, most lunches, and even a couple of breakfasts. Typically the temperature was about 85 degrees during the day, and 60 to 65 during the evenings. Humidity was nonexistent. No gnats. No mosquitoes. Some flies, but not too bad. Whether on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, at the San Diego Zoo, visiting U.S.C., at a Dodger game, or in backyards in Pleasanton, Auburn (Sacramento area) or Long Beach, we enjoyed "the world's greatest climate." We were able to spend lots of time with my family and catch up with old friends, many of whom I had not seen for years. With zillions of people, zillions of cars, crime, pollution, and astronomical real estate prices, there's not much that I miss about California. But I do miss the climate, friends, and closer contact with my family.

While sitting outdoors enjoying one of those meals, a fourteen-year-old (?) girl walked by with her mother and sister, pregnant. The people who keep the statistics tell us that this is happening all of the time now. How is our civilization going to survive this trend, I wondered? A month or so before this we were out for dinner with a couple from the church. It must have been prom night. We were treated to a constant parade of very dressed-up young couples. Without exception the girls were dressed like harlots. Low-cut tops, short skirts, tight-fitting everywhere, reds and blacks. There is no other way to describe them. It may as well have been a streetwalker masquerade party. A few weeks after that we were on the beach in South Carolina with a very large group of high school students. They were from some of the best families from the Greenville-Spartanburg area. You could, one might well guess, cut the hormonal tension with a knife. Most of the girls had next to nothing on. Female swimwear was not just worse, but much worse than Southern California in the 1960's and early 1970's. All of the boys, without exception, wore short pants with their underwear prominently displayed.

I trust that you take this for more than generational grumpiness. My point is that one should not be surprised when one lights a match, and tosses it into a pool of gasoline, if fire erupts. The explosion that results should not shock anyone. Expect precious few teenagers to survive the environment that we have created for them with their virtue intact. One cannot regularly mix teenage boys with sensually attired teenage girls and promiscuity not result. In addition, if you flood their minds from the time they are young children with glamorized images of illicit sex, if you do so in advertising, in movies, in their music, on television, indeed if you confront them with these images nearly everywhere they turn, and then if you tell them in the classroom that they are merely complex animals rather than made in the image of God and accountable to Him, you will have established a very efficient system for producing teenage pregnancy, spreading venereal disease, increasing abortion and legitimacy rates, and psychologically scarring (and spiritually destroying) a whole generation.

For you parents and grandparents I have a question. What are we going to do? How can we possibly make peace with our culture? To do so inevitably means that our children will be placed under enormous moral pressure and that a large number of them will fail. Again, the statistics are telling. I am not a prophet of doom. I am describing what has already happened in evangelical homes all across this nation. The incidence of moral failure is just as great among evangelical children as the rest. Mainstream young children are a generation ago and that probably meant that they would play sports, get good grades, conform generally to biblical standards. That's where the culture was. But mainstream young children today and they will, more or less, associate with children who have seen it all on computers, video, and cable, heard it all on radio and CDs, and done it all. And this by the time they are fifteen. Few will resist this devilish peer culture. Our children also will dress like harlots and pimps, and fall.

The evangelical church, along with traditional Catholics, must begin to establish a culture to counter the dominant one. We can no longer participate in this one. We cannot sacrifice our children on the altar of social conformity and acceptance. It is our duty to provide an alternative that allows for a de-sensitized and "innocent" childhood and adolescence. If even secular commentators are alarmed (see Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, David Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, and most recently, Michael & Diane Medved, *Saving Childhood*), it's time for us to wake up and do something.

Our Culture & Its Choices

There's nothing like being pressured by a couple of teenagers to see the latest Hollywood release to focus one's mind on one's cultural choices (not that I speak from experience). By what amusements ought Christian people to be entertained? I sometimes envision myself standing before Christ explaining my chosen recreations. The scene isn't comfortable. Justifying to the Almighty the reasons why I found obscenity, vulgarly, crudity, and sensuality in the movies, TV programs, concerts, music, and literature to be "funny," "entertaining," "enlightening," or "amusing" does not come easily.

It's not that I haven't heard the rationalizations—

"We need to keep in touch with culture"
"We shouldn't stick our heads in the sand"
"We need to know what the world is thinking"
"We can't withdraw like monks"
"We need to engage the world" etc.

I've heard it all. I've said most of it myself at one time or another. Frankly, to me, those assertions now sound like excuses on the part of people who have made idols out of their amusements. Idols are gods, and gods, of course, are beyond challenge. They are maintained at all costs. Discriminating or critical thought respecting them is heretical. So it is that unholy amusements are rationalized and preserved in the name of piety.

I can barely hide my contempt for the marshmallow ethics of WWJD—"What would Jesus do"? But I find myself wanting to borrow that line from our fundamentalist brethren—

Would Jesus watch movies and TV shows that blaspheme His name, that glamorize promiscuity, that display unclothed bodies, that turn us all into creepy voyeurs and peeping Toms?

Would Jesus be a patron of music that excites the "animal spirits" (that's what our ancestors would have called them), that encourages the casting off of restraints, the abandoning of oneself to one's passions and urges? Further, would Jesus entertain Himself with lyrics that encourage rebellion, disorder, irresponsibility, illicit drugs and sexual immorality?

These straightforward questions can also be asked of radio, literature, web sites, and so on. The answers are obvious. Jesus wouldn't. And we shouldn't.

But I have one more question—If this is so, if "Jesus would not," then why do Christian parents say, "Go ahead," to their children and youth? I'll grant this: there are some tough calls. Some amusements are borderline. I'll also grant that parents get worn down. One needs to pick one's battles. But I also know that Christian young people are seeing, hearing, and reading what they should not, and their parents are letting them. Christian young people themselves are self-deceived and culpable. Did you know that 88% of all of America's teens identify themselves as Christians? Yet, many (most?) of them see nothing inconsistent with Christian discipleship and the latest trashy PG-13 movie. "I will set no worthless thing before my eyes," said David in the Psalms (Psalm 101:3). The Apostle Paul says our minds are to be set on the things that are right, pure (!), lovely, reputable, excellent, and praiseworthy. I'm having a hard time imagining that the typical 2-1/2 hours at Regal qualifies.

By the time we reach the end of the Apostle Paul's approved list, not much of our popular culture remains for Christian consumption. That is the harsh reality that we face. There are few movies, TV programs, books, magazines, radio stations, or songs that we can enjoy with a clear conscience. We are in conflict with our culture. Yet perhaps if enough of us withdraw our financial patronage from the vulgar and morally degrading, standards will slowly begin to change.

Chapter 5

Children & Adults

Given our alienation from the decadent culture in which we find ourselves, we are asking, "how are we in the Christian community going to create a counterculture that will provide for a de-sensitized and "innocent" childhood and adolescence?" Obviously we cannot allow our children to participate in the decadent and devilish peer-culture that surrounds them. We don't want them to be entertained by the popular stars of TV, movies, and music. We don't want them to be dressed by the Calvin Kleins of the fashion industry. These are not the role models that they need. As arbiters of taste, decency, and style, one can hardly imagine a class of people less qualified, proven daily by their seemingly endless stream of tasteless, immodest, crass, tawdry, tacky, and indecent products. Yet they have unprecedented access to the minds of our children through media. What can the family do? I have several suggestions, which I trust are appropriate in light of what the Bible tells us about parents, children, right, and wrong. But one recommendation is fundamental to them all: *let your children remain children*. Guard the childhood of your children from premature exposure to adult knowledge and experience.

Neil Postman, in his *The Disappearance of Childhood*, points out that prior to the printing press the world showed little interest in or awareness of childhood at all. Until age seven they were treated as infants. Thereafter they were treated like miniature adults. They were exposed to adult themes, like violence and death. They were exposed to adult responsibilities, such as work. Prior to the sixteenth century children were part of an oral culture that shielded them from nothing. In the restricted confines of mostly one-room Medieval housing, they saw and heard all, apparently without shame on the part of parents or children. Life was rough and crude. Whatever was talked about, they heard. They were fully exposed to all the functions of the body. Moreover, there were no books on child rearing written prior to this time. There was no such thing as children's literature. Paintings of the period portray them dressed exactly like adults. These seems to have been no particular jargon used by children. Few of them went to school and most of them worked long days in the fields or in the factories.

Only with the advent of the printing press and the rise of literacy did civilization begin to recognize that childhood was a special time of vulnerability during which the young should be protected and prepared for the adult world. Beginning in the sixteenth century there ensued a four hundred year battle for childhood which was not won until the child-labor laws were passed early in the twentieth century. My grandfather, for example, descending into the Pennsylvania coal mines at the age of ten was a victim of the old "miniature adults" mentality, remnants of which were still present at the turn of the century. But from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries childhood gradually was set apart and viewed as special. With that awareness came various cultural ways in which the uniqueness of childhood was represented. Children wore different clothes, played different games, used different language, were occupied up with different activity, and were shielded from adult themes such as death and sexual matters. Postman argues that this is the world that we are losing. As we move from a print-based to a picture-based culture, we are returning to a world, like that of the middle ages, in which there is no awareness of childhood. Television makes all the secrets of the adult world immediately accessible to children, even as they were in the middle ages.

For the last four hundred years adult secrets have been hidden in books. Literacy, which can only be acquired with age, was the key to unlocking them. The adult world conspired to shield its young from these themes by erecting a wall of literacy and manners around them. It can be understood that one did not talk about certain things around children. But television brings that wall crashing down. They now see and hear it all again. Consequently, *childhood is disappearing*. At the same time and as a necessary effect, so is adulthood. Children now dress like adults, and adults like children—the same shorts, sandals, t-shirts, and so on.

Children now talk like (and swear like) adults, and adults like children. As silly as it seems, grown adults refuse to let go of adolescent terminology. Children now listen to and enjoy the same music as their adult parents. They admire the same pop stars and attend the same concerts. Once upon a time adult tastes matured. No more. They watch the same television shows. They play the same games. Children are shielded from nothing and adults fail to grow up, or childhood disappears so does adulthood. They are becoming one.

How are we to evaluate this? The Christian community should not be pleased about this development. We of all people should wish to nurture and protect children well into their teens, and on the other hand, encourage childish adults to grow up. This merging of childhood and adulthood is a trend to be resisted. Let me now suggest how.

Chapter 6

Preserving Childhood

As of 1990, David Elkind's *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* had sold 300,000 copies. He documents the phenomena we introduced last time: baby boomers are refusing to grow up at the same time that their children are being forced to grow up too fast. They are being forced into the academic environment too soon; they are wearing adult clothing and accessories too soon; they are being exposed to adult themes and concerns too soon. They are being pushed into an adult world for which they are not ready emotionally, intellectually, or socially, and the consequences, measured by stress, drug abuse, and suicide are devastating. What can parents do?

Reinforce the traditional cultural markers that identified children as children. Consider the following:

Children's clothing—do not let young children dress like teenagers, or teenagers like adults. Maintain some distinctives. Withhold some privileges. For example, when our own George Lindsay was a boy, he was required to wear knickers until he was thirteen. There is only so much trouble one is going to get into wearing knickers. Elkins writes:

Three or four decades ago, prepubescent boys wore short pants and knickers until they began to shave; getting a pair of long pants was a true rite of passage. Girls were not permitted to wear makeup or sheer stockings until they were in their teens. For both sexes, clothing set children apart. It signaled adults that these people were to be treated differently, perhaps indulgently; it made it easier for children to act as children. Today even preschool children wear miniature versions of adult clothing. From overalls to LaCoste shirts to scaled-down designer fashions, a whole range of adult costumes is available to children. (Along with them is a wide choice of corresponding postures such as those of young teenagers modeling designer jeans.) . . . When children dress like adults they are more likely to behave as adults do, to imitate adult actions. It is hard to walk like an adult male wearing corduroy knickers that make an awful noise. But boys in long pants can walk like men, and little girls in tight pants can walk like women. It is more difficult today to recognize that children are children and not miniature adults, because children dress and move like adults. (pp. 8, 9)

What are the equivalents of knickers today? Too many elementary school girls are dressed in shamefully sensual, suggestive attire. Too many middle and high school girls look like high-fashion models and actresses. Slow it down! Let them remain little girls! At the same time, adults, knock off the kid's stuff. Grow up! Stop dressing like teenagers. Do we find that children today don't show adults much respect? Maybe we are treated like their peers because we look like their peers. Join the adult world, and dress the part.

Children's language—require of your children that they use titles and proper language when addressing an adult. They may not use slang with adults. They may not make fresh remarks. They will refer to all adults as Mr. or Mrs. Banish all "yeahs." Insist on "sir" and "ma'am." Likewise adults, get rid of youthful slang. Talk like an adult. Banish "man," as in "hey man," to Haight-Ashbury, where it should have been left thirty years ago. Don't "get into" anything. Leave "like" to the Valley girls. Restrict "cool" to weather reports.

Children's entertainment—we have had a great deal to say about TV over the years, none of it positive. First, there is the problem of the medium itself, apart from the content. Even "good" TV, because it is a passive medium, suppresses the development of the ability to think creatively or consecutively (i. e., linear, logical thoughts). It is bad for children except in small doses.

Second, and more to our point at this time, it is virtually impossible to watch commercial television without exposing your children to inappropriate adult themes. We try to watch the Saturday college football games. We only can by jumping up and changing channels when the invariably crude and offensive commercials come on. Young children do not need to see adults in passionate embraces, or hear vulgar jokes about private matters. Because of the morally challenged folks responsible for TV programming, it is impossible for children to watch TV and avoid these things.

What about the movies? Try to name a "children's" movie of recent years that does not portray adults as incompetent and unworthy of respect, or feature a low-cut, sensually suggestive leading lady, or place its characters in "romantic" situations unsuitable for children. The latest Disney films, it grieves me to say, are among the worst in this respect. We have refused to take our children to see *Pocahontas* or *Hunchback of Notre Dame* because of these sorts of problems. PG-13 films like "Jack" are trash, filled as they are with crude and offensive manners and language, and should not be seen by any preteens. Parents, clamp down! There is virtually nothing edifying about any PG or PG-13 movies. Mark them permanently off limits.

There is much more that one could say about this. Let me just mention this. My children were introduced last summer to the old series of eight *Republic Roy Rogers* movies in color. Though they are B-grade, they are wonderful films for children. There is never a foul word. In eight films there is not so much as a kiss. There is lots of action—good-guys, bad-guys; horses, gunfights, and singing cowboys. The Johnson and Parrish children are wild about them. But they are not like the fast-paced, hyper-action, movies of today. If your children have already seen the modern stuff, they may find Roy to be "boring." Recommendation: save the Star Wars type movies for when they are preteens or teenagers. Again, distinguish childhood from adolescence, and adolescence from adulthood.

Now what about you? Looking at entertainment more generally, have *your* tastes matured? Are you still listening to adolescent music? Should you be? Are you still watching adolescent TV and movies? Is your idea of "fun" about the same as the average American teenager? Are you still riding skateboards and hanging out at the mall, so to speak? What does that say about you? Are you still sending the wrong signals to your children? Doesn't the Apostle Paul say,

When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away

with childish things. (1 Cor 13:11)

If we as a community of faith can come together on some of these things, we can resist the "Disappearance of childhood." Our children will all dress like children, speak like children, and be exposed only to knowledge and experiences appropriate to children. They will be protected so that they will be able to enjoy their childhood. You in the process may finish the process of growing up.

Chapter 7

Children, School & Activities

John Rosemond recently wrote a column on the "Frantic Family Syndrome," and then a follow-up "Q&A" on the same subject. He understands the widely observable phenomena of families constantly on the run from event to practice to game to meeting as being "the predictable consequence of shifting the emphasis in child rearing from character development to the development of specific skills." This shift, he says, is unnecessary, foolish, and ultimately counterproductive, resulting in largely useless "skills," children devoid of character, and fragmented family life. His main point is that values (morals) are transmitted primarily through families, not coaches, teachers, and other surrogates. Strength of character is absorbed in the context of a loving, relaxed family, with children spending extended periods of unhurried time with parents and siblings.

What Rosemond perhaps has not considered is the degree to which circumstances conspire to even rob well-intended families of time to "sit back and smell the roses" together. Look at some of the factors. We've gone into detail about the destruction of America's neighborhoods through automobile-induced suburban sprawl. I literally walked across the street to attend my Cub Pack meeting. My children have to be driven. I rode my bike or walked to Little League practice. My children have to be driven. Ballet lessons? Music lessons? Everything extracurricular involves a drive across town. Get two or three children involved, and it means run, run, run.

Then consider the contribution of the typical school to the frenzy. Do any Christian parents doubt for a moment that they are the primary teachers of their young children? Do any Christian parents doubt that this is God's way, that he places children in families because character is best developed in the home? Does Scripture not charge parents, particularly fathers, to bring up their children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4; cf. Col. 3:20, 21). Is this not why the Proverbs direct every one of their considerable number of admonitions regarding child rearing toward parents, whose efforts alone apparently are considered sufficient to produce godly and wise children?

If these things are so (and it seems to me indisputably that they are), then how do we justify sending our young children off to schoolhouse surrogates for over half of their waking hours? Talk about no time to smell the roses! Most of our 6- to 8-year-olds sleep twelve hours a day. If they attend school they are up at 7:00 a.m., hurry to change clothes, rush through breakfast, are driven to school, where they remain from 8:00 a.m. until around 3:00 p.m., from which they are picked up and driven home, arriving between 3:15 and 3:30. If that 8+ hour chunk out of the family (over 2/3 of their waking hours) were enough, then they face another 30-45 minutes of homework. Now we're up to nine hours or about 3/4 of their waking hours. Between 4:00 and 7:30 p.m., the family must squeeze in dinner, family worship, baths, preparation for the next day, and bedtime reading. This is a recipe for frenzy!

Not all of us are, can be, or should be home schoolers. But I have to say, when is there time for little brothers and sisters? When is there "down-time" with mom and dad? When do we relax together? When do we even throw a ball around in the backyard? Enriching activities? You must be kidding. We're not talking about children who stay up at night until 9 or 10 o'clock, and who consequently have several extra conscious hours with their parents. No, 3/4 of all their waking hours, the equivalent of an adult twelve hour day, is consumed by institutional schooling.

Why? In part because we lost our neighborhood schools to the progressives/radicals, and have to car pool ours clear across town, adding 30-45 minutes to their day. But also the failure of the public schools to educate was dealt with in the 1980's by extending the length of the school day. They needed more time, they said, as though five hours a day, 25 a week, 20 weeks for 13 years were too little. Just last week, the headlines of the *Savannah News-Press* told of plans to extend the school day yet another half-hour. Why are we rewarding failure? My L.A. city school 1st-3rd grade classes met from 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., a five hour day with recess and lunch. Even Christian schools today, aping the secular schools, have a 6+ hour day. These two factors alone (the commute plus the extended day) rob the family of two hours together at home.

Is this really necessary? We are asking this of all our activities. I want my children to play soccer. But is it really necessary? I want them to be involved in scouting, taking ballet, learning to play an instrument, and so on, but are they really necessary? Likewise, I still wonder if the major culprit, the extended school day—is it really necessary? Russian children don't begin formal schooling until 7. John Dewey didn't think that it needed to begin until 8. Raymond and Dorothy Moore have argued for years that it is often harmful to put boys in regimented classrooms before 8.

David Elkind, in *The Hurried Child*, argues strenuously against early education, maintaining that more is less at the younger ages and likely to produce student burnout. Recognizing this and the need to keep young children at home with parents, some truly radical schools like the Perimeter Christian School of the Perimeter Presbyterian Church (PCA) teach their 1st-3rd graders from 8:45 to 12:00 on a four day week, with an enrichment day on Fridays. By way of contrast, a local secular private school runs a seven hour a day, five day a week program at K-5. I know what they're doing—they're getting their kids ready for Harvard. My question is, what are we doing?

My main point? Childhood is disappearing not only because of the factors we looked at last time, not only because of children being pushed into adult clothing, allowed to use adult language, exposed to adult entertainment and adult themes, but because between schooling and organized enrichment activities (soccer, etc.) there is not time to just be a kid. Or to be a parent.

Chapter 8

The Pace of Life

While vacationing last summer I was hit by a series of articles on the subject of vacations. One in the "Work and Family" section of the *Wall Street Journal* was entitled, "Do We Work More or Not? Either Way, We Feel Frazzled." It cites studies by economist Juliet Schor as well as The Bureau of Labor that claim that employed women are working 233 more hours a year than in 1976 and men 100 more hours. Moreover the blurring of the lines between work and play are contributing to the *perception*, if not the reality, of more time given to work and less for leisure. Much of this is being driven by technology, as lap-top computers, cellular phones, e-mail, and faxes make it possible to set up an office almost anywhere, even beside the pool. "Vacations are shorter, and 'leisure' has become part of the actual workday. . . work spills into personal life—aided by technology and a sense of rising demands—with workers at home working, in an office working, at the beach working."

A second article (also in the WSJ) entitled "Vacation is Anything But for a Chief Executive at Play," cites the example of a CEO who by dinner time had fielded 17 business calls, phoned 5 important clients, received a special delivery of "must-read" work papers, 18 faxes, and 27 e-mail messages on *his first day of vacation!* His son said that his most vivid memory of family vacations was his father with "the phone glued to his ear." When his toddler daughter pulled herself into a wobbly standing position and he exclaimed, "Hey, did you see that?!", his wife dryly responded, "She's been doing that for two weeks."

Contrast this with another bit of vacation-time reading, *At Home in Milford*, Jan Karon's first of four volumes in which she looks at life in a small mountain town from

the perspective of an Episcopal minister and his parish. This immensely popular series is based upon Blowing Rock, North Carolina, a mere stone's throw from where we vacation. All of the attractions of a small town are present in abundance, a walking environment (the minister hasn't owned a car in eight years), mixing of the social classes, shopkeepers who know their customers, indeed, everyone knows everyone else, a slow pace of life, and a "religion" that is central to the life of the people. This last point is the most surprising. The Episcopal parish around which the book's plot is built is unambiguously orthodox and evangelical. Scripture, faith, prayer, and a living relationship with Christ are evident on every page. The minister knows and loves his people, and they *he*, not the least because he lives among them. They work in close proximity to one another, they pass each other in the streets, they see each other at the grill, their paths cross in the bank, in the post office, and in the library. They have community.

I feel the contrast of these two worlds very deeply. Most of us don't live like the CEO, but we understand the pace of life today, and the direction of the trends. I don't believe that we aren't meant to live that way. The CEO article mentions in passing his stables, horses, and 45-acre, multimillion-dollar estate in Long Island's Hamptons. My response is, who cares? I would rather be a store-clerk living at the poverty line with a forty hour week than live like that. The most important job I have in this world is that of rearing my five children. No amount of money is worth the time away from home and children that is required by most high-powered jobs. We have decided to homeschool in the fall, a decision made with fear and trepidation. We are doing so not because we are unhappy with any school in particular or all schools in general, but for one reason only. We feel the need to have more time with our children, and for us, the school day is too long.

I don't believe that God ever intended us to live at the pace that the modern world is forcing upon us. I'm not sure what to do about it. I am deeply discontent because of it, but have the opportunity. The church, however, cannot ignore a fact of life that is destructive of family life and even of our humanness. But I am glad for vacations, and the love of slow down, enjoy one's children, and the beauty of God's creation.

Chapter 9

Educating Our Children

When I arrived in England to pursue the theological studies in the fall of 1977 it was as a typical product of the American system of education. I had gone to public schools through the 12th grade. My college degree was from a private university. But public or private it was all pretty much the same. Like most American university graduates I managed to earn a degree without having ever read much or written much. I was utterly ignorant of the best literature. The "great books" had remained closed throughout 17 years of formal education. Ponder that for a moment. The "classic" authors of Greece and Rome were not read. The classics of English literature were not read. The leading philosophers and theologians were not read. The schools instead peddled a "new math" and new English, multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank tests. Of course we dabbled in a little Shakespeare or the odd reading from Defoe. But systematic, sequential, comprehensive encounters with great literature were happily abandoned.

Perhaps worst of all for me was the abandonment of traditional educational methodology. Phonics were definitely out in the California of those days. Memorization was scorned. "Rote" learning, as they called it, was considered positively medieval. Grammar was not taught. Sentences were not diagrammed. The received wisdom of the day assured us that we'd learn the structure of the English language naturally, by usage, by osmosis, one assumes. Of course we never did learn grammar. I can still today lapse into the most appalling grammatical errors because of this one, of many, untested educational fads of those days.

A whole generation, now several generations, was cheated. One need only encounter high school graduates of previous generations, who were taught using the old methodology (i.e. pre-Dewey, pre "Dick and Jane", pre "look-say") to realize how far we have fallen. One educational novelty after another has been foisted upon an unsuspecting public by an arrogant educational establishment, "outcome based" education being merely the most recent in a long line of failed theories.

I was aware of none of this when I arrived in England in the Fall of 1977. By ten weeks later, I knew that something was seriously amiss. In ten weeks I wrote more papers than I had in four years as an undergraduate. And I was a history major, accustomed to writing term papers! I was competing with British liberal arts majors who had done nothing but write during their undergraduate years. I managed, through extraordinary exertions, to survive the research and writing dimension of theological training in Britain. But then there were the language classes. My best friend, Chris Bennett, had taken Latin since he was 11, Greek since 13 and had had Hebrew as an undergraduate. He could sight-read the Greek New Testament! His knowledge of languages and how they work left my head spinning. I didn't even know the English language, much less Greek. That indeed was the problem. Stay with me. I in fact took one and a half years of Greek as an undergraduate at USC, nearly failing each semester. I honestly don't know how I ever passed, so utterly lost was the entire 3 semester! When the text books for Greek I were passed out in those early days in Bristol I opened to the first chapter, determined to learn Greek *this* time. John Wenham, the author, placed an explanation of English grammar in the opening section. He explained *English* adjectives, pronouns, demonstratives, infinitives, and so one. We'll let me tell you, feelings surged through me like those normally reserved of a tent-meeting revival. The lights went on! So that's what I've been trying to learn! It seems funny now. But behind the humor is a tragedy of wasted time.

I suppose a critic might say, "Well that's just your experience. It doesn't mean that it has been that bad for most people." No, you're right. It's worse than I am saying. I, in fact, am one of the better educated Americans. Though, like Paul I speak as if insane" if I boast about myself, with all humility, I say what I know to be true. I always had high test scores and was at the top of my class through graduate-school. Even in England, through hard work and perseverance, I did very well. Yet there I realized quickly that in reality I was hardly educated at all.

There are two conclusions I draw from my personal pilgrimage through America's educational system. The first is personal and it is this: never again. Whatever it takes in time, energy, and money, I will see to it that my children are properly educated. If I have to quit my job, move to a slum, clerk in a store, so that I can be at home enough to do it myself. I will. They will one way or another spend their childhood and youth eating, drinking, and breathing great literature. They will learn the structure of language through Latin and traditional exercises in grammar. They will develop their faculty for memorization by constant drilling. They will be exposed to the "great conversation" that has gone on through the centuries and join in that discussion themselves. They will write, write, write.

The second is societal and ecclesiastical. The English speaking peoples will never again produce a Winston Churchill or a James Madison or a Thomas Jefferson if we do not restore the classical curriculum and traditional, time-proven educational methodologies. The church will never again produce theologians and teachers like Jonathan Edwards and Charles Hodge (to name just two) if we are not giving them the resources by which they might become such. I was listening to talk radio the other day to an interview with the author of a recently published biography of Jefferson. The question was raised, how was it that there appeared on the scene in America in one generation such a gallery of stars: Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Mason, Henry, Burr, Hamilton, Adams, etc. The biographer said he could answer with one word: *Latin!* They all studied Latin and read the classic authors. They wrote with precision and skill because their minds had been structured by the study of Latin and formal logic. They had been interacting with the leading political theorists from Greece and Rome, as well as leading contemporaries since childhood. Edwards consumed John Locke. Hodge read and mastered everybody. They all responded to the challenges of leadership with depth and breadth (and more than pietistic warmth) because they had been classically educated. We should do no less for our children. We should attempt no less for the kingdom of God.

Chapter 10

Christ and Junk Culture

The other day I asked my Sally what her favorite restaurant is. What is your favorite food to go out and eat? Her answer: McDonald's! Chicken Nuggets at McDonald's! For her, that is the finest food in all the world, bar none.

A true cultural relativist would look at her judgment and be forced to insist that it is all a matter of taste. Some buy Chevys, some buy Fords. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. It is said, if one thinks that a Big Mac is fine food, and McDonald's a superior restaurant, what are we to say? There are no objective standards when it comes to these things. Whatever she thinks is true for her. Nothing more can be said.

Or can I? We all know, don't we, that McDonald's sells junk food. My Sally's judgment, bless her heart, is that of a five-year-old. As she grows older, her tastes will mature, we trust. She will learn to appreciate a more sophisticated, more subtle, more nutritious diet.

This I believe is a parable of American life today. We are surrounded not only by junk food but by junk culture. An adult who identified McDonald's as the finest restaurant in the world would be subject to our ridicule, and rightly so. Why then is it that we seem to have so much trouble identifying junk music, junk fashion, junk architecture, junk literature, and junk visual art for what they are—junk? They have all of the attributes of junk food—designed for mass consumption, immediate accessibility, affordability, convenience and immediate gratification. Importantly, they need no prior knowledge or training or sophistication (hence their appeal to juvenile tastes). This is true of grunge fashion, the architecture of the fast-food joint, the franchise, the strip-shopping center, and the mall; the literary quality of the dime-store novel, be-bop music ("All junk all the time," says Richard Brodtkiser of *National Review*), and pop-art. We are surrounded by a plastic and neon, fried and polyester, crude, vulgar and ugly culture. Like junk food, much of it is tasty and fun. In small doses and at appropriate times it is harmless enough. There is no problem with sloppy dress at the beach or park, with occasionally relaxing with an entertaining novel, with periodically enjoying the adolescent themes of a catchy pop-tune, or now and then devouring a juicy burger and fries. But they should not become one's steady diet. They should be recognized for what they are—light, occasional, entertaining bits of culture to be consumed with caution and moderation lest our aesthetic arteries become clogged and we suffer a debilitating, taste-aresting, culture-relativizing stroke.

We are commanded to let our minds "dwell" on whatever things are "true and honorable . . . right . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good repute" as well as those things that are excellent and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). Our culture is overwhelmingly dominated by the opposite of all the above. It popularizes falsehood not truth, and fitness not purity. To say this is to say the obvious. But it goes beyond this. Because it denies that there is any truth or righteousness, it necessarily has lost its grip on what behavior is "honorable" and "of good repute." A society with no *morals* cannot sustain *manners*. Similarly it has lost touch with the "lovely" and "excellence." A society that chooses falsehood and immorality, will inevitably prefer the vulgar. In so far as we embrace the dominant culture, we will be poisoned by its preferences, absorbing its lies, its wickedness, and its ugliness.

The forms of popular culture are not inherently evil. Often the content of popular culture is (e.g., the lyrics of many pop songs, the subject-matter of many dime-store novels, the indecency of much of popular fashion, etc.), but the forms are not. Still, the forms are mostly juvenile, usually mind-numbing, sometimes unhealthy, and often unworthy of our attention. If we are to learn to recognize "whatever is lovely" and appreciate "excellence," more strenuous effort will need to be exerted within the Christian community to promote higher quality music, fashion, architecture, literature and visual art.

Evaluate the culture with which you surround yourself. Are you mainly a junk culture junkie? Or are you beginning to train your aesthetic taste buds for higher standards than are generally available in popular culture?

Chapter 11

Architecture & Community

Eighty percent of everything ever built in America has been built in the last fifty years, and most of it is depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy, and spiritually degrading-the jive-plastic commuter tract home wastelands, the Potemkin village shopping plazas with their vast parking lagoons, the Logo-block hotel complexes, the "tourist mansardic" junk-food joints, the Orwellian office "parks" featuring buildings sheathed in the same reflective glass as the sunglasses worn by chain-gang guards, the particle-board garden apartments rising up in every meadow and cornfield, the freeway loops around every big and little city with their clusters of discount merchandise marts, the whole destructive, wasteful, toxic, agoraphobia-inducing spectacle that politicians proudly call "growth."

—James Howard Kunstler
The Geography of Nowhere

It bothers me that no one in the Christian community seems to have noticed how ugly our world has become since the end of the Second World War. It is not as though suburban development hasn't given us ample opportunity to notice. Just stand on the corner of Derenne and Abercorn and look south or west. What do you see? You see the same thing that you see in every other suburban community in America—an ocean of parking lots, a forest of neon signs, an anarchy of buildings staggered at varying distances from the curb, none of which have anything in common with the rest except that with few exceptions they are ugly. Our suburbia has no charm, nothing to distinguish it from a thousand other places, and provides no reason why anyone should care for it. Hasn't anyone noticed? Did a whole generation go to sleep while the Southside mess was built? Oh, but we did notice, at least at one level. No one wants to live anywhere near suburbia's thoroughfares. No one wants to get stuck driving on them. We all avoid Mall Boulevard and Derenne and Abercorn as much as we possibly can. They are depressing. They are, to put it simply, ugly.

Yet the contrast with downtown couldn't be sharper. Busy streets are not the problem there. People from all over the county are moving into downtown Savannah, traffic and all. It's no mystery why. Downtown Savannah provides what America's towns and cities all provided before the automobile transformed community development and chased it away. What is it? Think of Main Street at Disney World. We all love it. It reminds us of a different kind of life than we now live but one for which there remains considerable nostalgia. Main Street has charm because it is built on a human scale (not too large or small); its two story buildings provide exterior or outside "walls" which define space comfortable for human beings; it has a variety of shops all within walking distance; the architectural styles employed are compatible with one another; and there are no cars. The charm of Main Street is the same as the charm of Savannah. The absence of zoning laws means that mixed use of property is possible in close proximity. The bottom floors of some buildings can be used for retail, upper floors for offices and living space. Homes are next to churches are next to schools are next to stores over which are lowest apartments. All of life's errands are potentially in walking distance. The sidewalks are full of activity. Many people walking from point to point means that human interaction takes place regularly, building a sense of community. The mixture of very expensive and very inexpensive housing options means that classes and races and ages mingle naturally, shopkeepers with shopowners, young with old, black with white. Because public space receives such heavy usage, builders pay more attention to what they build, and are more responsible about the visual impact that they make upon the community. Whenever Kunstler lists the half-dozen or so best places to live in the United States, he always lists Savannah. And it's not because he likes our malls!

Then there is Savannah south of Derenne as it has been allowed to develop. Zoning laws requiring large single-use areas has made it impossible for Savannah to continue to replicate itself as it has grown southward. With housing over here, and retail over there, and businesses back around the other way, it is impossible to reproduce the rich community life of the downtown. Every single errand that one must run requires an automobile. Need a stamp? a lightbulb? a bottle of milk? Does junior have ball practice? a Cub Scout meeting? piano lessons? Then mom the chauffeur must drive to the store or activity. There aren't even any north-south sidewalks south of 63rd Street! Obviously the city-planners were anticipating that whenever we'd leave our homes we'd ride in a car. The southside of Savannah was made for cars, not people. That's right. It was made to accommodate cars, not human beings. Of course you don't pass people in the streets. No one is in the

streets. There's no place for them outside of their homes. They're all in their cars where they belong. Of course you don't talk to your neighbors. You never see them. Of course our neighborhoods are segregated, dividing young from old, rich from poor, black from white. Who wants a housing project at the Landings? How many young families, or black families can afford Ardsley Park? The natural integration of downtown has been replaced by the artificial segregation of housing developments.

The social and economic cost of automobile-induced suburban sprawl has been enormous. When every errand requires a car, enormous amounts of energy are unnecessarily devoured, the air is polluted, and a disproportionate amount of the family's wealth is consumed. The postwar sprawl has resulted in the abandonment of our inner cities (once the centers of town and the most desirable places to live, it is well to remember), the desertion of our small towns, and the filling-up of open countryside with monotonous housing tracts, strip-shopping centers, fast-food joints, and malls. This is progress. Who is paying attention? Why has the Christian community not noticed our deteriorating visual environment of parking lots, neon signs, and ugly, artless, flat-roofed buildings? Look at public buildings downtown and compare. People used to care about what they built and what others would be forced to look at every day. Why has the Christian church not noticed the disappearance of community under the pressure of the automobile and zoning laws? Do Christian people not care about the dehumanizing of the human habitat? Have we become fatalists about development, as though things cannot be any other than they now are? Hopefully a people charged to care about the "lovely" and "excellence" can make a difference in the years ahead.

Chapter 12

The Ethical & Aesthetic Continuum

Once upon a time there was a long line of over one hundred men standing side by side. On the left end stood a clean-shaven fellow. On the other end was a man with a long, full, heavy beard. Between the two there was a gradually increasing degree of "beardedness" on the faces of the men, ranging from almost smooth faced, to six o'clock shadow, to a full beard. A certain sophist happened upon this line of men and studied them carefully. Soon he was joined by another, who similarly gazed in amazement at the sight of the line of men and pondered its meaning. The sophist said to the other bystander,

"I believe that this line of men proves that we can distinguish no difference between being clean-shaven and having a beard."

"What do you mean," asked the bystander.

"Well," said the sophist, "Can you tell me where to draw a line between what is a beard and what is not a beard."

"Not exactly," the bystander had to admit. "But I'd say that it would lie about there," he said, pointing to a man about in the middle. The sophist pounced.

"That is a totally arbitrary choice," he said. "What about the man to his left? His whiskers are just slightly lighter."

Are you saying that just because his beard is a little tiny bit less full that it is not a beard?

"Okay," said the bystander. "I relent. He too has a beard." The sophist pounced again.

"Well, what about the man to the left of him? Are you saying that just because his whiskers are just slightly lighter than the man to his right that his is not a beard?"

"You're right," admitted the bystander again. "If the man next to him is deemed to have a beard, it would be arbitrary to say that his just slightly lighter whiskers do not constitute a beard."

"And the man to the left of him?" asked the sophist, pressing the point. "And to the left of him, and to the left of him, and to the left of him?"

"Ah, now I see your point," said the bystander. "I have to admit that you are right. Every line I draw between the bearded and the unbearded is arbitrary. I must acknowledge that we really are not able to distinguish between being clean shaven and having a beard."

As absurd as the above parable is, it is repeated a thousand times a day in today's ethical and religious discussions. Almost all ethical and religious distinctions lie on a continuum. Because they do, there is always the temptation to employ what Gordon-Conwell theologian T. David Gordon calls "the fallacy of the beard." Beard is clearly wrong. Preserving life is clearly required. But in the middle somewhere one may determine to withdraw extraordinary treatment from a dying patient in such a way that it is not murder, but it is not preserving life either. Then there are slight gradations away from this act in the direction of murder, where everything gets even more muddled. The Kevorkians of the world will argue that because no precise line can be drawn between withdrawing extraordinary means of preserving life and actively terminating a life, then there is really no ethical difference between the two acts. Because they lie on a continuum, there can be no distinction between turning off a respirator and doctor-assisted suicide, they say. But we all know that there is a difference between allowing someone to die naturally and killing them. We are able to distinguish between the two acts, and talk meaningfully about their differences. The muddle in the middle should not be allowed to blur the vast area outside the middle where distinctions are clear.

Apply this to other areas. Theologian John Frame notes that some people sway when they sing a hymn. This, he says, is a primitive form of dancing. Thus, like swaying, dancing in worship is permitted. Are you convinced? Of course not. Back up. Swaying and dancing are on a continuum. But they are not the same thing. We can distinguish, and meaningfully differentiate between incidental swaying and "liturgical dance," or even "dancing in the aisles."

The same theologian notes that some preachers preach with dramatic emphasis. Thus preaching is a form of drama, he says. Hence, drama is permitted in worship as a form of preaching, he concludes. Again, there is a continuum between the dramatic element in preaching and a skit. But preaching and drama are not the same thing, and no amount of sophistry can make them such. We can distinguish between them, and talk about the difference meaningfully.

What about the Sabbath? Worship and rest are permitted. Worldly recreation and work are forbidden. But in the middle there is some muddle. What about a walk on the shore? That seems okay. What about a run on the shore? Well, maybe. What about a race? No. Verboten! Ah, someone says, you already said you could walk and run. What is wrong with a race? The distinction seems arbitrary. Some are tempted to point a finger at this point and yell, "Pharisee!" "Hypocrite!" "Legalist!"

They want to maintain that because we cannot draw a clear line in the middle then no lines can be drawn at all. There is really no difference between keeping the Sabbath and breaking it, they in effect are saying. Once again we would urge, lets not commit the fallacy of the beard. Walking, running, and racing are on a continuum. So are cooling off in a pool, paddling around in a pool, and water polo. Yet we can distinguish between these activities, and talk meaningfully about how some of them help us enjoy the Lord's word and works and how others clearly undermine the same.

The same principles can be applied to aesthetics, beauty and all of life. Sure there are matters of taste. There are areas of gray where you have your preferences and I have mine. There is a spectrum from the beautiful to the ugly, from the excellent to the vulgar. We all understand that. But let's not be ruled by the fallacy of the beard and say "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Let's not completely subjectivize aesthetic judgments. We are able to distinguish between the lovely and junk. We are capable of identifying, commending and encouraging musical, artistic, athletic, and academic excellence in our children and others around us and distinguishing it from the mediocre, the vulgar, and the unworthy. The distinctions are not always easy, but nevertheless they may and must be made.

Chapter 13

Immunize Your Children

Webster defines "immunize" as to "render resistant" or "not susceptible." I would like to commend to you the strategy of immunizing your children from the cultural diseases that are all around us. Would you like them to instinctively reject junk literature, music, art, and food when they encounter it? Of course you would. We all would prefer, I assume, that they prefer good literature, music, art, and food. Here is a strategy for doing so. First, begin at an early age to introduce them to the highest standards in each of these categories while, second, you explain the limitations of "junk" without demonizing it. Let me explain.

While Drew, Sam and I were riding waves at Litchfield Beach last July we somehow or other began singing some of the songs of the 60's through the 80's that Dave Barry labeled as the worst ever written, first in an article written a few years back, and recently in a book he has just published which builds on the original article. "I shot the sheriff" was near the top of my list and his. I serenaded the boys. "But I did not shoot the deputy," I continued. They laughed and laughed, demanding that I sing it over and over again. We went on to Three-Dog Nights' "Joy to the World," not to be confused with Isaac Watts' by the same title. This amounted to immunization through ridicule. Listen to these great lyrics.

Joy to the world; all the boys and girls,
Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea;
Joy to you and me.

Need I say, this is not Shakespeare? Most of the rhyme schemes of pop music are infantile. The Beach Boys, the early Beatles, all the songs of the 50's and early 60's are just plain silly. "If everybody had a notion, across the USA, then everybody'd be surfin', like Ca-li-for-ni-a." It's silly. But that's okay. Silliness has its place. Some pop music has tried to be serious, as Dave Barry has pointed out, but has only managed to go from being silly to ridiculous.

Someone left the cake out in the rain,
And I don't think that I can make it,
'Cause it took so long to bake it,
And I'll never have the recipe again.
Oh nooooooo, Oh nooooooo.

The boys howled at that one. There was no need to demonize it, even if it had at one time been thought worthy of study in high school literature classes, along with Bob Dylan and Simon and Garfunkel. It's just silly. It's just junk, along with most of the rest of the the late 1960's and 1970's that masqueraded as sophisticated poetry.

Does your baby or toddler have playpen time alone? If not, let me suggest that quiet time, alone, is important for children of all ages, but that is another issue. During part of this time, why not softly play great music—the classics—the music of Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikovsky, and others of the masters—music that has proved to be good enough to transcend the taste and style of its own particular age and appeal across the generations. Continue playing such music throughout their childhood, and by the time they are teenagers, they will know instinctively great music from junk, and prefer the former to the latter. Oh sure, they will still prefer silly music at silly moments. But they won't mistake it for good music, which is more than can be said for much of the baby-boom generation. At the same time, don't demonize the top-40 junk that dominates the listening lives of most of America's youth. Much of the content of the top-40 should be demonized, but the music itself and some of the lyrics need not be transformed into alluring "forbidden fruit" by absolute prohibition. Instead, listen closely with your children and enjoy a good belly laugh. If you can get them to laugh with you, the battle has been won.

Chapter 14

Immunization and Worship

Is there any reason for a minister to get worked up about popular music? After all, if I might caution myself, I am stepping on other people's taste buds. They may resent it. Here is why I am willing to take the risk. God has given to us what has been called a "cultural mandate." The command in Genesis 1 to subdue the earth sends us out into every corner of the earth, into every sphere of human endeavor, and demands that we subdue it to the glory of God. The Christian community should produce song writers and poets. But we shouldn't produce song writers and poets who can do no more than mimic the cheap style and low standards of contemporary culture. I despair of us ever being able to do so if we are not willing to call junk what it is. We will only produce outstanding musicians and song writers if we are making distinctions between the superior and the mediocre, thereby training the ears of our children to appreciate the greatness of great music.

A second reason has to do with our own worship. Many churches have abandoned fine, reverent, "traditional" worship services in favor of "contemporary" services which have the earmarks of junk culture—insipid tunes and juvenile lyrics. Why have the churches done it? Why have even old churches, with beautiful, traditional buildings done so? Its very simple. Because the people have demanded it. They don't like the church's music. They want *their* music. In other words, the barbarians are at the musical gates of the church. A whole generation of baby-boomers has been raised that can't distinguish great music and words from junk. For twenty or thirty years that is all they have listened to. As they have come into the church, they have demanded that their junk come with them. If in any given church there are enough of them, and if they scream loud enough, their demands, with rare exception, will be met.

My motive for everything from the "Psalms and Hymns of the Month" to promoting children's and youth choirs, to hiring classically trained musicians, to writing this article is to immunize the church from junk through exposure to greatness-great music, and great lyrics. That our youth sometimes go off to summer camps and come back complaining about the silly songs that they were made to sing indicates that we are somewhat successful in this endeavor, if less so in stifling a critical spirit. Bad money chases out good, but in many other areas, the good will chase out the bad. For the most part the children of our church grow up, move out, and wherever they end up demand biblical preaching, immediately recognizing mere story telling for what it is. Similarly they search for churches where the worship is reverent, not entertaining, and the songs are substantial, not superficial. This, I say, is exactly what we want if we are to transmit our faith and practice to the next generation.

But it comes at a cost. The timid don't want to offend anyone. Others fear being guilty of cultural imperialism. Western civilization rose up from the cesspools of European barbarism on the back of the Christian church. The greatest music ever written was composed by European Christians for the Christian community. The

church will generate great music again, if in the midst of contemporary barbarism, we don't lose our nerve.

Chapter 15

Immunization and Literature

Gene Edward Veith, Jr., in his very helpful book, *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature*, recounts his favorite line in a recent *Star Trek* movie when Dr. Spock and Captain Kirk were discussing the customs of twelfth-century earth. Kirk identifies the source of his information as "The Collected Works of Harold Robbins and Jacqueline Suzanne." "Oh yes," says Spock. "The greats." Veith notes with concern that no one else in the theater laughed.

Reformed Protestantism once produced the greatest of literary figures. John Milton, the finest of all English poets, and John Bunyan, a man of unsurpassed literary genius, were both products of English Puritanism. Daniel Defoe, an orthodox Calvinist, credited by some as having invented the novel with Robinson Crusoe, and Jonathan Swift, a conservative clergyman of the Church of England, likewise are among the greatest literary figures of the English language. But visit the typical Christian bookstore and what will you find? For the most part, junk. Junk from one end to the other. Why do evangelical people settle for junk? Because, sad as it is to say, we don't know any better. What is true of music is true of literature, only more so, or should I say, less so. I deeply lament the weakness of my background in literature. The public schools utterly failed me as a child in this respect. But the bigger problem is the shift of our culture from words to images, from the typographic to the pictographic.

Not only is most of what we read poorly written, but few of us are reading anymore at all. We will never win back our culture unless we produce great literary works once again, and we will never produce great literary works unless we turn off our televisions and begin to read to our children from the crib and encourage them to read quality literature. Presumably, no one wants his children to grow up to be couch-potatoes. No one wants them to never advance in their reading genre beyond dime-store novels and People magazine. What can we do then? Let me suggest a strategy.

First, establish a read-aloud routine with your children. Find time (bedtime works best for most folks) to read to them every day. Depending on how much time you have on a given day, read from 15 minutes to an hour. Read with religious regularity.

Second, read outstanding literature to them. Thankfully much of what is excellent is also good for reading aloud. Don't know where to start? There are many lists around. Everyone has his favorites. We have especially benefitted from the literature recommended by *Sonlight Curriculum Ltd.* Their catalogue costs \$5.00 and is well worth the investment. Read, study, and re-read it! It may be obtained at 8121 South Grant Way, Littleton, CO 80122-2701.

They emphasize the use of historical fiction and biographies. Extensive use is made of Caldecott and Newbery Award winning books. The public library is also a fantastic and underutilized resource. Browse the shelves and get acquainted with what is available.

I have a few recommendations that I can make at this time, though I am reluctant to do so. I would really rather wait five years or so, when our knowledge will be much more

complete than it is right now. But rather than say nothing, I can say that the Johnson family favorites thus far have been as follows:

- 1. Fiction: Favorite Authors**
 - Winnie the Pooh*, A.A. Milne
 - Boxcar Children*, Gertrude Chandler Warner
 - Little House on the Prairie*, Laura Ingalls Wilder
 - The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis
 - Mrs. Piggie Wiggle*, Beverly MacDonald
 - Henry Huggins*, Ribsy, and *Ramona*, Beverly Cleary
 - The Indian in the Cupboard*, Lynne Reid Banks
 - Little Princess*, Burnett
 - Homer Price*, Robert McCloskey
 - Little Bear*, Eleanor Lattimore
 - Treasury for Children*, James Herriot
 - Pinnocchio* (the real one!), Carlo Collodi
 - Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little*, E. B. White
 - Lassie Come Home*, Eric Knight
 - Riki Tiki Tavi*, Rudyard Kipling
 - The Enormous Egg*, Olive Butterworth
 - The Sheep Pig*, Dick King-Smith
 - Call of the Wild*, Jack London
 - The Rabbit Hill*, Robert Lawson
 - Red Sails to Capri*, Will
 - Ginger Pye*, Eleanor Estes
 - Strawberry Girl*, Lois Lenski
 - Sarah Plain and Tall* and *Skyjark*, Patricia MacLachlan
 - White Stallion of Lipizza*, Marguerite Henry (and all of her horse books)
 - The Wizard of Oz*, Baum
- 2. Historical Fiction**

This is an excellent way to learn history. We are just now beginning to read this genre, but the following look promising:

 - Ancient History:**
 - The Golden Goblet*, McGraw
 - The Maid of Artemis*, Coolidge
 - Detectives in Tazas*, Winterfeld
 - Outcast, The Eagle of the Ninth*, and others, Rosemary Sutcliffe
 - Middle Ages:**
 - The Apprentice*, Llorente
 - The Sword in the Tree*, Clyde Robert Bulla
 - (He is the author of many outstanding children's books)
 - The Minstrel in the Tower*, Skuzinskey
 - The Trumpeter of Krakow*, Kelly
 - American History:**
 - Johnny Tremain*, Forbes
 - Toliver's Secret*, Brady

The Witch of Blackbird Pond and *The Sign of the Beaver*, Speare
Carry On, Mr. Bowditch, Latham
etc. etc. etc. (There are many, many more!)

3. **Christian Books**
Regrettably we have not yet found many of these that are of outstanding quality. The following are exceptions to that rule.

Dangerous Journey, The Story of Pilgrim's Progress
Trailblazer Books (24 Volumes of historical fiction), Dave and Nita Jackson—These are wonderful, must-read lives of great Christian leaders.
The Huguenot Garden and *The Scottish Seas*, Douglas Jones—Superb, suspenseful, inspiring works of historical fiction.
The Sugar Creek Gang, Paul Hutchens (35 volumes in this series, thoroughly enjoyed by our children)

- Third, encourage your children to read wholesome, quality literature, by establishing some sort of reading reward or enforcement strategy.** For some families a "quiet hour" works in which for one hour no talking, TV, radio, or CD's are allowed. Only reading. Other families "pay" their children for reading, so much per book. Others require equal time for TV and reading, where each minute of TV must be matched by a minute of reading. We recommend the following readers for learning and pleasure.

1. **Edward Stratemeyer**
Also known as Franklin W. Dixon, Carolyn Keene, and Laura Lee Hope, among others, Stratemeyer was responsible for the writing of nearly 1,300 novels selling in excess of 500 million copies. According to George Grant, "he wrote more and sold more than almost any other writer who has ever lived anywhere at any time" (*World Magazine*, July 26, 1997). All of it is compatible with and encouraging of Christian values.

Minute Boys of Lexington (also of Bunker Hill)
Hardy Boys (58 volumes)
Nancy Drew (55 volumes)
Bobby Twins (70 volumes)

We look for older editions in second-hand book shops. Some newer sets have been tainted by political correctness.

2. **G.A. Henty**
A British author of the last century, Henty wrote scores of historical fictions. Whereas Stratemeyer can be read by elementary school children, Henty is written at a middle to high school level. Among those recently reprinted are:

Beric the Briton: A story of the Roman invasion
The Dragon and the Raven: Or, the days of King Alfred
For the Temple: A tale of the fall of Jerusalem
In Freedom's Cause: A story of Wallace and Bruce
By Pike and Dyke: A tale of the rise of the Dutch Republic
By Right of Conquest: Or, with Cortez in Mexico
St Bartholomew's Eve: A tale of the Huguenot Wars
With Lee in Virginia: A story of the American Civil War
The Young Carthaginian: A story of the times of Hannibal
Winning His Spurs: A tale of the Crusades

These are available through the church bookshop

3. **Landmark and Landmark World Books**
This fantastic series was published in the 1950's and 60's and featured world-class authors such as Pearl S. Buck, Robert Penn Warren, William O. Douglas, and Ralph Moody, among many others. Nearly two hundred first rate biographies were produced. Only about ten are still in print but the others are available from the public library and can be found in second-hand shops.

4. **Legacy Books**
This was another great series which along with Landmark books was published by Random House in the 1950's and 60's. It too featured outstanding authors (e.g., John Gunther, Robert Penn Warren again) who reworked the myths and legends of antiquity.

As an example of how all this can work, in a given semester your children may study ancient history in school. For a read-aloud you might read *Detectives in Togas*. For quiet hour you might encourage them to read Landmark books on the Pharaohs, Xenophon, Ulysses, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Cleopatra. The Legacy series might provide smaller volumes on mythology: *The Gods of Mt. Olympus*, *The Golden Fleece*, *Medusa's Head*, *The Adventures of Hercules*, *The Voyage of Ulysses*, *Cupid*, *The God of Love*, and *The Trojan Horse*. These books are all so well written that they are virtually pleasure-reading for the children, not schoolwork for which their arms must be twisted.

5. **Childhood of Famous Americans**
Developed from the 1940's to the 1960's, these highly readable, semi-fictional biographies are a delightful way to introduce history to young readers. They are easier reading than the *Landmark* series. Only a handful are now in print, but many are available through the local library.

6. **Favorite Picture-Books**
The Mitten and *Town Mouse*, *Country Mouse*, Jan Brett
Goodnight Moon and *The Runaway Bunny*, Margaret Wise Brown
Madeleine and *Madeleine's Rescue*, Ludwig Bemelmans
Ov-Cart Man, Donald Hall
Sheep in a Jeep, Nancy Shaw
The Adventures of Obadiah, *Thy Friend*, Obadiah and Obadiah the Bold, Brinton Turkle
The Three Billy-Goats Gruff
Blueberries for Sal, *One Morning in Maine*, *Make Way for Ducklings*, Robert McCloskey
The Glorious Flight, Alice and Martin Provensen
Corduroy, Don Freeman
Drummer Hoff, Barbara Emberly
Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel, Virginia Lee Burton
The Tale of Three Trees, Angela Hunt
The Velveteen Rabbit, Margery Williams
Giant John, Arnold Lobel
Miss Spider's Tea Party, David Kirk
Curious George (many titles), R.A. Rey
The Story of Little Black Sambo, Helen Banneman
Peter Rabbit, Beatrix Potter
A Child's Garden of Verses, Robert Louis Stevenson
The Children's Book of Virtue, William Bennett
The Wretched Stone, Chris Van Allsburg
Three Young Pilgrims, Cheryl Harness
Young John Quincy, Cheryl Harness

7. **Early Readers**
There are several excellent series of early readers that have been favorite read-alouds for us.

"**An I Can Read Book**"—
This series features a numbers of favorite authors and titles.

Frog and Toad, (several titles), *Owl at Home*, *Mouse Tales*, *Small Pig*, *Grasshopper on the Road*, Arnold Lobel
Danny the Dinosaur, *Julius*, *Sammy the Seal*, *Grizzwald*, Syd Hoff
Amelia Bedlia (many titles), Peggy Parrish
A Bargain for Frances (several other Frances titles), Russel Hoban
Hurray for Hattie Rabbit! (and several other Hattie titles), Dick Gackenbach
Little Bear (several titles), Elise Minarik

"**An I Can Read History Book**"—
The history "I Can Read" books are wonderful examples of historical fiction.

Sam the Minuteman, *George the Drummerboy*, and *Snorri and the Strangers*, Nathaniel Benchley
One Bad Thing About Father (T. Roosevelt), *The Drinking Gourd*, and *Indian Summer*, F.N. Monso
The Long Way to a New Land, and *The Long Way Westward*, Joan Sandin
The Golly Sisters Go West, Betsy Byars

"**Step Into Reading**"—
This series was written at four levels. Among them are many fine historical works. Among our favorites are:

The Trojan Horse, Emily Little
Pompeii...Buried Alive, Edith Kunhardt
Tut's Mummy: Lost...and Found, Edith Kunhardt

Of course one should add to this list all of the Dr. Seuss books, which make wonderful read-alouds as well as early readers.

Fourth, provide an education that emphasizes the study of classic works. Our children need exposure to the great speeches, letters, short-stories, and books written by the great leaders and authors of Western Civilization. These should be read and studied both in history and literature classes. As is true with preaching, writing is as much caught as taught. Exposure to greatness breeds greatness. If we will do these things, regularly reading aloud to our children, encouraging the reading of great literature, and providing an education that emphasizes the study of classic works, we will make progress. We will move beyond *USA Today*, *People Magazine* and *Harlequin Romances*. We may even raise up another Milton, Bunyan, Defoe, Swift, Chesterton, or Lewis.

Chapter 16

The Big Picture

We bring to a close now our musing on the subject of Christian discipleship as it intersects the culture in which we live. We have been considering such subjects as manners and morals, preserving childhood, junk culture, suburban sprawl, and cultural immunization. At times these themes may have seemed to drift from what might be thought of as strictly religious considerations. Perhaps this thought has crossed your mind. What is the preacher doing, messin' with my music and my kids? Why is he talking about architecture? Let me try to answer that, and in the process draw together the various strands examined in these discussions.

Simply put, Christian people care about community. Or even more simply—we care about people. We care about the quality of life of those who live in this world. Our concern is not just for their souls. We care about their well-being now as well. We cannot therefore close our eyes when we see the deterioration of the quality of life even if it is masked by technological and material advancements. No one seems to doubt anymore that Christians ought to be concerned about the environment. Faithful Christian stewardship of nature requires that we work to stop harmful pollution and protect our physical surroundings. As one who grew up chinking on an L.A. smog that burned the eyes and shortened the breath, I'm grateful for the progress. But what about our ethical environment? What about the cultural and social environment? It is amazing to see people who would storm Washington D.C. if they were subject to the pollution of their drinking water or air say nothing about the pollution of their moral water and aesthetic air. These factors have far more to do with the health of individuals and families than does physical pollution, for all the same reasons that spiritual, mental, psychological well-being is more important than material. William J. Bennett understood this when he published his "Index of Leading Cultural Indicators" to quantify America's social condition in the same way that the "Index of Leading Economic Indicators" has been used for years to interpret economic conditions and trends. Life is more than money. It is also more than religion strictly defined.

We care about the deterioration of *manners* because it represents a decline in the quality of life that may be experienced every time one encounters a rude clerk or a vulgar kid. The world is a tougher place in which to live now that we've lost the old standards of Christian gentility. We care about the *cultural environment* in which we live because as creatures made in the image of God we are deeply affected by our aesthetic surroundings. Junk culture, consisting of junk food, junk fashion, junk music, junk visual art, junk literature and junk architecture is spiritually degrading and dehumanizing. We care about *social organization*, about how villages, towns and cities develop because development which undermines community is spiritually impoverishing and dehumanizing. We care about the *pace of life*, because people who never slow down will not have adequate time to think about eternal matters, nor to be good husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, or children. The rat race may destroy both them and their families. We care about that. The categories of religion and culture cannot be separated into neat packages. In the real world they intersect all the time in the lives of real people whom we are called to love. It grieves me to see people who ought to know better being poisoned by a toxic pop culture, and mimicking the tastes of the media and fashion kings. It grieves me to see families running so fast that they never have time to slow down and get to know one another, or to have family devotions, or even to meet their neighbors. We care about the great cultural, social, and moral questions because we care about the environment in which we live, about the kind of community in which we will raise our children. We care because we care about people.

Chapter 17

Childrearing in the Hope of Future Grace

"Why do I have to memorize the catechism?" one of my under motivated children asked. "Because I said so?" . . . No, that won't do. "Because it's what Presbyterians do. . . . No, try again. "Because it's good for you—trust me." My mind flashed from one answer to another. "Because it introduces you to theological concepts that you need to know if you are to be a good biblical theologian." I finally muttered. A blank stare greeted me. Then off he went to do more memorizing.

My answer was half-fictionous. But the other half of my answer was indeed earnest. Think of all we do as parents. We take our children to Sunday school and church. We send them to school or home school them. We conduct family prayers and catechize them. Why? Not because any of these endeavors will necessarily

save them. Only God can do that. Their hearts must be converted and only He can do the converting. But that doesn't mean that parents are to be passive and merely wait. We have two issues that we all as parents must address.

1. What are the means that God will use to convert our children?
2. When He does convert them, in what condition (spiritual, emotional, intellectual, social, etc.) do I want them to be?

I became serious as a Christian the second half of my sophomore year in college. I began to gobble up everything I could find to help me understand both the Christian faith and the world in which we live. The works of Francis Schaeffer, J. I. Packer, John Stott, Paul Little, and other IVP titles were my lifeline in a secular college environment. I soon realized that I'd never catch up. I had read too little of the world's great literature. I knew too little of the world's great philosophies. And I had studied too little of the world's classical languages. I would never be a great scholar though I might always remain eager to learn. Watching my classmates sight-read their Greek New Testaments while I spent hours and hours on vocabulary and grammar (they had been studying Greek since they were 13) made a profound impact on me. I was determined—with my children it would be different. God will do what He will do in their hearts. But I would lay the foundation for future service in the hope of future grace.

What kind of childhood training will maximize their future Christian service?

They will need to know the context of the whole Bible, so we will *read the Bible together* as a family.

They will need to know the Church's treasury of music, so we will *teach them Psalms and hymns* and teach them to play a musical instrument.

They will need to know the "great conversation" that has been recorded in the world's great literature so they will be encouraged to *read extensively*, both Christian and non-Christian authors.

They will need to be adept at learning languages (so they can study the Bible in its original languages and so that they can learn the languages of the mission field), so they will undertake at an early age (while the mind is still supple) the *study of foreign languages*.

They will need to be well-rounded individuals, developed in body and soul, brushing shoulders with Christian and non-Christian, accustomed to victory and defeat, so they will be involved in *athletics* beginning at an early age.

They will need to be good theologians, so indeed they will *memorize the catechisms* of the church through which they may develop the mind's theological building blocks.

How has it gone? It is far too early to tell. Tomorrow any one of them might do something that might disgrace the whole family. Many children of ministers have. We have our devotions at 7:15 a.m. We read aloud in the evenings. Sometimes we hit the mark. Sometimes we fail. Being a minister with a minister's schedule offers a few advantages and some disadvantages. This is true of all of us.

Yet we can be pleased with some progress. None of our endeavors of ourselves will give our children new hearts. None of our "successes" means that they are converted. None of our failures means that they are lost. Our parental labors are all undertaken by faith, trusting that grace will come, and when it does come that it will find them with a larger potential for service than otherwise would have been the case.

Back to my two issues:

1. What will God use to convert them?

What he always uses. His Word and the prayers of the saints. We take our children to Sunday school, and church, send them to school and conduct family worship with the hope that God's word will not return void (Isaiah 55:11), that He will sanctify them by His truth (John 17:7).

2. When converted, in what condition will He find them?

Our aim is that He will find them with a large capacity for service—well read, theologically sound, biblically literate, socially adept, physically fit, ready for language study. None of my children may follow me to seminary and on to vocational Christian service. I'd be lying to say I don't hope they do. I would love for my boys to become ministers and my girls to marry ministers or head for the mission field. But they may not. My aim, regardless of their decisions, is to prepare them for future service as well as I can, that God might make of them all that He wishes. I want to raise my children for future service, and do so in the hope of future grace.