

Sermon follow up: 8/24/08, 8/31/08, 9/7/08

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These notes are really follow-up for the last three weeks' sermons, which have dealt with the relationship of the church, the culture, and the Christian family. The main thing I want to do is 'footnote' the sources I've been drawing from so that you can do more study if you wish. I have also included a couple of additional resources for your edification.

The best theoretical approach to culture is Henry Van Til's *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*. If you want understand what culture is, this is the book for you. (My one quibble may be found here: <http://www.trinity-pres.net/essays/public-church-private-christian.php>) David Hegeman's book *Plowing in Hope* may be considered a small scale treatment of the same issues. Another fine treatment of the meaning of culture, especially "Christian culture" is T. S. Eliot's *Christianity and Culture*. *Angels in the Architecture* by Doug Jones and Doug Wilson is a very good book on "applied Christianity," looking at the ways in which Christian culture stands antithetical to the world. Peter Leithart's *Against Christianity* is must reading for an understanding of the church/culture relationship; indeed, one of Leithart's main contentions is that the church herself is a culture. More of my thoughts can be found in these conference lecture notes: <http://www.trinity-pres.net/essays/aapc2006church-lecture-notes.pdf>.

The two books I quoted from the most were Andy Crouch's new book *Culture Making* and Dick Staub's *The Culturally Savvy Christian*. Both of these books are excellent discussions of the church's relationship to the world in our contemporary setting. In particular, Crouch's book has a lot of insights. I especially enjoyed his discussion of the cultural implications of Israel's exodus and Christ's resurrection. One thing I gleaned from Crouch that I did not get to work into a sermon is his discussion of how God brings together the powerful and powerless to form new cultures. Crouch brilliantly compares the two defining women of the last century, Princess Diana and Mother Teresa. Applied to parenting, his lessons look something like this: We should seek to train our children to be powerful, because more power means more opportunity to unite with and serve the powerless. We should train our kids to be elite, as much as is consistent with other biblical demands (e.g., avoiding elitism, snobbery, and other temptations that come with power). Crouch defines power as the ability to successfully propose a new cultural good. If we want to reshape our culture, one thing we have to do is put Christians in positions where they can propose new cultural goods. This cannot happen unless we study hard, get into good schools,

and navigate corporate ladders. Being “upwardly mobile” for the kingdom can be a very good thing.

In our cultural context, service often implies condescension...in the sense of maintaining our sense of superiority even while we offer charity to those “less fortunate”...But it does not often carry with it the idea that the very people we might serve are in fact people with their own untapped cultural capacities – people whom we might end up needing as much as they need us. And so service does not always carry with it the astonishing biblical insight that when God works in history, he does so through partnership between powerful and powerless alike.

For the basic thing we are invited to do with our cultural power is to spend it on those less powerful than ourselves. The more customary phrase would be spend it on behalf of the powerless, but that is not the way power works in God’s economy. The way to spend cultural power is to open up for others the opportunity to create new cultural goods, adding our resources to theirs to increase their chance of moving the horizons of possibility for some community...

We do not approach the relatively powerless as recipients of our charity but as sources of a power that we who are relatively powerful may not even know. When we put our power at their service, we unlock their creative capacity without in any way diminishing our own – and in this way, spending power is very different from spending money...[T]he only way to truly create cultural goods is in partnership with others, in a process where power does not so much flow from one participant to another as accrue to the overall creative capacity of a community of people, who become more and more able to contribute new and good things to the world.

To state the point another way, as we help our children find their long term calling in God’s world, we want to train them to be good stewards of the cultural power God entrusts to them, and that includes being willing to enter into partnerships of various sorts with those who are far lower on the power scale. There is nothing wrong with pushing our kids to pursue the best possible education available to them, and to go into fields that are more culturally influential, provided they understand that with greater influence, money, and power come a greater responsibility to be merciful. If we have power, we must use it to empower others.

Staub (p. 100) has some interesting thoughts on how to avoid both legalism and laxity in our cultural and entertainment pursuits.

Once we lay our life down and begin the reckless pursuit of God, we have set our life's course on the path to nonconformity. Taking the road less traveled is the equivalent of taking up your cross, for if you truly follow Jesus, you will experience what he did. You will seem too irreligious to your religious friends ("Why is Jesus partying with the drunkards and prostitutes?") and too religious for your irreligious friends ("Why is Jesus so obsessed with God?"). You will become...too Christian for your irreligious friends and too irreligious for your Christian friends.

Too many Christians either practice an avoidance ethic, or no real ethic at all. Staub gives a pretty good test case: One way we know we are not captive to either polar extreme is if we are constantly getting into trouble with folks on both sides of the spectrum.

John Frame's new book *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* contains an excellent section on culture (chapters 45-49). This may be the best overall summary of the issues I have found, and Frame even includes a special section on movie watching. If there is a weakness it is that Frame tends to fall into a kind of stylistic relativism and aesthetic egalitarianism. Of course, I fully appreciate his desire to emphasize that Christian truth can travel in any number of cultural vehicles. I also respect his desire to avoid cultural and historical snobbery which would tie the gospel into an upper crust, elitist package. But I do think the section could have been improved with a discussion of beauty, especially its objectivity (Phil. 4:8).

I also used Ken Meyers' book *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*. This book is a bit dated, and is vitiated by a Klinean approach to biblical theology. Meyers also has a rather strong prejudice in favor of high culture, sometimes failing to recognize that high culture is just as fallen as pop and folk cultures. Indeed, those categories themselves are somewhat limited. But the book as a whole is still loaded with good information and discussion, especially on the forms of pop culture and their impact on our sensibilities.

Other authors to consider include almost anything by Leland Ryken and Calvin Seerveld on art and literature; Brian Godawa, Jeffery Overstreet, and K. L. Billingsley on film; Richard Mouw on common grace in culture; David Dark and

William Romanowski on pop culture; Steve Turner and Jeremy Begbie on music; Neil Postman, who was not a Christian, but whose books contain many noteworthy insights into the problems and pitfalls of modern, technologized cultures; etc. Of course, the list could go on and on – there is no shortage of helpful books on these Christ/church/culture issues.

One issue many of you asked about that I did not deal with in the sermons is sports. We live in a sports crazed culture, and sometimes our participation in sports, as competitors or spectators, verges on idolatry. There is certainly nothing wrong with athletics per se; in fact, Paul uses more than enough athletic illustrations (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:27, 1 Tim. 4:8, etc.) to suggest that sports can be a great help in developing the whole person. God is just as concerned with our bodies as our souls, and the bodily self-discipline that comes with sports is of great value in life. I know that my participation in sports growing up taught me many lessons that have continued to serve me well to this day (e.g., how to win with humility and lose with dignity, how to develop well-rounded character, how to be a part of team, how to persevere, how to pursue excellence, how to overcome adversity, how to respond to a coach/authority-figure, etc.). For many boys, playing sports is way to leave behind the soft, feminine world of home life and begin making the transition into the hard, challenging realm of manhood. Sports provide an arena for young men to develop friendship, find mentors outside the family, release energy and adrenaline that might otherwise be poured into more destructive pursuits (including war, as the saying goes: “Sport is war pursued by other means”), and develop their work ethic.

Watching sports and following favorite teams can be an enjoyable hobby. Sports provide a measure of drama, excitement, and escape. Sports are thrilling in a life-and-death sort of way....but at the end of the game, no one is dead. However, when following sports becomes more than a recreation – when the on the field rivalries affect how we view or treat others, when our attitude hinges on the outcome of the game, when our support of our team borders on obsessive fanaticism, when the games take an inordinate amount of time (and money), etc. – then our enjoyment of the game becomes an idol. In the American South, I daresay college sports, especially football, rises to an idolatrous level. My college pastor, Peter Doyle, used to say that in the South, Saturday is our “high holy day,” and he applied the language of Romans 1:23 to our team loyalties – we worshipped “creeping things,” like tigers, elephants, and bulldogs!!

It is safe to say that while following sports is relatively speaking harmless, compared to much of the filth that Hollywood spews out, following athletic

teams is not without dangers. As far as entertainments go (and that's what sports are – entertainments), they *should* be at worst a mild distraction from more important things we could be doing with our time, money, and energies (e.g., mercy ministry, family time, etc.). Sadly, for some men (and perhaps women too), sports has become something of a substitute religion, a way of attaining unity and transcendence. As John Piper would say, don't waste your life on sports. We have to ask ourselves some serious questions: Are we more concerned about the success of our team than the success of the gospel? Why does our culture spend so much money and time on sports? Why is the sports section of the newspaper more read – and more relevant – than the religion section? Why are successful sports figures given such a wide platform for cultural influence? Why do we *care* so dang much if our team wins? Why are men who would never express emotion over things of God so deeply emotionally involved in sporting contests? Why do so many of us have more statistics memorized than Scripture? For a full discussion, see Leon Podles, *The Church Impotent*, 168ff.

Families must learn to balance their inward and outward responsibilities. Eugen Rosenstakc-Huessy gives a helpful model with his 'cross of reality.' Peter Leithart explains (<http://www.leithart.com/2007/02/26/sermon-outline-second-sunday-of-lent/>):

There are many ways to express this, but Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy has summarized it neatly in what he calls the "Cross of Reality." He says that every human being is stretched out simultaneously in various directions. We are obligated to the past, but also must aim for the future. We have duties toward our inside group, but must interact with those outside our group. The family is torn by these pressures and demands, which are often all legitimate yet incompatible with one another. Do we protect our children from outside influences, or do we train them by exposing them to the outside world? In answering questions like these, timing is everything. There is a time to build walls around our family, but there is also a time to let the world in and push the family out. A family that remains enclosed in its protective walls is bound to be an unbalanced family. When we try to escape the challenge of balancing these demands, we are torn. As we are torn, we mature.

One demand on families is the necessity of carrying on a heritage, honoring the past. Within the nuclear family, the past is

represented by parents, and children are commanded to obey and honor parents (Ephesians 6:1-2). But the past comes into the family in all kinds of other ways as well: Parents have parents, whose lives stretch further into the past and whom they are supposed to honor; each parent comes with a family and personal history that affects how the family works; and each parent comes with a set of traditions and habits from their own families. Parents should strive to pass on this heritage to their children, telling their own family histories, doing what they can to help children to know their grandparents, memorializing the past in family holidays (e.g., birthdays) and ceremonies. Families will be unhealthy if parents attempt a revolutionary break with the past.

But families cannot live in the past. Every marriage creates a new family, with a new future, a new variation on the families' themes, and a family is created by an overlap of past and future. Families ought to honor the past, but they also necessarily break with the past, and this break is as right and proper as continuity with the past. Conflict arises when parents will not allow their adult children and their families to create a future.

Note again what Leithart says: "Do we protect our children from outside influences, or do we train them by exposing them to the outside world? In answering questions like these, timing is everything. There is a time to build walls around our family, but there is also a time to let the world in and push the family out. A family that remains enclosed in its protective walls is bound to be an unbalanced family. When we try to escape the challenge of balancing these demands, we are torn. As we are torn, we mature." This is exactly the point. Parents must wisely protect their children, and then slowly turn their children loose in the world. The pull of inside protection and outside mission must be balanced. Ideally, by the time a child is ready to leave home he/she is ready to navigate the temptations of the world, while simultaneously ministering effectively in the culture as an ambassador of Christ.

It's been said that if ancient people worshipped their ancestors, Americans worship their offspring. But if we keep past and future in tension in the "cross of reality," we will be able to reject both of these idolatries, and that will help us make wise choices about family entertainment.

Jerram Barrs makes the point that many kids are bored today because we abuse various entertainment media

(http://theresurgence.com/jerram_barrs_2003_everything_is_interesting).

Children are naturally curious, but over-exposure to television and underexposure to the outdoors can kill that curiosity. If we want to raise educated kids who are “interested in everything,” who are not passive and bored about life, we need to get involved with them and get them involved in what has God has called us to do. We have to turn the television off so it becomes servant rather than master, and we need to help them develop an imagination. We face some might challenges in our postmodern, consumerist, culture. Barrs explains:

We face a problem in our culture as a whole. There are two things in our society which work together to quench our children's curiosity: postmodernism and consumerism. Postmodern ideas say there is nothing true or meaningful that we can learn about life or build our lives around. Consequently, our postmodern culture has lost the sense that there is an overarching meaning to life, a story that explains life. Society no longer believes in ultimate meaning. Our culture mainly rejects Christian truth, and there has been nothing else to take its place which explains where we have come from, what we are here for and where we are going. Postmodernity leaves people with no answer to the question, “What is life for?” This message constantly comes at our children from their televisions, music and peers. They hear over and over again that there is no ultimate meaning to anything, so we might as well live for today. This message is implicit in the soap operas, the children's shows and the music on the radio.

At the same time our children are being schooled in the “meaninglessness” of life, they are bombarded with the messages of a consumer society, yet another feature of our culture which drives people into passivity and boredom. Every commercial on the television, radio, billboard or magazine tells them that having this thing or that thing will make them happy. They constantly hear that life is about having this sense satisfied or having that pleasure consummated, and it is only natural that this is what society pursues. When postmodernism says there is no overarching explanation to who one is and what one is here for, it leaves people with nothing else to do except satisfy their senses. A postmodern society produces people who are idolaters.

Now the consequence for our children, if we are not careful, is that they are going to be always dissatisfied. They will always want more, but when they get what they want, they will always find themselves disappointed that the thing has not lived up to its promise. Their appetites become jaded, and they become bored. The abuse of television, the lack of time with our children, and the message of our culture – all three of these things are reinforcing each other all the time to lead our children into a pit of boredom and disillusioned cynicism.

Television, time and consumerism, all three of these pose great threats to our children and their natural creativity. So what are we going to do? How are we going to raise educated and interested people? We can start by intentionally countering these threats with a plan to help our children grow intellectually just as we plan balanced meals to help them to grow physically.

I briefly quoted from Ray Stedman's classic article on separation from the world (http://www.inplainsite.org/html/the_christian_and_worldliness.html). Here is the article in full (it's quite helpful – sorry about the formatting):

What does Christian separation mean? Your effectiveness as a Christian hangs on your concept of what separation means, and I think almost all of our personal and church problems will be solved if we get a biblical concept of what separation really is.

This question of separation has been a bone of contention among Christians for many, many years, and although I believe that the Scriptures are very clear on the matter, still I'm sure that we're not going to solve all the contention in this article. But we do want to look at it very plainly. It's interesting that you don't read very far in the New Testament without becoming aware of some very pointed warnings to Christians concerning their danger from the world around them.

Second Corinthians 6:14 is a very well-known passage: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." And then it goes on, but ". . . come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

These words, "come out from among them, and be ye separate" have been nailed to the masthead of many denominations and church groups as the one idea that Christians need to heed in these days.

Then we have that very strong passage in 1 John 2:15-17,

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world ... For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And - the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

Then James comes out with probably the strongest word along this line and says very flatly and very plainly, ". . .

know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?

whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Now that's very plain language, and as we read these passages we begin to realize that there's something dangerous about the world and the world's ways and the world's thinking.

Christians have rightly taken these passages very seriously. They have thought that the Lord would not speak so plainly if there was not something to be warned against. They've remembered the sad words of Paul when he had to write about one of his own young men who traveled with him: ". . . Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world. . ."

And Christians have realized that a worldly Christian is a useless Christian. He's no good to the world and he's no good to God. Neither one gets any good out of him at all.

So Christians, in the light of these passages and because of them, have through the centuries drawn up lists of things they considered worldly.

The trouble was that their ideas differed very widely along this score.

Whenever anybody had any trouble with something or with some temptation or some particular type of recreation or some type of work where trouble occurred, they learned a lesson from it or thought they did and wrote that thing down as worldly.

And so there came into being a great many different lists of worldly things.

Tremendously different because of the different places.

And as a result of this you have such things today as the folks in the South called the Hook-and-Eye Baptists. They got that name because they believe that buttons are worldly, and that the proper way to fasten your clothing is not with a button but with a hook and eye. And so the button-

wearing folks are worldly in their estimation and the hook-and-eye people are spiritual.

Frankly, I can't for the life of me imagine (and I have a very lively imagination) how they ever got started thinking of buttons as worldly but that's what they think. So buttons are on their list as worldly. And they mean it! They're serious about it. It's just as much a worldly thing to them as some of the things on your lists.

You find standards differing widely in Christian circles about other things.

Drinking of beer among Christians is very normal in places like Germany, and Christians over there think nothing at all about having a glass of beer with their meals. Nobody thinks they're not spiritual because of it. But in this country it's quite a different matter. In this country beer drinking is almost always considered a worldly thing.

I've been in parts of this country where people regarded with horror mixed bathing, when boys and girls went swimming together. They thought that was terrible. And yet in most places, here in the West at least, mixed bathing is not frowned upon at all. We consider--it quite a normal, natural thing and few think twice about it as being essentially wrong.

There are places in this world today where lipstick is called "devil's grease" because it's thought the devil is behind the lipstick business. Now I've mentioned things that most of us would laugh at as being considered worldly. I haven't mentioned any of the things that are on our lists.

But the point I want you to see is that these people are just as disturbed about these things as you are about the things on your list. And the result is that these ideas have been passed on from generation to generation.

We all have a tendency to think that the things that we have been taught are inspired truth. And few of us have ever taken time to check these with biblical principles as to whether they're really worldly or not worldly.

I'm afraid that many of us often mistake our prejudices for our convictions.

And it's a very easy thing to do.

I was talking with a man about a certain matter, and I had to confess that perhaps I was mistaking my prejudice for a conviction of immorality in connection with it. That's an easy thing for us to do.

But we must remember that not what we've been taught or what our fathers believed or the way we were raised is the standard of Christian behavior, but the Word of God. Always!

And if what we are taught is not in accordance with the principles declared in the Bible, then we'd better revise our standards and our thinking in accordance with those principles.

Now that's a very simple thing to say but it's hard to follow out. If we will follow it out though, we'll discover that it'll make some great changes in our lives.

The result of this habit of drawing up lists of things which are worldly and making an index of that which is right and which is wrong in the Christian life has been that today nine out of ten Christians have mental lists of "do's" and "don'ts." And by checking this list they blithely determine if they're worldly or spiritual.

And they call these lists Christian standards!

Yet, if they were so very important it's strange that they're not mentioned in the Scriptures themselves.

Now I don't want to make fun of certain Christian and those standards once arrived at in each individual standards at all. There are necessities along that line, life must be carefully adhered to. I am not saying that there are no such things as standards but I am saying the method by which we determine those standards must be in accordance with the Word of God and not simply by our upbringing.

Now then, since all the things that are on your particular list (and on mine) ' are being done by the unsaved worldly people around about us then there comes a tendency for us to either consciously or unconsciously avoid temptation by avoiding worldly people.

There is a tendency to withdraw, to seek our own crowd, to create our own little separate world which is a world that is as complete as we can make it with recreation and education and all that we need from the cradle to the grave. We create our own smug little airtight circle in which we live and which we've set up to run in competition to the worldly world outside of that life.

Now the ultimate result of that kind of thinking produced the monasteries that appeared in the Middle Ages where men, taking these things literally and looking at it from this same standpoint, decided that the way to avoid the temptations of the world was to completely seclude themselves from it.

They built high-walled monasteries and lived their lives inside and thus thought to avoid the world.

Today we do not build walls of brick and of mortar in order to avoid these things but we still have walls of thought and seclusion that are almost equally effective. So we are doing this very same thing.

And the worst tragedy of all, in my estimation at least, is that we're passing all this on to our young people. We're teaching them these same things because they pick up our way of life and our way of thinking, and instead of teaching our young people to overcome evil we're teaching them to avoid it. They are not learning how to fight the good fight of faith. We don't know how ourselves, many of us, so how can we tell them? How can we show them?

What are the results of this type of separation? Let me say, I do not speak from hearsay or from mere observation on this matter. I speak from very sad experience. An experience born of at least 10 years of my Christian life that I consider now almost utterly wasted because I was thinking and acting along these very lines. These were the results in my own life. I'm confident, from observation, they're the results in other Christians' lives who think in this way.

The first result is, there comes a terrible sense of boredom and frustration in life. Life becomes pale and uninteresting, especially Christian things. You just go through a routine. You go to church and you go through the set formula of things you're supposed to do, but there's nothing very gripping, very fascinating, very illuminating about it. Life becomes very boring. The challenge is gone.

Why? Because there's no sense of danger! There's nothing to call forth heroics out of a young Christian faced with that kind of thinking. He's protected. He's sheltered. His life is arranged in such a way that temptations are reduced to a minimum and consequently he becomes bored and frustrated and there's no challenge. Life becomes very lackluster.

We sense this in our Christian lives and often we try to correct it by creating false challenges. You know, "Let's win the attendance contest," and we get all excited about the attendance contest. Or, "Let's gain a reputation in our church for having a tremendous missionary outlook, and let's parade the figures in front of us all through the years as to how much we're giving for missions," and so we create false challenges and false goals along this line. Not that these things are wrong in themselves but the trouble is, the personal challenge in the individual life is gone. You remember what Peter Marshall said so graphically, "Today's Christians are like deep-sea divers encased in suits designed for many

fathoms deep, marching bravely forth to pull plugs out of bathtubs." That's a pretty graphic way to put it, and it's true. We're taught all the resources of the Christian life, for what? Well, to just win attendance contests with! Build buildings with! No real challenge, you see. Life just becomes lackadaisical.

I think that's one of the major, if not the major reason, why our Christian young people today, (and I say it sadly because I see it in my own church) are so lethargic, so lackadaisical, so utterly pepleless about their Christian lives. It's difficult to get them to avoid the things on our lists any longer. They'd rather feel some of the stimulation and the challenge and the temptation of the world than to live lives that are so colorless and lackluster as many of us would like them to.

Now the second result of this isolationist separation is a tremendously increased amount of worldliness in Christian living. Now I mean that! This is a paradox. It seems strange. But the reason why Christians isolate themselves is because they're trying to avoid worldliness, and it always results in more worldliness.

You see, if you think that the things on your mental list are the only worldly things and you avoid those, then what happens? Why, you let down your guard and the world then begins to seep in, in a thousand places all through your life. And instead of being worldly in the ways that are on your list, you're worldly in a thousand different ways and all of them equally as bad.

The truth is that worldliness is not a matter of things. Of doing this and--not doing that. That's not what marks the difference between worldliness and spirituality. If we could just learn that! That's the mistake we so often make.

But worldliness is a matter of the attitude of the heart, the attitude of life in thinking and dealing with things.

Let me see if I can illustrate that. If you ladies wear a new dress to church in order to attract attention, that's worldliness. You're trying to attract attention to yourself. The opinions of others mean much to you.

That's worldliness, no matter whether you never drink, dance, smoke or go to a nightclub or anything else. You're just as worldly as if you did. Thoroughly saturated with it.

On the other hand, if you wear a dowdy old dress to church in order to be thought spiritual, that's worldliness too. Now the dress, you see, has nothing to do with it. New or old. It's the attitude of the mind that constitutes the worldliness.

If you have to have a new car every year in order to keep up with the style, that's worldliness. Pure and simple. Worldliness! If you need it in your business and you're honest about it and you really need it, that's another matter entirely. For this reason no one else can sit in judgment on you on this matter. But the Lord knows the heart, and if you have the car just because you're trying to keep in style, you're worldly!

If you are hurt because people don't notice you, that's worldliness!

If a TV program conflicts with something that you know the Lord wants you to do, your attendance at church or prayer meeting or something else, that's worldliness! You've chosen that, you see, in place of the Lord's will.

Now I'm not trying to make up new lists in this article. What I'm trying to do is to show you that everything can be worldly just as everything can be spiritual. This is a tremendously important point.

Read what John says. "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh" (that includes eating and drinking and sleeping and wearing clothes or anything else your body wants to do); "all that is in the world, the lust of the eyes" (that includes the desire for anything that you want to buy or possess, whether it's good, bad or indifferent), all "the pride of life" (or the vainglory of life, the fighting for station and for promotion and for advancement and all the other things), "all that is in the world, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

Now what does he mean by that? He means that everything is worldly, if your attitude is worldly. And on the other hand, if your attitude is that of the Father, nothing is worldly. You see what he's getting at? That's why the Apostle Paul could say and did say, "All things are lawful to me. But there are only three restrictions: I will not be brought under the power of any, all things are not profitable for me, and all things do not help other people." And those are the only restrictions. Everything else is fine.

Now you can't make up lists. Each of you may have your own personal areas in which you feel, under the guidance of God, you cannot enter.

There are certain things you cannot do or do not want to do, not because someone else doesn't want you to or because you think the church will frown on it, but because you feel that's not the Lord's place for you personally. But that must be decided individually.

You see, what makes a thing worldly? Listen to John again. "All that is in the world ... is not of the Father. . . ." That's the thing. You exclude the Father out of your thinking and when you do that, you're worldly no matter what you're doing. You've done some act or taken some step or made some plan without the Father, without taking Him into

consideration and seeking His guidance on it. That's worldliness. No matter whether it's a completely innocent thing in itself.

So the making of lists only increases worldliness. It makes it worse because we let down our guard about the things that are off the list, and as a result we become saturated, we become steeped in worldly thinking, worldly acts and worldly deeds.

Building walls does not shut it out, any more than building a wall or a fence around your backyard will keep the weeds out of your garden. In order to have the weeds out of your garden, you've got to cultivate it and plant it with good seed or it'll produce weeds forever.

I've had a fence around my backyard for five years and my garden is loaded with weeds. In fact, because of the fence they've all intermarried with one another and I have a special variety of my own! But they're still weeds! You see, the fence doesn't keep them out.

The third great result of this type of thinking is a total or partial loss of the of sacrifice in our lives. When we worldly people because we're trying to avoid worldliness, we also lose most of our opportunity to sacrifice for Christ's sake. The result is, and I've seen it and you have too, that this process of withdrawing into our own little watertight Christian circle of affairs results in people who become insensitive and unsympathetic and smug and complacent in their thoughts and in their lives.

We can get all worked up over missionaries 10 or 12 thousand miles away, but people can live right next door to us and be perishing in their spiritual agony and we do nothing.

That's worldliness. It results from this business of thinking we can live our own lives; that we can withdraw from the world and create our own little tight circles and live within them.

We have changed the Lord's words "Go ye," into "Send ye," and we think if we're sending out people into the mission field, that's the adequate answer to our own responsibility. But the Lord didn't say that. He said, "Go Ye into all the world." And I don't think He meant that only geographically.

I think He meant that from the standpoint of into all the ways of the world, into all the thinking of the world, into all the attitudes of the world, in order that you might understand and have some sympathy with the poor dying wretches who live next door to you that are in the world and lost in the world.

I think this is one of the most tragic things about our Christian lives. We become disobedient Christians, you see. We forget our own personal responsibility in witnessing. We talk about witnessing but we seldom ever

do it. We're embarrassed about it. We confess in moments of honesty that we're embarrassed and ill at ease in this process of trying to witness to someone else and talk to them. We confess we don't know how to do it. We're supposed to be imitating our Master who gave up all things, who pleased not Himself, who laid down His life in order that He might win these lost worldlings to Himself.

But when it comes to us, we don't want to give up an afternoon of golf or a night of bowling or an afternoon of tea or open our homes or give up some time on Sunday to do something to win these lost ones.

Isn't that the truth? Doesn't that describe us? When I think sometimes of our comfortable, easeful, luxurious lives that many of us lead and then read in the Scriptures about those early Christians who loved not their lives unto death, I tell you I sometimes grow sick with the very shame of it.

Why don't we have the spirit of sacrifice? Well, I think it's because our view of separation has built a shell about us so that we don't see the need of sacrifice. And that's the terrible tragedy of it. We're living in the midst of people who are dying for what we have, really who are hungry, who are putting bullets through their heads, and jumping off bridges, and turning on the gas, and living in utter misery year after year after year. And they don't live 10,000 miles away. They live two blocks down the street, two houses down the street, right next door to us, behind us, all around us, and we don't see the need for sacrifice!

We've become deaf to the cries that surround us. We've become hardened to them -- to all the hands that reach out from every side.

We take the place of the Pharisee and the Levite in that parable of the Good Samaritan, who passed by on the other side of the road when they saw the wounded traveler lest they become defiled themselves by helping him. We're there really. That's not the modernist and the liberal. That's the fundamentalist Christian who is so concerned about being defiled with worldliness that he's lost his touch with the world. He's no longer interested in helping worldly people, in meeting their problems, in learning to become friends with them and meeting their needs. That's where we stand.

Now there are many people who sense the hypocrisy of this kind of Christian living and they try to remedy it, and the result is that they go to the other extreme. They rush out and they begin to mix with the world in every way. They begin to drink cocktails and take up card playing and small gambling, and they learn how to dance, and they move in with the world.

Now please, I'm not making lists of things; please don't misunderstand me.

I'm simply trying to characterize some of the thinking of a life like this. They adopt the world's standards and the world's values in the hope of being of some influence to the world in some small way for Christ. Now the result of that is always tragic. When we become like the world we lose all our power to influence the world.

I remember reading of a boy who had a cage full of sparrows and he thought it would be nice to teach the sparrows how to sing like a canary. So he bought a canary and put the canary in the cage with the sparrows. After a couple of weeks he came running in to his mother and said, "Mother! The sparrows are not singing like the canary. The canary is now chirping like the sparrows!" That's always what happens. The canary begins to chirp like the sparrows.

If you want to see the folly of a life like that, go out and stand by the shores of the Dead Sea and look at that cheerless, dreary, lifeless waste. And then go read the story of Lot who moved into Sodom in order to try to win it and influence it by being like it and see what he lost as a result. That dreary, desolate place stands as a mark of the folly of moving in to be like the world.

Well now, what's the answer? How do we reach the world and still not be like it? Well, we must learn to walk and to live on a frontier between these two extremes. We must be in the world, we must seek worldly friends, deliberately become friends with them. Invite them into our homes, go into their homes.

We're going to have to ignore some things that are irritating to us, some of their habits, some of their ways of thinking and talking. We have to ignore it for awhile.

But we must make friends with them. We dare not shut ourselves away from the perils and the dangers and the dilemmas of the world around us. Our Lord doesn't want us to! We must be in the world, seek worldly friends, but we must not be like the world.

You see, the word that we need to emphasize is not separateness; that's not the word if you think of that as withdrawing, but the real word and best translation here is distinctiveness. We're to be distinct, different. Dare to be different. Be in the world like our Lord was in it up to the hilt. But never to live under false colors.

We're not to be thinking like the world, you see; our attitude is different. Our thoughts are different. And yet we're to be with them.

We're to be out-and-out Christians. Distinct but not distasteful. We're to be sheep among wolves, as our Lord says. That is, we're not to stay in the sheepfold. We're disobedient if we stay in the sheepfold. We're to be out, He wants us out among the wolves, boldly out there.

Well, you say, isn't that dangerous for sheep to go out in the midst of wolves? Yes, it is. Of course it is. But that's the thing that makes it gripping, vital, interesting, challenging, stimulating. It's this danger! The Lord wants us to live on a frontier where we're constantly under danger, and we'll be safe just as long as we're loyal to the Shepherd and never begin to think or act like a wolf. When we do that, we're really in trouble.

But as long as we think and act like a sheep, we're safe among the wolves. Well, you say, isn't this difficult? Doesn't it present a lot of problems? Aren't you constantly having to make adjustments and make decisions? Of course you are! Whoever said the Christian life was easy? That's been the trouble with it. We've made it so easy that we have no problems any longer, and so we have no power.

Now we're to have problems. Our Lord wants us to have problems. He wants us to be constantly wondering what to do about this particular situation and thinking it through and testing it according to the Word and praying about it and finding the answer that satisfies and that works. He wants us to live that way. That's what makes it challenging and interesting, and without it life becomes dull and meaningless.

Let me share with you a brief paragraph from a letter that came recently from a woman in Southern California. She says, "My husband is getting rather fed up with church." (Now the church in mind here is a very prominent evangelical church in their city.) "He is from a very strong Christian family, and was a strong Christian himself. But now he says to get ahead in the world and make the kind of money he wants to make, you can't be a full-time Christian because you either give up all you've got to follow Christ's claims, or you're riot worthy. Since he's not worthy, why go half-way? I can't make him see otherwise."

Now, that's a tragedy. There's a modern prodigal son who has chosen to go out from the Father's house seeking the things he wants, and he doesn't realize that what he really wants is to be found only in the Father's house. And he's going to have to learn by going down into the pigpen, or by drinking of the empty, unsatisfying cisterns of this world; how barren and meager such an affair is. He's going to have to learn the hard way, and this is the tragedy he must face.

This man is choosing a dead-end street today, and when he gets to the end of it, there'll be nothing to do but to turn around and come back. But though we pity his choice, let me say I admire his honesty. This young man at least has seen that the Christian life is insipid and tasteless if it's only lived half-way. Here's an example right here in black and white, and others like it are taking place all around us today.

Let me bring you another quote from another source that I think says it much better than I. Here's a young man who writes very penetratingly about this problem, and this is what he says:

"To sum up, the Christian's vocation is to be in the world, but not of it; to represent Christ in it and to intercede on its behalf because it's under judgment (this is the Christian's priesthood), to identify himself with its sufferings but not with its attitudes; to bring his influence to bear upon the world's life without being corrupted by the world's ways; to stand on the frontier, holding forth the Word of Life, and so to love and obey that Word that he's delivered from the evil one and sanctified in the truth. Such a calling involves a cross. The man who separates himself from the world and seeks to escape it does not know that cross. The man who submits to the world's pressure and loses his distinctiveness as a Christian does not know that cross. The man who seeks to be in the world, as our Lord was in it, but shows that he is not of it because he's a Christian and in Christ, that man will find his cross. It's only the disciple who follows Christ in both these respects who has a cross to take".

Now, let me say, if this sounds hard and harsh and difficult and unappealing, it's because you haven't got your values straight.

Let's be honest now. Is God right, and is the Bible right, when it says this world is passing away and is really very unimportant? Is it really peanuts to us, this world in which we live and the things of it? If so, then it's the easiest thing in the world to live a Christian life. But if this world's things mean much to you, it's a hard and grueling thing to be a Christian.

Believe me, I know that's so, and you do too.

You remember the story of the woman who went to the psychiatrist and said to him, "My friends have asked me to come to see you. They suggested that I've blown a fuse or something and I don't know why."

"Well," he said, "what's your trouble?" She said, "The only thing is that I like pancakes, that's all Well," he said, "there's nothing wrong with that. I like pancakes myself Oh," she said, "you do! Well, you must come over sometime.

I've got six trunks full of them up in my attic."

Now that sounds silly to us. But do you know that is exactly what most American people are doing today? Storing up pancakes in the attic! Really!

These passing temporal things, these little transient baubles that we are so concerned with are just pancakes, and yet that's exactly the world we live in.

We're in a world that's so confused, that has its values so twisted that people think you're crazy if you don't store up pancakes in the attic like they do. Isn't that right?

But Christians, you see, have seen the Truth. They've seen the Light. They're not interested in pancakes any more. ". . . We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Now let's be done with nursery stuff. Let's be done with the kindergarten and with playing children's games. We've a man's job to do in this world. We're co-laborers with God. Do you know what that means? We're to supply the hands and the feet and the voices that He needs today. Every day should see us at the task of binding up the broken-hearted around us; of bringing sight to the poor sightless, blinded creatures that live next door to us; of leading thirsty men and women to the waters of Life; of bringing beauty for ashes and the -oil of joy for mourning and bringing happiness and harmony into the desolate homes that are all about us today.

You remember what old Robert Moffat said after 30 years in Africa when he was asked by a little slip of a girl to sign her autograph album. He wrote in it these words:

"My album is a savage breast, Where sorrow reigns and darkness rests, Without one ray of light. To write the name of Jesus there, To speak of worlds both bright and fair, And see that savage bow in prayer Is all my soul's delight."

Now there are savage breasts like that all around us today. They're not naked. They're dressed in gabardine and nylon, but they're just as savage as those in Africa.

Now are you willing to be expendable for Christ? Are you willing to count not your life dear unto yourself but willing to make friends with these wonderful people? To put up with all their irritating ways and for Christ's sake go after them no matter how little they encourage you? To learn to talk about storing up pancakes until you can find an opening to talk about

more wonderful things? And to pray and invite them over, and pray again and invite them over again, and pray again until you see the darkness lift and God's Spirit write the name of Jesus there on that savage breast?

Are you willing to do that? I'll tell you what will try it. You'll learn first of thrill of a Christian life! I'll tell you what will happen when you all the wonderful thrill of a Christian life! How challenging it can be.

How wonderful it can be. And then you will discover how utterly inadequate you are for the job.

And do you know what you'll do then? You'll come to your pastor or to some other Christian leader, and you'll say, "I tried to say something to so and so and I made an awful botch of it. Could you show me how to study my Bible so I'd know the answers?"

You'll be at prayer meeting because you'll realize the power that's there to reach behind the mask of this world and open up doors that can't be opened up any other way. You'll become an effective Christian when you begin to try to live this-way for Christ.

And do you know what else? You'll discover what Christian separation really means!

Our heavenly Father, we thank Thee now for the promises of Thy Word and for the revelation of it. Here is Truth. This is the way things really are in this universe. The things we read of and see outside here are not true. Many of them are but perversions of the Truth. Here is Truth. Help us to live by it. Help us to believe it and obey it and walk in its light and dare to be different for Christ's sake. Amen.

(NOTE: Text from the 1957 Booklet. Elaine Stedman offers the comment that when this booklet was first printed, one group of Christians at a well-known evangelical church in Los Angeles gathered all the copies of this booklet they could find--and held a book burning ceremony! Note added by Lambert Dolphin, September 24, 1998)

Finally, there is one blog post I wanted to call your attention to because I think it summarized the issues well. It may be found here:

<http://makinghome.blogspot.com/2008/06/thoughts-on-sheltering.html>. I have pasted in the post as well as the comments for your convenience:

Monday, June 16, 2008

Thoughts on Sheltering

Someone recently asked if I'd expand on my thoughts about rules/relationship and sheltering parenting. [*Honestly, the subject has been better tackled elsewhere ([Parenting with Love & Logic](#) deals*

with teaching our children to make wise choices and allowing "affordable mistakes" while they're in our home... and other individuals have tackled these things online in terms of homeschooling far better than I could.).]

Nevertheless, since I was asked to share, I'll share some from my personal perspective.

SOME OF MY STORY

Growing up, my parents were not repressive and judgmental, but my surroundings were. We were in a fundamentalist church circuit where virtually no pastor/church was "sound" enough for my dogmatic grandfather. Though I was saved at a young age, this environment smothered out the true love for Jesus that can grow in the heart of a child.

Long story short, I went along with my surroundings until I hit age 13, and then I rebelled against it until I was about 16. My parents felt convicted about things and intentionally left the hypocritical environment we had been in (a dying church which they'd been threatened by my grandpa to stay a part of), and sought out a vibrant Christian fellowship. After looking for *months*, they found it, and though at the time I didn't know why, but I no longer felt the need to rebel. I was drawn to the grace and truth I found among my peers and the families we encountered at this new church.

All that to say, when I was surrounded by *rules*, I rebelled big time, seeing no need to follow them because in my mind, there were absolutely no *benefits* to following the rules. The people around me all seemed grossly unhappy, personally dreary, and spiritually bored (or even dead). But **when I was shown true fellowship, true joy** among believers, and a pursuit of holiness-- not for self-righteousness, but out of **a true desire to please God-- well, my heart fell in line with that** really quickly. "Sign me up!"

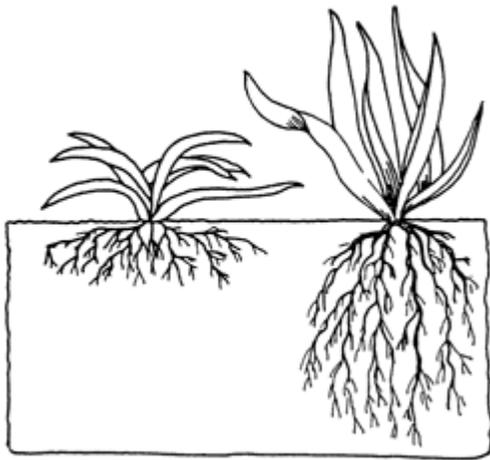
What I learned in a nutshell: **Christian joy flourishing in faith built on a strong foundation draws the soul toward Christ. An outward focus on rules and "perfection" kill the Spirit, focusing too strongly on the law.**

The "world" I had grown up in was dry soil. I had heard about rich soil. They talked as if "this" was it. But it was dry and dead and had almost no beauty growing in it.

ODDLY ENOUGH, THOUGH... ENCOUNTERING A GREENHOUSE

The church we joined also had a HUGE contingency of quiver-full homeschoolers (a group of people which I'd never before encountered-- I'd never known ANYONE with more than 3 or at the most 4 children). Ironically, these homeschooled kids/teens weren't allowed to be in the youth group that was life-changing for me, drawing me deeper in faith. They were kept

separate. I'd imagine their parents would have used terms like "wise sheltering" or given examples about greenhouses and flowers and how "until they're transplanted", they need to be "protected".



Problem is, those "plants" that had been completely sheltered didn't develop tough roots, and didn't learn how to feed themselves. Sure, they had knowledge... but they had never encountered others who saw the world differently. They'd never even been allowed to hang out with the incredibly godly public school kids I was challenged by in this youth group-- much less the worldly kids they would have encountered by taking jobs, or in some other way having intentional interaction with secular society. I'm sure their parents didn't mean to set their kids up for failure. Many of these parents are still baffled that their children didn't follow the "formula" they had tried to follow so carefully... and don't understand where things went wrong.

When these protected, secluded homeschooled young adults encountered the real world, with "real" sinners who seemed to be sinning and having a blast, they were fascinated. Without exception, they all fell prey to the appeal of the world, at least for a very long and painful season of adulthood. Many of them have never returned to faith.

THE PROBLEM WITH PROTECTION

Protection is a fine goal.

It's the goal of most people cultivating things. Of course you don't want hail to rain down on your newly growing seedlings. You don't want a bird to come and peck away at the plant you've worked so hard to grow. Yes, young plants need careful protection... but protection is NOT the *ultimate* goal of raising plants or crops or having a garden. And we homeschooling parents can sometimes forget this. While we may be honestly striving to do right by our kids, we could forget to transplant them until it's too late.

Once they're out of the house, whatever that looks like, we're going to be playing a far less significant role in their lives. So in my mind, the transplanting (for a plant, that means growing in REAL soil in the REAL open air rather than being in a potted plant in a greenhouse) needs to take place once we've given them a good start... probably in the early "teen" years.

TRANSPLANTING

Transplanting may look different for each family... but if we're going to do it successfully, I think we need to do it while we can still regularly offer up some water and fertilizer to encourage them towards godliness.



For example, one family in our youth group had 6 boys whom they homeschooled through 6th grade. From then on, they put the boys in public school. During that time, they played football (undoubtedly being exposed to all kinds of locker room talk) and kept up their studies while being disciplined and mentored more deeply by their father. These last 6 or so years in their parents' home were devoted towards FAITH IN ACTION.

Another example: some families (like **Voddie Baucham's**) follow a three-part phase of raising children-- **the obedience/training phase** (teaching our young ones to heed our words), **the catechism phase** (teaching our children the deep doctrines and truths of scripture), and **the discipleship phase** (teaching our young adults how to put faith into action). So, the early years are devoted towards training in obedience (*"Children obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord."*), the elementary years are devoted towards teaching children truth about God, His Word, and faith (**Deut 6:7**), and the last years of

parenting are spent with a focus on making disciples. Part of discipling is intentional life-on-life training. In the real world.

Jesus spent incredible amounts of TIME with His disciples-- but He didn't pull out to a cave to spend that time with them. He took them as He was going along in life-- talking to adulteresses, partying with tax collectors, going to weddings, mourning the dead, praying for the sick, pointing out the holiness and generosity of widows and the hypocrisy of the "religious". We can, I think, follow His example by not hiding from the world but doing our best as parents to use the world to continue our children's education.

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

That doesn't mean every homeschooled kid should end up in public or private school. It doesn't mean every parent ought to opt for youth group. Or that every kid should work at some secular place like Trader Joe's or Krispy Kreme. But we SHOULD be intentional about letting our kids learn what the world is really like, and even letting them foul up from time to time. (Love & Logic talks about this-- letting our kids make "affordable mistakes"-- mistakes that they can learn from and we can live with.) Essentially, though, our kids need to, for themselves, find God faithful and value Him above what the world offers. And my experience and observations tell me that this doesn't happen when our ultimate goal is protection and sheltering.

OK, so I've shared my perspective on this-- but it's not fully developed and I've certainly not raised teenagers, or even begun to enter that world. So what are your thoughts? Those of you who have raised your children into adulthood? Those of you who ARE raising young adults? Public school moms? Other homeschool moms? **What say all of you?**

Jess

Written by Jess at 6/16/2008 10:15:00 PM

*Categories **Children are a blessing, Discipleship, My Life, Parenting***

49 COMMENTS:

MoziEsmé said...

I like the example you gave of homeschooling through 6th grade, then "Faith in Action."

I went to church schools all my life, which have their own set of issues. For my child,

I want her to be exposed to a wide variety of beliefs while helping her form her own and then to stand up for them. I'm not into censoring everything that comes her way, because I know I won't be around forever to do that.

10:32 PM, June 16, 2008

Catherine said...

Excellent thoughts, Jess. As my kids approach their teen years (my oldest turns 13 in a few days!!), I have been pondering this more and more. How can I help them learn about God and interact with the rest of the world? Even if they are home for school, how can I encourage other activities? I certainly agree that no two families will come up with the same answers. You have given some good things to think about.

Blessings,
Catherine

10:32 PM, June 16, 2008

Evers said...

My wife pointed me to this post, asked what I thought... so here's what I think. =-)

Great post. Very thought-provoking. We have four, soon-to-be-five little ones 6yo and under, all homeschooled. We hope/plan to homeschool them through high school.

My response? I would guess that many of the quiver-full homeschool parents you knew sheltered the kids, and end up with "overly sheltered" kids who left the faith... is because the parents themselves were sheltered; and sought homeschooling not as a training ground to prepare their children for being light in the world, but as a cave to hide from the world (like monasteries of old).

How often did these families interact with unbelievers? How much did they travel the world? How aware were they of politics and world trends, as they relate to being a faithful citizen and "mission-minded Christian" -- apart from lobbying for homeschool rights? How often did they as a family minister to lost people? Interact with lost neighbors?

One of the side effects of being a faithful parent with children in the public school

system instead of homeschool is that you're forced (to a degree) to interact with unbelievers.

I think as our children get older, enter into teen years; we need to think: how can we as a family, and they as soon-to-be-adults, engage meaningfully and evangelistically with the world around us?

I think you makes a fundamentally important point: to shelter children for 18 years... then just to drop them into the world with no transition plan is a recipe for disaster. The thoughtful, faithful, wise Christian parents, no matter their schooling option, shouldn't be simply trying to get through child-rearing years and hoping to get them out of the house. They should be deliberately working on training and equipping their children to be soldiers for Christ, winsome warriors for the Lord.

Thanks for your thoughts.

10:46 PM, June 16, 2008

Tracy said...

Jess,

I can't tell you what a blessing this post is to me today. We have four children. 17B, 15G, 13B, 9G. All homeschooled. Until a few years ago. We allowed our eldest to attend public school. Play football. Run cross-country, join ROTC. You get the picture. None of our children are "sheltered". The oldest has a job, and has for 2 years. The boys are in scouts. They have been in plays, chess clubs, and get together with friends.

Anyway, the oldest was just accepted to a governor's school for the summer. Yesterday we delivered him to the university where he'll be for the next 5 weeks. I came home and cried, asking myself, "Does he have a strong enough foundation to endure the temptation that he'll encounter there? What about the liberal teachings that he'll hear?"

But you know, after this five weeks, he'll come home, and we can talk about everything. Then he's a senior in high school. Perhaps this is God's way of giving him a trial run before he heads to college for good. We pray that he'll be a blessing and a light to those whom he'll encounter this summer.

And of course, we'll be talking on the phone, and sending letters with encouraging scripture verses.

Anyway, your post made me see his trip away in a whole new light. Thanks!

In Christ,
Tracy

11:12 PM, June 16, 2008

christy said...

I am thankful for this well-thought out discussion of sheltering.

We have three boys. My husband and I have them home to shelter them, BUT...we recognize the need for them to be "in the world" on occasion.

I have had problems sorting out in my own mind what's just "letting them try out their wings" and letting go entirely.

Unfortunately, I generally see things in black and white. Sometimes grace can be a gray area.

Again, thank you for not just referring people to other places; this is the blog I happened upon.

12:11 AM, June 17, 2008

a woman found said...

I think this is an excellent post! I have a 3 and a 5 year old. Just recently I began "homeschooling"...basically just being more purposeful and engaged in my time with them. I never thought I'd homeschool. I want them to have real faith in Christ and know Him intimately, I don't want them to grow up thinking God is keeping them from "having fun." I want them to know the joy of the Lord.

Thing is, I've been confronted by the Lord in my own time with Him that He holds me accountable to do my part in modeling that life of joy in Him and in loving my kids enough to train and discipline them to believe my words and obey them.

I've really struggled to know how to parent my kids. I was raised with a fearful example and I don't want my kids to be fearful. I want them to be strong and courageous.

I am just learning that there is a time for them to be "protected" and saturated in influence from me and my walk of faith in Christ and that there is a foundation building time of teaching them God's word and that there is eventually a time to let them go. In fact, the Lord brings the stories of Moses' mom and Samuel's mom to mind often. He reminds me that there comes a time to be "weaned" and released into the world (Pharoah's house) and into the service of God (the temple).

I believe it's not sheltering but rather releasing that is the goal of parenting. The goal is to build my kids up to be released into a life of living by faith. I pray that happens for them without years of bondage to perversion and sin like it did with me. But I trust that just as Christ was able to draw me out of bondage and sin He is able to save my sons!

I pray that as I pour my life, my love and God's word into my boys they will seek to follow the God of their mother!

Bless you!

Sheila

12:51 AM, June 17, 2008

Terry said...

Wonderful post, Jess. It is a balanced approach to protecting our kids that many parents miss out on- either by sheltering too much or being too permissive, both of which can have disastrous consequences.

12:53 AM, June 17, 2008

Mrs. Amy Brigham said...

Great post, Jess, and you have summed up so many of my feelings & thoughts on sheltering, based both on my own experiences growing up and my mom's perspective using the 20/20 hindsight. :o)

Jess, would you mind if I printed this post to tuck away in my home management binder for future reference & encouragement? :o)

1:02 AM, June 17, 2008

Gina@Chats With An "Old Lady" said...

It will look a little different in each family. We need to pray for wisdom as to how God is going to provide opportunity for our children to learn to stand. It will be different with each child...depending on where they are at spiritually etc. We have found that it really is different for each of our children. We just need to be willing to not "over shelter". My children have never been in a youth group, but have learned how to be a part of the body of Christ as a whole. They have not needed a youth group to interact with peers. We have public school kids and homeschool kids in our church...but at church...they are just kids...a part of the body of Christ. Schooling is not an issue. Our church is committed to training parents to train their children...because that is their job..not a youth pastor. If a kid comes to church who does not have christian parents, then we make them a part of our families...and a part of the body.

I also don't think that kids who rebel...even if they have been overprotected, can blame it all on their parents. They do know right from wrong, and make choices. I have seen several kids rebel over the years, and have seen some well meaning parents very devastated. When all is said and done, we will not ever be perfect parents. There are always things we could have done better or differently. Even if I have overprotected at times...my children have still been taught right from wrong. They have to answer for themselves. We will be held accountable as well...and I continually beg for mercy that I might do the very best I can do, and that God will fill in where I miss it!

1:30 AM, June 17, 2008

The Pauls' said...

We have 4 teenagers, 18, 17, 14, 13
(plus 6 younger ones)

Our goal with them has not been to keep them from the world, or to shelter them, but rather to lay a foundation in their hearts. It's not about rules, it's not about sheltering, it's about training their hearts to know why right is right and wrong is wrong. To teach them how to make choices based on God's Word not because they have to, but because they want to and because they love Him. You mentioned families that 'sheltered their children and then when they were 'let out' in the real world, they didn't know how to react and found sin 'attractive'. My opinion would be that they knew all the 'right things to do' but they didn't know why they did them. What was the goal of training these children. Was it to have children that were looking good on the outside and doing all the right things, or was it the inward beauty of the heart. I think this is

where many parents go wrong. You can shelter right up until they leave home, but if their heart is not trained it won't help. But I am not against sheltering. We are not quick to throw our kids out to the world just because we don't want to be accused of sheltering, yet we do know that we need to slowly let go. We haven't done youth group as a rule. They have went to functions once in awhile, but generally we try to do things as a family with other families. Why, because we believe the family unit is a very strong one when functioning the way God designed it to be. And we don't believe that our kids will listen better and grow more spiritually in a youth group. In a family you learn way more that you do amongst peers ect. And as a family you can minister to the lost and the needy. You don't have to have a program to do this, God has set it up right within family. I think there is such a fear out there from parents who hear the 'negative sheltering' stories and then we throw it all out. We need to remember that God has entrusted these hearts to us, to seek Him for wisdom and not to judge ourselves according to others, but to know what God has called us to and do it

3:02 AM, June 17, 2008

Nicole said...

Thanks for this wonderfully thought out post.

I agree wholeheartedly with you that the ultimate goal of Christian parenting is not sheltering. I was blessed with godly Christian parents who sent me to the local public school, and saw it as a training opportunity (like the life on life training you were talking about). They didn't send me off and leave me to my own devices, but through constant counsel gave me the tools I needed to be a follower of Jesus, in the world. I am very grateful to God for them and hope to follow their example with my children.

5:47 AM, June 17, 2008

Jessi said...

I'm a new reader and have really enjoyed your blog. I thoroughly LOVED today's post. I am a mom of 4, ages 3-12 and currently homeschool, but we are open to all options, and take everything on a year-by-year basis, and consider each child's needs individually. Your post was very insightful and encouraging. Thanks for sharing your thoughts!

6:01 AM, June 17, 2008

ky frugal mom said...

Just some food for thought! Taken from www.visionforumministries.org

Our Church Youth Group

by Douglas W. Phillips, Esq., December 24, 2002

I have the privilege of worshiping in a small, family-integrated church. When asked about our various church programs, I explain that we are blessed with more than thirty different organizations to which our members belong — they are called families. I further explain that we have more than sixty youth directors — they are called parents. In fact, we have such a full schedule of events that there is a mandatory activity every day of the week — it is called family worship.

The Phillips Family Youth Group and friends visit with the Scott Brown Family Youth Group at their home in North Carolina

Both through the preaching of the word and informal shepherding of the congregation, the church leadership aspires to equip our dozens and dozens of youth pastors to successfully minister to the diverse needs of the many individuals and special interest groups within their respective organizations. Because we don't want to leave anybody behind, we have instructed these church organizations to reach out to the young, the old, and the infirm — the singles, the divorced, or abandoned — everybody, such that we will have a comprehensive outreach for every special interest group represented by the membership of our assembly of believers. As a result, these organizations sponsor events that include hospitality and evangelism outreach, one-room schoolhouses (usually meeting in the family den), foreign missions (to Mexico), and literally hundreds of other activities designed to meet the needs of the organizational members.

The amazing thing is that our financial budget to accomplish these goals is \$0.00. Well, that is not exactly true — we do spend some money on photocopying, tape distribution, and various other training tools that we place in the hands of our youth directors.

As an example to the congregation, the elders are required to be youth directors, too. In fact, if the elders don't manage their own youth programs well, they have to step down from being elders.

The Stinnett Family Youth Group practices biblical peer-grouping in Plymouth as part of the 2002 VFM Faith & Freedom Tour

With so much responsibility on their hands, our youth directors have to really get their collective acts together. (I happen to be one of the youth directors, so I speak from personal experience.) They have to study God's Word more than they have ever studied before so they can wisely lead their organization. They have to be creative so they can solve the diverse problems of their special interest groups. They have to learn to be patient. They have to learn to love. They even have to reprioritize their lives.

This last part is crucial. Only by reprioritizing life, and structuring their organizations properly, will our youth directors be successful. They know that. They also know there is a price to pay. But most of them are willing to pay the price, because they have decided that the greatest activity they can do in this life is to be a youth pastor and to run a special interest organization called the Christian family.

Here is what we are discovering: The more we commit to faithfully shepherding our mini-congregations, the more blessing we experience. Moreover, the more we study what God's Word says about these little congregations, the more we see the wonder and the brilliance of God's plan of equipping the Church and transforming the entire culture through these often forgotten, twisted, and even maligned organizations called Christian households.

The Doctrine of the Christian Household

Did you know that the Bible communicates at least seven crucial, culture-transforming missions for the Christian household? The household is the God-ordained seat of education. It is the first place where we are to develop and communicate a distinctively Christian aesthetic for culture. The home is not to be relegated to a mere place for consumption, but transformed into a powerful tool for industry and production. In the household (not the state welfare agency) we find God's true pattern for multi-generational, covenantal care. The home, not even the temple or church meeting house, has always been the God-ordained primary locus for daily worship. Our homes not only provide us with a platform to honor God's non-optional commands for one-anothering and hospitality, but they were designed to be the most powerful forums for evangelism and discipleship in the Christian's arsenal.

Of course, this vision for the Christian home presupposes a rigorous adherence to the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Unless we presuppose the Holy Scripture, not the traditions of man or the present cultural patterns, as the starting point for any coherent worldview or cultural vision, our thinking will, by definition, be muddled. Furthermore, this household vision of victory presupposes an appreciation for the doctrine of biblical patriarchy, which teaches the necessity of leadership in the home by fathers committed to family-unifying policies and a vision for multi-generational faithfulness.

When the household is functioning according to these God-directed purposes, it becomes the most powerful instrument available for the Church of Jesus Christ, next to the Bible itself, in its arsenal of culture-transforming, kingdom-building tools. When properly understood, the doctrine of the Christian household is the antidote to the palsied, family-fragmenting efforts of modern churches to resist the world through man-centered programs which do little more than bring the philosophies and methodologies of the world into the Church of Jesus Christ.

Long live the Christian family! Long live biblical patriarchy and the victorious household!

Get the Tape

If you would like to learn more about the principles articulated in this e-mail, it would be my pleasure to send you a copy of my sermon tape "An Introduction to the Doctrine of the Christian Home." See my P.S. below.

Family Vision in 2003

As we approach 2003, may I suggest that now is the time to ask the Lord for a distinctively biblical family vision of victory. Please continue to visit our Web site for suggestions on how you can expand your vision and for exciting opportunities to join us as we do the same through our new Father and Daughter Discipleship Retreats, regional Uniting Church & Home conferences, New York-based Faith & Freedom Tour, Back to Patriarchy conferences, and much more.

Persevero,
Doug Phillips

Vision Forum Ministries

Researcher George Barna maintains that if current trends in the belief systems and practices of the younger generation continue, in ten years, church attendance will be half the size it is today.[1]

Dawson MacAlister, national youth ministry specialist, remarked that 90% of youth active in high school church programs drop out of church by the time they are sophomores on college.[2]

6:59 AM, June 17, 2008

Carletta said...

Interesting post, Jess! There is a conversation about this currently on the WS. I have not had time to participate, but from what I've read, the focus is similar to your posts - rules vs. relationship.

Ironically, someone there quoted Michael Pearl as saying that if you can only have joy or discipline - choose joy. I am NOT a fan of TTUAC, but I find it interesting that this man who so many feel is focused on punishment has said to choose joy first.

When looking at others, I wonder if some of us miss the essence of what helped them produce great children.

I will admit that sheltering is one of the main reasons we homeschool. It is not what drew me to homeschooling at first, but I feel we are reaping the benefits of it.

My children will be (and are currently being) exposed to values we don't agree with, but I am glad that I am with them during those times of exposure. I am glad that I am with them enough that they look to me for direction and guidance instead of looking to their peers.

I listened to Voddie Baucham's audio sermon about the three stages of raising children, and I was under the impression that during the discipleship phase his

children were with him more, being mentored by him, and not necessarily out in the world on their own.

My aunt is the first person who introduced me to the concept of sheltering. Of her 5 adult children, 4 of them are thriving and 1 of them went through a period of wilderness and came back to the Lord. While the 1 was in rebellion, she kept wondering what she did wrong.

I wonder if some of us focus too much on rebellion among homeschoolers and too little on the ones who don't rebel.

I think there was a study done that showed 85% of Christian teens who go to public high school leave the faith. I wonder if the numbers are that high for homeschoolers.

Anyway, it is not like the statistics matter because we can't parent by them, LOL! I wish there was a perfect formula to follow.

I try to watch my children for guidance as to when they are and aren't ready for more. I've recently learned that my son is ready for a bit more freedom, and that I had given my daughter freedom she wasn't ready for. I am beginning to think that only time will tell whether or not this has been a job well done. I am praying that the Lord will fill in where I mess up.

Thank you for these thought provoking posts!

7:04 AM, June 17, 2008

Gina@Chats With An "Old Lady" said...

Why not "some rules And relationship"?

Why not "discipline AND joy"?

It's so easy to swing to one extreme or another. All of us battle that. That's why we need to pray constantly for wisdom, and then admit to our children we are not going to be perfect, but we are really trying to strike a balance. I say to my kids all the time, "Look, I've never been a mother of an 18 and 15 year old. I'll make some mistakes. Please be patient with me. I really love you, and love God and want to do it all right. I'm not going to do it perfectly, but I'm really striving to do the right thing."

I think if they know you are trying, and you willingly and regularly seek forgiveness when you fail, your children will show so much grace. Atleast that has been my experience.

3:28 PM, June 17, 2008

Pepperpot said...

I can relate to this posting so much it's painful. I was one of those sheltered kids, lost in the greenhouse of rules with no love for Christ. When I went away to college - a Christian college - I soon was lost in a desperate life I loved, but could destroy me. It took many years for me to be willing to let Christ free me, and I bear many scars to this day from my years as the prodigal daughter. I could talk all day about how important it is to find that balance, and not put your kid's heads in the sand to keep them 'safe'. It's something I think about on a daily basis with my own children.

Thanks!

4:37 PM, June 17, 2008

Jess said...

Hey Carletta-

I haven't been to the WS in a while; funny that they're talking about it there too. :)

I think it's great to shelter to a degree... particularly in those early years. But sheltering to protect God-given innocence while still recognizing that our children's "enemies" are not only on the outside of them but are also IN them (namely, their sin)... that is a different thing from sheltering to keep our children from ever encountering the world and seeing the "outside" as enemy.

And sheltering them from the larger themes of a depraved world while they are young is different from keeping them from interacting with reality as they get older. (I'm just using your questions to springboard the discussion-- not aiming these comments at you, obviously, friend!)

As for Voddie Baucham, you're right-- they DO have their older children spend huge amounts of time with him-- but it is time in the real world-- his daughter helps to run a lot of his schedule/calendar/speaking stuff, and his son travels with him-- to hotel

rooms, books signings, interviews and speaking events. They are both interacting with real people in the real world and having a chance to "practice" before they hit the ground running as adults.

Yeah, I think you're right that we can focus too much on this issue-- but at the same time, there are always new people coming into the homeschool ranks who haven't yet thought through these things and perhaps haven't had the life experience to watch what happens when you overshelter young adults.

I'm completely with you on the idea that only time will tell.... and that I'll need so much of God's grace and mercy to smooth out the places where I did too much of something, and to fill in those places where I did too little of something else.

Thanks for the discussion- I always appreciate your thoughts.

4:46 PM, June 17, 2008

Johanna said...

This is such a hard topic to discuss truly in a setting like this because so much of it depends on the child. Some children need more sheltering than others, and a parent needs to really know their child to make that decision. Although the thought of sending our precious ones off into the world can be scary at times, especially when reports come out of violence and things we wish our children would not have to face. But the reality is that my job as a parent is to prepare my child to be part of this world, and to do it with his/her faith intact. I cannot fully do that if I never allow my children into the world. Did I encounter some not-so-great things in my youth group or at my Christian school? Yes. But my parents had given me a great foundation before I ever got there and I was able to stand up for what I believed anyway.

Great post - something all parents have to be thinking about!

5:04 PM, June 17, 2008

Kristi said...

I think Carletta is talking about the post I started at the WS, I was lamenting about the difficulty I'm having finding a balance with disciplining my very strong willed dd. I'm starting to think the WS isn't the place for me anymore either.

I really don't know how I feel about this. My oldest, like yours, is only 6 and I can't imagine letting her have more freedoms or allowing her to be a part of the world since anytime I turn my back she seems to be sneaking around. I can just see that letting her loose would be a recipe for disaster. We went for dinner at a very conservative Christian family's house and the kids disappeared for maybe 5 minutes and she was basically molested by their 8yo dd. There seems to be dangers lurking around every corner, how many "mistakes" do we allow them to make when they're this young? Putting her in school would guarantee she be exposed to pornography and talk about sex and drugs, things I remember being exposed to as early as 1st grade at my very small, conservative Christian school. Is that really what's best?

When is sheltering "too much" and when is it just our common sense job to protect our children?

This parenting thing is so hard.

6:14 PM, June 17, 2008

Jess said...

Hey Kristi-

Well, you have to realize-- I'm not talking about "releasing" my 6yo to go and be "in the world". I'm talking about wisely and cautiously letting a 16 yo actually interact with the real world. Big difference.

I'm basically trying to help define the difference between innocence and naivete. And there's a big difference.

And this isn't necessarily a public school/private school/homeschool issue. This could look different for every family, at each potential age range we're talking about.

Generally speaking, with public school the potential problem will be overexposure to things that are unsavory and above the maturity level of the one expected to deal with it. But I think we as homeschoolers need to wisely recognize that a lot of homeschoolers in the past have gone wrong by not giving their kids the opportunity to learn and know about the world within carefully defined boundaries that are laid out at an age appropriate level.

There's a big difference between what I have just described and the first grader analogy you gave.

6:30 PM, June 17, 2008

Kristi said...

Yeah, I know it's not a homeschool vs. public school thing, I've just honestly been thinking about public school lately so I guess that's where my mind goes. I do think that homeschoolers (obviously) put a priority on sheltering so it's something we need to balance. That's the hard part, as I see it. I understand you're talking about older children, and hopefully it gets easier as they get older!! LOL...You said there's a big difference between innocence and naivete, is there really? I would think the line between raising our children to be innocent but not naive is pretty fine. Most teen homeschoolers I know are completely dorky and clueless because they HAVE been sheltered. Not that dorky is necessarily a bad thing, but how do we keep our children informed and a part of the world as they grow without sacrificing their innocence or purity? I guess that's not something I have to worry about quite yet, but I do think about it (and worry, lol)

8:05 PM, June 17, 2008

madgebaby said...

This is a great post! I was very sheltered and I struggle daily with how to walk the line between discipline and attachment, between sheltering and trusting, all the time.

I also am trained as a social worker, and I worked with survivors of sexual and physical abuse. It is crucial to keep in mind that this can happen even in a sheltered environment, and sometimes is it easier in such environments because the guard is slightly down. Protecting children from abuse is a different level of protection than keeping them "unstained by the world". It is frequently the case that people who desire to abuse children will use the auspices of the church to do so--we all know about the problems in the roman catholic church, but it happens in ALL churches, and by lay and ordained people of all ages I'm sad to say.

9:46 PM, June 17, 2008

madgebaby said...

One more thing about the abuse issue: if an 8 YO is acting out against younger children at the first opportunity, I'd suspect someone has done this to her. It is pretty common for kids to do what has been done to them as a way of dealing with their trauma, and if a kid is truly sheltered where would they come up with that behavior?

9:48 PM, June 17, 2008

Tamra said...

Just found your blog and WOW. I am enjoying it immensely. I have a couple blogs and will be posting links to your site, as I'm sure my readers will enjoy it here! Thanks so much.

~Tamra

10:33 PM, June 17, 2008

Leanne said...

Interesting discussion! I was a "dorky" kid myself, and was never homeschooled a day in my life...LOL!! I came to terms with my dorkiness in college, where I was actually esteemed for my mad grammar skills ;o).

My story is similar to yours, Jess, in that I grew up surrounded in my church by home-schooled kids who had absolutely no exposure to the world - whose parents didn't even talk to them about what they might encounter. Today, interestingly enough (with a few exceptions!) neither those kids NOR their parents are serving God today.

I really do believe that kids will rise to whatever you expect of them.

If you expect that your kids are going to be rebellious, they will be. So if your motivation in "sheltering" your kids is to keep them from rebelling because you just "know" that they're going to go nuts without your watchful eye...then chances are, they will live up to your expectations!

As a child and a teenager, it was the expectation that I would go after God...be in His Word...and I was encouraged that way. My mom concentrated on building a strong spiritual foundation and encouraging me to have a relationship with God...as a result,

I never really wanted to rebel, nor did I lose my innocence (I was actually dubbed "the sweet, innocent one" in my group of friends my senior year of high school!).

Again, I do not write this as an "expert" on anything - I do not even have kids of my own! Just sharing my own story and how I was raised...

11:25 PM, June 17, 2008

Kristin said...

From the perspective of someone whose parents did some things really well... my parents homeschooled me and my brother and sisters through elementary and middle school, and then sent all of us to public high school. This was a deliberate decision so that we would be exposed to different opinions from peers and teachers, different "truths" taught, different family backgrounds and value systems and behavior choices - while we were still living at home and could come at the end of the day and talk to Mom and Dad about what was going on. They reasoned that if we had this training while we were living at home, we'd be a lot better equipped to handle such situations in college or when we were on our own.

For me, this was invaluable - I learned a lot about talking about my own beliefs rationally, calmly and compassionately; interacting with people who weren't from a Christian background; and standing firm in the face of peer pressure. It also pushed me to examine my own faith, and to determine absolutely that I believe these things because I know them, and not just because that's what my parents believed. It was, essentially, a training ground for life in the real world, on my own and living in a different state.

This may or may not be the best path for every family or every kid, but the general principles I think are sound.

11:44 PM, June 17, 2008

Catherine R. said...

Jess, I'm glad you are talking about this. I am really trying to decide exactly what I think on this topic and I don't think it's too early even for me who's first child is 4 months away from the other side of the womb.

It is strange to me, because of my life, to hear about overprotected kids but it does make sense. I think there's probably little danger of me oversheltering my kids...I mean how many of us can tell their kids about mommy's years as a heroin addict? My single parent household was one of zero guidance. I do see the potential problems with oversheltering though. It seems foolish just as it is with parents who personally introduce their children to porn, for example.

I hope to get a good balance, like you encourage, without squeezing too tight or at the other extreme, flat out neglecting to guide.

11:58 PM, June 17, 2008

Britt said...

I'm planning on homeschooling my girls (ages 5 & 2 now) all the way through high school. I went to both public and private growing up...and saw/experienced a bunch of things I don't want my daughters to at such a young age. I am also, however, planning on *exposing* them to the *world* around them...volunteering at shelters, troubled youth facilities, etc...to teach them that there are people out there who are in different places and we need to reach out to them, rather than *join* them. I'm praying this way, they can see what might result from some bad choices, without having to experience it themselves (like I did due to my sheltering as a child...eek!).

But if anyone has this parenting thing figured out to a "T"...fill me in!!! :)

1:27 AM, June 18, 2008

Ticia said...

Well this could be long.

I grew up in a conflicting household where God existed but was paired with permissive hippy type parents.

I attended public school k-12.

We (me and my husband) based on our experiences and choices have chosen to homeschool through high school.

I have 2 two children ages 13 and 16 .

We choose very carefully what is and is not appropriate for our children. But there is a fine line to walk for sure.

We have layed a solid foundation for them and believe that they will do very well in

life. I even watched my young cousins who were very very sheltered grow up to be excellent people who are an asset to their community. They didn't lose their faith and are well adjusted. Just know that what is wrong for one family is not wrong for another. Even two families making the same "sheltering" decision will not do it in the same way. Thanks for letting me share my thoughts on this subject. Leticia

2:08 AM, June 18, 2008

darci said...

great post! thanks. too many long but i'm sure interesting comments for me to read right now. :) bath bed and a good book are fairly important right now.
but I really agree with what you wrote. it's such a fine line..to find the balance between the shelter i believe we're called to give our kids and wrapping them in bubble wrap. we homeschool, 8yr old, 5 yr old, 10 month old and (soon) two more but I find that our kids have WAY more interaction and true friendship with non-Christian kids than any of the other kids at our *old) church. even though these kids attend school with each other, our (old) church was so cliquey..everyone so relieved that there were so many church kids at the school. we have many friends over to our house who are not of our faith, and of course have great opportunities to teach our kids. Our kids regularly pray for their friends, and we have conversations like 'why do you think they talk like that?'.which leads to what Jesus says is cool, not what the world thinks. I just pray daily that God shows me the balance, to raise up strong men and women of God. Safe, confident, gutsy for God kids.

6:01 AM, June 18, 2008

Carletta said...

Oh, yes! I know we are only discussing and I'm enjoying this conversation. It is something I have been thinking about.

I totally agree with you that the sin comes from within - it is part of the sinful nature. I remember asking my mom once, "Where do these kids come up with this stuff?" And she told me, "It's IN them!"

We are probably talking about the same Voddie Baucham sermon. I came away with the exact picture you just described.

When I hear the word "shelter" I think, "Of course we should!" But I think I am a bit clueless as to just how some people take it to the extreme. I have only witnessed legalism from afar through family members who deemed us unsaved and too sinful associate with, so I don't have a full picture of what extreme sheltering is like or how damaging it can be.

I think we are pretty close in our thoughts on this issue. As always, thank you for your insightful posts!

6:17 AM, June 18, 2008

Mrs. McG said...

Apparently, I do things backwards from others. My children all went to public school until middle and high school and the oldest 2 boys now attend a private Christian school. My oldest daughter went to public school all the way through and that was a huge mistake that I will not repeat (for reasons such as: gang violence, almost complete lack of teacher assistance/caring, opposition to and countermanding our religious beliefs, sex happening in the school, etc.). One younger child is autistic so we'll have to play that by ear.

I think the best choice is to search out all the facts in the matter, know your child and, above all, seek the perfect will of God for that particular son or daughter.

6:26 AM, June 18, 2008

Amy D. said...

I love this post. It really provided me with some great inspiration as to how to find the balance in this parenting thing. I have a 3 and 1 year old and have felt many of the things other "posters" have felt. A book I've just recently read on grace has opened my eyes so much and it's truth has freed me and given me peace, that I must recommend it to your readers - I hope that's okay! It's called GraceWalk by Steve McVey.

6:57 AM, June 18, 2008

Lady M said...

Hi Jess,

I am addressing some of this to you and some to the comments already posted and it has gotten rather long.

Unfortunately, not everyone has the benefit of a youth group like the one in which you were involved. After the experience both my brother and I had with our church group (you do not even want to know my sister's experience), I have no desire to have my children have anything to do with a church youth group. There was more undesirable behavior there (pre-marital s*x, drugs, you name it – it was there) than I would ever want my children exposed to – even as adults. It was supposed to be a reputable group (all the grown ups thought so anyway), but the kids there knew better. Sigh. I went to a public school and I graduated long ago – way back in 1986. I was exposed to plenty – plenty of stuff that I would never, ever want my children exposed to, that is for certain. It may have been the very best school in the state (academically, sports, music), but the people were still just the same as everywhere else. At that time, the church schools were full of the children that had been kicked out of the public schools – certainly not a good option.

You bet I want to shelter my children. That is the job of being a parent. Protect your child from the nastiness of the world until they are prepared to deal with it – and it may be they are not ready until college or later! My dear sister, I wish she would have been better protected – it was in that 6th - 8th grade area that she went down the path she was/is on. Unfortunately, our father was having grave health problems during that time period and she got involved with the very worst crowd – not the party crowd – the dark side – and she was raised in a Christian home – same upbringing as my own. We were in public school, yes, those parties looked like a blast – that was all you heard the kids talking about. I at least waited until I was out of high school before I got on the band wagon of stupidity. What could my parents have done differently? They did it according to what you said – trained us biblically, we attended youth group, Sunday school, had us out in the “mission field” seeing real, live sin..... My parents were involved in church – as young children, we were at church as often as the PK's were. However, we all have free choice, don't we? I did not have to decide to start going to parties after HS, but I did.

Both my husband and I have various life experiences and can also refer to family behaviors as examples as to why they would want to avoid certain behaviors. Yes, Sin LOOKS fun – and yes, it can be fun for a season. Ultimately, as with ANY sin,

there is a price to pay for that season. We have both paid various prices for our past sins. We may be forgiven, but that does not mean they are without consequence (God did not say forgiveness negates consequence). I look back now and shake my head and wish I could erase a lot.

That said, we are very up on what is going on in the world. My husband and I do not hide from it. Heaven forbid anyone actually believes what they are hearing from the mainstream media – there is a whole other world of news out there and it makes the 5pm news look like a BBQ. My children (although younger 7 & 9) are well aware of the nastiness of the world. Sad, but true – we can thank family members for illustrating that for them, sigh. We train them as to what is right, what is wrong and WHY they should avoid said behaviors.

Can we not shelter and protect our children from the nastiness of the world, train them up to know better without tossing them into the pit to learn the lessons of why from “experience”? In this day and age, children are being treated more and more often as adults in the courts eyes....Not sure I want them to run the risk of “affordable mistakes” – to many are not affordable anymore, whether it be jail time, drug addiction, pre-marital s*x (with resultant std’s), etc. The whole let’s send the child to PS so “my child can be salt & light” is a horrid misnomer. Most children are not properly equipped to refute the gook that is out there. I know I was not and my parents were fairly diligent about training us at home and at church. PS was my parents only option or so they thought – they had no idea that homeschooling was in that states constitution.

I should also say that I have a good friend who was raised in a Christian home and went to PS as well – and she is still after all this time as naïve as they come about the garbage out there. I like that in her – it is a good thing and must have been very refreshing for her husband when they first met.

8:11 AM, June 18, 2008

Anonymous said...

I agree with much of what you said, however I'm not big on the idea that the world is the "real" environment and the home is a fake green house environment. And I think that young ones need lots of chances to see how mom and dad interact with the world before they are ready to go off on their own, even to cub scouts. This method means lots of family-in-the-world time together when they are young. Ministering to

neighbors, volunteering, etc. I think it's important not to do a lot of age-segregated stuff, I just don't see the benefit there. The "real world" isn't age segregated, when you get a "real job" it usually involved interacting with a variety of ages. Not that kids shouldn't have kid-classes, but there are some who spend almost all of their social time with their age-mates. I've met lots of totally UNsheltered teens that have no idea how to talk to an adult because they rarely have to. The Sunday School my kids attend has ages 5 to 12 all together in the same class and it is WONDERFUL.

10:42 PM, June 18, 2008

Ticia said...

I thought I might add that I don't feel that the public school system reflects what the "real" or adult world is like.

My teens have never snuck out of the house, stolen anything or had sex.

(all things mys sisters publicly schooled children have done on more than one occasion.)

This is because my children are not learning from other children what to do or how to make decisions. They have learned from adults who know better.

They do interact with the other kids in there neighborhood. But they also have no problem telling these kids not to swear around them. They also defuse fights that happen . But you know what they are the most popular kids on the block.

2:52 AM, June 19, 2008

Kristie said...

Did anyone hear about this yet?

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1815845,00.html>

11:22 PM, June 19, 2008

Anonymous said...

another wise post, Jess :)

Many good things here from others also. I just wanted to add one little point - we should avoid parenting out of fear.

By all means, we need to protect our children - and that will look different in different homes, and in different cultures and parts of the world - but if we shelter out of fear,

then we may not be trusting in God to be in control.

If the local church youth group is not suitable because of worldliness, materialism etc, then we should find another way for our teens to spend time with friends and grow in spiritual maturity (for of course they do need friends, and Christian friends can really spur each other on). But if we just avoid all youth groups because of our own bad experiences, I think our teens will see through that - i think they will sense our fear.

Those first 12-13 years or so are a wonderful opportunity to build values into their hearts. But there comes day when they need opportunities to demonstrate that they are starting to think for themselves. We can spend these teen years alongside of them, helping them think through decisions, and explaining choices we may make for them.

Anyway, some great thoughts from others :)

Sim in Oz (with a newly 14 yr old, plus a 12, 10, 8, 7, and 4 yr old coming behind)

11:55 PM, June 19, 2008

Saralyn said...

Thanks, I needed that.

Your post exudes trust in a heavenly Father Who has a plan, Who's arm is not too short, and Who can save church kids and street kids alike. Praise God it's not all up to mom!

2:56 AM, June 20, 2008

E03 said...

jess

i just want to say that i'm glad i found your site, you have a lot of good things to share. and...i'm curious, you said you're overseas, right? where are you?

7:31 AM, June 20, 2008

4kids&luv it said...

I am a stay-at-home mom of four, we are in our third year of homeschooling. You hit it right on with everything you said. We do homeschool for personal reasons but it was a hard decision to make because both my husband and I knew families like the ones you described. We didn't want to be lumped in the same category or to have our kids turn out "weird" or worldly because of sheltering. It's all in how you communicate with your kids and in the activities and friends you provide for them. We are so blessed to be part of a church with a large homeschool population as well as public/private school kids. No one (so far) feels that their way is better or judges anyone else, and certainly NO ONE would keep their kids from enjoying the benefits of fellowship with other Christian kids- it's refreshing to see!

5:10 PM, June 20, 2008

Melisa said...

I found it interesting that one commenter thought that people were avoiding church "youth" groups out of fear. Could it possibly be they are avoiding them out of WISDOM?

Those of us who homeschool are already aware of the benefits of avoiding educating everyone by their age group and thus only being with their own age group (something you will not find in the real world - when was the last time you shopped at the Target that was only for 20-25 year olds...).

I attend a "family integrated" church. You will not find a youth group there. Youth groups are a relatively new creation. Worshiping and learning as a family is not. I have seen far too many church youth groups that are simply awful. They look all nice and shiny on the outside but rarely are they what they are hoped to be or do what the parent thinks they will do for the child.

If a parent (or anyone else) has had what someone calls a bad "experience" in the past, are we not supposed to learn from said experience? Once upon a time, experience was referred to as wisdom. We should be very wise with our children and not just jump on the band wagon of what everyone else is doing (there is an unpopular thought line these days). I realize not all church youth groups are the same, but given the number I have seen that are fairly similar in makeup, etc., I do not blame the people who want to avoid them.

Be wise and learn as much as you can about situations before tossing ones children to the "wolves" - it may even entail you sitting in on several meetings and

chaperoning a couple of events before allowing your child to become involved - if at all after checking the situation out.

10:58 PM, June 20, 2008

Anonymous said...

Thank you for your wonderful post. It has truly given me much food for thought and I suspect it'll keep my mind twirling for a long while. I can't really had anything to what has been said on the pros and cons about the different schooling systems, but regardless of all that what you have written has made once again reflect on the fact that:

1 - I strongly believe that most of my mistakes somehow related to areas of my parents lives where they weren't too sure about what they believed in or areas where they or one of them struggled or did not provide a good example coming from the heart.

2 - It is normal that teenagers challenge the world around them. This includes their parents, naturally. I think that is only natural and positive (after all, we are not without sin and therefore there is potentially a lot to be challenged). I think you should just make sure that (a) they pick up this inquisitive and questioning spirit from you (it is easy to just follow the crowd even when you're a christian) and (b) that they apply it also to their peers.

3 - If our kids attend a regular school, I believe it is crucial to make their family their safe place, which is truly welcoming and strong and loving so that they do not become emotionally dependent on their peers. It seems to me that the present trend of having kids spend all day in school clearly sets them up to become vulnerable to whatever influenced they may be exposed at school or outside the family.

Just some thoughts.

Again, thank you for your post.

Catholic Maria

1:32 AM, June 21, 2008

Anonymous said...

Jess,

We homeschool (ages 6, 4, 1.5 and expecting...TWINS). We are in Christian community with many homeschoolers and strong Christians who attend the solid Christian school with devoted parents. I have a number of the teenage girls come

over to help me. It astonishes me how silly and peer OBSESSED many of the girls are who attend the youth group. There is a contentment and glimmers of virtue with many of the girls who are homeschooled. I know this sounds extreme, but I look very closely. To show my partiality, though, I do not come from a close family so perhaps I would do well to not focus on that TOO much. I think A LOT about sending our teens off on a never ending stream of social demands that the youth group gives and really, cannot imagine not being together as a family on Sundays. We love worshipping together. OH, and the youth group...wow, have I been unimpressed...it seems like it is just to entice the teenagers to come and hang out with maybe a little bit of scripture thrown in. The pastor and young woman youth leaders actually act foolish and "so crazy" in order to be cool. I just don't see how it would prepare our sons and daughters to be virtuous men and women, but I think I should be careful to not be too extreme either.

Have you heard Voddie's "Centrality of the Home" sermon..I believe I found it here at your blog. Anyhoo, I really struggle to see what is so great about all the age segregation and foolishness that youth groups perpetuate?

anonymous

3:01 AM, June 21, 2008

Anonymous said...

Hi Jess,

I have really enjoyed reading your blogs. I am curious about the quiver full homeschooling families whose kids rebelled. Would you describe them as the typical families you would find say at Voddie Baucham's Family Integrated Ministry or was there something more extreme about these families? Our family has been prayerfully considering leaving our mega church and going to Baucham's church. We love his teaching and the people there. I have had some people warning me to be careful of sheltering my kids by taking them to this "bubble" as they call it which doesn't represent the mainstream christian culture. Sometimes I feel so confused. I know our children need experiences with the world around us, but do I really want the negative influences coming from church? I just keep thinking that the church isn't the place for them to be exposed to what we don't want them to succumb to. I would rather allow them to see enough through our family reaching out and serving a hurting community than for them to get an education in worldliness, rebellion, etc. through the church. So, I am just asking do you think Voddie Baucham's views and church are balanced

or is this just the kind of ministry you said you saw a lot of kids rebel in? Thanks so much. Your blogs have been a real encouragement to me.

5:40 AM, June 21, 2008

Anonymous said...

This is an excellent post, and it makes me wish that all parents, whatever their faith or schooling beliefs, put as much thought into how to raise their children as you have.

My husband and I are strong believers in public schools for various reasons, but it is important to be conscious of the downsides of every type of schooling.

One thing I have come to appreciate as a parent is how much we learn from our children, as well as how much we need to teach them.

Your reflections on your own teenage rebellion indicate to me that your parents learned the right lesson from you, which is that the church your family belonged to was not giving you the support and guidance you needed.

One can easily imagine your parents reacting to their rebellious daughter in a different way, which might have pushed you much further from Christianity and for a longer time.

Laurie B

3:08 PM, June 21, 2008

Ashley said...

hi jess, CP gave me your blog address, and i have really enjoyed reading it! you are obviously very well-read and a thinker! i really enjoy getting some good, stimulating reading between wiping bootys, moving the laundry through, etc! i am a fellow OBUer and am interested in many/all of the topics you cover here! i love it! thanks for this entry, specifically. as my oldest boy gets closer to school age, i have been pondering homeschool and its implications often.

9:15 PM, June 23, 2008

50s Housewife said...

This is such a thought provoking post! I'm also enjoying reading all the comments.

I guess we're sort of in the "middle". We home schooled and then public schooled. We DO let them participate in youth group, but only certain activities and mission opportunities. I am more one to shelter the children and my husband is more one to let them participate in the "real world". We balance each other nicely. :)

My oldest 2 sons are grown and currently serving in the U.S. military. Both are walking out their faith as young men of God. That is/was our ultimate goal as parents. :)

5:18 AM, June 30, 2008

Miss Amy Smarty said...

I'm not yet a parent...but I have a few things to say.

I was raised in private school from K-12, then all during college. And I say "THANK GOD!". Seriously.

I now teach private voice lessons full time in a public school. Just being there everyday...talking to the kids, and seeing what goes on...I will NEVER put my kids in public school.

To me, it's not only about sheltering vs. letting them get out in the world. It's very much about education. I cannot stand the cacophony that is the public school system. I think my children would get a much better education from me...and I'm NOT one of those dress wearing, boring, opinionated home school mom types. I just don't like the education system. But I'm not chomping at the bit to fit into some home school category either. So we'll see. I need to figure it out before I have children, I guess.

2:43 AM, September 07, 2008