

CHRISTMAS 2025

THE  
Westminster  
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JOURNAL



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WESTMINSTER CLASSICAL PRESS

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# Why Publish a Journal on Classical Christian Education in Canada?

The Reformers knew how essential Christian education is for children. They also knew the importance of turning to the authority of Scripture and the wisdom of the past (*ad fontes*) to secure the truths necessary for a child's heart and mind to flourish.

The battle over the future of our families, our churches, and even our country will be won or lost in the education of our children. I am certain of this. And if we are to educate our children properly in these times, we need resources to encourage and unify us, texts we can share and use in our homes, churches, and schools. This journal is an attempt to be one of those resources.

I hope you find encouragement in its pages and are inspired to join us in advancing classical Christian education in Canada.

*Soli Deo gloria,*

Brenden Bott

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# Rightly Ordered Loves

Written by Tina Bergs

When you visit an art museum and you have a limited amount of time, where do you decide to concentrate your efforts? Personally, I would rather not waste my time on the Andy Warhols and Jackson Pollocks. Instead, take me straight to see the vibrant van Gogh or the visionary da Vinci. In our current cultural climate, where “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” the claim that some paintings are more worthy of our observation than others is objectionable. However, if everything is equally deserving of our admiration, and we are not to discriminate between the worthy and unworthy, then statements such as “That is a beautiful painting!” are rendered meaningless. In classical Christian education, we make the bold assertion that some things are more worthy of our esteem than other things.

Our ultimate guide to what we ought to love is the Bible. In the Bible, Jesus spoke of ordering loves or priorities:

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt 6:33)

“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41–42)

“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12:25)

In classical Christian education, one of our aims is to train our students to value what they ought to value. As C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Abolition of Man*,

St Augustine defines virtue as *ordo amoris*, the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind of degree of love which is appropriate to it. Aristotle says that the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought . . . the task is to train in the pupil those responses which are in themselves appropriate.<sup>1</sup>

We can easily find out what a student loves and values by observing what they give their full attention to, and also by watching their actions. Sometimes we find that a student rejoices in the

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man, or, Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 10, 13.

wrong things. Perhaps he delights in disobeying his teacher and finds it funny. Or maybe she is more interested in making her classmate giggle than listening to the lesson at hand. What are these students valuing?

We want our students to be able to curb their inclination to be silly when it interferes with their learning (or someone else's learning). We want to help him or her value the teacher's instruction, value learning, and value harmony in relationships. We want our students to be able to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15). When a student's values are at odds with the values of our Christian community, then this will result in a lack of harmony.

An equally important aim is to train our students to love what they ought to love, with the kind and degree of love appropriate to the thing loved. A child might say that he loves his yogurt, loves his bike, and loves his father, all while using the word "love" without defining the intensity or character of that love. If he gets those loves in the wrong order, it can cause disorder in his thinking and difficulties in his relationships. If, for example, his father calls him to come inside when he is enjoying riding his bike, and he ignores his father and continues doing what he loves, he likely does not realize that his behaviour is saying to his father, "I love riding my bike right now more than I love obeying you." Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). We heed the voice of the one we love, and we hurry to do what he asks.

The ultimate aim of a classical Christian education is that our students will love God above all, and love others well. But how does this aim influence our classroom practice? First of all, the teacher models the appropriate response to the text or artwork that is under their collective study. She carefully curates the best literature, music, art, and so forth to place in front of her students so that they can learn to delight in good, true, and beautiful things. If they are viewing a delightful painting, the teacher expresses that delight and wonder in her face, her tone, and her words. On the other hand, when reading an account of a terrible event in history, the teacher shows in her voice and demeanor that it is sober and sad. If a student says something that is inappropriate to the occasion or rude, the teacher will show appropriate displeasure in her facial expression and verbal response to the student. Students watch their teacher's responses, and they emulate them.

Not only do students watch and emulate their teacher's responses, but they also watch and emulate their teacher's actions and behaviour. Since parents are the child's first teachers, this not only applies to teachers but to parents as well. Children learn by imitation. "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). This verse underscores the importance of choosing your child's teachers carefully. Does the teacher value and love the right things, according to God's order? By watching and imitating his or her teacher, what will your child be learning to love and value?

It can be intimidating and sobering as a teacher or parent to know that our children are watching our every move, and even mimicking our responses. I remember a time when I was a first-year teacher and one of my students did a perfect imitation of me teaching the class. It was as entertaining as it was horrifying! But it made me stop and pause, realizing how not only my words but also my tone, actions, and even mannerisms are being absorbed by the children. This knowledge drives me to my knees. I pray that God will help me to make Jesus Christ visible to the students, that "Christ in me" would be manifest in my bodily life.

When Christ regenerates the heart of a person, this is often followed by a complete reordering of the person's loves and priorities. Christ must be first in the heart, and He will suffer no rivals. New believers will often find that the things that used to occupy their time and attention are no longer worthy of their focus or devotion. Their family and friends may be completely baffled as to the change in their habits and values. In classical Christian education, we prepare the way for the Lord to do this work in the hearts of the students that only He can do. We point our students to the reality that there is a life that is rightly ordered, a life that will be a blessing. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink; true—but you can salt the oats! In Matthew 5:13, Jesus tells us that we are the "salt of the earth." Salt acts as a preservative in food by dehydrating it and thus depriving pathogens of the water that they need to grow. This is why salt makes us thirsty. When we teachers take on the role of the "salt of the earth" in this corrupt world, we preserve the truth about beauty and goodness, and in doing so, we can generate a thirst in our students for a harmonious, beautiful, well-ordered life.

**Christ must be first in the heart, and He will suffer no rivals.**

### *About the Author*

## **Tina Bergs**

*Tina Bergs is the Assistant Head of School at Westminster Classical Christian Academy (WCCA). She completed a Bachelor of Education at the University of Victoria and a post-degree diploma in Special Education Teaching at Vancouver Island University. Tina worked as both a classroom teacher and a special education teacher in public schools in British Columbia before becoming one of the first teachers to join the WCCA faculty when the school opened its doors in 2014.*

# A Classical Christian Vision for Mathematics

Written by David Robinson

When people talk about the distinctives of classical Christian education, they usually mention the *trivium*: a curriculum of learning that leads students in the way of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. They may emphasize subjects such as Latin, history, and literature. Math is rarely mentioned.

Students who struggle with math ask why they need to persevere. They ask, “Why do I need to learn this?” and “When am I ever going to use this?” We think that we need to justify learning math by defending its usefulness. I asked ChatGPT, “Why do I need to learn math?” Here is the answer that I got:

- It builds problem-solving skills.
- It’s the backbone of tech and science.
- Money
- It sharpens our brains.

I asked Google’s Gemini that same question, and here is the answer that I got:

- Problem-solving skills
- Logical reasoning
- Critical thinking
- Financial literacy

Are these the only answers that we can give students who want to know why they need to learn math? I asked ChatGPT and Gemini, but I also asked Boethius, a Christian who lived in the dying days of the Roman Empire (ca. 480–524). He had a classical Christian vision for learning math. Boethius argued that just as students should learn the art of literacy by following the *trivium* (the three ways of grammar, logic, and rhetoric), so they should learn the art of numeracy by following the *quadrivium* (the four ways of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy).<sup>1</sup>

1. Boethius wrote treatises on arithmetic (*De arithmetica*), on geometry (*De geometria*), on music (*De institutione musica*), and (possibly) on astronomy (*De astronomia*). For more on Boethius and the *quadrivium*, see Henry Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 69–107; David S. Chamberlain, “Philosophy of Music in the *Consolatio* of Boethius,” *Speculum* 45, no. 1 (Jan 1970): 80–97; Michael Fournier, “Boethius and the Consolation of the *Quadrivium*,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 34 (2008): 1–21; Anne E. Moyer, “The *Quadrivium* and the Decline of Boethian Influence,” in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, eds. Noel Harold Kaylor and Philip Edward Phillips (Leiden: Brill, 2012),

David declares in Psalm 147:4,

The LORD determines the number of the stars;  
he gives to all of them their names.

God names and numbers. We are the image of God, and as the image of God, we need to learn the art of naming and numbering.<sup>2</sup> The *trivium*—grammar, logic, and rhetoric—trains students in the art of literacy, the art of naming. The *quadrivium*—arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy—trains students in the art of numeracy, the art of numbers.<sup>3</sup>

Arithmetic trains a student in the relationship of numbers. Geometry trains a student in the relationship of numbers in space. Music trains a student in the dynamic relationship of numbers in time. Astronomy trains a student in the dynamic relationship of numbers in space.

By following the *quadrivium* and learning the art of mathematics, a student discovers the inherent numerical structure and order of God’s creation, which gives glory to God and gives hope to man.

We read in Genesis 1 that in the beginning, the earth was formless and empty, but as the Spirit of God hovers over the face of the waters, God speaks and forms what is formless and fills what is empty.<sup>4</sup>

In Genesis 1:6, God forms: “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And then in Genesis 1:14, he fills: “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.” God forms: separation and expanse. God fills: lights for signs and seasons, days and years.

What God has formed and filled can be known through arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. What he has formed and filled can be numbered and measured by the art of arithmetic and geometry. He has filled the heavens with moving objects—sun, moon, planets, and stars—whose size and weight and movement and velocity we discover through the art of astronomy. He has established day and night, signs and seasons, days and years, so that there is inherent meter and rhythm and ratios and harmony in time. Meter and rhythm and ratios and harmony in time

479–517; Cecilia Panti, “Beauty, Ethics and Numbers in Boethius’ *Quadrivial Treatises*,” *Aisthesis* 11, no. 1 (2018): 67–79; and Leo Schrade, “Music in the Philosophy of Boethius,” *The Musical Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (April 1947): 188–200.

2. Bradford Littlejohn, “On Naming the World: A Protestant Vision for Training in Wisdom,” in *Reforming Classical Education: Toward a New Paradigm*, eds. Rhys Lavery and Mark Hamilton (Davenant Press, 2022), iii–ix.

3. Kevin Clark and Ravi Scott Jain, *The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Philosophy of Christian Classical Education*, 3d ed. (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2021), 66–99; Nathan Johnson, “Cosmic Wisdom: How the *Quadrivium* Serves Theology and Ethics,” in *Reforming Classical Education: Toward a New Paradigm*, eds. Rhys Lavery and Mark Hamilton (Davenant Press, 2022), 79–104; and Gregory Wilbur, “In Search of Virtue: Why the *Quadrivium* Matters,” in *Reforming Classical Education: Toward a New Paradigm*, eds. Rhys Lavery and Mark Hamilton (Davenant Press, 2022), 59–77.

4. Johnson, “Cosmic Wisdom,” 89–92.

are the numerical substructure of music. Music is the audible expression of the inherent numerical order and structure of the universe. As the mathematician Gottfried Leibniz wrote, “Music is the joy that a soul takes in counting without realizing it.”<sup>5</sup>

By learning math, we discover the inherent numerical structure and order of God’s creation, and this inherent numerical structure and order of creation gives glory to God.<sup>6</sup>

Consider Psalm 19:1–4:

The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours out speech,  
and night to night reveals knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words,  
whose voice is not heard.  
Their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.

The heavens do not *display* the glory of God; they *declare* the glory of God. They do not show; they tell. The art of mathematics teaches us the language of dimension and proportion and velocity, ratio and rhythm and harmony. The language of math is the language of the heavens declaring the glory of God. The language of math is liturgical and universal and accessible to all.

## By learning math, we discover the inherent numerical structure and order of God’s creation.

By learning math, we learn the heavenly language of doxology. While the heavens declare the glory of God, we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Math exposes the disorder of the human heart and the chaos and disharmony of our lives and our experience in this world. Yes, Jupiter and Saturn and the moon are all on course, declaring God’s glory. But not my life! Yet there is hope.

Learning math gives us hope. Learning the language of the heavens may expose the chaos and disorder of our lives, but it reassures us that, despite our experience, the world is not governed by chaos and disorder. Astronomy and music comfort us. The harmonious movement of heavenly bodies and the harmonious melody of music are reminders that Christ “upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3).

5. Quoted in Clark and Jain, *Liberal Arts Tradition*, 89.

6. As Wilbur concludes in his defence of the *quadrivium*, “The purpose is the glory of God and knowledge of what he has made and how he has revealed himself.” “In Search of Virtue,” 73.

When Boethius was in prison, Lady Philosophy came to console him. She asks him a question: “Do you think the course of the world is random and haphazard, or do you think it is guided by reason (i.e., *ratio*)?” Boethius, having learned astronomy and music, answers, “I should certainly refuse to believe that such unerring movements are the outcome of random chance. I know that God superintends the universe.”<sup>7</sup>

Boethius was simply affirming David’s testimony in Psalm 147:3–4a:

God heals the broken-hearted  
and binds up their wounds.  
He determines the number of the stars.

David gives us a word of comfort: “God heals the broken-hearted.” How do we know he heals the broken-hearted? Look at the heavens: “He determines the number of the stars.”

Again, Psalm 42:7-8:

Deep calls to deep  
at the roar of your waterfalls;  
all your breakers and your waves  
have gone over me.  
By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me,  
a prayer to the God of my life.

When the psalmist’s soul is downcast, when he feels as though his life will be consumed by the chaos of his circumstances and the taunts of wicked men, he can say, “By day the LORD commands his steadfast love.” How can he be assured of God’s steadfast love? Music: “At night his song is with me.” The melody and harmony of God’s song rebukes the roar of the waterfalls, so the psalmist can say,

Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you in turmoil within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my salvation and my God. (Ps 42:5, 11)

Math gives hope, and it stirs up hope. As we observe the harmonious movements of the heavens and as we hear the harmonious melodies of music, we long to find our rest in that harmony. And one day, Christ will bring us home to that place of perfect harmonious rest in the New Jerusalem. Listen to the geometry in Revelation 21:15–17:

7. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. and ed. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.p6.3-4, 16.

And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.

Math gives us a glimpse of the New Jerusalem, and math gives us ears to hear the music of Zion. John says,

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. (Rev 15:1–3)

Geometry and music give us hope by training our imaginations to contemplate the life of the age to come.

When students ask why they need to learn math, we cannot simply appeal to economics or technology. Students learn math because they are the image of God and “the LORD determines the number of the stars; and he gives to all of them their names” (Ps 147:4). God names and numbers. As the image of God, we need to learn the art of naming and numbering. A classical Christian education trains the hearts and minds of children to see and hear the numerical structure and order of the universe, which is true, beautiful, and good, and which gives glory to God and hope to man.

### *About the Author*

## David Robinson

*David Robinson is the senior pastor at Westminster Chapel at High Park. He has a Ph.D. in theology from the University of St. Michael's College (at the University of Toronto), where he studied the history and theology of early Christianity. David also teaches courses in biblical studies and systematic and historical theology at Tyndale University.*

# A Thousand Stories: A Call for the Careful Curation of Children's Books

*Written by Elisha Galotti*

Our days in kindergarten are filled with good things, such as lessons in reading, math, handwriting, music, and all the other explicitly academic parts of our day. However, stories are what punctuate the kindergartener's school day. We read stories during our morning and afternoon snacks and during lunchtime and rest time, and then we read a host of additional stories that are connected to seasons, holidays, special projects, culminating events, and art or music study.

With this in view, we ought to consider the importance of a carefully curated kindergarten library. It is not uncommon to hear people say, “So long as they're reading and listening to stories, that's all that matters!” After all, a story is just a story. But does the person choosing the story matter? Do the stories themselves matter?

Because we're not reading just one story. In kindergarten, we're reading a thousand stories.

An early mentor of mine once said that if a kindergarten student did nothing else in his or her day but read wonderful stories, it would still be a valuable day at school. Of course there are many things that are important in a day, but she was expressing something deeper: the wise teacher or parent understands that young hearts are tender and actively being shaped in one direction or another.

In her book *Leadership in Turbulent Times*, American presidential historian and biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin writes about the early childhood influences on America's greatest presidents. She records Theodore Roosevelt's description of an early childhood with a father who read aloud to him daily. Reflecting upon the importance of stories, Roosevelt said this: “Leaders in every field need to know human nature, to know the needs of the human soul. And they will find this nature, and these needs, set forth as nowhere else by the great imaginative writers, whether by prose or by poetry.”<sup>1</sup>

While the great leaders of history, like Roosevelt, spent their young lives being shaped by reading great stories, we, in the present day, read increasingly less and instead are shaped increasingly more by what we can swipe and scroll. It should come as no surprise, then, that as adults read less themselves, parents are likewise reading less to their children. A recent study by HarperCollins

1. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Leadership in Turbulent Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 54.

Publishing confirms this: “Fewer than half (41%) of 0–4-year-olds are read to frequently, a steep decline from 64% in 2012.”<sup>2</sup>

Before we turn our attention to the curation of a child’s library, perhaps parents must first be convinced that reading to their children truly matters. One way or another, the pages of a child’s life will turn more quickly than we could ever imagine. The days become years, and the opportunity to read stories to them will not last forever. Young parents of today ought to swim against the cultural current and believe in the preciousness of reading stories to the children entrusted to them. In the scope of life, as can be attested to by us older parents, reading to young children is an opportunity that will vanish like the mist at dawn.

Let us also, as parents and teachers, be called to the careful curation of children’s books.

Each school year during the second semester, I read a chapter from *Charlotte’s Web* during our daily morning snack time. The book is about a sweet girl named Fern and her adorable runt pig,

### **As we read the story, my students’ minds and hearts are being shaped to recognize what is true in the human experience.**

Wilbur, whom she saves from the farmer’s butcher block. It is a delightful, funny story with a colourful cast of characters and is excellently written. But in addition to this, as we read the story, my students’ minds and hearts are being shaped to recognize what is true in the human experience.

Charlotte, the wise and loving spider, speaks as eloquently as any other literary heroine. Wilbur, the precious runt pig of the story, has his life saved by Charlotte’s intricately designed spider webs.

Toward the end of this story, Wilbur looks at Charlotte and asks, “Why did you do all this for me? I don’t deserve it. I’ve never done anything for you.”

“You have been my friend,” replied Charlotte. “That in itself is a tremendous thing. I wove my webs for you because I liked you. After all, what’s a life, anyway? We’re born, we live a little while, we die.”<sup>3</sup>

Those words, when read aloud to a child, provide a soft but indelible contour in the child’s heart as he or she becomes a little more able to recognize the goodness of sacrifice, the beauty of friendship, and the precious truth that life itself is brief.

2. “New Research Reveals That Parents Are Losing the Love of Reading,” HarperCollins Publishers, April 30, 2025, <https://corporate.harpercollins.co.uk/press-releases/new-research-reveals-that-parents-are-losing-the-love-of-reading-aloud/>.

3. E. B. White, *Charlotte’s Web* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 164.

If stories are shaping, and if we are reading stories in kindergarten all the time, a carefully curated kindergarten library has to matter. A story encouraging children to “be themselves” or to “follow their own truth” is not equal to a story about friendship, sacrifice, and the brevity of life. The belief system and worldview of the person setting the curriculum or choosing a thousand stories has to be of some importance. The often-heard, shrugging expression “At least they’re reading” cannot be the standard.

What then should the standard be? What types of stories ought to fill a kindergarten bookshelf or a family’s bedside book basket? It is certainly not the case that a story needs to be serious, old, or explicitly Christian. Far from this, our shelves and book baskets ought to be filled with an array of stories old and new, weighty and light, magical Western fairytales and ancient Eastern fables, living stories and rhyming stories, picture books and chapter books—in other words, the types of stories we read should be as vast as the world God has made.

Considering what a story ought *not* be is also instructive—never vacuous, never ugly, never twisting truth so that evil masquerades as good. Rather, the stories we read ought to shape us on the deepest level, shaping even our intuition, so that we find ourselves wanting to seek what is true, behold what is good, and create what is beautiful.

Our affections, our imagination, our intuition, our very understanding of human beings and the human soul are shaped by the stories we read.

With all this in mind, these concluding comments are meant to encourage the tired teacher or the weary young parent who may wonder how much each story matters in the end. The next time you’re cracking open a children’s book and settling into snack time in the classroom or, at home, pulling a child close with a book before bedtime, forget not the privilege nor the surpassing value of what is about to take place. Sure, what you’re doing is ordinary and just part of the daily routine. And yet it is also extraordinary, for it is one of the means by which a human heart is being shaped.

#### *About the Author*

### **Elisha Galotti**

*Elisha Galotti teaches Junior Kindergarten at Westminster Classical Christian Academy (WCCA). She received her Bachelor of Arts from Ryerson University and then continued her education with the Royal Academy of Dance, completing an intensive three-year Teaching Certificate Program. She started teaching at WCCA in 2015.*

# Followers by Design

Written by Brenden Bott

There are certain unmistakable challenges in parenting—difficulties we all face when raising our children. Some of these challenges are obvious, such as when a child defiantly says “no” to the request to clean his or her room or refuses to eat broccoli. But other tests of parental resolve are subtler. They can be found in our responses to simple statements such as “But Jane’s mom lets her” or the even more unpleasant “Everyone else has one.” And though it is certainly worthwhile to discuss how we can help ensure that our children are polite and respectful,<sup>1</sup> there is often a particular kind of motivation behind statements like these that concerns us here—the desire for imitation.

Whether the appeal is to a certain child at school or to all children in existence, these and other unwelcome pronouncements like them are not in direct disobedience to parental directives; rather, they are meant to serve as an “opportunity,” an invitation, if you will, for parents to reflect on their shortcomings about whatever the relevant issue may be. (They are not—and never were—intended to be formal arguments; both child and parent know, or at least they should, that no sane parent can raise his or her children by constant appeals to other parents’ decisions for justification, as there are too many examples of parenting gone wrong to take such arguments seriously.) But the message behind these kinds of statements hints at something deeper, something more foundational to human existence, something we cannot ignore as parents if we are to raise our children to be prepared for life. And that is this: at the heart of human existence, we are followers by nature, and, as such, we must be ever so careful about whom we permit and whom we encourage our children to imitate.<sup>2</sup>

We can quickly see in our children this desire to imitate when we, with a history of experience about what they like and don’t like, respond to their appeal with statements such as “You don’t even like rollercoasters” or similar suspicions about whatever the indirect request may be—and we receive the less-than-confident reply “But . . . I do now.” We can also see this in whatever trend

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1. One of the marks of the last days, the “terrible times” when the religious community is corrupted, is that the children in it are disobedient to their parents (see 2 Tim 3:2). God calls children to obey and honour their parents, both in the Old and New Testaments. Scripture even links the proper treatment of one’s parents to God’s blessing upon a child’s life (see Eph 6:1–2). Therefore, for the good of their children, parents cannot permit them to speak unkindly or show irritation when a parent denies a request, as such behaviour robs the child of the good that they might receive and obscures the glory of God in their lives. In short, disrespect must not be tolerated.

2. The appeal to do what other children do or to have what other children have may be an indirect and simple appeal to an idea of perceived unfairness. Or it could be born from simple selfishness, even envy—it is not my purpose here to untangle these. However, it can also be, and often is, an appeal to follow—an appeal to a parent not to disrupt the imitation of those we admire. And I want to suggest that the appeal to be like someone else resonates so deeply with parents as a persuasive element because we, too, feel this same pull toward imitation.

happens to be current, when a child is desperately eager to be a part of it, no matter how unnecessarily expensive and similar it is to what she already has, or how polluting it may be to good aesthetic sensibilities. Some of us are old enough to remember the ’80s with horror.

We all feel a pull, an inner desire to become like something else or someone else. We are designed that way. And unless we recognize just how strong that pull is in human nature, we will struggle to take seriously not only our responsibility to train our children but also the way in which they must be trained.

Now this pull can be good, which we will discuss later, but first we must understand how dangerous it can be. It can be much more serious than poor taste in fashion and boxes filled with expensive barely-used trinkets.

After World War II, there were questions raised about human nature—questions such as how could human beings treat one another in such horrific ways? Hannah Arendt, though offering what is now recognized as a deeply flawed analysis, presented in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* one of the most influential accounts of how this could happen. Originally published as a series of articles in *The New Yorker*, Arendt’s work details the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the person responsible for organizing and coordinating the mass deportation of Jews to concentration camps. In her account, Arendt portrayed Eichmann as ambitious with respect to his career but largely thoughtless, a man simply following orders (though it should be mentioned that Arendt still believed Eichmann to be deserving of death). She is famous for using the phrase “the banality of evil,” which she employs near the conclusion of her book.<sup>3</sup>

Other thinkers have taken different approaches from Arendt in seeking to understand how humans could commit such atrocities, yet the ease with which ordinary people can move into active participation in evil is rarely appreciated.

In the early 1960s, American social psychologist Stanley Milgram developed an experiment to see how far he could get the average person—in a relatively short amount of time—to inflict another human being with what was presented to them as 450 volts of deadly shock. The experiment was falsely presented to its participants as a study intended to determine the relationship between punishment and learning. Its participants, given the role of the “teacher,” were told to administer ever-increasing shock levels to a person—an actor, who was identified as the “learner”—when he answered questions incorrectly.

There was not one experiment but many versions, with varying degrees of compliance with the instructions to administer increasingly higher levels of shock. The relative ease with which the

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3. Later historical investigations have demonstrated that Adolf Eichmann was anything but banal—or a passive functionary mindlessly carrying out orders. Rather, he was a committed monster. Arendt was misled by his courtroom performance and the documentation she had available. Later historical records have revealed that he was someone deeply passionate about his crimes.

average person could administer deadly shocks was far beyond imagination. In the most famous version of the experiment, 65% of participants administered what was presented to them as 450 volts to a person who expressed being in pain, even as the participants themselves often displayed visible signs of discomfort when they did this.<sup>4</sup> In an early pilot study, “the Learner never voiced

**We are far too easily led—a truth not only about us, but one we must be ever so careful about as we teach and train our children.**

any objections, [and] all participants went this far”—right to the very end.<sup>5</sup>

But how could this be? Why did they do this?

In the most compelling interpretation of the Milgram experiments that I have read—one consistent with the results of the experiments and the Scriptures—the authors conclude with the following words: “Our analysis supports the view that people are able to inflict harm on others not because they are unaware that they are

doing wrong, but rather because—as engaged followers—they know full well what they are doing and *believe it to be right*.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the people we follow and look up to, those in whom we find a compelling or authoritative view of reality, will shape us so deeply that we will often comply with their directions, no matter how disturbing their view of reality turns out to be.

This was true for the majority of the participants in the most famous version of Milgram’s experiments, and it was also true for Eichmann and many others in Nazi Germany. We are unlikely to be passive actors in the movements around us; rather, we are drawn in and actively engaged by what and whom we admire, and these influences, more than anything else, often determine how we act.<sup>7</sup>

It is not my purpose here to dissect the accounts given for why people desired to follow the instructor’s directions in the Milgram experiments, or why the participants found the instructor’s vision of the experiment and the experiment itself to be so compelling that they ignored better moral judgements. My purpose is more general. It is merely to point out that we are far too easily

4. For those skeptical of the experiment, a more recent replication—though employing lower “voltage”—produced similar results. See Jerry M. Burger, “Replicating Milgram: Would People Still Obey Today?” *American Psychologist* 64, no. 1 (2009): 1–11.

5. S. Alexander Haslam, Stephen D. Reicher, Kathryn Millard, and Rachel McDonald, “‘Happy to Have Been of Service’: The Yale Archive as a Window into the Engaged Followership of Participants in Milgram’s ‘Obedience’ Experiments,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 54, no. 1 (2015): 56.

6. *Ibid.*, 79.

7. Haslam *et al.* write, “Milgram’s paradigm reported . . . [that] the willingness of participants to administer the maximum level of shock can be predicted with a high degree of accuracy by observers’ estimates of the degree to which a given variant encourages participants to identify with the Experimenter and the science that he represents rather than with the Learner [the actor pretending to be shocked] and the general community that he represents. For example, identification and obedience both drop dramatically when . . . the Experimenter’s role is enacted by someone who appears to be another naïve participant.” *Ibid.*, 62.

led—a truth not only about us, but one we must be ever so careful about as we teach and train our children.

So, what do we do? What *can* we do? Are we and our children simply destined to follow the dictates of those around us who are esteemed, no matter how immoral they may be? Sadly, this is often the case for people, but it does not have to be so. By the grace of God, there are things we can do to ensure that we and our children have the strength to be different when trials come.

In classical Christian education, imitation is at the heart of what we do. We often call it mimetic teaching, a term derived from the Greek word *mimesis*, which means to imitate or become like. We are not only aware that children are natural imitators, but we also use this preoccupation of theirs to teach them good things—the necessary skills and virtues they need in order to be prepared to handle life’s challenges with grace, truth, and competency. We do this by directing their imitation toward people worthy of respect and honour, those whose character and skills are worth emulating.

The first rule in all of this is that we, as teachers, should be worthy of imitation—as Christ declares, we will be like our teachers when we are fully trained (Luke 6:40). Now, at a very basic level, this means that the teacher who is teaching grammar must know good grammar, or the art teacher must know the skills of her trade—whatever the skill or knowledge base that may be in focus, a teacher must be worthy of imitation in any given area if they are to teach. But an ability to draw or to quote extensively from classical authors and even Scripture does not mean a person has good character and is worthy of imitation. It does not mean they are someone who treats others with kindness and perseveres when they are tested. A teacher who seeks to teach about godliness needs to be godly, not simply be able to talk about being so.

If we want our children to learn to have good character and virtue, and learn what it means to live as God calls us to live in this world filled with temptations and distractions, we need our teachers to be the kind of people worthy of imitation, that is, good and godly examples for our children to imitate. I cannot stress this enough. Why would we sit our children under people who cannot even be honest about their taxes or discern when a story, idea, or even a person on a screen has a corrupting influence? Why have our children study in their extremely impressionable and formative years under people who, according to Jesus, are on the wide path that leads to destruction and are unable to call our children to grow into the people they need to be, as they do not know the way themselves?

But this also means that we must not only set before our children godly teachers, as best we can, but also examples of people who have, by God’s grace, turned the tides of time for the glory of God and the good of others, people who withstood the temptation to follow those who so easily settled for less. We should set before our children examples such as William Wilberforce, George Müller, our many brothers and sisters in the persecuted church around the world, and others of

whom the world was not worthy (see Heb 11:38). It is through their examples that we and our children can gain encouragement and strength to live our lives well to the glory of God.

Children also need to learn literature and history—the countless other ways people have done well and the countless ways they have gone into error—so their minds can be more alert to the direction they should go and less susceptible to the negative influences around them. C. S. Lewis, in his essay on literary criticism, wrote, “But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. . . . In love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.”<sup>8</sup> The exposure of our children to a variety of different people in different contexts helps prepare them for how to live and act on every occasion, even the difficult ones to discern.

And our children need, most of all, to have Christ at the centre of it all. Classical Christian education calls this being Logocentric, which means that all words and actions and images and ideas are evaluated, tested, and viewed through the Word, Christ Himself, and how He calls us to live and think. We have no perfect standard outside of Him and His Scriptures—for it is Christ and the Scriptures that we need to know above all else.

If we look to the New Testament, Christ disrupts the very fabric of a person’s existence with His unambiguous call to follow Him at any cost. He knows, as we should know, that we are followers by design, and unless we have Him at the centre of it all and as the measure of it all, we will easily be misled or drawn away by characters or things that are unworthy of God and unworthy of the people we are called to be as His children. We were made to follow Him, and ultimately the success or failure of our lives, and the lives of our children, will be bound up in this truth.

And in all of this, it also means we need to be aware of our children’s temptations, not only where they are tempted to sin but also where they are tempted to follow people who will shape them in ways other than those found in Jesus Christ. This will, in a matter of time, cause them to falter.

In order to help strengthen our children so they can resist the fatal impulses that would take them from Christ—for we know that many who grow up and go to university are no longer seen in the pews—we have to help them grow in character now. If a child struggles with losing, we want to help him or her with that. If a child looks down on others after he or she wins, we want to help with that too. If a child is prone to making excuses, we want to get that child to the place where he or she takes responsibility for his or her actions. This will not only help them overcome sin and keep them from being a nuisance to those around them but also prepare them to handle life, with all of its temptations to follow those who will draw them away from Christ.

Yes, we need to give children room to fail, but we also need to be aware of where they struggle so that we can pull them back and help them try again. When children are in our sphere of training,

8. C. S. Lewis, *On Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), 141.

they can grow in their strength of character in a way that will support them for their entire lives and keep them steady in their following of Christ through whatever may come.

Now this is all necessary, but it is not sufficient. We need the grace of God, and so do our children. The problem with our nature is that we are so easily deceived. We can even, as Oswald Chambers often warns, follow our ideas of Christ instead of Christ Himself. We can often read the stories of great men and women and assume, quite naturally, that we would do the same thing—and if not the very same thing, then pretty close—but in this, we forget our weaknesses as well as our own tendency to fall short of the glory of God.

Peter was like this. Remember our Lord said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times” (Matt 26:34). Peter had three years with the best teacher anyone could imagine, hearing good stories expounded and having an overview of history with God’s perspective made clear through the best scriptural expositor in existence, as well as benefiting from close attention to his spiritual growth by someone who knew his heart and mind more than he did himself. He even hung around a generally good crowd, for the most part. But still, he was not ready for his moments of temptation. Why?

After Jesus predicted that His disciples would fall away, Peter responded with unqualified confidence, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away” (Matt 26:33). But as we know from the rest of the story, Peter did not only fall away, he denied Christ three times, and one of those denials was even accompanied by cursing—an impassioned denunciation of his relationship with Christ. In a moment of upheaval, the pressure to follow what he thought were the respectable associations of those who asked for his identity was all the pressure Peter needed to abandon his Lord.

Now this is not to be hard on Peter or suggest that I have not failed in countless ways, but there is something missing in this story, something essential for us to remember as we are to be the people that follow Christ and raise children that do so also.

In between the time Jesus predicted Peter and the others would fall away and the moment when Peter actually denied Christ three times, there was Gethsemane. And it was in Gethsemane that Jesus told Peter, James, and John, “Watch with me,” which means “watch and pray” (Matt 26:38, 41). Jesus then returns to find Peter and the others asleep, and he says to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Matt 26:40–41). Jesus returns to prayer, comes back a second time, only to find them sleeping again, and then Christ—our Lord and our teacher—goes back for a third time to pray. It cannot be doubted that

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it was Christ's prayer for Peter, as mentioned earlier in Luke, that kept things from being as bad as they could have been (see Luke 22:31–32), but it is also evident that Peter's prayerlessness was at the heart of his failure.

Jesus knew Peter would deny Him, but He gave Peter every opportunity to pray, to seek God's help, so that it would not be so. Often, it's easy to think we have things together, that our children are on the right path, when we do not see our need for God and we do not seek God in prayer. And this is where the battle is won or lost, for without God, all our education and planning is for naught. As much as we do the right things, speak the appropriate words, expose our children to the Scriptures and keep them away from corrupting influences they are not yet able to handle, we need to be a praying people if we and our children will overcome the temptation to follow others away from Christ. It is He who gives us faith and the ability to follow Him and overcome temptation, and it is often our prayerlessness, as it was in the case of Peter, that opens us up to failure.

There are countless temptations that will pull us—and our children—away from Christ. If we fail to recognize how quickly we can follow others into grievous sins, we leave ourselves unprepared for life and for the sacred task of training our children well. If we are to take the responsibility of training our children well, we need to do our best to ensure that they are placed in the care of godly people—people who are wise and good, who can truly teach them what it means to be wise and godly. We also need to give them examples of sages—those who have done what is right despite the cost—again and again. And in this, we need to have our children exposed to the great canon of literature and history to help them understand the many ways people choose good and ill, to enrich their lives, and to give them tools to navigate life's situations. And we need to keep the Scriptures at the heart of everything, for in them we come to understand all of life, and it is also in them where life is found—for it is in the Scriptures that we find Christ, the Logos of all things.

But all of this is still not enough. Raising children in the Lord, preparing them for life, and setting them on the right path requires the work of Almighty God, a continual miracle, and therefore we need to be in prayer for our children, as He has promised to hear the prayers of His people. However prone to wander human nature is or however great the temptations of life may be, our heavenly Father is more than able to take us—and our children—safely to glory so that we and they would follow Him above all and at the end of our lives hear the words of Christ: "Well done, good and faithful servant." His voice is the only voice that truly matters.

### *About the Author*

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- **Damilola Oladosu**

family. Our kids are, and see the strengths and fitness and virtue in them. As parents as we seek to





## LETTERS FROM OUR WCCA Bursary Recipients



In a world saturated with confusing ideologies, I am thankful for Westminster Classical Christian Academy, a school that aligns with my Christian and personal values in both its curriculum and environment. The assistance provided through the bursary made it possible for my child to attend such a school. Witnessing my child's flourishing love for Christ on a daily basis fills me with immense gratitude to God for the financial relief provided.

- Damilola Oladosu

WCCA has been a rich blessing to our children and our family. Our kids are, and feel, truly loved by their teachers. Teachers are quick to see the strengths and skills of our children, and patiently work to cultivate godliness and virtue in them. In many ways the teachers are an encouragement to us as parents as we seek to raise children who know and serve the Lord.

The bursaries offered for WCCA students and families are truly a gift from God. Without generous donors providing these gifts, we simply wouldn't be able to send our kids to WCCA. With these gifts, our four kids will grow up in Toronto with the foundation of a strong Christian education. The impact of these gifts on the lives of our kids and our family is hard to overstate.

- Joshua and Tricia Martin



My dream was always to have my daughter attend a private Christian school. Finding WCCA was such a blessing; not only did it have everything I was looking for, but I knew the values that I was teaching my daughter at home in regards to our faith would also be continued at school. I was sold on WCCA from the moment I stepped through the doors for a tour. However, since it is just my daughter and myself, I worried about how I would be able to make this dream a reality. Thankfully with the help of bursaries, I have been able to have my daughter enrolled for the last three years. I have seen her growth not just academically but in her faith as well. I have seen her be supported in ways I know she would not be in a regular school setting, and, for that, I could not be more grateful.

- Grace Synch



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