

Talk to Strangers

Giving hope to discouraged parents

“My praying with them at home and taking them to church is not enough to compete with what is happening to them at school. I’m not going to win.”

BY MANDI GERTH

Recently, scanning the middle grade fiction section at the library with my kids, I stood by a young mom trying to help her daughter find something new to read. And, because I am like my father—which according to my kids means I talk too much to strangers—I inserted myself into their conversation, saying, “If you need recommendations, we’ve got lots ...”. I began to pull books off the shelves and list titles she should look up later.

As we talked, she admitted that she doesn’t know what her daughter is reading at school. She can’t keep up. But she has noticed that what her daughter reads influences her ideas. And what her daughter brings home from the school library is not what she wants her to be reading.

With tears in her eyes she confessed that her daughter is learning too much about gender, race, and homosexuality at school and not enough about reading, writing, and



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arithmetic. “I thought school was the way it was when I was little, but it’s not,” she said. “My praying with them at home and taking them to church is not enough to compete with what is happening to them at school. I’m not going to win,” she realized with grief and heartache written all over her face.

When talking to parents like this young mom, I think it is important to listen first. Just like when you are trying to share the gospel with someone.

I talk to people I don’t know because God is always busy drawing men to Himself. Everyone has a story to tell—how they got to where they are. Listen and hear. Allow God to move in the moment. Simone Weil has said that “it is impossible for two human beings to be one while scrupulously respecting the distance that separates them, unless God is present in each of them.” The gulf between two selves is bridged only by a Third Person. God is essentially mediation.

Remember that these parents wrongly believe that “school” is still the same experience they had. They do not understand philosophies of education. They remember school with sentimentality. Let them come to their own conclusions before you tell them what to do about it.

Second, they believe school is supposed to be free. There is no category in their budget for tuition. It requires a big leap of faith to pull children out of the local neighborhood school—to go against the system. Even more so when going against the system comes with a hefty price tag. It usually has to get really bad before parents are ready to make that kind of change.

Parents don’t often realize how many alternatives are available because it requires work to find them. And money to pay for them. So be patient and encouraging as they think through options. Validating their concerns and the implications of those concerns is the first step in helping them get out. Showing them the beauty of classical Christian education is the next.

I have no idea what God is going to do with the words I exchanged with this mom, but I do know that God has used the right idea at the right time to change the course of my life. So, I am hopeful. And I will continue to talk to strangers. ❖



MANDI GERTH teaches at Coram Deo Academy in Dallas, TX. She and her husband have labored for over twenty years to build a family culture for their five children that values books, baseball, museums, home-cooked meals, and conversation about ideas.



Classical Conundrums

Have questions about classical Christian education? We are here to help!

Q • “I’ve heard classical education is unnecessarily difficult or harsh. Won’t my child be stressed out?”

A • Children enjoy learning. They are wired for it. Assuming that children will not be able to succeed or be happy in a challenging environment is tempting, but simply untrue.

As adults, learning new things can be uncomfortable. However, most children are fascinated by what they learn. The excitement of children learning Latin grows as they become able to describe the world in a language that most adults do not understand. The rich and complex texture of classical literature is strangely amplified by youth. Science and the history of Western civilization come alive for those who hunger to know about their world. For the unconvinced, a visit to our schools is sure to demonstrate that our students love to learn.

Classical schools maintain order in the classroom. This should not translate to stoic classes where interaction is limited to an occasional, downcast “yes sir.” In fact, we encourage extensive interaction between students and teachers. Students are not allowed to be disruptive, but they are constantly encouraged to offer observations, ask questions, interact, and make comments. The classical method, implemented wisely, encourages a stimulating and enjoyable learning environment for students.

—David Goodwin, President, ACCS



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