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FAITH THAT LASTS, A FATHER AND SON ON CULTIVATING LIFELONG BELIEF

By Cameron McAllister and
Stuart McAllister

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THANK YOU FOR THE WAY YOU HAVE DEMONSTRATED YOUR COMMITMENT TO KEN AND HIS MINISTRY BY COMING ALONGSIDE US IN PRAYER AND SUPPORT.

THE PROMISES OF GOD

EYES WIDE OPEN

Read Jeremiah 32:17-19

17 Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:

18 Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name,

19 Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings:

Think of what life would be like if a country's criminal justice system were based only on the judgment of the presiding judge. If a person were accused of a crime, he or she would come before the judge for sentencing or acquittal. There would be no need for attorneys, witnesses, juries, evidence, appeals, or the complicated and drawn-out systems that are in place to try to determine the truth in a given civil or criminal indictment.

The judge on the case would have to know exactly what had happened, both externally (the actions) and internally (the reasons or motivations). Knowledge of mitigating circumstances and any past history of offenses would be coupled with a perfectly upright standard of evaluation. The reason we do not have such a system of justice is that no judge is able to know all things about all people at all times. No human judge, that is.

At a crisis point in Judah's history, the prophet Jeremiah was astounded by God's all-seeing eye. The armies of Babylon were just about to knock down the walls of Jerusalem when God instructed Jeremiah to make a real estate investment in his hometown—a long-term investment for the future. The light bulb came on for Jeremiah: He realized that the nation was not going to be permanently destroyed. And God was indeed saying exactly that. Astounded, Jeremiah praised God whose "eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men" and who rewards "everyone according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jer. 32:19).

The evidence was that God's people had sinned. God had seen it and was about to judge them for it. But God also saw the future, and He here indicated to Jeremiah that judgment would be followed by restoration.

God's eyes are open to everything. When it comes to our eternal destiny, we will never have to worry about a missing piece of evidence or a witness who is afraid or unwilling to tell the truth. When God is on the bench (as He always is) there is no wringing of hands by the righteous who come before Him. His all-encompassing knowledge and perfect justice bring relief to the righteous but worry to the wicked. Are you glad today that God's eyes are always open to everything?

God's Promise:

You may live in peace, knowing God is vigilant on your behalf.

Reflections Ministries

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REFLECTIONS

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart

JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

Lord God, when Your kindness and love for the people You created appeared in the Person of Your Son, You saved us, not on the basis of deeds we have done in righteousness, but according to Your mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Now that we have been justified by Your grace, we have been made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. We have been justified by faith and not by the works of the Law, and only the righteousness of Your Son in us can make us acceptable before You. Teach us, Lord, with increasing clarity that not only is grace through faith in Christ the basis for our salvation, but that grace through faith in Christ is also the basis for our sanctification in the spiritual life. It is as we abide in Christ that His fruit of good works will become evident in and through us.

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Becoming Like Little Children

BY CAMERON MCALLISTER

I’ve lost count of the number of times someone has told me that they’re glad they’re not raising kids today. I suspect this is something folks have always said. It makes sense, of course. Each era ushers in a set of unique challenges that tempt us to think our moment is entirely without precedent. When the church was in her infancy, moms and dads likely shuddered at the thought of broaching subjects like pederasty, temple prostitution, household gods, and meat sacrificed to idols, to name just a few. Likewise, impoverished parents confronted by the radical demands for cheap labor imposed by the industrial revolution likely shook their heads at the unprecedented decision of sending their young boys into mines, glass factories, and canneries.

Those of us raising kids today must contend with the possibility that our child will be tempted to see their identity as little more than clay in their hands. “What do you want to be when you grow up?” takes on a more ominous tone.

The key challenges of the modern world have remained largely unchanged. They revolve around massive technological innovation and radical approaches to human identity respectively. Henry Ford declared that “history is more or less bunk,” giving voice to the assumption that innovation ought to always trump reflection. With his usual poetic flourishes, Emerson argued that history is an “impertinence” and an “injury if it be anything more than a cheerful apologue or parable of my own being and becoming.” We live in the shadow of both of these assumptions.

Both Emerson and Ford are opposed, it seems, to pausing, looking back, slowing down. As much as I like to think of myself as reflective, it only takes a little time with my son to

disabuse me of the notion. Like many kids, he asks lots of questions, most of them seemingly irrelevant to whatever task I find at hand. The more he asks, the more I find myself wanting to either offer him quick answers that will shut down further inquiry, or, worse, find some device to pacify him so I can press forward with the progress of my day. As understandable as such an impulse may be, it amounts to nothing less than crushing the spirit of childlikeness in my little boy. God’s good world is an absolute marvel and one of the qualities we cherish in children is that they can remind us of this fact by urging us to probe into its inexhaustible riches. But we’ll only see it if we slow down and remain teachable. Like Ford and Emerson, I find I’m often loath to slow down.

How do we prepare kids today for a cultural moment such as ours? It seems to me that wisdom dictates we must give them the space to be children. I worry that in our zeal to cultivate responsibility, we often mistake childlikeness for childishness and punish kids for being awestruck by our world. On good days, I’ll answer my son’s questions with questions, leading him down a dusty trail of inquiry. When I can’t answer his question, we’ll embark on a journey of discovery together.

We’ll do messy science experiments on the kitchen table, onerous lego projects in the dining room, and catalog Joro spiders in the backyard. “I’ll never forget these times, daddy.” His phrase that still stops me dead in my tracks. I try to remember it whenever the words “waste of time” pop into my head. I try to remember that one day I’ll wish I’d done a whole lot more of this.

In the words of our Lord, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3)” If we lose our sense of awe and wonder, we’re liable to become hardened and unteachable—a quality we’ll almost certainly pass on to our kids. “In leisure,” writes Josef Pieper in his classic book on the subject, “man...celebrates the end of his work by allowing his inner eye to dwell for a while upon the reality of the Creation.” Modern society militates against this practice, which is why Pieper felt compelled to pen his treatise. Why? Speed, efficiency, and control are three of the major ambitions of the modern mind. Allowing the inner eye to dwell for a while upon the reality of the Creation is to touch the hem of mystery—mystery not in the sense of something alien or inscrutable, but rather a vast abundance that exceeds our full understanding. Such is God’s good world. It’s a scandal to the modern mind; it’s a joy to children. Control ends in flatness, hollowness, sterility. Mystery is an ongoing adventure.

One of the most conspicuous ways in which we chip away at the childlikeness in our kids is by imposing an overbearing schedule that leaves them no room to wander, loaf, and dream. Soccer, karate, ballet, and t-ball are all well and good, but what about bounding around

the great outdoors aimlessly? What about watching the witchy shadows of trees play across the walls of their room? What about lying on their back to stare into the overhead ocean of the sky? For that matter, why don’t we occasionally join them in their blessed indolence?

When’s the last time you laid aside your “smart” devices to stare into the heavens, or to take in the exotic anatomy of a big, juicy bug?

Yes, in many ways ours is a fearful cultural moment replete with challenges that seem utterly unique. When the sage of Ecclesiastes tells us there’s nothing new under the sun, he’s not ruling out the need for wisdom in situations that once seemed unimaginable. It’s a big, wonderful, terrible, and complicated world after all. How do we resist the ruthless pace of our culture that pressures us to prioritize speed and efficiency, radical individualism and self-expression? Naturally, sound teaching and training will be important, but, as the wisdom of our Lord makes clear, we must also become like little children.

In this effort, we must lead by example. Paradoxically, if we want to lead our children well, we must become like them.

Citations:

Josef Pieper, Leisure the Basis of Culture: The Philosophical Act tran. Alexander Dru (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2009), 49.

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