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Teaching Children to Pray the Catechism

Pray the Catechism? Isn't the Catechism just something we require children to memorize and recite? Don't we do that because a knowledge of the Catechism is necessary before a child is confirmed and participates in the Lord's Supper?

Martin Luther would agree so far. But I think he would suggest something else as well. He would invite us to *pray* the Catechism and to teach children to do the same. Luther himself prayed the Catechism—on a daily basis.

There is an evangelical quality to the Catechism. For example, each of the commandments (other than the first) has an explanation that begins with the words, "We should fear and love God so that..." In response to God's love, we fear him (in the sense of awe and worship) and love him. Part of that fear and love involves coming to him in prayer. By its very nature, the Small Catechism invites the attitude of prayer.

Let's try it. How might we pray the First Commandment? Perhaps something like this: "Lord, you alone are God. I want you at the center of my life. Help me always fear you above everything else, help me love you more than anything else or anybody else, and help me trust you to provide me with all that I need and to protect me in every situation." Or how about the Second Article? "Lord Jesus, true God and true man, thank you for redeeming me, a lost and condemned creature. Thank you for purchasing and winning me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. You did this, Lord, by means of your holy, precious blood and your innocent sufferings and death. Help me always live for you and serve you. Assure me that because you rose from the dead I too will arise to live with you forever in heaven." Or how about Baptism? "Father, thank you for the forgiveness of sins, the deliverance from death and the devil, and the assurance of eternal life that you have given me in my baptism. Help me drown my old Adam by daily contrition and repentance and cause the new man in me daily to arise to live in your presence in righteousness and purity."

The Catechism is really a little Bible, so praying it is a handy way of reviewing the chief teachings of Scripture. Praying the Catechism also helps us think deeply about what we are saying; when we pray it, we cannot just say it by rote.

The Catechism's simplicity and poetic qualities invite memorization. We need to insist that our children memorize it, not only so they can regularly draw on it as a source of comfort and strength but also so they can use it as they come to God regularly in prayer.

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Why Do Believers Suffer?

Paul L. Willems

This world is filled with suffering. “Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward,” wrote Job (Job 5:7). God cursed the ground when Adam sinned and now weeds frustrate our efforts to grow crops. Our wills are subjected to the desires of sin that lives within us and we cannot do what we want (Ro 7:21). Finally we die. We understand this is a result of sin. Yet not all suffering is a consequence of sin.

When Jesus’ disciples saw a blind man they asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind” (Jn 9:2)? They were astonished at his answer. Jesus told them the man’s blindness was not the result of sin. His suffering was for God’s glory. Similarly the death of Lazarus caused many to glorify God when Jesus raised him from the dead. We do not understand God’s ways with humans. We see only the outward appearances. When we do not see God’s reasons behind things we often become confused.

Job lost his wealth. His children were killed. He lost the support of his wife and friends because of a contest between God and Satan. Job suffered. He was perplexed over his suffering for he knew he was innocent. His friends knew, “He who sows wickedness reaps

trouble” (Pro 22:8). They accused Job of being a wicked person. Job defended his innocence. Any spectator to their conversations would conclude Job lost the debate. His friends repeatedly listed the consequences of sin—sudden calamity, loss of physical strength, disease and finally the wicked is left to face death alone. The comments of Job’s friends hurt him deeply. Job knew God’s anger consumed the wicked. He knew God does not leave the guilty unpunished. Job knew he looked like the wicked person his friends described. What Job could not demonstrate was his hidden faithfulness to God. He was innocent. He cried out against those who abandoned him in his time of suffering. No one stood by Job’s side. Everyone accused him of evil. He stood alone and suffered.

This same play of emotions was evident at Gethsemane. Jesus asked his disciples to watch and pray with him. They did not. One betrayed him to his enemies. Several fell asleep. Peter who walked on water with Jesus denied he even knew him. James and John ran away. One does not expect such callous treatment from friends. No one stood by Jesus’ side. He was innocent and sinless, yet he was abandoned in his time of need. Jesus stood alone and suffered.

What then, when all human help fails? What then, when no one even wants to hear the cry of the innocent? Why do believers suffer? God's ways often baffle us. Habakkuk was dumbfounded when God told him he would use the heathen Babylonians to punish Israel. Even the believing Jews would suffer. Habakkuk could not see God's plan for Israel and for the world. And that's where the problem lies. The suffering of the believers can only be explained on the plane of faith that is above human sight, wisdom, and logic. It is useless to plead God's justice in the cause of human suffering. No one has kept God's Law perfectly. We all deserve death and eternal punishment. All are condemned. We must plead God's mercy. Job's rallying cry was "I know my Redeemer lives!" Jesus prayed not that we be taken out of this evil world and its suffering, but that we be protected from Satan and from evil through God's mercy (Jn 17:1-26). When we lie broken, cast out and unwanted—when we are accused and we sit suffering—we need mercy, not justice.

As believers who suffer we can be confident the suffering is for our ultimate good. Job declared, "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). In his darkest hour Job's faith shone the brightest. He glorified God. As those around us suffer, and as we suffer, God is providing opportunities to turn to him. War veterans often remark, "There are no atheists in fox holes." When human strength and resources fail believers are driven to God for mercy.

His love never fails. Such a plea is a plea of faith and not of sight. When Peter trusted, he walked on water. When his eyes focused on the raging seas, he faltered and began to sink.

Remember that only in the pain and labor of childbirth does a new life enter this world. Only when the grapes are trampled and crushed do they yield their juice for wine. Only when night is the darkest can we see the stars shining their brightest. And so it is with us. When we suffer, the words of the gospel bring us the greatest comfort.

Just as human strength fails us in our justification, so human reason fails us in our suffering. Human efforts cannot save us nor can they give us lasting comfort. Only Christ gives meaning to our lives and only his words show us the victory which is ours even in death. God's mercy reveals this to us. Human wisdom fails. The blind Saul suffered and became the praying Paul. God showed Paul the many things he would have to endure for his name. In suffering Paul learned patient perseverance and those witnessing his suffering saw how God's power was made perfect in human weakness. As we share in Christ's suffering, by God's mercy, so we share in his glory (Ro 8:17). Suffering has always been the badge of the believer (Ps 44:22). This is living by faith. This is why believers suffer and glory in their suffering.✠

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Student-Led Parent Conferences, Part 1

Brian C. Miller

Introduction

This study examines the student-led conference versus the traditional conference. At our school we traditionally have had our parent teacher conferences in the fall at the end of the first quarter. Typically, parents attended the conference without their child and discussed their child's performance with the teacher. In talking about parent teacher conferences with the faculty, we shared some common concerns about the productivity of the conference. I believe we have very good parent teacher communication. Our school is a small parochial school with an enrollment of about 120 students. If a student is having difficulties, the parents are involved and regularly communicating with the teacher. Not only is our school small but we live in a small community of about 4,000. The teachers and parents see each other on a regular basis in the community and at church and school functions. What we found happening at the conferences was usually a rehash of what had already been discussed with the parents. At times we even felt there was not a need for a conference.

The faculty felt that it would be great if we could get the students involved in

the conference process and help them to exercise choice, take responsibility for their learning, and do their best work. We saw an opportunity to reach these goals by implementing student-led conferences, enabling students to be directly involved in their assessment process.

If students are responsible for assessing their own work, reflecting on it, and communicating to their parents what they're doing in school, we felt they would be more likely to follow through on an improvement plan. Students would also have the opportunity to develop confidence and a reflective mind-set as they evaluate their learning accomplishments and failures.

Another concern everyone had was about how students' perceptions of their progress differed from the teacher's perspective. This underscores the weakness I found in my literature review that sometimes what parents hear at home from their child is quite different from what they hear from the teacher's report. The teachers at my school agreed that the student-led format may help our students be more engaged in the assessment process and give students, parents, and teachers a better picture of who the student is, what he or she has achieved, and what the student's

future goals may be.

We decided to use student-led conferences in grades 1-8. Our teachers are a veteran staff and undertook implementing the new conference format with enthusiasm. We have five teachers for these grades. First grade has one teacher, second grade has one teacher, and grades 3-8 are multi-grade rooms.

We decided to keep track of student work throughout the quarter in a portfolio. We had the students determine which work samples would be included. This would help to keep the conferences positive so parents would not have a tendency to dwell on poorly done work. As we approached the day of conferences, we practiced the conferences in our classrooms. The conferences in grades one and two would focus on various stations that the children would lead the parents through to show them what they were doing in school. In grades 3-8 the conference centered on the student portfolio.

Surveys were handed out to students, parents, and teachers to get their ideas on traditional parent teacher conferences before the conference. Surveys were again distributed after the student-led conference to evaluate how well the new format was received.

We found that parents were generally satisfied with the traditional parent-teacher conference. They were, however, very receptive to the new conference format. Overall parents were quite pleased with the student-led conference. This held true for students and teachers as well. Our teachers felt that the student-led conference achieved the

goals we set out to accomplish, namely that students become more responsible for their learning and strive to do their best.

Previous studies and literature on parent-teacher conferences

As I looked at a variety of resources on student-led conferences there were many common themes throughout the literature. The sources I read all seemed to agree on weaknesses of traditional parent-teacher conferences and also agreed on the strengths of changing to a student-led conference format.

Typically in traditional conferences, parents attend the conference without their child and discuss their child's performance with the teacher or advisor. Sometimes what parents hear at home from their child is quite different from what they hear from the teacher's reports. Parents are then put in the position of either believing the child or the teacher. Parents and teachers are likely to become defensive which, in turn, blocks open communication. There are times when the child also attends the traditional conference, but often plays the silent partner in this situation.

Students may also see traditional conferences as an opportunity for parents and teachers to "talk behind their backs" (Hackmann, 1996). Parents also hold negative views on traditional conferences. Some view it as another opportunity for the teacher to tell them how terrible their child is and parents may feel that the only time they hear from

the school is when there is a problem. It is for this reason that traditional conferences may discourage open and honest dialogue between students, teachers, and parents. It has been my experience as well that the teacher's perceptions of a child's performance are a complete mystery to the child.

If we believe the learners are the key stakeholders in their education, then they should take the lead in dialogue at the conference. Having a student-led conference can help students take responsibility for reporting their progress and be more accountable for their learning. Students possess an intimate knowledge of their own progress. They may not have had opportunities to express this knowledge or had the practice in articulating this knowledge. When students lead the conference, they become empowered to take responsibility for the content of the conference and facilitate discussion. The student-led conference can be particularly effective with middle level students although it can be used with students at all grade levels. Adolescents feel a need to assume greater control over their personal growth. The student-led conference gives them this opportunity.

The student-led conference places the student at the center stage as an active learner. He or she is engaged in self-evaluation and self-motivation. The more frequent use of portfolios in schools also motivates the student to judge his or her work throughout the semester as to what is placed in the portfolio. Another positive outcome of student-led conferences is that the confer-

ence can increase the student's self-confidence with oral communications. Because the student sees him- or herself as the leader, the conference becomes more relaxed and supportive.

Student-led conference model

There were a variety of formats for student-conferences in the literature, however, the overall concept was the same. The student is in charge of the academic conference with the parents. The teacher is a discussion facilitator if needed. The student moves from being the passive recipient of information to active participant in a three-way interaction among parent, teacher, and student. Students assume equal partner status in discussions concerning their academic progress. The student-led process has basically three phases: preparation, the actual conference, and an evaluation (Countryman & Schroeder, 1996).
Preparation

It cannot be assumed that students will have the confidence, organizational skills, and communication skills necessary to lead a successful conference. Teachers need to prepare students and provide them with an appropriate conference structure. Teachers instruct students on how to lead the conference, assist them with collecting and preparing information to be shared with parents, and describe how to explain and interpret any information to be shared. Students learn that excuses are not acceptable and understand that they need to present artifacts to their parents that depict their progress. It is impor-

tant that students receive specific instruction on self-analysis. They also should receive practice in role playing the actual conference. This provides them with the opportunity to articulate their progress (Cleland, 1999).

When letter grades are used, students need to be able to explain the grade report. This requires the teacher to con-

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If we believe the learners are the key stakeholders in their education, then they should take the lead in dialogue at the conference.

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duct mini-lessons on explaining a report card and grading system. The teacher also instructs students on selecting examples of work, making subject folders, and effectively communicating. These mini-lessons may even include proper conduct and appropriate attire for a conference (Guyton & Fielstein, 1989).

Letters should be sent home explaining the format and objectives for the conference. Scheduling the conferences can be done in a variety of ways. Some schools decide the teacher will be pre-

sent for the entire conference but will intervene only when necessary (Countryman & Schroeder, 1996). Other schools schedule three to four conferences in the teacher's room simultaneously, with the teacher moving freely from family to family and spending only a few minutes with each group (Guyton & Fielstein, 1989). The letter should clearly explain that the student will be in charge and that the teacher will serve as a facilitator. Parents should be encouraged to support their child and could also be provided with a list of sample questions they may wish to ask their child during the conference (Hackmann, 1997).

The teacher may start preparing students and parents already at the beginning of the school year. Students can brainstorm a list of possible goals for the school year. Copies of these goals can then be sent home for students and parents to discuss. Students then prioritize these goals and select three or four. This goal-setting plan is then kept in their portfolios. At the end of each month, students write a self-reflection letter to their parents about their progress. Parents then write a letter of encouragement to their child which is kept in their portfolio also (Norwick, 1996). Once students and parents are prepared, the stage has been set for a successful conference.

The conference

Discussion of academic grades is usually the focus of the student-led conference. This, however, should not be the only focus. Many schools now use student portfolios and this conference for-

mat provides an excellent opportunity for students to share the contents of their portfolio. This explanation can include why each artifact was selected for inclusion and how the artifact shows progress. The students can also explain how the artifacts help to explain grades and discuss their goals for the past term as well as the upcoming term.

The conference should be looked on as a process. Parents and students should be discouraged from dwelling on unsatisfactory performances. Instead the focus should be on mutual problem solving and a working on a plan of action for improvement. This plan of action shows that the student is accountable for academic progress and provides the parents an opportunity to support the child in appropriate ways (Hackmann, 1997).

Student-led conferences will likely take more time than traditional conferences. Teachers that have gone to this format have found that it takes more than the traditional 15-minute conference. Many schools recommend 20 or 30 minutes to allow for more discussion (Guyton & Fielstein, 1989).

Evaluation

Immediately following the conference or shortly after, students, parents, and teachers should have the opportunity to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the conference. This way the teacher can fine-tune the conference model and respond to student and parent concerns. It may be that some parents will want to schedule another traditional

conference with the teacher to address any unresolved questions. This can be done in a number of ways: Allow parents to schedule either a student-led conference or traditional conference. Reserve five minutes at the end of the student-led conference for a private

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Our teachers felt that students become more responsible for their learning and strive to do their best.
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conversation between parent and teacher. Permit the parent to schedule a follow-up conference at another time with the teacher (Hackmann, 1997).

Evaluation can be done with a simple questionnaire. Parents and students should be provided an opportunity to respond. Open ended questions for students such as the following: (1) What did you like about student-led conferences? (2) How did you feel during the conference? (3) What didn't you like about the conference? (4) If you could change the conference to make it better, what would you do? Parent questions can focus on the following: (1) Which conference (traditional or student-led) gave you a better appreciation of your child's progress? (2) Which con-

ference format did you prefer? (3) What are the benefits of a student-led conference? (4) What are the disadvantages of a student-led conference? (Countryman & Schroeder, 1996).

Schools that have gone to the student-led conference have found that a majority of parents, teachers, and students prefer the student-led conference format. They have also found that student-led conferences do a better job of meeting the needs of the students and increasing student-parent communication. They give students, parents, and teachers a better picture of who the student is, what he or she has achieved and what the student's future goals may be. Students are fully engaged in the process and parents also have the opportunity to measure their child's progress over time instead of their child's work against that of other children.

Center Middle School found that in four years of student-led conferences, 90% of parents and students preferred the student-led format. Their attendance at conferences has also increased (Hackmann, 1996). Guyton and Fielstein (1989) found numerous benefits to the student-led conference format. Among those were the following: Students were more likely to assume ownership for grades and progress. Parents enjoyed the interaction with their children. Students seemed more accountable for daily work as they prepared for the conference. There was an increase in student academic performance. Students indicated they enjoyed the opportunity to communicate with their parents about their work in school.

Thus previous research and the literature reviewed show an overwhelming positive response to student-led conferences. Most teachers would agree that these are important goals for our students: (1) accountability for work produced; (2) taking pride in workmanship; (3) being an effective communicator; (4) and initiating and carrying out a plan of action. Student-led conferences can help our students to achieve these goals. ■

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Brian Miller is the principal of St. Paul's Lutheran School, Algoma, Wisconsin. In part 2 Mr. Miller will describe the research conducted in his school on student-led conferences.

Why Do Terrible Things Happen?

Geoffrey A. Kieta

A couple of weeks ago, I was talking to a staff minister about God and evil. We were studying Psalm 71:20, “Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.” He was puzzled when I said that God often sends evil into the lives of Christians, but always with a good purpose. He asked me, “Wouldn’t it be better to say that God permits evil to happen?” After we talked about it for a while, he had a very practical follow-up question: “How do you teach this to children?” At the time, I didn’t really have a good answer for him. I’m still not sure that I do, but the question has taken on a far greater urgency. In the few weeks since we talked, terrorists seized control of four airplanes and crashed two of them into the twin towers of the World Trade Center and one into the Pentagon. How can we teach children about God’s providence in the wake of such a disaster? How can we understand his will ourselves at a time like this?

I wish I could say that after you read

this article, you’ll know everything there is to know about the subject. But that simply won’t be the case, because we can’t know everything about this subject. We Lutherans have always understood that God is hidden from us. Unless he reveals himself, we can’t know anything about him at all. Because he loves us, he does reveal himself in part. But even in the Bible, we don’t see all there is to see. That’s why Paul wrote, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Co 13:12). We won’t see all there is to see until we see God face to face.

But God does tell us some very important things about his providence or the way that he rules the world and takes care of his children. The Bible teaches that God is very involved in his world. In fact, God’s providence is a continuation of creation. It’s what makes it important that God created the world in six days. If God had simply been a watch maker, who put the pieces together, wound up the watch and let it run, what difference could it possibly

make if it took him six days or six billion years to do it? We'd be in the same place, either way. But God is not a watchmaker and the world is not running on its own. God is intimately involved in creation.

In fact, providence is more than just a continuation of creation. It is continuous creation. The world would not exist if God didn't actively use his power to sustain it, every second of every day. The sun doesn't shine unless God says, "Shine, sun, shine!" and the light doesn't get from there to here unless God says, "Go, light go!" Hebrews 1:3 says, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word..." Ephesians 1:22-23 echoes the point: "And God placed all things under his [Jesus'] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." Nothing works unless God sustains it by his powerful Word – the same Word that he spoke when he said, "Let there be light."

That's terribly important when we talk about tragedies. If someone breaks into your house and shoots you, God sustains the laws of physics that allowed the hammer to fall on the cap and the gunpowder to explode and hurl the bullet through the air and into your body. When terrorists crash airplanes into buildings, God doesn't suspend the laws of physics – in fact, he actively maintains them so that the impact and fire and destruction happen according to the rules he has set. The Bible teaches what

Lutherans sometimes call a constant invasion in the creation by God. So Psalm 71 can say that God causes us to see troubles, many and bitter. In that sense, God did "cause" the destruction that our country has experienced.

But that doesn't let human beings off the hook. In reality, we can speak of causes on many different levels. On most days, I see a mail truck pull into our church parking lot. Why does it turn into the lot? What is the cause? Obviously, it's the driver – he turns the steering wheel and that turns the tires and the truck changes direction. But it would also be true to say that U.S. Postal Service is the cause, wouldn't it? Don't they pay the driver? Don't they assign his route? And what about all the people (mostly sending junk mail) who put stamps on letters and send them to Grace Ev. Lutheran Church? Aren't they also a cause of that turning? Sure they are! And since at least some of the mail is directly addressed to me, you could say that the synod is the cause, because I received my call through the normal calling process, and the letters addressed specifically to me turn that truck. You could go on and on. All those statements would be true at the same time and they would not contradict each other. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain." The builders do "labor" and the watchmen do "stand guard." They are secondary causes for the building going up or the city being protected. But the one who makes the

actions real is the LORD.

We are responsible for our own actions. And the Bible clearly teaches that God is good and loving. He hates sin and even sinners (see Psalm 5:4-7). He does not participate in evil or sinning. He is not the author of evil, even though he does give his consent to actions that are evil. This is a subtle but important difference. God's purpose is holy, simply because God himself is holy, as Leviticus 11:44 tells us ("I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. ..."). But the individuals who think they are the cause of what they are doing are sinning. They must bear personal responsibility for their sins.

I think one of the clearest examples of this in the Bible is Assyria. In Isaiah 10:5-6, God says, "Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets." Clearly God is the author of the invasion that is coming. He "sends" Assyria to "loot," "snatch plunder" and "trample down" Israel. Indeed, the descriptions of the atrocities that Assyria will commit are stomach turning (see, for example, Isaiah 9:20). But Isaiah goes on to say, "But this is not what he intends, this is not what he has in mind; his purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations" (verse 7). So, God says in verse 12, "When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, 'I will punish the

king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.'" God will punish Assyria for doing exactly what he is sending him to do! Why? Because God's purpose is holy — he is punishing unfaithful Israel for their sins. But the Assyrians purpose is sinful—destruction and pride. God will hold them responsible for their own sins.

Now, does that mean that what happened to America is a punishment for abandoning the faith of our "Christian nation"? For allowing millions of unborn babies to be murdered? For glorifying homosexuality and shouting down the gospel? Maybe. But God hasn't told us that. What he has told us is that he rules over everything for the good of the church and that all things happen for our good. His purpose is holy. But sinners still will be held responsible for their own sin. The Bible teaches that God permits sin while he works to achieve his holy purposes. He doesn't put so many obstacles in our way that we can't possibly commit a sinful action. More important, God judges our hearts, so we are responsible for our sinful motivation as well as for our sinful actions.

We should point out that many times God does prevent actual sins from taking place. His angels watch over us. God works in response to our prayers. Who knows how many times God has suspended the laws of physics to keep us from harm? Every pastor can tell you stories of miracles — the doctors said that someone had no chance of surviving, but somehow they did. Most people

can relate times when they were bent on sin, but God intervened. Consider David in 1 Samuel 25. He was bent on vengeance and destruction, but God sent Abigail to intervene, and David did not do the evil he had in mind.

On a still deeper level, for us Christians, God works against the evil in our hearts by using the gospel to change us. Philippians 2:13 says, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” All our righteous acts, all our good works, all our service to God and conquering of our sinful nature – all that is God’s work in us. He is the cause.

All of which does not really answer the question, though: why do terrible things happen? The answer is simple: terrible things happen because of sin. The curse of sin has ruined the perfect world that God created for us (see Genesis 3:15-19 and Romans 8:18-23). All the horrible things around us happen because of sin. God, who does rule over all things, allows them to happen and even sends them for two reasons. First, he uses sin to punish sinners. And they have it coming. But second, he sends it to bless believers, because believers are never punished for their sins. Christ has taken our punishment away (Ro 8:1). And where is the proof of that? It is at the cross.

Important passages for understanding why terrible things happen are Romans 8:28-39 and Hebrews 11:1. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” We can’t see how the destruction of the World Trade Center and the loss

of thousands of lives can be for our good or an expression of God’s love. But faith is being sure of what we can’t see. How can we be sure? Because of Christ. In Romans 8, Paul points us back to the cross in the midst of pain and anguish and he shows us God’s love there. In Jesus’ death, we conquer pain and sorrow and death and hell. In Jesus’ resurrection, we receive God’s guarantee that we will be resurrected, not only from the dead, but also from all the pain and sadness of this life. It will all be undone. So for this life, Paul could say, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Only the perspective of the cross makes sense of what we have witnessed in our country during September of 2001. Because on the cross we see two realities meet: God’s law and his gospel. The cross shows us the true horror for our sin—it shows us hell. We all deserved far more than what happened on September 11th. Our country deserves more than terrorist attacks. We sinners deserve more than the horrible death those people suffered. In the hell

Jesus suffered we see how much we should have coming. But Jesus suffered it for us. He stepped into our place and suffered all the punishment that every human being has coming. He suffered all the hell and now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That is the love that Paul clung to in all the horrors of this life. Neither terrorists nor warfare nor broken hearts nor the end of our country nor even death itself will separate us from the love of God that is Christ Jesus, dead and risen to give us life.

How will we teach our children about God's will in these terrible events? I don't have all the answers. But we must begin with Jesus and his love. We need to remind them that we can't understand everything about God – we're like insects trying to understand what peo-

ple are doing. But we know that God loves us. God is holy and he never does anything wrong. God is also in control of everything. At the same, we have to teach them that we are responsible for our own sin. We are guilty when we do things that are wrong. When God lets sinners hurt other people, he promises that he will undo that hurt when we get to heaven. That is what they need to hear. And the proof is the cross and the empty tomb. God bless your teaching! ❧

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Job is Tested (From Luther's German Bible)

Raising Abel

A review of *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson

Bart Gurgel

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you so angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.... And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him” (Genesis 4:6,7,8).

From this biblical “tale” Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson derive the title of their book. Kindlon and Thompson are psychologists with over thirty-five years of practice treating boys, especially in school situations. Their book is an attempt to look at the trials of growing to be a man in the United States. They use case histories and anecdotes to detail the pitfalls a boy may fall into during his journey through adolescence.

Kindlon and Thompson surmise that our culture struggles to define what a man is. The stereotypical man in the eyes of our culture is strong, brave, stoic, and in many ways unemotional. This lack of emotional expression does not allow a young boy and later a man to express what is bothering him; therefore, the boy acts out in improper ways contrary to the standards of society.

Although never stated in the book, their theory is much like Freud’s id, ego and superego theory in which too much stress will finally blow the roof right off the house.

The majority of the book describes how boys are misunderstood and pegged wrongly in their growing years, especially in school. Volumes of research have been completed on the inappropriate treatment of women in the last twenty-five years, but few have touched the subject of boys in education. With females gaining a more equal footing in the classroom and society, we have forgotten that there are differences between the sexes. When we deny these differences we expect boys to act like girls and vice versa. We expect them to learn in the same way. This is unfair to both boys and girls. They develop cognitively and physically at different rates.

The first few chapters deal with society’s ignorance of boys’ emotions. The authors write about the “emotional illiteracy” of young boys (5). We expect girls to know and express what the words “sad,” “angry,” and “ashamed” mean. We ask girls how they feel. Boys are not encouraged to talk about their

feelings. Because of this they really do not know what is bothering them. They express anger in aggressive ways for two reasons. One, they often do not know at what they are angry. Second, society almost expects them to act aggressively because that is what boys do.

Most violent crimes are committed by young adult males. Alcoholism, drunk driving, heavy drug use, and successful suicide all have substantially higher rates among males. Why would this be? All boys are born with the “emotional potential” (10). Newborn boys cry and show other expression as often or more than do newborn girls (10). However, boys are socially programmed to start showing less emotion. They are programmed for toughness and stoicism. They are told to act like a man. These lessons tell boys as they are growing up that emotion is unwanted. Tears and trepidation are for sissies.

How different Cain’s story might have been had he been able to draw upon inner resources, emotional awareness, empathy, and moral courage, for instance, to master the moment. But this emotional education was missing for Cain, and it continues to be the missing piece in the lives of boys today. (19)

In education, the physical nature of boys, the playful attitude and the need to be active is often forgotten. Boys are four times as likely to be diagnosed with ADD/ADHD than girls (32,44). Some of the complaints of a boy who is diagnosed with ADD or ADHD are that he fidgets, squirms, or will not stay in his seat (44). Kindlon and Thompson asks

whether these are not the traits we expect in boys.

There is also “culture of cruelty” that dominates a boy’s life (72-93). Boys live in a boy world where size, dominance, competitiveness, and fear are the norm. There is an overwhelming fear to fit in and comply or a boy will tumble down the pecking order. This may not disappear in the adult male but may even expand. All boys are vulnerable. Each knows that his day on top can end. This again inhibits their ability to talk or work out their emotions because emotions, besides anger, do not fit into this culture.

Kindlon and Thompson also write about the relationship of father and son. Many surveys found that a father’s relationship with his son is the most influential on a boy’s life (98,99). This is an interesting relationship because the father has gone through the same childhood experiences as the boy. He was taught stoicism and lived in the same culture of cruelty. Kindlon and Thompson write that if you want to bring a man to tears, talk about his relationship with his father. As a boy grows older this relationship becomes increasingly difficult. Both the boy and the man are competing for the same things, competency and control.

These factors in a boy’s life lead up to a “fortress of solitude” (142). Boys, because of their emotional isolation and their need for control, would like to believe that they are a rock onto themselves. When faced with a hostile situation that would challenge their ability to be this rock, they lash out defensively.

Much of the aggressiveness of boys in schools comes from this fortress of solitude. Because of the emotional illiteracy of many boys, a simple question or even facial expression can be misinterpreted. The boy feels encroachment on his being and must defend his manhood.

The authors then deal with individual problems from a boy's point of view: suicide, drinking, drugs, girls and sex, and anger and violence. The last twenty pages of the book give seven suggestions on how to understand boys and allow boys to explore their emotions.

- ⇒ Give boys permission to have an internal life.
- ⇒ Recognize and accept the high activity level of boys.
- ⇒ Talk to boys in their language in a way that honors their pride and their masculinity.
- ⇒ Teach boys that emotional courage is courage.
- ⇒ Use discipline to build up character and conscience, not enemies.
- ⇒ Model a manhood of emotional attachment.
- ⇒ Teach boys there are many ways to be a man (239-258).

I believe that recognizing that boys are active is an important reminder for a grade school and a high school Lutheran teacher. Many times we punish boys for doing what they do naturally. We should look for opportunities to allow boys and girls to get up and move around in the classroom. I believe that some punishments, such as keeping a child in for recess, may be counterproductive. Because you are taking away something that a child loves because of

his sin, will a child react negatively because you are not allowing him natural movement?

Another point that struck me from the book is Kindlon and Thompson's section on ADD/ADHD. They seemed to imply that we are diagnosing children as abnormal for movements and traits that are very normal to them, especially in boys. We sometimes diagnose boys with medical or clinical problems that might be a result of sin or may even merely be normal personality traits.

Another way of looking at that issue is that we may be pigeonholing students into certain personalities or disorders. In this way we allow inappropriate behavior because we expect it. Expectations, especially from teachers toward their students, are very powerful. If we expect an ADHD student to act in a certain way, he probably will. Giving titles to behavior problems or traits does not solve the problem. We need to work for ways to allow each student's individual personality to excel in the classroom.

As a male teacher my modeling of what a Christian man is and should do is especially important for young boys. I need to show them that emotion, especially empathy and service for others, is an important quality. I need to show them that I am nothing because of my sin, yet God has forgiven me. He has made me perfect through his son. Therefore, a Christian man does not need to rule. His competency and self esteem come first from God. In a world where young boys look constantly for a healthy self-image and affiliation, it is

important to model that my self-image relies on the justification of faith that I have received from my Lord and not on acceptance from peers. It is important for a Lutheran teacher to look for the culture of cruelty in his school and help boys avoid situations in which they may be physically or emotionally damaged. This may be as simple as staying in the locker room until all the athletes have left. It is also important to have with-it-ness in the classroom to snuff out quickly the isolation or picking on of a particular student. Sin is abundant in the classroom. It is important to recognize it. Administer the Law. Then come with the comfort of the gospel.

Another good idea a Lutheran teacher can take from this book is to make sure that he recognizes his own family as a first priority. So many times it is easy to get caught up in our duty to the school and forget about our duty at home. Lutheran men need especially to take time for their sons. Act as role models at home, school and church. The Lord tells us many times that a faithful leader must have his home in order. Raising his family, not just contributing money, should be a first priority.

For some, this book can be a hard read, not because the vocabulary is difficult, but because it strikes close to home. It can be difficult for men to deal with emotion; they would much rather be a rock or an oak. The authors point out that talking about a father's relationship with a son is one of the toughest relationships to talk about, and I would concur.

There were many good ideas in this book on issues dealing with the schooling of a boy. Obviously helping a boy to explore his God-given emotions is healthful. Learning to deal with anger not in violence, or self-abusive behavior is also ideal.

This book may also be helpful in distinguishing our German heritage from our Lutheran heritage. Although this may be a bit of a stereotype, the ideal German Lutheran male would probably have a lot of the qualities of the impossible man that some aspire to be. The impossible man is strong, courageous, and brave without a weakness. We need to separate the world's image of a man from God's image of a man. We need to recognize that some of our heritage, like church first, family second may not be a good idea.

God has established roles for men and women. In the role of a man, there is nothing that says that we are not to have emotions. There is no law against crying, being frightened. Jesus wept. We have lost the image of God forever on earth. However, God has still given us many gifts including emotional literacy and empathy. We need to explore how to use these gifts, remembering that God gives them to us to enrich our family lives and to help witness. ❖

Note: All references are from Kindlon, Dan et al. *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*. New York: Ballantine, 2000.

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Ten Myths about Giftedness

Jane R. Mose

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood “labels” attached to students today is gifted. Definitions of giftedness vary from school system to school system, expert to expert. And as educators struggle to understand what giftedness is, they struggle all the more to determine how best to work with the gifted children they teach.

The lack of understanding of giftedness has led to the perpetuation of a number of myths about this subject. Let’s take a look now at ten common myths about giftedness:

Myth #1: Giftedness is defined as excelling in mathematics or in language arts.

Howard Gardner, author of *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), wrote that there are seven human intelligences: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. (At a conference in June of 1995, Gardner identified an eighth intelligence: naturalist.) Of these, the two intelligences that most often lead to a child being regarded as “gifted” in school are the

linguistic (related to language arts) and logical-mathematical. A child who excels in these areas and who performs exceptionally well on an individual IQ test is often considered by school systems to be gifted. But giftedness is much broader than this. It is important for educators to look for evidence of other types of gifts and to structure instructional activities to develop all gifts to the full extent possible.

Myth #2: Children who are gifted generally function well in school even if no curricular modifications are made.

Gifted children are considered “At Risk” students—more likely than the average student to experience academic difficulties and behavior problems. Students who are gifted are prone to underachievement, boredom, attention problems, peer rejection, classroom misbehavior, poor work habits, frustration, and perfectionism if their unique needs are not met.

Let’s look at it another way, using the bell-shaped “normal” curve. As educators know, if a test is given to a large group of people, their scores will dis-

tribute themselves in a form similar to this curve. This means that if all the students in the United States were given the same IQ test, about 68% percent would score in the average range, which includes the large bump in the middle of the curve and a section on either side of that bump. Most school textbooks are geared at that level because that is where most students are. About the next 14% up would be considered above average, while the next 14% below the middle bump would be considered below average.

That leaves 4% of students on the extreme ends of the curve. Those at the lower end are considered mentally retarded, or cognitively disabled. Few would argue that these students, in the lowest 2% of the curve, could function well in school without special help or curricular modifications. Yet some believe that those in the highest 2%—who are just as far from the middle as students with mental retardation—require no special curricular modifications!

Keep in mind that throughout the years parents have fostered excitement

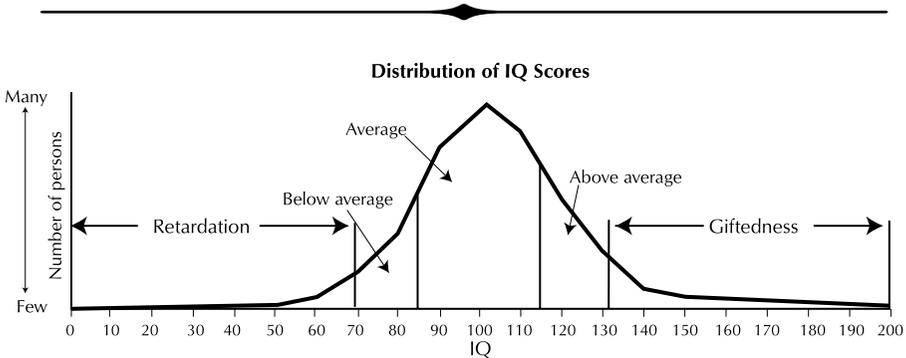
for school in their young children by telling them, “School will be great because you’ll learn a lot of new things!” To fail to modify the standard curriculum for a child who has already mastered its content is to disappoint the eager learner. The unwitting message to the child is, “It’s OK if you don’t learn anything while you’re here in school.”

Most important, we need to look at the child’s needs from a biblical perspective. Would God—who gave the gifted child his or her “gifts”—want those gifts to go unused? (See the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30.)

Myth #3: Parents are very happy when they realize that their child is gifted.

Generally happiness is not the first emotion parents feel when they realize their child is gifted. Even if it is felt, it is usually quickly replaced by other emotions: fear, doubt, panic, and an overwhelming sense of responsibility. Here are some thoughts common to parents of gifted children:

“I’m afraid to tell the school my child is gifted and needs special challenges; they’ll think I’m being presumptu-



ous!”

“Sometimes I feel intimidated by my own child. He’s smarter than I am!”

“I’m frightened for my child. How will she ever have a normal life?”

“I’m overwhelmed—how do I raise a child like this?”

“I feel so isolated! When my friends tell me what their kids are doing, I can’t tell them about mine. They’ll think I’m bragging!”

Parents who come to realize that their child is highly gifted may even go through a period of mourning, similar to the mourning of parents who find out their child is disabled. In each case, the parents must come to terms with the fact that their child will not have the “normal” childhood the parents anticipated. The parents of a five-year-old working entirely at a fourth-grade level, for example, must come to terms with the fact that their child doesn’t “fit in” with the other students in his class and may even begin high school at age nine, never having a “normal” high school experience. It takes time to accept that being unique is OK!

Myth #4: Allowing a gifted child to begin kindergarten at age 4 or to skip a grade will cause socialization problems in the future.

The number one argument teachers have against acceleration of gifted students is that it will cause social problems for the child. Grade skipping is not without problems. Yet research studies over the past four decades have overwhelmingly shown that accelerated students benefit academically and are not disadvantaged socially or emotionally.

In fact, exceptionally gifted children retained with age peers or accelerated by only one year (too little a change) are at serious risk of social isolation and peer rejection, and failure to accelerate may cause serious or long-term damage. (Note: The term “exceptionally gifted” in this context refers to students who are advanced in most—or even all—academic subjects. It would not be advis-

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Would God—who gave the gifted child his or her “gifts”—want those gifts to go unused?

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able to allow advanced grade placement for a child who is above grade level in only one or two academic subjects but has average, or even below average, abilities in the rest.)

It is helpful to remember that we make adjustments for infants who learn at different rates. For example, when a nine-month-old learns to walk earlier than the average child, we don’t tell that child, “Stop! You can’t walk until you’re twelve months old!” Yet in school we tend to base class placement more on the basis of the child’s date of birth than on the child’s readiness. This is a practice that came about only recently,

in the early 1900's; before that, children of various ages shared schoolrooms and worked through their readers at different paces. Even today, we allow musicians and Olympic athletes to compete based on competence, rather than age. It is important to be open also to academic placement based on competence.

Myth #5: A gifted child will have above-average achievement in all academic subjects.

Most gifted children tend to be gifted in only one or two academic areas.

Although children who are highly gifted in both the linguistic and logical-mathematical areas are more likely to have above-average abilities in many academic subjects, even they may not be able to do exceptionally well in all subjects.

Even in those subjects for which a child has above-average ability, the child's achievement may be average or below-average. Much depends on the child's motivation and study habits. Many gifted children are underachievers. They may be bored with work that is too easy for them and not put effort into such work. Or they may have developed some lazy work habits in the primary grades, when everything came easily to them, and feel overwhelmed and frustrated when subjects begin to challenge them more in later grades. Making sure that work is challenging from the earliest school years on can help prevent these problems.

Myth #6: A highly gifted child will be able to learn math facts and spelling words easily.

Highly gifted children often learn differently from other children. They may

see ordinary things in very different ways than others do, and they often learn by exploring, by analyzing the reasons things happen, and by using creative and imaginative approaches. For children who think in these ways, rote memorization, which is very common in the primary grades, can be a problem. A six-year-old may do complex multiplication and division problems and understand fractions and decimals, yet needs to count on his fingers because he hasn't yet learned his addition or multiplication tables. A seven-year-old may read at a twelfth-grade level, yet spells at a third-grade level. It is important not to hold the gifted child back from advancing academically because memorization of some facts has not yet taken place; this memorization will come in time.

Myth #7: A child who is advanced academically will also be advanced emotionally and socially.

Often gifted children are also emotionally and socially advanced for their ages, but this is not always the case. One of the chief characteristics of gifted children is their asynchronous development. They often function at various age levels at once. A six-year-old child may seem to be age 12 academically, age 8 socially, and age 5 in gross motor skills.

Looking at it another way—a highly gifted five-year-old could probably explain clearly to you several reasons it's important to share on the playground. Yet within minutes of giving you this explanation, that same child will run out to the playground, grab a ball a

classmate has, and yell, “Give it to me! It’s mine!” Adults often make the mistake of expecting gifted children to be “little adults.” It’s important to treat them as children first, gifted second.

Myth #8: When teaching a child whose skills are well beyond her current grade placement, a good approach is to provide extra, more challenging projects for the child to do as time permits after she has completed the regular classroom assignments.

Many educators think this is a good solution when confronted with the challenge of teaching a gifted child. But the problem with this approach is that it still requires the child to do the work of her current grade placement—work that is too simple for the child and from which she won’t learn. While the child is spending her time on this unnecessary work, she is losing the opportunity to do work that will challenge her and allow her to learn. In essence, the child is being required to earn the right to learn by first doing tasks without value to her (a very frustrating requirement for the child who loves learning). The better approach would be to allow the child to “test out” of material she already knows and move immediately to projects at her level and of interest to her.

Myth #9: Accelerating a gifted child through school or giving such a child special, more challenging projects is unfair to the other students.

Teachers often feel that they are being unfair to other children any time they modify the curriculum for one child,

whether that child has a disability or is gifted. Again, it is important to remember that all children are in school to learn. If the curriculum is too easy or too hard for a certain student, that student won’t learn. It is helpful to speak to all the children about this at the very beginning of the school year. The teach-

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Research studies over the past four decades have overwhelmingly shown that accelerated students benefit academically and are not disadvantaged socially or emotionally.

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er can share the following concepts with them:

More important than the work you do or the grades you receive this year will be the effort you put into your work. Each student needs to work hard to use the abilities God has given him.

God has given each student different abilities, and your assignments will sometimes be based on your abilities.

Students who are able to do more difficult projects will be expected to do them. Students who need more time to learn may be given smaller assignments that will let them work more slowly.

God wants us all to accept and be kind to each other just the way we are, with different abilities. No matter what abilities we have, we are all created by God and loved by him.

Myth #10: It's easy for parents to raise a gifted child.

Many studies have shown the importance of parental involvement in children's education. Teachers therefore want to work closely with parents—especially parents of students with special needs, such as gifted children. It is important, then, for teachers to be understanding of the struggles parents of gifted children face.

Raising a gifted child can be both stressful and exhausting. The parents must repeatedly make very difficult decisions relating to the child's education, always questioning how hard and how far they should push the child so that he uses his God-given abilities without missing the joys of childhood. The parents must also cope with the child's unique characteristics at home, including such activities as asking constant questions, filling the house with experiments and collections, pushing limits by using logic against the parents, worrying about very adult concerns, and acting "different ages" emotionally, physically, and intellectually.

Unfortunately, parents of highly gifted children often have no other adults

to turn to for support in their struggles. Finding other parents with similar children can be very difficult, and as stated previously, parents of gifted children often are reluctant to talk to others about genuine concerns for fear of being perceived as bragging. Teachers can help a great deal by offering a sympathetic ear and by putting parents of gifted children in touch with other parents in similar situations if possible.

Teachers can also help by expressing to the parents a willingness to modify instruction to meet the student's needs, and by suggesting enrichment activities outside of the school setting. And, of course, praying with and for the parents and children is the best way you can give your support.

Meeting the needs of a gifted student is not an easy task, but dispelling the common myths about giftedness is a good first step. Work with and support the parents of the student. Recognize that the gifted child has special educational needs. Be open to a variety of options in meeting those needs. And pray for God's help as you seek to enable all of his lambs to fully use the abilities he has given them.✠

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Alabaster Jars

The Ministry of Creative Discipleship, Part 1

Ramona Czer

“And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” John 12:3b

“One major reason people are unhappy and unfulfilled is that they haven’t discovered, developed, and deployed the gifts God has invested in them.”

Paul Kelm. “Rejuvenating our Spiritual Service.” *The Northwestern Lutheran*. 11-15-91.

The following seven articles, one each issue, will run all this year and next.

Their purpose is to explain the ministry of creative discipleship and then to suggest ways in which you, as Christian teachers, can begin to serve Jesus more creatively every day.

- † “Shekinah Words” Part I and Part II—An explanation of the ministry of creative discipleship
- † “Alabaster Jars”—The process of pouring out and filling up as creative Christian disciples
- † “The Camel’s Hump”—The contrasts between the Christian idea of creativity and the world’s
- † “Fishes & Loaves & Lowered Biers”—How to practice creative discipleship through problem solving
- † “This is the Ark that God Built”—The benefits and the problems of expecting God to direct our day by day steps of creative discipleship
- † “In the Furnace”—Resistance to and

even persecution of the ministry of creative discipleship

Shekinah Words: Part I

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory....” 2 Corinthians 3:18

I would like to introduce you to a whole cast of characters I know, some from the Kingdom of Light—Shekinah Words, I call them—and some from the Kingdom of Darkness—Me Words. Admittedly, they’re a strange group, but I believe when you get to know them, especially the Shekinah Words, you’ll grasp what I mean by the ministry of creative discipleship.

Shekinah is Hebrew for “the visible presence of God among us,” a word which was used to describe the halo the Israelites saw on Moses’ face when he came down from the mountain and the same light which hovered over the Ark of the Covenant. My mother used the word for describing the sky when rays of peculiar, cascading light flowed from billowing clouds. As if in a trance, she’d whisper, “Look at that, children—shekinah glory—look!” At any moment, I expected trumpets to blare and Christ to descend.

The above verse from 2 Corinthians is

true and Christ can make us glowing beings, filled with his visible presence—just like my Shekinah Words. He can transform us, not just save us; we can reflect God's glory in our unveiled faces, in our daily lives, not merely our own weak, wavering light. With the living God inside us, our sinful natures become new, ruled by him and not by sin any longer.

We can't help radiating what we are. At all times. We bring up words from deep inside us, like springs bubbling to the surface from our molten core. It may seem that we decide what to say or do because of circumstance outside us or because of impulses caused by tiredness, irritability, hunger, or hormones. I believe, however, that even the needs we choose to fulfill and the impulses we unconsciously succumb to reveal our natures. They reveal the deep down part of us which is being fashioned like a fine piece of sculpture by God, our deep down artist. Who is your deep down artist?

Mine is God, not because I've earned his attention by being a particularly moldable lump of clay with a lovely grayish tint, but because at my baptism he washed away my sins in his red flood—and my clay is now a lovely pinkish tint! Ever since my baptism, he's been keeping my spirit as his own, and chipping away at it, making it into a place where he can dwell.

Unfortunately, I'm not a beautiful work of art just yet, not like Michelangelo's glorious David that's for sure. But that's my fault, not his. I could be. He is capable of creating me into

something new and ultimately beautiful, if only I'd stop getting in the way, playing with his tools, even tearing down some of what he's created. I do know that I long to be made into the woman he envisions I could be. I long to be an intimate friend of the Shekinah Words.

But it's time to meet these magical beings. The book of Proverbs is an especially good place to study the ministry of creative discipleship, and in my estimation the creatures of Light seem to particularly love this book. Let me introduce them to you. After their names, I've also indicated their second names that the world prefers to call them by, not understanding godliness in the least, and I'll also identify each one's favorite proverbs.

Trust (dubbed Foolishness by the world)
Though Trust is a grandmother, she wears a frothy dress of moonbeams and saber-toothed tiger teeth dangle from her ears. She is strong but laughs a lot and lives in a house ten stories up in an ancient oak. From her tree house hangs a swing that she not only encourages her grandbabies to use, she gives them extraordinary pushes. Half of the year, Trust travels, usually by hot air balloon, jet, or canoe, but she's been know to try just about anything once in her quest to understand other people and places. The rest of the year she volunteers for inner city programs that work with prostitutes and drug dealers who want to turn their lives around. Although she's been mugged and threatened often, Trust never nags or fears the people she works with, but somehow her quiet gaze

and stories of God's goodness always arrest their attention and make them want to understand what she has.

Trust's favorite proverbs are 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" 3:5, "Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding;" and 16:3, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

Humility (thought of as Meekness)

When Humility was quite young, he married Trust. A military man and the captain of thousands, he wears a coat of ocean waves but also pants of sand. He knows well the power in his grasp as well as his limitations and that winning a battle is not the joyful thing it is so often portrayed as. A man of prayer, he spends long hours talking to God. He also seeks input from all those who possess vital knowledge before many decisions. He smiles constantly and loves to play with his grandchildren, making them stilts from Redwood trees, teaching them how to make a fort from blankets of snow and strings of comet tails, and rolling in the grass below the ten-story tree house he built for Trust. He also listens to children and tells his wife, with awe in his voice, "I learn from them daily."

Humility's favorite proverbs are 11:2, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom;" 24:17, "Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice;" and 25:27, "It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to seek one's own honor."

Love (known as Obsession)

Trust and Humility have one child, a daughter named Love. She was born on a day when the tree house bent almost to the ground in a windstorm, but her parents held her tight and never despaired. Love grew up to wear a gown of milk and belts it with fish scales. She is a recording artist, having discovered that the trees and beasts liked her singing so much they gave her standing ovations (although she suspects the trees do this no matter who sings). Her songs, however, have never made much money since she prefers to sing from her soul rather than to please those beyond her circle. She also understands when not to sing and often remains silent before grief, her arms about the person like a cradle. Besides being a mother of three, she is a juggler of planets, a weaver of starlight and clouds, and a gourmet chef using herbs and spices from exotic jungle and desert locations. Her large cauldron spreads fragrant smells throughout the forest, and she sings while she stirs. She speaks softly and often not at all, preferring to work with her hands. For Love, God's death on the cross is her eternal pain and her greatest treasure.

Love's favorite proverbs are 3:28, "Do not say to your neighbor, 'come back later; I'll give it tomorrow'—when you have it with you;" 10:21, "The lips of the righteous nourish many;" and 25:20, "Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day or like vinegar poured on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart."

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Wisdom (tagged as Slyness)

Wisdom met Love in the forest one day and fell in love with her immediately. Wisdom thereafter became a Ranger, watching for forest fires and seeing after the vegetation and beasts in his care. Wisdom wears his uniform of woven leaves and bark when he doesn't go naked, but often tops it off with a hat of iron ore to remind him of the practical arts of men. This silent man also holds back floods and controls electricity. He has learned the power of containment and the paradox that says God is pure and hard, as well as fatherly and full of mercy.

Wisdom's favorite proverbs are 11:9, "With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous escape;" 13:3, "He who guards his lips guards his soul, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin;" and 15:23, "A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word."

Peace (often labeled Inertia)

Wisdom and Love had three children, the oldest of whom is Peace. Peace was a pleasant child from her very first hour, cooing and beckoning to sunbeams. She grew to wear a dress of clouds and to develop a passion for sailing. However, due to a terrible accident, Peace became paralyzed and now has to be pushed around her garden home in a wagon. She never complains and tries to express herself and her love for God with paintings in lush colors of both water and fire.

Peace's favorite proverbs are 17:1, "Better a dry crust with peace and quiet

than a house full of feasting, with strife;" 17:14, "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out;" and 26:20, "Without wood, a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down."

Cheerfulness (defined as Vapidity)

Next born was Peace's brother, Cheerfulness. Cheerfulness has a laugh like a waterfall. He likes to wear baby's breath and chicken down and somehow on him, these things do not look silly. Cheerfulness has a serious side, and he often talks with his younger brother about the problems in their lives long into the night, but always Cheerfulness tries to consider God's ways as the best life can offer to him. Cheerfulness likes to hunt and garden in order to supply the family with their food. Cheerfulness is shy but has a kind of strength that even the animals seem to respect, bowing down before his necessity as if they understood it to be God's will, and he is also the healer of the family, knowing intuitively what herbs and oils cure what ills.

Cheerfulness's favorite proverbs are 12:25, "An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up;" and 17:22, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."

Honesty (nicknamed by most Naïveté)

Last born to Love and Wisdom was a son, Honesty. Honesty is the largest man most people have ever seen. He wears wind as his clothing and uses fire as a topcoat. Many people quake to see

him, but this is mildly humorous since he has the gentlest spirit of the three children. Honesty does look you in the eye in a way that make you feel exposed and raw, and he is an amazing fighter when enemies come near, crushingly passionate yet fair. But at the end, he

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*Only with Christ are
all things possible.
Only with Christ can
I hope to bear the
fruits of Trust,
Humility, Love,
Wisdom, Peace,
Cheerfulness, and
Honesty in my life.*

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cries at any pain he must cause. This giant is often found kneeling on two mountains, confessing to God his sins, very aware of what he isn't.

Honesty's favorite proverbs are 11:3, "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity;" 24:26, "An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips;" and 28:13, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."

These are the creatures of Light, my Shekinah Words. They inspire and haunt me. How can I possibly be like Trust, when I'm a mother of five children ranging from ten to twenty-one? Don't they need my continual care, or at least my worry? How can I be like Wisdom when as a professor I feel more and more inadequate every year as I sense the immensity of what I do not know, both about my subject matter and about my students? How can I be like Love when I tire so easily as a homemaker, mother, and wife—how can I ever meet the needs and wishes of my family, let alone others I come into contact with daily? The answer is obvious: I can't, not on my own. Only with Christ are all things possible. Only with Christ can I hope to bear the fruits of Trust, Humility, Love, Wisdom, Peace, Cheerfulness, and Honesty in my life. Only with Christ will I be able to withstand temptations to live more like the Me Words than like my Shekinah Words.

Next time: I'll introduce you to the creatures of Darkness, who radiate self-interest and the desire to be independent from God. Then I hope to explain how they insidiously infect our lives and keep us from serving Jesus like the redeemed and radiantly transformed creative disciples we could be.✿

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"And there were in the same
country shepherds abiding
in the field..."

A blessed Chistmas from the editors.
CL, PL, ML, JI