

# FOUNDATIONS



## A Parent's Introduction to Christian Education

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*To all whose passion is  
to bring children to Jesus*

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“The foundations of the earth are the LORD’s;  
upon them he has set the world.”

1 SAMUEL 2:8



# FOREWORD

This book is written for parents. It discusses things about schools and learning that parents are talking about with other parents. The topic is education or, more specifically, *educational models*. Before you dismiss the book as academic, you should know that it is different from other books on the subject. Its purpose is to help you see the importance of the vital role you play in your child's education. As the subtitle says, it is a *parent's introduction*.

You already care about the kind of education your child receives. Good parents do. You understand that the interest you take in your child's education will lead to some of the most exciting and important decisions you will ever make. Experience has taught you that having a quality education is critical in today's world. This book will help you focus on the things that matter most when it comes to achieving the objectives you have set for your child's education. It has been written in language that any parent can understand. No jargon. No hype. It's not a policy handbook or a book of rules and regulations. Nor is it a marketing ploy to promote Lutheran schools. It speaks to the important issues that every parent deals with during the schooling years. It does so directly, honestly, and with clarity. The aim is to help you navigate the unique approach to learning that we will be referring to as *Christian education*. You will be empowered to take a proactive role in influencing your child's future. You will discover *how* Christian education works, *why* it works, and why it will prove to be one of the most valuable gifts you can ever give your child. Along the way you will begin to see a clear distinction between the secular educational model and the Christian educational model. The differences will at first seem more theoretical than practical. As you delve deeper into the foundational principles of Christian education, you will begin to recognize that Christian education influences every aspect of daily life.

The philosophical underpinnings for Christian education are found in the Bible. The Bible—God's book—tells God's story. It is his truth. The Bible

tells us who God is and what he has done for us. The Bible (also called *Scripture* or *God's Word*) informs everything that occurs in a Christian school, including the curriculum, the school's climate, and all social interaction. In a very personal way, the Bible speaks to the needs of every child, parent, and teacher in a Christian school population. It recognizes that all of us—parents, teachers, and students—are flawed by sin. It offers the only possible resolution for that deadly flaw—the sacrifice Jesus made to save us. As redeemed sinners, purchased with Jesus' sacrificial death, we are works in progress. Likewise, those schools and school systems that claim the name Christian are *works in progress*. The model described in this book is an ideal, a goal, something that every Christian school is striving to achieve. The Bible's central message of forgiveness and reconciliation with God is the only power that can cause a Christian school to make progress toward that goal.

The Bible binds parents and teachers together in a Christian school community. It provides the framework for their solemn partnership and serves as their mutual charter, keeping them on the same page and working together toward the same goals.

While we've been careful not to overwhelm you with quotations from the Bible, don't be surprised to find a few Scripture passages sprinkled throughout. Christians rally around God's Word. In his Word we find the inspiration, encouragement, guidance, and comfort to take on the sacred business of preparing our children for their futures.

Learning is a wonderful process. It engages the whole child on a path of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development. As your child is maturing, you will also be doing some growing of your own. That's a very good thing, though it won't always be easy. We hope this book will become a valuable part of your own personal learning curve. The value of a child's education improves exponentially as his or her parents grow through the same process.

While it would be easy to finish reading *Foundations* in just a few sittings, it is designed for a more studied approach. Constructed around four themes—PEACE, HOPE, JOY, and LOVE—it encourages parents and teachers to use the book in an ongoing conversation about school issues and educational concerns. In this way, the book serves as the umbrella for a complete package of materials that can be presented in a comprehensive four- or five-year program. The aim is to bring parents and teachers together around God's Word to discuss the many blessings that Christian education has to offer.

If a learning process is based on a false premise, it is possible to construct a curriculum that teaches foolish or even harmful lessons. During the Middle Ages, when the Black Plague swept through Europe and education was at one of its lowest points in the world's history, a law was passed requiring teachers to instruct their pupils to say "God bless you" whenever somebody sneezed. The law was inspired by the superstitious conviction that evil spirits were expelled from the body by sneezing.

Today the idea that sneezing expels evil spirits is ludicrous. Superstition is clearly not a solid educational foundation.

When the foundational footings for education are not sound, the rest of the structure will be vulnerable and unstable. For any educational model to have integrity, it must have a legitimate basis in truth.

The Bible's central figure is Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us that Jesus is God's truth in the flesh. From the many Bible lessons that your child will learn at a Christian school, you will become more familiar with Jesus. For now, one lesson that he taught is especially helpful when considering educational models.

Two men each decided to build a new house. The wiser man looked for property that had a base of solid rock to provide a strong foundation. The second man wasn't so fussy. He was in a hurry. He never even considered looking for land that offered solid footing. It never occurred to him that the integrity and stability of his new house would require a sound foundation. Instead, he constructed his dream home on top of a sand dune.

Sometime later a hurricane swept through the area—winds well in excess of 100 miles per hour. When it was time to survey the damage, it was discovered that the house that had been constructed on bedrock had some minor cosmetic damage, but the foundation was firm. The house remained, proudly standing right where the wise man had built it.

There wasn't much left of the fool's home. Whatever the torrential winds hadn't destroyed, the tidal floods had washed away. It lacked the structural integrity to withstand the storm (Matthew 7:24-27).

Jesus was teaching a simple but profound lesson about life. If our lives are tethered firmly to the bedrock of God's Word, we will be able to withstand the dangerous storms that will inevitably sweep through our lives. Because our lives

are products of the educational models that are in force as we grow, Jesus' words speak to those educational models. If you build an educational system on a foundation made of shifting sand, you can expect to reap the unhappy rewards of such a foolish choice. A wise building plan would instead establish a child's education on a foundation that has integrity, one that inspires confidence, one that is grounded in truth. This book presents an educational model intent on building human houses that have the integrity to remain standing forever.





In the early 1980s, American education awoke to a troubling new trend. At an alarming rate, spiraling school violence—a concern that had not previously been on the radar—was finding its way into our nation’s classrooms. Gang violence was spilling into the corridors of our high schools. The stories children told of daily confrontations at school, sometimes involving knives or guns, caused parents to question the safety and security of the schools to which they were sending their children.

Then, on April 20, 1999, armed with semiautomatic weapons, two teens calmly walked into their local high school in Columbine, Colorado, and opened fire on their fellow students. By the time the rampage ended, the two had shot 36 of their fellow students and one teacher before turning the guns on themselves. Twenty-four of their victims survived. Thirteen did not. In the days that followed, an entire generation watched in horror as newscasts replayed footage of the tragic scene. The security of our nation’s schools instantly became the number one concern for parents with school-age children.

More than a decade later, peace of mind is still parents’ number one priority when choosing a school for their children. Today school systems carefully assess their vulnerability. They are busily engaged in developing vigilant and effective security plans for dealing with a variety of potentially dangerous scenarios. Curriculums now instruct young people on how to deal with bullies and help squelch school violence. Yet parents everywhere continue to express their concerns: “I want my child to attend a school that provides a safe and secure environment. I want my child to learn in a peaceful setting that is free from conflict, threats, and bullies.”

# PART ONE



"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

HEBREWS 12:14

## CHAPTER ONE

# R. E. S. P. E. C. T.

It's inevitable. Walk the halls of any elementary or high school in America on the first day of classes, and you are likely to hear teachers repeating the *R-word* during their student orientations. *Respect* is a very important word in the everyday life of a school. It is a concept that applies to students, their parents, and the teachers who will have contact with the students on a daily basis. Like the air we breathe, mutual respect is one common value we all cling to. Without respect it is impossible to operate a school system, a school, or a classroom.

*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states that word experts have variously defined *respect* as a mode of behavior, a kind of valuing, a motive, an attitude, a feeling, a principle, a duty, an entitlement, a moral virtue. It matters little if the setting is a secular school, a parochial school, a private school, or a charter school—all of these definitions of *respect* apply to all school settings all of the time.

## LEARNING IN A SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Schools are communities. They are microcosms of the larger societies in which we all must function. They are collections of people, all living in an environment that encourages engagement in some aspect of learning. The health of the fabric that holds school communities together can be measured by the relative health of the relationships of its participants. In schools, relationships will either grow and mature over time and through common experiences or they will deteriorate into dysfunction.

People who do not receive the respect of others are likely to have little respect for themselves. All who are part of the school community (students, parents, teachers, bus drivers, maintenance people, etc.) are expected to embrace the value of respecting others.

Healthy relationships are a critical component of any communal learning setting. Without exception, the need for mutual respect places a burden of

responsibility on every member of the school community. Each member will need to show respect for

- *authority,*
- *parents and the parental role,*
- *teachers and the instructive role,*
- *students and their levels of understanding,*
- *safety rules,*
- *school rules,*
- *civil law,*
- *family,*
- *ethnic and cultural traditions,*
- *other people's rights and feelings,*
- *our country's flag as the symbol of a free and democratic form of government,*
- *our country's leaders,*
- *the unvarnished truth,* and
- *the right to hold differing opinions.*

## WHEN SOCIETIES BREAK DOWN

In one of the early narratives in the Bible, we get to see a clear picture of what happens when the individual members of a society are completely lacking in respect for one another. In the well-known account of the great flood, we learn that God saw mankind's rampant wickedness. The people living at that time had only evil in their hearts. The Bible says, "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence . . . for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways" (Genesis 6:11,12). That comment reveals a lot. Imagine an entire society in which each individual is so self-centered, so morally bankrupt, and so lacking in respect for others that all social order has completely broken down! Lawlessness ruled the day. It must have been horrible.<sup>1</sup> Failure to respect the law and honor the rights of others ultimately and inevitably results in chaos, violent behaviors, and bloodshed.

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<sup>1</sup>A present-day comparison might be made to sections of some American cities where police no longer have much of a presence because the crime rate is too high and violence is so prevalent that to patrol has become virtually impossible.

God intervened with a terrible flood so that lawlessness would not entirely engulf his created planet and snuff mankind into extinction. But he saved eight people—Noah and his family. Every other human being died a violent death.

No school can afford to let the learning community turn from a peaceful environment into a violent, chaotic place where outlaws freely roam and threats of one kind or another drive every part of daily life. Disrespect cannot be tolerated, because it leads to behaviors that will ultimately dismantle a peaceful community.

Adults and children alike need to learn how to get along with others and have respect for one another. That is why educators make respect such a high priority, explaining from day one that everyone will be expected to demonstrate respect for everyone else.

The fundamental need for mutual respect in a school environment begins with teachers respecting their students. Educators show respect for their young students by treating everyone fairly, by valuing each and every child as a unique individual, by recognizing personal gifts and abilities that God has given to each child, and by holding high standards of respect for all human beings—regardless of ethnicity, race, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, or political opinions. Even when we disagree, we must learn to disagree respectfully.

The relative health of the relationship between a parent and his or her child's teacher(s) is of fundamental importance. This relationship is, in theory, a partnership among equals and dedicated to the singular cause of teaching the child. Education experts are concerned that this critical relationship has been steadily eroding for several decades.

## PEACE IN THE PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIP

The general reminder that respect is essential among all students applies also to the parent-teacher relationship. When parents and teachers are at odds, learning suffers. The curricula (the list of subject areas that are to be taught) can vary widely. The climate can be quite different from one school to another. But the success of preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, junior highs, and high schools depends largely on the unity and strength of the partnership between educators and parents.<sup>2</sup> In this relationship, both parties have to be committed to honest and open communication. Their common goals require

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<sup>2</sup>Some schools insist that at least one parent signs a partnership contract that clearly spells out expectations for both parents and teachers.

complete agreement. Both parents and teachers must be willing to work together in harmony so that these goals are met. ■

## DISCUSSIONS FOR CHAPTER ONE

1. List some ways in which children demonstrate disrespect for other children.
2. In practical terms, what does respect look like from a child's perspective? from a parent's perspective? from a teacher's perspective?
3. Do you see any signs of moral breakdown in your community that may have their origin in a lack of respect for others?
4. In what ways do you see yourself working closely with your partner in Christian education?
  - In what areas do you think there is some potential for conflict regarding how education should be conducted?
5. Read James 2:1-10. Why is the subject of favoritism an especially appropriate discussion point when it comes to choosing a school for your child?
  - How does this passage in the book of James lay a biblical foundation for a school system that is very careful and conscientious about not showing favoritism of any kind in its approach to education?
  - What argument does the apostle James make in verse 5 that helps us understand how God would like us to treat one another at home and at school?

## The “I Want” Syndrome

How well do you know your child? Do you remember bringing the tiny bundle home? Infants are so vulnerable and helpless. It is difficult to imagine selfish desires lurking about in their innocent little hearts. A parent gets a glimpse of infant self-awareness only when hunger or the discomfort of a messy diaper calls for attention. A few shrill outbursts—a newborn’s way of communicating urgency—and we get the message.

Did the Terrible Twos<sup>1</sup> alter your thinking? By age 2 most parents know their child has a will. Initially it can be a charming discovery. A two-year-old’s willful demands are proof-positive that a real person is living inside that tiny body. Such stubborn self-awareness may even look and sound vaguely familiar. Parents often begin to see little hints of themselves in their child’s me-first behaviors.

### A CHILD’S VIEW

Childhood experts theorize that a two-year-old has occasional fits of unreasonable, willful behavior because of the child’s limited vocabulary. This is a valid observation. But observant parents also know that their child’s unreasonable demands reflect a self-centered worldview and a self-serving attitude. When a two-year-old shouts “I want” in every other sentence, a parent gets that this child believes the world revolves around him or her. And if the child’s demands are not met, the result could be characterized as *conflict*.

So, how does a parent know all this?

The answer is that you and I each draw upon a lifetime of experience. We know what went on in our own hearts and minds when we were young. We understand the attitudes of our kids because we have attitudes of our own. We *want*—and some of our wanting is wrong. Should we be surprised then that our kids sometimes want in ways that are selfish and self-serving?

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<sup>1</sup>For some children this brief life stage may come before age 2; for others it may come later.

Selfish wanting—the kind that slavishly serves our personal desires—is a spiritual affliction. We all suffer from it. Many of us may know it by another name: *sin*. And, sadly, we’ve passed it on to our children.

An inspired Bible author named James wrote a letter that was intended reading for every follower of Jesus. James was a brilliant student of human behavior. He understood how conflict works and what causes it. In his letter, James asked this powerful question: “*What causes fights and quarrels among you?*” (4:1). (In the question James posed, you can almost hear the voice of a teacher who has just walked in on a fight, saying, “*What’s going on here?*”)

James bluntly answered his own question: “Don’t [your fights and quarrels] come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight” (4:1,2).

Do you feel the finger of judgment pointing at you? James is taking aim at you and me. He says that *you* are the problem; *I* am the problem. The problem is that we—all of us—*want*. And sometimes *we* want wrong things, immoral things, things that lead us to sin.

James is right, of course. We are by nature selfish people. We want. And our selfish wanting sometimes leads us to sin.

Not all wanting is wrong (like wanting a decent education for our kids). Yet some of our wanting is very wrong (like wanting our neighbor’s job or spouse). These same truths apply to our children. Sometimes the things children want are just plain wrong.

Most people try to avoid talking about sin. But when people intentionally avoid talking about anything, you know the subject they are avoiding is serious.

Sin is a serious matter. It leads to unending personal disaster. Sin tragically destroys the one relationship in our lives that can offer real hope for an eternal future; it trashes our relationship with our loving God.

The problem of sin has to be dealt with in every individual’s life. In a Christian school, sin is dealt with on a daily basis, but not always in the way one might think.

A writer named Moses recorded the first occurrence of selfish wanting. He tells us that God had created a beautiful garden for our forbearers, Adam and Eve. They enjoyed a happiness there that you and I cannot begin to fathom.

God had said that they were not to eat of the fruit of one of the trees in their garden home. This gave them a chance to exercise their free will, making it possible for them to show that they trusted their Creator to know what was best for them.

Then Eve was tempted. The devil convinced her that the forbidden fruit was her ticket to becoming just like God. It was a lie. In spite of all that God had given to her, Eve wanted more. She wanted something she could not have. Adam followed Eve's lead when he should have been leading her away from temptation. Wanting caused Adam and Eve to disobey God's will. Their willful act of eating the forbidden fruit spoiled everything about God's perfect creation. While it happened a long time ago, you and I carry the legacy of their first sin. And we have passed it on to our children.

## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION'S TWO MASTER LESSONS

In a Christian school, your child will learn the sad story of sin and the painful truth that he or she is a sinner. That is a hard truth for anyone to accept. Your child will also learn that fellow students, teachers, principals, and other adults are capable of saying and doing things that are not pleasing to God. Your child will learn that parents occasionally make choices that are shameful and anger God.

If sin were the only truth a Christian school had to teach, it would be a miserable place to send your child. But it isn't. Christian education is not only about sin. Christian education is based on an even greater truth that deals positively with the very negative problem of sin, and this truth does so in the most extraordinary way. We will consider this profound Bible teaching in the next chapter. ■

### DISCUSSIONS FOR CHAPTER TWO

1. Describe some ways in which your child exercises his or her own will.
2. List some ways in which you can already tell that your child is a *chip off the old block*.

3. Why is it so important for everyone in a school population to remember that teachers, parents, and students are sometimes driven by sinful desires?
  
4. Explain why sin is such a devastating part of the human experience.
  - In what ways do you see sin doing its damage in your family?
  
  - In what ways do you see sin doing damage in the school setting?
  
5. Read Matthew 25:31-46. According to Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats, how is unbelief connected with selfishness and self-centeredness?
  - How does the way we treat one another, either in the home setting or in the school setting, reflect on our relationships with Jesus?
  
  - As a result of this little study of Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats, what lesson do you want your child to learn both at home and in school?