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PERSPECTIVE

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH

A photograph of a stone wall made of irregular, grey and brown stones, with some moss or lichen growing on it. The wall is set against a clear blue sky with a few wispy white clouds. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

LIFE IN A
FORTRESS OF
SOLITUDE



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STAFF > SERMON SCHEDULE

- November 6** Sing the Word
- November 13** Pray the Word
- November 20** Authentic Christianity
Philippians 3
Guest Preacher: Wallace Francis
- November 27** A Kingdom of Compassion
John 6:1-15

> FIGHTER VERSE

⁹ Honor the LORD with your wealth
and with the firstfruits of all your produce;
¹⁰ then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine.

Proverbs 3:9-10 (ESV)

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A look at the newest members to join the Mount Vernon family.

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by Aaron Menikoff

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Use the QR reader on your mobile device to sign up to receive each issue of *Perspective* by email.

Knowing the Body

[our newest members

The following adults were voted into membership during the quarterly Church in Conference on October 30. Please be sure to get to know and love them.

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” - John 13:35



Ben & Amy Brewer
Katie, Hackett, Lee, Butler, Jane, Emory
Kennesaw, GA



Dustin & Jamie Butts
Nate, Timothy
Marietta, GA



Larry & Shirley Chandler
Jaynie, Jacob
Marietta, GA



Greyson & Liesel Daughtery*
Atlanta, GA



Bernie & Jocelyn Davis
Benjamin, Jacob, Luke
Marietta, GA



Marvin Dorsey
Acworth, GA



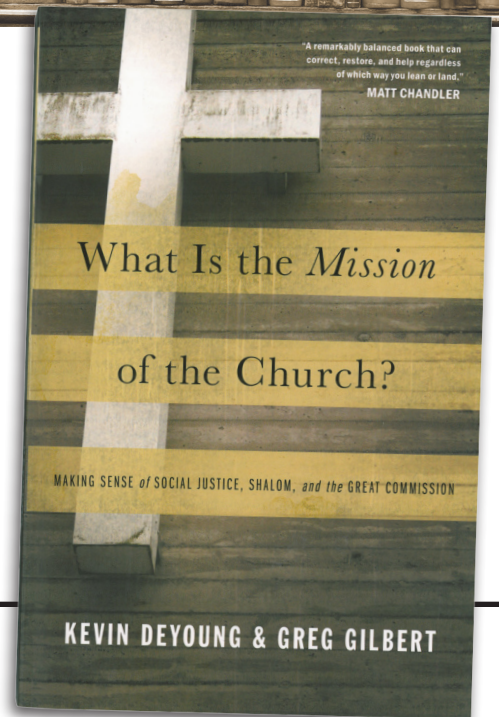
Ricky & Eden Hutchins
Marietta, GA

** Non-member*

What Is the Mission of the Church?

by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert

Reviewed by Brad Thayer



HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED a gift wrapped in stacking boxes? I remember giving my mother a small bracelet wrapped in multiple boxes for Christmas when I was a teenager. I wrapped it in the original box, put that box in one slightly larger, wrapped it again, and continued the process until the bracelet was wrapped in six boxes. On Christmas morning, I watched her (with a strange sense of joy, I might add) labor to open box after box, starting with one large enough to hold a winter trench coat, until she finally arrived at the bracelet.

To answer the question “What is the mission of the church?” in today’s Christian culture is a lot like unwrapping those stacking boxes. It’s laborious, requiring you to deal with a number of options (multiple boxes). And it is tedious because the answers vary in breadth and specificity (different size boxes). Yet, this is exactly the task undertaken by two young pastors. In *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert seek to unwrap the answer to a frequently discussed and debated topic in evangelicalism.

DeYoung and Gilbert answer the question with great clarity and precision. Here are just two examples: “[T]he mission of the church is summarized in the Great Commission passages—the climactic marching orders Jesus issues at the ends of the Gospels and at the beginning of Acts” (27). To be more specific, “*The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father*” (62 and 241, original emphasis). In light of such specificity, you might expect the subtitle to be “Making Sense of the Great Commission.” But as it implies, they are seeking to distinguish themselves from Christians that propose an alternative to the mission of the church (e.g., 20-24).

There is no way I can navigate all the nuances of this topic and the details of the book in this short review. Others have done a better job than I could (see the book reviews at www.thegospelcoalition.org, audio interview at www.9marks.org, or a nearly two hour video interview at www.desiringgod.org/live). My goal is to state some of the book’s strengths and how it can be of value to Mount Vernon.

The authors give convincing reasons why the mission of the church can be summarized as the Great Commission. Such is the case, in large part, due to their careful handling of the biblical texts. Chapter after chapter is filled with exegesis that seeks to be faithful to the original context, careful with its interpretation, and appropriately placed in its application for today’s audience. Chapter four, “Are We Missing the Whole Gospel? Understanding the Good News,” is an excellent example. The mission of the church is determined, in many ways, by the definition of the “good news” of Christianity and its various inclusions and exclusions. For example, how do we relate Jesus’ ministry in Matthew 4:23—“And he went...proclaiming the *gospel of the kingdom*...”—to Paul’s ministry in Romans 1:16-17—“For I am not ashamed of *the gospel*...For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’”? Is the “good news” of Christianity about the kingdom or justification? It requires careful handling of the texts to answer such questions. Knowing something as important as Jesus’ command to His church, the church for whom He died, deserves nothing less than careful attention to the Word of God. That is exactly what DeYoung and Gilbert provide time after time.

Another strength that supports the authors’ thesis is their ability to define the terms and set appropriate categories. In chapter one, they lay groundwork that is invaluable for the rest of the book

by defining the term “mission.” We have to understand Jesus’ purpose for sending the church into the world (17-20). Chapter seven, “Making Sense of Social Justice: Application,” is a good example of having the appropriate categories. Many Christians rightly have a concern for the ills of society. But how does one not crumble under the burden of guilt when the ills are so pervasive? DeYong and Gilbert suggest, “appropriating the concept of moral proximity” (183). They define it saying, “The principle of moral proximity is pretty straightforward, but it is often overlooked: The closer the need, the greater the moral obligation to help” (183). Moral proximity may be in terms of geography, as in the case of a natural disaster. For example, when tornadoes hit Alabama this past Spring, the churches in Alabama had a greater moral obligation to help with disaster relief than churches in California. Does that obligation mean the churches in California did not care or should not have prayed? No. But they were under less obligation than Mount Vernon to provide relief. Moral proximity may also be in terms of relationships. I have a greater moral obligation to tend to the well-being of my family than I do for a suffering family in Africa. Am I unconcerned for the family in Africa? No. But my moral obligation lies with those that I am closer to in relational proximity than those I am not.

Another example of setting the proper categories for thinking about social justice is in seeing the value of dropping the title “social justice” and adopting “love your neighbor” (192-193). The authors are concerned that local congregations are being indicted for “injustice” if they do not help do something about the AIDS epidemic in Uganda, for example. In promoting social causes, churches and Christians are being told they “ought” to do something as an act of justice when it would be better to say that they “can” do something as an act of wild, sacrificial, and creative love (192).

There are other convincing reasons for why the church’s mission is to make disciples, but I want to conclude with some reasons why this book is of particular value to Mount Vernon.

First, the context of our city demands that we think rightly about the mission of our church. The social ills in Atlanta demand our attention as Christians and as a church. Just consider how the following problems are in close proximity to our congregation:

Poverty—I’m always struck by the juxtaposition of being shuttled through low income housing for the PGA Tour Championship at East Lake Country Club, one of the most premier country clubs in the U.S.

Racism—There is a historical reason why South Atlanta is predominantly African American and North Atlanta is white.

Quality Education—Think of the recent cheating scandals in Atlanta schools.

Abortion—I pass a group of abortion protesters outside an abortion clinic every morning on the way to the church.

Human sex trafficking—Atlanta is rated one of the cities with the highest percentages of trafficking minors for sex in America.

Affordable healthcare—Bill Warren’s Good Samaritan Health Center seeks to be a solution to this problem.

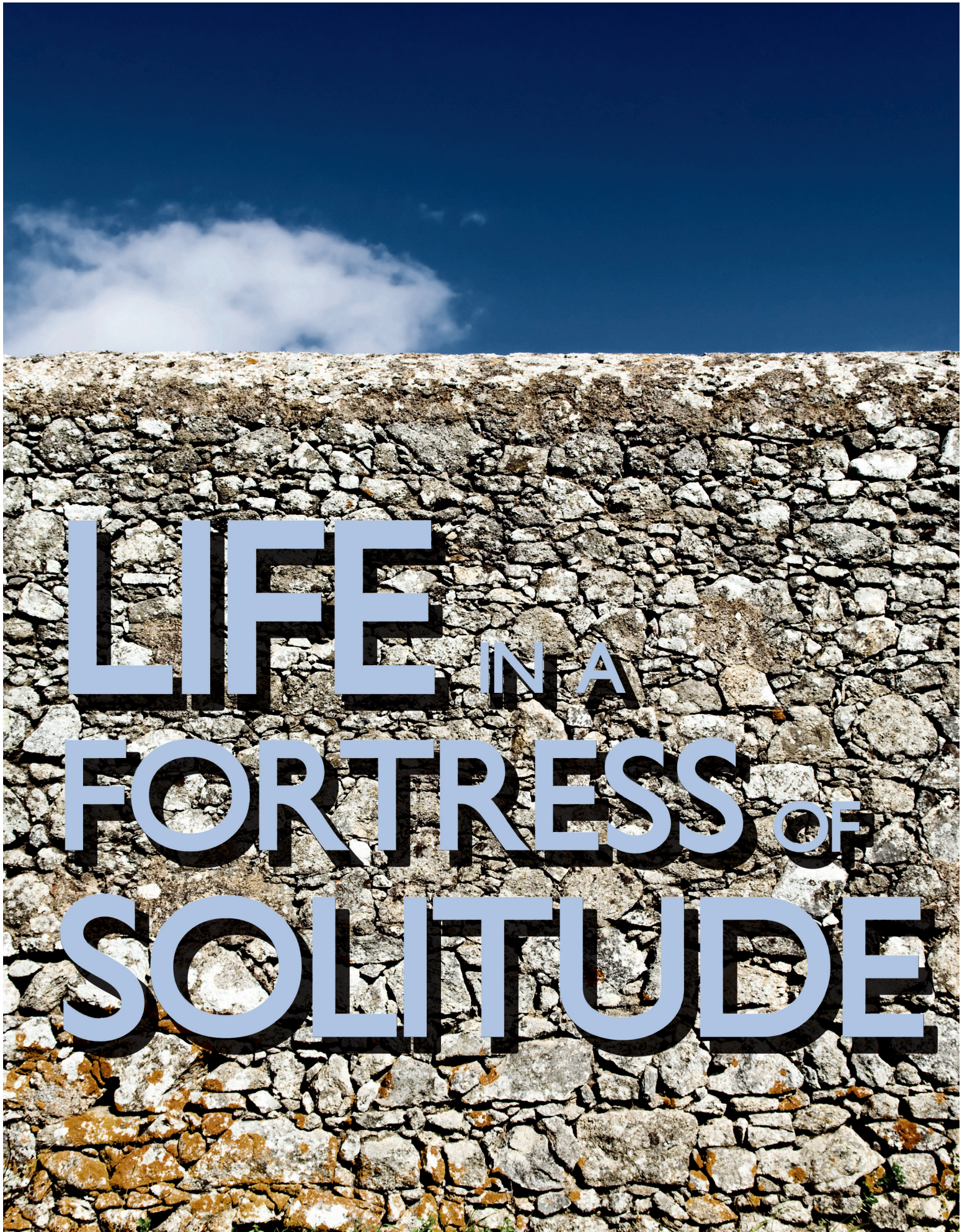
The list could go on.

To be an evangelical church located inside the I-285 perimeter demands that we have a biblical and theological framework for knowing whether or not we have a responsibility to address these problems. Should we and can we right every wrong and meet every need? We have to know where the church, with its leadership and finances, should show sacrificial love to our neighbors in Atlanta. We also have to know where it is best for an individual member or group of members to use their gifts and talents to address these problems and let the church do what it is uniquely called to do, namely the making of disciples through the proclamation of the gospel here and to the ends of the earth.

Second, faithful stewardship of our resources, as a church and individuals, requires that we know the mission of our church. You are probably familiar with the popular phrase that says: if you want to know what someone values then look at their checkbook and schedule. In other words, see how someone spends their money and time, and you will know what they treasure most. There is much truth to that. And on the whole, Mount Vernon is unusually blessed with its availability of financial resources and freedom of time. (I recognize that there are always exceptions to the norm.) We will have to give an account to God for how we steward our money and time.

If the mission of the church is simply any good we choose to do in the name of Jesus, then it will be difficult to know how to best steward our resources. Furthermore, we have a limited amount of time and money, and we cannot do everything. Thus, we must know the mission if we are going to faithfully steward our resources. I want to encourage us to devote the majority of our “missions” giving to what Jesus has uniquely commanded local congregations to do. Our corporate gatherings should be organized around our mission. When we stand before the Lord to give an account for our stewardship, we want to be found faithful to His commission.

Lastly, and this is not particular to Mount Vernon, the worship of God demands that we know the mission of the church. DeYoung and Gilbert conclude by pointing their readers to the end of redemption—the worship of God. Pretend for a moment that God used Mount Vernon and other local congregations to radically transform the city of Atlanta—the crime rate and poverty cut in half, quality education and affordable healthcare for all, neighborhood after neighborhood revitalized, and more. What would all of that mean at the return of Jesus if individuals were not led to bow their knee in worship to God? As DeYoung and Gilbert wrote, “There is something better than the good life...The good life might be good, but without Christ it’s not the goal of Christian mission” (246-247). The goal of the church’s mission is to lead individual men and women, boys and girls, to the worship of God. This is why the nations are gathered before the throne of God in Revelation 7 crying out, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev. 7:10). ■



LIFE IN A FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE

THE FIRST WESTERN VISITORS to the islands of Hawaii did not go for surfing on the North Shore or moonlit walks on the beach of Waikiki. They went as missionaries to proclaim the Gospel. Evidence of their presence can be found in the churches they planted that still exist throughout the islands.

Asa and Lucy Thurston were some of the first to evangelize the Hawaiians. They came in the early nineteenth century. The Second Great Awakening was taking place in the United States, and the Thurstons wanted to see the Holy Spirit move in the Pacific.

But the Thurstons were scared for their children. They believed God had called them to Hawaii, but what influence might these natives have on their kids?

So the Thurstons segregated their children from their new world. They build a fortress to keep the Hawaiians away. A stone wall, six feet high and three feet thick, encircled their five-acre estate.¹ The Thurstons even built special hallways in their house to make sure the native help could not have access to their children. When Asa preached to the Hawaiians in the church he planted, the kids weren't allowed to attend.

As much as the Thurstons wanted to reach the Hawaiians with the Gospel, they were just as eager to keep the "uncivilized" Hawaiians from reaching their kids. The Thurstons left worldly goods behind and made a home in the distant land. Then they proceeded to write their children out of their ministry.

How could they do this? Was it simply ungodly prejudice against the Hawaiians? Was it genuine fear? Was it parental prudence? Probably some of each. They didn't understand or respect the Hawaiian culture, they knew their kids were impressionable, and they feared the Hawaiian customs might harden their own children's hearts.

The Thurstons were not alone. The missionaries who made the long journey to what was then known as the Sandwich Islands, were not prepared for what they found. As one historian put it:

The evangelists believed they had much to fear when it came to raising their children among pagans...They firmly believed that the actions and behaviors of the Hawaiians threatened their offspring's salvation. In the eyes of the evangelists, the natives were lewd, vulgar, unchaste, immodest, impure, and even revolting.²

As one missionary mother put it, "This is a sad place to bring up children: so many heathenish customs, lewd words, and unbecoming gestures are used by the natives, that it is exceedingly difficult to keep our little ones from being corrupted by them."³

Does any of this sound familiar?

¹ Jennifer Fish Kahshay, "Problems in Paradise: The Peril of Missionary Parenting in Early Nineteenth-Century Hawaii," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 77:2 (1999), 87.

² *Ibid.*, 86.

³ Patricial Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 131.

These missionaries wanted to be *in* a new culture where they could share their faith, stand up for Christ, and make a difference. But they knew their children lacked the wisdom and discernment that comes from Christian maturity. So they did what every parent does—albeit to varying degrees—they sought to protect their kids from an unwholesome world.

The Thurstons love for the Gospel *and* for their kids should cause Christian parents to reflect on the ways we live out the Gospel in our families. Are we as bold as the Thurstons to leave the comfortable surroundings of our home to go where there is no Gospel witness? Are we so afraid, as the Thurstons were, for our children that we will keep them away from the very world that we pray would be saved?

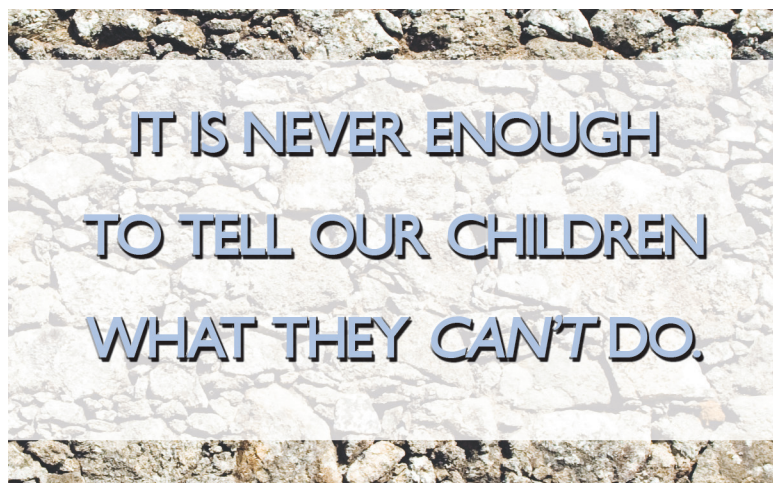
These are honest questions and they deserve serious answers. Christian parents know God has commanded us to bring up our children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), but we are also called to be "salt and light" in a fallen world (Matthew 5:13-16). How can we do both? In the rest of this article, I want to make two practical (and I think obvious) suggestions.


First, protect your children from the world.

Some days it may be tempting to build a stone wall around your home. Perhaps your child comes home from school or practice with a word you wished he didn't know or a question you had hoped she wouldn't be ready to ask. For fear of these words and questions, many Christian parents isolate their children from the world. We try to keep our kids from the ideas and habits and patterns of speech that don't bring glory to God and that tempt our kids to ridicule holiness. Perhaps you can appreciate why so many Christian parents choose to send their children to a private Christian school or even to take care of the schooling at home themselves.

But regardless of how you choose to educate your children, every parent has a responsibility to protect them from influences that they cannot understand or that they are not ready to handle.

This means monitoring our children's exposure to the Internet, to video games, to television, and to movies. Make no mistake. Our children are the targets of experts who know what colors and sounds and products will most appeal to them. They are waging a war for our children's hearts. And it goes beyond trying





**WE HAVE TO SHOW OUR KIDS
THAT THERE IS A FAR BETTER,
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SATISFYING KINGDOM.**

to pry a few dollars out of our pockets for the latest toy. The influence goes much deeper. Hollywood and Madison Avenue are defining beauty, happiness, and even love for our children. A beautiful woman is always slim. A happy life is a wealthy life. Love is romance, for however it lasts.

We can all agree that one way to protect our children from the world is to unplug the television and turn off the computer. We can warn them of the dangers of too much exposure to the media. This may work, *for a time*, and the wise parent will certainly make every effort to “unplug” his or her children from digital poison.

But it is never enough to tell our children what they *can't* do.

We also have to present a positive vision of what they can do. We protect our children not only by keeping them from what glitters in this world, but by showing them what is truly valuable.

Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44).

Jesus came preaching the kingdom of heaven. In this kingdom, Christ is exalted and praised forever. In this kingdom, mercy and humility are valued. In this kingdom, the sacrifice of our Savior leads us to worship our Savior. In this kingdom we cannot get too excited about what this world has to offer because we know the new heavens and new earth are coming where there will no longer be pain, sickness, sorrow, and death. It is a place for all those who have repented of their sins and trusted in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

We are living in the dawn of this glorious kingdom of heaven (Mark 1:15). We have the privilege of living as children of this kingdom, today! We do this by drawing near to God. We do this by knowing, singing, and praying His Word. We do it by glorifying God and enjoying Him. We do this by serving Him as we serve one another.

Parents, one way to protect our children is by genuinely and passionately caring about the kingdom of heaven today.

Do our children see us *joyfully* drawing near to God? Do they see us *joyfully* knowing, singing, and praying His Word? Do our children see us *joyfully* gathering together with God’s people on

the Lord’s Day? Do our children see us *joyfully* serving the Lord by serving one another?

It is not enough to protect our kids from the kingdom of this world; we have to show our kids that there is a far better, more fulfilling, and more satisfying kingdom.

There are two strategies we have to employ to protect our children from the world. Both are important. The first is negative—we strive to keep our kids away from poison (monitor their schooling, their Internet use, their media exposure, etc.) The second is positive—we strive to show them that following Christ is the best and most fulfilling path even if it is, at times, rocky and hard.

Second, engage the world with your children.

As we seek to protect our children, we want to avoid building a stone wall around our lives. This is a special risk for those of us who have chosen to educate our children in a private Christian school or at home. But it is a risk for every Christian parent who tries to guard his or her children from the influence of this fallen world.

Jesus was speaking to his disciples when he said, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16).

Jesus is commanding us to roll up our sleeves and engage our community and our world. He is commanding us to tear down the walls that separate us from the world and to boldly interact with the world.

Sadly, these verses ring hollow in too many of our ears because we have erected our own fortress of solitude. Our fortress is not built of wood and stone but of the church, our Christian friends, and our Christian family. It is safe and comfortable in this fortress. Our children are protected from the world in this fortress.

In these fortresses our kids spend time with other, Christian kids. They play sports in church recreation leagues. In many cases (including my own family!) they are taught at home, by their parents.

But at what cost? For many of us, it is at the cost of a vibrant, evangelistic witness. God has designed Christian families to testify to the Gospel. Our unbelieving friends and family members, therefore, need to hear us *speak* the Gospel and *see* us live the Gospel. It is hard to do that if we have so ordered our lives that we never engage the communities in which we live.

If you have so protected your family that you don’t engage the world with your children, consider making a change:

- Instead of placing your kids in a Christian sports league, sign up for a league in your city. This is a great opportunity to interact with unbelievers. You already share something in common—your kids are playing the same sport. But be bold. Don’t just go to the practice or game and sit quietly on the sidelines. Start conversations.

For some of you this is very easy. If this is hard for you, find a couple Christian friends, tell them what you are trying to do, and urge them to pray. God is good, and He will answer those prayers.

- If your kids play in a church league, invite community friends to participate and take time to get to know the other parents. Some will most certainly be Christians, but others will not. At the beginning of the season, create a time for the parents to get together. Again, be deliberate in your conversations.
- Whatever activities your kids may be in, budget time to get to know other parents. I say, "budget," because time is precious. We don't have time for everything and we will very rarely give time to things we don't plan to do. So plan ahead!
- Model for your children a love for your neighbors. Invite them over. Spend time with them. Show your kids what it looks like to have conversations with non-Christians. Show your kids what it looks like to love your neighbors.
- Get your family into the world, together. Instead of a week-long trip to the beach, consider using those resources to take a mission trip together as a family. Instead of carting your kids back and forth from practices one season, consider using that time to take the whole family to visit homebound members of the church. Instead of a Saturday trip to the movies or the park, consider leading your family to volunteer a day at the Good Samaritan Health Center or serving refugees in Clarkston.

The end result of all this may be your children playing with some kids, or being around some people that are, in many ways, "worldly." But how will your children know how to remain in the world but not *of* the world, unless you help them walk through it?

Do you remember Asa and Lucy Thurston, the Hawaii missionaries? They were petrified that something horrible would happen to their children if they interacted with the native Hawaiians. But not all the missionary families were of the same opinion.

Maria Chamberlain, another missionary, believed that her family was central to her evangelistic outreach. She wanted the natives to see how the gospel had changed her family. She needed to share the gospel and her own life as well. Writing to her sister she put it this way: "Perhaps the question may rise in your mind what good can you do for the natives, now that you have so many children? Something doubtless by way of example. By being sober, loving our husbands, loving our children, being discreet, chaste, keepers at home, obedient to our own husbands; virtues which converts from heathenism would be slow to learn without living examples set before them."⁴

Just as the Church needs parents wisely protecting their children from the world, the Church also needs families who are "living examples" of the gospel. Men, women, and children engaged in the world in which they live. ■

~Aaron Menikoff

⁴ Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty*, 152-53.

Is the Bible Enough?

During the month of November, Pastor Aaron will continue a three-part sermon series on whether the Bible is enough.

Each sermon will be available on the Monday after it is delivered through the Mount Vernon Podcast on iTunes, in The Courier, and on the church's website at www.mvbchurch.org.

Sermons will also be available on CD for \$5 per copy.



November 2011

	1	2	3	4	5
		▶ 8:00 pm Frank Discussions			
	8	9	10	11	12
6 Daylight Savings Ends ▶ 6:00 pm Lord's Supper				▶ 7:00 pm USO	
	7	14	15	16	17
		Georgia Baptist Convention			
13	20	21	22	23	24
	▶ 10:30 am Guest Preacher: Wallace Francis	▶ 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon	"Wednesday on Tuesday" ▶ 6:30 pm Thanksgiving Service	Church Office Closed	Thanksgiving Day
	27	28	29	30	26

EVENTS ◀ ▶ BIRTHDAYS

Churchwide ▼

November 2 8:00 pm *Frank Discussions for Men*
Men 18 and older are invited to an open discussion about living and fighting for purity in today's culture. Guests are welcome to attend.

November 6 6:00 pm *Lord's Supper*
We encourage members to examine their hearts and relationships with one another in preparation for this celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.

November 22 6:30 pm *Thanksgiving Service*
In lieu of all Equipping Matters classes, we will be having a special service of thanksgiving as a part of "Wednesday on Tuesday."

Missions ▼

November 11 7:00 pm *USO*
(See ad below.)

Adults ▼

November 21 12:00 pm *RW&A Luncheon*
Everyone 50 and older is invited to the monthly RW&A luncheon. Bring a covered dish.

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------|----|-------------------|
| 1 | Kyle Blackburn | 19 | Leslie Wilkins |
| 2 | Margie Arnold | 20 | Patricia McDaniel |
| 3 | Andrew Groslimond | | Lily Squires |
| | Patrick Hearn | 21 | Susan Wheaton |
| 4 | Bill Coen | 22 | Karen Frantz |
| | Russ Mitchell | | William Terry |
| 7 | Nathan Pillsbury | 23 | Connie Heiskell |
| | Sandi Korthals | 24 | Hala Mayes |
| | Carolyn Shaw | | Nathan Payne |
| 9 | Styles Caldwell | | Dan Taylor |
| 11 | Larry Chandler | | Jane Vanderzee |
| | June Dever | | Toni Winters |
| | Andy Merl | 27 | Sue Cranfill |
| | Marsha Whelpley | | Chris Millen |
| 12 | Larry Luttrell | 28 | Jo Davidson |
| 13 | Nathan Payne | | Darrell Ingram |
| 14 | Kathleen Ford | | Violet Thompson |
| | Jane Hall | 29 | Terri Ingram |
| 17 | Eden Hutchins | 30 | Suzu Kauffmann |
| | Jennifer Miller | | |
| | Sarah Tucker | | |
| 18 | Brandi Payne | | |



FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2011

7:00 PM

COST: \$15*

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED

Come hear about MVBC's Winter Ukrainian Outreach
and how you can partner with the team.

AUTHENTIC UKRAINIAN DINNER & AMERICAN JAZZ SWING DANCE

featuring

FREE DANCE LESSONS by our very own **FRANK & CAREY LOUTHAN** and **LIVE MUSIC** by **THE TRUETT-McCONNELL JAZZ BAND**

*Pay at the door. Reservations are required for admission. All proceeds go to benefit ministries in the Ukraine.

Sign up for dinner and child care reservations at Connections Corner, Wednesday night supper or calling the church office 404-255-3133.



Mount Vernon

BAPTIST CHURCH

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Sandy Springs, GA 30327

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