

"Kids"
Grove Presbyterian Church
11 October, 2009

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
'Honour your father and mother'—this is the first
commandment with a promise: 'so that it may be well with you
and you may live long on the earth.'

And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but
bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 6: 1-4

They don't trust us.

So said one of the kids I've been know to toss off the
church property for skateboarding.

Said one of the adults working with him at school: *If kids
don't trust adults, we have to look at are we trustworthy?*

Kids!
I don't know what's wrong with these kids today!
Kids!
Who can understand anything they say?
Kids!
They are so ridiculous and immature!
I don't see why anybody wants 'em!
Just you wait and see
Kids!
Kids! They are just impossible to control!

Kids! With their awful clothes and their rock an' roll!

Lyrics from the Musical, *Bye Bye Birdie*. From 1963 - only
46 years ago....

These kids today!

Take a look at or visit Memorial Park. Ever since they put
those benches there, it's been a magnet for trouble makers.
Unruly boys. No self respecting person would want to visit
the park while they're hanging out there.

Oh, excuse me: I'm quoting a newspaper article from 1910 - a year after the Memorial Park was dedicated. Only 99 years ago

And there is nothing new under the sun.

Do they still run Goofus and Gallant in Highlight's Magazine?

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When was the last time you admonished someone for doing something wrong? When was the last time you dared speak up?

Examples?

Reprimanding someone for cutting in line or scolding kids using profanity in public

Asking a fellow to doff their Penn State cap inside the Sanctuary, or for that matter, when sitting at the table with you at Perkins

Or reminding your own children to stop texting during supper

Now, not scolding them. Don't mean yelling or berating them..

Ephesians: that's provoking them, literally turning them into ogres. Pushing them so they snap back with resentment and insolence.

Instead: acting exactly as you want them to act.

Instead: telling them that you would appreciate it if they would use better language or when we ask the kids skateboarding on church property to please leave we try to remember to say, "I'm respecting you, I would appreciate it if you would respect us."

Plenty of ambivalence here when we do enforce these rules. We blame the kids for skateboarding on church property, but where else can they go? Everywhere they go they are roused. What's the alternative? Retreat indoors, turn troglodyte playing video games? Sneak out and entertain themselves with smashing pumpkins?

It doesn't help to force kids into corners. Better is to guide, train. Which requires getting to know them, and them getting to know you. Where the trust becomes personal.

Ephesians speaks of discipline (nurture, paedea) and instruction (admonition).

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Have you admonished anybody recently? Corrected them when correction was warranted? Why not?

The Bible speaks of an obligation as a community to raise up each other's youngsters. Even to tell off other people's children. How else will they appreciate boundaries? Of course, it could be communities today lack agreed upon boundaries.

To walk with them. Proverbs captures it beautifully.

***For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light,
and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life...***

Scott Lawvere once described what a dim light lamps back then provided. No fluorescent light bulbs, no flashlights, no halogen light bulbs. When it was night, it was pitch black. Couldn't see your hand in front of your face. You walked in the darkness holding oil lamps with burning wicks, casting a dim glow which only illuminated the next step or two ahead in the utter darkness.

We take small steps together.

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It is unlikely we'll ever get back to those days when we use to have our church clothes, our school clothes and our play clothes - but we need to do something to counteract all the other influences.

My daughter really wants to read a book she found in a bookstore, titled, How to be Audrey Hepburn in a Paris Hilton World.

Given the way the mass media normalizes behavior, is there a place for a David Niven in a world of Jerry Springers? Denzel Washington's in a world of Slim Thugs?

Class or crass?

Can't really get offended by some TV shows or movies. The comedians try so hard to be clever and scandalous when in fact they are pathetically boring.

Class or crass?

Since when is being a gentleman synonymous with being a wimp or push-over? Rudeness ought not be confused with equalitarianism. So says Lynne Truss in her book, Talk to the Hand.

What is your pet peeve?

Cartoon or TV shows where smart alec juveniles sass grownups, who all are incredibly dumb buffoons.  
 Girls gabbing away and snapping gum in the movie theatre?  
 Folks walking four abreast down the hallway?  
 Bicyclists running traffic lights?  
 Smokers flicking cigarette butts out the windows (hey: my earth is not your ashtray!)?  
 Persons in restaurants talking on cell phones forcing you to listen to their private conversation? And then we're told it is none of our business.

Well, it is. Because you're doing what you want to do, you make it my business. You want me to respect you but you're not respecting those around you. It is not a matter of your rights but doing right.

This psyche of non-accountability itself needs constant correction, especially when, as Truss writes, the internal moral censors are absent.

Fact is: by virtue of living in society, we are all public property. Rugged individualism is at its finest when it realizes we owe something to the world. The world doesn't owe us.

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Part of the blame for lack of etiquette stems from the sorry fact that most kids today have limited interaction with adults. They don't learn how to behave. They aren't shown the boundaries by a group.

How many coaches are worse sports than the kids on the field?

Or when they do interact with adults, the adults are either too timid to speak up or if they do it's the cranky old guy up the street who threatens them with his garden hose or shotgun.

I know what happens if you keep beating a dog and chasing it away... rejection and fear makes them bare their fangs.

The other blame can go to how we smother and control kids. Over-regulated. Over-watched. Over-structured. What someone said last month: then we were stable but unstructured; today they are unstable and over-structured. Over-protected.

They aren't even allowed to play with balls at lunchtime at the middle school.

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Our book club selection discussed last week was The Red Badge of Courage. It's the story of a young man worried if he will prove himself a man. Will he run from battle or will he fight? He ends up doing both.

Boys ask this about themselves, maybe more than do girls. Guys need to prove themselves.

Something to strive for. Something and someone to be accountable for.

We tread barefoot through shards of broken glass:  
Girls define themselves by who they are with  
Guys by what they achieve

There is a direct correlation between emotional health and chores too. They need the chance to prove themselves. He may feel cool racking up points in a video game but it pales before the pride and satisfaction of stepping back from the window frames he scraped and painted, however much he griped that he had to paint them. Guys are proud of their scars

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We admire the Police Athletic League with their boxing tournaments, gyms in the ghettos, lighted basketball courts.

Here is the motto of the Police Athletic League of New York City:

Before kids can go places, they need a place to go.

Because if you want to fight negatives, you got to come up with positives. You cannot fight negatives with bigger

negatives. The cops know all too well that you can either coach them or cuff them.

Here's some 'thank you's' we received from some of the kids you sent to Camp Krislund, kids who otherwise would never have had the chance for a week in the woods, away from mom and dad. An adventure all their own.

Thank you for sending me to camp. I enjoyed learning about God, taking hikes, seeing snakes, living in nature. I want to go back to camp.

I had a wonderful time, I loved the pool. I like when we went on a hike. I think the food was great. Thank you very much.

Dear, Grove thank-you for sending me to krislund because I had the time of my life. I loved the rock climbing wall and I hope I can come again.

Dear Grove thank you for paying for Krislund. I liked swimming. I loved lunch.

This is from a kid who is not used to getting lunch.

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If we want them to have class and manners, it begins with us. Nurture provides the context for the admonition.

Who cares if our kids like us parents? I don't need my kid to be my best buddy. Nothing here in Scripture about them liking you. It is about them honoring you.

You want to be honored, be honorable.

You want them to respect you? Be respectable.

You want to be trusted - prove yourself trustworthy. Trust is not automatic. For trust must be earned, step by step. Once broken or betrayed? It takes more effort then to rebuild and restore. Fool me once...

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Ah yes, I hope you kids have noticed that so far I've been correcting, admonishing the adults in the crowd. But it does go both ways. Two way street. It is the principle behind all of the Letter to the Ephesians; the principle of

mutuality. We are mutually obligated. The world doesn't owe us anything. We owe each other all we are.

Hey kids: you want me to trust you? Then you know what you need to do.

Choices and chances.

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Which is why Steve Kistler, whom we buried yesterday, gives us the perfect example of what Ephesians is talking about.

Richie and Robbie, rough and tumble neighbor boys, were always playing sports in their backyard and always getting into trouble. Their footballs, basketballs, volleyballs, soccer balls, baseballs - all sorts of balls - would fly into Steve's backyard and crash into his vegetable and flower gardens, breaking stems, squashing the peppers.

Steve could have yelled at them.

Steve could have punished them for the damage.

Steve could have called the cops on them.

Steve could have scolded them to where they were too afraid to play outdoors.

Steve could have confiscated the balls that invaded his yard.

Steve could have simply put up with it.

What did he do?

Steve helped them build a backstop.