



At the height of what became known as “The Cola Wars,” a friend asked me about my preferences. “Do you drink Pepsi or Coke?” This was a time when marketers from PepsiCo were setting up tables in malls, shopping centers, and other public places encouraging passersby to take what was known as “The Pepsi Challenge.” Participants would sit down at the table in front of two identical unmarked white cups, one containing Pepsi and the other Coke. They would sip from each and then choose the one they preferred. The rep would then reveal the two cans so that the taste-tester could know which flavor they preferred. Of course, the goal was for the tester to choose Pepsi over Coke, which didn’t always happen.

In my case, I never had the ability to tell which was which, as I had never developed the kind of discriminating taste buds that could tell the difference between the two. My capacity for “cola discernment” was so low, that it was non-existent. . . and still is to this day!

In the larger scheme of things, cola discernment really doesn’t matter. But developing skills in spiritual discernment *does* matter. In fact, for the follower of Jesus Christ, pursuing, practicing, and

developing skills in discernment is a non-negotiable calling that marks the obedient disciple of Jesus Christ. In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul reminded them that they were to pursue maturity in Christ, “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Ephesians 4:14).

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to develop the skill of knowing, understanding, and applying the truths of God’s Word to all of life, so that we might distinguish truth from error, wisdom from foolishness, and right from wrong. And, as we develop discernment, we must also guide our impressionable young children and teens into doing the same, teaching them a skill which is desperately needed in a world where the winds of culture are furiously blowing our kids around in ways that so easily lead to shipwreck.

The Psalmist prays these words: “Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments” (Psalm 119:66). He was asking God for discernment. The theologian Sinclair

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YOUTH
CULTURE

HOT
QUOTE

Gisele Bündchen discussing the changes parents face as their children head into their teen years. *The Tonight Show*, March 21, 2024

“The most important thing [is] you have to make time to have conversations, because, I think, you know, they are changing, every day is a whole new world.”



“PARENTS, LOOK FOR AND USE THE TEACHABLE MOMENTS EVERYDAY LIFE BRINGS TO PRACTICE BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT WITH YOUR KIDS.”



Ferguson says that discernment benefits our kids in four specific ways.

First, discernment protects and guards them from being deceived spiritually. This is especially important in a world where it’s not so much the obvious lies that are the most dangerous threats to our kids, but the half-truths that serve as Trojan Horses which sneak so many dangerous lies into their lives. Charles Spurgeon has famously said, “Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right.”

Second, discernment exercised between persons in a spirit of grace and love can move a brother or sister from error to truth. As we develop our skills of biblical discernment we can express our deep love for others, including our kids, by telling them the truths. . . sometimes *hard* truths. . . that will protect them from harm and provide for their well-being.

Third, developing biblical discernment will keep our kids from becoming enslaved to an unbiblical pattern of life. In other words, discernment leads to decision-making that will keep them off the wide road that leads to destruction, and on the narrow road that leads to life.

Finally, exercising discernment leads to spiritual growth. Proverbs 14:6 tells us that “The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning.” The more you practice discernment, the more discerning you become!

Parents, look for and use the teachable moments everyday life brings to practice biblical discernment with your kids. When our kids are young, we think *for* them, telling them the difference between the right and the wrong in every situation. When they become teenagers, we need to respect their developing cognitive abilities by thinking *with* them, so that we are preparing them for a lifetime of thinking with biblical discernment *for* themselves.

One simple way to think with them is to put current events, marketing messages, media, music, and social media under the discerning microscope of God’s Word by asking and discussing three questions:

1. What is happening here?
2. According to God’s Word, what should be happening here?
3. What would God have us do to make that happen?

During this month that begins with “April Fool’s Day,” let’s commit to cultivating wisdom and discernment in our kids. Pray with *and* for your kids this prayer from Psalm 119:125 – “I am your servant; give me understanding, that I may know your statutes.”

WALT MUELLER
CPYU President



FROM THE NEWS

READING ON DIGITAL SCREENS

In the past, we’ve mentioned the results of initial research regarding the difference between reading text on a printed page, versus reading text on a screen.

Researchers found that there is a fundamental difference between the two, as eye scans show that those who read on the printed page read line by line, and those who read on a screen tend to skip over text while looking for keywords. A new study looked at screen and print reading differences among children ages ten to twelve, that three year period which is most critical in reading development. This is the time when students shift from learning to read, to reading to learn. The initial findings indicate a greater depth of processing when reading from the printed page. Deeper comprehension and deeper learning occur. Since more and more kids are reading off screens, this could explain the declines in text comprehension skills of thirteen year olds. Parents, don’t throw out the books. And most of all, keep your kids reading printed Bibles.

TRENDS:

Sports Gambling

It seems not a day goes by without hearing or seeing advertisements for an online sports gambling platform. With the Major League Baseball season gearing up, your local broadcasts will mention not only what's happening on the field, but the odds on a host of things occurring in the game along with an invitation to put money on anything and everything. Add to this the promotions and bonuses for signing up, and it's no surprise that our kids are drawn into online sports gambling through the apps. And, while there are age restrictions, there's nothing stopping kids from lying about their age and getting involved. Parents surveyed regarding their concerns about the risks of online betting for teens ages 14-18 put debt, gambling addiction, a ruined credit score, and drug and alcohol abuse at the top of their list. Teach your kids that God has promised to provide for our needs. He doesn't instruct us to gamble to get it. Rather, we are to work to meet our needs and to bring glory to Him.



LATEST RESEARCH:

Drinking and Brain Development

Besides warning our kids about the spiritual and legal issues related to underage drinking, we must also warn them about the damage that underage drinking does to their still not-fully-formed brains. In today's world, more and more kids are engaging in binge drinking. That is, consuming five or more drinks in a period of two hours. Researchers have now found

conclusive evidence that drinking during adolescence can lead to structural damages in the brain that can easily result in memory and cognitive deficits that can persist into adulthood. In other words, drinking as a child or teen can effect the brain even if the person stops drinking as they go through

life. Parents, talk to your kids about the dangers of drinking, and encourage them to be good stewards who care for their God-given bodies. Warn them about the dangers of exposure to high doses of alcohol during their adolescent years. What they choose to do now can and will affect them for the rest of their lives.

QUICKSTATS

19.5% of American teens have had a major depressive episode in the last year. This compares to 8.8% of American adults.

(National Survey on Drug Use and Health)

A review of available evidence is showing that video gamers may be risking irreversible hearing loss and persistent ringing and buzzing in their ears due to exposing themselves to unsafe sound levels as they play their games. Wearing gaming headphones increases the risks. Anything over 85 decibels can lead to hearing damage. Some video game sound levels can reach bursts of 119 decibels, which is as loud as a bulldozer or motorbike.

(BMJ Public Health)

III TOP III

10

BEST-SELLING VIDEO GAMES

of 2024 so far
Source: Circana

1. Helldivers 2
2. Call of Duty Modern Warfare 3
3. Tekken 8
4. Final Fantasy VII: Rebirth
5. Suicide Squad Kill the Justice League
6. Madden NFL 24
7. Persona 3 Reload
8. Hogwarts Legacy
9. Skull and Bones
10. EA Sports FC 24



PARENTS SAYING “NO”

by WALT MUELLER

Why do so many parents tiptoe gingerly around their children in today’s world? More and more parents are afraid to step up, take the reins, and assume their God-given position of authority. Instead, parents have become like butlers, available to wait on and serve their kids’ every desire and whim. Fearing rejection, we sometimes go against our better judgment and God’s design to say yes when we should be saying no.

God established the family with a pecking order. Those who are older and wiser are charged with the duty of raising, nurturing, and protecting those who are young and not-so-wise. In other words, parents are to parent their children.

Dad, Mom: you have a God-given responsibility to love your teenager, to guide them through life, to protect them from harm, and to provide for their well-being. This means that there are times when you will have to teach your kids God’s will and way by saying no. Parent your teenagers to the glory of God!

FROM THE WORD

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hen difficult decisions. . . or even the little decisions of life. . . need to be made, what authority do you consult for guidance? All of us make thousands of choices a day, and every one of those choices is made based on some standard or authority. For the Christian, it is the authority of God's Word that should form the basis of all of our decisions.

The writer of Proverbs tells us that the discerning person deliberately "sets his face toward" or "focuses the gaze of his eyes" on wisdom. In other words, biblical discernment comes when we intentionally focus on the truths of God's Word, trusting that God has

given us those truths in order to provide guidance in every decision, either large or small. What motivates us to keep our eyes toward wisdom is our desire to love, serve, follow, and ultimately glorify God in all things.

The writer of Proverbs also points us to the way of the fool, who keep his eyes not focused on God's will and way, but on things here, there, and everywhere, darting from one thing to another. Commentator Bruce Waltke writes, "The eyes of the wise focus on wisdom, which in turn serves them well, but the fool's focus flits from one godless, unattainable thing to another that does not profit him."

It's important to note that the Hebrew word used here for "the discerning" indicates someone who has understanding and insight that leads to the ability to see and know the right option. It is the power to judge correctly and to have perceptive insight.

How do we get to be "the discerning?" We prayerfully sit under the proper preaching and teaching of God's Word, and we regularly bathe ourselves in the words of Scripture on a daily basis. As we do, the Holy Spirit transforms us, and unlike our physical eyesight which diminishes and loses focus over time, our spiritual eyesight sharpens and we see things more clearly!

"The discerning sets his face toward wisdom, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth."

Proverbs 17:24



PODCAST



Youth Culture Matters

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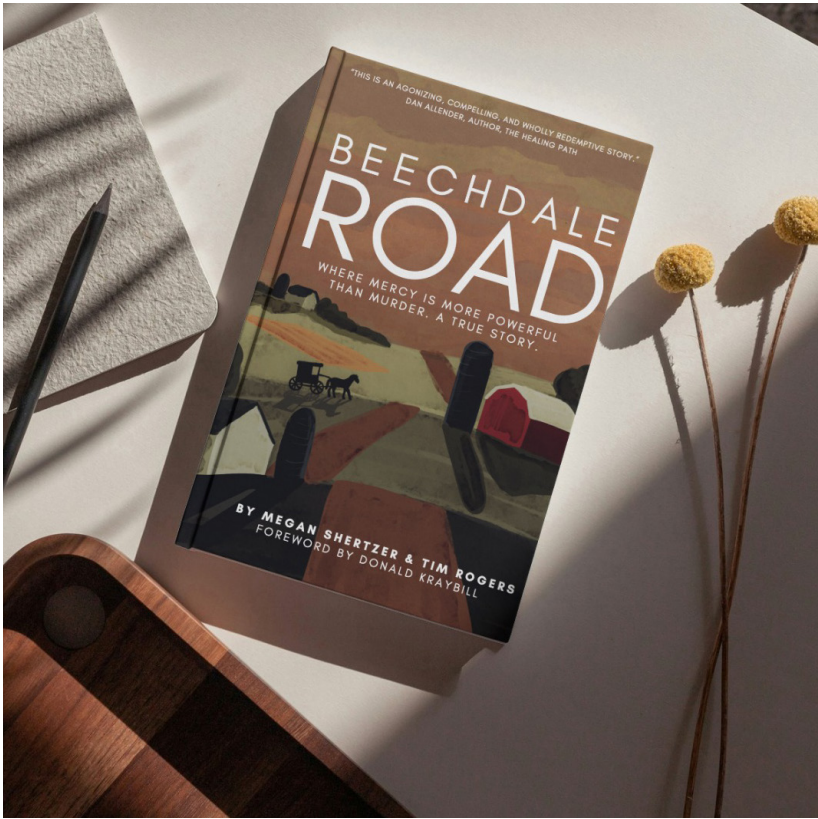
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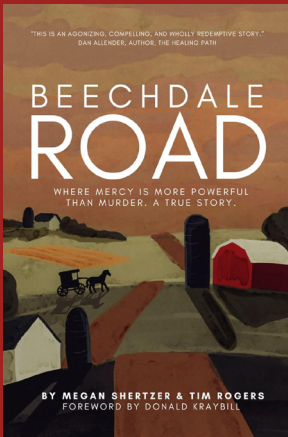
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REDEMPTION IS
ALWAYS MORE
POWERFUL
THAN TRAGEDY.

HELPFUL RESOURCES



BOOK

On Sunday, June 21, 2020, 18-year-old Linda Stoltzfoos of Bird-in-Hand, PA was kidnapped and later murdered by Justo Smoker. Justo is Tim Rogers' brother-in-law and Megan Shertzer's uncle. *Beechdale Road: Where Mercy Is More Powerful Than Murder. A True Story.*, is Megan and Tim's attempt to share their story of grief, anger and pain but also unexplainable grace, kindness and mercy at the hands of the Amish community. For over a year following Linda's disappearance, their family had various encounters with members of the Amish community. In this book, they reveal what it was like for them to encounter kindness when condemnation would have been understandable. From meeting Linda's parents to having a birthday party with Linda's closest friends to being invited into Linda's home for her wake, they walk through what it was like to be confronted and changed by the disarming and shocking power of grace, kindness and mercy.

This would be a great book to read together with mature teens to discuss themes of mercy and grace.