



THE ART OF
RAISING
CHILDREN FOR
GREATNESS

EDUCATION

BRITTON LATULIPPE

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About the Author

BRITTON LATULIPPE

No one understands education like Britton LaTulippe. This homeschooling father of seven is the author of more than 70 children's books and *The Art of Raising Children for Greatness* series, creator of several early-learning curriculum sets, and the founder and president of Blue Manor's Online Academy. After attending an elite prep school in Virginia, he realized that the greatest disparity between the rich and poor is the quality of their education. Now, it is LaTulippe's mission to bring high-quality education into the world of homeschooling.

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Introduction &

DEDICATION

The Art Of Raising Children For Greatness series, which includes five books (*Revealing School, Education, Character, Noble Way, The Triumph of Evil*), is first for my own children: Audrey, Emma, Colton, Jonathan, Bennett, Charles, and Michael, and any other children God might bless us with in the future, and to my children's children, and to their children—that they might know how to achieve greatness, in this life and the next. If only they read this book and apply its wisdom, using it to raise up a great family for themselves, I will be satisfied.

But, this book is also for the benefit of those brave men and women who have chosen to be mothers and fathers in an age when children are often unwanted and inconvenient. However, this is not a book for *every* mother or father. My book is for Christian parents who understand that their children are a sacred trust and a blessing from almighty God.

Furthermore, this book is written for parents who want to raise their children for greatness. I believe most good parents secretly want greatness for their children but hide their desire behind a mask of altruism, not wanting to look ambitious or superficial, while others don't believe in themselves or their offspring as being capable—they are afraid of failure, so they pretend not to care.

Remove your mask, and put away your fear. In each of your children, God bestowed on you a most precious gift—a life for you to shape and mold for His Glory, your family's honor, and the goodness of this world. God wants your children to do great things. It was He who put the desire for greatness into the hearts of fathers and mothers because God knows children need more than happiness—they also need to make a difference.

I don't know who you are or your background—maybe you come from nothing—but I do know, greatness is within your children's reach because God is good and He honors those who honor Him. And I know God can raise up shepherds and make them kings. So, if you can admit that you want greatness for your children, this book was written for you.

THE ART OF RAISING CHILDREN FOR GREATNESS

BOOK II: EDUCATION

Chapter 1:

EDUCATING FOR GREATNESS

The Compass

We all know who great men and women are, but where do they come from, and how are they made? Don't they enter the world like the rest of us—small and weak, naked and crying, without any knowledge or understanding? We remember Julius Caesar's confidence as he took an army across the Rubicon, but we forget he was once a shy little boy, hiding behind his mother. We recite Shakespeare's poetry but forget he too was once a child, struggling to say his first words. And we marvel at the courage of Perpetua in a Roman colosseum, but we forget she was once a little girl, afraid of the dark.

The Caesars, Shakespeares, and Perpetuas of this world were not *born* for greatness; they were *raised* for greatness. That is the first and most important lesson of this book. Greatness is not passed through genes, nor is it a fortune that can be inherited, as so many believe. Instead, greatness is simply the natural fruit of good character and proper education. Admittedly, in the past, wealthy men could afford an elite education for their children that common men could not. However, the printing press reduced money's advantage and the Internet eliminated it.

Now, great children are merely a reflection of their parents' wisdom, love, and labor. There are exceptions, of course.

There are men and women who rise above their upbringing or fall below it. But, for the most part, this Proverb is true:

*Train up a child in the way he should go: and
when he is old, he will not depart from it.*
(Proverbs 22:6)

Many modern parents don't believe in this Bible verse anymore because for all their love and labor, their children seem to grow up and then do as they please. But modern parents are not as powerless as they imagine; they merely lack understanding and direction.

The first time I did a land navigation course in the military, it seemed impossible. I had a map and compass, but they were not leading me to the first destination point. For hours and hours, I traveled over hills and mountains, through streams and draws, but found nothing. I was so angry, I punched a tree. And if the map and compass had been my own, I would have destroyed them.

In my frustration, I became convinced that any random direction was as likely to bring me to the destination point as my compass. So, I wandered this way and that and began to reason, first, that my map was wrong; then, my compass must be broken; and finally, the destination point didn't even exist.

The day was almost over when a search party was sent for me. A sergeant came out from nowhere, "Airman LaTulippe, are you lost?"

I was not sure. I told him my theories about the wrong map, broken compass, and missing point. But the sergeant had the same map, his compass pointed in the same direction as mine, and he knew the point existed because he had already

found it.

“Are you using the right declination?” asked the sergeant.

“What is declination?” I asked back.

The sergeant laughed, because he had solved the riddle, and explained that a compass does not point to true north. Its needle is drawn to a powerful magnetic field in the northern hemisphere, but the magnetic field deviates from true north. The angle of deviation between true north and magnetic north is called the “declination.” The declination angle is needed to calibrate a compass for true north and orient a map to the surrounding terrain. The degree of declination varies by geographic position, and based on my location, I had to subtract 15 degrees. With this new understanding, I was able to calibrate my compass, orient my map accordingly, and find my destination.

Modern parents have everything they need to raise their children for greatness. They have a compass, map, and great destination in mind but have never been told about the “greatness” declination. So, parents set out in the wrong direction and quickly get lost. But, that is no longer your situation. Your search party has found you, and now you have this book, which *is* the “greatness” declination. You will use it to calibrate your compass and orient your map for greatness. Your journey begins now.

Prep School

Most Americans are not aware that there is a two-tiered education system in this country. One tier is comprised of a handful of elite prep schools scattered across the nation, and they are educating for greatness. The other tier, the one

we are most familiar with, is made of public and private schools educating for commonness. While the masses are in government schools learning to sit down, follow directions, and above all else, stay on task, other children are in elite prep schools learning how to rule the world. Literally!

I attended several public and private schools before attending an elite prep school. I've experienced both tiers of the education system, and I tell you, the success gap between regular public/private schools and elite prep schools is far greater than can be expressed in this book.

But to give you some idea, 35 percent of prep schoolers, or 1 in 3, are admitted to Ivy League universities, while only 0.01 percent—that's 1 in 10,000—of public schoolers are admitted.

The greatest tech-icon billionaires: Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and Elon Musk are all prep schoolers. I love the example of Gates and Zuckerberg because they both dropped out of Harvard. Zuckerberg was only halfway into his sophomore year when he left. So, where did a 19-year-old get the know-how to start a billion-dollar empire known as Facebook? Prep school, of course.

Bush, Obama, and Trump all attended elite prep schools. Prep schoolers make up just 0.5 percent of the population, but they are 100 percent of the last three presidents.

So, what do prep schools do that public schools don't? Most people assume it has something to do with the \$50,000 price tag. They imagine the high tuition buys better teachers, state-of-the-art facilities, newer textbooks, etc. There may be some truth to that, but largely, the superior results of prep schools are a matter of methods, not means.

Prep schools are not just doing regular school better; they

are deploying an entirely different educational philosophy. Their direction, process, and methods are specifically designed to fashion world leaders, titans of technology, an aristocracy of the arts, princes of politics, barons of business, and kings of commerce.

Many common people imagine if their children study very hard, get good grades, and into a good college, they can be great too. But, it is unlikely because raising children for greatness isn't just about academics. In fact, it is mostly NOT about the academics.

The great distinction between regular schools and elite prep schools is: academic achievement makes up the whole of regular schooling while it is only a small part of a prep school education. Besides academics, an elite education focuses on purpose, mastery, character, etiquette, networking, faith, family, tradition, leadership, and wealth.

Prep schools understand that great men and women are made of more than just high GPAs and SAT scores. But, regular schools still haven't figured this out, so they always produce an inferior education.

Yet, I find most parents still believe in regular schooling and don't understand that its failures are systemic. Even homeschooling families, who have pulled their kids out of the broken public school system, do everything in their power to recreate public school from home—focusing almost entirely on academic achievement. That is crazy!—like going to a bad restaurant, eating a terrible meal, and then asking for the recipe.

It's true, when it comes to academics, homeschoolers do soar over the heads of public schoolers. They disproportionately win academic competitions and score higher on standardized

tests. They go to college at higher rates and are more likely to graduate. Measuring their success in terms of test scores, just like public schools, many homeschoolers are given a false sense of accomplishment up until the point of graduation.

However, once students leave the world of academia and begin the world of career and family, the illusion of their great homeschooling success begins to evaporate. Employers don't care about GPAs or SATs, and a college diploma has the same weight whether it was earned with many As or many Ds. So, when school ends and the real world begins, homeschoolers and public schoolers run mostly shoulder to shoulder in the rat race of life. Homeschoolers took the high road and public schoolers the low road, but both arrive at the same destination: common families, common careers, common faith, common wealth, common health.

Now, that doesn't mean you have to send your children to an elite prep school to raise them for greatness. In fact, as you will see in the next section, I don't recommend it. However, raising your children for greatness *does* require you to adopt the purpose, direction, and many methods of prep schools because prep schools are not just out-performing public schools academically, they are heading to an entirely different destination. The prep school compass is pointed directly up; it is a ladder straight to the top. While public, private, and most home schools are charting a flat, common course with little hope of greatness.

Princes are Tutored

When my first child, Audrey, was born, I intended to send her to an elite prep school, similar to the one I attended.

However, our home state of Idaho has only one prep school, and its room and board cost \$50,000 a year. I could not afford this, so as Audrey approached school age, I debated between an affordable private school or, even, a public charter school. While I was going back and forth deciding, my wife, Janine, began teaching Audrey preschool at home.

By the age of five, Audrey was already reading, doing third-grade math, and naming most of the major cities and countries off of a globe. She was advanced in pretty much everything. We thought we had a genius on our hands, and we weren't going to slow her down by putting her in a "normal" school. So, my wife decided to homeschool Audrey, indefinitely.

When our second child, Emma, was three years of age, my wife began teaching her preschool at home as well. By the time Emma was of school age, we thought we had another genius on our hands. Emma was just as advanced as Audrey was at that same age. "A miracle!" we believed. So, we decided to homeschool Emma too, thinking regular school would also slow her down.

Then came Colton. When he began preschool at home, he was slower than the girls at first, so we thought Colton was just a "normal" kid. But, by the time he turned five, Colton had caught his sisters and even surpassed them in many things like doing complex multiplication in his head, solving large square roots, and even beating his older State-Chess-Champion sister in chess!

By this time, though, we knew better than to call his achievements a "miracle." We had become familiar enough with the homeschooling world to know that the appearance of "genius" amongst homeschooled children is quite common.

I found homeschooling to be extraordinary—mothers with no training, using discount curriculum and local libraries, yet, providing an academic education to rival the best prep schools. Somewhere, I had gotten the idea that homeschooling was second-rate and practiced mostly by quaint religious folk afraid of the real world. However, this notion was blown away by the *reality* of my five-year-old doing complex math problems even many adults cannot solve. How was this possible?!

Although prep schools are the finest schools the world has yet to offer, they are still schools, and thus, share several common flaws with regular schools—the greatest of which, is standardization. Schools employ standard teachers, who teach standard lessons, to standard classes, to meet standard needs of standard children. But of course, there are no standard children. A one-size-fits-all education can fit no child properly.

Prep schools try to combat this disadvantage with small class sizes. The best prep schools boast of classes with a ratio as low as 1:7. This is much better than public schools, where the ratio might be 1 teacher to 30 students, yet not quite so good as the homeschool, where the ratio is 1:1.

The rich and powerful have always understood the advantage of hiring a private tutor or governess to teach and mentor children on a one-on-one basis. It is only in the last few hundred years that affluent families began preferring prep schools to home tutors and governesses—and only as an opportunity for their children to network with other great families throughout the nation and world or have an admissions advantage to elite colleges because of the relationships prep schools have developed with the Ivy League.

Eton College is one of the oldest and most prestigious

prep schools in the world. Annual tuition is nearly \$55,000. Yet, while it has become a favorite of the global elite, it was not founded for such. King Henry VI created Eton College in 1440 as a Catholic charity to gift 70 poor boys a free education. As grand as King Henry made Eton College, it was never meant to educate Henry's own son, Prince Edward, or any other prince. Princes didn't go to school. Schools were a gesture of Christian equalitarianism for those who couldn't afford a quality education but certainly not an adequate means of educating a future king. Peasants were schooled; princes were tutored.

Royal families understood that great men and women cannot be mass-produced, and greatness is not a class children can take or a textbook they can read. Greatness is a way of life, and to bring children up in it, they must have full-time tutors to provide a custom-tailored education. And so, kings used tutors to sculpt and shape their children into masterpieces—works of art, highlighting each child's unique abilities and ambitions.

How good God is then, who gifts all children a mother and father—private tutors—spiritually and biologically suited to meet their individual needs in a way no one else on earth could. So take heart all you home-tutoring mothers and fathers, you offer your children a tremendous privilege, one even the most elite prep schools are unable to replicate. All you have to do is, combine your inherent home-tutoring advantage with the purpose, direction, and methods of the elite prep schools, and you will surely raise your children for greatness—giving them an education fit for a prince!

Home Learning

What children learn is only half as important as *how* they learn, and *who* teaches them. Children's minds are content to learn from a schoolteacher or television program, but their souls want to sit in their mother's lap, to hear her sweet voice reading, and have her laugh and clap after they read their first words. And it is not the laughing or clapping that counts—teachers can do that, too—it is the mother that matters. Mothers are special to children. Children don't need to read books as much as they need to *sit with their mother* and read books. A great teacher can form a child's mind but has little power to touch his heart like his mother and father.

Many of the advantages of home learning are lost on this generation because it measures everything in test scores, not understanding the most important things in life cannot be counted—like love, for instance. Homeschooling mothers have met and exceeded the academic standards of well-funded schools and professional teachers, but schools have not competed with parents in providing children with love because love is not a technique, and it can't be manufactured, bought, or sold. Children are not machines, needing only fuel and programming; they are human beings, requiring much love—and school is a place without much love.

Good teachers do their best, but they have too many students and too many lessons to love school children properly. Besides, parental love is an instinct, not merely a choice. And even if a teacher could feel it, or fake it, children don't want to be loved by their teachers; they only want their parents' love.

Another thing about schools, they are always talking and never listen. "Be quiet" is the first lesson children learn in

school. But children shouldn't be quiet. They need to talk, and at certain ages, all the time. Talking is how children begin to think. They need to hear their thoughts out loud and have others respond. This is a significant part of the learning process.

Children know they need to talk, even if it inconveniences the adults around them. Somewhere between the ages of four and seven, children begin to talk incessantly. I first made this discovery driving to and from Jiu-Jitsu practice. When my oldest son, Colton, first started Jiu-Jitsu, he fell asleep during every car ride. It was nap time, and the ride was long and sunny, so he couldn't help himself. However, shortly after turning six years old, something changed. He woke up and began to talk and didn't stop. He talked about everything that came into his head, offering up a 45-minute monologue going to practice and another one on the way home. Even when he asked me questions, it was only because he wanted to tell me the answers.

One day, Colton started talking, and while he talked my mind drifted, and it was not until we were nearly home that I realized he was still talking. He didn't know I hadn't been listening for nearly half an hour. I felt a little guilty then, and even worse a while later, when he stopped talking. As suddenly as it started, the talking stopped. Colton sat quietly the whole ride there and then the entire trip home.

"Why don't you talk anymore?" I asked.

"Oh, I just like to think and imagine things," he said. It took him a year to talk himself out, and now it was gone, and the car was quiet, and I was sorry for it. Occasionally, I heard Colton mumbling things, but he was only talking to himself.

For many months, our car rides were mostly silent until

my sons, Jonathan and Bennett, began Jiu-Jitsu. Bennett was still in the napping stage, so he slept both ways. But Jonathan was five years old, so he talked and talked and talked. I was more careful to listen this time, realizing, eventually he too would stop, and I'd miss it.

So, for now I have a napper, a talker, and a daydreamer, every car ride to and from Jiu-Jitsu. As I was driving home the other night, I had a sad thought: if my boys were in school, they would be punished for all of this. There is no napping in class, there is certainly no talking, and schools don't like daydreaming either.

School is not suitable for children, and I think it really hurts them. Children aren't meant to fit nicely into perfect standards and block schedules. They are organic, random, contradictory, emotional, feeling creatures, just like us. Sometimes they need a day off, even when it's not the weekend. Sometimes they need to sleep in. And sometimes, they need a hug from their mother—and not always at a convenient time but right in the middle of the day. But there is no mother to hug them at school. Sometimes children need a good hard spanking from their father, but fathers aren't at school either. And sometimes, they need the freedom to make choices for themselves, but school is too scheduled for luxuries like that.

How can children learn anything in a classroom with so many distractions—pretty girls, good friends, class clowns, and obnoxious bullies? Do you think I could write this great book in a crowded classroom, with stale air, and fluorescent lights? No. No one can think in a place like school. When I write, I need a dark room, a comfortable chair, and an area to pace and talk out loud. I require the freedom to get up randomly and go outside and drink coffee. I prefer silence,

usually, but sometimes I like to listen to music. And I can't write according to a dictated schedule. My thoughts come in bursts, and sometimes they come with much labor, and other times, they won't come at all. So, I write when I feel like it. Sometimes I write all night, and other times, I don't write for many days. This is not by choice. I wish I could be creative on command, so I could conveniently schedule my day, but I am a human being, not a machine, so I think and work as I'm inspired.

Children are human beings too, but schools have forgotten, or they just don't care. They offer no flexibility, no inspiration, and they can't be bothered about passions and dreams and freedom and love; schools only have immovable standards, inflexible schedules, impartial teachers, and no recognition that children are individuals.

Right now, my daughter Audrey is in the orchard. Birds are chirping, and it's a cool, sunny, blue-sky day. The last of the snow is melting. Her free-range chickens have followed her, hoping she'll throw some food, but she doesn't notice them because she is reading a book—a book she chose for herself. I don't know what it is; I don't know when she started or when she will end. I only know she is happy to read it. She is free to read all day if she likes, until her heart is content. And Audrey is learning more than I ever learned in school, and with none of the stress and all of the joy. This is how children raised for greatness should learn: happy and at home.

Chapter 2:

RAISING PETER

Neverland

In 1904, when J.M. Barrie wrote *Peter Pan*, Neverland was an imaginary world children escaped to in an effort to never grow up. Today, Neverland is a real world created by adults in an effort to extend childhood. It is no longer the mission of parents to prepare their children for adulthood but to keep children childish for as long as possible and to make childhood a fun and magical experience.

Children should enjoy their childhood, but that should not be a parent's primary objective. A parent's first duty is to ready children to enter the adult world so they can enjoy all stages of their life, not just their "magical" childhood. But, for the most part, that is not happening. Parents have neglected their duties in favor of a good time.

When I see grown women carrying fully-dressed toy poodles in their purses, grown men playing video games late into the night, adults obsessed with sports and celebrities, adults not wanting to get married and never wanting kids, adults in ridiculous costumes still trick-or-treating, millions of adults in prison (a form of extended timeout), adults living paycheck to paycheck while financing expensive toys, an astronomical divorce rate because adults can't get along,

masses of adults playing with sex and then bearing babies out of wedlock, and murdering the unwanted ones, I remember these aren't really adults at all but only large children forever caged in Neverland.

Your children were born for greatness, but they can't achieve it while they live in the nursery world of Neverland. If you are to raise your children for greatness, you need to ask yourself: are you raising a Peter the Great—a man to rule the real world? Or are you raising a Peter Pan—a boy who never grows up?

Make-believe

In childhood, make-believe is the maxim—and not just for children, but for parents as well. I discovered how important make-believe is to parents as soon as I had children of my own. When my eldest son, Colton, was four years old, he caused a real raucous in Sunday school. It was nearly Christmas, and he had been telling other children the truth about Santa Claus.

“Liar!” is what the kids called him. He naively looked to his teachers for support. I can only imagine the sense of betrayal he felt when the adults in the room not only didn't stand up for him, but reported him to his parents for trying to “ruin” Christmas.

But, Colton wasn't the real villain of this story—that was me, his father. I could read it on the faces of his Sunday school teachers and the other parents—an element of disgust for the “killjoy” who told his son, Santa isn't real.

I've seen this face many times. Like when my oldest daughter lost her first tooth.

“How much money did the Tooth Fairy give you for your

tooth?” an adult asked.

“Money? For my tooth?!” exclaimed my puzzled daughter. Then that accusatory look in my direction—killjoy!

Why must we lie to our children? Will our lies help prepare them for adulthood? No. But lying is so fun! And isn’t fun what childhood is all about?

In the world of Neverland, little girls aspire to be princesses and little boys, superheroes. I suppose I can accept “princess” as a life goal so long as our daughters are developing realistic plans to raise an army, in order to overthrow a country, so they can establish a monarchy, crown their father king, and thereby, become a princess. But, if they think a prince is just going to fall out of the sky, fall in love with them, and they’ll ride off into the sunset, well, they are still playing make-believe.

And I don’t mean to spoil the fun, but how does a boy become Spiderman, shooting webs from his wrists? I know, I’m no fun, but don’t our boys deserve real heroes? Heroes can be powerful things, you know, but when *real* heroes are replaced with make-believe *superheroes*, they lose the power to impact our children in real and meaningful ways. My children would be hard-pressed to name more than one or two superheroes, but they could tell you all about the great and inspiring men and women of history—those are *their* heroes.

Having stripped your children of fantasy, you will discover children are not as superficial as you thought; every ounce of their being is burning to enter your world, where they are taken seriously, and their actions matter. Let them escape the confines of Neverland’s make-believe, so they may be raised for greatness, in the wonderful world of real.

Children at Play

In the 1980s, Toys “R” Us produced a popular marketing jingle. The main chorus repeated over and over in the heads of millions of children and parents: “I don’t wanna grow up, I’m a Toys ‘R’ Us kid.” This idea that children shouldn’t want to grow up and parents should buy them lots of toys to keep them childish, became a kind of mantra for modern childhood and parenting. Parents stuffed their children’s rooms to the ceiling with toys. These piles of toys made Toys “R” Us very rich, but they robbed childhood of its richness and really did create a generation of children who “don’t wanna grow up.” But growing up is what childhood is really all about.

Toys make it harder for children to grow up. I didn’t always know this. I used to believe the toy manufactures who told us children learn by playing with toys. So, like every other modern parent, I turned my entire house into a giant toy bin—every single room! Our house was always a mess, and the kids could barely clear a path to their beds, but at least I was giving them an *authentic* childhood, or so I thought.

My son, Colton, received a toy toolset for his birthday one year. He was ecstatic...for about five minutes. Colton picked up the hammer and a large plastic nail and began to pound it, just like he’d seen his daddy do so many times. Only his hammer didn’t work. The nail bobbed about with every hit until the plastic seam spilt, and it was broken. He pounded another toy nail. It was also defective, unable to pierce even the softest materials.

So, he put the hammer aside and picked up his saw, but it was worthless, unable to cut through anything. He pressed down as hard as he could and only managed to flatten a few of

the saw's plastic teeth. He looked back at me in utter disbelief.

"My tools don't work," he said.

"They are toys. You just have to pretend," I replied. But he didn't want to play pretend. He wanted to work, to build and create, just like his father.

Then I had an epiphany: why not buy Colton some real tools? Later that year for Christmas, Colton got a little hammer, some wrenches, screwdrivers, a tape measure, and a tool bag. It was a huge hit! He *works* with them all the time. And now, whenever a table leg is loose, he comes running with his wrenches. Colton got his real tools when he was five years old, and he still loves them. And sometimes, I borrow them because they are real and useful.

I wonder how many little girls labor over plastic stoves to serve plastic meals, when, what they really want—what they really need—is to be invited into the kitchen to cook alongside their mother.

My oldest child, Audrey, played with dolls. She carried them about everywhere with her, she kissed them, and sang them to sleep, as if they were the real thing. But, when my second child was of doll-playing age, she wasn't interested because by then, she had the real thing—little baby brothers.

Toy manufacturers are going to great lengths to create life-like baby dolls. Why? Because they understand little girls don't really want dolls, they want babies to care for. Just look at Baby Alive, a doll that drinks from a bottle, needs burped, can spit up, and even goes potty.

Even mealtime has become playtime. With adults allowing children a steady diet of "fun" food over nutritious meals, manufacturers have created real "toy" food for children to play with and eat. A colorful caricature of compressed sugar

for breakfast, a happy meal of salty-grease for lunch (which of course comes with a toy), and then for “din-din” some artificially cheesy noodles—these are the things that come to mind when I think of kids’ meals. I know, healthy is no fun! It’s yucky! However, in a society with childhood obesity and diabetes epidemics, I prefer my kids eat nutritious grown-up food.

Once upon a time, adults and children shared the same kinds of entertainment. Television shows and films like *Anne of Green Gables*, *The Sound of Music*, *John Wayne*, and *The Andy Griffith Show* used to be meaningful family entertainment, enjoyed by children and adults alike. But, in Neverland, children’s entertainment must be supremely childish, flashy, colorful, wildly exciting, and insanely stupid. And adolescent entertainment must be appropriately inappropriate because in Neverland that is all that separates little children from big children.

Modern educators would have us believe that kids learn best through play. Well, I’ve made a remarkable discovery, kids learn more by working. And play isn’t even more fun. Play quickly becomes boring and depressing because it teaches and produces so little.

So, while other kids collect *Magic* cards, my son happily collects seeds to plant in his garden. While other kids care for plastic baby dolls, my daughters help care for their baby brothers. While other kids raise Giga pets, my kids raise chickens, goats, sheep, and cows for produce and profit. While other little girls are in play kitchens busily creating inedible plastic meals, my little daughters are cooking meals for our family, in a real kitchen with real food. While other boys are beating video game levels, my six-year-old son is working to

code his own video games.

It is true, the child who works too hard, too early, is stunted, but so is the child who plays too long. There comes a time in every child's life when his parents must interrupt his Neverland of play and lead him out into the real world of work.

Pets

It has come to my attention that in this entire book, with all the controversial things I say, this section on *Pets* really hits a nerve with some parents. Americans love their pets, and many believe pets are a child's right. If you feel that strongly about it, let your kids keep their pets. It is not going to ruin them, and you could use it to teach your children the responsibility of caring for another living creature.

However, this book is about maximizing our children's strategic advantages, and in most cases, pets are a distraction. A pet is a kind of living stuffed animal that serves no other purpose than to be played with and looked at. There was a time when animals were useful—you ate your cows, your chickens gave you eggs, your dog guarded your livestock, your cat kept disease-ridden rodents at bay. That time is no more.

Maybe, it makes more sense when the pet is a dog or cat, but American children are keeping rodents in their bedrooms! They are feeding and caring for rats, animals that nearly wiped out our ancestors by spreading the Black Death. What a wonderful way for our children to invest their time and money—caring for rodents! Perhaps, when they are older, they can leave grain out in the garage to feed all the stray and homeless rodents.

Look, I had a hamster when I was a kid, so I totally understand the pleasure of watching a tiny creature being driven insane by living its life in a box, running endlessly on a wheel that goes nowhere. At risk of once again being a killjoy, I'm just going to suggest that only in the land of Disney do people have relationships with rats.

I once considered buying my daughter a pet hamster for her birthday, imagining it would be a great way to teach her responsibility. But, wouldn't it actually be the height of irresponsibility to pour time, money, and energy into the care of a rodent—one that didn't need or especially want to be caged and cared for in the first place?

I would urge you to think twice even about getting a family dog. For Christmas, a few years ago, we bought a German shepherd puppy. It really did make for a magical Christmas, but all the magic was gone by New Year's. My kids thought they were getting a living toy, but this toy could bite. His puppy teeth shredded our kids' clothes—nearly every outfit, every single day. He shredded our inside and outside furniture. He killed the quail I was raising for food. He dug up all the plants in my garden. He barked endlessly at the neighbors. He peed and pooped on the carpet and chewed about 15 feet of siding along our house.

The up-front cost was 1,000 dollars to buy the puppy. Then he cost me several thousand more in damages to our house, furniture, and yard, and between food and vet visits, we spend about 1,000 dollars a year on this puppy. And that is just the monetary cost. There is also the time we invest in caring for him. Between walks, picking up dog poop, and other things, we likely invest an hour a day into our pet dog—that's 7 hours a week, or roughly 28 hours a month.

And did the kids even enjoy their pet? Well, like I said, our puppy was magical for about a week. After that, the reality of caring for an animal set in. The kids couldn't remember to keep his water bowl full; they forgot to feed him; they didn't like grooming him; they were unable to walk him on a leash, and most of all, they hated picking up his poop.

Our magical week of fun cost us thousands of dollars and hours. Yet, as parents, we wonder, "Can we give our kids an authentic childhood without including a few pets?"

My affinity for owning pets changed when I left the city and moved to a farm in the country. Our pet, who was much trouble in the city, is great help as a farm dog. He helped me trap several skunks that killed our chickens. He chases deer out of the orchard and garden. He keeps my kids safe when they go for a hike or play at the creek. He has helped me push cows and even a few bulls off of our property. A farm dog is not a pet. He isn't there only to be played with; he is there to work. That makes the time, money, and energy wisely invested.

Children should not be working to feed and shelter animals that can offer nothing and would do better on their own in the wild. And so, in my house, pets are no longer welcome—no lizards, fish, hamsters, rats, snakes, cats, frogs, or dogs in the house. On our farm, we care for chickens, goats, cows, a barn cat, and a farm dog. Each of these animals rewards our care with something useful—eggs, milk, meat, rodent control, and security.

If you live in the city and livestock is not an option, remember animals don't have to be owned or caged to be useful. Take your children fishing, hunting, bird watching, or have them pet sit—then they can get paid to have that magical

pet week, instead of paying for it.

Sports

It was a perfect shot—one that had taken the boy years to master. The crowd cheered wildly, but I sat quietly, wondering, “Is this not insanity?” The world has real problems that need solving, real skills that need mastering, and here we are, training our youth to put a ball in a net.

Oh, I don’t really mind sports. My kids play soccer, basketball, football, baseball, badminton, and many other sports but only with their friends in our backyard. They love it. It’s great fun and exercise. However, when kids start treating sports as if they matter, investing thousands of hours to master artificial skills like putting a ball in a hoop or end zone, they are really playing make-believe in Neverland.

Childhood is a flash. Our kids will soon be adults. They will soon need to feed and shelter themselves and their own children. In the wonderful world of real, employers don’t care that they can run the 100-meter dash .3 seconds faster than anyone else in the state. Employers care about marketable skills.

Now, it is possible to be a marketable athlete, or professional baller. If that is your plan, I commend you for thinking about the future. But, I also feel the need to warn you that you might have an easier time winning the lottery.

If your boy plays football in high school, his odds of going pro are 1 in 4,233. Remember, that isn’t 1 out of every 4,233 people; that is 1 out of every 4,233 high school football players—guys practicing and training just as hard as your son. For basketball, the odds are 1 in 11,771; baseball: 1 in 659;

hockey: 1 in 598; and soccer: 1 in 5,768.

Now, before you get too excited and think your kid has a chance, you should know most professional athletes only play for about 10 years. In the NFL, most careers only last 3 years. And by the way, for most professional athletes, those glory days aren't even prosperous. Many professional athletes can't make a living, especially females.

Even in the NFL, the median salary is only \$860,000. And most rookies start off at half of that. Then, taxes will take another half. And again, for most, it's all over in 3 years. And, that is the NFL.

Compare that to the Men's Soccer League. In the USA, professional male soccer players usually start off making between \$30,000 and \$40,000 a year. Even the highest paid players aren't likely to make much more than \$200,000 a year. And the women make much less because their audience size is so much smaller. So, even if your children win the lottery of professional sports, they still aren't likely to get the windfall they've dreamed about.

It's not that I'm against sports. It's that I'm against wasting time. Time is precious. Our children have little time left before they are going to be out on their own, providing for their own families. Professional sports is a child's dream of getting paid to play, but unless you expect your child to be one of those lottery-winning professional athletes, you should encourage them to be more strategic with their time.

Trivial Pursuit

Can you tell me the name of the ship Christopher Columbus sailed to America on? The Santa Maria, very good!

Now, here is a harder question: if you didn't know the name of Columbus's ship, how would your life be any different?

History is so boring in school because it is utterly irrelevant and mostly useless. The Song Dynasty ruled China from 960 to 1279 AD, but so what? What can children do with such knowledge? Will this knowledge grow their faith, feed their families, make them wealthy, or live longer? Or is history taught in school merely to pass the time of day?

In the 1980s, a new game called *Trivial Pursuit* became very popular in the United States. Trivia is defined as unimportant facts and information. So, the name of the game literally means: the pursuit of meaningless facts and information. You win the game by knowing the most irrelevant and unimportant things.

Many popular game shows, like *Jeopardy!* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, were created for modern scholars to show off how much trivia (unimportant facts) they have memorized. But unfortunately, game shows are the only time and place that trivia can make you rich.

A trivial pursuit makes sense as a board game, something to play with friends to pass an evening. And if you've got enough trivia bouncing around in your head to win a small fortune on some game show, why wouldn't you? But, I warn you not to mistake a trivial pursuit for a proper education, as so many American students do. It could cost you dearly, up to a quarter of your life and a mountain of college debt.

For those of us raising children for greatness, we must be willing to lose the trivial pursuit so that we can win life's essential pursuits. Time is not infinite, and there is more to know than can ever be known. Therefore, the ability to give your children an accelerated education will largely depend

on what you choose not to teach them. This is extremely important, so I will repeat it: your ability to give your children an accelerated education largely depends on what you DO NOT teach them. Now, I'm not saying you should teach less overall, just less of the non-essential. The reason you filter the non-essential is to free up more time to teach the things that actually matter.

Between school and university, children spend thousands of hours learning the world's histories, but most learn little of their own history. The history of their own faith and their own family. School children will learn of the millions of Europeans who died from the Bubonic plague but won't know of their own family's history of cancer and Alzheimer's. If history is to teach us about our roots and identity, shouldn't our children study the history of their great grandparents twice as long as they study the history of ancient kingdoms? If our children are to learn about the mistakes of history, so they don't repeat them, isn't it more urgent to teach them how grandfather lost the family farm to a bank than to teach them how the cotton gin transformed the textile industry?

If there are no great lessons from your family's history, it is still essential children study it, with the understanding that their own life and history will be read by their own grandchildren someday. Few histories are so precious as our own, and our children will act better and achieve more, simply by knowing that their own history will be recorded and their deeds, remembered. Family history is not trivia; it is absolutely essential and should be a part of every homeschool curriculum.

Schools teach many things that are no longer essential. Cursive writing might be one of them. Like it or not,

penmanship is becoming less and less essential in the digital age. I haven't used cursive, except to sign my name, in almost twenty years.

Spelling and grammar are also becoming less important—and I say this as a published author, even as one who has helped write grammar textbooks for children. There was a time when rote memory of grammar rules and spelling words was absolutely essential. However, today, there is a smartphone in almost every pocket. We can speak into it, and it will type and spell for us. We have elaborate spelling and grammar programs that autocorrect. And we have the Internet to look up anything we aren't sure about. Of course, my children still study spelling and grammar, just not to the extreme of previous generations. However, this doesn't mean my children study less; it only means their studies have shifted. For instance, we take the time and energy previously assigned to memorizing spelling lists and devote it to developing better writing and communication skills.

People often mock Donald Trump for his bad spelling and grammar. Yet, he is still the President of the United States, and before that, he was one of the most successful billionaires in the world. So, if Donald Trump has bad spelling and grammar and is still one of the most successful and powerful men in the world, I wonder, is that an argument against him or against the over-importance of spelling and grammar? Maybe Donald Trump was learning more profitable skills and knowledge, while his less successful critics were too busy memorizing spelling and grammar rules.

In the age of mass production, the skills of sewing, quilting, and crafting are also no longer essential. Even if our children could sew their own clothes, would it really be

worth the time, planning, and energy, when they could buy something similar for a few dollars at a secondhand store? You can still like sewing as a hobby, but it is no longer part of an essential curriculum unless, of course, your daughter wants to be a professional seamstress or fashion designer.

If you are to raise your children for greatness, leave the schools to their trivial pursuits while you help your children master the essentials.

Pursuit of Life

If I live to age 76—the average for men in the U.S.—and eat three meals a day, that means I will eat 83,220 meals in my lifetime. I wish I would have learned how to cook. And not just the basics. Food is a huge part of our lives, it should be a huge part of our children's education.

In *Revealing School*, I lamented my inability to cook, and one woman challenged me, saying school didn't stop me from learning how to cook—I still could have learned at home. But I didn't! That's the point. I didn't think to. My pursuit was college, and cooking wasn't on the SAT. I was perfecting a college resume, doing every sport, every club, all the extra credit, and there wasn't any time left for cooking.

My education was all backward. I worked my butt off to master calculus, and I have yet to solve a single calculus problem outside of academia. But, I'm faced with a meal three times every single day. Teaching kids calculus before they know how to cook is like teaching kids about fashion before they can tie their shoes. But, we don't think about that because we are pursuing college, not life.

Well, college is not a pursuit. It might be a step along the

way, but it is certainly not a destination. So, we shouldn't be educating for college, we should be educating for life.

Long before any teaching takes place, we must decide what we want to accomplish. Are we preparing our children for Jeopardy, or will their education enhance their future lives outside of academia? The things that affect our happiness the most are: our faith, family, finances, and fitness (health)—these are the 4 great pursuits of life. Sadly, when it comes to these four life pursuits, America is highly deficient.

Faith? We are at an all-time low. Family? About fifty percent of marriages end in divorce. And that is the good news. The bad news is, divorce is going down because more and more people are just shacking up. That leads to less divorce but even more broken homes. Finances? Americans trade almost exclusively in debt, not dollars. We've sold ourselves into slavery. And fitness? You've probably heard about the obesity epidemic. All this, while a record number of Americans are graduating college.

Children know how to get into college, but they don't know how to live. If our children are going to study for a standardized test, it should be the one test we all must take, what I call the "deathbed test." At the end of their lives, our children will not regret an "F" in algebra, the way they will regret an "F" in family.

Faith, family, finances, and fitness are the four F's of fulfillment. Will our children be on their deathbeds prematurely because they neglected their health? On their deathbeds, will they be ready to meet their Maker? Will they be at peace with their families? Will they have an inheritance to leave their children?

No. Preparing kids for college isn't enough. An elite education has to do more. It has to prepare children for life.

Chapter 3:

CURRICULUM

A Path To Greatness

A great education requires a great curriculum, and a great curriculum is more than a tall stack of books. Very few people seem to really understand this because they often buy a cookie-cutter curriculum out of a catalog and usually the same one for each of their children. Then when their children score above average on the state's standardized tests, they think it's proof their curriculum is working. But, doing well on a standardized test is only proof that a child is exceptionally *standard*—nothing to be overly excited about.

Every curriculum is a path designed to take a student from one place to another. A public school curriculum is a path from childhood into corporate America by transforming young, bright-eyed dreamers into standard units of labor.

For those of us raising children for greatness, we cannot follow the common path. We must find or forge a curriculum that leads our bright-eyed dreamers into the reality of their dreams.

Custom Tailored

Children have unique dreams, so they must have a unique,

custom-tailored curriculum to match. And it is not possible to purchase a truly custom curriculum in a catalog, nor can you preplan it.

This is the hardest thing for people to understand. Parents always wonder why Blue Manor Academy doesn't have a preplanned learning schedule or a day-to-day lesson outline. But how could we? It might take one child five days to master a skill or concept another child learns in five minutes. Every child has different strengths and weaknesses; every child has different ambitions and abilities. A great curriculum molds itself to the child, not the child to the curriculum. The moment a curriculum is standardized, it is no longer custom.

So, how does Blue Manor Academy's curriculum work? We lay out a broad learning path that points children in the right direction but allows them to work at their own pace. We also understand our curriculum is incomplete because some things are learned better outside of a classroom, like leadership, for example. And we make sure our parents know this and recommend ways for them to fill in the gaps.

In addition to our curriculum, we advise parents to find additional resources to meet their child's unique abilities and ambitions. For instance, if their daughter wants to be a great author, she will need more in the way of language than their son, who wants to be an architect, but she will require less math than him. So, after meeting the minimum academic requirements our curriculum provides, the son might work extra calculus problems while the daughter diagrams sentences.

A great curriculum must also customize for individual learning preferences. When my oldest daughter started to seriously study art and illustration, I pointed her to a

professional curriculum that did wonders for me. However, she found my preferred curriculum boring and confusing compared to a free art channel she discovered on YouTube. So, which art curriculum is better, mine or hers? It is always the one that best works for the student.

Now, sometimes, what works best for a child is not what the child likes best. Children will always prefer the fun, easy, and stylish curriculum, but that doesn't automatically make it the best custom fit. What children like best, is rarely what they need most. You are still the parent, so it's your job to pick the resources that first meet all their needs, and then second, meets their wants.

In my home, we put most of our energy into teaching our children to read as early as possible. Once we have a competent reader, we step back and allow them to take the reigns of their own education. They can't do whatever they like, but we give them enough freedom to follow their passions. While our children use Blue Manor Academy as their primary curriculum, we also offer them an array of preapproved books, videos, websites, YouTube channels, and apps. Then, we allow them to make their own schedules and set their own goals. This permits maximum customization while also greatly reducing our parental workload.

Our children rarely study every subject every day. Instead, they study in bursts. At this very moment, my three oldest kids are all playing a math game from a newly discovered website. They started playing the game a few days ago and will probably play until the end of the week. Then, they will get bored and move on to something else.

When my children first discovered Google Earth, they studied geography for several weeks, looking up old homes

they had lived in and famous places they hope to visit someday. For about a month, they were transfixed on the stock market after finding an app that allowed them to invest fake money. In the final months of the 2016 presidential election, my kids learned all about the Electoral College and political parties. They chose to watch the debates and follow the polls. And on Election Day, they tracked the live election results, state by state, until nearly midnight. A week or two before the state chess championships, my kids play chess every day, all day. Then, when the tournament is over, their chess enthusiasm dies, and they pursue something else to study.

Once, after watching the movie *The Sound of Music*, they were very interested in the history of World War II. And after watching *The Fiddler on the Roof*, they wanted to know all about the Russian history of the Jews and the Communist Revolution. A fairy-tale movie will often inspire my children to read the original story in the following weeks.

This is how you would expect children to learn—with intense energy and excitement, deeply lost in discovery until their curiosity is satisfied, at which point, they bounce on to the next wonder. This is very different from a standard school curriculum, which says, “It is 2 pm on Thursday; therefore, we will now study grammar.” The time to stop studying is when the mind is satisfied, not when the bell rings. That means some lessons will last five minutes and some will last forever.

However, this mode of education should not be confused with unschooling—an educational philosophy that allows children to study whatever they want, whenever they like. The methods of raising children for greatness share many similarities with the unschooling movement, especially since we do our best to follow a child’s natural passions, preferences,

and inclinations. But make no mistake, the parent is closely observing, always leading, ready to step in and take charge, if necessary. We know where we are taking our children; we have a clear direction and destination in mind. We only give them freedom so they can run ahead, not so they can fall behind or get themselves lost.

There are, of course, standard things every child should learn and understand, like counting and reading. We might allow our children some freedom as to the means and methods of learning those essential subjects, but not learning them is not an option.

Generally, we have our children study for about two hours, sometime after breakfast and chores. During this time, they must study a few of the common subjects like history, math, geography, reading, etc. They do this on their own and then show us what they've accomplished. If we are impressed, they are free to learn whatever they want for the rest of the day. But, if we are not impressed, we send them back to continue their formal studies until they can prove they have learned something new. After that, they too, are free to follow their passions.

However, even as children follow their passions, these passions should lead in our desired direction. As parents, we must serve a grand academic feast with more goodness than could ever be devoured. Our children should be able to pick through as they please, but we won't have them sneaking off to the pantry to devour mouthfuls of teeth-rotting junk—full of flavor, but with no nutrition. We must demand our children's education is balanced and nutritious, and we won't allow overly picky eaters who avoid math or always choose comic books for their reading time.

Customizing a curriculum for your children is no easy task. Your children will have to try a few on, and even then, you will likely only find a good, possibly great, but certainly never a perfect fit. And every year your children will grow, and what fit before, will soon be constricting them. You will have to measure your children once or twice a year and adjust their curriculum accordingly. But don't let this discourage you. Whatever you come up with will be a far better fit than public school's one-size-fits-all approach to education.

The Last Caveman

Have you ever heard the story of the cowboy and the last caveman? It happened about 150 years ago in Texas. At the end of a long day driving cattle, a cowboy needed to use the restroom. Being the gentleman that he was, he excused himself from the other men and found a nice cave for privacy.

The minute he dropped his drawers, there was a terrible commotion. Apparently, somebody lived in that cave. The cave was home to the last surviving caveman. The caveman was furious! How dare a cowboy use his home for a toilet!

The caveman wanted to fight, but the cowboy, a true gentleman, suggested a duel instead. The caveman's weapon of choice was a club—a very big club. Now, the cowboy had his pistol and, being an honorable man, wanted a fair fight, so he suggested the caveman use a pistol too. However, the caveman took one look at the tiny bullet and laughed: “You no fool caveman. I keep club!”

When the duel began, the caveman raised his large club high above his head with two hands, and then heard a loud “bang.” It was the last thing, the last caveman ever heard.

Parents, when it comes to your children's education, DON'T be the last caveman! Embrace technology. Believe in classical education, but with modern technology.

A few years ago, I was shocked to find how controversial technology is in the homeschooling community. At a large homeschool convention, I took a poll and found to my surprise that exactly 100 percent of the mothers there still preferred paperback textbooks to computer-based learning programs.

I tried explaining the benefits of computer-based learning to one mother: "It's cheaper, you can access it anywhere, you get free updates, auto-testing, audio, video, sound effects, games..."

She interrupted, "I know, I know, but there is just something special about the feel of paper." I laughed because I thought she was joking, but she wasn't joking.

Others explained that looking at a screen isn't healthy. This is mostly a myth we created for kids who play video games too much, but I get it, our generation was raised on paper books, and we have an unjustifiable attachment to them. It's called nostalgia.

I'm sure in ancient times, when people went from stone tablets to parchment paper, there were those same people protesting, "If it isn't written in stone, it just don't feel right!"

I don't want you to be anti-paper. I just want you to be open to computer-based learning. It is the future of education. And we have to allow the new generations to embrace superior technology if we want them to get superior results.

A few years ago, my daughter competed in her first state chess championship. Nobody knew who she was. It was only her first year playing chess. She was not ranked, and she was not a member of any team or club. We sat quietly together in

a far corner of the main hall because all the seats and tables were taken by school teams.

Audrey's first match was against one of the top-ranked players from the largest chess club in town, and his instructor was a grandmaster. The boy must have thought his first match was going to be easy against this unknown little girl.

Instead, Audrey beat him quickly. Then she checkmated the next opponent, won again, and so on until she was in the final championship round. Her opponent was a little boy whose entire family came to watch, including some aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Audrey beat him too—it wasn't even close—and became the Second Grade Idaho State Chess Champion.

Most people attributed Audrey's sensational victory to me, her father. I must have taught her how to play so well. In truth, I played a very small role. I mean, what could I teach my daughter that her opponent's grandmaster instructor couldn't teach him to do even better?

So what was Audrey's secret? How did a little girl become a state champion her first year playing chess without the aid of teams, clubs, coaches, and grandmasters? Simple, she harnessed the power of technology. While other kids were paying up to \$65 an hour for private lessons from a grandmaster instructor, my daughter was paying \$5 a month to learn chess at an online site called Chesskids.com. She had unlimited access to lessons, videos, puzzles, and games from the comfort of our living room. She didn't rely on me or any other adult because she had a computer ready to teach her 24 hours a day.

So, why don't more homeschooling parents ride the technology wave?—because there is just something about the

feel of paper.

Look, I'm not trying to mock anyone. I like paper books, too. In fact, I own an education company, and believe it or not, in addition to our online curriculum, we sell lots of amazing paper books. I have personally written and illustrated many paper books, and my own kids use paper books all the time. Books are fun! However, raising our children for greatness also requires us to take advantage of the computer age and technological innovation. Embracing computer-based learning will not only ensure our children are getting the highest quality academic education but will also help them excel in an ever-increasingly digital world.

The Classics

Most educators believe it is only their job to teach children how to read, as if reading were its own virtue. You can see this in summer reading programs that reward children merely for reading, regardless of what they read. However, if we are to raise our children for greatness, we must go a step further, not only teaching our children to read but teaching them to read *good* books—a slight difference that makes all the difference in the world.

The great advantage of modern printing presses, libraries, and the Internet is that books have become more accessible to us than at any time in history. But, the great disadvantage is, there are more books than could ever be read in many lifetimes, and unfortunately, many unworthy books are being shelved alongside timeless classics, giving them an appearance of equality. So, there are children who have read the entire series of *Goosebumps* but have never touched anything by

Tolstoy, Dickens, or Shakespeare. This is unfortunate because the classics are the academic meat and potatoes of an elite education.

The classics are the classics for a reason. They are the books that changed the world in their time and continue to impact the world in our time. Classics are timeless and as powerful and relevant now as the day they were written.

It is true, they are not easy books to read. They are thick books and sometimes contain sentences that go on for pages. They require readers to have a dictionary close at hand and discuss big ideas, forcing their readers to think hard. No, they are not easy books, but they are worthy books.

I understand why children prefer to rot their own brains with “book candy,” in the form of fantasy novels and comics, rather than be challenged by the classics. But, I have never understood why many parents and teachers allow it and even contribute to their children’s educational malnutrition by replacing the classics with nothing more than third-rate textbooks that boil powerful thoughts and ideas down into academic baby food, with nothing for children to chew on and little to swallow. Textbooks do most of the thinking, feeling, and concluding for children and more often than not, reflect the publisher’s opinions over the thoughts of the original classic authors. And I say all this, as a publisher of many textbooks.

However, textbooks at Blue Manor Academy are merely introductions to the classics; they are not meant to replace them. For instance, I have written a Bible textbook, but I would not dare substitute my textbook for actual Bible reading. My Bible textbook actually is baby food, intended for very young children, and I would not consider any child’s education complete until he had read the entire Bible from

cover to cover for himself. Textbooks are only introductions to the great thoughts and ideas reflected in the timeless classics but never a suitable replacement.

A history textbook is no substitute for reading Herodotus' *Histories*. A language textbook is no substitute for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. A math textbook is no substitute for Isaac Newton's *Arithmetica Universalis*. A science textbook is no substitute for Albert Einstein's *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*. An economics textbook is no substitute for Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. A civics textbook is no substitute for Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. A public speaking textbook is no substitute for Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*. A philosophy textbook is no substitute for Plato's *Republic*. A religious textbook is no substitute for Saint Augustine's *The City of God*.

Besides textbooks, beware of other impostors that often replace the classics and come in the form of movies, abridged editions, and children's books. Books usually become classics for three reasons: the story is incredible, the writing is wonderful, or the information is invaluable, and the best classics are a combination of all three. When a book is a classic because of its wonderful language (like the plays of Shakespeare), it should never be rewritten into a simpler book for younger audiences because the very thing that made it worth reading in the first place—its beautiful diction—is lost. It is fine to rewrite certain stories for children, like Aesop's fables, when the important thing is the moral of the story, not the writing, but don't let your kids read a child's version of *Hamlet*!

Occasionally, a movie comes out that is as good as the book, or even better, like *Anne of Green Gables* for instance.

Anne of Green Gables was a marvelous adaptation of the book, but because I saw the movie first, the book was spoiled. I tried to read it a few years ago, but it couldn't keep my attention because I knew everything that was going to happen. This has also happened in reverse like when I read *Gone With the Wind* before seeing the movie. I read the book when I was sixteen, and it was so good, I finished it in a week. However, when I watched the film afterward, it was horrible. Scarlett O'Hara wasn't anything like I imagined her, and the story was boring because, again, I knew everything that was going to happen. There was no suspense. You must choose between the book or the movie for the first impression, and unless the movie is as exceptional as *Anne of Green Gables*, I prefer my children read the book first.

I generally despise abridged versions of the classics. Who is a publisher to abridge or rewrite a greater man's work, as if the publisher knows better than the author what is worth reading? Much meaning is lost in these abridged classics, and the language is often of lower quality. If your child is not ready to handle a full, unabridged classic, then wait until he is. It is better to wait than to push ahead with an inferior adaptation.

Just as bad as replacing the classics is avoiding them altogether, but some Christian educators do this because they are afraid. And who can blame them? The classics are powerful, and many are dangerously powerful. The writings of Machiavelli, Luther, Marx, Voltaire, Wollstonecraft, Paine, Darwin, Nietzsche, and others have led to war, revolution, genocide, and caused many to lose faith in God and His Church.

However, a great education must wrestle with all the great ideas that have shaped the world—for the better and for the

worst. It is not good to hide our children from bad ideas or to make bad ideas sound worse than they are by turning them into strawmen for our children to easily tear down because eventually, our children are going to have to do real battle with those bad ideas, and they won't fall over so easily as the strawmen we trained our kids to defeat.

You might need to wait until your children are old enough to handle the heavy subject matters, and there are times to censor parts of books when they are so filthy and foul they borderline pornography, as some of Voltaire's writings do. But, for the most part, do not hide your children from the arguments of supremacists, Nazis, communists, capitalists, feminists, pagans, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Protestants, or Catholics, and do not misrepresent their arguments or oversimplify their motives and reasoning. Be willing to accept what is true, but also help your children identify what is false.

You can be sure I hate communism, and so, you can be doubly sure my children will read the entire Communist Manifesto. It would be foolish to merely dismiss communists as crazy, the way leftists dismiss conservatives as hateful, because eventually my kids will meet a real communist, and he is going to say communism is all about caring for the poor and promoting equality, and that isn't going to sound so "crazy." But my children won't fall for the "communism is equality" rhetoric because they will have read the radical calls for bloody revolution, the stealing of all property, and the end of marriage, family, religion, and faith from the classic communist himself, Karl Marx.

If we are to raise our children for greatness, we must be willing to show them the enemy's strongest arguments unabridged and as unfiltered as possible, and teach our

children to do battle with those. So, when our children leave the protection of our house, they know who they are, what they believe, why they believe it, and will be able to defend their faith and values against even the Devil's lies.

And, take heart, not all the classics are hostile. Some are allies and champions of the truth, like the works of Aquinas and C.S. Lewis. Also remember, the greatest classic, the Holy Bible, is on our side. And have faith, as St. Augustine did, that God's "truth is like a lion; you don't have to defend it. Let it loose; it will defend itself."

Whether you like them or not, the classics have greatly impacted the world, and your children must wrestle honestly with them. Do not be afraid of, run away from, hide, dilute, or replace the classics, but stand firm on the truth and do battle—that is what a great education is.

Layer-learning

We have all seen those funny man-on-the-street interviews where somebody asks a high school or college student a basic question like, "What is the largest country in South America?" And we've all had a good laugh when the student answers something absurd like, "Africa." But, it's not funny—it's a trillion-dollar national disgrace! They should be ashamed of themselves! No, I don't mean the students should be ashamed. After all, they didn't educate themselves. I don't blame the teachers either since they are just doing what they are trained and paid to do. I blame the administrators who are always coming up with brilliant new ways to lower academic achievement.

These administrators have done the impossible: they have

perfected a system in which the most intelligent creatures on planet earth study for 13 long years and learn almost nothing. They call their system “public schooling,” but I call it a “know-nothing-education.”

There are about a million things wrong with public schooling, and I discuss them extensively in my other book *Revealing School*, but one of the biggest reasons children learn so little after studying so long is that schools teach subjects in blocks. One year you get US History, another World History, one year Physics, and the next Chemistry. Students are forced through a block-learning cycle of being ignorant, then overwhelmed, then cramming, and finally, forgetting.

During my junior year, I took Honors Chemistry. I was stressed out to the max as I crammed every night until I passed the final exam, and now I can remember nothing! It is as if I never studied chemistry at all. If asked today, I could not even fill in the periodic table. I worked so hard but did not retain anything. And this didn't just happen with chemistry. It was the same for most subjects.

Instead of teaching subjects in blocks like this, it is much wiser to study subjects in layers. Basically, you take the same block of instruction, but spread it out over years, starting with the most basic concepts, and then add layers as each concept is mastered.

A few years ago, I was the Christian Education Director at a church, and I used this principle of "layer-learning" to develop a Bible curriculum. Traditionally, Sunday schools teach the Bible in blocks, usually story or theme blocks, but I did something different. I took the entire Bible and boiled it down to six essential stories: Creation, Fall, Judgment, Promise, Chosen People, and Jesus. For each story, I only

gave the kids a few-sentence synopsis. This meant, in just a few lessons, kids got a basic understanding of the entire Bible message from start to finish. The entire Bible in a nutshell—that was the first layer. Only when the kids had mastered and memorized the first layer, did I add the next.

The second layer covered everything from layer 1 but also began filling the gaps between the first six stories. Layer 3 reviewed layers 1 and 2 and then continued to fill in gaps. Each layer reviewed the previous material and then added more. The students were never overwhelmed, and they never forgot because the material was constantly being reviewed, lesson after lesson, year after year.

Think of a picture. Say the canvas is 100 feet by 100 feet. School would break the canvas into one-foot by one-foot blocks, analyze each block to death, and then move on, block by block. It would be very confusing because you would never be able to see the whole picture, so you would struggle to see how each block fit together in the greater scene.

In the layered approach, you stand far back, take in the entire painting all at once and see how it all works together—that is layer 1. Take a step forward, now you can still see the entire canvas, but you are closer, so you can start to see more of the finer details. For each layer, you take another step forward, noting more and more details until finally, your face is inches from the canvas. You can no longer see the whole picture because you are now noticing the smallest, most minute details. However, because you started wide and worked your way narrow, you still understand how those tiny details fit into the bigger picture.

Block-learning forces public school students to cram and dump, cram and dump. But, if our children are to understand

and remember all that they study, academic subjects must be formed into many layers and taught slowly over the course of many years.

Learning Styles Debunked

When I was in college, I believed in the theory of “learning styles”—the seven learning categories all children supposedly fall into: visual, aural, verbal, physical, logical, social, and solitary. But after I left college and started teaching, I discovered that learning style theory has few practical applications and almost never enhances actual learning.

The trouble began with classification. Every time I thought I had nailed them down, my children would do something to contradict their own learning style. “What do you mean you don’t want to sing this song, you are a verbal learner!” My children seemed to transition from learning style to learning style, and then back again, faster than a spinning top.

While classifying my children was frustrating, planning lessons was brutal. How do you teach history to a physical learner? Oh, there are ways, but they require more planning and creativity than most parents and teachers can muster on a daily basis. Here is an even more daunting task—planning a single lesson that accommodates all seven learning styles. No wonder it doesn’t take long before teachers start complaining of burnout. I mean, is it really possible to teach social and solitary learners with the same lesson, at the exact same time?

In my mid-twenties, I had the opportunity to take a learning style identification test. I discovered that I was a verbal/social learner. That means I need to talk and socialize to get the most out of my learning experiences. However, in college, I joined

several study groups where zero learning took place. When I got together with my study groups, we talked and socialized about everything BUT the topics we were there to study. So, while a scientific learning style test did a great job flushing out what I already knew—I like to socialize—it recommended the learning style that was the least effective for me.

It was at this point that I turned my back on the Learning Style nonsense. Instead of putting my kids into a categorical box, I taught them as individuals. Along the way, I made some interesting discoveries. I found that all children fit into every learning style category. I learned that a child's preferred style does not always reflect his most effective style. For instance, I may prefer to exercise while lying on a couch, eating potato chips, and watching television, but that does not mean this is the best way for me to get in shape.

In addition, I found that teaching methods should not just conform to the student, but also to the subject. Some subjects are easier to learn in social settings, like speech and debate, while reading comprehension is best learned in solitude. Just use common sense.

These discoveries led me to the conclusion that the Learning Style Theory was created to torment teachers, not enhance learning. Since that time, I have become aware of many other learning style theories. Ignore them all! These ever-modern theories have sold lots of books, but their students don't appear to be learning any better. Your own common sense will serve you best.

How People Really Learn

All people really learn and fail to learn according to

what I call a “learning spectrum.” On one end of the learning spectrum is passive learning, and on the opposite end, active learning. This simple principle governs the learning spectrum: the more active, the more a student learns; the less active, the less a student learns.

Should be obvious, right? Well, you’d be surprised how few people understand the concept of passive and active learning. I see this confusion all the time in notetakers. Several years ago, I was sitting in a real estate class with a buddy. Our teacher ran PowerPoint slides while the entire class fervently copied every word. Several times the teacher wanted to move on, but students stopped her because they hadn’t finished copying.

My buddy was one of them and, even though I tried to warn him, he insisted on taking notes because he claimed to be a “cognitive learner.” He must have just heard that somewhere because obviously he didn’t know what cognitive means—but I knew what he meant. He meant that he was a hands-on (tactile or kinesthetic) learner. Of course, I also knew that no such thing exists, and while you might develop muscle memory that way, hands don’t absorb, process, or retain concepts and information—meaning hands DON’T learn!

So I sat back, refusing to scribble a single note. Instead, I read the slides, answered questions, made mental notes, asked questions, and during the breaks, while my classmates struggled to make sense of their doodles, I volunteered to teach them because I knew that while note-taking is the most passive form of learning possible, teaching someone else is the most active.

When test day came, I breezed through it while the notetakers struggled proportionately to the pile of notes stacked

beneath their desks. The more notes, the more they struggled. That is because copying is mindless, extremely passive. Most notetakers don't even know what they are writing. They're just desperate to get the words on paper. Truly sad because, for all their efforts, there is no reward for passive learners.

To understand this better, I'll refer to Blue Manor's Learning Pyramid where passive and active learning is hierarchically ranked. Passive learning (Listen, Read, Observe) forms the bottom three steps of the pyramid and active learning (Practice, Do, Teach) forms the top three steps.

Step 1, Listening, is the most passive stage. The student simply sits and listens while a teacher tells him what she thinks he should know and explains the subject according to her own understanding. The student passively absorbs what he can from the instruction. Very little is learned this way. If the student daydreams for even a moment, he is lost.

The next step, Reading, is slightly more active than listening but far less active when compared to the other stages. Reading does require the student to take initiative and allows him to go back and re-read something he doesn't quite understand. However, he is still learning from the author's perspective and not his own.

Step 3, Observing, is the first stage that allows the student to affect his own learning. While he is still excluded from firsthand experience, he is no longer learning from the instruction and perspectives of others. He is able to witness the subject directly and form his own perspective as a result.

The next step is Practicing. Practicing is mostly active learning. Here the student is personally handling the subject and is able to test it himself. He still has a guide, but now he is the main player.

The final two steps are entirely active. The student has taken the reins and learns by doing. Doing helps the student gain a fuller perspective of the subject and ensures that he retains the material.

Still, the student has not mastered the subject until he transitions from doer to teacher. Teaching forces a student to wrestle with the subject until he has gained a complete understanding. His understanding becomes so complete that he can effectively direct others.

In most schools, students start at the bottom of the pyramid and progress upward until reaching Step 4 (Practice), where their educational journey ends. But, people don't reach full learning comprehension until they complete stages 5 (Do) and 6 (Teach).

For example, let's say you would like to learn how to hunt. You start by asking others everything they know about hunting. This is the Listening Phase. Listening is a great start, but you cannot learn to hunt by listening to others describe it.

So, you take it a step further. Stage 2 is Reading. You read every book you can get your hands on about hunting. The concept is growing, but still, you have not learned to hunt. The next step is observing real hunters.

Now, you can really see how it is done and can imagine yourself doing it, but you still have a ways to go. You need to practice, so you take the next step and find a friend who is willing to take you out on your first hunt. You go out several times until you get the hang of it.

Finally, you are ready. You grab your rifle and head out on your own. There is no instructor guiding you. You have finally learned to hunt. A true master, however, cannot only do but can teach as well. Teaching someone else how to hunt is the

final phase, the pinnacle of the Learning Pyramid. If you can successfully teach someone from start to finish, you'll know you've mastered the learning pyramid for the subject at hand.

Now you know the six stages of the Learning Pyramid, but you don't necessarily need to go through all 6. In fact, you could start with step 4, Practice, and still learn how to hunt as long as you complete the top two stages, Do and Teach. Do and Teach are where students learn the most because they are purely active—requiring students to take initiative and responsibility for their own learning.

Here is how you would use the Learning Pyramid to teach your children addition. You might start by explaining the concept of adding objects together. Then you could skip Stage 2, Reading, because it is simply unnecessary. Next, work a few addition problems while your child observes. Then, have them practice a few on their own while you coach them through the process. Next, take the concept of addition and give them real-world problems to solve. Notice I said give them real-world applications instead of more worksheets. That is because worksheets and tests fall into the category of practice, not doing. We do not teach children math so they can complete worksheets for the rest of their lives. We teach them math so they can account, design, build, figure, and analyze in the real world. So be creative. Give your kids some real-world addition.

Finally, once they can consistently do the addition, have them teach someone else. If they have a younger sibling, that would be perfect. If there is no one else to teach, have them teach you. Pretend you don't understand and see if they can walk you through the process. Once they demonstrate that they can effectively teach the material, you know they have

learned the subject.

Now, consider the learning process for science. Science is a common subject that rarely gets past the Practice stage. That is because many adults mistakenly assume performing a textbook experiment is “Doing.” Textbook experiments are another form of “Practicing.” If you want your children to “Do” science, then they must form their own hypothesis, create their own experiment, and solve a real-world dilemma.

The top 3 tiers of the Learning Pyramid are the Achilles’ heel of public schooling. Students aren’t required to take the subjects and apply them to the real world, outside academia, and so they can’t visualize the true purpose of the subjects that they are studying. For that reason, public school children learn little and retain even less.

If we want to raise our children for greatness, we must be sure that their education advances to the highest tiers of the Learning Pyramid as possible.

Body, Mind, & Spirit

“Body, Mind, and Spirit”—the motto of Fork Union Military Academy—captures the essence of an elite education where the purpose is to not only learn something, but *become* something. Prep schools, like Fork Union, understand that a great education must consider the entirety of man: body, mind, and especially spirit.

It is essential to train the body as it contains our life, strength, and health. The mind is also essential, as it contains knowledge and wisdom for good living. But, the spirit is most important because it contains our true identity and is the measure of our greatness in this life and the life to come. For

God will not judge us according to how healthy we were, or how much knowledge we gained, but according to the works of our spirit.

Now, everyone knows what it is to train the body and mind, but whenever I talk about spiritual training, people immediately assume I am going to talk about religion. However, training the spirit is about more than just religion; it is also about training our children's character, attitude, values, virtues, passions, and sense of purpose.

Sadly, public schools mostly consider education a series of subjects, with the focus almost entirely on the mind. Sometimes they offer the occasional gym class as an attempt to train the body, but they always neglect the spirit. That is the fatal flaw of public schooling because, without a spirit of greatness, neither the body nor the mind can achieve greatness on their own.

Years ago, when I was in the Army learning how to parachute, I realized how supreme the spirit is, but I also discovered how difficult it is to train.

When preparing to jump out of an airplane, the mind is the easiest to teach. In Airborne School, our instructors simply told us: jump out far enough to clear the plane, check your chute, put your feet and knees together, tuck and roll.

It is harder to teach the body to do these things. So we practiced the movements over and over, by jumping off various platforms until muscle memory was developed.

However, the spirit is the hardest to train. Everyone comes to Jump School with a body and mind capable of jumping out of an airplane, but many lack the spiritual strength. You see, when the side door of a C-130 opens at 1,200 feet, you hear a tremendous roar, and can't help but look down at the ground,

which makes you wonder what it would be like if your chute didn't open, and suddenly, you feel sick, and your spirit starts to fail, causing your body to grow weak and mind to become confused.

The Army knows this, so a major part of our training was focused on preparing our spirit to overcome the terror of jumping out of a speeding plane, into 1,200 feet of empty air. To prepare us, our instructors had to bolster many aspects of our spirit like courage, duty, discipline, pride, and especially faith—faith in our instructors, faith in our equipment, and faith in ourselves.

They had us jump off taller and taller platforms, starting with a five-foot stand, then a ten-foot stand, then a 30-foot tower, and finally, we were dropped from a 250-foot crane. As the platforms grew taller, our courage and confidence grew accordingly. Our faith in the process and equipment solidified as we landed safely from greater and greater heights.

Our spiritual sense of pride was appealed to constantly with assurances that when we earned our wings, we would share in the glorious history and tradition of airborne soldiers going all the way back to the 101st Airborne Division in World War II. In contrast, we were warned of the spiritual humiliation that failure would bring us. Our instructors told us stories of soldiers who refused to jump, and instead of returning home with jump wings pinned to their chest, they forever wore a conspicuous, though invisible, badge of shame.

All these things our instructors did, and more, to prepare our spirit for the first real jump, and still, on jump day, I saw a few people freeze in the door of the plane and one gal start to cry, not because they didn't know what to do, but because their spirit was not yet strong enough.

Whether jumping out of an airplane or achieving some other great feat, the spirit is always the linchpin. Which is why, if we want to raise our children for greatness, we must have a curriculum that trains the entire child: body, mind, and spirit, but also allots a double portion to the spirit since it takes so much more effort to train.

Chapter 4:

MASTERY

Common Knowledge

When I was in school, it was said a few times and implied often, if we didn't go to college, we'd end up working in fast food for the rest of our lives. That was certainly an exaggeration, but it did reveal a lot about the value of the education we were receiving.

Kindergarten to 12th grade is 13 years of schooling, and yet, teachers admit they've only prepared us for minimum wage jobs. And it's not like they even prepared us for that because any bum can flip burgers or take down orders whether he has a high school diploma or not. The problem isn't that we learned nothing; the problem is everyone learned the exact same thing. Our education was common—common to the core. I hadn't learned anything my classmates hadn't learned. As far as my education was concerned, I had nothing special to offer an employer that every other kid in my school couldn't offer as well. This is a major problem because, ultimately, we don't get paid for what we know but for what others don't know. We don't get paid for what we can do, but for what others can't do.

Think about it. If every person in the world could paint the Mona Lisa, would that painting be worth anything? Basic

economics of supply and demand tells us that the scarcity of desired goods and services makes them more valuable, and oversupply makes them less valuable. What is overly abundant and common is also cheap. Therefore, common knowledge is cheap knowledge. And thanks to public schooling and extreme standardization, all that high school graduates have to show for 13 years of education is common knowledge.

Children do need common knowledge. Every kid should know how to read, write, and work simple arithmetic, but that is not enough. Kids raised for greatness must also master marketable skills—uncommon, lucrative skills that are in high demand.

A Head Start

The wisdom of winners is always: follow your dreams, work hard, and never give up. Don't believe them. Listen instead to the wisdom of losers, who were also following their dreams, working hard, and never giving up even as they failed. The true secret to winning is: getting and maintaining a good head start on the competition.

In our society, we wait until college before kids begin to focus their education into a career path. This is way too late. The majority of high school graduates have zero professional experience, yet they are expected to choose a career path and pay a fortune in college tuition to learn it. And the first two years of a college education focus on general studies, often totally unrelated to the student's career path. So, most students don't begin studying marketable knowledge and skills until they are 20 years old. When they graduate at 22 years old, they still have not mastered anything. Now they are

encouraged to go on and get a master's degree. If they work hard, they might earn that degree by 24 or 25, but for others, it could take longer.

Of course, anyone who is familiar with these advanced degrees understands graduates have only mastered the very basics. They are certainly not masters in their professional fields. Mastery will take many more years, perhaps even decades, of working in their field. As a general rule, I would say it takes at least 10 years to master anything of significance and decades longer to become a master of masters. Mastery has few shortcuts. This means, the person who starts first will always carry a significant advantage over the others in his field. So long as he continues to study and work hard, who can catch him?

I learned this lesson when I began wrestling in 8th grade. I beat just about all of my opponents except for a handful of kids I could never beat. They were untouchable and should have been in a league of their own. They were the kids who started wrestling when they were five years old and did it year-round.

Masters are not born. Masters are formed minute by minute, hour by hour, week by week, year by year. Starting wrestling in 8th grade, meant that I could never make up the time a few of my opponents had put in since they were five years old. Unless they simply stopped training altogether, there was no hope; there just wasn't enough time in the day. I certainly tried to catch up, even staying late after practice, but there was a good chance they were also staying late.

Junior year of high school, I became team captain and finished 3rd place at the state championships. By senior year, I won several tournaments and MVP awards and only lost two

very close matches. I was getting pretty good.

However, about midway through my senior year wrestling season, I went to a match against a rival school. Their wrestler at my weight was good, but I had already beaten him twice. So their coach changed things up. The coach had him cut to the weight class below mine and then had another wrestler, we'll call him "Bobby," bump up a weight class to wrestle me. Bobby was only a sophomore, but he had already won the state championship the previous year and was undefeated in his weight class. I expected a hard match, but it wasn't even close—he destroyed me, throwing me around the mat, and then pinning me in the second period. My team was shocked. They had seen me lose but never this badly.

I didn't see Bobby again until the state championships. And this time he wrestled his own weight class, thankfully! In the championship match, he humiliated his opponent—taking him down, letting him up, taking him down again, letting him up again, over and over. It was total domination, even worse than in my match. His opponent was unable to score even a single point.

We were great wrestlers, but Bobby was like a god of wrestling. What made Bobby so much better than us? What separated his skill from ours? It wasn't that he wanted it more or trained harder. Bobby started wrestling when he was four years old. I started wrestling when I was 14. He had a ten-year headstart on me—hundreds, maybe thousands of extra hours of training, instruction, and experience.

If our kids wait until they are in their twenties and in college to start mastering marketable skills, they will trail those who started as young children. Take two artists, for instance. One begins his training at five years old and the

other begins at 20. To catch up, the 20-year-old would have to work double-time for 15 years, and even then, the two artists would only be even. If the artist who started at five years old was working 8 hour days, the artist who started at 20 would have to work on art 16 hours a day. But how could he? He is an adult now, with little skill and experience. Who is going to hire him? Like most art school graduates, he will probably be forced to get a job outside of the art world until he has a professional portfolio. That means he will only have a few hours after work to practice art. On the other hand, the boy who started studying art when he was five, could easily have a professional portfolio by the time he turns 20. He could get at least an entry-level job in the art world where he will continue to develop as an artist and get paid to do so. And he will still be able to train on his own, after work, if he wanted to. So, even if the artist who started training at 20 years old were to spend every moment of his spare time practicing art, the gap between him and the boy who started at five is more likely to grow, rather than narrow.

When Brian Kesinger was young, he had an interest in illustration. Instead of waiting for college to begin studying art, his parents started training him in grade school. When Brian was a senior in high school, he sent his art portfolio to Disney Animation Studios. It was a long shot, but they hired him straight out of high school. He is the youngest animator Disney has ever hired. He didn't just find an art job; he landed every artist's dream job at 18 years old and has been a professional artist ever since.

So many parents let their children waste their childhoods, not realizing the time can never be recovered. The freedom of childhood is impossible for a responsible adult to recreate

later in life. Our kids don't have to worry about paying bills right now. They are free to dream and study, learn and train, for as long as their hearts delight—especially if they are homeschooled. But, once children become adults, it's not about chasing dreams anymore; it's about providing food and shelter for their families. And that is why a head start early in childhood, is the real secret to success.

What to Master

When I was a kid, I first wanted to be an artist. In fourth grade, I decided to be a mathematician, and after watching the Winter Olympics that year, I also wanted to become an Olympic figure skater. In fifth grade, I wanted to be a musician, DJ, and personal trainer. During my first few years of high school, I planned to be a cattle rancher, author, and possibly a detective. My junior year, I decided to be a bodyguard, but by senior year, I was pretty sure I would be the President. When I started college, I wanted to be an international businessman, but by sophomore year, I thought about becoming a teacher. Junior year of college, I wanted to go to law school, but then I left college to start a career in the military. How did I end up? I'm an entrepreneur who founded an online learning academy, author and illustrator, and real estate investor who also owns a hobby farm, where I raise chickens, goats, cattle, and a small plum orchard.

I don't think I'm the exception. Kids are ready to adopt a plethora of passions; they want to do everything! And that means they could happily follow many career paths. It is the parent's job to help focus their kids, strategically matching their passions, talents, and ambitions with a realistic career

path or paths.

Yet, few modern parents would dare choose a career path for their children to master. Parents don't believe in leading their children into the future anymore. We sit around waiting for our kids to have some lightning-strike revelation or burst of passion to point them in the right direction. This rarely happens. Many young adults enter college and still don't know what they want to be. Some graduate from college and still are unsure. But, even if our children discover their passion early and on their own, even then, we wouldn't dare take the lead; we wouldn't dare *push* them. We aren't supposed to be active coaches anymore but mindless cheerleaders, clapping no matter what choices our kids make.

We have watched too many Hollywood movies where "overbearing" parents try to "crush" their kid's dreams, forcing the kids to rebel, maybe even run away. Usually, by the end of the movie, the kids have achieved their pipe dreams in spite of their parents, and the parents come back and repent, admitting they were wrong, and then everyone lives happily ever after. In Hollywood, parents aren't supposed to lead; they're supposed to follow.

You know, like when the Little Mermaid is driven to sell her soul to Ursula, the sea witch, because her overbearing, bigoted father won't let her run off and marry a handsome stranger she saw one time on a ship. But, this isn't Hollywood; this is the real world, where kids who chase their "dreams," in opposition to their parents' wisdom and guidance, most often lead themselves to failure and heartache than a happily-ever-after.

However, I understand parents' trepidation. Believing all children have unique and innate passions and talents, they feel

they must wait until their children discover their true calling. But, are passions and talents really inherent, something parents must root out, or are they something parents can plant in their children? I would not deny that a child's unique personality traits can influence his passion and talents, but on the other hand, all six of my children are passionate and talented chess players. Am I to believe they were just born to love chess? Or did their father, who not only loves chess but also believes it is an essential thinking exercise, implant this passion in them?

A child is not born with a *single* passion but is a fertile field able to grow many passions, perhaps *every* passion. To reap greatness, parents must strategically plant the right passions in the spring of life. Parents must not wait for their child's peers to sow *their* passions into *his* heart, or the child will come home one day wanting to be in a punk rock band!—God forbid.

Parents who don't guide their children will find that most kids never discover a sacred life calling on their own but pick careers according to what they think will be the most fun. This is a huge mistake for several reasons. First, fun changes over time as children grow older. Second, doing the same thing over and over again isn't going to be fun all the time, no matter what the occupation. Trust me! I'm a professional artist, and there are times when the last thing I want to do is draw another picture. Finally, fun will turn into frustration when it doesn't pay the bills.

Fun is different than fulfilling. We want to help steer our children toward fulfilling career paths. My time serving in the military was not always fun, but it was fulfilling. A fulfilling career is one we are good at, we enjoy doing, and most importantly, provides a good living for our family. When

I say, “provides a good living for our family,” I don’t mean just monetarily. If I’m making tons of money but work such long hours that I never see my wife and kids, it might not be a “good living.”

Usually, the key to a fulfilling career is to simply be good at your career, whether it’s always fun or not, because if you are good at your job, you will have success. Success is always enjoyable, and it often leads to a good living for your family. And generally, people “discover” their true passion when they find something they are truly good at.

When I was a young kid, I played soccer and loved it because I was one of the best players on my team. Then, I tried out for a competitive select team and went from being one of the best to one of the worst. I often warmed the bench, and soon I stopped loving soccer. I tried basketball and was terrible at that, too. Then I tried wrestling. I was quickly one of the best on my team. Guess what? Wrestling became my passion, and it still is to this very day.

It was the same with drawing. I don’t suppose I liked drawing more than the next kid until I realized I was better at drawing than most other kids. That is when drawing became a passion of mine. It is hard to be passionate about something we are not good at and hard not to be passionate about something we excel at. This is true for both children and adults.

However, you do not have to wait to see what your children will be good at before developing a career strategy for them because most kids will be good at whatever they start studying and training at an early age. Which means, in most cases, parents can pick their children’s passions simply by giving them a head start down a particular professional path.

That said, I must caution you about a few careers where

being good isn't good enough. In these career fields, your child will have to be the best of the best to enjoy any success. Beware of the three As: artist, actor, athlete. Mediocre doctors can still make a good living, while mediocre artists, actors, and athletes starve!

Yet, for some reason, I know tons of parents pumping tons of time, energy, and money into helping their children become better artists, actors, and athletes. But, I don't know any preparing their kids to be lawyers, doctors, bankers, dentists, builders, pilots, coders, accountants, salesmen, or businessmen. That is crazy when you consider the top 1% in these careers can make enough money to rival the top 1% of artists, actors, and athletes, and the bottom 99% still make a great living while the bottom 99% of artists, actors, and athletes will likely need a second job just to pay rent.

What's more, there is a much higher demand for the other careers while artists, actors, and athletes are forced to fight tooth and nail for just a handful of jobs. If you are a singer trying to land a record deal, you are competing with almost every other singer in the world while a doctor is only competing with a handful of other local practices.

You may not want to crush your kids' dreams if they are desperate to become one of the three As. But, they still deserve to hear the truth that the competition is more than just stiff; it's astronomical!

If that is still the route they are determined to go, then you better hold their feet to the fire; you better make them practice excessively, get them started as young as possible, and then cross your fingers because that is what it will take to find success in those careers.

Whatever path of mastery you choose for your children, it

is important you choose it early, somewhere between the ages of five and seven years, because the head start is what usually leads to greatness in the first place. Don't put your choice off for fear of choosing the "wrong" path because the greater risk is that a path won't be chosen at all, or it will be chosen too late, or under the influence of misguided peers. Besides, nothing is written in stone. You can adjust your focus as your children's passions and talents become more pronounced. And that is still better than having no focus and allowing children to wander aimlessly into adulthood.

The Shoulders They Stand On

As hard as it is to become a famous Hollywood actor, a handful of kids have such a huge strategic advantage, it seems like a waste not to pursue an acting career. These are the kids whose parents are actors. It is no coincidence Kurt Douglas's son, Michael Douglas, is just as famous as his father. It was no surprise when Jaden Smith became a famous movie actor. After all, both his parents, Will and Jada Smith, are famous Hollywood actors. Angelina Jolie's father was actor Jon Voigt. Ben Stiller's father was actor Jerry Stiller, and his mother was actress Anne Meara. *Star Wars'* Princess Leia, played by Carrie Fisher, was born to actress Debbie Reynolds and actor Eddie Fisher. And we all know Charlie Sheen is the son of Martin Sheen. John David Washington is quickly becoming just as famous as his father, Denzel Washington. Kate Hudson was the daughter of actress Goldie Hawn and actor Bill Hudson and stepdaughter of the famous Kurt Russell. The list goes on and on, but you get the point. Having parents who have already found success in Hollywood is the single best

indicator that you will also find success in Hollywood.

That is not just true for Hollywood. It wasn't random chance or genius that Donald Trump became a world-famous real estate tycoon; he had his real-estate-investing father to guide him. It is easy to argue Glen Keane is the greatest Disney animator of all time, and it is no coincidence that he just happens to be the son of famous artist Bil Keane, who illustrated the comic, *The Family Circus*. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart did not become the most famous classical composer in the world all by himself; his father, Leopold Mozart, was a great composer. Nathan Rothschild, who founded the most powerful banking dynasty the world has ever known, was, of course, the son of a wealthy banker. And the great child prodigy and mathematician, Blaise Pascal, just happened to be the son of a mathematician.

Thankfully, you don't have to be great in your professional field to raise a great child in your footsteps. Richard Williams was only a mediocre tennis player, but when he learned how much money the top professional tennis players were earning, he decided to make both of his daughters, Venus and Serena Williams, professional tennis players. He wrote up a training plan and began teaching his daughters tennis when they were only four years old. He did not wait for them to show promise or interest but decided to raise his girls to be a better version of himself and to live his dreams through his offspring. Some people would object to this, but I'm sure Venus and Serena aren't complaining. Richard's daughters learned to love tennis, and not only did they become professionals, but they also became extremely wealthy world champions!

Children are born to follow in their parents' footsteps, and parents desire to live on through their children's successes.

It is natural and good. We want our children to stand on our shoulders so they can reach new heights, and then, their children will stand on their shoulders and reach even further. For, children who stand on their parents' shoulders see much further than children who stand alone.

If you have a career in real estate, business, sales, engineering, banking, construction, medicine, photography, art, law, teaching, coding, or any other profession, it would be natural to pass it on to your children. You will have passion, opportunities, knowledge, wisdom, insights, connections, and shortcuts to share with your children that their peers won't have access to.

The homeschooling parent makes the ultimate mentor, with the ability to turn their child's pursuit into a lifestyle. A coach has an hour of practice to train a child, a teacher has a 45-minute class, but the homeschooling parent has 24 hours, 7 days a week, if she likes. But, it is not just about time and access. Coaches and teachers are *dedicated* to their students, but parents are *devoted*.

No one will ever love your child as you do. Your child's success is your success. Their future and your future are one and the same. You also share genetic and personality traits that help you relate to one another. And as far as young children are concerned, there is no one they love more, want to impress more, and trust more than their mom and dad. So, when it comes to raising children for greatness, they will stand the tallest on the shoulders of their own parents. Teachers, coaches, tutors, mentors, and counselors are no replacement for a devoted father and mother.

A Master's Focus

When I first started my company, Blue Manor Academy, I wanted to do everything. I was the author, editor, illustrator, animator, web designer, blogger, technician, public speaker, photographer, videographer, and accountant. And those were just the roles I filled in the company. On the side, I was also a landlord, realtor, stock investor, beekeeper, constant volunteer, my own personal handyman, and my church's Education Director. And in the midst of all this, I nearly bought a large cherry orchard.

When my wife reminded me that I was struggling to keep two cherry trees in the backyard alive (as of this writing, one is certainly dead and the other nearly dead) and asked what I knew about farming an orchard, I told her, "I'll figure it out." And I might have, but I am so grateful our offer wasn't accepted.

While I was proud of my ability to get many jobs done, I was often ashamed of my shoddy work. I learned the very hardest way, you cannot author and edit your own book, and my company did not take off until I stopped trying to be the expert at everything.

Children who are taught a little about everything, end up knowing a lot about nothing. That is, they will know how to speak Spanish, but not good enough to carry on a conversation. They will know how to sew, but not good enough to sew anything they would want to wear. They will know how to paint, but not good enough that anyone would want to put their artwork in a frame and hang it on the wall.

Many homeschooling parents do all they can to provide a well-rounded education. They do unit studies on every

imaginable thing, but in doing so, they actually under-educate. Their kids end up with a wide range of knowledge, but shallow depth. This is a big mistake because the jack of all trades is often a very poor man, rarely called on to do anything but the simplest and cheapest work.

Imagine you want to hire an artist to paint a family portrait. Two artists apply for the job. The first artist is considered the greatest painter in the country. The second artist can only paint a little, but he can also sing a little, dance a little, and sculpt a little. Although the second artist has a wider range of talents, you are more likely to hire the first since you want a painted portrait, and that is what he specializes in. And the second artist isn't likely to get hired very often. He is able to sing, but perhaps not as well as someone who only sings. He is able to dance, but perhaps not as well as someone who only dances. He will only ever be hired for second-rate jobs.

If you want your children to be great, be a very picky educator. Not everything is worth learning, and intense focus is necessary to master any worthwhile skill. Find one or two marketable skills that your children love, and then make them focus until they are among the best in the world.

This doesn't mean children should spend every waking hour focused on mastery. We don't want the focus to be so intense, our children can hardly bear it. If you crack the whip too often, you'll drive the passion straight out of them, and then the race to mastery is over because there is never mastery without passion.

There is certainly a time to crack the whip, but there is also a time to pull the reins. For some self-motivated children, their passions become obsessions, and they will push themselves to burnout if you let them. Parents and children must understand:

mastery is not a sprint; it is a marathon. Children who leave the starting line running as fast and hard as they can, may gain an early lead, but they will soon fatigue, and when they do, their competition will swiftly pass them by. That is what Aesop's fable, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, was about. Remember?—slow and steady wins the race.

So, focus, but don't be too focused. Give your children a head start. Then help them set a steady pace that challenges but does not exhaust, and finally, make them persist until they have arrived.

My oldest daughter, Audrey, who wants to be an artist, began her marathon to mastery a few years ago. I didn't tell her this, but she started with no natural talent. Yet, for the past two years, she has focused on art. She took a weekly painting class for free at our senior center. And most days, she watched a few art tutorials on YouTube and produced at least one sketch for me to critique. A few times a week, she snapped pictures of various things around our property. This helped her study the world and its details and learn about staging, lighting, framing, color, and focus—all very important not only for photography but for illustration and painting. All in all, I'd say my daughter practiced art for no more, and no less, than an hour or two a day, four days a week.

Audrey focuses on art almost every day but is not so focused that she doesn't have time for anything else. And most importantly, what she is doing, is working. Audrey is improving rapidly and without the slightest hint of burnout. She is still far from mastery, but when I see how far she has already traveled, there is no doubt in my mind she will be a professional artist before she turns 20 so long as she continues to focus.

For those of us raising our children for greatness, mastery is a must, and mastery is within the reach of all our children if only we dare to focus them early and keep them focused for the long haul. Focus is not a tip or suggestion; it is mastery's only law. There are many different paths and strategies to achieving mastery, but every single one of them demands focus.

The Master's Standard

In school, children are issued standard grades according to their ability and willingness to meet the school's standards. If students do the standard work, give the standard answers, and all in the standard time, they are assigned the standard A. The United States Department of Agriculture also uses standard grades to qualify meat, but this is not how we should measure children being raised for greatness because greatness is never standard.

Children who are measured according to standards will often do the least possible to meet the minimum requirements. Some will work for a standard C, and others will strive for a standard A, but few will strive beyond. My last three years of high school, I was an A student. I carefully read each class syllabus and vigorously studied to do all that was necessary to achieve the golden A. There were times when the A was far out of my natural reach, and I had to work myself to death to achieve it. Other times, the A came too easy. I was capable of much more, but why waste the effort when I already had my A?

If accepted, this minimum mindset bleeds into all areas of a child's life. Several years ago, it reared its ugly head

in my own home and took me many months to break. One afternoon, when my children were bickering, I sent them out to pick weeds as punishment. At first, I said they had to pick weeds for an hour. However, by the end of the hour, they had managed to remove only a handful of weeds. It was remarkable how little they accomplished. So, I sent them back out but exchanged the time standard to a quantity standard.

“I want 100 weeds, and I’m going to count every single one, so don’t think you can get away with anything less. And I don’t care if it takes you all day!” I instructed.

Again, they met the standard perfectly. In less than five minutes, they were back inside ready for me to count. It was incredible! They had managed to find an area in a flower bed covered with tiny, clover-like weeds so small that they could be pulled out easily by the dozen. My kids had spent more time searching for the micro weeds than they had pulling them out. It was very clever of them, but I wasn’t impressed.

I sent my kids back outside. This time, I changed the standard from quantity to volume. They had to fill their bucket up to the very tiptop. Again, they returned, and it only took them a few minutes longer. The bucket was overflowing, but when I looked inside, I found it contained a lot of dirt and one gigantic thistle.

I couldn’t accept it. A single weed in a bucket was not what I had in mind. But this time, it was my kids who felt cheated. My sweet Emma began to cry. Her older sister, Audrey, accused me of “Not being fair!” And my little Colton, grumbled out loud, “We just have to pick weeds forever!”

My standards weren’t working. For each new standard I set, my children crafted a way to meet the letter of the law while undermining the spirit of it. So, I sent them out one

last time, to meet one final standard. As soon as they met this standard, I promised they could be done pulling weeds. It was a very simple standard. There was no minimum time, no minimum quantity, and no minimum volume. No quota at all, actually.

“I want you to go outside and pick weeds until I come out. Then I will check your work and your attitude, and if I am impressed, you are done—I promise. But, if I’m not impressed, you keep pulling weeds until I am,” I told them.

My new “impress me” standard worked, and it is how I measure everything now. I consider the time, quantity, quality, and attitude of my children, and if I’m impressed, they pass; if I’m not impressed, they keep trying.

When I send my children to clean their rooms, I don’t tell them every little thing needing to be done. I just want to be impressed. Or, when my children write a report, I don’t tell them how many words or pages to produce; I only ask to be impressed. When they compete in chess tournaments, they are not encouraged to win, but to impress me.

“Impress me” is the master’s standard because it is the only standard that encourages kids to strive for mastery and not just meet the minimum requirements. Since a minimum standard makes no exceptions for impressive effort or significant progress, children begin to slack the moment they exceed it, or if they see failure is inevitable, they get discouraged and stop trying. But, when the standard is “impress me,” there is always a reason to hope even if you are failing because you can still offer up an impressive effort and show impressive progress. And there is an incentive to push on to greater heights of mastery when you are succeeding because there is always room to impress a little more.

In school, grades aren't fair because they don't tell the whole story. There might be a C student who is reaching his potential and making great progress, and there might be an A student who is falling short of his potential and slowly getting worse. The "impress me" standard is one that can be fairly applied to all children because it's flexible—a living, breathing standard, meeting the child where he is and considering what he is capable of and what he hopes to achieve in life.

Up until recently, my lovely daughter, Emma, has not appeared as gifted at chess as her younger brother, Colton. He always wins the state championship for his grade, while Emma usually comes in second or third. However, in many tournaments, she has impressed me more than Colton, and I have been more pleased with some of her losses than some of his wins. Several times, she handled her losses with more maturity than Colton handled his victories. And she has played harder, thought longer, and been more focused in her matches than Colton.

Standard grades don't consider dreams, but parents raising children for greatness must. Since my oldest daughter wants to be a professional artist, you can be sure I hold her artwork to a much higher standard than her little brother who, at this time, is more interested in building and architecture, or her little sister whose primary interest is teaching.

Of course, the "impress me" standard only works if parents are honest. Parents aren't supposed to be cheerleaders. So, forget about all the new age positive thinking and self-esteem nonsense. Don't be a coward—tell the truth. If your kid does a terrible job, don't pretend to be impressed. That doesn't mean you ridicule him, or tell him he is garbage, but you don't fake a smile and fan praise, either. That isn't kindness—it's a lie!

Tell him the truth, you expected better.

On the other hand, you don't want to be one of those impossible-to-please parents, either. If your kid has done a great job, it's your parental duty to be impressed. And your genuine admiration is powerful motivation to keep your children aspiring to mastery.

When you look at masterpieces like the Sistine Chapel or the Cathedral of Notre Dame, intuition immediately informs you that those magnificent works were not created by men of minimum standards, but by men with a great desire to impress. And that desire was planted in them when they were young children.

Therefore, make your children strive to impress so they develop the habit of pouring their souls into their work, which will surely lead them to achieve mastery. And as they continue to live and grow according to the master's standard, the desire to impress will grow within them, until they say, "I will impress the world with my contributions and be remembered. I will make the masterpiece of my life so wonderful, it will impress even the heavens and make God smile."

MOTIVATION

Believe in Childhood

When my son, Colton, was four years old, I called him upstairs to my office. I whispered, “Shut the door.” His eyes grew wide. I had him come close. Then I whispered in his ear, “I think you are going to be a king someday.”

And he said, “Umm huh, yes.” Apparently, he already knew that.

I told him not to tell anyone. But, he immediately ran downstairs, brought his mommy into a closet, and whispered, “Daddy said I am going to be a king!”

He believed me. Now, don’t think that is cute. That is not cute! That is powerful. That is childhood. It is what adults were before they lost the ability to dream big and believe in themselves.

If you want to accelerate your children’s education, you must believe in your kids the way they believe in themselves. You must see greatness in them and not just that they could be great someday, but that they are great right now!

Yet, for some reason, we have trouble taking our children seriously. Children certainly look helpless, and though we’d never call them dumb, we imagine their “underdeveloped” brains aren’t capable of thinking as clearly, quickly, cleverly,

or deeply as our own.

Modern adults don't respect children or acknowledge their exceptionalism or potential. We tell them that they can achieve whatever they set out to accomplish in life for the same reason we tell them Santa is going to bring them presents—not because we believe it, but because we think it will make them feel good. However, our actions betray our true feelings.

It starts very early with perpetual baby talking. Babies talk like babies because they are still learning to use their vocal cords. Why adults choose to mimic their children's baby talk, greatly inhibiting their ability to learn to speak, is beyond me. Perhaps parents think that their children lack the intelligence to understand adult speech.

This lack of respect continues as children grow. Parents baby their kids by wiping their noses, tying their shoes, dressing them, washing them, and then making excuses for their childish behavior long past reasonable ages. When young children throw a fit, too many parents believe they are not capable of behaving better. Parents imagine temper tantrums are a normal developmental stage that must be tolerated until outgrown. Parents neglect proper discipline and training because they do not believe in their children's ability to behave.

The same treatment carries over into education. Instead of teaching children as if they are highly intelligent human beings, able to think and comprehend like adults, teachers overcomplicate their lessons with unnecessary images, graphics, and cartoons. Parents and educators imagine that children are unteachable unless the curriculum is properly dressed in silliness, immaturity, and absurdity. In these ways

and many others, schools show a lack of respect by expecting so little and setting standards so low.

In the past, I was guilty of the same lack of respect for my own children's abilities. I was a "pathological underestimator." It never occurred to me that a 2-year-old could be taught to read, write, and do basic math. I was skeptical when my wife suggested we teach our 3-year-old daughter to play the piano. I was skeptical about everything. Could 3-year-olds learn to recognize all the countries of the world? Could they learn to type on a computer and do multiplication? Could a 2-year-old exhibit better table manners than a fully grown adult? Every time I underestimated my children, they exceeded my wildest expectations.

My doubt about children and their abilities persisted until my daughter, Audrey, set the record straight once and for all when she was eight years old. She actually beat me in two out of three chess games. That doesn't mean anything until you know I played chess competitively in high school and still play online often, and Audrey wasn't in a chess club, nor did she have a coach. Audrey taught herself how to play chess by watching videos online. She outthought me, fair and square, and she went on to win the state championship.

Children are smart! All kids! Even very young ones.

Did you hear about Akash Vukoti? In 2016, he was in the news for being the youngest kid ever in the National Spelling Bee. He was a six-year-old homeschooler, competing mostly against teenagers!

Children aren't simple. They are so intelligent that they learn a foreign language within the first few years of life. Even more impressive is the fact that they do this unaided, without textbooks, teachers, schools, or even a basic understanding of

grammar. Still, more amazing is that they do so casually. Have you ever seen a toddler studying late into the night? Of course not! They don't need to. They pick up language on the side while learning a million other things. A child's intelligence is natural—it's God-given.

You have a child capable of being the next Michelangelo, but if you can't believe that, you aren't likely to push him past the crayons and finger paint. And that is the problem because your kids will achieve what *you* believe! Let me say that again, "They will achieve, what YOU believe!"

Motivators: More Than Fun

Children are born with a natural motivation to learn, but when education becomes no more than a monotonous cycle of crowded classrooms, long lessons, boring instruction, useless content, mandatory homework, and standardized tests, their motivation dies, and the only thing children really learn in school is to hate learning!

Most teachers are quick to know what to teach, how to teach it, and why it should be taught, but they fail to discover what would motivate children to learn it. So, they spin the wheels of education, burn lots of rubber, and go nowhere.

One of the primary reasons I have had great success in teaching is because I teach everything by way of motivation. I learned a long time ago that it is impossible to teach unmotivated children. It is not that they can't learn, but they choose not to. They disengage their brain, and from that point on, nothing the teacher says is heard, considered, processed, or remembered. Learning becomes hopeless until children are motivated to engage.

I once had an epiphany while watching a boy who struggled in school and had several “learning disabilities,” master the most mind-boggling video game in just minutes. I tried to play it with him, but I couldn’t figure the game out, and he ran circles around me until I quit. I thought to myself, “How can he understand this confusing game but not simple math? Is the video game not more complicated than adding and subtracting?” And it occurred to me for the first time: “Children can learn whatever they are motivated to learn—complex video games are proof of it.”

My wife and I have taught children with a variety of learning disabilities. Many times, their parents had been convinced by previous teachers that their children would always learn at a slower rate and lower standard and only with much medication and many tutors. We ignored all their diagnoses and merely assumed each child was suffering from “malmotivation.” In almost every case, we were right. By turning on the motivation, the learning flowed uninhibited.

If you plan to give your children an elite education, you too must turn on the motivation and become a master of the art. The art of motivation has no perfectly set rules. But, like all arts, certain methods and techniques are universally effective. The following is a list of 14 powerful motivators you can use to make your children *want* to learn:

1. Fun: Once, when my two daughters and oldest son grew bored of trying to remember the geographic location of countries, I used a Nerf sword to motivate them with fun. When they got the answers wrong, I pretended to be outraged and playfully hit them with the foam sword. And guess what? They couldn’t stop laughing, and they wanted to play geography all day.

But, “fun” is not the greatest motivator. “Fun” is one of the more shallow and finicky forms of motivation. The only reason it is first on this list is because it’s the most common. If we are to motivate our children for greatness, we must go beyond fun.

Just look at the Navy SEALs. Their training isn’t what we’d stereotypically think of as “fun,” but you’d be hard-pressed to find a group of more motivated men. Ask Navy SEALs what motivates them, and you will hear one or a combination of things like the challenge, love of country, sense of duty, prestige, love of adventure, sense of legacy by following in their father’s footsteps, or an ambitious career choice. But, you probably won’t hear any of them say they joined the Navy SEALs just for fun.

Children aren’t very different. They like to have fun, but contrary to popular belief, fun is never their only motivator, and actually, it is rarely even their primary motivator. Children are motivated by a plethora of things far more powerful than fun.

2. Leadership: Five years ago, I took my daughter and niece hiking. I made them follow me up a mountain, and after only the first 100 yards or so, they began whining and were soon “too tired” to press on. Then I let them take the lead and pretended *I* couldn’t keep up. I pretended to whine and complain, and suddenly, they giggled their way to the top of the mountain. I motivated them by letting them lead.

A wolf at the head of a pack moves faster than a dog on the end of a leash. It is the same with children. A child allowed to lead will be more motivated than one made to follow.

However, your children don’t necessarily have to lead a group to feel the motivational power of leadership. It is really

just about giving children the opportunity to take initiative, make decisions, and set a course. They can start by leading themselves. Give them some autonomy. Allow your children to make some decisions on their own, help choose their curriculum, and set some of their own learning objectives, and they will certainly experience the motivation of leadership.

3. Curiosity: When I want my oldest daughter to read a certain chapter book, I open it to an exciting part, read up to the climax, and then slam it shut. She begs me to read on, but I refuse. So guess what? She reads it herself because she has to know what happens.

I do the same thing with all subjects. For geography, I tell my children about the most wonderful or terrible places in the world, but I refuse to tell them where they are located. Or for history, I tell them stories of kings and great battles, but sometimes I don't say how the battles end, so the story becomes a mystery. Sometimes Siri solves these mysteries for my children in a moment, and other times, it takes them half a day of searching, but curiosity always finishes the stories that I do not.

4. Challenge: My favorite motivator is telling my kids they are too young, too small, or not smart enough to do something. Don't they love to prove me wrong. They love the challenge.

I say things like: "That book is too long for a little girl like you to read," and an hour later, my daughter has completed it, or, "Those sticks are too heavy for a little boy like you to carry all the way to the burn pile" and off my son goes.

What is it about a challenge that can make moving sticks suddenly exciting to a young boy? Well, when a chore becomes a challenge, it is transformed from a menial task into

an opportunity for a boy to prove to his father what he is made of, to prove he can do more than he is given credit for, and even to prove he is a winner.

However, we must only throw down challenges that are in the realm of possibility. If our challenges appear impossible, they can have the exact opposite effect—stealing every ounce of our children’s motivation. After all, no child is in a hurry to prove himself a failure or a fool, taking on what is far beyond his ability. Monumental missions like that are best reserved for long-term goals.

5. Competition: For some reason, we value most what is hard and painful to get—things we have to work or even fight for. In my house, homeschooling is a series of competitions: chess and Jiu-Jitsu tournaments, history, geography, and Bible bowls, spelling and math bees, speech and debate competitions, art galleries, and 4H. The trophy or prize my children can win is always a positive motivator. But, the fear of letting their team down or looking foolish in front of others is also motivating. Competition is a powerful double-motivator, invoking both the hope of triumph and the fear of failure.

6. Punishment: When my kids complain about schoolwork or chores, I just double whatever they are fussing about. “Oh, you want to have an attitude about one little math worksheet? Okay, now you can do two. Oh, you’re going to cry about it? How about three?” Do this a few times, and it is amazing how motivated and grateful children are just to have their normal workload.

7. Energy: Our body’s energy is directly tied to our sense of motivation. Most people understand that food, exercise, sleep, posture, and comfort all affect the body’s energy level.

However, they falsely assume if something is a source of energy, like food, the more they consume, the more energy they will have.

If you tell someone that you feel tired, they will probably ask if you've had enough sleep but never if you've had too much, even though too much sleep will zap you of energy and motivation just as quickly as too little. Or, if you say you lack energy, people might wonder if you need something to eat but never if you've already had too much. Yet, when people overeat, the blood in their body rushes to digest the excess food, making the person feel sluggish and unmotivated. And if I had to guess, I'd say here in America, overeating is a greater cause of fatigue than undereating.

If someone is about to begin a long, possibly boring talk, they might warn you to get comfortable because you are going to be there a while, but it should be the other way around. We get comfortable when we want to sleep and should get uncomfortable when we want to stay awake and focused.

Exercise is a great source of energy, but again, overexertion can just as quickly lead to exhaustion. After an hour of wrestling or Jiu-Jitsu, the only thing I'm motivated to do is take a nap. However, instead of one long, excessively-strenuous exercise session, short bursts of exercise throughout the day can be extremely energizing.

In the Air Force and Army, whenever we had to sit through long, painfully-boring PowerPoint briefings (which was actually quite often), the military had a special way to keep us awake, energized, focused, and motivated. Every 30 to 45 minutes, the PowerPoint presentation was paused, and soldiers were made to stretch and do jumping jacks or pushups to get our heart pumping and blood flowing.

When we started to nod off between breaks, we were made to stand at the back of the room. This usually cured us. In all my time in the military, I only remember one person who fell asleep standing up—and that was me, but only because I had been awake for nearly 48 hours straight.

If your children can't seem to pay attention or stay awake for their studies, and you have tried other motivators, remember the body—perhaps they only lack energy and need to stand up, or do a round of pushups, or eat a smaller breakfast.

8. Their Desires: If a doctor began surgery on us without our permission, we'd give him the fight of his life. Surgery is costly and painful, so before we let a doctor cut into us, he must convince us that his purpose aligns with ours. In truth, doctors perform surgery to make money for themselves—that is their true desire. But, we don't care about their desire; we only care about our own, which is to maintain our health. These desires seem like they have nothing to do with each other, and yet, there is a point of intersection when our desire and their desire become one and surgery happens.

It is the same with children and education. To be motivated to learn when the learning is costly and painful, children must believe their education aligns with their own ambitions—and it has to be *their* ambitions, not yours.

But too often, parents and teachers begin the painful process of education, thinking only of what they want. So, education becomes something adults inflict on children, and children resist, as they would an unwanted and unnecessary procedure.

Yet, if adults were more discerning they would see that between their desires and their children's, there is always a

point of intersection. For instance, parents want their children to study math, but most children don't care about math—not for its own sake anyway. However, all children enjoy counting their money. So, your children will resist you if you make them study math, but they will be so grateful if you only help them count their money. That is the win-win point of intersecting desires.

Middle and high school students are told they must study hard to get into college. But think of it from the teenagers' perspective. Many already hate school, and yet, are being told, if they work really hard, they can have some more of it—suffer school so that you can go to college and suffer more school! How could this possibly motivate a child?! It's like a doctor saying he wants to amputate your healthy leg, so he can cut your other healthy leg off later. It's pointless pain rewarded with more pointless pain. No, college is the parents' and teachers' desire, not the teens'.

There are three universal desires shared by all teenagers—three things all teenagers want: the opposite sex, independence, and the ability to buy things. So, if your purpose is to get your kids into college, say things like: “You know, I met your father in college, and we were married right away!” or, “It seems like all the pretty girls go to college,” or try, “Doctors make an obscene amount of money—they can buy almost anything—but, they have to go to college first.”

I realize *their* desires might seem less noble than our own, but that is only because we are not teenagers anymore, and we already have a spouse, our independence, and money to buy things. So, it is not fair to dismiss or make light of their desires, and it is even more foolish to think you can gain their cooperation without appealing to them.

Children can endure almost any struggle so long as they accept the purpose behind it. That is why children love sports so much and will agree to run extra laps if they know it will give them a competitive edge. Children submit to their coaches because they understand that they and their coaches are on the same team, working for the same goal.

If we want our children to take their studies seriously and be motivated to learn, they must believe that their education shares their sense of direction. Most children won't see the connection between our curriculum and their dreams on their own. They know what they want but don't know what math or grammar has to do with it. That is what parents are for. We must convince them that the entire purpose of their education is merely to make their dreams come true. Accomplish this, and see how their motivation soars.

9. Goals: Every person has a fantasy for their future—a paradise they want to create or find. Goals are the stepping stones to take us to our paradise. Setting goals gives us motivational hope, and accomplishing goals gives us the motivational assurance that we are making real progress toward our dream.

So, help your kids set goals. Don't wait until they are in their teens, either. Young children love to set and achieve goals, too. Here's a list of goals my Emma wrote for herself when she was six years old: rock climb the hardest wall at the YMCA, memorize some *Beauty & the Beast* songs, win a chess championship, learn to ride a bike better, and jump off the high dive.

Emma had her goals pinned above her bed, she talked about them all the time, and within the year, she accomplished all of them except the high dive (and that was only because we

moved to the countryside, and she no longer had access to it). And to this day, she loves to write down new goals and check them off the list as she achieves each one.

10. Peer Pressure: When I was ten years old, my grandmother showed me an old picture of my father from when he was in high school. He had long girly hair and wore pants with big goofy bell-bottoms and a shirt that was too small. He looked ridiculous, and I didn't understand why he dressed like that.

But now, I have a silly photo of myself from junior high school, and I look even more ridiculous. I had a perfect bowl cut parted straight down the middle. Although I was short and skinny, I wore an XXL sweatshirt that was as long as a prom dress, and it was a good thing too since I also wore the waist of my pants just above my kneecaps. I looked like an emaciated, saggy-baggy elephant, but it was the fashion of my peers.

I am ashamed to say, that was not the worst of it. At the time, a few of my female friends convinced me that my skin was way too white, and I needed a tan. Because it was a cold Kansas winter, sun tanning wasn't easy. I did attempt it, though, through my bedroom window. When that didn't work, my female friends introduced me to sunless tanning lotion. They said, "Rub it all over your body," and I did. But, they didn't tell me to use just a small amount or to rub it in evenly. So, there I am in a seventh-grade family photo, looking like I have dark orange mud smeared all over my face. The look of my stained, dirty face, combined with the over-sized shirt and pants, gave me a final look of a homeless bag lady.

In my teens, I looked as ridiculous as my father did in his teens and even as ridiculous as the teens of today. I see it now, but I could not see it then because my peers had possessed

me—they could motivate me to do almost anything. It would be a funny memory if it was only the fashion they controlled, but they controlled everything and led me to many regrets.

Psychologists are still trying to understand exactly why, but for some reason in the teenage years, peer pressure becomes an all-powerful motivator. And at least in public schools, the peers are always passing poison down the line. No kid graduates without submitting to some form of stupidity and delinquency, and for a few, their peers destroy them, and they never recover.

Because public schools usually bring out the worst in children, schoolyard peer pressure is almost always a downward spiral. However, it is a mistake to believe that *all* peer-pressure is inherently destructive. Introduce your kids to positive peers, and keep the bad ones far away, and you will harness the motivational power of peer pressure to work in your favor.

11. Fear: One of the most powerful motivators in my life was a bitter woman who went out of her way to make me miserable. Just before I graduated high school, she sneered, “I can’t wait for you to get out on your own and fall on your face. I’m going to laugh!”

Whenever I needed a boost of energy, something to inspire and motivate me, I replayed that woman’s hateful words over in my head. It was wonderful. What she meant as a curse, I turned into a great blessing. She instilled a fear of failure that motivated me to work twice as long and hard and to never, ever, give up.

Life is a race we run, and success is what we hope to achieve at the finish line. However, most people run without a sense of urgency, and so their pace is too slow to achieve a

prize of great success. For a few lucky runners like myself, though, the fear of failure burst onto the track and began to chase us when we were young. Failure is chasing us now. We can see and hear it snarling and snapping at our heels, eager to sink its teeth into our legs and bring us to the ground. Fear pumps through our body, and there is an explosion of adrenaline as we run for our lives. And the fear of failure spurs us on to great success.

The fear of failure is a mighty motivator if we can only master it and make it work for us as Queen Elizabeth I did. Queen Elizabeth had every right to be a coward. She was two years old when her father, Henry VIII, beheaded her mother, Anne Boleyn. Then after her father and brother died, she watched her older half-sister, Mary I, behead her cousin, Lady Jane Grey, who had jockeyed for the crown. Queen Mary I seriously considered beheading Elizabeth as well, after Elizabeth foolishly involved herself in a plot to overthrow Mary.

When Mary I finally died, and the Protestants placed the English crown on Elizabeth's head, she had even more reason to fear. She was an illegitimate girl with no real claim to the throne. The Protestant half of England supported her, but the Catholic half seemed to favor the closest legitimate heir, Elizabeth's cousin, Mary Queen of Scots. On top of that, the Catholic King Philip II of Spain was planning to invade England in retaliation for Elizabeth's support of the Protestant wars against Spain and also for persecuting Catholics living in England. Elizabeth understood that failure to defeat the superior forces of King Phillip's Spanish Armada would be the end of her reign and her life.

Elizabeth did not ignore her fear nor let it paralyze her.

Instead, she harnessed it. Her great fear drove her to take bold measures, which led to a great victory—the annihilation of the entire Spanish Armada in 1588.

Fear is a gift from God. Not only is it a natural biological warning device that alarms a person when he is in danger but also gives him a powerful, motivating boost of adrenaline to help him flee or fight when he needs to. Therefore, have no fear of fear. Instead, help your children tap into this healthy, all-natural energy booster.

12. Critics: When it comes to motivation, parents usually prefer the feel-good, positive-reinforcement stuff. It's true, if our kids *only* hear the negative, they will get discouraged, but it's also true that if they only hear the positive, they will become complacent and overconfident. Our kids have to hear both. They have to hear from their fans and their critics.

Yet, I see it all the time, parents drowning their children in praise without the slightest word of criticism. Bobby is 3 years old, and he drew a dinosaur for the first time, but I can see right away it looks more like a blobby kaleidoscope. Yet, his parents celebrate as if he just painted the Mona Lisa. They lead little Bobby to believe he has found perfection on his very first try. And you can't improve on perfect, so Bobby gets his crayons and creates another blobby-kaleidoscope dinosaur, followed by another and another.

Look, cheer your children on, but give them some form of criticism, some little thing they can improve. Criticism may not feel as nice, but it is necessary and motivates kids to come back each time with something better.

13. Public Recognition: A few years ago, I was trying to motivate our homeschool chess team to practice more. I talked about how they could win a team trophy, and they were

interested, but you should have seen how they lit up when I told them, if our team won the state championship, I'd get the news announced in the local paper.

Everyone secretly desires their 15 minutes of fame. It might seem a little vain to you at first, but I think kids who work hard and do well have the right to be proud of their accomplishments and publicly recognized. And what's more, the public praise they receive will motivate them on to even greater achievement.

14. Inspiration: Use music, speeches, books, and even movies to inspire your children. When I wanted my children to take their studies more seriously, I introduced them to the wonderful Anne Shirley of *Green Gables*, who always worked so hard to be at the top of her class. When I wanted to inspire my son to toughen up and start behaving more like a young man, I introduced him to John Wayne films. When I wanted to elevate my children's appreciation of manners and etiquette, I fed them a diet of Victorian-era movies, like *Pride and Prejudice*. Sometimes, before a speech class, I have them watch a famous speech or scene from Shakespeare. A few weeks before a chess tournament, I have them watch an inspirational chess movie, something like *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, to get them motivated.

Music also has a way of inspiring by creating moods and atmospheres. For instance, when I want to inspire a calm, reverent mood for our family's traditional Sunday dinner, I play beautiful Gregorian chants. Classical music sets the mood for serious study. And other, more upbeat music motivates children to wake up in the morning and exercise.

However, the key to motivation through inspiration is timing and scarcity. It is counterproductive to watch *Searching*

for *Bobby Fischer* just before a spelling lesson. Your children will be inspired to play chess, and this will make them even less interested in their spelling words than they normally are. But, watch five minutes of a suspenseful spelling bee on YouTube, and then see how your children are suddenly inspired to spell.

Also, just as familiarity breeds contempt, the overuse of inspiration breeds boredom. An inspiring movie loses its effect when it's over-watched. The same is true with music or any other thing. I only let my children watch *Searching for Bobby Fischer* once a year, just before the State Chess Championship, so that when they watch the movie, it is new and exciting, not old and boring.

With very young children (ages 3-7), inspiration is not as effective as some of the other motivators on this list. However, as children grow older and then into adulthood, inspiration becomes more and more powerful.

You might wonder where I found my motivation to write this book? Was it for fun? No. No one writes a book like this just for fun. My peers weren't pressuring me, I have no one to compete with, and I wasn't motivated by the challenge. I had no fear of failure or threat of punishment to spur me on. There was a sense of purpose that motivated me to start writing and keep writing, but I would not say it was the primary motivator. My primary motivation was inspiration. I was inspired to write *The Art of Raising Children for Greatness* series. Almost every single word was inspired. There were moments throughout the process when inspiration left me, and I sat at my computer for half the day and could write nothing but dribble, and if inspiration still didn't come to me, even the dribble would dry up. And, that is what we call "writer's block."

Without inspiration, motivation can become a painful grind. That is why before I write a word, I search long and hard for inspiration in books, music, speeches, art, movies, and conversation. I've learned that if I can't find inspiration, I will usually be more productive taking the day off.

Parents raising their children for greatness will find all 14 motivators useful, but inspiration is the internal spring that you must work hardest to tap into because once kids are inspired, your motivating job gets easier. Your children will no longer need you to drag them forward, but will instead push themselves far beyond.

Diminishing Returns

I once worked for a large company where my manager loved meetings so much that we had them every day and sometimes even twice a day. This is when I really got to understand the Law of Diminishing Returns.

In each meeting, my attention followed the same cycle. For the first 10 to 15 minutes, I was focused. Sometimes I even thought, "Wow, this is great! Really good information." Had we stopped then, I might have gotten something out of it, but of course, we were just getting started.

Somewhere around the 20- to 30-minute mark, I'd begin to squirm: "What time is it? When will this end? Doesn't he know we have real work to do?" From 45 minutes on, all was lost. While my face smiled, my heart quivered with rage, "Just stop talking! Shut your mouth! Will this meeting ever end?!"

If eyes could kill, mine would have! But I had no choice except to sit and take it. So I sat in silent protest, secretly daydreaming, refusing to focus, and refusing to remember.

My wife says I just had a bad attitude, but if that was true, then all of my co-workers were suffering from the exact same bad attitude.

In reality, our boss had simply ignored the Law of Diminishing Returns. He had good intentions, but his long meetings tortured us because they exceeded our natural limit to retain information or be engaged. This is exactly what school does to children. For all its effort, school receives little return on learning because it always exceeds a child's natural will to learn. It burns them out and frustrates them. Hour after hour, day after day, year after year, for 13 years, children are forced to endure the same dull routine. It is unbearable. Yet, school is a mindless machine that drones on long after kids' motivation is dead, and their learning switch is flipped off. Without the will to learn, there is no way to learn—if only educators understood this.

Sometimes less is more. If we want to keep our children motivated, the school day should be drastically shortened. How long will depend on the individual child's ability and interest. However, the general teaching principle is to never force-feed (unless you absolutely have to), overfeed, or even fill your children. Merely whet their appetite and leave them hungry for more. Keep your lessons short, intense, and interesting, and then quickly set your children free again to pursue their own passions and achieve their own goals.

Labels

At first, I didn't know why I had to go to that double-wide trailer. My teacher called my name and sent me out right in the middle of class. Week after week, my name was called, along

with another boy and girl, and off we'd go.

It must have been the second or third week when I got my first clue. Our "double-wide" teacher explained, "I'm here to help you read." That's when it hit me! I looked at the other two students. They weren't exactly known as the brightest in our class. They were in the double-wide for special help, and that meant I must also be one of the not-so-bright ones! From that point on, I hated the trailer. I cringed when the teacher called out our names in front of the class. All I heard was, "Stupid 1, Stupid 2, and Stupid 3, time for special ed!"

I was in third grade, and I might have gotten over the shame if there was light at the end of the tunnel. But even as young as I was, I knew I was being put onto an especially slow track, one that was unrecoverable. Yes, we were reading the same book as the other students, but in just a few weeks, we'd fallen several chapters behind. "For crying out loud," I raged, "if we are so far behind, why aren't they trying to catch us up?"

My discouragement reached its peak when I concluded that not only were we the dumbest kids in third grade, but we now had the dumbest teacher in the school teaching us! Every day we'd spend an hour with her, taking turns reading paragraphs from *Little House on the Prairie*. After each paragraph, our special teacher would pause and ask us to explain what was happening in the story—you know, because as dumb as we were, the simplest sentence might fly over our heads. Well, we came to a part where some boys had been bad in church (or something like that, it's been a long time ago now). The story went that after church the boys' father took them behind a shed and "tanned their hides." The other dumb boy sitting across from me explained that it meant that their

father spanked them.

“No, no,” our special teacher explained, “It means that he tanned their hides. ‘Hides’ is another name for skins, and in the old days, they used to tan animal skins and then wear the skins as clothes.” All of us dumb kids looked at each other dumbfounded. Was she joking? Back and forth we argued, explaining that the boys were being punished for disobeying and “tanned their hides” meant a spanking. She didn’t buy it, and our session ended.

I could only shake my head. This was the woman charged with “catching us up” and testing our reading comprehension. We didn’t stand a chance. Luckily, I eventually moved to another school, or I might have stayed in special education forever.

Up to that point in my life, I’d always been shy in school. I don’t know what changed at the new school, but for the first time in my life, I became a popular kid, and it just went straight to my head. I even got the most popular girl in school to go out with me. Well, I felt pretty cool. In fact, too cool for school. All day long, I created scenes: picking fights, making jokes in class, sassing back, and refusing to participate in class activities. My teacher hated it, but the other kids loved it!

It wasn’t long before I was on our school’s official “Discipline Plan.” And my teacher, I swear, started a personal crusade to have me diagnosed and drugged. I remember one day, she was so nice to me. She said, “You just be yourself today and talk out as much as you like.” At the end of the day, she called me up to her desk. There was something like 100 tally marks on her notepad. “You see these marks, Britton? I marked one for each time you were talking when you weren’t supposed to be.” I swallowed, but then she smiled. “You can’t

help it, can you? You just can't control it, right?"

I went along with it, "Yeah, I just can't help it."

She smiled again, "Well, that's OK."

It was a weird conversation, but I was just happy she didn't have me sit on the line during recess. She kept tallying without punishing for the next few weeks, and that was just fine by me. It was all going great until I found myself following another teacher out and into another double-wide trailer.

It was a strange place. Little was explained to me except that I would be doing my schoolwork in the double-wide for a while. I didn't read in this double-wide as I had at my last school, though. Instead, I did worksheets while some lady stared quietly and took notes. I quickly figured out that it was my behavior she was charting. Of course, without all the other kids goading me on, it was easy to follow the rules. On top of that, I felt my teacher had set me up, and I was determined to make her look like a fool.

I was overly agreeable, and everything was, "Yes, sir. Yes, ma'am." At the end of the week, the woman reported back to my teacher that my behavior was good, but she wanted to try some other tests. From then on, she started testing me in school subjects. She marveled at how advanced I was, especially in math.

The testing results came back. This time I was GIFTED! My misbehavior was written off as an Einstein Complex! How ironic, in one trailer I learned I was dumb and the next, a genius!

My new and improved label helped me recover quickly from the "Special Ed" label, but it took me a long time to overcome the stigma of being labeled "Gifted." You could hardly blame me for walking with my nose in the air. Hadn't

science confirmed my superior intellect, and didn't that in some way entitle me to privilege? When my parents' opinion differed from my understanding, I had to wonder if all non-gifted people were so ignorant.

It was not until I graduated from high school that I began to see human potential spans beyond artificial labels, and it cannot possibly be summed up with a short visit to a double-wide trailer. Whether someone has been gifted with slightly higher or lower intellectual aptitude is of much less significance in determining his future success than his level of motivation. Motivation leads to hard work, and hard work beats natural talent every day of the week.

So, parents should be very cautious about labeling children, if we do so at all, because children change, but labels stick and stifle. A child who believes he has learning disabilities will assume it is his genetic lot to lose, and believing failure is a foregone conclusion, he will have little motivation to work hard. So, if you see your child struggling, a little encouragement and tutoring will do a lot more good than a label.

I do understand that some children are born with slightly more intelligence than others—what some call “gifted”—but I also believe it can be detrimental to their motivation to tell them so. Think of the *Tortoise and the Hare*. The Hare believed his genetic superiority would be enough to beat the Tortoise, and at first, he was right. He started in a flash. But his overconfidence soon killed his motivation. He imagined he was so fast that he couldn't lose. So, he didn't work as hard as the Tortoise. Before the race was over, he rested, and then fell asleep. While he napped, the determined Tortoise caught up, pushed on past, and won the race.

You may think your child is gifted, and you might even be right. But let the gift remain a secret so that he continues to struggle and work just as hard as if he had no gift and success was merely a matter of great effort.

Creatures of Habit

In 403 A.D., a young mother named Laeta petitioned the great church father, Saint Jerome, for advice on raising her daughter in the Christian faith. St. Jerome replied in a short letter and only mentioned a few things that he considered essential to raising a Christian daughter. One of those things was the importance of forming good habits early:

...You must see that the child is not led away by the silly coaxing of women to form a habit of shortening long words or of decking herself with gold and purple. Of these habits one will spoil her conversation and the other her character. She must not therefore learn as a child what afterwards she will have to unlearn. The eloquence of the Gracchi is said to have been largely due to the way in which from their earliest years their mother spoke to them. Hortensius became an orator while still on his father's lap. Early impressions are hard to eradicate from the mind. When once wool has been dyed purple who can restore it to its previous whiteness? An unused jar long retains the taste and smell of that with which it is first filled. Grecian history tells us that

the imperious Alexander who was lord of the whole world could not rid himself of the tricks of manner and gait which in his childhood he had caught from his governor Leonides. We are always ready to imitate what is evil; and faults are quickly copied where virtues appear inattainable.

Children are creatures of free will, and ultimately, no matter how we raise them, they will always possess the ability to choose a different path for themselves. But, just as Saint Jerome wrote, children are not exactly free agents either because they are also creatures of habit. What they eat, when they wake, how they talk and dress, personal hygiene, and even more serious things like health, behavior, and character, are generally motivated by habit—not free will.

This is because habit is a powerful psychological motivator that programs behaviors into the subconscious mind. And once a person's subconscious is programmed with particular habits, they can only alter their program with intense conscious and consistent effort. Even then, one is always at risk of defaulting to the original program of habits first wired in childhood and often for the remainder of their life, whether the habits are good or bad.

That is why the Bible can say with confidence, “*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*” Through the influence of habit, God gives parents the ability to program their children in the way they should go, and by the power of habit, most will stay the course.

“If this is true,” you might ask, “how could a Christian

nation, such as America, raise up a generation of atheists and agnostics? Why are teenagers so well known for parental defiance and rebellion? Why do so few young adults want to be like their parents?" The answer is very simple: parents are no longer their children's primary programmer—public schools have taken their place.

Before the era of compulsory public schooling (which began in Massachusetts in the year 1852 and gained full steam by the early 1900s), children were the spitting image of their parents—in dress, manners, politics, religion, and usually occupation. It was not until parents gave schools a major role in training up their children that their children began to look and act less and less like their parents, and more and more like their schools.

Public school children are raised on a habitual seesaw. Whatever habits their parents attempt to form at home are counterbalanced by the school. They teach their children to be polite and respectful at home, and their children's peers are at school, teaching them new curse words and dirty jokes. Parents teach their children to save themselves for marriage while their children's school is passing out condoms, and their classmates are introducing them to pornography and pushup bras. Parents teach their children that they were created in the image of God while teachers are busy convincing students that they come from monkeys. Since schools possess children for the larger part of the day, parents are playing seesaw with a 400-pound gorilla—and parents usually lose.

Parents can prescribe good behavior at home, but if their children spend the majority of their day at school, they are more likely to adopt the bad habits of their peers, whether they mean to or not. And once habits are programmed, they

are terribly hard to break because they gain strength and momentum every day of their lives. Like tiny snowballs rolling down a mountain, habits formed in childhood rapidly become boulders with the force and momentum of speeding trains—who can stop them?

These past few months, I've been pruning an old, overgrown orchard on the backside of my property. The other day, I found a mature plum tree growing horizontally across the dirt. Having sprung up in a thicket of other trees, it found itself in dark shadows. So, instead of growing tall, it grew long with its trunk slithering through the dirt for nearly 15 feet until, finally, it found sunlight at the edge of the other trees. There it sprouted branches and even managed to produce a little fruit. A tree this age should be towering high with the other grown trees, yet having spent its forming years in darkness, it stood no taller than a two- or three-year-old sapling. There was no saving the tree. Its trunk was tangled in the roots of other trees, and its belly was rotting in the dirt and full of insects. I was sorry to waste it. It's hard to scrap an old tree, but there was no setting it straight, either. The trunk was hard wood. And so, I cut it into many pieces to feed a fire. I actually felt bad—such a waste of a tree.

How much worse it would be to waste a child, allowing them to adopt all the wrong habits that lead to a lowly, rotten life. But, many modern parents do exactly that, letting their children's bad habits survive into early adulthood, hoping they will work themselves out in time. It is a huge mistake because you don't straighten an old tree; you straighten the sapling. Once a tree is full-grown, you'd sooner break it than set it straight. It is the same with children. So, parents must nip bad habits the moment they bud and do all they can to

graft good habits onto the young roots because both good and bad habits will persist and grow forever if they are left alone.

When I was five years old, I began biting my fingernails. The habit, not corrected in childhood, is still with me today. It is a terrible habit, especially for a public speaker. People always imagine I am nervous before a speech, when in fact, I chew my nails all the time, when I'm nervous and when I'm not. Many times, I have thought to break the habit, but it takes more effort than it's worth because most of the time, I don't even realize I'm doing it.

On the other hand, I did form good habits, too. In my toddler years, I was taught to bow my head in prayer for every meal. The habit was so deeply a part of me that when I was seven years old, eating lunch at a friend's house and his mother began the meal without a blessing, I had to speak up. It was as if my being did not know how to eat without saying a prayer first. Thirty years later, I still pray before every meal.

For better or worse, most people really are creatures of the habits they form as children. So, if you want to raise your children for greatness, you must make sure they are motivated by the right habits—the habits of greatness: getting to bed early and rising even earlier, healthy eating and exercise, professional dress and appearance, but more importantly, the habits of strength and courage, the wise management of money, hard work and perseverance, kindness and manners, honesty and integrity, faith and religion, and other disciplines and virtues great men and women live by.

You must keep your saplings straight while they are young and easy to form. Then when they are grown, and their roots are deep, and the hard wood of habit has set in, see how they can't help but shoot straight up into the heavens.

Hunger Drives the Hunt

Hunger is usually associated with weakness—someone lacking food and energy—but actually, it can also be a source of great motivation and strength. For in the jungle, it is the hungriest lions who dare to bring down an elephant. And a starving wolf will steal prey from a fat bear for the mere reason that the fat bear isn't as hungry, and thus, isn't ready to fight, possibly die, for the food.

Physical hunger is a powerful motivator for human beings as well. Every man and woman has felt and been motivated by the pain of a grumbling stomach. However, *man does not live on bread alone* but is also motivated by spiritual hungers that can grow even stronger than the physical.

One of mankind's spiritual hungers is for a successful legacy. Man is hungry to succeed, to accomplish something great, and to leave his mark on this world in the short time that is his life. From the moment he is born, his hunger to leave a legacy begins to grow within him, and by his teen years, the hunger pain becomes so intense, it drives him on for the rest of his life until he finds great success, or loses hope and gives up, or dies.

Great hunger can be a great advantage in pursuing success and leaving a powerful legacy. People imagine that rich families have an easier time raising successful children, but wealth is its own hurdle because children, who already have access to everything they could ever want, are robbed of the motivating hunger that drives men on to greatness. That is why there are so many rags to riches stories while many rich families lose it all by the third generation—the poor have greater hunger.

I saw this first hand at boarding school. Many of the wealthy students in my classes wanted to do well, but they weren't as hungry as I was. My family did not have a lot of money growing up. My father didn't become a doctor until I was halfway through high school. Besides, at prep school, having a doctor for a father was no big deal. So, I felt very much outclassed. Yet, that fact was hardly discouraging. Each morning, I woke up with a sense of hunger and an understanding that if I wanted to achieve any great thing in my life, I would have to work twice as hard and twice as long as my classmates.

Hunger is a blessing, but only if we allow it to drive our children to hunt for themselves. Just go to any major city and look at all the hungry homeless people waiting for someone to feed them. And feeding them may be just as cruel as giving them money for beer or drugs. I don't mean we should let them starve, but we should only give them opportunities to feed themselves. Never a handout, not for those of able body and sound mind. Handouts spoil hunger, wasting its motivational powers.

That is why I rarely give my children money because I know it will deprive them of the will to earn for themselves. And generally, I do not buy things for my children first and then let them pay me back or work it off later because no one is hungry to work for a meal already digesting in their bellies. Even if it is something I want my children to have, I let the hunger build because it is powerful motivation.

The hunger for success and legacy is natural in all men. It is the very motivation that drives humanity to create, invent, and invest—working to leave the world a better place than they found it. But while every person is born with this *natural*

hunger, those raised for greatness must feel an *unnatural* hunger—a deeper and more acute hunger—in order to have a stronger drive than the average man or woman. And the best way to intensify your children’s hunger is by increasing their appetite.

Most children begin life with a tremendous appetite—they want to live in a castle, rule the world, and travel to the moon—but their hunger shrinks smaller and smaller with age as they better understand the effort it takes to hunt a big meal. If we are not careful, our children will settle for the first meal they can catch. They will find a small house, a decent job with good benefits, and ignore their hunger until their stomach shrivels, and the rumbling quiets, forever.

There is nothing inherently wrong with “settling,” but it never leads to greatness. So, for those of us raising our children for greatness, we can let our children eat some sardines along the way, but we can’t let them forget: it’s the whale they are really after.

Always encourage your children to want more out of life. That is how you will increase their hunger and stretch their appetite. And don’t worry, your children won’t bite off more than they can chew. They might not be able to achieve all they hunger for, but as the saying goes, “Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.”

A Sense of Greatness

As I said earlier in this chapter, every child will have a unique sense of purpose, and it is wise for parents to tap into it. But, you can do more than tap into their desires, you can supersize them.

A few years ago, when my daughter decided she wanted to be an artist, I told her: “Anybody can be an artist. But, you should be a great artist! One of the best in the world! You could work for Disney, or better yet, you should start your own studio, and animate your own movies!”

Creating this sense of grandeur about life and dreams is powerfully motivating. When I arrived at Fork Union Military Academy, I believed I was there to get a good education and some much-needed discipline. But actually, it was much bigger than that. God had brought me to that place to receive a great privilege so that I might fulfill my destiny. I was set straight about this right away, by a short man with fiery eyes and an authoritative voice, named Commandant Ivens, who said:

Boys, it is no mistake you are here. This is a great school, and you are here for a special reason. You are going to change the world, and we are here to prepare you.

I didn’t know if it was true for all the other boys, but in my heart, I instantly knew Commandant Ivens was speaking to me. I looked up at the ceiling in the old chapel and believed God had brought me there, and He intended to make a great man out of me—a man to change the world! Suddenly, the hardships of military school were more meaningful and knowing that it would all pay off in the end, motivated me to work hard and with a sense of urgency. Each day I woke and worked with the great conviction that I was preparing to take my place among the great men of this world.

That conviction is in me now, and I’ve already placed it

in the hearts of my children. I've told them that they are not studying to get into a good college and land a good job; they are preparing to change the world.

Other parents can say the same thing to their children, but their kids won't believe it. They will know their parents are just being nice because their upbringing and education are no different than any of their friends. However, my children genuinely believe they are on a greater path because they can see and feel it. The rules and standards I have set for them are higher than their peers and what one would expect of children *truly* being raised for greatness.

So, all my children know they are on a sacred mission, and that understanding is more motivating than all the fun, in all the world. And if you too want to raise your children for greatness, you must put the same understanding in their hearts.

THE ART OF
RAISING CHILDREN FOR GREATNESS
(SERIES)

BOOK I: *REVEALING SCHOOL*

BOOK II: *EDUCATION* (✓)

BOOK III: *CHARACTER*
(to be released in the summer of 2020)

BOOK IV: *NOBLE WAY*
(to be released in the fall of 2020)

BOOK V: *THE TRIUMPH OF EVIL*
(to be released in the fall 2021)

You just finished reading “Education,” one of five books in *The Art of Raising Children for Greatness* series. Congratulations! You now know more about educating children than most Americans. But you won't know enough until you have read and checked the entire series (all five books) off the list. Only then will you fully understand what is required to raise great children whose lives glorify their God and honor their families. You can get the entire series on Amazon or through Blue Manor Education's website. May God bless your journey.

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If you have further comments or questions for Britton LaTulippe, you can contact him through the online academy or Blue Manor's Facebook page.