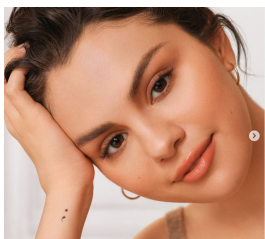


Helping **parents** understand **teenagers** and their world

YOUTH CULTURE
HOT QUOTE

“*I suddenly had to learn how to be with myself. That was annoying, because in the past, I could spend hours looking at other people’s lives. I would find myself down nearly two years in someone’s feed, and then I’d realize, ‘I don’t even know this person!’ Now I get information the proper way. When my friends have something to talk about, they call me and say, ‘Oh, I did this.’ They don’t say, ‘Wait, did you see my post?’”*

Selena Gomez, explaining her relationship with social media and that she doesn’t have the passwords to her social media account, but rather lets her assistant handle posting, *Elle*, August 26, 2021.



LIVING THROUGH YOUR KIDS

WALT MUELLER, CPYU President



You know them when you see them. They are the parents who scream at their kids from the sidelines, show disappointment when a child brings home an A-minus grade, and continually post carefully curated pictures and announcements on social media that trumpet their kid’s good looks and achievements. For parents who live vicariously through their kids, it’s not at all about encouraging kids to quietly go about life humbly doing *their* best to God’s glory, but using their kids to loudly and selfishly showcase themselves at *their* best.

I have never forgotten the first time that I so clearly saw a father admit to seeking his own identity and glory through his football-playing son. After two quarters of obnoxiously screaming loudly at his teenage son from the stands, the father was confronted at halftime by a peer who yelled, “Hey Bob! You’d think that was you out there on the field!” Bob didn’t hesitate to issue his enthusiastic reply: “It is!!” God bless Bob’s son.

In his book *Parenting: Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*, Dr. Paul Tripp includes a chapter on the topic of “Identity.” Dr. Tripp states the “Identity Principle” this way: “If you are not resting as a parent in your identity in Christ, you will look for identity in your children.” While expecting our children to be successful and do their best is not a bad thing, far too many of us are harboring parental hearts that are more focused on our children achieving the kind of success that makes us look good, rather than on the child who is required to deliver it. The result is that we crush and embitter our children through the weight of our pressures and expectations. When that happens, God bless our sons and daughters.

The remedy to this is to rest in our identity in Jesus Christ. If we are not finding our identity in Christ, we will attempt to find our identity

in something in the creation. . . possessions, vocation, accomplishments, and even our children. Simply stated, this is idolatry. As Dr. Tripp reminds us, only Christ is able to give us the identity, peace, and meaning that our hearts seek.

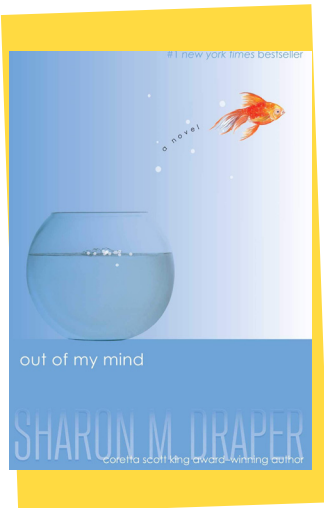
So, how can you know if you are living to find your identity through your children rather than in Jesus Christ? What are the signs that your parenting is driven more by what you need *from* your children rather than by what God wants to do *through you* in your children? Dr. Tripp shares these five “sure indications”:

- **Too much focus on success.** You want your children to succeed because you need them to succeed.
- **Too much concern about reputation.** You rely on your children and their performance to polish your reputation as a parent.
- **Too great desire for control.** You control situations and people to make sure your children succeed and enhance your reputation.
- **Too much emphasis on *doing* rather than *being*.** You focus on your child’s physical, social, and educational accomplishments rather than on their heart.
- **Too much temptation to make it *personal*.** You focus not on how their behavior is viewed by God, but on how their behavior affects you.

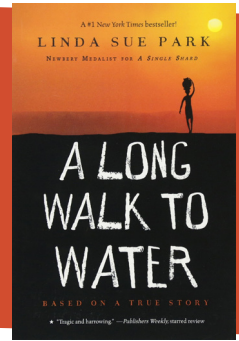
Parents, take stock of how you’re parenting. Are you putting undue, spirit-crushing pressure on your kids, or are you seeking to find your identity in Christ? And, are you teaching your kids to live to give glory to God, or are you pressuring them into living to give glory to you? ★

Best-selling Middle Grade Paperback Books

Source:
New York Times
August 2021



1. *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park
2. *The One and Only Ivan* by Katherine Applegate
3. *Out of My Mind* by Sharon M. Draper
4. *Fish in a Tree* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt
5. *Wish* by Barbara O'Connor
6. *Restart* by Gordon Korman
7. *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson
8. *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai with Patricia McCormick
9. *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander
10. *A Wolf Called Wander* by Rosanne Parry



QUICK STATS

Video game revenue increased from \$4.18 billion in July 2020 to \$4.6 billion in July 2021.
(NPD Group)

61% of 18-year-olds have a driver's license. Over the last 3 decades, the percentage of 18-year-olds with drivers' licenses has dropped nearly 20%.
(Federal Highway Administration)

FROM THE NEWS:

WILLOW SMITH AND POLYAMORY

Twenty-year-old Willow Smith is the hit-music-making daughter of Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith. Popular among our children and teens, she is one of today's influencers regarding belief and behavior. Back in 2019, she came out as bisexual. Earlier this year, she announced to her followers that she is polyamorous. The word combines the prefix “poly”- meaning “many or several” – with the Latin word for love, “amor.” In other words, those who embrace polyamory believe in having several emotionally and/or sexually intimate relationships at one time, and doing it all out in the open, with the approval of everyone involved. This takes the commonly accepted practice of premarital promiscuity and amps it up to new levels. Parents, your kids are now swimming in a cultural soup where relational and sexual faithfulness are seen as archaic and so yesterday. Take time and care to engage in the ongoing process of teaching your kids to know and embrace God's good design for their sexuality.

TRENDS: SMARTPHONES AND CHILDHOOD OBESITY

When we first started monitoring youth culture here at CPYU, smartphones did not exist. Kids who spent time in front of a screen did so with televisions. It was long before there were connections being made between time spent watching television, and obesity among kids. Now, researchers are looking at the relationship between smartphone use to diet and weight among adolescents. One recent study found that even moderate smartphone use may influence the dietary choices

and weight of teens. Kids who used a smartphone more than two hours a day were significantly more likely to eat more junk food and fewer fruits and vegetables than those who spent less time on their phones. Teens who spent more than three hours a day on their phones were significantly more likely to be overweight or obese. Parents, there are many reasons to monitor online time. Because our teens need to learn to steward their God-given bodies, we must intervene to make sure they are exercising and eating wisely.



LATEST RESEARCH: TRENDS IN E-CIG USE

Researchers at the CDC recently surveyed more than 14,000 high school and middle school students about their use of e-cigarettes. The good news is that between 2019 and 2020 the number of

students who say they have used an e-cigarette have dropped significantly. In 2019, over 27% of high schoolers reported using an e-cigarette. That

number dropped to 20% in 2020. Among middle schoolers, the number dropped from over 10% in 2019, to 5% in 2020. It seems that education, legislation, and enforcement are working. But far too many kids are still using e-cigarettes. Researchers are right to sound the warning that e-cigarette use is a gateway to worse health habits as adults, including moving to conventional tobacco cigarettes. In fact, researchers have found that many who use e-cigarettes at age 12, have made that switch by age 14. Parents, warn your kids about the physical and spiritual dangers of substance abuse.

**SEXUAL INTEGRITY
INITIATIVE**
A resource of CPYU and Project Six19

**This Transgender
Moment**
by Walt Mueller

As the school year gets started and we begin another season of youth ministry, the kids will be coming back. And they will be bringing with them, more than ever before, a host of unfolding beliefs and behaviors on sexuality and gender that most of us have never had to think about or address as youth workers or parents. Here at CPYU, we've been working to track with these specific gender and sexuality trends for as long as they've been developing, and what I've learned personally is that these are complex, sensitive, and difficult issues that involve God's deeply-valued Divine image-bearers.

To youth workers, parents, and all others I would humbly say this. . . this is an issue that we must study, reckon with, and address. So much hangs in the balance. Our kids need voices that will point them to – not away from – the life-giving freedom that comes with denying self, taking up one's cross, and following Jesus. We want our kids to live in the redemptive narrative of the Gospel. . . Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. . . a narrative that clearly sets God's agenda for matters of gender.

To get you started on your study and response to this transgender moment, consider scanning the QR code to the left and listening to a *Youth Culture Matters* podcast episode we recorded with Peter Lynas titled "Understanding Transgender in a Changing Culture."

New Podcast

The Word in Youth Ministry is a podcast from CPYU for youth workers by youth workers.



Listen at
www.cpyu.org/twim

Be sure to check out
Episode 8
“The Story of Scripture”

FROM THE WORD

Have you ever asked kids to describe God? Some of the most common descriptions reveal that many think God is an old, gray-bearded dictator who spends his days sitting on a throne while issuing non-stop judgements against all the things we do wrong. They see God as a kind of divine kill-joy who is bent on destroying their enjoyment of life. Consequently, they grow up fearing God and the joy they believe he gets from issuing retribution. The sad reality is that these are horribly skewed misunderstandings not only of God, but of what it means to fear God.

“FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS, FOR THIS IS THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.”
ECCLESIASTES 12:13

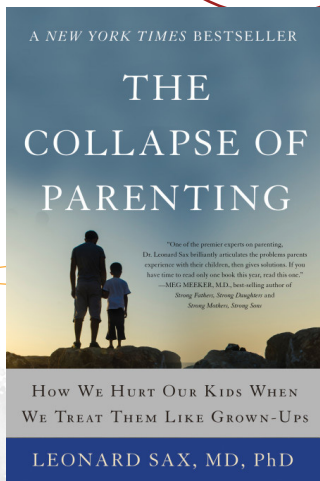
The writer of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes set out on a quest to discover the meaning of life and the source of joy in life. After trying all the things that we think will bring us joy – things that only leave us feeling increasingly empty and joy-less – the writer comes to this conclusion: *“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”*

A proper understanding of what the writer is saying is the key to undoing our false notions about God and what it means to fear God. You see, if we properly understand God through his activity in history, and the person and work of his Son Jesus Christ on his behalf for our salvation, our concept of God is not that of kill-joy, but of a grace-filled lover. And it is because of God’s great love for us that we are to *fear* God. The theologian J.I. Packer says it this way: “What does it mean to ‘fear God’? “This is a fear that has nothing to do with being frightened. It is an expression of love which adores, worships, and stands in awe, remembering the greatness of God and the smallness of ourselves.”

Lord, may we and our children live our lives in joy-filled holy fear.

HELPFUL RESOURCE ←

Many parents are afraid of seeming too dictatorial, and end up abdicating their authority rather than taking a stand with their own children. If kids refuse to eat anything green and demand pizza instead, some parents give in, inadvertently raising children who are more likely to become obese. If children are given smartphones and allowed to spend the bulk of their free time texting, playing video games, and surfing the Internet, they become increasingly reliant on peers and the media for guidance on how to live, rather than looking to their parents. In *The Collapse of Parenting: How We Hurt Our Kids When We Treat Them Like Grown-Ups*, Dr. Leonard Sax argues that parents are failing to prioritize the parent-child relationship above all other relationships. The result is children who have no absolute standard of right and wrong, who lack discipline, and who look to their peers and the Internet for direction, instead of looking to their parents.



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