



# CHRISTIAN SCHOOL



## Reclaiming Childhood

By Jan Wilton

Today's child is growing up and losing the innocence of childhood at an alarmingly younger and younger age. It is important not to "hide your head in the sand" and to pretend this is not an issue for children in our circle of responsibility. How can the Christian school and Christian school teachers make a difference? We need Christian School teachers and parents who are willing to face the reality that our children are not growing up in a godly, child-friendly world. We need teachers and parents who will take the risk and be a voice for the children.

Nancy Carlsson-Paige in her book, *Taking Back Childhood*, wrote from her observation and research how childhood culture has changed dramatically in just ONE generation. She believes this is directly a result of current "social trends — screen time, commercialism, sped-up daily life, violence and sexualization, and academic pressures." These factors are changing how children experience their childhood. In regard to commercialism Carlsson-Paige observes:

"When corporations pitch their wares to kids, it's not just products they're selling through the increasingly sophisticated campaigns their marketers devise. It's also a mindset — one that tells kids, 'You'll be happy if you have this toy, if you eat this food, if you look this way.' One result is that from an early age many children get the message that happiness comes from acquiring things, which undermines their ability to find satisfaction and to meet their basic developmental needs through play and meaningful relationships with others. As we learn more about how commercialism is harming our children, we'll see that, despite its pervasiveness, there are many ways to counteract its destructive influence."

Christian school children and parents are as much at risk from current trends as children in non-Christian homes and schools. Therefore, everyone should take to heart Nancy Carlsson-Paige's following suggestions on how caring adults can keep their children from the harm caused by current social trends:

- "Keep it simple with toys. Remember that fewer is better, simpler is better.
- Reduce television time, especially children's exposure to commercial TV.
- Avoid substituting material things for emotional expression and connection.
- Find regular times to be together as a family and encourage children to contribute to family life as a way of caring rather than a means of getting a material reward.
- Help children to find peace and sanctuary through connecting to the natural world.
- Help children to explore their own unique talents and interest and to show your interest in their activities by making descriptive rather than evaluative comments about what they do.
- Point out ads, talk about why they exist, and ask open-ended questions that encourage children to think more about marketing, keeping children's ways of seeing the world in mind.
- Prepare kids ahead of time for visits to a store.
- Help children to learn how to handle the urge to buy without giving into it.
- As children get older, talk with them about our interconnections with the people and conditions that produce the items we consume."

In the Christian school, we have the privilege of bringing to the children and parents the Word of God for making decisions that impact a child's childhood.

### Deuteronomy 6:5-9

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (NIV)

In Mark 9:36-37, 42, Jesus is very specific about loving children and not causing them to sin: "He (Jesus) took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.' ..... And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck."

Vaclav Havel once said, "Hope is a state of mind, not of the world. Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously heading for success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good." We have hope in God for the childhood of future generations of children as we value our children by protecting their childhood. Together we can reclaim childhood for the next generation.

### Works Cited:

Carlsson-Paige, Nancy. *Taking Back Childhood: Helping Your Kids Thrive in a Fast-paced, Media-saturated, Violence-filled World*. New York: Hudson Street, 2008.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.