

We Must Open Our Eyes

What Has Happened to Education in America

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William Wilberforce, a politician in the 1800s, spoke out against the slave trade, trying to open people's eyes. However, the people did not want to open their eyes. Abolishing the slave trade, would be a *huge* inconvenience to the people. The Slave Trade was considered "the norm" and considered acceptable at the time. How could it be wrong if everyone was doing it? But Wilberforce never gave up. He spent decades trying to open people's eyes.

His closing words to a remarkable speech have stuck in my mind. After explaining in terrific detail the horrors of the slave trade, Wilberforce closed with these words: "Having heard all of this, you may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say that you did not know."

Once I started to really understand the state of education in America and how it is impacting the character and minds of our children, I could no longer say that "I did not know." I could no longer turn the other way or stay silent.

I want to share with you the things that I have learned and the ways that my eyes have been opened.

This is not a message saying that everyone needs to homeschool. But this is a message saying that parents need to have their eyes opened and become much more involved in their childrens' educations.

It is startling to see how education has changed in America in the past two hundred years. To get an idea of how academic standards have changed, one only needs to look at tests given in elementary school or read speeches, essays, and poetry that children were reading, memorizing, and reciting in the 1800s. But, I am not going to dive into the significant lowering of academic standards for this message. Instead, I will focus on changes that I believe are even more important.

First, let's compare some differences between public schools in America in the 1800s.

Public School in American in the 1800s

- Praying to God for guidance and to express gratitude is a daily practice.
- The Bible is a foundational textbook. Bible passages are memorized and recited. The teachings of the Bible, as well as Bible verses, are found in the textbooks of all subjects: spelling, grammar, science, history, and so on.
- The Ten Commandments are displayed, taught, and referenced often.
- Religious content in student papers and speeches is common and encouraged.
- On average, 16 out of 25 pages of textbooks *emphasize* a moral lesson.¹ Textbooks contain no negative moral lessons.
- Children sing hymns and Christmas songs.
- Children are taught all subjects through the lens of Christian principles and belief in God.
- All books of fiction available and required at school have extremely high literary merit, high moral merit, and teach moral principles.

Public School in America Now

- Praying to God is illegal and forbidden.
- The Ten Commandments, by law, must not be displayed or referenced.
- Children, by law, are not allowed to include religious content in papers or speeches.
- On average, 0.06 or less out of 25 pages in textbooks emphasize a moral lesson¹, and many textbooks contain negative moral lessons and anti-Christian beliefs.
- Children are taught all subjects through the lens of atheism and humanism.

- Books that contain profanity and inappropriate behavior made to look acceptable are often read out loud to children and are required reading for both elementary, middle, and high schools.
- School libraries are flooded with books that have extremely low literary merit; are stripped of moral messages; are all about self-centered thrill and adventure; contain profanity and crude language; make disrespect toward family members and teachers appear funny and acceptable; belittle and make fun of learning, high moral behavior, and strong families.

It is alarming that many strong Christians today believe that religion and morals do not have place in education—that it is politically incorrect or undesirable or unimportant to combine religion and education. The incredible and inspired men who framed our constitution and founded the greatest nation ever known on the earth did not feel that way. Author and historian David Barton wrote, “The framers of our government did not believe that encouraging religion in schools was unconstitutional; rather, they believed just the opposite.”²

Early educational laws in America had a religious-centered emphasis. For example, in 1789 the first federal law to address education, which was signed by George Washington, declared: “Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools, and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”³

Early schools and universities had Christian beliefs as their foundation. In 1860, 262 out of 288 American college presidents were Christian ministers.⁴ Harvard, the oldest university in the United States, and from which ten of the first twelve U.S. presidents were graduates, had these two mottos: “For Christ and the Church” and “For the Glory of Christ.” Harvard also admonished the following:

Let every student . . . consider well, the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus, which is eternal life (John 17:3), and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all knowledge and learning.⁵

You cannot teach *any* subject without some type of religious foundation. It is not possible. The definition of religion is “a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe.” So, in our public schools today, the religion that is at the foundation of schools and is being taught is atheism and secular humanism, which set of beliefs teach that God either doesn’t exist or He is not important.

Why today do so many Christians not seem to care about whether or not our children’s educations have a foundation of secular humanism rather than Christianity? Why do we so easily send our precious children out to the door for 6-7 hours a day to a place where prayer is forbidden, where literature is often unwholesome and profane, and where atheism and humanism provide the religious foundation of education? These are good parents. Why don’t they care?

I believe there are four reasons:

1. **Most parents today, even good Christians, have been educated with secular humanistic philosophies themselves and do not realize what is going on.** Secular humanism is the system of thought that laid the foundation of public schools from the 1960s and on. Because so many parents of school-aged children today have been educated through a humanistic approach, they hold humanistic views without even realizing it! It is a humanistic view to feel it is acceptable for children to be educated in a system where God and religion are banned and emphasis is placed on only secular knowledge. Parents who were educated with humanism tend to feel that God does not need a place in their children’s education—that God only belongs to home and church.
2. **Parents are complacent because it is easy and it is the “norm: “everyone else is doing it.”** The majority of parents in America are sending their kids to humanistic schools, so parents think it must be OK. It is now the “norm” to have education exclude God and focus on secular knowledge. And people have become comfortable

with the “norm.” It is so much easier to go with the flow, rationalize, and ignore the issues.

3. **Parents feel everything is fine if their children have good teachers or go to school that is strong academically.** Parents feel a good teacher or a school that has strong academics is sufficient; this is usually because, again, they have been raised themselves with humanistic views on education. The truth is, even a good public school teacher or a strong academic public school is forced to take a secular humanistic approach to education and use a godless curriculum.

David Barton wrote, “Many today are *unaware* of the massive and dramatic changes that have occurred in American education in recent decades, and too many others are *simply complacent* about the changes . . . Imparting mere academic knowledge should never be a sufficient final objective for learning, nor should the secularization of education ever become acceptable.”⁶

The secularization (separation of learning from religious connection or influence) of education was not OK with many amazing and wise men from the past who helped structure this country. These men, who stood up and put their lives on the lines to stand for truth, did not consider secular of education acceptable.

Thomas Paine: “How then is it, that when we study the works of God in the creation, we stop short and do not think of God? It is from the error of schools . . . that of generating in the pupils a species of atheism. Instead of looking through the works of the creation of the Creator Himself, they stop short and employ the knowledge they acquire to create doubts of his existence.” (Thomas Paine, “*The Study of God*”)

Benjamin Rush: “The Bible . . . should be read in our schools in preference to all other books.” (“*A Defense of the bible as a School Book*”)

Gouverneur Morris (“penman of the constitution”): “Religion is the only solid basis of good morals; therefore, education should teach the precepts of religions and the duties of man towards God.” (“*Notes of the Form of a Constitution for France, September 14, 1791*”)

Part I: Four Precious Principles Lost

Once my eyes were opened to the true state of education in America, I began to deeply study education and how it has changed in America. I have identified four precious principles that are vital to education, but are now missing in public schools. I believe the following principles should not be ignored or forgotten.

Principle #1: Parents

One of the greatest problems in American public education, after the removal of God, is the removal of parents. This has happened through government overreach and federally dictated control of standards, testing, and funding, but also by parents becoming complacent and lazy. Most parents have no idea who created common core, what it is, or the framework it lays for the future. In fact, a Gallup poll in 2014 showed that 37% of parents did not even know what Common Core was—even though it had completely changed education in America and had already been implemented for a year. William J. Bennett, who served as secretary of education and wrote the book *The Book of Virtues*, explained it well: “Too many mothers and fathers have the attitude that school is like a car wash where you drop your child off at one end and pick him up at the other.” (*The Well Educated Child*, pgs 15-16)

It used to be, in the generations that produced some of the most noble men in US history, that parents of several families got together and built a one-room school house with all grades in one classroom, often with 20 students or less. Parents were in charge of selecting teachers, school values, subjects, and text books. Parents got together and hired a teacher who held their same values, and the teacher was accountable to the parents.

Today, the average elementary school in Utah has 523 children and the average middle school has 780 children (compared to the average of 20 in the 1800s). The federal government dictates what children will learn and when—parent's have little to no voice. Like a factory, all children of the same age are being taught exactly the same, even though each child is hugely different with different needs, abilities, and interests. Parents have little ability to select teachers, and usually, students rotate through many different teachers for “specialized” instruction, making it difficult to know the values and character of all the teachers. Parents have no input into the text books used, the subjects taught, books being read, or the values promoted.

William J. Bennet wrote: “Parents often get a subtle, alluring, but deeply damaging message from today’s culture: your role is not quite so important after all. You can delegate. You can outsource. Children will suffer no harm—in fact, they may reap some benefits [today’s culture says], when they get more of their care and guidance from others. . . . It is a seductive siren song. It gives the green light for surrendering part of a sacred duty . . . You must resist these temptations. For good or ill, you are always your child’s most influential teacher.” (*The Educated Child*, pg 7)

Principle #2: The Good & The Beautiful

Statistics from 2013 show that 42% of college students will never read another book after they graduate. (“Read Faster, Reading Stats,” 4.28.2013) If this is the result of our educational system, I feel it is hugely failing at fostering a love of learning in the youth.

Public schools are being forced to focus massive amounts of time and energy on standardized tests and scores and a one-sized fits all mandated education. The National Education Association today explains: “Over the past decade, the high stakes testing regime has squeezed out much of the curriculum that can make schools an engaging and enriching experience for students.” (neatoday.org, November 2, 2014)

Teacher Diane Ravitch wrote: “Our children are now experiencing heightened levels of stress, anxiety, confusion, lowered self-esteem and a lack of interest in school . . . We are raising a generation of students for whom education has become punishment.” (<http://dianeravitch.net>)

I believe that large classroom sizes, federally dictated one-size methods and standards, and the massive focus on testing kills academic creativity. Forced uniformity has sucked the life out of learning, and it is hard for teachers to create their own, engaging lessons, personalized to meet *individual needs*.

But I believe another deep and even more significant problem is that the good and the beautiful has been stripped from learning. The good and beautiful literature is replaced with *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. The Bible and powerful, masterfully created classic poetry is replaced with smart-mouthed, shallow, fictionalized characters such as Junie B. Jones. The power, goodness, and beauty of God and religion are banned while the shallowness and self-centeredness of humanism and secularism become the emphasis. How can we expect to foster a love of the good and the beautiful in that kind of environment?

Robert S. Wood said: “. . . the excitement of true learning is not simply gathering diverse bits of information but learning to understand how they fit into a pattern and how that pattern reveals the hand of God.” (*Complete Christian*)

In early America, the *McGuffey Readers* were the most widely used textbooks. These readers featured the Ten Commandments, Bible verses, powerful poetry that referenced God and religion, and stories that encouraged faith, high moral character, hard work, and love of nature. These textbooks are in stark contrast to textbooks today.

The drastic drop of moral teachings in textbooks is reflected in a special study of public school fourth grade readers between 1810 and 1950. Out of each 25 pages the following emphasized a moral lesson:

1810 — 16.01 pages

1830 — 16.75 pages

1850 — 12.42 pages

1870 — 6.00 pages

1890 — 4.19 pages

1910 — 4.50 pages

1930 — 1.00 pages

1950 — 0.06 pages

(George C.S. Benson and Thomas S. Engeman, *Amoral America*, pg 23)

I did my own study of 4th grade public school readers in 2014. Not only were the vast majority of the textbooks I studied almost always stripped of high moral lessons, but also they contained many negative portrayals of character made to look funny or acceptable. Many of the textbooks also included anti-Christian beliefs. Many of the textbooks, instead of pointing out the courage, deep faith, integrity, and goodness of great men in history made them out as lazy, greedy, and atheistic.

Our schools used to be based around literature of high moral and literary merit. However, today, literature with high moral and literary merit is non-existent in many classrooms. To illustrate, one of the most widely read teacher read-alouds for young, impressionable students is *Junie B. Jones*, in which the main character is a smart-mouthed, obnoxious, and disrespectful child. Also, the book contains incredibly simple writing and purposefully poor grammar. It has no literary value and contains no goodness or beauty.

Public school libraries are full of books that are packed with examples of disrespectful behavior and weak character. Why our schools are buying books that are demeaning and making fun of teachers, principles, and learning is baffling! But they are.

Parents should be aware that there is an overwhelming trend in literature to present parents as absent and uninvolved, to display families as dysfunctional and unhappy, and to create child characters that act disrespectfully to parents.

According to Nielsen BookScan, which tracks roughly 80% of print sales, the highest selling book in 2013 in the United States was *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Hard Luck*, selling an astonishing 1.8 million copies. The very first paragraph of the book begins by making fun of family: "I love my family and all, but I'm just not sure we were meant to live together. Maybe it'll be better later on when we're all in different houses and only see each other on holidays."

Dork Diaries, a popular book series for middle school children that has sold over 10 million copies, starts with these sentences: "Sometimes I wonder if my mom is brain dead. Then there are days when I know she is."

Our public schools, unfortunately, are chalk-full of disrespectful books. Many of these books are checked out by students and read at school—parents are probably not aware of everything a child is reading at school and do not have the chance to monitor it. And unfortunately, many teachers are reading these books aloud to the children.

When one of my daughters was in first grade, the teacher was a woman who shared my faith and that I perceived (from my very brief time spent with her) to have high moral standards. She read *Junie B. Jones* to her class every day, and I had no idea. Near the end of the year, another one my children said something about that book series. My first grader piped up: "Yes, my teacher reads that to us every day. It made me feel uncomfortable, so I finally told my teacher that it made me feel bad inside. So she made me go sit in the corner every day for the rest of the year when she read to the class. I could still hear the book, and all the kids made fun of me as I sat in the corner every day."

I was saddened to know that, during one my child's most formative years, she was being read stories every day of a bratty, rude girl whose behavior was made to look funny and acceptable. It made me sad to realize that instead of that, I could have filled her mind with powerful, beautiful, inspiring literature.

Who was ultimately responsible for my daughter being read inappropriate literature all year and not being exposed to the good and the beautiful? Me!

Not only has the morality in literature changed, but literature has largely changed in its complexity and style. Most books written today are stripped of the beautiful, complex language of the classics, and are written in easy, simple sentences with constant, self-centered, thrilling action driving the book. Thus, most of the intellectual value gained in reading books is lost.

I believe it is the spiritual and moral—the good and the beautiful—that fosters a true love of learning. As parents, we are responsible to make sure our children's educations include the moral, the good, and the beautiful.

Principle #3: Character

We should never be indifferent or unknowledgeable about the kind of character training our child is receiving at school through examples in their reading materials, through the influence of teachers, through the absence of God and faith, or through the behavior of other students. Is it positive or negative? Is it a safe, pure environment for our "tender sprouts?" Is my child gaining more Christ-like, noble character through his or her education? These should be our top questions. Too many good Christian parents are more concerned about their children testing well, being in school sports, going to football games, and participating in school activities over their child receiving an education that will mold high character.

Principle #4: God

Whether we recognize it or not, our children are being taught an underlying religious belief and philosophy in public school: secular humanism, which is defined as "belief that humanity is capable of self-fulfillment without belief in God." Secular Humanism is an attempt to function as a civilized society with the exclusion of God and His moral principles.

It is men like John Dewey (who is called "The Father of Modern Education") and other humanists and atheists who fought hard to bring in the idea that religion did not help but hindered schools. John Dewey's goal was to take God and religion out of academics. Unfortunately, he and other humanists have done a great job. Many people now believe that religion doesn't have a place in academics. But the problem is, education HAS TO be based on some religious foundation. In place of Christianity, which our forefathers believed should be the backbone of our schools, our students in public schools are being taught the religions of atheism, humanism, secularism, and moral relativism.

Rousas Rushdoony explains how it is not possible to teach children without SOME religious foundation: "They [humanists] teach and propagate a philosophy of life which does more than omit Christianity: it is radically at war with biblical religion. Until we recognize that **schools are establishments of religion**, and that **all education is inescapably a religious activity** we cannot come to grips with our cultural crisis." (*The Philosophy of The Christian Curriculum*, 176)

Humanist Charles F. Potter freely expresses how education is a great way to spread the religion of humanism: "Education is thus a most powerful ally of humanism, and every American school is a school of humanism. What can a theistic Sunday school's meeting for an hour once a week and teaching only a fraction of the children do to stem the tide of the five-day program of humanistic teaching?" (Charles F. Potter, "Humanism: A New Religion," 1930)

The religious foundation of any school our children attend should matter to us. How would you feel about sending your kids to a school where the religion being taught, whether directly or subtly, was denial of absolute truths, materialism, reliance on man, rejection of traditional moral codes, and an emphasis on only intellectual and worldly attainments? That is exactly what human secularism is. And that is the religion being promoted in public school.

Personally, the secular humanistic approach to education, with God, character, parental decision-making capabilities, and the good and beautiful being stripped away, is not how I want to raise my children. Not only do I believe that a secular humanistic approach to education is dangerous, but this education approach is empty and lacks depth. In this kind of environment, children do not feel the worth or the joy of the learning because the spiritual and moral aspects of knowledge are absent from learning. Godless curriculum is shallow, indifferent, and catered to growing the natural man and not the spiritual. As the spiritual and moral aspects of learning are neglected, our children become more drawn to the shallow, the frivolous, the easy, the thrilling, and the egocentric.

Part II: Conclusion

How each parent decides to educate their child is a decision that is up to them and the Lord. I truly have never judged anyone in my heart for the way they choose to have their child educated. However, I do believe that parents need to open their eyes. We need to do our homework and understand what is happening in our schools. C.S. Lewis wisely stated, "If the parents in each generation always or often knew what really goes on at their son's schools, the history of education would be very different." (*Surprised by Joy*, chapter II)

We need to be much more concerned about and proactive with the education of our children. If you are not sending your children to private Christian schools or homeschooling, do you read and review all your children's textbooks and lesson plans so you can correct and re-teach all incorrect principles and information? Do you bring the good and beautiful, the moral, and God into your child's education by supplementing what is missing? Do you take time to pre-read all teacher-read alouds so you can approve or disapprove of the literature with which your child's impressionable mind will be filled? Do you monitor and approve of what your child is reading for personal reading time at school? Are you finding a way to help your child gain a true love of learning and a taste for what is wholesome and right?

When William Wilberforce commenced his efforts to abolish the slave trade, people were angry with him. They made fun of him, belittled him, and even threatened him. Wilberforce's ideas were not popular, even though they were correct. Abolishing the slave trade would have a negative impact on the economy and individual lives of the British. *It would require great sacrifice.* When Wilberforce used tactics that made people become aware of the misery and horrors of the slave trade, the people were enraged. They did not *want* to have their eyes opened. It was so much easier to ignore it, and go on with life as normal.

When it comes to education, it is much easier to leave your eyes closed and "hope" your child comes out "OK." It is so much easier to just send your kids out the door and go with the flow. But I urge all parents to ask themselves these questions, and then to prayerfully ponder what the best answer is for their child.

- 1) Are my children receiving a Godless, secular humanistic education? Would their spirits and characters be impacted positively or would their learning and education being deepened and more meaningful and impactful if their education did not ban God?
- 2) Is my children's school a place where they can learn by the Spirit in a positive atmosphere?
- 3) Are my children being taught truth, or do I have the ability to know and completely correct what is learned?
- 4) Are my children doing "just fine" in school? If so, what changes could be made so their minds and characters are being molded to the highest potential?
- 5) Are my children gaining noble characters through their education?
- 6) Do I feel deeply involved and connected to my child's education?
- 7) Do I feel I have a voice in how and what and how my child is learning?
- 8) Are my children developing a love of learning?
- 9) Are my children connected to me and their family? Is their education helping to deepen strong family relationships?
- 10) Are my children being exposed to literature that is disrespectful or inappropriate? Are they developing a love for literature with high moral merit?

11) Is the social atmosphere at my child's school helping them grow into a person with a respectful attitude, high integrity, and high feelings of self-worth?

When I asked myself those questions, I could not turn the other way, even though it required much effort and sacrifice, and even though some family and friends would not and still do not agree or understand, I chose a different approach to education. The world is so rife with disrespect, religious indifference, dishonesty, selfishness, ingratitude, negativity, pride, and low character that it takes some pretty serious work and sometimes different measures to raise respectful, selfless, grateful, honest, humble, positive, and moral children today. But it is eternally worth the effort.

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1. George C.S. Benson and Thomas S. Engeman, *Amoral America*, pg 23
 2. *Four Centuries of American Education* by David Barton, pg 20
 3. "Northwest Ordinance, Article III"
 4. David Barton, *Four Centuries of American Education*, pg 23
 5. Benjamin Pierce, *A History of Harvard University*, pg 5
 6. *Four Centuries of American Education* by David Barton, 51