

# PARENTING BY MANURE

When we moved to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, I quickly realized that my sense of smell was going to be taxed to limits never before experienced. We often joke that when the wind is “blowing right,” we can smell the thick, rich, and pleasant odors coming from the chocolate factory on the other side of our town. But when the wind is “blowing wrong,” we smell the thick, rich, and putrid odors of manure that’s been spread liberally on the extensive farmland near our home.

Over the years, I’ve shifted from asking “Why do these farmers need to do this to us!?” to understanding why manure is so important to the success of the over 5,000 farms and 425,000 acres of farmland in Lancaster County. You see, farmers use manure to improve soil quality as it provides the nutrients necessary for crop growth and yield. In turn, we benefit from the fruits of an abundant harvest that grows out of this rich soil.

Recently, manure has been in my nose and on my mind as late Fall is a time when our local manure spreaders are out in full force, getting the soil ready for next year’s planting and harvest. Manure has also

been on my mind as I was reading about Jesus and his telling of what’s been called The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9). Eager to see Israel repent of their sin, turn to Him, and begin to bear spiritual fruit, Jesus taught the parable as a way to communicate the need for people to repent, the patience and grace of God, and the ultimate disastrous end of those who don’t turn away from their sin to follow God and thereby bear fruit for the Kingdom. The barren fig tree represented Israel. God’s willingness to allow the vinedresser time to care for the tree represents God’s patience and grace.

While there’s so much truth packed into the parable, I couldn’t help but think about how the role of the vinedresser represents so well our role as parents as we take on our God-given high calling and responsibility to diligently tend to the spiritual nurture of our children and teens. In an effort to see the barren tree produce fruit, the vinedresser ramps up his efforts to pay special attention to the tree, digging around it and putting on manure. Loosening and fertilizing the soil in which a tree sits

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## YOUTH CULTURE

## HOT QUOTE

Lex Fridman, AI researcher at MIT, discussing his nervousness when using and programming Artificial Intelligence.  
Lex Fridman Podcast, March 25, 2023.

*“You sit back, both proud, like a parent, but almost like proud and scared that this thing will be much smarter than me. Like both pride and sadness, almost like a melancholy feeling, but ultimately joy.”*



## DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9 REMINDS US THAT LIVING AND SPEAKING THE WORD OF GOD TO OUR KIDS IS A 24/7 ENDEAVOR.



produces the kind of health and growth for which the tree was intended. As a fig tree is meant to produce a rich harvest of figs, so are our kids made and meant to follow and glorify God by bearing the rich fruit that comes with spiritual growth.

What are some of the most basic elements of the difficult and hard work of parenting for spiritual growth that we can enlist as we endeavor to see our kids come to life in Jesus Christ? What are the nutrients we must spread like manure into the soil at their roots?

First, we need to be present in their lives. If we choose to “step out of the vineyard” our positive influence will be absent from their lives. In fact, our choice will be a choice to let someone or something else nurture them into a narrative that will compromise their healthy growth and development. Our presence is necessary and non-negotiable!

Second, we must teach them God’s Word. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 reminds us that living and speaking the Word of God to our kids is a 24/7 endeavor. Nothing is more important than teaching our kids the truths of God’s word.

Third, all of our digging and manuring must be bathed in prayer. It is the Holy Spirit’s work to bring our kids to salvation and to grow them into healthy fruit-bearing followers of Jesus Christ. Pray without ceasing to that end.

Fourth, quiet the outside influences so that they can hear God speak. Our lives are filled with the noise of social media, screens, entertainment, frantic activity, and a host of other distractions pulling our kids in a multiplicity of directions. As parents, we need to set borders and boundaries that shut down these voices for great lengths of time so that our kids – all of us! – can meditate on and ponder the Word of the Lord.

Finally, enlist “the means of grace.” God has provided certain means as pathways to the end of spiritual growth that serve as the nutrients we must till in the soil of a child’s life. Along with the preaching of the Word of God and individual study of Scripture, God calls us to come together regularly with the full Body of Christ in the church for prayer, fellowship, and the celebration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Make sure your kids are experiencing all of these in the context of an inter-generational local Body of Christ.

Parents, if the wind is “blowing right” through your parenting of this type, your kids will be smelling the sweet scents that come with your efforts to dig around them and apply spiritual fertilizer to their lives. We need to get to work!

**WALT MUELLER**  
CPYU President



## FROM THE NEWS

### Artificial Intelligence and Fake Nudes

The father of a young fourteen-year-old girl in Spain was recently quoted in a news report as saying this: “Today a smartphone can be considered as a weapon. . . a weapon with a real potential of destruction, and I don’t want it to happen again.”

What was this father talking about? He was the father of one of the over thirty 12-14 year-old girls in a town in Spain who were victimized by a group of male minors who used an artificial intelligence app to remove clothing from the girls in photos. The app, called Nudify, is one of a growing number of phone apps that uses AI to change a photo into a nude one. These fake nudes are then distributed through social media, leading to what’s rightly being called the direct exploitation and abuse of women and girls. In some cases, the photos are used for extortion purposes to get money from the victims at the threat of posting or sharing the photo online. Parents, teach your kids that exploitation of this or any type, is sinful and wrong.

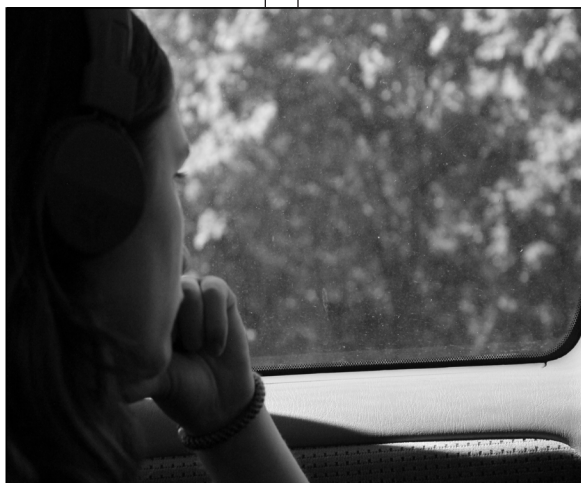


## TRENDS:



## Lala Bop

Over the years, teen culture has seen many slang terms come and go as negative references to girls who it is assumed promiscuously sleep around. Now, there's a new derogatory term that's being used to bully and shame someone for engaging in allegedly promiscuous behavior. The term is "lala-bop". It originated in a 2021 sexually explicit song from rapper Almighty REXXO. Social media bullies will use the term on TikTok and X as a way to label and demean girls, accusing them of sleeping around and being passed from guy to guy. The trend has become so common that schools are now taking steps to inform parents of the trend. In years past this trend has also been termed "slut-shaming." We all know that our girls can be especially unkind to each other, especially during the middle school years. We would do well to warn our kids that this is not a behavior they should engage in, nor should they bully others. Instead, they are to treat each other with Christ-like kindness.



## LATEST RESEARCH:

## Suicide and Depression

The latest research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding our kids and suicides are quite alarming. With mental health issues like anxiety and depression on the rise among our kids, it should come as no surprise that more and more kids are opting to choose the darkness of self-inflicted death, over a life which to them seems inescapably

darker. Since the start of the Covid pandemic in 2020, the suicide rate by firearm among children and teens ages 1-18 had risen by 11%. Parents, we need to teach our kids that on several occasions Jesus told his followers they could expect pain and persecution. The Psalms are full of the moans and laments of human suffering and emotional misery. But all of God's Word points to the fact that God does not leave us alone in times of trouble. In Psalm 46:1 we read

these words of truth and comfort: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." Teach your kids to lean into the hope of the Gospel.



## QUICKSTATS



This Christmas shopping season, 89% of adults plan to buy toys for grown-ups on their list. In addition, 43% of adults plan to buy toys for themselves. In 2022, \$9 billion was spent by adults purchasing toys for themselves or other adult loved ones. It is believed this trend is due to adults reminiscing or being nostalgic about their childhood and has been given the name "kidulting."

(Toy Association)

A vast majority (95%) of teens acknowledged that drowsy driving is dangerous. However 1 in 6 teens reported having driven while drowsy during their first two years behind the wheel. Roughly 20% of all motor vehicle crashes are related to drowsy driving.

(2023 Drowsy Driving Survey from the National Sleep Foundation and AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety)



III TOP III

10

## ARTISTS GLOBALLY ON SPOTIFY

Source:  
Spotify 2023 Wrapped

1. Taylor Swift
2. Bad Bunny
3. The Weeknd
4. Drake
5. Peso Pluma
6. Feid
7. Travis Scott
8. SZA
9. KAROL G
10. Lana Del Rey



## DANGERS OF MATERIALISM

by WALT MUELLER

Those of us who live in North America have been deeply blessed in terms of material provisions and wealth. Relative to the rest of the world's population, we are incredibly rich. Jesus warned about the dangers of money and wealth, and these are warnings we must heed ourselves, and teach our children to heed as well.

In Luke 16 Jesus speaks these words, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

I recently read these helpful clarifying words of commentary on this saying of Jesus: "Sin arises not when we possess riches but only when our riches possess us. To set our hearts on wealth is to turn away from God."

Parents, we need to model and teach a proper, God-glorifying perspective on money and wealth. We must warn our kids against idolatry, and to use all they have and will be given to God's glory.

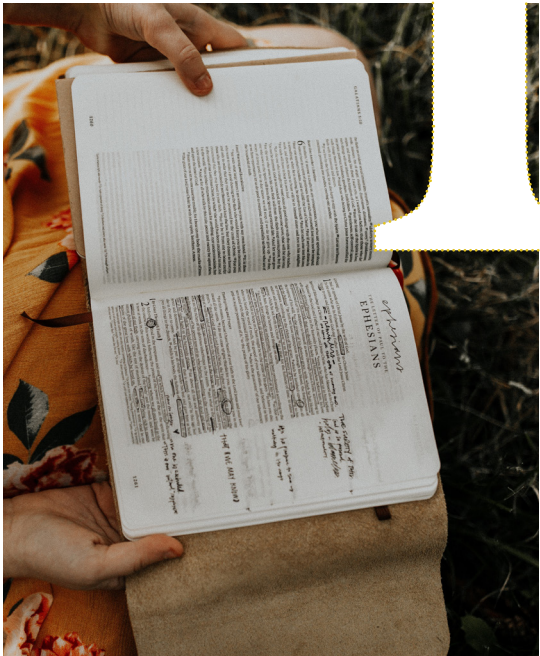
# FROM THE WORD

If you're like most parents, what you hope for is a safe, smooth, and problem-free ride through the years of adolescence with your kids. So why should we actually pray for our teenager's corrupt and sinful nature to rise up and reveal itself while they're still living under our authority and watchful eyes? Why in the world would we ever hope for difficulty?!?

Think about this: we need to constantly remind ourselves that part of our teenager's makeup (because they are human) is that just like us, they were born with a tendency to sin. In other words, they didn't have to be taught how to do wrong. It comes naturally. The apostle Paul recognizes this reality when he instructs parents to teach their children how to do right by bringing them "up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

**"Bring them up  
in the discipline  
and instruction  
of the Lord."**

**Ephesians 6:4**



Sadly, in many Christian homes, kids will often hide their sinful nature through behavioral conformity that doesn't reflect the true condition of their hearts. But if the nuances of their corrupt nature come out when they are young, we have the opportunity to address those heart matters now. If those things are left to rear their ugly heads later in life and our kids don't recognize or know how to deal with them, think about the great troubles and difficulties that will come. Pray that God would reveal your teen's sin issues and tendencies now so that you are able to teach them how to recognize and deal with them, both now and for the rest of their lives. When God answers this prayer it's certainly not easy. But it's important to face and address their sin tendencies *now* so that you can nurture your teen's heart into a God-honoring adulthood, rather than having to face them later.

## PODCAST



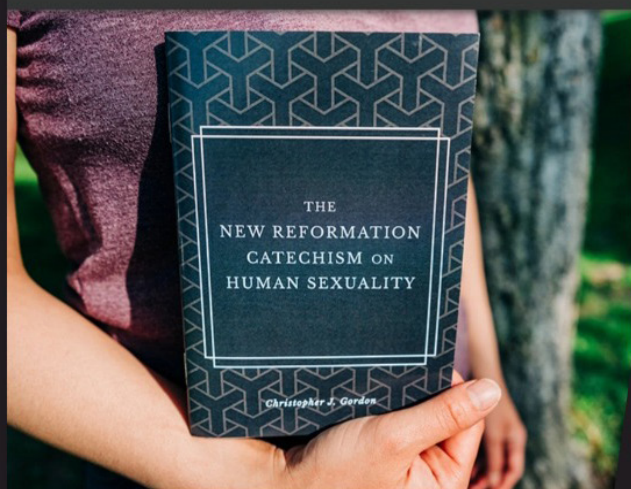
*Youth Culture Today with Walt Mueller  
is a one-minute daily radio show  
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### What Can the Bible Teach Us About Gender and Sexuality?

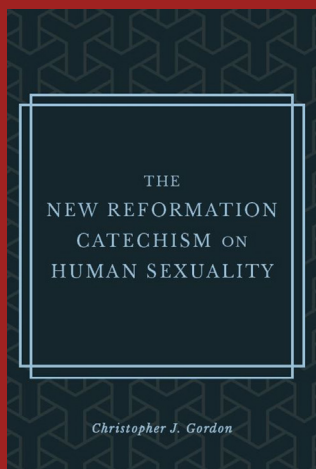
Pastor Christopher J. Gordon combs the Scripture to bring the church a new, simple catechism that tackles the gender and sexuality confusion that runs rampant today.

# The New Reformation Catechism on Human Sexuality

Chris Gordon



## HELPFUL RESOURCES



### BOOK

Written by Christopher J. Gordon, *The New Reformation Catechism on Human Sexuality* is intended to be used devotionally around the table. This catechism provides an opportunity for parents to talk with their children about sexuality and how it relates to the purpose of life. It does not end there. It is also an excellent reference tool for Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and sermon series for pastors wanting to address the current challenges surrounding the topic of human sexuality.

Gordon states "As a pastor, I was experiencing firsthand how the sexual revolution was affecting parents in the shepherding of their children. I took for granted that the most basic truths of creation and how God made us as male and female were understood, and I was alarmed at how these things were now being challenged in the Christian community... I wrote the catechism because Christians, especially parents, need clear, concise, biblical help on the core issues regarding human sexuality, that the next generation may be instructed well in God's good, creational sexual ethic."