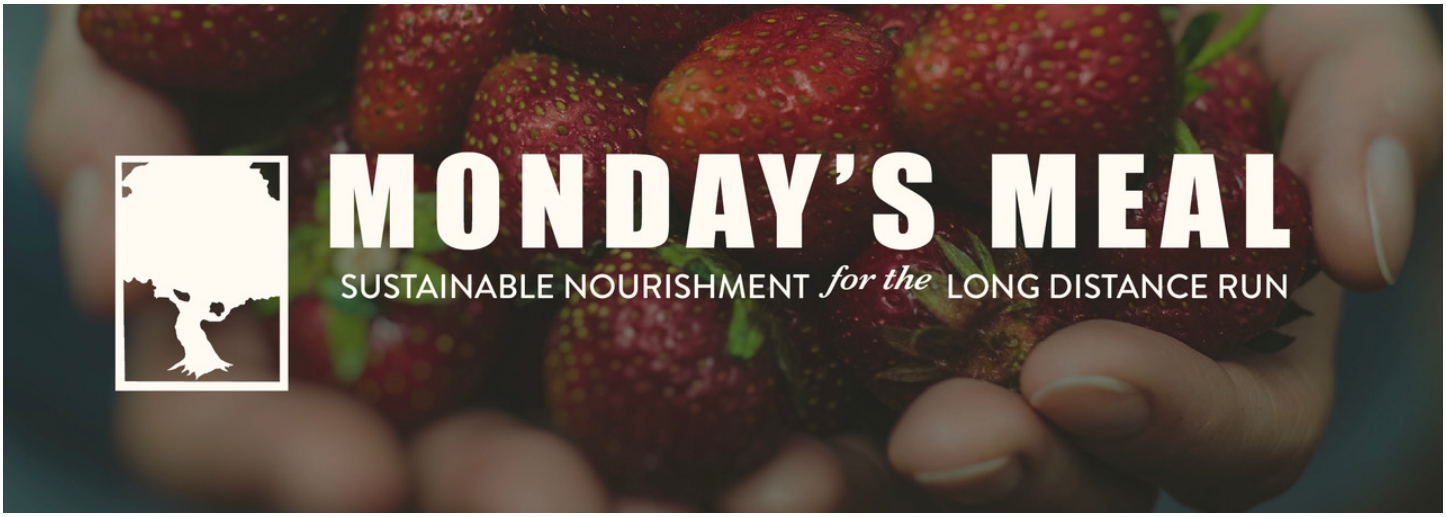

Letter to a Classical Christian Parent

5 tactics for parenting through your child's school life

by Kanaan Trotter

Monday's Meal is a service of The Oaks Classical and Christian Academy. Each meal is selected specifically to feed and nourish parents for the long distance run. If you found it helpful, consider passing it along.

"…and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds…" Hebrews 10:24

Dear Parent,

What are your children here for? Perhaps you have not stopped to ask this question, but given you are here the odds would indicate that you are more intentional than that. Cost alone is enough to insist justification for what you have chosen. The greatest resources a man has are his time and money, and you have exerted significant amounts of both to have your children where they are now: in this education. If you have chosen this route - and you clearly have - then you want your child(ren) to succeed. You want them to be something more than what they would be without **this.** You have seen something here.

Perhaps you cannot truly put your finger on it, but whatever it is, it appears to be worth something. That is the bet, at least.

Perhaps, though, you have set your bar too low. Perhaps you even read the word "success" and it smacks of hollowness. Is that really all your investment is going to return? Is that really all you are expecting it to return?

Here are 5 tactics - tools for your understanding of what this Christian, classical system demands of you - to begin answering this question for your own family: what are your children here for?

1. ***Read the book your student is reading.***

   The greatest parental sin may be the mindset that goes with the language: "sending my kids off to school." To adopt this idea as a parent is to innately disassociate yourself not from your student's schooling, but from your student himself. Their life will carry on, tightly compartmentalized away from your own. They will read great works, study great things, and you will hear nothing of it beyond a parent-teacher conference. Will they learn something valuable from it all? Maybe. Will they have grown farther from you in that learning? Certainly.

What's more, your choice to remain uninvolved is itself communicative to your student. You may not think of it, but your lack of action is itself action. Your lack of speaking is still speaking. And what is it that you are saying? What they are learning - the concepts they confront - are not an adult activity. They are not applicable to what you might call the real world. These concepts are for the first 17 years of life. Beyond that, it's time to enter the real world.

Speak something different. Tell your student, with no words at all, that they are in fact learning more than concepts. They are learning the structure of the world around them. They are studying the architecture of mankind itself. Go hunting in these ideas alongside your student, and see if there is not more to be gained than you assume. The fruit is worth the time you invest. ***Read the book your child is reading.***

2. ***Allow your student to do things for their teacher that they are not prone to do for you.***

If you have not seen it yet, soon you will watch your children look to other adults as role models. They will see outside of you something they start aiming for. You will watch them conduct themselves differently than they ever have. Here is the rub: you will be prone to jealousy and frustration. You will be prone to compare yourself to that role model. Even if they are admirable, you will feel as if you are losing your children.

Do not miss the gift in front of you. That position in your student's life is not a curse. It is a chance to have life and truth breathed in from a different angle. No man is the sum of only his parents, and neither is your student. They are the sum of all the people around them, and you have, at this very school, the chance to let the highest caliber pour new elements into the life of your student. What's more, you have the chance to see your children thirst for that investment. They will do extra work, invest in their fellow students, serve in the school itself, just to be like their role model. Do not dread it; pray that your student finds this.

If this is concerning to you, consider that this will be inevitable in any environment. Students gauge themselves by their teacher - and "teacher" here is not simply the one in a classroom. What's more, consider what you have chosen by putting your student in this place. You have selected these **people** to teach your child. You have entrusted your student to **this** institution and the people that are running it. Make your student's enrollment an intentional decision as to what those role models will be. And watch with excitement as it happens. ***Allow your child to do things for their teacher that they are not prone to do for you.***

3. ***Commit to never denigrating the amount of work a teacher gives your student. Ever.***

The workload will be too much and totally unfair, at some point. The secret is out, and you've been warned. So what will you do about it? When your student comes to you on a Tuesday night at 8pm, already three hours deep into homework, with miles more to go, you will face a very crucial moment. For most parents, the answer is simple. The scales of justice are out of balance, and it is right and proper to set them back in order. You tell them that you will talk to the teacher, and they ought not worry about it. It **is** unfair, you tell them.

But this is not congruent with their life after this place. In fact, more often than not things will be unfair. The question is not what should the authorities do to make things more fair - that is the thought process of slaves. The free man looks at the unfairness of his life and considers how he might take responsibility for his actions regardless of it. The free man takes action, and often fails, but understands failure at one thing is not failure in totality. Equality is the desire of the lazy. Wisdom is the desire of kings. And wisdom is like gold, hidden deep in rocks that require inequitable amounts of work to move. Do not treat your student as a slave. ***Commit to never denigrating the amount of work a teacher gives your student. Ever.***

4. ***Go to school events that your student is not participating in.***
   The road you have chosen for your student is not practical - by now you know this from experience. It demands much of you and your student, and the output appears to be similar to what you'd find in a public school. Your student goes to class, does the extra-curriculars, comes home, and does homework. Perhaps the flavor is different, but the meal is still practically the same.

   A most central reason this is incorrect is the orientation you are taking to your school. To come simply for what the school **gives** to you is to miss what the school could mean to your family. This is not a baseball game where you sit and watch. Your student's education is inherently not a spectator sport. But the tendency of every human is to evaluate what a thing is by what you get out of it. Your job then, as a parent, as an example to your student, is to consistently visualize what it means to lean **into** the things you have chosen to do: your job, your family, your church, your school. To simply look for net gain is to teach your student that their lives are the sum of what they might get, and this is not true. Like the parable of the talents, actual increase is found when you give away what you have; when you **invest into** the world, the culture around you. It is a wicked servant that closes the blinds and looks to ensure he keeps what he has. That is the opposite of faithfulness.

   Practice this in front of your student. Practice it in front of yourself - preach the truth to your own psyche as much as your family. Do the things that are not expedient and see what the net result is. ***Go to school events that your student is not participating in.***

5. ***Assume the teachers are correct, not your student.***

   Exceptions do not make good rules, and yet we are all prone to drift towards exceptions - particularly when the rule is not satisfactory. If we can erode the substance of the rule by example to the contrary, we are more likely to accept our own transgression with a nod of self-acceptance. To be blunt, though, the road to hell is paved with this kind of self-congratulation and justification. You need not look beyond your own state government to see this principle played out all too often.

   Do not let this mentality creep into your view of your student and his teachers. Do not accept the faulty assumption that your student is correct when the authorities to whom you've entrusted him speak to the contrary. To do this is to fall into the same pit, but with even more consequences. Your choice of inherent distrust will position your student to do the very same thing. By mentally and verbally pitting your student against their teachers, you will erode not just the principles of authority, but the character of your

student. The classroom will become a place of contention and antagonism, not a place of growth. It will not be a garden; it will be a cage fight.

Build a different narrative in your home and in your speech. Presuppose the opposite. This may, at times, mean that you will have to assume your student is guilty of things until proven innocent. This is not a flaw in the mentality proposed here. The tone you carry by doing this will guide your student to see their teacher as truly authoritative, empowered by his own parents, and aligned with the rest of the structure of his life. This is not just good, it is healthy in more ways that you will be able to see. ***Assume the teachers are correct, not your student.***