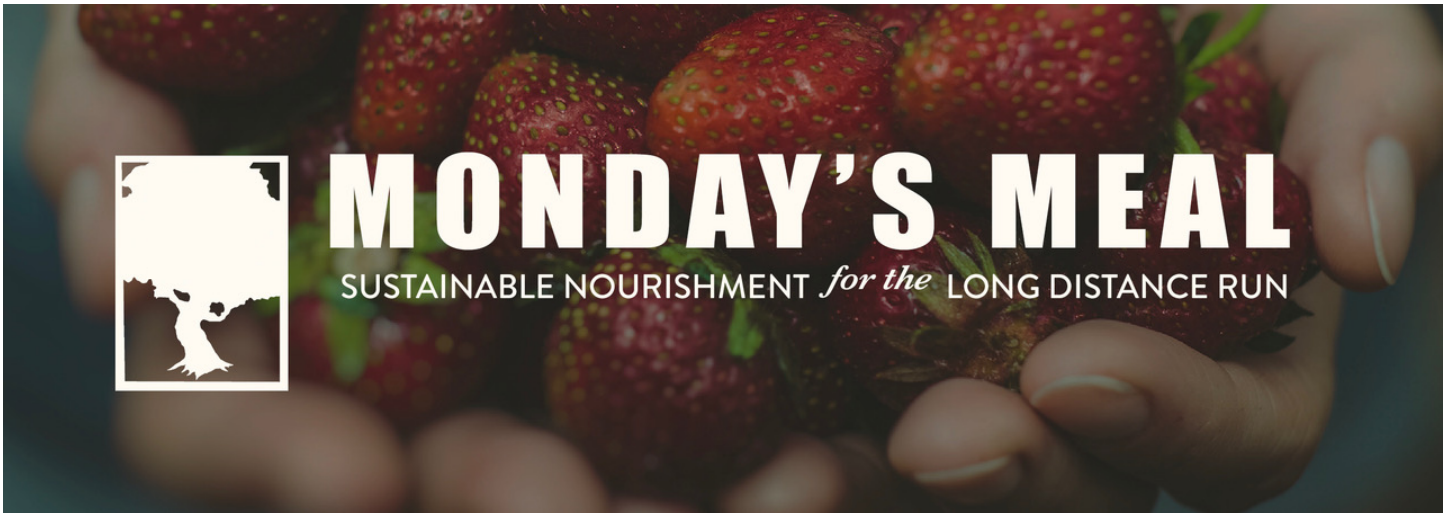

Letter to a Classical Christian Student

5 tactics for your 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 Student,

Have you noticed that you are not like many peers your age? For most of your demographic, their life is built upon a structure that is ontologically and teleologically different - that is, the core and purpose of their day, week, world is not like yours. Or at least that is the idea of this thing you are a part of, the world of education that is both systematically Christian and structurally classical. But do you understand that reality? Or more importantly, do you align with that reality? Do you believe that is how it ought to be? Is that how it ought to be?

You are quickly becoming too old to claim naiveté on this subject. It is time you picked up the scales yourself, weighed them, and determined the balance of things. Make true sense of your world. Shrugs of ambivalence are no longer an acceptable option. Life is not ambivalent; it has razor sharp teeth for ambivalence.

Here, then, are 5 tactics to guide you into greater maturity as you become who you will be:

1. ***Act like school is your choice, not your parents'.***

   Too many students would have no defense for why they study what they study. The answer is paramount to total ignorance, "Because my parents enrolled me." But here is the truth: your ignorance as to cause and intent is a great sin. It is an abdication of what you ought to be responsible for: the very reason you do anything. The inability to own intent is what allows concentration camps to be an acceptable practice, and children to be murdered in utero with standing ovations. We may call this Apathy - the lack of concern. What's more sinister is that most students are tricked into thinking this a sign of virtue. Only the most confident are apathetic. It's the losers who care, who apply real intent to their schoolwork. This is a lie. Apathy is not a signal of superiority. It is a tattoo of deep ignorance and blindness; and like a tattoo, it is nearly impossible to remove once

it's present. Do not let it penetrate your skin. It will haunt you all your days, in school and beyond. ***Act like school is your choice, not your parents'.***

2. ***Read your school handbook, and sign it like a contract.***

   As you grow up, you'll find yourself signing binding items: a mortgage, a work agreement, a marriage certificate. These are ties that you make voluntarily. They are not forced upon you, in one sense. But they come with a responsibility to act - the expectation to do something. Responsibility, in turn, is a weather vein (privately and publicly) to indicate if you are, simply put, worth trusting. Are you one who can be entrusted to do what it is you ought to do? If you are, the responsibility will arrive at your door, knocking. And that responsibility will be connected to commitments that you make. Your life now offers you the chance to practice for this game of commitments and responsibility. But like the rest of life, it is up to you to accept that practice. Choose to be challenged; choose to accept the commitments that lie within your grasp. ***Read your school handbook, and sign it like a contract.***

3. ***Thank one teacher every day for the rest of your school life.***

   One day you will be older than your teachers are now. And for many of you, you will not be yourself what they are. You will be something other than a teacher, and you will suddenly realize what it is to be a teacher - to some degree. But the lesson here is not that you simply practice gratitude for your elders. That is a lesson of milk, not meat. Your life, every life, is made up of cycles: action, waiting, and the outcome of those actions. The difficulty lies in a realization about the middle part. Waiting takes up more than anyone would care to admit. What's more, the waiting usually tends to reach its fingers into the first part - your actions. You will be forced to do your life while waiting for the outcome to appear. In fact, you will not know when or how that outcome will arrive. And you will often find an uncomfortable chafing that occurs with having to wait while you act. Often it will seem that what you do on a daily basis is senseless. But you would be wrong. Proper action - righteous action - will always yield the right results, and most often the timeline of those results will be radically different than you assume. It is up to you to believe that the chafing you feel now is exactly the place you ought to be. What's more, it is up to you to exercise gratitude for that chafing. It is the highest discipline to not simply accept discomfort, but to actually appreciate it. Your teachers, right now, are your first chance to see this reality, face to face. It is your choice to believe that the work they give you is exactly the work that will make you who you ought to be, regardless of your immediate perception of that work. Refuse to believe what you may feel. Preach to your own feelings with what you know to be true. ***Thank one teacher every day for the rest of your school life.***

4. ***Volunteer to clean a bathroom once a quarter.***

   A great trick that occurs in your life of study is the assumption that what you do, every day, is built around the intent for you to gain intelligence through information. Like some kind of multi-course mental meal - the purpose is for you to ingest the food. But this is expressly not what you are here to be taught. If that were the case, there are much cheaper options for you and your parents. So, then, what are you here to do? What - or who, particularly - should you be when you emerge from the last final of the last class of your last year? We might approach this from many angles, but for our purposes let us overly simplify this to make a point: above all else, you should be able to see - see what is meant behind what is said; see what ought to occur as opposed to what does occur; see what Truth is and is not; see what is Beautiful compared to what would pretend to be Beautiful. You ought, then, to practice this skill

particularly: seeing what needs to be done, and seeing what it should and should not look like(whatever it might be). Give yourself the practice. ***Volunteer to clean a bathroom once a quarter.***

5. ***Fail a test before you decide to cheat on the test. Then write a letter to yourself on your experience.***

   Cheating is rarely a black and white reality. How often does an example of cheating accurately reflect how you've been tempted? You don't smuggle papers into class, but you find yourself facing a semi-unintentional glance, or an overheard word that you were hoping to hear. This is true of all sin. Satan lurks in all the gray areas that thrive off a heavy dose of self-justification and muddied waters. After all, wouldn't it hurt your reputation if you admitted cheating? And what about your parents' reputation? What would happen? Remember that where you are now is the least murky life will get - things will only lend themselves to becoming more muddled. Choose otherwise, and choose that now. Do not allow yourself to be tricked into foggy thinking. Truth is simple and clearer than we'd like it to be most times. That is why it is often uncomfortable. Truth has the ability to impose order and simplicity on the most complicated parts of life. Practice this now. Run the harder experiment, and see what the outcome is. Commit yourself to see just what happens when you choose the Truth regardless of your immediate perception of the consequences.Then record that outcome. Assess for yourself what really happens when you choose to acknowledge things as more black and white than they may seem. ***Fail a test before you decide to cheat on the test. Then write a letter to yourself on your experience.***