

Classical Conversations of Durham

Recovering Quality in a World of Quantity Academics by Leigh Bortins

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Choosing quantity over quality may be a child's instinct when buying jellybeans, but it is not a good principle for education. Unfortunately, college admissions and standardized testing requirements can turn the focus of even home-centered education onto the number of social science and language credits on a student's transcript. The focus becomes quantity, not quality.

As a parent, I don't want to raise "math people," or "language people," or "literature people." I want to raise children who are capable of knowing God and making him known through every subject that they study.

Skills, Not Subjects

Dorothy Sayers, a friend of C. S. Lewis, gave a lecture at Oxford in 1947, which challenged educators to think about learning in a different way. She asked, "Do you ever find that young people, when they have left school, not only forget most of what they have learnt... but forget also, or betray that they have never really known, how to tackle a new subject for themselves?"

She answers her own question with a practical solution: return to the classical model of education. Teach just three skills: grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric; and use the best of literature and science and math resources guided by a Christian who loves teaching students to learn anything.

As a parent and teacher of four boys, I have found that Sayers' "tools of learning," are the foundation of a lasting, Biblical education. I want my children to be able to use their brains to learn any subject they choose. Based on the lessons of the Bible and history, I believe this goal is within reach for all Christian families who are willing to do the time-consuming, diligent work of discipling their children.

Hosea 14:9 reminds us that "the ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous will walk in them, but transgressors will stumble in them." God trusts us to raise small beings into eternal heirs reigning with His Son. Surely He will not abandon us to complete the task alone. But amid the tumult of tests, subjects, and entrance requirements, many novice home school parents become discouraged and give up. What both parents and children need is to rediscover how to learn. Skills, not subjects, are the mark of a solid education.

Important Dates:

- Thanksgiving dinner, Tuesday, November 17th at 6:30 at Parkwood Baptist Church (Durham).
- Thanksgiving and Christmas break. Last day Thursday Nov. 19. We will return January 7.
- Re-enrollment for CC families starts January 7.

The Learning Trinity

The Bible uses three key words to describe educational skills: knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Proverbs 24:3-4 says, “Through wisdom is a house built; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” In Isaiah 11:2, the Israelites are told, “And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” Colossians 1:9 says, “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” These three words relate to the three skills historically taught in American Christian education as grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric.

Grammar, the science of reciting and memorizing vocabulary, should begin the study of any topic. Terms always need to be defined. The master should define terms for the student and Christians for the culture, not the other way around.

Logic, or the discussion and reconciliation of ideas, should be taught next. This is often called the dialectic stage. The Biblical view of truth is in opposition with the world’s view of truth. This should inform our educational choices, teachers, and methodology.

Rhetoric, the ability to take the grammar and teach it to others, is the final step. Rhetoric is the consequences of ideas. True knowledge and understanding should lead to wisdom.

Taken as a whole, classical education means good education: being taught how to learn anything by defining and storing terms, clearly thinking about the reconciliation of new ideas with old information, and wisely using knowledge and understanding to share the gospel with the community.

Equipped for Life

The classical model is very simple to define, but it is difficult to wrap around our modern brains. We are more familiar with graded learning, standardized tests, and credits than the actual purpose of education, which is to know God and to make Him known.

Instead of offering students survey courses on the history of movies, philosophy of gender neutrality, astronomy, or SAT Prep, C. S. Lewis suggested that we teach students to read about any subject, research about any subject, write about any subject, and argue a point within any subject. Essentially, study only a few courses, a few skills, or a few goals at a time via subject matter that forms the great conversations of Christian society. Lewis, along with John Milton, would propose that Christian education raise plumbers who can read Aristotle and professors who can read instructions for building bikes at Christmas. The point of a liberal (meaning “freeing”) education was to equip students to take their strengths and make the most of them in other areas as needed. Quality, not quantity, is needed to accomplish this goal.

We must also remember that skills alone do not make a Christian education. A Chief Financial Officer (CFO) who uses accounting practices to ensure the company’s employees receive the salaries they deserve shares the good news whether he knows it or not. A CFO who uses accounting practices to cheat the company reveals the depravity of man and our need for the good news.

Both CFOs know the lingo and principles (grammar) of accounting. Both know how to manipulate their knowledge (dialectic) of accounting. Both know how to use their understanding and knowledge to get what they want. What sets a Christian, and a Christian education, apart is that it should be centered on truth. In education, parents should instruct their families to use the skills of learning to pursue truth, goodness, and beauty in order to glorify God.

It’s not an easy task to choose quality over quantity, but it is our privilege and our mandate. Remember: the Lord will not let the gates of hell prevail against the church. Recovering the lost tools of learning within a Biblical worldview will go a long way to fortifying our families to join Him for battle.

Praying for the World:

As we are studying the world, I would like for us to be praying for the world as well. God tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to “pray without ceasing.” Pray for the people of the country or area, pray for missionaries that may or may not be there, pray for salvation, and for the gospel to continue to go forth.



Week 7 pray for India, week 8 China, week 9 Korea and Mongolia, week 10 Japan, week 11 Italy, and week 12 Syria. I also have a big map of the world sitting on one of the tables in the lunch room. Take the time to look over it and pray as God leads you.

Field Trips

If you have an idea for a field trip or know of an event and would like to organize this, please let me know. There are lots of great opportunities happening around this time of the year. Gather any information about the event and email it to me, I would be happy to send it out to the group. You may want to host a play date during our break, or meet at a park. I'm sure other families would love the opportunity to get together.

Mom's Night Out:

Saturday, November 14– Janice Glass' home at 7:00 pm

Come out and enjoy the fellowship of the other CC of Durham moms. This is a great time to ask questions, be encouraged, and just have fun.



Thursday, December 10– Tonya Nelson's home

This will be our Mom's Christmas Party. Please bring a heavy hor'dourve and/or dessert. If you would like to participate in our white elephant game, please bring a wrapped gift under \$5.00 or less.



Prayer box:

† Don't forget there is a colorful prayer box by the coffee on Thursday mornings. You can either leave the card in box, or hand this to Kristi Coburn directly. Please let us know if your request is confidential or if we can share as a prayer concern. I hope that we all lift the families in our group up in prayer as the Lord brings them to mind.

Kristi will also be organizing the care around the Kholobayev family. Please email her directly if you have any questions. (mommyhard@nc.rr.com)

New Thanksgiving Plans

When: Tuesday, November 17th

Time: 6:30 pm

Where: Parkwood Baptist Church

1515 Clermont Rd.

Durham, NC 27713



If you have not signed up to bring anything, please email **Pam Borden** at **bordenenterprises@mebtel.net** very soon. We would like to get an email out soon with the menu. Previously I asked you to bring two food items and a drink. I will now be providing lemonade, tea, water, and paper products. You do **not** have to bring a drink.

If you can come early or stay late to help with set up or clean up, please email me. Extra hands will be very helpful. I will have someone at the front doors to greet you and show you where to go.

I am excited that the dads may be able to make this special event. The children are still invited to dress up that evening. They may choose to dress in a character we are studying this year, some other historical person, or someone from the colonial times. We will have a time where they can tell us who they are and a little bit about themselves. There is a picture on the home page of the website of the children last year in costume.

Updated Website:

Remember to look at the calendar on the website. There will be field trip opportunities posted. Periodically check the “event information” section. There will be descriptions of any special events coming up.

Throughout the holidays there will be many opportunities for field-trips, plays, or play dates. You will have to stay updated through the website.

Don't forget about our challenge websites. Especially if you're considering entering your child into one of these programs next year.

Debbie Rook– Challenge A
www.challengeamo.org

Kelly Frazier– Challenge B
www.challengebgood.org

Christine Weber– Challenge I
www.challengeldurham.com



January 7– CC Families Can Re-Register for 2010/2011

Classes for Foundations and Essentials will resume on January 7. This is also when the CC of Durham families can reregister for next year. We will open registration to others outside the program February 25. If you want to reserve a spot for your children you will need to complete the following forms:

- Program Participation Application—**1st page only** (please put the age each child will be next year)
Ex. Taylor birthday: 11/6/97 Age:12 (next year)
- Risk Release Waiver
- Essentials program participation (if your child is participating in Essentials)
- Family Covenant

These forms are on the website under important links. Click on the box that says “registration form.”

At the time of registration you will also need to pay the registration fee and supply fee for each child participating in the program.

The registration fee for Foundations is \$50 per student and the supply fee is \$50 per student. Essentials registration fee is \$50 per student and the supply fee is \$20 per student.

Heather Mangum
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November 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	Thanksgiving dinner at Park- wood Baptist Church 17	18	Last day of class ! 19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					