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THE Bull Pen REVIEW



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Preface: What is the Bull Pen Review?



THROUGHOUT HISTORY, WHENEVER reformation has seized the Church, the first mark has usually been a revival of Word-centered worship. The driving element of this has historically been *expository preaching*.

This reformation of preaching has consistently been followed and bolstered by efforts of writing and publication, for the education and edification of the people of God. The audience and circulation runs a wide breadth. Charles Spurgeon published *The Sword and the Trowel*, which focused on engaging pastors and church leaders. More recently, John Piper during his time at Bethlehem Baptist Church would send out a weekly newsletter titled “The Bethlehem Star,” written strictly for his own congregation. Pastors like John Newton were known for a robust ministry of personal correspondence via letters.

And of course, writing for the local church is at the very foundation of our faith: The New Testament is an arrangement of twenty-seven *written* documents, *most* of them letters to specific local churches, all aimed at instruction and edification and equipment of the saints.

Our aim is similar for the Bull Pen Review. We long to strengthen, edify, educate, and inform the congregation God has graciously entrusted to us through the ministry of not only proclamation, but the pen. We aim to continue in this tradition, and enrich the love of Bull Street Baptist Church for Christ Jesus through this bi-monthly periodical.

A word about the layout.

Culture: At BSBC, we have six distinctive cultures which the elders hope to see our church treasure and continue to grow in. These articles will explore different topics and answer different questions to help our church grow in these “cultures.”

Historical Retrieval: To study history is to practice humility. Whether it’s events, theological developments, or historical figures, we are part of a great tradition, and we want to appreciate the house on which we are building.

Theology: The church thrives on a diet of healthy doctrine. Every sermon has to weigh the balance between that doctrine and its application. These articles are a way for us to help the church continue growing in a more systematic understanding of God, his Word, and his world.

Book Review: Of the writing of many books there is no end—how much more so when it comes to reading them! (Also, another reason why we’re writing *articles*, and not full books!)

Some books are worth reading; some are not. We hope in these reviews to commend some good resources to you, and suggest how to read others with a careful and critical eye.

Thought for Food: More of a devotional thought, based usually on a single passage or pair of Scripture, written for your reflection and spiritual benefit.

Vice, Virtue, Verse: A brief definition and description of a vice and a complement virtue, along with a “fighter verse” you can memorize to grow in this area. If you don’t have a plan for memorizing scripture, start here!

Ask a Pastor: Do you have a question you’d like answered by all of the pastors, or by one in particular, which might be helpful for the rest of the congregation to hear? Send Pastor Andrew an email with the topic line “Ask a Pastor.” We will answer no matter what—but perhaps you’ll spark a conversation that could benefit others as well!

CULTURE: GOING

God's Glory Displayed in Faithful Local Churches | United Arab Emirates

Taylor Lazenby

STORIES OF MISSIONARIES easily capture the imagination of Christians and inspire us to engage in the Great Commission. Missionary biographies like David Brainerd, John Paton, Jim Elliot, Hudson Taylor, and Lottie Moon are rightly treasured.

Yet, those stories also have another side we don't often think about— they train us to look for individual names. A single individual with a tremendous amount of courage leading to great gospel impact.

This is not a wrong picture, but I do think it is an incomplete picture. Because behind nearly every individual who captures our missionary imagination is something far less dramatic and far more important: the local church.

God's chosen instrument for his glory among the nations is the ordinary local church. Not an exceptional individual, but the local church.

A Storm in the Desert: A Story of God's Faithfulness in the UAE

One of the most encouraging stories of God's glory among the nations through the local church is what has happened over the last two decades in the United Arab Emirates.¹

In the late 1990's, John Folmar was a student at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Ministry

was not his first career choice— Folmar was actually a successful lawyer in the Washington D.C. area before pursuing ministry. He graduated from seminary in 2003 and began working at Capitol Hill Baptist Church.

While there, an opportunity to move across the world to pastor a church in Dubai was brought to him. In 2005, after praying and seeking counsel, the Folmars moved to the United Arab Emirates as John was called to become the Senior Pastor of the United Christian Church of Dubai (now called the Evangelical Christian Church of Dubai).

For the last 20 years, John Folmar has been laboring for the gospel to go forward in the Middle East through ECCD. As a church, they don't do anything fancy— there is no glitz, glamour, smoke machines, LED lights, or massive screens. ECCD simply preaches and teaches the Bible, lives congregationally, and observes the ordinances. A simple, yet biblical, focus.

The story does not end there, however. To be sure, that would be enough to give glory to God. But God continued to do more. ECCD began to pray that the Lord would use their church to impact the Middle East. The Elders of ECCD committed themselves to lead the church to love a gospel-centered, word-oriented ministry philosophy, with an emphasis on pastoral training and church planting on the Arabian Peninsula. Their ultimate goal: a realization of Ephesians 3:10, "through *the church* the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (emphasis added).

¹ What follows is the story of the Evangelical Christian Church in Dubai and its impact in the Middle East. I retell the story in a much shorter fashion. To hear the full version, listen to the podcast *A Storm in the Desert*, <https://open.spotify.com/show/6mz-7P4Urfj0YAzcHCUgkP7>

A few short years later, that biblical dream became a reality. In 2010, Redeemer Church of Dubai was planted. 3 years later, Ras Al Khaimah Evangelical Church was planted. The following year, Grace Evangelical Church of Sarjah would covenant together as a church.

Now, each of these churches are strengthening, revitalizing, and planting other churches themselves. Here is how ECCD describes the faithfulness and fruitfulness of God

Between 2009 and 2022, the UAE experienced extraordinary growth in gospel influence through the reform and planting of congregations motivated to be salt and light among all people. Alongside UCCD's church planting efforts, churches in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Fujairah and Ras Al Khaimah were being revitalized and starting new churches. The pastors of these congregations supported one another through fellowship and prayer. We partnered together for preaching training and Bible conferences. We cooperated in church planting, preaching supply, and evangelism. What unified us was a high view of the Scriptures, a commitment to God's sovereignty in salvation, biblical eldership, believer's baptism, and congregational self-government.²

What might the Lord do in the next 20 years? Could the Arabian peninsula, starting in Dubai, become a new center for global Christianity? Man, that would be something! And it is not outside the realm of possibility because of God's faithfulness to his name and to his people.

Pastor or Missionary?

Would John Folmar consider himself a missionary? I'm not sure. Maybe. But I do know that he considers himself a pastor.

Unfortunately, many people in our churches assume full-time missions work simply means going

somewhere with few Christians and telling as many people about Jesus as possible. Don't get me wrong—that is not a bad thing! But I do think that this view of mission work ignores the biblical pattern of missions as established in the New Testament.

Consider the ministry of Paul. He was more than just a traveling evangelist. He was intent on planting churches. Paul went into synagogues (Acts 13:14; 17:1-3; 18:4; 19:8), houses (Acts 16:32; 18:7; 20:20), marketplaces and centers of pagan life (Acts 14:13-15; 17:16-17, 22-23), and irreligious cities (Acts 17:16; 18:1; 19:1) proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. He then trusted that the Lord would use his Word to convert sinners. From those who were converted, assemblies would be established (Acts 14:21-23; 20:17, 28). Paul pastored those assemblies for a time, committed himself to the preaching and teaching of the word of God and prayer, and focused on raising up other elders to pastor the assembly after he departed.

Why does this matter? Well, like John Folmar, I think Paul would primarily consider himself a pastor, too.

I think we can say it like this: over time, good "missionary" work should lead to pastoring and the establishing and strengthening of other churches.

For the Local Church Member

So where does this leave you, as an ordinary and faithful church member?

ECCD is not a special church— It is a faithful church. John Folmar is not a special man— He is a faithful man. The Lord used a faithful man to lead a faithful church toward increasing biblical faithfulness. In turn, this faithfulness continued to saturate and permeate the life of the congregation, as church members began to understand and apply the Scriptures, held one another accountable, and encouraged one another toward mission for the glory of God in the Middle East.

Can something like that happen here? Absolutely! Allow me to give you 3 practical suggestions for cultivating a faithful church atmosphere.

2 <https://www.eccdubai.org/full-history>

1. Know Our Global Partners as Pastors, Not as Heroes

The pastors and missionaries that we support should be well known by our regular church members, not just the Elders or the missions committee! Seek to know their stories and the churches they are serving abroad. Learn about the victories and struggles of their ministries. Ask questions about their churches, the elders they serve with, and the men they are seeking to train up and send out.

2. Be the Kind of Church Member You Would Want on the Field

One of the greatest gifts that our church can offer to the work of missions is the development of faithful church members. Why? Because future pastors and mission workers are grown in the soil of faithful church membership. In other words, faithful church membership is a prerequisite for anyone who aspires to be on the mission field in the future. Not only that, but in the day of world-wide connectivity, the gospel does not advance in a straight line down a one-way street. The realities of immigration, remigration, exchange student programs, internet and mass communication—all these create a spiderweb of connectivity in which simple decisions to obey Christ and advance his kingdom in your own family, church, and neighborhood can have ripple effects that reach to the end of the earth.

3. Be Willing to Be Sent

Here is the thing—most of you reading this will not go to the mission field. And that is okay. But, some of you reading this *should* go. And the pathway to going can be quite unremarkable. It may involve picking up your whole life and planting it overseas. Or perhaps it means a week-long trip. Or a summer length internship. Maybe it means taking your trade, or your remote employment, to a cross-cultural context. Maybe it means asking God to use you for his mission on trips you're *already* going on. What matters is that we are simply eager to be obedient and open to what the Lord would ask of us.

Conclusion

My prayer for you is that you would fall more in love with the church that you are currently a member of. Bull Street, like ECCD, is the kind of ordinary congregation that God delights in using. Being a faithful member of a faithful church is not something that should be taken for granted. There are numerous places across the face of the Earth where there is no faithful church presence—yet. Perhaps you are learning what it means to be a part of a faithful church now so that you can take a faithful church to a place that desperately needs one.

HISTORICAL RETRIEVAL

Small and Silent Seeds of Reformation and Revival

Andrew Ballard

MY SEMINARY ALMA MATER would often describe themselves as “a small school with a disproportionate impact.” This is often the way God works in the world—he will use the tiniest seed to produce the greatest tree. It reminds me of the Christian Missionary Alliance denomination of churches, in which my grandfather has served as a missionary and pastor for decades. The CMA has less than 350,000 members in the US. However, they have historically had a high ratio of missionaries to churches.

The CMA reminds me of another group of “small but mighty” believers: The Moravians. The Moravian church in what is now known as the Czech Republic gained the gospel through early Greek Orthodox efforts, and later was brought under the authority of the Roman church. However, they had a strong national-Christian identity, and many national leaders sought to reform the church and preserve the faith. It is often thought that the Reformation started with Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, and that’s true as long as we are referring to a specific *period* in the West and the Church. However, there have always been reformers, and there will also be a need for lower-case reformation, as we are constantly seeking to sanctify Christ’s body and renew pure religion and faithful worship.

One of the reformers who came before Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, etc., was John Hus (1369–1415). I love the story of Hus. Long story short, he argued against papal authority and against indulgences. He was burned at the stake for it, a true martyr. (Pope John Paul II basically apologized for the reformer’s execution in 1999.) The most striking and famous

detail is John’s response to his death sentence. His last name meant “goose,” and when he was condemned to be burned at the stake, he exclaimed, “You may roast the goose, but a hundred years from now a swan will arise whose singing you will not be able to silence.”

A swan would sing? Who couldn’t be silenced? Whatever could that mean? It seems a terribly obscure thing to say. But 102 years later, Martin Luther published his ninety-five theses and kicked off the Reformation™. He was labeled a “Hussite,” and eventually the title seemed to stick. (Still waiting for an apology to *that* reformer, by the way.)

Returning to the Moravians, they went on to not only maintain a spirit of reformation, but also of missionary fervor. The former led to the latter, and it often does. The SBC currently has a ratio of roughly 3,300 members to every IMB missionary. At the height of their missionary mobilization, the CMA had one missionary for every 72 members. But during the global missionary movement of the 1700s, the Moravian church had on average one missionary for every *sixty-two* church members. The average SBC church size is 70 people. Imagine us having more missionaries than we have churches. We would have nearly 170,000 missionaries, as opposed to our current 3,600 IMB missionaries. Now *that* is a disproportionate impact!

But they were not only disproportionate in their numbers, but in their zeal. Today, you can be a missionary for two decades or two years. You can transplant your job, work in the Tokyo marketplace, and return to Florida with a fully-stocked RothIRA. It was not so easy in the 18th century. Many missionaries packed their belongings into coffins

instead of chests or crates, making a visceral statement to themselves and others: *No turning back*. There is even the testimony that two young men went to the West Indies in 1732 to preach the gospel to the slaves. Their missionary strategy? They sold *themselves* into slavery, that they might reach the enslaved.

Oh, we may have many reasons to know ourselves as “small.” But Lord, let us be so disproportionate in our obedience, faithfulness, zeal, and impact for the gospel! Let us be like the Moravians, and labor to reform the church on Bull Street, in Savannah, and in America. Let us be like the Moravians, ready to go and ready to send. Let us be like the Moravians, ready to give and sacrifice and die, in whatever way our Lord should be fit, so that the gospel might go forth and Christ might receive the glory he is due.

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Some Descriptions of God's Trinitarian Nature

Andrew Ballard

RECENTLY I RECEIVED a theological question from a former student of mine. “Can you explain the trinity to me?”

No, I cannot explain the Trinity to you. But I can describe him.

The trinity is the most wonderful thing in the world, and outside of it. The trinity is also the most difficult to understand, because “trinity” is a word that describes God in his godness, in the way that he is different from us. When it comes to thinking about God's trinitarian nature, we can *apprehend* the truth about this, but we cannot *comprehend* that truth. That is to say, our understanding can be accurate, but never total. So when we talk about “explaining” or “understanding” the trinity, our exercise in thought is less like filling the cup of our minds with 16 oz of ideas, and more like plunging our little Pyrex brains into an ocean of truth. We cannot contain the truth of who God is—but we can *fill* our brains with that truth, and it is *so* worthwhile. There is no greater truth to fill up your mind with than the trinitarian God.

God is trinitarian. That means his nature is “God,” just like your nature is “human.” You have a human nature; he has (or is) a divine nature. But *nature* is not the same thing as *person*. There is only one human *nature*, one human race (thus we can speak about the singular *humanity*, which refers to the human-unity, the unit of humanity), but there have been and are billions of human people.

With God, there are three and only three persons who are God. One God, three persons—that's how we usually sum it up. But the nature of God is different than the nature of man. St. Anselm said that God is, by definition, *that being above which no greater being*

*can be imagined.*¹ He is superlative, and that which is superlative, by definition, exclusive. You can't have *two* best friends, and you can't have *two* “greatest beings.” This makes sense, when you think about it. God is omnipotent (all-powerful), and omni-present (everywhere). How can you have two separate beings who both have all the power and who are everywhere? It's a logical impossibility. So either they're different beings with different natures (and only one of them is truly *God* as we've described him) or else they are the same being with the same nature—and yet, in some way they are differentiated.

This brings us back to the idea of trinity. “Trinity” is a way of reconciling what we've discussed above with what we find in Scripture. Everything I've written so far is both ascertainable from logical thinking and observing the world around us—it's also clearly in Scripture. But how do we reconcile these ideas with what the Bible says about who is God? The Bible clearly says that the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God and that the Father is God, and clearly they are different persons who relate to one another, but they all have the same “ultimate, greatest being” status. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, who are the same being and have the same nature. How do we reconcile that? Well, we describe it, and define it, but that doesn't mean we “comprehend” it. He's God! We can say “what” but we can't say “how.” But it is a really glorious “what.” Let me explain.

We can't know many *hows* about the “intratrinitarian relations,” but the *whats* are really wonderful. For example, how does love exist in our world? Think

¹ My paraphrase. Anselm said this in the context of the ontological argument for God's existence. He didn't come up with this argument, but he did popularize it.

about it—love is predicated on the difference in persons yet some aspect of unity between the two. The greater the unity and commonality, the greater the love may be (for example, you do not have as much capacity to love a power outlet as you did another human being). Yet we still need diversity of persons for that love to exist.

Where did this wonderful dynamic of love, this dance of unity and diversity, originally come from? The trinity is the only possible explanation. If God is ultimately only a *unity*, only one person, then there was no one for him to love, which means that love cannot be part of his essential nature. That's actually quite a terrifying idea! Imagine a God who was not essentially loving, in himself, in his own nature. What could possibly be his motivation for creating the world? Not love! And you might say, *Well, maybe he created the world so he could gain the capacity to love.* Well, that would imply that God had room for improvement. If he has room for improvement, he's not the greatest being imaginable, because we can imagine he would be greater if he was able to love. So not only is the existence of *love* a beautiful aspect of God's trinitarian nature, it's actually a good argument for it. If it is better to love than not to love, then love must be part of what it means to be God, and if it is impossible to love without having more than one person, then God must be more than one person without those distinct persons being separate beings. A unitarian God (a single-person God, like *Allah* in Islam) is not essentially loving, and thus is not God, because this deficiency means he is not the greatest being imaginable.² On the contrary: "God

is love" (1 John 4:8), which is another way of saying "God is trinity."

This brings us to the follow-up question, *How do the members of the Trinity relate to each other?* Well, fundamentally, in love. And that's where love comes from, and the whole world. The *trinity* means that the world was created, not out of the neediness of a God who hadn't learned to love yet because he *had* no one to love yet—no, the world was created out of an overflow of the love that the Father had for the Son and the Spirit and that the Son had for the Father ... *et cetera*.

Now, there are many topics we could explore further. How precisely do the members of the trinity relate to one another, in eternity past? In their own relationship? How do each of them relate to creation and the world? How do they relate to one another, *in* the world?

Those are all wonderful questions, and they would make this a book. But someone already wrote that book, and he did a better job than I could. So I recommend you read Michael Reeves's *Delighting in the Trinity*. I think it would deeply benefit your soul and encourage your heart. Feel free to ask me follow up questions when you read this letter, or when you read that book, but I think it would be great for you to read it.

2 That's the problem with having unitarian monotheism—a theology that says "There's one God and he is *only* one person." But there's also the other ditch of polytheism (like you get with Mormonism, for example), which says, "There are multiple persons, and they're each separate Gods." The obvious problem with polytheism is that none of these "gods" are "God" at all, because they have that same problem that all of them are claiming to be the "greatest." Every religion has to account for the unity and the diversity in the world; unitarians are weak on the diversity, and polytheists are weak on the unity. And then you have the bud-dhists-types, who are really just the worst of both worlds. Once you work through all the options logically, only the Trinitarian explanation is really satisfactory.

BOOK REVIEW

A Heart Aflame for God: A Reformed Approach to Spiritual Formation

Book by Matthew Bingham Review by Taylor Lazenby

AS A PASTOR in the Reformed stream, I often have conversations with Christians about their walk with the Lord. A common refrain in such conversations is, “Why so much focus on the mind and not on the heart?” Notably, this question is most often raised by those under the age of forty. Ironically, these same people will say things like, “I feel like it’s going to rain today,” without realizing that such observations and conclusions are products of the mind, not the emotions.

The point is this: for those who grew up in the wake of the Young, Restless, and Reformed movement, new cultural currents are now unmooring spiritual formation from the Word of God and redirecting it toward other practices. Popularly, the works of Jon Mark Comer have had a considerable impact on the under-forty crowd. Academically, James K.A. Smith has garnered many admirers and adherents. Anecdotally, we all have a friend who is entertaining leaving Protestantism for Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy because it “feels” better.

This is why Matthew Bingham’s work *A Heart Aflame for God: A Reformed Approach to Spiritual Formation* is such an important work at this moment in time. Bingham does not say anything novel. Rather, he says that which is very old: Spiritual formation begins with the Word and is centered on the Word of God.

Bingham suggests that a Reformed approach to spiritual formation consists of three pillars. First, it is word-centered. God has revealed himself in his Word by the power of His Spirit. Thus, it follows that God’s people are most profoundly shaped by and formed by God’s word. Second, it is marked by biblical simplicity.

Spiritual formation that is centered on the word is simple in the avoidance of extrabiblical additions. The Word is sufficient in and of itself. Third, a Reformed approach is committed to engaging the heart via the mind. In a world that is increasingly centered on the feelings as the center of truth, the reminder that God’s ordained means of grace for keeping the heart and cultivating God-honoring affections involve setting one’s mind on truth.

With the pillars of Reformed spirituality in place, the practical implications are obvious. Christians should commit themselves to Bible reading, meditation, and prayer. These are not innovative techniques or newly discovered disciplines, but the ordinary means God has always used to form his people. There is nothing glamorous about opening the Scriptures day after day, laboring to understand them, and responding to them in prayer. Yet it is precisely through these ordinary practices that God ordinarily produces extraordinary fruit.

Bingham’s great contribution is not the introduction of new methods, but the reorientation of modern Christians back to old ones. The Puritans served Bingham’s purpose of showing such methods in action. He draws from the deep well of Puritan writings throughout, showing the reader that such actions produced minds *and* hearts enthralled by the God of the Bible. In an age that prizes personal experience and novelty over the biblical means of grace and growth, *A Heart Aflame for God* serves as a timely reminder that spiritual depth is not achieved by chasing feelings but by dwelling in truth. The heart is not bypassed in this process. Rather, it is properly

engaged, shaped, and inflamed as the mind is steadily saturated with the Word of God.

In this sense, Bingham offers a much needed corrective to contemporary spiritual formation, successfully pushing back on Comer and Smith. He calls the church back to confidence in Scripture, to patience in the ordinary means of grace, and to the conviction that lasting transformation is not engineered through techniques, but cultivated over time through saturation of truth. For pastors and lay Christians alike (particularly those under 40), this book is a serious summons to return to the simple and sufficient path God has always provided.

Romance Is Worth The Risk

Andrew Ballard

JOHN PIPER ONCE WROTE,

If our single, all-embracing passion is to make much of Christ in life and death, and if the life that magnifies him most is the life of costly love, then life is risk, and risk is right. To run from it is to waste your life.¹

I agree. I don't want to waste my life; I want to run toward costly love, even if that means facing risk. I want the same thing for you. For some of us, costly love may require the right risk of cross-cultural church planting. For some, it may require the right risk of moving to an uncomfortable city or neighborhood.

And for some, costly love may require the right risk of pursuing a godly spouse.

He who finds a good wife has gotten a gift, a hearty smile from the King (Proverbs 18:22). A godly spouse is a wise investment, and children are the great return (Proverbs 31:10; Psalm 127:3). But from the garden onward, the foundation of marriage has been costly love.

Eve's very genesis reveals this profound truth about the husband-wife relationship: It required from Adam a rib. Before sin ever entered the world, Adam had to enter sleep (a "death" of sorts), sacrificing part of his own body so that his wife could live. The name "Eve" denotes "life" in Hebrew, so it is not a stretch to say that life itself springs from costly love.

Man could not fulfill his glorious task of representing God's rule through multiplication and dominion any other way. The fall and curse underlined this reality, but they did not cause it. It was sown into the fabric of man's genesis. The first picture of Christ and his

church included a price point and a stitched-up side. The mother of all living herself sprang from costly love; should we not expect something similar for her daughters? There is indeed a risk inherent to the realm of romance, but that risk is right.

Realm of Many Risks

The first challenge for many today is not *how* to pursue marriage but *whether* to pursue it at all.

Why? Well, some people are cynical. The marital institution has been corrupted over time. Others see marriage as implausible—not in *this* economy! But I suspect fear paralyzes the majority.

Modernity catechizes young ladies to pursue the gender-neutral path to "success" that lands them squarely in the 9-to-5, laboring for a corporation (rather than a household), submitting to a CEO (rather than a husband), and filling a checking account and 401k (rather than a womb). In short, they are being told to invest in a career rather than a spouse.

Many young ladies buy into this not because they despise the male sex but out of fear. What if she never finds "the one"? What if her fairy tale is written backward, and her "prince" turns out to be a toad? Even if she does find her prince, it's a two-income society. So she works more and more, and she looks less and less, and she fears.

I know more than a few ladies who did not chart this course intentionally. They never outright dismissed the opposite sex. Some of them simply followed the career path suggested by their parents. Many of them are trying to be productive and make the best use of their time; they have bills to pay, skills to use, and talents to honor their Lord with. Many would say

¹ John Piper, *Risk Is Right* (Crossway, 2013), 17.

they still want to get married. But even if fear did not put them there, it may keep them. The longer you build a life and future as a single person, the harder it may be to imagine anything different — and the more it may feel like a risk to pursue a marriage that could change everything, though you yearn for companionship and family.

The guys have their own fears to deal with. The “Chads” love to quote the Stoics as they pour their soul into bodybuilding, but many of them are Epicurean when it comes to romance. Epicurus and the “incel” (involuntary celibate) share a striking similarity in their outlook: The “good life” is defined by *maximally avoiding pain*. So don’t even *try* to get the girl. Have you *seen* the divorce statistics? Have you *seen* the double standards and unrealistic expectations? No thanks. I’ll stick to my friends and my hobbies.

But just like with the ladies, most young, single men have not dismissed the institution or ideal. Many just fear the risk. Risk of rejection. Risk of wasting their time. Risk of the unfamiliar. Even the white knights are afraid of risk: What if he hurts her? What if he makes a mistake? What if he ruins the good friendship they have? What if he’s not ready — financially, spiritually, emotionally? And of course, our society incentivizes prolonged adolescence with Netflix, video games, and sports.

If I may point at extremities to make my point: Young women cope with their fear of risk by pursuing a career path that looks strangely like what used to be a man’s idea of success. And young men avoid the risk by black-pilling (deciding the game is rigged and the future is hopeless) and withdrawing altogether.

Risk Is Still Right

Here is the truth. Marriage is still good — and still part of God’s plan for filling the world with people who represent his rule. The Great Commission has not superseded or nullified the Cultural Mandate; they are compatible. Complementary, even.

Is it risky to bear fruit, multiply, and take dominion? Yes. A rib is the price of entry. And that was *before* the thorns. It will cost you far more, *especially* if you “win.” It will require death to self every day. You will risk embarrassment, failure, exposed sin, the needs of others, ingratitude, and, if you are abundantly successful, sleepless nights and dirty diapers. It will cost you. But cost is not always curse; sometimes cost is the point.

Remember David’s final words in 2 Samuel. Araunah offered to give him a threshing floor and oxen so David could make a sacrifice that would save the nation. “No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24). David knew the cost gave his action meaning. Life is not about avoiding pain. Life is about pain that purchases something worthwhile. Life is costly because love is costly. That’s not the curse. That’s part of what makes it good.

Not Riskless, Not Reckless

By all means, think about the right risk of devoting your life to singleness, so you can be single-mindedly devoted to the things of the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:32–34). Consider that a genuine option. But if it’s in your heart to get married, take a different risk that’s also right: the risk of pursuing a godly spouse.

If you are an unmarried woman, read the book of Ruth. Take note: *It is not unspiritual to have a strategy for getting a spouse*. Sometimes, we assume that if we just do all the spiritual stuff — read the Bible, pray, attend church, serve — God will drop off a husband on our front porch. But that’s like a married couple waiting on their front porch for babies by stork. I write to you what I would say to them: *Friends, there is in fact something you can do about this!*

It is okay to have a strategy, a game plan — in fact, it may prove necessary. You might need to change your schedule, rearrange weekly commitments, and ask married couples in your church for help. Ruth and Naomi were a couple of schemers. Boaz did not stand

a chance because they had a thoughtful strategy *that the Lord blessed*.

Unmarried men, you too can plan. A good life is not riskless, but it is also not reckless. My encouragement is advice well-worn: Do not, first and foremost, focus on getting a girl; instead, focus on building the kind of life a woman would want to join you in. Are you the kind of godly man a godly woman would want to marry? Read Psalms 127 and 128. See what a great blessing a wife and a family are. See the connection between building a household and keeping a civilization. See the connections between family and fulfillment, between lineage and legacy. See how truly *good* it is. Desire it. Aspire to it. Pursue it. Let the mature married couples in your church know you're on the hunt for a godly woman. Ask for their input.

And when wise counsel agrees you're in a good and godly state to date, *go for it*. Ask her out. Do not make her make the first move. Don't belittle her if she does — but take the lead from there. Seek wise counsel about how to date well. Maybe do some light reading.

Do you want a pain-free life? Save yourself from the pain of loneliness and irrelevance that will inevitably come from a youth squandered on isolation and entertainment. Do you want to avoid risk? Avoid the risk of wasting your life on self-serving comfort. Embrace the risk of laying yourself down for the sake of costly love. Life is love, and love is costly, so life is risky.

And that means, in the realm of romance, that risk is right.

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VICE, VIRTUE, VERSE

PRIDE - Pride makes a living as a caricature street artist, and can see no one accurately. Pride gives himself a big jawline and his friend a big waistline. Pride is inherently antisocial. Pride creates distance between self and others (see Rom 12:16). Pride wants attention anyway he can get it—and he has many ways of getting it. Pride kills harmony, and humility kills pride.

MATTHEW 23:12: Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

HUMILITY - Humility is thinking of yourself less, and thinking of what others think of yourself least.

A fable, for the overly introspective:

Pride and Humility were mortal enemies. One day Pride came to Humility's house, intending to ambush him. But Humility saw the danger lurking, set up his own ambush, and got the better of his opponent. Humility sat on the front porch swing, looking down on Pride's body. He folded his hands behind his head, and congratulated himself. "Ah, well—Pride wasn't so hard to beat after all!"

Unfortunately, this comment put a spark of life back into Pride, who lifted his cracked head from the floor with a smile. Horrified, Humility leapt up and smote him with a rocking chair. He put his hands on his hips, ready to boast once more for his victory over Pride—and then he paused, thinking about the vicious cycle he was being dragged into.

After a moment, he nodded his head, went inside, and made himself a sandwich. Pride crawled away and was not heard from again.

*Moral: Some sins are killed in combat.
Some are resurrected in victory.
And some are defeated by distraction.*

ASK A PASTOR



QUESTION: *How can I train my kids to sit through the Lord's Day service?*

ANSWER: As I write this piece, Oliver Lewis is five years old, Eden Carolina is three, and Jubilee Emerson is one. Before you ask, let me just tell you—no, we are not planning on stopping with this *children* business any time soon. We are running a social experiment, you see. Our research question is, “How much progeny does it take for Whole Foods to ban you from their store?”

But with great fertility comes great responsibility, and we have arrived at another tollbooth on the road of family discipleship. Our eldest has entered the worship service, and with him, utter chaos. If you look to the front-right pews on any given Sunday morning, you will observe crayons splintering, Cheerios shattering, and a kindergartner rehearsing for his contortionist-breakdancing routine as he tries to discern whether he is too tired to stand up or too wired to sit still. Or, so it seems to us self-conscious parents, at least.

So we threw the flag, and reached out to some older, wiser friends for input. How do you teach your sweet little squirmers to sit through a service? Here's how our friend, a more experienced mom, responded to Brooke when she asked the question.

Oh friend, that's such a hard transition, but it's also such a sweet one. Remember that you're not just trying to get him through church, you are teaching him how to worship with God's people. That takes time, patience, and lots of repetition.

One thing that helped us was having a special “church bag.” We kept it simple: his own big-boy Bible, a notebook or drawing pad, a few crayons or colored pencils, and maybe a Bible

storybook to quietly look through before the service starts. I personally avoided bringing snacks and toys because I didn't want church to become associated with food/toys or for them to expect it every week. [Andrew's note: Corrine Cheverier has wonderfully put together a sort of “starter pack” like this for your kids, which is available next to the double doors when you enter.]

Going in with the right expectations made all the difference. There were many Sundays when I barely heard the sermon because I was training the girls. That's okay. You're still worshiping by faithfully discipling your child. It won't be like this forever.

We also had a few simple family expectations:
When the church stands, we stand.
When the church sings, we sing (or at least try!).
When the church prays, we fold our hands and pray.
When we listen to the sermon, we listen, even if the child is quietly drawing.

Consistency is what teaches them.

If one of his favorite songs comes on, make a big deal about it! Whisper, “This is your song! Let's sing it together!” Let him see that worship is joyful, not just something adults endure.

During the sermon, I still sometimes whisper, “Can you draw something you hear the pastor talking about?” If the sermon is about Noah, maybe he draws an ark. If it's about Jesus as the Good Shepherd, maybe he draws sheep. It's okay to help him think of ideas, it keeps his ears engaged instead of his mind wandering.

Some other things that helped us:

- Sit closer to the front if you can. Kids often pay better attention when they can actually see what's happening.
- Read the Scripture passage together before church if you know what it is. Use his Bible to look up Scripture when it's being read.
- Talk about the sermon afterward over lunch. Ask simple questions like, "What did you hear about God today?" or "What song did you like best?"
- Praise specific moments of faithfulness: "I noticed how quietly you listened during prayer," or "I loved hearing you sing."
- If you have to step out because he's upset, don't see it as failure. Calm him down and come back in if possible. That consistency teaches that church isn't something we leave whenever it's hard.

Most of all, remember that this is discipleship. Deuteronomy 6 tells us to diligently teach our children about the Lord as we go through everyday life. Church is one of the primary places where they learn that gathering with God's people is a joy and a privilege, not just another activity.

Also remember that Jesus welcomed little children (Mark 10:13–16). Their wiggles and whispers don't keep them from belonging among God's people. They're learning what it means to be part of Christ's church.

Praying with and for him before you walk into the building can also be powerful: "Lord, help us listen to Your Word today. Help us sing to You with glad hearts. Help us love being with Your people."

It feels slow while you're in it, but week after week, God uses those ordinary Sundays to

shape their hearts. One day you'll look over and realize he's standing, singing, listening, and worshiping because those habits were faithfully planted over time.

It's gotten easier the older the twins get. I enjoy worshiping alongside them now and enjoy their questions after church.

Thank the Lord for an abundance of counselors!

Under the Kingly Rule of Christ,
Pastor Andrew

P.S. - Yes, our friends have twins, and they are the most high-energy kids I know. But I've watched these girls sit through service after service for years, genuinely and happily engaged. What a treasure to benefit from this hard-won wisdom!

GRATITUDE

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