

## THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS VERSUS THE AGORA

Our highest calling as parents is to raise spiritually mature children who can help re-form our continually decaying culture. Dr. Larry Taylor, head of Prestonwood Christian Academy (Plano, Texas), shares some great insights below on what that process looks like:

It is fundamental to our children's discipleship process that we understand the difference between the road to Damascus and the road to the agora. What is Damascus and what is the agora? Damascus represents conversion. Paul was converted while on the road to Damascus. In today's context, this represents a child's personal decision to follow Christ. This decision is something we as parents earnestly and consistently pray for from the very moment of our child's birth. Conversion is the first step toward the goal.

I've been honored to pray with each of my four sons during their personal conversions to Christ. My road to Damascus was different than their roads, but conversion was the same outcome.

The road to the agora is different. *Agora* means "the marketplace"; specifically, the meeting place for the ancient Greeks. At this meeting place business was conducted, issues were discussed and debated, and ideology of the culture formed and dispersed. Within the context of the importance of developing our children's worldview, the agora represents the university and beyond to the epicenters of culture-forming entities—Hollywood, Wall Street, Washington, D.C., and the like.

The road to Damascus is part one of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20) and the prerequisite to making disciples. However, part two of Jesus' charge to make disciples is the teaching and training element—preparing for the agora. I believe the Christian community has done an exceptional job at the evangelistic part of the Great Commission. These efforts should never decrease—if anything, they should increase. However, the strategic effort of teaching, training, and preparing our children for the agora is the most neglected aspect of discipleship for parents and the church. Research supports this claim. Too many of our children are walking away from the church. The agora is eating them up and spitting them out (Astin 2004; Gunnoe and Moore 2002).

It is vital to note that the discipleship of our children continues during their college years and even beyond. I call this the three-phase cycle of transmitting our faith to the next generation. The first

phase is marked by the 6,570-day period from birth to high school diploma (Flor and Knapp 2001). The second phase is the 1,500-day period during college. The third phase is life—work, marriage, and parenting. Of course, this is a simplified model of a much more complex array of spiritual, emotional, and physical maturity points. Grasping these three phases and the specific training needs during each one will help us get our arms around an ongoing discipleship plan. The key deliverable is a child whose spiritual maturity trajectory is constantly getting deeper. Their spiritual root system is gaining strength—they are ready for the agora (Land 2008)!

Parents are leading a massive movement in the country to embrace Deuteronomy 6:7–8 and take responsibility for their children's training and discipleship. They are heeding the warning signs of the secular drift in our youth culture (Pearcey 2004). The road to the agora will require churches, parents, and Christian schools to continue to adapt and change their discipleship paradigms (Spears 2005). Christian school parents, you are on the front end of this movement, and I encourage you to continue your commitment to the biblical and transcendent cause of kingdom education.

Larry

### References

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