

CHRIST

over

culture

Raising Christian Kids to
Stand in a Postmodern World

ANDREA CRUM

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Endorsements

“In a straightforward, easy to understand way, Andrea teaches us about the influences that have shaped our culture into what it is today. But she doesn’t leave us hopeless and defeated. In *Christ Over Culture*, Andrea gives us a clear roadmap to equipping our kids to live confidently and make an impact for Christ. This book is a must-read guide for parents.”

— Kathy Gibbens

Host of the *Filter It Through a Brain Cell* podcast

“By providing the framework for the postmodern worldview and critical theory ideas and countering it with the Biblical perspective, Andrea offers clarity, direction, and inspiration as we seek to equip the next generation toward faithfulness and courage.”

— Alisha Illian

Author of *Chasing Perfect*

“This book is like a Christian parenting lifehack. Navigating the mish-mash of cultural ideas as a Kingdom-minded parent is no easy job. Luckily, Andrea has created a resource which will greatly unburden your efforts. Her insightful analysis of culture is clear and compelling, while her prescriptions for Christian parents are easy to follow and theologically sound. It’s evident in her writing that she brings a sincere heart to this project, as well as a practical approach to helping parents conceptualize the principles of the Christian worldview, and its competitors, so they can effectively disciple their families.”

— Lori Morrow

VP of Women in Apologetics

Introduction

What will your kids say when asked, “How many genders are there?” like my son was asked in seventh grade by a couple of kids in the hall on his way to class.

Will they know the answer? Will they be able to articulate a response? Should they be able to?

Over the years, I’ve struggled with the idea that our inclination is to raise martyrs rather than kids. It’s as if this unwritten expectation exists that our kids must make up for the battles we lost, the conversations we weren’t brave enough to have, and the apathy we let settle on our faith.

We can turn on any given TV show, scroll through any news feed, listen in on any teen conversation, and see that the world our kids are growing up in is vastly different from the one we did. We also recognize that the battles our kids will encounter will be monumentally more challenging than the ones we faced. The world isn't pretty out there, and the hostility toward Christians who hold biblical beliefs tends to be trending up rather than leveling out. Some theologians call this not just a postmodern society our kids are growing up in, but a post-Christian one.

So, in this "Strange New World,"¹ as author Carl Trueman calls it, should our kids be martyrs? Not literal martyrs like the first-century Christians, but metaphorical martyrs who put themselves out there in the hallway of seventh grade and proclaim to the world — or at least proclaim to the unforgiving, unrelenting teen universe — that there are only two genders, only one way to procreate and produce life, that an XX chromosome for females and XY chromosome for males is in every cell of our bodies, and no amount of hormone pills or surgeries can change that.

In other words, do our kids have to make up for our silence?

When we think about the world our kids are growing up in, it's natural to lament, to mourn because it shouldn't be this way, to recognize that, yes, we, and the generations before us, had a part to play in all this. But we can't stay in a place where sadness turns to fear and our most instinctual response to stick our heads in the sand prevails. Instead, we pull ourselves up, look to the One ultimately in control, and find solace in the knowledge that this cultural moment we find ourselves in doesn't surprise God. He's not worried about whether the Christian faith will make it. Jesus Himself even declared that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18).

So, we remind ourselves that today is a new day, and where we lacked intention in the past, we can make up for it in the here and now. God can use His supernatural power to move in us and our children in ways to make up for lost time and exponentially increase it.

Resisting the temptation to raise martyrs rather than set-apart Christian kids, we remind ourselves that Jesus already won. He overcame the world. He knows how the story unfolds and how our children's lives will be part of it.

Our kids are HIS handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared for them to do (Ephesians 2:10). He marked out each one of their times in history and the territories for them to live (Acts 17:26). He is not an abstract or absent Father, but One who knows our children better and loves them more than we ever will.

God gave us our children to guide, lead, steward, protect, disciple, mentor, and give them a firm foundation of the faith so that they will stand even when the pressure of the world begs them to worship superficial idols and compromise their faith. Even in the chaos, they will remain faithful to God and fortified to stand like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, not to be *“tossed back and forth ... and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and ... the craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming”* (Ephesians 4:14).

God is doing something beautiful in this next generation. He is raising up a generation of believers who will not bow down to other “gods,” a generation who will stand firm on His truth and on His Word, who will walk in His way, who will follow in obedience and declare His truth from the rooftops, who will not be silent, who will raise their voices and declare His majesty.

And you and I are raising them.

God knew His plans for this coming generation. He knew we would be the parents to shepherd them. He knew we'd heed the call, we'd make the sacrifice, we'd find the strength and make the time. He knew we would raise them to stand.

1

The Missing

Plot

When I started in ministry, I began having regular chats with women. It was a wonderful way to build relationships, learn what God was doing in these women's lives, and learn more about their beliefs. Over chai lattes and conversations spanning everything from purpose to politics to children, I found that about half of these Christian women believed homosexuality was okay.

"Love is love, right?" was a typical response. The realization confused me, mostly because I assumed that as Christians, we would all be on the same page about God's design and, more importantly, the core Christian tenets of sin and salvation. Yet, I stumbled into discussions with women, specifically moms, who had no issue with what was either a glaring contradiction in their faith or, more likely, an unrealized compromise.

Either way, something was off, and research confirmed what I was experiencing. Many Christians today do not align with the beliefs that the Christian faith has held for thousands of years. Worse yet, pastors, including youth pastors, follow suit, with only 37% of pastors and 12% of youth pastors holding to a biblical worldview, according to research out of Arizona Christian University.

At one point, my oldest son felt God's call to start a Bible study. He came home one day excited because his friend seemed just as on fire for God as he was. He even hoped this kid could lead the Bible study with him. We talked about the importance of making sure this young man believed the same thing about sin and salvation as our son did. The topic of LGBTQ+ is always a good litmus test.

Imagine our son's disappointment when he learned that although his friend believed homosexuality was ultimately not God's design, his friend also had strong beliefs that we must respect each person's choices, "just love everybody," and let them live the way they want without interference or correction, even if they self-identify as Christians.

Then there is a ministry I had long believed was a Jesus-loving, Scripture-believing, truth-telling organization. Over time, however, I heard rumblings of a support group implemented for LGBTQ+-identifying teens. I initially reasoned that this ministry was well-intentioned in its desire to help these teens escape the lifestyle. However, this support group soon evolved into a group of teens affirming each other in the LGBTQ+ lifestyle.

A couple of years later, this same ministry taught on reimagining what it meant to be a Christian, focusing solely on Jesus' love as His only characteristic.

As compelling as the teaching was, and as much as I wanted to fall into complete alignment with this leader's point that the Christian

Church was not always acting like Christ and that love should be a cornerstone of our interactions with people, what kept nagging at me was that this intriguing narrative missed the plot.

I encountered the same situation with a faith-based organization promising to teach churches how to engage teens who identify as LGBTQ+. Hearing how they developed relationships with these students and shared God's love made me tear up. In many ways, it mirrored what God had been clear with us about in our ministry. We were not only to declare the biblical standard for what was right and wrong in society but also to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a culture influenced by the sexual revolution. That meant loving people who often felt unloved by the Church.

What I noticed, however, was that, once again, they buried the lead and, worse yet, missed the plot.

In all these situations, while professing to believe the Bible on the topic of God's design for the genders and for sex in marriage, not anywhere did they mention the moment of truth – the moment when they finally shared with these individuals about sin and the true gospel of Christ. The gospel of Jesus tells us we are all sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God and that God required, ever since the Garden with Adam and Eve, a perfect blood sacrifice to atone for our sins (Genesis 3:21). Jesus' death on the Cross, the shedding of His blood, was God's ultimate justice on display, freeing a dying world from death and setting us into freedom from sin and healing from hurt for all those who believe and follow our One true risen Lord, not only in salvation but also in obedience to His commands.

Silence, in the name of sharing God's love, only leaves people in their brokenness and sin, instead of in the freedom, healing, hope, and joy that comes from a life of following Christ.

God's love directly ties to sin and salvation, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). If we miss this, we miss the Gospel.

This insistence on God's love as His only attribute has, in many ways, made the gospel of Jesus null and void in the Christian Church. If God's character excludes His order, holiness, justice, judgment, wrath, and grace, then Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross was not necessary.

So, how did we get to this place where the one true gospel of Jesus Christ has been hijacked and reimagined?

It would be easy to pinpoint the barrage of cultural influences and assume that those caused it. For example:

- ▶ Our desensitization to all the LGBTQ+ messages that have bombarded us over the last twenty years in every sector of entertainment we consume, from books to TV shows, movies, and social media.
- ▶ The legalization of same-sex marriage in the Obergefell v. Hodges case and the number of people we know who celebrated their legal right to love whoever they chose.
- ▶ All the new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts finding their way into businesses, and sadly, some churches that taught about the oppression of some and the importance of making sure everyone felt safe and included.

Many Christian thinkers would also tell us the cause is our culture's obsession with self. In other words, we are the center of our universe, and God is part of our world instead of us being part of His. In his book *Strange New World*, Carl Trueman chronicles the past couple hundred years of intellectual and philosophical

thinkers who have paved the way to our current understanding of self, which includes how our culture now understands, and even accepts, the modern-day belief that we can disassociate our minds from our bodies, as seen with the transgender movement.²

One of the most eye-opening realizations came from Alisa Childers' book *Another Gospel*. It highlighted the reimagining of the Christian faith by the progressive movement infiltrating Christian thought. Her insights and experience illuminated why our churches are struggling and, ultimately, shrinking, according to Gallup research, and how the postmodern worldview is setting up shop in the Christian Church.³ With prominent themes of church hurt, deconstructionists turned exvangelicals, and churches flying rainbow flags, something has definitely changed.

But what exactly?

If we examine the last several decades, we can uncover three reasons why the Church was vulnerable to the diminishing and dulling of the Christian faith that we see today and, more importantly, our understanding and articulation of the one true gospel.

These areas are essential for course correction as we raise our kids to stand.

2

The Dulling *Begins*

As a mom now in my forties, I still remember the church I attended in fourth grade. We had never attended church before, but my mom decided my brother and I needed a positive Christian influence, so off we went one Sunday morning.

It wasn't until the church's summer camp in seventh grade that I believed Christ as my Savior and felt the Holy Spirit in my life. I was on cloud nine for a few days and experienced an overwhelming peace. Not long after, though, the teenage life consumed me. I slowly slipped away, having never been discipled in the faith, into everyday teen drama, which eventually led to sinful behavior and a questioning of my faith by the time I entered my late teens.

Over time, I found my way back to Christ through one particular friend and the prayers of countless people. God is faithful to bring

us back when we go astray or when our faith isn't mature and our walk isn't thriving. The sad thing is that I got lost again years later. Not the lost that isn't saved, but the lost that goes off track, meanders off the narrow road, and finds other things more appealing in life than Jesus. That indifference toward my walk with the Lord lasted around twenty years.

So, why did this happen? Moreover, why is my story similar to so many other people I know? Maybe even yours. If we take a trip down memory lane, we can uncover three primary vulnerabilities in the Church and Christian living that led us to this place.

1. Lack of Discipleship

One of the seemingly greatest inventions in the Church was the mass production of cute resources that helped us to quickly and efficiently share the gospel. Armed with our bracelets, cubes, and pamphlets, we set out to evangelize the world one neighborhood at a time.

For the most part, the gospel presentation shared about our separation from God by sin and how Jesus paid the price for our sins on the Cross, and if we did as Romans 10:9 says, *"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Many who liked what they heard prayed, accepted Christ into their hearts, and went on with their lives.

While full of good intentions to help a busy Christian society share the gospel easily, following Jesus requires more than a prayer and minimizing the gospel to a few verses shared in a three-minute presentation. This introduction to the faith doesn't express the breadth of what Jesus calls us to when we trust Him

as Lord and Savior. Now, we have a whole generation of Christians who grew up on this commoditized gospel.

Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms that to follow Him is to believe, repent, take up our cross, count the costs, walk the narrow road, live a life of obedience and sacrifice, and understand that the world will hate us because it first hated Him.

When we read Romans 10:9 in context, we discover that the preceding verses tell us that we receive righteousness by faith by having the Word of God in our hearts and minds. Verses 6–8 reference Deuteronomy 30, with God saying that to follow, honor, and love Him is to obey Him. So, when we read Romans 10:9 in context, there is already an expectation that we will obey and follow God along with our belief and declaration of faith in Him.

Somehow, we miss this part of the gospel story. We talk about how Jesus is our Savior but neglect that Jesus is our Lord.

In the Great Commission, Jesus ultimately called us to make disciples. The word disciple in Hebrew means “learners” or “scholars.” When we make disciples, we teach people to know God, know His ways, and obey. Jesus even tells us to teach *“them to obey everything I have commanded you”* (Matthew 28:20).

Our lack of discipleship has hurt the Church because we do not know what we believe, and we do not know how to defend it. It has created a weakened immunity in our defenses and allowed for ideas that do not glorify God to enter the Church and, in some cases, our homes.

The good news is that we can create changes in our own families. There is no better place to make disciples than at home with our kids. They are our priority, the ones God has given us to steward, so we should start there.

I say that, but for many years, the idea that we as parents need to disciple our kids made my throat tight and my shoulders tense. Anyone else?

With our busy schedules, lack of discipleship and knowledge of God's Word, the prospect of discipling our kids can get overwhelming quickly. And what do we do when we get overwhelmed? Change the scenery. We scroll, grab that glass of wine, text a friend, or do anything to distract us from the reminder that we should be doing something we aren't.

This leads to the second vulnerability in the Church for most believers.

2. Distractions Galore!

After spending some time away from the Lord in my late teens, I found my way back through a friend who invited me to play in a softball league at her church. Meeting all the softball players and getting invited back to church by a few of them eventually led me to the pew on Sunday mornings. Rededicating my life was an easy decision to make, and for the most part, it filled me with peace, with only the occasional longing for my old sinful life.

Within the next couple of years, as I got my faith walk back on track, I met my future husband. Our friendship grew on a church trip to Europe, and over that next year, we fell in love. Soon, we married, bought a house, and had many fun vacations. Seven years later, our first child arrived. Three years after that, our second made his debut.

In the meantime, my career was blowing up in the best way possible — money and promotions and travel overseas. My husband became a stay-at-home dad, and I became the sole provider.

Within a decade, we moved from our starter home to our forever home. Life was good. Life was busy. It was the dream, right? Big home, lots of money, positional prestige at work. Yeah, life was going well.

Only it wasn't. Stressed all the time, pressure to provide, desire to do all the things everyone else was doing, demands at work for more, no light at the end of the tunnel, a waning spiritual life, a son who called out more for his dad than for me, and a budding alcohol addiction to numb the stress.

The truth is hard to admit. It's even harder to type out loud for the world to see. But there it is — life and all its distractions, and our constant desire for more, buried me, tearing me farther and farther away from Christ. Soon, I was that Sunday Christian I used to feel sorry for.

It's here where I found myself in the second stint of my wilderness season. Only it lasted a lot longer than the first.

My story is likely similar to yours. Maybe the activities are different — school sports, over-volunteering, the fifteenth load of laundry, anyone? Maybe it's not the wife but the husband who is consumed with work and always gone. Maybe the numbing is something else, like food, pills, porn, the gym, shopping, or scrolling. For the most part, the average Christian attending our churches today lives burnt out, overwhelmed, and exhausted, even if it doesn't look that way on the outside, because we live in a world that preaches conventional wisdom and not godly wisdom.

Go, go, go, earn more and more, buy bigger, save for that future you're not guaranteed. All this instead of coming to Jesus, who promises to give us rest, trusting that God will take care of all our earthly needs and storing for ourselves treasures in heaven rather

than on earth, where moths and vermin cannot consume and thieves cannot break in and steal.

We get distracted from the things that matter most. The Kingdom. Our relationship with Christ. The purpose God calls us to, including discipling our children.

What if the most significant work of the enemy over the last several decades in the Church was to lead us to contempt for ordinary lives and peaceful living and instead lead us toward busy, unsustainable chaos that always promised more but never really delivered?

When we don't have time to pour into others, including our kids, something central to God's desire for our lives and family and crucial to Christian living is lost.

If we don't have time to disciple our kids, then there aren't many pillars of faith rising right now to hold up the Church in all biblical truth and love in this next generation, which means our foundation is weak and our grip on the Church, as a whole, is slipping.

But how can we disciple if we don't know what we're doing?

We are now to our third vulnerability.

3. Unchanged

The wise youth pastor at our church told me once that this next generation focuses more on whether Christianity is good than whether it is true. He said they would determine if it was true once they decided it was good. They determine a good Christian life by a godly life well-lived, not a life well-imagined. Kids can sniff out hypocrisy a million miles away. If they see us espouse a belief on Sunday mornings and social media that we don't adhere to in our

own lives, then it leaves them with no real idea of what genuine faith is and what it promises to believers — a changed life.

I'm not talking about a successful, rich, or easy-going life; I'm talking about a life where love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control are thriving and commonplace (Galatians 5:22-23). I'm also not talking about a perfect, self-righteous life, but one where grace abounds, forgiveness heals, and daily surrender is a regular practice.

Jesus promises us a changed and forgiven life. One that leaves the conventions of this world and follows Him. One where the old sinful life is no more, and we are a new creation. A life where spiritual gifts exist, fruits of the Spirit are ripening and flourishing, and there is a perspective that sees how well God clothes the lilies of the field and how the peace that surpasses all understanding is present when we set our eyes squarely on Him.

How many of us live this life? I sure didn't for most of my Christian walk, and even now, there are some days when I'm in the middle of the chaos, distracted and spiritually empty, nudging myself to remember what God has for me in the quiet of His presence.

You see, we disciple from the full well; we pour out from what we have and the life we have lived, from our experience seeing the goodness of the Lord, walking with Him in the trial, climbing with Him out of the pit, and studying the Scriptures with intention. Sadly, many of our wells have been in drought for decades, and we have nothing to give and even less to teach, so we don't disciple.

There was a moment when I recognized the incongruity in my life and, ultimately, my hypocrisy. I realized that there was one Andrea people knew at work, and another Andrea people knew at church. The one at work had high expectations and drive and

lacked empathy. The one at church was full of smiles, mercy, and love. I was a church greeter after all.

I even remember a team dinner while traveling to Europe for a work trip when I mentioned I was a Christian, and one of my colleagues said, “Oh, I didn’t know you were one of those.” Hadn’t he seen my worship playlist?

That comment stayed with me for a long time. My colleague’s statement about “being one of those” dripped with contempt for Christians, and I justified it was a compliment. That somehow, as a firm believer, I infiltrated common culture without detection. Thankfully, I wasn’t holier than thou and could fit in with the world. In the world, but not of the world, right?

It took me a long time to admit that he didn’t see me any differently than a non-believer. Maybe it was my hard-working, no-nonsense, “projects are more important than people” attitude. Or maybe it was because I liked my third glass of wine too much.

Either way, my life did not reflect Christ.

Can you relate?

The Christian faith promises change because Jesus saves and the Holy Spirit transforms. If we look more like the world, love what the world loves, and believe what the world says is true, then the transformation (aka sanctification) process stalls or altogether stops until we put the One true God back on the throne where He belongs and align our lives back to Him and His Word.

We live more fulfilling lives when we dig into our relationship with Christ, surrender to Him in all ways, and allow Him to transform us into His image. When we do, we also give our children a glimpse into the life God has for us. One that is good, not easy or

trauma-free, but full of peace because we know our help comes from the Creator of heaven and earth.

If we remain unchanged, the world has nothing to look for in the darkness. Likewise, if all that people experience are Christians jaded by the political environment and progressive agendas who don't reflect the love of Christ in our interactions, then we aren't presenting the changed life that the gospel promises.

Our kids are desperate to see a Christian life that fulfills its promises, and our dark and dying world is desperate to see that city on a hill that cannot be hidden; to see our light, goodness, joy, and peace; and to encounter Christians who let their changed life shine rather than get dull and dim.

God calls us to get disciplined, focus on Him, and change. The implications of this trifecta of lack of discipleship, distractions, and unchanged lives are evident in the Church today. These are some of the most important reasons why the Church is in a weakened state today, why progressive ideology has taken root in some churches, and why only 4 percent of Gen Z has a biblical worldview.⁴ We need intentionality in these areas for our children's faith's sake if we ever expect to see change.